

The CEE Startup Voucher 2023 knows its winner. The first place was seized by a Slovak project that produces healthier sugar alternatives.

Ostrava, 4. 12. 2023 – it is decided. The golden voucher valued at €20.000 will be awarded outside of the Czech Republic. The winner of the third edition of the international CEE Startup Voucher competition is the Slovak project sweetACTIVE by BFT company. The project changes the traditional approach to sugar beet processing to shield the biologically active compounds that can contribute to reducing the sugar content in food. It also brings health benefits to consumers at a comparable price to conventional sugar. In this way, the consumers can enjoy the sweet taste of sugar without increasing the risk of its negative impacts on health.

Adéla Píchová, the organizer representing MSIC, said: “95 startups from 23 countries decided to compete in this year’s competition. There were projects with very diverse backgrounds that reflected the market needs in various areas – be it education, healthcare, logistics or IT, on a high level. Thus, choosing the top ten was a really difficult task. During the finals, it was up to the startups to stand out in front of the audiences and the jury.”

There was a lot at stake – it was not only about the visibility in front of potential investors, customers, the international contacts, it was also about the feedback, tailored services within the ecosystem, and lastly the financial boost.

The €20.000 prize as well as the audience award of the CEE Startup Voucher 2023 went to the company BFT for its startup project sweetACTIVE. Both prizes were handed over by the CEO of Science Bridge, Martyna Scibiorek. The founder and director of BFT, Boris Žitný stated: “We didn’t expect to win, but we hoped we would, because we have been working on it for several years. We could realistically enter the market in the next two or three years and every such award, be it financial or non-financial, pushes us closer towards this goal.

The second place went to the Slovak startup SPEAR Hydro with its environmentally friendly floating hydro power plant. The silver voucher worth €12.000 was awarded by Vlasto Kocián, the CEO of INOVIA, based in Žilina. Third place was won by the Czech entrepreneur Miroslav Ud’an with the project Out of Dark which improves the customer journey. This success netted him €8.000 and a congratulations from Andrea Hoffmanová, the deputy major of Ostrava.

The CEE Startup Voucher competition is organised by members of the international CEE Startup Network. It was established two years ago by the Moravian-Silesian Innovation Centre in cooperation with the INOVIA centre in Žilina with the aim to secure a stronger position on the European startup scene, and to draw the attention of companies, investors, and politicians to less established ecosystems. Together, enthusiasts from the border regions of Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia are proving that innovative ideas, with the potential to change the world, can emerge even outside the capital cities.

The CEE Startup Voucher finals co-moderator, and the member of the MSIC Board of Directors, Adéla Hradilová, states that: "Cooperation between startups, corporations and regions is very important. For this reason, we try to create conditions in the CEE startup Network that will facilitate its development and help us build a startup environment that will be on par with other environments at the international level."

The finals were hosted at the end of November at Ostrava City Campus within the significant international event Unique Summit Ostrava 2023. Startups, entrepreneurs and municipalities met there to inspire each other, and to share knowledge in the fields of innovation ecosystems and entrepreneurship. Unique Summit was first hosted in 2018 as a global initiative of the Global StartupCities. Today, it connects 18 cities across the world to support entrepreneurship and startup development.

The finalists:

[BarterMe](#) (CZ) – a platform that connects brands with influencers and simplifies their collaboration.

[Edumus](#) (EST) – an educational online platform that helps students acquire skills they need to succeed in today's world and in their future careers- in a fun way.

[Flourish](#) (MNE) – a mobile app that allows users to learn more about their social and emotional intelligence through interactive and fully personalized games.

[Obortech](#) (EST) – a blockchain and IoT-based logistics hub that provides stakeholders with a simple all-in-one solution for digitizing and tracking the entire supply chain.

[Out of Dark](#) (CZ) – The Out of Dark project helps companies monitor and evaluate the customer journey in a simple and transparent environment using AI.

[Sommify.AI](#) (FIN) – a startup that makes it easier for customers to choose the right wine through a mobile app chat or on the producer's websites.

[SPEAR Hydro](#) (SK) – the first floating power plant of its kind that provides clean and stable electricity by harnessing the natural flow of rivers. Its unique technology makes it extremely environmentally friendly.

[Spendbase](#) (UA) – a tool that allows companies to gain control over their finances by managing all software expenses and associated functionalities in one place.

[sweetACTIVE](#) (SK) – a group of products based on an innovative technology for sugar beet processing. The production process was focused on shielding of active substances which can improve the health impacts on consumers from overconsumption of sugar in food and thus contribute to reducing the risk of diseases.

[ZeroCactus](#) (SK) – a no-code platform using advanced AI technology combined with human intelligence to make it easier for companies to grow without coding knowledge, based on tailored coding.

Winners:

1st place: sweetACTIVE

2nd place: SPEARhydro

3rd place: Out of Dark

Audience award: sweetACTIVE

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