

Right at the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic in Poland and in Kraków, the municipal authorities launched a comprehensive information campaign targeted at residents and entrepreneurs. Kraków has created dedicated internet resources in order to disseminate all information regarding the epidemic efficiently and timely. Since a considerable number of foreigners resides and works in the city, some time ago the authorities decided to launch a special website (Open Krakow; <http://otwarty.krakow.pl/>) containing information in English and Ukrainian (a large number of migrant workers in Kraków comes from Ukraine). With the outbreak of the pandemic, the website has become a platform for communicating all epidemic-related information in foreign languages.

Our next step consisted in adjusting the city and its everyday life to challenging new conditions which arose within mere days. Below we list several concrete and tangible initiatives introduced to support residents and entrepreneurs throughout a number of sectors:

- **Free parking in what normally is Kraków's Paid Parking Zone**

For several weeks parking will be free of charge to support residents who commute to work in Kraków's city centre, live in the area or provide care to family members residing in the zone.

- **Municipal transport**

We keep adjusting the functioning of the municipal transport system to accommodate the changing circumstances and the latest guidelines issued by central authorities.

Buses and trams run less often in order to ensure that savings are made in the challenging economic conditions. However, special buses for medical staff have also been introduced to facilitate their daily commute.

The number of passengers in selected buses and trams is regularly controlled by Public Transport Inspectors joined by policemen and women. All trams and buses are marked with stickers clearly stating the number of spaces available.

It is worth emphasizing that all vehicles are regularly and thoroughly washed and disinfected; special attention paid to items touched by passengers, i.e. buttons, railings or handles.

- **Streets and stops disinfected**

Kraków Cleaning Service is continuously disinfecting the city's vital areas, i.e. squares and pavements in areas most popular with residents, as well as zebra crossings, bus stops and public waste containers.

Additionally, all pedestrian-activated push buttons at Kraków's zebra crossings have been marked with black tape to remind pedestrians that they should avoid touching them with their bare hands.

- **Support offered to elderly, homeless and destitute Krakovians**

The municipal social services are currently working at full capacity. The challenge we are now facing requires that social work professionals are fully committed. Soup kitchens remain open and serving meals to go. Volunteers join in, offering support to senior citizens, single senior neighbours or health professionals.

It is also worth emphasizing that **volunteering** is on the rise in Kraków under lockdown. Local universities and institutions also join in. Thanks to only one such initiative, within a couple of weeks, over 20 thousand face shields and even more masks have been produced and offered – free of charge - to local hospitals, nursing homes and police departments.

To prevent the virus from spreading in Kraków's nursing homes, all new residents - before being admitted - are now subject to quarantine in one dedicated centre.

In order to contain the epidemic as soon as possible, the municipal authorities decided to support private healthcare centres with donation of masks, sanitizers, etc.

- **City lights and other savings**

Since Cracovians are now requested to stay at home as much as possible, the city authorities decided to switch off street lights every night from midnight to 4 a.m. This decision will generate substantial savings. Research shows that so far the decision - implemented on April 14th - had no bearing on public safety in Kraków.

Additionally, the city hall is limiting the use of the work vehicles in order to generate savings. The city hall's HR policy is not forecasted to change substantially; savings will be generated naturally with no new employee contracts being signed. Remuneration cuts are not considered at the moment.

- **Children and education**

Municipal cultural centres have moved their activities and programmes online. The offer is varied, starting with classes for parents of young children and babies, through sing-alongs for children, to online exhibitions and theatre performances for teenagers.

Schoolchildren, who are now learning at home, are also supported: the Municipality will purchase 120 tablets to ensure digital inclusion for underprivileged children. Kraków is also supporting a project run by some of Kraków's companies which collect older, unused laptops and desktops and offer them to children who otherwise could not participate in online classes.

To make lockdown more bearable and, potentially even fun and interesting, Kraków runs the *Lockdown Festival*. It's an online competition for children and youth who prepare short films demonstrating their lives under lockdown and compete for prizes.

Privately owned nurseries, that have found themselves in financial difficulties since many parents withhold fees as children are staying at home, will be able to apply for municipal grants to survive the crisis.

- **Culture**

The local cultural scene has for long been one of Kraków's most recognizable features.

The pandemic and the correlated crisis have hit the sector particularly hard. All cultural events have been cancelled, museums are closed, so are libraries and bookshops.

Kraków is now working on elaborating a special support scheme for the culture and event industry called **Kultura Odporna - Resilient Culture**.

The Mayor of Kraków Jacek Majchrowski has already addressed the Ministry of Culture, appealing for a swift elaboration of national measures to counteract the breakdown in the sector (subsidies, grants, scholarships).

Local artists and cultural institutions are eligible for reductions of rents and fees under the PAUZA programme (details below).

Artists can apply for municipal scholarships.

Cultural institutions will be invited to elaborate digital programmes promoting culture. Winning institutions will be offered municipal grants.

Through its institutions, the municipality will hold competitions and place orders for artistic projects helping the public deal with the tensions of social distancing and the trauma of the epidemic.

The municipality will support projects aimed at promoting local artists, art galleries, etc. (e.g. virtual tours and meetings).

For many years now Kraków has been making efforts to promote small local bookshops. Now these facilities are losing even 98% of their regular income. In order to support them , the Municipality has launched the **Resilient Bookshops** programme, encouraging Cracovians to purchase books online or even over the phone.

- **Tourism**

Kraków's well-developed tourism sector has been particularly badly hit by the crisis. The entrepreneurs working in the sector are, of course, eligible for all reductions and deferrals of rents and local fees under the **PAUZA programme** (details below).

The municipal Department of Tourism is elaborating a programme to support the local tourism industry in promoting their offer in the post-epidemic environment and rebuilding the supply chain in the sector. The programme will take into consideration several potential scenarios concerning the condition of the world economy following the pandemic.

A new *sustainable tourism policy* will be elaborated by the municipality in cooperation with the representatives of the tourism industry. The policy will take into consideration the development of the epidemic and its varied effects.

- **Sports clubs**

Local sports clubs can apply to have their rents and local fees reduced (for more details see PAUZA programme below).

Since their regular activity is now significantly reduced, the clubs can choose to create programmes aimed at promoting physical education. Selected programmes will be financially supported by the Municipality.

Sports clubs can also apply for support regarding necessary maintenance and renovations works.

- **Green areas**

In order to tackle this extraordinary challenge and contain the spread of the virus all parks, playgrounds, open-air gyms and pitches in Kraków's green areas were temporarily closed. On Monday, April 20th 2020, parks re-opened but the national and municipal police are continuously patrolling the city, ensuring safety for all those who want to relax in greenery.

- **Economy**

In connection with the pandemic, all new calls for tender and investment contracts have been suspended. As it is impossible to forecast the full scope of the pandemic's influence on Kraków's economy, we are not in the position to make any new financial commitments. The municipal budget will surely suffer, yet it is hard to estimate the extent of the cuts. Moreover, we are working in highly volatile circumstances and must take any unforeseen expenses into consideration. In such trying times we need to be flexible and react efficiently, which can only be achieved if we ensure good communication and efficient cooperation of both public and private stakeholders.

The pandemic has a negative impact on world economy. Kraków is not an exception. Especially tourism and catering industry have been particularly strongly affected. To demonstrate the scope of negative influence one can refer to numbers related to incoming tourism. Last year, Kraków had 14 million visitors who spent a total of PLN 7.5 billion while staying in the city. This, in fact, was the income of several dozen companies working in such sectors as tourism, catering, transport or real estate. The event industry also suffered considerably due to the epidemic. What is more, in an attempt to contain the epidemic, many shops - small and large alike - have been closed; book shop owners, artists, artisans and the entire beauty industry are also losing their sources of income. We keep re-estimating the losses in Kraków and realise that, even when the current health crisis subsides, we will have to face its long-term consequences. This is why we are already trying to support the local entrepreneurs and help them survive.

Without waiting for a national programme to be announced, already on March 13th 2020, we started implementing local, municipal solutions, creating the **PAUZA programme**. Consequently, entrepreneurs in Kraków can now apply to have their local taxes, fees and rents reduced, postponed, split into instalments or annulled. The programme covers, among others:

- real estate tax;
- vehicle tax;
- commercial property tax;
- beer garden fees;
- dedicated parking space fees;
- rents on real estate parcels.

Additionally, we have prepared a support pack for municipal open air markets, which allows operators and stall owners to apply for reductions in fees. Itinerant tradespeople and horse carriage drivers now have the opportunity to terminate or amend their contracts. Local entrepreneurs forced to suspend their business due to the epidemic can also have their waste collection fee reduced.

In order to obtain a reduction or annulment, all interested parties must apply for it. The Municipality has already received hundreds of applications that are being thoroughly analysed.

Simultaneously, we are promoting restaurants that offer take away meals. The database we have created is regularly updated.

We are also currently analyzing our budget to verify what other forms of support can be offered to entrepreneurs, e.g. *de minimis* aid. We are talking to NGOs in order to cooperatively elaborate support schemes for businesses. In doing so, we will also support the NGOs themselves as they are also struggling with financial and organizational challenges. We are aware that the support programmes must not cease when the pandemic subsides. In fact, we want to create permanent solutions that will supplement regular support schemes for the local business community.

On May 4th, Kraków will open 5 consultation points for entrepreneurs who need advice and support under current crisis. Each consultation point will be manned by two clerks: one offering face-to-face consultation, the other working on the phone. The centres will also offer advice to individual clients concerning selected issues, e.g. housing.

The epidemic is also a major challenge for business services - one of Kraków's key industries. In Kraków, there are over 200 BSS companies, with a total headcount of approx. 80 000. According to ABSL (www.absl.pl), 50% of the BPO, SSC/GBS, IR, R&D centres in Poland, operate globally and 80% of them have well-developed business continuity or disaster recovery plans ready to be implemented when crisis strikes. Nonetheless, we must remember that operations of the business services sector are closely interconnected with other entities and depend on their smooth functioning. The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in one sector will resonate far beyond it, which is why the BSS companies expect cohesive, long-term programmes instituted primarily by the national authorities. Systemic support is essential in ensuring that both small and large enterprises survive, consequently fueling the entire economy. This is

why, on March 16th 2020, the Mayor of Kraków addressed the Ministry of Development with a number of suggestions concerning the national measures aimed at supporting entrepreneurs.

In testing times cooperation and communication are crucial. This is why, on March 6th 2020, the municipal authorities contacted the local entrepreneurs (approx. 1 500 companies), asking for their insights and comments concerning the current situation, as well as suggestions concerning desired activities the municipality could implement to support them. The city hall is also in touch with the business associations operating locally (ASPIRE) or nationally (ABSL). Representatives of the city hall take active part in regular online meetings organised by the associations and companies who also prepare lists of key challenges that they and their employees face in connection with the epidemic.

We have been providing answers (in both Polish and English, as many employees are English speakers) to questions concerning issues that the municipality is directly responsible for, such as public transport, paid parking zones or municipal services. Yet, we also try to support them in addressing challenges that remain, at least partly, beyond our competence, such as health services in Kraków, work permits for foreigners, etc. We also keep the companies updated whenever new regulations or forms of support are being implemented in the city.