

## INTERVIEW with Ms. Danijela Djurovic and Mr. Boran Ivanoski: *NALAS Benchmarking Report on Solid Waste Management provides a great opportunity for bench-learning*

*“It helps NALAS members to understand the current situation in their respective national contexts and to exchange with their peers from the region for better solutions”*

*By: Jelena Janevska, NALAS Knowledge and Communications Manager*



The living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, like no other period before, threatens to endanger the Earth and its natural resources. The wide-spread consumerism has a tendency to overwhelm us with material goods that eventually have to end up somewhere. Being reused, recycled, properly taken care of, or dumped anywhere – the decision is to be made by us all, but operationalised by the waste management operators, and the municipalities, that in many cases are their owners.

Have you ever wondered how much waste do we produce? Where does it end up? Is the way we manage our waste the right one? How do we stand compared to others? These and many other

questions are being addressed by the **NALAS Benchmarking Report on Solid Waste Management in South-East Europe**. We have in hand the last edition of the Report, available [HERE](#).

Today, bringing the Report closer to you, we talk to **Ms. Danijela Djurovic and Mr. Boran Ivanoski**, who are part of the team that developed the Report. Namely, this report is a joint effort by the members of NALAS Task Force on Solid Waste and Water Management. It is utilising data from 2018 from ten economies of the SEE region.

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**Mr. Boran Ivanoski** is NALAS Program Officer, in charge of the Task Force on Solid Waste and Water Management. Mr. Ivanoski has initiated the development of the benchmarking report and coordinated its three editions. Mr. Ivanoski is an engineer, a nature lover and environmentalist, with long-lasting experience in local government development.

**JJ: Mr. Ivanoski, what was your guiding star when you initiated the NALAS Benchmarking Report on Solid Waste Management? To whom you address the Report and what it aims to achieve?**

**BI:** The idea was initiated by the NALAS Task Force on Solid Waste and Water Management back in 2015. Within the Task Force, local practitioners were exchanging their challenges and discussed possible solutions. They concluded that there is a need to compare the status quo in SWM at local level among the 12 economies from the region of SEE. That's why, they have decided to establish a systematic monitoring tool based on research methodology with 24 indicators that are measurable with data deriving from different national contexts and what is even more important they are comparable at regional level. Why comparable indicators are important, because the main aim of the report and this exercise itself is to learn from different experiences. Although we call the Report benchmarking, we would rather use the word bench-learning. It

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helps NALAS members to understand the current situation in their respective national contexts and to exchange with their peers from the region for better solutions. In this direction, our member Associations share the report among their members, the local governments, within their expert bodies that deal with SWM issues, national institutions, academia, etc. In addition, the Associations of local governments use the main findings of the Report and best practices for advocacy actions in negotiations with the line ministries.

**JJ: What are the main messages that the latest, the third edition of the Report sends?**

**BI:** The Report provides an overview of the situation in the municipal solid waste management, tackling different aspects of this complex system. Therefore, it is very difficult to extract few main messages, but to me, the main one is related to the need of reducing the landfilling and application of other waste treatment approaches. I know that it is easier to say than do, but this Report, the third one in the row, clearly shows that we must change something in this regard in a long run. Unfortunately, the landfilling remains the primary option for waste treatment in our region with an average of 79% of the generated waste disposed on landfills. Even more, there is an upward trend from 67,3% in 2014, 77,5% in 2015 to 79% in 2018 which is far from the EU28 average of 46,4%. We have Slovenia from our region as the best practice with only around 10% of generated waste finishing at the landfills. NALAS members should use this capacity in the



efforts to improve the situation in their national contexts. The situation is not that simple having in mind that still the majority of municipal waste is disposed at noncompliant landfills and illegal dumping sites. The intervention for improvement in this sector requires capital investments, but if we take a look in the NALAS Report on Fiscal Decentralisation Indicators, it is obvious that the environmental protection is the function where almost all SEE countries spend the least, as well as the percentage of expenditures related to investments at local level is decreased from 29% in 2006 to 21% in 2017. Nowadays, having in

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mind the coronavirus crisis, the revenue side of the waste utility companies and local governments will tremendously decrease which will make the situation with potential capital investments even worse. It will also affect the quality of the service delivery and potentially wellness of the population. More than 20% of the population in the region, especially those in the rural areas are not fully covered with municipal solid waste management services, which is also an issue worth immediate attention.

**JJ: What is your key advice to the local governments of South-East Europe when it comes to better solid waste management?**

**BI:** One of the issues that is regularly repeating in all editions of this Report since 2014 is the lack of available and reliable data on waste at local level. The NALAS TF on Solid Waste Management has developed a methodology for identification of the quantities and morphology of the municipal waste. Regular measurements will provide the local decision-makers with reliable data on municipal waste necessary for proper development of the local policies. So, this should be a starting point upon which the sustainable SWM system needs to be developed. For example, recycling as an approach for waste treatment seems attractive to most of the local authorities, but the



mechanical biological treatment, composting for instance, should not be neglected having in mind the fact that 55% of the municipal waste is biodegradable. The collected information about the content and quantities of the municipal waste should also change the paradigm and confirm that there is no “one size fits all” solution. Instead, different solutions should be applied for different local contexts, of course based on the informed decisions.

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**Ms. Danijela Djurovic** is a member of the NALAS Solid Waste and Water Management Task Force, on behalf of the Union of Municipalities of Montenegro, coming from the coastal City of Herceg Novi, a true pearl of the Adriatic Sea. Ms. Djurovic is an engineer, specialised in environmental protection. She is a Vice Mayor of Herceg Novi, a former President of the City Assembly, City Manager and Director of the Waste Management Company. This brings Ms. Djurovic to a unique position to not only understand the challenges of solid waste management, but also see and address them from the perspective of a high local level authority.

**JJ: Ms. Djurovic, based on the Report findings and your professional experience, what are the main challenges that local governments and their waste management companies in South-East Europe face?**

**DDj:** It is a common opinion that the lack of financing and high investments in waste management are the two basic issues that waste management companies and municipalities struggle with. Often central governments impose laws hard to be implemented on the local level and that is contributing to more stress when working within the sector. On the other hand, there are many good examples of waste management in simple solutions. It is not always needed to implement high-end solutions, but those that best serve the local needs and practices. Other challenge that is stressing the system is political influence. Unfortunately, due to political changes the decision-makers, but also waste management CEO's are often changed, lacking the continuity of work and even more, investment ideas. Waste management is a specific sector. Either you love it or you hate it. Decision makers, when not coming from the sector, tend not to understand the specifics and needs, which leads to misunderstanding and poor management. Waste management definitely should be led by dedicated professionals from the sector.

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**JJ: When it comes to dealing with these challenges, what is your suggested “to do list” for every municipality that wishes to improve its solid waste management?**

**DDj:** Every municipality has its own ideas how to improve the waste management sector. And they all have their own specifics that should be taken in account. Nevertheless, objectivity should be the main focus. If I was to suggest a “to do list” it would look like this:

1. Recognise and evaluate your assets. Be objective on what you have and how to use it.
2. Set priorities. See what you can and cannot do in a specific period and plan according to that.
3. Invest not just in equipment, but also in employees. Quite often good practitioners can find innovative solutions and produce good results with fewer resources available.
4. Be aware that waste management could be profitable. It is common in our area that waste management companies are more social establishments than productive companies. Even though it is a local service, when operated in a smart



way, it could produce revenues, without being dependent from municipal subsidies.

5. As I said before, less politics and more professionals in waste management could be productive for both.
6. There are good practices all around. Do not be afraid to ask for it and use it. From my experience peer-to-peer approach gives the best results.

**JJ: This report for the first time explores the issue of circular economy and concludes that it is not a priority topic for the SEE countries, with the exception of Slovenia. What is circular economy about and what can we learn from Slovenia?**

**DDj:** Often the terminology of circular economy seems abstract to the general population. Basically, it is a new and improved way of thinking, more towards sustainability and understanding that waste could be a resource. The Report had shown that most of the NALAS region believes that circular economy should be enforced by EU, considering that the EU accession process will force governments take more in account circular economy principles. Even though in some cases CE is present in part of the laws, usually it is not recognised if not worded clearly. That is a strong signal that CE should be more promoted to both practitioners and the general population, for them to understand the meaning and the benefits. The fact that Slovenia is an EU member state for long time, contributed that circular economy principles are implemented in the country legislation and enforced in practice. Slovenia is also a small country, in terms of territory and population, with historically long tradition in implementing innovations and strong working habits. That is why it is not a surprise that Slovenia is a good example of implementation of circular economy principles and practices.

**JJ: Based on your rich professional portfolio, you are in a great position to understand the solid waste management issue both from an expert perspective, but also from a perspective of a decision-maker. What would be your key advice to Mayors? How to use this Report and where to direct their efforts in improving the solid waste management in their communities?**

**DDj:** First of all, within the waste management sector, there are other tools developed by NALAS beside the Benchmarking Report, such as SWIS model and CFM tool (<http://www.nalas.eu/Tools>), both very useful. I would strongly recommend to Mayors to demand from their municipal departments and waste management companies to use those tools and submit reports available from those tools. From one to other election

period, Mayors change and they need to be informed what they have available and easy to use and comprehend. If they need to understand where their municipality stands in the waste sector related to other municipalities or countries, the tools and the Report are the main sources of information. When applying for funds to different donors it is always useful to have studies and documentation to support the project idea. If an investment is considered, the tools could help to conduct easy cost and

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**JJ: Finally, how is Herceg Novi standing when it comes to solid waste management? What is your biggest challenge and what are you especially proud of?**

**DDj:** Herceg Novi was and I still believe is the leading city in Montenegro when talking about waste management. Even though we do not have a sanitary landfill, the disposal site is regulated by local by-laws and is very well managed. We were the first municipality to introduce separate waste collection in 2006

with investment in special street bins and semi-automated recycling line. Due to the fact that space – free public areas are deficient in Herceg Novi, this year we have invested in implementation of semi-underground containers with capacity of 5m<sup>3</sup> and separation of wet and dry waste fraction. We are very proud to be one of the cleanest cities in Montenegro.

