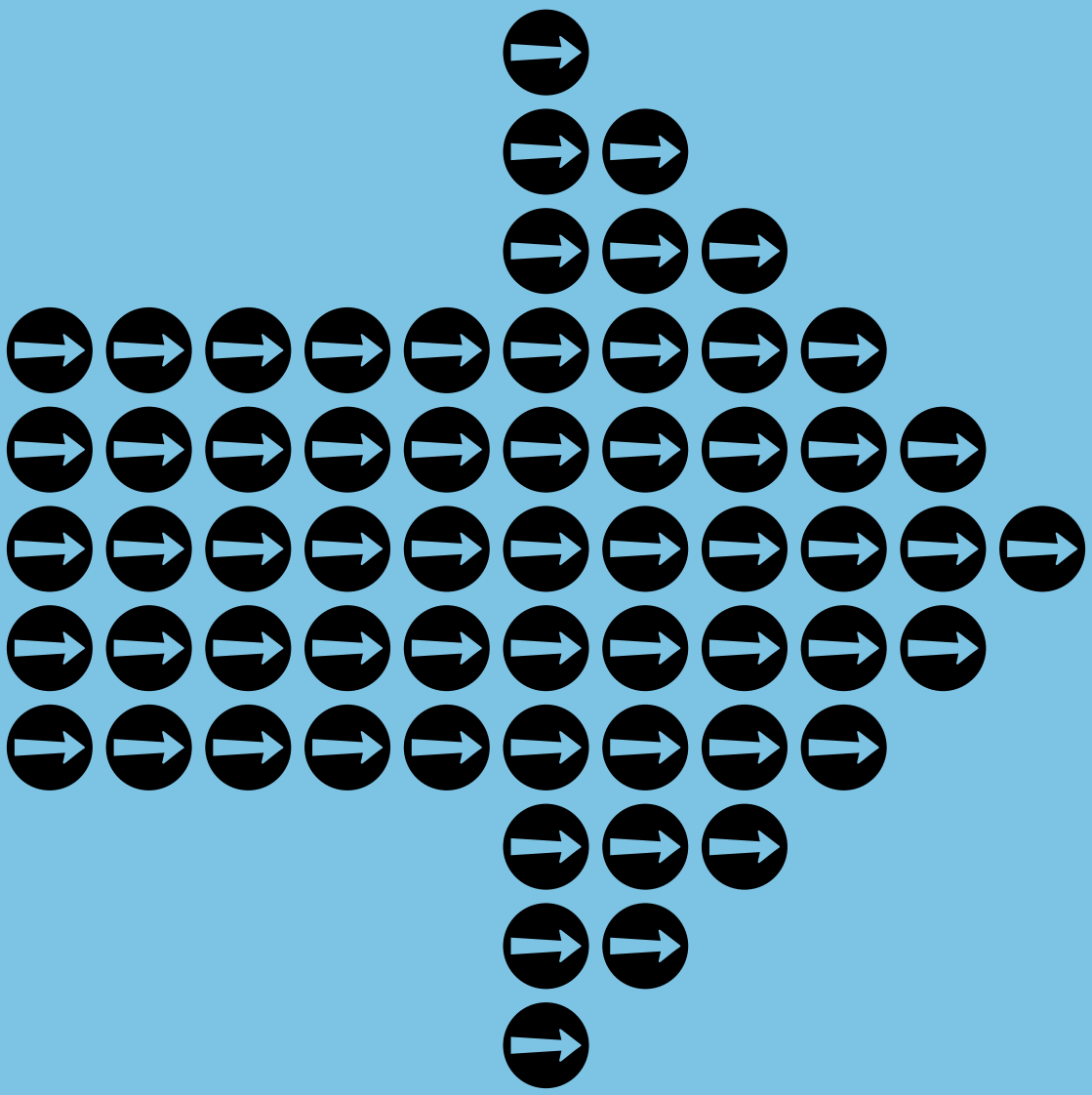


**FEASIBILITY STUDY:
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GRIP
PROJECT IN THE CITY OF KOŠICE**



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Project Partners:

City of Oslo, Norway

City of Aachen, Germany

City of Košice, Slovakia

SINTEF AS, Norway

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INTRODUCTION AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT OF THE GRIP PROJECT

1.1 Definition and Global Framework of the Project

The GRIP project (Green Responsible Innovative Procurement) is a strategic initiative funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe programme, specifically under the auspices of the “NetZeroCities Enabling City Transformation Programme (2024)”. Its primary objective is to build the capacity of cities and transform public procurement from a mere administrative exercise into a key instrument for climate action.

The project responds to a fundamental pan-European challenge: while cities possess the will to inspire one another, the direct replication of climate policies often fails due to „context barriers“. What succeeds in a wealthy capital city with a robust administrative apparatus and a long-standing tradition of sustainability is often not transferable to cities operating under different legislative frameworks, tighter budgets, and limited personnel capacities.

The analysis conducted during the project preparation phase (Proposal) identified that existing guides and methodologies for Green Public Procurement (GPP) are, paradoxically, often perceived as a **barrier in themselves**. They tend to be overly extensive, technically complex, replete with jargon, and disconnected from the everyday reality of public procurers, who operate under the pressure of deadlines, strict legislation, and scrutiny from audit bodies.

GRIP therefore aims to alter this approach. Its goal is not to create a universal „one-size-fits-all“ model, but to develop

and test in practice an **adaptable toolkit**. This tool will respect the **readiness level of a specific city**:

- It will offer tools for fine-tuning innovation and market dialogue for high-capacity cities.
- For cities in the developing phase (such as Košice), it will offer pragmatic „cookbooks“, model documents, and strategies to overcome the „lowest price“ culture, whilst taking into account local market specifics and the need to reduce administrative burden.

1.2 Green Public Procurement as a Strategic Tool

The key instrument for this transformation is **Green Public Procurement (GPP)**. GPP is not merely a technical-administrative procedure for purchasing goods and services. It serves as a strategic instrument of economic policy through which public institutions leverage their substantial purchasing power to shape the market, support eco-innovation, and achieve environmental goals. The European Commission defines GPP as a process whereby public authorities seek to procure goods, services, and works with a reduced environmental impact throughout their life cycle, compared to goods, services, and works with the same primary function that would otherwise be procured. For the Municipality of Košice, which annually oversees purchases ranging from office supplies and vehicle fleets to large-scale construction investments, implementing GPP represents an opportunity not only to reduce its carbon footprint but also to stimulate the local green economy.

1.3 The Knowledge Transfer Ecosystem: From Oslo to Košice

The GRIP architecture is deliberately designed as a „living organism“ that connects cities at three distinct stages of green procurement development. This model, known as the „Mentoring Model“, is not a static hierarchy where one teaches and the other listens. It is a dynamic ecosystem for the exchange of experience, allowing for the universality of proposed solutions to be tested across different European contexts. The consortium is structured as follows:

1. The City of Oslo (The Mature City / Mentor)

- **Role:** Leader and provider of know-how.
- **Context:** Oslo has actively utilised GPP as a strategic tool since 2019. It has established processes and standards for low-emission construction and transport.
- **Benefit for the ecosystem:** It provides a „blueprint“ of successful solutions. It shares methodologies for market consultations and the definition of technical specifications that have already been reality-tested. Oslo also receives feedback regarding which of its practices are transferable and which are too specific to the affluent Scandinavian context.

2. The City of Aachen (The Adopting City / Adaptor)

- **Role:** Validator and adapter.
- **Context:** A city with a strong political commitment (Climate City Contract) that is ready to implement GPP but requires assistance in establishing processes.

- **Benefit for the ecosystem:** Aachen adopts the Oslo models and adapts them to the strict German legislative and market environment. It acts as a „translator“ between the ideal state and the reality of continental Europe, thereby testing the robustness of the GRIP tools.

3. The City of Košice (The Developing City / Laboratory)

- **Role:** Test lab for emerging markets.
- **Context:** A city in a region with lower economic strength, facing capacity challenges and the dominance of the „lowest price“ criterion.
- **Benefit for the ecosystem:** Košice is key to verifying whether GPP is feasible even under resource-constrained conditions. If the method works in Košice, it is likely applicable throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Košice is not merely a recipient; it actively defines the „minimum viable products“ (MVP) for GPP—the absolute essentials a city requires to commence green procurement.

4. The Multipliers

The ecosystem also includes so-called replicator cities (e.g., Münster), which are not direct partners but provide external feedback on the tools being developed. They ensure that the final Toolkit is not „tailored“ solely to the needs of the three partner cities but is universally applicable.

The „Learning-by-doing“ Principle:

Cooperation within this ecosystem is not based on a unilateral flow of information (Oslo -> Košice). There is a strong

feedback loop. When Košice encounters a barrier in applying the Norwegian model (e.g., missing infrastructure for electricity supply), this information is fed back into the system. The aim of this activity is to create a „Toolkit“—a set of tools and guidelines for local governments on how to approach green public procurement, including best practices (with different options for cities depending on capacities, resources, and level of political commitment). The guide will be process-oriented, practical, and will lead users through individual steps of the process while highlighting specific aspects that need to be considered during the planning, budgeting, and implementation phases. The result is a tool that is flexible and modular—usable for both „beginners“ and „advanced“ users.

1.4 The Role of Creative Industry Košice (CIKE) as an Innovation Catalyst

A significant feature of the implementation of the GRIP project in Košice is the involvement of the non-profit organisation **Creative Industry Košice (CIKE)** as a full-fledged consortium partner. CIKE, which emerged as a legacy of the European Capital of Culture 2013 title, introduces a necessary element of creativity and innovation to the technocratic world of public procurement.

Why is CIKE's involvement important for a GPP strategy? Traditional public procurement is often rigid, bound by concerns regarding legal compliance and a tendency towards „status quo“ solutions. CIKE functions in this ecosystem as a bridge between local government and the innovative market. It helps define challenges in a way that attracts not only standard suppliers but also startups and technology companies offering new, often greener solutions.

Within the GRIP project, CIKE focuses on:

- **Capacity building:** Organising workshops and training sessions for city officials, utilizing design thinking methods to solve procurement problems.
- **Pilot interventions:** Supporting the implementation of pilot projects (Work Package 3), where innovative practices are tested in real-time.
- **Knowledge sharing:** Systematising lessons learned and disseminating them not only within the municipality but also towards municipal enterprises and other local governments.

The GRIP project, which runs until September 2026, is currently the de facto „incubator“ for the future green procurement strategy of the City of Košice.

BASELINE ANALYSIS: READINESS AND NEEDS SURVEY

For the successful implementation of the GRIP project, it was necessary not only to define theoretical goals but, above all, to understand the real state of public procurement in the Košice environment. For this purpose, a detailed **questionnaire survey** was carried out in the preparatory phase, aiming to identify current practices, challenges, barriers, and needs of key municipal organisations in the field of public procurement.

The survey was attended by **9 relevant public sector entities** in Košice, including the Municipality of Košice, municipal enterprises (e.g., green management, transport), and the Technical University of Košice, thus ensuring a representative sample across the entire spectrum of contracting authorities. All size categories were represented, from small organisations (up to 9 employees) to large entities with 250 or more employees. The portfolio of activities is broad and includes education and culture, technical services and infrastructure (e.g., green management, road maintenance), local government, and property management. This diversity indicates a wide range of needs in the field of public procurement.

Scope and Content of the Survey

Number of questions: The questionnaire included 28 questions (some with sub-questions) divided into 8 sections.

Survey focus: The survey mapped current practices regarding Green Public Procurement in the city organisations of Košice.

Specifically, it focused on:

- Identification of organisations and their characteristics.
- Current criteria in public procurement (especially the dominance of price criteria vs. environmental criteria).
- The use of environmental criteria when selecting suppliers and the subject of procurement.
- Barriers and obstacles to implementing green criteria.
- Necessary support and measures for improvement.
- Strategies and priorities in individual areas (construction, transport, IT, energy, etc.).
- Monitoring and assessment of environmental impact.
- Willingness to participate in pilot projects.

Twenty-three city districts were addressed, along with all universities in Košice and all faculties of TUKE, all established city enterprises, and some institutions established by the VUC (mostly cultural, where there was a willingness to respond).

Respondents included:

- Technical University of Košice
- East Slovak Gallery
- Košice - Šaca City District

- City of Košice
- BPMK
- Urban Green Management in Košice
- Košice - Džungľa City District
- K13 Košice Cultural Centres
- An entity identified only as „Municipality“ (50-249 employees, technical services and infrastructure sector)

2.1 The „Will versus Reality“ Paradox

A key and disturbing finding of the analysis is the profound **discrepancy between declared willingness and everyday reality**. This „implementation deficit“ is characteristic of an environment that recognises the need for change but lacks the tools or courage to implement it.

- **High level of motivation and awareness:**
The survey confirmed that there is a strong political and managerial will for change in the Košice ecosystem. As many as 8 out of 9 organisations expressed their willingness to participate in pilot projects to test environmental criteria, and the same number are interested in participating in expert working groups. These figures indicate that the „mental barrier“ (rejection of the green agenda) is not the primary problem. Organisations are aware of climate goals and their role in achieving them.

- **The dominance of the „Lowest Price“ culture:**
Despite high willingness, the executive reality is diametrically different. All 9 respondents stated that the dominant, and often the only decisive criterion when choosing a supplier, remains the “lowest price”. Environmental criteria were mentioned as a decisive factor by only 2 organisations. This state of affairs reveals systemic paralysis—procurers, although they wish to purchase differently, in practice revert to the safe and proven path of the lowest price, likely out of fear of inspections (PPO, SAO) and a lack of argumentative certainty.
- **Extremely low level of application in practice:**
Even more alarming is the situation regarding specific commodities. In common and marketable categories such as IT, electronics, or office supplies, where the offer of „green“ alternatives on the market is standard, most organisations reported the share of environmental criteria at the level of „less than 10%“ or „none“. This implies that even with „low-hanging fruit“ (easily available green products), the city is not utilizing its purchasing power to promote sustainability.

Analysis Conclusion: The problem in Košice is not a lack of interest, but **a systemic inability to translate strategic interest into operational practice**. What is missing is the „gear lever“—the tools, templates, and knowledge that would allow buyers to safely leave the comfort zone of the lowest price.

2.2 Identification of Key Barriers

Analysis of the responses made it possible to precisely identify why GPP is used at an extremely low rate in Košice.

Three main categories of obstacles were identified:

- **Financial barriers (perceived costs):**
The most frequently cited barrier (5 out of 9 respondents) is “higher costs” and a lack of funding. Procurers perceive green solutions as more expensive because they often do not work with Life Cycle Costing (LCC) methodologies.
- **Capacity and knowledge deficits:**
The second most significant barrier is “lack of expertise.” Employees feel insecure about defining technical specifications for green contracts.
- **Market restrictions:**
Respondents also pointed to a “lack of suppliers” and a limited offering of environmental solutions.

CASE STUDY (PILOT PROJECT): PURCHASE OF COMPUTER EQUIPMENT

Following the results of the questionnaire survey, which identified the „IT and electronics“ segment as an area with a high frequency of purchases but simultaneously with extremely low use of environmental criteria (most respondents reported a share of < 10%), a pilot contract was selected, focused on **the purchase of computer equipment (computers and laptops).**

The implementation of this contract represented a strategic experiment in the form of a „**Living Lab**“. The primary goal was not only to provide material and technical equipment for the municipality but, above all, **the empirical verification of findings from the questionnaire survey in a real market environment.** This process was purposefully designed to critically examine the identified barriers—particularly perceived administrative burdens and anticipated increased financial costs. The aim was to confirm or refute the hypothesis of whether these barriers are objective in nature or merely persistent myths resulting from insufficient practice.

3.1 Evolution of Strategy: From the “Gold Standard” to „Green by Default“

The process of preparing the pilot contract underwent an important development that illustrates the clash between the theoretical ideal and the administrative reality of public procurement.

- **Phase A: Initial Strategic Proposal (“Green by Bonus”)**

An ambitious proposal was developed in the initial phase, aiming for a comprehensive Multi-Criteria Assessment (MEAT). The strategy included awarding extra points for a high proportion of recycled plastics, ownership of environmental certificates, or a superior warranty.

- **Phase B: Rationalization and Implementation (“Green by Default” with MEAT elements)**

When moving to the implementation phase (call for tenders pursuant to Section 108 of the Public Procurement Act – sub-threshold contract), the public procurer had to take into account the need for administrative efficiency and process speed. The originally intended comprehensive scoring model, where suppliers would be ranked based on the percentage of recycled plastic, would have required difficult and lengthy verification of technical sheets for each bid.

To avoid the risk of process errors and disproportionate burden on buyers, an innovative strategy was chosen: **„Green by Default“**. In practice, this meant a radical shift: key environmental characteristics did not become a matter of competition (who receives the most points), but **an insurmountable condition for participation** (compliance is mandatory for inclusion).

However, it is crucial to emphasise that this approach did not imply a resignation regarding quality or a descent into the “lowest price” trap. **The competition retained its MEAT character (Most Economically Advantageous Tender)**. The evaluation criterion was not merely price, but a combination of price, **warranty period**,

and environmental certificates. With this hybrid model, the city achieved a dual effect:

1. Environmental minimum:

Guaranteed for everyone through technical specifications (preventing the offer of „harmful“ products).

2. Economic advantage:

Competition for the best price and longest lifespan (warranty) among those who met the green minimum.

The following parameters were therefore directly incorporated into the binding technical specifications (Annex No. 1 of the Call):

- **Energy efficiency:**

Strict requirement for compliance with the **Energy Star 8.0** standard (or the current EU regulation for ecodesign ErP Lot 3/7), which excluded energy-inefficient devices.

- **Repairability and modularity:**

A requirement for a design solution that allows for easy replacement of key components (battery, memory, disk) using commonly available tools, which is key to extending the life of the device.

- **Sustainable packaging:**

Explicit ban on difficult-to-recycle plastic fillers and a requirement for packaging made from at least **80% recycled cardboard**.

This approach ensured that the winning product would be „green“, regardless of which bidder won, eliminating the risk of purchasing cheap but environmentally unfriendly hardware.

3.2 Debunking the Myth of „Expensive Green Procurement“

The most significant finding of the pilot project is the **destruction of financial barriers**, which was cited as the main obstacle by 5 out of 9 respondents in the questionnaire.

1. ECV setting:

The Estimated Contract Value (ECV) was determined based on a market survey for **standard** computing technology, without specific environmental surcharges.

2. Competition result:

The winning bid not only met all strict environmental requirements and offered an extended warranty (extending the product's life cycle), but its **final price was lower than the Estimated Contract Value**.

This result clearly demonstrates that with the correct setting of market consultations and technical specifications, an **environmental solution need not be more expensive**.

3.3 Debunking the Myth of „Administrative Burden“

The second most common argument against the introduction of GPP (according to the survey) was the fear of **administrative burden and process complexity**. Employees feared that „green“ procurement would entail weeks of extra work, complex mathematical formulas for evaluation, and the risk of legal disputes. However, the pilot contract proved the exact opposite.

The **„Green by Default“** strategy, which moved environmental requirements from the evaluation process (MEAT)

directly into the technical specification (Conditions of Participation), not only did not complicate the process but even **simplified and accelerated it**:

1. Binary evaluation (YES/NO):

The buyer did not have to calculate points, weigh percentages of recycled material, or compare complex technical sheets. The check was simple: Is the device Energy Star/ErP certified? YES. Is there a declaration of honour on packaging in the offer? YES. If the answers were positive, the offer was accepted.

2. Legal certainty:

By competing for the prize (while meeting strict quality standards), the risk of subjective evaluation and subsequent objections from unsuccessful bidders—common with MEAT criteria—was eliminated.

3. Standardization:

The use of internationally recognised standards (TCO, Energy Star) freed the buyer from the obligation to invent their own, often questionable, definitions of „environmental friendliness“.

The pilot project thus proved that GPP can be **procedurally efficient, fast, and legally secure** if the correct method is chosen.

3.4 Innovative Use of MEAT Criteria Without Administrative Burden

In connection with the myth of administrative burden, it is important to clarify that the pilot competition was not based solely on the lowest price. It also utilised **MEAT criteria** (Most Economically Advantageous Tender), which

included qualitative parameters. The key finding, however, is that the **MEAT criteria were designed to be efficient and quickly assessable**, thus not causing excessive administrative burden. Instead of complex formulas and subjective assessments of „quality“, which often lead to objections and the prolongation of competitions, **objectively measurable parameters** were used:

- **Warranty length (extra points):**

The assessment was a simple mathematical assignment of points for each year of warranty beyond the legal minimum. This parameter did not require any expert opinions or complex verification and had a direct impact on sustainability (longer equipment life).

- **Environmental properties:**

These were set up so that their fulfilment was supported by a clear certificate (e.g., TCO) or a technical sheet (e.g., energy consumption), allowing the commission to make a quick and clear decision.

This approach achieved **„Legal Certainty“**. By competing for the contract while meeting strict quality standards and additional, easily verifiable MEAT criteria, the risk of subjective evaluation and subsequent objections from unsuccessful bidders was eliminated.

3.5 Flexibility and Dialogue with the Market

The pilot contract also demonstrated the importance of the institution of explanation. During the competition, the contracting authority responded to market stimuli and adjusted the display size specification from a fixed 15.6" to a range of „15.6 to 16 inches" and replaced the Energy Star requirement for AIO computers with a legislative reference

to **ErP (Energy-related Products)**. This acronym stands for energy-related products and refers to the Ecodesign Directive (2009/125/EC), which sets mandatory energy efficiency requirements for products placed on the EU market. This flexibility allowed for wider competition and prevented the exclusion of quality bidders.

LESSONS LEARNED AND THE WAY FORWARD: FROM PILOT TO SYSTEM

The implementation of the pilot order for the purchase of computer equipment was not merely an isolated transaction, but a strategic „**proof of concept**“ (proof of feasibility) for the entire City of Košice. Confronting the results from Chapter 2 (where concerns about high costs dominated) with the reality in Chapter 3 (where financial savings were achieved) brings a fundamental finding: **GPP is fully feasible under the conditions of the City of Košice without a negative impact on the city budget.** This knowledge represents the most important lesson learned from the entire pilot process, shattering the long-standing myth regarding the financial unsustainability of ecological solutions.

4.1 Key Lessons Learned

Based on an in-depth analysis of the course and results of the pilot project, we can formulate six fundamental conclusions that rewrite the current narrative about green public procurement in Košice:

1. **Demystifying the price: „Green“ does not mean „expensive“.**

The most important finding is the empirical refutation of the myth that environmental criteria automatically increase the price beyond the city's budgetary possibilities. The pilot contract showed that if requirements are set in accordance with current market standards, the market can generate an offer that is ecological, high-quality, and simultaneously priced below the Estimated Contract Value (ECV).

- **Proof:**

The ECV was determined based on a market survey of common (non-specified) devices. The winning bid, which included a full package of environmental features (TCO, recycled packaging, energy efficiency), was nevertheless lower.

- **Conclusion:**

The economic barrier is often psychological, not real, in the segment of common commodities. „Green“ features are becoming a market standard, not a luxury surcharge.

2. **Administrative Efficiency (Myth about Complexity).**

The pilot project dispelled the fear that GPP had to be administratively demanding and time-consuming. The key to success was changing the complex scoring strategy to a “Green by Default” strategy (green parameters as a condition for participation).

- **Mechanism:**

The buyer did not have to laboriously calculate

the percentages of recycled content in each component, nor study the complex chemical composition of plastics, which would require expert knowledge.

- **Result:**

The evaluation process was reduced to a quick binary check (Yes/No) for the presence of the required certificates (e.g., Energy Star, TCO) that were required as part of the tender evaluation criteria. This radically reduced the error rate, accelerated the work of the commission, and minimized the room for subjective decision-making.

3. **The Power of Technical Specifications (“Green by Default”).**

For routine operational purchases (commodities such as IT, paper, cleaning products), it has proven inefficient to use complex scoring criteria that place an administrative burden on purchasers and often lead to minimal differences in points. A much more effective way for Košice is the “Green by Default” strategy—integrating green parameters directly into mandatory technical requirements.

- **Effect:**

In this way, the city guarantees that **100% of purchased goods** will meet environmental standards. With the point system (Green by Bonus), there is a risk that a cheap, non-ecological bidder who simply missed out on points for ecology will win. The technical specification closes this „loophole“.

4. Dialogue with the Market is a Necessity.

The pilot project would likely have failed or been significantly more expensive if the contracting authority had strictly insisted on the original parameters without consultation. Public procurement is not about dictating unrealistic terms from behind a desk, but about finding the intersection between the city's needs and market possibilities.

- **Example:**

The acceptance of 16" monitors instead of fixed 15.6" and the replacement of the Energy Star certification for AIO computers with a legislative reference to ErP enabled a wider range of suppliers to participate.

- **Conclusion:**

Flexibility and the institution of explanation (market consultation) are critical tools for preventing cancelled competitions (the „lock-in“ effect).

5. The Local Market is Ready.

The fear of a shortage of suppliers has not been confirmed. Suppliers in the region are mostly distributors of global brands that are part of international supply chains. These brands (HP, Dell, Lenovo, etc.) have long since adapted to the strict standards of Western Europe and Scandinavia.

- **Conclusion:**

Košice does not need to „educate“ the market in basic commodities. Local suppliers are able to meet environmental standards if they are clearly and understandably defined (e.g., by reference to ISO standards or EU legislation).

6. **Moving Away from the Dictates of the Lowest Price: Quality and Sustainability (MEAT Criteria).**

While the pilot project showed that “it can be done”, the GRIP project aims to ensure that this happens systematically. To ensure that the success of the pilot does not become an isolated exception, the next phases of the project will focus on working systematically with city institutions.

Currently, **intensive workshops** are being held with city employees and relevant stakeholders, aimed at identifying in detail the specific needs, barriers, and expectations of individual departments and organisations.

All this knowledge, together with the experience gained from the pilot project, will subsequently be transformed into two key project outputs:

1. **Roadmap:**

Defines the strategic approach.

1. **Toolkit:**

Provides practical support for buyers.

These documents will not be created „from a desk“, but will be a direct reflection of real needs identified during ongoing participatory meetings.

Conclusion

The feasibility study clearly confirms that the **implementation of Green Public Procurement under the conditions of the City of Košice is feasible, economically sustainable, and strategically necessary.**

It was the implementation of a sample (pilot) order for the purchase of IT equipment that provided tangible proof that theoretical knowledge and methodologies are directly applicable in practice. The lessons learned from this process—from setting technical specifications to successful market dialogue—will not remain in isolation. They will be directly implemented into the next phases of the GRIP project, namely the creation of the Roadmap and Toolkit, ensuring that this is not a one-off success, but the beginning of a systemic change.

The barriers identified in the introduction (fear of price, administration, ignorance) can be overcome through education (CIKE), the simplification of processes, and the use of standardized tools that the GRIP project will bring in the following phases. Thanks to this project, Košice has a unique opportunity to become a leader in innovative and responsible procurement in the region.

In Bratislava 19.12.2025



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