



CSE Spotlight

Spotlight on De Pleats

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Themes:

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Country:

Netherlands

Restaurant De Pleats

De Pleats is a medium-sized restaurant in Burgum, a village in the north of the Netherlands. It is the first restaurant in the region that obtained a Green Key Gold certificate (in 2014). This certificate confirms its restaurant's sustainability efforts. De Pleats serves an important social function as well, and it is strongly anchored in the region. Where most sustainable hospitality companies focus on reducing their impact on the environment, and have less attention for the social dimensions of sustainability, De Pleats does both. This is in part due to the origins of the company: it was founded as a farmhouse in the 1778, and has served as a cultural centre since 1954. Though being taken over from the municipality by its current management in 1997, De Pleats remained its role as an important social gathering place. It hosts open air and indoor theatre and music performances throughout the year.

Adding value to employees

The company's motto 'always hospitable' applies to all types of guests, as well as their own employees. People with physical or mental disabilities are always welcome. This hospitality also applies to its staff. De Pleats employs several persons with a 'distance to the labour market'. Persons who might find it challenging to find employment or who are employed via protected employment agreements are welcome to join the team. De Pleats, for example, employed a person with a visual impairment in their dishwashing activities. De Pleats is a flat organization. They limit hierarchy in their company. There are no formal supervisors. The person that comes in first plans the daily shifts thus creating equality amongst employees. Responsibilities are given to all employees. For example, by allowing household staff (who come in before the restaurant opens) to also serve early clients and restaurant guests next to regular cleaning activities. Overtime and late shifts followed by early shifts and vice versa are seen as an exception contrary to common practice in the industry. Employees are allowed to consume anything (non-alcoholic) during their shifts and are not asked to pay for it. They receive reimbursements for transport costs, including trainees. The rationale behind the employee policy of De Pleats is that although the restaurant business is all about hospitality, entrepreneurs themselves often tend to forget to treat their employees the same way as their guests. This policy contributes to their reputation. De Pleats has a waiting list of people who would like to join as employees.

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Adding value to the community

In its community, De Pleats takes an example role in engaging other entrepreneurs in sustainability measures that benefit the community. For example, De Pleats took a leading role in applying for a grant that was used to plant trees in the public space to make it more attractive. Furthermore, an idea was pitched to collect the coffee grinds collectively. Individually no company could meet the quota of kilograms needed to make it financially feasible for a company to pick it up and convert it into bio gas. The profits would be reinvested in making the public space in the village more attractive. De Pleats



also had a leading role in getting an electrical taxi service in the village. Especially elderly people, but also others with a physical impediment, found it challenging to do grocery shopping or visiting the health care institutions. The project successfully obtained financing and the electrical taxi service is now available for any person living within the zip code area of Burgum, for just 1 euro per ride.

Adding value to the environment

De Pleats also actively adds value to the environment. The Green Key Gold certification stipulates impact reducing measures with a strong focus on water, energy and waste. De Pleats takes these much further than the bare minimum. All chemical cleaning products are banned from the restaurant; there is not one bottle of chlorine to be found. Local food and beverage products are intensively used and presented on the menu, which provides income for local entrepreneurs and gives a sense of place of the village of Burgum and the province of Fryslân to the guests. This local sourcing leads to less 'food miles'; the amount of transport needed to get food from its source of origin to the plate (or glass) of the customer. The daily special always includes a vegetarian option. Food waste is also important, because it is considered inappropriate to throw away good food. The restaurant started serving their side dishes in smaller portions and instructed their waiters to inform the guests that they are always welcome to order more accompaniments free of charge. These efforts led to a reduction of side dish waste of 716 kilograms on a yearly basis, with a worth of 788 euros.

Dealing with challenges

The entrepreneur is a driving force for the sustainable performance of De Pleats. When challenges are observed there are typically two ways to deal with them. The first is to do research the topic and understand underlying causes and solutions. Food waste, for example, has been a topic for research resulting in improved performance, the employees' hospitableness and the influence of a hospitable attitude on guest appreciation of the service. The second is the 'trial and error' approach. One result of this approach is that employees are allowed to post Facebook messages on the page of the restaurant by themselves based on full trust. Employees often co-decide guest orders and therefore have opportunities to support the selection of sustainable products. The 'can-do' attitude is part of the entrepreneur's lifestyle. For instance, she observed insufficient facilities for autism education in regular schools. The 'can-do' mentality resulted in setting up an autism campus in Fryslân. She ignites positive change in the region via her entrepreneurship including memberships and participation in a wide variety of local community boards and committees.

Finally, if you would ask her if she thinks her business is very sustainable, than she would probably shrug and say 'it's okay'. This reflects the modest and down-to-earth Frisians culture but also the fact that sustainability is her default. Her key value of business is doing good for others, the environment and yourself. She comes close to the perfect archetype of a successful sustainable entrepreneur although she would probably not label herself in this way.