

**Interview with Dominika Dawiec**  
**the Vice President of Instytut Zrównoważonej Energii „Miękinia”**

[transcript]

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Good morning, my name is Natalia Mizera. I am from the UNIVERSEH project and today Mrs. Dominika Dawiec from the Miękinia Institute of Sustainable Energy is with me. Good morning, welcome Mrs. Natalia. I think that in the first place, since the age difference between us is not large, I suggest that we switch to "you". I'm Dominika. Natalia, very nice to meet.

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We met today to talk about spin-offs. So let's start with who are you at all? On a daily basis, I am an employee of the university, I work at the Faculty of Geology, Geophysics and Environmental Protection of the AGH University of Science and Technology. In addition to such standard, educational and didactic activities, I also deal with the implementation of research and development projects, as well as investment projects. Currently, we are finishing a very large investment at the Faculty under the name of the Center for Sustainable Development and Respect for

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Energy. It is a building

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built in Miękinia. Currently, we are equipping it with specialized scientific and research equipment. There will be laboratories, including a laboratory of mineral and organic sorbents or a radioisotope laboratory of environmental analysis or our original laboratory of renewable energy sources and

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virtual reality. Cool, could you tell us a little bit about what exactly the Institute does? The Institute is a spin-off company that I run under the full name of the Miękinia

Sustainable Energy Institute. It is a company founded in 2015 and this company also operates in the renewable energy industry. We focus on the implementation of investments

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related mainly to heat pumps. Heat pumps are currently a very mature, highly effective and widely available technology in Poland. We make various types of installations, including cascade heat pump installations or technological heat recovery installations. This is our kind of pearl of the industry, although we also make hybrid heat pump installations in combination

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with some other renewable energy technology, such as photovoltaics. We also build research and teaching stations related to renewable energy technologies. It all sounds very interesting, but also very advanced. So where did the idea to start operating in such an industry come from?

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Honestly, the originator of the founding of this company was late Jadosław Kotyza, entrepreneur,

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who in the renewable energy industry worked very

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very long years since the times when renewable energy sources in Poland were not justified by the society. This was related, among other things, to low

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in those days, electricity prices and, on the other hand, very high prices of technologies using renewable energy sources, for example heat pumps. This technology was just entering the Polish market was immature and the prices of these devices were very high, and also there were also no government programs, subsidy programs that would allow the average John Smith

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to install such a device in your single-family home. So an idea appeared. Did you have any goal, at what point did you decide that this was really the moment to start operating officially as a company? I must admit that we were consciously following

various reports on the development of renewable energy technologies in European countries and in countries around the world.

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We noticed a trend related to the very rapid development of renewable energy sources in other European countries and that is why we decided to establish a company, because we saw great potential that in Poland this technology also has a chance for rapid development. It's clear who you needed on your team to get started.  
Company Team

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spin-off has been created. They were mainly university researchers plus a daughter company

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of the AGH University of Science and Technology INNOAGH. Of see. So I'd like to know a little bit, what were your own motivations as a researcher to start working with industry?

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Working in a spin-off company allows practical application of research results and that was kind of my main motivation. In addition, my motivation is to develop business skills, build a brand, focus on aspects of commercialization. In addition, I must admit that working in a spin-off company gives way more flexibility and autonomy than working at a university.

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Also cooperation with the industry, already at the stage of writing my doctoral thesis, which I prepared in cooperation with the municipal heat energy company. I noticed that cooperation with industry, when science meets practice, is very important. This gives rise to great potential for the implementation of new projects. New ideas are created to be implemented

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and in my opinion, for a scientist.

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the commercial application of research results is, in my opinion, the most important distinction for a scientist in the evaluation of scientific achievements. Of course, I think you can just see this practical application then. You just used such a very nice

phrase, where learning and practice are combined. I just wanted to ask about what support you received from the university?

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As far as the support received from the university is concerned, there was undoubtedly a kind of direct access to the scientific and research equipment on which we were preparing

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tests, like of heating devices, including heat pumps. Our strength was that at the stage of creating the company we already had a huge potential of practical knowledge. And where did you get the funding from?

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The share capital of the company was created by making a financial contribution of shareholders

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Company. It was our financial contribution at a small level, although at a level enabling the commencement of the first stage of the company's operation. Here I must emphasize that financial management in the company, especially at the first stage of activity, is indeed important. I do not recommend taking loans or credits in the first place, because it is very risky.

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Sure, but what are the consequences of academia engaging with industry? Here, undoubtedly,

8:39 as spin-off companies drive such a cooperation between the university and industry. This is a big advantage for the university because as a result of such cooperation, common ideas for projects are born, which

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can be implemented by the university. Usually, we submit applications for funding for such projects, including to the National Centre for Research and Development. Are the benefits you assumed compatible with those you have achieved? Of course, our motivation for the functioning of the spin-off company was the implementation of

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innovations and new solutions for the market, and working in a spin-off company definitely enabled the practical application of research results and knowledge transfer to the market. In addition, my motivation was to develop my own business skills, learn brand building methods, learn company management, marketing and advertising, and running a company forced me to develop these entrepreneurship

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and management skills.

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Thanks to running the company, I have acquired business competences not only in the form of theoretical knowledge, but most importantly in the form of specific practical knowledge.

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Well

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Practical knowledge, and yet also contact with the client, to whom, let's say, this knowledge should eventually go in some form. How did you find your customers, do you still do it? What does such cooperation look like? In fact, we already had our first customers before the company was founded. This was due to the fact that the company's shareholders and the management board participated in many organizations before establishing the company,

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associations.

For example, I personally functioned,

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I was a member of an association, for example the Polish Geothermal Association or the Geos Geosynoptics Association. I was also active in other organizations, such as the Polish Organization

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Development of Heat Pump Technology or GlobEnergia Editorial Team. It's like functioning in this environment that,

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already has a very large network. Functioning in this industry allowed us to build a very strong network of contacts and acquire the first customers before the establishment of the company, also we performed our first projects only a month after signing the notarial deed establishing the company. Everything sounds like a real machine for making success.

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Listening to you, I think I can say for sure that your actions, your current activity is a synonym of success, and so I would like to ask, what do you think are the key elements of this success that so many of us are striving for? I think that undoubtedly the way to success here is to develop a clear vision and mission for the company. Defining specific goals. In my opinion, the company's mission is its foundation.

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In addition, the team. Here, building a strong team that shares a common goal, vision and values, as well as at a later stage strong investment in this team, i.e. various types of employee training and similar elements. In addition, in my opinion, effective communication, not only between

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team members, but also effective communication with customers

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and business partners and in my opinion it is also important to accept feedback, learn from experience and be flexible in adapting to changing market conditions or customer needs and situations. We remember recently we had the COVID pandemic

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that actually turned the business environment upside down. Currently, we have a war at the gates, which also affects various aspects of doing business here.

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So we know what you think the elements of this success are. And what do you think characterizes an entrepreneur who has the potential to achieve this success? Entrepreneurs should be able to effectively lead a team and motivate. Such was the late Jarosław Kotyza, the founder of the Miękinia Sustainable Energy Institute. He motivated others to act and create further development strategies.

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We are currently continuing his mission to grow a spinoff company.

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Currently, we are trying to expand our offer with the production, sale and installation of high-power heat pumps. We are at the stage of constructed prototype of a high-power heat pump. The prototype is currently undergoing testing so that it can be commercially launched on the market. We are also at the stage of talks with a potential investor who sees in our company a large

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potential and wants to financially support our company. I admit that it would help us start the production of this device - a high-power heat pump on a large scale.

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Sure. Well, I think that you, as an experienced person at the moment, can help us here a little bit of our group of students by giving advice, that is, exactly what would you advise people who are interested in starting such a business as a spin-off company? Maybe in the space sector, maybe in another sector. What do you think is the most important? How do you think you can help them with your good advice? In my opinion, undoubtedly the space sector

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is dynamic and requires very specialized knowledge, so one of my advice for students and scientists is, of course, to deepen their knowledge and develop skills in areas related to space technologies, engineering, earth sciences, astronomy or space resource management. It is worth it, really worth it, because it is something that has led our company to success,

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make contacts with other scientists, students and professionals from the space industry, establish cooperation also with scientific institutions and research centers that conduct space-related research.

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And not only in Poland, but above all abroad. For example, I can recommend here the French university International

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Space University.

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In my opinion, it is also important to participate in conferences, symposia and other events where you can meet people from the industry. Cooperation and exchange of experience with others is very valuable and creates a field to start business ventures.

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I also recommend identifying market gaps, problems to be solved or new opportunities for the use of space technologies. It also pays to identify areas where space technologies can be used outside the space sector, for example telecommunications,

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navigation, Earth observation or satellite data analysis. And finally, the icing on the cake. FENG, i.e. European Funds for the Modern Economy, has just been launched. Other European funds programmes have been launched. I recommend looking for opportunities to support and finance space ideas and projects. There are various organizations, programs and competitions that offer grants, scholarships,

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Business incubators and mentoring support for space startups. The space sector is the future of the world, so this field is taken into special consideration in the context of providing financial support.

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Thank you very much Dominika for this broad advice and broadly sharing of your experience, that is really huge, despite the fact that, as you mentioned at the beginning, the age difference between us is not so big. Slowly approaching the end, I think there is another important question. Is there a topic you'd like to share with us? Because you know from experience that it is simply important, and perhaps very often overlooked in the conversation about spin-offs.

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Yes, it seems to me that here such a key issue in the context of spin-off companies



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is the protection of intellectual property, which we did not mention. A spin-off company is often created on the basis of the results of scientific research or innovative ideas created during work at the university. The most important issue is to establish the right to use the technology and research results and to obtain appropriate licenses or technology transfer agreements. Regulating these issues is crucial

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In the context of cooperation with the university, in addition, at later stages it is important to properly protect intellectual property through patent filing, trademark registration

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or protection of business or university secrets. Thank you very much for this little insert at the end, which may turn out to be very crucial, in fact when developing your own business. Once again, thank you very much for the interview. It was very nice to meet you, to learn a little more about your business and I think we would love to follow you and your company. So where can we find more information about you? I think here I will show off our website,

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where you will find not only the offer of our company, but also various curiosities from the industry from the world of RES, and from our website is [www.instytutmiekinia.pl](http://www.instytutmiekinia.pl).

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Super, thank you very much and we will definitely follow your fate with bated breath. Thank you.

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