



# Tazar as a Model of Social Entrepreneurship: Driving Innovation in Waste Management in Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract	Conference Article
<p>This article analyzes the Tazar Company as an example of Social entrepreneurship in the Kyrgyz Republic, which seeks to solve existing social and environmental problems through an entrepreneurial mindset and skills. Equally, the article aims to show the role of social entrepreneurs in launching and running a social enterprise, which plays a significant role in solving societal problems.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Social entrepreneurship, Tazar, environmental problem, waste management, digital tools.</p>	

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## I. Introduction

According to the United Nations Environment Programme's Global Waste Management Outlook 2024 (UNEP, 2024), more than 2 billion tonnes of municipal solid waste are generated globally each year. The report draws the following analogy: "If all this volume were placed in standard shipping containers, they could circle the Earth at the equator 25 times or reach the moon and back" (UNEP, 2024, p. 9). The study predicts that without urgent action, waste generation will increase by 56% by 2050, reaching 3.8 billion tonnes per year. Only 62% of this waste is managed responsibly; the rest is incinerated, dumped in unauthorized landfills, or left uncollected (UNEP, 2024).

Meanwhile, according to the same report, improper waste management is a significant factor

exacerbating three interrelated crises: climate, environmental, and sanitary (UNEP, 2024). The transportation, processing, and disposal of waste contribute to greenhouse gas and pollutant emissions, accelerating climate change. Uncontrolled waste disposal pollutes land and water bodies, disrupting biodiversity and food chains. It is estimated that between 400,000 and 1 million people die annually from diseases related to poor waste management, including infectious diseases and cancer (UNEP, 2024).

Kyrgyzstan generates approximately 1.2 million tons of waste annually, with less than 5% recycled. The remaining 95% is disposed of in landfills without prior sorting or processing. In 2023, the volume of waste disposed of was 1.792 million tons, equivalent to approximately 250 kilograms per



person per year. This situation places significant pressure on the country's ecological system: landfills overflow, polluting the air, soil, and groundwater (Ushakov, 2025).

All of this is particularly acute given Kyrgyzstan's natural wealth. In a country where mountainous landscapes, lakes, and biodiversity are considered national treasures, garbage creates a painful contrast and is becoming increasingly visible. Against the backdrop of pristine nature, manifestations of human negligence are particularly striking: plastic trash, wrappers, and household waste are found in the mountains, on the shores of lakes and mountain rivers, in gorges, in pastures, and along popular tourist routes. Pollution not only spoils the landscape: when released into the environment, waste contributes to ecosystem degradation and poses risks to all living organisms (Vallero, 2019).

This situation requires not only technical solutions but also a rethinking of approaches at the behavioural, cultural, and societal levels. In a context where recycling infrastructure remains limited, and the habit of sorting waste is only beginning, initiatives aimed at environmental education and citizen engagement in recycling processes are significant. One of the most notable and successful such initiatives in Kyrgyzstan is Tazar. This social enterprise has become over the past few years a confident leader in promoting sustainable waste management practices. By prioritizing environmental responsibility, digital technologies, and mass education, Tazar demonstrates how social entrepreneurship can drive systemic change. After all, it's not just a waste-sorting startup; it's an initiative seeking to transform the very culture of consumption in Kyrgyzstan.

This article examines the development of the Tazar initiative as an example of social entrepreneurship in sustainable waste management in Kyrgyzstan. The analysis covers key stages of the organization's growth and expansion, from the initial idea and the launch of a mobile app to the formation of a platform combining digital solutions, educational initiatives, and local projects. Special attention is given to the challenges the team faces and the opportunities arising from the growing interest in

the green economy and sustainable development in Kyrgyzstan.

Theoretical basis explains social entrepreneurship as “enterprising a social innovation” and as creating social value (Dees and Anderson, 2006), while aiming to solve social problems. A social entrepreneur is “who carries out innovations that blend methods from the worlds of business and philanthropy to create social value that is sustainable and has the potential for large-scale impact” (Dees and Anderson, 2006) or “an individual whose main objective is not to make profits but to create social value for which he/she will adopt an entrepreneurial behaviour” (Bacq and Janssen, 2011, 381). The social entrepreneurs are analysed as “individuals with a social mission, capable of combining practices and knowledge as well as developing partnerships to promote sustainable social change” (Macke et al. 2018, 677). One of the most representative notions on social entrepreneurship (Zahra et al. 2009) explains that “they make significant and varied contributions to their communities by adopting business models to offer creative solutions to complex and persistent social problems” (p. 519).

Our methodology is a case study. This article is based on both an analysis of open sources and an in-depth interview conducted with one of Tazar's co-founders, Ainura Sagyn. Data from the organization's official website, its social media pages, as well as previously published public speeches and interviews with the founders, were used to provide a detailed description of Tazar's history, structure, and areas of activity.

## II. Analysis/Discussion

### 2.1. Historical Background of “Tazar”

In 2018, two friends, Aimeerim Tursalieva and Ainura Sagyn, the future founders of Tazar, spent a lot of time hiking in the mountains, exploring the country's natural beauty. However, their admiration for the landscapes was invariably accompanied by disappointment: even in the most picturesque corners, by mountain lakes and rivers, and along hiking trails, they repeatedly encountered discarded bottles, packaging, and other waste. This observation became the starting point for an idea: to

create an initiative that would help people care for nature, starting with a simple, understandable action: waste sorting (YouTube, 2018). "It was painful for us to see how much trash there was everywhere, in the mountains, in the city. And I thought: how can I help the city, the state, the people solve this problem? Well, because I live in this country, in this city. I understand that if each of us doesn't contribute something to development, then no one will do it, and everyone will wait until someone wants to solve it" (Interview with Ainura Sagyn, co-founder of Tazar, May 2025).

The founders personally walked the city, documenting the addresses of recycling collection points, and were struck by how little residents knew about them, despite their large number. Their first idea was to be as hands-on as possible: printing a list of addresses and posting it in stores. However, it soon became clear that a more convenient and scalable tool was needed to reach a wider audience. One of the founders, Ainura Sagyn, is a software engineer. Her professional experience led to the idea of creating a mobile app that would enable users to find information about the nearest recycling collection points quickly. Thus, in 2019, the first version of the Tazar app was released, a simple, minimalist solution that brought together all known recycling collection points in Bishkek. The founders financed the development themselves. The app quickly resonated with city residents; people downloaded it frequently, shared it with friends, and asked questions. This demonstrated that there was already demand for waste sorting and environmental awareness in the city; all that was missing was an accessible, understandable tool (Interview with Ainura Sagyn, May 2025). Today, it is a social enterprise that combines technology, educational activities, and sustainable lifestyle values. Tazar is gradually changing the environmental habits of an entire society. It is not only a technology platform but also a team that implements large-scale projects, develops partnerships, and promotes environmental education at various levels, from school classrooms to businesses, city administrations, and relevant government agencies.

## 2.2. Tazar Today

Today, Tazar is more than just a mobile app. It is a social enterprise that combines digital technologies, educational activities, research initiatives, and practical support for citizens, businesses, and government agencies on sustainable waste management. Tazar's work is based on the principles of sustainable development and the Zero Waste philosophy, a commitment to waste minimization and resource reuse. The organization aims to change society's consumer culture through actions. The team strives to demonstrate that waste is not useless junk, but a resource that can and should be recycled, benefiting everyone. "Our most important, core mission is to reduce the amount of waste we send to Kyrgyzstan's landfills every day" (Interview with Ainura Sagyn, co-founder of Tazar).

Today, Tazar is registered as a public association and positions itself as a social enterprise. A key factor in its sustainability is a multi-tiered financial model that combines commercial and non-commercial sources. As part of its commercial activities, Tazar provides consulting services, organizes waste collection, and supplies sorted recyclable materials to recyclers. The funds received are invested in the development of initiatives. Additionally, the organization attracts grants from various donors, enabling it to implement environmental and educational projects. This model ensures relative financial autonomy and promotes sustainability.

## 2.3. Tazar App

The Tazar App is available in Kyrgyz, Russian, and English. It serves as a convenient tool for systematizing and organizing the recycling process. Both individuals (68% of users) and businesses (32%) actively use the app. "We connect waste generators with recyclers. Producers can be individuals and legal entities, as well as cafes, offices, companies, organizations, schools, and ordinary citizens like you and me. Recyclers transform this waste into useful products, for example, toilet paper, cardboard, and other items." (Interview with Ainura Sagyn, co-founder of Tazar).

The key feature of the Tazar App is an interactive map with waste collection points and eco-boxes throughout Kyrgyzstan. Users can find the nearest collection point by geolocation, switch to a list view, apply filters by waste type, or use the search function. Each collection point's card displays its name, address, contact number, opening hours, a list of accepted recyclable types, photos, and additional information. The map currently covers over 230 eco-boxes and 60 stationary collection points in Bishkek, as well as locations in Karakol, Osh, Cholpon-Ata, the southern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul, Talas, Naryn, Jalal-Abad, and Batken.

One of the Tazar App's features is the ability to call an eco-mobile. This special electric vehicle travels daily throughout Bishkek and collects recyclables directly from the user's door free of charge. The app also includes a donation option. Users can donate clothing, shoes, and other household items to those in need through the platform. This feature is implemented in partnership with organizations such as the Red Crescent, BooruCare, and others. An additional incentive to participate is the bonus program: for every waste donation, users earn points that can be redeemed for discounts and gifts from partners: l'Occitane, Shoro, Matsunoki Hotel, Keremet Bank, the G. Aitiev National Museum, Sapsan Bookstore, eco-product manufacturers Ecoflora and Ecopads, and the BG Zone board game club. A crucial informational component of the app is the built-in Eco-Guide, a convenient reference guide for waste sorting. It contains information on the types of recyclable materials, their acceptance conditions, pre-treatment methods, and which products are made in Kyrgyzstan from recycled materials. In addition to practical recommendations, the section introduces users to the Zero Waste philosophy, emphasizing that sorting is not just a household chore but a conscious contribution to a sustainable future.

#### 2.4. Educational Activities

In addition to digital solutions, Tazar is actively developing environmental education. The organization conducts training, master classes, and consultations on waste sorting and management for both the general public and businesses. Corporate

clients are offered comprehensive solutions for implementing separate collection systems in offices, hotels, cafes, restaurants, and other establishments. Services include developing information materials, developing implementation strategies, conducting training sessions, installing specialized containers, and organizing waste collection logistics.

The Tazar team places great emphasis on educating a broad audience, making eco-friendly practices accessible to everyone. As part of this mission, the organization conducts training events in educational institutions and develops free educational materials. These resources are designed for children and adults and help them understand the importance of waste sorting and how to integrate it into their daily lives properly. The educational kit includes a brief reference guide with basic rules (the "Eco-Guide"), a workbook with assignments, and an interactive game to reinforce knowledge. All materials are available in Russian and Kyrgyz and can be used both in schools and at home (Tazar Website).

In 2024, Tazar, in collaboration with the Bishkek School of Contemporary Art, released a children's eco-fairy tale, "Sparkling Mountain." The book, created as part of the "Library of Rescued Books" project, tells the story of schoolchildren Altyn and Kalys, who, confronted by a garbage monster, learn to sort waste, involve their friends, and save the bird Alakush with the help of the superhero Bema. The story encourages children to take personal responsibility for the environment and shows how even simple steps, such as sorting garbage, can be the beginning of meaningful change. This project has become another way for Tazar to communicate with the younger generation about the importance of environmental thinking in an accessible, engaging, and inspiring way (tazar.org, 2024).

Tazar places special emphasis on social media, particularly on Instagram, where the organization has approximately 10,000 followers. Through this channel, the team regularly publishes short videos and infographics in Russian and Kyrgyz, making eco-friendly practices more understandable and accessible to a broader audience.

Recent publications include a video about the dangers of fast fashion, a video about garment waste, and posts on eco-friendly sites, sorting rules, and the importance of separate collection (Tazar's Instagram page).

Tazar also conducts research in the field of waste management. Through their projects, the team analyzes how the current recycling system impacts public health, the environment, and the economy of Kyrgyzstan. For example, in 2023, in partnership with the Bishkek School of Contemporary Art, the Tazar team conducted a study measuring the volume of textile waste and highlighting the need for a systematic approach to its recycling. Such studies help identify current issues and track trends in waste management, providing a more accurate understanding of existing challenges and opportunities for addressing them (tazar.org, 2023a).

The organization's official website is available in Kyrgyz, Russian, and English. It contains information on all areas of Tazar's work and offers users the opportunity to support the project through one-time or recurring donations. In addition to its core functionality, the website features a blog and a news section where the team shares its work, environmental information, and announcements of new initiatives (tazar.org).

## 2.5. Projects

Throughout its operations, Tazar has implemented projects both independently and in partnership with government agencies, international donors, public organizations, and professionals from various fields. The team hosts events, participates in environmental forums, and promotes initiatives to reduce waste and foster a culture of sustainable consumption. Below, we will discuss initiatives, the eco-point in the village of Zhany-Zher, and the Kadam project.

### *- Eco-point in the village of Zhany-Zher*

In March 2023, Tazar, together with the Zhany-Zher village aiyl okmotu (local administration) and the international organization Doctors Without Borders, established the first eco-point in Kyrgyzstan, where recyclable materials can be exchanged for goods. A notebook can be obtained

for 500 grams of plastic bottles. Residents can recycle plastic, glass, aluminum, and tin. A Tazar employee is always on site to help residents understand the sorting rules and facilitate the exchange. Next to the eco-point, a small second-hand store was opened, where low-income families can receive free clothing. This initiative combines environmental and social impact, and its format has proven successful, with ten similar points having been opened in various regions of Kyrgyzstan. The village of Zhany-Zher is considered a potential first "zero waste zone" in the country, where everything usable will be recycled (Tazar.org, 2023b).

### *- Kadam*

One of the creative activities of the Tazar team is the "Kadam" project, initiated by the organization's co-founder, Ainura Sagyn, in collaboration with artist Dmitry Petrovsky, journalist Rakhat Asangulova, and photographer Bayastan Sabyrov, with the support of the Shoro company. This project combines environmental themes, visual art, and personal stories. Its central idea is to create portraits of real people in Kyrgyzstan using plastic bottle caps collected by the Tazar team. A total of ten portraits were created: four in Bishkek and six in each regional center. "Kadam" draws attention to the problem of environmental pollution and demonstrates how recycling can become not only a technological or everyday process, but also the basis for public dialogue, cultural expression, and a rethinking of attitudes toward waste in modern society (kadam.to).

Thus, Tazar's current activities cover a wide range of areas, from digital solutions and waste-sorting infrastructure to environmental education, partnership projects, and local initiatives. The organization takes a comprehensive approach to waste management, combining technological tools, community outreach, and collaboration with various sectors, including educational institutions, businesses, and government agencies. Implementing projects in both urban and rural areas, developing a mobile app and educational materials, and participating in research and artistic initiatives, Tazar operates on multiple levels, from shaping everyday

environmental habits to influencing public perceptions of sustainable consumption.

## 2.5. Challenges and Limitations

Despite the wide range of initiatives being implemented and the high level of public support, Tazar operates under less-than-ideal conditions. Beyond its own programs and internal resources, the organization faces systemic and structural barriers that limit its development and scaling. These difficulties are related not only to logistics and funding, but also to deeper institutional and organizational problems characteristic of the waste management sector in Kyrgyzstan. Key issues are discussed below.

One of the main structural barriers to Tazar's operations remains the lack of a robust regulatory framework for waste management. According to co-founder Ainura Sagyn, Kyrgyzstan still lacks clear laws regulating and licensing the work of organizations engaged in recycling and collecting recyclable materials. An unstable legal environment creates significant uncertainty and complicates the development of sustainable waste management. The organization is forced to operate in a legal vacuum, where key processes rely not on institutions but on trust and informal agreements. This limits scalability and reduces the predictability of interactions with other sector participants. "The waste sector in Kyrgyzstan is chaotic; it hasn't yet matured. There are no defined laws, no regulations... Many recyclers lack a license and are subject to taxes and additional fines. The industry is still in its infancy, regulations are insufficient, and many are still learning" (Interview with Ainura Sagyn, co-founder of Tazar).

Another serious obstacle is the uneven interaction between government agencies, private businesses, and civil society. Each of these parties plays an essential role in a sustainable waste management system, but in practice, they operate in a disjointed manner, lacking the necessary coordination. The private sector requires stable access to raw materials and institutional support, citizens require environmental education and sorting infrastructure, and the government requires a willingness to perform a coordinating and regulatory

function. According to the Tazar team, positive interaction between these groups is virtually nonexistent. As a result, the organization is forced to act not only as a solution provider but also as a facilitator, initiating dialogue, training participants, and coordinating joint actions. This role goes far beyond the mandate of a single initiative and highlights the industry's lack of systemic connections (Interview with Ainura Sagyn, co-founder of Tazar, May 2025).

The limited involvement of government agencies in infrastructure development and waste management regulation creates an additional burden. The organization receives no government funding and relies entirely on grants, commercial revenue, and its own resources. Meanwhile, the relevant ministries lack sufficient investment and qualified specialists to develop and implement effective environmental policies. In addition to legal uncertainty, the very nature of waste recycling, a complex, technologically limited process, poses an additional challenge. Not all types of materials can be recycled under existing conditions. This is especially true for composite and multilayer packaging, which are either completely unrecyclable or require sophisticated equipment that is often unavailable locally. The high level of contamination of recyclable materials usually makes them unsuitable for reuse. All this significantly limits the volume of waste actually recycled and reduces the economic viability of waste collection initiatives (Interview with Ainura Sagyn, co-founder of Tazar).

An equally serious problem remains staffing limitations. As emphasized in the interview, the limited budget typical of most social enterprises prevents Tazar from offering competitive wages. This is especially critical given the need to attract specialists to relatively new professional fields in Kyrgyzstan, such as environmental education, sustainable waste management, digital recycling solutions, and the implementation of green projects. At the same time, the waste management industry itself has not yet been adequately developed in the education and training systems. As a result, the labor market is experiencing a shortage of personnel with the relevant expertise and practical skills that meet the sector's needs. Finally, one significant challenge

identified in the interviews is the high emotional burden and the risk of burnout. Social entrepreneurship, especially in the early stages, requires significant personal commitment from the founder. This means managing multiple jobs, unstable income, and uncertainty. The interviews emphasize the importance of developing self-regulation skills, the ability to recover emotionally, and the willingness to endure prolonged periods of instability as an integral part of the social enterprise journey (Interview with Ainura Sagyn, co-founder of Tazar, May 2025).

Thus, Tazar's activities are accompanied by serious structural, institutional, and human challenges. The organization is forced to operate in an environment of weak regulation, a lack of systemic government support, and disunity among key sector participants. Limited human resources and a high risk of burnout, a phenomenon typical for initiatives with a strong social mission, create additional challenges. These barriers simultaneously highlight the resilience and dedication of the Tazar team and the vulnerability of social entrepreneurship in an underdeveloped industry.

## 2.5. Factors of Resilience and Growth

Nevertheless, despite the identified barriers, Tazar demonstrates high resilience and significant development potential. A combination of external and internal factors creates a favourable environment for the organization, facilitating the enlargement of its activities and strengthening its institutional position. Below are the key capabilities that support Tazar's resilience and allow it to flexibly respond to changing conditions while remaining true to its social mission.

One of the key external factors contributing to Tazar's sustainable development is the growing global interest in the green economy and responsible consumption. In recent years, the environmental agenda has taken center stage in both political strategies and the priorities of international donors. Issues of waste management, the transition to circular consumption patterns, resource recycling, and reducing environmental impact have become integral to global sustainable development goals. In this context, the work of organizations like Tazar

takes on particular relevance, as they directly address issues supported at the national and regional levels. According to the co-founder, over the past two years, the Tazar team has largely stopped seeking funding sources independently; proposals for partnerships and grant support come directly from interested foundations and programs. This was made possible by the organization's focus on waste management, one of the three key topics on the global environmental agenda (along with water resources and energy shortages). Thus, international attention not only creates a favorable external environment but also opens access to financial, consulting, and partner resources. This reduces the administrative burden on the team and allows them to focus on meaningful work and strategic development (Interview with Ainura Sagyn, co-founder of Tazar).

One of the key internal capabilities that has contributed to Tazar's development is the team's professional experience in information technology. One of the co-founders came to the environmental field from the IT industry, which gave the project a strong start: the idea of digitizing waste management formed the basis. The development of a mobile app wasn't just a technical step but a strategic advantage that enabled a rapid response to user needs and simplified interactions between citizens and recyclers. It ensured the transparency and scalability of processes. Thanks to this technological approach, the team built a sustainable digital infrastructure that remains the core of the organization's operations. "For example, I'm not an environmentalist at all. I came from the IT industry. And I was trying to bring digitalization to waste management. That's why we started with a mobile app" (Interview with Ainura Sagyn, co-founder of Tazar, May 2025).

An additional source of Tazar's resilience is its internal flexibility, its ability to adapt to changing conditions, master new work formats, and consistently expand its scope. As the co-founder emphasizes, the team began with a simple idea: to create a waste-sorting app. However, as the project progressed, it became clear that an effective solution required a much more comprehensive approach, including outreach, public education, and collaboration with government agencies. This adaptability has become one of its key competitive

advantages, enabling the organization not only to maintain sustainability but also to find new directions in a constantly changing external context (Interview with Ainura Sagyn, co-founder of Tazar).

Thus, Tazar's development perspective is primarily determined by the organization's ability to integrate into global processes, effectively utilize internal resources, and flexibly adapt to emerging challenges. The combination of external features, such as growing interest in the green economy and attention from international partners, with internal strengths, including digital competence, team adaptability, and a strong value base, creates fertile ground for sustainable expansion. These opportunities do not eliminate existing challenges, but they create conditions in which the organization can confidently develop, strengthening its influence and contributing to the formation of an environmentally oriented future for Kyrgyzstan.

### III. Conclusions and Lessons

Tazar's story is a clear example of how social entrepreneurship can not only solve a specific environmental problem but also initiate systemic societal transformation. Beginning with the idea of creating a simple digital tool to facilitate waste sorting, the initiative has transformed over the past few years into a multi-layered project combining technology, educational outreach, research, and cross-sector collaboration. This path demonstrates that sustainable development requires not isolated solutions, but a comprehensive approach in which each local initiative becomes part of a broader cultural and institutional transformation.

One of the key lessons learned is that Tazar's history is marked by the importance of strategic flexibility and a cross-sectoral approach. In a context where the state does not provide a reliable regulatory framework and the recycling market remains nascent, the team did not limit itself to its original objective. Instead, it reimagined its mission, expanding its activities: it took on educational functions, established collaboration with the private sector, offered solutions for citizens, and integrated into the global sustainable development agenda. This adaptability allowed Tazar not only to survive an unstable environment but also to create its own

ecosystem, where digital technologies seamlessly blend with local initiatives.

It is also important to note that the institutional weaknesses in waste management in Kyrgyzstan have become not only a barrier but also an entry point for active actors. It was precisely against this backdrop of a lack of systemic public policy, insufficient sectoral coordination, and legal instability that Tazar carved out a unique niche. The organization has become not only an intermediary between citizens, businesses, and recyclers, but also, in some cases, between donors and government agencies, effectively fulfilling the functions of coordination and systemic education. This experience underlines that, in conditions of institutional deficits, grassroots initiatives can act as catalysts for change, particularly if they are grounded in trust, reputation, and consistent values.

The founders' personal motivation also played a significant role, proving decisive in the case of Tazar. The team's history demonstrates that social entrepreneurship requires not only professional skills but also deep personal commitment. Starting with an internal question, "What can I do for my country, my city?", the team developed an initiative that eventually took on an institutional dimension. The Tazar example clearly demonstrates that technological solutions in social entrepreneurship are only effective when accompanied by cultural, educational, and institutional change. The Tazar app has become more than just a convenient service, but an entry point into a broader process, environmental education, the development of local initiatives, and the establishment of a dialogue with businesses and government. This underscores an important lesson: sustainable change begins not with technology per se, but with people capable of using it as a tool to promote values, shape a new culture, and build models of conscious interaction.

Thus, the Tazar experience provides valuable material for rethinking the role of social entrepreneurs in countries with emerging institutions. It demonstrates that even in conditions of regulatory uncertainty and limited resources, it is possible not only to create sustainable models but also to gradually transform social culture, step by

step, through technology, partnerships, and education.

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