

John Petersen from Kesanova: "I like to be in a place where there is meaningful work to do"



As stated on their site, [Kesanova](#) delivers printed block bottom paper carriers. They offer [environmentally friendly](#) white or brown bags with or without handles, with or without multicolor print, in [many formats](#) and for [many purposes](#). The main principles they apply are: strength and quality of their product, affordable prices and low environmental impact.

The magic word "low environmental impact" sparked our interest. We "met" John Petersen on an odd occasion when he posted news about his company and dissatisfaction with the state of business affairs in Macedonia, on one of our [ecological groups](#). We contacted him to express interest in his company and he told us that he posted on our group by mistake. Or maybe it was destiny... if you like american movies and believe in such things, anyway.



John is certainly an interesting and versatile person, who did not want to share his biography with us, simply responding "Oh, there is a lot". But looking at his professional [LinkedIn profile](#) we found out a thing or two about him.

Danish by nationality, John is not your typical "executive", as you might expect in these parts of the world. Before starting Kesanova he wore many hats and changed professions frequently. He was an editor-in-chief and writer of the news blog [TekstPetersen](#) in Danish language.

Before that he was a consultant for [NameGrænseforeningen](#) managing a project to preserve and strengthen the Danish language and culture in the Danish-German border country.

On several occasions he was a Folk High School Teacher of Global Journalism, EU affairs, philosophy and European history in various Colleges in Copenhagen Area, Denmark. He was also founder of the European course and events activities in one of the High Schools where he worked. But that was more than twenty years ago.

In the meantime he also worked as corporate communicator, editor and journalist, copywriter, press/media-coordinator and has expertise in search engine optimisation, if the previous wasn't enough for you.

The conversation with such a person could be led in many ways, but we chose the ecology path, since that is the most important conversation of all, for our country especially. If we

stick to law and order, because those who do not, are winning – they are never punished. So, problems with law and rules enforcement applies in the context of ecology and plastic ban as in all other contexts of Macedonia. Somehow Macedonia needs to reward, when you do good, and punish when you do bad. To me it seems like it is currently the other way around. So, the answer is yes: when there is no law enforcement, there is no law obedience. And, there is still an economic incentive to break the law. The incentive is even enforced these days, because paper prices are going steadily up, when more and more countries introduce anti-plastic laws and demand paper instead. I am even afraid that more and more plastic will end up in countries like Macedonia, because plastic is going to be relatively cheaper.

B.P. Do you have your own production (e.g. from recycled paper) or do you import/buy most of the paper needed for the production of the bags.

J.P. We almost don't use recycled paper. Our brand is pretty much strong paper (recycled is not strong). Still, our paper is recyclable, of course. Most of our paper is from mills in Sweden. There are few mills in Europe, where all paper bag producers' paper comes from. Currently, we import the assembled bags and we print them in Skopje. By time (if plastic ban + state of law comes: immediately), I guess we will also assemble the bags in Macedonia.

B.P. What materials and inks do you primarily use in your production?

J.P. [KESANOVA](#) aims to be seen in the context of raising environmental awareness that extends across the Republic of North Macedonia. In the citizens' eventual attempt to "make Macedonia clean again", KESANOVA offers [paper carrier bags made of compostable and biodegradable paper](#). The paper comes from industrial forests where more is planted than forested. Our inks are water-based.

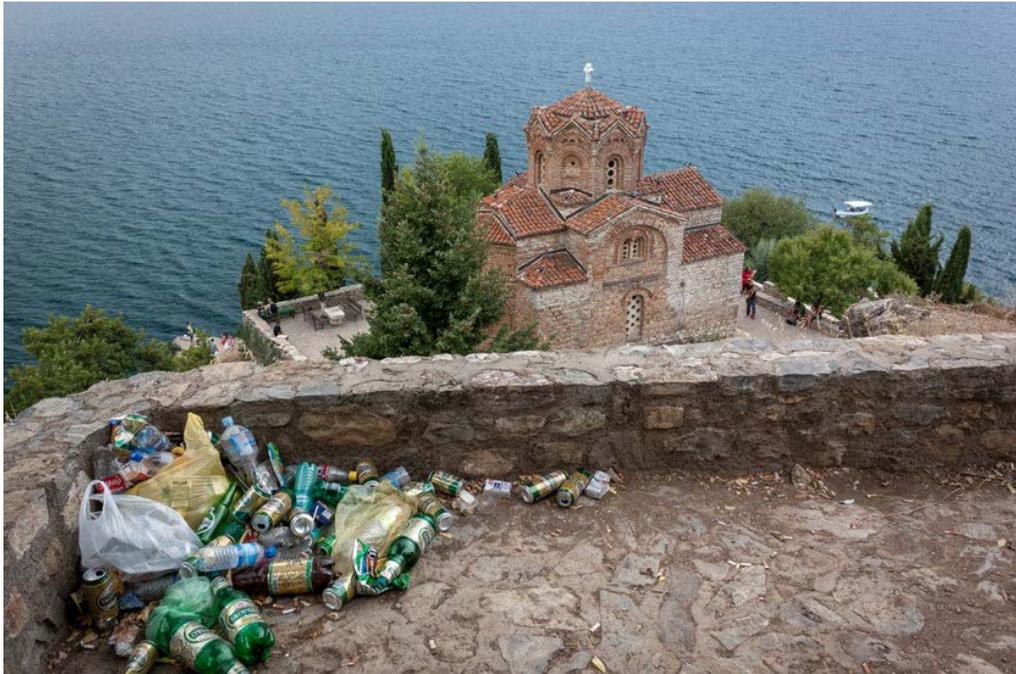


Image source: KesaNova D.O.O.

B.P. According to my own experience there's a strong environmental awareness that is limited to a minor group of people in Macedonia, but the majority is still unaware. What is your opinion on the question of environmental awareness in Macedonia?

J.P. In my experience, there is a raising awareness that something has to be done in the context of environment and climate issues. At the same time, there is an even stronger awareness that Macedonia is not capable of solving problems by itself. As a parallel to this, a strata of the population is simply living in a parallel world – believing in all kinds of conspiracies + in denial of Macedonia's state of law troubles + in denial of the world's climate troubles (in a way this is Macedonia's real problem that causes all the other problems).

I often compare it to smoking. Twenty years ago, when I was in Macedonia for the first time, I met people who thought health issues related to smoking was pure bullshit. Invented by western health industries who earned money on making people scared. Well, I don't agree with this opinion anymore. I suppose the same movement is ongoing in the context of environment + climate issues.

B.P. What do you like about Macedonia? What do you dislike?

J.P. It may sound strange, but I like to be in a place where there is meaningful work to do. A lot needs to be done, and it makes sense to work. Sometimes, I have the opposite feeling in my home country, where more work leads to more income, but – so on average – people

don't really need more money. You have to invent needs, so to say, in order to spend your money. This is not the case in Macedonia.

I think I already mentioned what I don't like. If you work for the common good in Macedonia, you will be punished. State of law is sine qua non. Perhaps I could add that I don't like, when citizens of Macedonia blame everybody else for what is missing. The West is to blame, the East, Bulgaria, Greece, Jews, Muslims, Albanians, whatever.

B.P. Macedonia has a great potential for eco-tourism, organic cultivation etc. but it is my personal opinion that we do not take care of our nature. Do you agree and what is your opinion on the matter?

J.P. I am not an expert, but I believe so too. Only, Macedonia has to take it seriously. It is about creating incentives to do it right. If there are no credible control mechanisms, it will all fail by time. It all boils down to state of law. How come taxi drivers can get away with throwing their garbage out of the window, and nobody cares? How come police cars are parked on Cvetan Dimov, when the cops need Burek, when at the same time authorities are removing private cars? Well, because if you – as a citizen - react to it, you will be punished. You will not even get sympathy.

B.P. If you want to add/say something that is not included in the questions, please do. If you like you could also include your personal short bio.

J.P. Oh, there is a lot 😊

As we conclude this interview, we keep thinking about our country, our place in this world, the way the foreigners look at us and how the ways they think could help us. We should listen more, and try to imitate good values, business practices and care for ourselves - not only our family, house, car or yard, but also our street, our neighbourhood, city and the state. There are some important lessons to be learned from John and other people that are born and raised in different societies than our own, we should cherish them, not run from them. Anyway, that's the reason we talked with John, now it's up to you.