

Abstract for EASY-ECO Saarbrücken

Evaluating regional programs that promote sustainable businesses

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Over the last ten years, six of Austria's nine federal provinces have implemented regional programs promoting corporate environmentally-sound practices and sustainability management in private enterprises. Public institutions and NGOs in other European regions have also initiated, financed and carried out programs that focus on consulting and identifying opportunities for making enterprises more environmentally sustainable rather than on funding the implementation of environmental technologies directly.

The programs typically comprise elements such as information and consulting services at no or low charge, set-up and promotion of networks, training and capacity building in enterprises, and awards schemes with publicity effects.

The paper will

- give an overview on the development of the regional programs in Austria and their evolution from cleaner production programs to more comprehensive sustainable business programs;
- explore their program designs using a theory-of-action based approach;
- highlight their common features and differences;
- give insights into the challenges of formative evaluations of such programs by building on the experiences of evaluating the Sustainable Business Initiative Styria.

What is the Sustainable Business Initiative Styria?

Styria is one of Austria's nine federal provinces with nearly 1,2 million inhabitants. The Sustainable Business Initiative (Wirtschaftsinitiative Nachhaltigkeit, abbr. WIN) was started up as a co-operation between the Styrian Federal Province Government, the Styrian Economic Chamber and the Styrian Business Promotion Agency in December 2002. The program is co-financed by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management. Companies benefit from the program by subsidies for consulting services offered by affiliated consultants. These consulting services are grouped into three core areas and ten modules:

- Core Area A - Sustainable Development:
 - Sustainability Check
 - Sustainability Strategy
 - Sustainability Report
- Core Area B - Management Systems:
 - Management Check
 - EMAS
 - ISO14001
 - Integrated Management Systems
- Core Area C - Environment and Climate Protection:
 - Eco Check
 - Eco Consulting
 - Waste Management Concept

So far, 270 consulting cases have been registered. The first evaluation of this program was carried out in fall 2005 by the Research Institute for Managing Sustainability of the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration. It included interviews with companies, consultants and stakeholders, an analysis of the projects database as well as of regional economic data.

The program has established the structures necessary to cover a broad spectrum of the holistic concept of sustainable development in Styrian businesses. In the relatively short period of its existence, WIN has succeeded in building up a large pool of consultants, in addressing a considerable number of businesses, and in achieving first documented effects. The co-operation of three important Styrian institutions turned WIN into a one-stop-shop for facilitating corporate sustainability in the province.

So far, WIN tackles the concept of sustainable development in rather broad terms. Thus, we suggested to narrowing its focus in the second program period. The structure of the program is thematically straightforward and flexible in order to integrate new issues in the WIN program. The use of public funds is efficient and the share of public subsidies is 32% in the short term and 12% in the long term. While the realized environmental effects are similar to those of other programs facilitating corporate sustainability, the share of fully implemented measures is lower than in other cases. Since the actual success of WIN depends largely on the implementation of measures that are in the planning status currently, the assessment of its ecological, economic and social effectiveness is only preliminary at the moment. However, the companies participating in the WIN program are mostly satisfied. They regard the qualification of the consultants and the services provided by them as outstanding, and they are satisfied with the achievement of qualitative objectives. Since objectives that were not achieved in a satisfactory way are regarded as secondary for participating in the WIN program, they did not result in frustration among businesses.

Martinuzzi, André/Galla, Judith (2006): Begleitforschung der Wirtschaftsinitiative Nachhaltigkeit. Kurzfassung des Evaluationsberichts. Wien: Schriftenreihe des Research Institute for Managing Sustainability der Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien [URL: <http://www.sustainability.at/pdf/WIN%20EvalBericht.pdf>, 10.3.2006]

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