

## Future Lab: Sustainable Consumption

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Resources are scarce. In general, environmentally sound handling of resources is acknowledged. Many enterprises have implemented environmental management systems or a sustainability management. Time is spent and effort is made to optimize energy use and production processes. Nevertheless, only some enterprises tend to produce really sustainable instead of conventional products. These enterprises face a wide range of challenges. The questions they have to deal with are: Which sustainable quality characteristics should be taken into account? How can quality be secured and proved? Which particular instruments and quality labels are best suited? How can economic planning be applied for sustainable products and what specific characteristics does a business plan for a sustainable product idea have? How does successful marketing of these products work?

Knowledge in all these areas is scattered. Producers or manufacturers, who have sound knowledge on sustainability, might face deficits in the area of marketing and business planning. Conversely, producers or manufacturers, who are experts in economic issues and marketing, might lack competence in the area of sustainability. For sustainable product development both economic thinking and expertise in the area of sustainability are essential.

According to the Federal Environment Agency there is a high willingness to buy environmentally friendly product alternatives and also to pay a higher price for these products (Umweltbundesamt, 2012). For product designers it is quite a challenge to achieve, on the one hand, required technical performance and cost demand and, on the other hand, to use a holistic sustainability approach. "There is often little awareness and understanding of the wider environmental, social and economic impacts of the design – in other words, the Sustainable Development aspects." (Howarth and Hadfield, 2006) Product designer define the use as well as the disposal of the finished product and also chooses the raw materials. That means the development of sustainable products have a lot of different areas to think about and a lot of possible restraints.

The main question of this research project, which is carried out by the consulting companies denkstatt and tatwort, is: Which restraints or challenges hamper sustainable product development? To answer this question, we will analyse the restraints and deficits of producing sustainable products. Our methods will be semi-structured interviews as well as a questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews will be held with managing directors or heads of sustainability or environmental management departments of eight companies in Austria. All of these selected enterprises are in the producing industry, e.g. fibre sector and food industry and have implemented such management systems. The study addresses questions like: Is there a definition for sustainability in the company? What is the motivation for the company to produce sustainable products? Which experiences have the enterprise made with producing sustainable products? Which challenges are enterprises in Austria facing regarding the production of sustainable products? The questionnaire will be sent to the broadest possible entrepreneurship.

The project has started in March 2013 and therefore no results can be presented yet. The guideline for the semi-structured interviews has already been developed and also a contact list for the quantitative data collection already exists. Between the end of April and the beginning of May all semi-structured interviews will be carried out. After the analysis of the received information the questionnaire will be developed and sent out. It is planned

that the results of the analysis are presented within the scope of an event in February 2014.

### **Sources:**

**Howarth, George; Hadfield, Mark** (2006): A sustainable product design model. In: Materials & Design. Vol. 27, Issue 10, 1128-1133.

**Maxwell, Dorothy; Sheate, William; Van der Vorst, Rita** (2006): Functional and systems aspects of the sustainable product and service development approach for industry. In: Journal of Cleaner Production. Vol. 14, 1466-1479.

**Umweltbundesamt** (2012): Nachhaltige Produkte: Produktkennzeichen und Zahlungsbereitschaft. In: <http://www.umweltbundesamt-daten-zur-umwelt.de/umweltdaten/public/theme.do?nodeIdent=3536>