

AUSTRIA

10 **Concerted Action Towards Sustainable Development**

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Introduction

The discussion of sustainable development and its economic impact started in Austria in the late 1980s and therefore has a longer tradition than that of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). In a similar way to the Austrian Strategy on Sustainable Development (Federal Austrian Government, 2002), the Austrian CSR activities build upon the long-lasting Austrian tradition of broad stakeholder involvement within the so called “social partnership”. This is the common dialogue platform between the main social partners. In the 1990s Austrian companies learned to deal with the terms environmental and social friendliness and finally with the term “sustainability”. Enterprises nowadays begin to include this visionary concept in their own goals and business philosophy. Moreover they are starting to implement the sustainability concept in their management strategies and tools and communicate this through sustainability reporting and open stakeholder dialogue.

The broader CSR discussion arose in Austria only recently. Due to the ongoing awareness process and due to many “mosaic stones” formulated during the last few years concerning corporate citizenship, corporate governance and business ethics, it was easy to introduce the CSR discussion. The time was right when the “CSR Austria Initiative” was formed by the Ministry for Economic Affairs and Labour and key industrial players in 2002. CSR Austria is therefore the private sector contribution to the Austrian Sustainability Strategy and, on a European level, a major Austrian contribution to the Lisbon Strategy and the CSR debate.

Historic Development of Corporate Sustainability in Austria

Austria has been very much aware of controversies in the ecological and environmental field. Since the 1970s we have had the highest level of organic farming within Europe with a clear position against genetically modified organisms (referendum against GMO in 1997); and a clear policy against nuclear power plants

(referendum against nuclear power in Austria in 1978). One may ask: Are the Austrians more sceptical about innovations and technological development than the rest of the world? The answer may be found in another question: How should one understand “precautionary responsibility”?

In that respect Austria is the cradle of several concepts which have often been “invented” near political or administrative programmes. The economy-oriented “eco-profit” idea for instance started in the early 1990s and the “eco-social market economy” concept was presented in the late 1980s by the former Vice-Chancellor Dr. Josef Riegler (Riegler & Moser, 1996). These concepts integrated the ideas of different groups and initiatives discussing politically and economically responsible behaviour. The concept characteristics are the definition of new eco-social boundary conditions on the outside and a new pattern of behaviour inside, in the form of “fair” and not “free” market, containing not only competition but also neutralism, commensalisms and symbiosis (Moser & Riegler 2001). Many different environmental and socially friendly economic development programmes have been part of an ongoing societal transformation process in Austria during the last twenty years. Especially the UN Summits 1992 in Rio, 1997 in Kyoto and 2002 in Johannesburg activated many initiatives in Austria:

- The Austrian Institute for Sustainable Development (founded in 1995) and the Climatic Alliance Austria (since 1997) tries to foster and implement the sustainable development process on a national scale.
- The official coordination of the Austrian Strategy for Sustainable Development (2002) and its implementation is administrated by the Federal Ministry of the Environment.
- With the Austrian Business Council for Sustainable Development (ABCSD) Austrian enterprises created their own forum in the year 2000.
- The “Arbeitsgemeinschaft Entwicklungszusammenarbeit” (AGEZ) is the official working group on development cooperation (established 2001). Around 30 NGOs from environmental, societal, social and development areas participate in this platform.
- The initiative “Sozialwort” (*social word*) of all the Austrian churches began to open the sustainability debate to the public from the religious and spiritual side some years ago. In this connection the project “Pilgrim” should be mentioned – a pilgrim towards sustainability from many different groups, initiatives and institutions coordinated by the In-Service Teacher Training for Religious Education in Austria.

Some major historic roots and initiatives are shown in Fig. 1. It gives a simplified but not exhaustive overview of the different milestones in respect to the wider landscape within which CSR is embedded in Austria.

Political Concepts or Programmes	Actions / Initiatives for the Environment	Actions / Initiatives for the Society	Specific CSR Activities
Eco-social Market Economy (1992)	Environmental Management: - Ecoprofit - Prepare - EMAS / ISO - others	Dual system of Job-Education & Training	CSR Austria Initiative (started 2002)
National Environmental Plan (1995)		National "Social Partners" Platform	CSR-Guiding Visions (2004)
Austrian Strategy for Sustainable Development (2002)	Integrated Quality Management Systems	Audit Family & Professional Career	CSR Implementation Guidelines (2004)
	Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment	Platform for Socially Responsible Investment	TRIGOS – Price for CSR Performance
----- Concepts for Corporate Governance	Austrian Eco-Efficiency Strategy (2001)	Price for the best Reconciling Work and Family Policies	corporAid – CSR and Development Aid
	Price for Security at Works	Federal Competition: Women and Family-Friendly Enterprises	
	Different Prices for Environmental Friendly Behaviour	Job-Oscar: Award for Employment of Persons with Disabilities	Austrian Business Academy for SD
Austrian Code of Corporate Governance (2002)			Austrian Sustainability Reporting Guidelines

Figure 1. Corporate activities in Austria regarding sustainability and CSR

The main actors in the Austrian CSR scene are the following (the list is not exhaustive):

Austrian Federal Ministries:

- Ministry for Health and Social Affairs (BM für soziale Sicherheit und Generation)
- Ministry for Economic Affairs and Labour (BM für Wirtschaft und Arbeit)
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (BMLFUW)
- Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology (BMVIT)
- Ministry of Finance (BMF)

Business administrations and organisations:

- Federation of Austrian Industry (Industriellenvereinigung)
- Austrian Chamber of Commerce (Wirtschaftskammer Österreich)
- Austrian Chamber of Labour (Arbeiterkammer)
- Vienna Chamber of Commerce (Wirtschaftskammer Wien)
- Labour Union of Private Employees (Gewerkschaft der Privatangestellten)
- Federation of Austrian Trade Unions (Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund)
- Federal Social Welfare Office (Bundessozialamt)
- Labour Market Service (Arbeitsmarktservice)

Private organisations, Academies, NGOs

- Main Association of Social Security (Hauptverband der Sozialversicherung)
- Austrian Consortium for Rehabilitation (Österr. Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Rehabilitation)
- AGEZ – Austrian working group on development cooperation
- Horizont 3000 – Austrian development cooperation organisation
- Austrian Caritas
- Austrian Institute for Sustainable Development (ÖIN)
- Austrian Business Council for Sustainable Development – ABCSD
- Austrian Business Academy for Sustainable Development – ASD

CSR in Austria – Drivers and Milestones of Success

Corporate Sustainability

Sustainable development is to be understood as a concept that ensures the integrated, well-balanced and equal treatment of the economic, social and environmental dimensions. Sustainable corporate development and, thus, social responsibility contribute to the increase of a company's value: by minimising risks, by generating innovation and by jointly shaping society. The kind of benefits derived by companies, however, depend on the approach taken. As presented in Table 2, the approach to CSR adopted by a company can be grouped into four categories.

Table 1. Types of approaches to corporate social responsibility

<i>Category</i>	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Description</i>
Passive	Problem solving	The company waits until there is pressure by the authorities and other stakeholders and then responds to their demands.
Reactive	Risk minimisation	Potential ecological and social risks are prevented that may impair the value or the reputation of the company.
Active	Innovation	The company realises that corporate social responsibility offers strategic opportunities in the market. New products, services and technologies give rise to new business fields. Internally, organisation and management develop in innovative ways.
Proactive	Responsibility to society	The company takes into account existing needs, but also shapes sustainable ways of life and business together with its stakeholders. This leads to close relations to customers, suppliers and other groups, giving the company a competitive edge.

Table 2. Core areas of sustainability management (Strigl, 2003)

<i>Sustainable Corporate Governance</i>	<i>Sustainability Management Systems</i>	<i>Sustainable Innovation Management</i>
Normative management Vision / mission Mission statement / strategy Code of conduct Corporate culture	Management systems for the realisation of strategies and goals (e.g. Sustainability Balanced Scorecard)	Sustainable product and service development R&D for sustainability Sustainable technology development
<i>Capacity-Building for Sustainability</i>	<i>Human Resource Building</i>	<i>Sustainability Communication</i>
Definition of responsibility Organisational learning Integration into all corporate divisions	Awareness raising Qualification Employee engagement	Reporting Stakeholder dialogue Media presence Image creation

There exists no universally applicable formula and strategy for sustainable corporate development. Every company has to take its own road to sustainability, and every company needs to work it out for itself. It will strongly depend on the regional, cultural, social and natural conditions of the company's operations. A company which wants to consciously orient itself to the concept of sustainability will become proactive at various levels and in various sectors. Important building blocks for a company's sustainable process are summarised in Table 2.

None of these elements exists by itself; they all interact with each other. Only the combination of all activities results in a dynamic business process towards sustainability.

Mutual Expectations of Austria and Its Businesses

Dual Apprenticeship Training System

In analogy with Germany and Switzerland Austria has an educational system which is quite unique in Europe and the world. Apprenticeships combine school education and on-the-job training, thus being called a "dual system": the apprentice is trained within an enterprise, completed by attending a part-time compulsory vocational school. Current reforms of the dual system will lead to an increased integration of economic and technological innovations. Moreover, they aim at motivating companies to invest in existing and to create new vacancies for apprentices.

The Austrian Companies and Corporate Citizenship

The overwhelming majority of Austrian companies are SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) with less than 250 employees. These enterprises are the backbone of the Austrian economy and therefore often the target group of specific supportive actions and programmes. According to a recent study (CSR Austria, 2003) 97% of Austrian enterprises acknowledge their responsibility as corporate citizens in relation to non-profit organisations. It results that only 17% of corporations with low public attention are actively pursuing CSR activities, whereas in the case of enterprises with high public attention this percentage rises to 47%. Publicly traded companies show a clearly higher commitment to be active corporate citizens (45% are highly active) than privately owned companies with a social engagement of only 31%. Enterprises with predominantly private customers and/or predominantly big customers show higher corporate citizenship commitment than the remaining enterprises. Altogether 81% of the small businesses, 58% of the medium enterprises and 49% of the large-scale enterprises support between one and five non-profit organisations. The ranges of topics, which most frequently find support through corporate citizenship programmes in Austria, are "health service and social mechanisms" (70%). The support ranges from money (93%) and in-

kind gifts (85%) to sponsoring (68%) and volunteering programmes (58%). According to the same study (CSR Austria, 2003) 61% of the Austrian enterprises are “very satisfied” and “satisfied” with the success of their corporate citizenship activities.

Environmental Management Systems

Corporate sustainability was introduced to companies in a number of different ways. In the 1990s the Austrian government and its administration started several top-down programmes to improve and support the implementation of environmental, risk, quality, and health and safety management systems. Fig. 2 shows the number of organisations certified in accordance with EN ISO 14001 in Austria from 1995 to 2002.

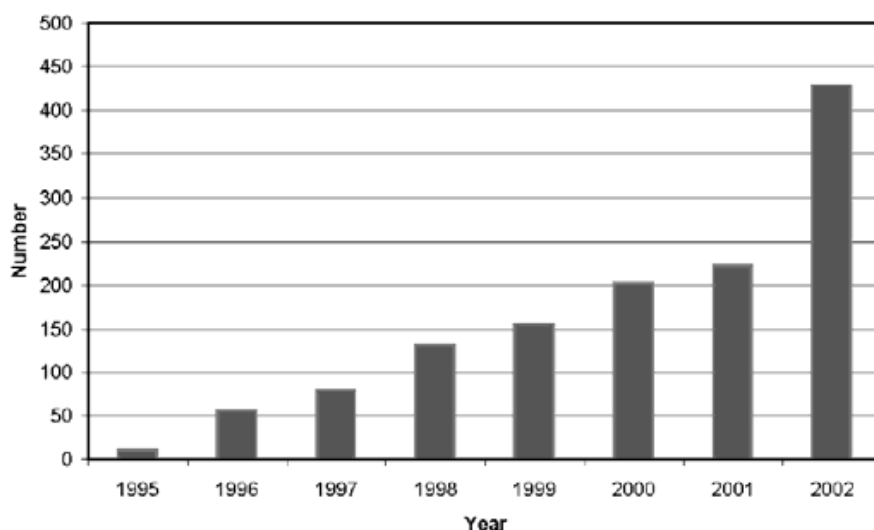


Figure 2. Increase of the number of Austrian ISO 14001 certified organisations

Source: “The ISO Survey of ISO 9000 and ISO 14001 Certificates, 12th Cycle, 2002”

CSR Activities of the “Life Ministry” (BMLFUW)

Platform for Socially Responsible Investments

The influence of the global financial markets on the economy is evident. To reach a sustainable path of development ethical, social and ecological aspects have to be taken into account when investing money. For the purpose of strengthening the market for socially responsible investments in Austria a platform for “Socially Responsible Investments” was set up in 2001 in the Austrian Society for Envi-

ronment and Technology (OEGUT) with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (BMLFUW). This platform constitutes a network providing information about specific activities in Austria and Europe. Within the framework of the Austrian eco-label, guidelines for the eco-label 49 “Green Funds” have been prepared for investment funds and mutual funds shares (sustainability funds, ethical funds or ethical-ecological funds, eco-funds and eco-efficiency funds as well as environmental technology funds).

CSR Activities of the “Innovation Ministry” (BMVIT)

Guidelines for Sustainability Reporting

The Austrian sustainability reporting guidelines “Reporting about sustainability” give a structured overview on how a sustainability report can be prepared. These guidelines describe in seven steps how the performance, goals and activities of a company can be presented with a perspective on sustainability. The guidelines:

- support enterprises in presenting their economic, environmental and social performance in a transparent and balanced manner,
- define the most important steps which lead to a sustainability report,
- present methods appropriate for the reporting process,
- ask questions to improve the self-assessment of companies,
- offer suggestions for stakeholder inclusion.

The guidelines are based on the evaluation of past sustainability reports produced in Austria and abroad and on practical experience gained from coaching the reporting process of two major Austrian companies. The Austrian Institute for Sustainable Development (www.oin.at) had the scientific lead in this research project. “Reporting about Sustainability” was promoted by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology as part of the Austrian Programme on Technologies for Sustainable Development under the subprogramme “Factory of Tomorrow”.

Austrian Programme on Technologies for Sustainable Development

The Austrian Programme on Technologies for Sustainable Development is a five-year research and technology programme (2001-2006). It has been developed by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology (BMVIT). The programme initiates and supports trendsetting research and development projects and the implementation of pilot projects. The research and technology programme with its more than hundred individual projects has to be seen as a milestone in the discussion and implementation of sustainability issues in Austria and thus as a major milestone of the CSR process.

CSR Activities of the Ministry for Health and Social Affairs

Family & Career Audit

The *Family & Career Audit* is an auditing procedure trying to find the right work-life balance. “Family & Career” is guided by the “family-friendly index”, an idea coming from the US and based upon insights from the Hertie Foundation. According to Badelt (1998), former Austrian representative in the European Family Observatory, the work-life balance is one of the most intensely debated issues in Austrian family policy. The *Family and Career Audit* supports companies to define and implement goals and measures for a family-oriented personnel policy (Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations, 2004).

Federal Competition: Women and Family-Friendly Enterprises

Introduced in 1999, the federal competition “Women and family-friendly Enterprises” awards enterprises, which implement women and family friendly measures. The purpose behind this initiative is to officially and publicly acknowledge the commitment of those companies to reconcile work and family in a fruitful manner. The federal competition is based upon competitions within the Austrian states: from among the state winners and under the auspices of the federal minister, the federal winners are determined.

The Austrian Code of Corporate Governance

An Austrian Working Group for Corporate Governance made up of representatives of the Austrian Institute of Certified Public Accountants, the Austrian Association for Financial Analysis and Asset Management, listed companies, investors, the Viennese Stock Exchange and academia drew up the Austrian Code of Corporate Governance. All interest groups were integrated into the process through a broad and transparent discussion of the issues. The voluntary self-regulatory initiative was designed to reinforce the confidence of investors by improving reporting transparency, the quality of cooperation between the supervisory board, management board and shareholders, and by taking long-term value creation into account. The Code provides Austrian corporations with a framework for the management and control of enterprises. It covers the standards of good corporate management common in international business practice e.g. the OECD Principles of Corporate Governance (OECD, 2004) as well as the most important provisions of Austrian corporation law that are of relevance in this context.

The CSR Austria Initiative

A Concerted Action to Promote CSR in Austria

The main instrument of the Austrian CSR policy is the “CSR Austria Initiative”, which was started in late 2002 by the Austrian Federation of Industries and the Ministry for Economic Affairs and Labour. Since May 2003 the Austrian Chamber of Commerce has been participating in CSR Austria, too, making it the main private sector contribution to the Austrian Sustainability Strategy. “CSR Austria Initiative” defines itself as a programme of the Austrian economy, which supports the great European visions – the Lisbon strategy and the concept of sustainable development. CSR Austria aims at achieving two goals: first to make evident how Austrian businesses work for the state and society; secondly to motivate entrepreneurs to intensify their efforts regarding CSR and at the same time to encourage them to communicate these efforts to a broader public.

The three main steps of the CSR Austria initiative started in June 2002 when the CSR Council Committee was founded at the Federation of Austrian Industry to prepare the CSR strategy for Austria. The first step from October 2002 to July 2003 was to initiate a broad discussion on corporate responsibility and to create a common understanding of its meaning and its benefits, as well as information and screening of international CSR initiatives for companies with regard to feasible CSR models. The survey “Corporate Societal Responsibility of Austrian Companies” (2003) concluded the first phase (CSR Austria, 2003).

The second step was the formulation of Austrian CSR-Guiding Visions building upon the Green Paper and other international texts e.g. the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and on the special experiences, expectations and needs of Austrian companies and Austrian society at large. Following the Austrian tradition of social partnership the elaboration of the Guiding Visions involves a broad dialogue with representatives of all sectors of civil society. At the CSR Conference at the end of September 2003 around 120 members from business, NGOs, social partners, and international organisations discussed the first draft of the CSR Guiding Visions for the Austrian business community. The finalised CSR Guiding Vision “Economic Success. Responsible Action.” was presented in December 2003 in Vienna. The 16 CSR principles drafted by the Austrian Industry are listed in Fig. 3.

In a third step CSR Austria is concentrating on further raising the profile of CSR and on assisting Austrian companies in their efforts to adopt and implement CSR practices. For this purpose the CSR Austria Initiative is preparing implementation tools; the following implementation activities are in the process of being introduced:

CSR Austria Guiding Vision: “Economic Success. Responsible Action.”

Corporate Social responsibility means

...successful economic action:

1. reliable and trustworthy
2. long-term, value-oriented decisions
3. fairness in a competitive environment
4. playing a role model

...involving others:

5. employees are partners
6. promoting social integration
7. taking into account the concerns of stakeholders
8. helping to improve the situation in other countries

...orientation towards the environment and the future:

9. observing the precautionary principle
10. economic solutions for ecological challenges
11. taking consumer interests into account
12. encouraging sustainable development at global and regional levels

...a committed implementation effort:

13. adopted principles are a reference framework
14. transparency through information policy
15. cooperating in a spirit of partnership
16. further development of promising measures

Figure 3. CSR Austria Guiding Vision

TRIGOS: The Prize for Excellent CSR Performance

Trigos is a prize awarded by the association “Corporate Social Responsibility Austria” (CSR Austria) that was given for the first time in May 2004 to companies with special social responsibility. The initiators of Trigos are Caritas, Red Cross, SOS Children’s Village, WWF Austria, the Federation of Austrian Industry (Industriellenvereinigung), the Austrian Chamber of Commerce and Humans World. Trigos is awarded to companies that are already attending to their social responsibility in the form of concrete projects or have implemented it in their corporate strategy.

ASD: Austrian Business Academy for Sustainable Development

In partnership with the Austrian Business Council for Sustainable Development (ABCSD) and the Austrian Institute for Sustainable Development, CSR Austria Initiative founded the Austrian Business Academy for Sustainable Development.

This institution will provide an appropriate and practical-oriented qualification programme for the business sector with respect to theory and implementation of corporate sustainability and CSR.

Building Bridges (Corporate Volunteering)

To attract more attention to the value of voluntary activities, CSR Austria is setting up a corporate volunteering programme between business leaders and non-profit organisations (NPOs) in cooperation with Caritas and Trigon. This programme is based on the experience in Germany and Switzerland and in the Austrian province Vorarlberg as well as the “Switch-Programme” from Siemens Germany.

corporAID

Initiated by the Institute for Cooperation for Development Projects (ICEP) the CSR Austria Initiative will take part as a partner in the corpoAID Initiative. The focus of this project is to support companies in carrying out projects in developing countries and to strengthen the knowledge about the needs in these countries. A second product of corporAID is the quarterly journal “coporAID magazin”. The magazine reports on Austrian CSR issues in general (sustainability reporting, socially responsible investing etc.) and on global development topics like fair trade or societal and regional engagements of Austrian companies all over the globe.

The Austrian CSR Guidelines

The Austrian CSR Guidelines “Guidance for the implementation of CSR” of the Austrian Standards Institute (2004) are based on the CSR Guiding Vision “Economic Success. Responsible Action.” and the guidelines “Reporting About Sustainability – 7 steps to a Successful Sustainability Report” (Kanatschnig, Resel & Strigl, 2002) which both have been produced by the CSR Austria Initiative. The guidelines on CSR principles, systems and tools were prepared by an interdisciplinary and inter-organisational working group “Corporate Social Responsibility” of the Austrian Standards Institute and are in line with international standards. In building on several initiatives focusing on the motivational aspect, the guide is designed to support the documentation, implementation, maintenance and improvement of a CSR management system. Furthermore, the CSR implementation guidance identifies possible interaction with other management systems. In general, it does not contain specifications or rules, but rather recommendations. Only references to Austrian law or the legislation of countries where the company in question is active or wants to become active are to be considered binding requirements. Even though this guide mainly addresses enterprises, other organisations, such as associations, public institutions and municipalities, are also encouraged to apply the guide.

CSR Activities of Labour Union and the “Civil Society” in Austria

CSR Positioning Paper from the “Austrian Civil Society” (2004)

A position paper titled “The social responsibility of enterprises (CSR) from a civil society perspective” (Amnesty International, AGEZ, AK, Ökobüro & ÖGB, 2003) was presented in December 2003 by the following organisations: Amnesty International; Working Group Development Co-operation (AGEZ) – the umbrella federation of 29 NGOs for social and development work; Federal Chamber of Labour (AK); Eco-bureau – the Austrian platform of environment organisations (members are e.g.: Greenpeace, WWF, GLOBAL 2000 / Friends of the Earth); and the Austrian Trade Union Federation (OEGB). The paper takes position on the CSR process in general and the CSR Austria – Initiative in detail. The organisations stress that socially responsible corporate behaviour has to go beyond the examples and principles indicated by CSR Austria and requires legal norms and norms for collective agreements.

CSR Position Paper of the Federal Chamber of Labour (2002)

The Federal Chamber of Labour (Bundesarbeiterkammer) represents the legal interests of approximately 2.7 million workers and consumers in all social, educational and economic matters. The CSR positioning paper stresses that there is reason to believe that companies need clear legal frameworks for their behaviour and strong internal and external representations of worker interests so that they can also gear their behaviour to public welfare aspects in a dependable manner. The chamber expresses the opinion that a voluntary CSR concept can only be the first step in the right direction. It needs to be followed by binding and actionable norms and clear legal incentives e.g. appropriate regulations for public procurement and competition as well as rules for promoting public enterprises.

Conclusion: CSR Perspectives for Austria

One of the biggest challenges faced by Austria in the coming years is to get actively involved in shaping the enlarged Europe (especially to the East and South) as an economic and social community. This ambitious goal hinges on two visions: On the one hand, the European economic and social model has to be further strengthened and in some respects newly designed, in order to be able to actively influence the framework conditions of globalisation. On the other hand, the integrative approach of sustainable development serves as a vision for the future. With the adoption of the Austrian Strategy for Sustainable Development in 2002 an important first step was taken to specify Austria’s contribution to the sustainable quality of our work, life and the environment. The CSR initiatives in Austria – of which only the most important ones were briefly mentioned – act in synergy to the overarching vision of sustainable development for both economy and society.

Modern economy and society depend on each other: Realisation of our personal and societal goals require a well functioning economy. At the same time doing business in an economical and sustainable way requires a society free of any social tension with an emphasis on solidarity. This societal pattern produces a win-win-situation and supports an ongoing process of Corporate Social Responsibility. Therefore human and social capitals have to be strengthened to increase the competitiveness of enterprises. By accepting their social responsibility Austrian enterprises rediscover their roles within society and make a contribution on the way to a sustainable path of development.

Note

¹ I would like to thank Mag. Wilhelm Autischer, coordinator of CSR Austria, for his kind comments.

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Further Internet-Links

CSR Austria

www.csr-austria.at

Austrian Business Council for Sustainable Development

www.abcsd.at

Sustainability Portal

www.nachhaltigkeit.at