

Project Group: 33 – Rethinking the future of work

Comment

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Over the course of this week we have been thinking about and discussing the future of work. We learned about the three pillars of sustainability and how to apply them onto the field of work systems and discovered that ecological, social and economic sustainability are interconnected.

When looking at possibilities for creating more sustainable work systems we realized the difficulty in measuring sustainable development. This difficulty stems from a lack of strict criteria for fair comparison as well as insufficient transparency. As a result there are a lot of companies creating a false image which is known as “Greenwashing”.

With a trend towards more and more precarious work situations as well as the climate crisis and a risk of losing the foundation for civilization on our planet, this topic is becoming increasingly urgent. Current working conditions don't seem to fully support peoples/ companies ability to focus on sustainability. Furthermore, the progressing globalization and digitalization promote the outsourcing of work due to missing regulations in countries of the Global South. Which in many cases means inhumane working conditions.

The difficulty in measuring sustainable work systems may result from the societal pressure leading companies towards creating a false image of their practices in order to keep their customers. Legal gray areas favor the usage of misleading sustainability labels. Biased studies and companies resisting inspections regarding sustainability due to possible economic disadvantages are amplifying this issue.

Possible points of leverage to this problem could be finding fixed criteria for a globally comparable sustainability score. This score should include criteria about workers' contentment, transparent supply chains as well as effects on the environment. If companies don't meet a set minimum of points, consequences should follow. Once a sustainability score is established and respected by the majority of society, the societal pressure will increase forcing companies to enhance their standards.

However, one may not forget that establishing a sustainability score comes with organizational hurdles and high costs - not only for the government but also for the customers that are purchasing products with high standards. It is also important to consider adjusting the score criteria depending on the region and the type of company. In addition to

that it may be necessary to cross-check examiners, which can prevent lobbying from weakening the criteria of the score.

Ultimately, lasting change can only be achieved when the individual, companies as well as governments are truly interested in moving towards more sustainable work systems.