

C: The Sustainable Company – Real Action Instead of PR Babble

Sustainability is a business buzzword. Every corporation wears it like a badge, but hardly any actually live it. Why? Because the system works against it.

In capitalist logic, profit comes first – not the common good. Climate protection is nice to have as long as it doesn't cost anything. The moment margins shrink, the good conscience suddenly stops being a viable business model.

When the Economy Meets the Climate

HeidelbergCement, RWE, BASF – they top the list of Germany's largest CO₂ emitters. Together with thousands of other companies, they **account for roughly 60 percent of total emissions**.

Germany aims to be climate-neutral by 2045, the EU by 2050.

But **politics has outsourced most of the work** – to the very actors that have polluted the most so far. The polluter-pays principle makes sense in theory. In practice, the result is this: climate targets as PR material, not as binding commitments.

The Old Rule: Profits Private, Costs Socialized

For a long time, things were convenient. Profits stayed with companies, environmental costs were borne by society. Economists called this “externalities” – an academic euphemism for shifting responsibility.

Much of this still works the same way today. CO₂ certificates, emissions trading – everything is supposed to be “**market-compatible**.” Above all, no real intervention.

Greenwashing as a Business Model

Few systems are as adaptable as capitalism. When sustainability is trending, campaigns are launched, sustainability reports written, green logos designed – all to **signal moral participation**.

But once returns decline, sustainability goals quietly disappear into the archive. Green, yes – but only if it pays. A prime **example is the German car industry**: weak performance in e-mobility, and suddenly automotive lobbyists demand that the planned phase-out of combustion engines be scrapped.

These reaction patterns reveal the core issue: the problem isn't a lack of goodwill. It's flawed system design.

Sustainability Needs Structure, Not Slogans

Climate protection must not be a subchapter in annual reports. It has to be part of a company's purpose. That means:

- treating **ecological indicators** on par with financial results,
- making CO₂ emissions a fixed component of every **corporate balance sheet**.

Companies that take this seriously become more resilient in the long run – because they build trust, not just returns.

Time for a Redesign

This isn't about blame. **It's about structures**. Companies are not enemies of the climate – but they operate under rules that

reward short-term thinking.

That's why BEconomics calls for **new frameworks**: transparent accounting, democratic oversight, and ownership models that enable sustainability instead of blocking it.

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