Webwatch

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AccountAbility

<http://www.accountability.org>

AccountAbility (AA) is an international, independent, and not-for-profit organization founded in the United Kingdom in 1995. Its main objective is to promote business practices that take into account the main principles and objectives of sustainable development and of corporate social responsibility. Since its origin AA activities have grown, and currently it has offices in the US, South Africa, Brazil, and China, to better reach out its partners and perform its activities.

In order to meet its objectives and better account for the multidisciplinary nature of sustainable development, AA carries out work in various areas, such as stakeholder engagement, partnership creation and development, responsive competitiveness, sustainability reporting and assurance, among others. In each one, AA seeks to develop new tools and strategies to tackle current or future problems of sustainability, and encourage the creation of links between individuals and/or organizations with common goals to better cope with the current and future global challenges.

The AA activities are based on its worldwide network of companies and of public and civil organizations that come together and work in common themes. The main four areas of research are: organization accountability, responsible competitiveness, collaborative governance, and citizen participation. In each one, AA undertakes in depth studies

focused in particular subjects, activity sectors, countries or regions. Of particular relevance are the activities in the area of sustainability accounting and reporting, where it has developed the AA1000 series of standards. Their aim is to help organizations become more accountable, responsible, and sustainable, addressing many of the issues that can have an impact on the organization performance, as for example stakeholder engagement. The standards include guidelines in several key aspects of sustainability, and they can be certified and communicated to all relevant stakeholders.

The site serves the main purpose of presenting the AA activities and how they are performed. Thus, in a specific section a throughout description of how it is organized, areas where it develops activities, and other organizational related topics can be found in the “About Us” link, with direct access from the main website page. The main webpage also features the latest news, and links to the more relevant publications of AA. Also, from there it is possible to enter other section devoted to research, where one can find a resume of the activities in each of the four research areas, with links to relevant publications and other sources of information. The sustainability standards can be found in another dedicated area of the site, where guidelines can be downloaded and information about certification and training is presented. A services area details some of the activities performed by AA with a wide diversity of partners in each of main areas of activity. A RSS feed and a freely subscribed e-mail newsletter aim to keep people informed about the AA activities.

The site is well organized and easy to use, with a search facility available in each page to assist finding what one wants. Yet, some of the most relevant information was placed in awkward site sections, in particular, the publications accessible from the “About Us” section. Nevertheless,

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the site has a lot of information available, especially in the areas related with sustainability and business.

Earthwatch institute

<http://www.earthwatch.org/default.aspx?splash=1>

The Earthwatch Institute (EI) is an international private organization founded in Boston in 1971. Its main objectives are the promotion and support of the activities, either action or research based, that have the sustainability of natural environment as a core issue, leading to decisions and strategies based as much as possible on real data and analysis of the pertinent issues and problems. Besides its general headquarters in Boston (US), the EI has now offices in Oxford (UK), Melbourne (Australia), and Tokyo (Japan), allowing a closer and direct contact with all the shareholders interested to work with this organization.

Of the various areas directly related with sustainable development, the EI is focused on supporting scientific research, education, network, and partnership build-up and development. In the first area, the EI focus on areas or countries where funding is scarce, as for example long term monitoring projects, women in science, among others. In the education area, the institute looks to increase the awareness of the public concerning sustainability issues. It focuses on the way people sees and understands the basic science behind the solutions and current strategies to tackle current and future problems. In the last area EI tries to offer people, mainly to volunteers, the possibility of working in the field with research teams in a wide variety of themes, such as archaeology, species conservation, among others.

EI develops most of its work with volunteers that may contribute with work but also financially to the institute activities. Also available are corporate sponsorships and partnerships, and other forms of participation, seeking to engage all relevant stakeholders in the institute activities. One of the main goals of the website is precisely this one, to show all interested people how they can engage and support, in a specific section called “Get Involved.” The section “About Us” includes a complete description of the EI activities and its organizational details, such as description of education and research activities, relevant partnerships, and a list of publications and news related to the institute’s activities. In the section “Expeditions” it is possible to find details about current or past expeditions, volunteers testimonies, and information on future activities. A newsletter and Twitter, Facebook and YouTube areas are available to people who want to place questions and to know more about EI. To take into account the particular aspects of the various places where EI develops its activities, there are continent specific sites, each one

accessed directly from the main webpage. Although similar in structure, all feature specific regional information. Thus, in reality there are six sites, all in English language.

The website is simple although the attempt in having few sections resulted in distinct sections with too many sub-sections. A search facility is available to help people finding what they want. There is also a focus on the institute activities, and not so much in presenting the results of the supported activities. Nevertheless, there is relevant information available at the site to people with interests in the sustainability area, and it can be a good starting point to find research and cooperation opportunities.

Environmental working group

<http://www.ewg.org>

The Environmental Working Group (EWG) is a US-independent and not-for-profit organization founded in 1993 by Ken Wood and Richard Wiles, and currently based in Washington, DC, US. The main objectives of EWG are to perform research, inform the public, protect citizens from existing and potential environmental threats, and lobbying politicians and other decision making organizations on issues directly related with the environment and sustainable development. Its vision is to promote and protect public and environment health, mainly through communication and policy making definition. To be able to better perform its lobbying activities, a sister organization “The EWG Action Fund” was founded in 2002.

The EWG is specialized in questions related with toxic chemicals, agricultural subsidies, public lands, and corporate accountability. In particular, EWG researches and looks into the issues stemming from the previous areas, to find potential facts and problems that may get unnoticed by the general public. This serves the basis for all the remaining EWG activities, in particular those linked to inform and educate the general public, and lobbying and influence the decision making process. In this regard, EWG pushes for more sound regulations and/or legislation, based as much as possible in scientific evidence. For the general public, EWG also creates, develops and extend the comprehensiveness of practical and useful resources in specific areas, such as “Skin Deep” for the cosmetics and related products area, to be used mainly by consumers but also relevant to other stakeholders. Other example concerns food and its content of pesticides, where EWG publishes the “Dirty Dozen” and the “Clean 15” lists showing what are the food with the highest and the lowest pesticide contents, respectively.

The site is designed mainly to serve as a presentation of EWG and its activities, and as an outlet for dissemination

of its main research results, with the general public in sight. Thus, the “about EWG” section includes a throughout description of this organization, how it works and is funded, its internal organization, among other aspects, directly from the main webpage. Also from there it is possible to access sections of the site dealing with specific topics, such as health and toxics, farming, among others. In each section, there are sub-sections that addressed more particular issues, where it is possible to find reports based on research done by EWG, regulations, news, and other relevant information. Some areas, as for example skin deep, have their specially designed websites within the EWG site. The sections “media center” and “take action” deals with news related with EWG, and how one can help.

The site is well designed and presents a lot of information that may be hard to find, as its particular organization reflects EWG main areas of interest. Thus, a search facility can be found in each page to assist people find what they want. Although EWG focus on the US realities, the issues considered are relevant for other developed countries, as for example European. Also, there is focus in some specific themes and in the general public, but many practitioners may find the information available at the site relevant for other contexts.

Natural resources and management portal

<http://rmportal.net>

The natural resources and management portal (NRM&D) is a web based resource created and maintained by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Its main objectives are the presentation of relevant information to all the relevant stakeholders in the areas of natural resource management, and to encourage the development of a community and networks of people interested in sharing their expertise and resources in this area.

The USAID is a US-governmental agency created in 1961 and responsible for the administration of US civilian foreign aid, either in the case of natural or human made catastrophes or in the capacity development for the improvement of the life conditions or people, with a focus on developing countries. The portal shares with all the relevant stakeholders the results, experiences, and thoughts that have resulted from many of the programs and relief activities of USAID. By doing this, it tries to reach as much

partners as possible, with the aim of developing potential collaborative work, either privately or public.

The website was designed to present all the available information, and to give the users the fundamental tools necessary for example to add more materials or information to the site, to start new partnerships, to find information relevant to their activities, among other tasks. It is possible to find a description of the main objectives of NRM&D, how to become a member, and other particular and general information, in the “about” section. A help section, specific aimed to newcomers, can be also accessed through the main website. The site also includes a news section, where the several partners and site members post news or information deemed relevant about events, publications, webcasts, among other things. The training section and the library sections are repositories of respectively educational courses and publications of various types, in a wide variety of subjects and aimed to different stakeholders for a large set of local conditions. Most of the courses and publications are free and can be downloaded directly from the site, as most of materials and information available in the portal. The “Group Workspaces” and “Projects” list the groups and ongoing projects created under the auspices of the portal, in a wide variety of themes and geographical scope. Some of them are member access limited, to ensure more fruitful discussions and that only interested people participate.

Although a lot of information and materials are available at the site, to add new things as for example news and publications, or to enter in certain sections, it is necessary to be registered at the site. Although it is free, this is done by e-mail, to limit the access only to the people really interested. However, the variety of themes and the quality of the information makes this site an excellent resource for many people with interests in the subject of sustainable development and related areas, even for people not registered in the site.

Final words

We will return on the next issue with a fresh selection of sites. If you know of sites that are worthy of being presented, send us all relevant information to the following e-mail address: amartins@fe.up.pt. Any suggestions will be considered with great attention for possible publication. In that case, the contributors names will be acknowledge in this column. Surf well.