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**Regional Sustainable Development and the role of Regional Change Agents –
The Example of the Regional CSR Competence Centres
in North-Rhine Westphalia (Germany)**

The integral concept of Sustainable Development (SD) reflects the highly complex challenges of today's and future generations. With the general agreement about the recently published Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, UN 2015) for global society, it is now up to the regions in the world, the international organizations, the individual nations and finally the national regions and local bodies to implement measures towards sustainability regarding all seventeen areas of the SDGs. There is need for developing high acceptance of measure implementations by potentially affected groups, because of the complexity of interrelations between ecological, economic and social spheres, which is still very high even on the regional level, and because the consequences of implemented or non-implemented sustainable measures are more clearly visible and experienceable here. Additionally the economic efficiency and effectiveness of measures should be as high as possible. All these pre-determinants and framework conditions ask for well organised cooperation and collaboration of the regional institutions involved in those SD strategies. As Sustainable Development requires fundamental changes on many different levels regarding philosophies, strategies, tactical and operative actions, institutions involved in those processes as major initiators are called "Change Agents".

The federal state of North-Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), Germany was formerly known as a highly industrialized region, and even though the structural change towards services during the last decades took place here, too, industry is still playing an important role. Based on a modernisation strategy for the North-Rhine-Westphalian economy, the Ministry of Economics as a very important change agent initiated a state government's CSR strategy, including the promotion of strategic CSR in NRW-based small and medium-sized companies. The paper to be presented in the first part will give insights about

- background and aim of the federal state government's CSR strategy,
- structure of the CSR competence centres, institutions involved, tasks to be implemented and expectations about objectives to be achieved after projects finalisations.

In the second part experiences of EthNa-centre of the Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences, which is involved in the implementation of the Lower Rhine CSR Competence Centre for Textiles and Garments, will be discussed regarding the following aspects:

- project steps and tasks planned and developed,
- experiences as another change agent among collaborating institutions,
- challenges and obstacles faced by the transfer from research to practice/business.

The paper closes with an evaluating summary and proposals for further research.

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