

<https://blog.en.erste-am.com/binge-drinking/>

Everything was better in the past!

Gerold Permoser



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The Austrian term "Komasaufen", which refers to the practice of binge drinking, received the "Doublespeak Award" 2007. The award followed significant media coverage and discussion on the alcoholic excesses that young people were engaging in with extremely sweet alcoholic beverages. On the one hand, I understand the relevance of the topic, not the least due to an array of beverages that target in particular underage customers.

On the other hand, I also find the discussion about heavy drinking slightly hypocritical. The aforementioned term has always been an attempt to draw a line in the sand between activities one had engaged in back in the days, and the actions of young people today. Yes, we also drank too much alcohol in the past.

Water to wine

Don't worry, my point is not "... and I turned out fine." Rather, I believe that alcohol is a drug accepted by (Western) society, and a complete ban can and should not be on the table. It cannot be, because I do not think a ban would realistically work. The roots of alcohol in our society are too deep, like an old vine. At state banquets, toasts are proposed; at family and company functions, people cheer, and the priest turns wine into the blood of Christ. And it should not be, because I believe that another Prohibition would come with side effects none of us would want. It is not by accident that Hollywood managed to burn Al Capone and Eliot Ness into the collective memory of mankind.

If a ban does not work and makes no sense either, the question is, what can be done? Turn around, forget about it, and order the next glass of wine? Of course not. We have to deal with the topic of alcohol responsibly. Personally, within the family, at work, and in society. In medieval times, stout was considered a nourishing breakfast for the whole family, including the children. Nowadays, a beer for breakfast is regarded as a clear hint that someone might have an alcohol problem. And that's even before the fact that the kid would not get any beer at all, not for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. This is not accepted by society and would be a clear no-go.

The responsibility of companies

This is where from my point of view corporate responsibility has to enter the picture. Companies are a part of society and have to be able to handle their responsibility. This includes production and its conditions as well as the product range. Is it responsible behaviour vis-à-vis society to create specific, dedicated product lines that appeal mainly to underage customers? During the sales process, does anybody make sure that the alcohol ends up with those who can handle it?

At the end of the day, the way companies treat the 340,000 people who are deemed to suffer from alcoholism is also important. Every company with about 100 employees can expect to have an average of 3 alcoholics in its midst. (N.B. Actually one more if we assume that children are less affected, and alcoholics tend to die younger than the rest of the population.)

From our point of view, it is the goal of sustainable investors to make companies take their responsibility in society seriously, curtail alcohol abuse, and handle its consequences.

Read more articles from this issue of our ESG letter [here](#).

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