

## EXPERT COMMENTARY

### When Standardizers Become Pearl Divers

It has already been five years since the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development by a unanimous vote of all 193 member states on 25 September 2015. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of this Agenda cover social, ecological and economic aspects and aim at nothing less than 'transforming our world'. However, where do we stand today, and which contribution can standards make?

The international standardization organizations – ISO, IEC and ITU – addressed the concrete implementation of the SDGs very quickly and provided detailed lists on their websites specifying the standards supporting the achievement of those goals. Thus, the cards are on the table. Standards cover almost all areas conceivable – from technical solutions to systems organizing processes and procedures.

### Pandemic and Climate Change

In 2020 we face a special challenge: the COVID-19 pandemic. The political actions taken by governments to respond to it have serious consequences for the global sustainability agenda. On the one hand, the lockdowns implemented in numerous countries temporarily reduced the ecological footprint of humankind. According to the Global Footprint Network, Earth Overshoot Day was even delayed – to 22 August – for the first time in many years. On the other hand, policy priorities are changing, and the focus is shifting away from the UN SDGs. The energy transition and climate protection, however, can only succeed if they are supported and shaped jointly by all countries.

### Situation in Austria

Austria has played a pioneering role in the standardization of environmental subjects in Europe since the 1970s. The population understands that a well-function ecosystem is of great importance and the need to mitigate the major challenges posed by hotter summers, cooling and overheating. Thus, a standardization project is currently underway on exterior vertical greening. Heat and draughts caused by global warming also put a strain on trees in cities. The concept of the 'sponge city' gives more room to roots also below streets, parking space and walkways.

### CO2: Buildings Account for Roughly One-Third of Emissions

A fact that is still not known widely enough: buildings account for approximately one-third of the overall energy consumption and CO2 emissions. The savings potential is enormous – depending on whether new buildings are constructed, or old ones undergo major refurbishments, energy savings of up to 80 per cent are possible and reductions by 50 per cent are realistic on average. This subject is addressed by our national standard ÖNORM H 5050 on the energy performance of buildings.

Austrian Standards has made good experiences with raising the visibility of innovative solutions based on standards and already calls for proposals for the 7th Living Standards Award this year. In 2020 the award-winning projects including, for example, 'Clean groundwater for climate protection' and 'Fight against electric waste' explicitly referred to specific SDGs in their submissions.



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### Dipping into the Knowledge Pool

To tackle the challenges for a livable future it is important to raise awareness among the relevant players and invite them to dip into the knowledge pool – like pearl divers: either by applying standards so that they do not have to reinvent the wheel or by actively taking part in standardization and contributing their expertise. Standards are a suitable tool for developing common, recognized solutions to global problems.

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