2018 Almanac of Sustainability: IDEAS AND ACTIONS. TRANSFORMATION!
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What is sustainability?

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. [...] In essence, sustainable development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations.”

Brundtland Commission 1987
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Sustainability is of great importance to people in Germany and to the German Government. For what is at stake here is nothing less than the future of our planet. The German Government and I personally are therefore especially keen to give the necessary support to the initiatives under the label “Sustainability made in Germany”. The Almanac of Sustainability highlights very clearly how German initiatives are lending substance to this idea through innovative approaches. The commitment to sustainability is tangible not only at national level. Municipalities, companies and associations are providing important and inspiring impetus in an international context.

Through the German Sustainable Development Strategy we have created institutional structures and made the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals binding. This was confirmed and warmly welcomed by international experts. However, they have called on us to carry on setting high standards for ourselves and to win the hearts and minds of everyone in Germany. We have to come to a common and comprehensive understanding of sustainable development. Only if sustainability becomes the focus of politicians, companies and society can the transformation to sustainable business practices and ways of life succeed.

In a world which is interconnected and interlinked to an unprecedented extent, it is more evident to us than ever before that our actions have an impact beyond national borders. We see this in our political, economic and cultural relations, as well as in the higher number of crises in our immediate neighbourhood. Forward-looking foreign policy focusing on the three dimensions of sustainable development – ecological, social, economic – can foster stability and peaceful exchange.
Viable international partnerships are a key instrument for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. We should make use of this key concept of diplomacy for sustainability both to resolutely advance common goals with like-minded countries and to remain in dialogue with difficult partners. Particularly at a time when more and more people are again calling for national solutions, and when protectionism is on the rise, we must work especially hard to strengthen multilateral institutions. For global challenges need global solutions.

The Almanac targets existing modes of thought and calls them into question. At the same time, it spotlights inspiring and creative alternatives. Its message is that if we are willing to explore new avenues today, then we will be able to leave a world worth living in for future generations tomorrow. Let us set about this task together!
Impatience, courage, action.

To press ahead courageously and discover new opportunities, you have to call into question existing norms and values – this is our civilisation’s cultural history to this day. The world may appear to be revolving faster and faster, however, cultural change takes time. The same goes for sustainability. It needs legislation and regulation. But it draws its strength from our conviction, from being the compass of our actions.

We have excellent parameters for this in Germany, as attested to by the international experts with their view of Germany’s Sustainable Development Policy. However, this does not currently represent what people perceive in their day-to-day lives. We are seeing backward developments in many areas – sustainability has not yet become the new normal. On the other hand, we are sensing a great deal of impatience in large swathes of society. Many things need to be accelerated if we are to effectively combat climate change, and a great deal needs to be changed more fundamentally if fairness is the benchmark of our political and economic actions and if societal polarisation is to be tackled. The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) takes this impatience and promotes ideas and initiatives that could serve as the solutions to major challenges. Turning the courage of individuals into strength for everyone – this is another of the Council’s responsibilities.

At all times, our framework is the global level, specifically the 2030 Agenda. This is the expression of a political will and a commitment to multilateral cooperation. As the Agenda says, sustainable development knows no borders. It is an assignment for us all – for all countries, institutions, companies and each and every one of us. Sustainability is the transformation of a
finite system to which growth compulsion and growth limits are intrinsic. Sustainable development knows no growth limits – from the outset, its solutions are bigger than the problems they cause. This is something that we in Germany and around the world still need to work hard on. The Council supports transformation in the direction of sustainability and the cultural change needed for this by means of its many projects, the Hub for Sustainable Finance, the Sustainability Culture Fund and the Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies. This is likewise a concrete answer designed to leave no one behind. Limited to certain topics, this almanac demonstrates how much we as a society have already learned about sustainability and what has already been initiated in this area. It also examines what we can still learn – from countries all over the world.
A search for the term “sustainability” in the world’s best-known search engine generates 147,000,000 results. This clunky term has therefore evidently firmly established itself throughout. Sustainability is everywhere – everything is somehow sustainable.

For me, the function of the term “sustainability” has changed again and again over the past 30 years. And it has always been a political term!

In the 1980s and 1990s, the new term “sustainability” (new at least to me!) allowed various environmental policy approaches (for example, nature conservation, noise control, technical environmental protection, green city spaces and waste policy) to be encapsulated in a single word. Sustainability was another word for an integrated view of environmental policy. And sustainability was incredibly political, as it established interrelations where others only saw technical problems.

In the early 2000s, my understanding of sustainability broadened and changed. It became a guiding principle for systematically understanding the need for a change in agricultural policy in Germany and Europe during the BSE crisis (those mad cows!) and for encouraging people to no longer see food as a cheap throwaway product, but truly as a means of survival. It wasn’t just about making animal feed a little safer. It was about an attempt to redefine sustainable agricultural policy – and this can only be seen as something political.
More recently – in my eyes, since 2006 – sustainability has become the topic that could serve to also overcome the north-south divide, following the end of the Eastern/Western Bloc confrontation. With its proposal of the Sustainable Development Goals, the global south successfully got the ball rolling regarding transforming the development paths of all countries – and not just the so-called developing countries – in the direction of sustainability. Sustainability presented the opportunity for the international community to come together and protect the health of all people and of the planet, and enter a new phase of cooperation. However, the real world has so far not adhered to these goals – goals which I think are admirable.

These days, my three stages of sustainability can be traced with the help of digital search engines – they are layered deep in the Internet much like the geological strata of a bygone era.

There are now clear signs of there being a new “era”. A search for the term “sustainability fake” generates 18,000,000 results, and searching for the term “alternative facts” delivers 1,490,000 results. This is put to political use as well by those who favour entirely other development paths which I believe are not sustainable. As a global sustainability community, we cannot afford to ignore this and above all we must not believe that this new development can be refuted on the basis of an ever greater number of increasingly accurate indicators! What’s needed are political answers.

Sustainability is and will continue to be a goal for which we must fight within the societal and political debates.
Implementing the 2030 Agenda and promoting sustainable development serve as a yardstick for the Federal Government’s actions.

In June 2018, Helen Clark – the former Prime Minister of New Zealand and former Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – presented the Federal Chancellor with the report of an international peer review which she had chaired. The Federal Government sees this report as an encouragement to achieve further progress in bringing about sustainable development across all policy areas.

The German Sustainable Development Strategy adopted in early 2017 emphasises the political significance of sustainable development. The strategy’s objective is to achieve economically efficient, socially balanced and ecologically sound development, whereby respecting the planetary boundaries of our earth and facilitating a life in dignity for everyone form the fundamental guiding principles for political decision-making. Due to the cross-cutting nature and special importance of sustainability, the Federal Chancellery has overall responsibility for the strategy.

The German Sustainable Development Strategy contains at least one indicator-based target for each of the 17 SDGs. Every two years, the Federal Statistical Office submits an independent report containing information on the development of the indicators; the strategy itself is further developed every four years. Furthermore, the Federal Government is currently working to update specific indicators and targets within the strategy.

Germany’s sustainability policy has been placed on a sound institutional footing: the State Secretaries’ Committee for Sustainable Development is responsible for steering the Sustainable Development Strategy. Chaired by the Head of the Federal Chancellery, the state secretaries of all federal ministries consult in the committee on key issues relating to German sustainability policy. Since 2018, representatives of groups within society have also been systematically included in the preparatory work for meetings. To improve joint ministerial action to implement the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Strategy, so-called ministerial coordinators – in most cases heads of department – were appointed at each ministry in 2017.

The German Sustainable Development Strategy forms a key framework for implementation of the 2030 Agenda in, with and by Germany. It defines concrete targets and measures for a large number of sustainability policy issues. The strategy has also been able to...
seek valuable advice on all issues relating to sus-
tainable development from the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE).

A broad social consensus is crucial for successful implementation of the SDGs and the Sustainable Development Strategy’s objectives. For this reason, an annual ‘Forum Nachhaltigkeit’ (Sustain-
ability Forum) was established at the Federal Chancellery in 2017, which facilitates dialogue between the Federal Government and key sus-
tainability players.

To ensure that the guiding principles of sustain-
ability are taken into account in every new piece of legislation and each regulation, they form a compulsory part of the impact assessments which ministries have to complete. A newly developed IT-supported instrument (‘electronic sustainability check’) systematically guides users...
through all of the indicators, targets and rules contained in the Sustainable Development Strategy and creates links to the individual SDGs.

The guiding principle of sustainable development also has a special significance for governance itself. With their overall procurement budget, public authorities have a major influence on demand for sustainable products and services and on their development. Consequently, the German Government has set itself targets for sustainable governance in its ‘Sustainability Action Programme’. These include, for instance, reducing energy consumption at its own sites, requirements for sustainable procurement, managing events sustainably, or facilitating a better work-life balance.

At multilateral level, the Federal Government works closely with its partners to bring about sustainable global development. It is a member of the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) and advocates at EU level for an ambitious implementation strategy for the 2030 Agenda. During its G20 presidency in 2017, Germany also lobbied for leading industrial and emerging countries to make firm commitments to implementing the 2030 Agenda. Germany joined China and Mexico to form the first group of G20 partners pursuing a voluntary peer learning mechanism. The 2030 Agenda also guides all of the Federal Government’s actions with regard to development policy. At UN level, the Federal Government is pressing for an ambitious implementation of the 2030 Agenda and effective progress monitoring. In 2019, the first SDG summit to be held for heads of state and government since adoption of the 2030 Agenda is due to send out a strong political signal to speed up the necessary economic and societal shift. Furthermore, the Federal Government is planning to report to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on its implementation efforts again in 2021, once the next stage in the further development of the German Sustainable Development Strategy has been completed in 2020. It last reported to the HLPF in 2016.
Multi-stakeholder peer review of Germany’s Sustainable Development Strategy – a transformative example to follow

by Helen Clark, Chair of the international Peer Review Group 2018

It was my privilege to chair the 2018 International Peer Review of Germany’s Sustainable Development Strategy. As members of the review team, we accepted the task knowing that what Germany does on sustainable development is of global significance because of the size and scale of the country. Its economy developed, as most have, with a big carbon footprint, and so it has heavy legacy issues in its transition to sustainability. That transition needs to be swift and it needs to be just. It is to Germany’s credit that it is approaching these issues holistically as the 2030 Agenda urges all countries to do.

Germany, however, was ahead of many in thinking in this way. It produced its first sustainable development strategy in time for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. The Strategy which our team reviewed is Germany’s third, and we were also the third international review team.

Our review team met with stakeholders across government, parliament, the private sector and civil society. From considering that wide range of perspectives, we concluded that:

» The institutional architecture established to support the Strategy is sound. Leadership of it resides in the Chancellery, which convenes state secretaries charged with driving the strategy at ministerial level.

» Nonetheless, the Federal Government’s co-ordination capacities could be strengthened. With 29 of the Strategy’s 63 indicators reportedly off-track, this calls for a strong action plan for the State Secretaries’ Committee and for departmental action plans for which there is accountability for delivery.

» At all levels of government, broad partnerships will need to be formed with stakeholders to turn around those indicators which are currently heading in the wrong direction.
rapidly. The Strategy’s indicator system suggests that there is a concentration of challenges relating to agriculture, land use and energy where targets would not be met on current trends.

- There were areas where the Peer Review felt that the Strategy could be more ambitious in scope and/or speed of progress in the areas targeted; for example, on moving towards zero land degradation, reversing the current negative trend on biodiversity loss, phasing out both fossil fuel- and nuclear-based energy generation, achieving a circular economy, and in promoting informed public debate on why achieving sustainable development is critical for both Germany and the wider world.

- Sustainable development in Germany is oftenseen as being focused on environmental issues, and, thus, civil society actors in the social and economic spheres do not always see the Strategy as speaking to them.

Yet the Strategy is comprehensive in covering the social, economic and environmental strands of sustainability. That needs to be better communicated, so that citizens perceive that their future well-being and that of the natural eco-systems on which human life depends are interlinked.

This calls for enhancing capacity for systems thinking and for education for sustainability at all levels of the education system and through lifelong learning. Politicians and officials need to comprehend the opportunities, the risks and the challenges implicit in the transition to sustainability to make optimal policy decisions and to implement them.

- Leaving No One Behind is a core principle of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Among those to whom we spoke, there was concern expressed that more people are being left behind in Germany itself. Efforts to secure
social cohesion and solidarity are more important than ever amidst the growing diversity of the population. This challenge is far from unique among high-income countries and is complicated by populist political reactions to economic and social trends in a number of them. The 2030 Agenda is an agenda of hope for inclusion, human rights and human development: following it principles does offer a way forward in these challenging times.

The oversight mechanisms provided by parliaments and national audit institutions globally are important in monitoring progress on sustainable development and ensuring accountability. The Peer Review recommended greater powers for the Bundestag’s Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development (PBnE). We also suggested that ways be found to reflect the Strategy in the Government’s budget to enhance monitoring. We also noted the decision of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions Congress in 2016 that the national institutions should undertake performance audits on SDG implementation.

The German Council for Sustainable Development was established in 2001 and is a well-respected convener of stakeholders and advisor of government on cross-cutting issues of sustainability. Consideration should

The state of sustainable development in Germany is regularly reviewed by international experts. Following on from the reviews in 2009 and 2013, an 11-strong team scrutinised the country and its sustainable development strategy for the third time in 2018. This time, the peer review was conducted under the auspices of former New Zealand Prime Minister and former Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme, Helen Clark. This was the first peer review conducted since the UN adopted the 2030 Agenda. The reviewers’ assessments varied. They said that Germany was in a strong position on the whole, but that there were also some shortcomings, namely that biodiversity was disappearing, land consumption was decreasing too slowly, the carbon footprint of, for example, transportation was stagnating, obesity was increasing and social disparity was widening further.

The peer reviews are special because the reviewers come from various countries and have expertise in the areas of science, the private sector, civil society and public administration. The RNE office organised the eight-month work of these peers and assisted in evaluating the surveys completed in writing by stakeholders from politics, business, science and civil society. During a peer week held in Berlin, the experts also met close to 100 stakeholders in Germany’s sustainable development policy. Helen Clark then presented the report to Chancellor Angela Merkel in person at the RNE’s 2018 annual conference. The peers discussed the findings in detail with the State Secretaries’ Committee for Sustainable Development at the Federal Chancellery, this being the committee responsible for effecting political consequences.

The published report is available at www.sustainabilitycouncil.de
be given to it having a legal entity status which befits its independent role.

Germany’s commitment to sustainable development positions it well at the European and global levels to be an advocate for meaningful action to advance the SDGs. Beyond its own shores, it can do more to address its overall footprint by committing to sustainable supply chains. Its substantial international development budget and its technologies and expertise can be even more significant in supporting developing countries to achieve the SDGs.

Overall, there is much that is commendable in Germany’s Sustainable Development Strategy. Our review calls for keeping what works, elevating what is good and changing what doesn’t deliver.

We commend Germany for its willingness to open up this core government strategy to independent, multi-stakeholder international review and commend this practice to all countries as a way of helping to strengthen implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs and national sustainability strategies.
My parents’ home is in Upper Franconia. Once isolated due to its proximity to the former East Germany and Czechoslovakia, it is now in the heart of Europe. Nestled in the beautiful nature of the Franconian Forest, the Fichtel Mountains, Franconian Switzerland and “God’s Garden” on the Upper Main, Upper Franconia has one of the highest industrial density levels in Europe and indeed the world. Because of this, it was early on that I came to understand and value the importance of striking a balance between industry and the environment while safeguarding social responsibility and maintaining cultural identity. This guiding principle of sustainable regional development is now more important than ever before.

This is the right guiding principle for the sustainable development of a Europe of regions. Its systematic application enables Europe to establish itself as an independent force in the global context of the USA’s path on the one hand and that of China and Russia on the other. As such, this guiding principle also has strategic significance and becomes a railing to which we can hold on for security as we move forward in an increasingly global world.

The multidimensionality of the guiding principle needs to be consciously developed in all areas of life – in industry and the environment, in energy and the climate, in the digital and social spheres, etc. This is challenging and complex, and calls for differentiated answers. But sustainable solutions are more stable than simple and one-sided solutions, and they pay off in the long run. As such,
businesses that apply social and environmental standards around the world face fewer risks than others; a business that systematically conserves resources and makes efficient use of raw materials has lower costs coupled with a greater ability to compete.

For me, sustainability is also about marching at the front of carefully considered progress, in other words not progress simply for the sake of it, but progress at the service of people and the environment. In this context, we need to make Germany and Europe a place of innovation leadership in the areas of digitalisation, artificial intelligence, biointelligence, nanotechnology, smart cities and smart mobility, to name but a few. Technologies which have not yet been developed can soon contribute to more effectively reconciling industry and the environment.

Let’s reshape Europe as our sustainable future.
“Developing sustainability as the financial market’s guiding principle”

contribution by Prof. Dr Alexander Bassen

Germany has established itself as a stable democracy that is committed to the social market economy. The desire to achieve environmental diversity and social justice remains a trait of a sustainable Germany, but this needs to be protected and developed further as a valuable public asset. I see major challenges in the increasingly imbalanced distribution of income and wealth and in the financial sector. To some extent, the latter has taken a course in recent years that promotes the financing of (more) sustainable projects. However, the major institutions in particular need to make an additional effort here to incorporate the SDGs into the activities of the capital market players as a generally accepted societal goal of the international community. I see the role of civil society in an especially positive light. Civil society organisations play a substantial part in the reduction of negative environmental and social effects and in encouraging the government to act when individual interests are being prioritised at society’s expense. The Sustainability Code developed by the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) is another positive example. In this Code, representatives of businesses and the financial sector have created a transparency standard which can be used both by SMEs and major enterprises to establish transparency regarding their sustainability activities. Even non-profit bodies such as higher education institutions are now using this reporting standard. In the area of sustainability, I focus on research, teaching and transfer. I perform research exclusively into the effect of sustainability on the capital market and on companies, for example whether sustainable investments deliver a greater financial performance. There is a particular need for the findings of conventional capital market and
management research to be applied to matters of sustainability. Fortunately, there is broad interest in the research findings, both within the scientific field and in practice. Where teaching is concerned, sustainability is handled in various ways: there are dedicated sustainability lectures and the topic is also integrated into traditional courses. However, research findings must also be communicated within the practical arena and research gaps seen in practice must be filled. I therefore believe that cooperation with various institutions in the practical arena is an indispensable prerequisite for giving the discussion regarding sustainability further momentum.
Adolfo Ayuso-Audry is the Director General in the Office of the Mexican Presidency, where he is responsible for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. He was a member of the group of experts chaired by Helen Clark that produced the third peer review of the German Sustainable Development Strategy in 2018 at the invitation of the Federal Government and facilitated by the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE).

What would you say was the best part of the German Sustainable Development Strategy?

The best part is the three dimensions that Germany chose in order to realise sustainability – the idea that Germany has to work on this at home, is called on to act at all levels of politics and also wishes to cooperate with partners for the benefit of the world. This international perspective is a revolutionary approach to understanding and realising sustainability. We would be living on an entirely different planet if all countries adopted this kind of understanding. Another great aspect is how the strategy features indicators for gauging success, clear goals and an understandable structure. There are also examples of successful implementation here, which is really important. And of course, there’s the fact that the strategy is revised again and again. This really is a typically German structure ...

Very systematic ...

Yes, very systematic. This is something that we in Mexico and elsewhere could take as a “gift” for developing our strategies in a similar way.

Where is the German Sustainable Development Strategy at its weakest?

I think it is lacking on the communication front. I don’t think people are very familiar with the 2030 Agenda, in other words the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals. This isn’t exclusively a German problem – it’s the same all over the world. We would have to realise an immense communications strategy in order to show people what sustainability is based on simple examples. The ideas behind the sustainability strategy aren’t widely known, even though people in Germany address these issues more than others do. But more really could be done in that regard.

The percentage of people who can tell you what the 17 goals behind the 2030 Agenda are is probably very small, right?

The principles behind the strategy are likewise not widely known: for instance, universalism – i.e. that the goals apply to everyone equally. You can do your bit to help achieve Goal 14, Life Below Water, here in Berlin too. These ideas need to be disseminated more so that people also
reconsider their own behaviour. Do they really need that big luxury car and do they really have to eat meat every day? There are plenty of examples. Many people buy items of clothing that they only wear once, if at all, before throwing them away. What this means is discussed in Germany within the Partnership for Sustainable Textiles. The price of clothes is not commensurate with the production resources used, from the materials and energy needed to the resultant environmental pollution. I am impressed with how the German textiles industry is addressing these issues.

Unfortunately, though, this is only a small industry in Germany.

But the issue is being discussed, at least.

The global Sustainable Development Goals are actually an invitation for countries to renew their industries and society. Are there countries that have understood this?

Well, yes – Germany … (laughs). There are obviously also others. The countries in the north are doing a lot, while others still have some way to go. The 2030 Agenda really is an incredible op-
opportunity to work on achieving goals together. On the other hand, these ideas can also be easily adapted to the municipal level, where there is still a lot to do. In Mexico, for example, we are very happy to have introduced the ideas of the global Sustainable Development Goals into local politics in 30 out of 32 federal states. This took a lot of work. But more can still be done. Because it is currently people living in the capital cities at the most who are aware of the existence of the 2030 Agenda, while the concept is still entirely unknown in the more provincial areas. And time is running out – more than two years have already passed since the 2015 resolutions.

Globalisation fatigue is very prevalent in Europe and elsewhere. The pledge made at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio that the end of the Cold War meant greater global cooperation, global trade and global exchange is now seen by many as a threat to their way of life and to their certainties. The global Sustainable Development Goals are the exact opposite of the escalating nationalism and populism. Does the 2030 Agenda even have a chance in the current political climate?

I have observed these trends too and understand these populist movements. But what I always say is that there are no straight lines in the universe. Nobody expected the global Sustainable Development Goals to be enforced and implemented easily. There are always setbacks. But it is also no coincidence that Goal 10, Reduced Inequalities, tackles precisely the area that hurts a lot of people. Globalisation is good. But in the 19th century too, during industrialisation, there was the belief that mass production would lead to the eradication of poverty. This was not the case. Nor will it be the case with globalisation. The rich got richer, while the poor got poorer. The illusion that globalisation would make everyone rich did not materialise. Even so, the only way to combat nationalism and populism is by working together, through global cooperation such as the 2030 Agenda.

The interview was conducted by Dagmar Dehmer.
Sustainability is a key topic for the human race. Material growth as is currently practised in Germany cannot serve as a model for the way in which business is done around the world in the future.

It is a delusion to believe that we can continue to exceed the planetary boundaries without this having a major impact on social harmony both nationally and globally. It is therefore the responsibility of Germany in particular to find an exemplary way in which to redefine well-being for everyone in such a way that intact ecosystems that offer all living things the chance of survival become an integral part of a new way of thinking and acting on the part of the policymakers, businesses and society. Sober recognition of the status quo is an important part of this. A pioneering framework is already in place in the form of the German Sustainable Development Strategy and the level of knowledge is high, but the level of consequential action is currently unfortunately not. Reducing the ecological footprint while maintaining a decent level of human well-being continues to be the benchmark here.

This first and foremost means achieving an absolute reduction in the consumption of resources, systematic implementation of the energy transition and an environmentally sound land use policy that accepts wilderness and substantially recognises the right of animal and plant species to exist. Nature conservation therefore needs to be given a new societal dimension. Economic activity must be gauged on the basis of its environmental and social impacts. This needs to become the benchmark for a new societal consensus and shape political action.
“SUSTAINABILITY MADE IN GERMANY”

contribution by Marlehn Thieme

With the major challenges that our planet is facing, every country needs to seek and find a way to achieve greater sustainability. This applies especially to Germany as a developed country.

A great deal improved following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda as it then became clear that sustainable development was a matter of global concern. Consequently, the German Sustainable Development Strategy, the efforts at all levels of government, and the stakeholder dialogue with civil society, the business sector and science were aligned much more strongly with the global Sustainable Development Goals.

But the pressure to act became even more evident in particular for the successful German economy with its global interdependence. The task at hand is to implement the SDGs more broadly and more deeply, i.e. more systematically, in Germany and in global supply chains: from the financial market to the chemical industry and from energy generation to science, research and equal education opportunities.
The action taken must be based on monitoring and on the finding that approximately half of the goals of the German Sustainable Development Strategy have yet to be achieved and that the path to achieving the goals has not been clearly marked out. This is the issue that needs to be tackled, with a reliable strategy implementation policy being developed in, with and by Germany. Only this will do justice to the German role and to the expectations made of Germany and its responsibility for Europe, development cooperation and global climate policy. The political parties and other non-governmental organisations, the business world and science, and also the media and citizens all have an important role to play here. They must reinforce the credibility of Germany’s policies with their actions and decisions, with their information and opinion forming, in order to master the challenges of the rule of law, democracy and planetary boundaries in the 21st century.
Sustainable finance in Germany – what are we waiting for?

by Alexander Bassen, Professor of Capital Markets & Management at the University of Hamburg and Yvonne Zwick, project manager at the German Council for Sustainable Development

Germany is lagging behind other countries when it comes to developing a sustainable financial sector, despite the fact that major shifts – such as energy and transport reforms – are in the pipeline and need considerable capital. The Hub for Sustainable Finance Germany (H4SF), initiated by the RNE and Deutsche Börse AG, was created to help wake German players from their slumber.

The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) put sustainable finance on its agenda twelve years ago, tentatively examining the financial market for the first time back in 2006. Its theory was that balance sheets based on shareholder value no longer adequately reflected the value of a company. In its CSR recommendation, the RNE accordingly proposed to the Federal Government that state-subsidised private and company pensions – the so-called Riester and Rürup pensions – should take long-term sustainability factors into account as well as traditional investment criteria such as the financial return. If the state set a good example, the RNE suggested, the market for sustainable investment in Germany could close the gap and reach the level already attained by other countries. Even back then, the RNE identified the capital market as an independent player which would have to be incorporated into the process. It advocated the use of a sustainability index like those which stock exchanges and financial service providers have been developing for 20 years now (see infobox). At an early stage, the RNE encouraged shareholders and asset managers to adopt the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) and report on their use. Unfortunately, looking back on these efforts also serves to illustrate how little has changed since then – despite the financial crash which triggered a global economic crisis over ten years ago.
Delivering impetus for change:  
"Making a start is better than doing nothing"

At the behest of a number of financial market players and investors, the RNE revisited the subject in 2008 and developed the Sustainability Code. The Code combined financial market players’ need for information with the increasingly widespread practice of corporate sustainability reporting.

Developing the Code marked a milestone in the RNE’s work: it was one of the first projects with which the RNE attempted to bring about change itself. This proved successful in the case of the Code – particularly because it was drawn up in conjunction with stakeholders who work with reporting systems and are searching for relevant information. Initially launched as a voluntary minimum standard, it developed further thanks to companies’ good reporting practices and triggered learning processes at organisations. If it continues to be cultivated as a constantly evolving standard at the interface between regulators, firms and financial market players, it will yield good results in the future as well. Germany has had legislation in place to regulate reporting on certain sustainability issues since the end of 2016. Following the transposition of the corresponding EU directive into German law, there has been an obligation for financial market players, banks and insurance companies in particular to disclose non-financial information in their reporting. The Code has proved to be an effective tool in this context as a source of pragmatic guidance. It helps companies to produce meaningful reports which also meet the reporting obligation.

Even after it had developed the Sustainability Code, the RNE kept returning to the topic of sustainable finance. In 2010, the RNE once again broached the subject of financial markets in a new recommendation. The 2013 peer review of the German Sustainable Development Strategy also placed an emphasis on finance – one which the new edition of the peer review took up in 2018 as well.

Selection of relevant sustainability indices from the past 20 years:

1997   Natur-Aktien-Index
1999   Dow Jones Sustainability Index
2001   FTSE4Good Index
2007   Global Challenges Index at Hanover stock exchange
2007   DAXglobal Sarasin Sustainability Germany Index EUR
2010   MSCI World ESG Index
2010   Hang Seng Corporate Sustainability Index China
2011   STOXX Global ESG Leaders
2013   Global Compact 100
However, none of this can hide the fact that when it comes to sustainable finance Germany compares lamentably with other European countries. At first glance, the trend looks promising. Since 2014, Germany has recorded continuous growth in the volume of responsible investments – i.e. products and investment vehicles which take environmental, social and governance (ESG) criteria into account – from 437 billion euros in 2014 to 1,409 billion euros in 2017. Between 2016 and 2017, sustainable investment funds and mandates jumped by no less than 17 per cent.

**Above-average growth – but the market is small**

This growth is largely attributable to institutional investors, who account for a predominant market share of 91 per cent. Their investment volume is increasing by an average of 32 per cent each year. By contrast, private investors – whose market share stands at the remaining nine per cent – are fairly insignificant. Since 2012, the volume of private investors has grown by a modest seven per cent on average. Alongside the legislative framework, the strong demand for sustainable investments from institutional investors is therefore a key criterion for the market’s development.

Although Germany’s sustainable investment market experienced above-average growth of 17 per cent between 2016 and 2017, the overall volume remains low: the proportion of sustainable investment funds and mandates makes up just three per cent of the total market.

This growth may appear impressive at first sight, but a European and international comparison quickly puts it into perspective: according to the European SRI Study 2016 by Eurosif, France leads the field by a considerable margin. However, the markets in the Netherlands, the UK and Switzerland are also developing fast and Germany cannot keep up. Even if the German market for sustainable finance continues to experience above-average growth, it will be unable to close the existing gap to other European countries.

**Sustainable finance – a term with many definitions**

Those who believe that sustainable finance means incorporating ESG considerations into investment decisions take too narrow a view. Anyone who wants to know whether sustain-
able financial markets can contribute towards sustainable development must use a broader definition of the concept.

The first step towards establishing a sustainable financial system is funding sustainable development in economic, social and ecological terms. A sustainable financial system can only emerge if the financial markets systematically integrate economic, social and ecological challenges – such as education, sustainable employment, pensions funding or climate protection – into their logic long-term.

A great deal of funding is needed. There is an estimated shortfall of 1.77 thousand billion euros to finance the EU climate and energy policy alone, which aims to bring about a 40 per cent reduction in CO₂ emissions by 2030. The European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) and other initiatives are trying to mobilise funds to compensate for this weak investment. However, this will not be enough. Closing the gap completely requires the financial sector to change its focus. It has a key role to play in bringing about sustainable development.

The first steps have already been taken. Based on an action plan developed by the EU High-Level Expert Group on Sustainable Finance (HLEG), the European Commission presented a package of measures with three legislative proposals in May.
2018. These cover: 1) a uniform classification system to determine sustainability in the financial system, 2) legislation on how institutional investors should disclose the way in which ESG criteria are integrated into investment processes, and 3) a CO₂ benchmark to make an investment’s CO₂ footprint transparent.

**Germany once again trailing behind**

If investors are to disclose how they integrate ESG criteria into their investment decisions in the future as per the second legislative proposal, it is essential to acquire an overview of the various sustainable investment strategies. Experts currently distinguish between eight investment strategies. Popular investment strategies throughout Europe are negative screening, norms-based screening, engagement and the exercise of voting rights. Other investment strategies are best in class, impact investing, integration and sustainable thematic funds. With the help of sustainable investment strategies, private or institutional investors can identify potential risks, such as environmental or health impacts, associated with financial products and subsequently take them into account in their decision-making.

A comparison of the volume invested within Europe using the above-mentioned strategies shows that:

- Only Switzerland and the UK are ahead of Germany in the use of negative screening for investment decisions.
- However, it is virtually impossible to catch up with France in the use of norms-based screening. The Netherlands are strong performers here too, while Germany is not worth mentioning.
- The UK is leagues ahead in the use of engagement and the exercise of voting rights as strategies. Much could be learned from the EU exit candidate on this score.

Sustainable investment is attracting more and more attention in Germany and demand is constantly rising. However, sustainable finance remains a niche topic. There is no sign of it becoming

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5 Eurosif and FNG in Germany have defined eight investment strategies. Cf. investment strategies identified by GSIA, PRI or EFAMA as well.

6 Eurosif (2016) „European SRI Study“

7 Explanation of the different strategies: one of the first steps when applying sustainable investment strategies is often negative screening. Negative screening systematically excludes investments or investment classes on the basis of specific criteria. Examples include ruling out investments in the arms industry, tobacco and alcohol, nuclear power or fossil fuels. The criteria most commonly used for negative screening in Germany are weapons (production and trading), human rights violations and labour law violations (FNG, 2017). Norms-based screening also excludes certain investments by using international norms and standards. This means that investments may not be made in companies which do not comply with the selected norms and standards. The UN Global Compact, the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises and the ILO’s core labour standards are particularly popular in Germany (FNG, 2017). Engagement involves raising awareness of ways in which companies could improve their sustainability performance in dialogue with firms, while the exercise of voting rights means that investors actively use their voting rights at AGMs to influence company policy in relation to ESG criteria. In practice, the popularity of exercising voting rights as an investment strategy can be gauged by looking at the number of shareholder proposals relating to sustainability issues. For instance, a study by the auditing firm Ernst & Young (2017) shows that around the world there has been a rise in shareholder proposals relating to environmental risks and CO₂ emissions.
mainstream, even though more than half of studies examining how ESG criteria affect corporate and portfolio performance reveal a positive correlation, with only about one in ten suggesting a negative link. In particular, no studies whatsoever have found a negative connection between green building and financial performance.\textsuperscript{8} The academic research therefore also begs the question as to why Germany is so far behind other countries with regard to sustainable finance.

The banks postulate sustainable behaviour more and more, but the message is not being heard by clients, partners and policymakers. It is difficult to gauge how relevant sustainability issues are for banks’ core business; many investors still know too little about the consequences of their decisions. Now, the CSR Directive Implementation Act is targeting precisely these players. It is important to consider the reporting obligation alongside the urgently needed overhaul of the financial markets and their orientation. Entrepreneurs in the real economy are not least among those demanding reliable framework conditions and partners – and these include the financial backers who set the tone with their incentive structures.

All of these observations make it clear just how crucial dialogue with investors and companies is. The market can only develop from trend to mainstream if it is debated more strongly by the public and knowledge about it is shared more widely. The HLEG action plan is one such move to deliver important impetus in this regard. Initiatives like this draw attention to the issue and provide a space for debate.

Depending on how much attention is paid to sustainable finance and how investors exercise their influence, firms will make sustainability a routine part of their corporate behaviour and bring additional investors on board in turn. It is important to reduce (bureaucratic) complexity as much as possible in order to minimise barriers for organisations. Furthermore, initiatives need to create a space in which discussion, knowledge sharing and the urgently needed skill building can take place.

\textbf{H4SF: impetus, initiatives, innovation}

This is precisely where the Hub for Sustainable Finance Germany (H4SF) comes in. To take sustainable finance to the next level in Germany, the RNE and Deutsche Börse AG joined forces in summer 2017 and combined their activities. The aim of the Hub is to raise awareness of sustainability as a relevant issue for the financial market and to integrate ESG criteria into investment behaviour across the board.

The Hub’s work is oriented on the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and the Paris Agreement, in which heads of state and government jointly agreed to strive to keep climate warming well below two degrees Celsius.

\textsuperscript{8} Gunnar Friede, Timo Busch & Alexander Bassen 2015, „ESG and financial performance: aggregated evidence from more than 2000 empirical studies, Journal of Sustainable Finance & Investment“
SDG 17 is entitled ‘Partnerships for the Goals’. As an open network of financial market players and other stakeholders, this is the essence of the H4SF’s mission. It brings all the players together, including some who were not previously part of the dialogue: businesses and financial sector stakeholders – those who are sustainability pioneers and those who are not – political and non-governmental organisations, and academia. By pooling numerous initiatives and players, the Hub makes space for innovation. In this way, it aims to contribute to a broad social discussion of the purpose and objective of a sustainable financial sector. The idea is for the players themselves to develop solutions of a transformational nature in conjunction with practitioners, such as solutions developed by the financial market for the financial market which help to achieve the climate target.

The RNE itself has developed over the last few years from a political advisory body to a proactive, enabling facilitator. Making a start is better than doing nothing – as the RNE proved with its Sustainability Code project. In line with this philosophy, the RNE is now setting out via the Hub to motivate market players to finally make their good intentions known widely. It will also lobby at the political level for smart co-regulation processes.

Ten recommendations for a sustainable financial system

The ten recommendations describe the most important fields where action is needed to make a sustainable financial system a reality (see info-box). These recommendations are based on a host of papers and reports: the HLEG interim report, the PRI Roadmap for Germany, the RNE’s Living Document Sustainable Finance, the Accelerating Sustainable Finance Initiative of Deutsche Börse, and the recommendations of the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures of the Financial Stability Board. The points at which they intersect delineate the content of the Hub’s activities.

Interested parties can choose the way in which they work on contributions relating to these ten recommendations freely. Parties invited to contribute are institutions representing either the financial sector, the world of business, politics or academia who are planning a contribution relating to one of the ten recommendations. The activity must enhance knowledge or make a constructive, objective or academic contribution towards the discussion of a controversial topic.

A start has been made: the first German Sustainable Finance Summit took place in Frankfurt in October 2017 under the aegis of the German Federal Ministry of Finance (BMF) as the H4SF’s inaugural event. One year later, in
autumn 2018, the second Sustainable Finance Summit was held under the joint patronage of the BMF and the German Federal Ministry for the Environment. The European Commission and the European Parliament were also involved in the event.

The summit showed that sustainable finance has finally made it onto the political agenda. The participants – representatives of the financial sector, politics, industry, academia and civil society – drafted a sustainable finance roadmap for the coming months. This roadmap now serves as a guideline for well-intentioned institutions which recognise that there is an urgent need to adopt a sustainable approach swiftly and consistently and that this issue can no longer be kicked into the long grass. In other countries, such as France, further-reaching regulations are already in place which make for a clear picture of the climate scenarios that form the basis for investment portfolios. By contrast, sustainable

### TEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE FINANCE IN GERMANY

1. Policymakers must take an active role in shaping and guiding these structures to a greater extent than has thus far been the case.
2. The state must fully embrace its function as a role model and guiding force behind the concrete realisation of a sustainability strategy.
3. Sustainable finance requires an entirely new relationship between the state and the financial sector – a relationship that serves societal goals and common integrity. This demands a strategic orientation and management on the basis of indicators and targets.
4. Suitable instruments need to be identified and developed with a view to financing future infrastructure.
5. Knowledge and competence with regard to fiduciary duty and the specific responsibility of the financial sector must be cultivated further.
6. Germany’s financial sector should make a visible contribution to reaching the global sustainability goals.
7. Integrated sustainability management as a component of entrepreneurial practice on the part of all market players should be a matter of course.
8. Good reporting is a key foundation for assessing the societal contributions of the business sector and finance industry. The quality, availability and comparability of the data must be expanded considerably.
9. Sustainability aspects must become a component of the financial sector’s risk culture.
10. Institutional investors should actively and responsibly exercise influence on shareholders.

For further information, please see [www.h4sf.de](http://www.h4sf.de)
finance pioneers in Germany still have a lot of convincing to do. If it is possible to bring business representatives on board with the SDGs out of their own conviction, financial market players could deliver a convincing sustainability performance within the space of two to three years and prove themselves as enablers and supporters. It remains to be seen whether Germany needs to use the strong arm of the law to achieve this or whether the principle of voluntary commitment still has a future.

THE SUSTAINABILITY CODE

The Sustainability Code is a standard that enables companies and organisations to report on their sustainability performance on the basis of 20 criteria. They outline their sustainability strategy, their sustainability management and the opportunities and risks in the areas of the environment and society. A Sustainability Code declaration of conformity addresses, for example, general norms of behaviour, concrete sustainable development goals and their implementation, energy efficiency and waste management, anti-corruption measures or employee health care.

The Code criteria help companies become more sustainable. The declarations of conformity are published in a publicly accessible database, allowing them to be compared. This makes them relevant to the public and, above all, the capital market as this makes it possible to identify companies in which an investment can be made in the interests of sustainability.

The RNE developed the Code together with the business and finance sectors in 2011 and it has since been adapted to various other industries. There are guidelines for banks, the housing industry, the food industry, waste management and municipal sanitation, and higher education institutions. The Sustainability Code is available in a number of languages and is compatible with international standards such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). Anyone who uses the Code also meets the EU’s CSR reporting requirements, which stipulate that as of the 2017 financial year companies of a certain size must publish non-financial information.

A total of 403 companies and organisations have now published one or more declarations of conformity (as at June 2018).

For further information, please see www.deutscher-nachhaltigkeitskodex.de
“Bringing about societal change through impact investing”

contribution by Dr Andreas Rickert

How can we as a society practise and shape sustainability? For me, sustainability is first and foremost about jointly developing a societal mindset – only then can the appropriate tools and regulations be developed. Sustainability means guaranteeing fair life opportunities – not only for the generations to come, but also for the here and now. We can only achieve this major feat if the stakeholders from civil society, the business community and the government all pull together. A shared understanding of sustainability can only be achieved within the context of good social interaction and societal cohesion.

Sustainability goes back a long way in Germany. Although the concept originated in forestry and agriculture, our economy is shaped by sustainability too, be it with the idea of the social market economy or a strong SME sector with a large number of family-owned enterprises. Here, value creation doesn’t take the form of short-term “shareholder value”. Rather, it is intergenerational, with a long-term planning horizon and social responsibility.

In spite of this achievement, we still face major challenges, and there is often a yawning and seemingly insurmountable chasm between what’s said and what’s actually done. It is therefore all the more important that the existing momentum and the many positive and inspirational initiatives and approaches from within civil society, the business sector and politics are specifically promoted and supported.
This is exactly where we at PHINEO want to do our part. We seek to mobilise resources for achieving effective societal engagement and for social and environmental innovations that contribute to a positive change in society. To really embed sustainability across the board within society, civil society involvement and participation need to be promoted and new equitable forms of cooperation between the sectors need to be facilitated. We at PHINEO see ourselves as bridge builders and as a catalyst of involvement.

A key question is how financial funds – and other forms of societal and corporate involvement – can be used in such a way that they yield maximum social and/or environmental effect. Philanthropic capital can kick-start new ideas, strengthen and disseminate promising approaches, and contribute to the development of new tools for greater sustainability. “Impact investing” is about investing money in ways that offer the prospect of a social and/or environmental effect and a financial return, and strategically evaluating and managing the effect achieved by the investments. As such, impact investing is different from both traditional capital investment that primarily seeks to generate a profit and the traditional donation that first and foremost endeavours to bring about societal change. Impact investors can therefore make a crucial contribution to realisation of the SDGs in Germany, Europe or around the world. Within the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE), I work with other stakeholders towards turning this approach into a functioning market that contributes to the mobilisation of additional resources for a sustainable society.
Sustainability is about offering people a good quality of life within the planet’s ecological boundaries. To achieve this here in Germany, we must become much more efficient and significantly reduce the consumption of resources and the emissions caused by our quality of life and our value added. We need to effect a societal transformation here in Germany while bearing in mind that sustainability is also a global challenge. As an economically strong and successful country, we can and therefore should make a commitment to sustainable development within our international procurement and sales markets.

The developments and changes needed for a sustainable economy and a sustainable lifestyle are considerable – and the time that remains in which to achieve this transformation is limited. We therefore need reliable societal consensus regarding the long-term goals and the short-term priorities and how we plan to realise them.

The global Sustainable Development Goals and climate protection goals are major progress on our way to achieving a common understanding of priorities. The long-term milestones have been set. We now need to lead an honest discussion about what the government, the business world and citizens can and must do to realise them.
All too often, many of the activities still focus on especially high-profile issues or measures which can be easily implemented. We cannot afford to lose sight of the crucial priorities and levers because of this.

One example here is the significantly higher reporting expectations made of companies. Transparency is important, but it is only the first step. Only when information from a wide variety of stakeholders is actively used for decision-making will transparency have its full effect. There should therefore be more of a focus on the details and the solutions, rather than stopping at the topic of transparency itself.

Another example is the circular economy. A clear and ambitious political framework that offers companies planning reliability and which facilitates a societal transformation based on the Sustainable Development Goals is crucial for companies. Greater political commitment in this area is needed in Germany over the next few years, to serve as the basis for innovations and new business models, and therefore for solutions to the challenges outlined.

The necessary changes can be brought about if all the stakeholders focus on the right issues and if society works on the right levers. The media also have a responsibility here to turn public perception away from the superficially sustainable toward truly effective measures.

The right framework political stimuli are crucial in order to steer the forces of change in the right direction. I would like to see a political will to shape the economic and societal transformation – together with a society which is ready to follow this path.
Impact investments: impact and profit for everyone?

by Andreas M. Rickert, Chairman of the Board of the non-profit analysis and consulting organisation PHINEO gAG

Though it may sound contradictory, it isn’t actually: more and more investors are using their capital to create benefits for society. The young – and still relatively small – market segment of impact investing is growing continually and can be seen as the avant-garde of a sustainable finance system.

At the age of 14, Dirk Müller-Remus’s son is diagnosed with Asperger’s, a mild form of autism. Dirk learns about the syndrome, attends a self-help group on the topic of autism and work, and learns that many adults with Asperger’s are out of work in spite of being well educated – in Germany, more than 85 per cent of them. So autism is a shortcoming? Dirk decides he intends to change this point of view.

More than ten years have passed since then. Today, the IT service company Auticon, which Dirk, 61, co-founded in 2011 on the basis of his experiences, employs more than 150 people on the autism spectrum in Germany, France, the UK and the USA, and places them with renowned clients such as Allianz, CNBC and Fox News to work on projects. The idea behind the company is that people with autism often have special gifts in the areas of logic, attention to detail and pattern recognition – skills that are especially important in the fields of IT and data analytics. And surprisingly, Auticon’s clients have come to appreciate another of the IT specialists’ traits over the years – the company now even advertises their “absolute honesty” on its website. Auticon’s success goes to show that financial returns and a social impact do not have to be mutually exclusive.

Doing good while also generating a profit – this form of investment is known as impact investing. “Impact investing is about using private investment capital to tackle a social issue in a way which is very direct, intended and quantifiable, and which delivers at least capital preservation or indeed a financial return,” says Brigitte Mohn, member of the Executive Board of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, which is active in the field of
impact investing. “For me, the crucial points are the very explicit intention and an obligation to measure the social impact had.”

It is in this way that the relatively new market of impact investing sets itself apart from conventional investment that primarily serves to generate a profit. It is also distinctive from the broader field of sustainable investment as there is a much greater focus on the effect that an impact investment has. In contrast, people who make a conventional donation are not pursuing financial interests, and are rather seeking to effect societal change with their contribution.

“We’re going through a period of experimentation and proof of concept in impact investment today,” says Sir Ronald Cohen, the British businessman who has been dubbed the “father of venture capital” and the “father of social investment”. “I have no doubt that we will be successful, just as I had no doubt that we would be successful in venture capital.” Cohen believes “it’s a question of inspiring the millennial generation to do again what it did in the tech revolution: But this time, to do it for impact – doing good and doing well at the same time.”

Impact investments can do their bit all over the world – they can be made both in developed and in newly industrialised and developing coun-

---<br>![INVESTMENT SPECTRUM Diagram](image-url)---
tries. What matters is that they serve to tackle global challenges, with capital being invested in, for example, businesses in the areas of sustainable agriculture, renewable energies, healthcare, education, financial inclusion or social and ecological housing construction. Most asset classes now offer the option of impact investing. In addition to publicly traded forms such as shares, bonds and investment funds, there are special investment forms such as guarantees and hybrid forms of financing. Impact investors usually make a direct private investment in a company by providing either equity or debt capital. The amount of returns expected varies according to the impact strategy, the investment sector – for example, education or healthcare – and the financial instrument, such as a loan or equity.

Financial returns and a social impact: not mutually exclusive

Impact investments currently account for only a fraction of the global investment funds, but both the interest shown in this new form of investment and the volume of such investments are increasing from year to year: the Annual Impact Investor Survey prepared by the Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN) puts the figure for 2018 at 228 billion dollars. This equates to approximately 194 billion euros. According to the FNG’s market report, the volume of impact investing in Germany in 2017 was 5.2 billion euros. For comparison, the market for sustainable investments in Germany is worth 171 billion euros. Just a small proportion of this remains in Germany, while the lion’s share goes to developing and newly industrialised countries in the form of microfinance.

There is room for improvement here – but impact investments are indeed gaining in importance, with demand for them increasing from both private and institutional investors. The authors of the GIIN study write: “Of all the respondents to the survey, over 50 per cent made their first impact investment in the past decade, indicative of the ongoing entry of new players to the industry.” In Germany, the recently founded Bundesinitiative Impact Investing is helping to forge links between German market players. It was initiated jointly by the Bertelsmann Stiftung, the BMW Foundation, the Association of German Foundations and PHINEO and has its roots in Germany’s National Advisory Board within the international Social Impact Investing Taskforce established by the G7 member states.

Just how strongly this market segment will continue to grow also depends on successful impact measurement. Impact investment has its effect by successfully implementing and scaling up an impact-oriented business model, in other words growing as a company while also generating increasing profit. In the case of an impact investment, the social impact is an integral part of the business model, with economic success and impact going hand in hand. However, if the social impact of an investment is just as important for people’s decisions to invest as the risks and
the return expectations, it is essential that this impact be defined and measured, and that the investors are given transparent information on this. Investors therefore examine the impact potential of the companies set to receive their capital during the due diligence process – i.e. the careful assessment of risk – that precedes their investment decision. They also assist the companies in realising this potential during the term of their investment and beyond – at least in cases where the investors assume an active management role.

Support for the Sustainable Development Goals

One of the effects of an impact investment can be that it contributes to the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed upon by the United Nations in September 2015 and to be achieved by 2030. For example, impact investors might invest growth capital directly in a so-called impact venture which seeks to realise one or more of the SDGs. Various impact investment funds likewise align their investment strategies with the SDGs and specifically seek out investments that contribute to particular Sustainable Development Goals such as combating poverty and improving education. In this instance, too, investors develop impact indicators that they derive from the SDGs to make an investment’s contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals visible and quantifiable. For example, in 2011 the KfW bank initiated the creation of the SANAD fund with the aim of financing micro-entrepreneurship, SMEs, and financial inclusion and integration in the labour market in the MENA region – and thus combating poverty. This fund is unusual in that it covers the entire spectrum of financial players, from microfinance institutions and commercial banks, to leasing and factoring companies, financial service providers and other financial institutions. One of the many projects supported by the SANAD fund is Vitas Jordan. This Jordanian microfinance institution has been lent three million US dollars, enabling it to pay out an additional approximately 2,200 loans to small companies and micro-enterprises. In turn, these businesses create income, jobs and prosperity for their families and the local communities. The National Bank of Egypt has likewise borrowed money – 7.5 million US dollars – from the SANAD fund, allowing it to offer loans to more micro-businesses and SMEs. The fund currently manages assets totalling 298.4 million US dollars and comprises both public and private investments.

Promoting innovations and solutions within society

Impact investments help entrepreneurs to develop and scale up business-minded solutions to social, societal and environmental challenges. In many areas, private investment capital unlocks new creative potential that boosts progress within society and gives effective approaches a reliable financial basis, such as when impact
Impact investments

Start-ups develop products and services that meet a previously unmet societal or social need and are of benefit in particular to people whose participation in society is limited due to their being disadvantaged educationally, economically or with regard to their health. In other instances, impact-oriented businesses directly integrate specific target groups into the value chain in a fair and sustainable way, thus helping them to get on their feet financially – companies such as Auticon or discovering hands, a non-profit enterprise that integrates blind and visually impaired women into the labour market. It also plays an important part in early cancer detection – the company says it is scientifically proven that the women it trains as “medical tactile examiners” (MTEs) can detect around 30 per cent more tissue alterations than doctors in physical breast examinations. Considering 70,000 women a year develop breast cancer in Germany, the potential of this social business idea, which won the 2016 Next Economy Award, the sustainability award for start-ups, is evident.

Impact investments can also help to make the rapid progress in areas such as digitalisation, artificial intelligence and biotechnology have a social and environmental impact and be of benefit to especially neglected target groups. It was with this objective that PHINEO created the Tech4Impact Fund. The fund seeks to promote responsible entrepreneurship within the technology sector by investing in innovative tech start-ups that tackle a societal need.

Social impact bonds (SIBs) are a special case within the impact investment market. This form of financing, which has so far been implemented in 109 pilot projects around the world, is a partnership between the public sector, social funders and a service provider that implements the measures. The idea is to try out new forms of social intervention that would otherwise not have access to any resources because their development and introduction costs are so high. But with an SIB, the public sector as the customer reimburses the funders with their capital plus an agreed risk compensation based on the degree to which the project achieves its impact targets within a specified time frame. There are currently two SIBs running in Germany, both developed and implemented by the Bertelsmann Stiftung together with PHINEO and local partners. One of them enables the city of Mannheim to give two primary school classes special assistance for their first four years, in particular helping children from non-German-speaking families based on their needs with the aim of offering all schoolchildren the same education opportunities.

Like impact investments in general, SIBs are not in competition with the state-financed social systems. Rather, they can make an important contribution to promoting social innovations for which there is often little scope for development within the rigid welfare state structures. Much like the SIB model, there are also so-called development impact bonds (DIBs) in the development policy context, the difference being that the role of the
customer is usually assumed by an international donor rather than the local government.

The avant-garde of a sustainable finance system?

There is growing awareness within the finance sector that all companies have a societal, social and environmental impact – impact that is either positive or negative. A sustainable finance system can only be established in the medium to long term if the financial markets price these effects into their evaluations and take the social and environmental impacts into account in their investment decisions as much as they consider the risks and returns. Initiatives such as the Hub for Sustainable Finance play an important part in promoting this change in awareness in the mainstream. As such, based on their strong impact focus, impact investments can be considered the avant-garde of a sustainable finance system.
Sustainability culture: fresh thinking is what the country needs!

On the cultural dimension of the sustainability debate
by Olaf Zimmermann, Director of the German Cultural Council

All too often, the debate surrounding sustainability focuses on what we must give up or will be lost. The true focus, however, should be the potential rewards for everyone. The UN’s Sustainable Development Goals will only become a reality if we can successfully reorient our perspective and give the term positive connotation. And this is first and foremost a cultural challenge.

In its broadest sense, the term ‘culture’, which comes from the Latin cultura meaning ‘tilling’, ‘care’, ‘cultivation’, stands for everything that humans produce themselves, in contrast to nature which has been neither created nor changed by humans and is in other words still natural. We tend to classify the environment as natural, but this attribute is very misleading, considering the noticeable influence that humans have on the environment all over the world. We instantly associate ‘natural’ with ‘original’, ‘unspoiled’, ‘pure’, ‘clean’ – in other words, not artificial. But this ideal of natural nature is a fantasy – wherever human culture has left its mark, this unspoiled state is no more. These days, traces of human culture can be found in the deepest oceans, in the highest mountains and even at the North and South Poles. So if this unspoiled nature no longer exists and we humans have made our mark everywhere, everything is ultimately culture.

I am not all that interested in the fierce debate among scientists as to when the final patch of unspoiled nature was impacted by human culture. I find it far more interesting to discuss the impact of culture on nature – a fact which can no longer be seriously disputed – and to draw conclusions from this regarding how we can treat our environment responsibly.
The most radical option for treating our environment sustainably is for us to exert less or indeed no cultural influence on it. This culture-free world would be incredibly sustainable, no resources would be squandered and life would strike a balance. But if we are honest, this alternative is more of an academic than a practical solution from our point of view as this scenario is only conceivable without us humans.

However, this does not mean that we humans bear no responsibility for our environment simply because we happen to be here. Precisely because humans are universal shapers and in spite of being unable to simply cease this shaping, we are responsible for our actions, in other words for the form that this shaping takes and for all of its consequences. We are responsible for species extinction, global warming and the overexploitation of nature’s treasures.

A culture which is not sustainable is on the path to self-destruction in the long run. But how is culture made sustainable?

The book The Limits to Growth published in 1972 marks a turning point. In Western Europe and the USA, the previous two decades were decades of supposedly unlimited growth. From the creation of whole branches of industry and manned space flight to full employment and the expansion of the science and higher education sectors – everything seemed to point towards unlimited growth. West Germany was finally able to indulge itself a little. The problems of the so-called Third World were far, far away.

The aforementioned book was the first instance of a serious damper being put on the optimism regarding progress that was associated with this growth. Higher, faster, farther appeared to not automatically lead to greater prosperity. The Limits to Growth study was commissioned by the Club of Rome and was financed among others by the Volkswagen Foundation. Extensive computer simulations – run back then on mainframe computer systems that filled entire rooms – were used to calculate the effects that the ongoing use of resources would have on our planet and the consequences of continued global population growth.

I was electrified by that book when I was young. Already fascinated by the beauty of the macrocosm and microcosm, I was shocked by the scenarios presented in the book. And the alarming reports have continued to this day, such as the oil crisis, criticism of nuclear power as a ‘future technology’, forest dieback and biodiversity decline, to name but a few.

Two camps were formed – on the one side, those who were convinced that prosperity and progress could only be guaranteed by pressing on, in other
words more and more and faster and faster, and who warned against allowing Germany as a developed country to be set back in global competition. And on the other side, there were those who warned that simply pressing on as before wasn’t an option in the long run as our planet’s resources are finite.

The debate revolved around loss and forgoing. Driving less, eating less meat, using less water, reducing emissions – these were the buzzwords of sustainable development. They were first formulated within a social climate which was characterised by the majority of West Germans being happy that they could afford more – finally owning a car, finally going on holiday abroad, finally not just eating meat on Sundays.

I believe that the logic of forgoing and loss of that time, which idealised an almost ascetic lifestyle, is one of the biggest problems in the debate about sustainability. Turning this logic on its head and changing the perspective is therefore one of the most important tasks in the realisation of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. And this is first and foremost a cultural challenge.

The UN’s 2030 Agenda has itself already made an important contribution to the change in perspective which is needed. It is directed at the international community as a whole. It is not a UN agenda that only applies to the countries in the north or the countries in the south; all countries are called upon to incorporate the 17 goals into their national policies and be bound by international agreements. If thought through, this means sustainability policy is actually an interdisciplinary task which is everyone’s responsibility – that of the governments, civil society and each and every one of us.

The 2030 Agenda is a global plan for the future. Its realisation calls for fresh cultural thinking that confidently highlights the opportunities of sustainable development. Affording everyone a good and successful life is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is time this obligation towards sustainable opportunities was realised for everyone and the over-exploitation of resources was countered with a different image of a good and successful life.

Art and culture need to step up to the plate in two different ways. Firstly, much more needs to be done to raise awareness of the fact that sustainable development is a cultural challenge. Old models and certainties need to be dispensed with, and new future strategies need to be developed. And secondly, art and culture have a direct obligation to boost sustainable development, to develop resource-conserving products, to facilitate access to education, and so on.

The German Cultural Council has formed its own 2030 Agenda working group that focuses on implementation of the UN’s 2030 Agenda in the cultural arena. It addresses issues such as sustainable urban planning and architecture, the development and marketing of sustainable de-
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Sign, gender equality within the cultural sector and the media, access to knowledge and information, etc.

The German Cultural Council contributes its point of view to the 2030 Agenda network coordinated by VENRO and the German Forum on Environment and Development. The German Cultural Council has been championing fair global trade for some years now and is a co-founder and sponsor of the fair trade network Netzwerk Gerechter Welthandel. This network furthers the discussion of trade agreements, detaching oneself from the desire to protect one's own area and generally promotes a fair international economic order that affords countries in the south fair market opportunities. The German Cultural Council continues to work with the Climate Alliance Germany in order to also make the point here that climate issues have a cultural dimension.

I am anticipating particularly important input from the German Cultural Council’s latest project which it is running together with Friends of the Earth Germany (BUND) – a series of discussions and an ideas workshop regarding the change in values and the cultural dimension of sustainability.

Sustainability is sometimes simply a question of eating more chocolate: the Green Economy Academy in Frankfurt am Main invites people to chocolate events featuring delicious food made exclusively using fair trade chocolate, music, poetry slams and a baking competition. The aim of these events is to teach those who attend about the poor conditions in which chocolate is usually produced.

The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) funds these chocolate events and 12 other projects with up to 50,000 euros each as part of the “Esskultur und Nachhaltigkeit” (Food Culture and Sustainability) ideas competition. The Council is able to regularly run competitions of this kind thanks to the Sustainability Culture Fund, which is being supplied with 7.5 million euros by the Federal Chancellery up to 2020. The idea behind this is that the existing thought patterns need to be broken down and values need to change in order for a sustainable society to be achieved. And art, culture, the creative industry and culture creators have a key part to play in this change of mindset. There are also ideas competitions in areas such as mobility culture and sustainability, building culture, living and sustainability, and fashion and textiles.

The ideas competitions are open to non-profit stakeholders with transformational projects, such as associations, foundations and non-profit companies as well as public sector entities, universities, communal kindergartens or regional authorities. A jury of Council members selects the winners. They base their decisions on how innovative a project is, whether it has a clearly defined target group, whether it has the potential to play a part in transforming how we think and act – and therefore whether it contributes to the achievement of the global Sustainable Development Goals.

For further information, please see www.sustainabilitycouncil.de
sustainability debates entitled “Heimat – was ist das?” (What is homeland?). The aim of the project is to consider how the term ‘homeland’ takes on new meanings, what cultural and societal connotations the term has and how it fits into current discourse on how we wish to live. In this context, the term ‘sustainability’ in particular will be scrutinised and discussed. The focus here is first and foremost on bringing the cultural aspect to the fore, more clearly elevating the role of the cultural sector in the sustainability debate and addressing issues such as cultural education and environmental education, among others. It will also look at the relationship between the terms ‘homeland’, ‘culture’ and ‘environment’. This entails consideration of cultural attributions and myths such as the German Forest. This project will seek to highlight two things. On the one hand, that the sustainability debate is a cultural debate and that it is a question of cultural change. And on the other, that the cultural and environmental sectors are considering the term ‘homeland’ jointly with a common focus on sustainability.

**TWO OF THE SUSTAINABILITY CULTURE FUND’S PROJECTS**

Everyone can act sustainably, including schoolchildren after a sports lesson, for example – by choosing between snacking on an apple from the meadow orchard three kilometres down the road or an apple that has been transported from 10,000 kilometres away. Three pupils at the Geschwister Scholl School in Lebach, Saarland, addressed this topic in a short film.

The film was the highlight of the inaugural event of the Saarlouis district’s Food Culture and Sustainability campaign year, which saw the RNE funding 13 projects from the Sustainability Culture Fund. In Saarlouis, the issue of plastic waste in the oceans was addressed and kids were able to measure their ecological footprints or be given an introduction to beekeeping. Numerous similar events were held over a 12-month period, such as a guided city walk on the topic of eco-friendly shopping, a Consumption and Plastic art installation as a pupil participation project and project days on the topics of climate change and the global Sustainable Development Goals.

Apples are the focus of another of the 13 projects too – "Neue Essklasse für Apfel & Co." (New Eating Class for Apples etc.) run by the St Marienthal International Meeting Centre Foundation in Saxony. This project won’t really get under way until the apple harvest in the autumn, when apples from the region will be marketed in a regional value chain covering everything from the apple harvest in meadow orchards and local juice production to the sale of apple juice in hotels and restaurants in the region.

Two school companies will organise the harvest and sales, while the Culture and Management study group at Zittau/ Görlitz University of Applied Sciences is designing the sales stands for the regional supermarkets where the products will be sold. Top chefs and regional celebrities will cook with the apples and other regional products. This will be shown on regional TV and on YouTube – the idea behind the project is, after all, to get young people in particular excited about regional food produce.
The purpose of the various activities is to contribute to a change in perspective. Firstly, awareness of the issue of sustainability needs to be raised within the cultural sector because our immediate environment influences how we live. Furthermore, it needs to be made clear and explicitly shown that the cultural sector can make a greater contribution to the sustainability debate than just what happens on the stage at climate conferences.

**Conclusion**

Humans are pleasure-oriented creatures. Doing something which is pleasurable and which focuses on what is gained rather than the forgoing of something encourages us to participate.

The topic of sustainability must be given a positive cultural connotation. If we are successful in this venture, the focus will shift to what is gained and away from what is lost. It will be an economic gain because sustainable business practice has long since become a market and an economic factor. It will be an environmental gain because preserving our natural resources is essential for our survival. It will be a social gain because a sustainable society is based on the common good. And it will be a societal gain because living in a world in which nature and culture lastingly get along with one another is a prerequisite for a good life.

Commitment from society as a whole will be needed in order to realise the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the UN’s 2030 Agenda. This future-oriented composition of a sustainable society calls for all areas and strata within society to change the way they think and be willing to reorient themselves. A fundamental change is necessary in order for a comprehensively cultural understanding of the world and the challenges of its sustainable development to be gained. Fresh thinking is what the country needs!
“Taking action now is in our own interests!”

contribution by Prof. Dr Hubert Weiger

Germany has a long tradition of sustainability, and discussion on the topic has really picked up since the 1992 summit in Rio. Yet at the same time, we live and do business as if we had three planet earths at our disposal. The day 2 May 2018 was Germany’s earth overshoot day. That is the day on which it is calculated to have used up all the renewable resources available to it for the whole year. Our carbon emissions are of particular consequence: although the political goals speak a different language, our energy consumption and traffic emissions are increasing, we are using fertile land to build on and are claiming too much farmland, both domestically and globally. A political course correction is urgently required: we need to take a different approach to production and consumption in the developed countries in order to safeguard our ecological resources – and to afford everyone a future on this planet.

A priority step is the phasing out of coal by 2030 at the latest – among other things, to make our contribution to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change. This exit is doable both technologically and from an economic perspective. We need an energy transition that replaces our nuclear power and fossil fuels entirely with renewable energies. For this transition to be eco-friendly, its implementation must go hand in hand with our using energy more sparingly. We need to reconcile all areas of life with this in the future, be it mobility, our homes or business. Demonstrating that this is possible would send out a signal of global significance.
We also need a turning point in transport policy, the only area in which carbon emissions have risen since 1990. The target of reducing emissions by 40 per cent by 2030 is otherwise at risk of substantially being missed. We need a shift to rail transport or, better still, avoid transport altogether and we need more efficient, smaller and also fewer cars. We need an urban mobility transition that redistributes public space – in favour of cyclists, pedestrians and local transport.

Both the phasing out of coal and the transport transition are subject to fundamental structural change. In the first instance, it is the policymakers’ responsibility to lay the groundwork and change the underlying conditions. Social issues need to be taken into account here right from the start, such as where those who currently work in the area of coal will subsequently work and what impact the necessary changes will have on the people who work in the automotive industry.

The transformation is also subject to cultural change – sustainable development requires us to consider lifestyle issues and sufficiency. In this respect, the high level of environmental awareness in Germany is encouraging. This is borne out not only by public debates and recent surveys, but also by the high level of participation in civil society initiatives. People’s appreciation of unexploited nature is also increasing – being able to swim in our rivers again or relaxing in untouched nature. Something which is increasingly being recognised (and which makes our taking action all the more urgent) is that observing sustainability principles is not just required for the sake of global fairness – it is in our own interests.
How are things, Germany?

On different perspectives and the role of the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE)
by Günther Bachmann, Secretary-General of the German Council for Sustainable Development

If we consider the status quo in Germany, what still remains to be done currently outweighs what has already been achieved – our carbon footprint does not live up to the climate goals, the hopes of making progress with regard to glyphosate have been dashed, insects are dying out, the country is littered with plastic waste, and economic growth and overconsumption can hardly lift our spirits. Much of the environmental and social costs aren’t even being accounted for in any balance sheet. By not paying for what really matters, we are impoverishing ourselves despite our growth. Of the 63 indicators that Germany uses to officially gauge its sustainability, close to half of them demonstrate serious shortcomings. Public sentiment is dominated by the diesel syndrome, the huge increase in rents and property prices, the spiralling out of control of the top salaries, and nursing shortages. People vent their dissatisfaction through the topic of migration even though it is not a serious cause of this.

But are some things changing for the good too? Is there anything positive at all to report? Yes, and this is most clearly demonstrated by taking a look at Germany ‘from the outside’. This perspective is often more important and more substantial than we in Germany believe or know to be true. This external view certainly does not overlook the home-grown problems. Nor do they shrink simply because the situation is worse elsewhere. The peer review of the German Sustainable Development Strategy is a good example here. It takes up questions from other countries, such as those concerning the energy system transition or examples of sustainable urban development, the organics boom, the extent of citizens’ social responsibility and the sustainability management of many companies.

Sooner or later, these questions zero in on the German Sustainable Development Strategy, its institutions and mechanisms, and the participation of interested groups. How can such a strategy – one which is rather dry and also a little
expertocratic – be kept going in the long run? How can it present a long-term view (goals up to 2030) in the face of the otherwise very dominant trend of rapidity and immediacy? After all, the Sustainable Development Strategy has been one of the top priorities of successive German Federal Governments since 2002. Its development is continued in each new electoral term, the government puts together packages of measures, there are statistical government reports and political debates in the Bundestag and the federal government’s draft laws are examined regarding their sustainability.

Germany was a driving force behind the United Nations’ sustainable development agenda and the Paris Agreement, both of which were adopted multilaterally in 2015. It is now ambitiously implementing the universal Sustainable Development Goals (in other words, applicable equally to the global south and the industrial north) at the national level. The topic is addressed within civil society by foundations, NGOs and other associations. The Federation of German Industries (BDI) runs sustainable development forums. Cities are experimenting with new and unusual sustainability solutions. And this is all just the vanguard of a movement that proves that sustainability is alive and kicking because it brings a critical view of the here and now together with a vision of a bright future.

At its core, this is shaped by the institutional architecture of sustainable development policy, consisting of three components. The government organises its internal responsibilities under the auspices of the Federal Chancellery. The parliament has its own advisory council that monitors the Sustainable Development Strategy. And thirdly, the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) is responsible for advising the Federal Chancellery and for running its own projects.

This has not always been the case. For a long time, Germany too failed on this front due to a lack of governance and was unable to produce a meaningful Sustainable Development Strategy. The architecture is still modified occasionally, and this will continue to be urgently required for as long as the key target indicators of transformation remain negative. Even with all the successes outlined, we cannot afford to delude ourselves: even in Germany, sustainability remains a peripheral issue which is all too readily intentionally obscured or totally overlooked within the current debates. Drawing on experience and examples from abroad is therefore prudent.

**What other countries do better**

Successful examples of the widespread and effective embedding of the concept of sustainable development (Finland), the role of a strategic ‘green’ infrastructure (South Korea, Bhutan), the supervision by national audit bodies (Canada, Sudan, Cameroon) and the federal use of multilevel government structures (Austria, Mexico)
are of particular interest to Germany. How you go about using any reports (on national sustainable development) made to the United Nations as a means of fuelling national policymaking (Togo, Spain) can also serve as an example. Examples of how sustainability aspects can be enshrined in constitutions (Wales, Finland, Bhutan, New Zealand) can likewise be of interest. There are certainly also clear instances of the paralysing effect of the term 'sustainability' being reduced to nothing more than a meaningless label.

The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE)

The German Council for Sustainable Development serves as a driver of sustainability politics in Germany. Its members are newly appointed or confirmed by the Federal Chancellor every three years, meaning some 50 public figures have been Council members since 2001. The Council’s Secretary-General is chosen by the Federal Chancellery. The Council is a multi-stakeholder body, as demonstrated not least by the appointment of individuals from all areas of society and even more so by how it intervenes. On the one hand, the Council produces concrete recommendations for the Chair of the State Secretaries’ Committee. These relate to the national goals and indicators and their role in relation to measures with effects in Germany, with the help of German development assistance and by Germany via solutions being developed which may be helpful elsewhere around the world. Alongside orientation with the 2030 Agenda, this triple approach of ‘in, with and by’ is one of the key new additions to the current Sustainable Development Strategy. At the Federal Government’s request, the Council also comments on the internal instruments of the Federal Chancellery and the federal ministries.

On the other hand, the Council has steadily expanded its sphere of activity over the years and doesn’t merely produce papers. Both the parliament and the government have been convinced that it makes sense to adopt new approaches and forms of activity that focus on work processes which each involve a large number of stakeholders. For example, the Sustainability Culture Fund project puts us in a position to fund third-party non-profit projects. No less than 13 projects focus on developing a sustainable food culture by reducing food waste and using food which is produced responsibly more sparingly and with greater enjoyment. We promote the forging of links among regional sustainable development stakeholders through four Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies (RENN). This encourages action to be taken at the local level and affords the many initiatives greater significance and self-efficacy. Other projects encourage and test the development of positive visions of the future (after all, we have more than enough dystopian visions) and get German cultural policy and many sociocultural centres involved in the area of sustainability. The Sustainability
Code is a tool we developed together with interested stakeholders from the finance sector, industry and non-governmental initiatives. Many companies now use the Code to publicly and transparently report on their sustainability activities. It is also available to interested parties from outside of Germany. Some key higher education institutions have also adapted the Code to their specific needs, with the Code fuelling the debate regarding exactly how science, sustainability and responsibility go together in our society. Together with the
Sustainable Finance Cluster and Deutsche Börse AG, the Council recently created the Hub for Sustainable Finance (H4SF) as a multi-stakeholder initiative which has tasked itself with getting involved in European sustainability regulation of the financial markets and financial policy. The annual National German Sustainability Award, which is presented in the categories of companies, cities, building, research and start-ups, shows it is possible to celebrate positive and good news concerning sustainability too. But there is more to it than that – the competition encourages all the entrants to become more sustainable and demonstrates how sustainability can become the driving force behind business or municipal success. The Council also organises regular dialogues for exchange among the mayors of German cities that have made sustainability a top issue. Nevertheless, involvement in stakeholder processes is not a master key – it calls for a high de-

The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) has been shaping the topic featured in its name since it was established by the German federal government in 2001. From the beginning, the Council was involved in formulating Germany’s first National Sustainable Development Strategy. This has served as a yardstick ever since for how Germany can jointly advance social, environmental and economic issues. It is now called the German Sustainable Development Strategy and includes the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations. Both of these form the fundamental framework of the Council’s work.

The Council is an advisory body to the German Federal Government. It develops contributions to ambitiously implementing the German Sustainable Development Strategy and promotes dialogue on the topic within society through its own projects and events. This encompasses recommendations regarding Germany’s sustainable development policy, the Sustainability Code directed at companies, the founding of the Hub for Sustainable Finance, dialogue with all the stakeholders within society, recognising ideas within civil society and promoting new projects that highlight new ways in which society can be made more sustainable.

The Council, which is appointed anew every three years, consists of 15 public figures from the fields of business, nature conservation, development cooperation and churches. When a team of international experts subjected Germany’s achievements in the area of sustainability to a peer review in 2018, they wrote: “With its high convening power, capacity for foresight, and overall competence, the Council has set a high standard for similar organisations worldwide.”

For further information on the Council, its activities and its projects, please see: www.sustainabilitycouncil.de

What has the German Council for Sustainable Development achieved as viewed by its members? What place does sustainability occupy in society, politics and the business sector? Current and former Council members take a look back and talk about their motivation, expectations and views. The English summary of the publication “15 Jahre RNE” (15 Years of the RNE) is available at www.sustainabilitycouncil.de
gree of leadership responsibility, the establishment of trust and good judgement of your own effectiveness. And most importantly of all, these processes must support representative democracy and the political mandate rather than seeking to circumvent them. A round table and a few votes are not enough.

Taking opposition seriously

A recent letter predicted once again that the Council was doomed to failure because there was no such thing as anthropogenic climate change and we were therefore dwelling on a phantom problem. And a journalist declared that sustainability was an empty buzzword and that all that was needed was ‘sensible’ policies. They posited that grouping such policies under the banner of ‘sustainability’ was superfluous and was merely the result of parasitic advisory coteries.

Opposition must be taken seriously, no matter how invidious or erroneous it might initially appear. It goes without saying that it is precisely the success of discrete legitimate interests that results in goal conflicts: between renewable energies and nature conservation, between marking out land for new housing and greenfield conservation, between food and consumption, between short-term and long-term interests, between the many

**SEEING MULTILATERAL RELATIONS THROUGH THE EYES OF THE 2030 AGENDA – AN EXAMPLE TAKEN FROM THE RNE’S ADVISORY ACTIVITIES**

Since the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted, the Council has repeatedly said that the agenda’s transformational and comprehensive aspirations make it necessary to generally strengthen and restructure bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The Council therefore campaigned during Germany’s G20 presidency in 2017 for a comprehensive G20 partnership with Africa based on the values enshrined in the 2030 Agenda and the African Union’s 2063 Agenda and to be drafted by all the partners.

The Council has identified trade, agriculture, energy, infrastructure and health care as focal areas for implementation of the 2030 Agenda on the African continent. In all of these areas, parameters need to be established and measures developed that will promote sustainability on the basis of the local circumstances while also achieving sustainability at the global level.

The Council’s advisory activities are founded on the maxim of considering how implementation of the 2030 Agenda can be promoted at all political levels and in all political relations without making the traditional distinction between national and international politics. The recommendation of the German Council for Sustainable Development "For a comprehensive G20 partnership with Africa to implement the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" is available on our website at www.sustainabilitycouncil.de
facets of possessing a lot and living well, cheap and affordable, and savings and investments. Goal conflicts of this kind need to be resolved in the interests of the common good and the fair distribution of responsibilities across the generations, including from a global perspective. It is now recognised within the fields of science and politics beyond all possible doubt that the atmosphere is reacting to having greenhouse gases continuously dumped in it.

**New certainties**

Opposition is important for the purposes of self-reflection. Germany is changing and the change process is greater and more fundamental than is often perceived. But it is at least felt by many people. Among other things, this is highlighted by the way in which people cling to certainties and how things were ‘better in the past’. This explains why, while the Berlin Wall has now been gone for longer than it stood, it continues to be a point of reference for many people which is more important than the prosperity improvements resulting from greater European integration, reformed citizenship laws, the 2011 nuclear phase-out, global climate targets and most recently the 2030 Agenda and the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The greater the change, the more heavily this weighs. And the change certainly is great: the party system is no longer stable, geopolitics are more impenetrable than ever, and in the EU, reaching agreement regarding difficult issues is no longer simply a question of time and money, but of whether agreement is wanted. Digital technology is already changing our lives and everything suggests that this change will only increase. In addition, there are the imponderables of climate change and many people’s life situations that lead to despair and flight.

New certainties arise: complexity is not bad per se. The nuclear phase-out is not a lifeline for coal-fired power stations. If you can bring creativity, innovation and commitment together, you can generate more of all three. Sustainability gives rise to optimism. Positive visions of the future are not naive paintings, but the lifeblood of an open society. Sustainability is more than just a word.
“Sustainability needs partnerships and patience”

contribution by Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul

I was already resolutely against adopting nuclear power back in the 1970s. Early on, I argued in favour of ceasing to use fossil fuels and expanding our use of renewable energies instead. I was and still am convinced that we must act as bulwarks against the exploitation of people and of nature!

When I became Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development in 1998, I made the promotion of renewable energies a focus of our work with the developing countries and pushed for a rethinks within the World Bank regarding this issue, the World Bank being part of my remit.

In 2004, we made a start on a coalition of the willing – developed countries, developing countries and non-governmental organisations – to decisively combat climate change and adopt a sustainable development path with the International Conference for Renewable Energies. As a development ministry, we wholeheartedly engaged in cooperation with China as we wanted to play our part in this important country specifically focusing on the issue of renewables. And China is now a key backer of the Paris Agreement!

We also resolved during Gerhard Schröder’s chancellorship in the early 2000s to phase out nuclear power. This experience shows that making a commitment to sustainability can be very fruitful. It’s a question of combining long-term commitment and cooperation with partners!
Tourism is rapidly changing. If you believe the experts, there are megatrends that are turning everything on its head: people want something individual and emotional, a sense of uniqueness. And then there’s digitalisation, in which everything is rated, liked and compared.

But the global megatrend is actually something else much more fundamental – climate change as a global threat to the world as we know it. Floods and torrential downpours are getting worse and water shortages are exacerbating conflicts and wars, which are causing people to flee or be driven out in many places, in Africa for instance, resulting in ever greater migration pressure in Europe.

This was the argument posited by Max Schön to approximately 300 hoteliers, restaurateurs, tourism experts and local politicians attending a symposium on sustainable tourism held in Lübeck in February 2018. Schön, a businessman, former President of the German Association for the Club of Rome and former member of the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE), is an expert in the field of reconciling ecology and economics.

“Closed locks when there is flooding in Rotterdam and flooded railway lines illustrate the fragility of logistics and mobility when climatic events occur, which also impacts on tourism,” said Schön. He also highlighted a way out, namely the United Nations 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs for short)
included in this. He argued that they would facilitate Growth 2.0 – a rising gross domestic product coupled with falling carbon emissions. This concept fundamentally changes tourism too. “Sustainability generates demand and is a marketing tool these days. This proves that something has changed within society,” said one of the symposium experts in summary.

**RENN.north: new networks for the 2030 Agenda**

The symposium is an example of how awareness of the 2030 Agenda can successfully be raised through new networks. It was organised by Tourism Cluster Schleswig-Holstein together with the RENN.north hub. RENN is an acronym that stands for Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies in German. Their purpose is to raise awareness of the global Sustainable Development Goals and the German Sustainable Development Strategy in particular within the parts of society that have so far remained on the periphery of this topic and in doing so help the goals be implemented. The RENN also bring people together who are making a commitment to sustainability. There are four hubs, each covering different parts of Germany: south, north, central and west.

In Lübeck, Schön’s presentation on the SDGs served as the opener, after which the participants turned their attention to practical issues such as how to go about certifying hotels or even entire regions that operate sustainably. “The symposium was a great opportunity to familiarise the tourism industry with the 2030 Agenda. Some of the delegates hadn’t even heard of the SDGs before,” says Jacob-Lucian Mărginean, who manages the network of Germany’s five northerly federal states from the office of the Hamburg State Association of the German Association for the Protection of Forests and Woodlands (SDW).

Rather than reinventing sustainability, what characterises the four hubs is how they bring initiatives together and strengthen them by means of partnerships across state borders and political levels. Among others, they work jointly with the RNE on projects to this end, such as the German Sustainability Action Days and the Project Sustainability award.

“Our idea was to give sustainability widespread exposure. We in Berlin can’t keep track of everything that’s already been achieved in Germany,” says Sabine Gerhardt, who built up the network from the RNE office and now coordinates it centrally. “The RENN hubs also all operate differently because there are different prerequisites in each region,” she says. As such, each RENN hub has its own focal areas. RENN. north, for example, focuses in particular on sustainable tourism and sustainable neighbourhood management.
RENN.central: small towns and a global metropolis

Meanwhile, RENN.central faces other challenges. This hub comprises five federal states in central and eastern Germany with a stark urban-rural divide. “On the one hand, we have Berlin with its hip city-based topics and on the other, there is the question as to why a voluntary fire department or the mayor of a small town in Thuringia or Saxony would be interested in sustainability,” says Josef Ahlke, who manages RENN.central from an office within the Future-Proof Thuringia association in Erfurt.

Ahlke has been working as a local Agenda 21 coordinator in the ‘socio-ecological arena’, as he puts it, since 1998. He remembers the Agenda 21 era well. Adopted at the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, this was the forerunner of the global Sustainable Development Goals. Ahlke says that although many of the projects and processes initiated back then ultimately petered out, this prior work is proving to be highly valuable today. “Back then, we had to develop pretty much everything from scratch and be very hands-on. But these days, sustainability is handled a lot more professionally at the local level by local authorities, associations and initiatives,”

These are the RENN hubs

Many people and organisations in Germany are working towards fundamentally changing the country in order to leave an intact ecological, social and economic society for the generations to come. To disseminate these activities, forge links between and promote the many projects and ideas both large and small, there are four Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies (RENN) – North, South, West and Central. The hubs are based within organisations which have a history of working on the topic of sustainable development.

The aims of the RENN hubs are based on the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which also form the basis of the German Sustainable Development Strategy. The hubs communicate the details of these goals at events, usually cooperating with other organisations. The topics addressed include education for sustainable development, environmental protection, nutrition, consumption, mobility, free time, clothing, tourism, housing and energy consumption, to name but a few. The RENN hubs help coordinate the sustainable development strategies of municipal authorities, the federal states and the German Government.

At the recommendation of the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE), the Federal Government is financing the RENN hubs with a total of 17 million euros up to 2022. The hubs began their work in December 2016. The network comprises 20 predominantly non-governmental partner organisations that input their expertise in order for it to be disseminated to all the federal states.

The network is coordinated centrally from the RNE office in Berlin. The hubs invite people to the RENN.days in Berlin once a year in order to bring together pioneers of sustainability from all over Germany.

For further information, please see www.sustainabilitycouncil.de
says Ahlke. It is now also easier to find partners in the business world that are seriously addressing the issue of sustainability, he says. RENN.central includes a number of organisations that came about on the back of the Agenda 21 movement.

The four RENN hubs were able to get down to work properly in 2017 – but they first had to establish some sort of structure. According to Ahlke, the first RENN.central meetings revolved around getting to know the existing organisations. The network therefore invited a lot of big names within the sustainability scene to its first annual conference, such as environmental associations and ‘One World’ networks.

The next step is to reach out to new players. "We're still one step away from the fire department associations, but it's precisely these organisations that play an important part in social cohesion in rural areas and which are frequently the only point of contact for the elderly," says Ahlke. His network wants to become a mouthpiece for this kind of work and demonstrate that it's all about sustainability, he says. "There's a lot more sustainability in a lot of things than you might think at first glance," says Ahlke.

**RENN.south: the entire array of sustainable living**

RENN.south operates in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, where it faces conditions which are different to those of RENN.central. These two federal states are economically strong in their rural parts too and are characterised by civic involvement. The network is based within the Sustainability Office of the Central Environmental Authority of the State of Baden-Württemberg (LUBW) in Karlsruhe and the Bavarian State Network for Civil Engagement (LBE) in Nuremberg. "We focus on groups and small-scale initiatives with no legal form and forge links between them in terms of their topics, including across state borders," says Dorothee Lang, who works for the network in the office in Karlsruhe.

The hub focuses on sustainable living and this covers a wide array of topics, including nutrition, consumption, mobility, free time, clothes, tourism, housing and energy consumption. In Munich, Ingolstadt, Karlsruhe and Heidelberg, for example, there are volunteer initiatives that organise consumption-critical guided city walks. In many places, the citizens are also working towards replacing disposable coffee cups with a deposit system in order to reduce waste. RENN.south seeks to bring the people who organise such initiatives together, because there is otherwise rarely any exchange between them. Anyone planning an event, publication, exhibition or similar campaign in the area of sustainable living can also ask RENN.south for a partnership. In Baden-Württemberg, for example, a range of practical workshops was put together on the topics of fundraising, social media,
Another focal area is fair procurement. Among other things, municipalities buy fire department uniforms, computers, coffee and toilet paper. All of these items can be procured fairly and ecologically, thus making the public authorities role models in the area of sustainable consumption. This is hardly a new topic – it’s something that the Central Environmental Authority of the State of Baden-Württemberg, where Lang is based, gives advice to local authorities on. But here, too, much could be improved through clever networking. “We want to improve cooperation, for example between ‘One World’ shops that offer fairly traded products and the municipal public

There are people throughout Germany who champion sustainable development at all levels of society. The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) has been recognising especially impressive initiatives and projects with the Project Sustainability mark of quality (formerly Werkstatt-N) since 2011.

Since 2018, it has done so together with the four Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies (RENN), and this has two advantages. On the one hand, the RENN hubs are located in various regions of Germany, which means the competition is brought to the attention of local projects much more quickly. And secondly, the winning projects can subsequently be incorporated into the local network activities.

One of the most recent winners was the project entitled Zukunftsperspektive UmweltHandwerker - Kompetenzfeststellung und Weiterbildung für Flüchtlinge (Future Prospects for Environmental Tradepersons – Determining Refugees’ Skills and Providing Further Training) run by the Hamburg Chamber of Crafts. The project involves refugees being given training to work in the area of energy and environmental technology. Another winner is the Tag des guten Lebens (Day of Good Life) organised by the Agora citizens’ initiative and Cultura21 e. V. in Cologne. A traffic-free Sunday is organised in a different district of Cologne every year and the locals are free to choose how to use the roads in the district on that day. An award also went to the Klimaschutz+ Foundation and the Climate Alliance in Heidelberg for their Climate Fair project, which allows citizens to donate the environmental and social costs caused by them because of, for example, travel to a citizens’ fund, which is then used to promote sustainable development at the local level. Another award went to the perspektive n project established in Berlin in 2016 as a series of debates on the topic of sustainable development within higher education institutions.

The number of competition entries increased almost twofold in 2018 due to the partnership with the RENN hubs. Ten projects are recognised per RENN hub, meaning 40 projects are recognised in total. It is by no means easy for the jury to make its decisions. All the winning projects receive 1,000 euros in prize money and are entitled to use the Project Sustainability logo to communicate their success. The competition is open to non-governmental organisations, social innovation initiatives, private individuals, municipal authorities, public institutions, companies and start-ups. Competition entry is subject to the project already being at the implementation stage. Four outstanding projects are also recognised at the national level as ‘transformation’ projects.

For further information, please see www.sustainabilitycouncil.de
administrations,” says Lang. Nuremberg as a fair trade town is an example from which many local authorities can learn, she says.

RENN.west: a link between the federal government, the states and the local authorities

With seven partners, RENN.west has the most stakeholders and operates in North Rhine-Westphalia, Hesse, Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland. Here, too, the partners’ expertise on, for example, climate protection, biodiversity, mobility, municipal development policy and education for sustainable development is incorporated into the network.

“As the link between the federal government, the states and the local authorities, we want to contribute to developing consistent sustainable development strategies and architectures across all the federal levels,” says Natalie Maib, who coordinates the hub’s work from within the State Working Committee Agenda 21 NRW in Bonn. The network is organised accordingly: in addition to numerous working meetings of the steering committee and the operational level, the RENN.west organisations meet with the representatives who are responsible for the four states’ respective sustainable development strategies, these usually coming from the state chancelleries or the ministries for the environment. “In the early days of RENN, we established ourselves as experts in sustainable development strategies for non-governmental stakeholders and local authorities and are in close contact with the state ministries and chancelleries regarding the federal states’ implementation of their sustainable development strategies,” says Maib.

Like the other hubs, RENN.west has set its sights on making the topic of sustainability more widely known, true to the holistic idea behind the SDGs. According to Maib, the major challenge they face in terms of expediting the implementation of sustainable development at all levels is that of not simply addressing only the obvious stakeholders. “We actively try to reach out to new target groups. At our next annual conference in November, we want to specifically also address stakeholders in the business world. We need to bring about a profitable rapprochement in this area with regards to content,” she says.

Overall, Maib sees the work of the RENN hubs as a major opportunity for civil society and municipal authorities. “Forging links between the stakeholders is not an end in itself – it can only be considered a success if it results in contributions that accelerate the implementation of the global and national Sustainable Development Goals,” says Klaus Reuter, Managing Director of the State Working Committee Agenda 21 NRW and head of RENN.west.

As such, there is still a great deal for the RENN hubs to do. In June 2018, a team of international experts presented its peer review on Germany’s endeavours in the area of sustainable develop-
ment – in which they explicitly recommended that the RENN hubs be strengthened. The review said that the Federal Government should first safeguard the hubs’ funding through 2030, rather than up to 2021 as is currently the case. It was also recommended that the RENN hubs be incorporated into “top-level stakeholder forums run by Government” – in other words, that they pass more of their local experience upwards. The hubs were involved in the Federal Chancellery’s Sustainability Forum in 2018 for the first time.

It is often suggested in talks with people who work within the RENN hubs that a great deal needs to be achieved but with only limited means. On the one hand, the major global and national Sustainable Development Goals need to be explained to people at the local level, even though these won’t initially mean much to them. And on the other hand, it needs to be explained to the policymakers what makes the country and the people in it tick and how they can be pulled on board for the lengthy process of socio-ecological transformation. Sabine Krüger, who works for RENN.north in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, vividly describes the workload situation: “My work for RENN is a part-time position – that’s 3.9 hours a day that I have to handle the entire federal state. The work is a balancing act between what all the associations and initiatives need and what you are capable of achieving,” she says. But she takes a positive view of the situation: “We may sometimes only manage small steps, but the good thing about small steps is that everyone can keep up.” And this is then sustainable in the best possible sense.

A “chopping party” was held in Straubing, Bavaria, at which people in the town came together to cook something delicious using vegetables that would otherwise have been thrown away. The University for Sustainable Development Eberswalde held a climate protection week. A clothes swap was held at the Linse youth club in Berlin, while ten foreign embassies in the city hosted a week of discussions, films and much more related to the topic of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, all organised by the Federal Foreign Office.

This all happened during the German Sustainability Action Days, which ran from 30 May to 10 June 2018. The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) initiated the Sustainability Action Days in 2012 on the occasion of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. The Action Days testify to the wide-ranging commitment to sustainability of people throughout Germany. Taking part is easy – you simply need to register on the Action Days website. Anyone can take part, be they private individuals, clubs, associations, initiatives, foundations, schools, playgroups, universities, churches, companies, social institutions, local authorities, municipal utilities, authorities or ministries.

There was record involvement in 2018 with a total of 2,500 events. This was in part due to the fact that the project is now advertised by the Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies (RENN). As there are similar initiatives in other countries, the Action Days have been a part of European Sustainable Development Week since 2015. This likewise set a new record in 2018 with a total of 6,035 events spread across 34 countries.

For further information, please see www.sustainabilitycouncil.de.
“Sustainability needs bolder policymaking”

contribution by Dr Imme Scholz

The German Sustainable Development Strategy of 2016 shows me how sustainable development is understood in Germany: the strategy has very high ethical aspirations – “the planetary boundaries of our Earth” and “a life in dignity for everyone” should serve as the absolute guidelines for political decision-making. Environmental protection and people’s well-being should be merged, both globally and domestically. At the same time, these aspirations are honoured in very different ways across the 17 political fields outlined in the strategy. The quantifiable goals and practical measures show that in a number of areas there is significantly less willingness to actually change than is required by the 2030 Agenda. This is in spite of well-filled public coffers, a very good scientific information base regarding the problem areas and possible solutions, and the fact that many citizens endorse the taking of real action to protect the climate and the oceans, for agriculture that works with and not against nature, and for more social justice and solidarity with the developing countries.

In essence, we need bolder policymakers who have the courage to address the transformational pressure and who do not shy away from reforms, and who therefore look to the future with confidence. The legal framework and the resulting economic incentives must send out clear and lasting signals that lead to innovative and sustainable decisions in the economy, public administration and households.
For this to be so, the strategy also needs to be reviewed: are the measures stipulated in the strategy really transformational? How can those in politics and administration learn to identify errors more quickly and modify routines? This relates in particular to how conflicts between the individual political fields are handled, for example agriculture on the one hand and the protection of bodies of water and flora and fauna on the other. It is also a question of mitigating the short-term negative impacts of reforms and of holding the public coffers and private businesses responsible for this. Reaching sustainable decisions to resolve these conflicts will be the key learning programme in the years to come. The German Sustainable Development Strategy makes these learning needs plain to see. Practical ideas have already been expounded: Jörg Mayer-Ries (IASS) has proposed government innovation labs, while the RNE believes the German government should test and improve application of its new management rules in practical learning workshops.

I tell others about the German Sustainable Development Strategy and about the fact that so many individuals are demonstrating through concrete projects how people’s well-being can be achieved in the 21st century. I personally try to live sustainably every day, for example by riding my bike, eating relatively little meat and dedicating leisure time to my family. Within my institute, I promote research into and advice on taking action at the various intersections as well as the interrelation between personal and global well-being.
Education that leaves no one behind

by Gerhard de Haan, Professor of Future Studies and Educational Research at Freie Universität Berlin

Persistently widespread poverty around the world, climate change, the loss of biodiversity, environmental pollution, a lack of gender equality and many other issues all indicate that learning processes need to take place in order for sustainable development to progress, both globally and nationally.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed by the United Nations as the 2030 Agenda give education an extremely high status internationally. Promoting education is listed as the fourth goal, after eliminating poverty, eradicating hunger and safeguarding health. There is good reason for this as there is a clear link between the level of education and the prevention of poverty and promotion of personal health. Little or no formal education goes hand in hand with low income and below-average health – which also impacts on life expectancy.1 However, an improvement in living standards does not only rely on education being provided: the quality and level of this education are also key. Little is gained if, for example – as in Egypt – more than 98% of children attend primary school but there are often 75 pupils in a class and a third of children at some schools are unable to read or write after six years of schooling.2 This means it is crucial not only to promote access to education for all, but – as signalled by the title of Goal 4 in the 2030 Agenda – to focus on the importance of quality education.

In this context, the whole of Goal 4 in the 2030 Agenda is also of interest to Germany. If it were only about access to formal education, the country would easily fulfil the requirements. After all, it is compulsory for all children and young people to attend school for at least nine years as part of the state's duty to provide education, and this obligation is indeed met. In almost all cases, this is supplemented by...

compulsory school (or vocational college) attendance until the age of 18. However, there are no uniform regulations covering all of the federal states.

**Education in Germany**

At first glance, the indicators used for the German Sustainable Development Strategy may appear to confirm the quality of education. According to the Indicator Report 2016 on Sustainable Development in Germany, the indicator for the quality of education in Germany is that the highest possible number of 18- to 24-year-olds be enrolled at a school or higher education institution, be completing a training programme, or have further education qualifications. The European Union target is for this proportion to be 90%. This figure is already exceeded in Germany. Germany also surpasses the target set by the European Union for the number of 30- to 34-year-olds with a tertiary or post-secondary qualification, which is the second education indicator. All-day care for children under the age of five is the only area where Germany’s performance falls substantially short of the targets.

Consequently, the overall balance concerning sustainable education is not entirely positive for a country which sees itself as a leading nation for education or indeed a knowledge society. One example of this is the issue of educational equity for people of different social status and from a range of family backgrounds. The performance of Germany’s formal education system cannot be considered (internationally) excellent in this field. Germany regularly receives OECD reports stating that equal opportunities – especially for socially disadvantaged schoolchildren and those from migrant families – remain below the OECD average, despite notable positive developments in recent years. Young people from socially disadvantaged families are far less likely to achieve an advanced school-leaving certificate (Abitur) than those from well-educated families – and much more likely to belong to the group with no academic qualifications at all. Children from weaker socio-economic classes are also more likely to be among those with low – or no – academic qualifications than children of parents who have an advanced school-leaving certificate or a university degree. Participation in higher education continues to correlate strongly with background. This means, for instance, that a very low percentage of students have parents with no tertiary qualifications.

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4 Ibid., p. 30 f.
5 Ibid., p. 32 f.
Where can the idea of sustainability be better cultivated than at higher education institutions? Here, those who will make the decisions later discuss, research and develop. Therefore it recently became possible for higher education institutions to transparently report on how they consider and advance environmental, social and economic issues in a holistic way, be it in the area of research and teaching, in day-to-day operations or with regard to how they introduce sustainable ideas to society.

In 2015, the RNE got together with around 50 higher education institution representatives and the joint project “Sustainability at Higher Education Institutions: develop - network - report” (HOCH-N) to develop a standard with which universities and higher education institutions could document and further develop their achievements in the area of sustainability. Following a testing period, the alpha version became available in April 2018 and guidelines on its application are currently being developed. The Sustainability Code for Higher Education Institutions is based on the Sustainability Code and comprises 20 criteria. In relation to criterion 17 “Human Rights”, for example, the University of Tübingen explains how it raises awareness of this topic with Tübingen Human Rights Week. Among other things, the University of Bayreuth demonstrates how sustainability is enshrined in its teaching with study courses such as Philosophy and Economics or International Economics and Development. The Freie Universität Berlin lists 457 research projects and 641 teaching events related to sustainability. Up to July 2018, seven higher education institutions had submitted a declaration of conformity to the new standard.

For further information, please see www.deutscher-nachhaltigkeitskodex.de

However, sustainable development is about much more than social welfare, sound career prospects and good opportunities in life. The ecological and economic aspect of sustainability must also be considered. However, this is problematic. As a rule, those with more advanced academic qualifications have a greater knowledge of environmental problems and are more sensitive to unfair living conditions. At the same time, this section of the population also has above-average living space and energy usage, is more like to fly – and fly further – owns larger cars, and so on. In short, the higher the level of education, the worse the carbon footprint and the more resources are consumed. This is, of course, not an argument to reduce the number of advanced academic qualifications. However, it is a clear signal that these indicators alone do not...
stand for sustainable development as regards resource usage, ecological impacts, etc. In fact, the opposite is true. Viewed across the entire population, higher academic qualifications tend to prevent precarious living conditions, meaning that they contribute towards social justice and help to foster this aspect of sustainable development. Having said this, further work is needed to enable sustainable development processes to arise from sustainable education. In other words, sustainable education must be linked with education for sustainable development.

**Education for sustainable development in Germany**

It comes as no surprise then that Goal 4.7 of the 2030 Agenda explicitly cites the objective of ensuring by 2030 that everyone has the skills needed to promote sustainable development. This is what is meant by education for sustainable development (hereinafter: ESD). The importance of ESD was emphasised in the final document of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio back in 1992. Chapter 36 of the document talks about the need for environmental education and awareness because a mental shift is a prerequisite for sustainable development (Agenda 21, 1992).

Technical innovations which conserve resources and a focus on sustainability in both politics and the business world will only come about if all players possess knowledge, acceptance and the will to change. This means it is crucial to initiate learning processes which take a close look at sustainable (and unsustainable) development.

In Germany, some initial efforts were made to establish ESD at schools between 1999 and 2008 with the model programmes for ESD of the Federal–State Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion (BLK). During this period, ESD consisted of merging traditions – primarily those of environmental education, but also of global learning – and continuing them with a focus on the aspects of sustainable development. Although ten to 20 per cent of schools providing a general education in Germany were incorporated into these schemes, they did not have a widespread impact or systematically integrate ESD into content frameworks or teacher training. In most cases, the activities did not go beyond the level of individual school projects. At the same time, a substantial proportion of ESD was – and is – delivered by organisations other than schools.

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In 2002, the United Nations was unable to identify any major international progress since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. This prompted the organisation to launch the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, with UNESCO as the lead agency, for the period from 2005 to 2014. Germany was heavily involved in this international initiative, which was designed to strengthen activities in all areas of education.

The wide-ranging projects gained visibility through an award programme which commended approximately 2,000 projects (from some 3,000 applications) for their achievements in the field of ESD. During the same period, the conferences of both the country’s education ministers and its university rectors also signed recommendations and/or statements to strengthen ESD. The end result, however, was merely the conclusion that numerous good projects and initiatives had been recorded. Although the decade had brought about considerable progress, there was no indication of ESD being systematically integrated into all areas of formal education. Nor was this to be expected. Diffusion research has taught us that a large number of good examples, award-winning projects, etc. cannot structurally embed innovations. There will always be those who adopt innovations – in the education system too. However, the question is how to reach those who

Without the generations to come, sustainability means very little. Not only do we need to maintain a liveable world for children, adolescents and young adults – they also need to be taught how to act responsibly as the decision makers of the future. The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) therefore initiated the “Ready, set, future!” (“Zukunft, fertig, los!”) ideas competition in mid-2017. It is aimed at traditional education institutions ranging from day care centres to vocational schools and higher education institutions, at further education institutions and at associations, foundations, youth groups and other initiatives. There were some 100 entries and the projects demonstrated what was being done at the grass-roots level to achieve the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals.

Results included, for instance, a nature app at the Museum of Natural History Berlin, the handbook “The school of repairs” (“Reparieren macht Schule”) which raises awareness for the concept behind Germany’s first repair workshop run by schoolchildren, or the “Catalogue of useless things” created by Braunschweig University of Art (HBK). A jury of experts selected 22 projects to showcase their work to foundations, companies and policymakers in a round of “Speed dating for #SDGeducation”, after which approximately half of the projects were sponsored. The education competition actively addresses what the fourth global Sustainable Development Goal calls for, namely ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning. The German Sustainable Development Strategy has a similar goal of offering all children and adolescents greater participation and better opportunities.

For further information, please see www.sustainabilitycouncil.de

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primarily hold on to long-established standards, the requirements of syllabi and content frameworks, curricula, etc. and are reluctant to experiment, instead preferring to carry on in the same vein, as specified by the regulations. This calls for a change in the regulations themselves – in the expectation that this will prompt those in question to change their behaviour. There is, however, no small risk of this expectation being disappointed.

As a consequence, the UNESCO Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development (2015 to 2019), the follow-up programme to the Decade of ESD, is dedicated to taking ESD beyond the project level and integrating it into structures. In Germany, a complex organisational structure consisting of a national platform, industry forums and partner networks has been established under the aegis of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) to systematically embed ESD in all areas of education.

Key players and stakeholders have been incorporated into this set-up – from federal ministries and the conference of education ministers to foundations, NGOs, businesses, the scientific community, experts with practical experience and youth representatives. A joint national action plan was adopted in 2017 which contains 130 targets and 349 recommendations to be implemented over the next few years. For instance, the action plan states that suitable means of strengthening ESD at schools are “developing concepts specific to each federal state (overall strategies for ESD, action plans, etc.); incorporating ESD into school legislation and other legislative frameworks; integrating ESD into teacher training (basic/advanced training and continuous professional development [CPD]).” As regards targets for higher education institutions, the document states, for example: “Target and performance agreements are a key means of shaping policy at higher education institutions. The federal states and higher education institutions are called upon to take ESD/sustainability into account as a higher education policy objective in their target agreements for the next forthcoming period.”

The national action plan adopts an imperative tone and delivers a clear call to action. Although key players and those responsible for changes in the education system were involved in drawing up the action plan, the decision to require the integration of ESD into the education system falls within the remit of the relevant state parliaments, bodies and organisations.

18 BMBF: “Umsetzung des Weltaktionsprogramms „Bildung für eine nachhaltige Entwicklung“ in Deutschland. „Vom Projekt zur Struktur – wie wir Bildung für nachhaltige Entwicklung stärker und breiter aufstellen“ (no place or year of publication). Available at: https://www.bmbf.de/files/WAP-Umsetzung_BNE.pdf (last accessed: August 2018)
Education for sustainable development that leaves no one behind

So what is meant by ESD? It would be too simplistic to imagine that it were only about issues such as climate change, social justice, poverty, hunger, etc. Merely taking the 17 SDGs and integrating them into lesson plans for existing school subjects would not meet the demands that are being made of the education system. Good ESD is best described briefly by differentiating between aims, content and methods – as is traditionally done in teaching – and looking at organisational structures in the education sector. Numerous experts consider the aim of ESD to be the acquisition of “Gestaltungskompetenz” (shaping competence).

This comprises the knowledge and abilities to analyse unsustainable developments and initiate sustainable development processes. That includes, for instance, the ability to see other people’s viewpoints, carry out interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary analyses, cope with risks and uncertainties, motivate oneself and others, act in the interests of sustainable developments, and also reflect on one’s own lifestyle, individual standards and aims. Even this brief summary shows that merely studying individual aspects of the sustainability discourse is not enough.

Although the content of ESD is determined by the whole gamut of the sustainability discourse, the content should fulfil several criteria: “It should be geared towards the future and values (justice; living well), offer interdisciplinary insights and support sustainable developments (transformation).” It also soon becomes clear that the SDGs cannot cover everything which is relevant for the sustainability discourse – such as the question of which form of sustainability is desired: strong, weak or critical sustainability? According to experts, the methods draw heavily on situated learning. The learners’ experiences form the starting point; the learning processes are participatory. There is a strong practical focus and the learners form communities of practice. This also means that children and young people participate much more strongly than previously and can contribute their ideas and visions of their own future. As regards organisational forms, good ESD is linked with a clear paradigm shift at institutions. Sustainability is the institution’s guiding principle: this relates to its energy supply, how it treats resources, procurement, the design of the grounds, mobility and food. In short, education institutions should lead by example.

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SUSTAINABILITY CULTURE FUND SUPPORTS FIVE SDG EDUCATION PROJECTS

Five of the ideas submitted as part of the “Ready, set, future!” (“Zukunft, fertig, los!”) education competition are now receiving funding of up to 50,000 euros from the Sustainability Culture Fund.

» One of the projects supported, “Take off to your future” („Abflug in die Zukunft”), sets out to transform one of the world’s largest buildings into a real-life sustainability teaching laboratory to inspire visitors of all ages, including young people. With this initiative, the foundation Gemeinschaftsstiftung Berlin Tempelhof hopes to pave the way for innovative sustainability concepts at the airport. To achieve this, it plans to run an ideas competition and workshops for youngsters in connection with the airport repurposing process.

» Preschoolers and children of primary school age learn best through stories, which is why “White sheet of paper” („Das weiße Blatt“) uses visual storytelling with the help of Kamishibai, Japanese paper theatre. The project’s initiator – the Schleswig-Holstein Central Library – is developing sets of picture cards which encourage audience members to join in, tell the story, sing and paint their own pictures and help make sustainability accessible.

» The University of Göttingen also has a message to share: how research is contributing to implementation of the SDGs. Its planned film concept is to be aimed at schoolchildren, which is why the university intends to involve them in its development. The series of films entitled “Sustainable development and the Sustainable Development Goals” („Nachhaltige Entwicklung und Sustainable Development Goals“) is designed to show schoolchildren, students and young graduates how interesting sustainability research is. Meanwhile, the multimedia storytelling project “UmWelt360” brings together written media, audio and video: as ambassadors for sustainability in their region, young people produce 360° photos, audio footage, information boards and videos about sustainability issues for an exhibition and develop visions of the future with the aid of a virtual reality tool. Submitted by the JuMP project run by the Bielefeld-based charity Haus Neuland e. V., this idea was also developed in conjunction with young people.

» “Komfona”, the fifth project sponsored by the Sustainability Culture Fund, is aimed at a slightly older group: 100 prospective vocational school teachers. The vocational and business teaching course unit at Leuphana University of Lüneburg creates research workshops where students can develop strategies and criteria for promoting sustainable development in the context of vocational schools. These are then presented in the form of 18 scenes using the spoken word, drama and dance.

Implementation status

For assessing the current implementation of ESD in Germany, the ESD monitoring conducted as part of the Global Action Programme is a helpful source of information. Over the last few years, ESD has been integrated more strongly into structures in all areas of education. This is clear from more recent documents, such as school content frameworks and nursery education plans. Nevertheless, an analysis of such documents reveals considerable differences in

how developed ESD is, both in different areas of education (early years, school, higher education, vocational training, non-formal learning) and between the various federal states. As a rule, the formal education sector is less dynamic than the fields of non-formal and informal learning (e.g. private education providers). While, for instance, clear shifts can be seen at higher education institutions – especially in the training of early-years professionals – very little has happened over the past ten years in the key area of teacher training. Apart from this, higher education institutions are proving highly dynamic, however. Many have now put sustainability officers in place. By contrast, changes to degree courses are progressing at a slow pace – due in part to the separation of subject areas. Institutional structures often make it difficult to embed ESD systematically: while a high level of momentum is generally in evidence at present in early-years settings, where the understanding of education is shifting to accommodate ESD, progress in vocational training is being hampered by the need to reach a consensus between the consortium partners (employer and employee associations) and the differentiation which exists between sectors, professional groups and individual companies. The monitoring in connection with the Global Action Programme is comprehensively recording the implementation status of ESD in Germany for the first time. The results are encouraging in that some degree of dynamism is evident in most areas of education over the past five years. However, innovations are still proceeding at a very slow pace. ESD should already be comprehensively implemented in schools’ content frameworks. Forms of learning should have changed considerably and the various teacher training routes should already be geared towards ESD if we are to be confident that everyone will really know what action can be taken to promote sustainability by 2030 – as set out in the 2030 Agenda.

Measuring progress

As yet, no indicator has been found to measure the progress of education for sustainable development. In my opinion, there are three options here. One possibility would be to use the delivery of advanced training and CPD to teachers as a benchmark for this topic as changes can be effected in short time frames here (unlike, for example, content frameworks – which are modified approximately every ten years). Although this would not measure the skills – let alone actions – of children, young people and adults, teachers’ capabilities are a prerequisite for ESD finding its place in schools. The second
option would be to record the skills of children and young people in the field of sustainable development. However, a reliable instrument which complies with the standards set by PISA, for example, has yet to be found. Thirdly, a simple procedure could be discussed: the proportion of goods consumed (food, etc.) which carry the fair-trade symbol and an organic/eco-label. The argument for this approach would be that if people switch from conventional goods to fair-trade, eco-certified products, this is associated with a learning process – however this was initiated and whatever the underlying forces motivating this action may be. In this case, the existing national indicator 12.1 a “Proportion of products with a state eco-label” would need to be modified. Perhaps this is an unsatisfactory solution for the field of education, however, whose role can only be to enable the acquisition of skills which permit sustainable action. What children, young people and adults do with these skills falls outside the responsibility of the education system.

We must change ourselves! This is the greatest challenge we face on the way to making society more sustainable. By this, I mean our day-to-day behaviour on the one hand and the decisions reached by organisations on the other. Both are based on people having a comprehensive understanding of the consequences of the decisions they make. It’s not that easy to change behaviour which has been passed down. Mastering this will be a key to creating a society which is in line with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

I believe that education for sustainable development is one of the crucial factors here. Only through education can we give people an understanding of the impacts of their actions, be they in the private or work sphere. Places of non-formal education in particular are a major asset when it comes to teaching (young) people how sustainability can be practised and made a success. Youth organisations are something close to my heart. Being a boy scout allowed me to learn a lot and simply give all sorts of things a go. This was a formative experience for me. I firmly believe that voluntary learning and experiencing things within youth groups can significantly increase people’s understanding of sustainability issues. Young people are clearly keen to practise what they have learned. This turns children and young people into stakeholders in all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This is something that society and the government need to allow a great deal more and also promote financially and structurally! This is what my work is all about and I love talking about our successful projects.
One example is the “beweg!gründe” project run by German Young Nature-friends. In this, young people considered the socio-ecological changes needed under the title of “global transformation”, looking at topics such as “buen vivir”, development, solidarity and the global common good.

The green events guidelines produced by Germany’s Catholic scout organisation DPSG demonstrate how groups can actively incorporate sustainability into their own activities. The guidelines clearly explain how a campsite for children and young people can be made more sustainable. What’s more, it is made practical, approachable and tangible. Young people don’t just talk – they turn their thoughts into deeds and witness the effectiveness of their own actions.

This is education for sustainable development. We can promote realisation of the Sustainable Development Goal of “Quality Education” simply by supporting youth organisations. What young people learn changes the behaviour of each and every one of them, with regard to both personal and career decisions. In this way, we create role models who stand up for and actively practise change. Promoting youth organisations more results in greater sustainable activity within society. It can be that easy.
“Nudging for good: the appeal of a sustainable decision-making architecture”

Contribution by Prof. Dr Lucia Reisch

How can people be encouraged to adopt more sustainable lifestyles? Why do many people act so often in ways that are unsustainable, in spite of wanting to do the opposite, as surveys suggest time and again? Which political tools are effective and make sense in order to promote sustainable consumption? This is my field of research.

I am especially interested in the question of how policymakers can effectively influence people’s behaviour without issuing decrees and prohibitions and without having to justify market interventions such as taxes and subsidies (even though these are often needed and are in many instances the best political tool available). There is a great deal of potential in so-called behavioural policy, or “nudging”: the idea being that the more sustainable alternative should be the most obvious and simplest option. Consumer decisions can be easily and specifically influenced via a clever “architecture of choice”. For example, through default settings, such as having people automatically be signed up for green electricity when they move into a new apartment, for instance, or having printers preset to perform duplex printing. Social norms, positive feedback and being reminded of your own goals can likewise serve as nudges. Ideally, this kind of “nudged” behaviour should eventually become a person’s regular practice. It is important that there is transparency regarding the goal (eating less
meat, for example) and the method (a meat-free meal choice in the canteen as a default). In a democratic market economy, the government’s “decision architects” must disclose which “nudges” are being used to what end and must also justify them. In addition, their effectiveness and unwanted side effects should be tested empirically before these nudges are rolled out.

One of the problems is that in our consumer society the consumers’ decisions are considered sacrosanct. As soon as you mention the environmental impacts of unharnessed consumption, you are accused of treating consumers as if they had no minds of their own and of wanting to rob them of their consumption freedom. I counter this with the argument that consumption freedom is without a doubt something of great value, but that it limits the freedom of others, for example of the generations to come. And if you ask people, they are sometimes even happy that not everything we like is actually allowed. In almost all of the 17 countries examined around the world, nudges are accepted by the majority of people in the areas of the environment and health, as established by my team together with Harvard University. Many people even endeavour to improve their self-control by means of self-nudges – “snudges” – for example by using fitness apps to improve their health. In business meanwhile, “sludges” are often used. These are nudges that serve to maximise profit and that are often used opaquely and manipulatively.

People very much like to adhere to social norms, and these have shifted in the direction of environmental and social sustainability in recent decades. Greed and ruthlessness are anything but hip these days – acting fairly for the benefit of your grandchildren is the new norm.
Acting sustainably requires knowledge. Knowledge is therefore also a prerequisite for implementing the 2030 Agenda and the German Sustainable Development Strategy. As the field of science has an important part to play here, when the German Sustainable Development Strategy was revised in 2016 the German Federal Government invited it to develop a platform that would scientifically oversee the process of implementing the 2030 Agenda in, with and by Germany.

The Science Platform Sustainability 2030 was established on 8 May 2017 and was presented to the public on 9 May 2017 during the 13th BMBF Forum for Sustainability. It is supported by the international scientific networks Sustainable Development Solutions Network Germany (SDSN Germany), the German Committee Future Earth (DKN Future Earth) and the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS). The platform is scientifically independent and is systematically incorporated into the dialogue, steering and implementation process of the German Sustainable Development Strategy.

The Steering Committee – a body comprising 26 experts from the sciences, the business community and organised civil society – is responsible for shaping the platform in terms of content and strategy. Under the auspices of Dirk Messner, Patrizia Nanz and Martin Visbeck, the Steering Committee formulates the work programme, initiates working groups and brings together stakeholders from science, politics, business and civil society. Its purpose is to provide innovative input for sustainable development policy while also providing the science sector with feedback regarding the research needs. The Federal Government oversees the Science Platform by means of a committee which is open to all the ministries. This currently comprises the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), the
Internationally speaking, a science platform of this kind is something entirely new. With the platform stakeholders pooling their existing knowledge and formulating scientifically sound options for action and the resultant research needs, knowledge itself becomes a critical and reflective element of sustainable development policy. This knowledge is founded on findings from basic research and from transformation and transformative research. The platform also further develops instruments designed to communicate scientific findings to politicians and the public and more broadly embeds the significance of sustainability within science. And last, but not least, the nature of the platform allows all interested stakeholders to scientifically track sustainable development policy.

In 2018, the Science Platform has working groups looking at four focal issues: sustainable consumption, the future of work, global commons and mobility. Here, members of the Science Platform’s Steering Committee work together with other experts from the field of science and from society. In addition to these focus groups, its work programme includes overarching activities designed to broadly engage the field of science, for example on the basis of the dialogue on sustainable development policy initiated with various scientific advisory councils of the Federal Government by the Science Platform together with SDSN Germany or with the platform engaging in exchange with other stakeholders such as the academies.

For further information, please see www.iass-potsdam.de
“LEVERAGING DIGITALISATION ON BEHALF OF OUR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT”

contribution by Prof. Dr Gesche Joost

Paying, communicating and voting online are now a part of everyday life. Platform-based work is also becoming increasingly digitalised. This means that without Internet access, an email address and a smartphone, I am already no longer a fully fledged citizen of digital pioneer countries such as Denmark, Estonia and South Korea. Being online is becoming the bedrock of participation in society. Are we ready for this? No. In Germany alone, 12 million people feel they have been left behind digitally. Two thirds of people in the OECD countries lack basic digital skills. Digitalisation is dividing our society into winners and losers.

This societal division is one of the greatest challenges for social sustainability in Germany – and indeed the world. The divide runs between people of different ages and genders, between people with access to digital education and those who are excluded from this, and between urban and rural areas – sometimes with a fast Internet connection, sometimes without. And the divide is getting worse: more and more people feel they are being left behind, are no longer able to follow the debate surrounding AI and algorithms, are very concerned about rationalisation processes founded on efficient automation and are feeling the effects of always being online in their private lives, namely increasing stress and permanent availability. Many people are wondering whether there is even a place for them in a highly efficient, technologically structured and rapidly developing society, and whether they still have a fair chance of leading a fulfilled life. We therefore need to have a rethink within
society and leverage the opportunities offered by digitalisation on behalf of our sustainable development. To define guidelines for this, it is important that we systematically consider digitalisation and sustainability as one and give it direction: at the service of people and the environment and in the interests of striking a sustainable balance between social, environmental, economic and cultural aspects. Digital technologies make social and political participation possible in the social media, in forums and in accessing globally networked knowledge; they offer the opportunity for the energy transition to be handled efficiently and successfully and for social innovations to be made economically sustainable too. We in Europe have a historic opportunity to firmly establish a sustainable digitalisation strategy and to stand up around the world to unfettered and disruptive digitalisation. In so doing, we will also establish ethical guidelines for the rapid technological development that can be set in motion to close the digital divide and build bridges. The SDGs are an important component in order for us to be effective at the global level. The citizens should be involved in the discussion so that their hopes and fears can better be understood – and to make the digital society a shared project which can assist us with sustainability.
Science, technology and innovation (STI) are key drivers of social and economic change in the world in which we live. They shape our daily lives and international relations. The UNESCO Science Report shows that around the world a great deal of hope is pinned on STI, in terms of both economic growth and sustainable development.

To say that technological developments are by definition ambivalent is something of a truism. They are one of the key causes of the multifarious over-exploitation of natural resources and of social upheavals. At the same time, they offer indispensable opportunities for overcoming global challenges.

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them” – this quote attributed to Albert Einstein also relates to our understanding of technical progress and innovations.

Vast sections of the political, business and also science fields are still dominated by last century’s faith in technology. But it’s high time we had an enlightened relationship with STI: rather than adapting people and society to technological development (as suggested by the debates surrounding digitalisation), a paradigm shift is long overdue. What’s compatible with people and (the global) society should be the focus of our endeavours, rather than what’s technically doable.
The guiding principles of the Rio summit and the 2030 Agenda are the result of sound scientific knowledge that simply carrying on as we are would be precarious for wealthy regions like ours too. It’s high time this knowledge was applied to innovations and sustainable structural change. This raises the question of the governance of STI both nationally and globally as well as questions about the part it plays in the 2030 Agenda.

The German Sustainable Development Strategy of the Federal Government is an important approach to laying new groundwork for achieving the global Agenda goals in, with and by Germany. At the start of the millennium, the strategy itself was a political innovation. But today, incremental improvements are no longer enough.

In view of the dynamics of the scientific and technological forces, it can only become effective when it addresses the innovation system and when it provides the parameters for the path to sustainability. Clear goal orientation, breaking down of the silos between sustainability research and technology promotion, and expedited research momentum to enable a new type of systems thinking to gain ground in the sciences and in engineering – this could be a model for the global knowledge society.

Global STI governance, which is currently lacking, would counterbalance institutions and rules that have a de facto influence on the direction of innovations such as the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO, investment protection agreements, etc. An important task in order to develop a research and academic relations policy in keeping with the 2030 Agenda would be to contribute to the establishment of global STI governance and to make this usable for sustainable diplomacy.
Can municipalities learn sustainability?

by Busso Grabow, Deputy Director, and Martin zur Nedden, former managing director of the German Institute of Urban Affairs (difu)

Municipalities are drivers of societal change and they have an important role to play in the transformation towards greater sustainability. Their heterogeneity increases the complexity of the task, but also presents an opportunity for producing a wide array of solutions – potential which past successes evidence.

Sustainability – its meaning and a frame of reference for municipalities

’Sustainability’ is a term with a long history. The phrase ‘sustainable use’ was first employed more than 300 years ago, by Hans Carl von Carlowitz in Freiberg, Saxony, in 1713. The German accountant, who is considered the author of the first comprehensive treatise on forestry, called for the more efficient use of resources that were in short supply, the planned safeguarding of raw material sources and a search for alternatives. More than two and a half centuries later in 1987, the UN’s Brundtland Commission interpreted the term ‘sustainability’ much more broadly as “... (meeting) the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Sustainable development is founded on the principle of seeing the environment, social justice and the economy as a whole and taking consequences and future sustainability into account in political decision-making.

Five years later, in 1992, 172 countries attending the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro adopted the Agenda 21 action plan. This action plan attached importance to activities at the local level for the first time and named local authorities as the key

1 The timelessness or, rather, the perpetual topicality of the term ‘sustainability’ becomes particularly apparent when we look at how firmly embedded in humankind’s cultural history this principle has always been; cf. Grober, U. (2010): Die Entdeckung der Nachhaltigkeit. Kulturgeschichte eines Begriffs, Munich.
players: “Because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, the participation and cooperation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling its objectives.”

Under the motto of “Think globally, act locally”, local authorities subsequently derived Local Agenda 21s as their independent contributions.

At the preliminary conclusion of this process, the New York Earth Summit on sustainable development held in 2015, the UN member states unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda with its 17 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Together with other guiding principles, this now serves as the standard framework for the political activities of local authorities.

This brief historical digression illustrates that sustainability is not a static mission statement, but rather a paradigm which is constantly adapting culturally to societal and political discourse. Nonetheless, some of the basic principles are unchanging – intergenerational equity and an integrated view of the three sustainability dimensions of the environment, social affairs and the economy. These three dimensions of sustainability are increasingly complemented by a fourth dimension: culture. Issues relating to distribution, fairness and good governance are additional integral components of sustainable development, such as the assumption of global responsibility, participation, actively tackling the issue of conflicting goals and successful vertical political integration.

Sustainable municipalities are characterised by the fact that the policymakers and administrators, local utilities, civil society and businesses systematically and consistently see these principles as being at the heart of their actions. Fortunately, the number of municipalities in Germany that are pursuing these goals continues to rise. Nonetheless, there is still a long way to go until this ‘mere’ guiding principle systematically shapes the actions taken each and every day throughout the country.

What are ‘municipalities’?

Municipalities are a very heterogeneous species, and this increases the complexity of the task. A municipality’s distinct identity is determined by its location, development history, size, economic structure and societal set-up, to name but a few aspects. As an example: the factors that influence air quality are generally the same across all municipalities, factors like industrial emissions,
traffic emissions, long-range transboundary air pollution, etc. But the degree of pollution is very much dependent on other factors, such as topography. And, in turn, the options regarding action to reduce emissions are dependent on these factors. For this reason alone, the situation in Stuttgart is very different to that in Hamburg.

A municipality’s options for taking action and the independent initiatives that are feasible also very much depend on whether it is part of a county or is independent.

In addition, a municipality is not a homogeneous entity – it is always also a complex network of players that include administration (divided into different areas of responsibility based on its size), municipal politics, local utilities, the private sector and the various civil society groupings, among others. Each player follows its own action logic. Their level of influence and how they communicate with one another vary from municipality to municipality.

Nonetheless, or precisely because of this, the local authority level is of crucial importance to implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. It is here that the consequences of a lack of sustainable action become directly noticeable. This boosts willingness to act and acceptance of the necessary measures. In addition, stakeholder diversity and local discourse increase the potential for innovative solutions. After all, it is within the municipalities and their neighbourhoods that there is the greatest opportunity for directly engaging with citizens.

With the local authority landscape being so multifarious, there is no one-size-fits-all recipe for the ‘sustainable city’. At the same time, however, this offers great potential for a broad array of solutions to be developed. Past successes stand as a testament to this potential. However, to realise this potential, the municipalities need to be granted sufficient freedom and the necessary resources.

**Progress and achievements on the way to creating the ‘sustainable city’**

**In the past, (integrated) urban development in itself already pursued individual goals directed at sustainability**

The aforementioned three – or four – dimensions of sustainability have an intense effect on one another. This results in the potential not only for synergies, but also for goal conflicts, both between the individual dimensions and within a topic. For example, if a municipality wishes to reduce land use, it must allow denser inner-city development. Fresh air corridors and green spaces near residential areas are just as important, though, and not all of these can be realised in equal measure at the same time.
An integrated overall view is needed, both in order to mobilise synergies and to weigh up any conflicting goals. This is not a new realisation in itself. As early as the 1960s and 1970s, municipalities were making use of urban development planning as a tool. This can therefore be seen as the forerunner to the integrated urban development concepts that are increasingly applied within municipalities today. But with the development time of these concepts being so long, the concepts’ high level of detail and the parameters constantly changing at the same time, the concepts were frequently already obsolete upon completion and were difficult to implement due to their complexity. The instrument fell into disrepute. In many places, there followed a period of ‘outlook incrementalism’, which is often represented by the oversimplified catchphrase of ‘projects instead of plans’. There are indeed cases of this approach being successful, a well-known example being the International Building Exhibition (IBA) Emscher Park development, a forward-looking programme of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia which effectively promoted structural change in the north of the Ruhr region between 1989 and 1999.

However, it became increasingly evident at the beginning of this millennium that this ‘strategy’ was able to live up to the complex interrelations only to a very limited extent, if at all. Consequently, the instrument of the ‘integrated urban development concept’ increased in importance. For instance, in relation to Germany’s ‘Urban restructuring in the new federal states’

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**SUSTAINABLE CITY DIALOGUE**

Whether or not sustainability can work globally is decided at the local level. Integrated, sustainable urban development allows for mobility coupled with little traffic, creates affordable housing, develops new neighbourhoods in a resource-efficient way – including in terms of land use – strengthens civil society and takes intergenerational equity into account in municipal finances. This calls for committed citizens and political leaders who get behind the idea of sustainability.

Which is why the RNE established the Sustainable City dialogue back in 2010. It involves the mayors of 30 German towns and cities regularly discussing the latest challenges of sustainable urban development. They also provide important input at the federal level by means of joint publications such as "Strategic cornerstones for sustainable development in municipalities" and policy papers on the current challenges, for example land policy. While the challenges they face may vary greatly, the mayors see themselves as a mouthpiece for responsible policies at the municipal level. As delegates of political responsibility, they champion the integration of sustainability into politics and public administration as a cross-cutting task. Adopting different approaches and using different examples, they demonstrate the importance of the role played by municipalities in implementing the global Sustainable Development Goals.

For further information, please see www.sustainabilitycouncil.de
urban development programme, the funding providers required the municipalities to produce integrated urban development concepts as a prerequisite for being awarded funding. Another important stimulus was the EU urban development ministers’ adoption of the Leipzig Charter during Germany’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2007, which explicitly emphasises the importance of integrated urban development concepts in particular with regard to sustainability aspects.

Integrated urban development concepts are now smaller in scope than they were in the 1960s, thus making them more practicable. However, they maintain or further develop their cross-cutting character nonetheless. All the stakeholders relevant to urban development, in particular also civil society, are already involved at the development stage. The towns and cities employ a wide array of communication formats to this end.

Success is dependent on the city officials, administration and politicians offering as much support as possible both during the development process and for the ultimate result. This is the best way to guarantee that those involved can implement the concepts over multiple electoral terms. It is also important that the concepts and their implementation be continuously evaluated and that adjustments be made if necessary. Furthermore, the communication structures put in place during the development process can nurture long-term, in other words ‘sustainable’, discourse within a municipality and thus support new cooperation structures.

A lesson already learned is that the challenges the municipalities face do not stop at their borders. Cooperation among local authorities, and in particular between the main city and the surrounding municipalities in conurbations, has a crucial part to play in pursuit of the goal of sustainable development. Involving the urban fringe as early as at the development stage of an integrated urban development concept is therefore all the more relevant.

Successes and shortcomings on the way to creating the sustainable city

As was made clear at the beginning, awareness of the necessity of sustainable development and of action based on this has been firmly embedded in many municipalities for some time now and is part of the local DNA, so to speak, in many places. There is much concrete evidence of this in:

» Numerous statistics and other data such as the increasing use and generation of renewable energies within municipalities or the rising number of childcare places for children under the age of three.

» Many qualitative indicators – sustainability is already a topic addressed by many local councils, there are active climate protection managers in many cities and municipalities,
sustainability reports are prepared and participatory processes are now the rule rather than the exception. The excellent activities in the area of accommodating, supporting and integrating refugees are also noteworthy.

» **The results of various competitions** in which municipalities that act sustainably are recognised.

» **The declarations of intent of many local stakeholders** ranging from the signing of the Aalborg Charter in 1994 to the signing of the resolution of the Association of German Cities entitled 'The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Building Sustainability at the Local Level'; many local authorities have passed political resolutions to pursue sustainability-oriented goals and are involved in stakeholder dialogues such as the German Council for Sustainable Development’s dialogue with city mayors.

However, even with all these pleasing developments, it is evident that there is still a great deal to be done:

» **Integrated urban development concepts, approaches and perspectives** must be made more widespread.⁶

» There are **management shortcomings** and therefore also shortcomings in terms of strategic management.

» There is still a lack of awareness among the decision makers regarding **certain sustainable development issues**, such as the topics of poverty (as a local authority issue), funding which is fair for all generations, and the assumption of global responsibility.

» **Political target values** are frequently neither achieved by municipalities nor does it seem that they will be achieved in the foreseeable future (examples: particulate pollution, child poverty, childcare for the under threes, 30-ha land use goal, etc.).

» Municipalities are **permanently structurally underfinanced**,⁷ and therefore make too few investments in sustainability.

These are just a few of the aspects, just like only a few of the successes so far have been mentioned. But it does also show that the municipalities are dependent on the higher echelons with regard to many of the topics. As well as highlighting that there is a need to learn.

**Municipalities as places of learning**

Municipalities are the primary place of learning for sustainability in many respects. They are learning systems in the sense that they can independently expand their knowledge about sustainability by bringing together past experience and existing knowledge and by ultimately implementing these again within political, administrative and civil society activities.

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Within a learning system, everyone – be they from politics, administration, local utilities, civil society or businesses – is both a learner and an information/knowledge sharer. Ideally, the local authority stakeholders learn from the cause for thought provided by civil society, which itself learns from exemplary local authority action and at local authority places of learning in the sense of education for sustainable development. Municipalities are initiators and inspirers that communicate the Sustainable Development Goals and visions and manage their implementation. They support the sustainable development and learning processes within society.

Learning requires knowledge, and this knowledge comes both from within and from outside (cf. section 5 ‘Connected learning’). At the same time, a common understanding of sustainability is a fundamental prerequisite for creating future-proof and liveable cities, municipalities and regions.

There are many fields of learning. All those who assume responsibility for sustainability at the local level or who wish to require the following:

- **Knowledge of sustainability in the various fields**, such as climate protection, mobility and social justice to name but a few.

- **Management knowledge**: this includes knowledge of strategic and operational management and of organisational matters, and a willingness to tackle the aforementioned goal conflicts. Goal conflicts are inherent to every sustainability approach; what’s needed is ‘nexus thinking’, i.e. an understanding of the interrelations, interdependencies and concurrence of the SDGs.

- **Successful communication** in order to arrive at a common understanding of sustainability. Horizontal coordination of and cooperation between administrative departments, functioning networks encompassing the public authorities, local utilities, civil society and businesses, and the involvement of communication experts can all help here.

A willingness and ability to learn are not enough for progress to be made on the way to achieving sustainability – the framework conditions must also facilitate sustainable actions. These include in particular a reformed, future-proof municipal funding system, the amendment of a large number of legal standards, giving experimental pilot and model projects greater leeway, and successful vertical integration of the sustainable development activities of the EU, the German government, the federal states and the munici-

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9 Cf. ibid., p. 79.
These pressing challenges are not specific to Germany – they are a global issue. The following aspects are mentioned as significant obstacles to sustainable development in cities: “limited political and fiscal power, lack of access to development finance, low level of institutional capacity, absence of robust multi-level government cooperation and integration ...”

**Connected learning**

“When it comes to sustainable development, cities copying one another is not forbidden and is indeed very welcome and productive. We can and must grow on the basis of and through the experiences of others.”

The municipalities’ different approaches to pursuing sustainable development result in the creation of a large array of tools. Even if a local authority has to adapt a measure developed by another municipality to its specific local conditions, this process of learning from others (both from negative and positive experience) contributes to the municipality’s own resources being used more efficiently and new ideas being promoted.

For this to be a success, exchange formats are needed that promote the interconnectivity not only of the municipalities, but ultimately also of all the relevant stakeholders within society, thereby broadening horizons. The German government, the federal states and the municipalities all have work to do here in equal measure, and a great deal has happened in this respect in recent years. Digital media are playing an increasingly important role alongside the ‘traditional’ print products. Be it Internet research, video conferences or e-learning, they all represent an important opportunity for knowledge exchange and discussion.

Even with these new avenues, the face-to-face contact experienced at networking get-togethers, (vocational training) events and the committee meetings of, for example, the local authority associations remains highly significant.

Competitions such as the Klimaaktive Kommune (Climate-Active Local Governments) competition or the National German Sustainability Award serve as an incentive and spread best practice knowledge. The European Energy Award reflects the status quo of the efforts made, provides impetus for their ongoing develop-
ment and promotes the forging of links between municipal actors.

**Conclusion**

Municipalities are fundamental to achieving the goal of transforming society in the interests of sustainability – in keeping with their role as drivers of societal development. They are places of considerable impairment of the determinants of sustainability. Municipalities are the cause of problems on the one hand and the victims of these problems on the other. In view of this, they can make a significant contribution to reducing burdens and offer major potential for overcoming these challenges. A great deal has already been achieved, but everyone involved must continue to make more of an effort, including by engaging those who should contribute more to helping shape sustainable living environments than they have to date.

Municipalities are not uniform, they are multifarious. As a consequence, tailored concepts and measures based on these are needed if the different local circumstances are to be optimally taken into account. Nonetheless, there are certain general bases for success. These first and foremost include a willingness and ability to think and act in an integrated way and to express this in the form of integrated urban development concepts. To develop and implement these, all the stakeholder groups of relevance to urban development must be involved and must work together across municipalities. Transparency is crucial in order to justify strategy content and measures, and a careful weighing up of conflicting goals is equally important.

Sustainability can only be guaranteed in the medium to long term on the basis of the ongoing evaluation and, if necessary, further development of concepts and measures. This requires all the stakeholders to be willing to learn, be open to reviewing their own positions and have the opportunity to exchange knowledge. Municipalities are the primary place of learning about sustainability.

However, the municipalities will only be able to live up to their role if the European Union, the German government and the federal states establish the appropriate framework conditions. These include adequate financial resources and the legal leeway to develop and implement innovations. Municipalities must also be involved in the discussion and decision-making processes at the higher levels.

The developments of the past few decades show that, while there are unquestionably still major challenges, the municipalities are ready and able in terms of both content and tools to build on the experience garnered and take the necessary steps for sustainable development, thus living up to their responsibility towards society.
Of the 7.5 billion people alive today, more than two billion are under the age of 16. In the years to come, these individuals will need their own homes and jobs and infrastructure such as education, sport and cultural institutions, playgroups, hospitals, roads and shopping opportunities, etc. In 1930, there was a global population of two billion. This means we will need to build the equivalent of the entire world of 1930 in the years to come. If this were done according to German national standards, it would take 1,000 billion tonnes of concrete and bricks. This volume is neither available nor can it be produced.

It is common knowledge that the global population will increase by a further two billion in the next 30 years. The global megatrend of urbanisation is resulting in 100 million more people living in cities every year. Cities already account for 80 per cent of global resource consumption and are responsible for 70 per cent of all pollutant emissions. 50 per cent of mass waste comes from buildings.

It’s high time that construction was reconsidered. Housing construction therefore needs to be made more sustainable. The target is triple-zero homes – homes which are built with zero-emission materials, i.e. are free of harmful substances, which are wholly recyclable, i.e. produce no waste, and which are run on renewable energies, i.e. do not use fossil fuels. Renewable resources need to be used in order to achieve these goals – in particular wood, which is abundant in a lot of countries.
In addition to the ecological side of things, sustainable housing construction is also about building homes that are affordable. At the same time, attractive solutions in terms of architecture and urban development need to be found. The German Federal Government and the German housing industry ran a Europe-wide competition to identify the best sustainable solutions. The results showed that homes could be made sustainable in all sorts of ways, both in urban and in rural settings.

It can only be hoped that these good examples will actually be used by many housing companies and building owners.
Sustainability ultimately affects all areas of daily life and each and every one of us. It is therefore important that we consider all dimensions of the sustainability process equally – the economic, environmental and social dimensions are by no means in conflict with one another. On the contrary, a major opportunity lies in our striking the right balance.

I firmly believe that high environmental requirements and sustainable business are a good match. And local utilities are in an especially good position in this respect as they are regional, reliable and sustainable. I therefore champion the cultivation of Germany’s ability to compete as a place of business within the sustainability process and the safeguarding of the high quality of the services offered.

Sustainability begins at the local level. Ideally, it is organised within municipalities and towns together with committed citizens, mayors, local utilities, other stakeholders and social groups. The local utilities’ services of general interest and their commitment to environmental, climate and resource conservation are a clear sign of sustainable action.

Acceptance is needed at all levels in order for sustainability to be achieved. This is the only way in which innovative concepts and new approaches can be realised. Many citizens have faith in regional economic structures. Regionality is seen as a counterbalance to globalisation and therefore
as an anchor. The regional value added of municipal utilities and local public companies is a business model that reconciles the economic, social and environmental aspects – that is to say that it practises and promotes sustainability in the best sense of the words.

The municipal economy is an elementary part of Germany’s social market economy. Local utilities are close to people in their home environments and offer equal and attractive living conditions within the regions and towns. They also promote participation and democratic interaction throughout Germany.

The figures speak for themselves: the municipal economy is responsible for income of around 16.7 billion euros and generates 23.7 billion euros in taxes. It therefore safeguards important infrastructures and is also a key economic factor. What’s more, it provides 734,000 people in Germany with jobs.

In my capacity as Managing Director of the German Association of Local Utilities (VKU), I champion the promotion and strengthening of the extensive endeavours of municipal utilities and public companies in the area of sustainability. I personally aspire to living in a way that allows the generations to come to likewise experience the great diversity that our planet has to offer. I work towards this goal both professionally and in my personal life.

If we do away with the wagging finger and provide concrete offers that make people’s lives easier, then everyone can contribute to greater sustainability.
International migration, people fleeing from crisis regions and the increasingly tangible impacts of climate change highlight the fact that global change is happening directly within municipalities. Vice versa, action at the local level has a global impact – these two insights from the Agenda 21 process of the 1990s are now well established. More and more cities, municipalities and counties are therefore acknowledging their global 2030 Agenda responsibilities, doing their part as “Global Sustainable Municipalities” and at the same time are also contributing their expertise to the international arena.

2030 Agenda – not without the municipalities

The 2030 Agenda makes municipal involvement increasingly important with regard to development and sustainability policy because the municipalities play a crucial role as the administrative level closest to the citizens and as pioneers of change. Goal 11 ‘Sustainable cities and communities’ explicitly holds the municipal level responsible and calls on municipalities to ‘make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’. However, numerous other Sustainable Development Goals can likewise not be achieved without the support of the municipalities with their specific competences and areas of responsibility. After all, SDG 17 calls for global partnerships for sustainable development to be established and expanded. The Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW) therefore works on behalf of Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the federal states that support it to assist cities, communities and counties with embedding the 2030 Agenda within society and with their sustainable urban development within the context of the SDGs. In addition to advice, networking and process monitoring, as a German competence centre for local sustainability and development policy, SKEW also offers the municipalities financial backing and staff support, as they often lack own resources.

Municipal partnerships: the key to global transformation

Municipal partnerships have a pivotal role to play, as the direct exchange of knowledge and the joint realisation of concrete projects make it possible for sustainable, citizen-oriented solutions to pressing environmental, economic and social problems to be found at the local level. For example,
an increasing number of German towns and cities are initiating and maintaining partnerships with municipalities in Africa, Asia, Latin America and eastern/south-eastern Europe and are focusing these more now than was the case a few years ago on local-level knowledge sharing and the joint implementation of concrete measures. They share and acquire local expertise for the necessary transformation processes, as illustrated by a number of examples: in the course of six project phases so far, since 2011 SKEW has been helping ‘Municipal Climate Partnerships’ around the world – now 60 in total – to develop and implement programmes of action for climate change mitigation and adaptation, with the seventh phase set to start in late 2018. Since 2017, SKEW and 12 ‘Local Sustainability Partnerships’ have been running a pilot project to see how German municipalities can implement the SDGs together with towns and cities in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Serbia. The programme ‘Municipal Know-how for Host Communities in the Middle East’ promotes cooperative partnerships between German municipalities and the municipalities in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey which have given shelter to large numbers of refugees from Syria. More than 50 German-Ukrainian municipal partnerships are boosting the decentralisation process in Ukraine, and in the ‘Maghreb-German Municipal Knowledge Transfer’ project, German municipalities are contributing to strengthening municipal structures within this region, thereby promoting sustainable municipal development and reducing the causes of migration.

The Service Agency offers German and African municipalities advice according to their needs and oversees the partnerships at all the stages of the localisation process within the new project ‘Agenda 2030 – Municipal Exchange of Expertise with African Partners’.

Municipal involvement abroad is also replicated at home: German municipalities pass resolutions on fair procurement and promote fair trade, they team up with migration-related organisations and actors within civil society or they support development policy information and education work. What’s important is that the various areas of action are systematically interlinked. To this end, together with numerous partners, SKEW offers comprehensive assistance with developing municipal sustainable development strategies through its ‘Municipalities for Global Sustainability’ offering. To make the various sustainable development measures commissioned by the BMZ more effective and more visible, they were bundled within the project ‘Global – Local: Agenda 2030 VerOrten’ (Global–Local: Giving the 2030 Agenda a Home). This project was recognised as an innovative 2018 flagship project within the German Sustainable Development Strategy by the State Secretaries’ Committee for Sustainable Development in June 2018. The German local authority associations and numerous other partners are involved in its realisation. They have also jointly developed a set of SDG indicators for municipalities which can be used as a guidance instrument and which is to be expanded further.
“Silent Heroes”

Contribution by Prof. Dr Ulrich Schraml

Close to two million people in Germany own forest. In many instances, they assume responsibility for just a small plot of land as these forests can be smaller than a football pitch. But in each case, it is a plot of land that has a significant impact on society as the forest is where the country’s most important renewable resource grows – wood. It is also where it becomes evident that careful management can lead to something that other industries have failed to achieve, namely maintaining and cultivating biodiversity. And last, but not least, it is where stressed individuals choose to go for relaxation, making the forest a veritable all-rounder. This makes forests an important health resource in and near big towns and cities in particular. Each and every forest owner therefore has a small part to play in boosting the well-being of people in Germany with their private commitment.

The overall balance of this personal commitment of the many is impressive. For decades, the relevant inventories have attested to improvements in biodiversity and forest stability, even though the law gives the forest owners wide latitude regarding what they may do with their property. And they make use of this latitude in very different ways. For example, some optimise forest management and reliably produce wood. Others plant especially attractive trees that delight not only the owners, but also visitors. While others do nothing at all based on the conviction that nature will take its course. Overall, though, they all contribute to the continuous improvement of the state of the forests and, by using the wood there, they make a contribution to the country’s climate policy.
Nonetheless, the word “sustainability” is not something you hear all that often within forest-owning families. The discussion at the local level is not based on lists of indicators with which individual success could be gauged. The extensive research into this group, which encompasses all social strata, shows that these people are far more interested in respecting nature, being in awe of the lifetime achievements of others and ultimately providing for the next generation. Forest owners therefore often struggle to put into words exactly why they endeavour to pass their forest on to their children in a better state than how they inherited it from their own parents. This is simply the way it works – out of a sense of tradition and responsibility.

Above all, this has so far worked without any public feedback. You won’t find forest owners on monument plinths, on the covers of magazines or on the stage at award ceremonies held in big cities. The Germans pay homage to the forest, but pay little attention to those obscure figures who planted the trees. In their hectic day-to-day lives, they are therefore missing out on one of the most hopeful sustainability stories that life has written. But the curtain is occasionally briefly raised and the example of the forest owners injects a moment of hope into the entire sustainability debate throughout the country.
RNE publications
(a selection)

Statements and recommendations (national and international)

2018

- **Steering global sustainability away from a dead end**
  The RNE’s recommendations to the German federal government for enhancing multilateralism for the 2030 Agenda, August 2018
- **Countering a standstill of the entire system**
  Statement regarding the German Federal Government's consultation paper “Updating the German Sustainable Development Strategy 2018” dated 5 June 2018 (in German only)
- **The 2018 Peer Review on the German Sustainability Strategy**, Berlin, May 2018
- **German Council for Sustainable Development – Statement to the EU Action Plan on Sustainable Finance**, April 2018

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- **Management rules for the German Sustainable Development Strategy**
  Recommendation of the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) following a review in accordance with the German Sustainable Development Strategy 2016, p. 34, Chap. B II.2.a), Berlin, 4 December 2017 (in German only)
- **Agricultural policy of the European Union**
  Statement regarding the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), December 2017 (in German only)
- **Results of the Stakeholder Survey on German Sustainable Development Strategy**, December 2017
- **Recommendations from the members of the Steering Committee of the Hub for Sustainable Finance on sustainable finance in Germany**, October 2017
- **A hub for sustainable financing in Germany?**
  Discussion paper/living document by Alexander Bassen, Achim Steiner, Günther Bachmann, 2nd version, last updated: 29 June 2017
- **For a comprehensive G20 partnership with Africa to implement the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, March 2017
» **On the German Sustainable Development Strategy of 11 January 2017**
Statement of the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) for the German Federal Government, Berlin, March 2017 (in German only)

2016

» **Bolder, not just moderate change!**
Statement regarding the Government draft of the German Sustainable Development Strategy, June 2016 (in German only)

» **Statement of the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) for the Federal Ministry of Justice and Consumer Protection (BMJV) on implementation of Directive 2014/95/EU**, April 2016 (in German only)

2015

» **German sustainability architecture and the SDGs**
Statement of the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE), May 2015 (in German only)

» **Greater courage! Sustainability must demonstrate political relevance. Expectations of and recommendations for the German Federal Government**, January 2016 (in German only)

**Studies and expert opinions**

2017

» **Ten years of the German Sustainability Award: Impact and prospects for sustainability within companies**, November 2017

» **Study on implementation of the SDGs within the German education system**, October 2017 (in German only)

» **Opportunities of the circular economy for Germany**
Analysis of the potential and starting points for the ICT, automotive and building materials industries, 2017 (in German only)

» **What does “sustainability” mean to the political parties?**
Answers to questions from the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE), April 2017 (in German only)
2016

» **Industry 4.0 and sustainability: opportunities and risks for sustainable development**, December 2016 (in German only)

» **Constitutional status for sustainability**

Legal opinion commissioned by the office of the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE), June 2016 (in German only)

» **Indicators of innovations within the context of the German Sustainable Development Strategy**

*Reflection on experience to date and consideration of its ongoing development*, March 2016 (in German only)

» **Indicators of sustainable consumption**, February 2016 (in German only)

2015

» **The Role of National Sustainable Development Councils in Europe in Implementing the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals**, October 2015

» **Study of the implementation of the "CSR Directive" in Germany, taking into account the Sustainability Code initiative**, May 2015 (in German only)

» **Resource management and municipal waste management**, January 2015 (in German only)

**Brochures**

2018

» **The Sustainability Code for Higher Education Institutions**

Reporting Standard for Higher Education Institutions based on the Sustainability Code, May 2018

» **The Sustainable Shopping Basket, 8th revised edition**, March 2018 (in German only)

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» **The Sustainability Code – Benchmarking sustainable business**, 2017

» **German Almanac of Sustainability – Initiatives and impressions on the social reality of sustainability 2017**, April 2017
- **Open SDGclub.Berlin Meeting 2016 – RNE Documentation**
  Non-state actors promoting change towards implementing the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2017

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- **Guideline on the Sustainability Code – Guidance for SMEs, 2016**
- **Inside sustainability counselling**
  Members of the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) review their impact, April 2016

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- **Strategic cornerstones for sustainable development in municipalities, August 2015**
- **Countries in development. Global Sustainable Development Goals, 2015 (in German only)**
German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) – members 2016–2019

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» Andreas M. Rickert

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