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Sustainable building gains momentum: another successful year for the DGNB – despite Covid-19

The German Sustainable Building Council (DGNB) strengthened its position in ‘the year of the coronavirus’. By the end of 2020, the non-profit organisation had seen a record number of new members. The DGNB Academy also made a successful transition to online training. The number of qualified sustainable building experts now exceeds 5000. In addition, the DGNB continued its success in the field of building certification, passing an important milestone on its path to internationalisation with the official launch of the DGNB System in Spain.

“2020 was particularly challenging for us at the DGNB. Our network thrives on personal exchange and interaction, and previously almost all events organised by the DGNB Academy were staged in the classroom,” states Dr Christine Lemaitre, CEO of the DGNB. “Looking back now, however, I have to say we managed a lot of things really well. We can also confirm that sustainability continued to gain in importance across the industry over the past year.”

One indication of this is the sharp rise in membership witnessed by the council in 2020. By the end of December, the number of members had risen to 1337 – the highest number ever for the DGNB. “I’m pleased to say that there were only a very small number of membership cancellations resulting from the coronavirus pandemic. This contrasted to a rise in interest from companies that hadn’t really thought in detail about sustainable building until now,” states Lemaitre. There was particularly strong interest from architects and planning offices.

Significant expansion in staff training and continuing education

The number of sustainable building experts trained by the DGNB Academy rose to around 5100 last year. The DGNB succeeded in overhauling its business model in this area in 2020 by moving all training courses and staff education programmes into digital formats. “This wasn’t just about adapting
our classroom-based courses and simply offering them like-for-like online, we also realigned teaching methods to the particular demands of digital learning,” states Lemaitre.

Training was also expanded to include a number of new series of seminars. These have now become a permanent addition to the training programme offered by the DGNB Academy. The main topics covered range from climate-neutral planning, building and building operation, to the circular economy, timber construction, low-tech solutions and eco-sufficiency. The academy also now offers a completely new fast-track course on the management of climate protection for buildings, which takes place for the first time from 10 to 12 February.

**DGNB certification continues to witness strong growth**

The number of projects awarded DGNB certification rose to around 7200 by the end of 2020. Again, there was no negative impact caused by the coronavirus pandemic. In fact, it was found that almost without exception all projects that already started certification completed the process. One even more significant development when it came to DGNB certification was the number of new projects registered, which remained high.

“We’re sensing increasing levels of awareness for the importance of high-quality, sustainable building. More and more building owners and buyers now understand the importance of certification to projects and its role in offering genuine added value, for example by minimising risk and safeguarding investments.” The DGNB is particularly pleased to see stronger interest in certification for buildings in use. Certification in this area is aimed at systematically improving existing buildings and moving closer and closer to climate neutrality. First projects were also certified in 2020 under the new DGNB System for sustainable building deconstruction.

**The DGNB continues to gain importance on an international level**

In December, the DGNB reached an important milestone on its mission to become the leading quality standard in Europe. The certification system was successfully adapted for use in the Spanish market. The DGNB System is thus now in use and undergoing further local development by our partner organisations in Denmark, Austria, Switzerland and Spain. This approach is unique within Europe. In international terms, projects have now been certified according to DGNB requirements in no less than 25 countries.

On a European level, the DGNB also joined forces with its partners in Denmark, Austria and Spain to conduct a feasibility study on EU taxonomy criteria. Initial results of the study, which took more than 80 projects into account, have already been presented to members of the EU Commission and will be included in an evaluation of taxonomy criteria. A full report on the taxonomy study will be published in the coming weeks.
The German Sustainable Building Council (DGNB e.V.)
The DGNB German Sustainable Building Council was founded in 2007 and has around 1300 members, making it Europe’s biggest network for sustainable building. The aim of the DGNB is to promote sustainability in the construction and real estate industry and instil awareness of building sustainability among the broader population. The DGNB is an independent non-profit organisation. Its certification system offers a planning and optimisation tool for evaluating sustainable buildings, interiors and districts. It was developed to help organisations enhance the tangible sustainability of construction projects. The DGNB System is based on the concept of holistic sustainability, placing equal emphasis on the environment, people and commercial viability. The DGNB Academy is an education and training platform that has already provided more than 5000 people from more than 40 countries with official qualifications in sustainable building.

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