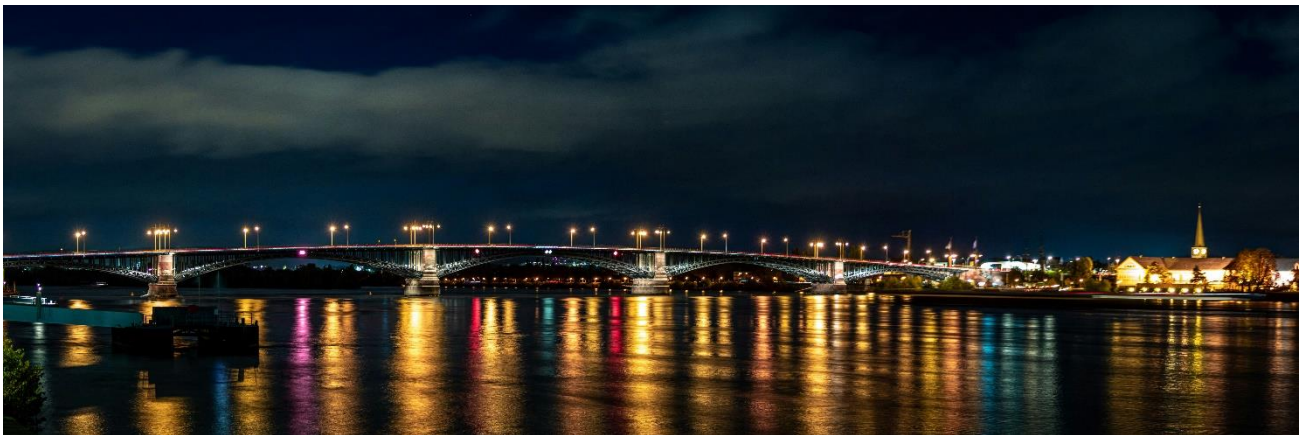




DOWNPASS STARS

## Association Work between Brussels, Branding and Sustainability

Dr. Juliane Hedderich is the managing director of various associations in the down and feather industry based in Mainz. The Association of the German Down and Feather Industry (VDFI e. V.) is the oldest and can look back on more than 100 years of history. Traumpass e. V., founded in 1974, started out as a quality circle and expanded its field of activity more than ten years ago to include the ethical sourcing of down and feathers. EDFA e. V. was founded in Amsterdam in 1980 by nine companies from eight countries. Since then, it has grown rapidly and currently comprises associations and companies from 21 countries spread across three continents - Europe, Asia and Africa. The youngest of the bunch is Downpass e. V., founded in 2011, which distributes the DOWNPASS animal welfare and quality label developed by Traumpass e. V., which has revolutionized the international bedding market over the last six years.



Michael Behrens, Unsplash

DOWNPASS spoke to the association's managing director, Dr. Hedderich, about the major challenges facing the industry: the importance of the EU for legislation, opportunities to exert influence in Brussels, standards and norms, as well as the particular buzz topics of our time - sustainability and the circular economy. Last but not least, we were curious to find out about the managing director's personal motives and goals.

### The Influence of the EU

**Brussels' influence is growing rapidly - what does the EU's increasing decision-making authority in terms of regulation and shaping economic framework conditions mean for the down and feather industry?**

The importance of associations as a mouthpiece for the industry plays an extremely important role, particularly due to the EU's increasing assumption of the authority to issue guidelines. In the past, the EU has influenced proposed legislation by formulating specifications in the form of a guideline and passing them on to the federal states for implementation. EU guidelines first had to go through the national parliaments in order to be adapted, if necessary, then passed and thus become legally effective.

In recent times, the EU has mainly focused on regulations, with which it directly intervenes in national legislation and where the member states no longer have any influence on implementation. In contrast to guidelines, regulations have direct legal effect in the EU member states. The Commission wants to implement objectives more quickly and therefore requires a correspondingly faster administration.

It is precisely because the European Commission's "reach-through effect" on the member states is becoming naturalized that it is so important for associations, as representatives of industry interests, to be present both during the drafting phase of regulations and in the implementation phase of laws.

Although EU regulations set out a basic direction with requirements and prohibitions, they are usually too generalized in their requirements to be equally applicable to every industry. Practical implementation strategies must therefore be developed for the individual sectors of the economy so that the same "horizontal" rules, i.e. the same requirements, apply to all companies. In practice, this is often solved through standardization projects. Associations can provide important input here by communicating feedback from members and stakeholders to politicians and also perform a critical monitoring function by working more towards social goals such as environmental friendliness, transparency and traceability.



Jorgen Hendriksen, Unsplash

Dr. Juliane Hedderich  
Managing Director

In general: associations reflect social diversity in political systems. They bundle heterogeneous demands into coordinated goals and communicate these to the outside world. Specific expertise and experience in the respective industries and subject areas are indispensable for this - without them, nothing works: as associations, we provide politicians and decision-makers with relevant fact-based information, we must competently moderate the standardization process and later provide comprehensive support for the application process in the market. To this end, we maintain a very intensive dialog with our member companies in the down and feather associations in order to constantly incorporate their feedback into the political decision-making process. We discuss common concerns and carefully weigh up the pros and cons of different positions so that we can then feed this into the public debate in the media.



Bild: Pandanna Imagen, Pixabay



Bild: logan-nolin, Unplash



Bild: Pixabay

### Buzz Topics of Our Time

**Sustainability is a key issue in many industries. How is the down and feather industry dealing with this and how new is it for the member companies?**

Sustainability is rightly a key issue in many industries. Our associations' work on sustainability focuses on recycling, the circular economy, careful use of resources and social sustainability, where we attach great importance to animal welfare and traceability. We must be able to show that our products are environmentally friendly, climate-friendly and resource-saving, and that they can be reused and given a second, third or fourth life. With down and feathers, the fillings for bedding can be recycled several times. Those parts of the filling that are no longer reused can be used in biological recycling as compost, to improve the soil or as insulating material.

Thinking in cycles is nothing new for companies. For our forefathers, who founded the VDFI e. V. in 1915, it was the guiding principle for supplying the population with warm bedding during the First World War. For our associations, the goal of thinking in cycles remains unchanged today. The idea of the circular economy already determines the product design of the majority of our member companies. Water management, the reduction of chemicals, the minimization of packaging and certification in accordance with international sustainability and environmental protection standards are a reality in the industry.

For DOWNPASS users, it remains a key concern to continue working on the topic of "animal welfare" and to provide the end consumer with as much information as possible without losing sight of the fact that quality is also assured.

In order to implement all of these topics, it is necessary to be open and exchange ideas with other stakeholders - an absolute necessity to achieve such goals. As industry associations, we are involved in various projects, be it to promote the circular economy or to develop the digital product passport, in order to help shape a consumer-oriented, transparent future.



Bild: Tim Mossholder, Unsplash





Duane Mendes, Unsplash

### Personal Goals and Motives

**What goals and priorities have you set yourself for the next few years in your professional work for the down and feather industry?**

To bring the topics of recycling, the circular economy and social sustainability to the fore. In a globalized world, riddled with crises and wars, it is important to live these issues in order to have the strength and capacity to stand up for common goals and to help when necessary. Our associations have had a very international focus in their work for a long time and we have noticed that this is bearing fruit. We learn from each other - across countries and continents - and can thus drive developments forward together. This will be a focus of my professional work for the down and feather associations in the near future.

**Which projects and results are you particularly happy about because they have achieved a lot for the industry?**

Happy is of course a big word, but we are very pleased about various successes:

Many fraudulently labeled products have unsettled consumers and distorted competition on the markets - both nationally and internationally. Their consistent prosecution and punishment has paid off for our companies as producers as well as for consumers, who have a right to genuine information and market transparency. Only in this way can trade and the market function properly.

Through our intervention in the planned change to the import duty on ticking fabrics, which were suddenly to be placed in the same category as bed linen, we were able to convince the EU Commission to withdraw the plan. The import duty for bed linen would have been almost twice as high as the import duty for duvet shells. Even though customs regulations are of course not really an attractive topic, the work, which took around nine months, was more than worthwhile for the companies.

What has made me really happy, however, is the success of the Downpass standard and its DOWNPASS brand. Over the past seven years, we have made a stand for the ethical sourcing of down and feathers with the label, which stands for a consistent no to live plucking and moukting, for rearing control and for quality testing. The outsourcing of all controls and audits to independent third parties, accredited companies and laboratories,



Marcos Paulo Prado, Unsplash



has more than proved its worth. Around 31.2 million pillows and duvets have already used the label to signal traceability, transparency and animal welfare to buyers. The revision of the DOWNPASS, which is currently being developed, has a lot more in store that will surprise some people. And I am looking forward to that.

*Source: Downpass e.V.*