

Chapter 10

Fostering the Participation of Companies in Standardization: A Soft Law Instrument to Reduce Risks – The Concept of Student Standardization Societies

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ABSTRACT

Standardization is one source of informal rules that regulate the public realm: standards are not legally-binding, but, as soft law instruments, they influence the governance, ethics, and conduct of companies. Standardization brings unique benefits to companies in term of knowledge, credibility, and risk reduction by bringing accountability and predictability. To foster active participation of companies in standardization, higher and continuous education in standardization is essential to build mutual understanding between companies and the standardization world since decision making in the former is a relatively quick top-down hierarchical process while in the latter time-consuming consensus-building is the norm. The concept of Student Standardization Societies (SSS) is introduced as the best way to promote standardization in the long term, and advice is given for the practical implementation of SSS and their relationship with Official Standardization Organizations.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-2181-6.ch010

INTRODUCTION

Standardization is a unique way of collaboration that humanity has invented a long time ago notably for commerce. In Roman time, “wine amphoras” held a standard volume of about 39 litres but there was a large variety of amphora of different standardized volumes and heights from 1.5 to 0.3 metres high. Since this dawn age, standardization has been conceptualized, formalized and refined to end up with current modern standardization systems.

It is interesting to note that nowadays **all nation states are involved in standardization** and are equipped with national Official Standardization Organizations (OSOs) covering nearly all domains from trade, techniques, quality to management and sustainability to name a few. This fact is a powerful proof that standardization fills an essential need of our current world. If not, logic has it that OSOs will exist only in some countries and dealing only with specific topics. However, independently of the cultural background, the political structure, the legal system and the economic organization, all countries have the capability to write and adopt official standards. Without standardization a gap is unfilled particularly in the economic field; therefore, economic actors should invest time to understand standardization, its benefits and its constraints: ignoring a universal tool such as standardization is never a good idea. No need to state that a lot of standards are addressing topics directly related to the economic field but also related topics such as sustainability and safety. Thus, an increasing and significant number of standards addresses societal, environmental and sustainable issues and impacts directly or indirectly companies, especially the ones having sustainability objectives and adopting triple bottom-line reporting.

It may be inferred that standardization is a tool which plays a role in the competitiveness of individual companies, economic sectors and supply chains.

The admixture of formal and informal law is a common feature of any legal order and standardisation is clear a soft law instrument. They, the interplay of soft and hard law makes standards an efficient mechanism that influences the governance and conducts of companies and governments even if they are not *stricto sensu* legally-binding and enforceable. The place of standardization in the legal system will be discussed.

All these call for an active participation of companies in standardization. What are the roadblocks to increase company participation in standardization?

The advantages associated with standardization such as in risk reduction, capability building, intelligence and better control of its environment in the long term will be discussed. This chapter per the author will show how companies can get involved in standardization and how they can benefit from such involvement.

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