

WHY BOULDERS DESERVE OUR RESPECT

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For some decades now, the Society for the German Language in Wiesbaden has been choosing the word, and especially the *un-word*, of the year. In recent years, the concept of “sustainability,” in particular, has had an increasing chance of being honored with this dubious title. Over the past few years, this term has been so misused and overused in politics and business that we can no longer bear to hear it. This is quite surprising, because the word actually stands for positive developments and essential considerations: namely, how we human beings could act ecologically, economically, and fairly. It is about how we could carefully protect the planet that has been given to us by previous generations, so that it remains worth living on for the generations to come.

The idea has its origins in forestry. As early as the 18th century, people realized that forests had to be logged carefully—that is, only in sections. If you cut down all the trees at once, this may mean maximizing profit in the short term, but you risk losing the forest as a source of income and as an equally valuable natural habitat. If, on the other hand, you act carefully and only fell as many trees as can grow back in the medium term, the forest will be able to regenerate. It will remain intact, in ecological balance, and also profitable in economic terms—that is, sustainable for both nature and humankind.

However, sustainability does not apply only to forests, but is understood as having a wider application

today. In 2015, the United Nations formulated 17 goals for “sustainable development,” placing human beings at the heart of them. The scope of these Sustainable Development Goals ranges from gender equality and decent work for all to the protection of ecosystems. These ambitious goals, which usually require complex solutions, can only be achieved through global partnerships. Communities of nations must be just as involved as companies. The idea of sustainability has long since ceased to be a philosophical luxury. We all bear responsibility for a life free of conflict and, in extreme cases, even for the survival of humanity within an intact natural environment, and we must all make our contribution to this.

What do these considerations have to do with boulders? Boulders were often created millions of years ago and will probably still be part of the landscape when we humans no longer exist, so why would we have to think about sustainability in terms of bouldering as well? After all, it is a sport that requires minimal equipment and follows very simple rules, and nothing is drilled: Apart from the regular removal of plant growth and the use of chalk, the rocks remain largely intact and undamaged. Which in itself is very sustainable, isn't it?

This is true in principle, but it is equally true that in the last few years the sport of climbing as a whole has experienced a huge boom, and therefore

In “Magic Valley” (Hamachal Pradesh, India), Bernd Zangerl has, along with the local population, developed a strategy to deal with bouldering. It is necessary to regulate the influx of tourists to preserve the area for the future.

