

>> SYNTHESIZE MOUNTAINS OF KNOWLEDGE <<

## Submitted Abstract

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## Abstract

Climbing is one of the oldest human activities. Scaling mountains and overcoming vertical challenges has been present throughout human history. Usually, the motivation for this activity was derived from exploration, science and conquest. Around the end of 19th century, climbing gained popularity as an adventurous activity, which slowly shifted towards a more sportive orientated activity. This trend kept evolving and developed into today's disciplines like sport climbing, trad climbing, bouldering and competition climbing which made this mountain sport available for everyone.

Today, rock-climbing is well recognized and established in the world. With the rise of popularity, many new challenges and issues emerged. Foremost, rock-climbing takes place in nature, where problems aroused in connection with nature protection. Rock-climbing affects the animals, plants, and, of course, geological structures. Most of the animals and plants which can be found in rock-climbing areas, are adapted specialists and extremely vulnerable. The nature experience during the climbing activity depends to a great extent on an intact nature environment and, on the long run, serves for our sustainable human livelihood.

Based on a social-cultural point of view, climbers were early stigmatized as disrespectful grungy looking guests who are doing drugs, bringing little money, and leaving many problems. The social and environmental components of rock-climbing lead to a complex conglomeration of conflict of interests. Apart from this, rock-climbing also affects cultural heritage sites as well as religious and spiritual sites. Although some conflicts have eased, the need for sustainable management of rock-climbing areas is today even greater due to increased visitor pressure.

In the framework of an EU project, an attempt was made to create an official definition of rock-climbing and its disciplines. This was accomplished by an international expert group to create the most appropriate transversally valid definition. The study also investigated all possible areas where rock-climbing has an impact, especially on the environment. A major backbone of the project was an extensive survey which was distributed to the major rock-climbing associations in 29 European countries. The analysis revealed which interest conflicts are prevailing in connection with climbing and how prominent they are. The study highlights viable elements on which a sustainable rock-climbing area management should build. Three case studies of successful rock-climbing area management systems give a holistic example of how a structured approach to visitor guidance could lead to a win-win situation for the majority of the involved stakeholders.