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Climbing halls

Climbing hall operators hit by lockdown, but optimistic about the future

## Climbing booming despite Covid

Friedrichshafen – The pandemic and resulting lockdowns have disproportionately affected musicians, restaurants, event and trade show organisers, and also climbing wall operators. State subsidies, strong industry associations and individual creativity have helped prevent the worst. Vertical Pro is the trade show and meeting point for the indoor and outdoor climbing industry, rope and safety systems and occupational health and safety in Friedrichshafen on 19 and 20 November 2021. “We look forward to being able to meet in person. Exchanging opinions, learning about new products and trying out new equipment is indispensable – and more important than ever after a year without larger physical industry meet-ups. The Demo + Test Area provides an extensive overview of the latest products and systems for everyone who works at height or climbs in their free time,” explains Project Manager Dirk Heidrich.

The figures make sobering reading: Climbing walls in Germany expect to generate two-thirds less annual turnover from the “2020/21 climbing hall season”. “The six months over winter are the strongest part of the year and normally account for some 60-65 per cent of annual profits,” says Elias Hitthaler, German Alpine Association (DAV) Expert for Climbing Halls, “but the walls were closed from November to mid-April.” The problem is that overheads remained constant. Rents, and in particular loan repayments – climbing halls involve considerable initial investment – did not stop. And unlike the consumer sector, there was no catch-up boom when the halls



reopened. Visitor numbers remain down due to hygiene measures and there is the time factor too: “Just because you couldn’t climb much in January, it doesn’t mean that you then climb more in July,” explains Elias Hitthaler. Nevertheless, the feared wave of closures has been avoided. The DAV sections were entitled to support from the substantial Corona programme, which helped them to survive, he explains. “The subsidies compensated for the losses,” says Elias Hitthaler. “However, it was a difficult process, as it was only possible to get answers to many of the questions relating to the scheme at a relatively late stage.”

Many hall operators had to find their own way through the complex application procedure. Only a small percentage of halls in Germany are run by DAV sections, the majority are private (individual) companies. And they reacted quickly and creatively. During the first wave, the Boulderwelt bouldering gym chain wrote an open letter on 25 April to Joachim Herrmann, the Bavarian State Minister for Sport with a proposed health and safety concept – before the DAV or climbing hall professional association KLEVER had started to get active.

Other operators, such as Camp4, launched support campaigns, under the motto “Help your climbing hall to survive the Covid-19 crisis!” to cover their running costs. “The money will be used solely to maintain the climbing hall. In addition, to covering the overheads, we will undertake repairs and improvements. As such, we would like to give something back. To improve your visit to the hall.” – this is how Camp4 describe their campaign on an internet funding platform. For the 2021/22 season, the halls hope to do better thanks to Germany’s 3G or 2G restrictions (*geimpft* - vaccinated, *getestet* - tested, *genesen* - recovered). Moreover, operators feel that they are making a positive contribution to overcoming the crisis as climbing is healthy and has a very positive impact on overall health and well-being.

The number of active participants is increasing and before the Corona pandemic, climbing halls were growing almost exponentially. This is confirmed by the DAV’s statistics: “In 1989, there were 20 new halls in Germany. Eleven years later, 180 new halls were built, and in 2015 a further 440 were added.” In addition, the DAV calculates that there are around half a million sport climbers in Germany (before Covid), and estimates that 76 per cent of them are DAV members. There is something else that the DAV member survey also shows: more and more members are visiting the halls

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and gyms to go climbing and bouldering. In 2013, only 25 per cent of DAV members went climbing and 11 per cent went bouldering, while by 2017 this had increased to 28 per cent and 20 per cent respectively – and there is no end to the boom in sight. This year, the Olympics also generated more attention for competitive climbing,” says Elias Hitthaler.

The Vertical Pro trade show takes place for the first time on 19 and 20 November 2021 in Friedrichshafen in accordance with a proven health, safety and hygiene concept. For more information, visit [www.vertical-pro.com](http://www.vertical-pro.com).



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