



There's no shortcut to sustainability!

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Reinhard Schneider (Werner & Mertz) and Daniel Merdes (BOS Deutschland) talk about climate neutrality as a presumed remedy

Climate neutrality is the new trend appearing on product labels and in manufacturers' advertising. At first the idea sounds very promising. Companies compensate for their CO₂ emissions, for example, by purchasing certificates that fund extensive reforestation measures. One euro per tree and the climate is saved. But is it really so simple?

Unfortunately not, according to Reinhard Schneider, owner of the Mainz cleaning products company Werner & Mertz, and Daniel Merdes, Managing Director of Borneo Orangutan Survival Deutschland (BOS Deutschland). In a 30-minute Talk on the Red Couch, they speak about modern trading in "indulgences" and how the goals of the Paris Agreement on climate change can truly be achieved.



Werner & Mertz owner Reinhard Schneider (right) talks with Daniel Merdes of BOS Deutschland and moderator Hanna Gersmann. Photo Copyright: Werner & Mertz

Radically reduce ecological footprint instead of compensating for it



For several reasons, both are highly critical of the "climate neutral" efforts of some companies. First, many businesses that offer climate compensation lure customers with low prices and undercut each other. In this case Merdes issues a warning: "When the price for planting a tree is very low, the offer is probably not serious." Instead of comparing the cost of tree planting, he suggests that companies compare the cost of seedling survival rates. "Planting trees is not enough. The first three years are especially critical. Growth has to be monitored and it may be necessary to intervene," said the managing director of BOS Deutschland. Evidence of the trees' real growth should be made as transparent as possible, with photos taken by satellites or drones, for example. Otherwise, compensation remains only a "make-believe number in the statistics and modern indulgences trading," Schneider added.

He sees a completely different problem. The apparently simple compensation of CO2 emissions might tempt companies to cease making improvements that would reduce their own carbon footprints. But, says Schneider, "Climate protection has to start in the area of design and should strive to be holistic." His company's philosophy is summed up in "integrally sustainable". In addition to high-quality recyclable packaging made from recycle and surfactants from European cultivation, Werner & Mertz has set its stake on sustainable construction of the new production center and increasing the electric mobility of its employees. "There is no shortcut to genuine sustainability," he says.

What does real climate protection look like?

Merdes agrees with Schneider. BOS Deutschland has offered reforestation for years and has recently received inquiries about its work from a number of companies. Such projects with the organization, however, are linked with conditions. "We require that companies go directly to their own supply chains and begin making changes there. Companies that can prove transparent and fair improvement efforts can cooperate with us," says Merdes.

As a cooperation partner of BOS Deutschland since 2019, Werner & Mertz works with the NGO to promote biodiversity and conservation of the rainforest and the natural habitat of the orangutans. When Schneider received the German Environmental Award, he donated the prize money of 250,000 EUR to the Mawas reforestation project run by BOS.

The high implementation rate BOS Deutschland has achieved convinced Schneider that the organization has not only CO2 reduction in mind, but biodiversity and species variety too.

"When key species like the orangutan disappear, many other species are irretrievably lost because the entire cycle is destroyed. That's why biological diversity has to be considered in every reforestation project. It is valuable for ethical reasons and essential for the future of our ecosystems," Merdes says.

Only then can the 1.5-degree goal of the Paris Agreement be achieved. If not, irreversible effects threaten not just orangutans and rainforests, but all natural systems, including humans.

This will take you to: Talk auf der roten Couch (German only)

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