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**SOME SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF  
THE SLOVENIAN MOUNTAINEERS AND THEIR  
MOTIVES FOR MOUNTAINEERING**

**NEKATERE SOCIALNO-DEMOGRAFSKE ZNAČILNOSTI  
SLOVENSКИH GORNIKOVI IN MOTIVI ZA GORNIŠKO  
DEJAVNOST**

### Abstract

The aim of the research was to establish the social status of mountaineers and their motivation for mountaineering in Slovenia on a sample of 1,294 persons that visited one of the mountain huts in the Julian Alps, Kamnik-Savinja Alps or the Karavanke Mountains. Furthermore, we tried to demonstrate the parallels and differences between our research and similar previous study (Burnik, 1973). The descriptive statistics and the  $\chi^2$  test were used. The results show that the Slovenian mountaineers belong to several different age groups and have different education. The respondents were satisfied with their economic status, although they had classified themselves predominantly as belonging to the lower social class. The prevailing motive for mountaineering was "the beauty of nature and a genuine contact with nature"; other motives depended mostly on the age of the respondents. Statistically significant change was recorded in the values of investigated socio-demographic variables depending on age. According to the results mountaineering in Slovenia is not one of the recreational activities that would emphasise social differentiation.

*Key words:* mountaineering, socio-demographic characteristics, motives, age

### Izveleček

Namen raziskave je bil na reprezentativnem vzorcu slovenskih gornikov (1294 oseb) ki so obiskali eno od planinskih postojank v Julijskih Alpah, Kamniško-Savinjskih Alpah ali Karavankah, ugotoviti njihov socialni položaj in njihovo motivacijo za gorniško dejavnost. Nadalje smo skušali v članku prikazati tako podobnosti kot tudi razlike v rezultatih naše raziskave glede na rezultate predhodne študije (Burnik, 1973). To smo ugotavljali s pomočjo osnovne statistike in  $\chi^2$  testa. Rezultati kažejo, da gorniki, ki zahajajo v slovenske gore, pripadajo različnim starostnim kategorijam in imajo različno izobrazbo. Ugotavljamo, da v gore zahaja vse več starejših in izobraženih ljudi. Anketiranci so zadovoljni s svojim materialnim položajem, čeprav se sami uvrščajo pretežno v nižji družbeni sloj. Med motivi za gorniško dejavnost prevladuje motiv »naravnih lepote in pristnejšega stika z naravo«, drugi motivi pa so odvisni od starosti anketirancev. Tudi proučevane socialnodemografske spremenljivke se statistično značilno razlikujejo glede na starost. Podatki nakazujejo, da gorništvo ni ena izmed tistih športno-rekreativnih oblik, ki bi v Sloveniji poudarjala socialno razslojevanje.

*Ključne besede:* gorništvo, socialno-demografske značilnosti, motivi, starost

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## INTRODUCTION

The most popular sports activity in Slovenia is hiking in nature across more or less hilly terrain. Therefore we sometimes name it tripping and hiking, sometimes mountaineering and mountain climbing. Mountaineering could be said to be an inseparable part of the Slovenian identity, a part of the Slovenian cultural heritage and of the Slovenian psychological image. Slovenia is an alpine country, where mountaineering is one of the most popular sports activities. About 80,000 Slovenians are members of the Slovenian Mountaineering Association. Mountains and mountain images often appear in Slovenian art and culture. With mountaineering and mountain climbing, Slovenians fought and won the battle for national identity, although the tendencies towards germanisation of Slovenians and Slovenia were strong and intense in the times of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

According to Janez Vajkard Valvasor's work "Slava Vojvodine Kranjske" (The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola), published in 1689, the first mountaineers in Slovenia were poachers and shepherds. As they sought for their lost goats and followed chamois herds, they climbed many rock walls and mountains in the Alps. Their achievements were not officially registered and were passed on to the future generations mostly as legends.

Mountain climbing is also characteristic of Slovenians. Apart from top sports achievements, there are also abundant literary works on mountain climbing and mountaineering. These reflect that Slovenians are aware of mountaineering and mountain climbing having a much deeper meaning than a mere sports activity. This phenomenon is partly described in the Slovenian Rock Walls (Mihelič, & Zaman, 1987). "One of the highest forms and values of mountain climbing is the experience of nature, as well as oneself, during a climb. Defence mechanisms, triggered by threat, transform a human body into a shivering antenna. The ordinary senses are not enough anymore, one directly absorbs the experience."

Different scientists tried to capture in a general formula the ideology, worldview, philosophy and the corresponding mentality of those that allow themselves to experience the excitement of mountaineering. In the past centuries, each generation tried to use mountaineering for personal expression, thanks to its unique characteristics. This goes as far back as to Petrarca's description of a climb to Mont Ventoux, in which he opposed the medieval relation to nature and mountains and celebrated the silence of mountain forest and meadows.

Motives for mountaineering have in fact been changing through historical periods. Some of them have lost their meanings, while others remained more or less unchanged. Kristan (1993) has collected them into the following string: commercial, expert, scientific, nationally political, emotionally romantic, aesthetically hedonistic, medically hygienic, sportily efficient and social motive, topped by the desire for discovering something new, unknown, seeking adventures, recognition and enforcement as well as compensation, identification and an escape into solitude.

Investigations in the past 20 years have shown that the most important motives for mountaineers and mountain climbers are aesthetics and health (Burnik, 1976; Nečimer, 1996; Stojin, 1999). The majority of mountaineers pointed out that they go to the mountains to admire the beauty of nature, experience the genuine contact with nature, as well as for health reasons and to retreat from the city haste into the world of peace and silence. These motives are followed by the desire to overcome the utmost efforts and difficult paths, as well as the ambition

to climb and discover new paths. At first sight it might appear that there is nothing left to discover, that pioneering is nowadays only the privilege of the rich. However, the mountains still offer attractions. Each new climb is a breakthrough to the unknown. The attractions of the mountains are hidden not only in the romantic escape from everyday life, but also in love of contrast. Simple, unromantic, always the same, but in fact grandiose, demanding something from a person.

Those who choose to spend their spare time in the mountains and find mountains a suitable place, meet a strong but natural element. This element makes them aware of the weaknesses and deficiencies of the modern world, sets the limits of their being, testing gravity and balance. Experiencing the mountains provides for new truths, enriches a person and enables self-understanding and discovery. Furthermore, one learns to value simplicity and pleasures that cannot be found in the modern, technologically-oriented everyday environment. Experience and comprehension that can elsewhere be obtained only with difficulty represent the ethical value of mountaineering.

This article discussed the social status and motivation of the Slovenian mountaineers in 2000, aiming to establish the changes between the selected variables recorded in a similar investigation, which was carried out in 1976 (Burnik, 1976). The results of the investigation enable us to place a Slovenian mountaineer into modern space and time and at the same time to envisage in which direction Slovenian mountaineering is developing, especially in the light of social changes.

## METHOD

### Participants

The sample group consisted of 1,294 persons who had visited one of the 10 mountain huts in the Julian Alps or one of the 11 mountain huts in the Kamnik-Savinja Alps or the Karavanke Mountains. Of all the collected questionnaires, 92% were filled in correctly. The investigation was anonymous, the mountain huts were chosen randomly on the basis of the following conditions: a) the access time had to be at least two hours, and b) the hut keepers being willing to cooperate. Participants visited one of the mountain huts during the survey, i.e. from 12 – 13 and 19 – 20 August 2002. It could be said that the sample of the mountaineers is a representative indicator of the widest population of Slovenian mountaineers.

### Instruments

The survey questionnaire consisted of two sets of variables: a) socio-demographic variables (age, level of education, economic status and social class), and b) motives for mountaineering (9 variables).

### Procedure

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the variables and the  $\chi^2$  test was used for establishing the differences between the selected variables.

## RESULTS

### Socio-demographic characteristics

*Table 1: Age of Mountaineers in the years 1976 and 2000*

Category	Age	1976	2000
1	up to 20 years	35.1%	16.8%
2	21-30 years	35.9%	20.9%
3	31-40 years	17%	20.7%
4	41-50 years	7.9%	23.2%
5	over 50 years	4.1%	18.4%

Mountaineers who frequent the Slovenian mountains belong to different age groups. It is interesting that the share of all established age groups is almost equal, i.e. about 20% (see table 1). In comparison with the results of Burnik's investigation (1976) that represents an important difference. At that time, 71% of the mountaineers were younger than 30, while today only 38% of the mountaineers belong to that age group. Surprisingly, 18% of the mountaineers are over 50 (in the past 4%). Some other investigations also show that sports activity increases in elderly people. However, 65% of people between 50 and 60 are still not involved in any sports activity (Petrović, Ambrožič, Bednarik, Berčič, Sila, & Doupona Topič, 2001). Also one third of the young - 18 to 25 years of age - are not practising sport. In the age group over 60 years more than 10% of the respondents still regularly (at least once a week) practice sport (Beranič, 2001).

*Table 2: Education of mountaineers in the years 1976 and 2000*

Category	Education	1976	2000
1	No education	6.7%	4.1%
2	Primary school	11.9%	11.1%
3	Vocational school	23.0%	15.3%
4	Secondary school	26.7%	28.5%
5	Grammar school	10.3%	9.1%
6	College	9.2%	13.5%
7	University	12.2%	18.5%

It can be concluded that ever more educated people go to the mountains. Among the mountaineers that were questioned in 2000, 32% had high school or university education, which was 50% more than in the past (Burnik, 1976). The differences in other educational categories were less distinctive, with the exception of 10% more mountaineers with only vocational school compared to the figure recorded in the year 1976.

**Table 3: Social class of mountaineers in the years 1976 and 2000**

Category	Social class	2000
1	lower	53.5%
2	middle	44.9%
3	higher	1.3%

The mountaineers were asked to place themselves into a social category according to their own opinion. The results of the investigation show that more than half of the mountaineers considered themselves as belonging to the lower social class. Only 1% would place themselves into the high social class, and one half into the middle social class.

With regards to the fact that the level of education greatly contributes to the amount of salary and at the same time determines a person's social position, it can be assumed that the results partly show also the economic status (wealth) of an individual. The estimation (again subjective) of the economic status of the respondents, however, shows a different picture.

**Table 4: Economic status of mountaineers in the years 1976 and 2000**

Category	Economic status	1976	2000
1	dissatisfied	45.5%	10.4%
2	average	33.8%	19.9%
3	very satisfied	20.6%	69.8%

As many as 70% of the respondents were satisfied with their social status and only 10% were dissatisfied. By contrast, in 1976 the latter accounted for 45%. To sum up, the mountaineers participating in the research place themselves into the lower social class and are satisfied with their economic status.

### **Socio-demographic characteristics in terms of the mountaineers' age**

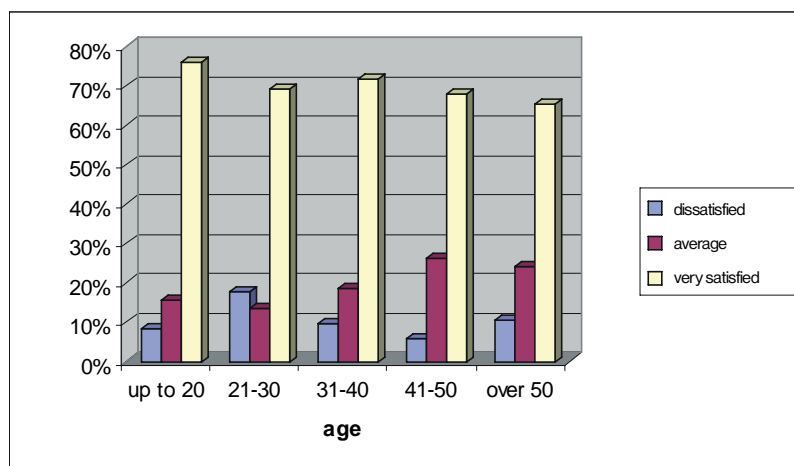
The results of our investigation show that there are statistically significant differences between the chosen socio-demographic variables in terms of age.

**Table 5: Three-point motives in terms of age**

	up to 20	21-30	31-40	41-50	over 50
Beauty of nature	64.1	64.4	64.9	66.3	69.2
Social contacts	7.8	5.6	3.7	3.0	3.8
Health	5.1	8.1	11.2	14.0	18.1
Collecting stamps	4.6	1.9	0.7	0.7	0.4
Peace and silence	5.1	14.1	11.9	10.7	3.0
Climbing	6.9	2.2	2.2	0.0	1.7
Pleasure in surmounting	5.5	2.2	3.7	3.7	3.8
Business	0.5	0.4	0.7	0.3	0.0
Other	0.5	1.1	0.7	0.7	0.0

$$\chi^2_{(40)} = 112.2 \quad p < 0.0005$$

In sociological investigations, the level of education is closely connected with social differentiation of society. The type and level of one's education can have a considerable impact on one's professional status. As a rule, people with higher level of education get better jobs, which also brings higher income, better working conditions and greater influence in society. Investigating the educational structure of the respondents it was established that more than one half of the mountaineers in the first age group (less than 20 years of age) have a very low level of education (completed or uncompleted primary school). This should not be surprising, for the youngest mountaineers (up to 20 years) were still in the process of gaining further education. Far more significant for our analysis were the mountaineers who were older than 30 years (age groups 3, 4 and 5), because the majority of them had already finished their education. The results show that in these age groups high-level education prevails.



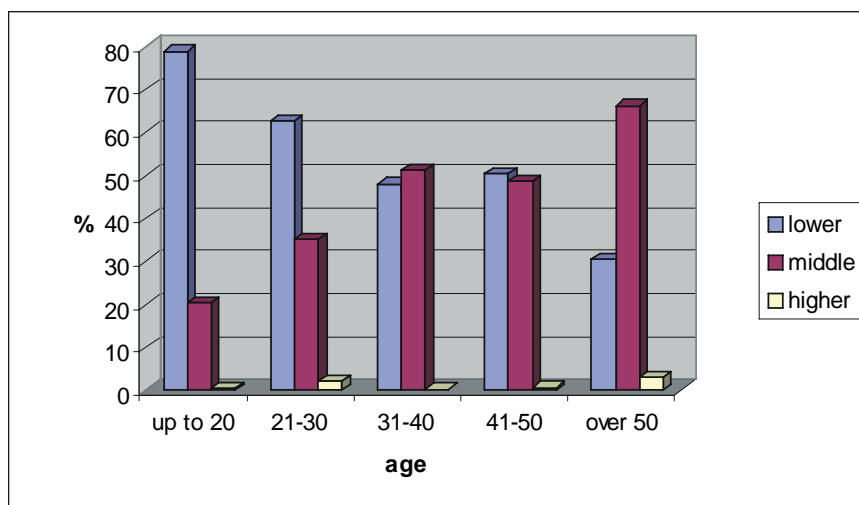
$$\chi^2_{(8)} = 40.2$$

$$p < 0.0005$$

**Figure 1: Economic status of the mountaineers in terms of their age**

Of all the respondents, the youngest were most satisfied with their economic status, namely 76% of the mountaineers below 20 years of age were satisfied with their economic status. It is possible that the youngest Slovenian mountaineers are not facing any existential problems, for their economic security is still provided for by their parents. Some other investigations, however, had shown (Černigoj-Sadar, & Brešar, 1996) that young people without children have the best housing conditions in Slovenia. Only the members of older generations (more than 64 years of age) dispose with more square meters per resident on average. Parents with pre-school children live in the poorest housing conditions, whereas parents living with school children or older children are somewhat better off. Those results are consistent with the results of our investigation, for the members of the middle age groups (20 – 40 years of age) expressed the strongest dissatisfaction with their economic status. However, one can observe that the dissatisfaction of the mountaineers participating in the research increases with age and then rises again in the highest age group (retirement).

There is a surprisingly small number of those who are partly satisfied and a large number of those who are very satisfied. As already stated, people who go to the mountains have different values and life philosophy.



$$\chi^2_{(12)} = 129.8$$

$$p < 0.0005$$

**Figure 2: Social class of mountaineers in terms of their age**

Furthermore, we have concluded that the share of mountaineers belonging to the middle social class increases with the age group. In other words, the younger the mountaineers the more often they classify themselves into the lower social class.

As stated above, the methodology of classifying mountaineers into social classes and measuring their satisfaction with the economic status were decided on by each individual. Herewith, the key factor was probably of economic nature and not the level of education. A comparison of the share of the respondents with higher and high-level education with their share in the middle and especially high social class confirms that in our case the level of education cannot be simply transformed into the corresponding social group.

## Motives for mountaineering

The results show that the beauty of nature and a genuine contact with nature is still the major motive for mountaineering (three-point motive). That motive was chosen by 65.9% of the respondents. Health motive is the second (11.5%), followed by retreat from everyday life into peace and silence as the third. According to the previous investigation (Burnik, 1976) some differences can be identified in the motives of the mountaineers participating in the research. The major motive remains the same, while the second motive in 1996 was pleasure in surmounting large distances and heights with my own efforts and will power, which was in 2000 ranked fifth (3.7%) according to the results of our investigation. Challenge and competence comprised in that motive are important factors of intrinsic motivation. In some other investigations, scientists established the same hierarchy of motives for mountaineering (Nečimer, 1996; Strojín, 1999; Zakšek, 2000). The results prove nature to be the major motive for mountaineering. Additionally, people more and more often turn to nature to relax, balance life energy and conflicts as well as to establish social contacts.

Among the two-point motives the health motive is the most important. It is followed by: the beauty of nature and a genuine contact with nature, retreat from everyday life into peace and silence, social contacts and possibility of unrestricted behaviour and pleasure in surmounting large distances and heights with my own efforts and will power.

Among the one-point motives two motives share the first place, i.e. retreat from everyday life into peace and silence and pleasure in surmounting large distances and heights with my own efforts and will power. The motives that follow are: health motive and social contacts and the possibility of unrestricted behaviour.

**Table 6: Motives of mountaineers in the years 1976 and 2000**

	3-point motives		2-point motives		1-point motives	
	1976	2000	1976	2000	1976	2000
Beauty of nature	66.6%	65.9%	17.3%	16.4%	7.3%	8.7%
Social contacts	5.9%	4.6%	12.7%	15.0%	11.3%	10.2%
Health	7.8%	11.5%	25.4%	33.1%	17.2%	18.6%
Collecting stamps	0.5%	1.5%	3.7%	2.4%	9.1%	6.3%
Peace and silence	7.2%	9.3%	23.3%	16.0%	20.9%	23.7%
Climbing	2.2%	2.4%	5.1%	4.0%	5.3%	5.6%
Pleasure in surmounting	8.7%	3.7%	11.7%	11.9%	24.9%	23.7%
Business	0.2%	0.4%	0.6%	0.8%	1.8%	1.5%
Other reasons	0.8%	0.6%	0.2%	0.4%	1.8%	1.2%



Regardless of age, the major motive for mountaineering is the beauty of nature and a genuine contact with nature. The social motive is, understandably, in the foreground when younger generations are concerned, while the importance of the health motive increases with age. Collecting stamps is interesting for younger mountaineers. The retreat from everyday life into peace and silence is important for the so-called middle generation, which is most burdened by professional and family concerns. Climbing new ways and being capable of extreme efforts is closest to the youngest age group.

## DISCUSSION

The results of our investigation show that there was a difference in age between the respondents in the years 1976 (Burnik, 1976) and 2000. In 1976, it was predominantly the younger generation that frequented the mountains. Scientists agree on the fact that only those people neglect regular sports activity in elderly ages that didn't regularly take part in it when they were young. Mountaineering can be considered an irregular activity, for the majority of people go to the mountains in the summer. This stereotype, however, is slowly changing. More and more people go to the mountains regardless of the season, which means that they are active throughout the year. Usually they do not go to the highlands, but rather visit the terrain suitable to the season and the weather conditions.

The average age of today's mountaineers is 36 years, which is 10 years more than in 1976. We believe that this could be the consequence of continuity and sustainable sport – mountaineering habits.

Educational structure of the mountaineers show a tendency towards higher level of education in the year 2000, with mountaineers with high-level education accounting for 32% of the total. In 1976, the majority of the mountaineers had finished secondary or vocational school (58.4%), while in 1976 the respective share was only 43.8%.

On the one hand, the level of education of the entire population is improving, which is also shown by the following data: the share of the population over 15 years of age with primary education has grown from 25.4% in 1971 to 42.4% in 1991. The share of the population with higher or university education has risen from 3.3% to 8.8% (Statistical yearbook, 1994) in the same period. On the other hand, the level of sports activity greatly depends on the level of education. In Slovenia, as much as 80% of the population with primary school education doesn't take part in any form of sports activity. By contrast, more than 70% of the population with high-level education practice some type of sport. That group of the population is usually involved in regular and organised exercise (Petrovič et al., 2001), which is not entirely characteristic of mountaineering. Increasing involvement of the population with high education in mountaineering can be attributed to better access to information about the importance of sports activity, especially as a means of relaxation after stress at work, having a number of positive impacts on a person's health.

Lower level of education usually defines a lower social status, for it is normally connected with lower salary, which is often the reason for omitting sports activity. People with low salaries generally have to get an additional job and lack time as well as money to participate in sports activities. Presumably, the more favourable social and financial sources, better physical health and less effort, the more heterogeneous our spare time is. In Slovenia, this does not entirely hold

true. It was established that 32% of the mountaineers have high-level education. However, only 1.3% of them classify themselves into the high social class.

Spare time of the members of each social group is determined within a certain referential frame, and with regards to other social groups. The limitations of time depend on the status of the group and its members (černigoj-Sadar, 1996). This means that the respondents place themselves into the lower social class, while, on the other hand, they are satisfied with their economic circumstances. These results could be explained with an extended analysis that would include data on one's pecuniary circumstances, job, lifestyle, etc. That, however, was not the central objective of our investigation. It could be said that mountaineers are a specific group of people, who are not interested in piling up economic goods but are guided by other values.

Sport, as one of the most important fields of human life and work, should not reflect the differences between social classes. These differences, however, appear far too often. Since mountaineering is considered to be a part of the Slovenian national identity, it could connect people with different social background. Unfortunately, mountaineering requires certain equipment, which involves expenses. However, mountaineering is not one of the sports activities, which emphasise social differentiation (Burnik, 1976; Petek, 2000; Strojcin, 1999; Zakšek, 2000).

Social differentiation is characteristic of capitalist societies, and even more so of post-communist societies, where social differences have increased resulting in a small privileged group of people who got rich. Spare time of the members of each social group is determined within a certain referential frame, and with regards to other social groups. The extent of its limitations depends on the status of the group and its members (černigoj-Sadar, 1996). In traditional west European countries, social differentiation is a common phenomenon, and it represents a basis and a social motive for economic order. By contrast, understanding of the new social order in our society often serves as a basis for boasting and uncritically praising those that live in better economic conditions.

Nature is the strongest motive that brings mountaineers to the mountains. Regarding this motive no considerable differences were recorded between 1976 and 2000. In both investigations the beauty of nature and a genuine contact with nature was established as the most important motive. That leads to the conclusion that Slovenians have strong aesthetic sense when nature is concerned, and, even more importantly, the Slovenian mountaineers are intrinsically motivated for mountaineering. That is also the most important factor for persisting in a certain type of activity. Additionally, such high percentage can be considered in the light of the biological need for stimulation representing a fundamental need.

A distinctive difference appeared in connection with the motive pleasure in surmounting large distances and heights with my own efforts and will power, which decreased considerably, and was by the mountaineers ranked only fifth in 2000, while in 1976 it was second. It can be concluded that the efficiency-oriented behaviour of the Slovenian mountaineers was less prominent in the year 2000 than in 1976. An interesting fact is that only a small number of mountaineers take part in mountaineering for collecting stamps, a typically external motive. From the future perspective, this fact is positive, because people enjoy most those activities which motivate them internally and enable them to achieve the desired (or at least expected) results. Collecting stamps in mountaineering is thus only a sort of an additional activity.

The majority of people consider mountaineering still a seasonal activity, practised usually once a week, therefore this sort of activity is most welcome from the experiential point of view. It

has lasting positive consequences on the emotional level, which positively influence one's self-image. Physical activity has a beneficial influence on psychological balance. Additionally, satisfaction and enjoyment are positive feelings. Satisfaction can be understood as intrinsic motivation. That means that there is no external praise and that someone takes part in a sports activity out of pure enjoyment. In our case, that enjoyment comes from the delight in the beauties of nature. In part, however, enjoyment can be contributed also to reaching the end of the way. On the other hand, fear and related stress are sometimes experienced during mountaineering, especially when mountaineers set too high aims in order to impress themselves or their companions.

Social structure of mountaineers has been changing with time. There are more and more people who go to the mountains because sports activities in nature are gaining popularity. Mountaineering became a matter of fashion, so to speak. A lot of people who go to the mountains for those reasons lack the fundamental knowledge on mountaineering techniques and rules, necessary equipment, potential dangers and physical efforts needed for certain demanding climbs. A question often arises whether the schools and the Slovenian Mountaineering Association have done enough with regards to the above problem.

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