

## **MOUNTAINEERING AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Since its origins in Spain and across Europe, mountaineering has been inextricably linked with a desire to explore and get to know the natural environment by engaging in a sporting activity whose very essence entails respect for nature and the acquisition of values and positive attitudes on the part of the individual, and also society as a whole.

Trailblazing in the mountaineering sector in our country has mostly been limited to geologists, botanists, geographers and specialists in knowledge of the area, who explored the mountains to become better acquainted with them, to further their studies, and enable the rest of society to gain a better understanding of them based on respect and measured contemplation. The creation of the first trekking clubs (including, amongst others, the Catalan Association of Scientific Excursions, which was founded in 1876 and is now the Centre Excursionista de Catalunya, the Sociedad de Ciencias Naturales Aranzadi, the Sociedad Excursionista Manuel Iradier or the Real Sociedad de Alpinismo Peñalara) have been closely linked to natural history and scientific societies, along with educational movements like the Free Institute of Education. More specifically, Giner de los Ríos was one of the most outstanding promoters of this Institution and of various scientific, educational and recreational movements in the vicinity of the Guadarrama mountain range that gave education a fresh perspective, in which the mountains were seen as the ideal school for teaching about life. Thus, mountaineering clubs and educators in those days coincided not only in viewing the mountains as a playing field and source of knowledge, but also shared the feeling of the need to defend the mountains from further deterioration and the absence of a principle of environmental protection in urban society.

The origin of mountaineering is strongly linked to knowledge of the environment, this being the reason why many clubs also incorporate sections for natural history, folk culture, botany or nature photography. The function of these organisations and federations throughout the last century in non-formal education circles is unquestionable, as generations of mountaineers saw the mountains from the perspective of the values and attitudes that had been instilled in them, which have much in common with the values and attitudes nurtured by Environmental Education (EE) in general.

After the 3rd edition of the Seminar, held in Granada, focusing on mountaineering and its implications for sustainability, it seemed logical to develop a section of increasing relevance in urban society in the 21st century, and to which the confederation of mountaineers, their various bodies, climbing instructors and mountain guides have a great deal to offer and work for if greater degrees of environmental awareness are to be achieved in those people that wish to enter into contact with these landscapes under their own steam.

All educational processes, whether of an environmental nature or otherwise, involve the increase of knowledge, a change of awareness, and the promotion of new behaviours and values in relation to a specific topic or problem. With Environmental Education, the aim is for people to actively collaborate and participate in resolving environmental problems. In short, it entails developing practices that are more respectful of the natural environment – and the social environment, too, as everything is related. In the case that concerns us in this Seminar, the mountaineering world's capacity for action in this regard is very clear.

Talking about Environmental Education means talking about a continuous process in which people acquire knowledge, modify their attitudes, acquire new values, and increase their capacity for action to develop a pastime that is respectful to their natural surroundings. This process enables knowledge and positive aptitudes to be turned into attitudes and actions on the one hand, and at the same time “learn to participate by participating”, which implies a greater capacity for action by the mountaineering sector towards conservation of the environment.

The spheres in which we will be involved during this process – Environmental Education – are primarily school, family and society, and the associative fabric of which organised mountaineering is a part.

Informal Environmental Education transmits knowledge, attitudes and values associated with the environment, which entails adopting positive attitudes towards the social and natural environment, and results in care and respect for biological and cultural diversity. This transmission process is the common denominator of the anonymous work of hundreds of climbing clubs, federations, sports colleges and guides responsible for taking groups out on trips in natural surroundings.

We shall now consider the situation of present-day mountaineering with respect to environmental awareness, reflecting on the activities being carried out, to propose measures and channels for enhancing the socio-educational work performed for more than 130 years by the mountaineering sector in Spain.

### **MOUNTAINEERING AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

- 1.- Mountaineering is not only a sports activity, but also a form of behaviour that fosters the holistic development of the individual and society by providing social and educational values concerning the natural environment.
- 2.- Knowledge of the natural environment where the sports activities are performed forms the basis for guaranteeing respectful behaviour on the part of its practitioners, further supported by protocols and codes of good environmental practice, and the knowledge and understanding of the legislation in force affecting access and enjoyment of nature.

### **THE ROLE OF THE MOUNTAINEERING SECTOR IN INFORMAL ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

3.- The work carried out by the mountaineering sector throughout its long history has served to better understand and appreciate the landscape in a sustainable way. Mountaineering offers the possibility of enjoying an intense experience of the landscape albeit individually or as part of a group. The different sports activities practised in the mountains are a good way to find out about nature, by engaging in a recreational sports activity that has a strong ingredient of exploration, curiosity and direct knowledge of nature. Federations and clubs should continue with their task of providing active and responsible publicity for the scenery, it being imperative that the needs and motivations of both environmental and sports managers are taken into consideration.

4.- The role of hikers' and rambles' associations, climbing clubs, and federations with respect to the children's and youth sectors has been and still is the basic channel for transmitting values and serving as a social laboratory for learning. It is necessary to support these initiatives by supplying coaches and club members who organise camps, excursions, courses, hikes and so on, at club and federation level for no personal gain, with the sole aim of fostering activities that will raise these youngsters' awareness of the natural environment.

5.- Ever since they first appeared, mountaineering associations have been pioneers in this sector in advocating the protection and defence of mountainous areas. It is logical that they should be present in forums discussing and exchanging ideas on territorial planning and development due to the fact that this is the area in which mountaineering activities take place.

6.- The clubs' nature committees have been involved in spreading the word and raising awareness of the natural environment at local and regional level. This has resulted in the transmission of behavioural values and ethics, based on active involvement in environmental problems and participating in sporting activities in a responsible fashion. Such work should be firmly supported by the governing authorities to obtain greater awareness not only amongst these associations but by the rest of society as well.

7.- For more than a century mountaineering clubs and their federations have been carrying out extensive work in publishing books on the world of the hiker, showing views of landscapes and places from a hiking perspective, usually adopting a respectful approach to nature. This task of responsible dissemination of the environment (publications, talks, organising events, etc.) should be complemented and coordinated through publicity campaigns within the framework of the management of protected areas and other editorial sectors, with the aim of achieving information that will succeed in involving the users and readers in the conservation and responsible use of natural areas.

8.- Amongst the huge variety of professionals working in the mountains, refuge wardens perform tasks and cooperate with the managers of protected natural areas, and are thus considered to act as references for the environmental awareness activities conducted in these areas.

### **PARTICIPATION, VOLUNTEER WORK AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

9.- Participation is a fundamental tool for ensuring that people engaging in mountaineering activities are well-informed, aware and capacitated to take action to protect the environment since:

- It is a process by means of which the mountaineering sector carries out positive actions for the natural environment and also becomes actively involved in the participatory bodies and other forums concerning Protected Natural Areas.
- It enables the mountaineering sector to become an element that tells its members, along with society in general, about the importance of preserving the natural environment and also galvanises other people into action to adopt this commitment as well.
- It contributes towards achieving a better diagnosis of the problems of the area, and ensures a greater number of solutions or tasks that are binding for all involved since they have been reached by consensus.
- Knowledge on the part of the mountaineers of the environmental reality of the area where they carry out their activity is an extremely valuable resource for environmental education.

10.- Environmental voluntary work in Spain has a broad base partly due to the mountaineering sector and should therefore be given special attention and support, particularly in Protected Natural Areas.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. All parties concerned should work to enhance the environmental education of mountaineers in keeping with the guidelines and trends emanating from recent national and international conferences on the environment that propose advancing towards sustainability by involving all the agents concerned (federations, authorities, local population, etc.).
2. It is essential to disseminate and promote amongst public administrations and non-profit organisations (NGOs, sports, environmental, cultural, youth associations, etc.) the important work done by mountaineering clubs and federations holding beginners courses in mountaineering and familiarisation techniques with the surroundings as a considerate strategy for bringing the general public into contact with nature.
3. Mountaineering has traditionally been thought to encourage a set of values and behaviours that are respectful of the environment, which should be maintained and promoted in all areas of the sport (competitions, courses, outings, hikes, ascents, bivouacs, etc.). Environmental authorities and sports federations should work to disseminate codes of good environmental practice, in order to be able to make their messages and attitudes known more effectively amongst the different clubs in the confederation and all those groups that express concern for the mountains.
4. Formal, regulated training recognised by the Ministry of Education has its maximum expression in Royal Decree 1913/1997, of 19 December, by virtue of which training courses leading to qualifications as sports technicians are configured as specially regulated models of education. Mountaineering has – for the past decade – formed part of the formal education sector, with training including courses on the environment at curricular level, in particular the modules on environmental awareness and interpretation. Support should be provided from the sports colleges and public administrations for these qualifications and channels of cooperation set up between those responsible for managing the public use of Protected Natural Areas and mountaineering experts, in order to contribute towards acquiring better training in this subject, which will help in the transmission of environmental values and attitudes to people working as guides.
5. 50,000 kilometres of the network of long and short trails in Spain are now marked in accordance with the regulations and technical endorsement procedure. This system of rambler's walks forms a great tool for bringing society into closer contact with nature in a safe and respectful manner. It is interesting to see that the institutions responsible for managing Protected Natural Areas provide support and advice for endowing these trails with enhanced environmental content, particularly along short, local paths that can be used to convey knowledge and attitudes concerning the environment in a simple way. At the same time, greater coordination should be sought between the federations and environmental authorities with respect to the promotion and signposting of new trails.
6. The emergence of new technologies in society opens up another very attractive sphere of activity in the field of environmental education, above all using computer tools and information networks. This should provide the clubs and federations with a means of communicating and informing their members and also the rest of society as a whole in a responsible and sustainable fashion.
7. Closer contact with nature should be promoted through the federations and public organisations using non-motorised forms of sporting activities – in compliance with current legislation – which offer a sustainable method of discovering mountains, contributing through such good

environmental practice to the reduction of air pollution and the conservation of mountain regions in the face of the threats posed by climate change.

8. Federations and public administrations should promote and support documentation centres linked to mountain regions. These will aim to update and disseminate the use of services already existing in the field of environmental education, and also act as a tool to provide advice to teaching staff and institutions. Public administrations can be involved in helping to create and maintain these documentation centres through framework cooperation agreements.

9. An increase should be encouraged in the number of continuous training programmes put together by federations for teaching staff (instructors, technicians, guides, wardens, coaches, etc.) concerning environmental awareness and academic subjects, through agreements between federations and the competent public authorities for the environment, education and sports. In the same regard, federations will continue to be encouraged to work together with higher education and research centres, facilitating access to PNAs, along with their study and environmental assessment, with special emphasis on their social function.

10. The programmes and plans for Public Use and Environmental Education in PNAs should aim to boost the active participation of the federations and clubs in all matters relating to the dissemination of regulations governing public use, fostering the efficient development of sporting activities in natural environments, and the training of managers and associates in environmental issues.

11. PNA reception facilities, along with mountain refuges, should be integrated in education, dissemination and interpretation programmes, and act as a tool for publicising messages that foster attitudes showing greater respect for the environment, encouraging the active participation of visitors in general, and mountaineers in particular.

12. In this context, it is proposed that specific meetings should be arranged on a periodic basis between the managers of natural areas and mountaineering federations (on the lines of a socio-environmental communication platform) to mutually promote programmes and activities to raise environmental awareness, fostering attitudes and values in these areas that are respectful of nature and compatible with the practice of mountain sports.