

The influence of the Crown of Polish Mountains on the attitudes of its ascensionists

Abstract

The aim of this article is to identify the changes in the (intra- and interpersonal) attitudes of experienced travellers after climbing the highest peaks of the 28 mountain ranges in Poland. The survey was conducted on 617 members of the Club of the Ascensionists of the Crown of Polish Mountains. The respondents provided subjective evaluations of the changes in their attitudes (in nine proposed areas) that resulted from regular mountain hikes. The obtained results demonstrated a significant improvement in the practical skills related to mountain climbing, which was greater than the change in attitudes to other people and the physical condition of the respondents. The most significant changes concerned knowledge of Polish mountains, ability to plan trips, and persistence in pursuing goals. Statistically significant differences were also found between the ages, genders, and frequency of trips (in particular in reference).

Keywords

Mountain tourism • tourists' attitudes • personal and interpersonal change • change through travel • the Crown of Polish Mountains

Ewa Hyt, Andrzej Stasiak[✉]

Institute of Urban Geography, Tourism Studies and
Geoinformation, Faculty of Geographical Sciences,
University of Lodz, Lodz, Poland
e-mail: andrzej.stasiak@geo.uni.lodz.pl
e-mail: ewa.hyt@op.pl

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Introduction

The beginnings of tourism in Poland are intrinsically linked to mountain hiking. In 1873, the Tatra Society of Galicia was founded, and was the first tourist organisation in the Polish territories. Mountains, and in particular the Tatra, were not only a destination for holiday, tourist, and health-related (spa) trips, but also a rich source of inspiration for artists (writers, painters and musicians) and a treasury of national mythology that shaped the patriotism of subsequent generations of Polish people, both during the partitioning of Poland and after the country regained its independence in 1918.

In the political climate after World War 2, foreign trips became unavailable for most Polish citizens. Mainly national tourism could develop, and mountain tourism was an important part of this. Popular forms of tourism included trips and camps by organised groups (e.g. school pupils, students, employees) and long, individual backpacking or hiking trips from one mountain hut to another. In the 1970s and 1980s, future outstanding Polish climbers (J. Kukuczka, W. Rutkiewicz, K. Wielicki and P. Pustelnik) were starting their careers in the Polish mountains (Łojek 2005; Legienis 2019). The mountains were a source of aesthetic experiences, a place where personalities were formed and social interactions developed, but also a way to escape the grey reality and a sphere of freedom (including for political dissidents). The extreme popularity of mountain hiking has been proven, among other things, by the number of badges issued by the Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (PTTK). In the 1980s, approximately 50,000 tourists received the Mountain Tourist Badge (Wójcik 2015).

Mass egalitarian hiking ended with the political transformation in 1989. The socioeconomic transformations in Poland changed the nature of mountain tourism. Mass tourists now choose a few trendy resorts with luxurious hotels and boarding houses and popular, easy sightseeing routes. However,

one may still encounter experienced mountaineers in higher parts of the mountains, on more demanding paths, although there are decidedly fewer of them than before (Mokras-Grabowska 2016; Prószyńska-Bordas 2013; Rogowski 2017, 2018).

Mountain hiking still enjoys popularity and social respect in Poland. On the other hand, the interest in obtaining the traditional badges of the PTTK has decreased noticeably. In the 21st century, only over ten thousand Mountain Tourist Badges were granted every year, which marks a clear decreasing trend (Wójcik 2015). They are sometimes even considered to be "a relic of the old days" (Mokras-Grabowska 2016). However, some new projects have emerged to activate Polish hikers.

The Club of the Ascensionists of the Crown of Polish Mountains

Commonly known sets of mountain peaks in the world include the Crown of the Himalaya (14 peaks above 8,000 m a.s.l. in the Himalaya and Karakorum) and the Seven Summits (the highest peaks on each of the seven continents¹). On the other hand, Sidor and Zarzycki (2013) listed as many as 15 crowns to be conquered globally. However, the extreme weather conditions, the great difficulty of the ascension and the costs of organisation make them accessible only for a few very experienced climbers.² This is why other national and international badges and titles have been created, so that less advanced hikers can obtain them. The most popular ones among Polish tourists are: the Crown of Polish Mountains (Lewandowski & Więckowski 1997; Bzowski

¹Due to the controversial opinions on the highest peaks of Europe and Australia and Oceania, two additional peaks are often included in the Seven Summits, respectively: Elbrus and Puncak Jaya.

²The group of approx. 40 climbers who ascended the Crown of the Himalaya includes 3 Polish mountaineers: Jerzy Kukuczka (1987), Krzysztof Wielicki (1996) and Piotr Pustelnik (2010).

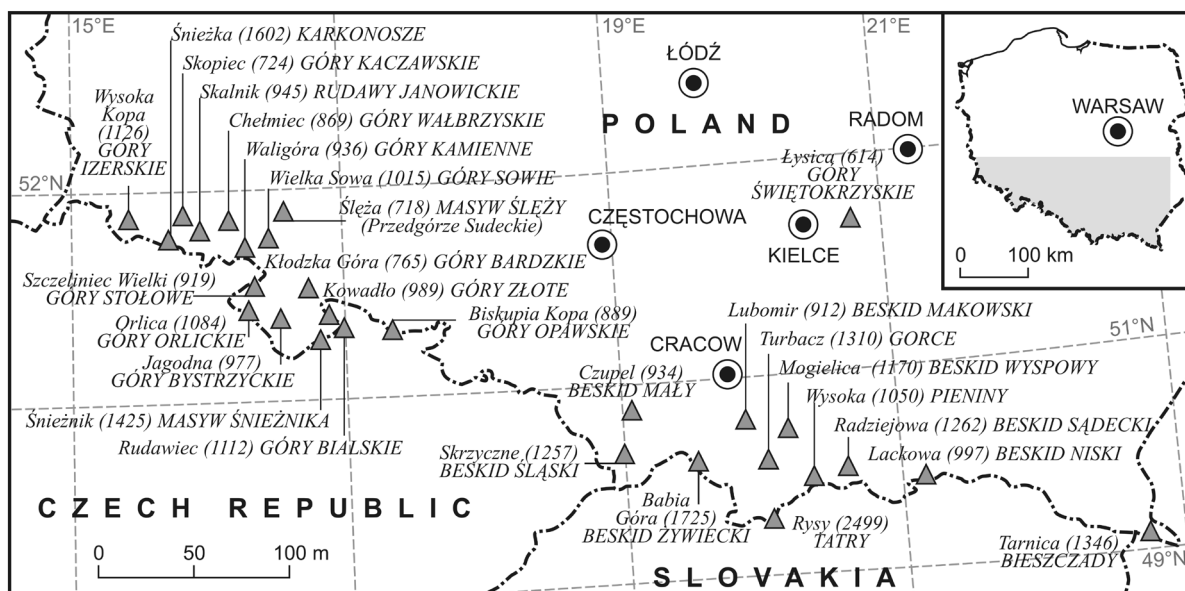


Figure 1. Peaks that form the Crown of Polish Mountains
Source: authors

2016), the Diadem of Polish Mountains (2013, 80 peaks in the Carpathia, Sudetes and Świętokrzyskie Mountains), The Crown of the Polish Sudetes (1999, the 31 highest peaks in the Polish part of the Sudetes), the Crown of the Sudetes (2001, 22 peaks in the Polish, Czech and German parts of the Sudetes) and the Great Crown of the Tatra (14 peaks over 8,000 feet, in the Slovakian Tatra).

The Crown of Polish Mountains was established in 1997. It consists of the 28 tallest peaks of all the mountain ranges in our country,³ includes various levels of climbing difficulty and heights ranging from 614 m a.s.l. to 2,499 m a.s.l. (Fig. 1). On 13 December 1997, the Club of the Ascensionists of the Crown of Polish Mountains was founded. Its members are both those who are in the process of ascending the peaks and those who have achieved the title of ascensionist. To gain this title, the person has to climb each of the 28 peaks, using only the power of their own muscles, and confirming each ascension with a photo and a stamp. There are no time limits. The Crown may be ascended either within a few days (the record for single climbers is less than 111 hours and for groups 76 hours) or over ten years or more.

The Club of the Ascensionists of the Crown of Polish Mountains organises trips to mountain peaks and mountain-themed events for its members, and sessions of the Lodge of Ascensionists, during which the achievements of candidates are verified. The Club has its own website (www.kgp.info.pl) that presents the most important information about the Crown of Polish Mountains, as well as lists of all members of the Club, ascensionists and multiple ascensionists of the Crown. Additionally, there is an online store that sells club gadgets and sports and tourist clothing. The Club of the Ascensionists of the Crown of Polish Mountains also has profiles on Facebook and Instagram. On Facebook, there is also a discussion group named "The Crown of Polish Mountains – Forum", whose members share practical information and their experiences.

At the moment of conducting the study (January 2019), the Club had 33,095 members (including nearly 1,800 ascensionists),

and in April 2022 the number of members increased to 80,020. Club Members are not only Polish citizens but also residents of several other European countries. Some of the hikers have climbed the Crown more than once. In 2019, 113 people ascended it twice, 38 – three times, 15 – four times, 10 – five times, and the record was 19 times. In 2021, these numbers were, respectively: 173, 59, 34 and 17 people. One of the climbers ascended the Crown 19 times and, another, 20 times.

Literature review

The current popularity of mountain hiking in Poland results from the historical, political and economic conditions mentioned above. The development of mountaineering in Western Europe in the 21st century results mainly from the trend of adventure tourism. However, there are few scientific publications that would allow us to better understand the participants of these kinds of trips (Pomfret 2006). Although the state of research in the world has been enriched since then (Pomfret & Bramwell 2016; Rantala, Rokenes & Valkonen 2018), there is still a lack of studies in Poland on changes in the attitudes of mountain hikers. The studies conducted in our country focus rather on the general characteristics of tourism in the area of the main national parks and the identification of its basic parameters (size, structure and seasonality), as well as the sociodemographic profiles of hikers, their motivations and the nature of their stay in the mountains. The studies conducted in the last decade analysed tourism in the following national parks: Bieszczady National Park (Prędko 2012), Gorce National Park (Semczuk, Majewski & Gil 2014), Pieniny National Park (Warcholik & Semczuk 2011), Tatra National Park (Hibner 2014; Mokras-Grabowska 2016), Karkonosze National Park (Fałk & Jarecka 2014; Rogowski 2018) and Góry Stołowe National Park (Rogowski 2017, 2020; Żyto et al. 2017). Some authors also attempted to conduct a comparative analysis of these areas in Poland (Hibner 2013; Prószyńska-Bordas 2013).

In literature, publications concerning mountaineering, rock hiking and climbing started to appear as early as the 1980s and 1990s (Ewert 1985, 1994). Since then, this issue has been the subject of studies on mountaineers in various parts of the globe (e.g. Baniya et al. 2021; Azmil & Marzuki 2015; Caber & Albayrak 2016; Gu et al. 2018; Pan & Ryan 2007; Wang 2004) or among specific

³The list includes peaks that may be reached by a marked tourist route. Some of them are the second-highest peaks in the respective mountain ranges.

social groups – for example, millennial students (Giachino, Truant & Bonadonna 2019; in Poland: Zarzycki 2004; Szczechowicz 2012; Korybut-Barska et al. 2013; Gawlas 2016). Studies have also been conducted on the psychological profile of rock climbers (Aşçi, Demirhan & Dinç 2007), self-efficacy and the willingness to take risks (Llewellyn et al. 2008), place meanings (Kulczycki 2014) and, generally, on the dedication, emotions, and experiences of mountain hikers (Delle Fave, Bassi & Massimini 2003; eds Musa, Higham & Thompson-Carr 2015).

In western countries, mountaineering was long considered to be a sport that is available only for the experienced members of the elite. However, in the second half of the 20th century, mountain tourism became democratised, and mountain hiking and climbing became very popular. The line between “real” mountaineers and “ordinary” tourists became blurred. The conceptual framework for the analysis of the experiences of mountain hikers became the objectives of adventure tourism (Swarbrooke et al. 2003; Weber 2001). This is completely reasonable, as features of mountain hiking such as physical activity, challenges and taking risks are indispensable elements of adventure tourism (Beedie & Hudson 2003; Pomfret 2006).

Consumer behaviour is one of the most often and most widely analysed areas in the field of tourism. Among the nine key concepts, Cohen, Prayag & Moital (2014) also distinguished attitudes. Attitudes are generally understood as a “person’s degree of favourableness or unfavourableness with respect to a psychological object” (Ajzen & Fishbein 2000, p. 2). They include learned behaviour and the way of perceiving and evaluating the key attributes of a given object. Authors of contemporary research studies in social psychology question the stability of attitudes: it is assumed that they may change under the influence of external factors or affective states (emotions or moods) (Ajzen & Fishbein 2000).

Attitudes are the subject of numerous research projects, but mainly as the key factor that determines making market decisions and the behaviour of consumers (i.e. tourists). As far as mountain areas are concerned, the analysed factors included, among others, the attitude of tourists towards products that originate from the mountains (Bassi et al. 2021) or of mountain communities towards the development of tourism (Chen & Qiu 2017).

Decidedly fewer authors focus on the changes in attitudes as an effect or consequence of travelling. The previous research focuses mostly on satisfaction and loyalty (Prebensen et al. 2013; Cohen et al. 2014), leaving the dimension of change practically unexplored (Staffieri et al. 2018). This is even more surprising, as authors very often emphasise the numerous benefits (educational, social or health-related) of tourist experiences (Petrick & Huehner 2013; Stone & Petrick 2013). This phenomenon may be justified by the difficulties in capturing changes in attitudes. They are difficult to identify, as they occur “in the minds” of tourists and the “change by travelling” is a complex, multi-faceted construct in itself. Authors emphasise that this concept has two dimensions (Fermani et al. 2017), or even three (Staffieri, Cavagnaro & Rowson 2018).

Objective and methodology of the research

The aim of the present study is to fill this knowledge gap and to identify and understand the changes (both intrapersonal and interpersonal) that occur in the attitudes of experienced mountaineers (in relation to the main sociodemographic variables). The research will improve our understanding of changes in attitudes as benefits from travelling experiences – in this case, regular mountain hiking trips undertaken over a long period of time as part of realising the project of ascending the Crown of Polish Mountains.

The research was conducted in January and February 2019. The research sample was selected randomly. Members of

the Club of the Ascensionists of the Crown of Polish Mountains were invited by e-mail to fill in an online survey questionnaire. It contained 19 closed questions concerning the motivations for their attempts to conquer the Crown, the nature of the mountaineering trips, and the ways in which they influenced the attitudes of the respondents. The second part of the questionnaire contained demographic questions that allowed us to identify the age, gender, education and place of residence of the participants.

Overall, 519 respondents took part in the survey. Such a large population sample allowed us to determine the statistical correlations between the age, gender or frequency of trips and the answers. A descriptive analysis of the results was conducted to evaluate the size of specific groups and frequency compared to the whole group. The results are presented, respectively, as N and %. For quantitative parameters, the results were presented as the average (\bar{x}), standard deviation (SD), and the values of the quartiles (Q1, Me, Q3) and extreme minimum and maximum values. Quantitative variables that do not have a normal distribution and do not meet the objectives of parametric tests were analysed using the Mann-Whitney test (for comparisons between two groups) and the Kruskal-Wallis test (for more than two groups). All analyses were verified using the significance coefficient $\alpha = 0.05$, which allowed us to consider variables with the p value < 0.05 as statistically significant.

However, one should remember that online surveys are not completely reliable, as they do not enable control over the sample. Another important limitation of the research is its autobiographic nature and self-reporting form. Changes in attitudes and behaviour were described by the respondents at their own discretion and without intervention. Due to the lack of a precise measurement scale, one must assume that the answers are highly subjective. Nevertheless, self-reporting is considered a popular and valid method for evaluating emotions related to tourism experiences (Li, Scott & Walters 2014).

Another issue that may raise doubts is the fact that the analysed changes are not differences between two measurements (e.g. before starting the attempts to ascend the Crown and after the ascension) but they reflect how the respondents perceived such changes at a specific moment. Moreover, the areas of change may not be exhaustive, as the respondents referred only to the attitudes proposed by the authors.

Characteristics of the respondents

Some 519 people took part in the survey. This group included 51.6% men and 48.4% women. The dominant group of respondents were young people, aged from 25 to 44 (nearly 70%). Both younger and older participants were a small percentage of the population. Almost two-thirds of the respondents had university degrees, and 31% graduated from secondary school. Fewer than twenty people had a lower level of education (primary or junior secondary school). A majority of the participants lived in cities (84.2%). The others (15.8% of the group) lived in the country. Table 1 presents the sociodemographic features of the survey respondents.

As far as the place of residence is concerned, the largest group of participants lived in the Silesian (śląskie) – 21.8%, Lower Silesian (dolnośląskie) – 17.3%, Masovian (mazowieckie) – 11%, Lesser Poland (małopolskie) – 10.2% and Greater Poland (wielkopolskie) Voivodeship – 9.1%, i.e. from the southern parts of Poland, which are situated in the vicinity of mountain ranges, and from highly urbanised areas (large urban agglomerations). The proximity of the mountains allows for more frequent trips, sometimes even one-day excursions, and lower travel costs. The spatial distribution of the places of residence of the respondents is shown in Figure 2.

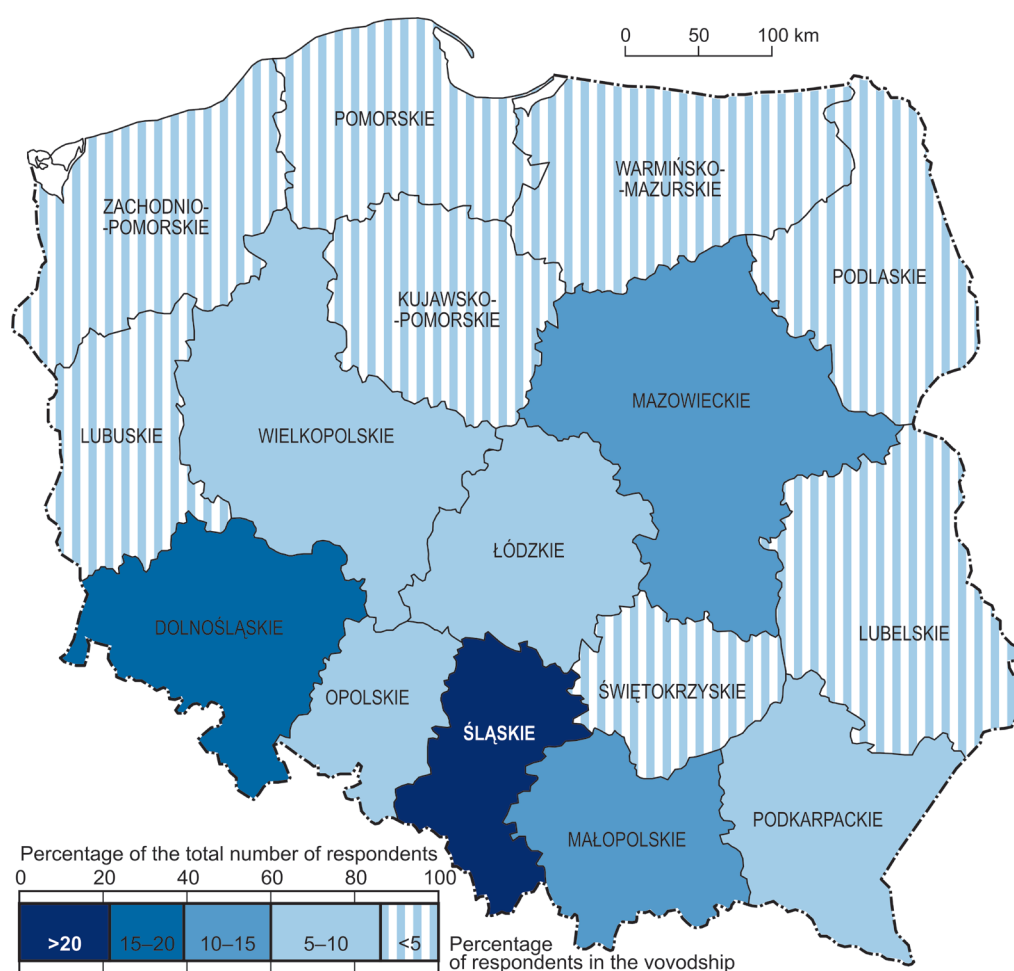


Figure 2. Places of residence of the respondents, according to voivodeships
Source: authors

Table 1. Personal characteristics of the respondents

Features	Variable(s)	N	%
Gender	Female	251	48.4
	Male	268	51.6
Age	15–24	39	7.5
	25–34	179	34.5
	35–44	180	34.7
	45–54	67	12.9
	55–64	45	8.7
	65 and over	9	1.7
Education	Primary	5	1.0
	Basic vocational	14	2.7
	Secondary	161	31.0
	Higher	339	65.3
Place of residence	Rural area	82	15.8
	Urban area < 50 000 inhabitants	122	23.5
	Urban area 50–99 000 inhabitants	90	17.3
	Urban area > 99 000 inhabitants	225	43.4

Source: authors

Results

Characteristics of the trips

The respondents were asked about the way in which they organised and undertook hiking trips with the aim of ascending the peaks of the Crown of Polish Mountains. Most of the participants started to pursue this goal when they were already experienced hikers. Usually, those who came up with this idea were seasoned tourists who were confident in their skills. However, 28% of the respondents reported that they had started climbing without any previous experience. Some 76% of the respondents started their Crown adventure within the 5 years preceding the survey. One-fifth of the participants had been climbing the peaks for 5 to 10 years, while the others needed more than 10 years to complete the project. The average for all respondents was 4 years.

The duration to ascend the Crown of Polish Mountains is not limited in any way and, yet, over half of the respondents travelled to the mountains more often than every three months, and nearly 30% every four to six months. Certainly, undertaking such an ambitious challenge effectively motivates tourists to go on mountain hikes more often and more regularly. Only one-fifth of the respondents visited the hiking routes less often than every six months.

As most of the participants are professionally active, they travelled to the mountains mostly at weekends (60%) and during holiday leave (23%). In order to save time and optimise the effect, the trips were organised so as to enable the climbing of several

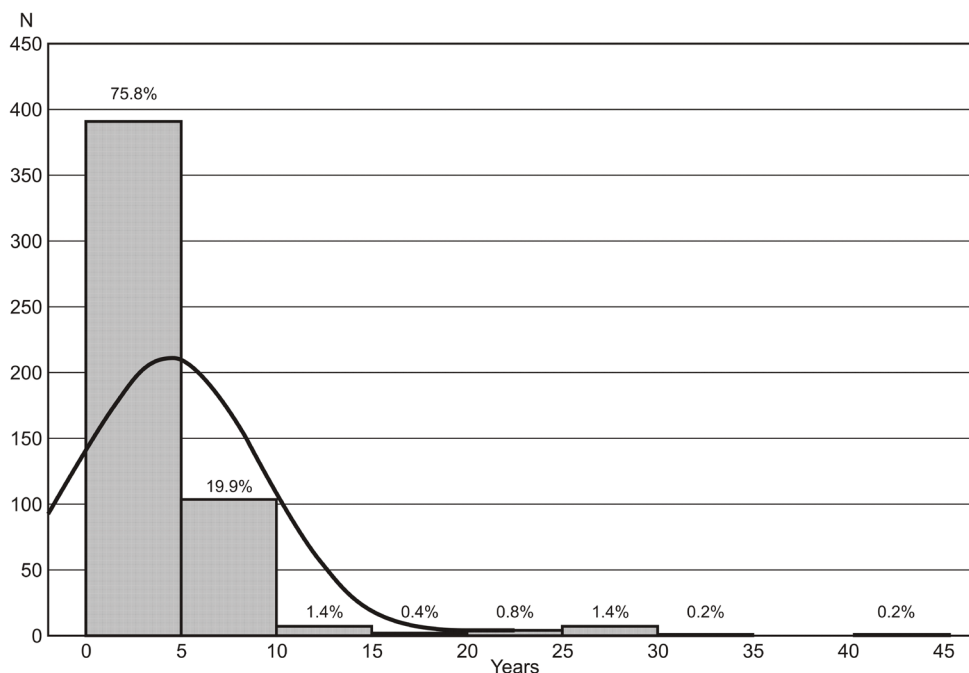


Figure 3. Duration to ascend the Crown of Polish Mountains
Source: authors

peaks of the Crown over the course of one trip. This is not difficult, as many of the peaks are located close to one another.

Mountaineers usually hike in groups. As their companions, the respondents chose their partners (38%), friends (22%) and family members (21%). However, 19% of the participants preferred to hike alone.

The respondents were asked to indicate up to three factors that motivated them to ascend the Crown of Polish Mountains. The most frequently chosen factors were "the wish to know the Polish mountains better" (57%) and the challenge "as a goal in itself" (56%). For 36% of the respondents, mountaineering was a form of "an escape from everyday reality", and for 21% a way to "improve their physical condition".

Changes in views, attitudes and behaviours

The respondents were asked to indicate the changes that occurred in them as a result of ascending the Crown. They evaluated nine proposed parameters on a scale from 1 (nothing has changed) to 5 (very significant changes) (Fig. 4). Based on the answers, the arithmetic average was calculated for each of the traits. The highest values of the average, i.e. the most significant changes in the whole population were noted for: knowledge about the south of Poland (4.06), the ability to plan a trip (3.55) and the persistence in pursuing a set goal (3.53), while the lowest average values were observed for: physical activity (2.92), the ability to offer selfless help (2.78) and the respect for others (2.69).

Further analysis involved searching for correlations between the features of respondents (gender, age, frequency of mountaineering trips) and the answers concerning making new friends and the nine changes in attitudes discussed above.

Meetings and conversations with other tourists, who share the same passion and love for the mountains, are an indispensable element of mountain hiking. Such incidental encounters quite often evolve into long relationships and friendships. The respondents were asked about the relationships established while ascending

Table 2. Correlation between making new friends and the gender of the respondents

Making new friends		Gender		Chi ² Pearson's test	
		Female	Male	Result	p
No	N	184	173	4.627	0.031
	%	51.54	48.46		
Yes	N	67	95		
	%	41.36	58.64		

Source: authors

the Crown of Polish Mountains that have survived until today. Here, a statistically significant correlation was found between the positive answers and the gender of the respondents ($p = 0.031$). Men (nearly 59%) established such long-term friendships much more often than women (over 41%) (see Table 2).

The influence of gender was also noticeable in the declared changes in attitudes. Interestingly, in all nine aspects, the changes in women were more significant than in men; however, for only two of the parameters (respect for others and the ability to offer selfless help), the differences were statistically insignificant (Table 3). The largest differences between genders were noted for improved orientation skills (0.5 point), the ability to admire and appreciate landscapes (0.48), and the persistence in pursuing a set goal (0.41). In general, women noticed deeper physical, psychological, and social changes as a result of ascending the Crown of Polish Mountains than men (Fig. 5).

The same parameters were then referred to the age of the respondents (Table 4). The value $p < 0.001$ for the Chi² Pearson's

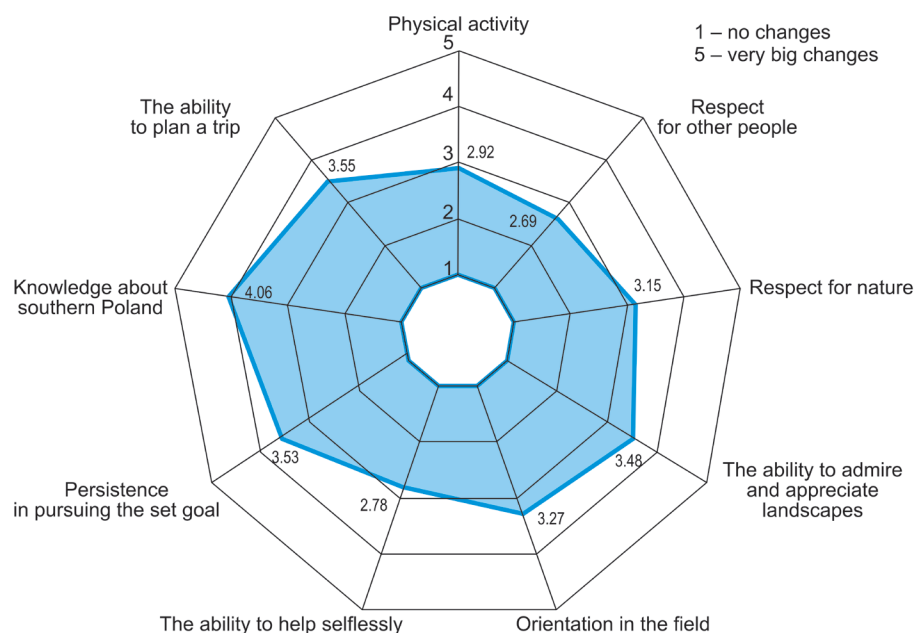


Figure 4. Changes in attitudes as a result of ascending the Crown of Polish Mountains
Source: authors

Table 3. Changes in attitudes and the gender of respondents

Factor	Gender	N	\bar{x}	SD	Min	Q ₁	Me	Q ₃	Max	Mann-Whitney test	
										Result	p
Physical activity	Female	251	3.13	1.19	1	2	3	4	5	3.427	0.001
	Male	268	2.72	1.27	1	1	3	4	5		
Respect for other people	Female	251	2.76	1.38	1	1	3	4	5	1.031	0.302
	Male	268	2.63	1.40	1	1	3	4	5		
Respect for nature	Female	251	3.33	1.51	1	2	4	5	5	2.514	0.012
	Male	268	2.97	1.56	1	1	3	4	5		
The ability to admire and appreciate landscapes	Female	251	3.73	1.42	1	3	4	5	5	3.966	<0.001
	Male	268	3.25	1.47	1	2	4	4	5		
Orientation in the field	Female	251	3.53	1.23	1	3	4	4	5	3.427	0.001
	Male	268	3.03	1.41	1	2	3	4	5		
The ability to help selflessly	Female	251	2.93	1.49	1	1	3	4	5	1.031	0.302
	Male	268	2.63	1.42	1	1	3	4	5		
Persistence in pursuing the set goal	Female	251	3.75	1.37	1	3	4	5	5	2.514	0.012
	Male	268	3.32	1.48	1	2	4	5	5		
Knowledge about southern Poland	Female	251	4.14	1.03	1	4	4	5	5	3.966	<0.001
	Male	268	3.99	1.10	1	4	4	5	5		
The ability to plan a trip	Female	251	3.69	1.33	1	3	4	5	5	2.222	0.026
	Male	268	3.41	1.40	1	2	4	5	5		

Source: authors

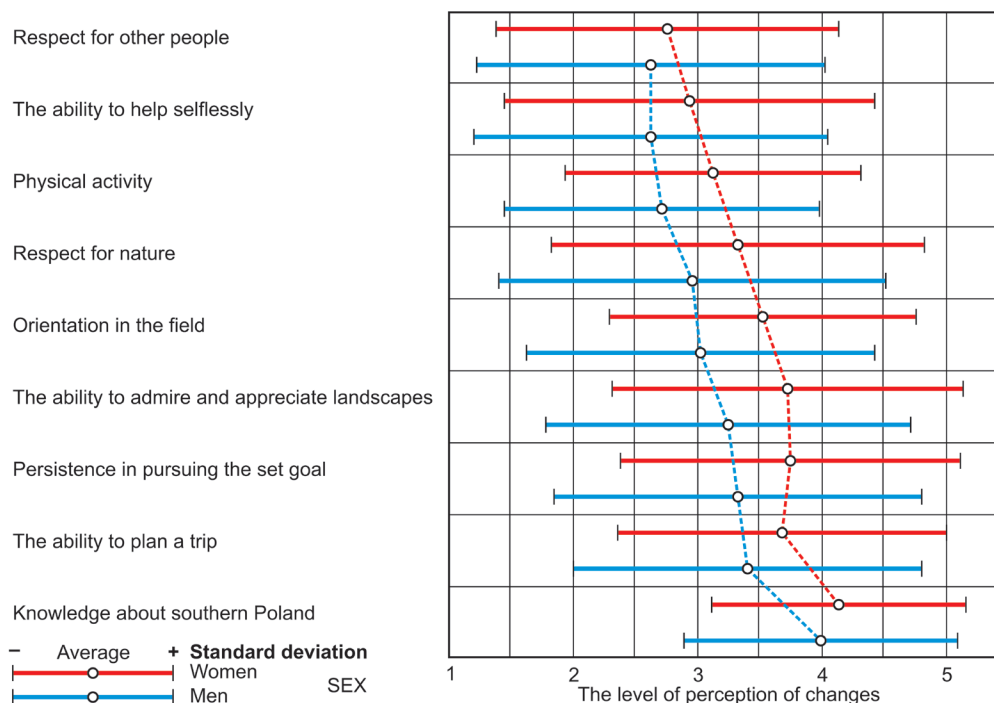


Figure 5. Changes in attitudes and the gender of respondents
Source: authors

Table 4. Correlation between making new friends and the age of the respondents

Making new friends		Age of the respondents (in years)					Chi ² Pearson's test	
		15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55 and more	Result	p
No	N	30	140	119	44	24	24.415	<0.001
	%	8.40	39.22	33.33	12.32	6.72		
Yes	N	9	39	61	23	30		
	%	5.56	24.07	37.65	14.20	18.52		

Source: authors

test points to the existence of significant differences between age groups, and the distribution of results shows that positive answers were given mainly by older people. Older age, which usually also means longer experience in mountaineering, contributes to building more permanent interpersonal relationships. For younger people, numerous social contacts do not have to be long-term friendships.

The influence of age on the remaining parameters was decidedly lower. Although the largest changes in attitudes were generally noted in the youngest age group (usually 15–24 years), statistically significant differences were found for only two categories: orientation skills and the ability to admire and appreciate landscapes (Table 5). The youngest respondents also showed the highest improvement in ability to organise trips. These are doubtlessly skills that require time and tourist experience to achieve proficiency. However, the most significant changes were noted for knowledge about southern Poland (scores above 4 in the first three age groups, max. 4.16 in the group aged 25–34). Interestingly, the smallest differences in the

scores in specific age groups referred to physical activity (only 0.24), and the highest amplitudes were noted for the assessment of orientation skills (0.89), respect for nature, and the ability to admire and appreciate landscapes (0.8 each) (Fig. 6).

The last analysed variable was the frequency of mountaineering trips. This factor had a significant influence on making new friends among the respondents ($p = 0.007$). Those who went hiking more often (at least every three months) made new friends more often than those who hiked less regularly (Table 6).

As far as the other nine aspects of attitude changes are concerned, the p value did not reveal any statistically significant differences (Table 7). However, certain regularity is noticeable: the highest values of the average score referred to tourists who climbed the peaks of the Crown often and very often (at least once every six months), while the lowest ones referred to tourists who travel to the mountains only occasionally (every ten months and less often) (Fig. 7). At the same time, the opinions of the groups of respondents classified in this way were the most

Table 5. Changes in attitudes and the age of respondents

Factor	Age (years)	N	\bar{x}	SD	Min	Q ₁	Me	Q ₃	Max	Kruskal-Wallis test	
										Result	p
Physical activity	15–24	39	3.05	1.15	1	2	3	4	5	2.306	0.680
	25–34	179	2.96	1.16	1	2	3	4	5		
	35–44	180	2.81	1.30	1	1.5	3	4	5		
	45–54	67	3.01	1.20	1	2	3	4	5		
	55 and more	54	2.96	1.48	1	1	3	4	5		
Respect for other people	15–24	39	2.74	1.37	1	1	3	4	5	4.152	0.386
	25–34	179	2.56	1.36	1	1	3	4	5		
	35–44	180	2.72	1.42	1	1	3	4	5		
	45–54	67	2.70	1.43	1	1	3	4	5		
	55 and more	54	3.00	1.40	1	2	3	4	5		
Respect for nature	15–24	39	3.67	1.40	1	3	4	5	5	6.458	0.168
	25–34	179	3.19	1.48	1	2	3	5	5		
	35–44	180	3.06	1.58	1	1	3	5	5		
	45–54	67	2.90	1.62	1	1	3	5	5		
	55 and more	54	3.22	1.62	1	1	3.5	5	5		
The ability to admire and appreciate landscapes	15–24	39	3.95	1.39	1	3	5	5	5	10.399	0.034
	25–34	179	3.61	1.35	1	3	4	5	5		
	35–44	180	3.46	1.51	1	3	4	5	5		
	45–54	67	3.15	1.58	1	1	4	4	5		
	55 and more	54	3.22	1.51	1	2	3	5	5		
Orientation in the field	15–24	39	3.79	1.30	1	3	4	5	5	12.429	0.014
	25–34	179	3.34	1.29	1	2	4	4	5		
	35–44	180	3.22	1.31	1	2	3	4	5		
	45–54	67	2.90	1.43	1	1	3	4	5		
	55 and more	54	3.28	1.46	1	2	4	4	5		
The ability to help selflessly	15–24	39	3.08	1.51	1	1	3	4	5	4.765	0.312
	25–34	179	2.61	1.42	1	1	3	4	5		
	35–44	180	2.83	1.48	1	1	3	4	5		
	45–54	67	2.81	1.45	1	1	3	4	5		
	55 and more	54	2.91	1.50	1	1	3	4	5		
Persistence in pursuing the set goal	15–24	39	4.00	1.26	1	3	4	5	5	5.387	0.250
	25–34	179	3.54	1.40	1	3	4	5	5		
	35–44	180	3.42	1.48	1	2	4	5	5		
	45–54	67	3.45	1.48	1	2	4	5	5		
	55 and more	54	3.59	1.51	1	3	4	5	5		
Knowledge about southern Poland	15–24	39	4.08	1.01	1	4	4	5	5	6.114	0.191
	25–34	179	4.16	0.94	1	4	4	5	5		
	35–44	180	4.11	1.11	1	4	4	5	5		
	45–54	67	3.88	1.08	1	3	4	5	5		
	55 and more	54	3.80	1.31	1	3	4	5	5		
The ability to plan a trip	15–24	39	4.05	1.19	1	4	4	5	5	9.241	0.055
	25–34	179	3.63	1.31	1	3	4	5	5		
	35–44	180	3.50	1.39	1	3	4	5	5		
	45–54	67	3.34	1.38	1	2	4	4	5		
	55 and more	54	3.31	1.54	1	2	4	5	5		

Source: authors

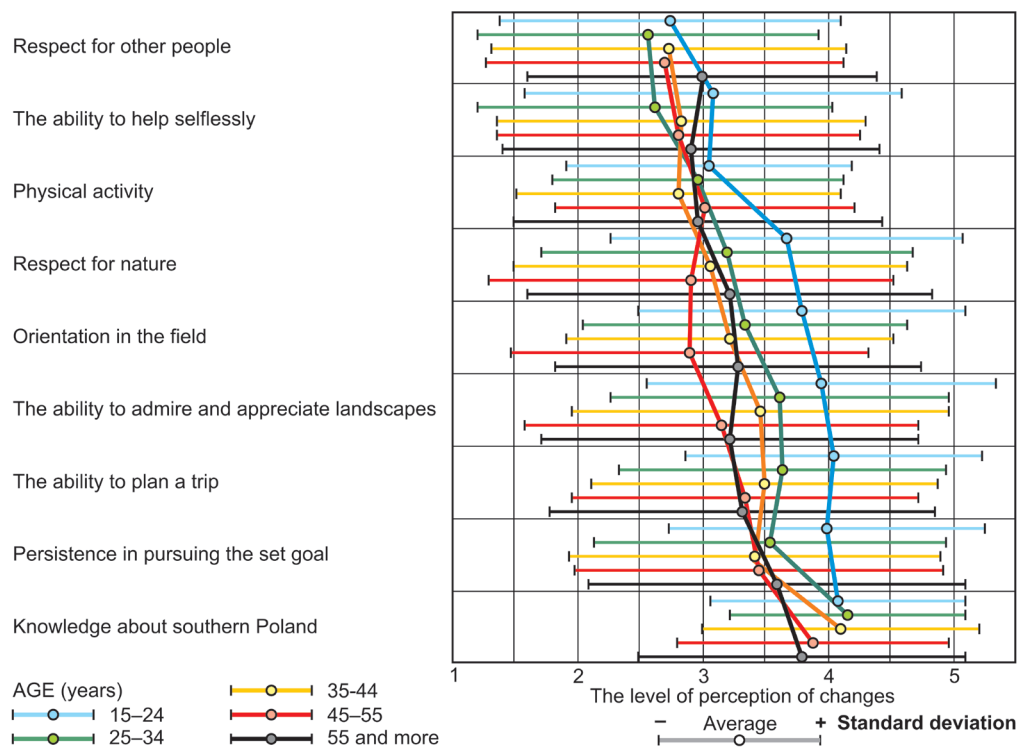


Figure 6. Changes in attitudes and the age of respondents

Source: authors

Table 6. Making new friends and the frequency of hiking trips

Making new friends		Frequency of hiking trips				Chi ² Pearson test	
		every 1–3 months or more	every 4–6 months	every 7–9 months	every 10–12 months or less	Result	p
No	N	163	112	37	45	12.243	0.007
	%	45.66	31.37	10.36	12.61		
Yes	N	100	39	12	11		
	%	61.73	24.07	7.41	6.79		

Source: authors

homogenous: the minimum difference between average scores (0.16) was noted for orientation skills, while the maximum (0.44) was for physical activity.

Discussion

The age-old question is: Why do people climb mountains? Experienced mountaineers answer curtly: "Because they are there". In fact, the answer is more complex, multi-faceted and highly individual, as every tourist has their own, unique reasons for hiking in the mountains.

According to the classification of the motivations of tourists presented by R. Winiarski (1988), the participants of the Crown of Polish Mountains project were driven mainly by cognitive motivation (the need for new experiences, knowledge and information), ambition (the need of achievements, respect and prestige), activity (the need to move and the will to improve one's

physical condition) and cathartic motivation (the need to relax and escape). On the other hand, health (the wish to improve one's health and wellbeing), social (the need to maintain social contacts, make new friends and belong to a group) and emotional motivation (the need for new stimuli and emotions) played a lesser role. However, it should be stated that the factors that inspire people to take such challenges are complex and multi-faceted. On the other hand, achieving the goal satisfies various expectations and desires of mountain hikers.

According to Pomfret (2006) the factors that inspire people to hike include both push elements (risk, mastery) and pull elements (natural mountain environment and mountain conditions). Other elements are personality traits (searching for new experiences, the desire to experience contrasting emotions, experience flow and peak experience) or lifestyle factors (e.g. past experiences of the mountains).

Table 7. Changes in attitudes and the frequency of trips to the mountains

Factor	Frequency of trips to the mountains	N	\bar{x}	SD	Min	Q ₁	Me	Q ₃	Max	Kruskal-Wallis test	
										Result	p
Physical activity	every 1–3 months or more	263	3.03	1.22	1	2	3	4	5	7.435	0.059
	every 4–6 months	151	2.89	1.26	1	2	3	4	5		
	every 7–9 months	49	2.76	1.22	1	2	3	4	5		
	every 10–12 months or less	56	2.59	1.32	1	1	3	3.5	5		
Respect for other people	every 1–3 months or more	263	2.77	1.43	1	1	3	4	5	2.262	0.520
	every 4–6 months	151	2.66	1.38	1	1	3	4	5		
	every 7–9 months	49	2.63	1.22	1	1	3	4	5		
	every 10–12 months or less	56	2.48	1.39	1	1	2	3.5	5		
Respect for nature	every 1–3 months or more	263	3.20	1.57	1	1	3	5	5	2.082	0.555
	every 4–6 months	151	3.16	1.52	1	1	3	5	5		
	every 7–9 months	49	3.12	1.48	1	2	3	4	5		
	every 10–12 months or less	56	2.88	1.58	1	1	3	4.5	5		
The ability to admire and appreciate landscapes	every 1–3 months or more	263	3.50	1.46	1	3	4	5	5	3.375	0.337
	every 4–6 months	151	3.59	1.46	1	3	4	5	5		
	every 7–9 months	49	3.41	1.40	1	3	4	5	5		
	every 10–12 months or less	56	3.18	1.57	1	1	4	4.5	5		
Orientation in the field	every 1–3 months or more	263	3.34	1.37	1	2	4	4	5	2.217	0.529
	every 4–6 months	151	3.21	1.37	1	2	3	4	5		
	every 7–9 months	49	3.20	1.19	1	2	3	4	5		
	every 10–12 months or less	56	3.18	1.32	1	2.5	3	4	5		
The ability to help selflessly	every 1–3 months or more	263	2.86	1.47	1	1	3	4	5	2.023	0.568
	every 4–6 months	151	2.70	1.47	1	1	3	4	5		
	every 7–9 months	49	2.76	1.39	1	1	3	4	5		
	every 10–12 months or less	56	2.61	1.42	1	1	3	4	5		
Persistence in pursuing the set goal	every 1–3 months or more	263	3.62	1.41	1	3	4	5	5	4.265	0.234
	every 4–6 months	151	3.53	1.46	1	3	4	5	5		
	every 7–9 months	49	3.39	1.24	1	3	4	4	5		
	every 10–12 months or less	56	3.20	1.66	1	1	3.5	5	5		
Knowledge about southern Poland	every 1–3 months or more	263	4.04	1.14	1	4	4	5	5	2.183	0.525
	every 4–6 months	151	4.13	0.96	1	4	4	5	5		
	every 7–9 months	49	3.90	1.07	1	4	4	5	5		
	every 10–12 months or less	56	4.11	0.97	1	4	4	5	5		
The ability to plan a trip	every 1–3 months or more	263	3.56	1.37	1	3	4	5	5	2.000	0.572
	every 4–6 months	151	3.61	1.40	1	3	4	5	5		
	every 7–9 months	49	3.43	1.22	1	3	4	4	5		
	every 10–12 months or less	56	3.43	1.44	1	2	4	5	5		

Source: authors

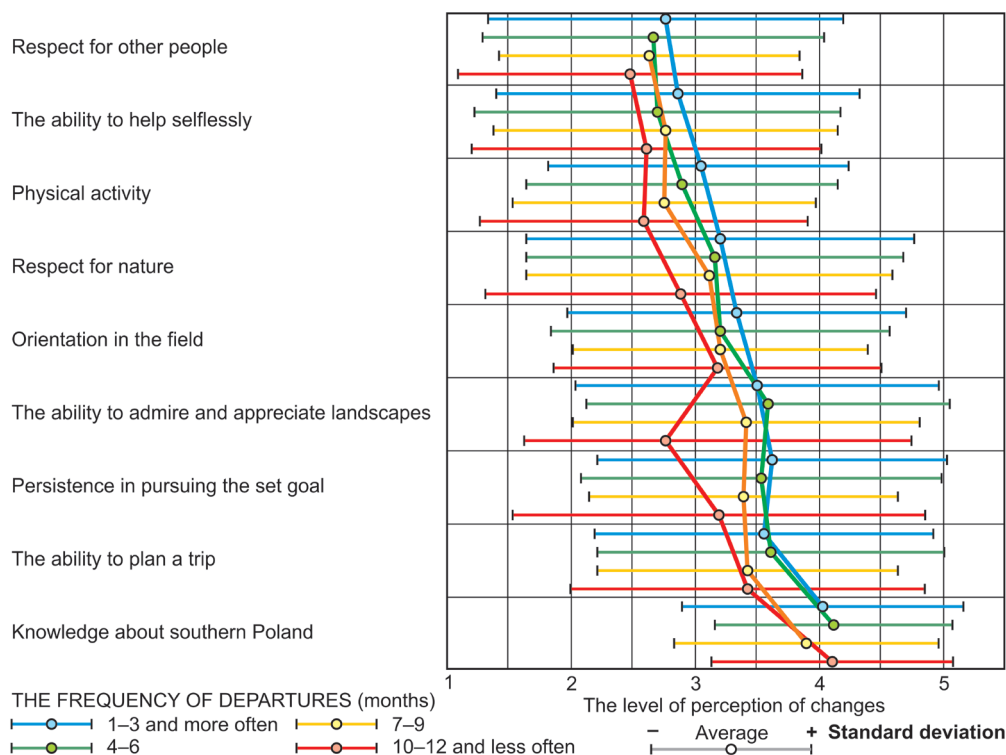


Figure 7. Changes in attitudes and the frequency of trips to the mountains

Source: authors

In the study presented here, the respondents pointed mainly to push elements – namely, the internal motivating factors that push people to act. These included: a thirst for knowledge, a need for new emotions and experiences and the wish to escape from everyday problems, the need for active recreation and the wish to improve one's physical condition, health and wellbeing. Due to the specificity of the selected population sample (participants of a challenge), factors related to ambition also played an important role: ascending all peaks in the Crown (a goal in itself), the realisation of a set plan, achieving success and, finally, satisfying the need for respect and prestige. Doubtlessly, the motivations that inspire people to take and pursue such challenges are complex, and achieving the goal satisfies the various expectations and desires of mountain hikers.

What is interesting is that the respondents did not usually declare that they had started ascending the Crown of Polish Mountains in order to give impulse to an internal metamorphosis, change or transformation through regular mountaineering. This was not the main, conscious purpose. However, such a change took place and they noted it.

"Change through travelling" is a two-dimensional construct involving personal and interpersonal change (Staffieri, Cavagnaro & Rowson 2018). The study on young Italian people revealed that the first dimension brought some introspective benefits that allowed young travellers to improve their self-awareness, while the other one was linked to knowledge about culture and openness to other people. Tourist experiences lead to changes, especially in young travellers. Travelling broadens their knowledge and horizons, and helps them build their own identity. It also helps them to socialise and develop tolerance and communication skills, and improves their ability to start relationships with others. It enhances flexibility, independence and self-confidence (Youth Travel Matters... 2008; Leask, Fyall & Barron 2013).

The authors of another publication (Fermani et al. 2017) emphasised that "change through travelling" is a three-dimensional notion: travellers may feel that they have changed in their relations with themselves, with other people, and with the natural environment. Interestingly, the literature does not provide references to the changes in the travellers' perception of their relationship to the natural environment (Staffieri, Cavagnaro & Rowson 2018).

The specific benefits of tourist experiences (e.g. personal development, a change in attitudes, values, or beliefs) depend, to a large extent, on what the traveller wants to experience (Staffieri, Cavagnaro & Rowson 2018). Research results demonstrate that the factors that have a significant influence on the depth and permanence of the changes are, on the one hand, the tourist's motivation and, on the other, their satisfaction with the trip (Prebensen, Woo & Uysal 2013). Fermani et al. (2017) pointed out that, in the case of young Dutch travellers, the dimension of change was determined by four out of six wellbeing components (positive relations to others, autonomy, purpose in life, self-acceptance).

The results of our study demonstrated, first of all, a significant improvement in the practical skills related to organising mountain trips, which was greater than the change in attitudes related to other people and the physical condition of the respondents. It is likely that the respondents considered that they had already sufficiently developed the latter properties before taking the ambitious challenge.

Men (nearly 59%) established long-term friendships much more often than women (over 41%). In general, women noticed deeper physical, psychological and social changes as a result of ascending the Crown of Polish Mountains than men. One may suppose that women are naturally more sensitive, and this is why getting to know the Polish mountains and receiving new stimuli had a stronger influence on their attitudes.

Older age, which usually also means longer experience in mountaineering, contributes to building more permanent interpersonal relationships. The influence of age on the remaining parameters was decidedly lower. Although the largest changes in attitudes were generally noted in the youngest age groups (usually 15–24 years), statistically significant differences were found for only two categories: orientation skills and the ability to admire and appreciate landscapes. The youngest respondents also showed the highest improvement in the ability to organise trips. It is almost certain that older tourists had acquired many of these abilities before they started their adventure with the Crown of Polish Mountains, so they did not indicate significant changes in these attitudes in the survey.

The last analysed variable was the frequency of mountaineering trips. This factor had a significant influence on starting new, long-term friendships among the respondents. One rather obvious regularity is noticeable: the more the climbers travelled to the mountains (at least once every six months) the more they met new people and stayed in contact with them. As for the other aspects of changes in attitudes, no statistically significant correlations were found.

Conclusions

In Poland, mountaineering has over 150 years of tradition. Initially those who travelled to the Tatra Mountains were mainly representatives of the patriotic economic and intellectual elites. Gradually, mountain hiking became an egalitarian and even mass form of tourism, especially in the era of the “iron curtain” and the lack of possibility to travel abroad. After the political transformations of the 1990s, mountain hiking in Poland became similar to the Western variant: apart from crowds of “ordinary” tourists who are content with a short, superficial contact with the mountain environment, there is a group of seasoned hikers, for whom the mountains are a source of deeper internal reflection, inspiration and new challenges. Mountaineering has become a popular form of adventure tourism, and its attractiveness is defined, among other things, by: the physical effort required; the challenge to overcome forces of nature and personal weaknesses; the existence of danger and risk; the experience of contrasting emotions; the need for specialist skills; a sense of community; and the chance to compete with other climbers.

“Collecting” the ascended peaks is typical for mountain climbers (Sidor & Zarzycki 2013). In the past, a visible sign of initiation and belonging to the elite group of tourists was to have

earned the PTTK badges, of various types and advancement levels (bronze, silver and gold). Currently, they do not evoke as much interest as they used to: they are rather treated as relics of the past (Mokras-Grabowska 2013). Nowadays, various types of media projects that set ambitious challenges for participants and may take years to complete have become increasingly popular. Such projects include ascending the Crown of Polish Mountains. However, this is not extraordinary, as it fits a wider trend of the gamification of tourism, which existed before in the “analogue” form (material badges) and has recently become “digitised” (virtual world, badges, awards, scores, and levels to complete).⁴ It increases the interest of project participants, evokes emotions and encourages them to persist in pursuing their goal and practising regular activity.

Travelling is similar to self-improvement in the sense that it allows us to escape from reality and experience something new. While “tourism makes us richer”, particularly demanding mountain tourism should enrich us even more. The conducted research has proven that regular mountain hiking causes significant changes in the participants, both young, and not yet fully formed, tourists and (although to a lesser extent), older, seasoned travellers. It was also noted that some of the changes in attitudes were influenced by such variables as age, gender and frequency of trips.

However, the obtained results cannot be considered to be universal and generalised to other populations. One should remember that the research was of an incidental, one-off nature and was conducted using the self-reporting method, which carries certain limitations. Despite their research, the authors were unable to find even one publication on a similar issue. Thus, it is worth conducting similar research in the future in order to confront the obtained results. Such research might analyse the changes in participants of other projects (e.g. ascending other mountain “crowns”, both in Poland and abroad), in the form of a longitudinal study (identifying attitudes over the course of many years: before stating the project, while they are “collecting” the peaks, and after ascending the Crown), or in the form of research based on other, more objective methods.

ORCID

Andrzej Stasiak  <https://orcid.org/000-0001-6964-3408>

⁴However, it should be noted that the project of the Crown of Polish Mountains, despite being present on the Internet and in social media, only uses the possibilities of modern technologies related to the gamification of mountain tourism to a small extent.

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