

In Memoriam

Tomaž Vrhovec, 1959 - 2004

Just before the end of the last year, we were struck by the news that our colleague Dr. Tomaž Vrhovec, Docent (Assistant Professor) at the Ljubljana University lost his life in a snow avalanche in the Julian Alps, on the mountain ridge south of Lake Bohinj.



Tomaž Vrhovec giving an interview to TV Slovenia

Tomaž was born in Ljubljana on June the 5th of 1959. His home was always Šiška (to be pronounced Shishka) - a district of Ljubljana. Jokingly he called himself "a meteorologist from Šiška". He finished his study of meteorology at the University in Ljubljana at the age of 23. After serving with the Slovene Meteorological Service for four years, he joined the Meteorology Division of the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics as "young researcher". After five years he presented a thesis entitled *Mesometeorological model of wind and temperature fields in complex terrain*, which earned him a PhD title. He continued his work at the Meteorology Division as Assistant, and in 1995 he was promoted to Assistant Professor. Recently, he was encouraged to apply for the Associate Professorship and, consequently, one of his last chores was the preparation of his biography and bibliography for election.

Tomaž was an extremely devoted teacher. He discussed the subjects of his teaching with students also after classes, and was passionate in making sure that they did get the point even if he had to explain the same idea over and over again in different ways. His ambition was not just formal teaching, but to spread understanding and knowledge through learning.

Most of Tomaž's professional and scientific work, as well as his personal affection, were devoted to weather and phenomena in mountainous areas. His first scientific work dealt with gravity waves in cold air pools. Mountains were the focus of his interest. He shared this curiosity with us through many educational and scientific articles. After joining the Mesoscale Alpine Programme MAP, he intensively studied precipitation using numerical simulations. He was most interested in the causes for the precipitation maximum in the Julian Alps.

Tomaž's interest in mountain meteorology is not surprising, as he was a committed mountaineer and touring skier. Consequently, he also studied snow and avalanches. He was systematically monitoring snow in the very mountains south of Lake Bohinj, where his life ended. Because of his broad scientific interest, and because - as a mountaineer - he wanted to estimate the degree of danger that avalanches present, he was digging deeply through meters of snow, observing structures, taking samples, and measuring the water content. That explains why he published and coauthored some 30 professional and educational articles on snow and avalanches; half of them are dealing with safety in winter conditions. If anyone was aware of the dangers, Tomaž certainly was! His peers recognized his high personal qualities and his strong devotion to mountaineering when they elected him member of the Council of the UIAA - Union Internationale des Associations d'Alpinisme.

Tomaž's friends appreciated his talent for poetry and essay writing. Those of us who worked with Tomaž, however, appreciated particularly the fact that we could always count on him: if he promised something or if he was asked to do something, we could consider the work to be done. He was also widely known for his openness: having friends and colleagues around the globe, he communicated all over the world. An excellent colleague and a fond and earnest friend! We will miss Tomaž - but he will continue to live in our common memory.

Our sincere condolences are with his wife Ana, the 12 years old son Jaka, the 9 years old daughter Tina, his mother and brother.

*Jože Rakovec
Chair of Meteorology
University of Ljubljana*

Tomaž Vrhovec in MAP

It was with great regret and sorrow that the international meteorological community learnt about the death of Dr. Tomaž Vrhovec in an avalanche accident at the end of 2004. It is hard to believe that Tomaž's characteristic smile and his full voice will not again be a much-liked ingredient of committee meetings and conferences.

It was during the setting up of the Mesoscale Alpine Programme (MAP) that I first met Tomaž. During the MAP meeting in summer 1997 at the shore of Lago Maggiore, I was quite impressed to witness Tomaž's caring attitude for the student group from Ljubljana: as driver of a white minibus, as organizer of economic accommodation and as a lively discussion partner. In November 1997 Tomaž joined the Coordination and Implementation Group (CIG) of MAP to ensure that the Slovenian point of view was properly observed during the preparation of the Special Observing Period (SOP) of MAP.

At the CIG meeting in Ljubljana in February 1999 I could first observe how Tomaž was acting "at home", even though we gathered at the Meteorological Service and not at his university. Close links between application and academia may be easier established in a small country, but it needs open people with much tact and fantasy to get them really going. I could vividly sense that Tomaž played an essential role in that respect in Slovenia.

A year later, the first results obtained during MAP-SOP in autumn 1999 were to be presented and discussed at another MAP meeting, the first one taking place in Slovenia. Without any ado, Tomaž had all the organizational strings firmly in his strong hands. What is sometimes called the MAP spirit of meetings off the beaten track of conferences, he uniquely transposed into the idyllic countryside near Lake Bohinj. Like about 150 participants from many countries near and far, I was most impressed about the Slovenian demonstration of how familiarity and effectiveness can be intimately combined with the notion of small being beautiful. Clearly the success of such an event is carried on many shoulders. But I could feel very clearly what a large portion was due to Tomaž 's initiative, motivating skills, and determination to reach the summit. Even at the valley floor, he exhibited the natural authority of an experienced mountain guide, likewise to the foreign guests as to his senior colleagues.

Very vividly I remember my last two encounters with Tomaž last October in Ljubljana and last November in Erding, Germany. During the former, he actively chaired a workshop session despite of severe temporal stomach problems after his trip to India as the Slovenian representative of an international mountain club association. During the later, he was very present with good advice and suggestions for the planning of the

upcoming ICAM-MAP conference in Zadar and the new MAP forecast demonstration project D-PHASE.

Tomaž's sudden and premature death forces us to pause a bit and to remember that it is personalities like him who bring the most important ingredient to our profession, namely human quality. In the name of the entire MAP Steering Committee, I express deep sympathy to all his Slovenian colleagues, and to his family in particular, for the grave loss, which they are forced to suffer from.

*Hans Volkert
Chairman MAP Steering Committee*



*Tomaž Vrhovec surrounded by MAP colleagues,
Heber City, Utah, USA, June 2002*