



OPEN WATER SWIMMING Data Summary



SEE SUSTAINABILITY AND
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION
IN OUTDOOR SPORTS



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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Project Partners

Leave No Trace (Ireland)

CREPS Rhone Alpes (Lead partner) (France)

Technical University Munich (Germany)

Sport Northern Ireland (UK)

INEFC (Catalonia, Spain)

Surf Clube de Viana (Portugal)

EUROPARC Federation (Europe Wide)

Folkungaland (Sweden)

Tara Mountain Club (Serbia)

IMBA Europe (Europe Wide)



INTRODUCTION

The Sustainability and Environmental Education (SEE) Project has been developed by member of the European Network of Outdoor Sports to develop mechanisms for training of leaders, instructors and guides in a range of outdoor sports in environmental issues. The training toolkit will be developed in Work Package 2 of the project. However, the first stage of the project was to understand what the issues are and also what federations and training organisations currently do provide.

Desktop research and surveys were developed to collect inputs from Protected Areas across Europe, to learn about the various impacts of outdoor sports and from federations to find out what information they provide on training courses.

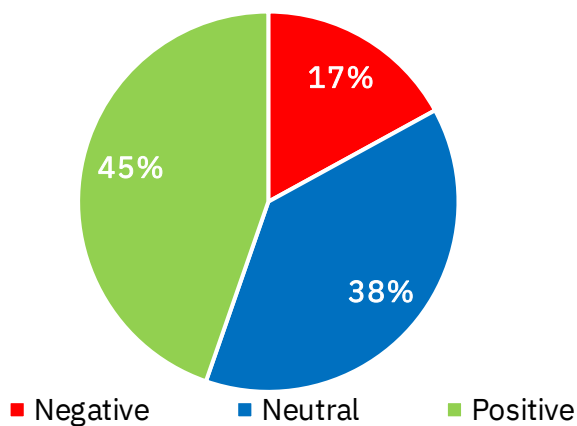
The outcomes of the data analysis will contribute to the preparation of a toolkit for outdoor sports' trainers and educators to ensure a more sustainable, respectful and enjoyable experience of being active in nature.



1. The Protected Areas Survey

The SEE project partners received data from 94 Protected Areas from 24 countries. Of these 97% have implemented some form of regulations to manage outdoor sports – most frequently permit requirements (69%) and restriction of access (67%). The majority of respondents (65%) also indicated that the authority of their Protected Area engages with the outdoor sports sector in decision-making for related regulations.

Chart 1 Overall perception of Outdoor Sports (%)



Overall, most respondents perceive outdoor sports in their Protected Area as a positive (45%) or neutral (38%) phenomenon, but each sport has unique impacts on habitats and ecosystems (see chart 1).

To examine the issues, a scale was used with a rating of 0 (no impact) to 6 (major impact). The respondents were asked to

rate each sport’s impacts under a series of issues that were relevant for that specific sport such as littering, disturbance to fauna, trampling of plants etc.

Within all outdoor sports disturbance to wild fauna was identified as the most prominent issue (average rating 2.5), while issues related to wildfires were identified as an issue of least concern (average 0.8) among the issues listed. Issues arising from high visitor numbers (overcrowding parking issues) and from irresponsible behaviour (littering, conflicts, practice in restricted areas or times) were all common but ranked relatively low in terms of concern.

Most respondents (80%) indicated that through the pandemic, outdoor sports became more popular and that overall there is a higher level of irresponsible usage by their practitioners.



Issues connected to Open Water Swimming and perceived level of impact

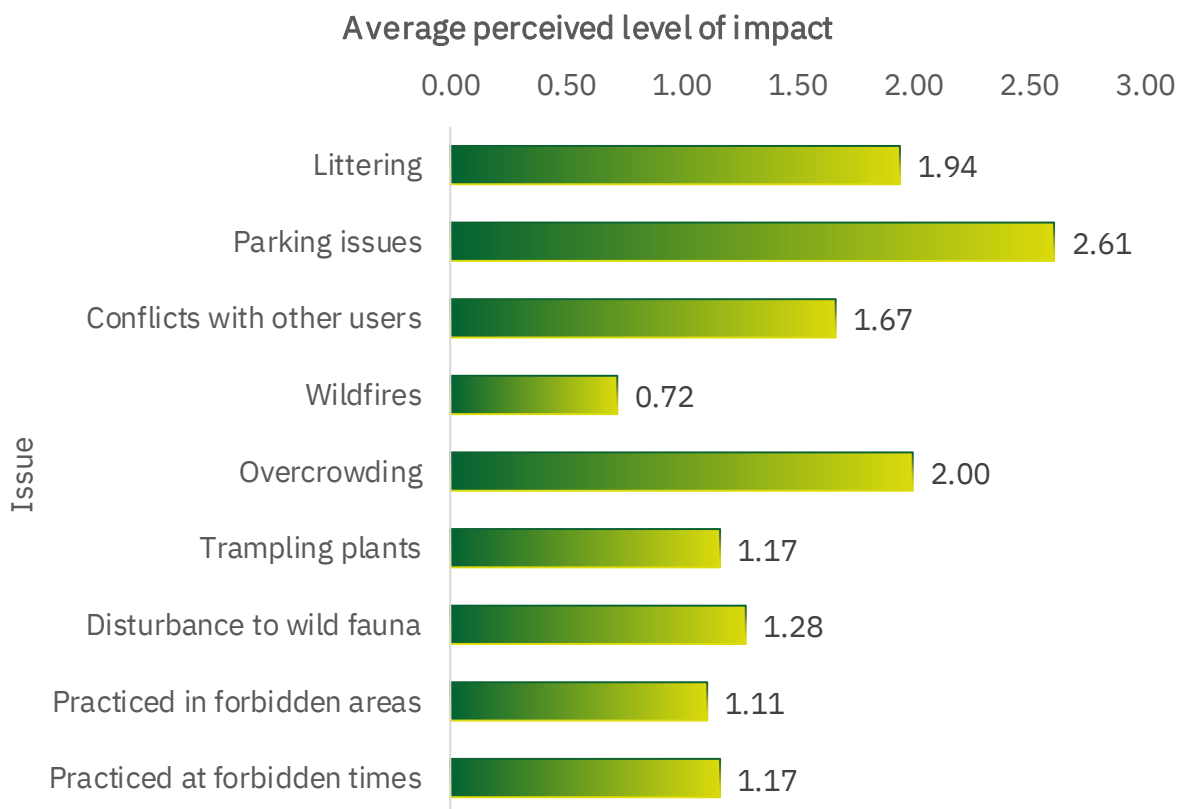
18 of the protected areas (19%) that responded to the survey indicated that open water swimming is one of the main activities within the area.

Protected Areas were asked the type of impacts that the sport had on the environment and nine categories were created and ranked from 0 (no impact) – 6 (major impact).

Overall, the sport had an average score of 1.52 out of 6 in terms of the impacts that it creates.

Chart 1 Average score for perceived issues

(Scale from 0 = no impact to 6 = major impact)



No respondents identified open water swimming as one of the least compliant sport with rules, regulations or policies.

No respondents indicated that they engage most with open water swimming (although two did mention water sports in general) but one indicated that they engage least with the sport.

There were no other sport specific comments provided.

Table 1 Average score and frequency of scores for each issue

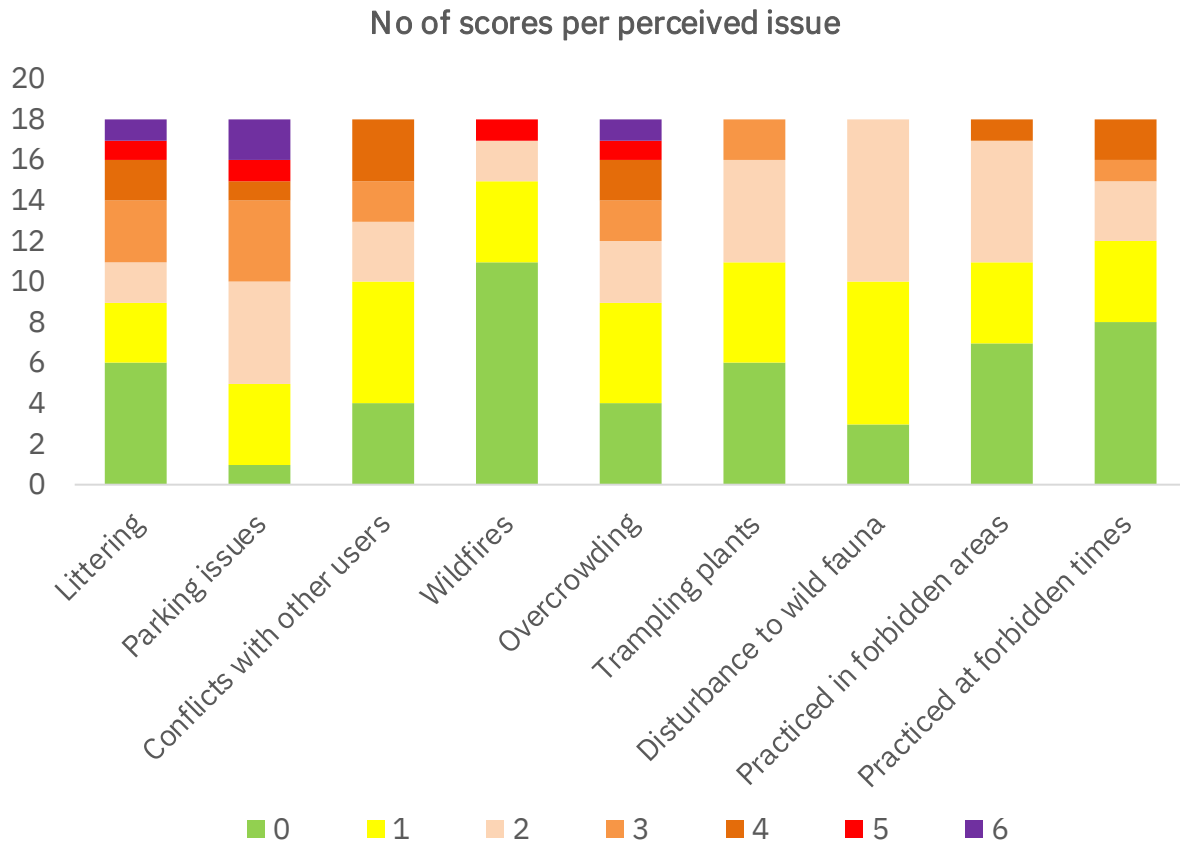
(scale from “0 = no impact” to “6 = major impact”)

Perceived Issue	Average score	Frequency of scores						
		Score 0	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3	Score 4	Score 5	Score 6
Littering	1.94	6	3	2	3	2	1	1
Parking issues	2.61	1	4	5	4	1	1	2
Conflicts with other users	1.67	4	6	3	2	3	0	0
Wildfires	0.72	11	4	2	0	0	1	0
Overcrowding	2.00	4	5	3	2	2	1	1
Trampling plants	1.17	6	5	5	2	0	0	0
Disturbance to wild fauna	1.28	3	7	8	0	0	0	0
Practiced in forbidden areas	1.11	7	4	6	0	1	0	0
Practiced at forbidden times	1.17	8	4	3	1	2	0	0



Chart 3 Issues related to open water swimming and associated impact

(scale from “0 = no impact” to “6 = major impact”)



Common features and quotes

66% of respondents find that OS in their Protected Area are linked to better awareness of nature and environmental issues, and 65% believe that their Protected Area is more valued by OS practitioners.

“Outdoor recreation plays a key role in building awareness of the natural world - it's much easier to foster an ethos of care for resources that people can experience at first hand.”

“Many outdoor sports enthusiasts are nature lovers and therefore enjoy coming to the national park. This is an opportunity to raise awareness of our goals among these groups.”

“Better informed, sportsmen and women often become actors of nature and landscape conservation.”

However, 8.5 % said that they don't see any significant benefit in OS for their Protected Area, and in total 17% of respondents perceive OS as a negative phenomenon in their Protected Area. The partners in the SEE project believe that this can be changed through environmental education and focus on sustainability in OS. In the survey, respondents were asked to share important features or messages they would like OS practitioners to know, which would inspire them to take better care of the Protected Area.

In general, respondents would emphasise features of natural heritage (such as characteristic habitats and vulnerable species), issues related to soil (e.g. erosion, vulnerability of sandstone or dead wood and associated soil processes) and demands related to responsible and respectful behaviour.

“Be responsible for your own actions, show consideration to other users and don't allow your activities to damage the area.”

If you want to read the full report or find out more about the SEE project you can follow us on the project website <https://www.see-project.eu/> or our social media account [SEE-project | Facebook](#) @SEE.Project.Europe



2. Examination of Open Water Swimming Federations websites

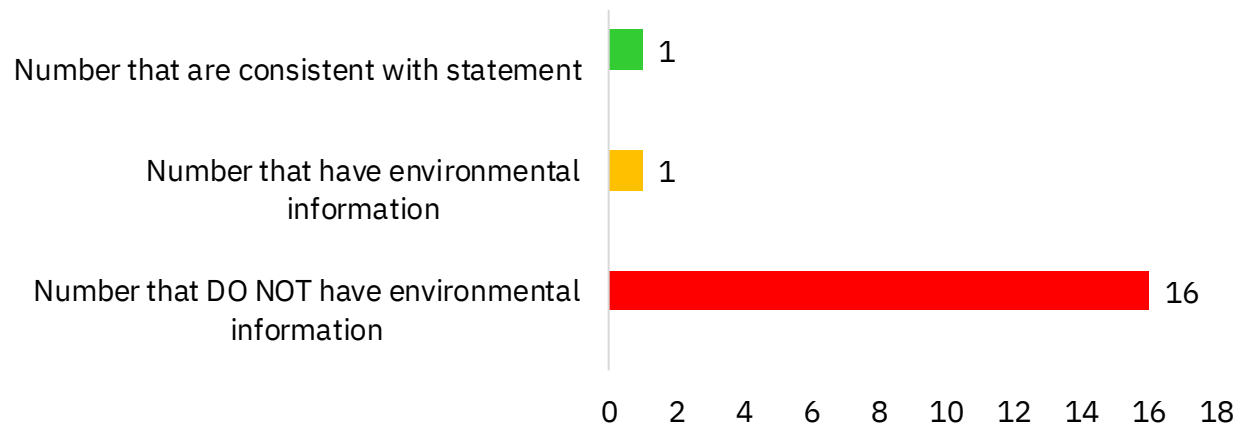
Following on from this work, partners to the project examined the websites of the Fédération Internationale De Natation and the World Open Water Swimming Association as well as the websites of the federations in 18 countries including the partner countries.

Neither of the international federations has any information on sustainability and the environment.

Of the 18 countries examined, 17 federations' websites were found and of these 1 (6%) had any form of environmental information. This one was of a standard that was consistent the statement for sustainability and environmental education that the SEE project partners had developed. (See Appendix).

Chart 4

Open water swimming federations' websites and environmental information



3. Survey of Federations and Training Organisations

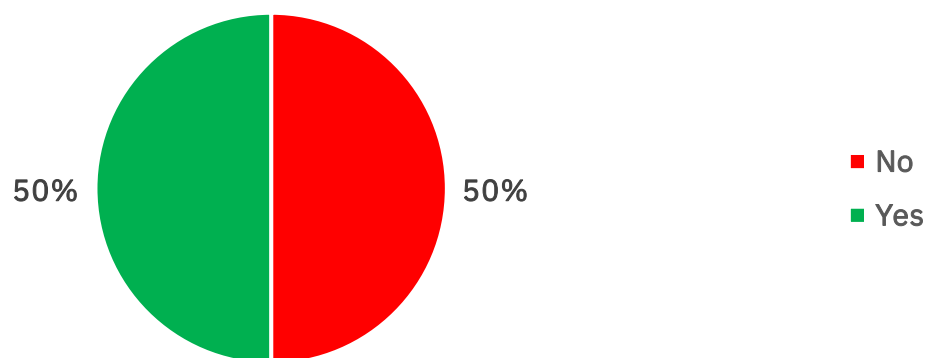
A survey was then carried out with outdoor sport federations in the partner countries and 10 open water swimming federations responded to this survey. While the data provided does provide some interesting information it should not be taken as representative of open water swimming federations across Europe.

Respondents provided answers on how they undertake environmental education (if at all) within their leadership training programmes and this included the amount of time spent on courses. However, the first question was on the provision of environmental training for outdoor leaders / guides / instructors as a required part of the training course.

Of the 10 responses received, 5 (50%) indicated that they do provide environmental training as part of the course while 5 (50%) do not provide this training.

Chart 5

Do you provide environmental training for outdoor leaders / guides / instructors as a required part of their training course?

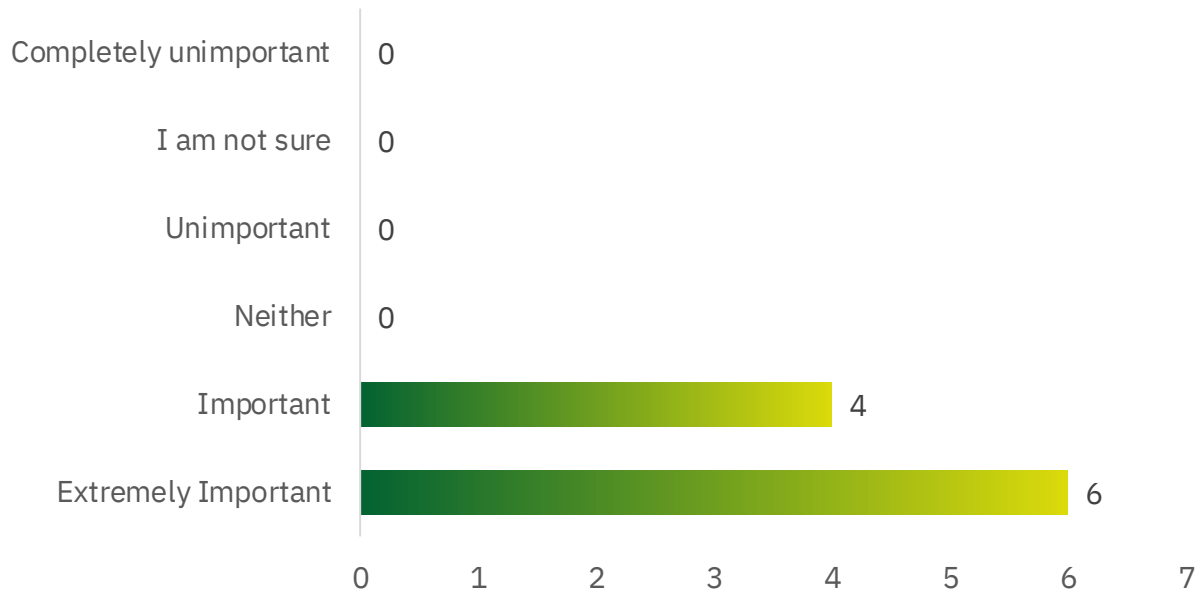


The survey asked federations how important they felt that environmental knowledge and awareness was for their sport's leaders, guides or instructors? 100% (n=10) indicated that it was either important or extremely important (See Chart 6).



Chart 6

How important in your federation is environmental knowledge and awareness for your sport’s leaders, guides or instructors?



This led on to a question to try to understand what the main reasons for not providing environmental training were. In recognition that there was probably no single reason why environmental education is not included within training regimes a scoring system was established for federations to rate the reasons. A score of 1 = least important reason while a score of 5 = most important.

The survey provided five options of reasons as follows:

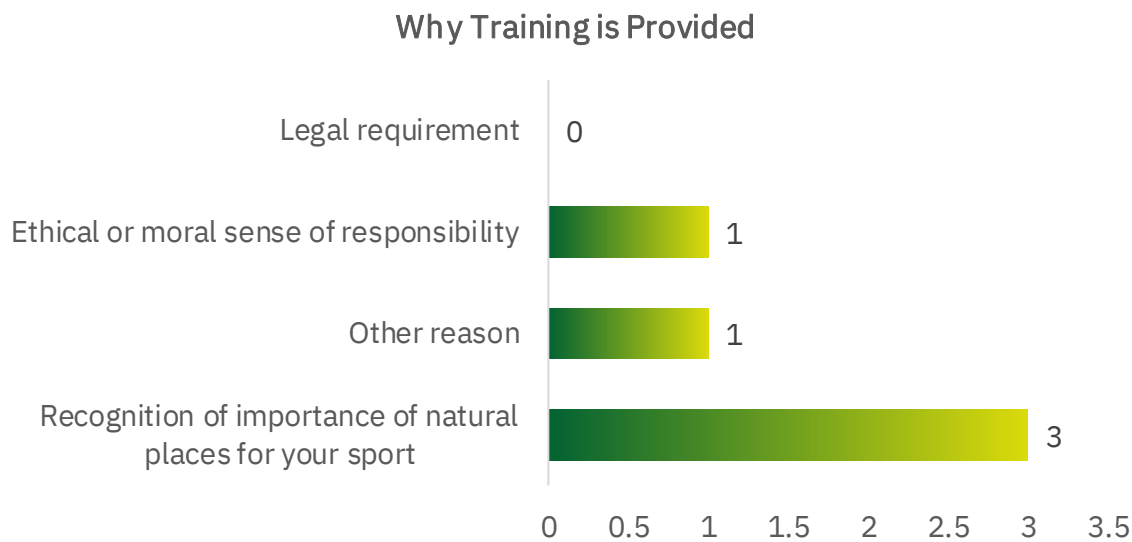
1. Not enough time on courses
2. Different priorities
3. Lack of knowledge by training providers
4. Not seen as important
5. Other reason (with the opportunity to state this)



The main reasons why the three federations out of the ten do not provide training were primarily lack of knowledge by training providers, not enough time on courses and to lesser degree, different priorities, “Not seen as important was deemed to be the least important reason. “Other” reasons which were associated with it not being required to access a National Park and the federation was based around a volunteer programme and therefore did not run courses.

Five out of the ten federations did provide this training and the main reasons for this were as per chart 7.

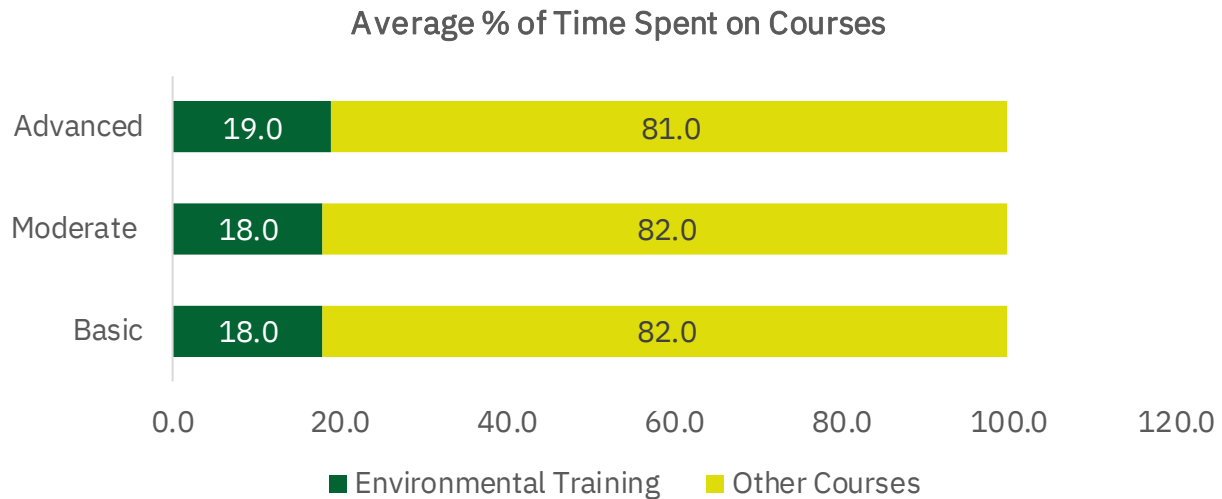
Chart 7



They had also been asked how much time was spent on this at basic, moderate and advanced levels and there is the most time spent on this at advanced levels.

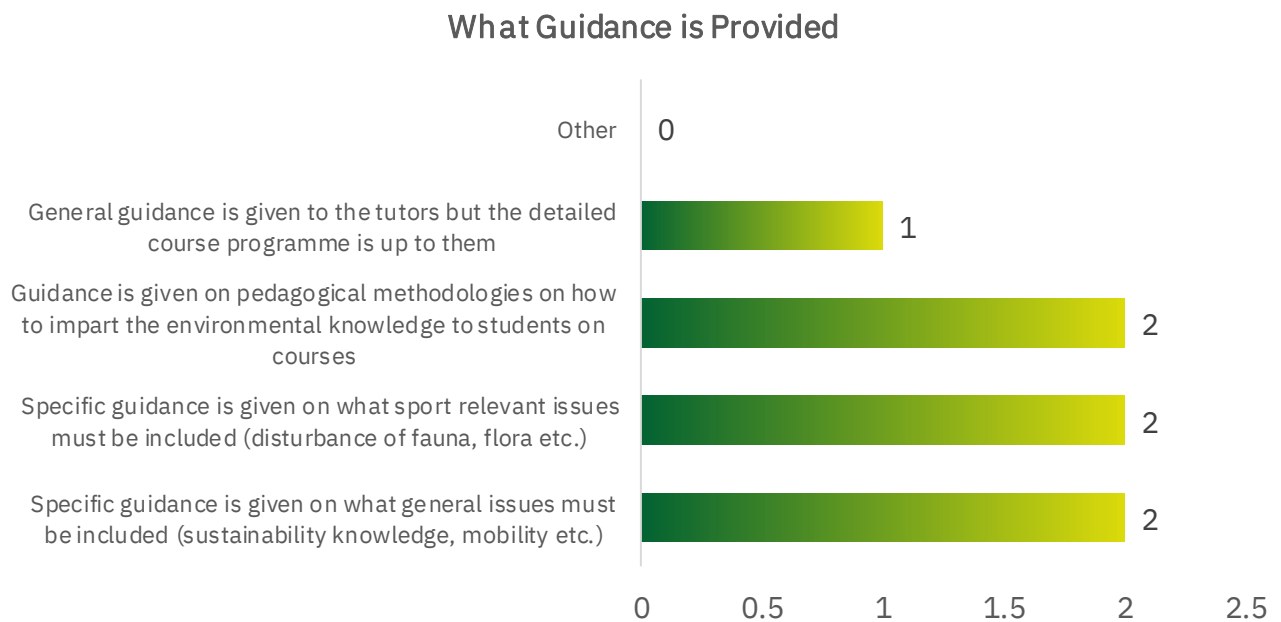


Chart 8



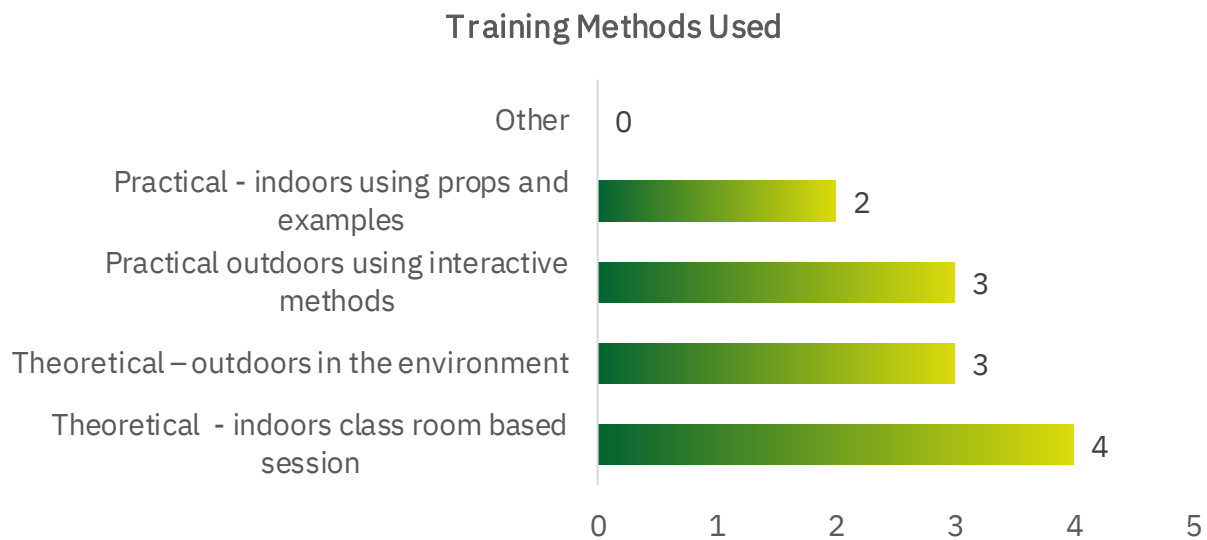
The next question asked was on what type of guidance is provided to the tutors who impart the training and for the most part the answers were similar with specific guidance preferred over general guidance.

Chart 9



It was interesting to find out whether they employed theoretical or practical methods to impart the environmental information. As can be seen from chart 10, the majority of the methods used were theoretical rather than practical (7 versus 5)

Chart 10

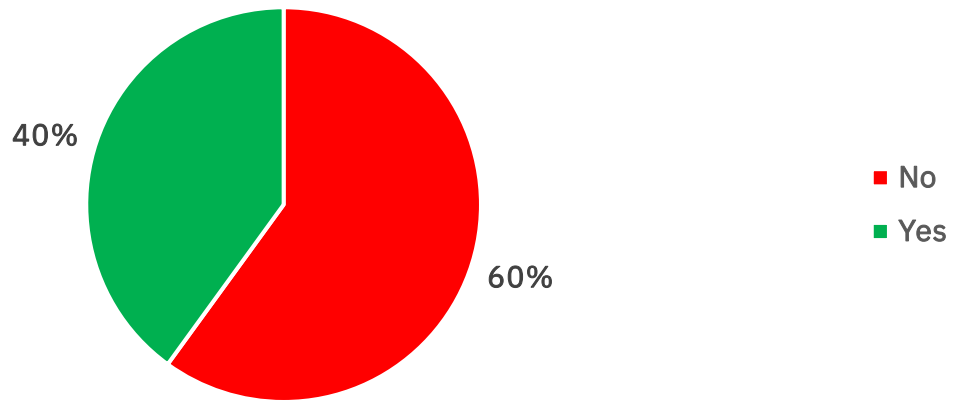


40% (4) of the open water swimming federations who returned a response indicated that they had some form of key ambassador or champion for the environment while 60% (6) did not.



Chart 11

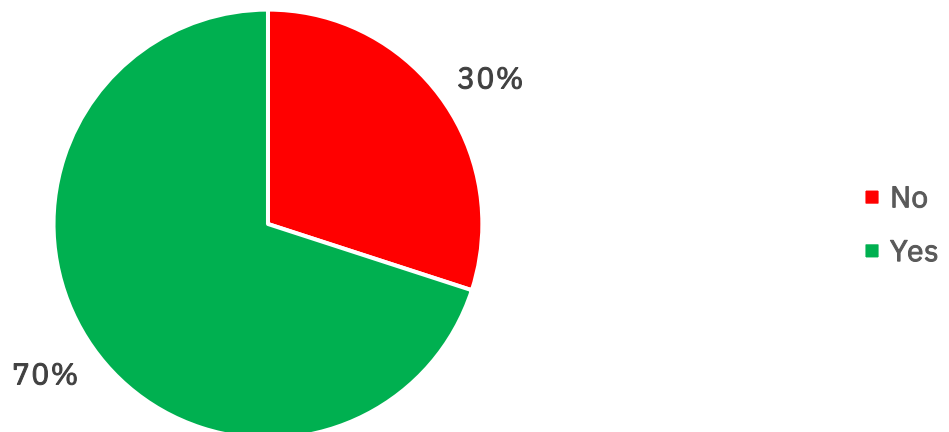
Do you have any key ambassadors or champions for the environment in your federation?



When asked if they would like to be kept informed of the SEE project, 70% said that they wished to be kept informed which is very positive for the project's dissemination.

Chart 12

Please keep me informed about the SEE project's developments



Appendix – Definition and Statement

As the SEE project has been developed through the European Network of Outdoor Sports (ENOS), the partners have adopted the ENOS definition for outdoor sports.

ENOS Definition of Outdoor Sports

We have defined outdoor sports as activities

- that are normally carried out with a (strong) relation to nature and landscape and the core aim is dealing with natural elements rather than with an object
- It may include activities that have their roots in natural places but use artificial structures designed to replicate the natural environment.
- where the natural setting is perceived by users, as at most, only minimally modified by human beings*
- that are perceived as (at least minimally) physically demanding
- that are based on man or natural element power and are not motorized during the sport itself
- that may use some form of tool (for example a surfboard, bicycle, skis etc) or just involve the human body

* does not have to be wild, just perceived as natural

SEE Project Statement on Sustainability and Environmental Education:

This project focuses on how outdoor sports training organisations educate their leaders and instructors on issues of sustainability and the natural environment.

This is not about teaching participants about how the natural environment affects us whereby the focus is safety (e.g. avalanche risk, floods in rivers etc.) Rather it is focused on how our activities affect the environment.

Sustainability for this project is the notion that the activity or consumption of resources in the present does not compromise the ability of future generations to also participate.

The term of Environmental relates to the local natural setting, protected areas that are highly used for activities and the global issues facing our natural environment and the planet as a whole.



