

Interview Report on Education for Sustainability in Water Sports



Executive Summary

This summary presents key findings from interviews conducted by Sustain-a-Wave project partners in Germany, Italy, Slovenia, and Portugal. Based on 20 interviews with stakeholders from sport clubs, NGOs, education institutions, and associations, the report highlights a strong shared commitment to using water sports as a platform for environmental education and community engagement.

Motivations for Integrating ESD into Water Sports

Across the four countries, several common motivations for integrating Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into water sports have emerged:

- **Environmental conservation:** All countries share a commitment to protecting aquatic ecosystems – including rivers, lakes, seas, and marine environments – as a core rationale for embedding sustainability in sport.
- **Experiential learning for awareness:** Water sports are seen as ideal platforms to foster a personal connection with nature, using direct experience to raise environmental consciousness.
- **Community development:** Many organizations use ESD in water sports to strengthen social responsibility and promote inclusive participation in local communities.
- **Youth education:** There is a widespread emphasis on reaching younger generations to instill values of environmental stewardship and long-term behavioural change.



Good Practices & Approaches

Across the four countries, several common good practices have emerged:

- **Experiential learning:** Hands-on activities such as clean-up events, guided tours, and practical workshops are widely used to engage participants and foster a direct connection with nature. These activities are consistently reported as more impactful than theoretical education alone.
- **Training and capacity building:** Professional training for guides, coaches, and volunteers is a priority, with a focus on both technical skills (e.g., safety, hydrology) and environmental knowledge. Germany and Slovenia, in particular, stress the need for high-quality training that incorporates sustainable practices.
- **Community engagement:** Collaboration with local communities, NGOs, and government agencies is seen as essential for promoting sustainability and securing resources. Germany, Italy and Portugal highlight the importance of networking among water sports organizations, educators, and institutions.
- **Incentive systems:** Competitions and challenges, such as waste collection contests, are used to motivate participants to adopt sustainable behaviors in a fun and engaging way.
- **Sustainable event planning:** All countries report efforts to minimize the environmental impact of water sports events through waste reduction, use of eco-friendly materials, and adherence to environmental guidelines.

Barriers & Challenges

Despite these good practices, organizations face several common barriers:

- **Resource constraints:** All countries report challenges related to limited funding, staffing, and time, particularly in volunteer-driven clubs and associations.
- **Lack of awareness and training:** There is a widespread need for greater awareness of ESD and sustainability among both participants and organizers. Many lack the knowledge or practical tools to implement ESD effectively.



- **Institutional and regulatory gaps:** Slovenia and Italy highlight the need for stronger government support and clearer regulations to ensure responsible water sports practices. Portugal points to difficulties in securing partnerships and corporate support.
- **Resistance to change:** In some cases, commercial operators or club members are reluctant to adopt new practices, prioritizing profit or convenience over sustainability.
- **Structural and organizational challenges:** Embedding sustainability into the core activities and governance of clubs remains a challenge, with many organizations lacking strategic planning or designated sustainability roles.

Skills & Competences Needed

The report identifies several key competences and skills required to advance ESD in water sports:

- **Environmental knowledge:** Understanding of local ecosystems, environmental impacts, and sustainable practices.
- **Effective communication:** Ability to clearly convey sustainability principles and foster a culture of responsibility among participants.
- **Practical training methods:** Skills in designing and delivering hands-on, accessible educational activities.
- **Collaboration and networking:** Building partnerships with other organizations, institutions, and stakeholders.
- **Project and event management:** Organizing sustainable events and integrating ESD into everyday club activities.
- **Strategic thinking:** Embedding sustainability into organizational structures and long-term planning.
- **Motivational leadership:** Engaging and empowering diverse groups through inclusive and enjoyable activities.

Both technical expertise and soft skills—such as communication, leadership, and collaboration—are seen as crucial for trainers and organizers.



Key Insights & Recommendations

The interviews conducted across the four partner countries reveal that while there is strong enthusiasm for integrating sustainability into water sports, organizations face consistent challenges in doing so effectively. The findings point to several critical areas where targeted support, training, and structural change can significantly enhance the impact of ESD initiatives.

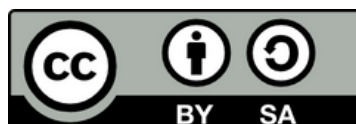
- Water sports serve as effective platforms for experiential learning, enabling participants to connect with nature and internalize sustainability values through direct, hands-on activities.
- Common barriers include limited funding and staffing, low levels of ESD awareness among practitioners, and a lack of tailored training materials or tools.
- There is a clear need for practical training that equips educators and sport professionals with competences in environmental education, facilitation, and programme design.
- Embedding sustainability into the operations and governance of clubs remains a challenge, highlighting the importance of strategic planning and long-term vision.
- Collaboration with local stakeholders—such as schools, NGOs, and environmental agencies—is key to extending reach and strengthening programme effectiveness.
- Emphasis should be placed on developing motivational leadership and fostering a culture of shared responsibility within sport and community settings.





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Partners



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