

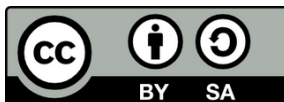


Sustain a Wave Interview Report

Motivations, Needs, Barriers and Strategies for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in water sports



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Introduction

This report presents an in-depth analysis of the findings from interviews conducted by Sustain a Wave project partners across the four partner countries Germany, Italy, Slovenia and Portugal. Drawing on 20 interviews with stakeholders from sport clubs, associations, NGOs, and higher education, the study reveals a shared commitment to environmental stewardship and community engagement, though each country demonstrates unique priorities and approaches. Across all contexts, hands-on learning, collaboration, and practical activities stand out as the most effective strategies for fostering environmental responsibility. Key barriers include resource limitations, lack of awareness, and the need for better training and institutional support. The findings highlight that advancing ESD in water sports requires both systemic changes and targeted capacity building to ensure long-term impact and inclusive participation.

Motivations for Integrating ESD into Water Sports

The report finds that all four countries are motivated by a strong commitment to environmental conservation and the protection of aquatic ecosystems. In Slovenia, the primary drivers are safeguarding fragile environments such as rivers and canyons, promoting social responsibility, and supporting local economies through sustainable tourism. Slovenian organizations see water sports as a unique way to blend physical activity with environmental education and stress that the long-term viability of these activities depends on the health of the natural environment.

Germany places a strong emphasis on social inclusion, community health, and democratic participation, alongside environmental concerns. German organizations use water sports not only for physical well-being but also to promote societal reflection, inclusion of underrepresented groups, and global awareness. Innovative activities like disc golf are seen as opportunities to combine outdoor recreation with environmental education.

In Italy, there is a deep-rooted sensitivity to sustainability among water sports participants, particularly regarding the impact of human activity on rivers, seas, and lakes. Italian organizations focus on fostering environmental values in children and youth, aiming to cultivate a culture of respect for nature that extends into broader civil society.

Portugal is motivated by a commitment to marine conservation and responsible tourism. Portuguese organizations emphasize raising awareness about marine biodiversity, pollution, and eco-friendly practices, while also promoting community building, leadership, and experiential learning through water sports.

Despite these differences, all countries recognize the value of water sports as a platform for experiential learning, environmental stewardship, and community engagement.



Good practices and 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.

Country-specific highlights include Slovenia's focus on the economic benefits of sustainable water sports for local communities, Germany's integration of ESD into club structures and political advocacy, Italy's emphasis on ecological materials and logistics, and Portugal's marine conservation initiatives and "Leave No Trace" principles.

Barriers and 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 and 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 and recommendations

The findings from all four countries underscore the importance of a multi-faceted approach to ESD in water sports. Government support and clear regulations are vital for ensuring responsible practices, while experiential learning and incentive systems effectively engage participants. Collaboration among organizations, educators, and local communities strengthens impact and resource sharing. Addressing resource constraints, providing targeted training, and embedding sustainability into club structures are essential steps for overcoming barriers. Ultimately, fostering environmental stewardship through water sports requires both systemic change and practical, hands-on engagement at every level.