

Recommendations from the 4th Nature and Sport Euro'meet

On 27-29th September, over 65 key stakeholders from 11 different European countries gathered at La Seu D'Urgell in Catalonia to share knowledge and develop critical thinking in the whole area of outdoor sports development at a European Level. This event was organised by La Seu Turisme in partnership with and under the auspices of the European Network of Outdoor Sports (ENOS).

At the conference 4 key themes were discussed with keynote speakers and recognised experts in their field all involved. These key themes were:

1. Mass mega sporting events
2. Active tourism
3. Outdoor sports in protected areas
4. Outdoor sports, health and well being

From the event, 7 actions were identified as key recommendations that should be sent to the EU Sport Unit which sits under the DG for Education Youth Sport and Culture (EAC). Although these are sent to the EAC, some relate to other units such as the DG for Agriculture and Rural Development.

There are 11 recommendations that we suggest can be adopted by national, regional and local authorities, protected area managers or event organisers to improve how outdoor sports are managed and developed in their region.

Recommendation 1 (The European Commission)

We strongly recommend that the European Commission consider the importance of participatory events and how these can be further supported. These often offer greater benefits to a wider community than high profile spectator events, such as football or even the Olympic Games. The Erasmus funding for not for profit sport events is a welcome initiative.

Recommendation 6 (The European Commission)

Rural development funding should include elements for improving access or developing opportunities for active tourism.¹

Recommendation 17 (The European Commission)

The European Commission should support the evidence base on the health and well-being benefits of physical activity and of being in nature, with the provision of dedicated funding for this work.

Recommendation 19 (ALL)

The European Commission, ENOS, federations, clubs and regional authorities need to promote images of ordinary people enjoying physical activity in green spaces that are accessible rather than those of very athletic looking “perfect” / elite individuals carrying out some form of extreme high adrenaline activity.

Recommendation 20 (The European Commission)

Increasingly risk averse authorities and organisations are limiting opportunities for access to green space for health enhancing physical activity for fear of litigation. The European Commission could alleviate this through a European Directive on access and personal responsibility to green spaces for recreation and physical activity. This is already enshrined in law in some countries.

Recommendation 21 (The European Commission)

The DG for agriculture that provides significant funding and subsidies to landowners and farmers could enact the provision of access for health and well-being as a key component of the rural development funding.²

¹ See recommendation 21

² See recommendation 6

Recommendation 23 (The European Commission & ENOS)

The DG for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport should consider the potential for the development of European Outdoor Youth Camps that provide exchange programmes but also focus on personal and social education programmes. ENOS could facilitate pilot programmes for this which also should be linked to academic institutes that can then carry out research into the social and health benefits accrued from such events.

Minutes of the 4th Nature and Sport Euro'meet

1. Mass mega sporting events.

Mass sporting events in the outdoors are an important part of the European culture and have been organised in various parts of Europe for many years. However, there was a view from the delegates that there has been a growth in the number and type of such events especially those that involve significant challenges in the last 2 decades. Such events can provide significant benefits to those involved whether as a participant, volunteer or spectator. Significant research quantifying the impact of major events in terms of economics, inspiration and wider social benefits has been carried out by a range of academic institutions and statutory agencies.

However, in outdoor sports there is always a challenge to balance the benefits generated by events with the need to ensure environmental protection and sustainability?

On the first day of this Euro'Meet Conference there were five passionate speakers who spoke about mass mega events from very different perspectives. These included:

- i. The rationale behind the 2022 Winter Olympic Candidacy for Barcelona and the Pyrenees, and the challenges faced during this multi-disciplinary team effort. This presentation posed the questions of sustainability, legacy and return on investment from the development of the necessary infrastructure for a winter Olympics in a warmer environment. What would be the longer-term legacy from such an event? There is limited evidence to suggest that any modern Olympic Games has achieved long term legacy impacts in terms of participation and it is a challenge for facilities to be used effectively once the event ends. These should be key considerations of any bid to host such a mass scale event.

- ii. The theories which explain why people participate in mass mega events was presented by Dr Tommy Andersson from the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. Their research showed that participants classified as 'involved or serious runners' achieve a balance which allows them to train and compete and how increasingly their families attend events with them. Dr. Andersson also offered the use of a questionnaire to help understand participation in events. This 'mass mega' survey, which contains 250 different questions is split into five different themes, each of which captures insight into a different element of event participation from motivations to economic impacts.
- iii. There were also three shorter presentations which provided specific insight into a cycling event, trail running classifications and a major equestrian competition. The Transpyr mountain bike event provided a very good example of how to focus on sustainability and also protection of the routes used.

There was a strong sense that those involved in promoting and advocating outdoor sports participation and encouraging people to enjoy the natural environment should take cognisance of the increasing popularity and demand for such events and the potential consequences on the land/water areas used. Many participants and consumers actively look for sustainability to be clearly built into such programmes and hopefully this growing pressure will help to alleviate issues. Whilst some nations/regions have codes of conduct or guidance on sustainable delivery these are usually voluntary rather than mandatory and there is no consistency across Europe.

Recommendation 1 (The European Commission)

It is recommended that the European Commission consider the importance of participatory events and how these can be further supported. These often offer greater benefits to a wider community than high profile spectator events, such as football or even the Olympic Games. The Erasmus funding for not for profit sport events is a welcome initiative.

Recommendation 2 (ENOS)

ENOS should work with the Europarc Federation to establish a resource that

shares knowledge and develops agreed standards of high quality sustainable practice for outdoor sport events in protected areas.

Recommendation 3 (Outdoor event organisers)

Further work is needed to understand participation in mass mega events to help to maximise the benefits created. Tools such as www.eventimpacts.com can be utilised by event providers and organisations to help to evidence the power of events. There may also be elements of the Gothenburg University survey which can be used to provide increased insight into the motivations for participation. Both these resources are free to use.

Recommendation 4 (Natural area managers)

The increasing popularity of a range of outdoor sporting events puts pressure on certain landscapes. It is necessary to track usage of areas used and to work with expert groups and local communities to ensure that such areas are not over-used.

Recommendation 5 (Outdoor event organisers)

Organisers of mass mega events in the outdoors (especially those that are commercial or charity fund raising events) should consider some type of 'payback scheme' to local land / water management or environmental agencies to help manage the areas that they use.

2. Active Tourism

The session on Active Tourism dealt with all the facets of outdoor sport in a touristic setting. The speakers came from different organisations and could therefore give a diverse and significant view on the topic.

Enric Torres (National Tourism Office of Andorra) gave an insight on the role of outdoor sport for the touristic development of Andorra. Dr. Lázaro Mediavilla and Dr. Vicente Gómez (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid) talked about the service quality in outdoor providers and highlighted the role of guides and leaders in the field of active tourism. Niels-Christian Levin Hansen (National Olympic Committee in Denmark) signposted the value of outdoor sport for Danish society and the work of the NOC in Denmark for the various outdoor sports. Lisbeth K. Lund (University Oslo) analysed the conflicts of outdoor sport and sports in

nature that are discussed in the actual literature. Pau Mateu, Miriam Rocher and Victor Labrador (INEFC – Barcelona) explored the personal and social effects of outdoor interventions through their empirical research during a Nordic skiing camp. Romain le Pemp described a case study about ski touring the development and changes of outdoor sports with the effects on space, participants and stakeholders and tried to give solutions to the occurring problems.

Through the questions, discussions and the speaker's expertise, the following information was highlighted and key recommendations developed:

It was highlighted that active tourism and outdoor sport have and will continue to have a great potential for the development of rural areas and regions. These are already highlighted in the EU white paper for rural development but need to be further broadcasted to different stakeholders including those responsible for rural development. The following two factors should be taken into account:

- Minimal investment brings high returns in developing outdoor sport and active tourism.
- Statistically proven data has shown that outdoor sport tourists have a longer average duration of stay compared to other tourist sectors and this can have a positive effect for income generated and a reduction in the carbon footprint caused by the tourism activity through longer but fewer stays.

There was a clear recognition that there are high quality education processes in place for the qualifications for outdoor guides and instructors across Europe. However, the development of aligned awards is still in its infancy. Furthermore it was highlighted that outdoor guides should also hold an environmental qualification to be ambassadors of nature protection. There seems to be a gap between European countries and their varied associations as some have this idea already in place while others are just in the beginning. Further exchange of knowledge and learning from each other is necessary along with cooperation with nature protecting organisations.

There was a desire expressed from stakeholders, officials and outdoor sport participants alike to have sensible information and regulations affecting outdoor sport and environmental matters broadcasted through easy

accessible media like websites and social media. In situ signposting and informational signs can give participants a positive sport experience but also transcribe important environmental matters.

The importance of outdoor sports to increase grassroots sports participation is evidenced by the EU Barometer and also various delegates at the event and this is recognised by some National Olympic Committees (NOC's) across Europe. It is essential to continue to promote this information and the associated benefits as the NOC's have a significant influence over sports development in their country.

Recommendation 6 (The European Commission)

Rural development funding could or should include elements for improving access or developing opportunities for active tourism.³

Recommendation 7 (Local, regional and national authorities)

Regulations concerning outdoor sport must be evidence based.

Recommendation 8 (ENOS)

ENOS should lead on an Erasmus fund application to develop a pan EU qualification for environmental awareness by guides and leaders.

Recommendation 9 (Local, regional and national authorities)

Agreed systems for signage and information displaying positive messages should be developed by regional and national authorities. The use of websites and social media to share important messages is essential.

Recommendation 10 (ENOS)

Further research and knowledge exchange about the positive effects of outdoor sport to both individuals and societies must be continued. It is essential that ENOS effectively disseminates information developed through the BOSS project to key stakeholders and to all the National Olympic Committees.

Recommendation 11 (Local, regional and national authorities)

³ See recommendation 21

National and regional authorities need to be aware that outdoor sports and active tourism desires can develop and change in a very fast manner. It is recommended that they are involved in the ENOS network to ensure that they have opportunities to connect with other key stakeholders and are both aware of and communicate any significant changes.

3. Outdoor Sports in protected areas

A challenging aim was laid down at the start of this session to define clear strategies to help the managers of natural protected areas to have more sustainable management.

One of the main conclusions of the session was the recognition that sustainable development can be divided into three main phases

- 1) A situation diagnosis phase, once the conflict has been detected;
- 2) A period of action or process of intervention, in which the recommended strategies are agreed and rolled out; and
- 3) A phase of evaluation and adaptation to any developments generated by the strategies adopted.

The diagnosis phase consists of an in-depth analysis of the environment and the four dimensions of sustainable development which are: social, economic, ecologic and institutional. This analysis, as shown by Javier Gómez Limón, should be done from a scientific point of view trying to define the carrying capacity of the area, which he renamed "the reception capacity" of the area. Estela Farías added the importance of knowing the characteristics and the profile of the visitors and sports people who use natural areas. He showed the methodology to analyse their profile with the aim of giving the people responsible for the management of a natural area some strategies to deal with them and their activities.

Overlooking the existence of a stakeholder involved in the practice of a specific sports activity may constitute a major drawback when it comes to managing the activity. The first essential step towards more sustainable management of the area is to identify all the stakeholders who may be affected by, or else exert a degree of influence on, decisions adopted in relation to management of a specific activity.

The intervention phase has its starting point following the scientific studies developed in the diagnosis phase, with the aim of generating strategies to "leave no trace" on the natural area, as Noel Doyle showed with their good practices in Ireland. The main aim of Leave No Trace Ireland is to create positive attitudes towards more sustainable behaviour by environmental education and ethics. It is essential to create the strategies in response to the

scope of the “reception capacity” of the area: the physical capacity; the ecologic capacity, defined by the ability for an area to recuperate effectively by its own resources; and the psychological capacity, as the maximum number of people that can be at the area without a feeling of mass use or dissatisfaction. Some successful strategies were highlighted by the speakers:

- i. “Ecobriefing” which consists of the use of explanations prior to the activity to highlight the effects of poor behaviour on the ecologic condition of the area.
- ii. Participatory processes with common agreements or shared responsibility and commitment.

The evaluation phase involves the corroboration of attainments in relation to the established objectives, through the assessment of the sustainability impacts generated by the adopted strategies. Once the results have been assessed, 2 outcomes may be found:

- If the results are positive then the situation needs to be monitored so that sustainability is maintained.
- In those cases where the desired degree of sustainability has not been attained, then further corrective measures should be devised.

The evaluation, as shown by María José Viñals, has to be assessed from the point of view of the different dimensions of the development: social, ecologic, economic and institutional. Marc Garriga from the Parc Natural de l’Alt Pirineu provided information on his experiences as the manager of a protected area. He highlighted the importance of recognising the (often limited) managing capacity of the area, based on the human and economic resources that the Natural park authority may have at its disposal.

In conclusion, many more questions than answers were laid on the table.

Recommendation 12 (ENOS)

ENOS and Euro’parc should work together to set some parameters and ways of understanding carrying capacity which could be renamed as the reception capacity. It should be recognised that this should be divided into three parts: physical capacity, ecologic capacity and psychologic capacity.

Recommendation 13 (Protected area managers)

The management authority for natural sites should develop a network structure that would encompass all the stakeholders involved, and foster collaborative processes in which they all share similar values for the natural area. This is critical when conflicts arise.

Recommendation 14 (Protected area managers)

Managers of natural protected areas should clearly separate their actions into the 3 main phases outlined above of the managing process:

- a. A situation diagnosis phase
- b. A period of action or intervention
- c. A phase of evaluation and adaption as required.

Recommendation 15 (Local / regional authorities)

Regional / local authorities should apply strategies that avoid unilateral solutions that lack a consensual basis, involve all stakeholders, and that respond to the strategies developed through collaborative thinking

Recommendation 16 (Protected area managers)

It is recommended that there is greater joined up thinking on the management of protected areas and outdoor sports as regulations are extremely diverse and inconsistent. This can be the case not just across national borders but even across regional and local areas

4. Outdoor Sports and well-being

Peter Varley provided a great start to the morning session and created thinking about the pressures of a modern-day lifestyle and that accelerated technological lives are commonplace. Time is now one of life's greatest luxuries and how it is spent can make a huge difference to health and well-being. The concept of slow adventure is that it is about human or natural powered travel, it is about the journey as much as or even more so than the destination and it provides connectivity with nature. Peter talked about our need for "Vitamin N" which is a great way to think about our need for natural connectivity.

Tadhg McIntyre was the second keynote speaker and provided a fascinating insight into the world of research into health and green/blue exercise. As a psychologist working in this field, Tadhg highlighted that there is still significant research needs into the impacts of green/blue exercise on health and well-being. However, there are a number of partner organisations working hard to bridge that gap.

He highlighted some of the work that has been done and it was notable that exercise in the natural environment invoked memory retention much better than that done in a gym or indoor facility. Tadhg also provided insights into motivation and behavioural differences between indoor and outdoor activity again showing that motivation can be stronger in the outdoors. The whole area of social and interpersonal connectivity through the outdoors was also a strong feature that Tadhg's talk highlighted.

Sina Hartmann gave a presentation on a Masters project that she was involved with to look at the impact of a summer camp in Sweden on young people's confidence and personal development. Those working in outdoor education are aware of the benefits that such programmes bring (through anecdotal quotes such as "that was the best day of my life!") but it is good to see some research done that starts to quantify impacts.

One of the things that ENOS is doing through the BOSS project is starting to collate and provide a good record of the research that is being done that highlights the social benefits of outdoor sports.

Kirsti Pedersen Gurholt was next and provided a fascinating insight into media portrayals of women and girls who live and travel in Arctic Norway environments. She highlighted projects where young people and especially girls were involved in amazing arctic adventures, but they didn't see it as wilderness – just as arctic environments. Furthermore, she highlighted the impact these had on their academic success and their resilience but also the role of these girls in reshaping and rethinking feminine identity.

A much more practical talk was provided by Anne Ward and Venora Hovelt who are ambassadors for the Ring of Gullion area in Northern Ireland. They gave an insight into the programmes that they run to provide a holistic approach to culture, identity and health through walking that connect participants back to landscape and a sense of place and also to local healthy food. It was good to see a very practical example of some of the theory that had been explored.

Finally, the last session was from Feliu Funollet who gave an inspiring and passionate talk on the power of nature for personal and collective transformation. Again, Feliu highlighted the challenges faced in a modern world and included how education can at times be stifling our young people. He highlighted the emotional connections that people have not just with nature but also with each other after being active in natural environments and these are highly observable among students he has had involved in programmes.

It was noted that this is one of the reasons that ENOS ensure that there are site visits in the conference as the connectivity and networking that people gain through the activities is often much better than when in meetings.

In conclusion there was a very varied morning that included academic research findings, thought provoking challenges, practical examples of the power of nature to make a difference in people's lives, the importance of moving and being physically active (although not necessarily at a fast pace) and the need to be passionate drivers for the value of outdoor sports.

Recommendation 17 (The European Commission)

The European Commission should look to support the evidence base on the health and well-being benefits of physical activity and likewise of being in nature by the provision of dedicated funding for this work.

Recommendation 18 (ENOS)

ENOS needs to promote and showcase any research that has highlighted this and should develop a partnership agreement with the GOGreenEX network.

Recommendation 19 (ALL)

The European Commission, ENOS, federations, clubs and regional authorities need to promote the use of imagery of ordinary people enjoying physical activity in green spaces that are accessible rather than those of very athletic looking “perfect” / elite individuals carrying out some form of extreme high adrenaline activity.

Recommendation 20 (The European Commission)

Increasingly risk averse authorities and organisations are limiting opportunities for access to green space for health enhancing physical activity for fear of litigation. The European Commission could alleviate this through a European Directive on access and personal responsibility to green spaces for recreation and physical activity. This is already enshrined in law in some countries.

Recommendation 21 (The European Commission)

The DG for agriculture that provides significant funding and subsidies to landowners and farmers could enshrine the provision of access for health and well-being as a key component of the rural development funding.⁴

Recommendation 22 (ENOS)

ENOS should facilitate an Erasmus application to develop training programmes for outdoor sports professionals and club leaders at a pan European level on how to develop programmes and maximise health benefits for participants on longer term programmes of activity in the outdoors.

Recommendation 23 (The European Commission & ENOS)

⁴ See recommendation 6

The DG for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport should consider the potential for the development of European Outdoor Youth Camps that provide exchange programmes but also focus on personal and social education programmes. ENOS could facilitate pilot programmes for this which also should be linked to academic institutes that can then carry out research into the social and health benefits accrued from such events.

Recommendation 24 (ENOS)

ENOS needs to promote the importance of using physical activity in the natural environment as a way of developing social interaction and community coherence.