

The 3rd Nature and Sport Euro'meet

Summary Report and Key Recommendations



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The 3rd Nature and Sports Euro'meet



Photo by S Folco

The 3rd Nature and Sports Euro'meet was held in Newcastle, Co. Down, Northern Ireland from 30 September - 2 October 2015 with over 140 delegates from 15 different countries at the event.

Two themes were discussed:

1. Increasing participation and optimising the social benefits associated with outdoor sports; and
2. Capturing and developing the economic importance of outdoor sports for a region or territory.

As a result of the Euro'meet, the European Network of Outdoor Sports (ENOS) has developed a series of 32 key recommendations that are for delegates (12), ENOS itself (15) and for the European Commission (7). These are highlighted in section 3 of this report.

The recommendations are broad but some linking themes emerged of:

- Creating, collating and communicating robust evidence whether of participation or economic value continues to be essential to prove the case for outdoor sports.
- Ensuring that programmes, activities and projects are sustainable in terms of environmental impact but also from an economic perspective.
- Partnership, collaboration and integration of services and approach are fundamental to optimising participation and economic viability and sustainability.
- Innovation and online communication remain important for optimising both participation and economic value.

There was consensus that there needs to be an increased political awareness and discussion on the importance of the 'outdoors' at both a national and EU level and ENOS should work towards the development of a white paper in the EU Parliament on outdoor sport and recreation.

Brian Henning Chair of Sport Northern Ireland, Minister Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, Roland Farkas (EU Sport Unit), Joao Zamith (ENOS), Minister Michael Ring TD, and Kieran Mulvey Chair of Sport Ireland



Introduction

The Nature and Sports Euro’meet is a biennial event that is under the aegis of and managed by the European Network of Outdoor Sports (ENOS). Previous editions were held in Annecy, France in 2011 and in Liptovsky Mikulas, Slovakia in 2013.

The 2015 event was held in Newcastle, Northern Ireland and was hosted by Newry Mourne and Down District Council. The 4th Nature and Sports Euro’meet will be held in La Seu de Urgell in Catalonia in 2017.

The programme for the event was created and developed by the ENOS Committee with input from partners from seven European countries. Once the themes were agreed, a wide call for speakers was sent out via the ENOS website and contacts. The organisation of the event and the site visits were managed by a Northern Ireland based steering group led by Sport Northern Ireland but involving five other partner organisations from both within and outside of the government sector. The event was therefore a prime example of partnership working at both a European and local level.

The two key themes for the event linked strongly both to EU priorities and to the needs for the development of outdoor sports in Northern Ireland as articulated by the Northern Ireland Outdoor Recreation Action Plan. These were:

1. Increasing participation and optimising the social benefits associated with outdoor sports; and
2. Capturing and developing the economic importance of outdoor sports for a region or territory.

However, there was an overarching consideration of the importance of working in cross-border regions where different legislative requirements exist.

Over 140 delegates from 15 different countries were at the conference and represented a great range of sectors. These included tourism agencies; local and national authorities; national and international federations of sport; private sector organisations; non-government organisations; academic institutions; and other relevant networks.

The conference was opened by the Ministers for Sport in Northern Ireland - Minister Carál Ní Chuilín MLA; and the Republic of Ireland - Minister Michael Ring TD, which emphasised the importance of cross-border cooperation. Both Ministers enthusiastically endorsed the conference and the opportunities for greater European Networking and collaboration as well as the importance of outdoor sports in meeting governmental targets for health enhancing physical activity and ‘smart and sustainable’ economic growth.

Councillor Naomi Baillie, Chair of Newry, Mourne and Down Council, welcomed the delegates to the Mourne area and highlighted that the council was delighted to be hosting the event.

Summary of Programme

The programme involved key note addresses, workshops highlighting good practice, technical workshops to provide detailed toolkits and practical advice, as well as poster presentations.

An important aspect of the conference was the networking time and this was facilitated through coffee and lunch breaks beside the main conference room in the outstanding Slieve Donard hotel.

Delegates were given the opportunity to participate in two working site visits which showcased the local area, provided breathing and reflection time and a great opportunity for networking with other delegates and local service providers.

A video that captures the essence of the 3rd Nature and Sport Euro'meet can be viewed online:

www.nature-sports.eu

Keynote Addresses

Jonny Young

Jonny Young a para-canoe athlete from Northern Ireland who, following a skiing accident in 2012 in which he broke his back, has gone on to be a member of the British Para Canoe team and won silver medal at the European championships. Jonny set the context of the conference by highlighting how outdoor sport has given him the motivation to “literally get back on his feet”. This was a very inspiring introductory address in which Jonny described his journey from “piste to podium”.

Roland Farkas

Roland Farkas from the Sport Unit of the European Commission provided insights into the policies and priorities of the Commission in developing sport and health enhancing physical activity in Europe. He emphasised the importance of connecting with the European Week of Sport and the importance of collating and providing evidence, developing policy and then motivating action. There is still a clear need for outdoor sports to show on an evidential basis its importance and value at local, national and EU levels.

Simon Shibli

Simon Shibli from the Sport Industry Research Centre at Sheffield Hallam University in England provided an overview of the potential of the outdoor sector in economic terms based on data from in depth studies carried out in Northern Ireland and Sheffield (UK). The potential impact of outdoor sports at a European level is staggering if the studies from Northern Ireland and Sheffield were to be extrapolated up and could potentially equate to consumer expenditure and Gross Value Added each over €5 billion and employment in the sector of over 1.5 million jobs. However Simon called for greater collaborative working to gather robust, comparable data. He urged delegates to speak the language funders want to hear and to join up the offer of the outdoors for maximum value. He indicated that research to date in this area has only just scraped the surface and there is a great potential for further work and showcasing of value.

Carol Ritchie

The final keynote speaker was Carol Ritchie from the Europarc Federation who highlighted that Europarc works for our natural and cultural heritage, to improve and champion the policy and practice of protected area management, in order to deliver sustainable nature which is valued by people. She reminded us that protected areas represent land that is our inheritance and that we hold it in trust for those who come after us.

Carol also highlighted the health, wellbeing and social benefits of engagement with the natural environment as well as the economic value of nature and so called for collaboration with outdoor sports in articulating value. She called delegates to meet an important 21st century responsibility to meet the challenges, promote new creative approaches and thinking and make new partnerships - Nature and Sports working together to proclaim anew the meaning and value of the natural environment, of biodiversity, conservation, and recreation; to expand the learning opportunities and share that knowledge broadly; and to encourage people to experience and connect with nature.

Main Workshops

Following the keynote addresses there were workshops on the two key themes and delegates could then choose which workshop to attend.

Participation Theme

Selected presentations were provided from Northern Ireland, France, England, Portugal, Germany and Greece on topics as varied as the importance of community engagement, developing genuine inclusivity for people with disabilities, connecting children and young people with nature and opportunities, creating innovative on-line and app mechanisms, private sector motivation and how the outdoors can facilitate sustainable participation at low cost.

Economic Theme

Presentations were provided from Northern Ireland, France, Wales, Switzerland and the Republic of Ireland on topics as varied as quality accreditation, creating innovative online and app mechanisms to capture reliable data and needs as well as to disseminate information, factors influencing the development of top climbing destinations and the economic value of trails and greenways.

The range of topics within the two themes provided stimulating discussions and innovative ideas for further development and these are reflected in the recommendations to follow.

Full details of each of the presentations will be available in the ENOS journal in January 2016, and a PDF version of each of the presentations can be downloaded at:

www.nature-sports.eu



Site Visits



Ten different site visits were arranged for delegates on a wide range of local issues related to the management or development of outdoor sports. These included farm diversification schemes; developing sustainable trails; connecting outdoor sports to film tourism; geo-tourism; and coastal rowing.



Some of the site visits were quite physical in nature including the visit to the mountain bike trails, gorge walking (bouldering/canyoning) and the rowing, while others were more mentally rather than physically stimulating.

The weather for these visits was fantastic and while they provided insights to the issues being managed locally they also created great opportunities for discussion and networking for delegates.

Taking time out at an international outdoor sports conference to see the area and the practical issues that are being dealt with is an essential ingredient for enhancing learning and development for the delegates.

Technical Conferences and Poster Presentations

Five different technical conferences were available to delegates that provided practical toolkits that could be taken and developed in their own region or country, these were:

1. Developing a toolkit for developing community path networks;
2. Suricat – a digital and interactive tool for providing up to the minute information and alerts about problems on any outdoor sport sites from a smart phone;
3. Geotrek, digital management and development application for hiking in the National Parc des Ecrins, France;
4. Methodology to capture the economic benefit of outdoor sports; and
5. Leave No Trace Ireland workshop and awareness training.

Three poster presentations were also provided on two projects in Catalonia and one in Bulgaria – again providing delegates with a real range of experiences and learning opportunities.

Gala Dinner and Ceilidh

At the end of the event the delegates had the chance to get to know each other better over a gala dinner and an exceptional Ceilidh (traditional music and dance). Music was provided by the “Stray Leaf” Ceilidh band and delegates were treated to a fantastic display of skill by the Celtic Storm dance group.

This was a superb and fitting end to the conference that showed tremendous local talent and culture and followed on from the inspiring scenery and in-depth discussions that delegates had seen and taken part over the three day event.

A raffle was held to help raise funds for the Mourne Mountains Upland Path fund and sincere thanks to all those local suppliers and manufacturers who provided prizes.

Key Recommendations from the Conference

For the Delegates

- Evidence from the Euro'meet emphasised that trusting partnerships are essential for effective delivery of increased participation and for improving economic return and so delegates should invest time and resources in developing effective and trusted partnerships.
- Delegates are recommended to develop connectivity between different sectors and agencies as outdoor sports are cross cutting and can be the 'glue' between sectors.
- It is recommended that those aiming to increase participation ensure that participants have choice through the provision of a range of activities/ opportunities as this was shown through the case studies presented to be effective.
- Iconic hubs or facilities for inspiring participation are important and should be developed at local/national level.
- Nearly all the successful projects highlighted in the Euro'meet involved 'officials with vision' - open minded and dynamic individuals with a drive to succeed, who champion projects. Therefore delegates are recommended to provide mechanisms for identifying, empowering and supporting such individuals.
- There was a very clear message about the need to engage and develop relationships with the education sector at a local, regional and national level.
- Delegates are recommended to map and promote what exists in an area and provide information in an appropriately packaged manner for target audiences.
- It is recommended that providers of services are quality accredited and that those who promote opportunities utilise the service providers who have been accredited.
- Delegates are recommended to invest in the creation of evidence of the 'value' of outdoor sports from an economic and social perspective as this is critical to be able to communicate effectively with decision makers and politicians.
- Outdoor sport providers need to work together to develop an appropriate quality label for their area.
- Outdoor sport tourism providers must build environmental consideration and the issue of sustainability into their offer so that impact and welcome by national parks and other authorities is achieved.
- Outdoor sport tourism stakeholders need to integrate their activities into the broader tourism offer in an area along with the accommodation, hospitality and transport sectors in order to improve efficiency of approach and economic sustainability of the sector.

For ENOS

- ENOS, along with other partner organisations such as the European Outdoor Group and Europarc Federation, should develop a 'green paper' (European Parliament discussion paper) on outdoor sports.
- There is a need to ensure a common language and ENOS should develop an agreed definition of outdoor sports.
- ENOS should promote a consistent approach to economic impact in line with EU recommended methodologies.
- ENOS needs to capitalise on the fact that outdoor sport has been highlighted through the European Week of Sport (EWOS) as an effective method of delivery.
- ENOS should seek opportunities to connect to the education sector for outdoor sport via the channel of EWOS and through members' national agencies.
- ENOS should develop standards for sustainable use of the natural environment for outdoor sports.

- All projects highlighted the social benefits of outdoor sports and so ENOS should continue to develop the 'Benefits of Outdoor Sports to Society' (BOSS) project to highlight these social benefits and community building at an EU level.*
- There are different structures in various EU countries with different legislation affecting outdoor sports. ENOS should provide information on this and also should continue to showcase good examples from various nations through the ENOS Experiences website (www.nature-sports.eu) and the Euro'meet.
- There is value of a single website that provides info from European - National - Local level that is very simple and straightforward to use. ENOS should develop a portal for such information.
- Need for appropriate qualifications and leaders - EU professional outdoor card - mountain guides and ski instructors. ENOS should liaise about the European Learning Syllabus for Outdoor Animators (ELESA) project and also support the mobility of instructors in line with respect for national regulations.
- It was very valuable to see different cultural approaches which creates 'thinking' and so ENOS should create further seminars and learning opportunities for meeting that are on line and therefore inexpensive.
- The conference provided a wealth of information and ENOS should ensure that there is effective and widespread dissemination of this information.
- ENOS needs to send reps to national conferences and events.
- ENOS needs to engage very widely with the outdoor industry sector and build relationships with organisations such as European Outdoor Group (EOG) and the Adventure Travel and Trade Agency (ATTA).
- ENOS should develop a role in providing information on funding streams and sustainable financing.

For the European Commission

The main recommendation is that there should be an initial green paper followed by a white paper specifically on outdoor sports that highlights the value of this sector. This could encompass the following recommendations:

- It is strongly recommended that the Commission keep 'outdoors' as a key facet of the EWOS.
- The Commission should ensure that funding is grass-roots friendly rather than 'high level' for grass roots activity.
- It is strongly recommended that the Education and Culture Directorate-General (EAC DG) should find mechanisms to ensure that outdoor sport is embedded into education opportunities for young people as there are very clear issues with urbanisation and a lack of engagement with nature.
- The Commission should support work to develop appropriate qualifications and leaders for an EU professional outdoor card e.g. mountain guides, ski instructors, mountain bike instructors, etc.
- The Commission should facilitate engagement with the DG's responsible for tourism and economics, as outdoor sports are cross-cutting, and thereby support opportunities for ENOS to feedback information from the Euro'meet to relevant organisations.
- The Commission could develop policy and/or a directive that ensures personal responsibility for risk associated with outdoor sports and active lifestyles, thereby reducing fear of liability and creating greater opportunity to adopt active lifestyles.
- There is a strong recommendation to develop joined up thinking between DG EAC and DG Environment on the promotion of outdoor sports and nature protection.

Feedback from the Online Survey

Delegates were sent an online survey at the end of the event and 55 responses were received representing a 39% response rate. The overall customer satisfaction rating was **94%** at good or excellent.

	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	Good or Excellent
Registration Process	3.8%	9.6%	40.4%	46.2%	87%
Quality of Speakers	1.9%	0%	61.1%	37%	98%
Workshops	2%	9.8%	60.8%	27.5%	88%
Venue	0%	1.9%	28.3%	69.8%	98%
Sound	0%	0%	30.9%	69.1%	100%
Quality of Interpretation (if required)	0%	0%	27.7%	72.3%	100%
Food	0%	5.5%	25.5%	69.1%	95%
Site Visits	4.1%	10.2%	40.8%	44.9%	86%
Customer Care	0%	2%	37.3%	60.8%	98%
Learning achieved	3.8%	7.7%	57.5%	39.8%	88%

Some comment received were:

"Excellent international contacts."

"Networking, shared issues across nations, inspiration."

"The opportunity to hear about best practice from other parts of Europe was beneficial."

"Understanding and realisation of what can be achieved and how."

"A clear picture of the progress that outdoor sport has made across Europe in recent years."

"The Euro'meet deserves a bigger, broader, more European public. It was a bit dominated by participants from NI and France."

Sponsors

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