



SPÓRT ÉIREANN
SPORT IRELAND

Urban Outdoor Adventure Initiatives Evaluation Report 2021



ciste na
gcuntas díomhaoin
the dormant
accounts fund





Contents

Executive Summary	04
.....	
01 Introduction	09
.....	
Dormant Accounts	10
Urban Outdoor Adventure Initiatives (UOIs)	10
Adventure Sports Conceptual Framework	13
UOI Vision and Mission	14
Evaluation Report Role	16
Observations	17
Evaluation Methodology	18
Limitations and Observations	19
02 Evaluation Key Themes	20
.....	
Theme 1: The UOI Adventure Sports Context	20
The Provision Challenge	22
Complexity	22
Participant Impact	23
Theme 2: Planning, Partnering, Positioning, Structuring and Communicating the UOI	26
Community Needs and Planning	26
Partnering	29
Positioning	34
Structures	39
Communicating	40
Theme 3: Realising the UOI Aspirations	45
Partner Roles	45
Activity Provision	47
Delivery Formats and Locations	49
Theme 4: Relevance	53
Theme 5: Impact	55
Providing the Pathway	55
Quality Facilities	61
Strong Organisations	65
Well Trained People	68
Conclusion	70
.....	

Executive Summary

This report evaluates the extent to which the aims and outcomes of the Urban Outdoor Adventure Initiative (UOAI), have been achieved. The methodology for this evaluation included qualitative methods such as interviews and questionnaires as well as some quantitative data from the UOAI grant process and questionnaires.

This evaluation notes that the UOAI approach anticipates distinctive benefits from adventure sports as alluded to in the stated desire of the UOAI to “develop confidence & skills among participants, help young people to manage risk and encourage them to welcome challenge”. So it is that adventure sports within the UOAI framework are tasked with supporting personal growth amongst the targeted participants.

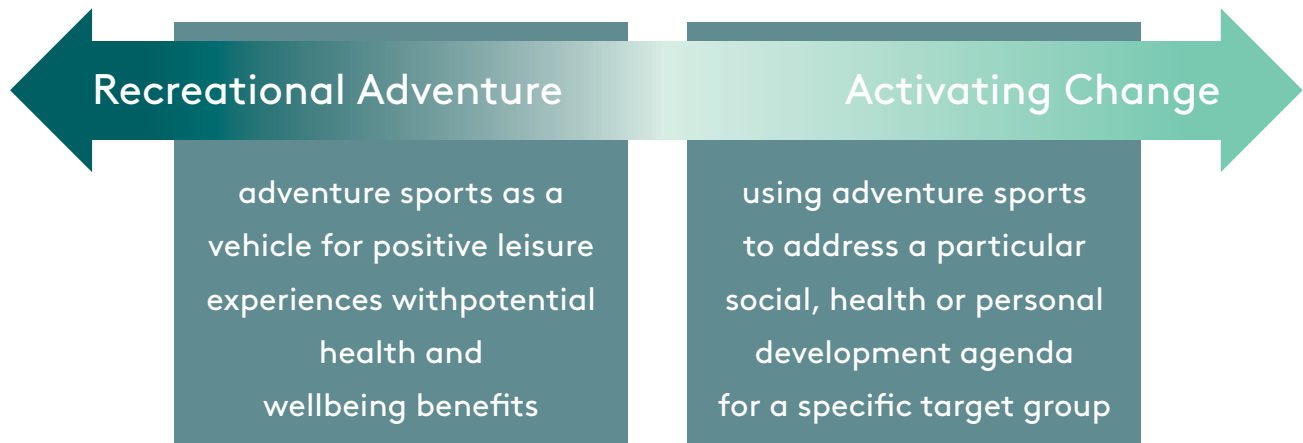
Urban Outdoor Adventure Initiatives (UOAI), must focus on disadvantaged communities or people with a disability.

UOAI guidelines

The challenge for the individual UOAI is to identify local needs and opportunities around adventure sports and support these sports within an urban setting as a viable and meaningful undertaking for individuals who are disadvantaged or who have a disability. Realising this challenge requires that each Initiative must undertake a need analysis, partner with others, develop an appropriate management structure and delivery mechanism, reach the target participants, and manage the complexity of the different adventure sports.

In response to this challenge, the various UOAI have positively developed the visibility, reach and capacity of urban-based outdoor adventure. This increased availability, visibility and uptake of adventure sports in urban settings was mainly achieved through a partnering process with community organisations, adventure sports clubs, youth clubs, education bodies and commercial providers. It is evident that UOAI have significantly engaged with the target populations, and they have enhanced local adventure sports capacity through additional training, equipment, infrastructure, activity sites and inter-organisation cooperation.

The UOAI reached participants along a continuum from the general population to specifically targeted disadvantaged populations and individuals with a disability. Most Initiatives provided adventure sports as a participation opportunity and as an alternative to more mainstream sports activities. Some UOAI also had a significant personal development impact on participants. So it is that the different UOAI impacted along a continuum from providing recreational adventure to activating positive change in participants.



Similarly, the capacity building actions of the UOAI included significant investments in adventure sports equipment, instructor training and facility developments which have strengthened and sustained existing sports clubs and, in some cases, generated new clubs. Membership pathways into some of these clubs have been enhanced for UOAI Participants and a number of the UOAI also adapted, reclaimed and further animated underused adventure spaces.

The UOAI encountered several challenges mainly relating to the dynamic and complex nature of some of the adventure sports. In some cases, connecting with the targeted participants was a challenge as was putting in place effective Initiative delivery structures that could sustainably deliver the potential of the Initiative. The COVID 19 pandemic also adversely affected most of the 2019 Initiatives.

The success of the individual UOAls appeared to be linked to the following criteria:

- Completing a defined needs analysis and identifying a clear intervention plan.
- An effective number and diversity of partners.
- The effective leveraging of existing resources such as activity providers and outdoor settings.
- Engagement with the targeted populations directly or via key partner channels.
- A delivery mechanism that was responsive and authentic.

This research suggests that a UOAI with integrated local knowledge regarding target participants, clearly analysed, defined and prioritised outcomes, shared Initiative responsibilities and divested ownership into their communities is more likely to activate change. In contrast, process- focused UOAls whereby the 'nuts and bolts' of identifying providers, activities, and locations, are at the forefront, can result in lower levels of engagement and benefit for the participants, despite good intentions.

While growing the base and increasing the visibility of adventure sports amongst urban communities in local settings has been a very positive output from the UOAls, the extent to which these Initiatives support disadvantaged communities can vary. Some UOAls may primarily benefit existing clubs and their members without offering a meaningful pathway for new participants, especially those who are disadvantaged or who have a disability. Hence, while the involvement of existing adventure sports providers in Initiative delivery and in providing participation pathways is welcomed, care is required to prevent club development and sport development agendas from side-lining the specific social agenda of the UOAI.

In summary, UOAls have been successful at increasing the diversity of sports within these urban communities and at bringing new people into these sports. Furthermore, engagement in these UOAI activities is widely appreciated at a participant and community level and some of the Initiatives have had a significant positive impact on participants personal development. Some UOAI have created awareness amongst other non-sports organisations as to the potential of these adventure sports activities as vehicles for the personal development of their clients and as a means to positively engage with targeted populations. The ongoing challenge is for the Initiatives to reach into the relevant communities and to maximise the distinctive potential of adventure sports beyond that of simple recreational adventure.

¹ A report or guide about the potential and the challenges of adventure sports as a means of addressing various health, social and personal development agendas.

Recommendations

Arising from the evaluation process, the following recommendations are suggested.

- The Vision and Mission of the UOAI might be revisited to bring them more closely into line with the sought outputs from the Initiatives.
- Additional emphasis on the potential of adventure sports to activate personal and community change is required. A 'white paper' 1 on the community and personal value of adventure sports is suggested to guide interagency collaboration at the community level.
- A stand-alone or more defined funding category of UOAI for people with a disability may position this target participant group more favourably.
- The significant experience and competence of the various LSPs in this area should be captured and shared through a case study insight resource. The following examples are suggested:
 - From the ground up developing long term and temporary physical infrastructure for adventure sports. The planning steps and practical realities.
 - Ready or not: evaluating and handholding communities and other organisations to increase their readiness and their capacity for local sport delivery.
 - Reaching deep: the opportunities and practical realities of engaging with and supporting fundamental personal or community change through adventure sports.
 - Stepping-stones: the types, benefits of, entry leadership and instruction levels across a variety of adventure sports and their training programmes.
 - Robust Pathways: models of best practice adventure sports participation pathways within sports clubs, youth clubs and the commercial sector.
 - All-in: the opportunities and challenges of different abilities engaging in the outdoors.



- Sustaining participation while important is not essential for an effective UOAI Initiative. UOAI that activate change in participants, but lack sustainability can be more meaningful than Initiatives that offer a sustainable recreational adventure experience.
- A formal documenting of a needs and readiness analysis before UOAI Initiative delivery has the potential to enhance their clarity and delivery. Some level of co-creation by participants should also be encouraged as part of the intervention design and delivery process.
- The cornerstone role of sports clubs in driving and sustaining adventure sports participation is being supplemented by commercial adventure sports providers and others. There may also be an emerging 'third way' of provision via youth clubs, scout groups and schools. Further engagement with these 'Target Group Services' and with National Governing Bodies are required to refine and enable this emerging resource.
- The low entry-level instructor training and bespoke or niche instructor training awards which have been created by some NGBs both lower the readiness barriers for potential instructors and may promote a participation culture at the club level. This is welcomed and should be further encouraged.
- Ongoing care is required for UOAI resources and the local culture of adventure sports to 'bed- in'. For example 'check-ins' with UOAI beneficiary organisations are required to monitor and support the sustained use of the UOAI equipment and participant engagement. Regular events which animate the UOAI process, ongoing instructor training, and phase two Initiatives that build on the potential of the intervention are also suggested.
- Additional metrics to measure the personal impact of the UOAI are suggested as are measures to determine the extent of UOAI participants active membership in clubs.



Introduction

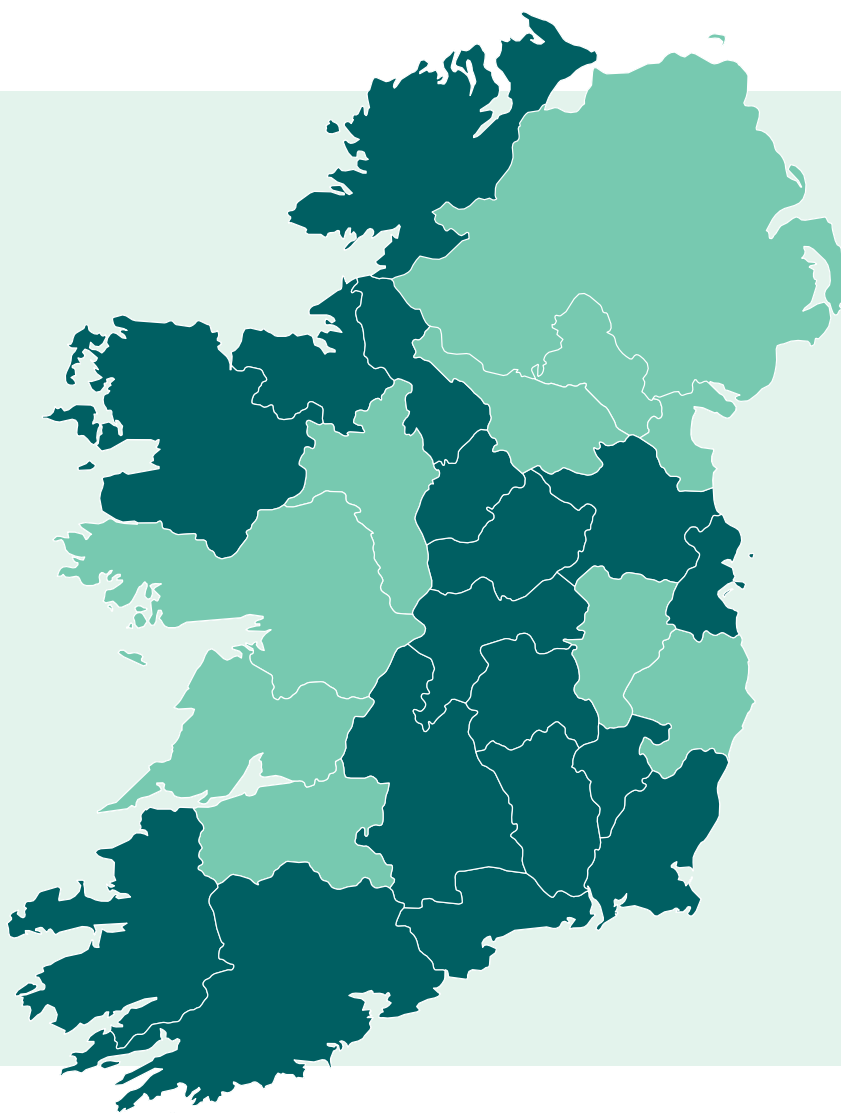
.....

This report is an independent evaluation of the Urban Outdoor Adventure Initiative (UOAI), for which funding was provided by Sport Ireland through the Dormant Accounts Fund (DAF) in 2017, 2018 and 2019. The purpose of this evaluation is to identify to what extent Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) who have rolled out the Initiative:

- Have achieved their intended outputs, outcomes and aims;
- What contributed to their success;
- Present any national-level findings across all of the funded Initiatives.

This report presents an evaluation of the delivery and impact of the UOAI over the **three years of funding² in 2017, 2018 and 2019³** to the LSPs in Counties Carlow, Cork, Donegal, Dublin City, Fingal, Kerry, Kilkenny, Laois, Leitrim, Longford, Mayo, Meath, Offaly, Sligo, Tipperary, Waterford, Westmeath and Wexford.

● Counties where LSPs received funding in 2017, 2018 & 2019



² Note that while the funding application process began in one year, the approvals process and the Initiative set up requirements, meant that the Initiatives commenced in the following year. For example, the 2017 Initiative activities typically took place in 2018.

Dormant Accounts

The Dormant Accounts Fund is a scheme for the disbursement of unclaimed funds from accounts in credit institutions in Ireland. The fund is administered under the 2001 Dormant Accounts Act, together with the Unclaimed Life Assurance Policies Act 2003 and the Dormant Accounts (Amendment) Act 2012. The Dormant Accounts Fund is under the statutory function of the Minister of the Environment, Community and Local Government with effect from the 1st January 2013.

Sport Ireland sought innovative applications for Dormant Accounts Funding to support the Actions from the National Sports Policy and the National Physical Activity Plan to implement and support participation programmes with a focus on disadvantaged communities⁴. Relevant Dormant Account projects were expected to build on investment to date and demonstrate appropriate partnership working with other NGBs, LSPs or other relevant agencies.

The UOAI Dormant Accounts funding was applied for by individual Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs), with the ambition of sports clubs, schools, community organisations, agencies and NGBs working together to create greater opportunities for people living in urban areas to participate in physical activity through adventure sports.

Urban Outdoor Adventure Initiatives (UOAI)

Sport Ireland's outline⁵ of the UOAI's purpose notes that there is a history⁶ of outdoor recreation programmes being "developed and delivered in disadvantaged communities, for at-risk youth groups, disadvantaged school groups and people with a disability in many countries with success. The growing body of evidence suggests that outdoor adventure programmes, where participants interact with nature and experience new outdoor adventure sports, are successful in developing confidence & skills among participants, help young people to manage risk and encourages them to welcome challenge."

³ Due to the application, approval and initiation process, the 2019 Initiatives commenced in 2020 and as a result, were delayed or restricted due to the various COVID 19 related social distancing and 'lockdown' requirements.

⁴ Disadvantaged groups under the DAF are defined as, 'People who are economically, socially or educationally disadvantaged, or Persons with a disability (within the meaning of the Equal Status Act 2000)'.

⁵ Sport Ireland The Urban Outdoor Adventure Initiative: <https://www.sportireland.ie/outdoors/the-urban-outdoor-adventure-initiative>

⁶ In the United States, the move to more localised provision was based on the "intensity, cost and duration of Outward Bound courses" (Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe, 1988). In the UK, the Sports Council (now Sport England) had become involved in the provision of adventure sports in an urban environment to target sports provision on groups experiencing disadvantage. The Lothian region in Edinburgh became a pioneer of such provision and had a city-based unit as far back as 1965. A pilot initiative by the Sports Council in the UK launched a number of city-based urban outdoor facilities in central and northern England with centres established in Sunderland (1975) and Manchester (1977).



However, the Dorman Account UOAI guidelines⁷ note that “the opportunities for young people⁸ living in disadvantaged communities to experience outdoor adventure sports is limited due to the distance from traditional outdoor settings (forests, mountains) where activities are usually offered, and the need for transport, equipment, supervision, training and support to engage in these sports.

The UOAI is timely in that it has the potential to provide a local urban outdoor and adventure settings approach with the potential to increase local awareness, appreciation and active citizenship⁹ for the natural outdoor environment¹⁰. As a result this can provide positive health, wellbeing and social outcomes and in some locations reduce the pressure on existing strained rural outdoor settings.

The increased emphasis on the Sustainable Development Goals across all the government policy in Ireland makes ‘urban Adventure’ timely and particularly relevant for two reasons. Firstly, the urban location of these projects takes pressure away from more sensitive wilderness settings and reduces the need to travel which reduces the carbon footprint of the activities. Secondly, ‘Urban Adventure’ has the potential to connect participants to their ‘place’ and to cultivate a sense of ownership and care for their ‘patch’. The additional benefits of a positive impact on active-citizenship, crime reduction and anti-social behaviour, and the positive Social Return on Investment have been documented by the BOSS (Benefits of Outdoor Sports for Society) project (Eigenschenk, Thomann, & McClure, 2018)”.

Conversations with Sport Ireland staff indicated the desire to ensure that the positive attitudes and encounter opportunities of the outdoors are available beyond higher socio-economic groups.

The key challenge for the Urban Outdoor Adventure Initiative is to connect outdoor adventure sports with these urban settings as a viable and meaningful undertaking for urban residents. In particular, the stated focus is on disadvantaged communities and people with a disability.

⁷ Dorman Account Funding June 2021. https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2021-06/dormant-accounts-funding-brochure_final.pdf

⁸ It is to be noted that while the segment of ‘young people’ was identified, there was an expectation that the UOAI opportunities would be across generations.

⁹ In more recent sports-based research ‘place’, rather than being simply background and a context for sport-based interventions has been recognised for its importance and impact (Ekholm & Dahlstedt, 2020).

¹⁰ ‘Pedagogy of Place’ and ‘Education for Sustainability’. Creating a connection to, and sense of belonging and caring for one’s ‘local place’. This connection and responsiveness to place have resulted in a noticeable shift away from a concentration on personal and social development to an emphasis on education for the ‘environment’ and ‘nature’ (Wattchow & Brown, 2011).

¹¹ Hedonic or subjective wellbeing relates to pleasant and unpleasant life experiences and happiness, eudaemonic or psychological wellbeing refers to the individual’s realisation of their true potential, including their experience of purpose and meaning in life. The Impact of an Outdoor and Adventure Sports Course on the Wellbeing of Recovering UK Military Personnel: An Exploratory Study Mariana Kaiseler,* Chris Kay, and Jim McKenna, 2019.

Adventure Sports Conceptual Framework

.....

It is reasonable to assume that the UOAls in focusing on adventure sports, as against other more mainstream sports, anticipates distinctive benefits from these adventure sports. This distinctive adventure sports expectation is alluded to in the stated desire of the UOAI to “develop confidence & skills among participants, help young people to manage risk and encourage them to welcome challenge”. While all sports have the potential to provide life experiences and happiness as well as functional outcomes such as physical health and social interaction, adventure sports experiences can also offer significant opportunities for eudaemonic¹¹ or psychological/subjective wellbeing. This eudaemonic¹² opportunity is in part due to the significant liminal¹³ and authentic encounters which can emanate within an adventure sports experience. These ‘encounters’ may in turn support self-determination¹⁴ through personal reflection and a reconfiguring within the participant such that personal growth, increased self-efficacy or a significant ‘phase change’ in attitudes or behaviour result.

Hence, the UOAls have a triangulated expectation of hedonic, functional and eudaemonic benefits. A key finding of this report is that the various UOAls are positioned at different points along these hedonic, functional and eudaemonic continuums.

“The Initiative helped people with a disability try an outdoor sport in their locality giving them and their families an insight into what is available to them locally and highlights to them that they can be accessed and what help if any if needed to access the activities.”

UOAI Initiative coordinator

“I can honestly say there is nothing we would change. It was a hugely successful program. Students from my school would never have had the opportunity to sail without this experience. There was also students with autism who do not attend any mainstream classes able to participate in the program and interact with their peers.”

UOAI Community Leader

¹² happiness is derived from meaningful experiences and purpose as against hedonic happiness which is derived from doing what we like or avoiding doing what we do not like.

¹³ From the Latin root, limen, which means “threshold.” The liminal space is the “crossing over” space – a space where you have left something behind, yet you are not yet fully in something else. Liminality includes standing on an edge, facing an abyss, jumping into a void.

UOAI Vision and Mission

The UAOI guidelines anchor the proposed Initiatives via the following **vision, mission** and **objectives**.

Vision

To increase the number of people of all ages undertaking physical activity through adventure sports in the outdoors.

Mission

To develop opportunities for people to engage in outdoor adventure sports in an urban setting.

The Initiatives should:

- create sustainable opportunities
- not involve transporting participants out to rural locations.
- be tailored around consultation
- involve partnership.

This process towards this vision and mission may include Initiatives which:

- build on past programmes;
- include the upgrade of facilities and amenities to enable outdoor activities.

The suggested outputs as a result of these Initiatives include:

- New opportunities for target participants and new programmes to be developed and delivered
- Improved links between local actors, project partners, community groups and representatives, local clubs, outdoor recreation guides and activity leaders and National Governing Bodies
- Improved structures and pathways for participation in outdoor adventure sports in the future
- Improved facilities and access to equipment.
- Improved network of trained guides and leader's information, knowledge and awareness about outdoor adventure sports opportunities in disadvantaged urban areas.

¹⁴ Self-determination theory is a conceptual framework that explains the core elements of optimal functioning, psychological health, well-being and life satisfaction. Ryan & Deci, 2001, 2017.

Aim	Sought Outcome	Activities specifically supported under this Initiative
Providing the pathway	New opportunities or Initiatives to enable participation in sport and physical activity in urban outdoor settings	Research into community profiles and needs assessment
Well-trained people	Training and development of the people to enable increased participation.	Marketing and promotion activities, including outreach events.
Strong Organisations	<p>Self-sustaining structures/ partnerships</p> <p>An integrated approach from local partners</p> <p>A social environment that engages members of the community</p> <p>Better organised and connected local clubs</p> <p>Genuine community engagement and leadership</p>	<p>Development and delivery of Initiatives between local partners and recreational physical activity groups</p> <p>Delivery of training and development courses for outdoor adventure sports leaders.</p> <p>Development/upgrade of an amenity or facility</p>
Quality facilities and resources	<p>Improved access and equipment for local people</p> <p>Integration with local facility planning and programming</p>	Purchase of equipment

The UOAI guidelines note that projects must demonstrate the ability to have a legacy potential once the Dormant Account Funding ceases. This may include

- The formation of a club or structure to sustain and continue activities into the future
- Increased capacity within the target area such as the creation of a network of trained outdoor leaders in the target area
- Improved linkages to local clubs and stronger links between partners and agencies
- Improved facilities and access to equipment that will be available for use in the area.

Evaluation Report Role

This report evaluates the extent to which the aims and outcomes as stated have been achieved by the various UOAI. This evaluation is also tasked with identifying the process through which the UOAI were developed and implemented across different counties concerning their:



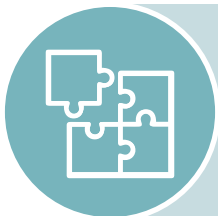
Reach: To what extent were the targeted participants engaged? What were the factors that influenced this?



Fidelity: Did the UOAI operate following the UOAI guidelines and details outlined in their respective application forms? What were the factors that influenced this?



Partnership: To what extent were the targeted organisations and partners engaged? What were the factors that influenced this?



Relevance: Level of perceived relevance and usefulness of the UOAI by the participants and partners. What were the factors that influenced this?



Sustainability: Was sustainability built into the way the UOAI engaged with targeted individuals and organisations? What were the factors that influenced this?

The intended goals of the UOAI are summarised in table form below and these provide the reference points for this evaluation process.

Observations

- This evaluation does not question or evaluate the generally recognised benefits and positive outcomes of engaging in adventure sports in the outdoors.
- This evaluation in addition to evaluating the process and outcomes of the various Initiatives also provides an opportunity to revisit the vision, process and outcome criteria.
- The impact of COVID 19 on the various Initiatives which were 'live' in 2020 and 2021, cannot be overstated. The social distancing restrictions, working conditions and uncertainty of this period had a significant and generally a negative impact 15 on these UOAI Initiatives.



Evaluation Methodology

Sport Ireland commissioned an independent and objective evaluation of the 2017, 2018 and 2019 Urban Outdoor Adventure Initiatives. The intended evaluation process of meeting with the LSPs, their staff and the community representatives and participants was prevented by the COVID 19 Pandemic and the associated lockdown and social distancing requirements. This process was adjusted accordingly and as a result, the evaluation process relied on the completion of four questionnaires, online individual and focus group meetings, and a series of in-depth interviews.

The four questionnaires were:

- Local Sports Partnership staff questionnaires:
 - Questionnaire 1 - the UOAI process.
 - Questionnaire 2 - the UOAI Impacts
- Community and provider questionnaire on their experience of organising, leadership or delivering the UOAI.
- Participant questionnaire on their experience of taking part in a UOAI.

17¹⁶ of the 18 Local Sports Partnerships involved in the UOAI process completed the first and second questionnaires and the follow up online conversation. Each of these partnerships also identified a range of community representatives who completed the community questionnaire some of whom also engaged in an online or phone conversation regarding the Initiative. This blend of questionnaires, interviews and focus groups led to the development of a case study for each Initiative.

- Semi-structured interviews with 16 LSP Coordinators and staff and 52 community and provider representatives.
- 6 in-depth interviews and thematic analysis with 16 participants.
- Online Questionnaires, LSP n=39, community and providers n=49, participants n=31

Following good practice, each LSP then had the opportunity to comment, and suggest amendments to the data on their Initiative. This feedback was incorporated and with the data was then used to evaluate the collective Urban Outdoor Adventure Initiative within the four pillars of the evaluation framework- providing the pathway, well-trained people, strong organisations and quality facilities.

¹⁵ Conversely, while limiting the specific UOAI, the COVID 19 'lockdown, appears to have significantly increased interest in the outdoors as a venue for recreational activities amongst the general population.

¹⁶ A senior staff change in one LSP prevented their completion of the evaluation.

Limitations and Observations

- Respondent Selection: The community, activity provider and participant representatives in this evaluation were in most cases identified by the LSP and this has the potential for selection bias.
- Staff Turnover: several LSPs (3) had a turnover of staff who were involved in the delivery or oversight of the Initiatives. This in a small number of cases led to second-hand information or gaps in information about the Initiatives.
- The passage of time since the first Initiatives in 2017/18 has blunted the recall of the staff, partners and participants.
- The UOAI programme and activities were at times blurred with the other programmes and activities of the Local Sports Partnerships. This made it challenging to parse out the UOAI specific contributions and actions in some instances.
- The in-depth interviews with participants was a very rich source of information, and they allowed the researchers to pursue unanticipated questions based on respondents comments.
- There were low response rates to the participant questionnaire possibly due to the transient¹⁷ nature of some of the Initiatives allied to the time which elapsed between some Initiatives and the evaluation and the disjoint caused by COVID 19. A decision was made to complete additional in-depth interviews instead of low (n=31), online questionnaire responses.



Evaluation Key Themes

Having clarified the role and sought outcomes from the UOAI, this evaluation process developed and applied a research methodology to explore the Initiatives from a staff, community, provider and participant perspective. These perspectives in turn highlighted a range of context, process and outcome topics which the researchers then amalgamated into the following five cross-cutting themes:

Theme 1	The UOAI Adventure Sports Context
Theme 2	Planning, Partnering, Positioning, Structuring and Communicating the UOAI
Theme 3	Realising the UOAI
Theme 4	Relevance
Theme 5	Impact

The following section presents and explores these themes. **Note that these themes are presented in a sequential rather than hierarchical form.**

Theme 1: The UOAI Adventure Sports Context

Adventure sports are accepted as being distinct from other sports due to their use of natural settings, high levels of perceived and actual risk, and their potential to generate rich authentic and liminal experiences. Hence the adventure sports experience, from the perspective of the UOAI, has an inherent context around:

- **The Provision Challenge:** managing the complexity of adventure sports so that they deliver the optimum impact for the participants, requires a level of technical and interpersonal skills on the part of the activity provider.
- **Participant Impact:** in addition to the functional (physical health and social interaction) and hedonic (pleasure from the participation), impacts of adventure sports, these types of sport have the potential to yield high levels of eudaemonic impact whereby the participant potentially experiences some level of self-actualisation and meaningful purpose in their life.
- **Complexity:** some adventure sports have high levels of complexity due to their equipment, location and skill requirements.



1.1 The Provision Challenge

A significant range of technical and interpersonal skills are required to manage the complexity of adventure sports, sustain engagement/participation and create an effective liminal experience. To deliver a meaningful adventure sports experience, an adventure sports provider must have the technical skills, safety competence, and the 'soft' inter-personal skills required to realise the more nuanced sought outcomes of confidence, managing risk and welcoming challenges. Reaching these levels of technical instruction competency can be challenging in several adventure sports while the 'softer' interpersonal competencies require an additional level of instructor training and experience.

Practical Implications

- Instruction skills in some of these sports can be challenging to attain and hence, these skills and qualifications are not as readily achievable, available or as easy to train compared to other more mainstream sports.
- Several UOAI providers demonstrated high levels of the 'softer' interpersonal awareness and skills which are required to realise the personal development ambitions of the UOAI, whilst other Initiatives are on the journey to this standard. Activity providers should have a stated agenda and a rationale for achieving these personal development ambitions in addition to any sports introduction and proficiency objectives.

1.2 Complexity

The relative complexity of adventure sports compared to other sports challenged several Initiatives. In most sports, for example in athletics or football, the participant or the coach can commence, take part and experience some levels of success quite quickly. However, for both the participant and coach a significant number of adventure sports require higher entry-level skills, specialist equipment, technical knowledge and they can also be replete with perceptions of risk. For example, rock-climbing requires a suitable natural or artificial climbing wall, the use of harnesses and ropes, specialist knowledge of knots and climbing techniques, and high safety awareness and competence.

Furthermore, some of the dynamic settings and environmental conditions in which the sports take place can be challenging, disruptive or overwhelming for the participant. Coldwater immersion in kayaking or stand-up paddleboard (SUP) and a fear of heights in rock climbing are some of the psychological stresses placed on the participant. Most of this equipment, motor skills, settings, environments, psychological stressors or coaching awareness are not readily experienced or transferable from other sports.

¹⁷ Participants in several UOAI were sourced via a third party, some Initiatives were finished and some of the LSPs had a momentary engagement with participants and limited levels of follow on. This transience was due in part to the peripherality of some participants and limited follow-on connectedness.

From one perspective these complexity issues are barriers to the provision and participation in these sports. However, these otherworld experiences are central to the personal development potential of these sports.

'When we got into the water, there was a whole different atmosphere, you know. The football talk was gone, and it was completely different, everybody's mindset kind of changed. We got on in ways that we didn't think we could have other than football, you know... we kind of bonded more so in them particular sessions in the water than we ever did on the football pitch.'

UOAI respondent adult

"We would not usually be out on the water. We usually do GAA and soccer and things like that. You are in control (in kayaking). It's not like in a Gaelic match or whatever, its kind of up to you, you do it on your own."

UOAI respondent,
child

Practical Implications

For these sports to realise their significant potential, Initiative organisers need to be aware and proactive vis a vis these complexity challenges.

- This sport complexity can be a potential barrier to securing an appropriate activity provider, progressing community members as leaders/instructors, and attracting and retaining participants.
- Further attention is likely required to resolve some complexity challenges, for example, the effective management/maintenance of UOAI bicycles.
- The acquired practical experiences of the LSPs in managing these complexities is an asset that should be shared.

1.3 Participant Impact

While all sports have hedonic and functional potential, adventure sports also have a high level of eudaemonic or subjective wellbeing potential. These anticipated personal impacts represent the optimum outcomes from the different Initiatives as illustrated in the following quotes.

These subjective intrapersonal impacts extend beyond the hedonic pleasure of taking part and the functional benefits for physical health. These quotes illustrate the movement by UOAI participants towards optimal well-being, psychological health and life satisfaction.

Furthermore, engaging in nature in a conscious challenging way brings the participant physically and attitudinally closer to the natural world and the outdoors. This type of experience can also create an awareness and appreciation of the value of this outdoor space for their personal recreational use and provide a venue to experience their wellbeing.

"It just gives you such a boost to be able to say that I went rock climbing, and I done this and I done that, so I can actually do anything. And it wasn't that long after that, that I says I'm going to college like, I can do whatever I want. You know, it just gives you...I just think it's amazing. I enjoyed every bit of it, and I swear to God, I would do it all over again like a light, like a light, all over again."

UOAI respondent, young adult

"I just know in my group, there's a lot of women that have been beaten down, you know, physically, mentally whatever way, and it kind of gave us a bit of a lift to say like, why not, we can do what we want to do if we put our minds to it. So that's what I will always take away from it."

**UOAI Respondent
in-depth interviews**

"The Initiatives have had a very positive impact on our school community. It has also had a very positive impact on some of our vulnerable and additional needs students. Overall a very positive impact on our community."

UOAI Community Leader

"I feel I have a better knowledge of my local area and the activities available. I've made connections with people as a result of this shared experience."

UOAI community leader

With some exceptions, there was generally a lack of an internal formal evaluation of the Initiatives. Increasing the opportunity for formal feedback during and at the end of the Initiatives is more likely to make these Initiatives responsive to their participant's needs. Structuring this feedback via a specific single item measure such as the M1 may offer the most manageable process, however, this is unlikely to capture the 'Activating Change' value of the Initiative for the participant's personal development, social engagement and increased awareness or appreciation of the outdoors.

Practical Implications

- While sustained participation in adventure sports by UOAI participants should be pursued via a follow-on pathway, this is not the only measure of an Initiative's positive impact.
- An Initiative that generates a positive personal phase-change or a deeper appreciation of the outdoors/nature in participants, even in the absence of sustained participation in the sport, is a highly positive outcome from an Initiative.
- While the M1 evaluation process is of significant value, the evaluation of any eudemonic impact, on the participant's personal development, social engagement and their increased awareness or appreciation of the outdoors, will need to be more detailed than the M1.
- With some exceptions, there was generally a lack of a formal internal evaluation of the Initiatives. Increasing the opportunity for formal feedback during and at the end of the initiatives is more likely to make these initiatives responsive to their participant's needs.
- Short taster experiences of outdoor adventure in the absence of a follow-on pathway or where there is low uptake of this pathway, will typically neither sustain participation nor provide long term positive personal changes. Such islands of isolated recreational adventure sports experiences have limited merit or legacy.



Theme 2: Planning, Partnering, Positioning, Structuring and Communicating the UOAI

.....

The second theme considers the challenge of matching the adventure sports context with the ambition of the UOAI while meeting the needs/readiness of their target participants.

Urban Outdoor Adventure Initiatives (UOAI), must focus on disadvantaged communities or people with a disability to be considered for support.

UOAI guidelines

This theme is explored through reference to:

- **Community Needs and Planning:** where the community and target participants are and how the Initiative structure is to provide an effective meeting ground.
- **Partnering:** effectively involving and benefiting from the competencies of the various patterning bodies and individuals to deliver the Initiative plan.
- **Positioning:** structuring the Initiative so that it reaches into the target participants and builds the capacity to realise and sustain the Initiative.

The overarching issue which emerged from this theme was the varying levels of focus across the initiatives towards the target populations. Some Initiatives strived and succeeded in engaging with very specific target populations and had very defined sought outcomes while others had a more generic adventure sports development agenda and a higher level of engagement with the general public. The following section considers the components which shaped these Initiative approaches.

2.1 Community Needs and Planning

The common goal of most of the Initiatives was for participants and the community to be more aware of, and to have the opportunity to participate in local outdoor recreation activities. Some Partnerships addressed more specific goals such as empowering the local community, enhancing self-worth, creating a social environment and similar aspirations.



The extent to which the Initiatives undertook a formal needs analysis varied significantly. Most Initiatives in the planning phase were guided at some level by tacit knowledge accumulated over time regarding a community's sport needs and capabilities. Over the three years of the UOAI:

12

Initiatives relied on informal discussions with the community.

10

used a semi-formal analysis, such as a consultation meeting.

8

Initiatives used a formal and documented needs analysis.

This significant semi-formal and informal approach was noted by the LSP's as being due in part to the burden of undertaking a formal needs analysis, and the already in-depth knowledge which the Partnership staff possess of local sports needs. In some cases, the LSPs noted that they had previously identified the potential for an adventure sports programme with a particular community or target group, which the Initiative subsequently satisfied.

This in-depth local knowledge is an asset that guided the aspirations of the individual UOAI grant applications and their subsequent delivery. For example, the County Sligo and County Cork Initiatives engaged the target audience with focussed promotion through agencies with which they had built up a long-term relationship. These Initiatives appear to have progressed outcomes that are consistent with local needs and the UOAI vision. Longford SP completed a needs analysis with the youth agencies, choose the programme of activities in cooperation with them and secured their buy-in as a quasi 'co-creation of the Initiative.

"It has allowed some individuals to be able to afford something that they otherwise could not. This has made these participants feel more valued."

UOAI community leader.

The extent to which the potential participants were involved in the shaping of the Initiative activities varied. Initiatives such as in County Donegal and Dublin closely involved the participants in the decision-making process, in the case of Donegal in the design of the proposed facility and

the supporting activities and in Dublin in the programme of activities. Other Initiatives involved the participant's perspective by proxy via the local knowledge of the various partner agencies. Some Initiatives adjusted their intended programmes in response to various activity or settings issues or in response to participant feedback. This type of flexibility is also reflective of a co-created type approach. The low level of personal confidence of disadvantaged participants, and hence their potential reluctance to engage in the Initiative, was anticipated in some UOAs but not in others. Some Initiatives undertook very targeted door to door type engagements with participants versus "We advertised but they didn't show."

The significant unforeseeable event of COVID 19 required several changes in the anticipated Initiatives while other less significant unforeseens also required a rethinking for some of the Initiatives decisions. Examples of 'unforeseens' included:

- **Sport:** the unique challenge of adventure sports, their settings, equipment and the challenge of attaining leader/instructor qualifications.
- **Host:** the low levels of readiness of some host communities to engage with the sports as leaders or organisers.
- **Participant:** difficulty connecting with participants, their availability and willingness.
- **Provider:** the sometimes-low availability and capacity of local adventures sports clubs or commercial providers to deliver the activities in the manner required.

Practical Implications

- The tacit awareness of community needs and capabilities should preferably be accompanied by a formal needs analysis process that reality checks the ambition, clarifies the details, formalises the partnerships and maps the responsibilities.
- There is a potential for Initiatives to be overly shaped by the perspectives of the organisers and partners based on 'this will be good for them' rather than co-created by the participants as 'this is what we want'.
- Co-creation of the initiatives and programmes with the participants, communities and partners is a positive means of both strengthening the Initiative reach and sharing ownership.
- Some UOAs demonstrated an awareness, flexibility and adaptation to several unforeseen situations, and this flexibility in approach is preferable to a slavish adherence to the original plan.
- Active targeted engagement is more likely to reach the target participants compared to a general public call.

2.2 Partnering

A successful UOAI requires partners to source participants and leaders, provide activities and offer sustainable participation pathways. It is evident that the various LSPs, and County Council Sports Staff (Laois) with responsibility for the UOAI, have a close working relationship with a range of community and sports organisations and various other community-related local agencies. Typically, the UOAI formed part of an ongoing relationship between the LSP and a partner or was a bridge to strengthening or initiating a new partner relationship for example the initiatives in Cork, Offaly, Dublin, Meath, Leitrim and Waterford. The ease of sourcing or interacting with partners for the Initiatives suggests that there is an effective integration of the LSPs within their local network of agencies and clubs.

Partners typically had an operational or a strategic role in the Initiatives. Strategic level partner organisations and agencies included County Councils, Education and Training Boards and TUSLA.

These strategic partners tended to provide resources in the form of Initiative finance, activity infrastructure/facilities, and specialist expertise.



Typical UOAI operational level partners included:

Community group/agency	Neighbourhood groups, community sports centres, or agencies such as TUSLA.
Community Leaders	Community members with a formal or informal leadership role within their communities.
Commercial Providers	Typically 'for profit' adventure sports activity providers
Disability Group	Ranging from semi-formal parent groups to formal bodies such as the Irish Wheelchair Association.
Local Sports Partnership Tutors	Trained individuals who are vetted and employed by the Partnerships on a course by course basis.
National Governing Bodies	The national organisation with responsibility for a particular sport, for example, the Irish Orienteering Association.
Sports Club	Adventure sports clubs in kayaking, orienteering, rock-climbing.
Youth club	Community-led or part of a formal County-based organisation or Foroige network. The Fingal Scout group is also included under this youth club category.

It is also worth noting the extent to which the UOAls promoted partnering within these different groups.

"I felt that as part of the initiative there has been a vast improvement in how the three kayak clubs work together towards common goals. This has a hugely positive impact on the future viability of the clubs."

UOAl community leader.

NGB Partners

Direct contacts with the NGBs tended to be where there was a lack of local club availability, most of the Initiative's engaged with local sports clubs as against the National Governing Body (NGB), of the sport. This is to be expected given the 'on the ground' nature of these clubs, LSPs and UOAls. However, it is noteworthy that the Irish Orienteering Association had a very close engagement with several initiatives via their Ready to Go teacher training initiative and their rollout of the MapRun digital online resource. The UK based Parkour governing body was also closely involved in the realisation of tutor training in County Longford. Some NGBs acted as an intermediary between local clubs and the Initiative, examples of this include Mountaineering Ireland connecting the Fingal Initiative with a climbing wall trainer Rowing Ireland supported the Initiative in Sligo and Canoeing Ireland was closely involved in the Initiatives in Cork and Meath.

Commercial Partners

Where local clubs were not available, the Initiatives often made use of commercial providers to deliver these activities. For this evaluation, we have included both for-profit and 'not for profit' activity providers under this 'commercial' heading. The following are some commercial provider perspectives:

- **Embedding:** adventure sports can have a recreational/tourism value that supports their commercial provision. This growth in the number of small-scale commercial adventure sports providers around Ireland can be seasonal and disconnected from the host community as they tend to engage with the visitor to the area, rather than the local. The opportunity for adventure sports activity providers to engage more locally with youth clubs and schools via UOAs can embed the provider and their activities within the community. For example, Wet and Wild in Sligo, Mayo Adventure Experience in Castlebar and Mid Ireland Adventures Offaly.
- **Quality:** the commercial activity providers are often well qualified, equipped and experienced with providing these activities to a range of participant types. Some of these providers have a strong community and personal development ethos to the extent that they delivered very impactful personal and community Initiative experiences which are superior to some club settings. UOA examples include the Adventure Project in Dublin and its work with disaffected youth, Wild West Sailing in Sligo and its work with special needs (autism) participants, Meitheal Mara in Cork worked well with a range of 'hard to reach groups such as disadvantaged young people and residents in Direct Provision.
- Where commercial providers were used to providing the UOA activities, sustained participation opportunities were typically dependent on Initiative funding. This was less of an issue with the not-for-profit commercial providers (Wexford). Some commercial for-profit providers continue to offer a seasonal delivery of the UOA activities (Leitrim), and other for-profit providers worked closely with adventure sports clubs to support their role as a sustainable participation pathway (Meath, Offaly, Wexford).

There are many positive roles and outcomes from the use of commercial adventure-sports providers in UOAs, however, commercial providers must be encouraged to buy in to UOA outcomes. Commercial providers are especially challenged in their peak seasons when they are busy targeting schools and groups or tourism clients. During these busy times, the commercial provider is likely to be in a 'splash and dash' mode of delivering brief fun experiences with little regard to long term personal development or community growth issues.

Practical Implications

- The effective UOAI partnerships integrated local knowledge, shared Initiative responsibilities and where possible divested ownership into their communities. This requires a diverse local partnership, a focused targeting of participants, an effective needs analysis which was communicated with the delivery provider, and where these needs were realised through a responsive delivery process with ongoing and active oversight of the delivery by the LSP and partners.
- Adventure sports lend themselves to a diverse range of delivery agents/partners from the for-profit and the not-for-profit sectors. Both of these provider type structures can be effective if they buy into the UOAI objectives.
- The actual role and potential of the for-profit sector in UOAI is significant but care is required so that such partners have the understanding, capacity and the culture to extend their activity programmes beyond hedonic to eudemonic activating change outcomes.
- UOAI were more likely to only realise a hedonic adventure sports recreational experience for the general public if there was an unclear, poorly structured/communicated needs analysis that was divested to a third party to deliver.
- The level of NGB involvement in a UOAI can be limited in part because they already have 'boots on the ground' in the form of strong local adventure sports clubs. However, the culture and structures of the NGB filters down to and shapes the extent to which local clubs see themselves as having a role/responsibility around Initiatives such as the UOAI. The positive examples of NGB and club cultures that have emerged from these UOAI should be acknowledged and built on.

¹⁸ For example, the Shielbaggan Outdoor Education Training Centre (Wexford), is under the aegis of the Education Training Board and the Adventure Project (Dublin), is a commercially structured provider which operates as a charity, the Portarlinton Leisure Centre in Laois is a County Council facility.

2.3 Positioning

This issue of positioning relates to the extent that an Initiative effectively reached into the target participants and built the local capacity to realise and sustain the Initiative.

The reader should at this point be aware of the rudiments of the McMillan Matrix an academic model or concept which recognises the balancing act of not-for-profit Initiatives such as the UOAs. This matrix notes that not-for-profit organisations must both meet their core agenda and also be politically and financially astute if they are to have a meaningful impact and long-term visibility. LSPs in general and the UOAs specifically strive towards this balance by pursuing a mix of:

- the 'easy' agendas of targeting willing participants that are easy to deliver programmes to have high numbers of participants and can readily generate financial, political and social capital;
- the 'hard' agendas of targeting participants who may have low interest, readiness or capacity and which typically require more resources and yield lower numbers of participants.

The Dormant Accounts and the UOA are clearly positioned with this latter 'hard' category and while this position does not prevent the overspill of UOA resources into the 'easier' agendas of sports development that benefits the general public, UOAs should be positioned so that they primarily reach into and impact on the hard categories of the disadvantaged and people with a disability.

There are two variables to the effective positioning of the UOAs:

- **Reach** relates to where the Initiative was positioned along the participant continuum, extending from the general population (low) to the significantly disadvantaged or people with a disability (high). This reach also includes the depth of outcome arising from the adventure sports experience by these participants. This outcome extends from Recreational Adventure sports as a vehicle for leisure with potential health and wellbeing benefits to Activating Change¹⁹ where adventure sports address a particular social, health or personal development agenda for a specific target group.
- **Capacity** in this context could be defined as the level of increase which the Initiative generated regarding the availability, quality or delivery of adventure sports in an urban setting. Typically UOA capacity building was in the form of training, equipment purchases or enhancing activity settings.

¹⁹ This 'Activating Change' approach tends to target a specific participant group, is less visible to the general population and often involves a specialist or bespoke alignment of resources rather than a more generic sports club or commercial provider adventure sports offering. They are also less likely to have high numbers of participants.

Reach

There are two dimensions to Reach, the extent to which the Initiative reaches into the target populations and the extent to which the Initiative reaches an effective outcome for its participants. In practice activity programmes of the individual UOAs largely determine this latter outcome reach. UOA activity programmes can be located along a continuum ranging from 'Participation Tasters' to Activating Change.

Recreational Adventure: the sought outputs from these UOAs were for an improved range of adventure sports provision as well as increased awareness and better access to these adventure sports. This output was typically achieved via a process of club strengthening and activity promotion.

"I was like a child really. It was so playful and so much fun, and then being able to just freely jump into the water and not be afraid, because I think that was one thing, we were all going "oh my god the water is going to be freezing and I'm dreading falling in". But once we got over that it was fantastic."

Adult UOA participant.

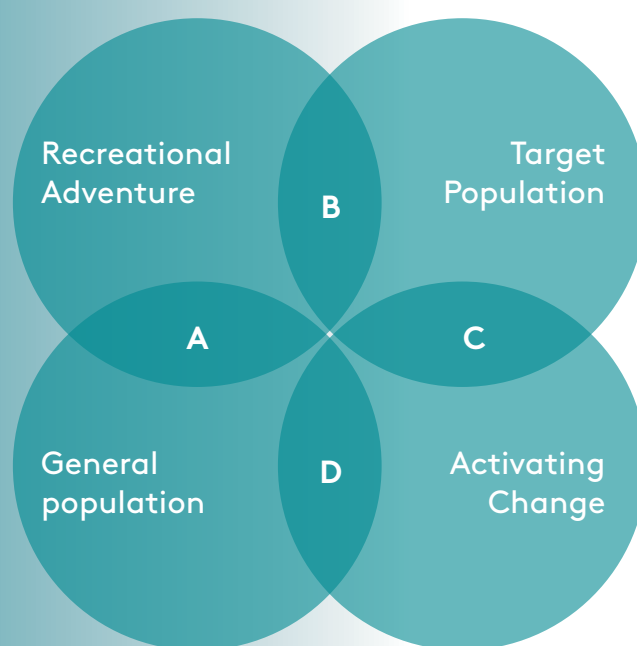
Activating Change: The primary goal of these UOAs was to provide a mechanism to encounter and address a local change agenda such as improving social interaction, enhancing personal development or improved community cohesion. The Initiative typically operated within a structure of local agencies and target group services.

"I think if they knew more about this, and the laugh you have, you know like, there wouldn't be as many young fellas hanging around street corners, going down the wrong way. And I truly believe that... Like if you had people around talking to those young fellas about coming out to do it, I guarantee you, like if they can just see that there's a better life out there. Yeah. Like, it's better than hanging around corners waiting for the guards to come. That's what I got from it, and I was forty-one at the time."

Adult UOA participant.

As illustrated by the above quotes all points along this continuum are valid and are potentially rewarding to the participant, but for different reasons and potentially to a different depth of impact. It can be argued that compared to activating change, the recreational adventure side of the continuum is somewhat of a missed opportunity or a 'UOA light'.

From a Reach perspective, the alongside matrix illustrates the potential impact points of the different Initiatives. There is a risk of UOAs falling into category A whereby they provide a recreational experience to the general population. This while a positive outcome in general sports development, a category A Initiative falls short of the potential/remit of the UOAI to have a positive impact on disadvantaged individuals or groups.



For example, a fixed orienteering course can provide a good recreational experience for the general population, however, a UOAI should bring a personal development opportunity to a target population via training for teachers in Deis schools or by opening up participation opportunities and self-efficacy in the sport for people with a disability.

Category B type initiatives reach a target population with a general recreational experience of adventure sports. For example individuals from a disadvantaged community having the opportunity to experience rowing and a real opportunity to become an active member of a rowing club.

Category C type Initiatives represent a high-value outcome whereby the target population engages in an adventure sport that has a positive and significant change for them or their community.

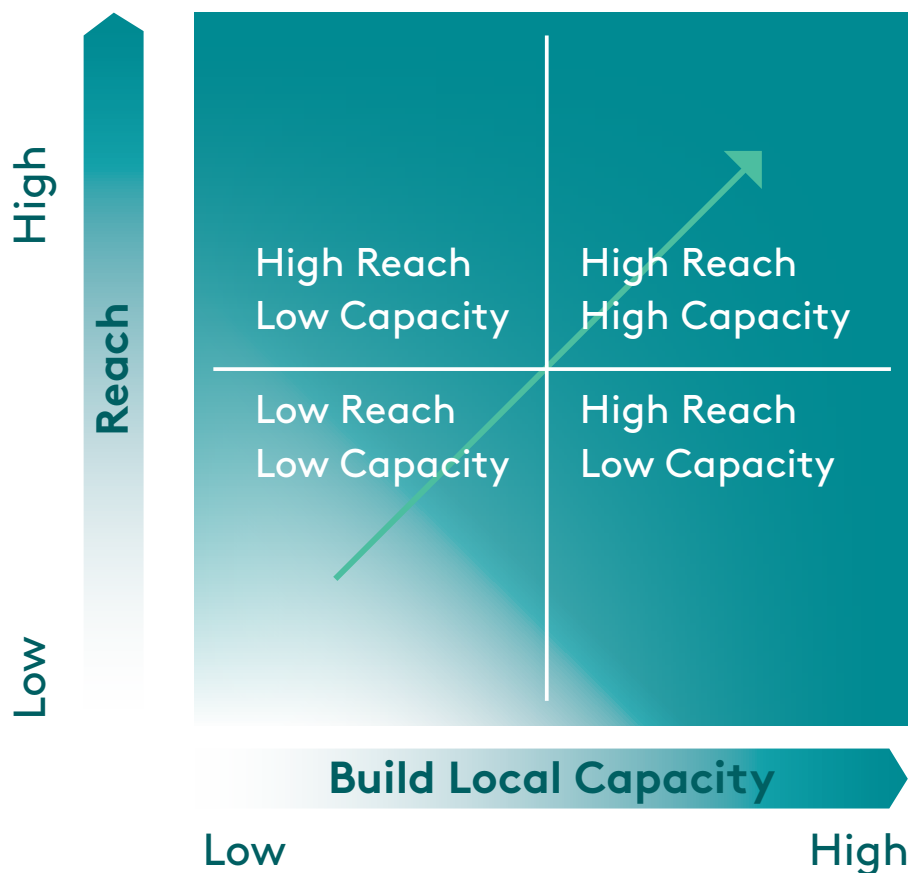
There were no visible **category D** Initiatives, however, some individual participants from the general population will likely have encountered an activity that had a fundamentally positive impact on them such as enhanced awareness and appreciation of the outdoors.

It is also worth noting that given their diverse content, each UOAI element (individual sports or activity programmes within the wider Initiative), in a single UOAI may land in more than one category.

For example, an Initiative's canoeing programme might be in category A but its orienteering programme might land in category C

Capacity and Reach

The structural position of the various UOAls can be further considered within a matrix of 'capacity and reach'. This matrix acknowledges the value of reaching the target participant while also recognising the importance of creating a legacy that can sustain this reach. This capacity can be equipment, training, network or culture related.



Hence, the ideal outcome for a UOAI is a very challenging one where local capacity is optimally increased and the greatest depth of reach, as outlined above, is also achieved.

Low Reach, Low Capacity by failing to increase capacity while also having a very surface reach (recreational adventure for the general population), has limited merit from a UOAI Dorman Accounts perspective. High Capacity, Low Reach by increasing capacity alone may just improve the provision of adventure sports for those in the general population who are already participating.

High Reach Low Capacity through a well-developed Initiative with a good reach into the target population may increase local capacity, however, given the nature of the target communities, significant handholding and external resourcing are likely to be required if there is to be real capacity growth.

For example, providing disability accessible equipment to an adventure sports club suggests capacity growth but real capacity growth is more likely if there is associated adapted physical activity training, interaction within the local disability network and meaningful checking in and supports from the LSP and other agencies with the club.

It should also be noted however that an Initiative may have had a significant positive impact on its participants to the extent that this Initiative can be considered as a success even though local capacity may not have grown significantly. **For example in the Dublin and the Leitrim Initiatives.**

High Reach and High Capacity is a challenging target and as identified above it is likely to require ongoing hand-holding.

Capacity growth was mainly visible through the purchase of additional equipment, new infrastructure or opening up new activity settings. Several Initiatives identified the challenge of following through on coach training especially for individuals who are new to the sport. This challenge is due mainly to the safety and group management responsibilities that are somewhat unique to adventure sports due to their risk context, for example, equestrian activities and kayaking. However, a small number of sports offer a more feasible route for instructor training, for example, orienteering (Ready to Go teacher training) and Parkour (Longford entry-level Parkour training Initiative and potentially an ergometer rowing instructor).

Cork LSP was mindful of having the UOAI integrate into their existing structure and programmes, whilst also using the opportunity to promote the River Lee as the largest outdoor amenity in Cork City. They maximised reach by completing a full needs analysis and identified the key gatekeepers for those groups they would like to target. An outdoor network helped to plan the Initiative and included representative stakeholders from youth organisations, disability organisations and Cork County Council etc.

Practical Implications

- The potential to reach and have a positive impact with the target participants, the disadvantaged and people with a disability, tends to be higher with the Activating Change type approach especially where the delivery structure has bought into this agenda. For example, the Dublin City not for profit Adventure Project company specialises in this type of personal change through the vehicle of adventure sports.
- While all of the four categories of reach illustrated in the first Reach matrix have positive outcomes, category C is a UOAI bulls-eye that UOAI must focus on.

- The intended position of each UOAI within the second reach and capacity matrix is likely to have been influenced by the high and low attractiveness of these capacity building and reach requirements as outlined in 'Appendix 2 The McMillan Matrix'. The future UOAI application process may wish to focus the intended ambition of each Initiative via these two variables.
- The reach of the Initiatives appeared to be more effective where they wrapped the targeted participants with adventure sports capacity and opportunity. Meeting and resourcing the targeted participants where they were.
- The significant majority of the Initiatives involved youth participants rather than a cross section of ages within the targeted communities. Care is required to prevent adventure and the outdoors from being perceived as a youth space.

2.4 Structures

The following are three structural approaches to activity delivery and an Initiative output continuum which the various UOAI can be approximated within.

Typical UOAI structural approaches:

1. **Local Adventure Clubs:** a structure that delivers the UOAI by augmenting the existing adventure sports club or developing a new club.
2. **Commercial Providers²⁰** : these providers are typically used to deliver specific activity equipment.
3. **Target Group Services:** some Initiatives partnered with organisations that already provided services for the targeted groups, for example, youth clubs and schools. The Initiative then worked to integrate adventure sports within this host group's services or activities.

Also, a small number of Local Sports Partnerships directly delivered minor aspects of their Initiatives.

A 'Target Group Services' approach appears on the surface to have a greater potential 'reach' into a targeted community, for example, the Leitrim Equestrian Initiative where local social service agencies identified potential participants from within their clients. This Group Services approach also provided some good capacity-building outcomes such as in the Carlow and Longford Initiatives where youth agencies grew their network and equipment resources.

A Commercial Provider and Adventure Club approach often realised capacity growth, for example, The Wexford Bunclody²¹ and Sligo rowing and kayaking club UOAIs where the providers benefited from new equipment, infrastructure, instructor training or network enhancement. Some 'Commercial Providers' also demonstrated significant 'reach' into the target community such as in the Dublin City North East Inner City Initiative

Practical Implications

- it is difficult to identify one structure that is the most effective across the different Initiatives, rather it is the planned commitment of the Initiative to reach into and impact on a targeted community along with the authentic buy-in of these structures which appears to generate effectiveness. Without a clear plan and authentic buy-in, UOAI resources such as the provision of training or equipment can just lead to a short-term encounter of an adventure sports activity.
- Sustaining UOAI reach and impact is likely to be challenging across all structures. Club structures rely on the goodwill, time and effort of volunteers, adventure sports are not core activities or competencies in the Group Services structure and Commercial Providers will require ongoing resourcing/employment. Clarity of purpose and a strategic commitment from partners towards the Initiative outcomes are vital sustainability resources.

2.5 Communicating

It has been suggested²² that the most effective sports interventions begin with an effective engagement with the target population. The various UOAI initially engaged with participants in different ways. Some UOAI channelled their message via the organisations and agencies which engage with the targeted participants. Other Initiatives made an open call through mainstream and social media ²³. The evaluation found that the channelled approach is more effective in securing UOAI participants from a disadvantaged background compared to a general public call.

Channels such as DEIS Schools, Youth Clubs, Tusla, Disability Groups and other organisations that are known to the LSP were used very effectively by several Initiatives.

²⁰. Commercial providers include 'for profit' and 'not for profit' organisations, for example, the Education Training Board Outdoor Education and Training Centres operate to a commercial, not for profit model.

²¹. The 'commercial' provider, in this case, was an Education Training Board education and training centre (Shielbaggan).

²². Specific observation of a senior Sport Ireland staff member and reflective of the anecdotal observations of various LSPs and partner agencies.

²³. Initiatives with a specific target group, a clear needs analysis and a focused intervention, appear less likely to require an open call.

Initiative Promotion Methods	Most Effective	Second Most Effective	Least Effective
Local/social media	3	10	3
Targeted promotion in specific organisations, schools etc	16	1	0
Individual invites	6	5	4
Open day, turn up and try it type event	5	5	5
Local newspapers or radio	1	4	9

The reliance on social media promotion by 10 initiatives, suggests a less targeted participant search compared to the targeted organisation promotions. This social media approach is more likely to result in a response from the general public rather than the targeted groups. It can be argued that a general public social media promotional approach is symptomatic of a focus on strengthening local adventure clubs/providers rather than engaging with the target groups. The low value of local newspaper and radio media promotion may be reflective of the tendency of the Initiatives towards youth participants and/or a desire to minimise the reach of the Initiatives into the general public.

Sligo Sports and Recreation Partnership noted that their experience was that when adventure sport opportunities were promoted more generally, some participants from disadvantaged backgrounds hadn't the personal confidence to avail of the opportunities. There needed to be a more specific engagement and process to involve these potential participants.

Practical Implications

- Open call communications can favour the engaged and advantaged in a community more so than the marginalised and unsure. However, this open call type approach may, in a small number of cases, be required where more focused UOAI promotion activities have not engaged with the targeted individuals.
- Initiatives that strengthen local adventure sports clubs, but which fail to 'structure in' links between these clubs and the targeted participants, are more likely to strengthen local provision but they are less likely to reach the targeted participants.
- The physically and operationally closer the Initiative partners are to the targeted community, the more likely that the Initiative will address the needs of this community and the more likely that participants from these communities will engage with the Initiatives.

UOAI Learnings

It is evident that the LSPs, partners providers and others involved in the Initiatives were very experienced in the development and delivery of sports-related Initiatives. However, these adventure sports are often more challenging than other sports in their organisation and delivery. The UOAI demonstrated three positive responses to the uniqueness of this adventure sports challenge and two approaches to maximising the impact of adventure sports.

UOAI responses to the unique challenges of adventure sports:

- Reduce the load: Some of the Initiatives diluted the adventure sports challenge by selecting a less adventurous sport, or by lowering the entry point of the sport. For example orienteering around familiar school grounds rather than in the unknown terrain of an unfamiliar forest, traversing two feet above the ground on an indoor climbing wall rather than a roped vertical ascent of a hillside cliff.
- Manage the Load: some Initiatives prepared the participant so that they encounter the sport in a manageable way. For example, instruction on animal husbandry, followed by feeding and maintaining an equine environment, and then riding the horse. Or using sit on top kayaks on a lake in good weather, before using sit-in kayaks in less favourable conditions.
- A combination of these two approaches is also appropriate, for example, school-based orienteering followed by a virtual or a fixed orienteering course experience in a local park, concluding in an entry-level school's orienteering event.

Also in response to the technical and interpersonal skill requirements of some adventure sports, several UOAIs, with the cooperation of various National Governing Bodies, created bespoke local skills training programmes for community members, or youth club staff and volunteers.

Initiatives demonstrated two types of positive approaches to maximise the impact of the adventure sports challenge:

- Building local capacity and sustainability in the provision of adventure sports experiences
Various UOAls developed new adventure sports clubs, brought a sport into the classroom (orienteering teacher training), built capability in existing clubs (more visible, attractive membership opportunities, disability positive instructor skills or equipment), or the increased presence of adventure sports in other organisations (adventure sports as part of the youth club or scout group timetable).
- Generating depth: using adventure sports as a vehicle to target a specific groups behaviour change. These bespoke UOAI programmes skillfully used the adventure sports core, to carry and realise a social, community, health or wellbeing agenda. The development and delivery of these types of programmes require high levels of planning and nuanced delivery.

Most of the Initiatives were able to engage with local partners across the Initiative delivery spectrum from sourcing participants to establishing sustainable participation pathways. This suggests that the Initiative coordinators are effectively engaged in a local partnership network.

- The Dublin City Initiative came close to the optimum Initiative positioning and outcome by successfully engaging with a very targeted disadvantaged population, and by supporting the emergence of an onsite and specialised activity provider. However, extraneous issues of provider insurance costs and unrelated health and safety issues at the main activity location, have stymied this Initiative.
- The Leitrim Equestrian focused Initiative has a high effective reach and significant partner commitment to sustaining the Initiative via an off-site commercial provider, however, the cost of establishing local equestrian provision/capacity is significantly beyond the resources of the Initiative.
- The Longford Parkour focused Initiative has successfully engaged with an urban youth group and has grown the capacity of the local youth club staff and the LSP tutors, via a level one Parkour training programme and through the development of an on-site and a mobile Parkour training platform.
- The Mayo and Sligo Initiatives operated via a Local Adventure Club structure with some targeted group services. A water sports networking group comprised of the LSP, clubs and community representatives as a structure, while a blend of adventure sports clubs, a commercial activity provider and some schools delivered the UOAI activities.
- It is noteworthy that the Sligo Initiative made an open call for participants but limited applications to locations within the county that are known to have high levels of disadvantaged communities and asked for agencies to refer participants to the Initiative.

- The County Meath Initiative successfully switched from its initial target group focus due to the training and motivation issues encountered.
- The Westmeath Initiative partnered with a diverse range of organisations including Westmeath County Council, Inny Kayakers, Mullingar Canoe Club, Canoe Ireland, Ballymacarraghy Family Resource Centre, Westmeath Youth Services, Community Mental Health Services, HSE – Disability, Waterways Ireland, local schools, and Westmeath Community Development
- A number of formal networking groups were established as part of the Initiatives, for example in Cork, Sligo and Mayo.



Theme 3: Realising the UOAI Aspirations

The following Theme considers the operational issues around the delivery of the UOAI in particular the roles of the various partners, types of activity provision and the activity delivery formats and locations.

3.1 Partner Roles

The Initiative partners had various roles in sourcing, leading, delivering and sustaining participation as outlined in the following table²⁴.

The capacity of these operational level partners varied. Youth clubs and schools were the most common and effective channels to reach the targeted participants, as well as agencies such as TUSLA. However, it is noteworthy that community groups and youth clubs, while central to securing participants, they were less relevant in delivering activities. This contrasts with the higher numbers of leadership and activity provision roles of the sports clubs and the commercial provider sector, and this appears to reflect the low level of adventure sports skills and confidence within youth clubs, schools and community groups. The potential to upskill youth workers and volunteers in some adventure sports activities, as demonstrated in the Fingal and the Longford Initiatives, should be actively considered.

Partners	Source of participants	Initiative Leaders	Participation Pathways	Main Providers of Activities
Commercial Provider		6	4	7
Community Agency	6	6		
Community group	12	7	3	
Disability Group	12		3	
Not for Profits				5
Sports Clubs		12	11	6
Sports National Governing Body		3	5	
Youth Clubs	12	4	4	2

Sourcing community-level leaders for the UOAI was challenging, especially for high skill activities, and there were low levels of community readiness.

²⁴ The table numbers refer to the number of partners in this role across the various Initiatives.

- **Type of Activity:** unlike mainstream sports such as soccer, athletics or swimming where most community leaders or parents of participants are willing to 'have a go' at some leadership role, the less well known, more complex and higher risk sports of rock-climbing, kayaking, orienteering and so on, meant that community leaders and parents were understandably reluctant to take on a leadership role due to this more complex setting and their lack of experience.
- **Community Readiness:** the UOAI's with reach into the more disadvantaged communities, often found it more difficult to source community leaders or parent helpers within their communities. This gap in community-level leadership appears to be due to a lower level of community readiness and individual self-efficacy around leadership.
- **Technical Competence:** community organisation staff (youth club leaders, local sports tutors, after school clubs), typically have high levels of readiness to take on new Initiatives. However, due to the technical skills requirements of most of these adventures sports activities, these staff typically lack technical sport delivery competencies.

Some low readiness targeted communities may lack a volunteer structure, culture or the social cohesion required for volunteer engagement and progression. In these cases, a more fundamental capacity building, beyond that of sports development, may be required. For example the ongoing community regeneration projects in Cranmore (UOAI Sligo) and East Wall (UOAI Dublin).

Practical implications

It might be argued that the deeper the reach of an Initiative into communities with disadvantaged populations the more likely they will face low levels of community readiness²⁵. This issue of readiness is a very real challenge, and 'deep reach' Initiatives must be strategic, realistic and responsive to these readiness levels. A focused promotion, low participant numbers and a measured build-up of interaction with the activities and a similar building up of participant confidence are some of the Initiative responses which are appropriate to building up this readiness.

Examples of strategic capacity/readiness development include:

- The Wexford UOAI initially provided local participation opportunities for target populations followed subsequently by an instructor skills development course with associated qualifications and supports for the participants.
- The Longford Initiative supported instructor training for local agency staff and existing youth club volunteers.
- The Fingal Initiative provided climbing-wall training and qualifications for the existing Scout Leaders at their activity location.
- The Carlow Initiative supported the adventure sports capacity of the Regional Youth Services.

²⁵ Regarding the McMillan Matrix of high and low attractiveness, it might be concluded that low levels of community readiness are indicative of high levels of community disadvantage.

3.2 Activity Provision

Low levels of UOAI activity delivery capacity at a community level makes Initiatives reliant on sports clubs and commercial partners to deliver their activities and objectives. In particular local club based provision provides a strong community link, offers an ongoing participation pathway and augments the membership and sustainability of the existing club. There was evident willingness within most of the adventure sports clubs to engage in these Initiatives. However, not all of these clubs had the coaches or a UOAI appropriate culture of youth and recreational participation to support the target participants²⁶. Where local clubs were not available, some Initiatives made use of commercial providers²⁷ to deliver these activities.

The main providers of UOAI activities were:



Several commercial activity providers were very effective UOAI partners. These commercial adventure sports providers, however, tend to operate seasonally and may have limited connections with the UOAI community. The successful use of commercial activity providers for the UOAI requires that these providers have a clear understanding and buy-in to the UOAI objectives and the target community, and ideally have experience of working with these target groups.

A 'third way' has also emerged via the training of other agencies such as capacity building youth club staff and school teachers. Teacher training in orienteering included local mapping and the utilisation of online orienteering apps. Both of these approaches have the potential to augment school and club activity timetables.

"We've gotten trained and qualified in the programme and that means that we can reduce costs [...] we've now five people in the group who are qualified wall instructors, that means we have five people to bring out as many people on the walls and other programmes if we had that for kayaking and canoeing and now sea rowing, and all these different activities, that brings the cost down big time, not paying for instructors that way."

UOAI Respondent Community Leader.

²⁶ Some LSPs used the Initiatives to create bridges into these clubs to initiate positive change. For example, the Sligo Initiative bought a recreational rowing boat for the local rowing club while the Waterford Initiative supported the safety boat training of a club's rowing instructors.

²⁷ The recreational tourism demand for some adventure sports makes their delivery commercially viable.

Some of the Initiatives are still in the process of developing an effective local provision structure. The provision of bicycles, which can have a significant positive impact on disadvantaged individuals, in particular, is proving to be challenging. The maintenance, distribution and tracking of bicycles outside of a club environment is possibly the most complex of all of the activities, given the potential misuse and misappropriation of this equipment. The model for third-party distribution and maintenance of equipment is still under development and requires further consideration.

Practical Implications

- Given the complexity, specialist equipment and higher levels of risk associated with these adventure sports a club structure appear best suited to support the sustainable provision and the development of community leaders in these activities.
- Commercial providers require an appropriate level of income and hence while offering a good short term mechanism for the delivery of UOAI activities, their long term Initiative delivery role requires careful consideration.
- Expanding the capacities of education providers and youth club staff/volunteers is an emerging third-way for adventures sports provision.
- UOAI cycling Initiatives can be of great value, but their equipment distribution and maintenance model, outside of a club environment, requires further development if this activity is to be sustainable.



3.3 Delivery Formats and Locations

Typically, the UOAI programmes were delivered in a session format with a focus on developing familiarity and then progression in the sport. These sessions took place in local settings for circa two hours across a range of sports with kayaking and orienteering the most frequently offered activity.



Most Initiatives offered more than one activity with some engaging with different target groups via different activities.

The availability of activity providers (club and commercial), and local natural settings have a significant influence on the type and proximity of adventure sports activities in an urban area. Some Initiatives are fortunate with the availability of nearby natural or built adventure sports settings, while other heavily urbanised spaces with few natural settings or activity provider resources represent a significant challenge.

A number of the UOAI were creative in generating new provision structures, reclaiming abandoned places, or constructing new facilities to provide a foundation for these sports. For example the redevelopment of the Edenderry Canoe Club, the emergence of the Bunclody Paddle Sports Club and the nascent Donegal Adventure Hub. The use of a sports hall climbing wall (Fingal), the reclaiming of a lock keeper's cottage (Dublin City) and the proposed expansion of a public park as a locus for outdoor sports (Carlow) are further examples of this adaptation, reclamation and animation approaches.

"The students in our school now use the local outdoor adventure facilities a lot more frequently as a result - we have facilities near our school which we didn't make full use of until we got involved in this Initiative. Also, students who wouldn't normally take part in some team sports got involved in some of the new Initiatives and it helped to improve their self-confidence. Some of them went on to do Summer courses in the sport that they took part in eg sailing."

UOAI Community Leader.

"A huge thank you for supporting our work here. I would also like to acknowledge funding which has enabled us to install safety booms on the river which has eliminated four dangerous hazards for our young paddlers and other water users."

UOAI Community Leader.

Practical Implications

The ideal UOAI setting is one in which a natural facility such as parkland, forest or watercourse is within the urban area and is supported by an existing adventure sports club or another provider. The lack of this ideal setting should not prevent the adaptation of existing resources. It may also be argued that urban adventure does not necessarily require a natural setting, for example, parkour, climbing walls, street orienteering and skate parks.

There is an opportunity for the examples and learning of the various UOAI's regarding the development and use of these settings to be compiled and shared²⁸.

UOAI Responses

Some UOAI's were effective at creating community-level provision and maximising local activity resources, for example:

- The Scout Leaders in the Dublin City Initiative were trained to a climbing wall specific coaching standard so that they were capable and confident at offering this activity on a local climbing wall.
- The redevelopment of the lapsed Edenderry canoe club in County Offaly and the proposed training of local leaders represents a positive step towards sustained adventure sports provision and is a possible start point for an adventure hub in the town.

- The County Wexford UAO Initiative driven water activity site and portacabins, the emergence of the Paddle Sports club, and the process of training local instructors/leaders is a comprehensive and potentially sustainable development at this site.
- The Sligo Initiative is growing the capacity, visibility and engagement of the existing local adventure sports clubs with the target participants, while also recognising and working towards improving the readiness of the main community.
- The Dublin City Initiative is in the process of creating a club within a disadvantaged community via a commercial provider. This approach has the possibility of transforming the club participants of today into future leaders and instructors. This is similar to the County Wexford Initiative, which is in the process of training local UOAI participants as future instructors.
- The Longford Initiative paralleled the training of local community and youth club leaders in Parkour coaching with the delivery of Parkour participation experiences in a local youth club, and as a mobile experience in local schools.
- The Irish Orienteering Association 'Ready to Go' teacher training programme for school children was used by different UOAs sometimes in partnership with local orienteering clubs, as a 'third way' of local activity provision.
- The Donegal Initiative has painstakingly pursued the redevelopment of a section of public park as an adventure activity space in response to a detailed needs analysis with local disadvantaged communities.
- The County Mayo and Carlow Initiatives are making good use of urban natural settings, and the integration of local clubs to grow their visibility and use.
- A number of Initiatives responded to the lack of local adventure sports delivery by working with clubs or commercial providers who were physically distant from disadvantaged communities. While less than optimum, these 'distant' partners could be effective, for example, the Leitrim Initiative very effectively uses a commercial equestrian provider located several miles from the targeted communities. Delivery proximity is preferable but not always possible.

²⁸ A portfolio of brief case studies with thematic insights is suggested.

Theme 4: Relevance

This theme explored the perceived relevance of the UOAls for the participants, communities and Initiative partners. While this theme was somewhat visible within the questionnaire process, the in- depth interviews provided the most valuable insights.

Enjoyment of the activities has been the pervasive theme of the feedback from participants and the community. A range of other specific benefits was also identified such as safety around water, confidence, sociability, an increased awareness, appreciation and interaction with the nearby natural environment.

Some respondents noted a life-changing awareness that has resulted from the Initiative while others identified an increased quality of life benefit:

"When I got there (a rehabilitation centre) I was kinda broken. I was there for two years, and now I'm in college, and I'm moving on, and I'm doing great. But to feel so free to run into the sea and all that, just gave us that bit of, kind of ourselves back. There was a change in us after that, and it sounds really cheesy, but I swear to god like, that's true. 100% true."

UOAI Respondent adult.

"I was 75 at that time, I'm now 77. And so, at 75 I got up on a bike for the first time in 50 years. And it was fabulous getting up onto a bike again. It was a great experience, and a beautiful bike compared to the three-speed bike I used to have in my youth. I think I'm the kind of guy that will do anything, to try it before I'm gone, yeah, I want to make the most of the time I've left, to be as active as possible."

UOAI adult respondent.

"Well, my legs are weak so I cannot really use a proper bike, it's really hard. So, we went to this place and we got, like, a hand cycling bike, and I use it a lot now."

UOAI child respondent
with a disability.

The relevance of proximity, visibility and affordability also emerged through the questionnaire responses from community representatives and participants.

UOAI local impact on adventure sports opportunities. (N=15)	Least Impact	Most Impact
more close-by	1	12
more visible	2	12
more affordable	2	11
more accessible for people with a disability	5	9
more enjoyable in how they are provided	6	8
more diverse	6	7
more approachable	7	7
more popular in how they are perceived	6	6

As part of the in-depth interview process which took place with six Initiative participants, two of the four core themes and six of the fifteen sub-themes which emerged related to the relevance and value of the UOAI from a participant's perspective.

These themes are summarised in the following table.

Novelty and challenge of the experience	Impact and further pathways
Escapism from the everyday	Personal empowerment through participation
Opportunity to challenge self	Pathways to further participation
Shared experiences and sense of belonging	
Special moments and feelings of accomplishment	

The volumes of participants in individual programmes varied significantly from hundreds to one or two individuals. These differences in volumes are typically reflective of the trade-off between providing a small taste of these activities to a large number of participants or the small number of participants that can be significantly impacted through a deeper engagement. These 'small number' engagements ranged from the one to one set-up and support for an individual using a UOAI handcycle in Waterford to the small group immersion activities in Dublin City.

Practical Implications

- Participant feedback strongly suggests that the removal of the barriers of proximity and cost allied to an increased awareness/opportunity of an adventure sports experience are central to making the Initiatives relevant to the participants.
- The initiative's impact varies according to the participant's perspective. For some it is about the discovery of a place, for others, it is about the discovery of self. The initiatives must continue to offer this breadth of potential.



Theme 5: Impact

This concluding theme considers the four stated aims of the UOAI framework:

- Providing the Pathway: New opportunities or Initiatives to enable participation in sport and physical activity in urban outdoor settings.
- Well Trained People: Training and development of the people to enable increased participation.
- Strong Organisations: Self-sustaining structures/partnerships, an integrated approach from local partners, a social environment that engages members of the community, better organised and connected local clubs, genuine community engagement and leadership.
- Quality Facilities and Resources: Improved access and equipment for local people and integration with local facility planning and programming

This theme revisits and aligns some of the earlier observations within this UOAI outcome framework.

5.1 Providing the Pathway

All of the Initiatives provided some form of 'gateway' into adventure sports (equality of opportunity), however, the level of effective pathways for sustained participation (equality of outcome), varied across the Initiatives. Participation pathways were mainly anticipated from existing adventure sports clubs, UOAI new club start-ups, schools (orienteering), and to a lesser extent from commercial activity providers and other commercial entities such as leisure centres and bike hire.

The provision of meaningful pathways was 'baked into' some Initiatives, anticipated in others, facility led and unattainable in some.

- **Baked in:** several Initiatives tightly linked their Initiative funding with sustained participation pathways²⁹. Typically, these Initiatives developed local capacity so that a sustained participation route was a key output. For example, the County Longford Parkour Initiative provided instructor training to several local volunteers and professionals and provided a base for the activities within a youth club as well as a mobile unit. Similarly, the Fingal Initiative climbing wall training for the local scout group leaders, integrated this activity within an existing membership. The provision of orienteering leader training for teachers via the Ready to Go programme was used by a number of Initiatives so that the sport of orienteering might take place within the school timetable. In Offaly there now is a pathway for young people in the town to get into kayaking and be connect to a wider community of competitive kayaking in Ireland and beyond. These



types of pathways tended to be accompanied by capacity development at a local level and they were aligned to a robust structure of a school, established club or a youth group. Notably, there were barriers to instructor training pathways in some Initiatives due to low levels of readiness in some communities, and the level of challenge associated with attaining a leadership qualification in some adventure sports.

- **Anticipated:** a significant proportion of the Initiatives which aligned with local sports clubs, anticipated that participants would continue their engagement via a membership with the activity delivery club. For example, the rowing and kayaking Initiatives in County Sligo, rowing in Waterford, kayaking in Mayo, the archery and canoe clubs in Laois and so on. The UOAI in these cases ‘broke the ice’ for both the participants and the club. In Sligo and Kilkenny, the UOAI has supported the kayaking clubs with universal design type equipment which supports inclusive sessions and this may support the focus of the club around inclusive activities. The increased awareness of the natural land and water-based resources has changed how UOAI participants view the city of Cork and this has created potential pathways for personal and group activity in city spaces as well as integrating existing resources and participants with community partners such as Meitheal Mara.

There is anecdotal evidence of participant transition into clubs (Waterford, Sligo) but in general,

“Club members have benefitted from seeing each other as individuals rather than as being ‘from a certain area’”

UOAI Respondent adult.

it was difficult to measure the number of UOAI participants who continued as club members. Furthermore, some sports and clubs had a dominant competitive culture,³⁰ and this hindered the participant’s transition from the initiatives into a club pathway. COVID 19 also curtailed club operations and hampered membership opportunities.

²⁹ The Sligo strategy included a “pre-introduction introduction” where the disadvantaged groups could get used to the activity, equipment, and the instructors to build their self-confidence sufficiently to benefit from a subsequent introductory session. When the programme targeted schools, the UOAI worked with the school to identify the students most in need of engagement. This approach was written into partnership agreements to ensure the school complied with the intended target students.

³⁰ Given the sometimes challenging contexts associated with adventure sports, UOAI participants are more likely to engage and thrive in a recreational participation club culture where they can bed in their experience of the activity, before choosing higher levels of commitment that the competitive sports setting requires.

- Facility led: also known as a settings approach this is demonstrated by the Donegal Initiative whereby the development of an adventure hub in an urban park has the potential to foster a local adventure outdoors culture and realise the emergence of peer-led and club activities. This project was guided by a comprehensive consultation process and includes the employment of a part-time coordinator to pump-prime the use of this space. The impact of this pathway is unclear as a range of ownership and planning barriers and then COVID restrictions have delayed its realisation. However, such an approach will likely require a period of handholding and the ongoing engagement of other youth and community organisations.
- Unattainable: some initiatives acknowledged that it was not possible to provide a sustained pathway for participation. For example supporting cultural change around animal husbandry in the equestrian initiative in County Leitrim, and the Dublin City personal development Initiative. In both initiatives, there was a desire to provide a pathway for future provision however the cost of an equestrian club structure was prohibitive in the case of County Leitrim³¹ and temporarily impractical³² in the case of the Dublin initiative. It is worth noting however that the change process brought about by these Activating Change type initiatives, appears to be significant and worthwhile regardless of the availability of a participation pathway.

In general, the UOAI has strengthened the links between some clubs and community agencies and there is evidence of greater openness and inclusiveness on the part of some clubs and the targeted populations. The UOAI approach supports disadvantaged participants engaging in these sports and also clarifies the pathways for continued participation. However, it has been difficult to quantify the level of sustained engagement amongst UOAI participants across these various pathways.

Also as noted earlier in Theme 1, a significant positive behavioural change resulting from a short UOAI intervention with no participation pathway, may still be very valuable.

"..... asked me would I be interested in joining the start-up, that he wanted to set up a Stand Up Paddle club. Yeah. So, myself and four or five others have become the committee members of that, so we're in the middle of starting that up now at the moment so that's kind of where I came from, you know, women on water... I would never have considered that an option before this, would never. I never thought I would have had enough knowledge to do it. Yeah. When I had that bit of confidence after, during the six weeks, it really made me feel this is far more accessible to me."

Some Initiatives noted the practical difficulties around providing these activities for individuals with a disability. It was also apparent that some Initiatives had low numbers of disability continuity in the activities in part due to low initial participant numbers and the resource challenge of continuing to provide these activities, especially within a club structure. However, the value of the Initiatives for these individuals with a disability can be very significant.

Local instructor training is an effective means of building local capacity through which clubs and schools could become less dependent on funded private providers. For example Sligo no longer required the involvement of Rowing Ireland in their schools as the PE teachers had completed the rowing coach training. Longford has trained local Parkours coaches and this enabled the sport to be rolled out in schools across the county. Kinsale Outdoor Education Training Centre had run training for youth workers in adventure games and facilitation which the youth leaders are already using, the development of a new club and locally trained instructors in Wexford, the rock-climbing training of the scout leaders in Fingal and the teacher orienteering instructor training in several Initiatives are some examples of this.

Practical Implications

- The adventure sports landscape and in particular the number of participation opportunities was aided and enhanced by the various UOAls. The UOAls varied in their ability to identify sustained participation and in demonstrating the strength of their participation legacies. More formal monitoring of the transition of UOAI participants onto pathways is required. For example club membership numbers and orienteering online App usage or online map downloads.
- Local trained activity leaders/instructors in clubs and Target Group Services appears to be an effective way to sustain participation amongst the target groups and this should be a key element in future UOAls.
- High impact 'Activating Change' type Initiatives are difficult to sustain within a standard club structure. High coaching ratios, specialist equipment and challenging participant behaviours may exceed the capacity or willingness of a voluntary club structure and its volunteers. Ongoing resources are likely to be required to sustain 'Activating Change' type Initiatives.
- Low levels of initial and sustained participation in outdoor adventure were especially evident amongst those with a disability. For example, the Waterford Initiative handcycle while of significant merit, the complexity of setting up this equipment limits its flexibility and the likely number of users. The County Laois Initiative noted the difficulty of providing water access for activities such as kayaking for individuals with a disability. There also appeared to be low levels of UOAI participation amongst individuals with an intellectual disability. The practical experiences of supporting engagement in adventure sports by people with a disability might be captured and shared via a case study process.

³¹ The County Leitrim Initiative partners continue to fund an annual equestrian programme, however, this does not offer a year-round continuity of participation for previous Initiative participants.

³² The insurance costs for the not-for-profit provider and some health and safety issues prevented the realisation of this pathway. However, these issues if resolved are likely to lead to a reinstatement of this pathway.



- It appears to be that participation pathways are more likely to be meaningful and robust where there is an inclusive cultural development with the pathway organisation (club, school etc.). Initiatives that primarily provide equipment to a club or funds club 'come and try it' sessions in the absence of meaningful buy-into inclusiveness and participation, appear less likely to lower the barriers between the club and the UOAI participant.
- Target Group Services: Where UOAI's partnered with target group services such as youth clubs or schools to deliver or structure the activities, the emergence of an adventure sports pathway/legacy within these organisations varied. Where staff training was included as part of the Initiative, this appeared to yield the highest sustainability.
- Self-directed Participation: Orienteering is emerging as one of the adventure sports with the potential for self-directed individual participation via permanent orienteering courses on public land (parks and Coillte forests) and the online MapRun software which provides an orienteering map and virtual orienteering controls. The relatively low volume of these facilities and online events currently limits the scale/frequency of such self-directed activity.

UOAI Achievements

The four Initiative approaches which appear to enhance sustained participation amongst the targeted disadvantaged populations and people with a disability are:

- Sport flexibility: the extent to which a sport is provided at a sufficiently low entry-level for the participant and the trainee instructor. For example, school-based and virtual orienteering, indoor climbing, Greenway/cycle trail and ergometer rowing.
- Community-level organisation staff or volunteer instructor training such as in youth clubs, schools and in one case a scout troop (Fingal).
- The meaningful buy-in of a club to the UOAI vision is more likely to support the transition of UOAI participants into these clubs, especially where the UOAI is part of an effective ongoing relationship between the LSP and the organisation/club.
- Sustained investment with a commercial activity provider to continue to provide activities, and instructor training.

³³ The physical environment includes rock crags, watercourses, parkland and some urban parkour, biking and skateboard sites and the slipways and steps, tracks and trails and orienteering controls. Personal/Activity equipment requirements for safety (buoyancy aids and helmets), protection from the weather (wetsuits, jackets and cagoules), navigation (compass, maps), and overnighting equipment (tents, sleeping bags). Sports Equipment includes 'vehicles' such as kayaks and bikes, as well as Training equipment such as rowing ergometers. The digital environment in orienteering and hillwalking includes digital mapping and fitness trackers.

5.2 Quality Facilities

While some adventure sports require little additional infrastructure aside from the natural setting, most require some facilities. Most of the Initiatives included the development of facilities across four formats³³ the physical environment, personal equipment, sports equipment and the digital environment.

UOAI investments in the physical environment mainly included the development of orienteering fixed courses, on-site equipment storage (Offaly, Wexford, Kilkenny, Laois), and at two locations the preparatory process for the construction of adventure activity sites (Carlow, Donegal). Also, additional inclusive and participation equipment has improved local sports facilities. For example, Waterford, Kilkenny, Tipperary and Wexford have increased facility provision and the attractiveness of these sports. A quad leisure rowing boat was purchased as part of the Sligo Initiative and this supports the social rowing, beginner, and school rowing as the existing boats were too fragile and expensive for these types of beginner programmes. In Cork, the purchase of a Hippocampi adaptive all-terrain wheelchair along with dry suits have enabled participation in cold water activities for a greater range of abilities.

The majority of Initiatives bought personal equipment to support sports participation mainly for kayaking, orienteering and cycling. This equipment was typically provided for a third party such as a sport or youth club, or school, for their continued use. In some cases, this equipment was bought to increase access to the sport for people with a disability, for example, a multi-surface wheelchair, handcycles³⁴ a hoist and easy entry/exit kayaks (Kilkenny, Wexford, Mayo, Cork).

There was also evidence of the Initiatives augmenting existing sports facilities for example the increased use of swimming pools as venues for kayaking (Cork and Mayo), and in particular adapted kayaking, the proposed inclusion of a slalom course on a lake (Mayo), the further development of parks and river banks for activities (Carlow, Wexford, Laois), the reclaiming of a canal as a recreation space (Dublin City).

"...we grew up with the lake beside us and we never had these activities there. Yes, yeah. I think that there is now an option for adults to take, to do the training for these things, it's fantastic."

UOAI Respondent adult.

"So being able to go down to the facility in my community is unbelievably amazing so I can bring groups down or go down myself. You can't put a price on it, it's just brilliant, you can do everything there"

UOAI Respondent adult.

³⁴ The cost of hand-cycles is considerable and the opportunity to sample and engage in this sport for a period may open up this activity for the participant before they make this significant financial investment.



Practical Implications

- The UOAI investments in club equipment are significant and can expand the relevance and opportunity of these sports for the targeted UOAI participant. Ongoing support may be required to ensure that this equipment does more than add value to the existing non- disadvantaged club members.
- A robust management and maintenance structure is required if UOAI cycling equipment is to be effective.
- UOAI orienteering teacher training, the MapRun orienteering app and the development of fixed orienteering courses offer significant potential for self-directed entry-level participation in this sport. Ongoing animation and orienteering events are required to energise this participation, as are more accessible pathways into orienteering clubs.
- The experience gained from the County Carlow and County Donegal UOAI site development can guide future similar projects.

UOAI Achievements

- Kayaks and bicycles were the most common sports equipment purchases. Bicycles were purchased to provide disadvantaged individuals with access to a bicycle or provide a youth club or school with supplementary bicycles for their disadvantaged members. Cycling programmes also have an important role in developing physical literacy amongst groups with low levels of bicycle ownership and use. However, managing the distribution and upkeep of bicycles has been challenging for the Initiatives³⁵.
- Some Initiatives are evaluating the potential of or have transferred the bicycles to a third party such as a bike hire company or activity provider with the understanding that these bicycles will be made available for the target groups.
- 68 kayaks and associated safety equipment were purchased mainly in partnership with an existing canoe/kayak club. This type of club equipment support has the potential to increase the capacity of the club to take on new members without these new participants having to invest in this equipment. Two clubs also used this as an opportunity to purchase more accessible/stable kayaks for people with a disability and dry suits so that individuals with a disability could have greater protection from the wet and cold.

³⁵ The Sligo Initiative Sligo are supporting participants in a Post Leaving Certificate type programme to complete a bicycle maintenance course first and thereafter an instructor course.

- Orienteering is making increased use of the digital environment³⁶ during the period of COVID 19 to support self-led virtual orienteering competitions. This has the potential to supplement the significant and challenging step up into a competitive orienteering club setting.
- Rowing ergometers or indoor rowing machines were purchased as part of a transition year rowing Initiative with schools and two nearby rowing clubs (Waterford and Sligo). This provides access to the sport in a very controlled and engaging manner without any weather restrictions while the on-water experience can be more easily timed during periods of suitable weather.
- In Donegal, a section of a public park was targeted for development as an adventure hub with the LSP as the lead partner. This type of investment involved alterations to a section of a public park so that it supported a range of outdoor adventure activities for a local community with high levels of disadvantage.

5.3 Strong Organisations

The Initiatives partner organisations were typically:

- Clubs: adventure sports clubs mainly kayaking/canoeing and rowing.
- Community Groups: mainly youth groups or general community development type.
- Commercial providers of the equipment and instruction in adventure sports activities.
- Schools: some schools provided adventure activities mainly in orienteering.

Strong organisations typically comprise strong structures including the strategic direction and management of the organisation and strong staff with training and experience. The effect of the initiatives for these organisations was through additional training and in some cases the improved cultural alignment of the organisation with the needs of the participants.

From the perspective of the UOAI, clubs that are heavily competition focused and which have little interest in recreational participation, are less likely to be relevant or engaging for the target participants. For example, school orienteering events offer a valuable participation link for UOAI participants, however, the pathway into the local orienteering clubs appears to represent a significant step up into a competitive setting which is likely to be less inviting for participants. In the sport of rowing, some rowing clubs developed a recreational rowing approach as a result of the UOAI (Sligo, Waterford).

³⁶ This smartphone individualised orienteering participation app 'MapRun' does not require physical controls on the ground nor a staffed start and endpoint for an event. These virtual orienteering events also supported participation over some time with individuals opting in as it suited them.



UOAI Achievements

- A small number of the UOAI strengthened the structures within existing clubs and communities either by making them more accessible or broadening the clubs offering to a wider cross-section of their community (Tipperary, Meath, Sligo, Kilkenny, Mayo). This strengthening also occurred through the networking of clubs and various other activity providers.
- The County Meath Initiative included the parallel provision of activities by two canoe clubs and a commercial canoe activity provider and new paddling/kayaking clubs have emerged from the UOAI (Wexford and Offaly).
- Existing clubs or other adventure activity providers were effectively linked with each other via a network structure (Mayo, Carlow, Sligo, Meath).
- The training and networking of youth club and agency staff in Cork City, via the Initiative, has strengthened this network. The schools orienteering teacher training and events provide a valuable participation link for the UOAI participants³⁷.
- There are examples of UOAI successfully using commercial providers (Laois, Longford, Dublin City, Meath, Kilkenny) and there may be no realistic potential in some locations for community-led provision in the short to medium term due to the earlier noted low levels of readiness (Dublin City, Sligo), the high activity provision costs (Leitrim) and the current COVID restrictions (Offaly, Meath).
- The National Governing Bodies of orienteering, canoeing and rowing were actively engaged in developing instructor or participant training opportunities for some Initiatives.

³⁷ Tipperary, Waterford, Sligo, Wexford, Dublin City, Fingal, Kilkenny, Mayo, Laois, Offaly, Meath, Carlow, Cork and Leitrim.

³⁸ Unlike most mainstream sports, a number of the adventure sports require the active involvement of the instructor leader in the activity.

5.4 Well Trained People

The leaders and staff of the community groups tended to have very little or no qualifications or experience in most of the adventure sports and this challenged the delivery of some of the Initiatives (Meath). Given the range of technical skills, issues of safety/risk and the additional challenges of providing adventure sports in dynamic outdoor environments, the training process for adventure sports are in most cases quite challenging³⁸. Some of the Initiatives noted the requirement of a long lead-in time to engage and qualify local leaders in some activities (Sligo) and there was an acknowledgement within some Initiatives that this leader/instructor training component required additional resources.

Some Initiatives relied on the commercial provision of activities, which was frequently effective in the short term, however, this approach can sidestep longer-term more embedded provision.

Some progression training was provided for club leaders so that they could advance the level of adventure sports provision for their members, and in some cases better meet the needs of individuals with a disability (Tipperary, Mayo). In some cases, the level of training required to deliver an Initiative locally was far more than that which a community might be reasonably expected to offer (Dublin City, Offaly).

Some UOAls succeeded in progressing formal training qualifications amongst their participants (Wexford, Fingal and Longford). It can be argued that other Initiatives added to the existing outdoor training culture of their area such as the likely positive influence of the Initiative in Kilkenny on the existing local Level 5 training course.

"I can't say I went out planning to do anything like this. And in the end, I kind of said to myself it's not about anybody else, it's about you, so I rang Shielbaggan. They convinced me to go for an interview. Long story short, I ended up on the course not really knowing what I was getting myself into, but I have no regrets. And getting into it, I would have had no background and I will have several qualifications and a Level 5 Outdoor Recreation award"

UOAI respondent adult.

"Outdoor Adventure sports require highly qualified and competent coaches to deliver the programme. Training to gain a level 1 or 2 qualifications can sometimes take a minimum of a year or more to complete. It is not easy to train up community leaders, leaders must be identified, and a lot of time and money is required to get them to a point to deliver. It is very hard to get courses and assessments delivered outside of Dublin which adds additional costs to the mostly volunteer participants. As the project budgets are based on a year it is difficult to get training completed within that time frame."

UOAI Leader.

Practical Implications

- Building local delivery capacity is an important step in both reaching into communities and sustaining reach.
- LSP Sports Inclusion Disability Officers play an important role in both networking and refining Initiative opportunities, especially for participants with a disability.

UOAI Achievements

- The Dublin Local Sports Partnership Initiative provided activities for individuals with sometimes challenging behaviours. The breadth of experience and interpersonal skills required to successfully realise such a course are significant and these interpersonal skills are in addition to the technical instruction skills which are also required.
- Several UOAI's bridged the gap in local activity provision by successfully embedding local leader/instructor training in adventure sports (Fingal, Laois, Longford, Wexford).
- Several Initiatives worked with schools to provide teacher training in orienteering (Tipperary, Waterford, Fingal) which facilitated the teachers to provide orienteering experiences to their students. These orienteering training programmes also included a self-contained orienteering equipment package of a school orienteering map and orienteering controls.



Conclusion

.....

It is apparent from the evaluation that the UOAI focus on adventure sports has been effective at two levels.

1. Increasing the **visibility, opportunity and participation** in adventure sports as a mechanism for recreation with the resulting enjoyment, health and wellbeing effects that this participation brings. This has been achieved by strengthening existing provision through training, equipment and programmes/animation.
2. Providing change opportunities for individuals and their communities through adventure sports. This has been achieved via clear agendas, targeted interventions, diverse partnerships and ongoing oversight.

It is apparent that all of the UOAI have increased the level of recreational participation opportunities and care is required to ensure that these opportunities also offer meaningful long term participation outcomes. It is apparent from the evaluation that more of the UOAI have the potential to deliver change opportunities through adventure sports especially amongst the targeted disadvantaged and disability participants. Care is required so that the UOAI does not simply become a means of strengthening or mainstreaming adventure sports amongst the able-bodied middle class. This while a very worthwhile outcome, it is not the stated ambition of these Initiatives.

The complexity of adventure sports are also sources of their distinctive value. The challenging outdoor environments, the skills required for both the participant and the instructor, the levels of perceived and real risk, the impact of weather and the hardships encountered are part of this challenge and they are also the key ingredients for their value. The expectations of sustainability from other mainstream sports, do not map as neatly on adventure sports. Adventure sports typically require more time and effort resources as well as higher levels of readiness and handholding if clubs are to be more inclusive and if these activities are to be sustained by the targeted populations.

The UOAI process is a positive step in the direction of bringing adventure into the urban space and beyond the middle classes. However, there remains considerable scope to increase the recreational and personal change potential of adventure sports in Irish urban settings. The current UOAI structure will benefit from some minor changes to align them more closely with these activating change ideals.

There is also an opportunity to further share the practical UOAI insights which the LSPs and their partners are accumulating.



SPÓRT ÉIREANN
SPORT IRELAND