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LIFE e-Natura2000.edu

(LIFE17PREDE003)

Final Report on the Evaluation of the Learning Experiences in the LIFE e-Natura2000.edu project

Developed by ETIFOR | Valuing Nature.



Supporting e-learning
and capacity building
for Natura 2000 Managers

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Credits

Project title

LIFE e-Natura2000.edu

Description

This report is a project deliverable of the LIFE Preparatory project LIFE e-Natura 2000.edu (LIFE17PREDE003). The project is funded by LIFE financial instrument of the European Community and implemented by EUROPARC Federation with support of five partners: ProPark, Fungobe/EUROPARC Spain, TESAF University of Padova, European Landowners Organisation, and the Kullaberg Nature Reserve. The report has been produced by ETIFOR as an independent external contractor in consultation with EUROPARC and the project partners. The contents represent the result of collective inputs from all project partners, participants and external experts.

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Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the European Commission.



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1 Introduction

This report provides the results of the external evaluation of the LIFE e-Natura2000.edu project (LIFE17PREDE003) carried out by Etifor. The report summarises the evaluation results and main impacts and is organised in chapters corresponding to the learning components delivered by the project: each chapter presents the results of the analysis of the data collected through many evaluation tools.

1.1 LIFE e-Natura2000.edu project

The LIFE preparatory project “LIFE e-Natura2000.edu - Supporting e-learning and capacity building for Natura 2000 managers”¹ explores the potential of building new approaches and learning methods to improve knowledge and capacity amongst people with responsibilities in Natura 2000 management in both public and private land, over a three-year period (2019-2021). Taking a competence-based approach, the three-year innovative project enables peers to connect and learn about what managers need to know and be able to do in practical terms to improve Natura 2000 management. The project analyses training needs and makes available new tools to access information and learn about the skills required for Natura 2000 management and policy implementation.

The learning components delivered within this project are listed and described as follow:

- **Online TNA tool:** before starting the online course, participants were asked to perform an Online Training Needs Assessment (Online Natura 2000 TNA), a new online tool developed within the project to help Natura 2000 site managers to assess their competencies and learn about their capacity building needs.
- **Online learning courses:** three online courses took place between March and June 2020 and consisted of different learning modules; each course counted about 20-25 participants and foresaw an in-presence conclusive workshop. Unfortunately, the period coincided with the first peak of the COVID-19 outbreak in Europe and many different countries experienced lockdowns other measures to contain the pandemic. As a result, only one in-presence workshop was carried out instead of three.
- **Virtual Summer School:** planned as an in-presence Spring School (later as a Summer School) and scheduled for April (and then September) 2020, it was the learning component most impacted by the pandemic. It was re-scheduled for June 2021 and, therefore, turned into a Virtual Summer School.
- **Smartphone App:** one of the new, high-potential learning and networking tools designed and delivered within the project is the ‘eNatura2000’ App: this was launched in September 2020 and continues to be promoted across Europe.
- **Communication tools:** transversal tools such as project-related web pages and other communication tools (Facebook and Twitter posts related to the project).

¹ <https://www.europarc.org/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/>

1.2 Evaluation activity

Project monitoring and evaluation is an essential part of the Project Cycle Management², and as such it is crucial phase to establish a continuous improvement during project implementation, incorporating feedback received by beneficiaries, and ultimately to communicate results and impacts to key stakeholders and donors. It will also be important for replicability of the project and for development of similar projects.

Objectives and scope

The overall aim of the evaluation is to enable partners, participants, observers, contributors and funders to understand the project's impacts and the progress achieved towards the goals and objectives of the project. The specific objectives are divided by target respondents to:

1. Measure the project's progress and impacts for the project coordinator and partners;
2. Improve project deliverables by maximising feedback from various project participants and contributors;
3. Demonstrate the project's progress and impacts to the CINEA by contributing to gather key contents for the final narrative report.

Target groups

Four target groups have been identified during the evaluation planning. For each group the scope and the main phases and tools of the evaluation are listed below:

1. **Core project participants:** detailed evaluation of the learning experience and feasibility in using online and other tools and project's impact in terms of opportunity created by the course, relations established with other N2000 managers, and application of learning. The gap analysis consisted of both ex-ante (benchmark analysis or baseline) and ex-post evaluation through the use of online questionnaire and sample interviews. Also, another monitoring online questionnaire, taken during the learning experience, was useful to report on project progress. The core project participants have certainly been the primary consultees and source of evaluation feedback and information and their contribution concerned the use of the learning tools, learning content and their participation in the project activities.
2. **Casual users:** collection of feedback from the external beneficiaries (App users) and monitor the number of visitors to the project webpages and people engaged by the communication activity. An online questionnaire has been made available on the App homepage to gather this kind of feedback and Google analytics data were periodically collected.
3. **Project partners:** collection of feedback and critical points. While the initial objective was also to deeply evaluate the project partners, their contributions came from the partners' Impact Assessment (self-evaluation at the end of the project).
4. **External tutors and experts:** collection of feedback and critical points. A sample of the external tutors of the learning core courses have been interviewed at the end of the project.

² https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/methodology-aid-delivery-methods-project-cycle-management-200403_en.pdf

Indicators

What follows is the list of the information collected and indicators measured within the evaluation for each target group (Table 1.1).

Figure 1 - Information collected and indicators measured within the evaluation, divided by target groups.

Target group	Information collected/ indicators measured	Ex-ante	Ongoing	Ex-post
Project participants	Feedback on the experience of using the TNA tool			x
	Participants time investment	x		
	Professional network distribution	x		x
	Professional network composition (frequency of contacts with Natura 2000 entities)	x		x
	Familiarity with the learning tools	x		
	Frequency of use of the online tools (personal life)	x		x
	Frequency of use of the online tools (professional life)	x		x
	Ease of use of the online tools	x	X	x
	Expectations with the online courses	x		
	Satisfactions with the online courses			x
	Level of information provided		X	
	Acquired competencies		X	
	Usefulness of learning		X	
	Application of learning/ tools		X	x
	Feedback on the learning experience			x
	Aspects that should be improved			x
	Attendance limiting factors/ COVID-19 impact		X	x
	Pace of delivery of tasks and activities		X	
	New job opportunities			x
	New initiatives proposed/ implemented			x
	Willingness to recommend the learning experience with own network		X	x
	Willingness to pay for the online courses			x
Casual users	First contact with the smartphone App			x
	Frequency of use of the smartphone App			x
	Ease of use of the smartphone App			x
	Reason why users use the smartphone App			x
	Aspects that should be improved (App)			x
	Google analytics data (project webpages, social media)			x
Project partners	General feedback on the project			x
External tutors and experts	General feedback on the learning course delivery			x

Evaluation activity overview

Table 1.2 summarises the evaluation activity, and it includes the learning components analysed, target groups, occurrence of the evaluation, methods, number of respondents and the coverage of the

investigation (where it was possible to compare the number of responses with the members of the target groups).

Figure 2 - Overview of the evaluation activity.

Learning component	Target group	Evaluation occurrence	Evaluation period	Data collection method	Total responses	Coverage
Online TNA tool	Project participants	Ex-post	03/2020	Online questionnaires	60	85%
Online learning courses	Project participants	Ex-ante	10/2019	Application form	66	93%
			03/2020	Online questionnaires	60	85%
		Periodic monitoring	03/2020 – 06/2020	Online questionnaires	326	66%
		Ex post	12/2020	Online questionnaires	50	70%
			02/2021	Sample interviews	5	7%
	Tutors	Ex-post	02/2021	Sample interviews	3	50%
Virtual Summer School	Project participants	Ex-ante	02/2020	Application form	27	100%
	Project participants	Ex-post	06/2021	Online questionnaires	15	56%
	Project participants	Ex-post	06/2021	In presence participatory evaluation (Mural)	15	56%
Smartphone App	Casual users	Ex-post	02/2021 – 05/2021	Online questionnaires	18	-
Communication tools	Casual users	Periodic monitoring	03/2020 – 05/2021	Web analytics	-	-

The project partners also contributed to the evaluation activity with the ERASMUS+ Impact Assessment exercise, a form that partners filled in between April and May 2021 highlighting the different impacts the project had on the partners themselves, learners, external collaborators and project observers.

Outputs

Etifor delivered other evaluation reports during the activity carried out in the last two years, to which reference should be made for a better understanding of the present document:

- Benchmarking analysis of participants to the Life e-Natura2000.edu online courses (22 May 2020);
- Interim report on the experiences of participants to the three core competencies courses (29 July 2020);
- Post-project 6-month evaluation of the project cohort (26 January 2021);
- Evaluation of the project cohort and casual users (19 April 2021).

1.3 Display of results

In the report, the information collected for the group of the core project participants that was evaluated is always linked together with the attribute of the specific learning group. Specifically, the results shown below refer to:

- The three competencies courses (in this case the results are displayed with the labels of the project partner who led the course):
 - *Competent inclusive communication*, led by **EUROPARC**;
 - *Building alliances for Natura 2000 management*, led by **FUNGOBE**;
 - *Applied conservation biology*, led by **ProPark**.
- The whole group of core project participants is identified by the label “**TOT**” (“total”)

2 Online TNA tool

2.1 Presentation of the online TNA tool

A new online Training Need Assessment (TNA) tool for Natura 2000 management³ was developed within the project to help Natura 2000 site managers assess their competencies and learn about their priority capacity development needs. By using this tool, all individuals that have Natura 2000 management responsibilities can self-assess their training needs and use the results to plan better their future professional development actions. It is based on IUCN's Global Register of Competencies for PA Practitioners (2016) and adapted to the specific competencies required of Natura 2000 site managers.

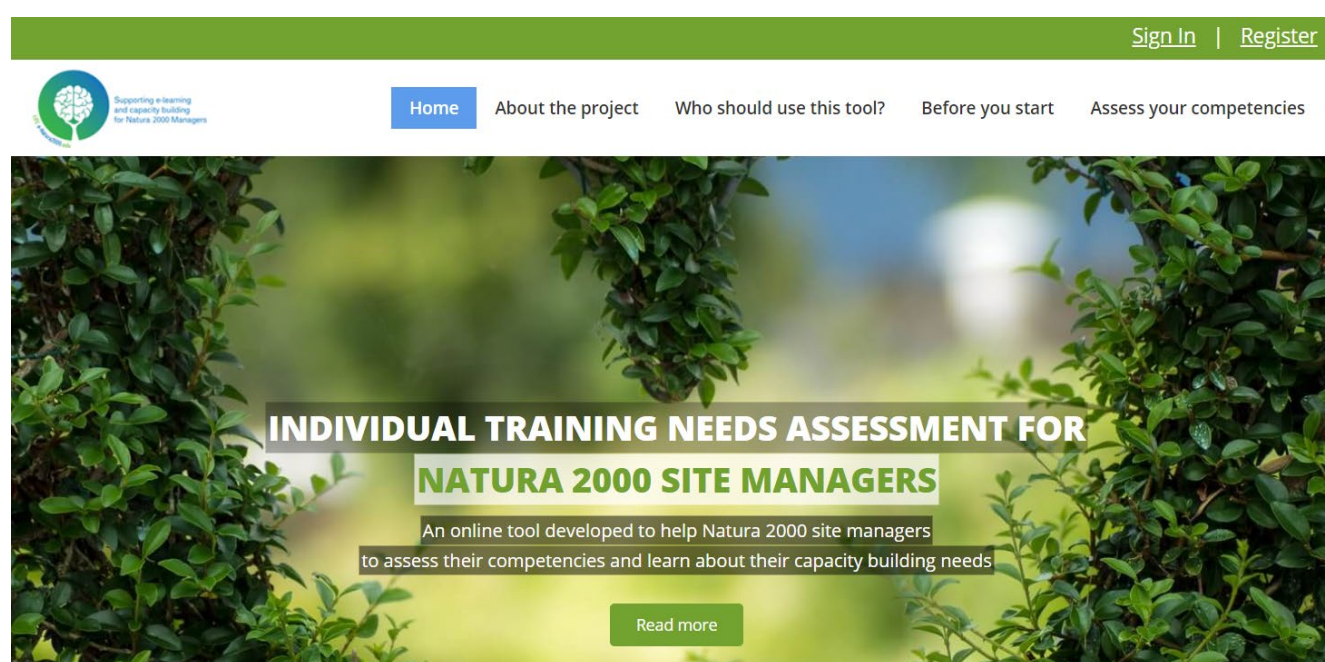


Figure 2.1 - Online TNA tool for Natura 2000 site managers: screenshot of the website homepage.

2.2 Evaluation of the experience using the online TNA tool

The core project participants were asked to perform an individual assessment before starting the courses and their feedback about the experience of using the online TNA tool was collected through an online questionnaire.

Usefulness

Overall, the TNA tool generated an added value for three quarters of participants (22% "Very useful", 53% "Useful"), while the feedback was overall positive for about 89% of respondents, including those people for whom the experience of using the TNA tool was a confirmation of their capacity building competencies (15%) (Figure 2.2). 10% of respondents classified it as a "Not very useful" tool. The share of respondents from the EUROPARC course who claimed not to benefit as much from the tool was higher than for the other student groups (24%).

³ <https://propark.ro/individualtna/>

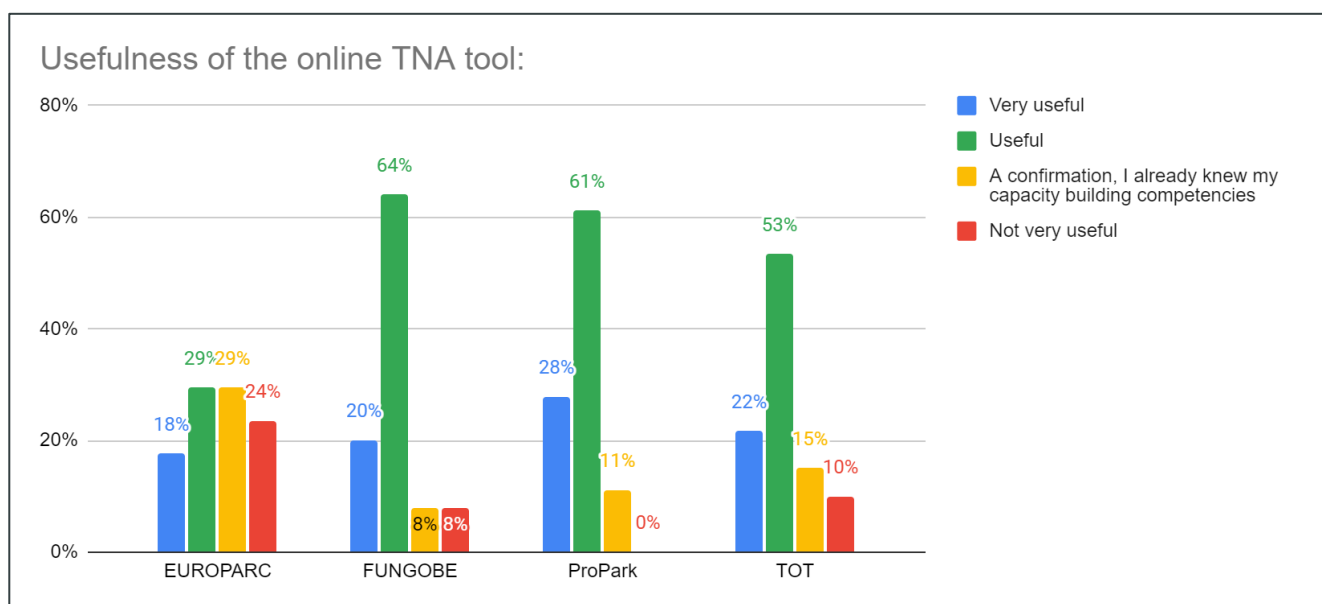


Figure 2.2 - Usefulness of the online TNA tool.

Pros and Cons

Respondents were asked to specify three pros and three cons of the experience of using the online Natura 2000 TNA tool. A total of 122 pros compared with 100 cons were collected indicating a positive rate of 1.22 ($122/100 = 1.22$). The main qualitative elements of the analysis are summarised below (Table 2.1 and Table 2.2).

Figure 3 - Pros of the online TNA tool.

Online Natura 2000 TNA tool – Pros
Complete, comprehensive, exhaustive, with a wide range of competencies covered
Covering key aspects
Appropriate classification of competence levels
Easy to use
Understandable outcomes and results
Interactive
It can be combined with work
Useful links at the end for learning opportunities
Useful option to save the survey (even if uncompleted) allowing to finish it later
Useful option to review your answers

Figure 4 - Cons of the online TNA tool.

Online Natura 2000 TNA tool – Cons
Unexpectedly too long, time-consuming
Platform did not work correctly, loss of responses without saving

Repetitive questions, redundant
Overlap between different skill descriptions
Many questions do not apply to each specific role/situation
Questions do not adequately cover the reality of each region/ context of work
English language only
Wording often complicated
Simple statistic results
No suggestion on how to fill educational gaps

Almost all respondents mentioned the time-consuming aspect of the tool in the cons. Two aspects seem to contradict each other:

- The completeness of the TNA tool, highlighted by many people and intended as the wide range of competencies covered, compared with the repetitive questions which seemed redundant and not applicable to each specific role/situation or region of work;
- The option of saving a partially completed survey and the possibility to complete it in a second moment is listed among the pros, while in the cons the loss of responses due to lack of saving or the malfunctioning of the platform were noted. This is a technical issue – perhaps connected to the browser used - which needs to be addressed.

Aspects that should be improved

The aspects of this tool, which should be improved following the experience of the project participants with the online Natura 2000 TNA are summarised in Table 2.3, and are grouped in four main categories:

- Timing
- Contents
- Settings
- Results

Figure 5 - Aspects of the online TNA tool that should be improved.

Aspects that should be improved	
Timing	Pre-filtering system based on current role/responsibilities
	Create various levels of analysis (from general to detailed)
	Add the option to skip certain sections where the candidate clearly has no experiences
Contents	Simplify sections
	More realistic without theoretical questions
	Simplify wording
Settings	Specify where you are (professionally) at present and where you would like to be in the future
	Autosave option
Results	Generate a graphical visualisation of results
	Possibility to download the results
	Send warning about new work/training experiences

Recommendation of the tool

Figure 2.3 shows that only 5% of participants would not recommend the online TNA tool to people involved in the Natura 2000 management or colleagues: therefore, although the experience of using the tool may not have been useful to some participants, as shown in the previous graph, in their opinion the tool could be useful in general to people working with Natura 2000 sites.

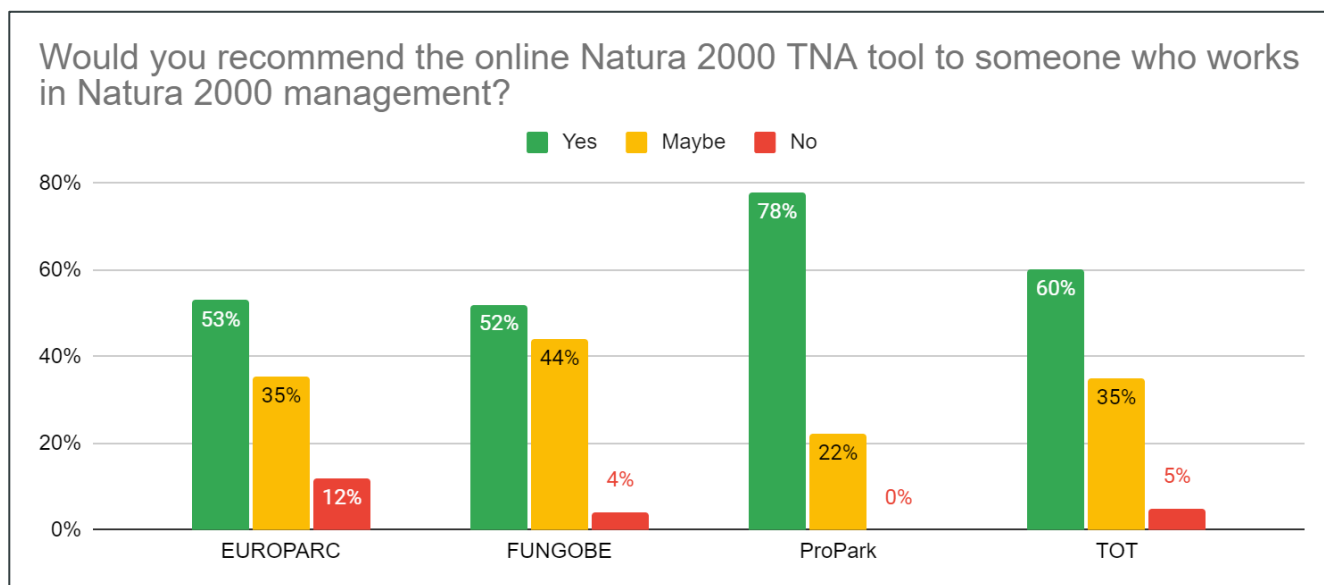


Figure 2.6 - Recommendation of the online TNA tool.

3 Online learning courses

3.1 Presentation of the online learning courses

Three online courses (details in Table 3.1) took place between March and June 2020 and consisted of different learning modules; each course counted about 20-25 participants and foresaw an in-presence workshop. Unfortunately, the period coincided with the first peak of the COVID-19 outbreak in Europe and many different countries experienced significant measures to contain the pandemic. As a result, only one face-to-face workshop was carried out of the three originally planned.

Figure 7 - Online learning courses overview.

Course title	Lead partner	No. of participants	Learning modules	Workshop made (Yes/ No)
Competent inclusive communication ⁴	EUROPARC	23	1 – 7	No
Building alliances for Natura 2000 management ⁵	FUNGOBE	25	0 (introduction) - 5	No
Applied conservation biology ⁶	ProPark	25	1 – 7	Yes

3.2 Evaluation of the learning experience

The online learning courses required the most effort for the evaluation team. The data was collected through five different evaluation tools:

1. The application form that the participants had to submit to apply for enrolment in the courses, designed by the project partners;
2. The ex-ante evaluation questionnaire;
3. The periodic monitoring questionnaire, at the end of each learning module;
4. The ex-post evaluation questionnaire (delivered six months after the end of the courses);
5. Qualitative interviews with a representative sample of participants.

Both the application form and the ex-ante questionnaire were used to characterise the group and set the baseline, while the other tools were used to monitor the progress of the learning courses and evaluate the overall experience of the project participants.

This section is broken down into the following paragraphs:

1. Characterisation of the participants: information that is not going to change during the project.
2. Baseline: the professional network of the participants is presented to understand the distribution and composition at the beginning of the learning courses. Frequency and ease of use of the online learning tools are also evaluated in this part. Finally, feedback about levels of expectation

⁴ <https://www.europarc.org/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/course-competent-inclusive-communication/>

⁵ <https://www.europarc.org/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/course-ii-life-edu/>

⁶ <https://www.europarc.org/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/course-i-applied-conservation-biology/>

was collected so that this could be compared with the satisfaction levels at the end of the learning experience.

- Results: it presents the results of monitoring the learning course and the impact evaluation: baseline indicators are re-evaluated to understand if and how they changed thanks to the project. Some indicators are compared with the baseline, while others are not, such as applicability, recommendation level, impacts of COVID-19.

3.2.1 Characterisation of participants

The number of participants is close across the three learning courses, while the average age of participants ranges between 34.5 (ProPark) to 42.5 (FUNGOBE), with the course led by EUROPARC in the middle. The number of countries covered by participants is as expected: the EUROPARC course is in English, is addressed to all European countries and the 23 participants represent 19 countries. The other courses have mainly Romanian (ProPark) and Spanish (FUNGOBE) participants.

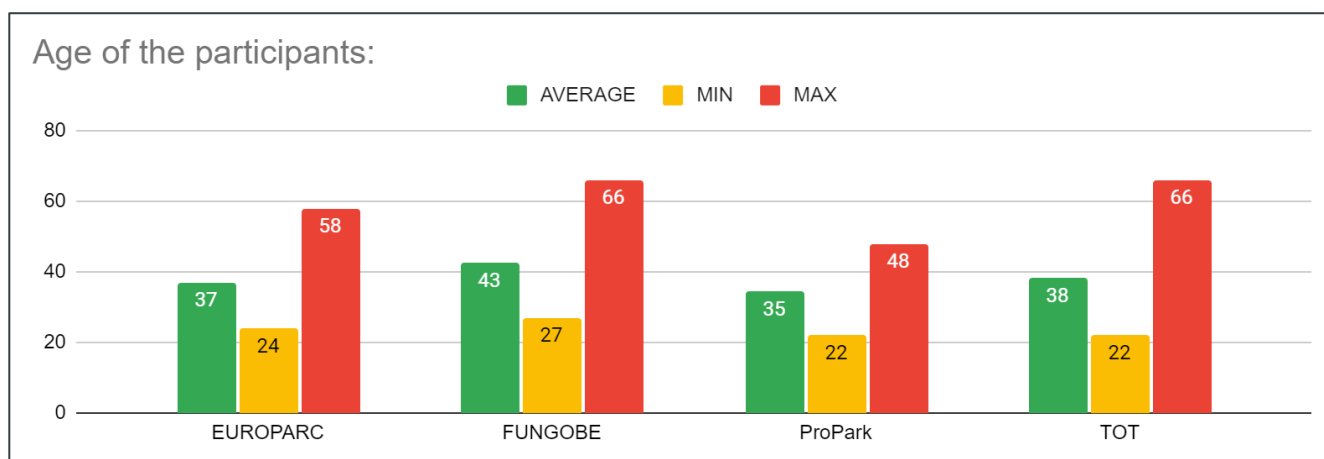


Figure 3.8 - Age of the project participants (avg, min, and max).

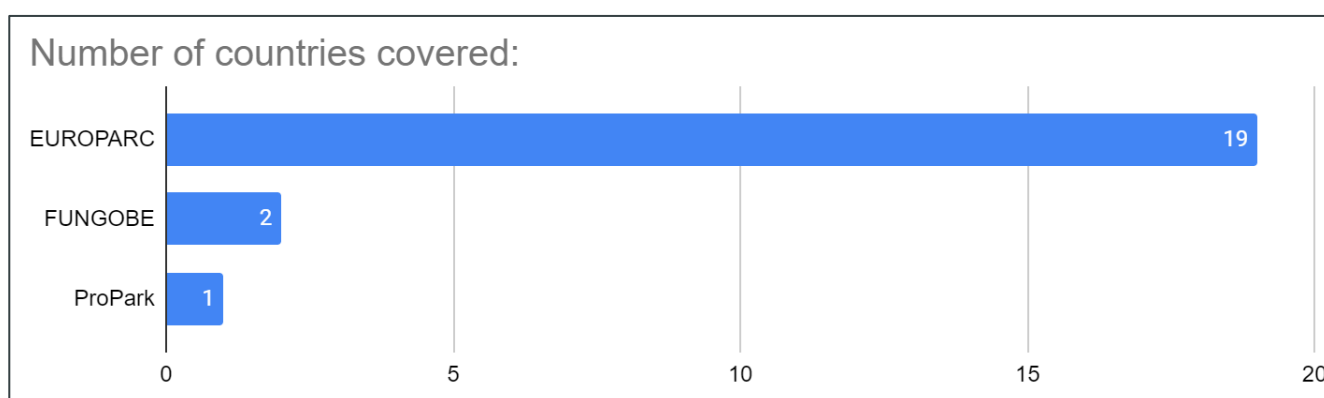


Figure 3.9 - Number of countries covered by the core competencies courses.

Membership

Course composition is similar across the courses delivered by EUROPARC and FUNGOBE: about 60% of participants come from public authorities even though there are differences in the type of authorities represented - national, regional, and local. On the other hand, more than half of the ProPark course

participants is represented by non-governmental organisations and natural resources management entities.

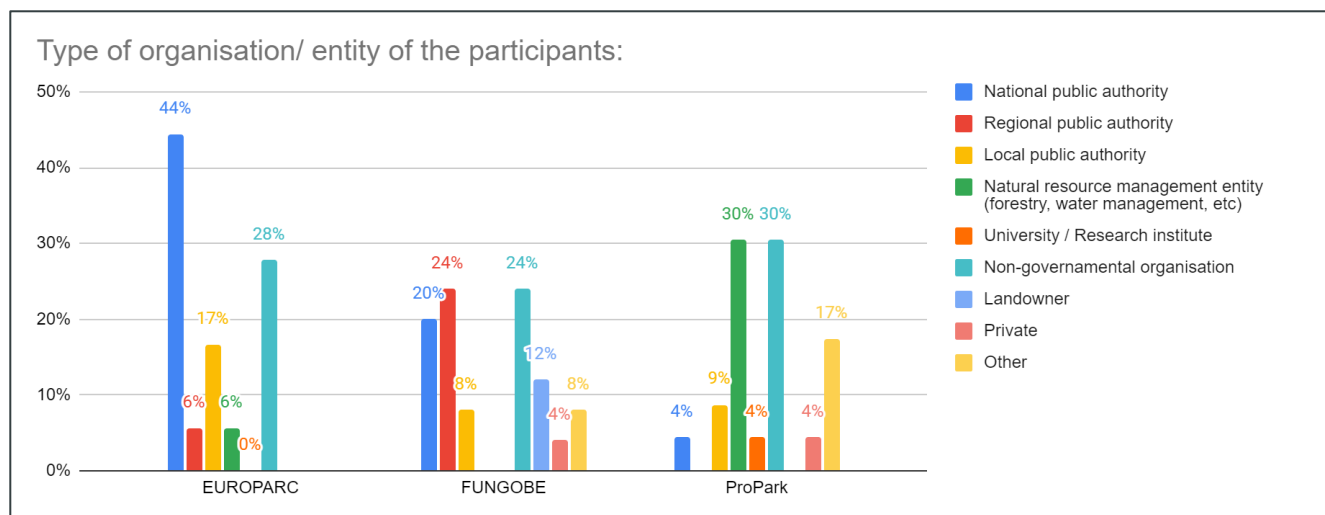


Figure 3.10 - Types of organisation/ entity of the participants.

An analysis of membership of the EUROPARC Federation and European Landowners Organization is shown in Figure 3.4.

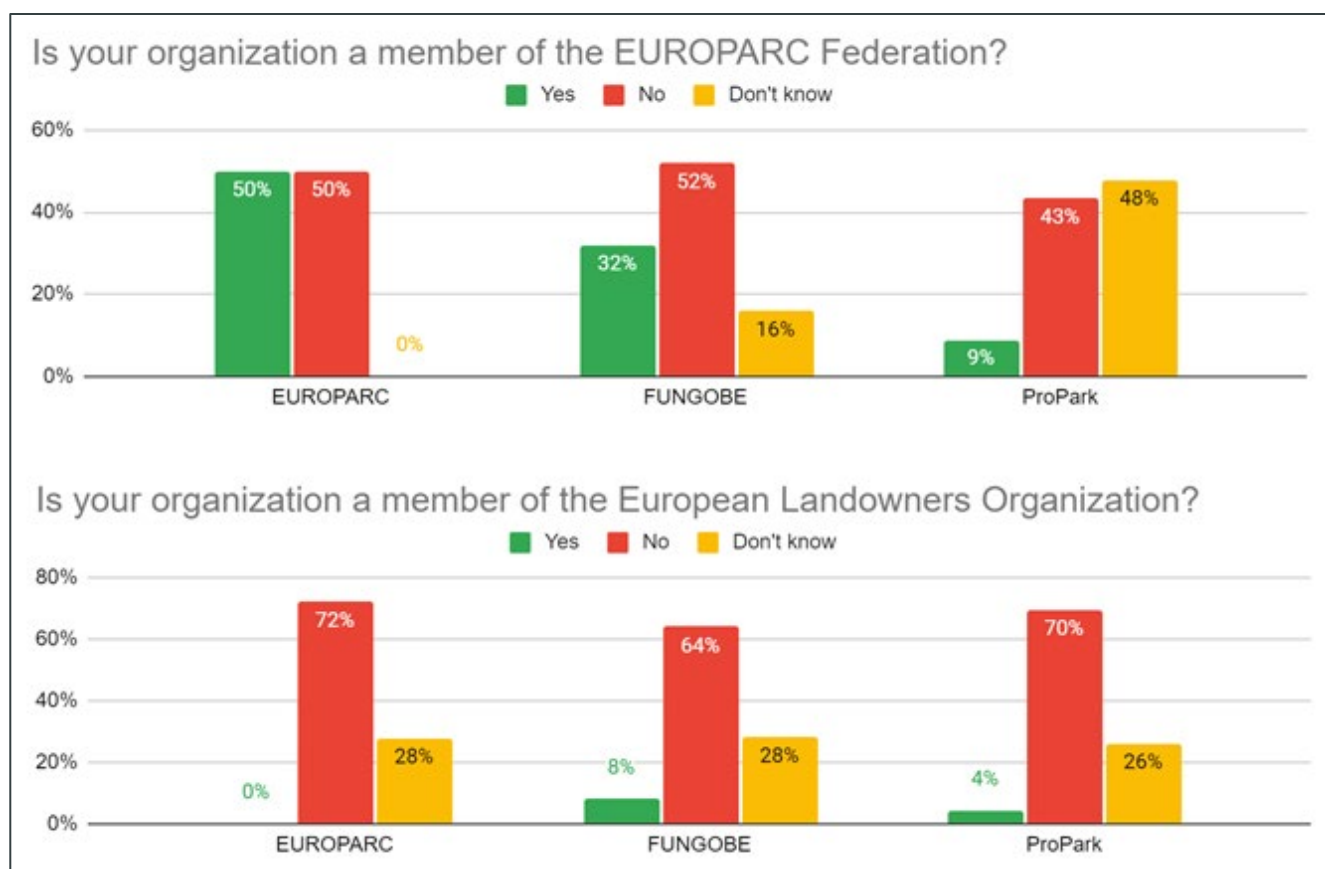


Figure 3.11 - Membership to EUROPARC and E.L.O.

Working position and role in Natura 2000 management

All courses share a similar level of work responsibility among the participants, intended here as the role of supervising a team (Figure 3.5).

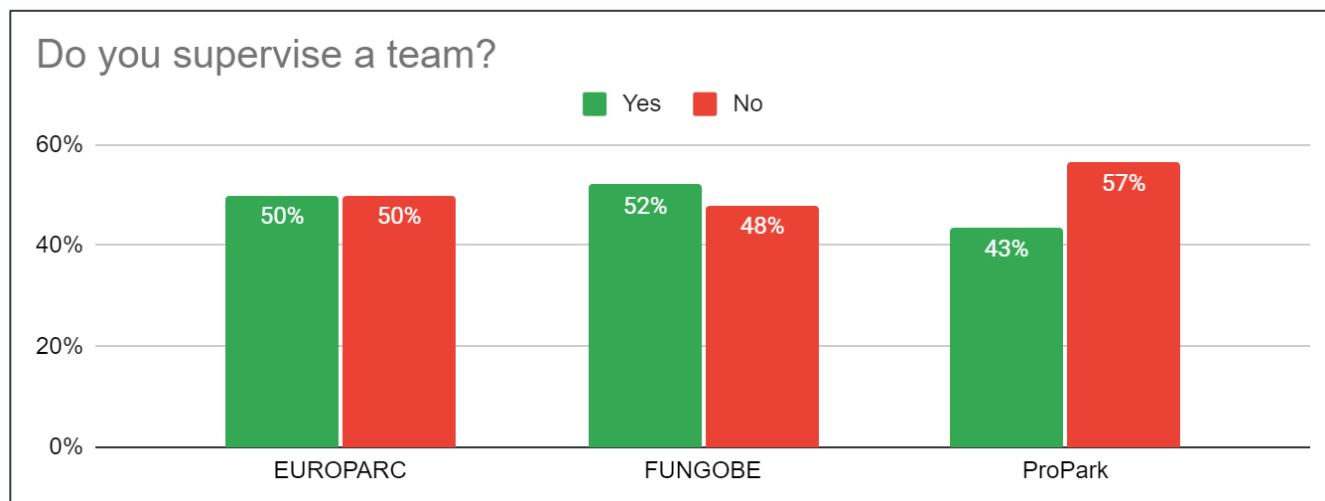


Figure 3.12 - Team supervision role.

The course led by FUNGOBE has the highest average age of participants. For this reason, more than 60% of participants have been working in their current position for more than 5 years. This is the opposite for about 75% of participants in the other courses. The percentage of time spent working in Natura 2000 sites shows a general longer period trend: this seems to indicate that participants may have changed their working position in the last 10 years, but not the area of work which has remained connected to Natura 2000 (Figure 3.6).

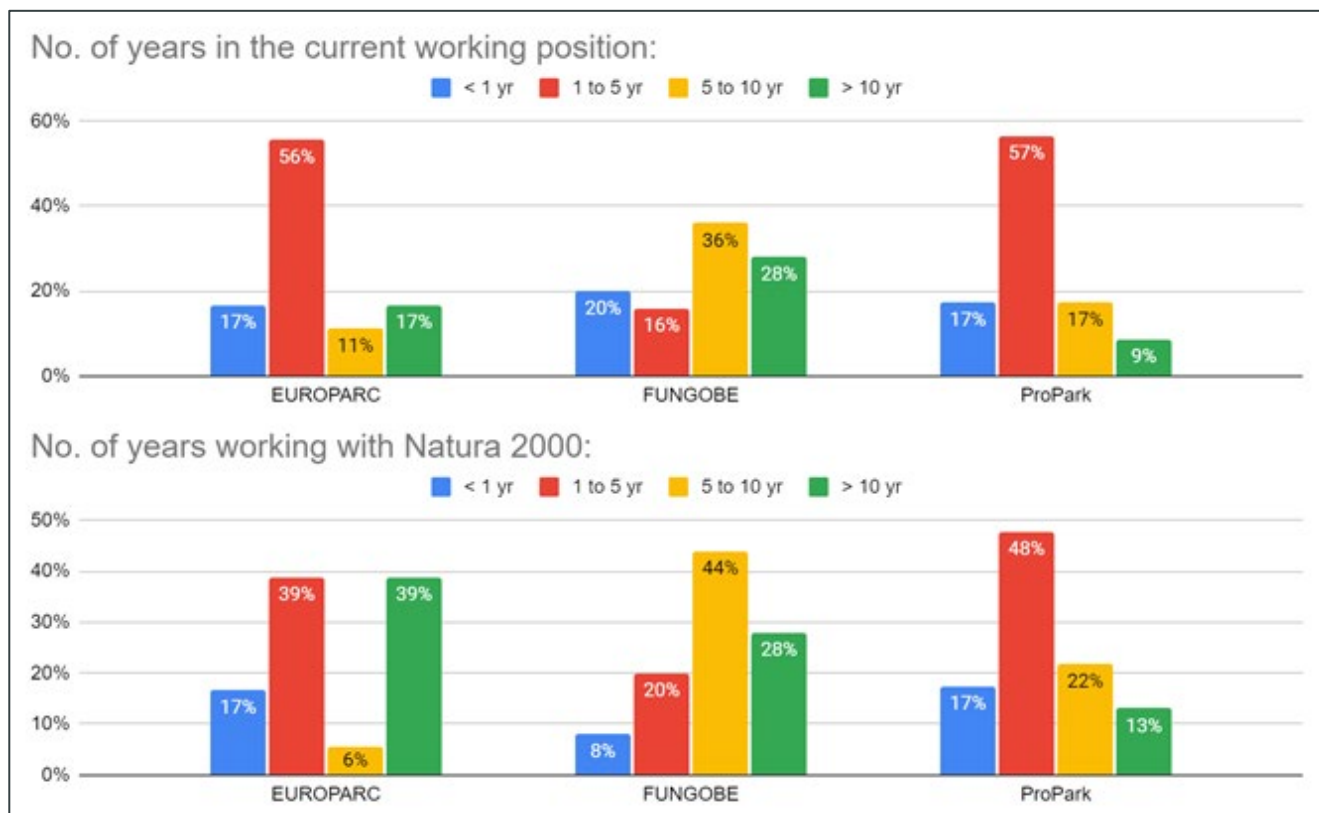


Figure 3.13 - Number of years working in the same position and with Natura 2000 by the participants.

In terms of occupation, results are quite similar: most participants work in a Protected Area management team (EUROPARC: 61%, FUNGOBE: 36% and ProPark: 48%). Differences occur in the other categories: while for all the courses the second largest group of participants is represented by people working in a Natura 2000 management team, in the course led by ProPark, 17% of participants are volunteers for a Natura 2000 site and 16% of participants to FUNGOBE's course work in a consulting team (Figure 3.7).

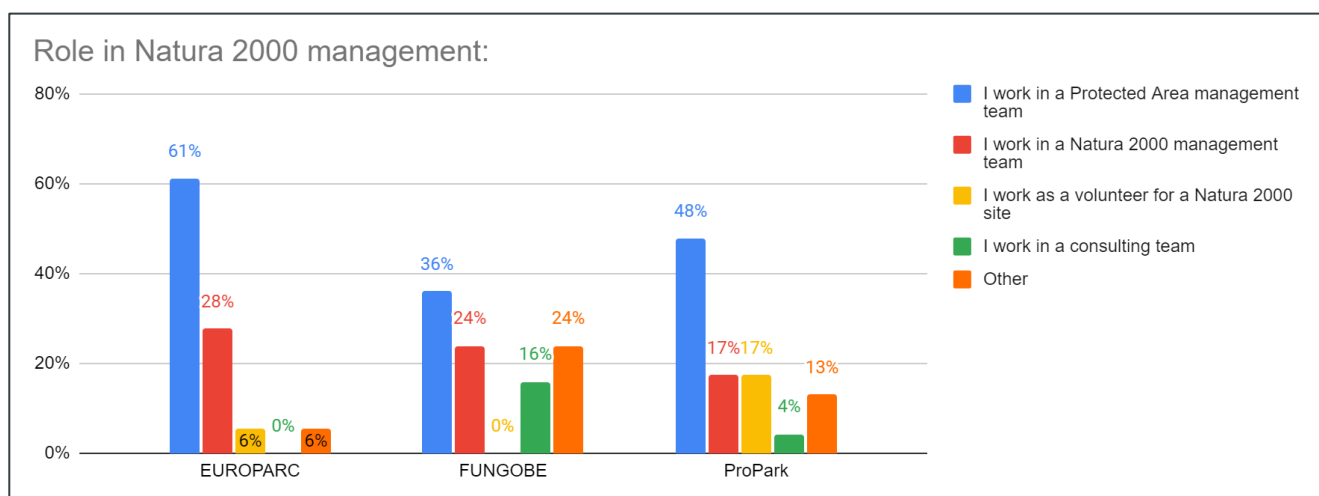


Figure 3.14 - Participants' role in Natura 2000 management.

Previous training experience

Most of the project participants have previous experience in face-to-face capacity building events (85%, Figure 3.8), and in attending online/distance learning courses. Interestingly, 17 % and 15 % of total project participants reported experience of preparing/helping to prepare an online learning course or an online learning tool. For 12% of participants, the project's courses were the first time they had had any online learning or face-to-face capacity building experiences.

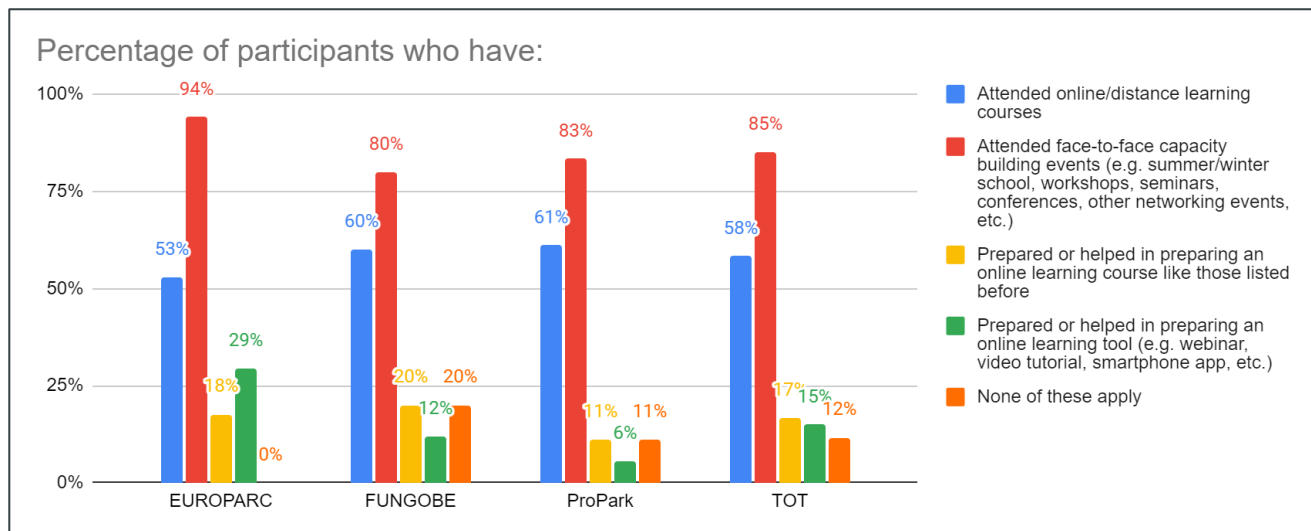


Figure 3.15 - Previous training experience of the participants.

Time investment

Only 12% of participants took part in this project during their working hours (see Figure 3.9), while 35% of participants used their own time: more than half of respondents (53%) were partially supported by their organisations.

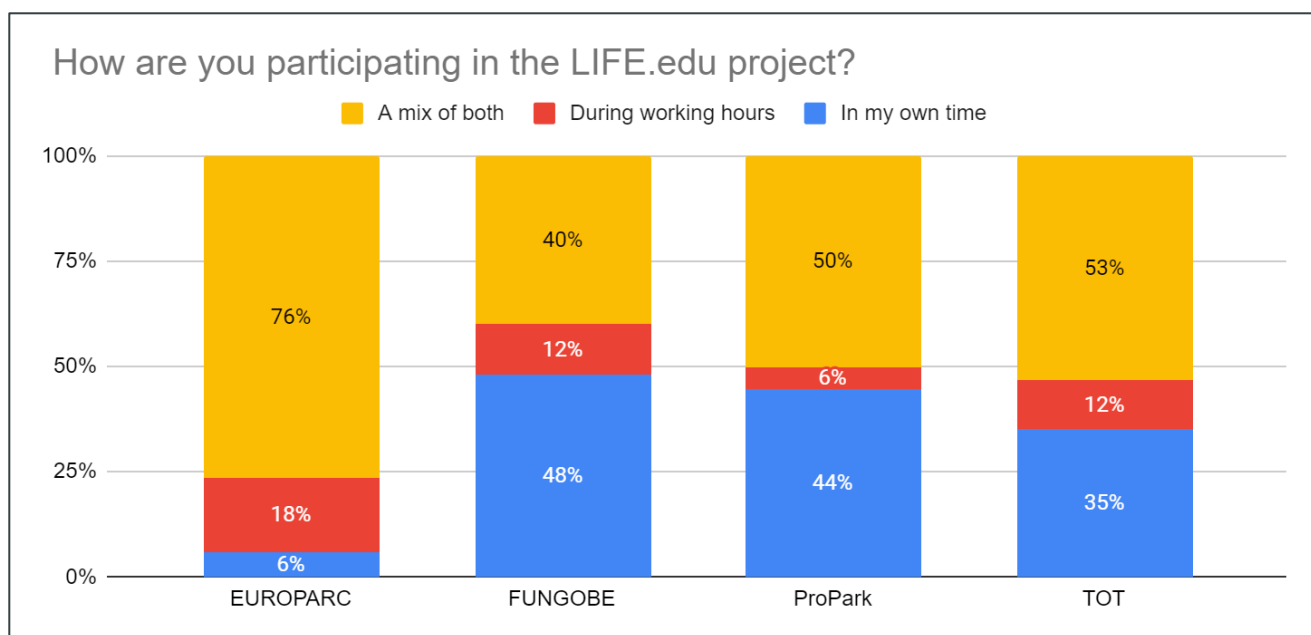


Figure 3.16 - Participants' time investment.

Training experiences are not supported by employers for 10% of respondents (Figure 3.10). Half of the project participants (51%) have access to paid training experiences, while the remaining 39% stated that it depends on the type of training considered.

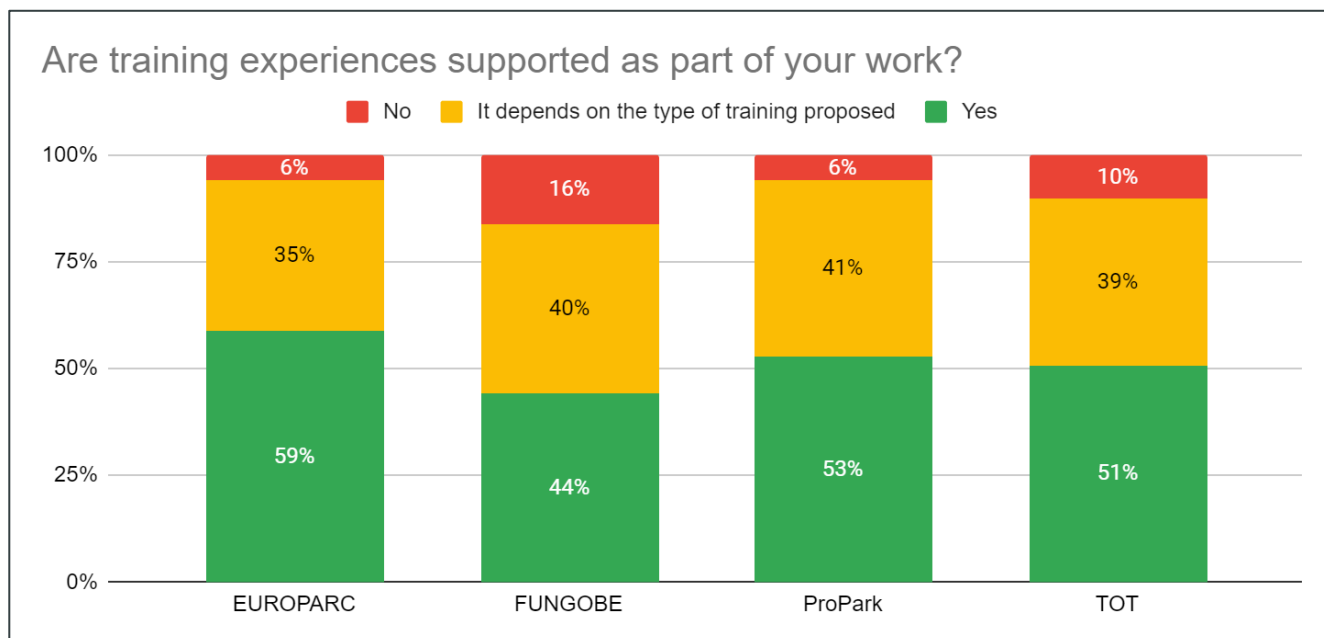


Figure 3.17 - Training experiences supported by work.

Finally, the frequency of the training experiences carried out by project participants and related to a reference period of the last two years seems to contradict the previous question results because Figure 3.11 shows that 19% of respondents paid for the training experience themselves. The percentage of participants who have training experiences supported by their work in the last two years is 36% - this is consistent with the previous result.

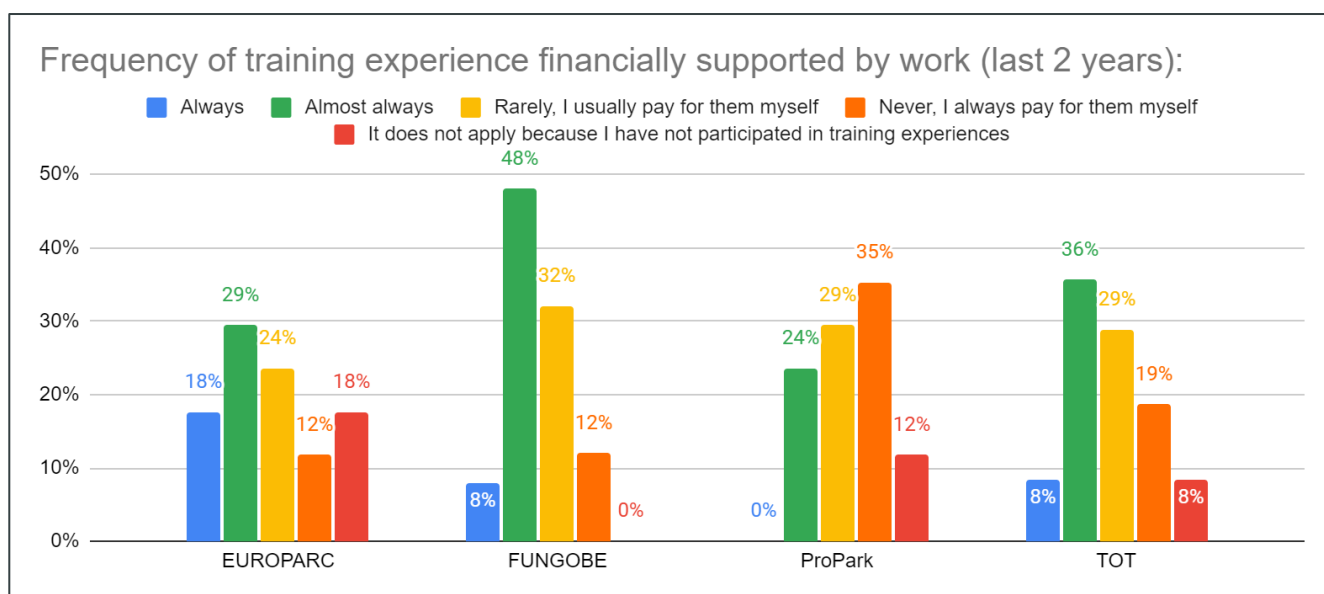


Figure 3.18 - Frequency of training experiences supported by work (last 2 years).

Familiarity with the online tools

Five categories were considered in the analysis on the familiarity with the online learning tools: webinars, online courses, e-learning platforms, demonstration videos and smartphone apps (Figure 3.12). The level of familiarity with social media was further investigated and is shown in Figure 3.10. The results show that more than 50% of the EUROPARC course participants claimed to be “very familiar with” the proposed categories of online tools. The same goes for FUNGOBE, with the exception of webinars (48%). ProPark course participants were generally less familiar with all tools although ‘occasional users’ are a large share of the total. In addition, ProPark and FUNGOBE have a higher percentage of learners who never used webinars (17% and 24% respectively), and this is consistent with the analysis of the previous learning experiences shown in Figure 3.8. Smartphone applications are certainly the most familiar tool among all project participants.

Familiarity with social media tools gradually decreases from Facebook to LinkedIn with Twitter at the lowest level. For FUNGOBE, participants are more familiar with Twitter than LinkedIn (Figure 3.13). Although not listed in the question, the application form shows that a lot of participants from all the courses are familiar with Instagram too.



Figure 3.19 - Familiarity with the different online tools proposed in the project.



Figure 3.20 - Familiarity with the social media.

3.2.2 Baseline

Professional network

Network distribution

According to the results shown in Figure 3.14, the professional network of the project participants is mainly composed of local Natura 2000 managers working in the same organisation (72%) and working in other organisations (52%). 38% of project participants network with colleagues working in the same organisation and in other regions of their country. Only 5% of participants usually network with Natura 2000 managers of the same organisation working in other countries, while one-third of them (which is however still a high percentage) network with managers of other organisations in other countries: this indicates a local vocation of participant organisations and, at the same time, the cross-border working dimension of the Natura 2000 managers attending the courses. The local distribution of the professional network is more pronounced in the ProPark group, while, as may be expected, the international distribution is mostly highlighted in the EUROPARC one.

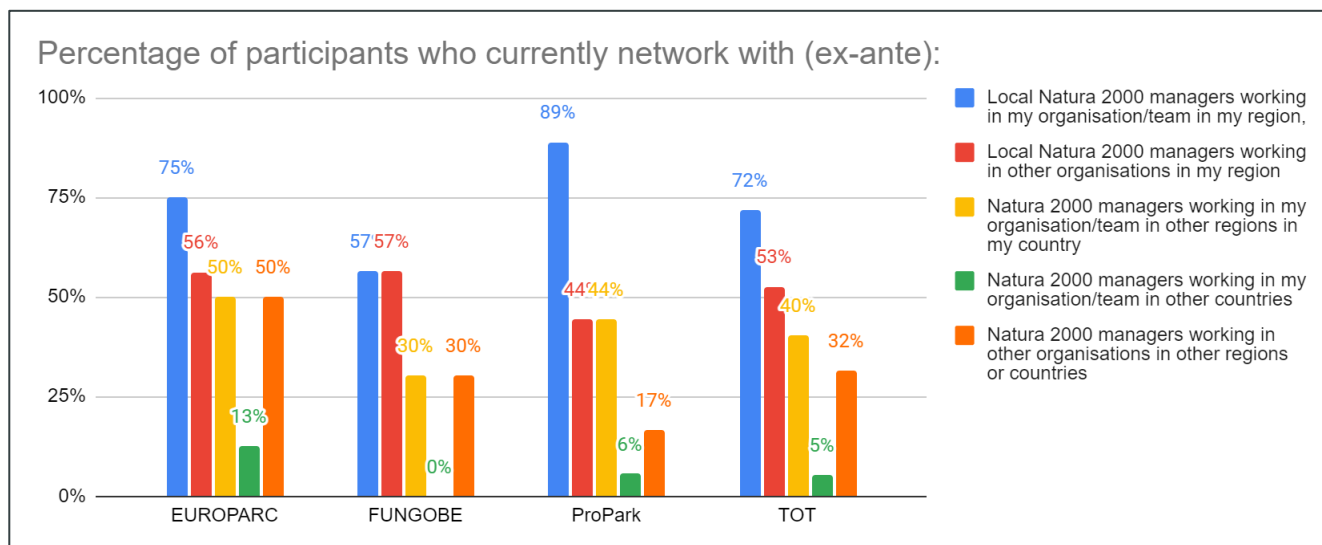


Figure 3.21 - Distribution of the participants' professional network (ex-ante).

Network composition

In terms of network composition, the Natura 2000 manager is the most recurrent in the responses as expected for a project that addresses this type of profile (Figure 3.15). Organisations supporting Natura 2000 management and governance and landowners inside Natura 2000 site are the second most represented profile. Research institutions and tourism organisations represent a marginal role in the participants' network. The distribution of "Landowners" responses shows a flatter curve, not skewed toward one or the other extreme but characterised by a high number of extreme answers. As expected from the local/ international considerations made above about results shown in Figure 3.14, these extremes mainly come from the EUROPARC group ("Never") and from the ProPark group ("Always"/ "Often"), while FUNGOBE reflects a middle profile. Other stakeholders related to Natura 2000 management were cited in the questionnaire and are summarised in Table 3.2.

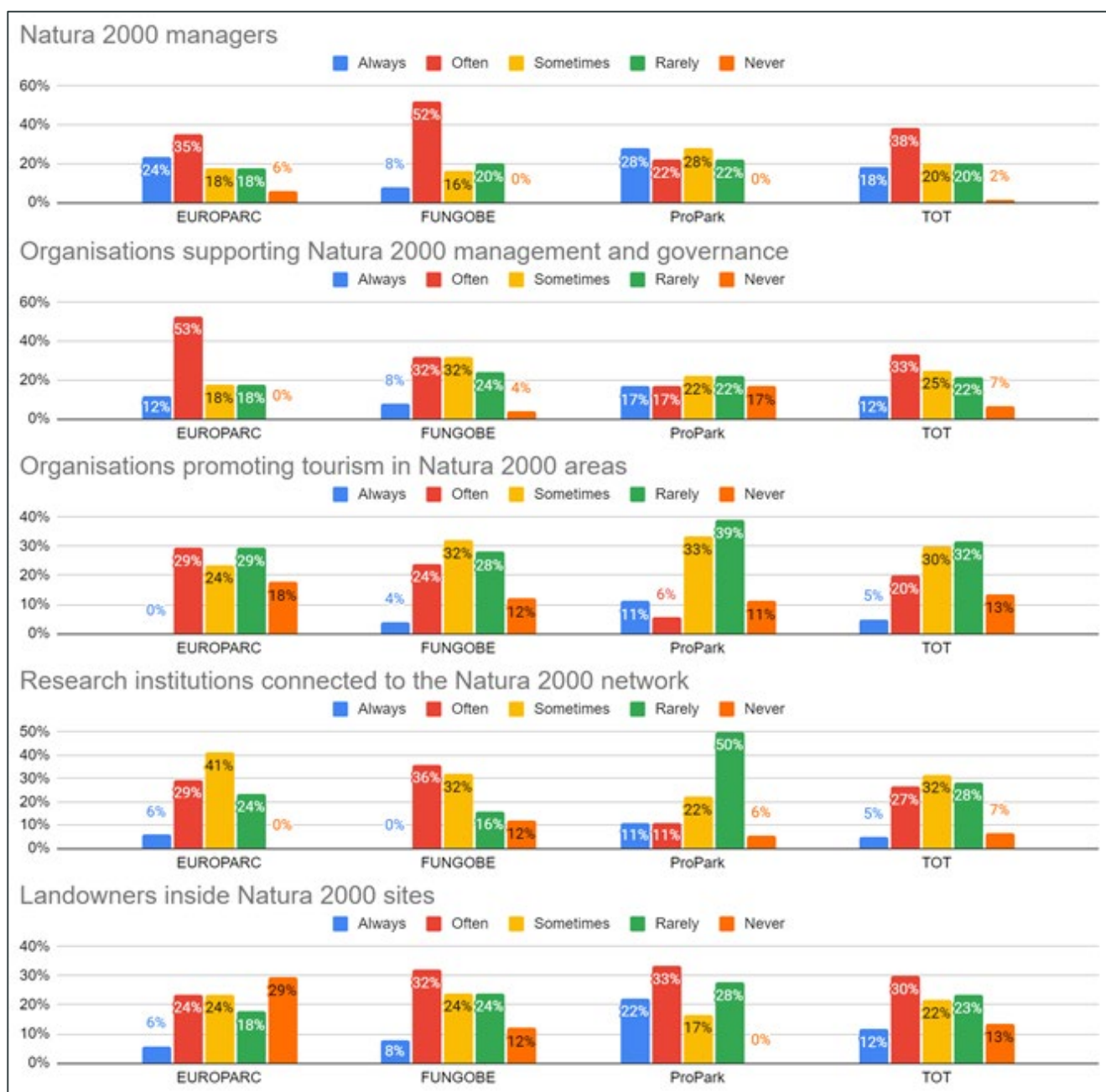


Figure 3.22 - Composition of the participants' professional network (ex-ante).

Figure 23 - Other types of stakeholders mentioned by respondents.

Type of stakeholders	No. of mentions
Authorities/ politicians	11
Local NGOs and associations	8
Fishermen, hunters, and relative associations	8
Tourists and visitors	6
Local population	4
Enterprises and professional entities	3
International NGOs and associations	1

Online tools

Frequency of use

Most participants rely on the use of smartphone applications and social media in both personal and professional life and frequency of use of these instruments is very high and characterised by daily use (Figure 3.16 and Figure 3.17). Demonstration videos and tutorials are used frequently (once a month) by a consistent part of participants in their personal life. Professional use of webinars, e-learning platforms and demonstration videos happens “rarely”. Few respondents mention the use of web applications and online libraries in their personal life and the use of software for online conferences in both fields. The use of internal sharing tools (e.g., Google Drive, Dropbox) is also highlighted, mainly for professional life.

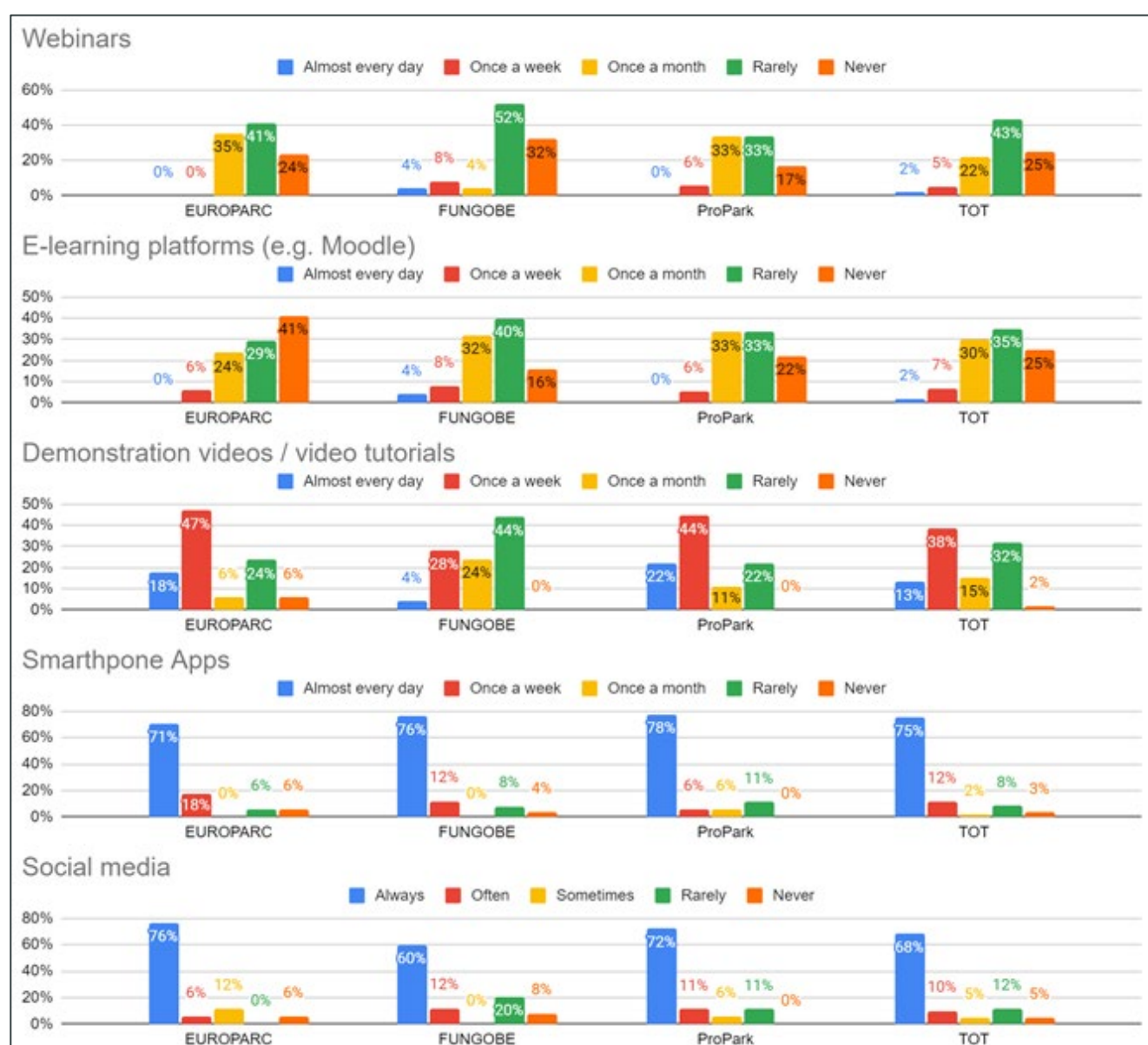


Figure 3.24 - Frequency of use of the online tools in participants' personal life (ex-ante).

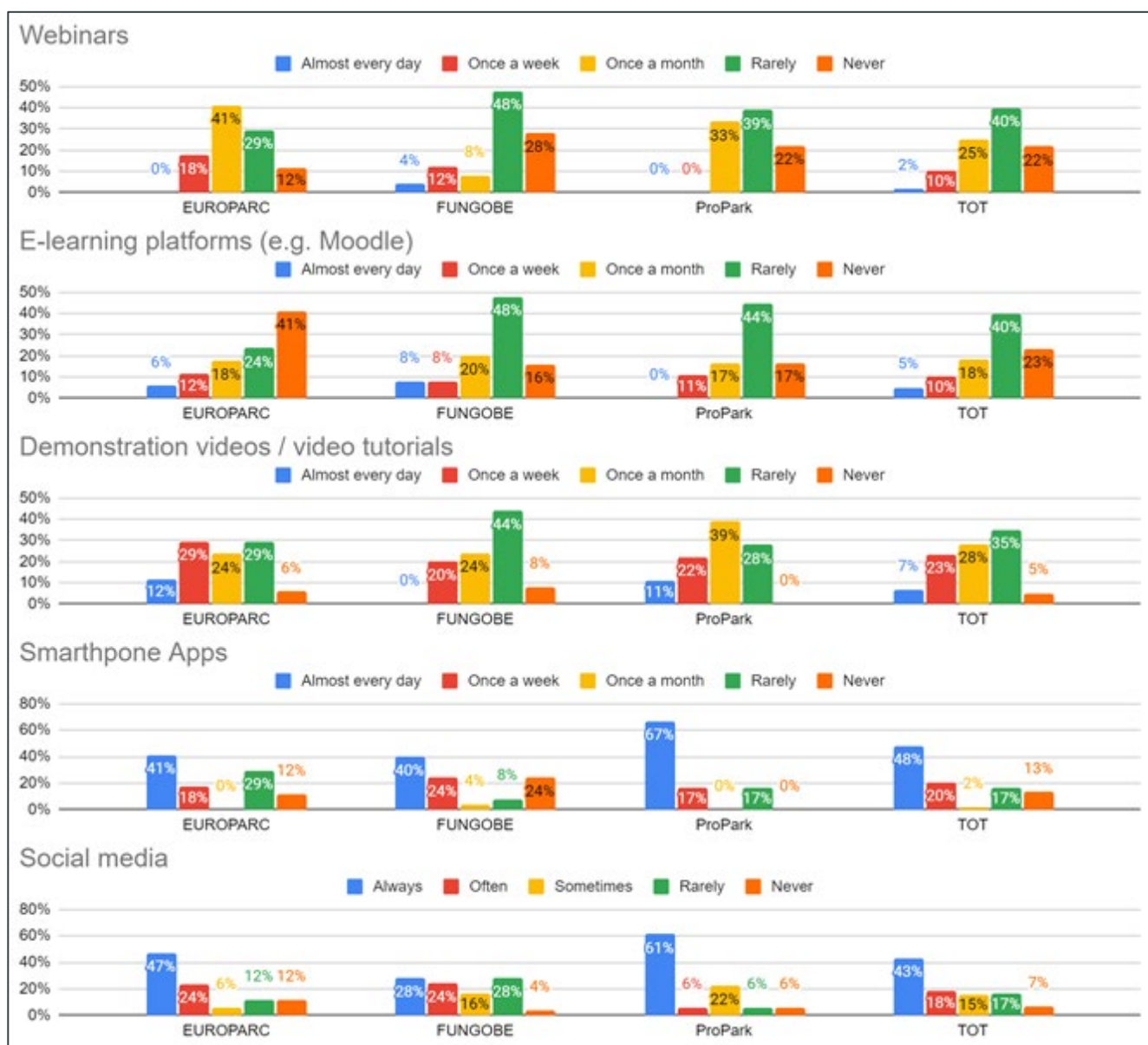


Figure 3.25 - Frequency of use of the online tools in participants' professional life (ex-ante).

Ease of use

Ease of use of these tools is generally high, with demonstration videos leading this ranking, followed by social media, smartphone applications, e-learning platforms, and webinars (Figure 3.18). Other tools mentioned in the previous question (web applications, software for online conferences, online libraries, information platforms and internal sharing tools) are generally considered easy to use.

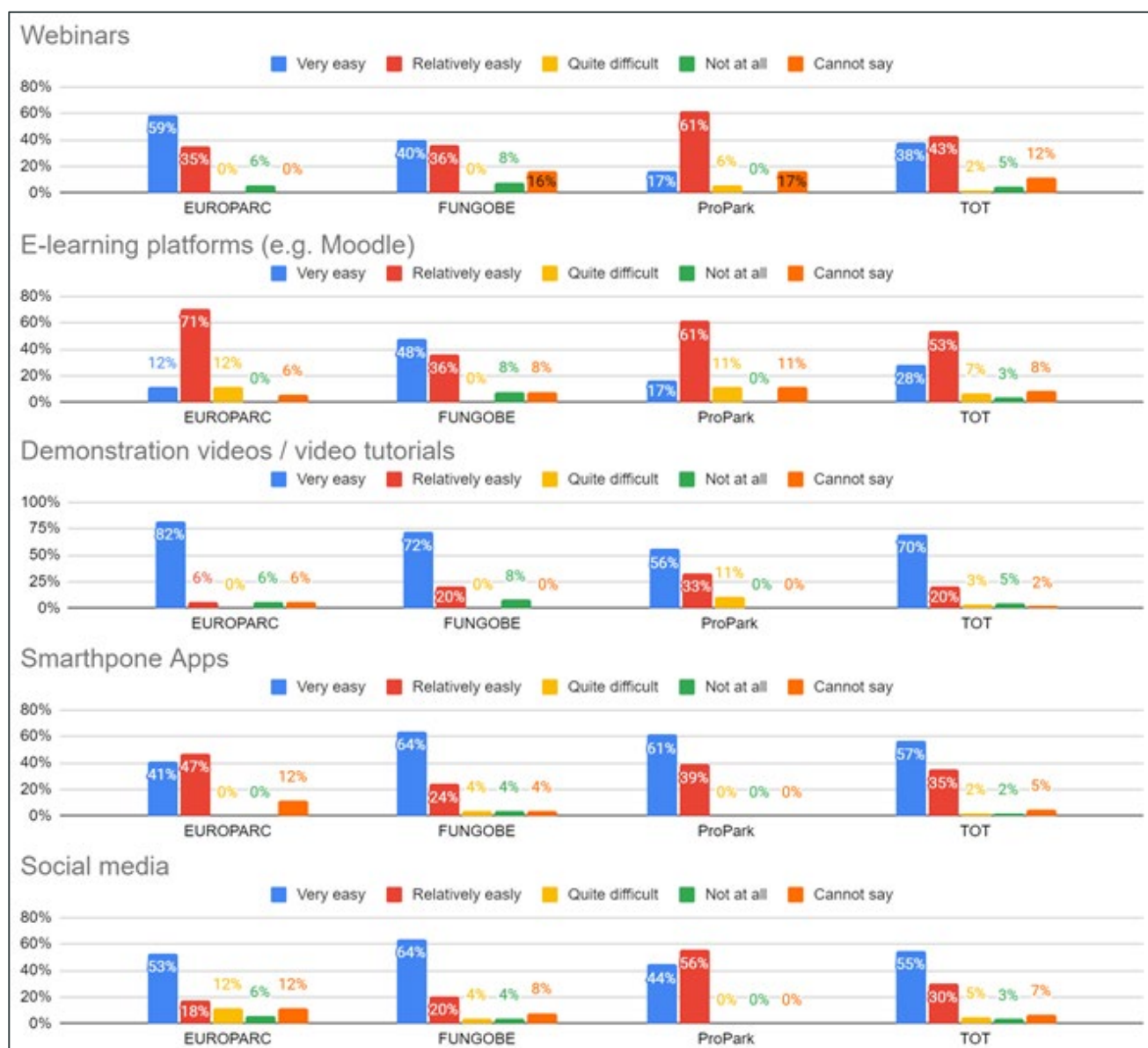


Figure 3.26 - Ease of use of the online tools (ex-ante).

Expectations

Expectations from the project are mainly related to (Figure 3.19):

- networking with other Natura 2000 managers (high expectations for 75% of respondents, with “Very high” as the most selected option);
- improving knowledge about Natura 2000 management practices (high expectations for 80%);
- improving technical knowledge with online tools (high expectations for 67%).

Improving general knowledge about the Natura 2000 network was overall a secondary expectation for the core group of project participants, while increasing job/employment opportunities from the online learning courses promoted by the project was considered a moderate expectation.

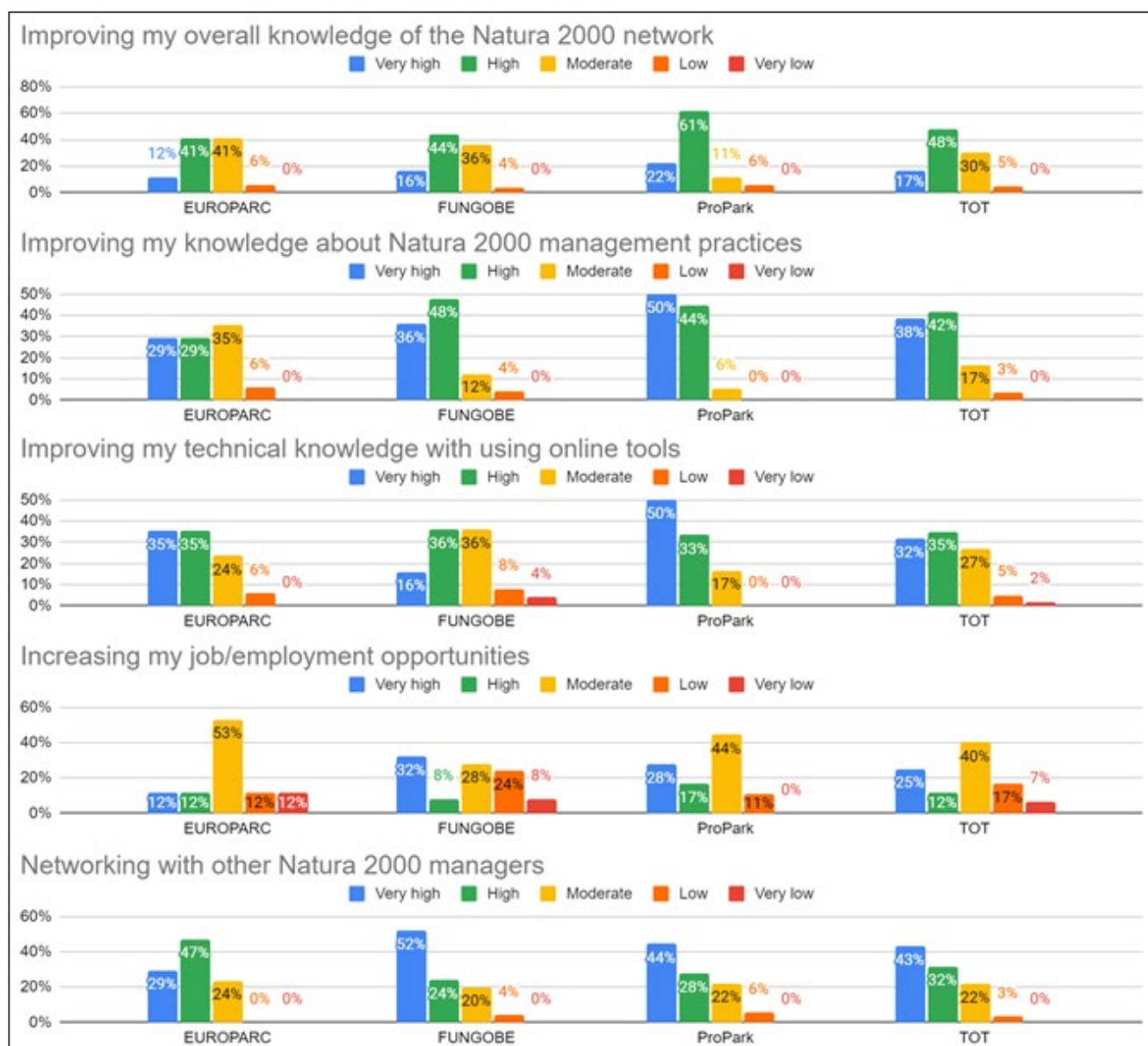


Figure 3.27 - Participants' expectations.

Additional expectations specified in the questionnaire by project participants are listed in Table 3.3.

Figure 28 - Additional expectations mentioned by respondents.

Expectations	No. of mentions
Improve communication techniques	12
Acquire new skills and competencies	10
Share experiences with other Natura 2000 managers	8
Engagement approaches for stakeholders and participatory strategies	7
Get ideas for new projects and activities	1
Clarify responsibilities of my role in Natura 2000 management	1

3.2.3 Results

The results presented in this section are related to the periodic monitoring of the learning courses and to the ex-post evaluation of the project 6-month after the completion of the courses by the core groups of participants.

Professional network

Network distribution

The professional network distribution reflects the baseline, with no significant changes (Figure 3.20).

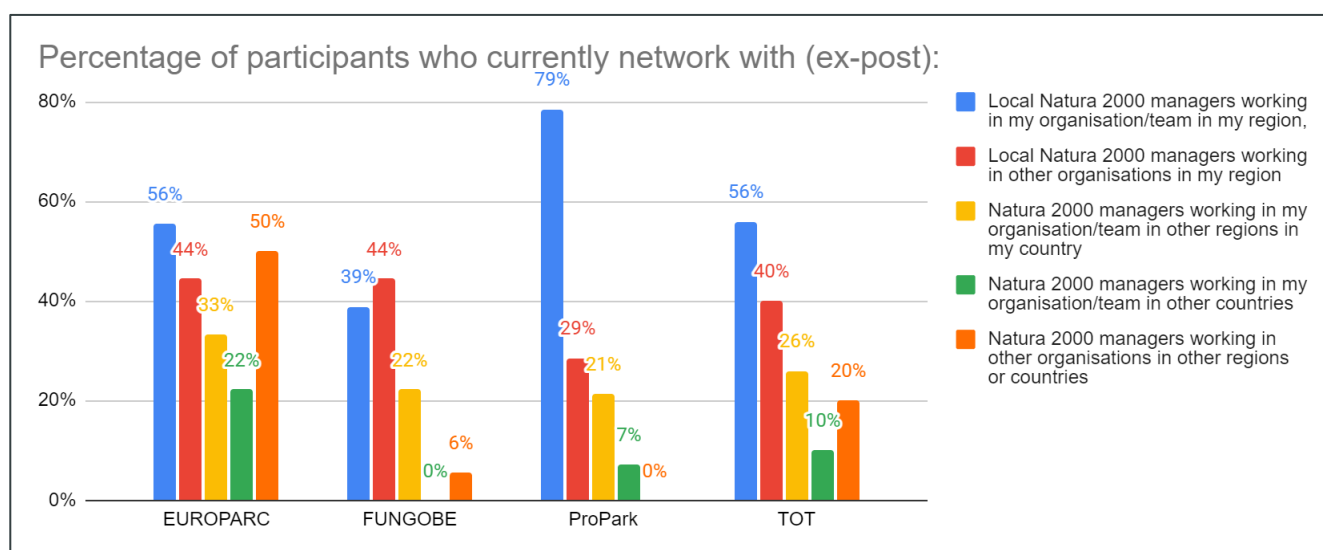


Figure 3.29 - Distribution of the participants' professional network (ex-post).

Network composition

It is likely that the learning experience provided additional networking opportunities when compared to the baseline, and this is slightly highlighted in Figure 3.21. Additional categories of stakeholders related to the Natura 2000 network (governmental institutions, NGOs, Fishing/ hunter associations) were included in the response options, because they were mentioned by several respondents in the benchmark analysis.



Figure 3.30 - Composition of the participants' professional network (ex-post).

Online tools

Frequency of use

The online courses, together with the different learning modalities and tools proposed within the project, increased the frequency of use of many online tools. Figure 3.22 shows the frequency of use related to professional life. Comparing these charts with the baseline (Figure 3.17) shows the impact of the project on the professional habits of the participants: webinars and e-learning platforms are now used at least once a month for about three quarters of participants, while demonstration videos and tutorials are the category with the highest increase (20% of participants use them almost every day, 50% at least once a week). None of the participants now do not use communication tools such as social media.

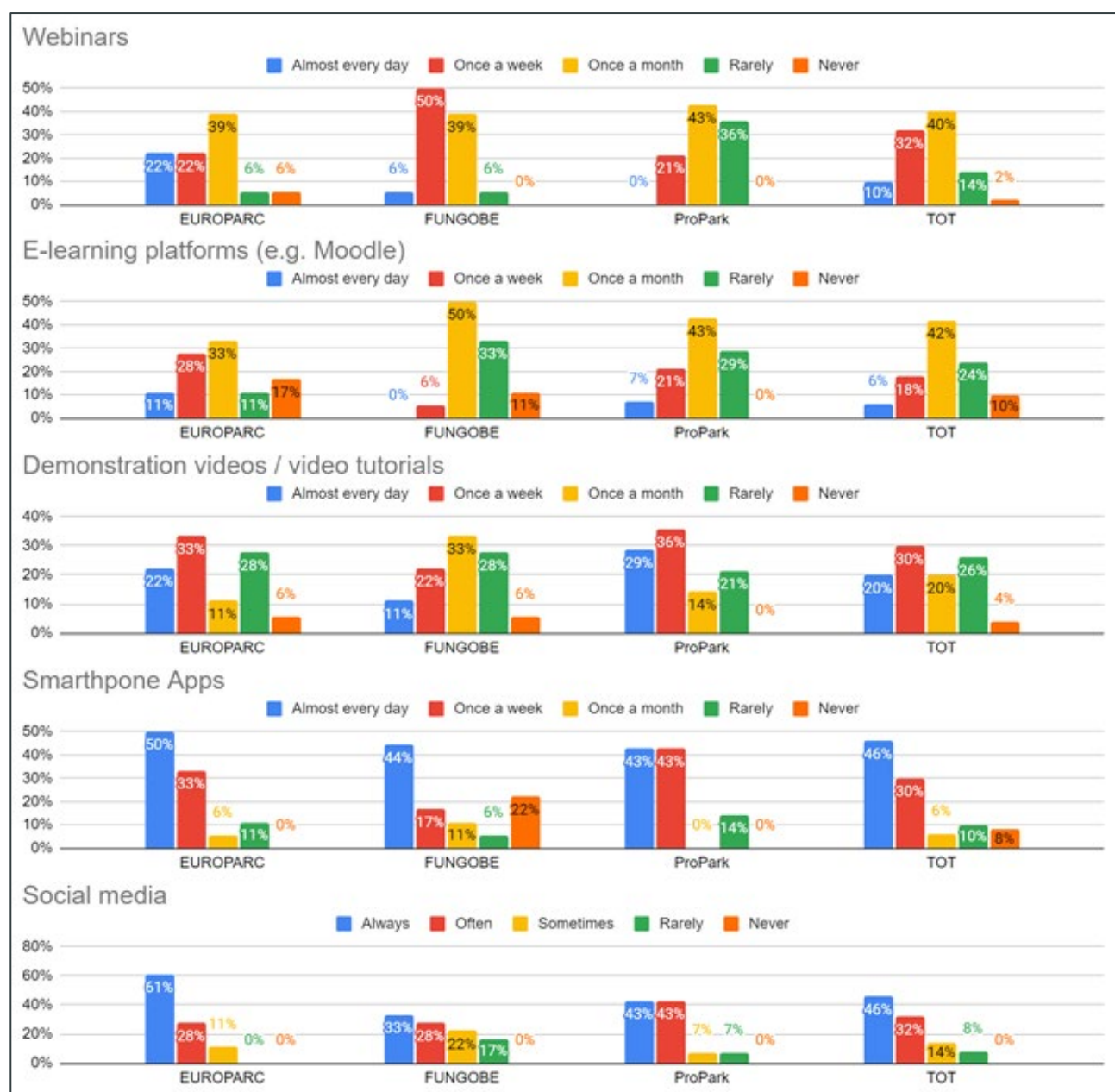


Figure 3.31 - Frequency of use of the online tools in participants' professional life (ex-post).

Ease of use

The ease of use with the different categories of online tools also grew after 6 months from the end of the courses. Participants considering webinars as a “Very easy” learning method changed from 38% to 70%, and the combination of the selected “easy” options counts for 94%. The same goes for e-learning platforms: 40% of respondents selected the “Very easy” option, against 28% of the baseline. Overall, there are no significant changes in demonstration videos and smartphone apps, while social media sees a slight increase in the ease perception.

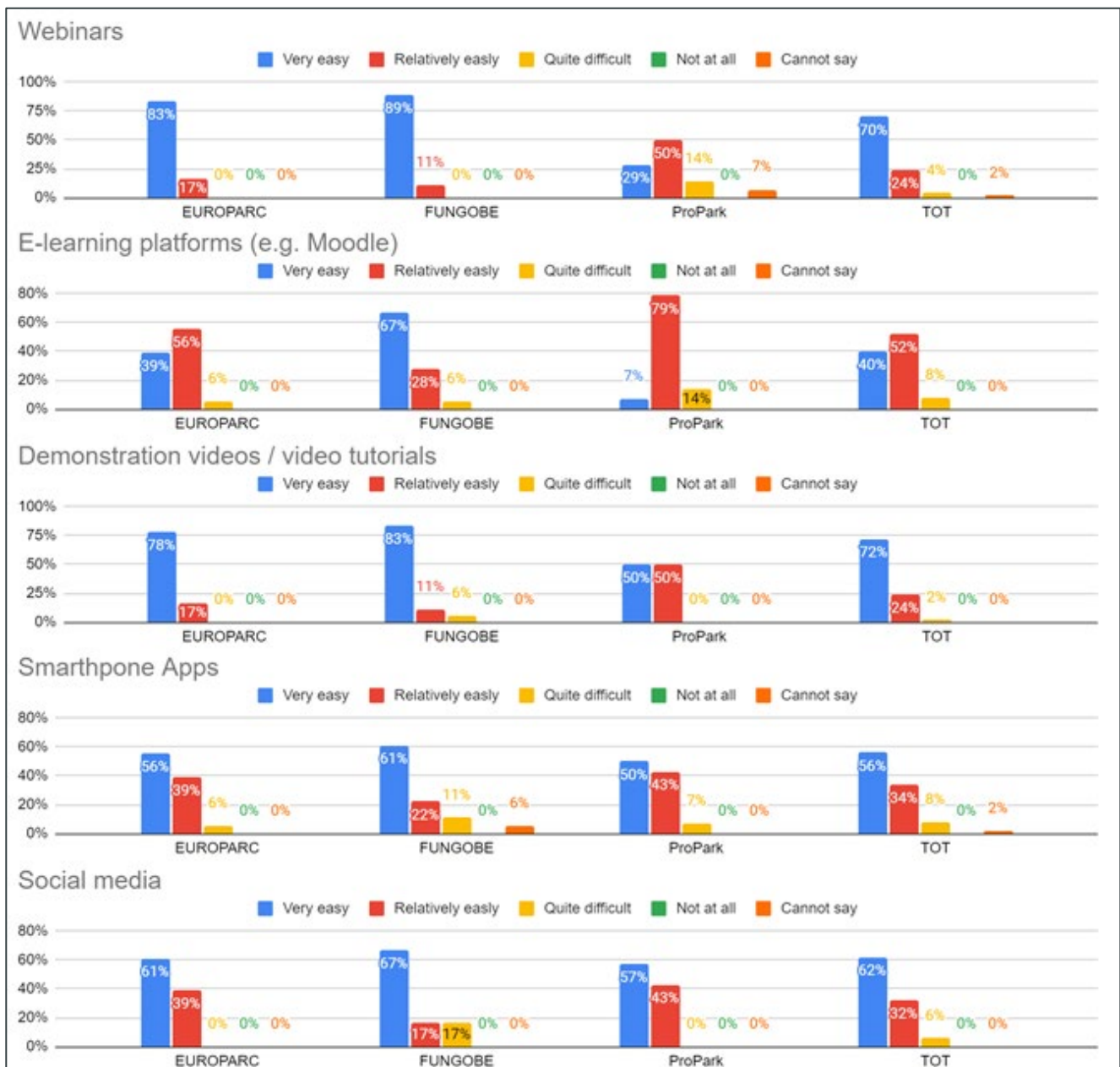


Figure 3.32 - Ease of use of the online tools (ex-post).

Most helpful tool in supporting the learning experience

The most helpful tool in supporting the learning experience was the e-learning platform, followed by webinars and demonstration videos (see Figure 3.24).

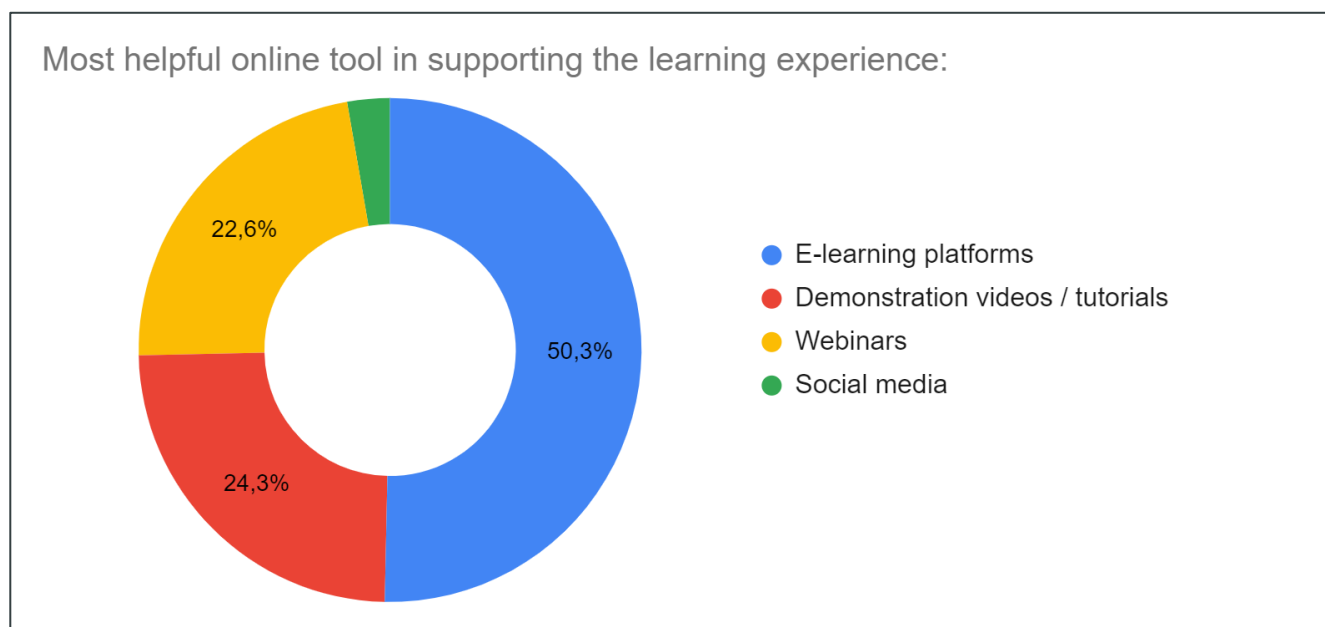


Figure 3.33 - Most helpful tool in supporting the learning experience.

Satisfaction levels

Satisfaction levels of participants was assessed against initial expectations, as well as against aspects or topics deepened by all learning courses, such as communication skills, stakeholder engagement techniques and participatory strategies. Overall, satisfaction is high for all components: this very positive feedback highlights the effectiveness and impact of the project itself. Slightly moderate satisfaction is shown in the increase of job opportunities, but considering it is the most powerful indicator to assess socio-economic impacts of the project, it is already a great achievement that 40% of respondents have at least a high level of satisfaction regarding this point. Due to the pandemic and the lack of the face-to-face workshops in the FUNGOBE and EUROPARC courses, levels of satisfaction about networking with other Natura 2000 managers does not match participants' expectations as expressed before the start of the courses. There is an evident gap with the ProPark cohort, who instead participated in the face-to-face final workshop (see Figure 3.25 below).

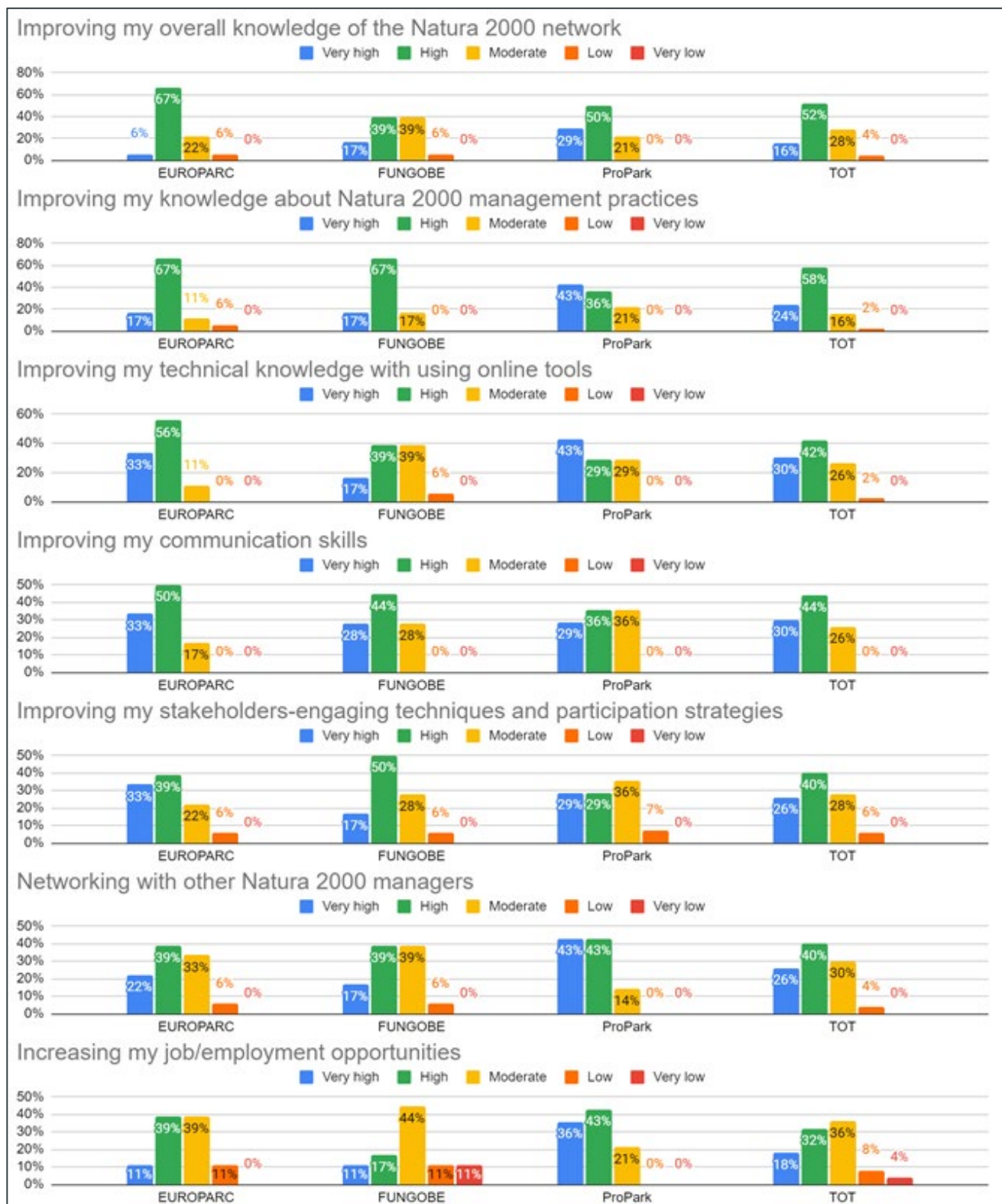


Figure 3.34 - Participants' satisfaction.

Level of information provided

To monitor the level of information provided in the learning modules, the usefulness of the content is plotted in Figure 3.26. The share of “Useful” and “Very useful” responses exceed 90% across almost all learning modules delivered by the three courses.

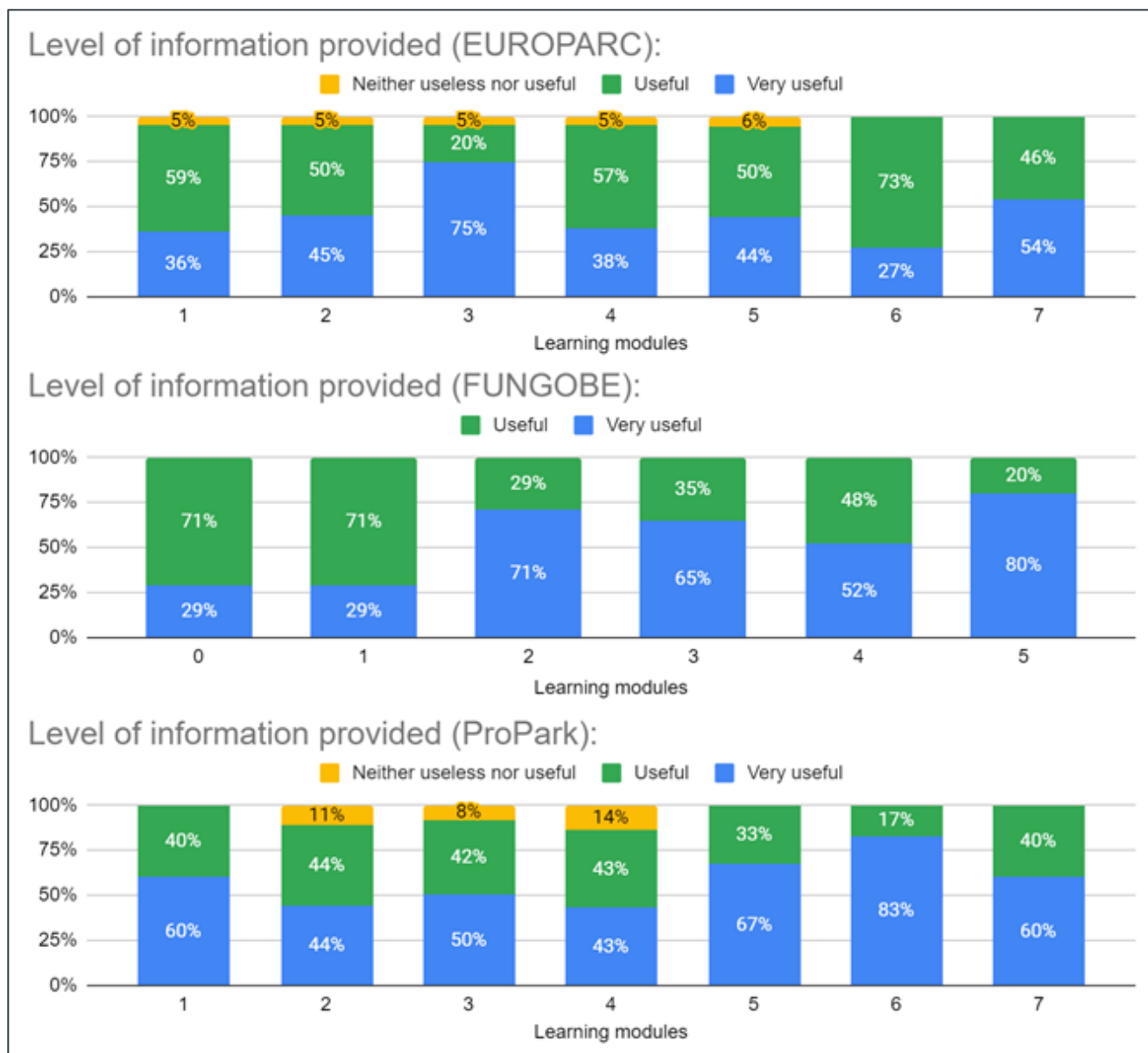


Figure 3.35 - Level of information provided in the learning modules.

Acquired competencies

The main competencies acquired by the core project participants are reported in Table 3.4.

Figure 36 - Competence acquired by the participants, divided by course and learning modules.

Competent inclusive communication (EUROPARC)	
Module 1	E-learning skills; communication strategy; awareness and education
Module 2	Stakeholder analysis and understanding; active listening; stakeholder engagement
Module 3	Presentation skills; teamworking; audience understanding and targeting
Module 4	Technical writing skills; process management; pressures analysis
Module 5	Creative thinking, writing and communication; digital communication skills; interpretation skills
Module 6	Negotiation techniques; conflict management and resolution; collaborative and partnership working
Module 7	Conflict management and solving; effective joint-working and collaboration; feedback giving and receiving
Building alliance for Natura 2000 management (FUNGOBE)	
Module 0	Effective communication skills; e-learning and video making; presentation techniques
Module 1	Assertive communication; communication skills; participation in Natura 2000 management
Module 2	Active listening; good practices and governance models; participation planning; facilitation skills
Module 3	Negotiation skills; communication with social media; participatory techniques
Module 4	Negotiation skills; active listening; comprehensive reading
Module 5	Participation and involvement techniques; exposure capacity; scenarios building
Applied conservation biology (ProPark)	
Module 1	Problem solving; decision making
Module 2	Planning and organisation; scientific thinking
Module 3	Communication skills and tools; monitoring and sampling methods; data gathering
Module 4	Conservation status assessment; operational planning
Module 5	Communication skills; monitoring techniques; risks identification
Module 6	Data management; GIS competencies; communication skills
Module 7	Communication strategy; GIS competencies; technical writing

Usefulness and application

A 0-10 scoring scale was used to assess the usefulness of the learning experience in relation to project participants' plans to apply their experiences in their work. Figure 3.27 shows the average scores related to the three groups of participants and then to the whole core project group. As reported, the results are encouraging and uniform among the three learning experiences.

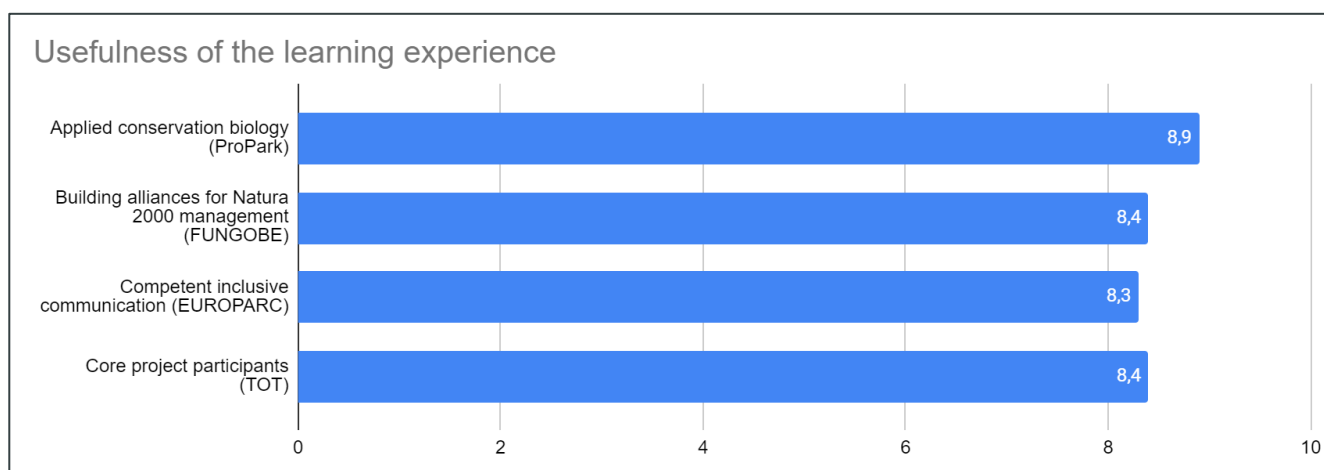


Figure 3.37 - Usefulness of the learning experience.

At the end of each module, the attendees were asked about their intention to apply the online learning tools to their work context: more than 75% of participants were willing to apply the tools during the courses (Figure 3.28).

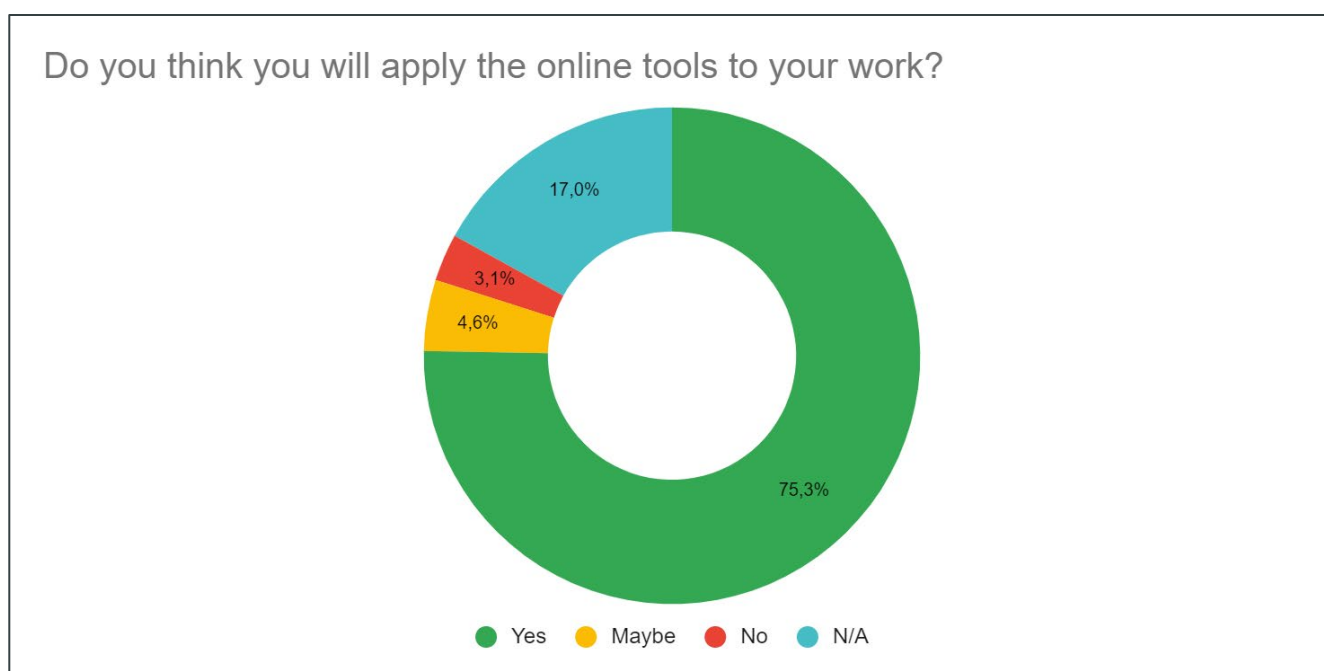


Figure 3.38 - Participants' intention to apply the online learning tools to the work context.

What is described in the chart above in terms of intentions, was confirmed by the post project 6-month evaluation survey, where former participants were asked how they were applying the online learning (see Figure 3.29). Overall, 96% of respondents started applying (or would soon) what they learned in their daily work, while those who stated they had not, commented technical duties at work. About half of respondents who benefit from learning in their daily work state that the learning experience was an inspiration for new activities.

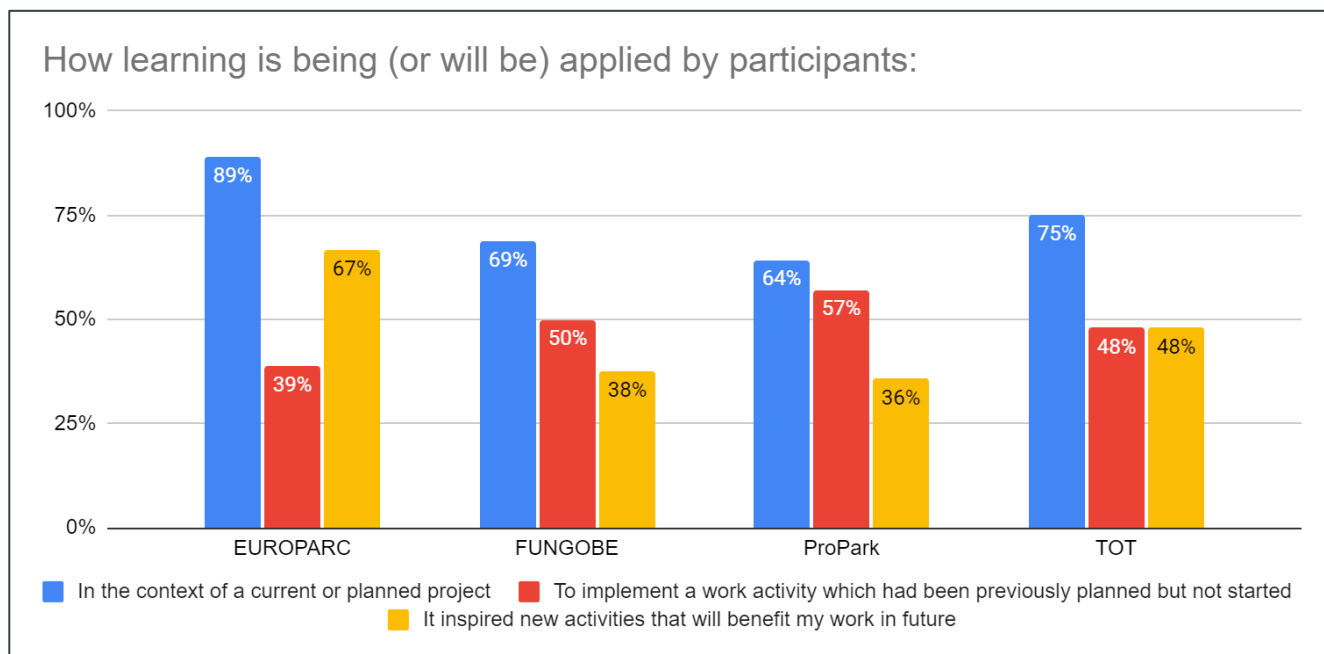


Figure 3.39 - Participants' application of learning.

50% of respondents listed at least one new activity as a result of the project, as reported in Table 3.5.

Figure 40 - New activities as a result of the project, grouped into macro categories.

New activities as a result of the project	EUROPARC	FUNGOBE	ProPark
New job opportunities	11	11	11
New job position	2		4
New projects	4	4	3
New activities	4	1	
New collaborations	1	5	4
New funding programs to apply		1	
New practices and activities useful for future funding applications	6	3	5
Research and field studies	1		3
Development of management methodologies and plans			1
New engagement techniques	1	2	1
New communication strategies	3		
Production of communication materials	1	1	
New areas of work	1	0	0
New Natura 2000 areas identification	1		

Pros and cons

At the end of each module, participants were asked to list the aspects that had worked best ("What worked best in the module?") and those that had not worked so well ("What didn't work so well in this module?"). The qualitative responses were grouped into 5 macro-categories: aspects concerning 1) the coordination/management of the module, 2) the quality of the information received, 3) the tools used

during the module, 4) the possibility of interacting with the other participants and creating a profitable networking, 5) the content of the module. The results of each module were aggregated by categories and summed up at the course level. Moreover, each answer was re-worded, and the detailed results related to the more specific items are reported in the next two paragraphs.

Pros

Almost all respondents gave a positive feedback (322 out of 324), with 372 concrete elements collected from respondents. The large number of positive comments received is an indicator of the quality of the project as a whole. However, the distribution of the comments in the 5 macro categories indicates that the three courses had very different characteristics, as the chart in Figure 3.30 shows.

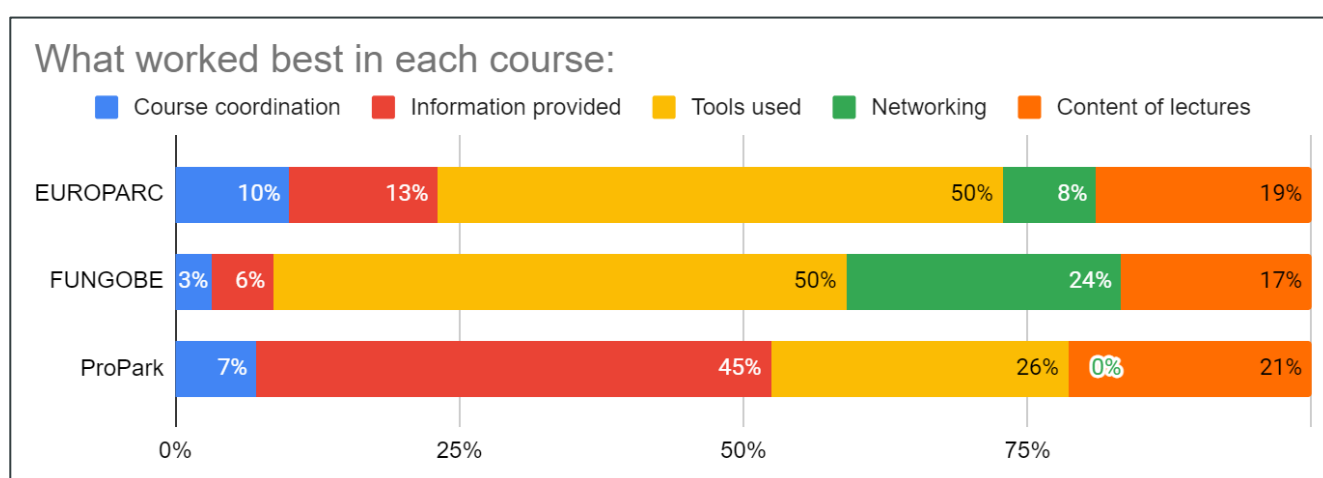


Figure 3.41 - What worked best in each course, with respect to macro categories.

Half of participants' responses in the FUNGOBE and EUROPARC courses are related to the tools used, while in the ProPark cohort the most mentioned category is the one concerning the quality of the information received (45%). In ProPark, vertical information sharing tools were mainly used (video tutorial, webinar, homework, additional readings); in fact, the second dimension regards the content of the modules, while the feedback on networking among participants is nil. The opposite situation appears in FUNGOBE, where the tools used were mainly aimed at sharing experiences between participants (mainly through a forum, which is clearly the first mentioned tool), and the networking category was stated by almost a quarter of respondents (24%). Specifically, learning from other participants' experiences was highly appreciated. Finally, the comments of the EUROPARC participants are distributed in a more balanced way across the five categories: a large majority of the feedback praises the coordination of the whole course, continuous feedback by external experts, preparation in the organisation and flexibility of activities, as well as the interactive approach. Table 3.6 reports the top 5 items per category and course, ranked by frequency.

Figure 42 - Top 5 positive comments per category and course (ranking based on absolute frequency).

	ProPark	FUNGOBE	EUROPARC
Course coordination			
1°	Clearly defined modules	Clearly defined modules	Feedback by specialists/experts
2°	Organised activities	Organised activities	Well prepared
3°	-	Efficient timing	Interactive
4°	-	Balance between content and tools	Organised activities
5°	-	-	Flexibility
Information provided			
1°	With concrete examples	Quality of content	Clear
2°	Synthesized	Clear	Quality of content
3°	Well communicated	Useful	Up-to-date references
4°	Easy to access	Up-to-date references	Quantity of information
5°	Friendly approach	Quantity of information	Well communicated
Tools used			
1°	Video/Tutorial	Forum	Webinar
2°	Homework	Video/Tutorial	Group work
3°	Additional readings to download	Additional readings to download	Video/Tutorial
4°	Webinar	Work on concrete cases	Task exercises
5°	Work on concrete cases	Moodle platform	Additional readings to download
Networking			
1°	-	Learning from others' experience	Cooperation with peers
2°	-	Knowledge sharing	Teamwork
3°	-	Cooperation with peers	Involving stakeholders
4°	-	Involving stakeholders	Learning from others' experience
5°	-	Teamwork	Knowledge sharing
Content of lectures			
1°	Communication	Facilitation skills	Communication
2°	Wildlife Survey Design Matrix	Governance	Negotiation and conflicts management
3°	Power Point	Communication	Stakeholder analysis
4°	Impact assessment	Participation	Video making
5°	GIS	Presentation skills	Psychology of behaviour

Cons

The percentage of respondents who provided negative comments is significantly lower: about 40% provided a negative comment (and often it was more a suggestion for improvement than a real criticism): in total, 141 critical comments were collected, which equate to only one-third of the total positive comments received. Many respondents pointed out that meeting in person at some point in the course would have probably improved the quality of learning and networking, and that finding time to attend online lessons during the COVID-19 lockdown was time-consuming for those with family at home. The distribution of the negative feedback in the 5 macro categories varies among the three courses (Figure 3.31).

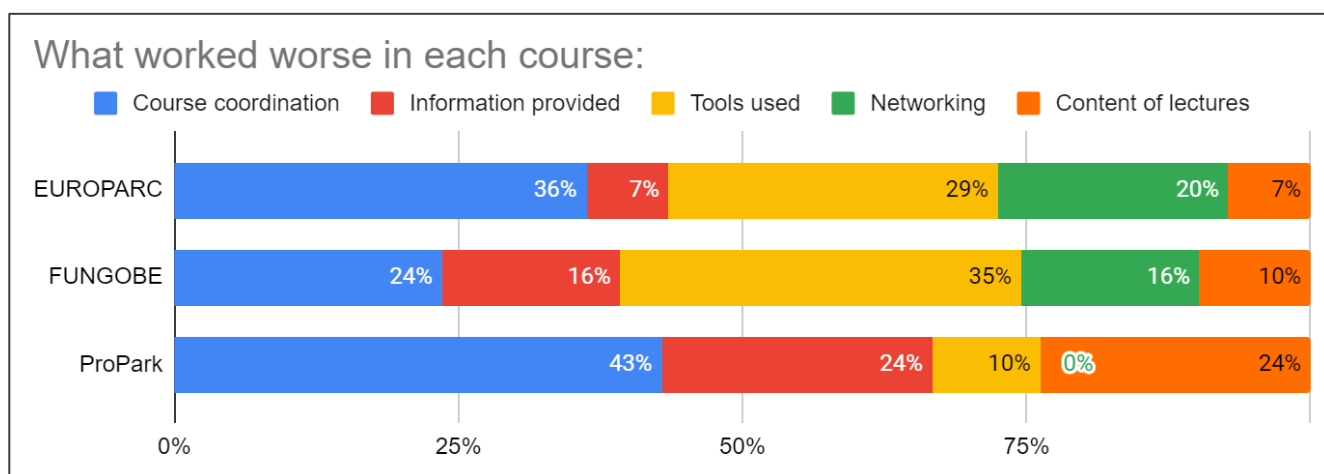


Figure 3.43 - What didn't work so well in each course, with respect to five macro categories.

The most balanced distribution is found in FUNGOBE's course. About a third of the comments (35%) relate to the tools used, the length of lectures and the static nature of the forum: on the one hand, the forum allowed the exchange of experiences and knowledge sharing among participants, while on the other hand, the interaction between participants through the forum is not regarded as being as dynamic compared with other tools. Perhaps more importantly, the usefulness of the forum seemed to decrease over time as levels of participation decreased. Some respondents pointed out that interaction was also lacking with lecturers. Finally, a suggestion was made to add summaries at the end of each lecture to help participants keep the main issues of each module in focus.

EUROPARC's participants expressed concern with the course coordination (36%), the tools (29%) and the networking (20%). Some webinars were too long and time demanding, with several overlapping tasks and little time to follow the webinars and discuss the topics with other participants. Moreover, some respondents pointed out that the use of wiki should be improved, as the instructions were not clear, and its potential was not fully exploited by everyone.

The distribution of negative comments for ProPark reflects the positive ones. Few interactive tools were used and so networking was not mentioned at all. Mainly, the web interface was chaotic and hard to read. Finally, some respondents had difficulty assimilating the information received because the examples did not fit the working context or situation of the participants. Table 3.7 reports on the top 5 items per category and course, ranked by frequency. Items cited only once have not been reported, and items related to the content of lectures category that were cited only once were not included in the table.

Figure 44 - Top 5 negative comments per category and course (ranking based on absolute frequency). Items cited only once have not been reported.

	ProPark	FUNGOBE	EUROPARC
	Course coordination		
1°	Chaotic web structure	Time-demanding	Time-demanding
2°	-	Lack of feedback by lecturers	Dragged webinars
3°	-	Too many lectures	Technical issues

4°	-	-	Overlapping tasks
5°	-	-	Short time to view details
Information provided			
1°	Not relevant in all contexts	confusing instructions	Disconnected
2°	-	a focused summary is missing	-
3°	-	lack of further resources	-
Tools used			
1°	-	Too long lectures	Webinars
2°	-	Static forum	Not clear wiki
3°	-	Tasks' format	Few times for open discussion
4°	-	-	Not feasible tasks
5°	-	-	Not real case studies
Networking			
1°	Missing interaction among participants	Lack of real interaction in forum	-
2°	Not well coordinated groups	Decreasing participation on time	-
3°	Few participants engagement	Few discussions	-

Aspects that should be improved

Most comments are related to the possibility to interact with other participants and trainers. Table 3.8 summarises all the feedback collected, grouped into four macro categories.

Figure 45 - Aspects to be improved.

TEAMWORK AND INTERACTIONS	53%	COURSE ORGANISATION	14%
More teamwork and interactions with other students	10	Provide instructions or tutorials to make sure participants won't have problems when attending the lesson	1
Ensure face-to-face meetings in parallel with the online experience	6	Advance information on course activities and workload	1
More interactions with trainers	2	Foresee a live application of learning	1
Keep the same working groups	1	Certification of course and experience	1
		Better coordination among different contents of the same lesson/ course	1
LEARNING METHODS	17%	CUSTOMISATION	17%
More funny methods and tasks to stimulate participation	3	Allow participants to present and exchange their cases and experience	2
Translation of videos and other communication materials	1	More homework and tasks related to our everyday work	4
Use of a more user-friendly platform (than Moodle)	1		
Shorter webinars	1		

Highlights from the qualitative interviews

This paragraph presents the main aspects that were highlighted by a small sample of participants interviewed in February 2020, to integrate the qualitative results presented above and collected through the online questionnaire.

The interview was structured to be very simple and understandable by all the interviewees: participant was asked to briefly present himself and then the interview focused on two main questions, the starting points to let the respondent range between many topics:

1. What worked best in the online courses?
2. Which aspects should be improved to help the project partners provide a better experience in the future?

Based on the answers collected, feedback was later analysed and organised into the following macro categories:

- Course contents and organisation
- Composition of the participants' group
- Time commitment
- Online tools
- Face-to-face event

In the following tables (Table 3.9, Table 3.10, and Table 3.11) qualitative feedback is presented and listed with symbols +/- depending on whether they are strong points or weaknesses.

Figure 46 - Highlights from the interviews (EUROPARC).

Categories	Feedback
Course contents and organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Communication is always useful in many contexts, even if it isn't the main part of your work. Such a course is pre-requisite for everyone involved in Natura 2000 management. - Pandemic caused a gap between the learning and the possibility to apply it + In general, course contents are immediately applicable to the working context, and they changed the participants approach in stakeholders' engagement and presentation (e.g., not only ppt).
Composition of the group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + International participants with different experiences, at various levels.
Time commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The middle part of the course was very intense. - The pandemic didn't let all participants keep up with the course tasks. + Organisers adjusted the pace based on our needs and they were very understanding when the pandemic took place.
Online tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Open forums help to get in touch with other participants, mainly with those having a similar job. - Sometimes too specific topic deepened in the forums. + Communication materials available even after the end of the course. - More video presentations could be useful.

Face-to-face event	+ Lack of F2F event was a big miss: surprisingly though, the absence was not entirely a problem because participants were more than satisfied with the online components.
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Figure 47 - Highlights from the interviews (FUNGOBE).

Categories	Feedback
Course contents and organisation	+ Different topics deepened in the course helped fill the gap with some lack of experience. - More sharing moments could be foreseen in the future.
Composition of the group	+ Course was very interesting also because of the variety of the participants' profiles. + That everyone was from Spain added value: it made the course accessible even to people who do not speak English; also, participants from the same country are faced with similar problems. - It could be more beneficial to organise an international course and select participants by role: to include participants depending on what they want to achieve. More people with the same role looking for the same solutions.
Time commitment	+ Course well organised and lots of information shared in advance: time demands were as expected. - Sometimes difficult to keep up with the open discussion due to work duties
Online tools	+ Organisers tried to facilitate and promote the discussion in the online forums very well. - Open forums effectiveness depends on participation and students' participation was sometimes low. - Smartphone App: something missing is a function to connect people with the same role in Natura 2000 management.

Figure 48 - Highlights from the interviews (ProPark).

Categories	Feedback
Course contents and organisation	- Most of the contents presented and discussed during the online course already known by some participants because of their educational background.
Composition of the group	+ Not only biologists or ecologists, but many different profiles.
Time commitment	+ For those supported by their job to participate, the course was not time demanding. + No problem with the time requested to participate.
Online tools	- Course online platform not very <i>user friendly</i> , it can be improved to help participants to have a better learning experience.
Face-to-face event	+ In terms of usefulness, the F2F event was much better than the online part: fields activities and sharing experiences with the other participants are essential for learning.

	+ The opportunity to compare different points of view (also on nature conservation and management practices) was really interesting: something not highlighted during the online part.
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This evaluation moment concerning the online learning experience also involved some of the course tutors (project partners and external collaborators that managed and delivered the courses, or part of them). For each course, one tutor was selected and interviewed with the same modalities described at the beginning of the paragraph and the main feedback are summarised in Table 3.12.

Figure 49 - Highlights from the interviews (course tutors).

Course	Feedback
EUROPARC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for constant long-term coordination (over 4 months) was very time demanding (also because it was something new for EUROPARC). • Roles and responsibilities were very well defined within the course team. • The overall impression is to have delivered a very comprehensive course - the quality of the final product exceeded the expectations. • Really good and clear structure of the course: to alternate learning and “resting” weeks gave the possibility to learners to assimilate the online sessions; at the same time, it offered partners and tutors time to prepare the next modules of the course. • To foresee a mid-term <i>review moment</i> was essential to understand the feeling of the participants with the learning experience. This should be kept in mind for and built in as a standard feature of all courses.
FUNGOBE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students dealt with proposed topics that are so necessary for their professional daily work, but which are not covered in their general training or studies. • The online format allows adapt to their time and work tasks and take the course in their free time. • A major part of the course was <i>top-down</i>, this is a critical point that can certainly be improved (e.g., including a specific and dedicated module for sharing experiences among the students of the course).
ProPark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The course was designed to be practical. • The diversity of the participants’ role in Natura 2000 management let them share different points of view. • If the course should be repropose, maybe more field activities could help, and more applied homework. The workshop also can be a longer event.

Attendance limiting factors

Only 60% of respondents identified some factors that limited their attendance to the learning courses, but almost half of them is represented by the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic in many EU countries. Work duties was also a limiting factor for 28% while other minor interferences with the learning experience are listed in Figure 3.32.

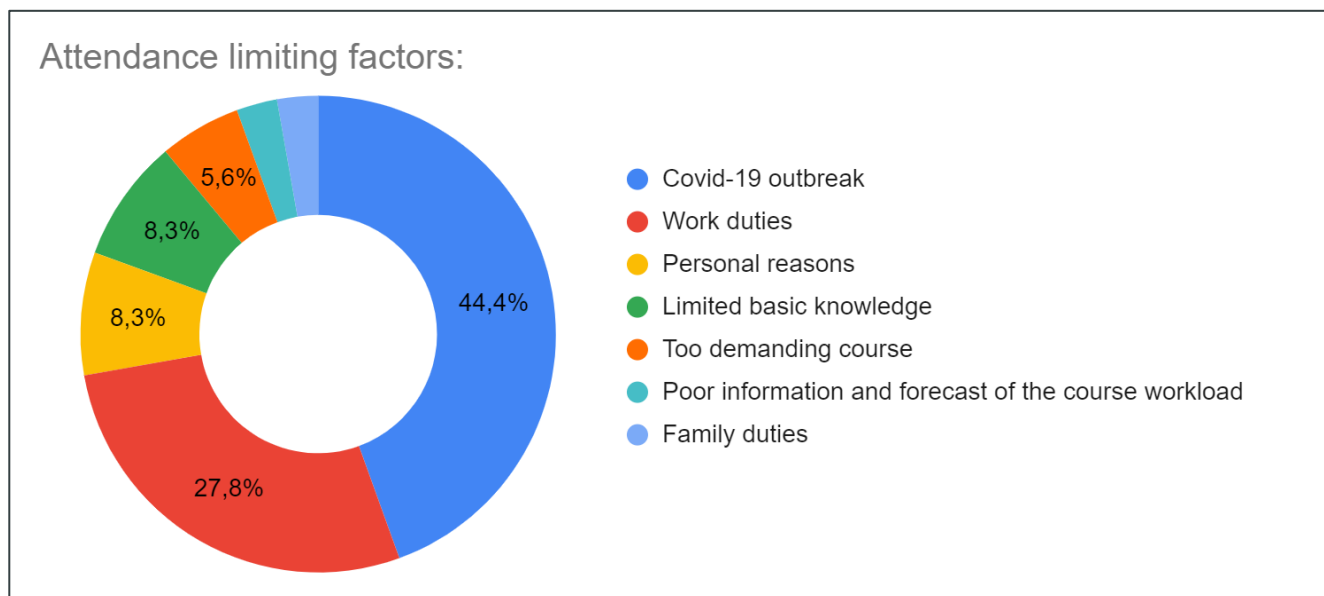


Figure 3.50 - Factors that limited attendance to the courses.

COVID-19 impact

As described above, the COVID-19 outbreak had a big impact on the participants' participation planning (4.4 to 5.5) as shown in Figure 3.33. The EUROPARC one was the most impacted.

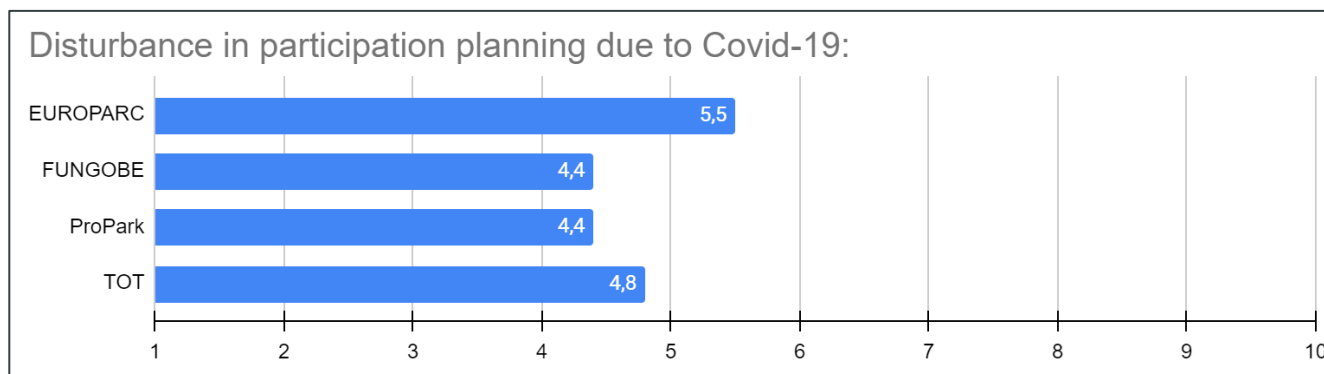


Figure 3.51 - Disturbance in participation planning due to COVID-19.

The impact was monitored module by module (see Figure 3.34): however, the main limiting factor of this type of analysis is the variable delivery times across the three online courses. The following graph therefore indicates impacts from COVID across the delivery period.

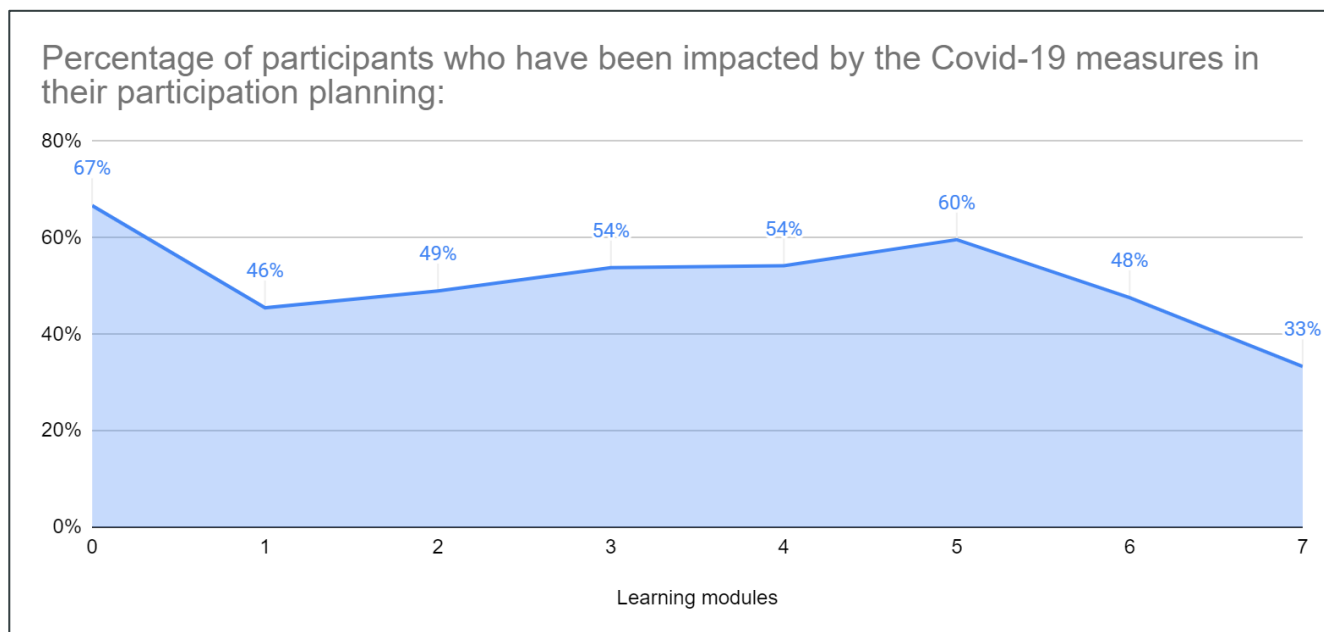


Figure 3.52 - Percentage of participants who have been impacted by COVID-19 in their participation planning, module by module.

Respondents who reported problems in relation to the coronavirus restriction measures and lockdowns were also asked to what extent the impact affected their plans in participating in the online courses. Figure 3.35 shows that a quarter of participants were significantly disrupted, while the rest experienced minor problems and were able to keep up with the course content.

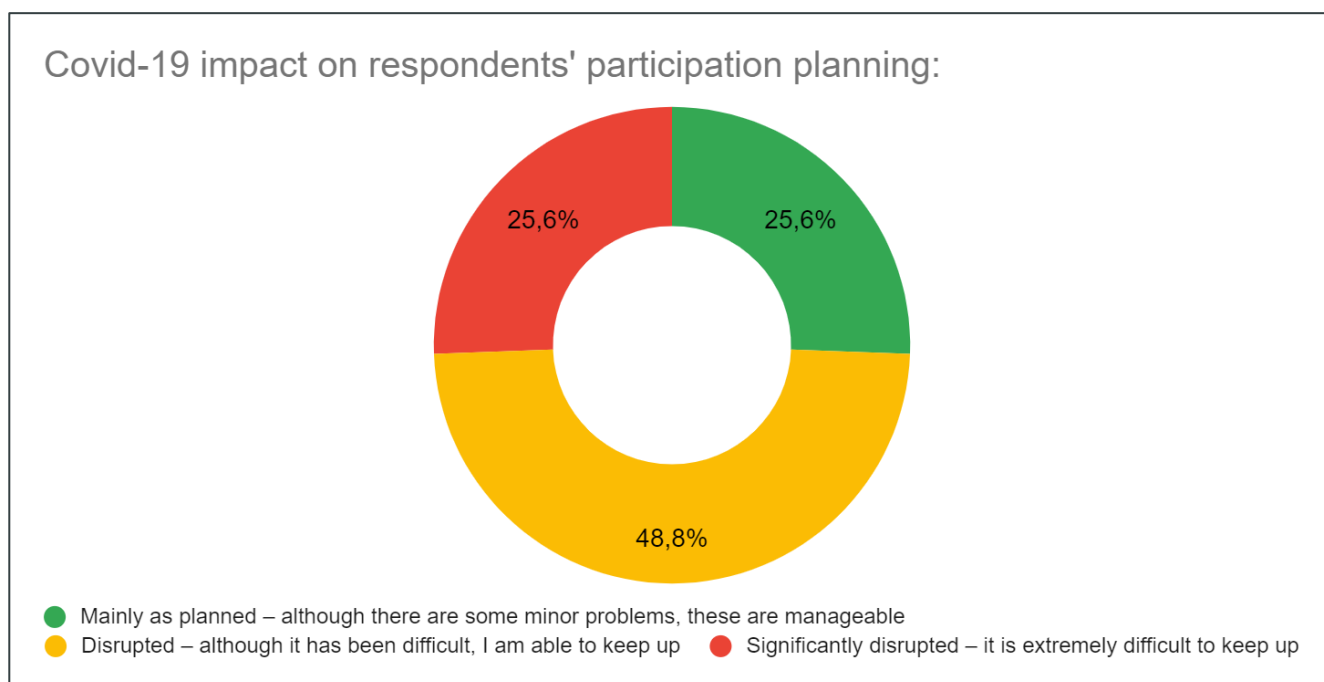


Figure 3.53 - COVID-19 impact on respondents' participation planning.

The main impact of the pandemic highlighted by respondents related to time planning (52%) and the lack of the face-to-face event (32%, see Figure 3.36).

Main impacts of Covid-19 outbreak on the learning experience:

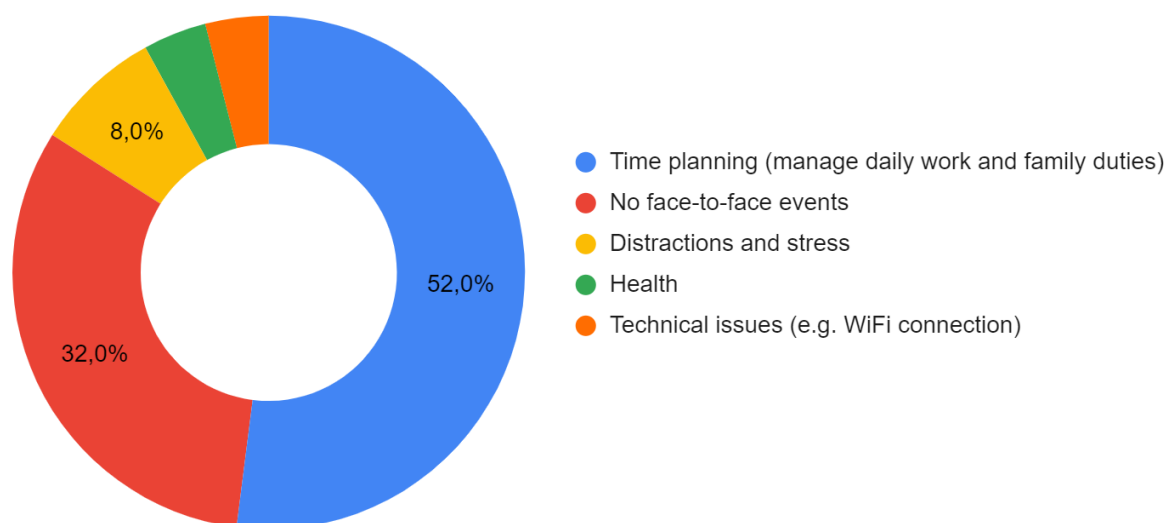


Figure 3.54 - Types of impact caused by the pandemic on the learning experience.

Pace of delivery of task and activities

According to respondents', the LIFE e-Natura2000.edu project guaranteed a good pace of delivery of the expected Tasks and Activities across the three core competence courses: 86% did not have problems or consider it "about right" (see Figure 3.37). This represents an important result when compared to the difficulties caused by the COVID-19 outbreak.

Pace of delivery of tasks and activities:

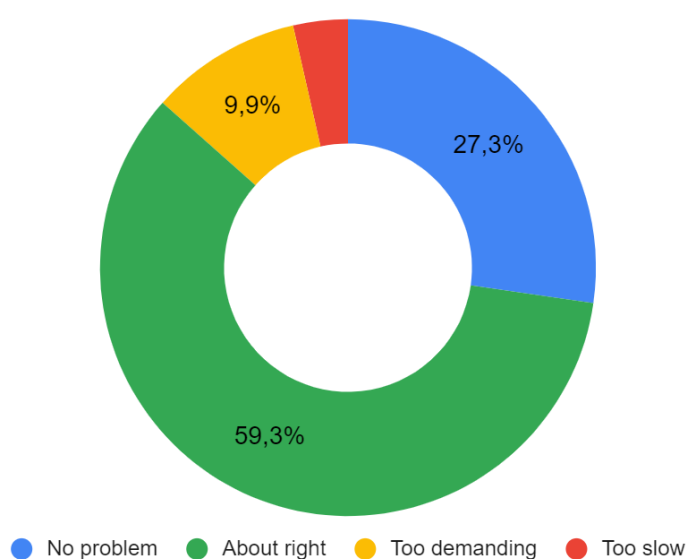


Figure 3.55 - Pace of delivery of tasks and activities.

Recommendation

Learning modules

Respondents were asked how likely they would recommend the learning module to their own network. Based on their answers, a recommendation coefficient (R_c , related to every single module) was calculated as follow:

$$R_c = 2 * (\% \text{ extremely likely}) + 1 * (\% \text{ likely}) - 1 * (\% \text{ unlikely}) - 2 * (\% \text{ extremely unlikely})$$

The score of this coefficient is reported in Figure 3.38, where every learning course has its own “recommendation curve”. Only two modules are characterised by a coefficient $R_c < 1$: however, they are respectively the first modules of FUNGOBE and EUROPARC courses, while the recommendation level sees a general increase across all the online courses over time. The trend of the recommendation curve is opposite to that of the COVID-19 impact presented in Figure 3.34.

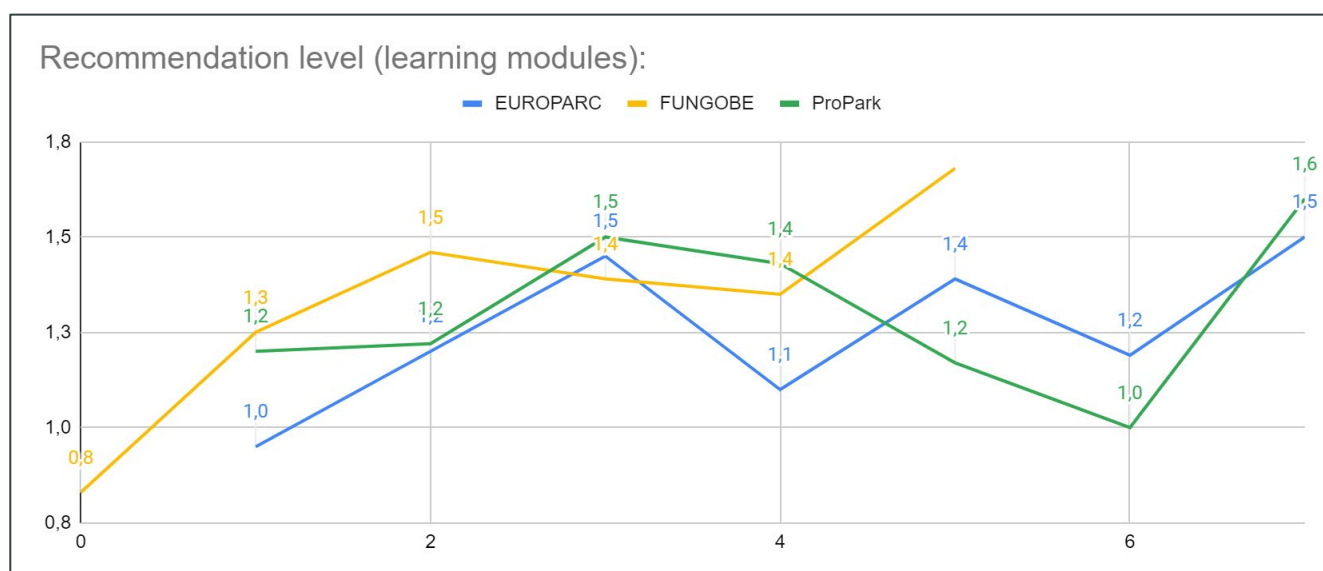


Figure 3.56 - Recommendation level of the learning modules, divided by courses.

Learning courses

The post project evaluation shows that 84% of participants would recommend the learning experience to colleagues or other people working with or involved in Natura 2000 management, while just 2% is not willing to do so and 14% answered “Maybe”. Percentages are quite similar for the three courses.

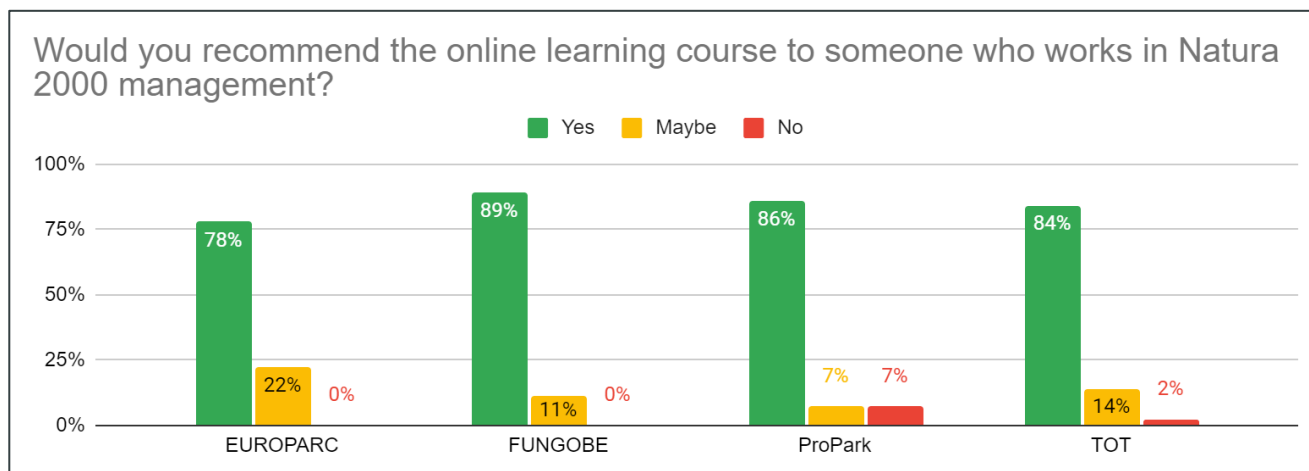


Figure 3.57 - Recommendation level of the learning courses.

Willingness to pay

58% of respondents are willing to pay between 50 and 200€ for such a course in the future. Based on the proposed ranges, the average respondents' WTP is about 135 €, with minor differences among the three learning courses.

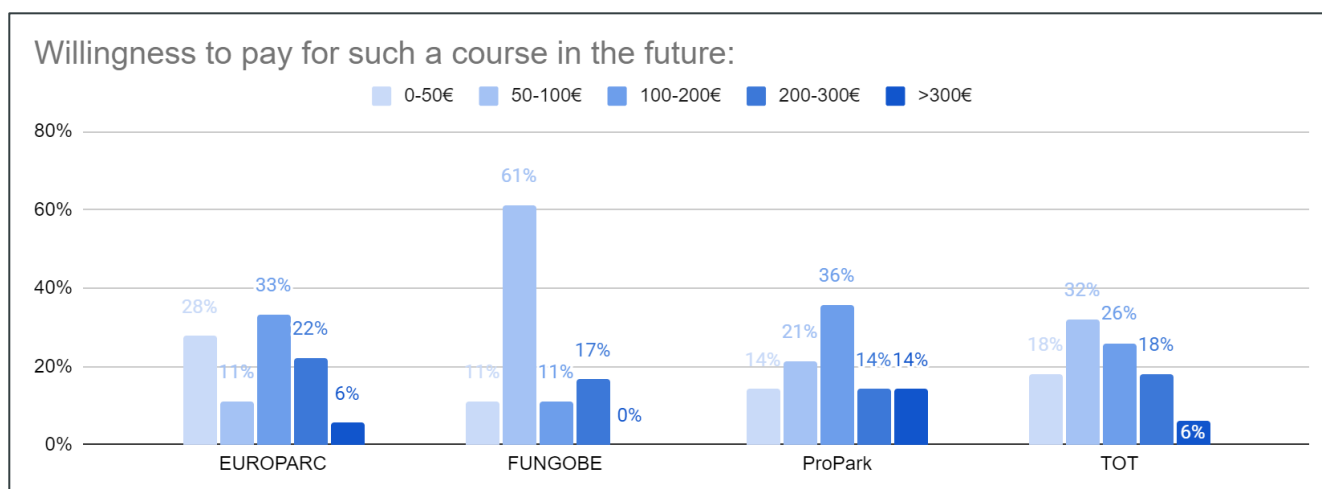


Figure 3.58 - Participants' willingness to pay for the online course attended in the future.

4 Virtual Summer School

4.1 Presentation of the Virtual Summer School

“Natura 2000 in Practice” is the name of the Virtual Summer School that took place from 7 to 17 June 2021 as an integral part of the LIFE e-Natura2000.edu project, led by the Department of Land, Environment, Agriculture and Forestry of the University of Padova (TESAF). The Virtual Summer School capitalised on the experience gained by the project partners, who collaborated throughout the project duration and the identification and selection of participants for the summer school.

The Virtual Summer School aimed to disseminate in-depth knowledge on innovative aspects related to the management of Natura 2000 sites and to develop practical and technical skills on ecological and planning tools useful for the appropriate management of protected areas. The final aim was to train public and private staff in the management and planning of Natura 2000 sites, applying innovative tools to the implementation of the Habitats Directive⁷ for Natura 2000 sites. The online lessons will strengthen the knowledge on ‘backbone aspects’ of managing Natura 2000 sites, whilst making a number of possible approaches available through specific examples gained from direct experience.

4.2 Evaluation of the learning experience

4.2.1 Characterisation of participants

Age

The average, minimum and maximum age of the group of participants to the Virtual Summer School is described in Figure 4.1. The age range is in line with that of the online courses (Figure 3.1).

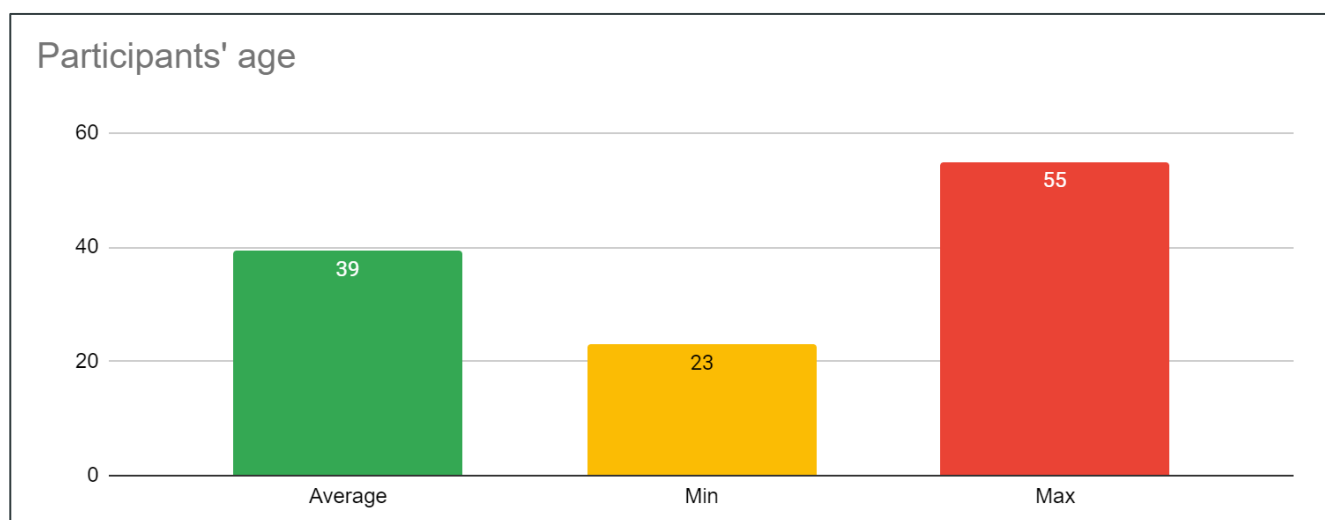


Figure 4.1 - Age of the participants to the Virtual Summer School (avg, min and max).

⁷ [Council Directive 92/43/EEC](https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index_en.htm) of 21 May 1992:
https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index_en.htm

Nationality

A total of 17 countries are represented in the group of participants to the Virtual Summer School. Figure 4.2 shows that most of them have Italian and Romanian nationality.

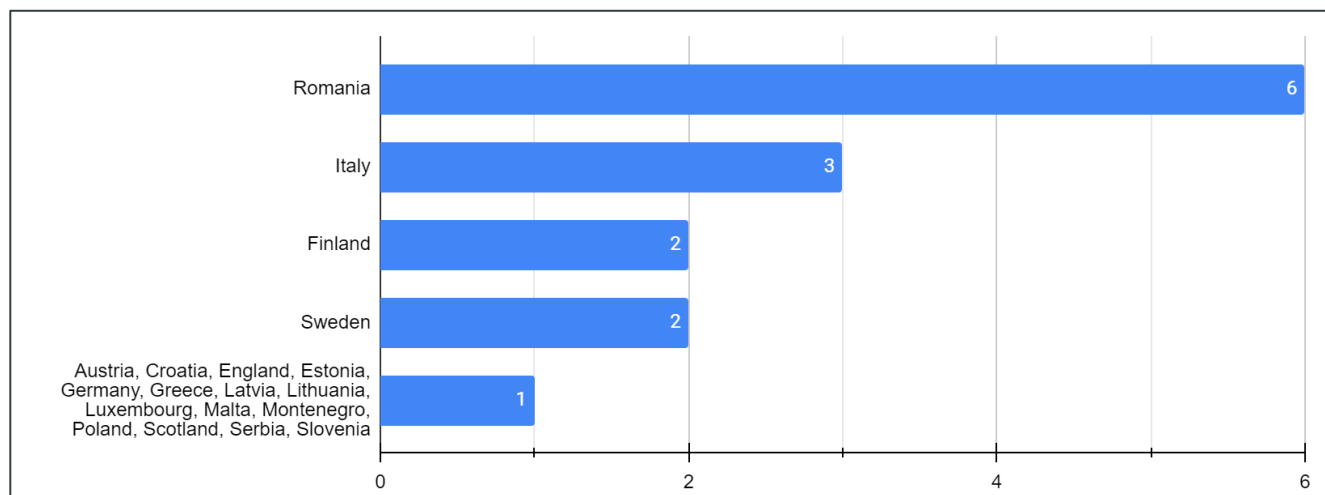


Figure 4.2 - Number of participants to the Virtual Summer School from EU Countries.

Membership

The course composition is diversified (Figure 4.3 **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**) and the types of organisations the participants work for include public authorities (about 60%), NGOs and private landowners.

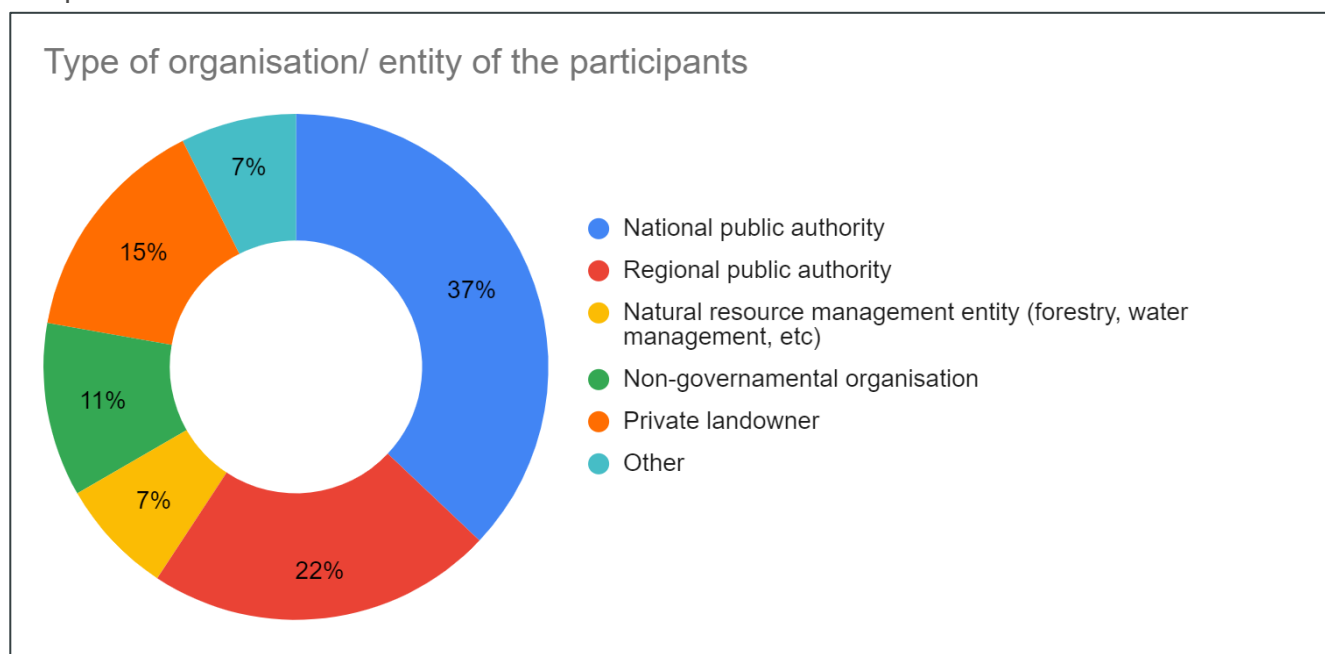


Figure 4.3 - Type of organisation/ entity of the participants.

Participation in previous project experience

The selected participants to the Virtual Summer School were a mix of participants who already took part in previous project activities (20% including online learning courses and webinars promoted within

the project) and “new” attendees participated for the first time in a LIFE e-Natura2000.edu activity (80%, Figure 4.4).

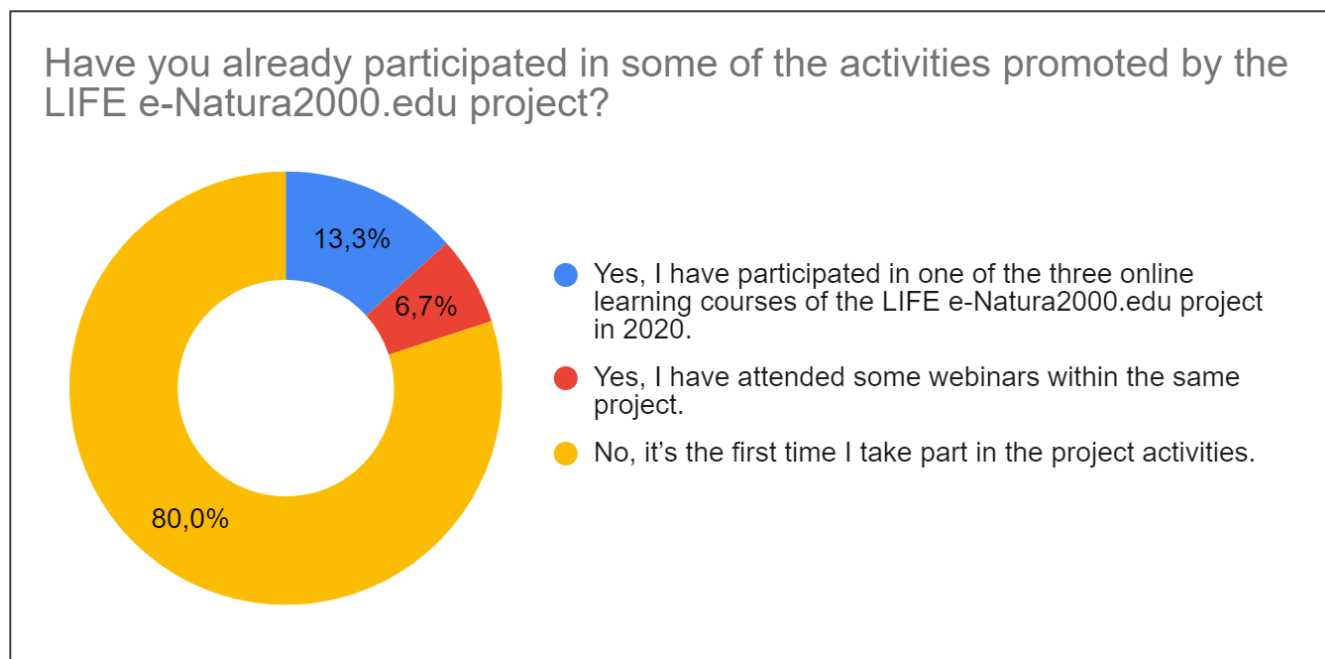


Figure 4.4 - Participation in previous project activities.

4.2.2 Results

Satisfaction

Objectives

The objectives of the Virtual Summer School were reached according to the attendees' self-evaluation. The chart in Figure 4.5 describes that more than 45% of participants claimed to be satisfied (“High” – “Very high” range) with about all the aspects proposed, with the exception of *Increasing my knowledge on the practical array of solutions to specific Natura 2000 management issues* (60% of participants with an equal or less than “Moderate” satisfaction). In general, the most satisfaction is expressed regarding the following objectives:

- Improving my stakeholders-engaging techniques and participation strategies;
- Improving my knowledge about monitoring habitat types and species;
- Improving my communication skills and knowledge about communication approaches.

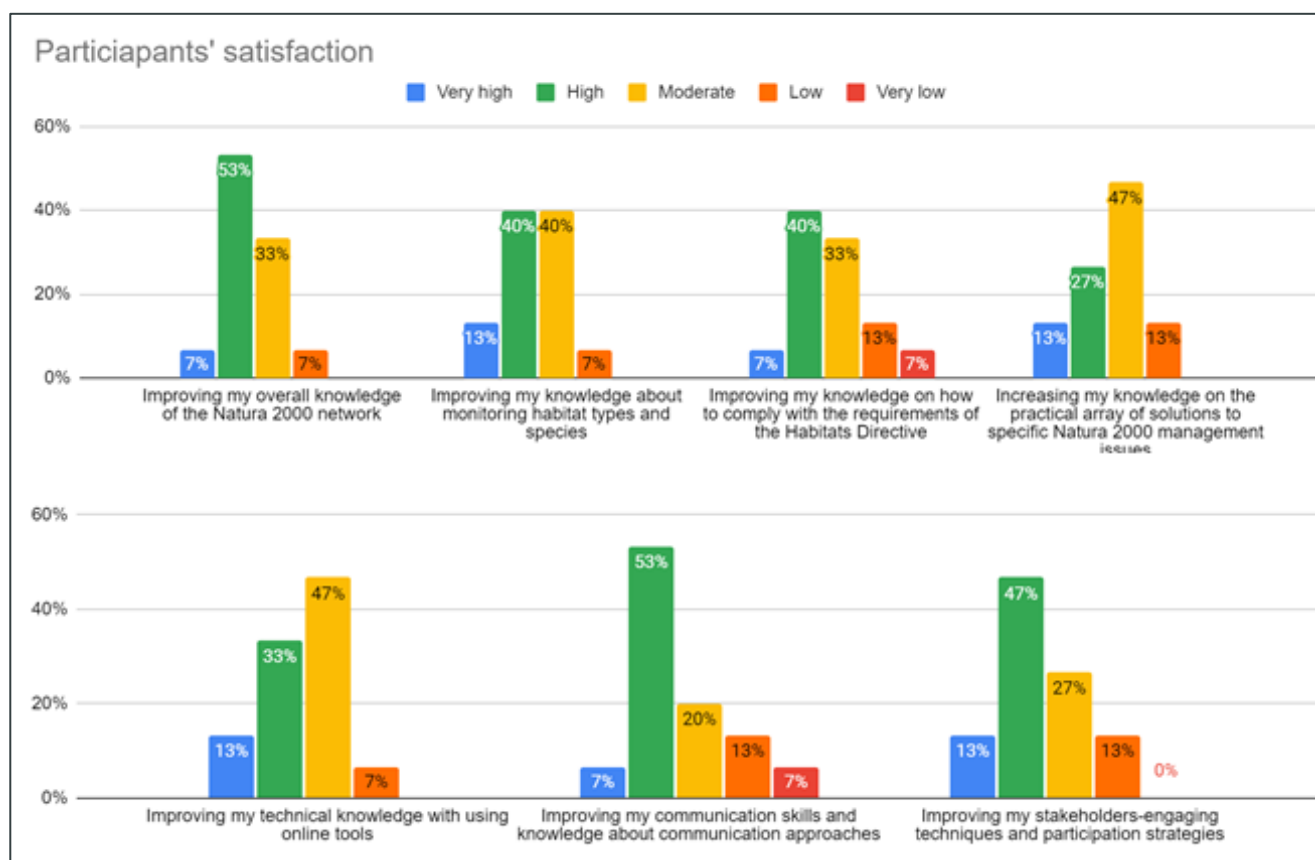


Figure 4.5 - Participants' satisfaction with the project objectives.

Organisation

The organisation provided by the project partners and TESAF as the lead partner for the activity was rated very positively. Participants confirmed an appropriate length of seminars and of the Virtual Summer School, the availability of materials on the Moodle platform, and the concrete character of lessons (Figure 4.6).

As expected, the interaction and involvement rates were lower when compared to the possibilities offered in a face-to-face Summer School, but interaction aspects that could still be improved were raised (see the qualitative feedback on pros/ cons and aspects that could be improved in Table 4.1 and 4.2 below). That said, again, as in the case of the online training courses, the participants drew inspiration from the project activity.

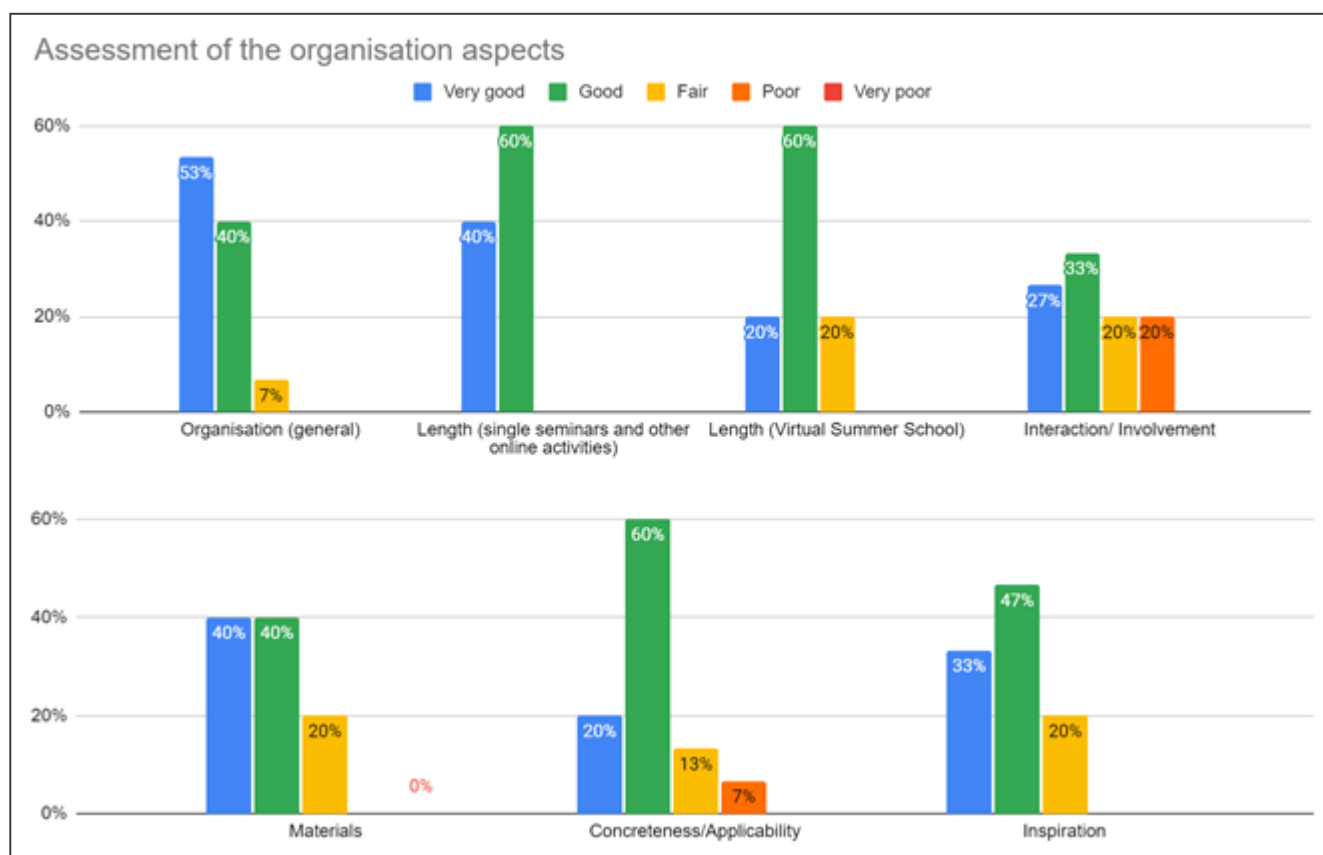


Figure 4.6 - Participants' satisfaction with the organisation aspects.

Learning modality

Participants were asked to express their hypothetical choice between a face-to-face Summer School or an online one, and only 7% responded in favour of a virtual experience (Figure 4.7). In general, face-to-face modality is more appreciated for this kind of event. Despite the participants' preferences and the difficulties connected to the pandemic, the perseverance of the organisational team to move ahead with the Summer School in a virtual form was appreciated by participants (Figure 4.8).

If you had the possibility to choose whether to make a face-to-face Summer School or to participate online:

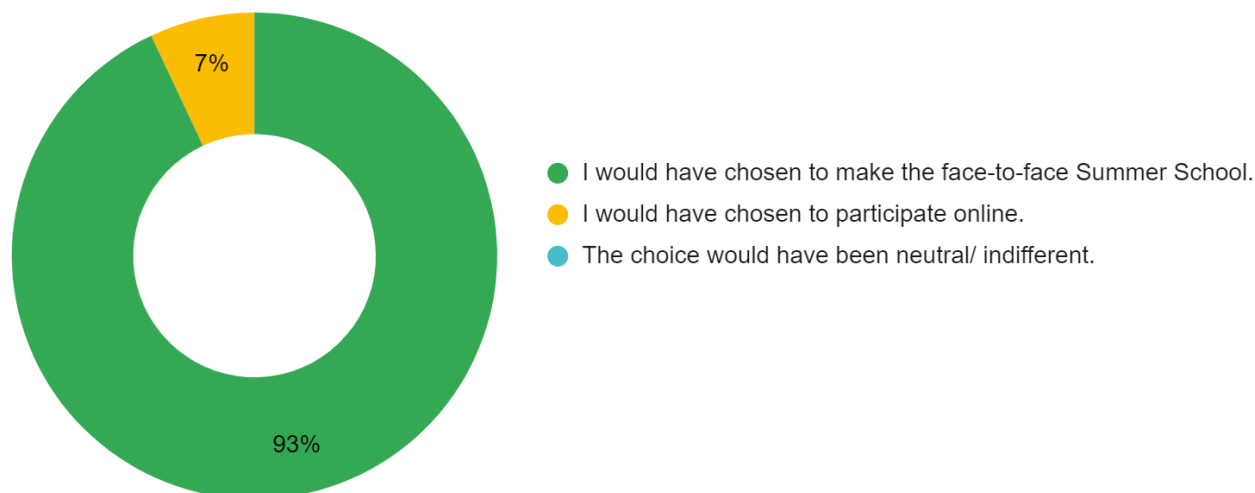


Figure 4.7 - Participants' preference on the Summer School learning modality.

Did you appreciate the perseverance of the organisation team to make anyway the Summer School in this virtual form?

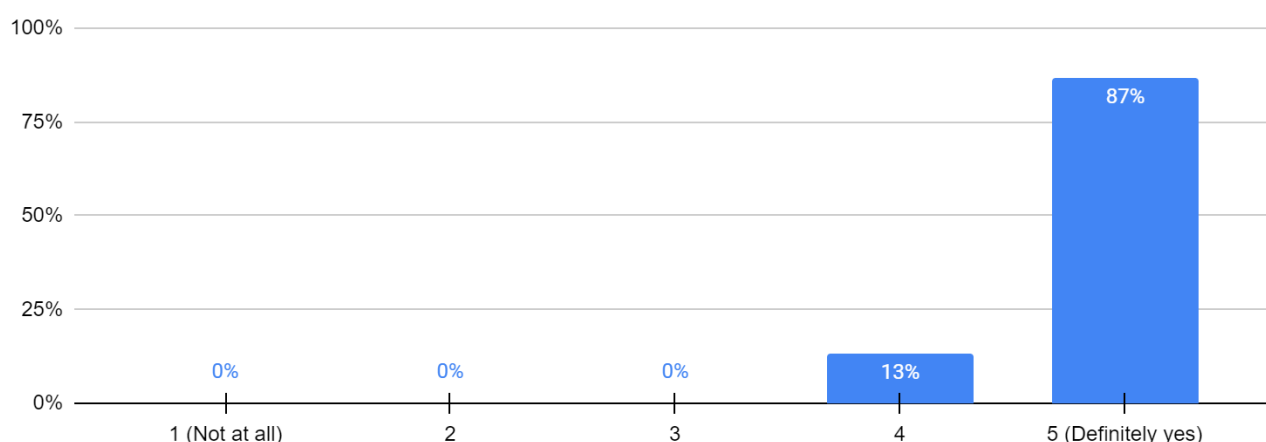


Figure 4.8 - Participants' appreciation of the organisation team perseverance.

Pros and cons/ aspects that could be improved

During the evaluation session held during the last meeting of the Virtual Summer School, participants were asked to highlight what worked best and aspects that could be improved to provide for a better experience in the future. The results from the attendees are summarised in Table 4.1 (Pros) and Table 4.2 (Cons/ Aspects that could be improved).

Organisation and coordination are mentioned to work best, while networking and interaction are seen as a weakness of the overall learning experience. This result is also evident in feedback about the “Virtual” Summer School and is confirmed by the results shown in Figure 4.7. On the other hand, the online modality makes the Summer School more affordable and open to a larger number of attendees.

If the face-to-face modality is certainly preferred by participants and a most effective solution, given the persistence of the COVID-19 situation, additional efforts should be put in place to make the online learning experiences more interactive. The Moodle platform was perceived as a powerful tool due to its functionality, of providing learning materials, also at the end of the sessions, including recorded lessons.

Figure 9 - What worked best in the Virtual Summer School, grouped by macro-categories.

Virtual Summer School – Pros	
Virtual Summer School organisation and coordination	Online modality: more affordable and Summer School available for more people
	All sessions recorded for future references
	Very well organised
	Qualified speakers
	Great balanced programme
Contents of lectures and information provided	Good variety of topics
	Interesting examples of Natura2000 sites
	New approach to communicate
Tools used	Positive feedback on the experience of using Moodle, which let all participants have backup materials and access additional information daily
	Videos were appreciated by the learners
Networking and interaction	The interaction moments were appreciated by the participants

Figure 10 - What did not work so well and/ or to be improved in the Virtual Summer School, grouped by macro-categories.

Virtual Summer School – Aspect that should be improved	
Virtual Summer School organisation and coordination	The Summer School would have been more appreciated if organised face-to-face
	Participants should have the opportunities to signal more issues and problems up front a day before a topic is being discussed
Contents of lectures and information provided	Some lessons were too focused on specific examples rather than methods
Networking and interaction	It was difficult to find participants and speakers contacts
	Promote interaction between the participants
	Let the participants share their own experiences
	More time/space for structured discussions (not general, foresee as a goal)
	Foresee virtual coffee breaks

Clarity

The clarity of topics proposed within the Virtual Summer School is shown in Figure 4.9. The excellent feedback confirms the good preparation of the invited speakers.

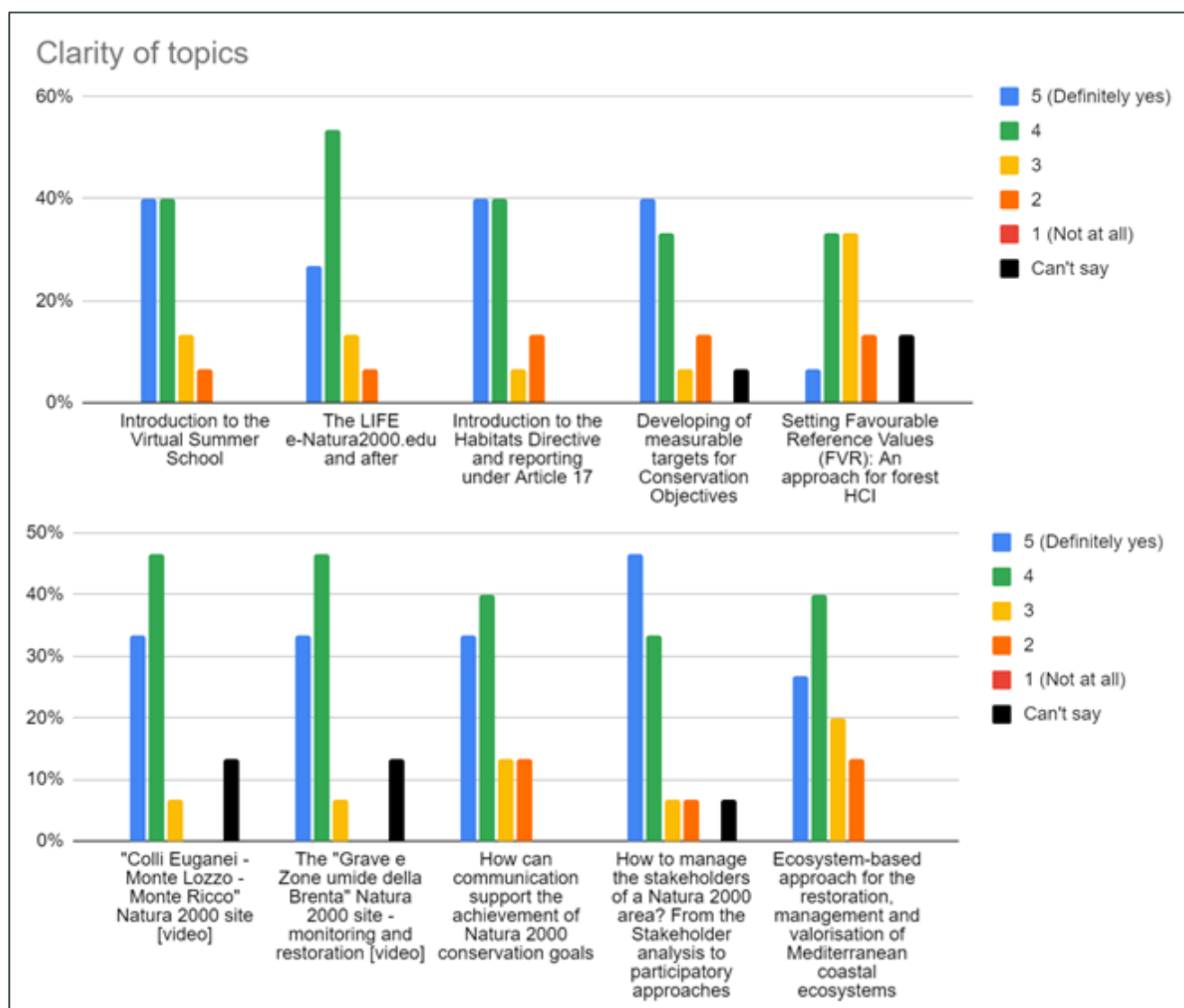


Figure 4.11 - Clarity of topics.

Exhaustiveness

The exhaustiveness of the presentations/ videos proposed within the Virtual Summer School is shown in Figure 4.10. The positive feedback confirms the high qualification of the invited speakers. The increase of the respondents who selected "Can't say" is probably due to the first-time approach of some participants with the proposed topics.

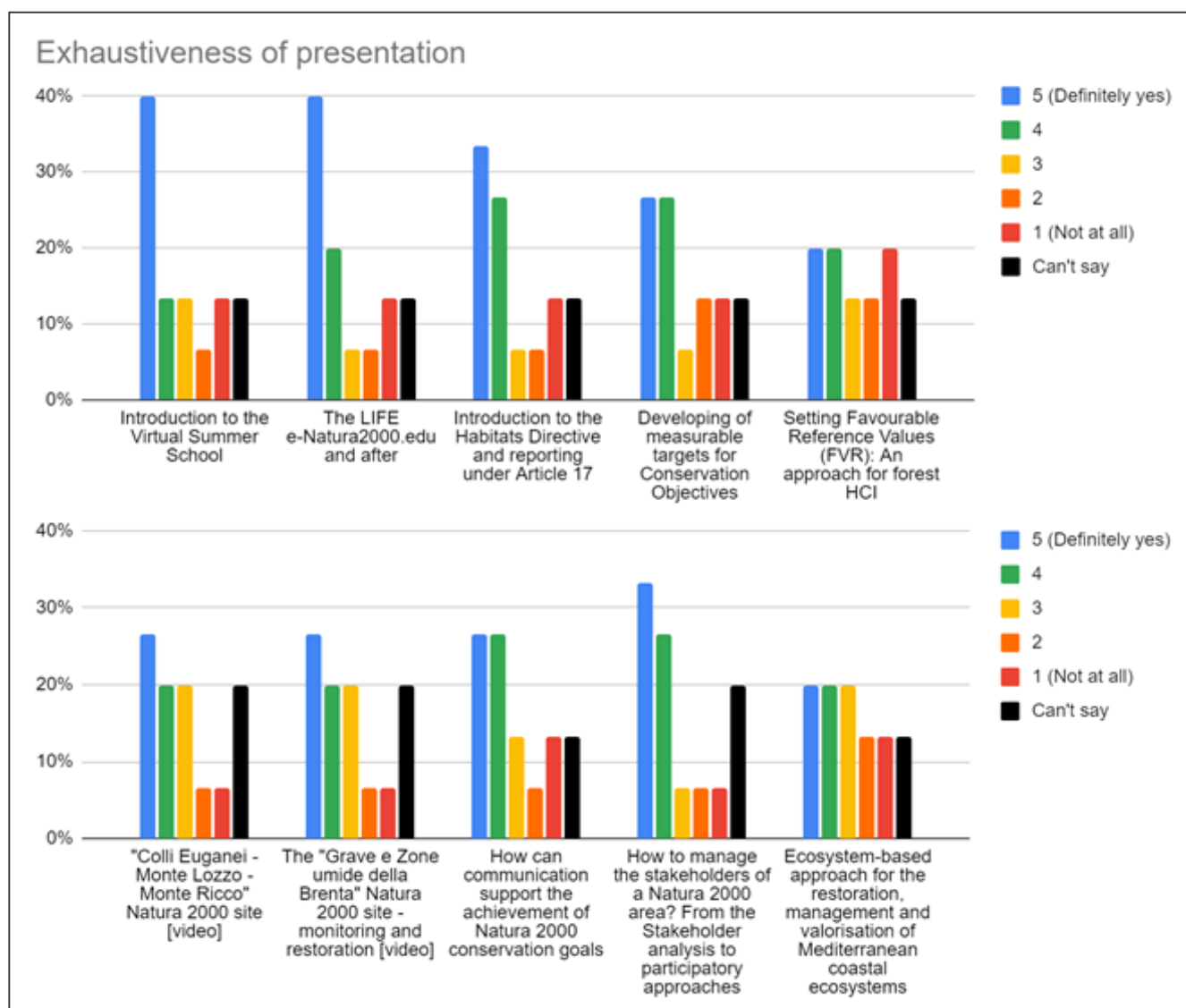


Figure 4.12 - Exhaustiveness of the presentations.

Applicability

Speaking about the project impacts, what is certainly important is the level of applicability of the learning to the work context of the participants. The results in Figure 4.11 show that learning was overall very useful, with peaks reached by the following sessions:

- How can communication support the achievement of Natura 2000 conservation goals;
- How to manage the stakeholders of a Natura 2000 area? From Stakeholder analysis to participatory approaches;
- Introduction to the Habitats Directive and reporting under Article 17;
- Developing measurable targets for Conservation Objectives.

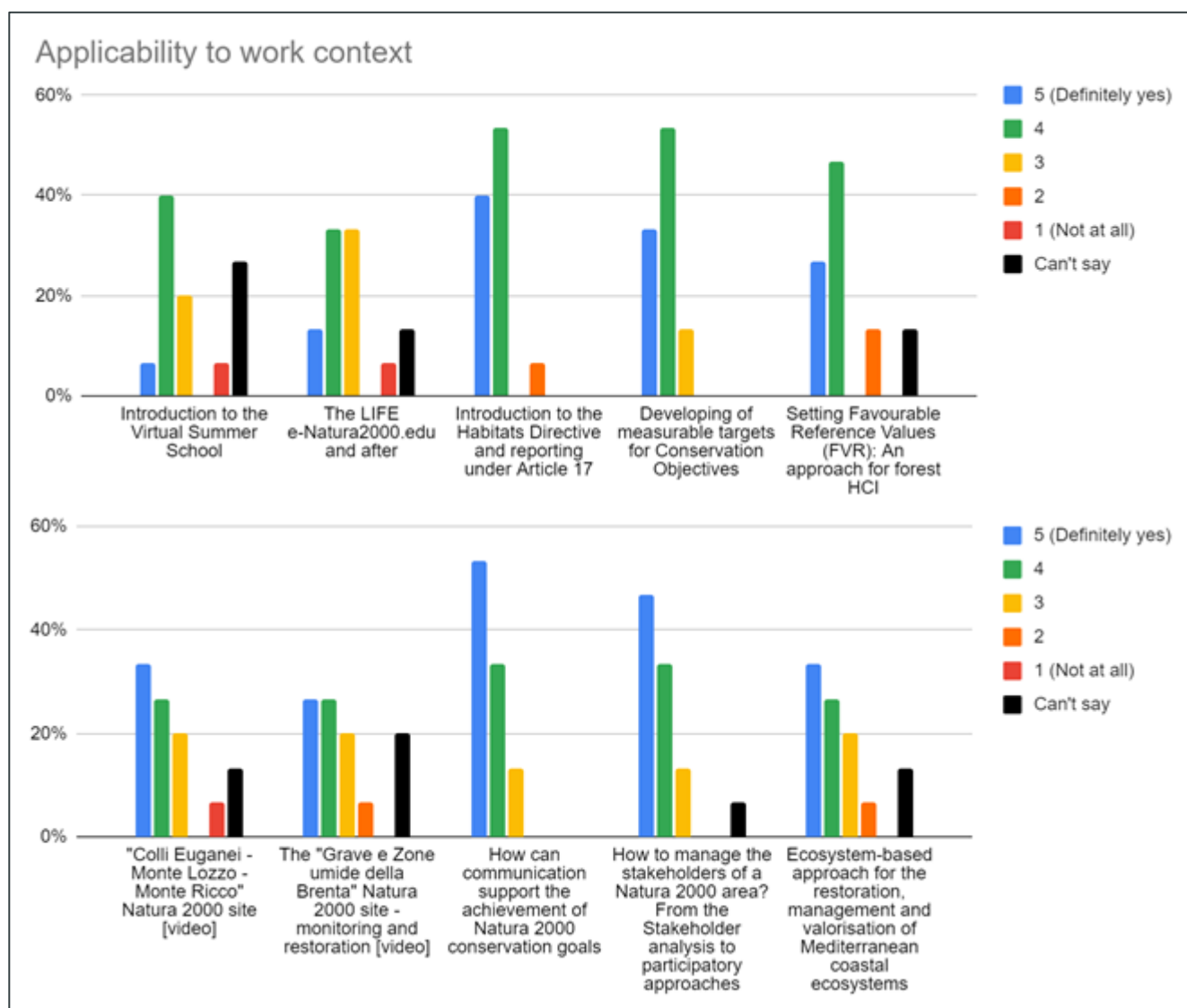


Figure 4.13 - Applicability of learning to participants' work context.

Recommendations

Another indicator of the effectiveness of the learning experience is the willingness to share and encourage colleagues and people working in the same sector to participate. 87% of the respondents said they were willing to recommend their course to others: none would not recommend it, while 13% answered "Maybe" to the question reported in Figure 4.12.

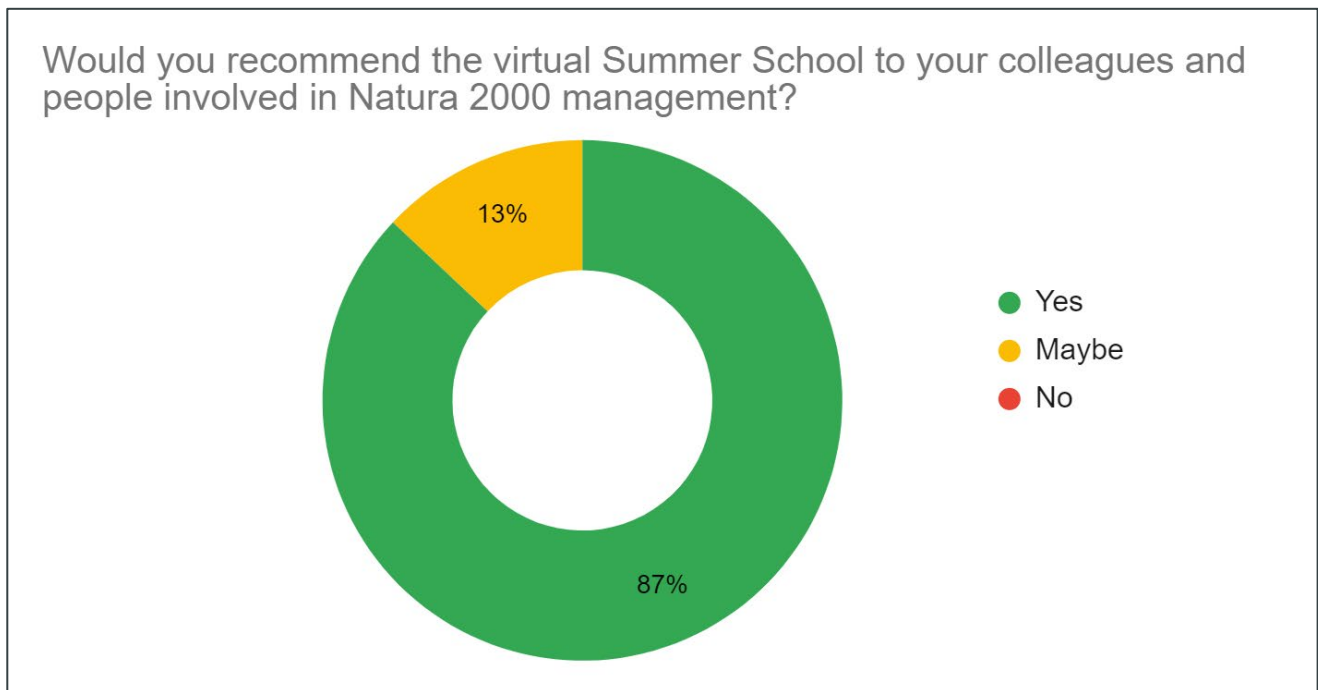


Figure 4.14 - Participants' intention to recommend the Virtual Summer School to people involved in Natura 2000 management.

Willingness to pay

The WTP is structured in two different questions. The first (Figure 4.13) tries to understand the share of participants who would still have participated in the learning experience if it had an attending fee (not specifying how much it is) and the result is 87% overall (counting “Yes” and “Maybe” responses). Only 13% would not have attended the Virtual Summer School in case of an attending fee, a percentage that matched those in Figure 4.12. The second question assesses the value that each participant would give to the learning experience (Figure 4.14). The average value turns out to be about 200 €.

If this Virtual Summer School had an attending fee, would you still have participated?

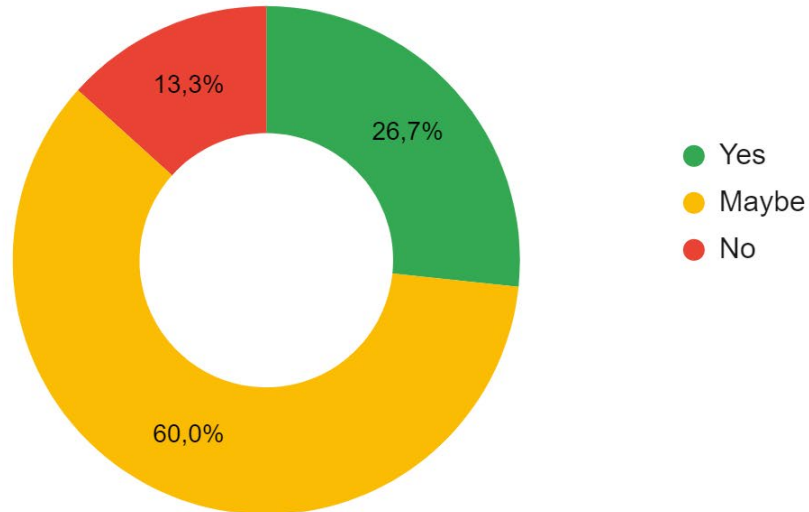


Figure 4.15 - Participants' intention to go beyond a hypothetical attending fee and pay to participate in the Virtual Summer School.

What value would you give to this Virtual Summer School?

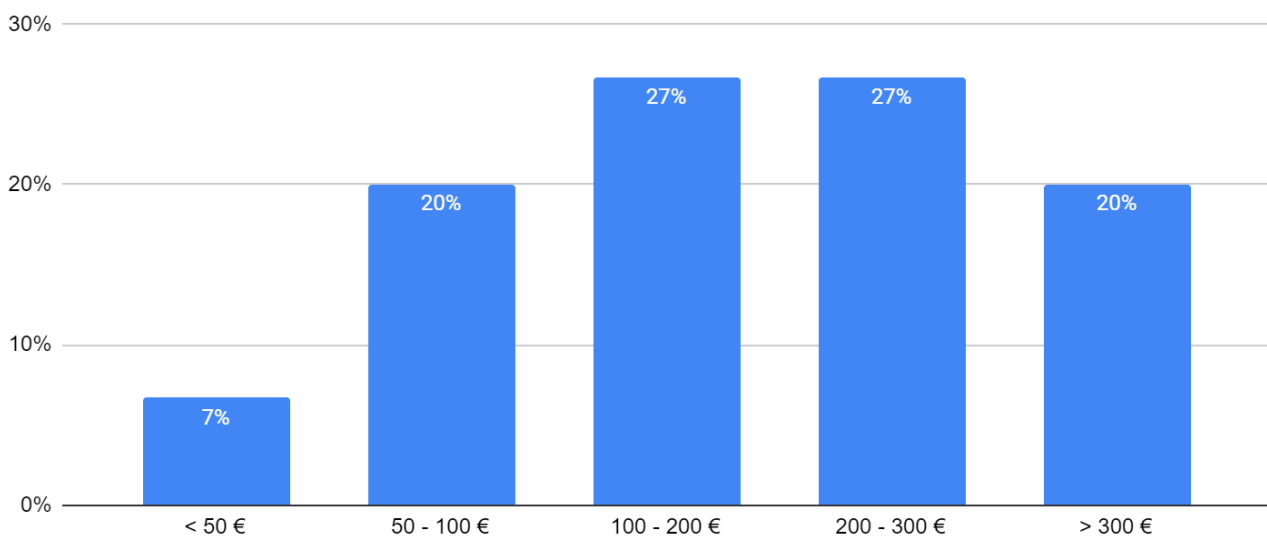


Figure 4.16 - Participants' willingness to pay for the Virtual Summer School.

5 Smartphone App

5.1 Presentation of the eNatura2000 App

The eNatura2000 App⁸ is one of the most powerful learning and networking tools delivered by the LIFE e-Natura2000.edu project. It has been designed to enable Natura 2000 site managers and private landowners to connect, discuss and learn in an innovative way and to provide a continuous flow of relevant news, features and videos about the Natura 2000 network.



Figure 5.1 - Outlook of the eNatura2000 app.

5.2 Evaluation of the experience of using the App

The evaluation of this learning component was complicated due to little feedback from App users. Only 18 responses to the online survey available in the App were completed. The results and feedback are presented below.

5.2.1 Characterisation of the App users

Half of respondents are young (18-35 years old, see Figure 5.2) and most of them come from Romania and Spain: this means that the use of the App has spread mainly in the pilot project areas (Figure 5.3).

⁸ <https://www.europarc.org/news/2020/09/e-natura-2000-app/>

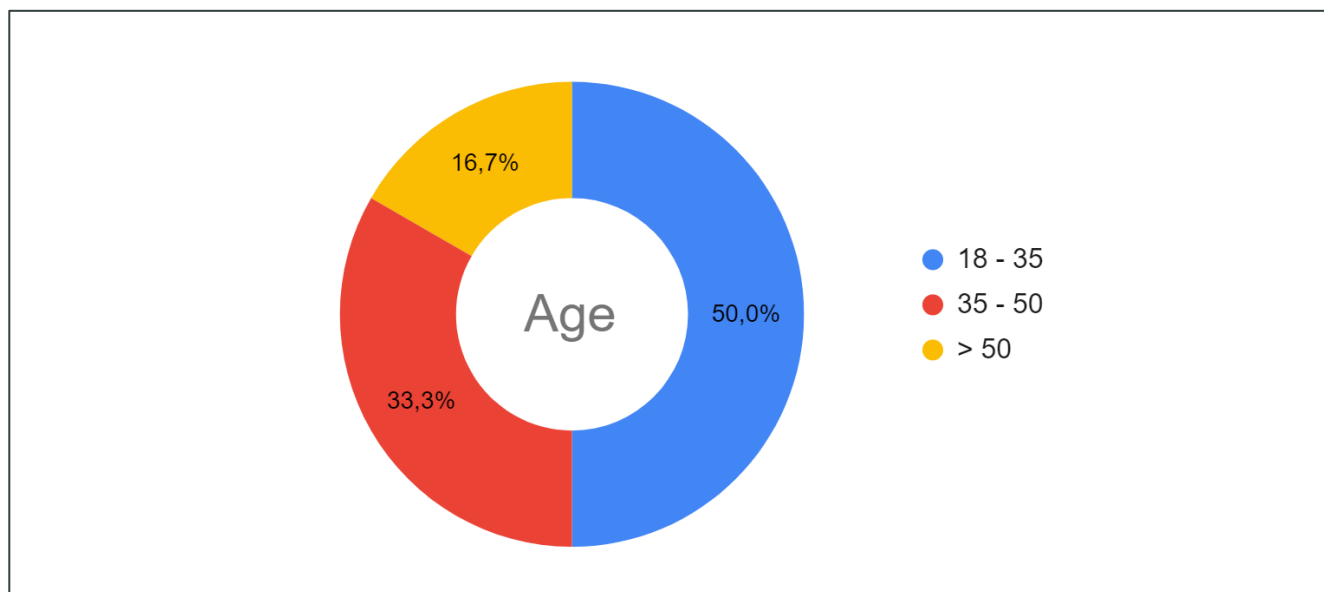


Figure 5.2 - Age of the App users.

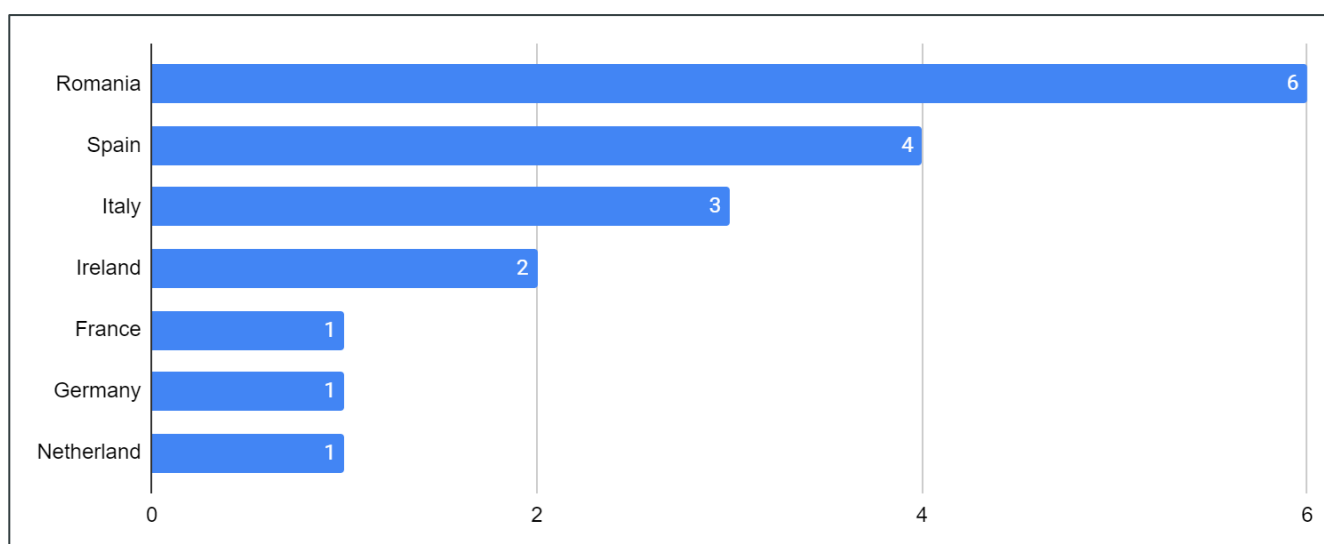


Figure 5.3 - App users from EU Countries.

A large percentage of responding users claim to work as a volunteer (39%) and are students or researchers (56%) involved in Natura 2000 management (Figure 5.4).

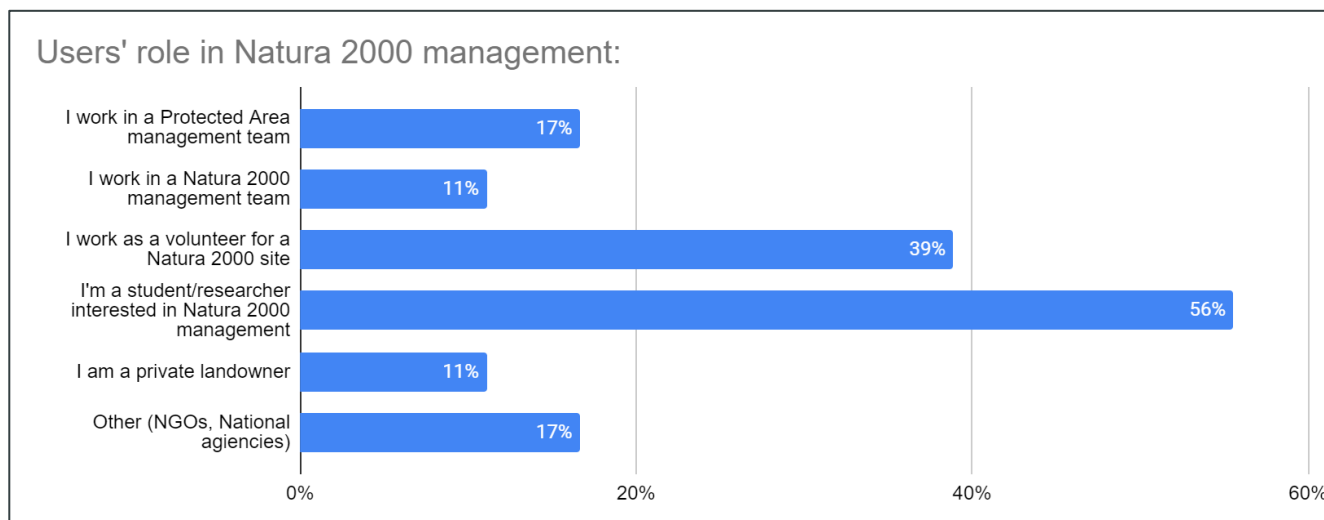


Figure 5.4 - App users' role in Natura 2000 management.

5.2.2 Results

App promotion

Users' first contact with the App were analysed (Figure 5.5) and the results show how project related tools such as partners webpage, newsletter, and social media, are performing well in promoting the App while recommendations through friends and colleagues remain quite low.

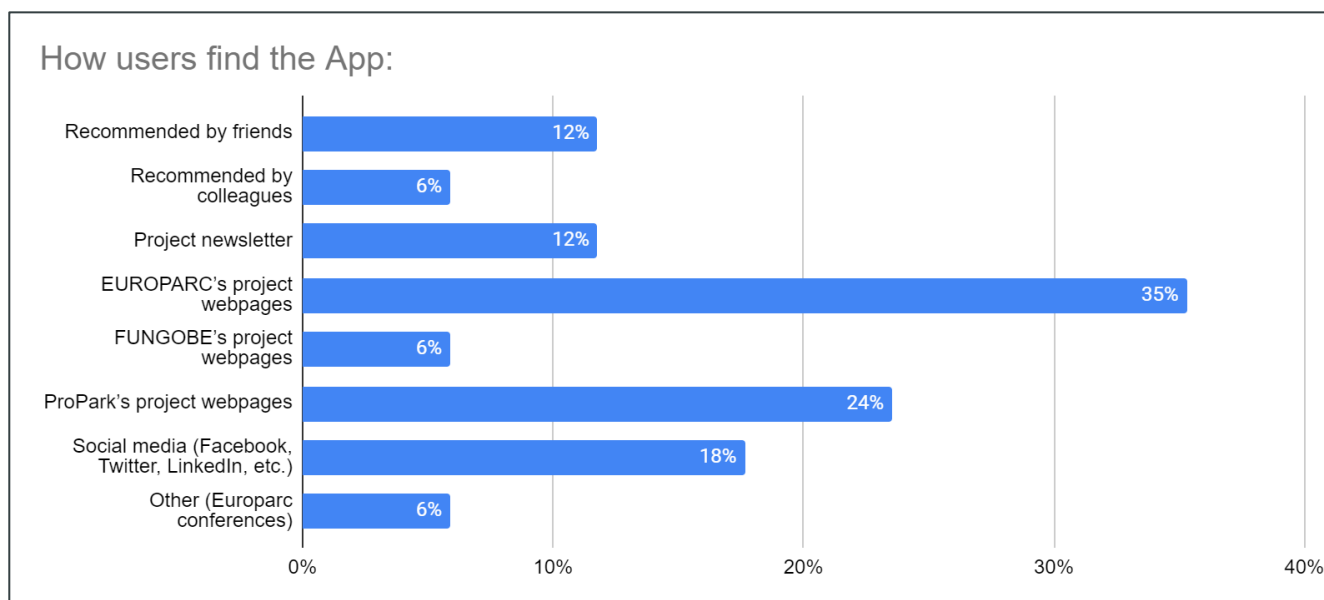


Figure 5.5 - First contact with the App by its users.

Relation with the App

Frequency of use

About a quarter of respondents claim to use the App daily, while more than 90% of respondents use the App at least once a week (see Figure 5.6).

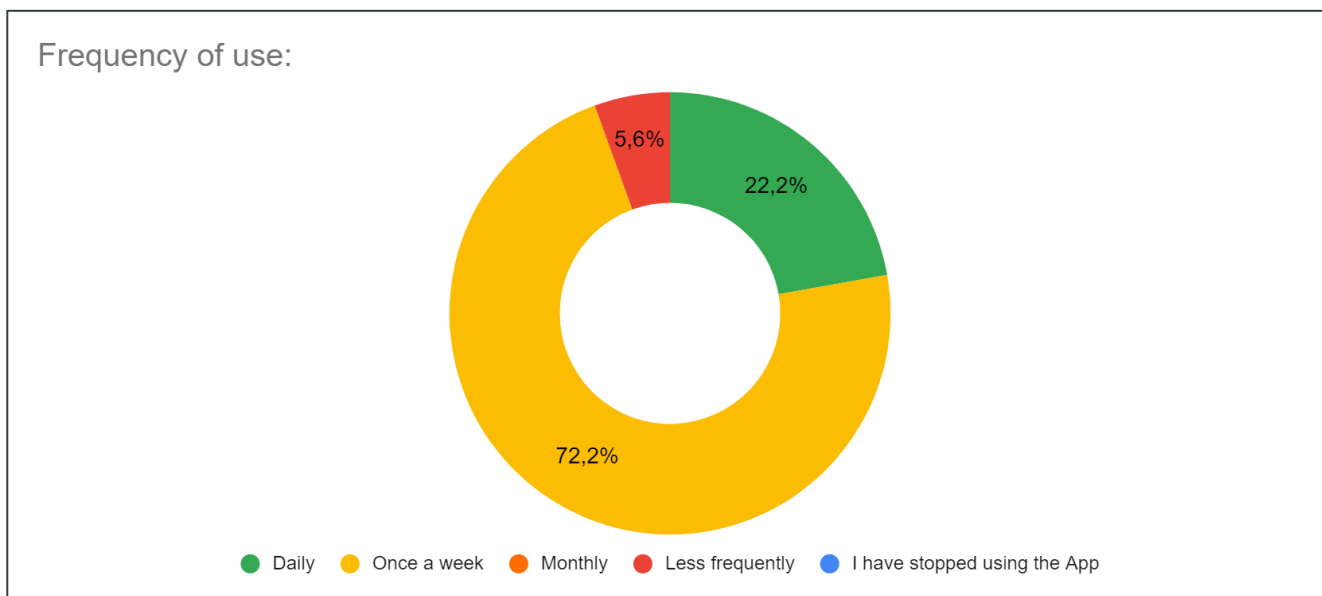


Figure 5.6 - Frequency of use with the App.

Ease of use

Figure 5.7 shows that the architecture of the tool can still see some improvements perhaps, in order to provide a more intuitive user experience.

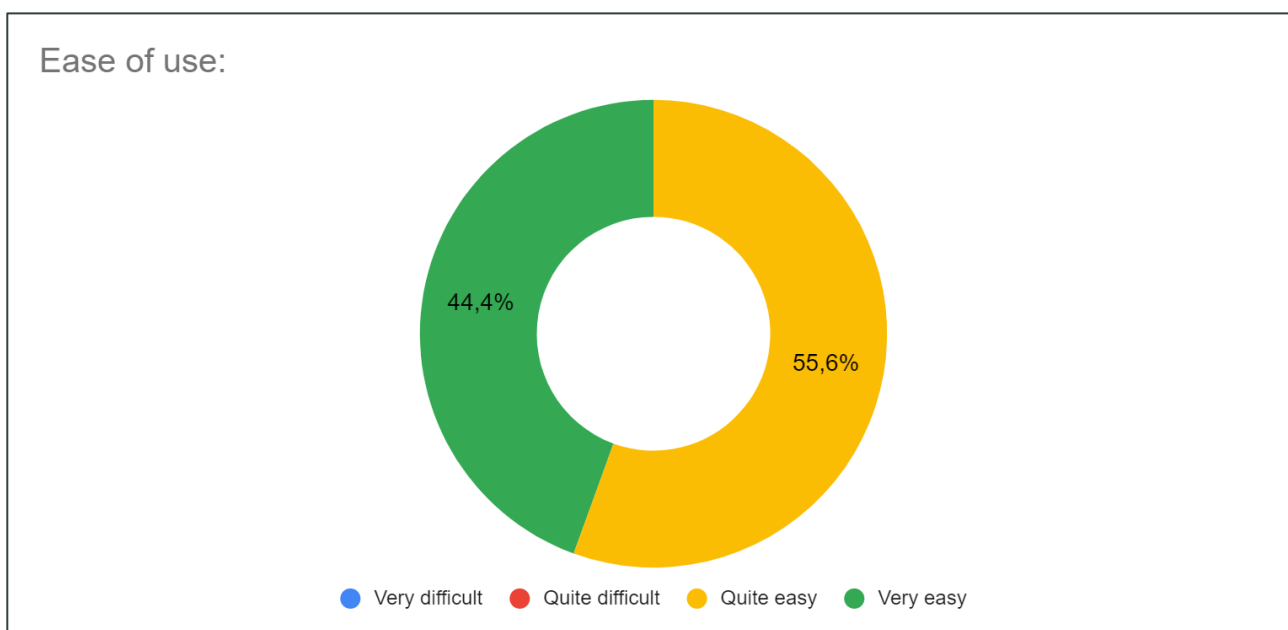


Figure 5.7 - Ease of use with the App.

Usefulness

Users were asked about the usefulness of the App' contents (Figure 5.8): none of the respondents are dissatisfied with the contents of the App and about 40% of respondents consider the App contents to be "Very useful".

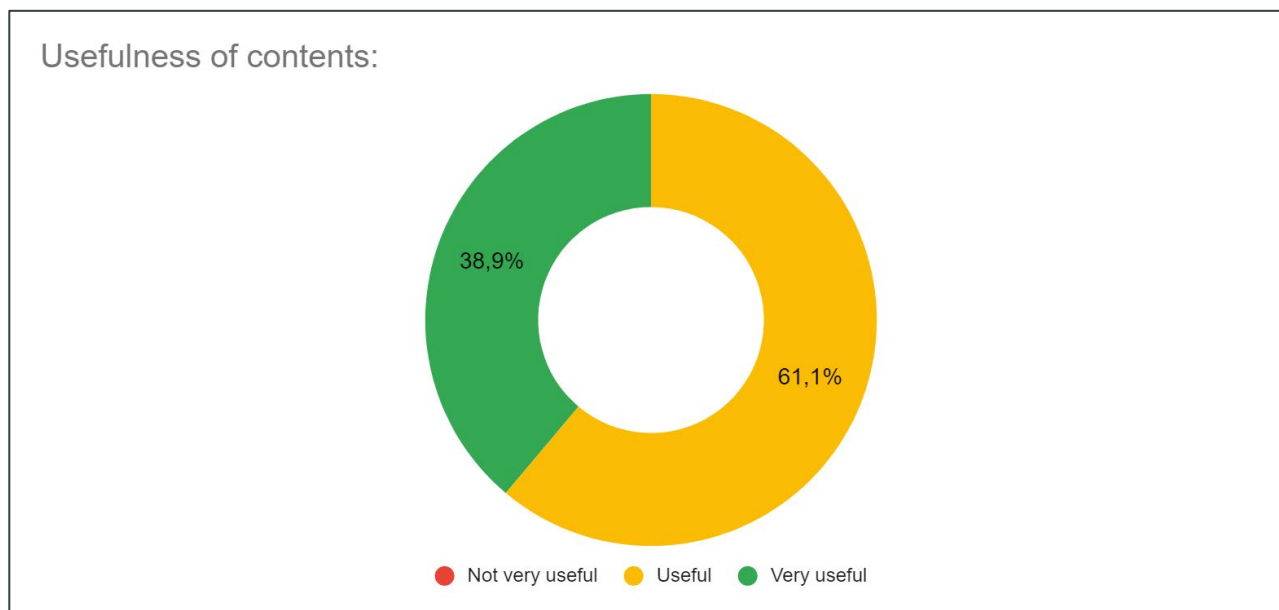


Figure 5.8 - Usefulness of the App's contents.

Reasons for using the App

Responses to the question “Why do you use the App?” confirm the usefulness of the contents (find contents and inspiration is the main reason with a share of 94%). Many users use the App for educational purposes (83% of them want to improve their knowledge about Natura 2000) and for the innovative function of connecting peers (67%).

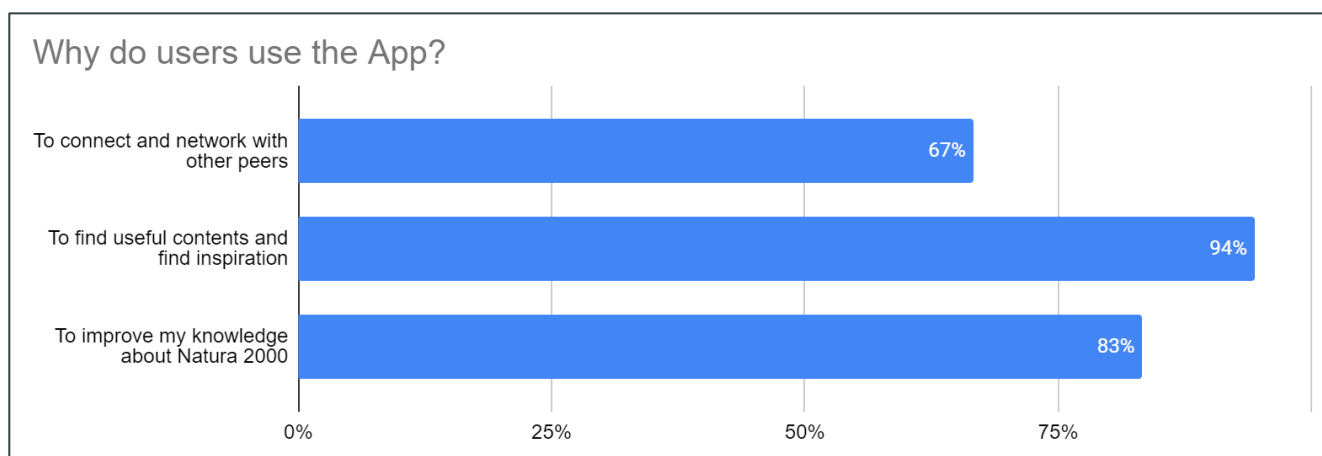


Figure 5.9 - Reasons why users use the App.

Aspects that should be improved

Contents

Suggestions for improvements include few and specific topics, while the ideas to improve the App contents are in line with the reasons why respondents use the App: to find inspiration and useful content and to learn about Natura 2000 management (Table 5.1).

Figure 10 - Aspects to be improved (App contents).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION TOPICS	ADDITIONAL CONTENTS
Legislation updates	Project reports
Sustainable tourism	Webinars and educational tools
Flora and fauna management	Visitor guidance
Infrastructure management (e.g., photovoltaic solar plants, wind power plants, quarries, intensive agriculture)	Natura 2000 site management experiences
	Methodologies of evaluation (<i>not specified what</i>)
	Job offers

Functions

As indicated in Table 5.2, the App is perceived as a networking tool: new functionalities can help in developing its potential, such as new searching tool, the possibility to create groups, the chat and the possibility to link to dedicated research publications.

Figure 11 - Aspects to be improved (App functions).

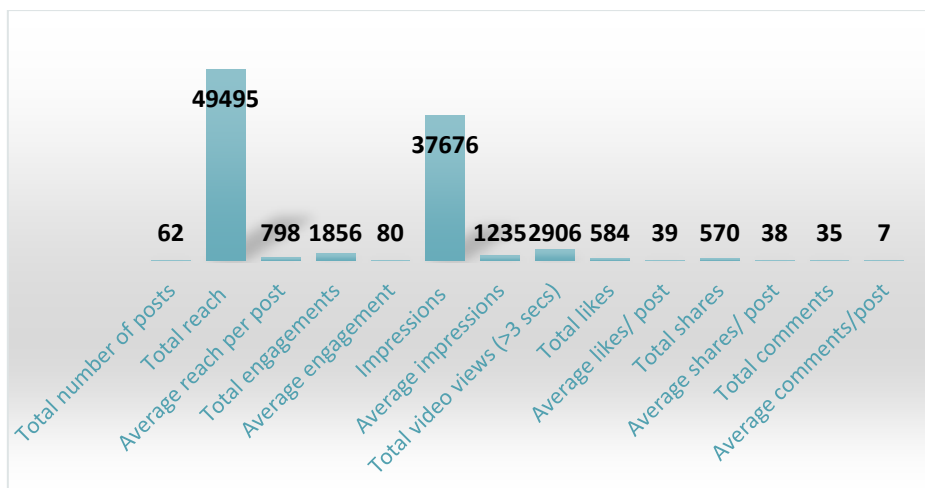
NEW FUNCTIONS/ IDEAS	OTHER COMMENTS
Searching tool to connect with colleagues and peers with a filter by job (role within Natura 2000 management)	Some features still maintained from the testing phase give the feeling that it is not yet fully functional.
The possibility to create small working groups	
A space to post and share news about users' projects	
A chat function in the App	
A section dedicated to scientific papers and other publications	

6 Communication tools

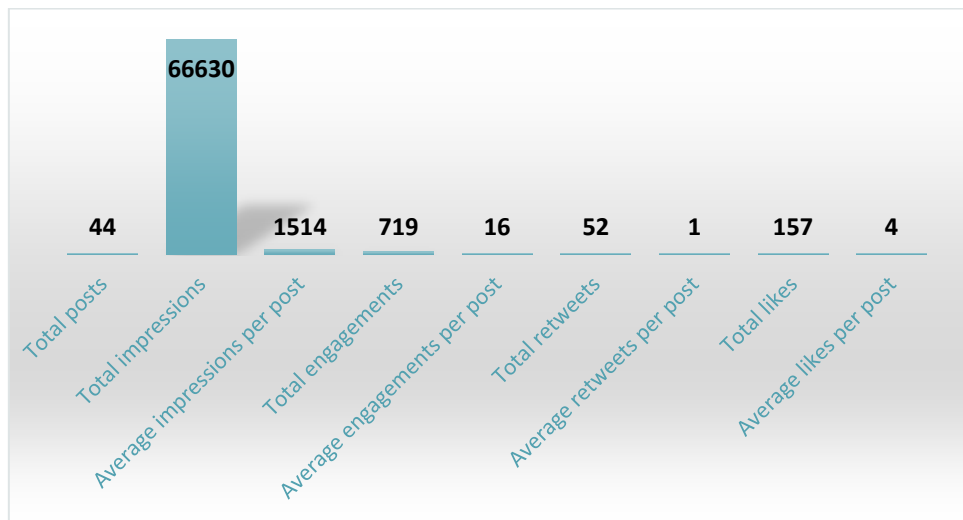
The effectiveness of other communication components of the project, which includes the project webpages, Twitter and Facebook posts, and their interaction with the online users were monitored during the project using Google analytics data from 1 April 2018 to 31 July 2021.

Figure 12 - Facebook, Twitter and web statistics concerning the project.

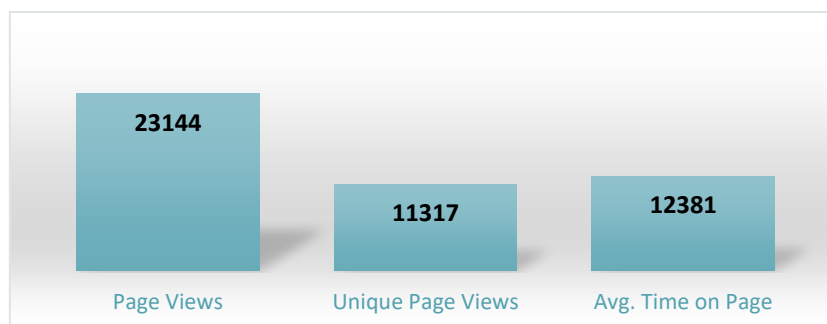
Facebook stats



Twitter stats



Web stats



The results are broken down below into the web pages concerning the project activity (Table 6.2).

Figure 13 - List of the web pages related to the project and main associated statistics.

Page title	Page link (https://www.europarc.org)	Page Views	Unique Page Views	Avg. Time on Page (sec)
LIFE e-Natura2000.edu – Building capacity through innovative training tools	/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/	1,337	1,021	134.13
Spring School: Natura 2000 in Practice	/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/spring-school/	1,026	742	118.79
Introducing our Natura 2000 managers	/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/course-competent-inclusive-communication/introducing-our-natura2000-managers/	146	122	201.06
Competencies for management of Natura 2000 – Report	/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/competencies-for-management-of-natura-2000-report/	140	95	110.00
Course I: Applied conservation biology	/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/course-i-applied-conservation-biology/	111	94	67.50
Course III: Competent Inclusive Communication	/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/course-competent-inclusive-communication/	100	82	84.94
Course II: Building alliances for Natura 2000 management	/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/course-ii-life-edu/	74	63	84.95
News & Articles	/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/news-articles/	37	28	45.93
Technical meetings	/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/life-edu-technical-meetings/	31	29	38.26
Partnerships: Connecting to other projects	/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/partnerships-life-edu/	17	16	114.00
The eNatura2000 App: connect, discuss and learn	/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/the-enatura2000-app-connect-discuss-and-learn/	8	7	13.33
Kullaberg Nature Reserve: interview with Elena Bazhenova	/tools-and-training/life-e-natura2000-edu/news-articles/kullaberg-nature-reserve/	26	24	80.00
Page title	Page link (http://www.fungobe.org)	Page Views	Unique Page Views	Avg. Time on Page (sec)
-	(permanent App added in the homepage)	7,428	5,627	57.00
LIFE e-Natura2000.edu	life-e-natura2000edu/	306	257	124.00

7 Conclusions & recommendations

The LIFE preparatory project “LIFE e-Natura2000.edu - Supporting e-learning and capacity building for Natura 2000 managers”, was completed in 2021 and **explored the potential of building new approaches and learning methods to improve knowledge and build capacity amongst people with responsibilities in Natura 2000 management in both public and private lands.** The project aimed to combine a **blended learning approach** and it envisioned the use of a set of **different types of learning tools and experiences, both in-presence and online, for Natura 2000 managers.**

The core part of the LIFE e-Natura2000.edu project coincided with a challenging historical period: just as the online courses were starting, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ensuing lockdown restrictions, spread across Europe and the world. The restrictions meant that some in-presence activities, such as workshops and the Summer School, were postponed and rescheduled, with the format modified accordingly. However, the difficulties encountered in implementing the planned activities in the different countries did not have major repercussions on the project impacts and results. Participation was only in some cases disrupted, but was overall quite consistent, feedback was overall positive (far greater than comments related to the aspects that needed to be improved) and the contents delivered were considered very useful. In addition, all the learning components and tools were deemed suitable for recommendation to other users and potential future participants.

All partners identified the **main impacts of the project** as follows – the project has:

- **Identified the specific competencies required for the effective management of Natura 2000 sites;**
- **Created and provided a very practical online training needs assessment tool for Natura 2000 managers;**
- **Demonstrated the need for and value of competence-based learning opportunities for Natura 2000 professionals through innovative learning methods and formats;**
- **Developed and tested new tools and diverse approaches for online learning that hold significant potential to improve and increase capacity building opportunities in future.**

Other important impacts cited by the partners are that the project LIFE.edu has:

- Created momentum for and demonstrated the **value of a larger scale follow-up project;**
- **Strengthened the links between academic and professional Natura 2000 managers;**
- **Extended partners’ networks** (amongst LIFE e-Natura2000.edu partners and with project participants);
- **Increased knowledge about Natura 2000 and its management challenges** among all stakeholders (partners, participants, managers, landowners and project sponsors).

The rigorous evaluation activities carried out during the project also was adapted to the challenges imposed by the pandemic: however, all evaluation tasks were completed within the project period. The evaluation was also adjusted to include questions that addressed the impacts of COVID-19 on the learners’ participation planning.

Based on the results of the evaluation activities and the feedback provided by partners and participants, we can draw out some **key points regarding the online learning courses** (as the core activity of the project) and the evaluation process:

1. Each course was calibrated to its own context, including differences in type of participants and topics: while this ensured that the contents were appropriate to the target and to the context of the countries involved, it was not possible to carry out a homogeneous evaluation on the learning experience and the use of the tools, as initially foreseen. For this reason, although the aggregate results are presented under the label “TOT”, especially regarding the online learning courses (in Chapters 2 and 3), sometimes those numbers do not convey the impacts of the project as accurately as the analysis of each individual course could. In the end, while a standardised course can be more widely available and possibly of interest to an international audience, **the most important aspect of a project of this type is for the learning material to be tailored to the needs of the participants and to the context in which they operate.**
2. Overall, one of the most important impacts of the project is evidenced by the fact that, **six months after the end of the courses, 96% (almost all) of participants of the online courses had started to apply the learning tools (or would soon) to their work context.**
3. Another important result is that about half of respondents who benefited from the learning experiences, stated that **the experience was a source of inspiration for new activities in their daily work.** This highlights the inspirational character of the project and has important implications for the need for continuing education and professional support throughout Natura 2000 managers’ careers.
4. One of the main impacts of **the COVID-19 pandemic** is that the face-to-face workshops (two out of three) were not carried out as planned: this unfortunately **lowered opportunities for informal contact and networking with other Natura 2000 managers** at the interregional/international level. In addition, there was a negative impact on the participants’ participation while working from home.
5. However, the COVID-19 pandemic also highlights how **risks are often accompanied by opportunities:** the courses were designed to be delivered primarily online before the pandemic started and this core aspect helped to overcome most difficulties. The proliferation of online meetings, webinars, and other learning and communication techniques during the pandemic endowed the project an additional and highly significant pilot function and the courses worked very well in changing participants’ attitudes to use of the online tools. **The pandemic allowed people to see the benefits of accessing new structured content online.** Some of these benefits include:
 - Online tools can **be recorded and are available over a longer period of time** (if proper space is allocated and maintained, availability can also last over several years);
 - If funding is ensured, the **contents of the tool can also evolve and be kept up to date;**

- Online tools allow for **greater participation**, also by participants who may not be able to take time off for travel;
 - They **decrease time spent away from home/work** and costs and environmental impacts associated with travel;
 - They can be very useful as we near a future in which more attention needs to be paid to the **impacts of travel on the climate**.
6. A thorough continuous evaluation, lasting over a year, was carried out with different target groups and using different types of questionnaires. This process enabled detailed analysis of the expectations (ex-ante) and the levels of satisfaction (ex-post) with the tools and learning approaches planned. In addition, by following the different learning phases, it was possible to provide a precise evaluation of the project progress, both in terms of qualitative and quantitative feedback. Finally, the evaluation steps were all carried out despite the COVID-19 emergency using online tools. It is likely that 'in-time' monitoring (as was done for the evaluation of the Virtual Summer School) would have yielded higher responses, but the responses received were in any case adequate given the large number of evaluation activities carried out.

Finally, the evaluation process for the project was quite substantial and provided an opportunity to improve the learning tools. **Comments specific to the project's tools highlighted the following:**

7. **The potential of the online Training Needs Assessment for Natura 2000 managers** was well recognised.
8. The TNA tool **could be more effective** if it also provided suggestions on how to fill educational gaps, for example by sending alerts about training opportunities.
9. **The Moodle platform also proved to be a useful tool** (50% of participants to the online courses marked it as the most helpful tool in supporting the learning experience, and it also received positive feedback from the Virtual Summer School learners). Participants appreciated access to backup materials and additional information on a daily basis. However, the platform could be more user-friendly, improving user experience with the tool.
10. Concerning webinars and live online sessions, these were often carried without including moments to interact and share experiences: a gap that could be addressed by **building in more interactive (sub-) group-work sessions**, especially if supported by facilitation to improve learning experiences.

Blended learning courses are going to be part of the future of delivering continuing education and professional learning courses, with a prominent role played by online learning tools. The LIFE e-Natura2000.edu spearheaded a novel and innovative approach to deliver relevant content to professionals working in the environmental and protected areas management field and the results of this work should be carried forward, with appropriate tools that can help address the distance factor and the reduced opportunities for networking.

These key points allow us to put forward the following **recommendations**:

1. **Blended learning courses should provide opportunities for continuing professional development programmes tailored to the specific needs and operating contexts of diverse nature managers**, as successfully piloted with the LIFE.edu project.
2. As piloted in the LIFE e-Natura2000.edu project, **online courses need to be designed with an international component in mind as well as with an awareness of country-specific targeted needs**. This ensures that scaling up is possible at the international level, and that at the local level there is backing for searching for additional resources.
3. **Courses should include a post six-month evaluation phase** in order to assess satisfaction with the tools and experiences, applicability of the course to the work environment and support for the development of new ideas and activities. This process will be essential if the project is scaled up and developed further in the future.
4. While informal interaction is more difficult in online courses, there are online tools such as “virtual cafes”, dedicated space for participatory activities or even “funny” competitions, that can be easily included in the delivery of the courses and **support the creation of formal and informal connections, chat groups and simply greater empathy among course participants**.

To reduce the costs of evaluation, some approaches could be adopted:

- **Specific evaluation tools (online surveys) could be made available for future projects**, for example through the use of large-scale platforms available on the EU LIFE website;
- **Space for evaluation should be created during classes, to create a participatory evaluation moment**. This would reduce the time taken to do the evaluation, and it would also help to identify the extent to which there is agreement or disagreement about specific points. This approach requires facilitation capacity but can also benefit from an open discussion;
- The online tools should have a space that ensures feedback from the users on a continuous basis.

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