

The Greek context

**Conceptualizing instructor's
competency in outdoor sports**

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Instructor competency in outdoor sports is not a job profile well defined in the Greek context.

Although there has been a rapid expansion of literature specially regarding the US and the UK contexts, about the qualities, competencies, and skills that can or should be possessed by instructors of outdoor sports, this sector is not yet developed in Greece.

General profile description I

- Outdoor Activities Instructors lead and supervise groups and individuals in the outdoors, ensuring their safety and teaching skills and techniques relevant to the particular activity being undertaken.
- Work with novices or more experienced clients/and young people or adults including groups with special needs
- Instructors are employed by private companies as well as charities, local education authorities and other organisations.
- The emphasis may be on recreation, self-development or teaching activity-specific skills.

General profile description II

- An Outdoor Activities Instructor might deliver short sessions or be responsible for a group on longer trips/expeditions.
- The role also extends beyond the activity itself – in residential centres instructors are likely to be involved with general housekeeping duties and are responsible for all aspects of the welfare of the group.

Responsibilities I

- Leading/instructing individuals or groups on a particular activity (*e.g. hillwalking, mountain biking, caving*)
- Briefing participants about safety and logistics
- Designing outdoor activity programmes and products for different groups
- Designing learning resources for groups
- Delivering training sessions or lessons in the outdoors and/or in a classroom environment
- Driving groups and equipment to the activity site (*often involving a minibus and trailer*)

Responsibilities II

- Complying with health and safety legislation also according to in-house procedures
- Carrying out and updating risk assessments
- Recording accidents/incidents and writing incident reports
- Cleaning, maintaining and preparing equipment (*e.g. climbing ropes, canoes*)
- Assisting with catering and housekeeping duties
- Liaising with other outdoor users and organisations regarding local environmental conditions and site-specific issues (*e.g. safety issues caused by rockfall*)

Describing skills and competences

Methodology

We could not base our desktop research on existing knowledge and already developed profiles for the specific sector we chose to run a twofold research:

- Look for similar or like-similar instructors profiles
- Research advertisement for job placements in the relative sector and gather the skills that the employers in the industry were looking for and placing an advertisement for.

Verify research outcomes

We discussed the outcomes with experts in the area, employers as well as employees of relative recreation organizations in order to pilot the conclusions we reached via the two previous means (*similar profiles and job advertisements*)

Research Findings

Sports instructors in general, have used the metaphor of “*hard*” and “*soft*” skills to understand their practice:

- hard skills representing technical competencies,
- soft skills representing interpersonal competencies.

In the light of current research and in the face of increasingly complex varieties of outdoor sports practice, the categorization of skills into “hard” or “soft” may obscure important aspects of experiential learning and limit the development of an effective pedagogy for outdoor sports

Research Findings (hard skills)

Typical examples of the hard category skills and competencies:

- Preparing and using equipment of different types.
- Basic outdoor movements and outdoor sport specific movements
- Basic and specific outdoor techniques (*orientation, weather prediction, river/sea reading etc*)

Research Findings (soft skills)

Basic examples of soft-skills are:

- interpersonal and communication skills
- empathy, understanding
- tender-minding, warm personality
- creative/imaginative

but also

- Experiential learning knowledge/guide participants to discovery learning
- Provoking and managing optimal psychological challenges and experiences in participants.
- Valid, systematic and cognitive structure of the concepts and principles of the discipline the instructor is trying to teach

Research Findings (market needs)

- Via a deeper look into the skills the specific job market required from its potential staff we came across a new set of soft skills, such as environment awareness (the **leave-no-trace** consideration) as well as health and safety pre-requisitions.
- The instructor is responsible for the **physical, psychological and social well-being of participants**, and for **arranging a series of experiences** which is consistent with operating organisations' methods and which gives participants maximal chance of achieving the program goals and personal goals.

Conclusions

In order to develop:

- an understanding of learning principles and
- to be able to facilitate discovery learning in outdoor participants

not only a well-conducted staff selection process is required but also the delivery of sophisticated training and appropriately guided experience.

This is the primary training responsibility for an outdoor sports organization.

However, this is a difficult task in the current environment where outdoor sports seem in most countries to be moving towards official qualification of only hard-skill competencies for instructors.

Conclusions

On the promising side, in fields such as using outdoor sports for therapy of certain groups (*e.g. horse riding for children with special abilities, sailing for people with movement problems etc*), sports instructors:

- ✓ use techniques from counselling, social work, and clinical psychology,
- ✓ are further developing knowledge about effective facilitation techniques and
- ✓ Discuss about the necessity of having formal recognition for such skills.

Knowledge Competences and Skills based on the EQF model

Knowledge

The learning outcomes relevant to Level 3 are knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study

- Valid, systematic and cognitive structure of the concepts and principles of the discipline the instructor is trying to teach
- Experiential learning knowledge/guide participants to discovery learning
- Interpersonal and communication skills
- Coaching and Group coaching
- Environment awareness
- Health and Safety

Knowledge Competences and Skills based on the EQF model

Competences	Skills
1.1 Preparing and using equipment of different types.	<p>a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Selection of equipment according to the needs (Group needs, weather needs etc)- Activity Specific Check of Condition of Equipment- Maintenance and Repair
1.2 Basic outdoor movements and outdoor sport specific movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Basic movements for each activity proceeding from general to specific (As an

Knowledge Competences and Skills based on the EQF model

Competences <i>take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems</i>	Skills <i>a range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information</i>
1.4 Provoking and managing optimal psychological challenges and experiences in participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tender-minding, warm personality - Creative/imaginative - Empathy, understanding
1.5 Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equipment and use of equipment regulations - Maintenance and repair Safety Considerations

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Thank you for your attention!



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