

Learning beyond walls

An Assessment of Demand, Opportunities and Boundaries of Outdoor Education at Wageningen University

Outdoor education is seen as a teaching methodology that takes place in a outdoor, preferably natural setting that fosters a positive, ethical and reciprocal relationships between humans and the natural environment.

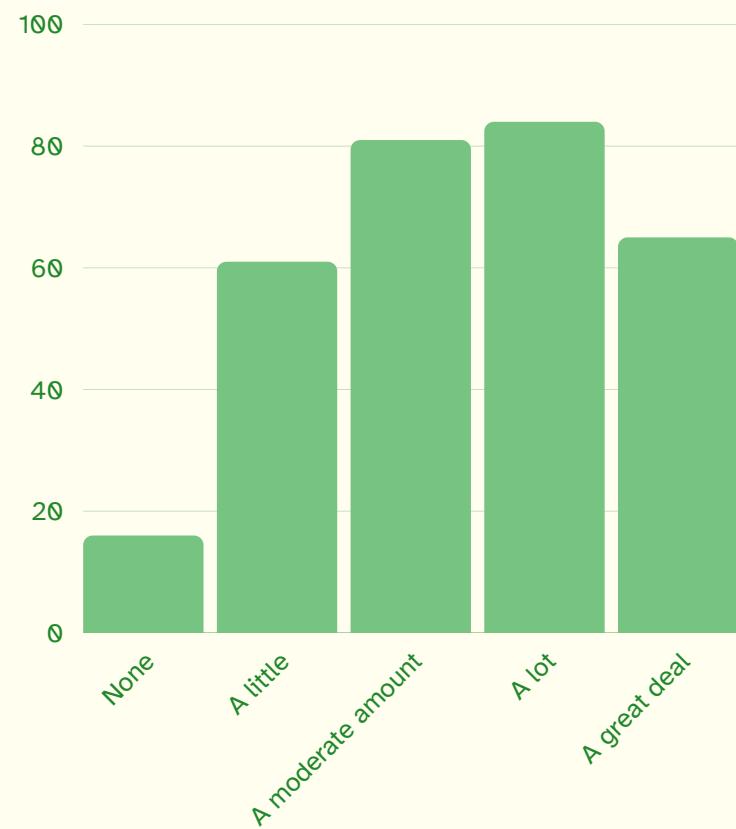
Within Wageningen University there is a lot of demand for outdoor education. Students and teachers alike seem to be highly motivated to move current education practices to the outdoors.



“Wageningen is simply a university that stands for the relation with the outside world.”
- Louise van der Stok



Interest in participating in outdoor education (n=307)



Benefits of Outdoor Education

In outdoor education, teachers and students perceived significant benefits, including stronger emotional engagement, long-term sustainable thinking, and personal empowerment. Outdoor education in a natural setting also supports student well-being (e.g., by reducing negative moods, mental fatigue). Outdoor education can combine experiential and relational learning processes, also leading to increased human-nature connectedness, and contributing to WUR's vision for education.



Experiential learning
Relational learning



Human-nature connectedness
Sustainable behaviour



Psycho-physical wellbeing and mood

Connection to natural spaces improves health and well-being, by providing restorative environments to recover from stress and mental fatigue and by reducing negative moods.

Personal Development and Self-perception

Through human-nature interactions, outdoor education positively impacts participants' self-perception, autonomy, and overall satisfaction. It also triggers an ongoing cycle of personal growth.

Academic and Learning Outcomes

Outdoor education enhances students' competencies, promotes sustainable lifestyles, facilitates students' connection to the environment, and increases performance on cognitive tests.

Social Development/Cohesion

Outdoor education promotes interpersonal connections. It fosters collaboration, support, empathy, and social cohesion, and strengthens students' emotional, and cognitive development.

Recommendations

According to interviewees and survey respondents, an outdoor education space has no need for high-tech facilities. Simple things such as notebooks, seating possibilities, and accessibility were seen as far more important; we propose using logs as seating opportunity, and/or arranging seating pads which are stored in nearby university buildings. With respect to accessibility, sites should be close to campus, to keep travel time manageable.

Both teachers and students also see the atmosphere as one of the most important elements in an outdoor education space, and one of the important advantages of outdoor education. A location should be in a relatively silent and secluded natural setting, in order to avoid distraction and gather the full range of benefits that outdoor education can offer.



By implementing these recommendations, outdoor education can contribute to WUR's education goals

1. Improving positive social dynamics among students and teachers alike,
2. Providing wider educational options at WUR
3. Enhancing student well-being
4. Reinforcing sustainability awareness, pro-environmental behaviour and human-nature connectedness.

Potential locations

Droevendaalsebos

- + most nature-inclusive location
- + secluded
- not easily accessible
- distant from campus buildings (no facilities)

max group
size: 30



Aurora pond corner

- + user-friendly, also without experience teaching outdoors
- + easily accessible
- + view over Dassenbos and Aurora pond
- + possibility for storing materials at Aurora
- some (noise) distraction by roads
- close to buildings

max group
size: 30



Food Forest

- + strong human-nature connectedness
- + content-specific education opportunities
- + suitable for small groups
- noise disturbance from Mansholtlaan

max group
size: 30



Wageningen Student Farm - field

- + suitable for both large and small groups
- + secluded in summer
- + human-nature coexistence
- + potential for storing materials on farm
- noise disturbance from bus lane and future access road

max group
size: 70



New space (to be developed)

A new space for outdoor education could be developed close to campus. This gives the opportunity to completely fit the space to users' needs: nature-inclusivity, secludedness, and accessibility.

References

All information provided in this report is taken from the "Learning beyond walls" report, created by team 3561 for the course Academic Consultancy Training at Wageningen University (December 2025).

References to the images used in this report are listed below.

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