

Open Water Swimming for All

OWS4ALL project presentation

Safe. Inclusive. Evidence-informed.



Co-funded by the European Union

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or EACEA. Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

What is Open Water Swimming?

Swimming in natural waters with real environmental conditions.

Natural venues

Sea, lakes, rivers, reservoirs and channels.

Changing conditions

Temperature, waves, visibility, wind, currents and marine traffic.

Different skills

Navigation, pacing, group swimming, communication and safety awareness.

Inclusive potential

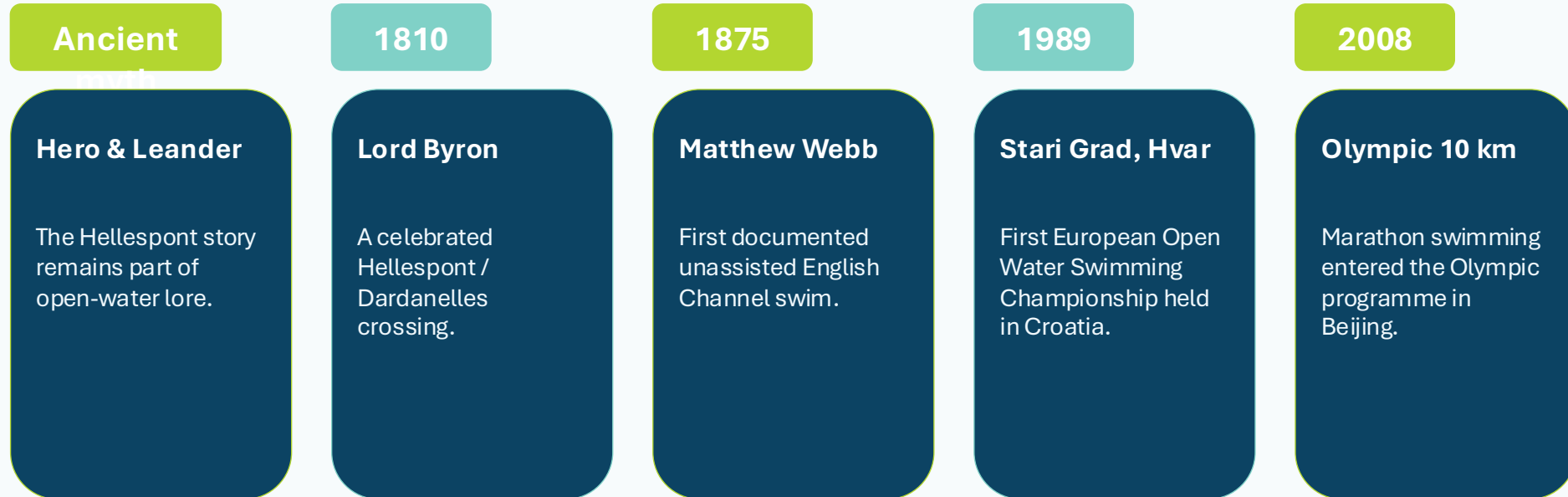
Accessible outdoor sport when preparation, support and risk management are in place.

OWS is not simply “pool swimming outside”: it requires preparation for nature, not against it.



From myth to Olympic sport

Open-water swimming combines legendary crossings, historic achievements, Croatian heritage and modern Olympic recognition.



Today, open-water swimming connects sport, nature, safety, community and inclusion - which is the central idea of OWS4ALL.

Legend of crossing the

A mythological story connected with the Hellespont, today known as the Dardanelles.

Ancient myth

Hero and Leander

According to Greek mythology, Leander swam across the Hellespont at night to reach Hero, who guided him with a lamp from her tower.

The story connects swimming with courage, distance and orientation.

The Dardanelles became one of the symbolic routes of open-water crossings.

The legend creates a bridge from cultural heritage to modern marathon swimming.

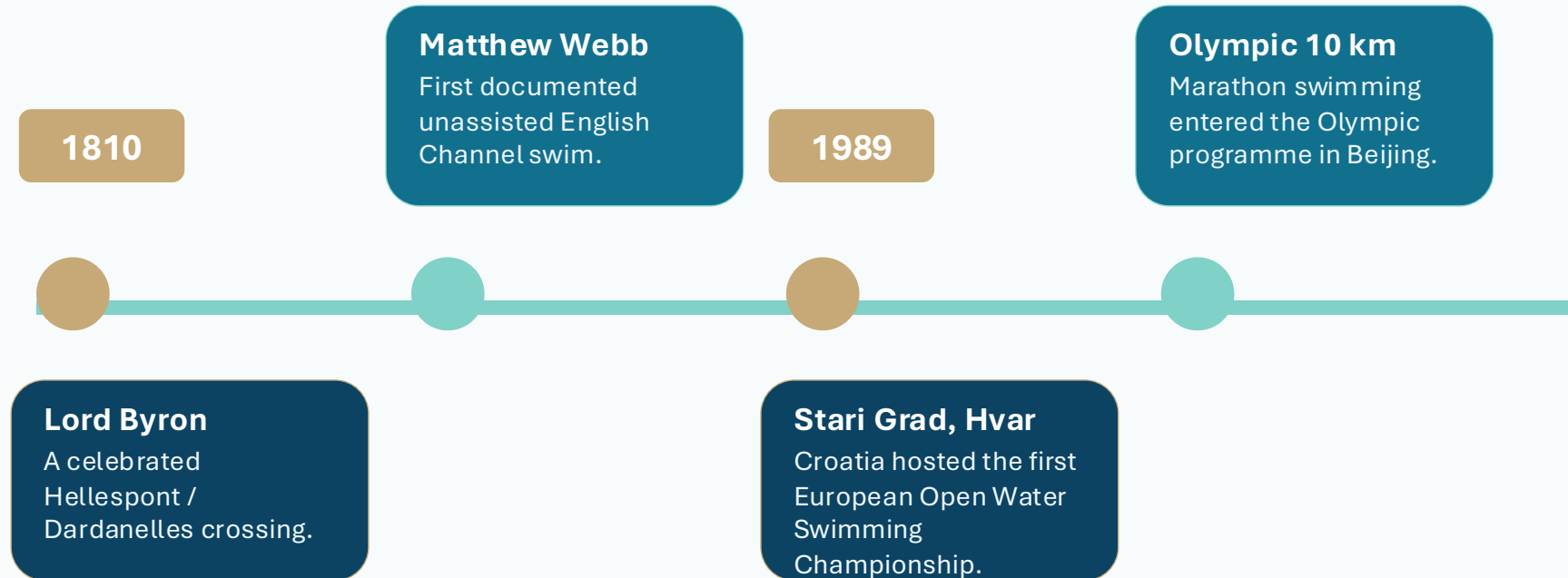
Open-water crossings have inspired people long before swimming became an organized sport.

OWS4ALL connection

Today, the challenge of open water is approached through safety, preparation and inclusion.

From Lord Byron to modern

Key milestones from celebrated crossings to an Olympic discipline.



Open-water swimming has evolved from daring individual crossings into a recognized international sport with strong community and inclusion potential.

Swimming in sea water: benefits and wellbeing

Sea swimming supports active lifestyles when practiced safely, progressively and with respect for individual needs.



Enjoyment & mood

Natural scenery, floating and outdoor movement can support relaxation, enjoyment and positive mood.

Fitness

Sea swimming develops aerobic endurance, breathing control and whole-body coordination.

Motivation to be active

Many people find open water refreshing, social and easier to maintain as a regular habit.

Safety note

Sea swimming should be adapted to ability, water temperature, sea conditions and individual health needs.

The OWS4ALL approach combines the attractiveness of the sea with preparation, supervision and inclusion.

Benefits of swimming for participants

Physical, mental and social benefits that are relevant for OWS4ALL.



Physical fitness

Endurance, strength, coordination, breathing control and low-impact

Mental wellbeing

Rhythm, nature exposure and group support can improve mood and reduce stress.

Social connection

Shared goals, buddy systems and community events build belonging.

Confidence

Gradual progression helps participants experience competence in a challenging

Inclusive value

When properly supported, swimming can increase visibility, participation and autonomy for persons with disabilities.

Open water safety: know the risks

The more inclusive the event, the stronger the safety system must be.



Cold shock

Sudden gasping, fast breathing and panic risk.

Weather & sea state

Wind, waves and visibility can change quickly.

Fatigue

Open water effort can feel harder than pool swimming.

Navigation

Swimmers may drift, miss buoys or lose orientation.

Traffic & obstacles

Boats, rocks, ropes, jellyfish or uneven entry points.

Water quality

Avoid swimming after pollution warnings or unsafe conditions.

Safety-first protocol

A simple checklist to prepare every session or event.

1

Assess swimmer readiness

Pool ability, medical considerations, confidence and previous experience.

2

Check conditions

Temperature, wind, waves, visibility, route, entry/exit and water quality.

3

Brief clearly

Buddy pairs, signals, turning points, stop rules and emergency contacts.

4

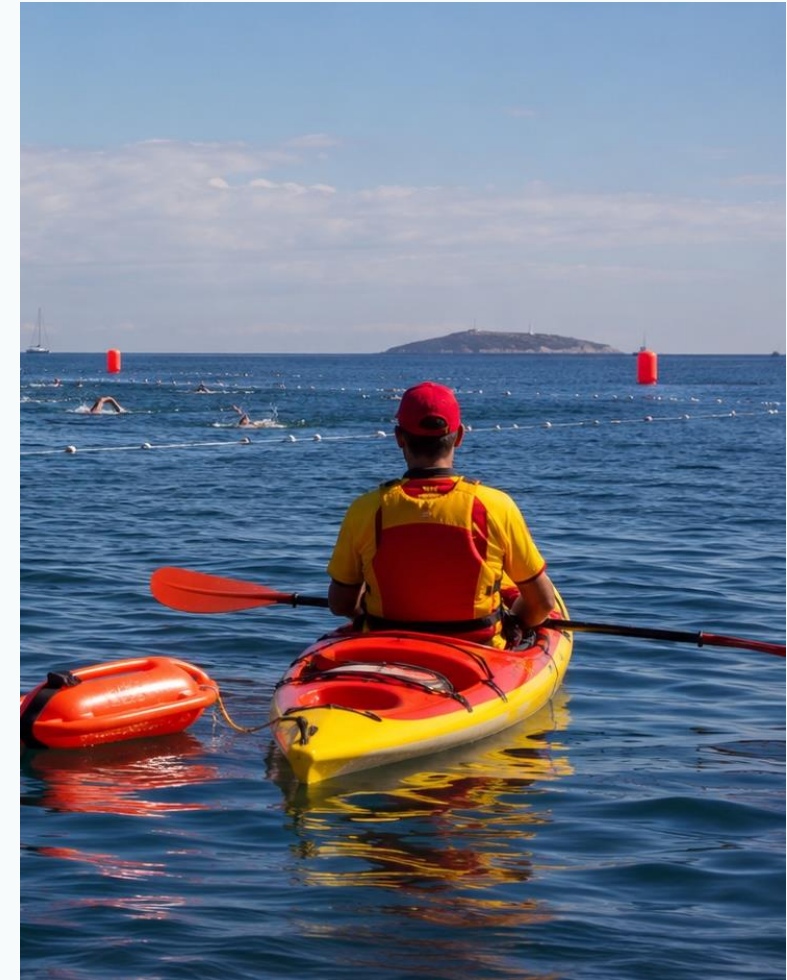
Support in water

Visible caps, tow floats, kayaks/SUP, assistants and rescue coverage.

5

Debrief and record

What worked, incidents, participant feedback and next progression step.



Inclusion in open water swimming

Accessibility is a design choice, not an add-on.



KEY PRINCIPLES

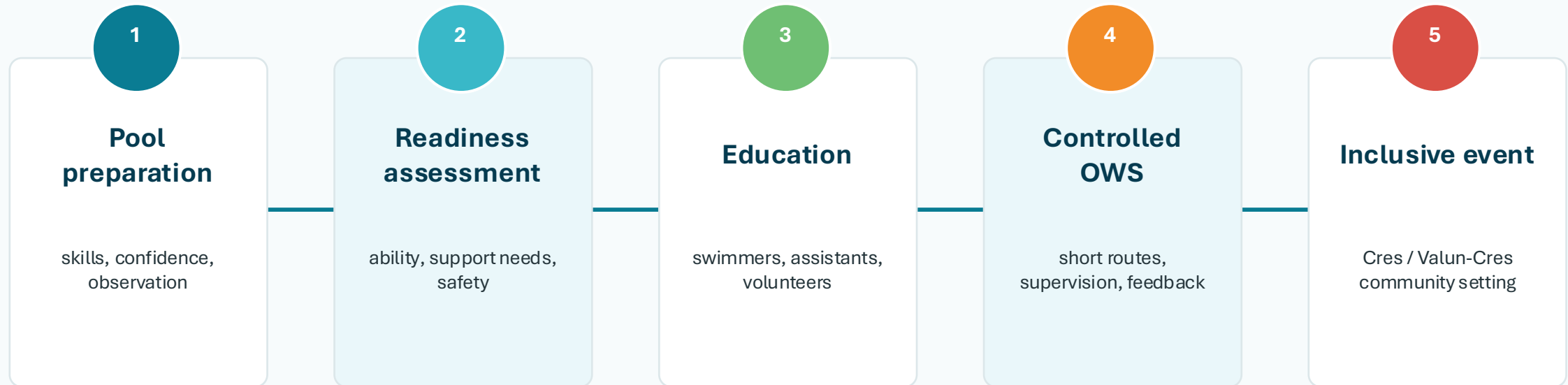
- Plan with participants, not only for them.
- Use individual risk assessment and consent.
- Match each swimmer with appropriate support.
- Communicate using accessible, simple instructions.
- Ensure dignity: independence where possible, assistance where needed.

PRACTICAL ADAPTATIONS

- Accessible changing, transport and entry/exit points.
- Visible caps, tow floats, assistants, kayaks or SUP support.
- Shorter route options and warm-up/cool-down zones.
- Clear “stop” signal and emergency handover plan.

OWS4ALL project model

A gradual pathway from safe preparation to inclusive open-water participation.



The model supports participation while respecting safety, autonomy and individual needs.

Pilot preparation: pool-based Slovenia event

Čatež pilot as a safe step before open-water participation.



PURPOSE

Introduce participants and assistants to the project approach. Observe swimming ability, confidence and support needs. Practice communication, entry/exit and safe group movement. Identify who is ready for the Cres open-water event and what adaptation is needed.

OUTPUTS TO RECORD

Participant readiness

Short checklist for route choice, support level and safety briefing needs.

Lessons learned

What needs to change before Cres: route, timing, staff, equipment, communication.

Cres / Valun-Cres inclusive event

A community setting where memory, sport and inclusion meet.

Florio Burburan legacy

Use the story with respect: a local inspiration for courage, perseverance and inclusion.

Inclusive route options

Shorter distances, companion swimmers and local participants can increase access.

Safety & visibility

Clear course, marked buoys, support vessels and volunteer briefings are essential.

Inclusive approach: shared event experience with appropriate support and route options

Communication messages

A coherent public story across the website, Facebook, Instagram and event materials.

Main message

Open water is for everyone - safely, inclusively, together.

Key messages

Safe progression from pool to open water.
Inclusive participation with individual support.
Community, confidence and visibility through sport.

Content ideas

Participant stories.
Safety tips.
Partner posts.
Čatež lessons learned.
Cres countdown and volunteer calls.

Tone of communication

Positive, inclusive, clear and safety-oriented, with respectful language for persons with disabilities.

OWS4ALL: from preparation to participation

A safe and inclusive pathway towards open-water swimming for all.

Prepare

Pool-based activities build swimming skills, confidence and readiness for open water.

Support

Assistants, volunteers, buddies and safety teams make participation more accessible.

Participate

Open-water routes and events are adapted to ability, conditions and individual needs.

Share impact

Photos, stories, feedback and lessons learned help promote inclusion beyond the event.

Join us in making open water swimming safer, more accessible and more visible for all.

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the granting authority. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible

© 2021