





ECA

STRATEGIC PLAN

SPORT PROGRAM

EUROPEAN
CANOE ASSOCIATION



SPORT PROGRAM

CANOE FREESTYLE



PRESENT OUR DISCIPLINE

- History
- Main evolutions
- Definition



INTRODUCTION

PRESENTATION OF THE DISCIPLINE

- **Canoe Freestyle**
- **History of Freestyle Kayaking**
- Freestyle kayaking, also known as playboating, originated in the 1970s, emerging from the desire to perform tricks and maneuvers in whitewater. Early kayakers began experimenting with their boats in river rapids, learning how to surf waves and perform spins. This form of whitewater sport quickly gained popularity due to its dynamic and acrobatic nature, evolving from traditional river running to a more trick-based style.
- In the 1980s and 1990s, with advancements in kayak design, the sport transformed as paddlers could perform more complex aerial maneuvers. By the early 2000s, freestyle kayaking was recognized as an official competitive discipline. Major international competitions such as the ICF Freestyle World Championships have propelled the sport into the global spotlight, where athletes showcase impressive combinations of tricks and technical skills.
- Freestyle kayaking has become a dynamic and highly respected discipline within paddle sports, focusing on precision, creativity, and control in challenging river features like waves and holes. The sport continues to evolve with innovations in boat design and increasing participation worldwide.



THE DIAGNOSTIC OF THE DISCIPLINE

SWOT ANALYSIS

- STRENGTHS
- WEAKNESSES
- OPPORTUNITIES
- THREATS

DIAGNOSTIC

Areas of reflections

1. Increase Participation and Global Reach:

- How can we attract new countries and regions to engage in freestyle kayaking?
- What strategies can be used to develop and sustain grassroots programs?
- How can we support emerging freestyle nations in terms of equipment, coaching, and funding?

2. Development of Venues and Infrastructure:

- How can we expand the network of suitable venues (both natural and artificial) for hosting regional and international competitions?
- What role can ECA play in assisting national federations in building and maintaining world-class venues?
- How can we incorporate sustainability and minimize the environmental impact of venues, particularly in regions affected by global warming?

3. Promoting the Sport Through Media and Innovation:

- How can we increase the visibility of Canoe Freestyle in global media, especially in underrepresented regions?
- What innovative formats, such as digital or e-sport initiatives, can help engage younger generations and expand the fanbase?
- How can we leverage social media, influencers, and online platforms to promote the sport and attract sponsors?

4. Integration with Multisport Events:

- How can we further integrate Canoe Freestyle into major multisport events, such as the **European Games** or **Olympic qualifiers**?
- What role can multisport events play in promoting freestyle kayaking to a wider audience?

5. Inclusivity and Gender Equity:

- How can we ensure gender equity across all levels of Canoe Freestyle, from grassroots participation to elite competitions?
- What measures can we take to promote inclusivity, especially for athletes with disabilities and underrepresented groups?

6. Youth Development and Education:

- How can we create effective programs to identify and nurture young talent in freestyle kayaking?
- What types of educational programs and resources are needed for coaches, officials, and organizers to improve the sport globally?

7. Sustainability and Environmental Impact:

- How do we address the challenges posed by global warming to natural freestyle venues?
- What role can Canoe Freestyle play in promoting environmentally sustainable practices within the broader outdoor sports community?

8. Cooperation Between Federations:

- How can we strengthen cooperation between national federations to share knowledge, venues, and resources?
- What joint ventures or partnerships can be established to enhance the development and organization of events across borders?

9. Economic Model and Funding:

- How can we create a sustainable economic model for the development of Canoe Freestyle, ensuring funding for athletes, venues, and events?
- What strategies can be employed to reduce costs while increasing revenues from sponsorships, broadcasting, and event hosting?

STRENGTHS

- Dynamic and Engaging Sport:** Canoe Freestyle is visually exciting, with a strong focus on acrobatics and creativity, making it appealing to spectators and younger athletes.
- Growing International Competitions:** The ICF Freestyle World Championships and other key events are drawing increasing participation from countries around the world.
- Strong Community and Athletes:** The sport has a passionate, global community of athletes, coaches, and organizers. Well-known paddlers like **Dane Jackson** and **Claire O'Hara** have popularized the sport internationally.
- Development of Venues:** High-quality natural and artificial whitewater parks are being developed, especially in Europe and North America, supporting the sport's growth.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Expanding Geographic Reach:** With the development of more artificial whitewater venues and partnerships with nations outside traditional hubs, there's potential for expanding Canoe Freestyle to new regions.
- Media and Broadcasting Growth:** Increased streaming and broadcasting of events via social media and online platforms provide opportunities to grow the sport's visibility and attract sponsors.
- Youth and Grassroots Development:** With the right support, including training programs and youth camps, the sport could see substantial growth at grassroots levels, increasing the pool of athletes.
- Sustainability Initiatives:** Developing eco-friendly venues and integrating sustainability practices can enhance the sport's appeal in line with growing environmental concerns.

WEAKNESSES

- Limited Global Reach:** Although the sport is growing, it is still concentrated in regions with easy access to suitable water features, such as North America and Europe. Participation in other parts of the world remains low.
- High Entry Costs:** Freestyle kayaking requires specialized equipment, including high-performance boats, paddles, and gear, which can be costly for new participants.
- Event Organization Challenges:** The number of venues capable of hosting large international competitions is limited, and there are still relatively few major events on the calendar.

THREATS

- Impact of Global Warming:** Changes in river flow, water levels, and weather patterns due to global warming may affect natural freestyle venues, making it harder to find suitable locations for competitions.
- Competition from Other Extreme Sports:** Canoe Freestyle competes with a variety of other adventure and extreme sports (e.g., surfing, skateboarding) for youth engagement and media attention.
- Economic Constraints:** The high costs associated with organizing events, building artificial venues, and securing sponsorships can limit the growth of the sport in less affluent regions.
- Limited Sponsorship and Funding:** While the sport has passionate participants, securing regular and significant funding for events, athletes, and grassroots programs remains a challenge.



THE MAIN AXIS OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE DISCIPLINE

HOW DEVELOP GLOBALLY THE DISCIPLINE

?

Canoe Freestyle has seen steady growth in certain regions, but to elevate the sport to a truly global level, several strategic areas need to be addressed. Development must focus on increasing participation, improving infrastructure, and raising the sport's profile through media, partnerships, and global cooperation.

DEVELOPMENT

DEVELOP GLOBALLY OUR DISCIPLINES

Areas of reflection

- Number of nations / athletes / ITO / in the European championships
- The organization of the discipline in the national federations: number of nations, , clubs, athletes, national events, geographical analysis
- Obstacles to the development of activity within clubs, federations, ECA, ICF
- The budget allocated by the national federations to the discipline
- The tools for judges, officials, referees, volunteers, organizers
- The link with the other disciplines
- The economic model of the discipline
- In order to foster the growth of canoe freestyle, it's crucial that National Federations actively invest in the discipline and contribute to organizing events. With their involvement and support, we can create a stronger foundation for the sport across Europe.

OUR PRIORITIES

1. Increase the Number of Nations and Athletes Participating

Collaborate with national federations to build structured programs that develop local athletes, clubs, and competitions. This includes both grassroots development and high-performance athlete support.

Increase visibility and awareness by promoting the sport through partnerships with regional sporting organizations, especially in regions with strong outdoor sports cultures.

2. Develop the Infrastructure for Competitions and Training

Support the construction and maintenance of **more artificial whitewater venues** in regions lacking natural resources for freestyle kayaking. These venues should be designed with sustainability in mind.

Identify and promote existing venues that can host regional and international competitions, and provide assistance to national federations looking to create such venues.

3. Sustainability and Global Cooperation

Develop events and venues with a focus on **sustainability and reducing environmental impacts**. Global warming poses a threat to natural venues, so finding innovative solutions and promoting eco-friendly competition practices is crucial.

Encourage **transnational cooperation** between countries for hosting and organizing events, sharing venues, and resources to reduce the burden on individual countries.

Support **joint ventures between federations** to co-host international competitions, allowing for greater diversity in location and reducing the cost of event organization.

4. Youth Engagement and Grassroots Development

Invest in youth programs to build a new generation of freestyle athletes by creating school programs, camps, and junior-level competitions.

Encourage the development of **local paddling clubs** and facilities, providing access to quality equipment and coaching.

Create platforms for **talent identification** and development programs to support young athletes' progression from grassroots to elite levels.

5. Judges seminars, trainings and workshops

Improve the quality of judging in canoe freestyle

Action Points:

- Expand the number of countries participating in the ECA Freestyle European Championships.
- Increase the number of junior athletes and competitions globally.
- Create a global network of training venues for athletes and officials.
- Promote Canoe Freestyle in major multisport events such as the **European Games and Olympic qualifiers**.
- Develop sustainable event practices and infrastructure to protect the environment and venues impacted by climate change.
- ICF judging seminars Foster a dialogue with athletes and coaches about judging standards and expectations. This can help ensure transparency and build trust in the judging process.



EVENTS AND CALENDAR

**HOW IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF OUR
EVENTS AND CALENDARS ?**

EVENTS AND CALENDAR

IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF OUR EVENTS AND CALENDAR

- 1. Standardized Event Formats:** Establish consistent formats for competitions, including categories, scoring, and timing. This helps athletes know what to expect and ensures fairness.
- 2. Quality Venues:** Select venues that meet high standards for safety, accessibility, and spectator experience. Invest in facilities that can accommodate both athletes and audiences effectively.
- 3. Promotion and Marketing:** Enhance the visibility of events through better marketing strategies, including social media campaigns, partnerships with local businesses, and community outreach to attract more spectators.
- 4. Event Scheduling:** Develop a cohesive calendar that avoids conflicts between major events, allowing athletes to participate in multiple competitions. Consider seasonal factors and local conditions when planning events.
- 5. Technical Support:** Provide adequate technical support, including judging panels, timing systems, and video replay capabilities to enhance the quality of competition.
- 6. Workshops and Clinics:** Organize pre-events like Euro Cups for athletes to improve their skills and for judges to refine their scoring techniques. This can raise the overall level of competition.
- 7. Collaboration with National Federations:** Work closely with national federations to align event standards, promote participation, and support talent development.
- 8. Athlete Engagement:** Involve athletes in the planning process to gather insights on what can improve their experience and the quality of competitions.
- 9. Sustainability Practices:** Incorporate environmentally sustainable practices into event planning to promote responsible tourism and athlete welfare.
- 10. Feedback Loops:** After events, gather feedback from participants, judges, and spectators to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments for future events.



VENUES & EQUIPMENTS

**HOW IMPROVE THE QUALITY, DIVERSITY,
OF OUR VENUES?**

VENUES & EQUIPMENTS

Our strengths

- **Strong Regional Interest and Participation**
- Varied Natural Landscapes
- Accessibility and Transport
- Support from Governing Bodies
- Tourism and Economic Benefits

Weakness

1. Weather Dependency

• **Unpredictable Conditions:** Outdoor freestyle events are heavily reliant on favorable weather and water levels. Unpredictable weather patterns, such as droughts or floods, can disrupt events, impacting athlete safety and event scheduling.

2. Limited Mainstream Appeal

• **Niche Audience:** While popular within the paddling community, canoe freestyle lacks widespread recognition compared to other sports. This limits the audience size, sponsorship opportunities, and media coverage, making it harder to attract large-scale investment.

3. High Costs for Participants and Organizers

• **Logistical Expenses:** Organizing events in remote or natural locations can be costly due to transportation, infrastructure setup, and safety measures. Participants also face high costs for travel, equipment, and training, which may limit broader participation.

4. Venue Accessibility

• **Remote Locations:** Many optimal whitewater venues are located in remote areas, which may lack the necessary accommodations and amenities for large crowds. This can create challenges in attracting spectators, media, and sponsors to certain events.

DEVELOP THE PLACES TO PADDLE FOR OUR DISCIPLINE

OUR PRIORITIES

- **Site Assessments:** Conduct thorough assessments of potential venues to ensure they meet safety standards, have appropriate water conditions, and can support different levels of competition.
- **Accessibility:** Ensure that venues are accessible to all athletes, including those with disabilities. Consider transportation options, accommodations, and facilities for spectators.
- **Safety Measures:** Implement strict safety protocols and provide adequate support (e.g., rescue teams, medical personnel) at each venue to ensure the well-being of athletes.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Invest in infrastructure improvements, such as spectator seating, amenities (like restrooms and food stalls), and parking facilities, to enhance the overall experience for participants and audiences.
- **Sustainability Initiatives:** Incorporate eco-friendly practices in venue management, such as waste reduction, water conservation, and habitat preservation, to promote environmental responsibility.
- **Local Partnerships:** Collaborate with local communities, businesses, and organizations to create a supportive network that can help promote and maintain the venues.
- **Regular Maintenance:** Establish a schedule for regular maintenance and upgrades to keep venues in top condition, ensuring they remain safe and appealing for events.
- **Diverse Event Formats:** Use the variety of features at different venues to host diverse event formats, such as head-to-head competitions, team events, or skill showcases, which can attract a wider range of participants.
- **Feedback Mechanism:** Create a system for gathering feedback from athletes and coaches after events to identify strengths and areas for improvement for each venue.



**ATHLETES-JUDGES-REFEREES-OFFICIALS-
COACHES-VOLUNTERS- ORGANIZERS**

**HOW IMPROVE THE NUMBER, THE SKILLS
OF OUR ACTIVE COMMUNITY MEMBERS?**

**HOW VALORIZE AND PROMOTE OUR
COMMUNITY MEMBERS?**

ATHLETES-JUDGES-REFEREES-OFFICIALS-COACHES-VOLUNTERS- ORGANIZERS

THE JUDGES-REFEREES-OFFICIALS-COACHES-ATHLETES –VOLUNTERS - ORGANIZERS - AT THE CENTER OF OUR PROJECTS

Our strengths

- Nations with good organizers and many paddlers like FRA, ESP, GER, GBR

Our Weaknesses

- The number of judges
- Number of active nations
- Numbers of paddlers out of the big nations mentioned above

Areas of reflection

- The courses for our coaches
- European judges committee
- The ITO'S nomination
- Athletes ambassadors

Grassroots Development and Youth Programs

- **Expand Youth Training Programs:** Promote freestyle kayaking through local clubs and schools by offering beginner-friendly training camps and after-school programs. Partnering with youth organizations can help introduce the sport to younger generations.
 - **Junior Competitions and Camps:** Host more junior competitions and training camps across Europe to develop talent from an early age, providing clear pathways from entry-level to competitive freestyle kayaking.
- 2. Increase Access to Training Facilities**
- **Develop More Whitewater Parks:** Encourage investment in more accessible whitewater parks across Europe, particularly in urban areas. This makes it easier for people to train regularly without having to travel to remote rivers.
 - **Offer Affordable Rentals and Gear:** Partner with kayak manufacturers and retailers to provide affordable rental gear and discounted equipment, making it easier for new athletes to participate without significant upfront costs.
- 3. Raise Awareness and Media Exposure**
- **Leverage Social Media and Content Creation:** Use platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to showcase exciting moments from freestyle kayaking competitions and training. Creating engaging content will attract more people to the sport, especially younger audiences.
 - **Collaborate with Influencers and Athletes:** Partner with popular athletes and influencers to promote freestyle kayaking. Athlete-led clinics, tutorials, and meetups can inspire new participants to try the sport.
- 4. Host More Local and Regional Events**
- **Organize Accessible Competitions:** Host smaller, local competitions in various regions to lower barriers to entry and increase participation. Local events are more affordable and accessible, encouraging first-time competitors to join.
 - **Create a European Freestyle Circuit:** Develop a series of connected events that lead to a continental championship, allowing competitors to progress and gain recognition at each level.
- 5. Increase Inclusivity**
- **Encourage Female Participation:** Develop initiatives aimed at increasing female participation through women-only events, workshops, and mentorship programs. Highlight female role models in the sport to inspire more women to compete.
 - **Promote Adaptive Freestyle:** Expand the sport's inclusivity by promoting adaptive kayaking programs for individuals with disabilities. Specialized events and training opportunities can make freestyle kayaking more welcoming to a broader group of athletes.
- 6. Offer Incentives and Rewards**
- **Scholarships and Grants:** Provide financial support through scholarships or grants to help athletes cover travel, training, and equipment costs. This can make it easier for up-and-coming competitors to participate in high-level competitions.
 - **Increased Prizes and Recognition:** Offering more attractive prizes and increased media exposure for winners can make freestyle kayaking more appealing to competitive athletes, drawing in new participants.
- 7. Engage Local Communities**
- **Community Outreach Programs:** Organize open days, "come and try" sessions, or kayaking festivals in local communities to introduce people to the sport in a relaxed, low-pressure setting.
 - **Partner with Outdoor and Adventure Clubs:** Work with outdoor adventure clubs, environmental groups, and other recreational organizations to promote freestyle kayaking as an exciting and accessible water sport.



RULES & REGULATIONS

**WHAT DO WE NEED TO KEEP, CHANGE,
ADAPT IN A SHORT, MEDIUM, LONG
TERM, WHY AND HOW?**

RULES & REGULATIONS

Our strengths

- The link with ICF rules
- Easier option to adjust the rules to European format

Our Weaknesses

- Sticking to certain rules of ICF
- Non-unity opinion of paddlers, coaches and officials
- fundings

IMPROVE OUR RULES AND REGULATIONS

- **1.Simplify and Clarify Rule Language**
- **Make Rules More Accessible:** Ensure the language used in the rulebook is clear and straightforward, avoiding technical jargon where possible. This makes it easier for both new and experienced competitors to understand the rules.
- **Visual Guidelines:** Include diagrams or visual examples to illustrate key points, especially for technical scoring, equipment requirements, or competition zones.
- **2. Revise Scoring System for Transparency**
- **Enhance Judging Criteria:** Review and refine the scoring criteria to ensure transparency and consistency in scoring. Focus on making sure the guidelines are clear for all aspects of performance (e.g., style, difficulty, execution).
- **Live Feedback:** Implement live scoring updates or displays, so both athletes and spectators can track results in real time. This will help eliminate confusion and increase engagement with the competition.
- **3.Introducing video judging** for canoe freestyle events can significantly improve objectivity, accuracy, and transparency in scoring
- **Video Replay and Review**
- **Instant Replay for Judges:** Enable judges to review critical moments in real time or after the athlete's run. This will help clarify complex tricks or missed details that are difficult to catch in live action.
- **Slow Motion Analysis:** Implement slow-motion playback to assess the technical precision of difficult tricks. This would improve the accuracy of scoring by allowing judges to focus on trick execution and form.
- **4. Increase Focus on Safety Regulations**
- **Regular Safety Audits:** Conduct more thorough and frequent safety audits of competition venues, including water flow, obstacle assessment, and emergency preparedness.
- **Mandatory Safety Training:** Require athletes and event organizers to undergo basic safety and rescue training before participating. Include clear regulations around protective gear and on-water support for athletes during competitions.
- **5. Regular Rule Review and Feedback Process**
- **Establish a Feedback Loop:** Create a formal process for athletes, coaches, and event officials to provide feedback on existing rules after each major competition. This ensures that the rules evolve in response to real-world experiences.
- **Annual Review Committee:** Form an independent committee to review the rules and regulations annually, ensuring they remain relevant, fair, and adaptable to changes in the sport.



MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE ECA

**HOW TO IMPROVE OUR ORGANIZATION
AND ADAPT IT TO WHAT WE PLAN TO DO?**

MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE ECA

Our strengths

- Skills of the technical delegates

Our Weaknesses

- Insufficient number of technical delegates

Areas of reflection

- The duties of the chairman and the technical delegates members of the committee
- The link with: ICF committees / the other committees / The board
- The organisation and the functioning of the committees
- The communication
- The relations with the other federations, the national committees and the chairman of the disciplines of the national federations

ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONING OF THE COMMITTEE





ACTION PLANNING

HOW TO PLAN OUR ACTIONS 2025-2028?

ACTION PLANNING

2025

- Euro cups ?

2026

- European championships (Finland?)

2027

- XX

2028

- XX

