

Achieving sustainability via minimal changes



Community partner: VUB
sport infrastructure

Group 4:

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1. Topic

Waste is a significant global issue. Increasing volumes of waste are being generated as the global population and living standards rise. The environmental impact is significant, with massive volumes of waste generated annually with only basic or little treatment to minimize its impact. People are increasingly concerned about the production of waste and its effect and are seeking ways to deal with the problem.

VUB sports complex does not stand aside. The amount of waste produced by people is not the only existing problem; added to it, the waste on the ground coming from people that don't throw the trash in the bins has become another issue to face. Some steps to improve waste management have already been taken, but that has not been enough.

We have set ourselves the goal of finding a way to reduce the amount of waste and motivate the visitors of the sports complex to throw away their waste in the designated place. The main challenge to do so was applying minimal changes with maximum efficiency. To achieve this goal, we asked ourselves the main question: "Why do people litter and what needs to be done to avoid it?".

2. Participants

First, it was necessary to collect the maximum amount of information and data on this problem in order to have a detailed understanding of the situation and the possibility of its improvement. We needed the help of third parties who could share their knowledge and experience.

The most important contribution to our work was made by Dirk van de Wiele, our contact and manager of the sports infrastructure. He told us about the existence of the waste problem at the sports facility and about its significance. He took us on a tour through the entire complex and shared problematic situations that are not visible to ordinary visitors. Also, at our request, he shared with us a map containing the location of the waste bins in the building, which helped us to analyze the data and have a clear view of the situation.

Secondly, we developed a questionnaire to be answered by the users of the sport facility. Consequently, the participants also gave their contribution to find a solution to the problem we were about to face: 114 people who visit the sports complex at regular times. The idea behind creating the questionnaire was that they, more than anyone else, know the causes of the waste problem from the inside.

Meetings with Maarten Ipers, who works for the Prevention and Environment Office of the VUB, Andrea Luyckx, Serge Gillot and Francis Geldof also helped us to choose the right path. In the next part we will explain, in more detail, the tips and knowledge that they shared with us.

3. Methodology

The increase in the amount of waste has led to carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere rising to new records in 2019. Climate change is affecting every country on every continent of the planet. It is disrupting national economies and affecting lives. At the same time economic and social progress over the last century has been accompanied by environmental degradation that is endangering the very systems on which our future development — indeed, our very survival — depends.

Our project will bring a contribution, albeit small, to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 11: sustainable cities and communities, (we don't only focus on people throwing their trash away, but also on reducing trash in general, by discouraging the use of non reusable bottles and incentivising throwing them in the right bin so that we are able to recycle them) and Goal 12: responsible consumption and production (since a big part of the waste is due to consumption, be it eating snacks and leaving the package behind or drinking and leaving the bottles behind.)

To achieve our goal, we will use concepts such as human capital (ideas, attitudes, willingness to participate, gumption, and the power of working together), social capital (feelings of high morale, sense of belonging) and natural capital (drinking water).

The main thing is to approach the problem systematically. First, we need to have a clear idea of what we have at the moment, what we want to achieve, and only after that find a way to come to an ideal strategy.

4. Action

We were assigned to help the sports infrastructure of the VUB become more sustainable. There are different approaches to achieve this objective, but Mr. Van De Wiele made it clear at our first meeting that waste management was the main issue. Since we had to achieve our goal with minor changes, we thought that this could be a good and applicable idea. We went to the VUB to see the sports facility infrastructure with him to have a closer look at these issues. People throw their trash, mostly drinking bottles, everywhere, without bothering about the consequences. Because of this, it takes a lot of manpower to keep the complex clean. Making the infrastructure more sustainable with minor changes regarding waste isn't as easy as it looks like. You need to understand why people do not use the bins. Is it a problem due to the location of the trash bins, a lack of awareness or simply because they don't care? Once you have the answers, you need to know what is possible to be done, what can be changed, and so on. After that, you need to implement your ideas in an effective way.

Our first idea was to install drinking fountains wherever possible and to change the colours of the bins to something more flashy and conspicuous. Based on those ideas and the questions we had, we made a survey specifically to understand why the bins are often not being used and how people feel about reusable drinking bottles.

4.1 Questionnaire

There were 114 participants in total. Voting took place online and anonymously, so that each participant could feel free to be sincere while answering every question. We always knew that it wouldn't be a perfect view of the real situation, but it should be useful as an estimate. The graphs can be found in "Appendix 1: Questionnaire".

Since not only VUB students are engaged in activities inside the sports facility, but also people from the outside the campus, the first step was to determine in which group a certain person belongs. In the end, 102 people were VUB students, which is 89,50% of the collaborators, and 12 people were not VUB students, which is 10,50%. When analyzing the answers to the following questions, we will also take this into account.

Then there was the question about which faculty the student is studying in. It is important to note that the answer "Not Applicable" was chosen by 8.8% of respondents, while 10.5% are not students of the VUB.

The bulk of the respondents are students from the Faculties of Economics, Social Sciences, Solvay Business School, Physical Education, Sports and Physiotherapy. It may seem that the absence of a larger number of respondents from other faculties may affect the result of the questionnaire, but as one of the following questions will show, that interviewed students quite often use the sports complex. Participants mostly answered that they visit the sports complex either 2-3 times a week or once a week.

We also noticed that 17% of the respondents do not use the sports complex. Since the answers from such users will not bring us any benefit, because they are not familiar with the infrastructure of the building, we decided to exclude these answers so that the final result is as accurate as possible. Further, we will evaluate the responses of only 94 participants who use the sports complex and are interested in improving it.

Also, as a result of the questionnaire, we were able to find out that only 42% of the respondents always or very often think of sustainability in their day-to-day life, while 58% sometimes or very rarely do it. This gives us reason to propose a project which aims to raise awareness about this subject.

22% of respondents don't have a long term drinking bottle. That means that they need to purchase plastic bottles and use them. This result prompted us to the idea of giving a bottle to everyone who buys a sports card in the sports complex. Like that, people are motivated to use a long-term drinking bottle instead of a plastic bottle every time again.

On the other hand, we saw that even the owners of a drinking bottle do not always take it with them while exercising in the sports complex. Only 72.4% do it all the time. That's something we should research further.

34% of respondents use a plastic bottle at least once a week when visiting a sports complex. This is again a sign that we should motivate people to bring a reusable drinking bottle. We can also notice that almost 30% indicated that they take the bottle with them and can use it several times, filling it with water. We think that 30% is positive, because people try at least to use less plastic bottles.

80% of respondents are willing to use drinking fountains as a substitute for water in a plastic bottle. 90% believes that, at the moment, there are not enough drinking fountains in the building of the sports complex. These answers are almost unanimous, that's why we worked further with it.

We asked people if there are enough trash bins at the complex. 61% believes that there is a sufficient number of waste cans on the territory of the sports complex, however, only 5,3% affirmed that in a moment of need they could find a trash bin nearby. These answers were quite controversial.

Thanks to the survey, we discovered that the places where people need the trash bins the most are the outdoor and indoor sports fields, the dressing room and in the main hall. Only 22% of respondents indicated that nothing prevents them from throwing garbage in the designated place. While 61% respondents indicated that they do not find the trash can next to them or it is very far away.

4.2 Analyse the location of trash bins

Out of the responses of the survey, our first idea was to analyse where the trash bins are located. In order to make sure that the location of the garbage cans are convenient enough the community, we analyzed their location. The plan of the location of the bins can be found in "Appendix 2: Location trash bins".

There are more than 60 waste bins (+40 on the ground floor and 20 on the 1st floor, some single for all waste, some double for PMD and all the rest ... not including the paper waste bins in the office rooms) for +/- 6000m², that is +/- 1 bin per 60m². Strategical placed at the entrance/exit of a room or zone (sports hall, changing room, sanitary room, office, building, parking, etc.).

It can be concluded that the distance from the bin to a person does not exceed 5-25 meters. The answer that the trash cans are too far away sounds more like an excuse than a proper and fair reason. As we could see on the map, the trash cans are located quite in a short distance from each other. But does that mean that they are located exactly in the places where visitors often pass? This issue requires more detailed study. It is necessary to conduct an observation and compile an analysis of which route people go on and in which places they commonly stay at. Perhaps the need to throw out the waste appears exactly between the garbage cans. Instead of installing two trash bins, it is possible to install one, but in the right place, with more efficiency.

4.3 Further ideas

We set up a meeting with Maarten Ipers and discussed some of our further ideas about the bins and awareness campaign.

We also mentioned the drinking fountains. Even if they might be too expensive for now, this solution could maybe be implemented in a few years if the budget allows it. He told us that the water that is already available at the sports complex, in the taps in the toilets for example, is often tested and is of good quality. We did a little research and came across an article of the VUB news about the quality of water the university taps, and in particular on *campus L*. It clearly describes the water quality test results and mentions that “The water coming from our tap is a luxury product and there is no risk whatsoever. Only a small amount of chlorine is added to prevent bacteria from growing. If you don’t like the smell or the taste, you can turn on the tap for a couple of seconds and they will disappear. It is a gas, so it vanishes. There is no harm at all.”

On the VUB website, we found that there is already a poster that says that the quality of tap water is better than bottled water. But for some reason, we did not find them in the toilet of the sports complex, so it would be good to install them so people know it, and those 15% who never bring their reusable bottles with them to the facility can change their mind. The poster can be found in “Appendix 3: Poster bottled water”.

With the next bilingual poster we made, we also want to refer to a previous campaign regarding water usage at the *campus*. The poster in both Dutch and English can be found in “Appendix 4: Poster: Tap water is safe!”.

Concerning the trash bins; we mailed Andrea Luyckx who is the *campus* administrator. She told us that the trash bins are fixed for the whole *campus* so we can’t change their colours to be more visible, unfortunately.

After those mails and meetings, we knew our two first ideas were not applicable, so we have this poster for the water usage, but we can’t just try to tackle this problem linked to water. Since the main issue we found through the survey is awareness among the facility users, we need to remind them to throw their trash away in the right places and what the consequences of not doing so are. We made another poster for that.

On the poster you see a girl that says “Hello, can you throw my trash in the bin? I’m too lazy for that”. With the poster, we want to say that leaving your trash on the ground is indirectly asking the cleaners to throw it away, which is our responsibility.

We want people to be aware of how disrespectful it is to leave their trash on the ground just because they are too lazy. With the posters, we hope to raise more consciousness and general agreement about the behaviour of people about waste and throwing it away. This poster can be found in ‘Appendix 5: Awareness poster’.

Other ideas we would like to suggest are: footsteps on the floor with different colours and a recycling logo towards the different bins and ashtrays; and setting basketball hoops at the bins like they did at the Brussels Airport. In this way, we can nudge people to do the right thing. Maybe people need a little nudging to effectively carry those concerns out in their busy everyday lives. The footprints can work as a reminder for the people who are not fully aware of their actions when they litter. An experiment of the Roskilde University of Copenhagen proved that the footsteps actually decreased the amount of trash next to the trash bins (Green Nudge: Nudging Litter Into The Bin). The basketball ring can remind them that laziness is not the solution. When you play basketball, the goal is to throw the ball into the ring, not next to it.

Usually, for marking the floor in a shopping center, or in stores, a film and a special thickened laminate are used, with high-quality gluing, such a product will last for several years, despite the endless shuffling and cruel chemistry which can rub it.

But what about a situation where the surface is uneven? Any film will fly off from it in a month, if not the next day! In this case, we recommend using the old method: stencil and paint. When applying, be sure to thoroughly degrease the surface! Then we mark the approximate location of the tracks and expose the stencil. It is clear that there should be two stencils, left and right legs, but if the volume of work is large, then in order to more easily and evenly expose traces, it is advisable to have two pairs. You should also worry in advance and choose the time so that the traces are not trampled and smeared.

Interactive waste bins and ashtrays will attract the attention of visitors and since this awakens something like excitement, a person will remember and use it every time.

Those measures are like, what was asked, very minor and are just little nudges to all the facility users. The pictures of these ideas can be found in “Appendix 6: Footsteps & basketball ring”.

5. Reflection and re-engagement

with reality (outside world)

At the end of our questionnaire we asked if people wanted to add something. These responses were very helpful. Dialogue is a vehicle for creating social capital. And social capital in its turn is the fuel which drives a community's capacity for a transformation. Those answers led us to quite a different place from which we started. We need people to feel responsible for the wellbeing of their community because without feeling responsible, defining and studying the problem will be of little help. Like we explained earlier, you can't just ask a cleaner to throw away your trash. They need to understand that throwing their trash on the ground is disrespectful. We hope to achieve more discussions between people about the subject. We hope people will start to confront others who are throwing their trash on the ground, raise consciousness can't be done with simply one campaign, but starts at home with education, in the schools by teaching and later on by confronting those who are doing it wrong, only then we can massively decrease waste and litter.

5.1 Reflection on action

As it turned out, achieving sustainability in a sports complex via minimal changes is not so easy. To solve the problem, we need to get rid of the cause of its origin. This includes both a total reconstruction of the building, like installing drinking fountains, more attractive waste bins, and a changing people's mind or way of thinking. Not only having the habit to clean up, but also produce less waste. Since the first option is not available to us, we delved into the second one.

The main action is to raise awareness, to make them understand the importance of the whole situation and show how easy it is to fix. A person simply has no choice and therefore buys a plastic bottle. But if you let him know that he has the opportunity to not buy an additional bottle, but simply tap water instead, which is freely available to everyone on the territory of the complex, this gives the individual a choice. Since it is obvious that reusing the bottle is both financially and sustainably more attractive, the decision should be obvious.

We believe that we have conducted a detailed study of the situation and provided the most optimal solution currently available. Of course, you can go deeper into some of the aspects and, if you

remove the restriction of minimal changes, find a more effective solution. What exactly this can be we will mention in the next section. Our study is more informative, that proposes viable options for now, but won't give a miracle solution. A survey on a bigger scale, after the pandemic, can maybe bring different ideas and long term solutions to this problem.

5.2 Further research needs

As we could see on the map, the trash cans are located quite a short distance from each other. But does it mean that they are located exactly in the places where visitors most often pass? This issue requires more detailed study. It is necessary to conduct an observation and compile an analysis of which route people go and in which places they most often stay. Perhaps the need to throw out the waste appears exactly between the garbage cans. Instead of installing two trash bins, it is possible to install one, but in the right place with more efficiency.

They can operate with Basic Fit, because as we know they have a filling system. There is a question whether it is possible to agree with the Basic Fit that people with an activated sport card, can access it and fill their bottles with water. If possible, it will help reduce the number of purchases of an additional bottle of water, and thus reduce the amount of plastic used. If this is not possible, they could install their own filling system, so that they wouldn't have losses because people fill their water in the Basic Fit.

It is also possible to study the problem of financing in more detail. Using financial resources, it would be possible to install drinking fountains, and therefore solve the situation indicated in the previous sub-price, independently of third-party partners, in our case Basic Fit. Maarten also mentioned that the facility will be renovated, so it could be an idea, if the renovations permit it, to directly install the necessary piping to build water fountains afterwards. It would definitely lessen the costs.

Mr. Van De Wiele also pointed out that the waste of the whole complex is mainly thrown in one container, this container is handled by the waste department of the VUB. Since this problem is at a bigger scale, being the campus, further studies can maybe find solutions to improve recycling of the whole VUB.

5.3 Participants

It is very important to collect a large amount of information, analyzing it, form a clear idea of the situation and its solution. It was necessary to understand what exactly we wanted to know and who exactly could help us.

We were lucky that our partner, Dirk van de Wiele, actively and openly helped us. He provided us with all the necessary information, answered our questions and advised with whom additional meetings could be held and in what direction to proceed further. Everyone with whom we conducted online conferences and corresponded not only answered specific questions, but also shared their tips, opinions, recommendations. Often we dealt with one problem, but in the end we discovered completely different ways to achieve the goal.

5.4 Self-reflection

To work together, we managed the four qualities of empathy. When someone was sick, we took the perspective of another person or recognized their perspective as the truth. We stayed out of judgement and felt with them. We hoped they got better soon. We created a safe and open environment where the members of the group could have an unique perspective, feelings and values. We wanted to grow as a team. That's why, in the first phase of the team development, we socialized and talked about the different problems when we met at the sports facilities. Second, we discussed which further steps we would make. In the third phase, we supported each other and balanced the tasks. It is a pity that our group will fall apart after this semester is finished. That doesn't allow us to learn as a team. Everyone did his part of the job without any pressure from the team, were we lucky when we were assigned together? Maybe, but ultimately everyone worked at a healthy environment without trouble, which motivated everyone to not let the others down.

If we look at our team from the Belbin Team Roles perspective, we can note that we had all the roles necessary for a well-coordinated work. Our team consists of monitor evaluator, plant, implementer, shaper, coordinator, team workers and resource investigator. This helped us to become a real team, distribute tasks in such a way that everyone does exactly what he likes and ultimately find a proposal to solve our issue.

5.5 Sustainability reflection

We want to work to make the world a better place from today and forever. The first SDG related to our project is “sustainable cities and communities”, because we don’t only focus on people to throw their trash away, but to reduce it by stopping to buy non reusable bottles and throwing it in the right bin so we are able to recycle it.

The second SDG is “responsible consumption and production”. A big part of the waste is due to consumption, be it eating snacks and leaving the package behind or drinking and leaving the bottles behind.

In our subject, the human capital of the capitals framework is very important. Once a leader starts with the new way of thinking, the rest will automatically follow. Every human being has the capacity to understand why we can’t throw our waste on the ground.

Our work wasn’t to make the facility a green place, where waste doesn’t exist or is fully recycled, our work was to improve the sustainability of the facility. It would be a lie if we assure you that we completed our job and that it will have an enormous impact, the ideas we brought worked for several different places and have had an impact. Those places calculated the impact of those measures and were glad when they saw the results. We Thought about those ideas after analyzing the data of the survey, who let us be clear isn’t fully representative because of the amount of people who responded, but is an estimate of what people feel and think about the facility and waste.

5.5.1 Sustainability

At the beginning, we took the time to analyse what we tried to reconfigure. We tried to step away from the urgency of the situation and tried to re-examine our deepest held assumptions and redraw our own mental map to change the landscape we are in now. We put aside our own frustrations about the trash and start thinking what the real problem could be.

The real problem is that we are dealing with a wicked problem. The social construct of people looking at the waste, believing it is not their problem. Throwing their trash on the ground, thinking cleaners will pick it up. Modern science can’t explain why people think and act that way. We are dealing with a very complex system of thinking and a lot of people have a different opinion on how the problem can be tackled. That’s why we made a questionnaire. We wanted to know why people still throw their trash on the ground, because that’s still an unclear causality. We observed the data of our questionnaire carefully and it guided us on the path to achieving the goal.

We need a transition in the way our system of thinking operates. We already have a guiding image of a more sustainable future and we know what our sustainable system might look like. We want to see trashless landscapes and places everywhere. We no longer want to push people to look for a bin. We want them to do it on their own. We proposed some innovative experiments or ideas, like the footsteps to lead people to the bins or a basketball court around the bin. And we hopefully will see that a process like this works. Because those experiments are almost costless, we can learn from it. After, for example, two months, the sport facility can ask people if the colorful footsteps help them to put their trash in the bin. They can start a dialogue that helps to identify new opportunities, to strengthen ongoing experiments and to extend the buy-in for the change process. It is important that the sport facility learns from the experiments or ideas we brought up. It isn't something you are going to change in a month or 2, but little by little people will become concerned with their waste, and when people have the right mindset then you will be able to make real changes.

5.5.2 Durability

If the sports facilities use some of our ideas and start a dialogue with people who use the facilities, they learn from the experiments and adjust the experiments where necessary. Like this, we can work with our wicked problem. We analyse the process of continuously reframing and negotiating what the problem might be and which measures would help to deal with the problem.

If you look at how long our ideas will work, then it depends on which idea. The idea with the posters will be for the short run, because it's more of a mindset and informative problem instead of a normal problem. The poster will help remind people they should do it, but if you don't change their mindset about it, the problem will come back. The second poster, about the tap water usage, could be redesigned later on and stay there in the long term. Since it's an university facility there are many new people who will be using it every year, they all need to be aware of the water quality and pushed towards those reusable drinking bottles.

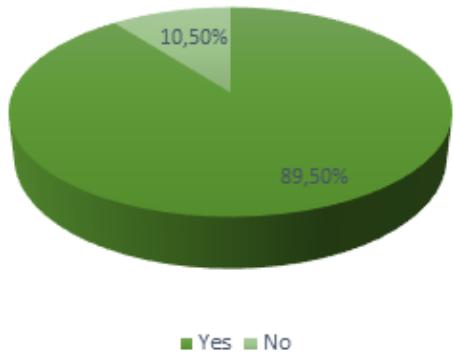
The other ideas, like a water fountain and footsteps, will work for a longer time but in the end everything has the same problem. People don't think that they need to throw their waste away, and as long if you can't change their way of thinking, it will always stay a problem. You can reduce it with measures like we want to take, but you can't entirely tackle it. That's why it's a wicked problem. It's something you just don't change within a day.

6. References

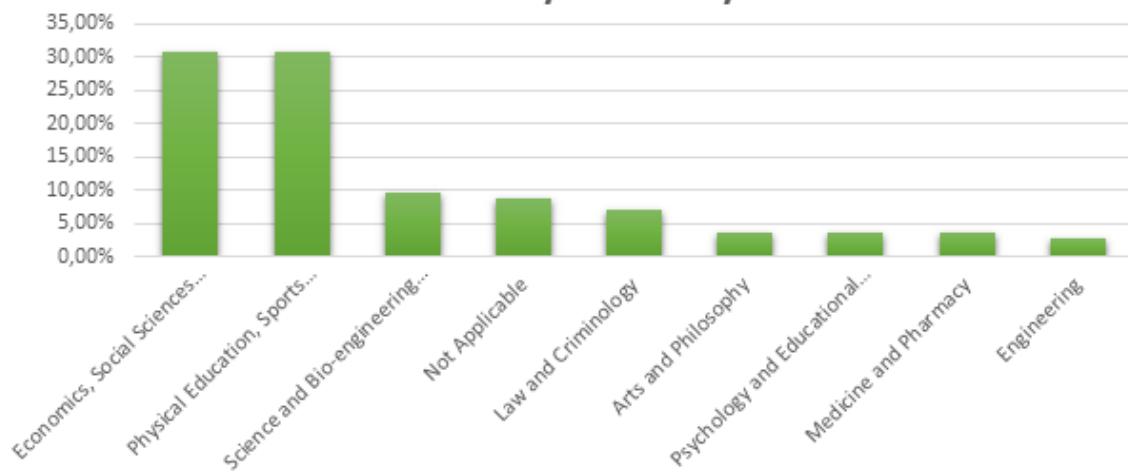
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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

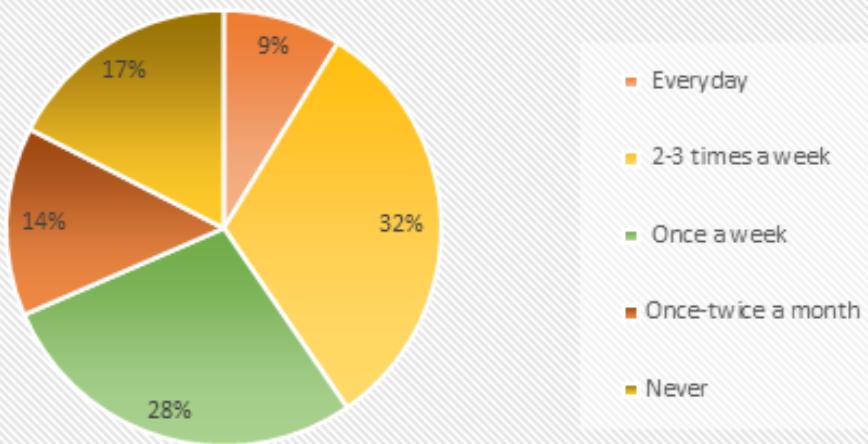
Are you a VUB student?



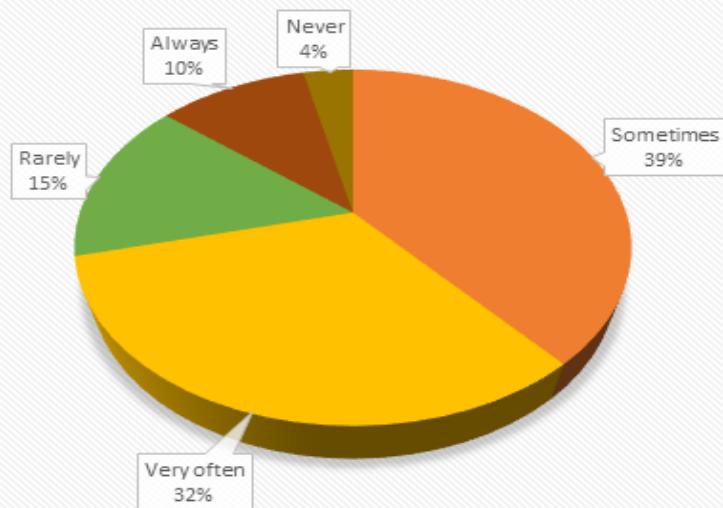
What is your faculty?



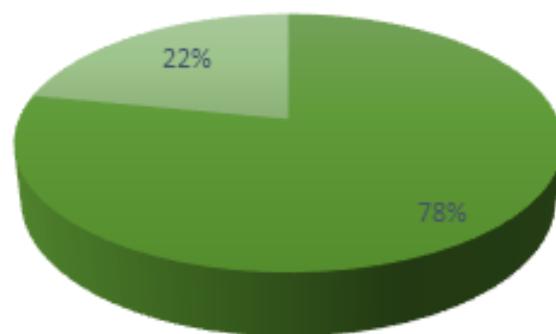
How often do you use the sports facilities at VUB (under normal conditions)?



How often do you think of sustainability in your day-to-day life (for instance, would you take the bus/train instead of the car if it is better for the environment)?

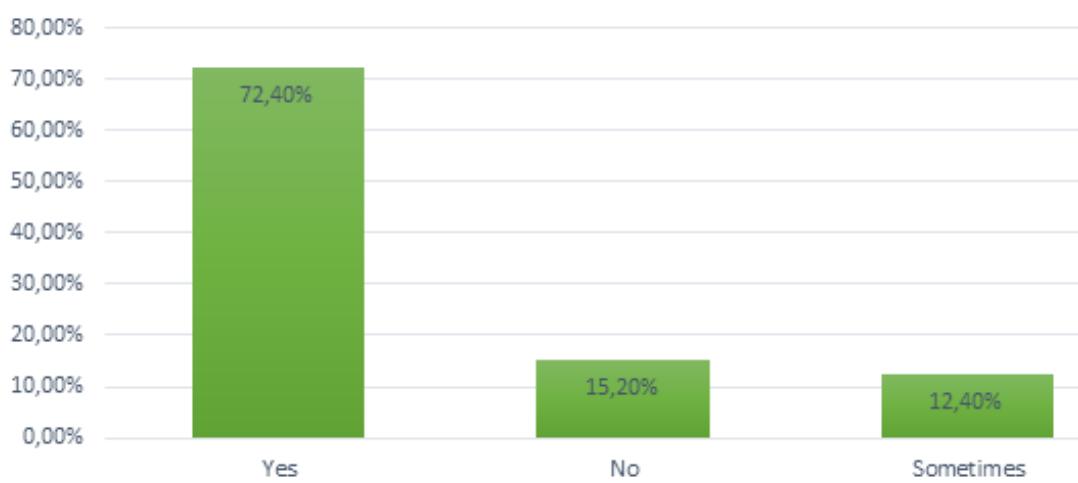


Do you have a long term drinking bottle?

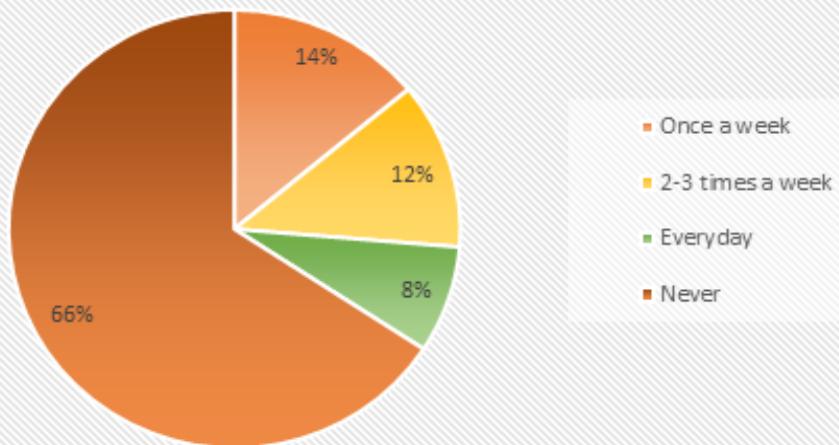


■ Yes ■ No

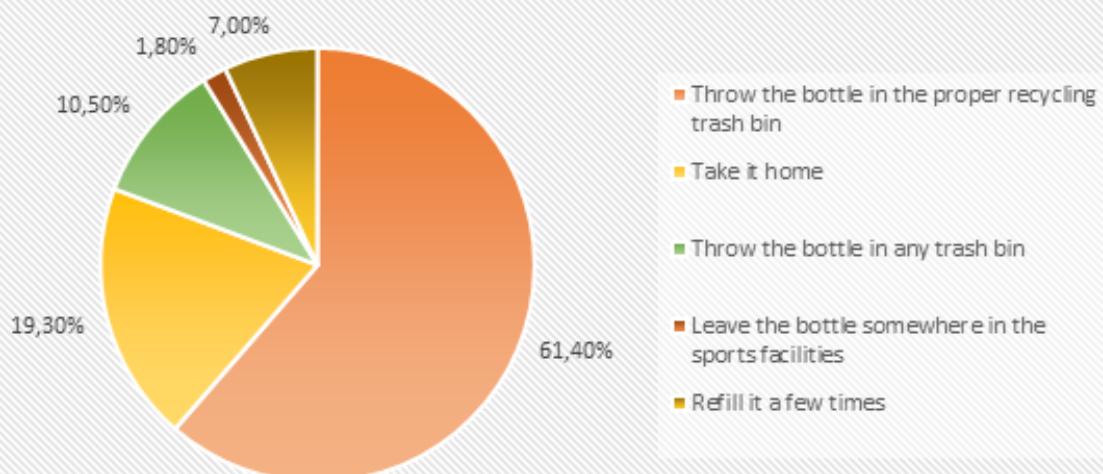
In case you have a reusable drinking bottle, do you take it with you during the activities at the sports facilities at VUB?



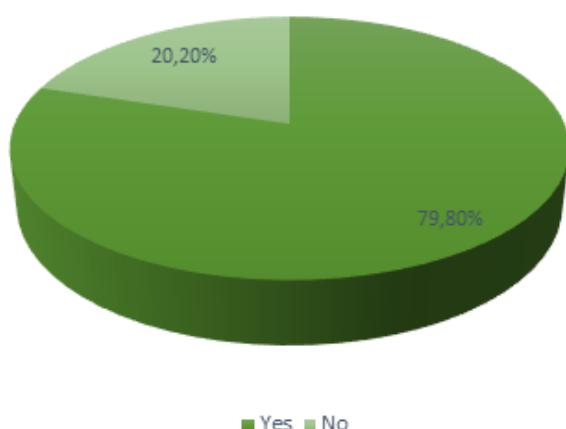
How often do you use non-reusable plastic drinking bottles while participating in sports at the VUB sportcenter?



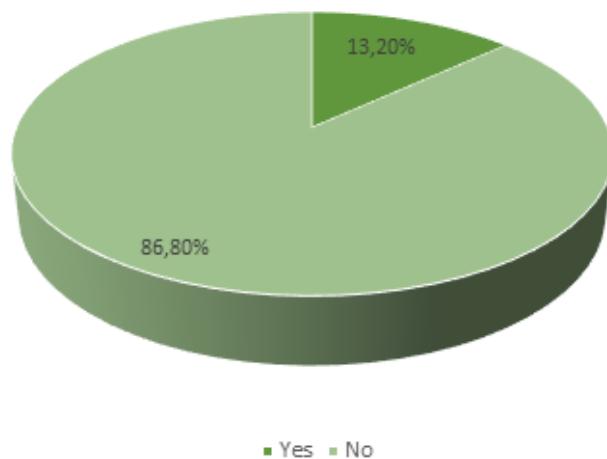
If you buy non-reusable plastic bottles, what do you do after using?



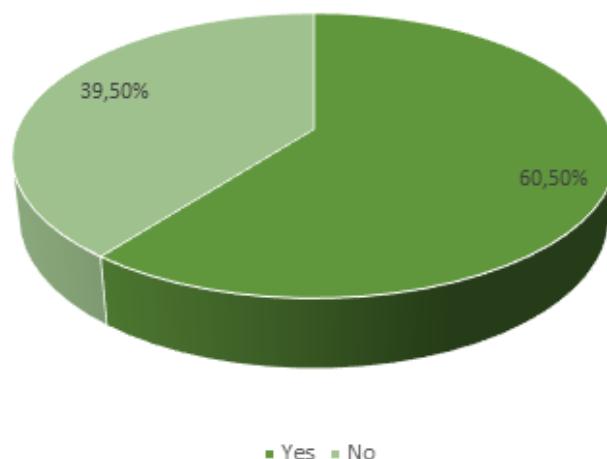
Do you agree to use drinking fountains instead of bottled water? (When there is no COVID-19)



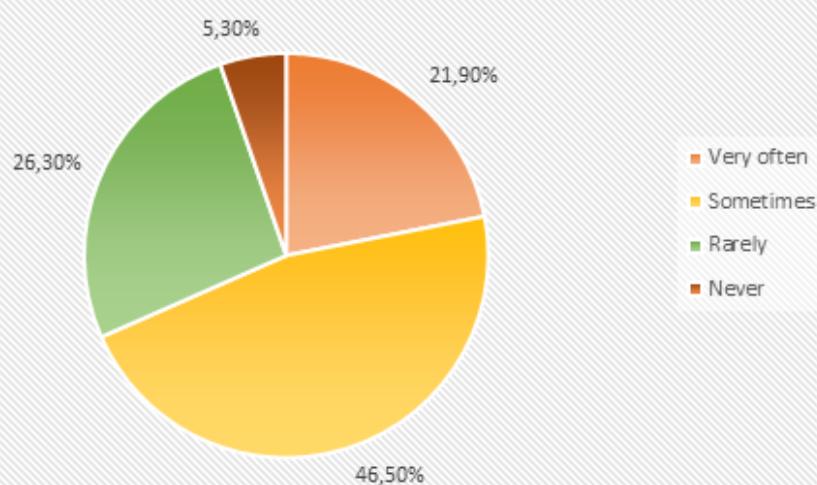
Do you think there are enough drinking fountains in the sports facilities at VUB?



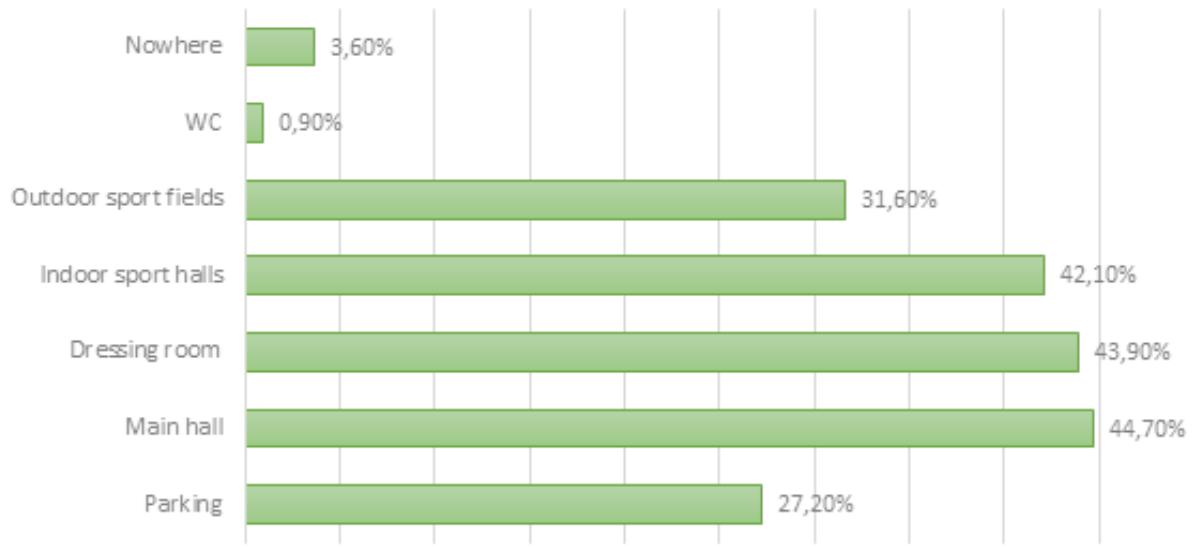
Do you think there are enough trash bins in the sports facilities at VUB?



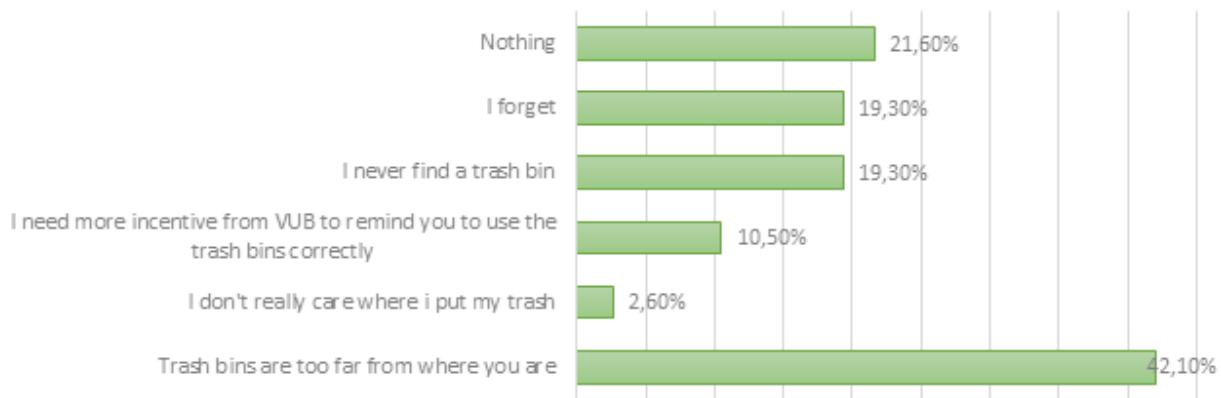
Have you been in a situation where at the right moment there was no trash bin next to you?



In which territories do you most often need to throw out waste? You can choose more than one option.

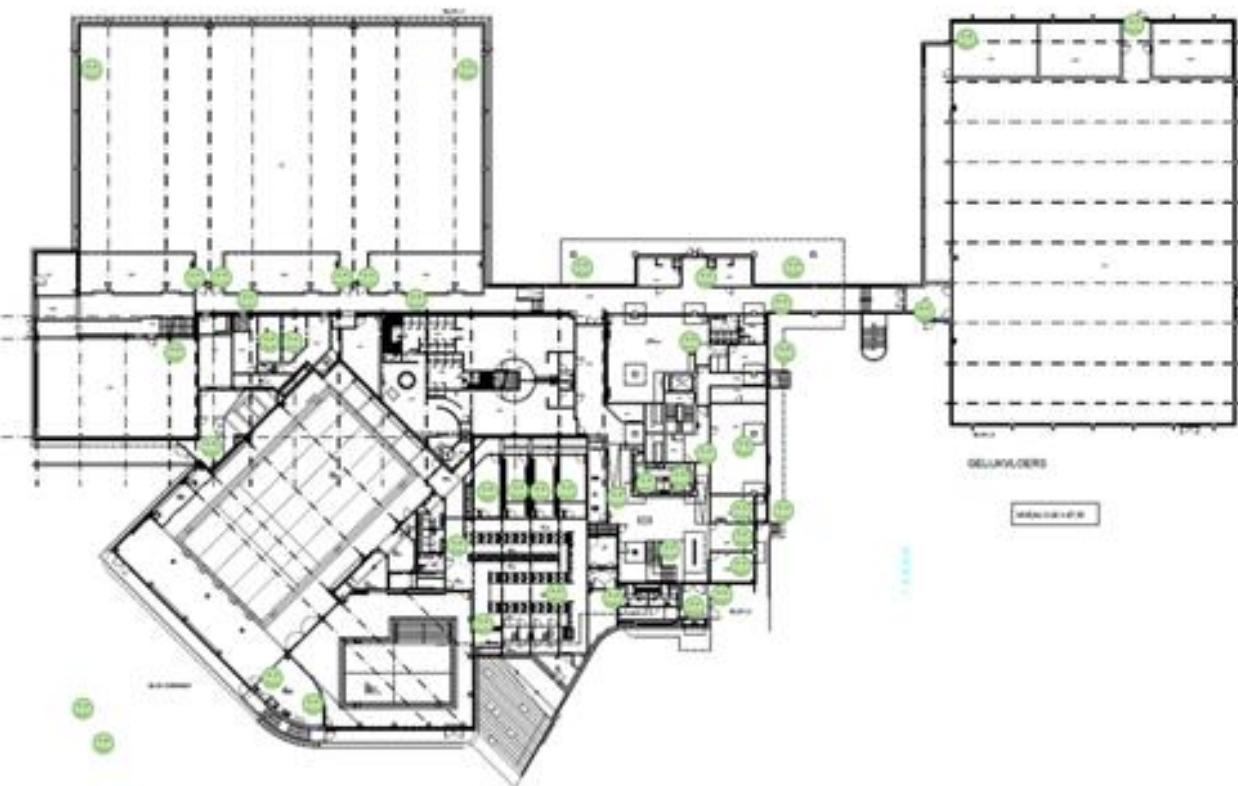


What prevents you from throwing the trash in proper trash bins? You can choose more than one option.



Appendix 2: Location trash bins

Floor 0:



Floor 1:



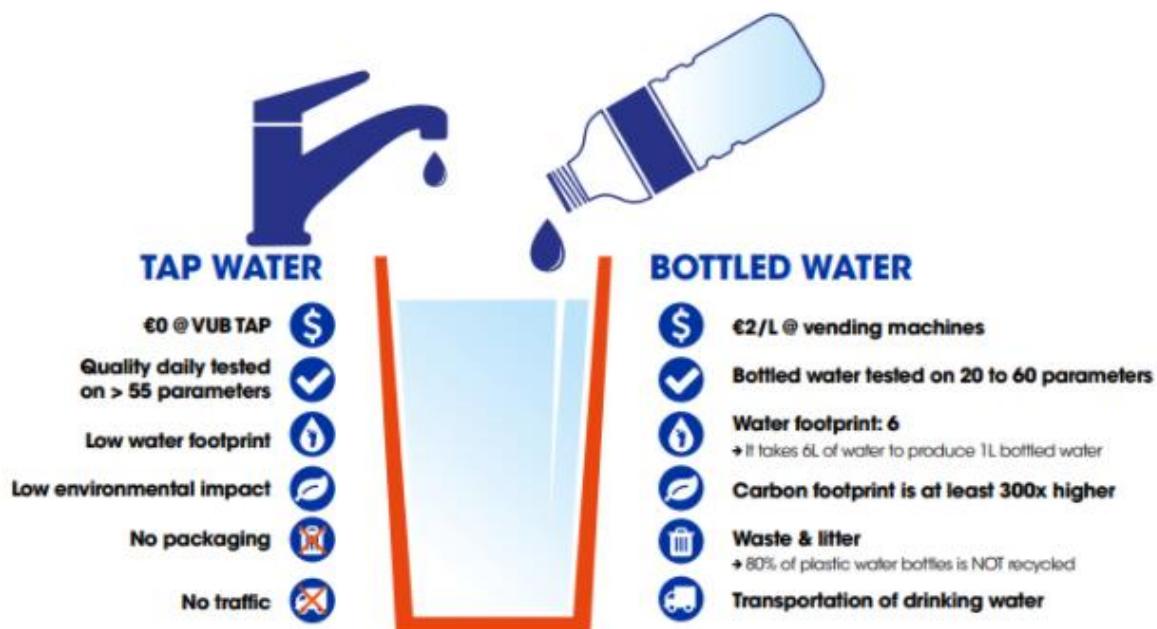
Appendix 3: Poster bottled water

DID YOU KNOW BELGIANS CONSUME A LOT OF BOTTLED WATER?

Belgium is one the countries with the highest bottled water consumption worldwide!

The average Belgian has an annual consumption of 131,7 litres per person.

JOIN THE VUB BLUE COMMUNITY DRINK TAP WATER!



Appendix 4: Poster: Tap water is safe!

TAP WATER IS SAFE!



Kraantjeswater is veilig



- The tap water in Belgium is tested everyday under more than 55 parameters;
- Contains calcium, which is good for your health;
- Single-use bottled water systems consume 11-90 times more energy than tap water systems;
- Tap water systems produces lower carbon emissions than bottled water systems, and by similar margins to lower energy consumption;
- With bottled water systems, collection of discarded bottles for recycling and transport of bottles to landfills adds to energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions and to other impact indicators;
- Besides that, tap water is good for your wallet!

Have always with you a reusable bottle or cup.

- Het kraantjeswater wordt elke dag getest op meer dan 55 parameters;
- Het bevat calcium, wat goed is voor je gezondheid;
- Niet-hernieuwbare watersystemen consumeren 11-90 keer meer energie dan kraantjeswatersystemen;
- Kraantjeswater heeft lagere koolstofgehalte dan flessenwater, en bij gelijke marges ook lagere energie consumptie;
- Met flessenwater, recycleren van de flessen en transport van die flessen naar vuilnisbelten zorgt voor meer energieconsumptie en uitstoot van broeikasgassen;
- Het is goed voor je portefeuille, want het is goedkoper!!

Zorg dat je altijd een herbruikbare waterfles bij je hebt!!



DRINKING TAP WATER IS GOOD...
+ FOR YOUR HEALTH
+ FOR YOUR WALLET
+ FOR THE PLANET
#DrinkingWaterEU



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+ FOR THE PLANET
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Appendix 5: Awareness poster

Hello, can you throw my trash in the bin?
I'm too lazy for that!



That is indirectly what you do when you don't take care of your own waste.

Let's be responsible?
Throw your trash into the bin!

Hey, kan je mijn fles weggooien, aub?
Ik ben daar te lui voor.



Dat is indirect wat je vraagt, als je uw afval zelf niet weggooit

Neem je verantwoordelijkheid!
Gooi je afval in de vuilbak

Appendix 6: Footsteps & basketball ring

