

NATURE, IDENTITY AND THE FUTURE OF CUGIR

**A sociological study of the community's
relationship with green spaces,
conservation and local participation**

**SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH REPORT
CUGIR
2026**

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between local communities and the natural environment in which they are situated represents an important dimension in the analysis of quality of life, territorial identity, patterns of spatial use and willingness to engage in community initiatives. In the case of the town of Cugir and its surrounding constituent settlements, the proximity of mountains, forests, watercourses and other natural areas creates a setting in which interaction between the population and the natural environment forms part of everyday life through recreational activities, traditional practices, travel, personal experiences and different forms of attachment to particular places.

This sociological research report was prepared by Active Research, under the coordination of sociologist Valentin Rațiu, and commissioned by the Raw Nature Experience and 2Celsius associations. The study was designed to provide the empirical evidence required to understand the relationship between the local community and the area's natural heritage, and to inform future approaches to conservation, community participation and local development.

The research examines how the adult population within the surveyed area uses, perceives and evaluates the natural areas surrounding Cugir. The study is both descriptive and analytical in scope and was structured to capture several dimensions of this relationship: the frequency of contact with nature, means of access, activities undertaken, sources of information, perceived health benefits, the role of nature in local identity and the existence of places of personal significance.

A distinct dimension of the study concerns residents' attitudes towards the conservation of natural heritage and the future development of the town. The research therefore examined the importance attributed to the protection of green areas, the relevance of conservation to Cugir's future, the level of support for the establishment of a natural park, and residents' perceptions of how the locality may develop over the next decade. The analysis consequently explores how modernisation, improvements in environmental quality, the enhancement of the town's attractiveness and the protection of nature are articulated in the responses provided by the surveyed population.

The study also examines the potential for community participation in relation to natural heritage. It measures preferences regarding activities that could be organised in natural areas, interest in participating in such activities and willingness to become involved as volunteers. It further analyses the relationships between these forms of engagement and characteristics such as age, educational attainment, income, frequency of use of green areas and attachment to particular natural places.

By integrating these dimensions, the study seeks to provide an empirical account of the relationship between the surveyed community and the local natural heritage. The findings describe existing practices, perceptions, evaluations and potential forms of public engagement, while providing a robust evidence base for recommendations concerning nature conservation, community participation and local development.

METHODOLOGY

	RESEARCH UNIVERSE	The research universe is made up of the non-institutionalized adult population of the city of Cugir and of the localities Vinerea, Bucuru, Călene and Mugești.
	RESEARCH METHOD	Sociological survey conducted through face-to-face interviews at the respondents' homes, using a standardized questionnaire.
	SAMPLE SELECTION	The households were selected using the random route method, with the application of a statistical step (k=3), each third household along the route being selected.
	SAMPLE	Probabilistic, stratified sample, consisting of 400 respondents, representative of the target population.
	DATA COLLECTION METHOD	T.A.P.I. (Tablet Assisted Personal Interviewing).
	DATA COLLECTION PERIOD	Data collection took place in the field between July 10–12, 2026.
	MARGIN OF ERROR	The maximum margin of error is $\pm 4.9\%$, at a 95% confidence level.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

In the sample obtained following data collection, women were overrepresented relative to the structure of the reference population. To align the sample distribution with the official data published by the Romanian National Institute of Statistics (INSSE) for the population of Cugir, the dataset was weighted by sex.

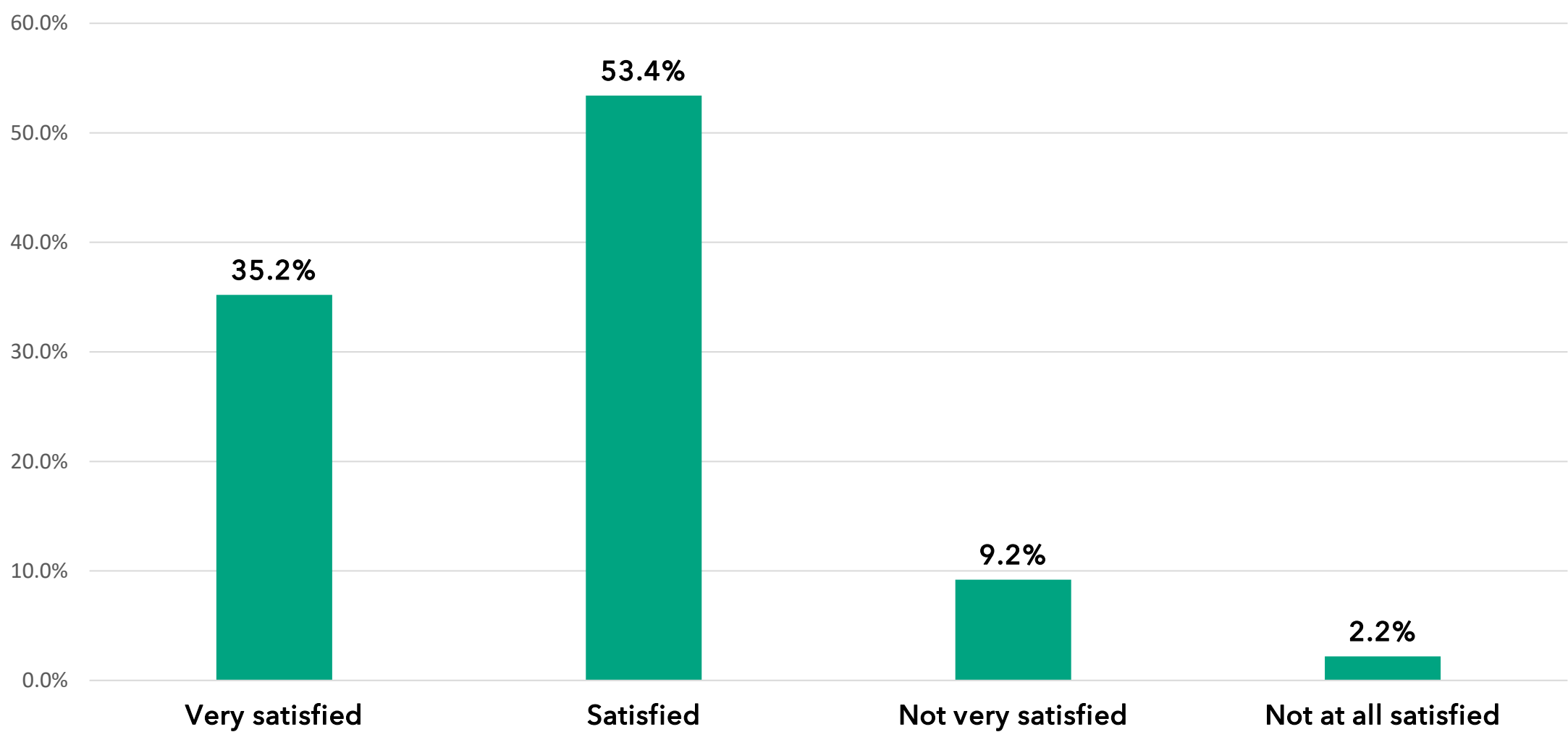
The following weighting coefficients were applied: **0.8814 for women** and **1.1707 for men**.

Through weighting, the statistical contribution of women's responses was proportionally reduced, while that of men's responses was increased. The final weighted distribution of the sample is **52.2% women** and **47.8% men**, in accordance with the structure of the reference population.

All percentages and analyses presented in this report were calculated using the weighted data.

OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH LIVING IN CUGIR

Figure 1. Overall, how satisfied are you with living in your locality?



Residents of Cugir report a very high level of satisfaction with the locality in which they live.

More than half of respondents, 53.4%, describe themselves as satisfied, while 35.2% are very satisfied. Taken together, these two positive categories account for 88.6% of the total, indicating that favourable assessments of the town are predominant within the surveyed community.

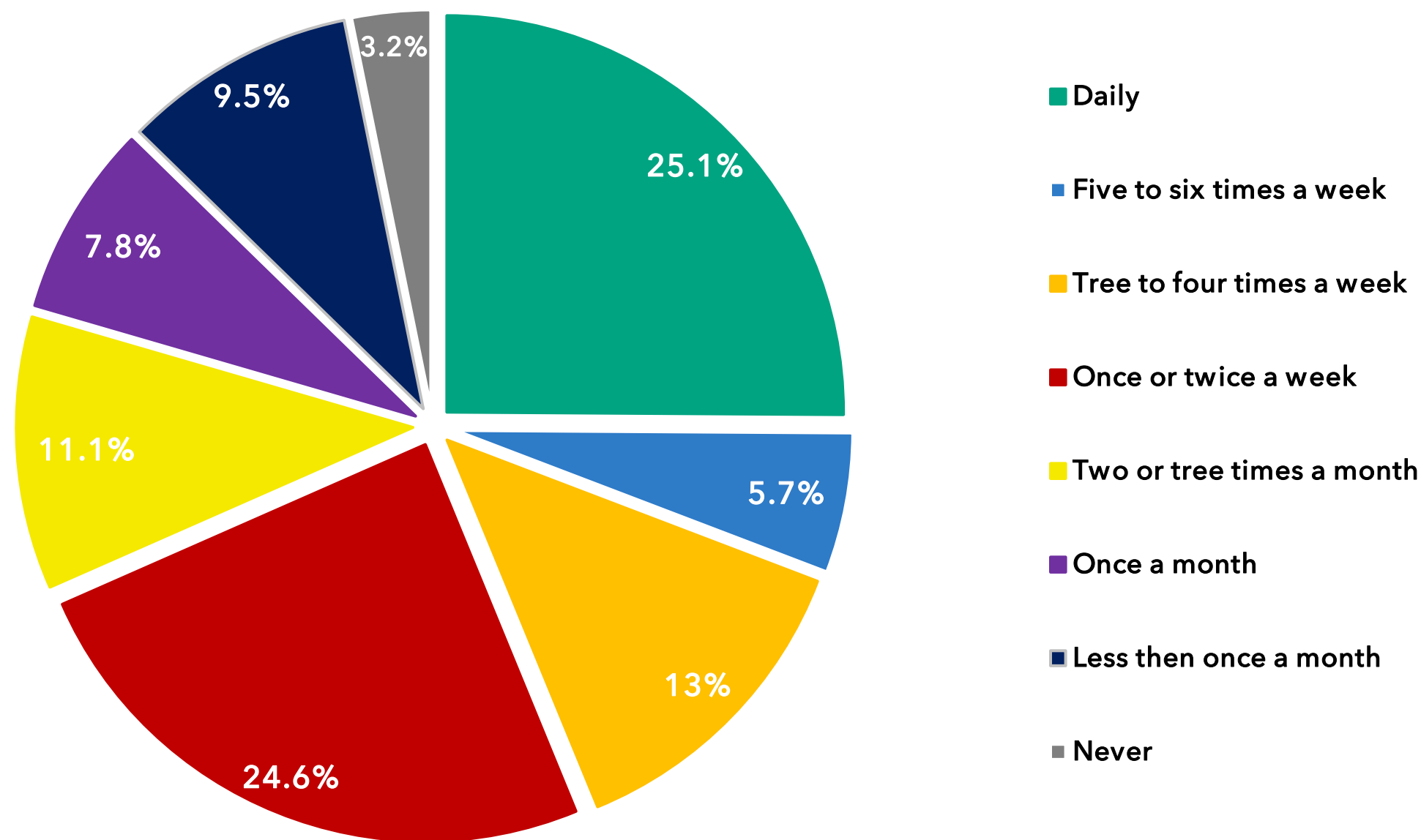
However, satisfaction is expressed primarily in moderate rather than strongly positive terms: the proportion of respondents who are satisfied is 18.2 percentage points higher than the proportion who are very satisfied.

This distribution suggests a solid appreciation of life in Cugir, while also pointing to the existence of certain reservations or expectations regarding further improvements to the locality.

At the opposite end of the scale, 9.2% of respondents report being dissatisfied, while 2.2% are very dissatisfied. Overall, negative assessments account for 11.4% of responses, almost eight times less than positive assessments. Taken as a whole, the findings depict a community characterised by a high level of residential satisfaction and a predominantly favourable relationship with the town.

FREQUENCY OF GREEN-SPACE USE AROUND CUGIR

Figure 2. How often do you usually spend time in the green areas surrounding Cugir?



Contact with nature forms part of the everyday routine of a substantial proportion of Cugir’s residents.

Approximately one quarter of respondents (25.1%) report spending time in green areas on a daily basis, while a further 24.6% do so once or twice a week. In addition, 13.0% visit these areas three to four times a week, and 5.7% five to six times a week. Overall, 68.4% of residents spend time in nature at least once a week, indicating a high frequency of contact with the natural environment.

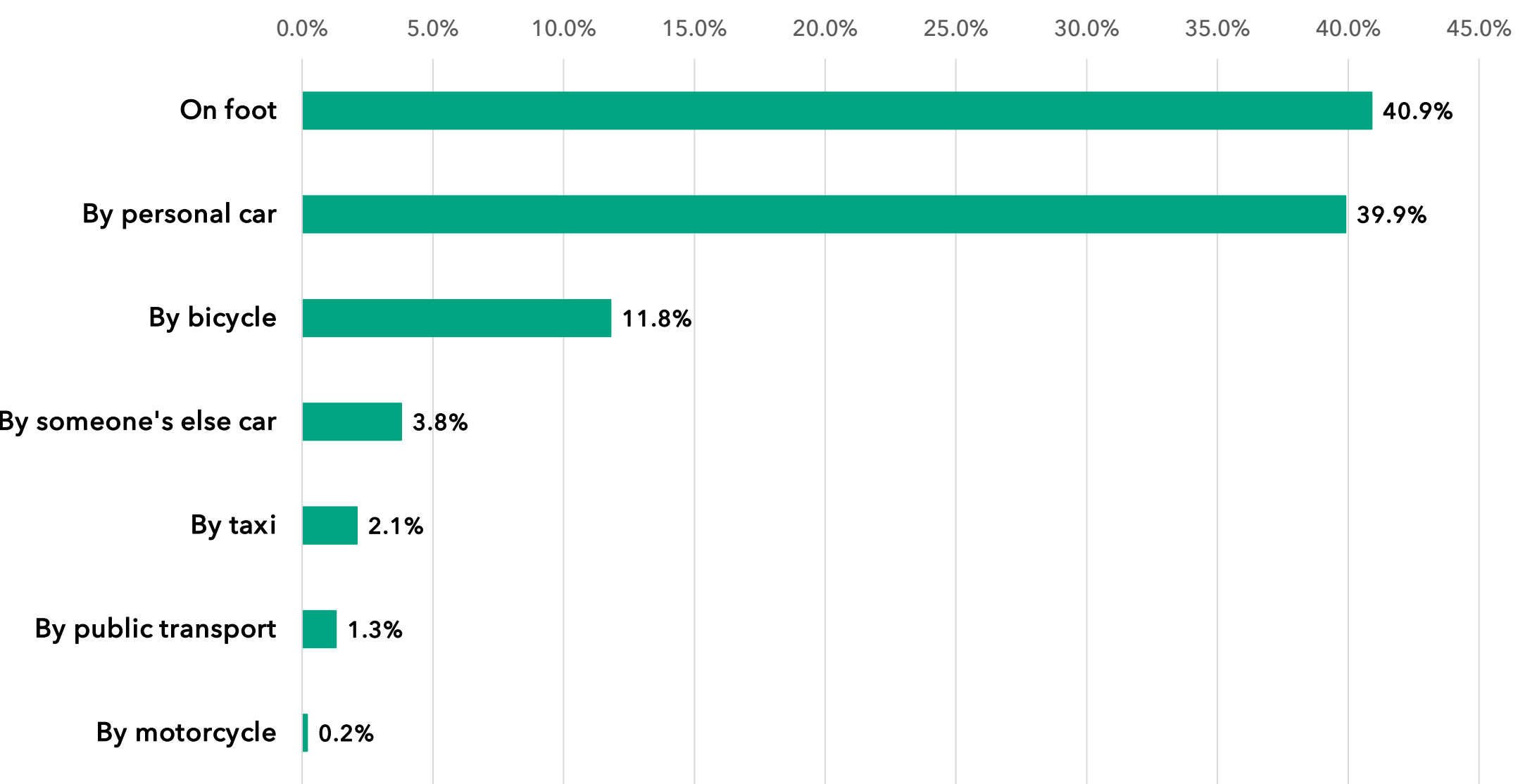
Less frequent use is characteristic of a considerably smaller segment of the population. Only 9.5% of respondents report spending time in

green areas less than once a month, while 3.2% state that they never do so. The distribution of responses shows that an almost complete absence of contact with nature is a marginal situation within the community.

Taken as a whole, the findings demonstrate that green areas occupy an important place in the everyday lives of Cugir’s residents. The high frequency of visits indicates that natural areas are well integrated into the daily practices of a substantial proportion of the population, although the data do not allow for a direct assessment of all potential barriers to access.

MOBILITY

Figure 3. How do you usually travel to the green areas surrounding Cugir?



Access to natural areas is almost evenly divided between motorised and non-motorised forms of mobility.

Non-motorised modes account for 52.7% of responses, with 40.9% of respondents travelling on foot and 11.8% by bicycle. By contrast, motorised transport accounts for 47.3%, with private cars representing the largest share (39.9%), followed at a considerable distance by the other transport options.

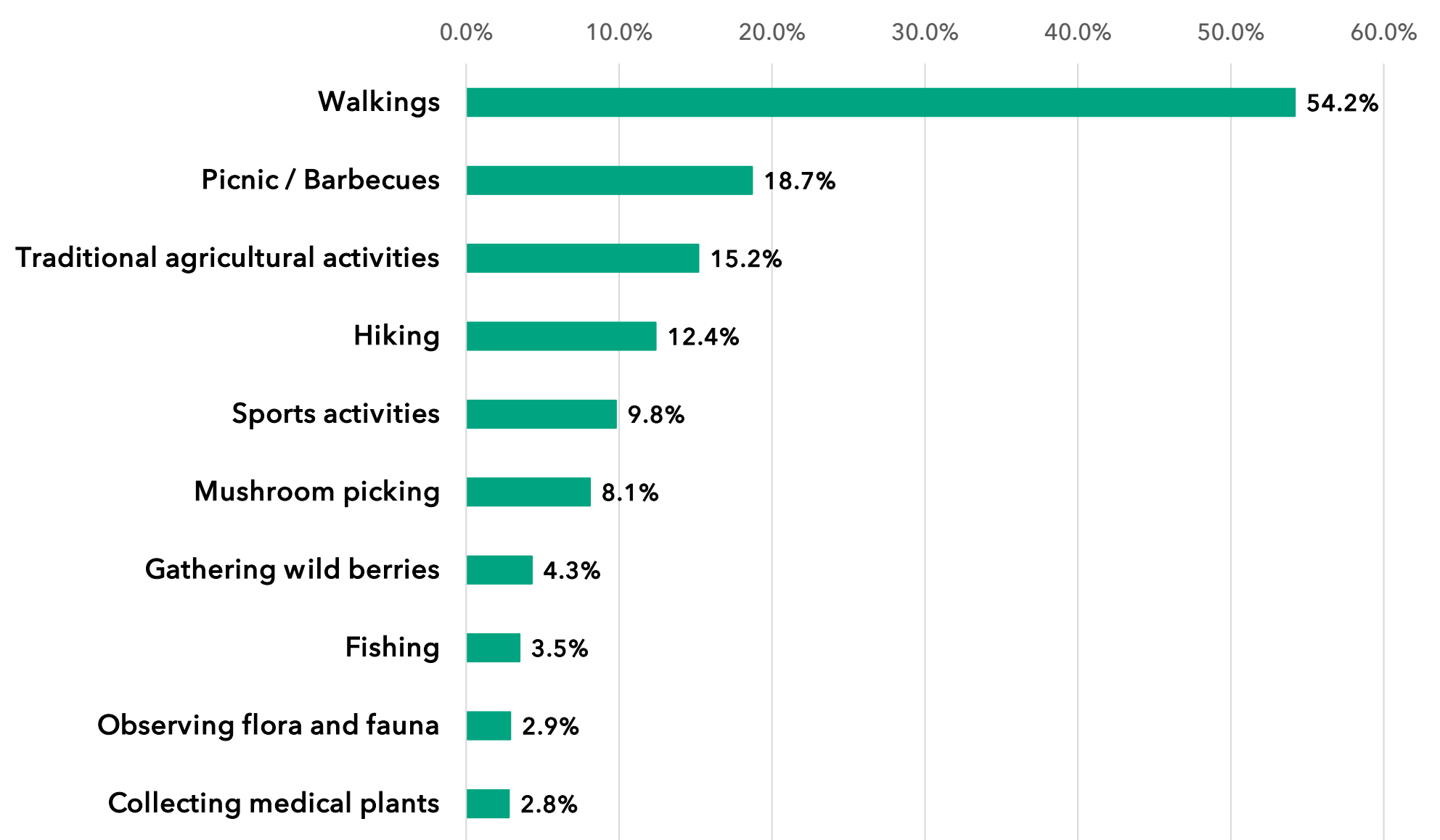
This distribution highlights significant potential for strengthening non-motorised mobility. The substantial proportion of journeys

made on foot or by bicycle indicates that a considerable share of residents already use active forms of mobility to reach natural areas, although reliance on private cars remains significant.

Overall, the findings support the development of local interventions aimed at promoting non-motorised mobility. The creation of attractive pedestrian routes, the expansion of cycling infrastructure and improved connections between residential neighbourhoods and natural areas could encourage active travel, with potential benefits for public health, environmental quality and access to natural spaces.

ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN IN THE GREEN AREAS SURROUNDING CUGIR

Figure 4. What are the main activities you undertake in the natural areas surrounding Cugir?



Walking is by far the principal way in which Cugir’s residents interact with nature.

More than half of respondents (54.2%) identify walking as one of their main activities, followed at a considerable distance by picnics and barbecues (18.7%), traditional agricultural activities (15.2%) and hiking (12.4%). This pattern indicates that engagement with the natural environment is oriented primarily towards recreation, relaxation and leisure.

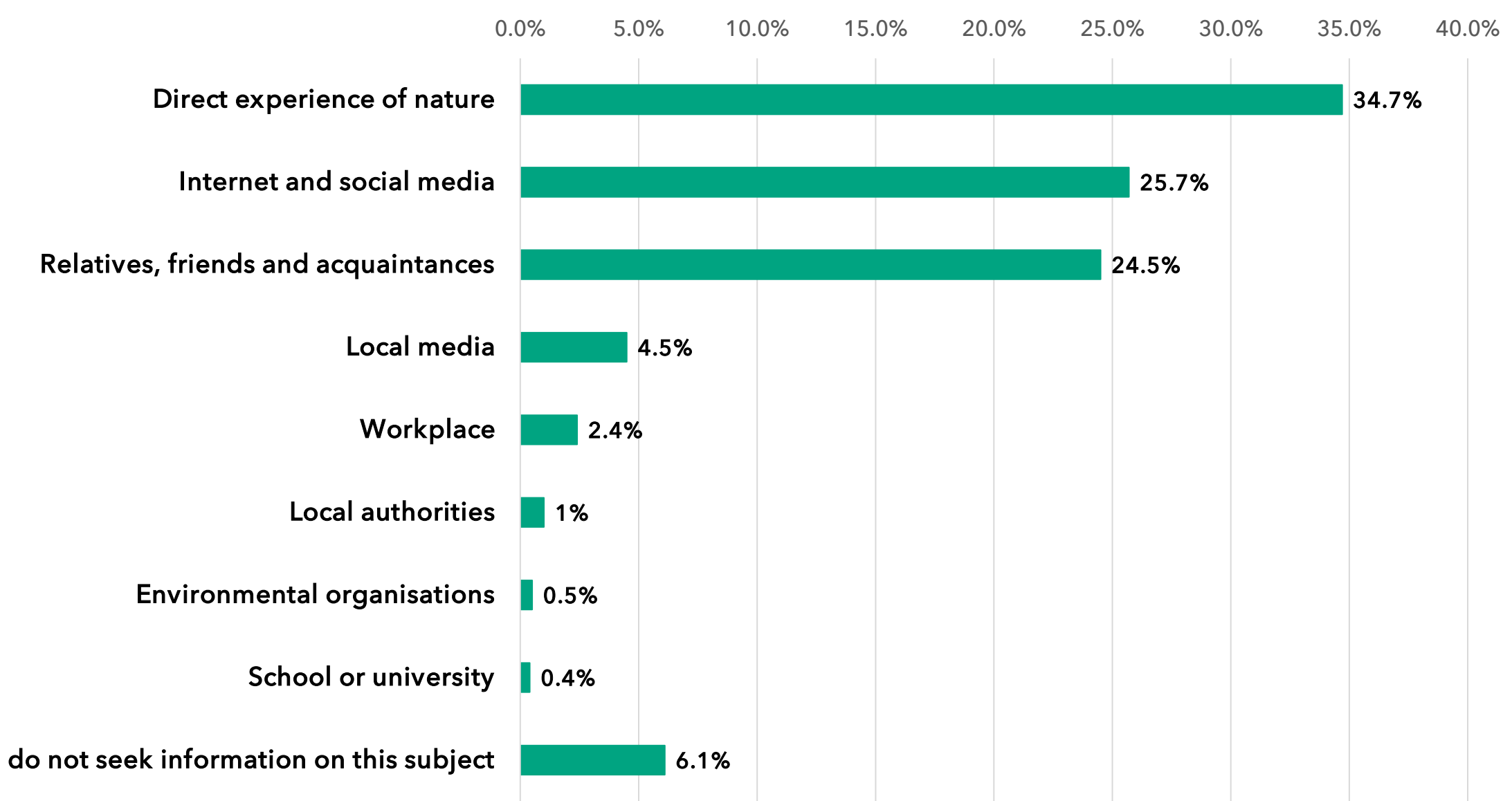
Activities involving more specialised or intensive contact with nature are reported far less frequently. Sports activities are mentioned by 9.8% of respondents and mushroom picking by 8.1%,

while fishing, observing flora and fauna, gathering wild berries and collecting medicinal plants are practised by only limited segments of the population.

The predominance of recreational activities suggests that nature is perceived primarily as a space for relaxation and social interaction. This orientation highlights the importance of maintaining natural areas that are accessible, attractive and well connected to the town, and that are capable of responding to the preferences of the majority of residents.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE GREEN AREAS SURROUNDING CUGIR

Figure 5. Where do you most often obtain information about the natural areas surrounding Cugir?



Direct experience of nature constitutes the principal source of information through which Cugir’s residents learn about the natural environment.

More than one third of respondents (34.7%) report that they acquire their knowledge primarily through direct contact with nature. The internet and social media (25.7%), together with discussions with relatives, friends and acquaintances (24.5%), rank next, indicating that personal experience coexists with digital and informal sources of information.

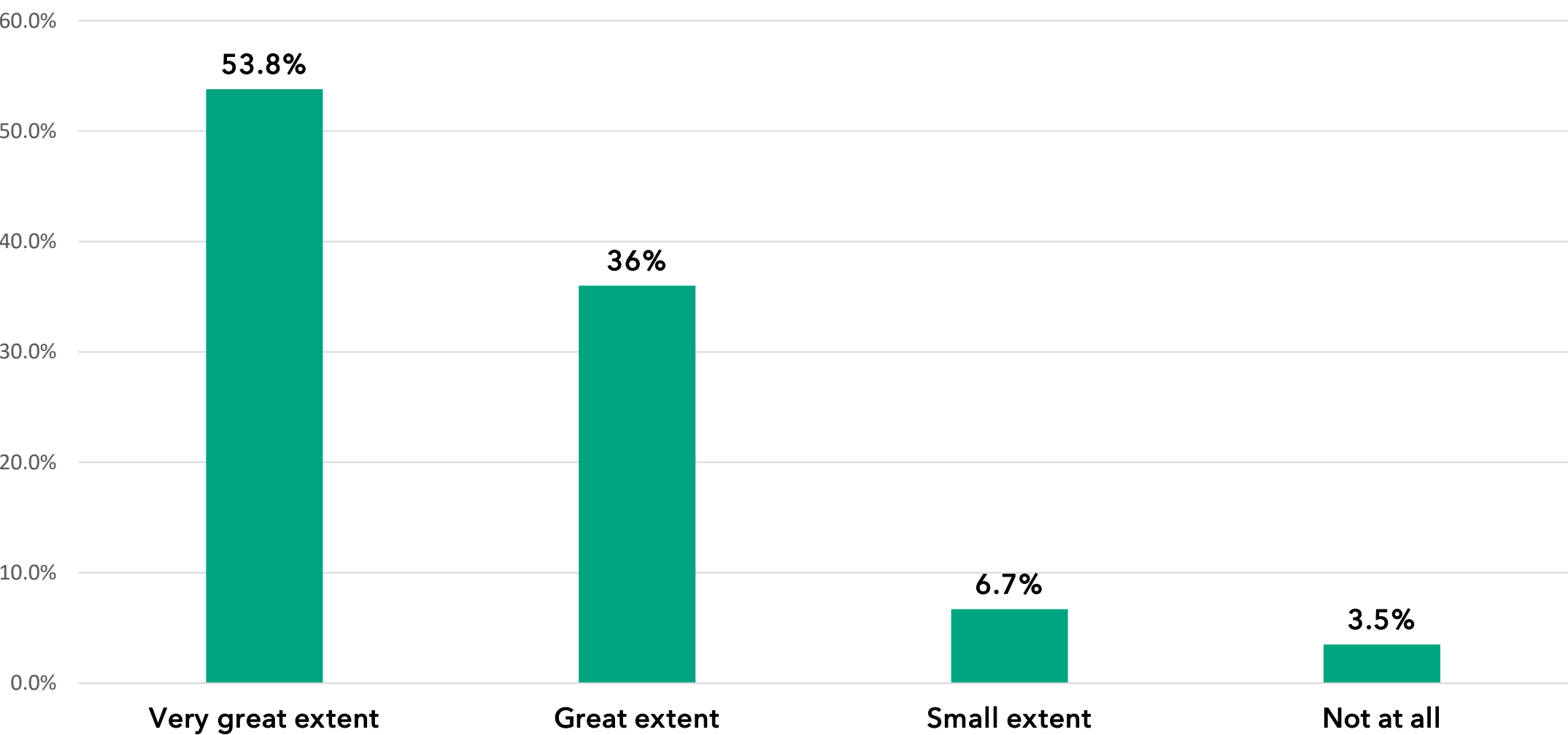
By contrast, institutional sources play a considerably more limited role. Local media are mentioned by only 4.5% of respondents, the workplace by 2.4%, local authorities by 1.0%,

environmental organisations by 0.5%, and schools or universities by just 0.4%. At the same time, 6.1% of respondents state that they do not seek information on this subject at all.

This pattern of responses suggests that information about nature circulates predominantly through personal experience and informal communication networks, while institutions have only a limited capacity to shape the population’s level of awareness. This situation highlights the need for more active involvement by local authorities, educational institutions and environmental organisations in public communication concerning the area’s natural heritage.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF GREEN AREAS ON HEALTH

Figure 6. To what extent do you consider the green areas surrounding Cugir to have a beneficial impact on your health?



The importance of nature for physical and mental health is recognised by almost the entire population of Cugir.

More than half of respondents (53.8%) believe that nature contributes to their health to a very great extent, while a further 36.0% consider its influence to be substantial. Overall, 89.8% of residents express a strongly positive assessment of the health benefits provided by the natural environment.

Views that assign a more limited role to nature are relatively uncommon. Only 6.7% of

respondents believe that nature contributes to health to a small extent, while 3.5% consider that it has no influence at all. The distribution of responses indicates broad agreement regarding the value of nature as a resource for maintaining well-being.

The favourable perception expressed by the majority of respondents provides a supportive social context for promoting outdoor activities and for developing local policies that recognise natural spaces as a resource for community health and quality of life.

THE IMPACT OF NATURE ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF CUGIR RESIDENTS

Table 1. The impact of nature on the quality of life of Cugir’s residents

RELATIONSHIP	STRENGTH OF ASSOCIATION
Perceived health benefits – Residential satisfaction	$\rho = 0.224$; $p < 0,001$
Frequency of green-space use – Residential satisfaction	$\rho = 0,216$; $p < 0,001$
Natural identity – Residential satisfaction	$\rho = 0,183$; $p < 0,001$

Resident’s relationship with nature is positively associated with their overall satisfaction with living in Cugir.

All three relationships examined are statistically significant, although the Spearman correlation coefficients indicate associations of weak magnitude.

The strongest relationship identified is between the perceived health benefits of green spaces and residential satisfaction, with a coefficient of $\rho = 0.224$; $p < 0.001$. Respondents who perceive natural areas as making a greater contribution to their physical and mental health also tend to report higher levels of satisfaction with living in Cugir. This finding suggests that the value of nature is assessed not only in aesthetic or recreational terms, but also in relation to its contribution to well-being. In a town where almost nine in ten respondents recognise the positive effects of nature on health, this association provides a relevant argument for incorporating green spaces into local public health and quality-of-life policies.

A relationship of comparable magnitude is observed between the frequency of green-space use and residential satisfaction: $\rho = 0.216$; $p < 0.001$. Respondents who spend time more

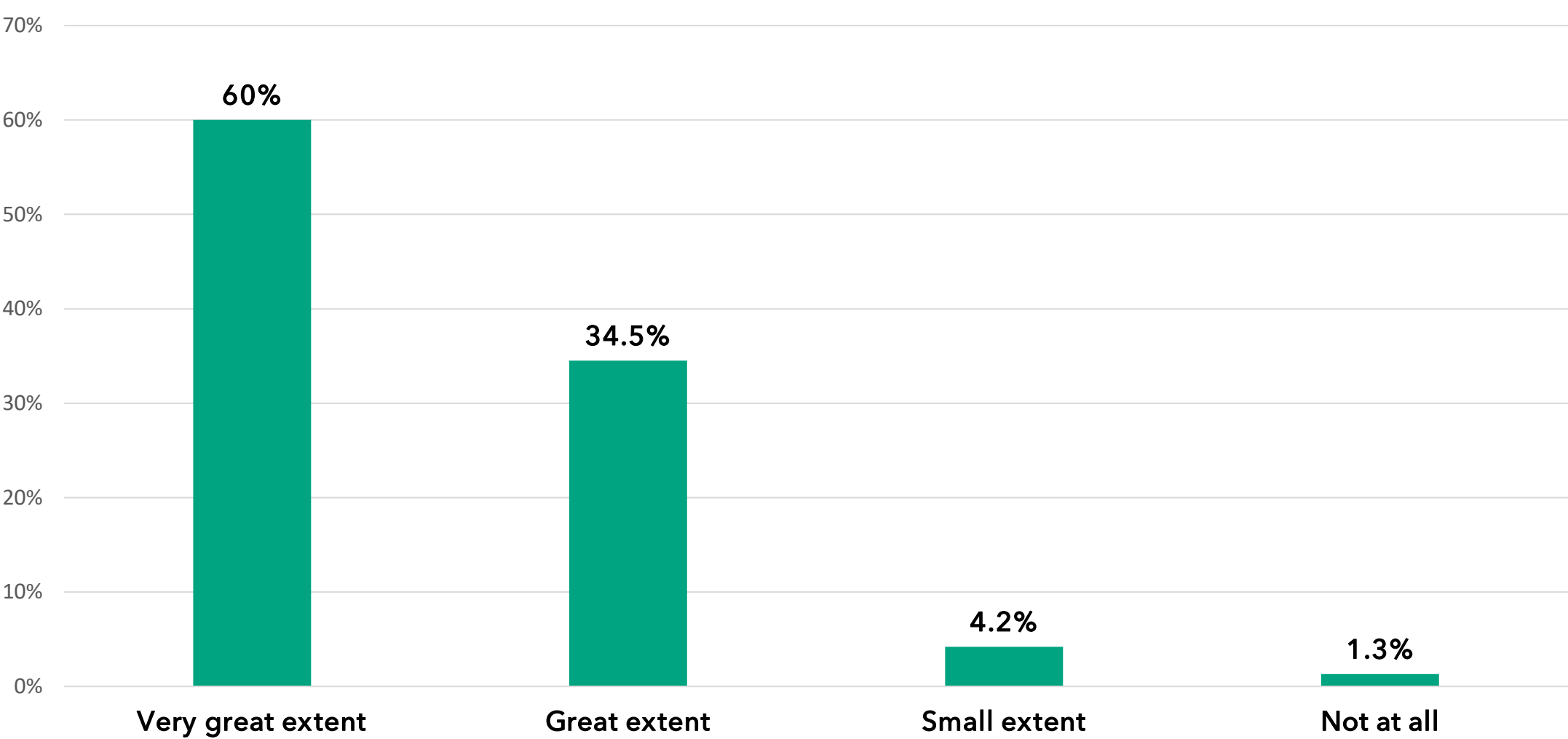
frequently in the natural areas surrounding the town also tend to evaluate living in Cugir more favourably. Given that more than two thirds of residents visit green spaces at least once a week, this finding highlights the potential role of accessibility, connectivity and opportunities for regular use in shaping a positive residential experience.

The third relationship examined links the perception of nature as an important component of Cugir’s identity with residential satisfaction: $\rho = 0.183$; $p < 0.001$. Although this is the weakest of the three associations, the result indicates that favourable evaluations of the town are also connected to the symbolic dimension of nature.

Taken together, the three findings support the conclusion that perceived health benefits, the actual use of green spaces and the integration of nature into local identity are associated with higher levels of residential satisfaction in Cugir. These relationships do not demonstrate direct causal effects, but they provide a relevant evidence base for local policies focused on health, well-being, active mobility, community identity and enhancing the town’s attractiveness.

THE ROLE OF NATURAL AREAS IN LOCAL IDENTITY

Figure 7. To what extent do you consider local natural areas to be an important part of Cugir?



Local natural areas constitute a defining element of Cugir’s identity in the perception of its residents.

Six in ten respondents (60.0%) believe that these areas form part of the town’s identity to a very great extent, while a further 34.5% consider their importance to be substantial. Overall, 94.5% of respondents directly associate the image of Cugir with its natural heritage.

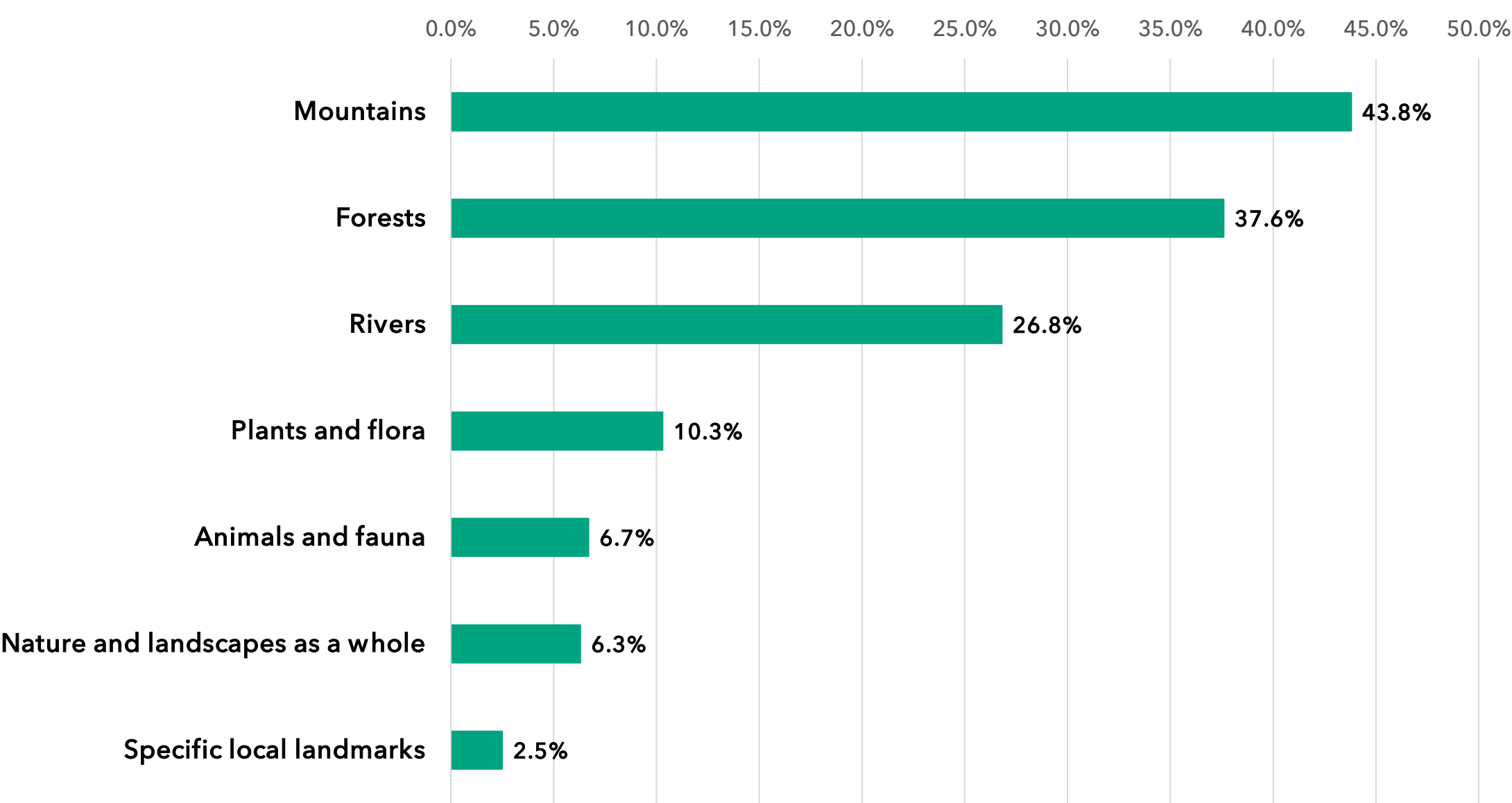
Contrary views are very limited. Only 4.2% of respondents believe that natural areas contribute to local identity to a small extent, while 1.3% consider that they play no such role at all. The

distribution of responses indicates an almost unanimous consensus regarding the importance of nature in defining the area’s distinctive local character.

This perception represents an important asset for the town’s development. When nature is regarded as an integral part of community identity, measures related to conservation, tourism development and the promotion of natural heritage are likely to benefit from higher levels of public acceptance and to have a greater capacity to mobilise community support.

REPRESENTATIVE NATURAL FEATURES OF THE CUGIR AREA

Figure 8. Which natural features do you consider most representative of the Cugir area?



Mountains and forests constitute the principal natural landmarks through which residents define the Cugir area.

Mountains are mentioned by 43.8% of respondents and forests by 37.6%, followed by the area’s rivers and other water bodies (26.8%). These findings indicate that local representations of nature are shaped primarily by highly visible landscape features that also occupy a prominent place in the community’s everyday experience.

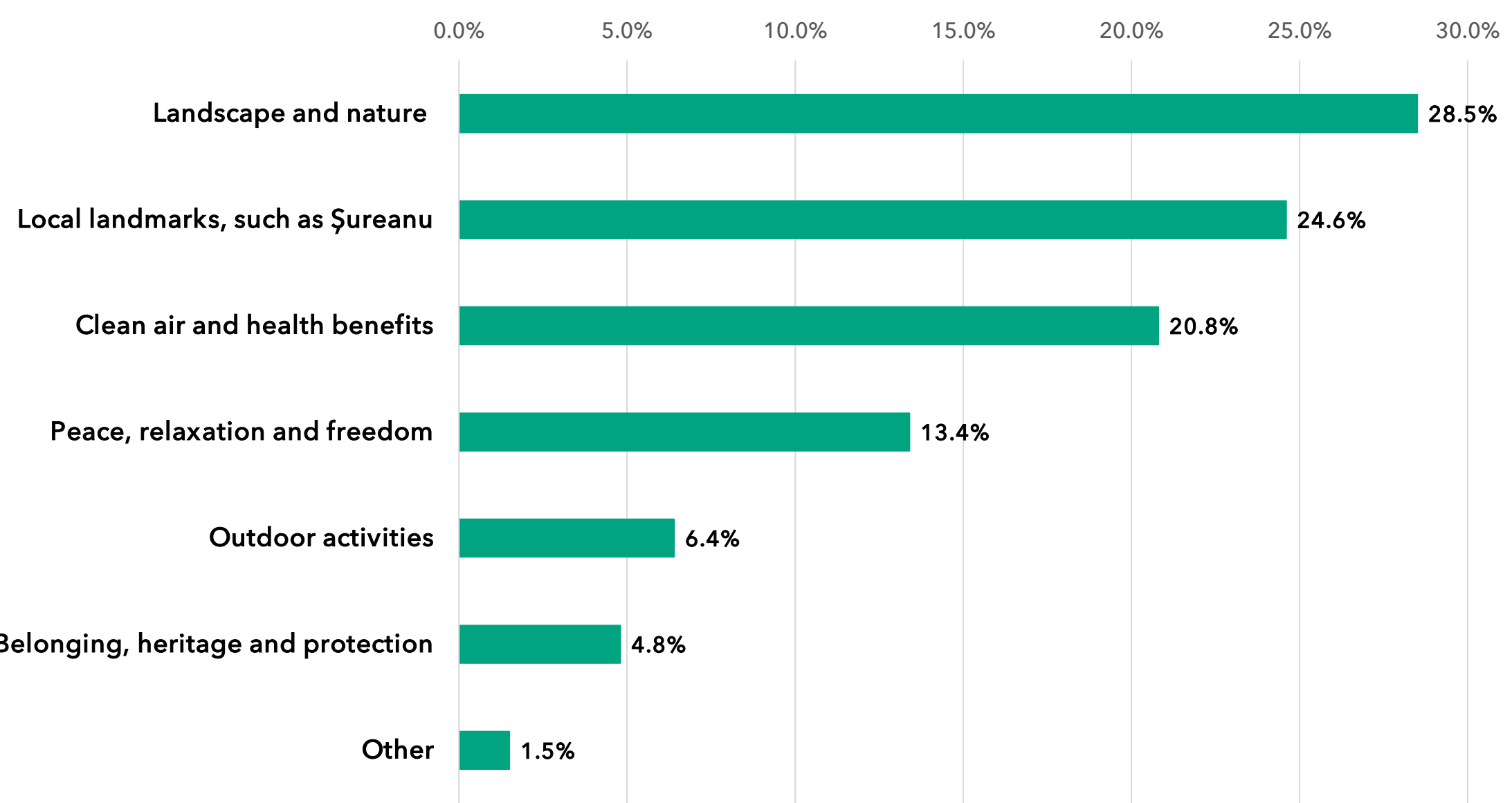
Other components of the natural heritage are mentioned considerably less often. Plants and flora are identified by 10.3% of respondents, animals and fauna by 6.7%, and nature or the landscape as

a whole by 6.3%. Explicitly named local landmarks account for only 2.5% of responses, suggesting that perceptions of nature are associated more strongly with broad landscape categories than with specific natural sites.

Overall, the responses indicate that the area’s natural identity is rooted in the dominant features of its relief and vegetation. These elements may therefore serve as central reference points in strategies aimed at promoting natural heritage, developing ecotourism and strengthening local identity through the valorisation of the area’s representative natural assets.

SPONTANEOUS ASSOCIATIONS WITH THE MOUNTAINS SURROUNDING CUGIR

Figure 9. When you think about the mountains surrounding Cugir, what is the first thing that comes to mind?



The mountains surrounding Cugir are perceived primarily in terms of their landscape value and their connection with nature.

For 28.5% of respondents, the first associations that come to mind are landscape and nature, while 24.6% associate the mountains with local landmarks such as Șureanu. A further 20.8% relate them to clean air and health benefits. Taken together, these three categories account for almost three quarters of all responses (73.9%), reflecting a predominantly positive image that is strongly rooted in the area’s natural qualities.

Associations with peace, relaxation and freedom are mentioned by 13.4% of respondents,

while outdoor activities (6.4%) and notions of belonging, heritage and protection (4.8%) account for smaller shares. Other responses represent only 1.5% of the total, indicating that the vast majority of answers could be classified within the principal thematic categories.

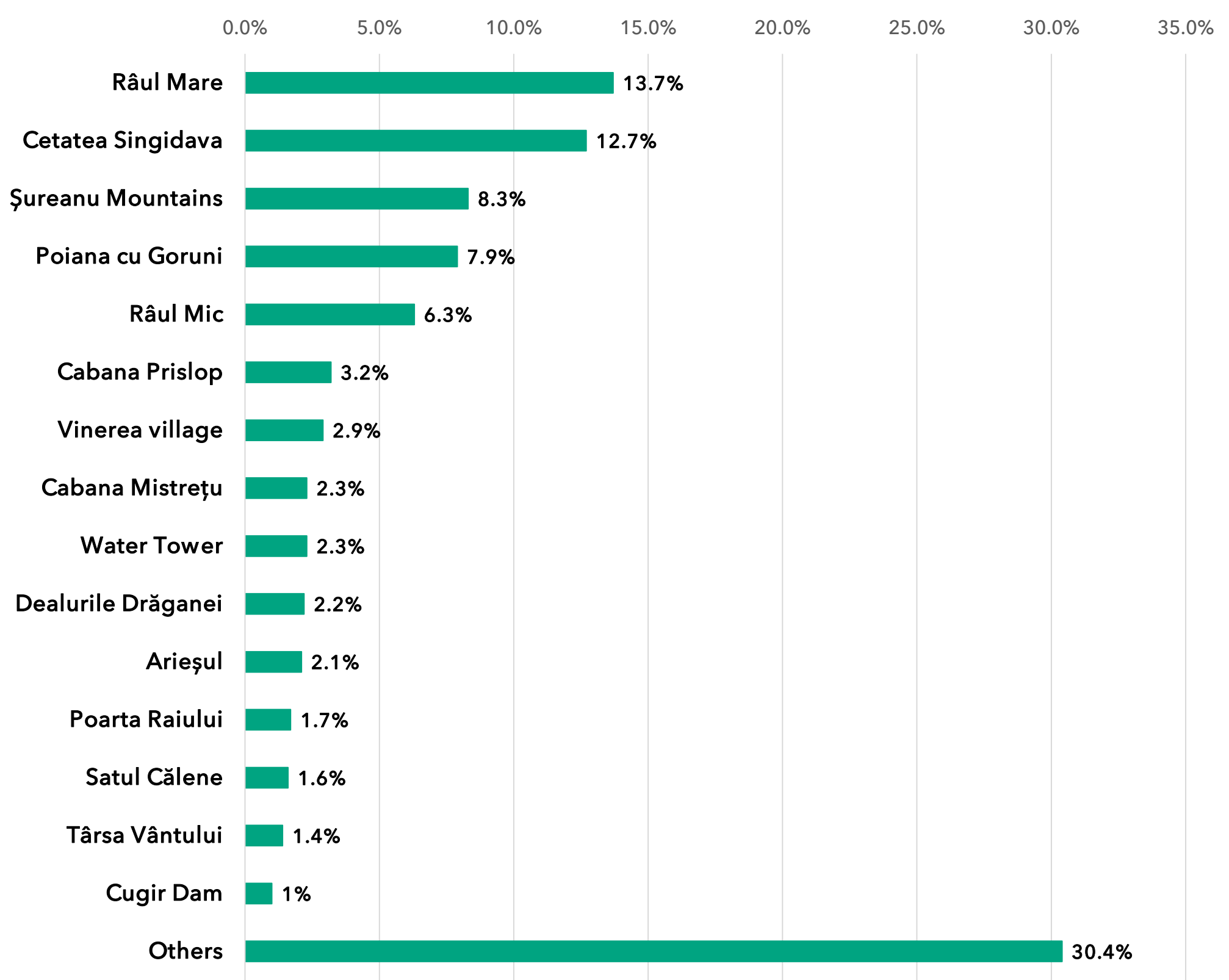
Overall, the response pattern shows that the mountains are perceived above all as a symbol of natural heritage and environmental quality. This favourable image may provide an important foundation for promoting local identity, developing ecotourism and strengthening nature conservation initiatives.

NATURAL PLACES OF PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE

Figure 10. Are there any natural places around Cugir that you consider very important to you personally?



Figure 11. Which places are these?
(% of respondents who answered “Yes” to the previous question)



NATURAL PLACES OF PERSONAL SIGNIFICANCE

For almost two thirds of Cugir's residents, there are natural places that hold particular personal significance and towards which they have developed an emotional attachment.

A total of 63.3% of respondents state that such places are important to them, while 36.7% report the opposite. This finding shows that the population's relationship with nature is not limited to the occasional use of green spaces; for a substantial majority, it also involves places endowed with symbolic, recreational or emotional value.

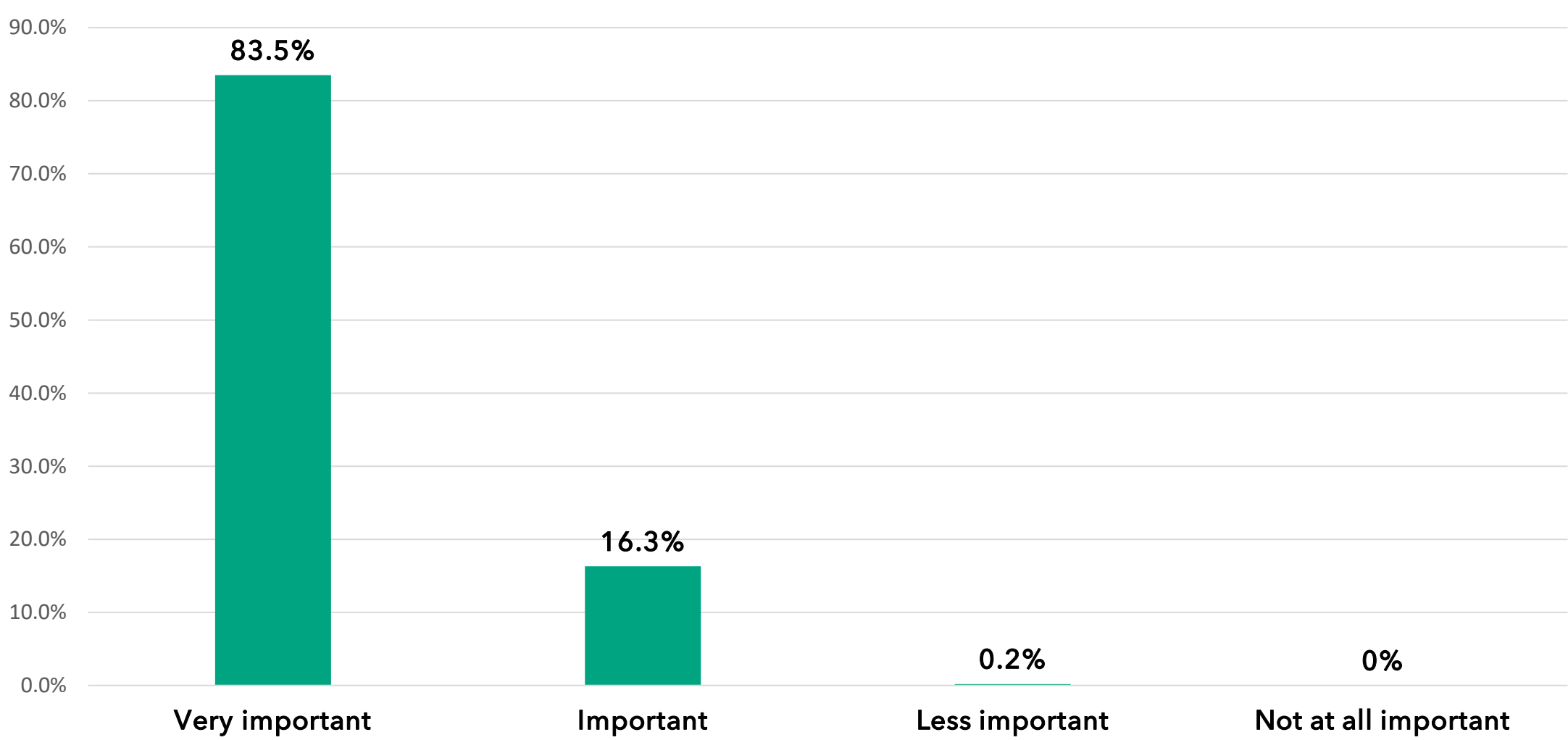
The analysis of open-ended responses provides a more detailed picture of these places. The most frequently mentioned are Râul Mare (13.7%) and Cetatea Singidava (12.7%), followed by the Șureanu Mountains (8.3%), Poiana cu Goruni (7.9%) and Râul Mic (6.3%). Respondents also identify other natural or tourist landmarks in the vicinity of the town, including Cabana Prislop, the village of Vinerea, Cabana Mistrețu, the Water Tower, Dealurile Drăganei, Arieșul, Poarta Raiului, the village of Călene and Târsa Vântului. At the same time, the "Other" category, which accounts for 30.4% of responses, points to a large number of individually mentioned places, none of which attracted a particularly high share of respondents.

This diversity represents one of the most important findings of the analysis. Although several natural landmarks are recognised by a relatively large number of people, almost one third of respondents identify other places of personal significance. This suggests that attachment to nature is not concentrated around a single landmark or area, but is distributed across the wider territory, with each resident developing their own relationship with particular landscapes, routes or natural spaces.

From a conservation perspective, these findings are especially relevant. The fact that a majority of the population identifies natural places of personal value indicates the existence of a favourable social basis for measures aimed at protecting natural heritage. At the same time, the considerable diversity of the places mentioned suggests that conservation and enhancement strategies should not focus exclusively on the best-known landmarks, but should also take into account the natural landscape surrounding Cugir as a whole and the variety of relationships residents develop with it. Such an approach could contribute both to strengthening local identity and to increasing community involvement in the protection of natural heritage.

IMPORTANCE ATTACHED TO THE PROTECTION OF THE GREEN AREAS SURROUNDING CUGIR

Figure 12. How important is the protection of the green areas surrounding Cugir to you?



The protection of the green areas surrounding Cugir represents an almost unanimously shared priority among residents.

No fewer than 83.5% of respondents consider their protection to be very important, while a further 16.3% regard it as important. Overall, 99.8% of those interviewed express a favourable attitude towards the conservation of green areas, representing one of the highest levels of consensus identified in the study.

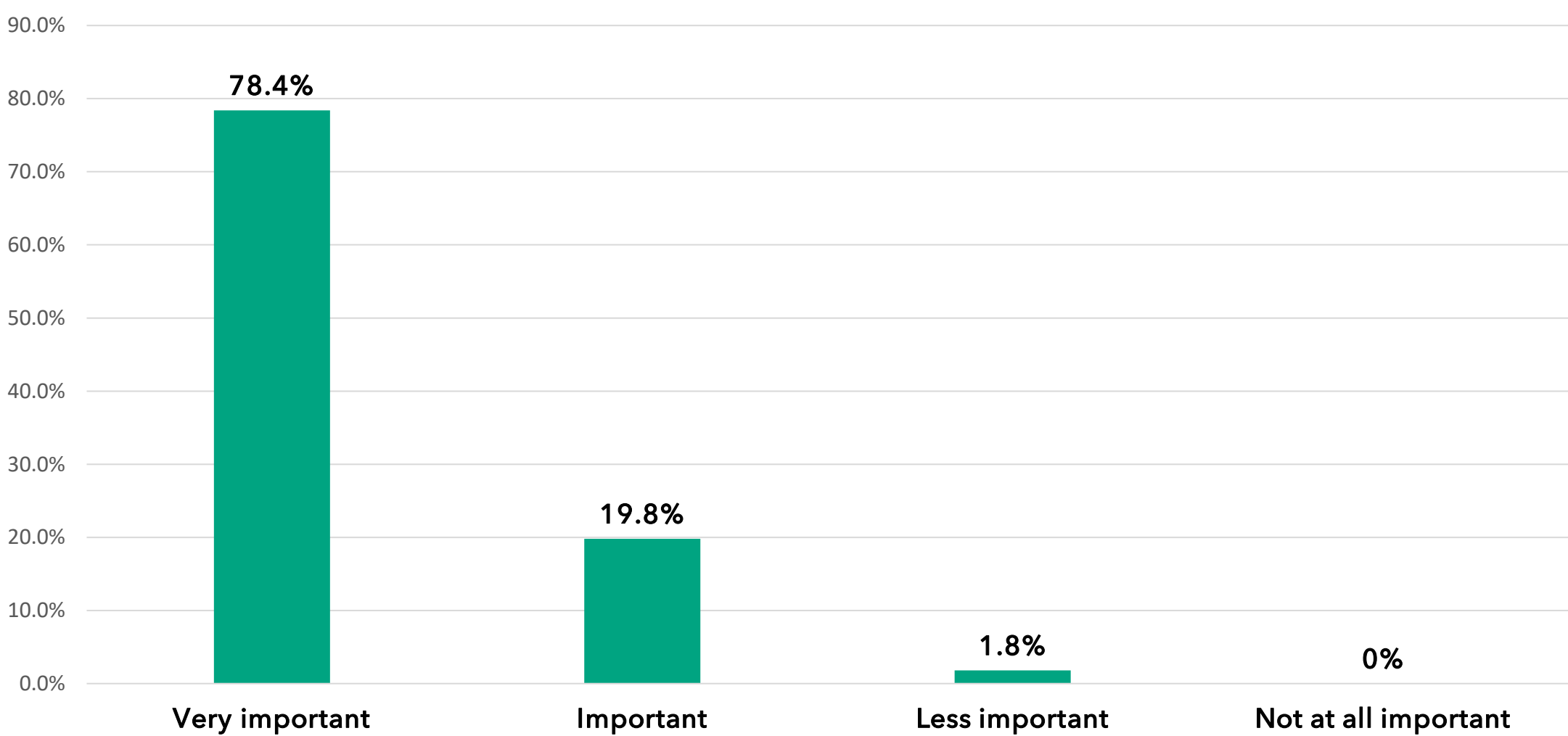
Views assigning limited importance to this objective are therefore virtually absent: only 0.2% of respondents consider the protection of green

areas to be less important, while no participant selected the response option “not important at all”. This distribution indicates that the value of these areas is recognised almost universally across the community.

This exceptionally high level of support provides a strong social foundation for local measures aimed at conserving, expanding and maintaining green infrastructure. Investments in habitat protection, the enhancement of natural spaces and improved public access to these areas would, in all likelihood, benefit from a very high degree of public acceptance.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTING GREEN AREAS FOR CUGIR'S FUTURE

Figure 13. How important do you consider the protection of the green areas surrounding Cugir to be for the future of the town?



Residents of Cugir consider the protection of green areas to be essential to the community's future.

Almost four in five respondents (78.4%) regard this objective as very important, while a further 19.8% consider it important. Overall, 98.2% of those interviewed recognise the importance of protecting green areas for the town's future development, indicating a very high level of consensus within the community.

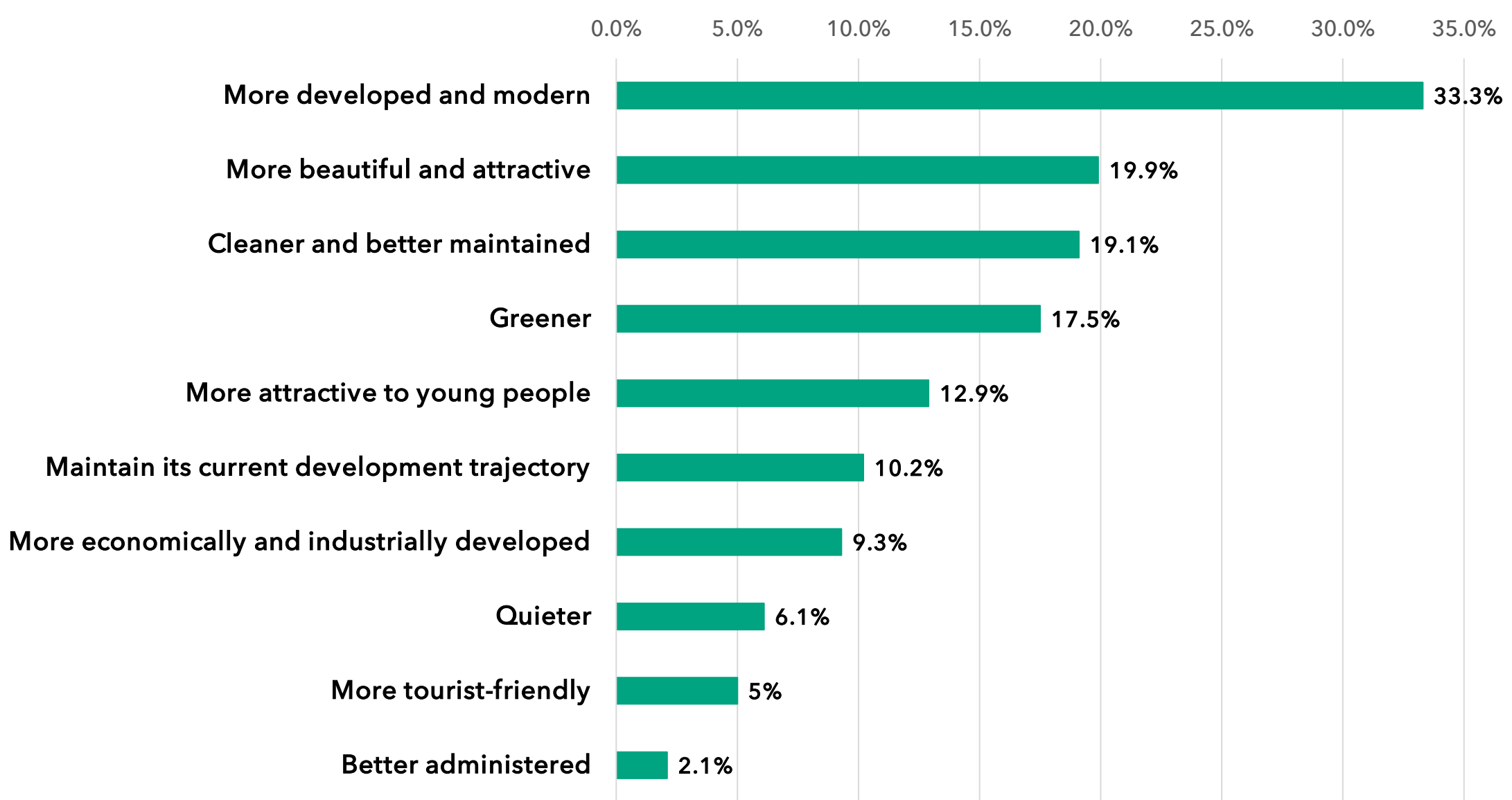
Views that minimise the importance of this objective are almost entirely absent. Only 1.8% of respondents consider the protection of green areas to be less important, while no respondent

regards it as unimportant. The distribution of responses indicates that investment in the conservation and expansion of green infrastructure enjoys a very high degree of social legitimacy.

These findings suggest that residents perceive green areas as a strategic resource for the town's development, rather than merely as a feature of the landscape. In this context, policies aimed at protecting natural habitats, improving green spaces and integrating nature into urban development are likely to benefit from favourable public acceptance and may contribute to enhancing quality of life for future generations.

EXPECTATIONS FOR CUGIR'S DEVELOPMENT OVER THE NEXT DECADE

Figure 14. What would you like the town of Cugir to be like in ten years' time?



Residents' vision for the future of Cugir is oriented primarily towards modernisation and improvements in quality of life.

The most frequently expressed expectation is for the town to become more developed and modern (33.3%), followed by the desire for it to become more attractive (19.9%), cleaner and better maintained (19.1%), and greener (17.5%).

Respondents also expressed a desire for the town to become more attractive to young people (12.9%), while 10.2% believe that its current development trajectory should be maintained. Economic and industrial development is mentioned by 9.3% of respondents, whereas

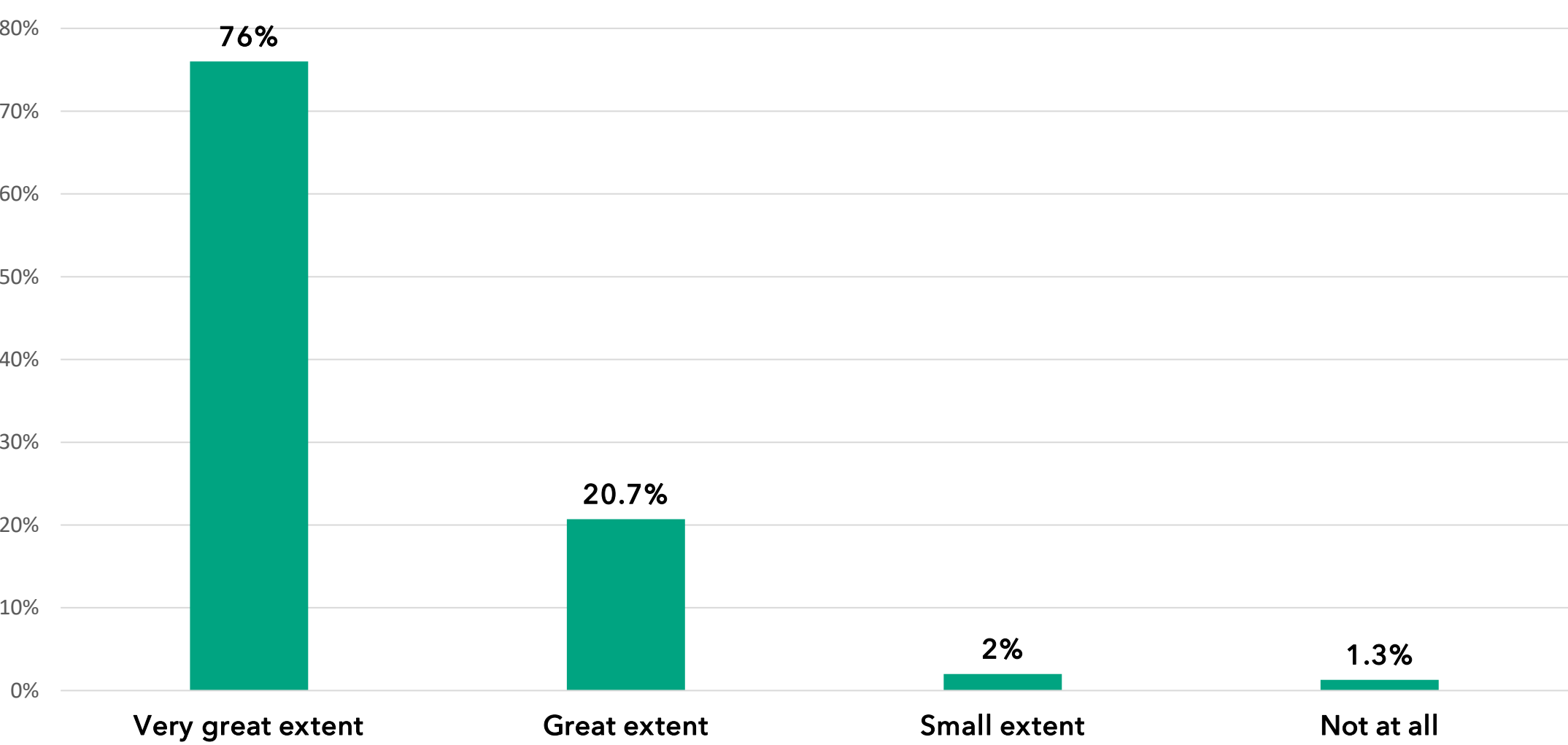
aspirations for a quieter town (6.1%), a more tourist-friendly town (5.0%), or a better-administered town (2.1%) are expressed less frequently.

In resident's representations of the town's future, modernisation coexists with expectations relating to cleanliness, attractiveness and the expansion of green infrastructure. The modernisation of Cugir is associated with a cleaner, greener and more attractive urban environment, indicating that investment in green infrastructure and environmental quality is perceived as an integral component of local development.

LEVEL OF SUPPORT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATURAL PARK

FIGURE 15. *"A natural park is a protected area intended to conserve nature, landscapes and local heritage, while also permitting certain traditional, educational, tourism and recreational activities, provided that they comply with conservation rules."*

Taking this definition into account, to what extent do you support the establishment of a Natural Park encompassing the green areas surrounding Cugir?



Residents of Cugir express a very high level of support for the establishment of a natural park in the area.

A total of 76.0% of respondents state that they support such an initiative to a very great extent, while a further 20.7% support it to a great extent. Overall, 96.7% of participants express a favourable position, indicating a strong level of consensus within the community.

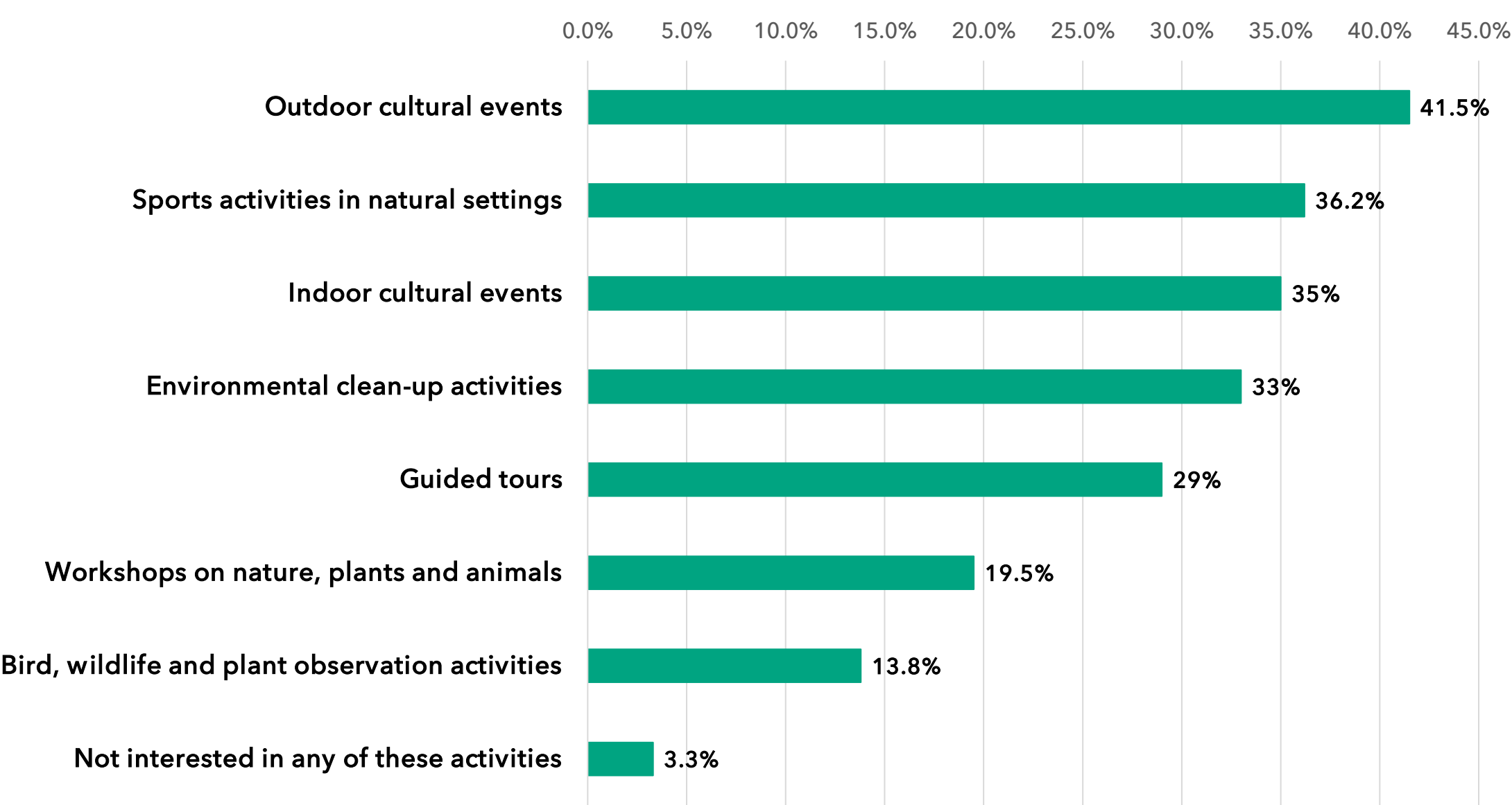
Negative views are very limited. Only 2.0% of respondents support the creation of a natural park

to a small extent, while 1.3% do not support the initiative at all. The distribution of responses shows that opposition to the establishment of a natural park is marginal.

The findings indicate the existence of a favourable social context for implementing such an initiative. The exceptionally high level of support suggests that the protection of natural heritage is perceived by most residents as compatible with both the interests of the community and the town's future development.

PREFERENCES FOR NATURE-BASED ACTIVITIES

Figure 16. What events or activities would you like to see organised in the green areas surrounding Cugir?



Residents of Cugir prefer activities that provide direct experiences of nature and a diverse range of leisure opportunities.

The most frequently requested activities are outdoor cultural events, mentioned by 41.5% of respondents, followed by sports activities in natural settings (36.2%) and cultural events held indoors (35.0%). Environmental clean-up activities are preferred by 33.0% of respondents, while 29.0% express an interest in guided tours.

Activities with a stronger educational or specialised exploration component appeal to smaller segments of the population. Workshops focusing on nature, plants and animals are

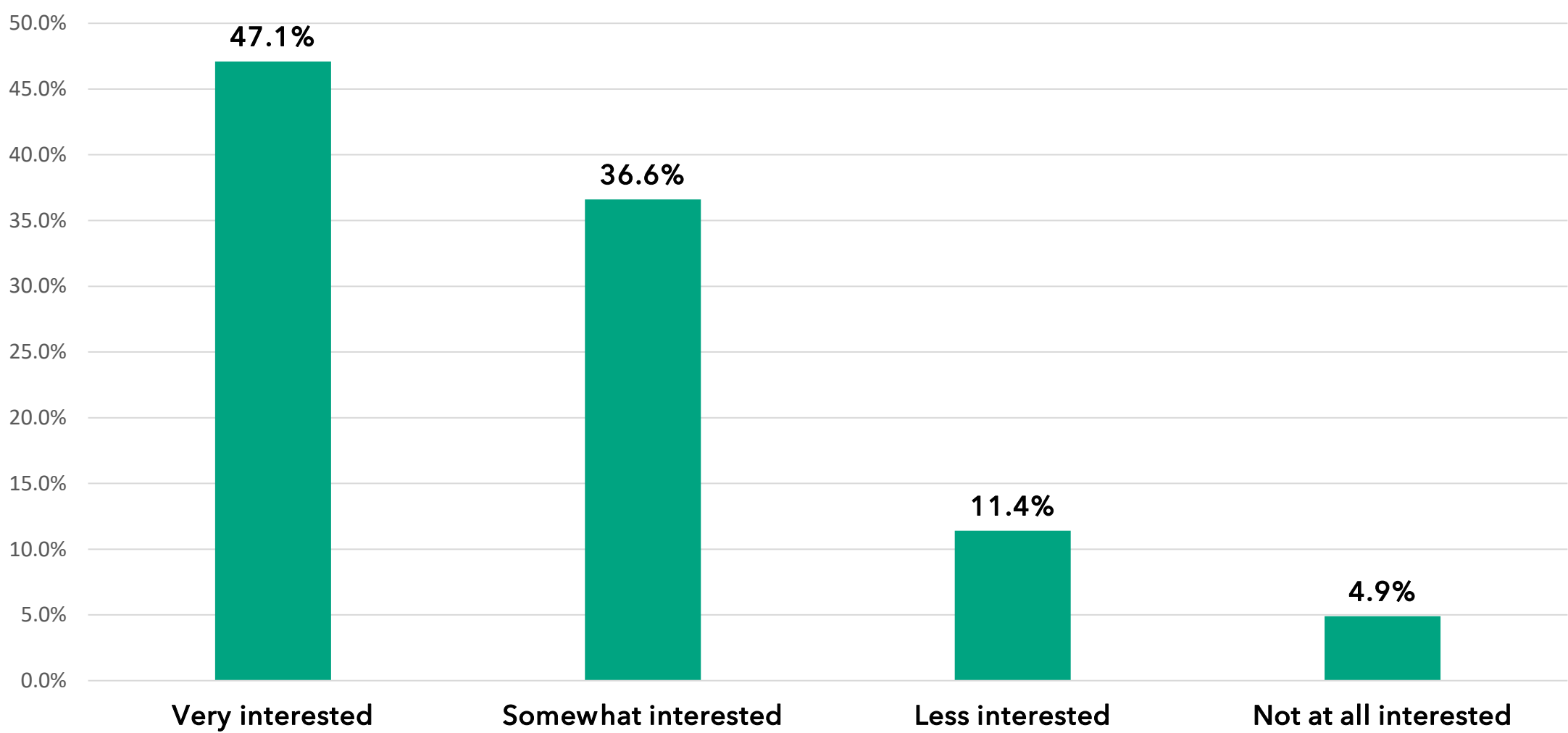
mentioned by 19.5% of respondents, while bird, wildlife and plant observation activities are selected by 13.8%.

Only 3.3% of respondents state that they are not interested in such activities, indicating a very high overall level of interest in events organised in the natural areas surrounding Cugir.

The diversity of preferences points to the need for a mixed programme combining cultural and sports activities with environmental clean-up initiatives, guided tours and educational activities. Such an approach could attract a broad range of participants and strengthen residents’ relationship with the area’s natural heritage.

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN PARTICIPATING IN NATURE-BASED ACTIVITIES

Figure 17. How interested would you be in participating in these types of activities if they were organised in the green areas surrounding Cugir?



Almost half of residents report being very interested in participating in nature-related activities, while more than one third are somewhat interested.

Specifically, 47.1% of respondents describe themselves as very interested, while a further 36.6% state that they are somewhat interested in taking part in activities in natural settings. Overall, 83.7% of participants express openness towards involvement in organised nature-related activities.

At the opposite end of the scale, only 11.4% of respondents report being less interested, while

4.9% state that they are not interested at all. The distribution of responses indicates that reluctance towards such activities is limited and characterises only a minority of the population.

The findings suggest substantial potential for community mobilisation within projects dedicated to natural heritage. The organisation of varied and accessible activities, tailored to the interests of different population groups, could help translate this stated willingness into sustained and effective participation.

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN PARTICIPATING IN NATURE-BASED ACTIVITIES, BY AGE GROUP

Table 2. Level of interest in nature-based activities, by age group

AGE GROUP	N	MEAN SCORE
18 - 29 years	33	3,56
30 - 39 years	61	3,56
40 - 49 years	71	3,59
50 - 59 years	60	3,26
60 - 69 years	71	3,11
70 - 79 years	79	2,93
80 years and over	20	2,31
TOTAL	395	3,26

Interest in participating in nature-based activities varies significantly by age, with the overall pattern indicating a decline in interest among older age groups.

The highest mean score is recorded among respondents aged 40-49, at 3.59 out of a maximum of 4. Almost identical levels are observed among those aged 18-29 and 30-39, both groups recording a mean score of 3.56. These findings indicate that people under the age of 50 represent the principal segment interested in participating in organised activities in natural settings.

After the age of 50, levels of interest begin to decline. The mean score falls to 3.26 among respondents aged 50-59 and to 3.11 among those aged 60-69. The downward trend continues among respondents aged 70-79, for whom the

mean score decreases to 2.93.

The lowest level of interest is recorded among respondents aged 80 and over, with a mean score of 2.31. The difference between the age group with the highest score and that with the lowest is 1.28 points, representing a substantial variation on a four-point scale.

Accordingly, age is negatively associated with interest in participating in nature-based activities, and this relationship is statistically significant and of weak-to-moderate magnitude: $p = -0.321$; $p < 0.001$. Overall, respondents in older age groups tend to display lower levels of interest in participation. The relationship identified is associative and does not demonstrate a direct causal effect of age.

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN NATURE-BASED ACTIVITIES, BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Table 3. Level of interest in nature-based activities, by educational attainment

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	N	MEAN SCORE
No more than 8 years of schooling	40	2,90
10 years of schooling or vocational education	93	3,08
Upper-secondary or post-secondary education	185	3,32
University or master’s-level education	77	3,62
TOTAL	395	3,26

Interest in participating in nature-based activities varies significantly according to educational attainment, with the overall pattern indicating greater willingness to participate among respondents with higher levels of education.

The highest mean score is recorded among respondents with university or master’s-level qualifications, at 3.62 out of a maximum of 4. They are followed by those with upper-secondary or post-secondary education, who record a mean score of 3.32. These findings indicate that respondents with secondary, post-secondary and university education constitute the segment most open to participating in organised activities in natural settings.

Lower levels of interest are observed among respondents who completed ten years of schooling or vocational education, with a mean score of 3.08,

and among those with no more than eight years of schooling, whose mean score is 2.90.

The difference between the group with the highest and the lowest level of interest is 0.72 points, representing a meaningful variation on a four-point scale. The distribution of scores shows a progressive increase in interest in participation as educational attainment rises.

Accordingly, educational attainment is positively associated with interest in participating in nature-based activities, and this relationship is statistically significant and of weak-to-moderate magnitude: $p = 0.277$; $p < 0.001$. Overall, respondents with higher levels of education tend to express greater interest in participation. The relationship identified is associative and does not demonstrate a direct causal effect of education on willingness to participate.

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN PARTICIPATING IN NATURE-BASED ACTIVITIES, BY INCOME

Table 4. Level of interest in nature-based activities, by income

INCOME CATEGORY	N	MEAN SCORE
Up to 2000 RON	65	3,06
2001 - 3000 RON	106	3,17
3001 - 4000 RON	80	3,32
4001 - 5000 RON	53	3,33
Over 5000 RON	61	3,48
TOTAL	365	3,26

Interest in participating in nature-based activities varies significantly according to income level, with the overall pattern indicating greater willingness to participate among respondents with higher incomes.

The highest mean score is recorded among respondents with incomes above RON 5,000, at 3.48 out of a maximum of 4. They are followed by those with incomes between RON 4,001 and RON 5,000, who record a mean score of 3.33, and those earning between RON 3,001 and RON 4,000, with a mean score of 3.32.

Lower levels of interest are observed among respondents with incomes between RON 2,001 and RON 3,000, whose mean score is 3.17, and among those earning no more than RON 2,000, for whom the mean score is 3.06.

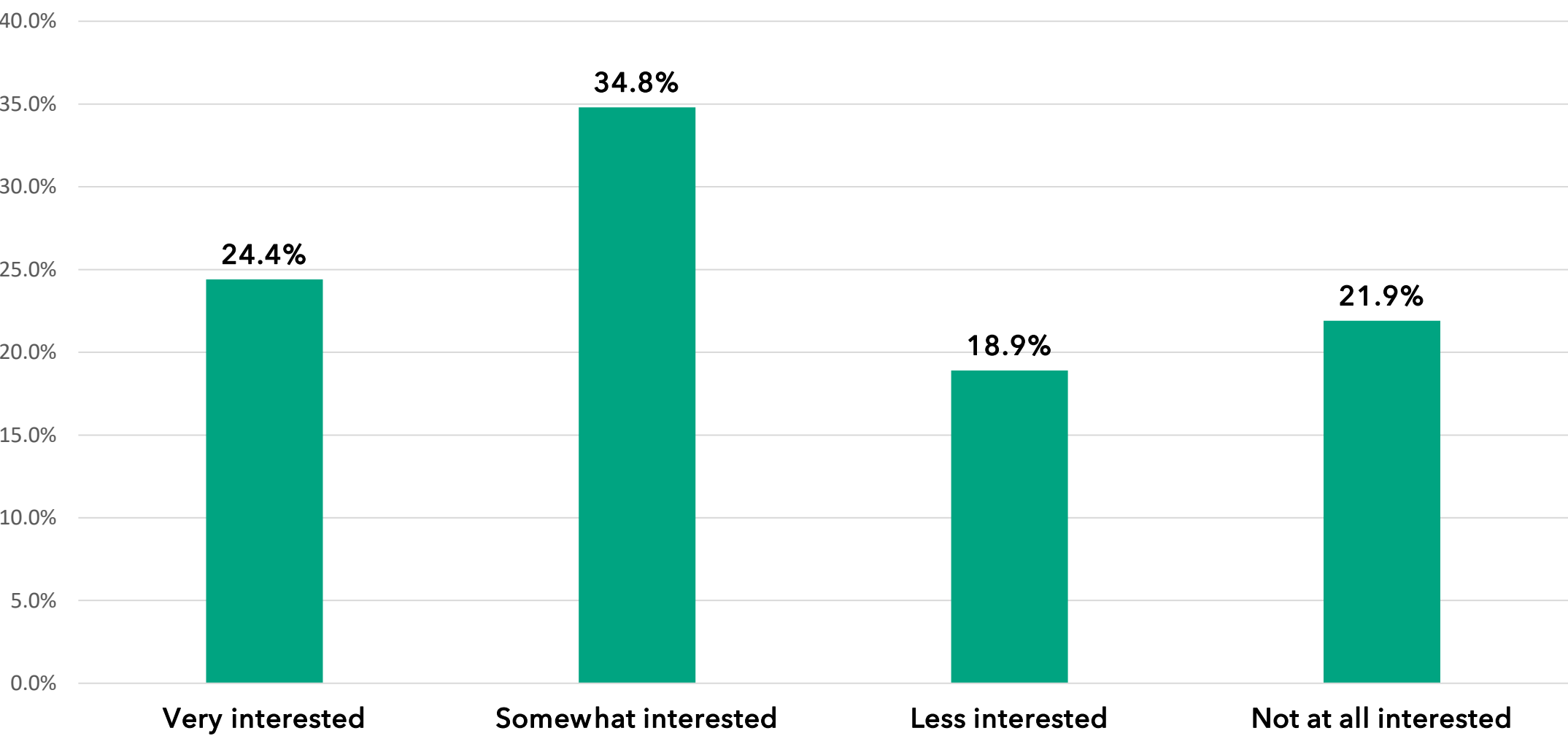
The difference between the group with the highest

and the lowest level of interest is 0.42 points, indicating relatively limited variation on a four-point scale. All income groups record mean scores above 3, showing that interest in participation remains high even among respondents with lower incomes.

Accordingly, income is positively associated with interest in participating in nature-based activities, and this relationship is statistically significant but weak in magnitude: $p = 0.151$; $p = 0.0038$. Overall, respondents with higher incomes tend to express slightly greater interest in participation; however, income differentiates willingness to participate to a lesser extent than age or educational attainment. The relationship identified is associative and does not demonstrate a direct causal effect of income.

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES

Figure 18. How interested would you be in volunteering to help organise these events?



Residents of Cugir demonstrate a high level of willingness to become involved as volunteers in organising nature-related events, although this willingness is lower than their interest in simply participating in such activities.

The largest proportion of respondents state that they would be somewhat interested in volunteering (34.8%), followed by those who would be very interested (24.4%). At the opposite end of the scale, 18.9% report that they would be interested to only a small extent, while 21.9% state that they would not be interested at all.

The distribution of responses suggests that assuming an active role in organising events

requires a greater degree of commitment and responsibility than simply attending them, which helps explain the more pronounced reluctance observed among part of the population.

Compared with the previous question, interest in attending events is higher than willingness to contribute to their organisation as a volunteer. This finding indicates the existence of a substantial core of potential volunteers, which could be expanded through targeted recruitment programmes and by providing flexible forms of involvement adapted to the community's availability.

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES, BY AGE GROUP

Table 5. Level of interest in volunteering activities, by age group

AGE GROUP	N	MEAN SCORE
18 - 29 years	33	2,96
30 - 39 years	61	3,14
40 - 49 years	71	2,85
50 - 59 years	60	2,63
60 - 69 years	71	2,42
70 - 79 years	79	2,25
80 years and over	20	1,55
TOTAL	395	2,62

Interest in volunteering to help organise nature-based activities varies significantly by age, with the overall pattern indicating a decline in willingness to become involved among older age groups.

The highest level of interest is recorded among respondents aged 30-39, with a mean score of 3.14 out of a maximum of 4. Relatively high levels are also observed among those aged 18-29 and 40-49, with mean scores of 2.96 and 2.85 respectively. These findings indicate that people under the age of 50 constitute the principal segment with recruitment potential for volunteering activities.

After the age of 50, stated willingness to volunteer declines progressively. The mean score falls to 2.63 among respondents aged 50-59, to 2.42 among those aged 60-69, and to 2.25 among

people aged 70-79.

The lowest level of interest is recorded among respondents aged 80 and over, with a mean score of 1.55, situated between the response categories “not interested at all” and “less interested”. The difference between the age group with the highest score and that with the lowest is 1.59 points, representing substantial variation on a four-point scale.

Age is negatively associated with interest in volunteering, and this relationship is statistically significant and of weak-to-moderate magnitude: $\rho = -0.316$; $p < 0.001$. Overall, respondents in older age groups tend to express lower levels of interest in volunteering.

The relationship identified is associative and does not demonstrate a direct causal effect of age on willingness to become involved.

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES, BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Table 6. Level of interest in volunteering activities, by educational attainment

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	N	MEAN SCORE
No more than 8 years of schooling	40	2,25
10 years of schooling or vocational education	93	2,27
Upper-secondary or post-secondary education	185	2,65
University or master’s-level education	77	3,14
TOTAL	395	2,62

Interest in volunteering to help organise nature-based activities varies significantly according to educational attainment, with the overall pattern indicating greater willingness to become involved among respondents with higher levels of education.

The highest mean score is recorded among respondents with university or master’s-level qualifications, at 3.14 out of a maximum of 4. They are followed by those with upper-secondary or post-secondary education, who record a mean score of 2.65. These findings indicate that respondents with post-secondary and university education constitute the principal segment with recruitment potential for volunteering activities.

Lower levels of interest are observed among respondents with no more than eight years of

schooling, who record a mean score of 2.25, and among those who completed ten years of schooling or vocational education, whose mean score is 2.27. The difference between the group with the highest level of interest and those with the lowest is 0.89 points, representing a meaningful variation on a four-point scale.

Educational attainment is positively associated with interest in volunteering, and this relationship is statistically significant and of weak-to-moderate magnitude: $p = 0.282$; $p < 0.001$. Overall, respondents with higher levels of education tend to express greater interest in volunteering. The relationship identified is associative and does not demonstrate a direct causal effect of education on willingness to become involved.

LEVEL OF INTEREST IN VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES, BY INCOME

Table 7. Level of interest in volunteering activities, by income

INCOME CATEGORY	N	SCOR MEDIU
Up to 2000 RON	65	2,21
2001 - 3000 RON	106	2,46
3001 - 4000 RON	79	2,69
4001 - 5000 RON	53	2,75
Over 5000 RON	61	3,16
TOTAL	364	2,64

Interest in volunteering to help organise nature-based activities varies significantly according to income level, with the overall pattern indicating greater willingness to become involved among respondents with higher incomes.

The highest mean score is recorded among respondents with incomes above RON 5,000, at 3.16 out of a maximum of 4. They are followed by those with incomes between RON 4,001 and RON 5,000, who record a mean score of 2.75, and those earning between RON 3,001 and RON 4,000, with a mean score of 2.69.

Lower levels of interest are observed among respondents with incomes between RON 2,001 and RON 3,000, whose mean score is 2.46, and

particularly among those earning no more than RON 2,000, for whom the mean score is 2.21. The difference between the income group with the highest level of interest and that with the lowest is 0.95 points, representing a meaningful variation on a four-point scale.

Accordingly, income is positively associated with interest in volunteering, and this relationship is statistically significant and of weak-to-moderate magnitude: $p = 0.261$; $p < 0.001$. Overall, respondents with higher incomes tend to express greater interest in volunteering. The relationship identified is associative and does not demonstrate a direct causal effect of income on willingness to become involved.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH WILLINGNESS TO VOLUNTEER

Table 8. Factors associated with willingness to volunteer

RELATIONSHIP	STATISTICAL INDICATOR
Interest in participation - Interest in volunteering	$\rho = 0.546$; $p < 0,001$
Frequency of green-space use - Interest in volunteering	$\rho = 0,228$; $p < 0,001$
Presence of a personally important natural place - Interest in volunteering	Binary logistic regression with one predictor: OR = 2.45; 95% CI [1.61-3.73]; $p < 0.001$

Willingness to volunteer is associated both with general interest in participating in activities and with the personal relationship residents develop with nature.

The strongest association among the variables analysed is between interest in participating in nature-based activities and interest in volunteering ($\rho = 0.546$; $p < 0.001$). Individuals who express willingness to take part in events, guided tours, sports, cultural activities or environmental clean-up initiatives also tend to display greater openness towards assuming an active role in organising them. From the perspective of community mobilisation, participants in such activities represent the principal group from which potential volunteers may be recruited.

A positive association is also observed between the frequency of green-space use and interest in volunteering ($\rho = 0.228$; $p < 0.001$). Although this relationship is weak in magnitude, individuals who spend time in nature more frequently tend to demonstrate somewhat greater willingness to become involved.

A particularly relevant finding concerns the association between attachment to natural places

and willingness to volunteer.

Within the study, 63.3% of respondents state that there are natural places around Cugir that are very important to them. A binary logistic regression model with a single predictor, weighted by sex and estimated using 395 valid cases, indicates an odds ratio of 2.45 for individuals who identify a natural place of personal significance compared with those who do not identify such a place (OR = 2.45; 95% CI [1.61-3.73]; $p < 0.001$). The confidence interval does not include 1, and the association is statistically significant; however, it does not demonstrate a causal effect or independence from other respondent characteristics.

Taken together, the findings suggest that willingness to volunteer is associated with interest in participation, regular contact with nature and the existence of an emotional attachment to particular places. From the perspective of community mobilisation, the results indicate the value of organising volunteering activities around places that are familiar and appreciated by residents, and of using messages that draw upon a sense of belonging and responsibility towards Cugir's natural heritage.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE BY SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Figure 19. Weighted distribution of the sample by respondents' gender

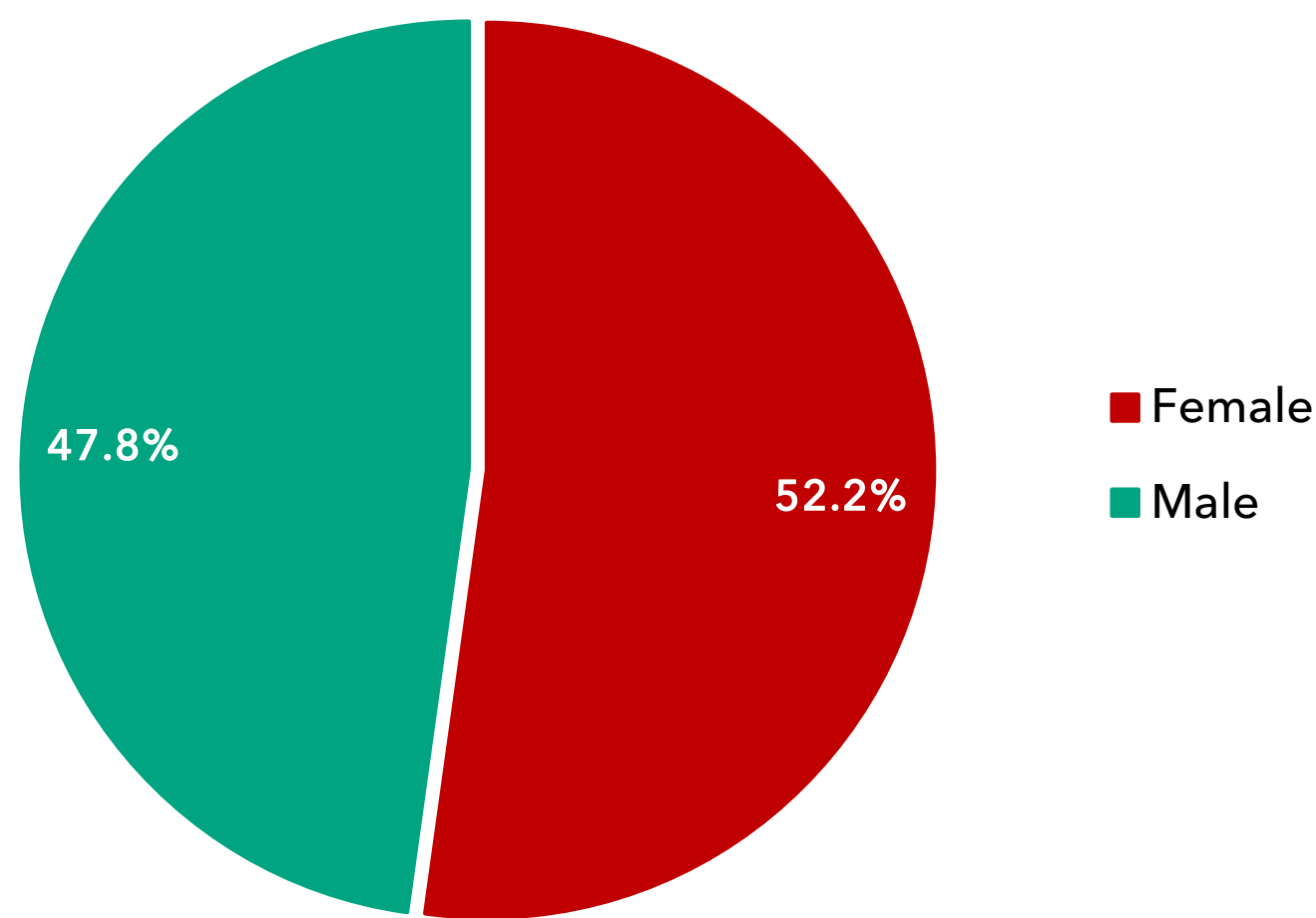
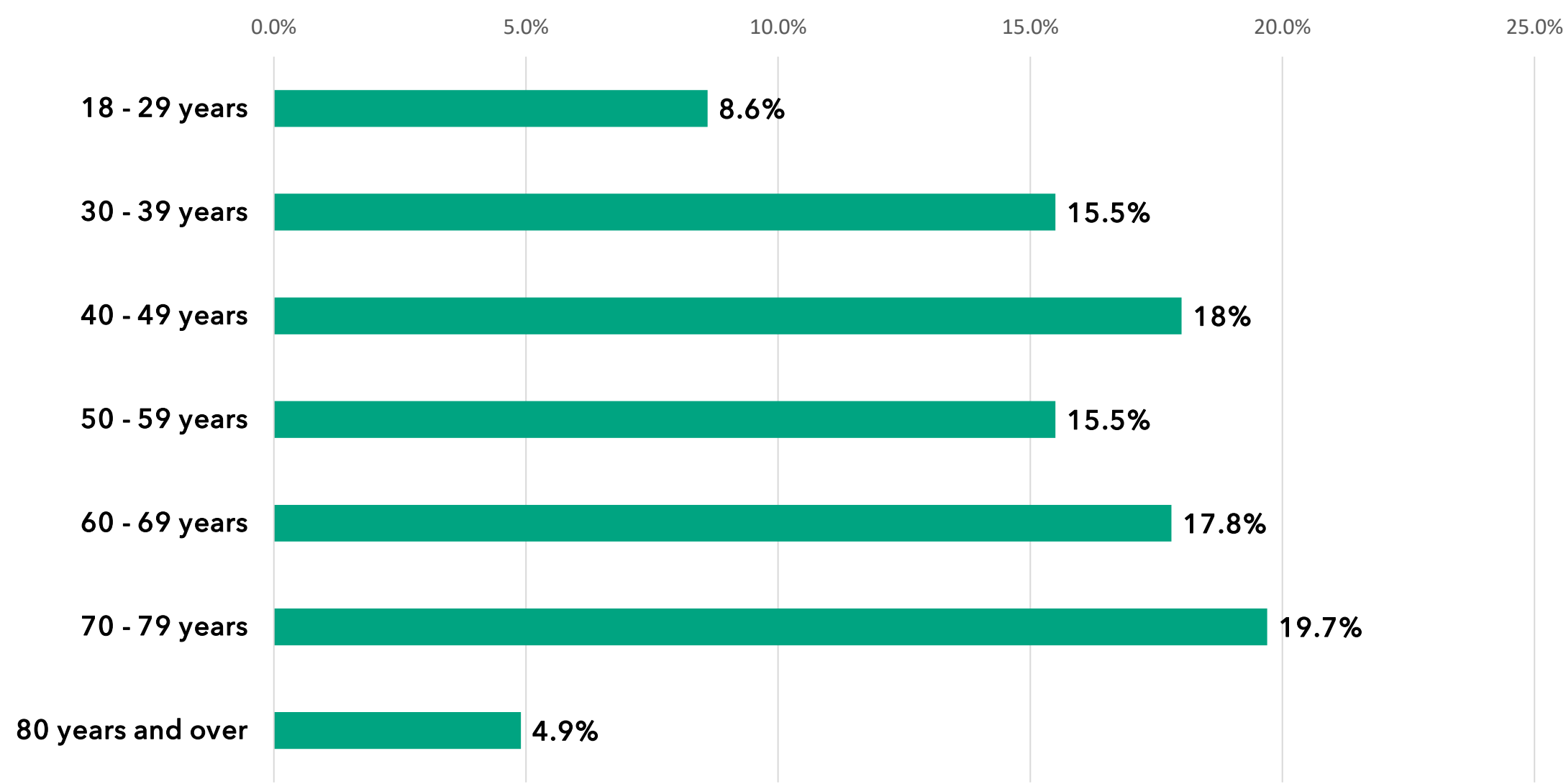


Figure 20. Distribution of the sample by age group



DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE BY SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Figure 21. Distribution of the sample by respondents' educational attainment

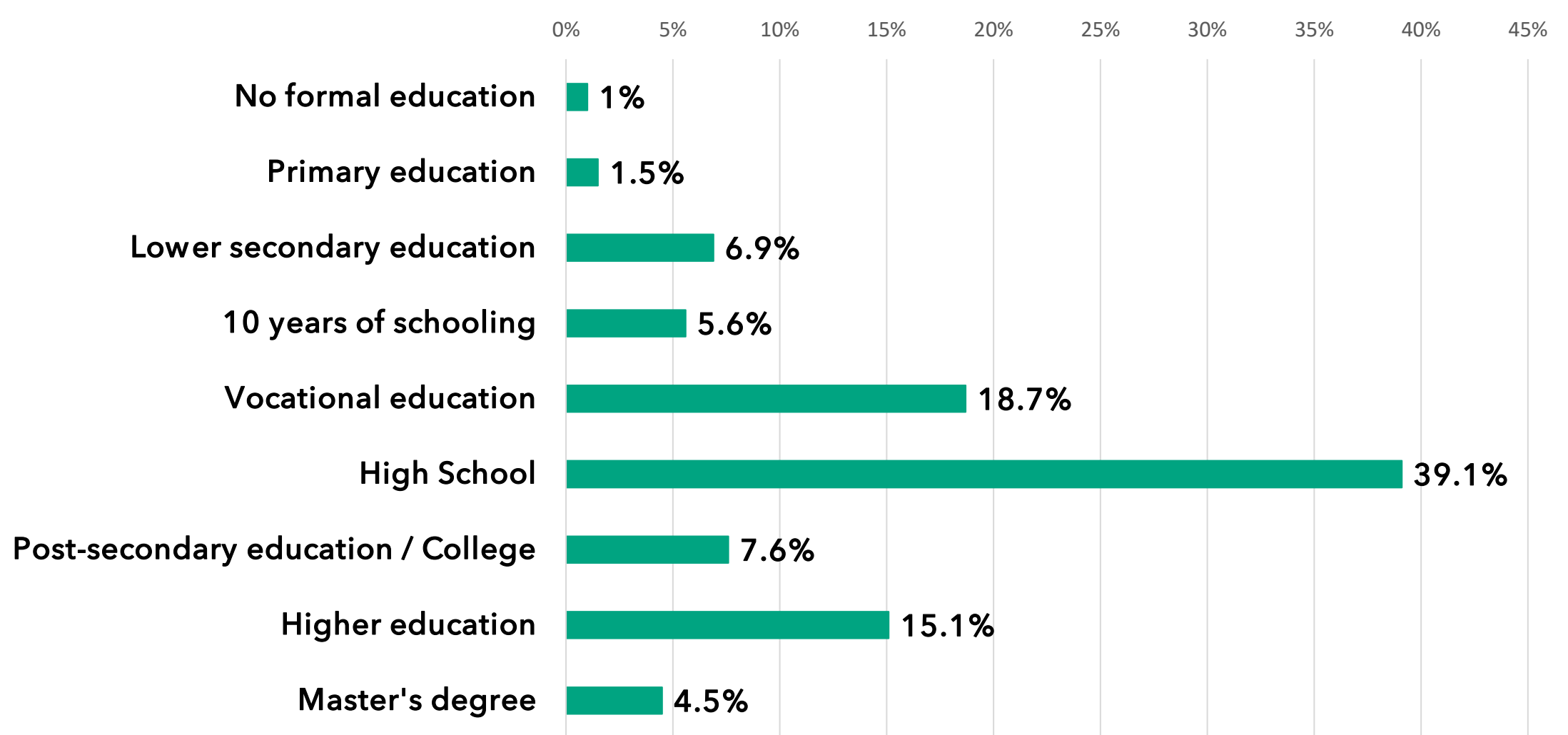
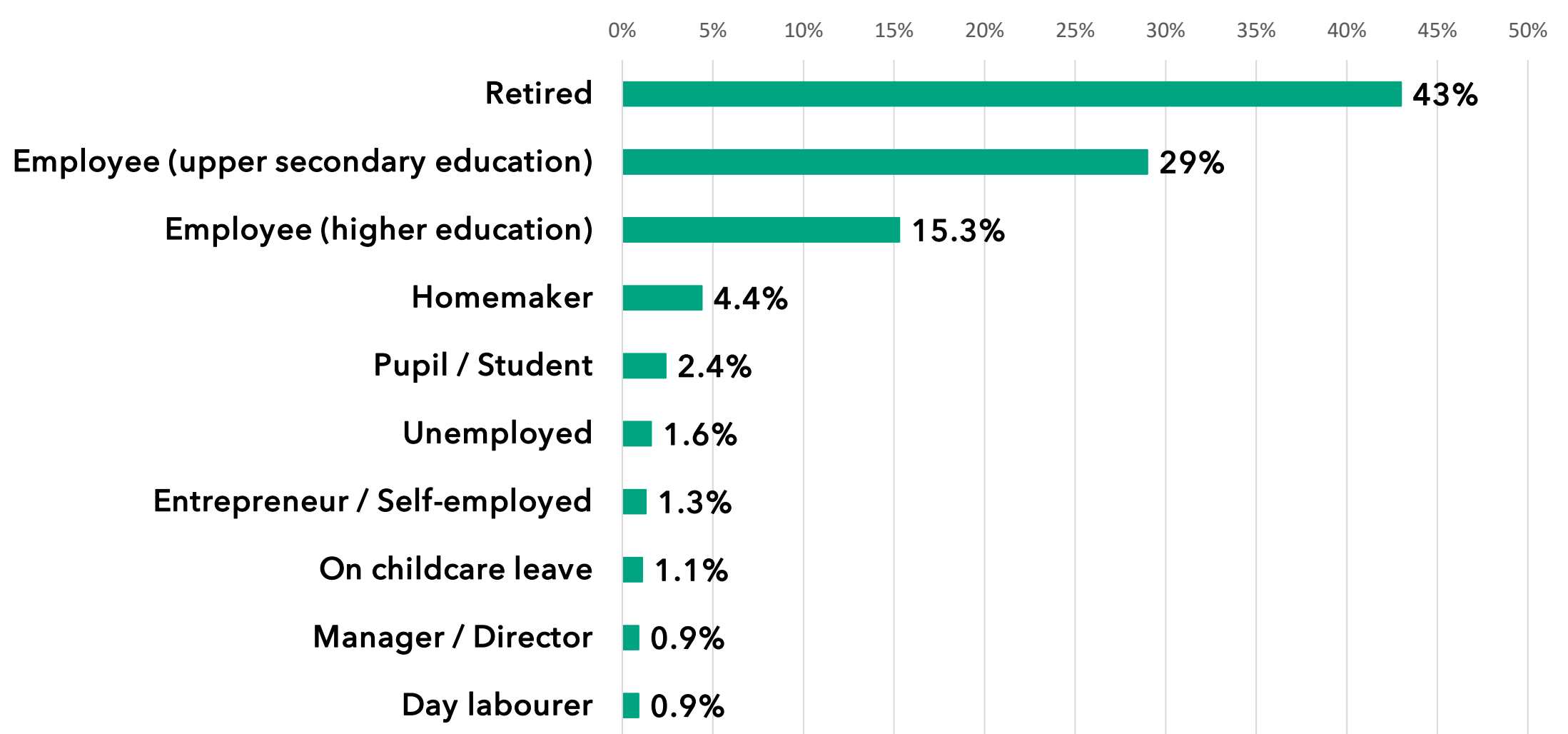


Figure 22. Distribution of the sample by respondents' occupation



DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE BY SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Figure 23. Distribution of the sample by respondents' income

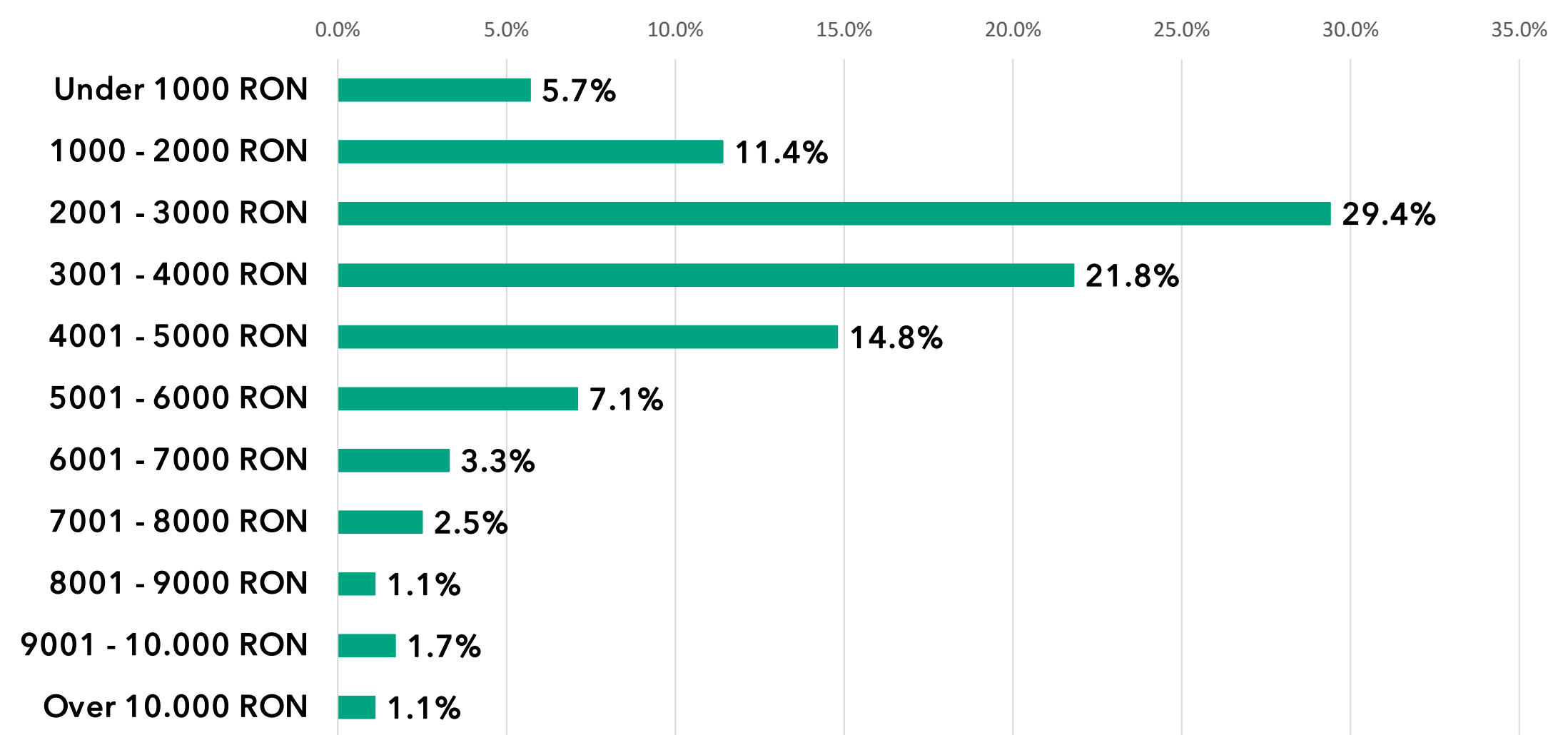
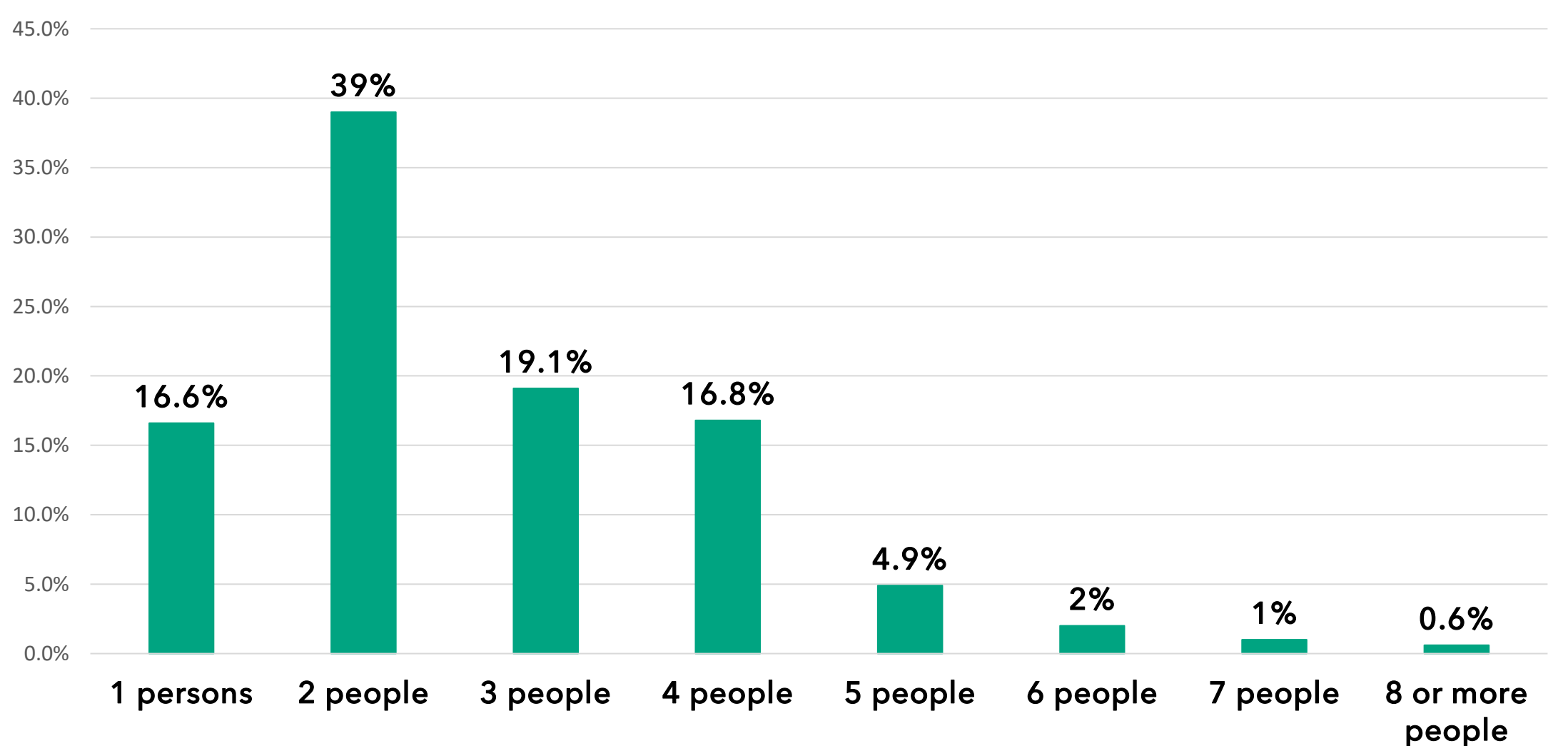


Figure 24. Distribution of the sample by number of household members



DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE BY SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Figure 25. Distribution of the sample by the presence of minors in the household

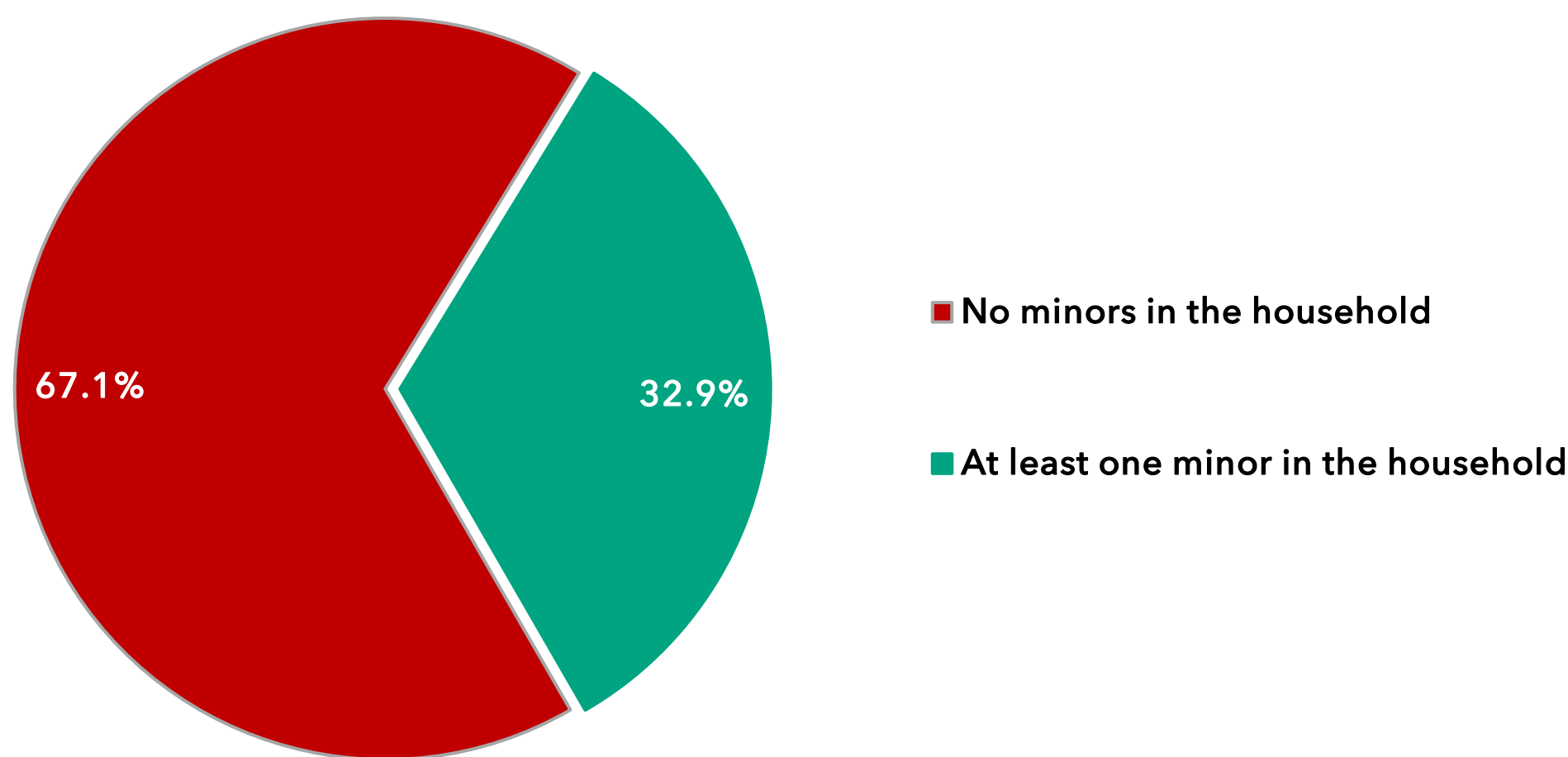
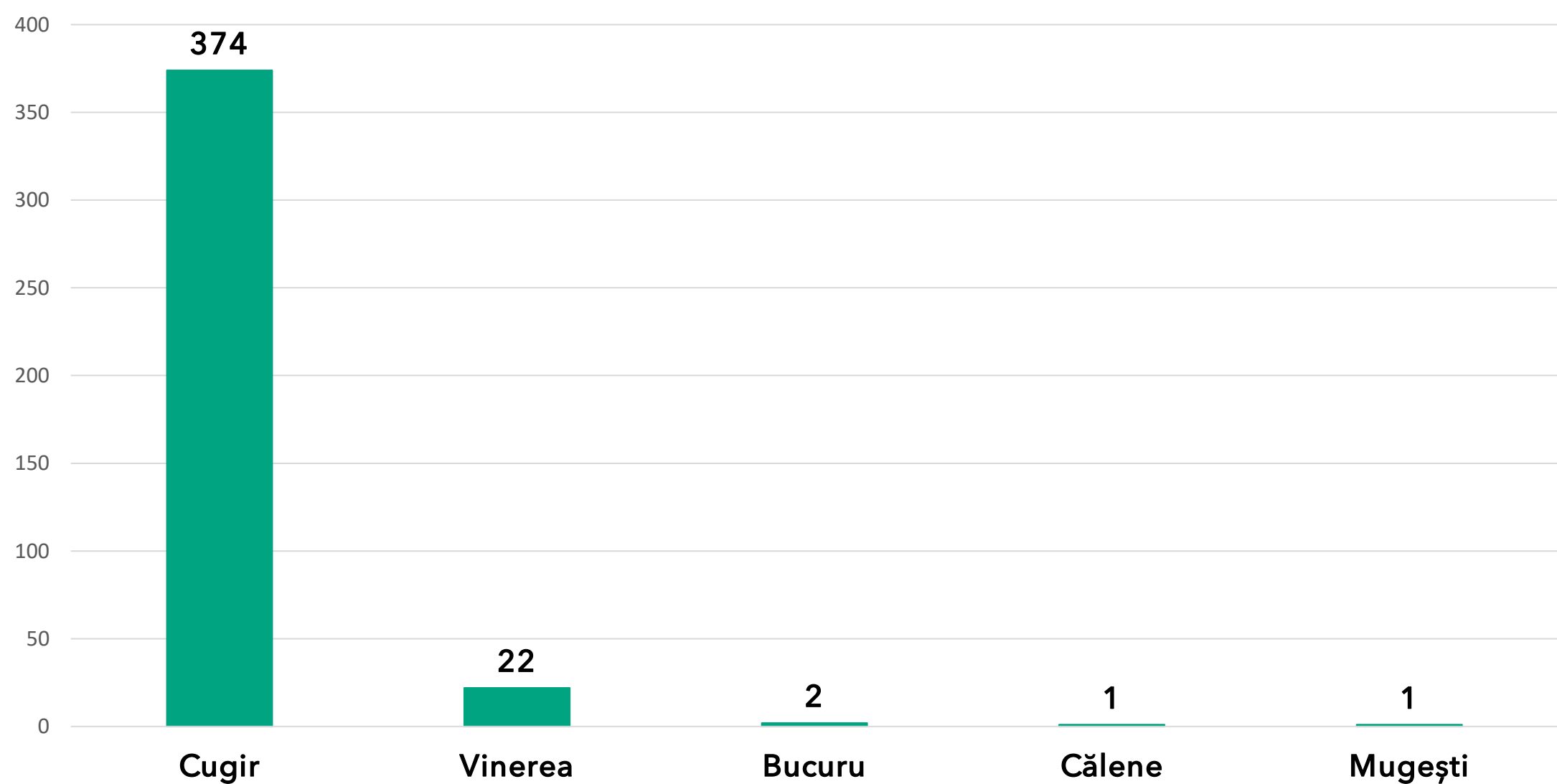


Figure 26. Distribution of the sample by locality



CONCLUSIONS

The research findings depict a community with a close, frequent and predominantly favourable relationship with the natural environment surrounding Cugir. Natural areas are used regularly, are perceived as important resources for health and quality of life, and occupy a central place in local identity. At the same time, residents express exceptionally high levels of support for the protection of natural heritage and the establishment of a natural park, as well as a considerable willingness to participate in organised nature-based activities.

1. Residents report high levels of satisfaction with living in Cugir, and their relationship with nature is associated with this favourable assessment

An overwhelming majority of respondents, 88.6%, report being satisfied or very satisfied with living in Cugir. Negative assessments account for only 11.4%, indicating a high level of residential satisfaction and a predominantly positive relationship with the town.

Statistical analyses show that residential satisfaction is positively associated with the perceived health benefits of nature, the frequency of green-space use and the extent to which nature is regarded as an important component of local identity. The strongest of these relationships is between perceived health benefits and residential

satisfaction, $p = 0.224$; $p < 0.001$, followed by the frequency of green-space use, $p = 0.216$; $p < 0.001$, and the perception of nature as part of Cugir's identity, $p = 0.183$; $p < 0.001$. Although these associations are weak in magnitude and do not indicate direct causal effects, their consistency shows that nature represents one of the components of a positive residential experience in the town.

2. Contact with nature is frequent and well integrated into the community's everyday life

More than two thirds of residents, 68.4%, spend time in green areas at least once a week, while one quarter of respondents report doing so every day. Only 3.2% state that they never visit these areas, indicating that a complete absence of contact with nature is marginal within the community.

Residents' relationship with nature is oriented primarily towards accessible recreational activities. Walking is mentioned by 54.2% of respondents and is, by a considerable margin, the principal activity undertaken in natural areas. It is followed by picnics and barbecues, traditional agricultural activities and hiking. More specialised activities, such as observing flora and fauna, fishing or gathering medicinal plants, are practised by smaller segments of the population.

CONCLUSIONS

3. Access to nature relies in almost equal measure on active mobility and private car use

Non-motorised forms of mobility account for 52.7% of journeys: 40.9% of respondents reach natural areas on foot, while 11.8% travel by bicycle. Motorised mobility accounts for 47.3%, with 39.9% of residents using a private car.

The finding shows that walking and private car use account for almost equal shares. On the one hand, there is already a substantial basis for active mobility; on the other, reliance on private cars remains considerable. Physical accessibility and proximity to natural areas therefore represent important elements of residents' everyday relationship with the natural environment.

4. Nature is perceived simultaneously as a resource for health and as a defining element of local identity

Almost nine in ten respondents, 89.8%, believe that green areas have a substantial or very substantial beneficial impact on their physical and mental health. Only 10.2% attribute a limited or non-existent role to nature in maintaining health. The data indicate broad consensus regarding the value of nature for well-being.

The identity dimension is even more pronounced: 94.5% of respondents believe that natural areas represent, to a great or very great extent, an important part of Cugir. The most representative elements are mountains, mentioned by 43.8% of respondents, forests, identified by

37.6%, and rivers and other water bodies, mentioned by 26.8%. Spontaneous associations with the mountains relate primarily to landscape and nature, local landmarks such as Șureanu, and clean air and health benefits.

Nature is therefore perceived not merely as an area outside the town used for recreation, but as a component of Cugir's image and of the way residents define the community's distinctive local character.

5. Attachment to nature is widespread and distributed across the wider territory

For 63.3% of respondents, there are natural places around Cugir that hold particular personal significance. The most frequently mentioned are Râul Mare, Cetatea Singidava, the Șureanu Mountains, Poiana cu Goruni and Râul Mic. However, the category comprising numerous other places, each mentioned by a smaller number of respondents, accounts for 30.4% of responses.

This distribution shows that residents' attachment is not concentrated exclusively around a small number of well-known landmarks, but is dispersed across the wider natural landscape. Different individuals develop emotional connections with rivers, forests, clearings, hills, villages, mountain cabins and routes. The relationship with nature therefore has a diverse personal and territorial dimension, shaped by individual experiences and the places people regularly visit.

CONCLUSIONS

6. The protection of natural heritage enjoys almost unanimous social legitimacy

The protection of green areas is considered important or very important by 99.8% of respondents, representing one of the highest levels of consensus identified in the study. At the same time, 98.2% believe that protecting these areas is important for the town's future.

Support for the establishment of a natural park is also exceptionally high. Overall, 96.7% of respondents support, to a great or very great extent, the creation of a natural park encompassing the green areas surrounding Cugir, while opposition accounts for only 3.3%.

The data show that nature conservation is perceived as compatible with both the community's current interests and the town's future development. Support for the park does not appear as an isolated attitude, but forms part of a wider context characterised by frequent use of natural areas, recognition of their benefits and their integration into local identity.

7. Residents do not perceive the town's modernisation and environmental protection as conflicting objectives

The principal expectation for the next ten years is for the town to become more developed and modern, an option mentioned by 33.3% of respondents. This is followed by the desire for a more attractive town, expressed by 19.9%, a cleaner and better-maintained town, mentioned by

19.1%, and a greener town, identified by 17.5%.

The responses show that modernisation is associated with improvements in the quality of the urban environment, rather than solely with economic or industrial development. A developed town is simultaneously imagined as more attractive, cleaner, greener and better suited to young people. In residents' perceptions, green infrastructure and nature conservation form part of a broader vision of local development.

8. Information about nature is obtained primarily through personal experience and informal networks

Direct experience of nature represents the principal source of information for 34.7% of respondents. The internet and social media are mentioned by 25.7%, while relatives, friends and acquaintances are identified by 24.5%. Taken together, these sources strongly dominate the circulation of information about local natural heritage.

By contrast, institutional sources have very limited visibility. Local media represent the principal source of information for only 4.5% of respondents, local authorities for 1.0%, environmental organisations for 0.5%, and schools or universities for 0.4%.

This finding highlights a clear discrepancy between the importance residents attribute to nature and the limited capacity of institutions to function as principal sources of information in this field.

CONCLUSIONS

9. There is a very high level of interest in organised nature-based activities and substantial potential for community participation

Only 3.3% of respondents state that they are not interested in activities organised in natural areas. Preferences are diverse: outdoor cultural events are mentioned by 41.5%, sports activities by 36.2%, indoor cultural events by 35.0%, environmental clean-up activities by 33.0%, and guided tours by 29.0%. Educational and nature-observation activities attract smaller segments of the population, but remain relevant to a proportion of residents.

Stated willingness to participate is high: 47.1% of respondents are very interested, while 36.6% are somewhat interested. Overall, 83.7% express openness towards participating in organised nature-based activities. Reluctance is limited to 16.3% of respondents.

10. Willingness to volunteer is substantial, but more selective than interest in participation

A total of 59.2% of respondents describe themselves as very or somewhat interested in volunteering to help organise activities. Willingness to volunteer is therefore expressed by a majority, but remains lower than interest in simply participating, which reaches 83.7%. This difference highlights the gap between wishing to take part in an activity and assuming a role that

requires time, responsibility and sustained involvement.

Interest in participation is strongly associated with interest in volunteering, $\rho = 0.546$; $p < 0.001$. Individuals who wish to participate in activities therefore constitute the principal group from which potential volunteers may be recruited. A positive, though weaker, association is also observed between the frequency of green-space use and interest in volunteering, $\rho = 0.228$; $p < 0.001$.

Attachment to natural places is also particularly relevant. The regression analysis indicates that respondents who report having a natural place of great personal importance have approximately 2.4 times higher odds of expressing willingness to volunteer than those who do not identify such a place. Volunteer involvement is therefore associated not only with interest in activities, but also with the existence of a personal and emotional connection to natural heritage.

11. The potential for participation and volunteering is not distributed evenly across social groups

Age is negatively associated both with interest in participation, $\rho = -0.321$; $p < 0.001$, and with willingness to volunteer, $\rho = -0.316$; $p < 0.001$. Interest is highest among people under the age of 50 and declines progressively among older age groups. The lowest scores are recorded among respondents aged 80 and over.

CONCLUSIONS

Educational attainment is positively associated with both forms of involvement. The correlation is $\rho = 0.277$; $p < 0.001$ for participation and $\rho = 0.282$; $p < 0.001$ for volunteering. Respondents with university or master's-level qualifications record the highest mean scores for both participation and volunteer involvement.

Income is positively associated with participation, although the relationship is weak: $\rho = 0.151$; $p = 0.0038$. In the case of volunteering, the association is more pronounced: $\rho = 0.261$; $p < 0.001$. Nevertheless, all income groups record mean participation scores above 3, indicating that interest in activities is also widespread among people with more limited financial resources. Income becomes more relevant when involvement requires individuals to assume an active volunteering role.

Overall conclusion

Taken as a whole, the research highlights the existence of a strong relationship between the Cugir community and its local natural heritage. Nature is used frequently, is associated with health

and residential satisfaction, constitutes a central component of the town's identity, and generates personal attachments to numerous places across the area. The protection of natural areas and the establishment of a natural park enjoy almost unanimous support, while residents do not perceive conservation and the town's modernisation as opposing objectives.

At the same time, the data show that stated support can be translated into genuine potential for participation. A majority of the population is interested in taking part in organised nature-based activities, while a substantial segment is also willing to volunteer. However, mobilisation varies according to age, educational attainment, income, frequency of contact with nature and attachment to particular places.

The findings therefore point to the existence of a strong social foundation for protecting and enhancing Cugir's natural heritage, grounded both in community-wide consensus and in residents' tangible, everyday and emotional relationship with nature.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below are formulated exclusively on the basis of the research findings and seek to translate the high levels of appreciation for nature, support for conservation and willingness to participate into concrete areas of intervention. The statistical relationships identified are associations and do not, in themselves, demonstrate direct causal effects.

1. Integrating nature into local policies on quality of life and urban development

The natural areas surrounding Cugir should be treated as a component of local quality of life, rather than solely as recreational spaces or landscape features. Almost nine in ten respondents believe that nature has an important impact on health, while the frequency of green-space use, perceived health benefits and the integration of nature into local identity are positively associated with satisfaction with living in the town.

Accordingly, the protection and accessibility of natural areas should be incorporated into urban planning, public health policies, mobility strategies and measures aimed at enhancing the town's attractiveness. Residents' vision for the future supports such an approach: the modernisation of Cugir is associated with the desire for a more attractive, cleaner, greener and more appealing town, indicating that development and environmental protection are not perceived as conflicting objectives.

2. Improving pedestrian and cycling connections between the town and natural areas

More than half of journeys to natural areas are made using non-motorised forms of mobility: 40.9% of respondents travel on foot and 11.8% by bicycle. At the same time, 39.9% of residents use a private car, showing that reliance on motorised mobility remains significant.

The development and maintenance of safe pedestrian routes, the creation or extension of cycling connections, and improved links between residential neighbourhoods and the main natural areas are therefore recommended. Interventions should aim both to support those who already use active mobility and to create viable alternatives for some journeys currently made by car.

Routes should be clearly signposted and connected to places that are used or valued by residents, without focusing exclusively on the best-known landmarks.

3. Developing a diverse and sustained programme of nature-based activities

Interest in activities organised in natural areas is exceptionally high, with only 3.3% of respondents stating that they are not interested in such initiatives. Preferences are nevertheless diverse, indicating the need for a mixed programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The activity calendar should combine:

- outdoor cultural events;
- sports activities;
- environmental clean-up initiatives;
- guided tours;
- workshops on nature, plants and animals;
- flora and fauna observation activities.

Cultural and sports events may attract large audiences, while tours, workshops and observation activities may respond to the interests of smaller groups with a stronger interest in education and learning about natural heritage. Activities should not be organised only occasionally, but incorporated into a recurring programme so that stated interest can be transformed into sustained engagement with local initiatives.

4. Creating a gradual pathway from participation to volunteering

Interest in participation is considerably higher than willingness to volunteer: 83.7% of respondents express openness towards taking part in activities, while 59.2% are very or somewhat interested in becoming involved in their organisation.

Event participants represent the principal potential recruitment pool for volunteering, as supported by the strong association between interest in participation and interest in volunteering, $p = 0.546$; $p < 0.001$.

For this reason, recruitment should not rely

exclusively on general calls for volunteers, but should also involve the gradual engagement of people who already participate in activities.

Such a pathway may involve:

- attending an event;
- signing up to receive information about future activities;
- undertaking a specific, short-term task;
- becoming involved repeatedly;
- participating in the organisation or coordination of activities.

Volunteering opportunities should be flexible, clearly defined and adapted to the different levels of time, experience and responsibility that residents are willing to contribute.

5. Using place attachment to support community mobilisation

For 63.3% of respondents, there are natural places around Cugir that hold particular personal significance. Moreover, individuals who identify such a place have approximately 2.4 times higher odds of expressing willingness to volunteer.

Participation and volunteering activities should therefore also be developed around places to which the community is already attached.

Environmental clean-up initiatives, guided tours, cultural activities and conservation measures may be associated with landmarks such as Râul Mare, Cetatea Singidava, the Șureanu Mountains, Poiana cu Goruni or Râul Mic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

However, the research shows that attachment is not concentrated exclusively around a small number of landmarks. Almost one third of the places mentioned were grouped within the “Other” category, indicating the existence of numerous spaces with personal significance. A participatory mapping exercise is therefore recommended in order to identify both established landmarks and lesser-known places valued by the community.

6. Adapting forms of involvement to different social groups

Interest in participation and volunteering is not distributed evenly. It tends to be higher among younger people and those with higher levels of education. Income differentiates participation to a lesser extent, but is more relevant to willingness to volunteer.

People under the age of 50 and those with upper-secondary, post-secondary or university education represent the groups with the greatest immediate recruitment potential. These categories may form the initial core of participation and volunteering programmes.

At the same time, strategies should not exclude older people, those with lower levels of education or those with limited financial resources. More accessible forms of involvement are required for these groups, including:

- short-duration activities;
- tasks that do not require substantial physical effort;
- information, support or local knowledge-sharing roles;
- activities located close to residential areas;

• forms of involvement that do not entail significant personal costs.

The differences identified should be used to adapt programmes, rather than to restrict recruitment to the groups with the highest scores.

7. Strengthening institutional communication about natural heritage

Information about nature circulates primarily through personal experience, the internet and informal networks. Local authorities represent the principal source of information for only 1.0% of respondents, environmental organisations for 0.5%, and educational institutions for 0.4%.

The development of more active and recognisable public communication is therefore recommended, led by local authorities in collaboration with environmental organisations, educational institutions and the local media. Institutional communication should nevertheless be adapted to the channels already used by the population, particularly the internet, social media and interpersonal networks.

Messages should include:

- information about natural areas and access routes;
- the schedule of activities;
- explanations of conservation rules;
- presentation of the benefits for health and quality of life;
- stories about places valued by residents;
- practical opportunities for participation and volunteering.

Communication should also be practical, locally specific and connected to the community’s direct experience, rather than relying exclusively on general messages about environmental protection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

8. Promoting Cugir's natural identity

For 94.5% of respondents, nature represents an important part of Cugir's identity. Mountains, forests and rivers are the principal elements through which residents define the area's natural heritage, while the mountains are associated particularly with the landscape, local landmarks, clean air and health.

These elements could provide the basis for a coherent public identity for the area, to be used in promoting the town, local education, cultural activities and conservation initiatives. Communication should present nature as part of the community's heritage and identity, rather than solely as a tourism resource.

At the same time, promotional efforts should not reduce the natural heritage to a small number of images or emblematic landmarks. The diversity of places holding personal significance shows that natural identity is also constructed through smaller spaces, everyday experiences and landmarks known primarily within the local community.

9. Continuing the process of establishing the natural park through a transparent and participatory approach

Support for the protection of green areas and the establishment of a natural park is almost unanimous: 99.8% consider protection important, 98.2% regard it as important for the town's future, and 96.7% support the creation of a natural park to a great or very great extent.

The findings provide a very strong social basis for continuing this process. However, support was

expressed after respondents were presented with a definition specifying that the park would allow certain traditional, educational, tourism and recreational activities, provided that conservation rules were respected.

The process of developing the initiative should therefore include:

- transparent presentation of the park's boundaries and objectives;
- clear explanations of permitted activities and any potential restrictions;
- consultation with residents and users of natural areas;
- integration of places with personal and community value;
- communication of the benefits and responsibilities associated with conservation.

The high level of consensus represents an important opportunity, but it should be consolidated through effective information provision and genuine participation.

10. Periodic monitoring of participation and changes in perceptions

The implementation of these recommendations should be accompanied by a simple monitoring system. This could track the number and profile of participants in activities, the number of volunteers, the frequency of involvement, preferred types of activities and the natural areas used most frequently. Interventions could then be adjusted in response to the community's actual behaviour and needs.

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TO BE COMPLETED

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