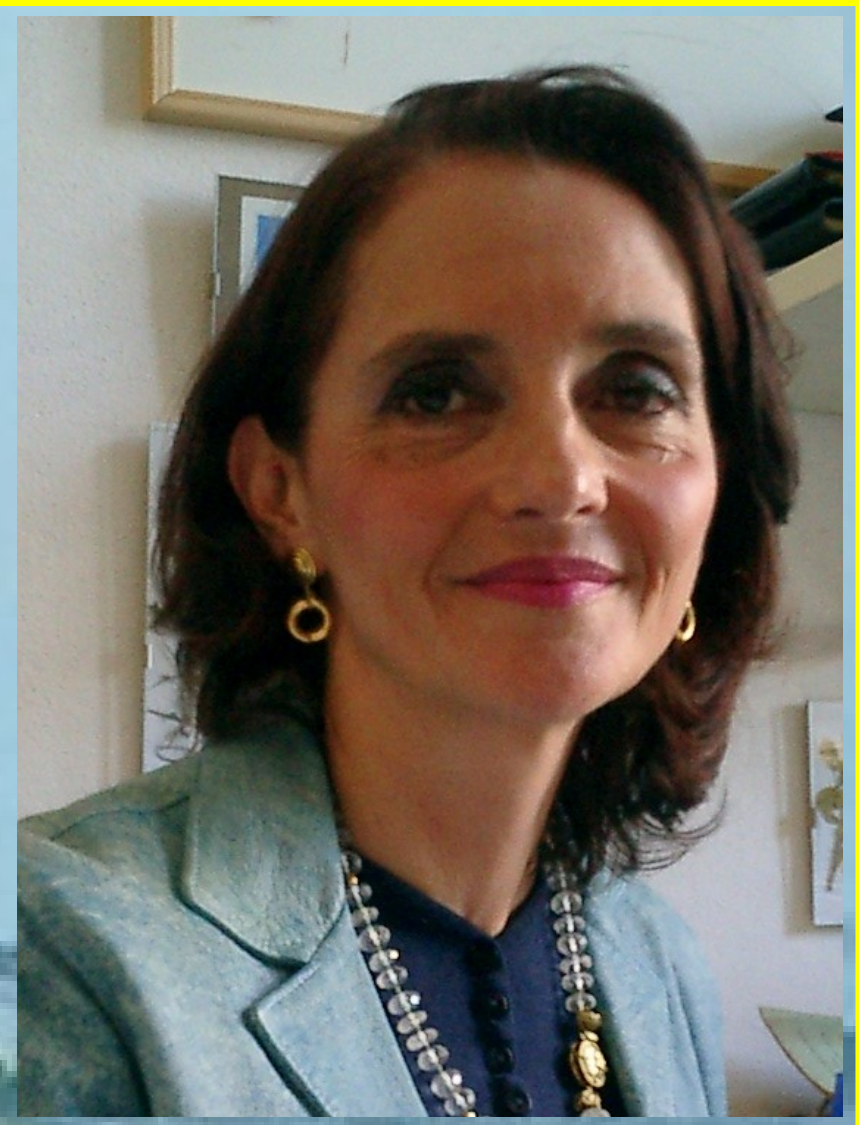


Seeing the sea from land: a project to increase the public awareness of recreation waters quality. Results of a pilot questionnaire



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INTRODUCTION

Public awareness raising and enhancing the capacity for informed personal choice are increasingly seen as important factors in ensuring the safe use of recreational water environments and an important management intervention: in particular, if people are able to receive and correctly understand the results of water quality monitoring, they can choose for their leisure activities the less polluted areas and by this way they may induce competition between resorts/destinations based upon relative safety and encourage investment in improvements. A well informed citizen is also trusted in institutions and can be able to properly react in the case of particular "media information storm" giving alarmistic news.

To improve people awareness is essential that information is available, comprehensible, widely spread and delivered in a timely manner according to a strategy involving as much stakeholders as possible. The first step for planning public information programs is the study of the target population in order to assess knowledge, attitudes, risk perception and behaviours. To this aim a survey was planned in Tuscany Region (tyrrhenian coast of the Middle Italy) that has develops 400 km of coast (600 km with islands), with many touristic localities. The seawater quality is generally high, because only about 5 km of the coast are regularly over the law limits for bacterial faecal indicators.

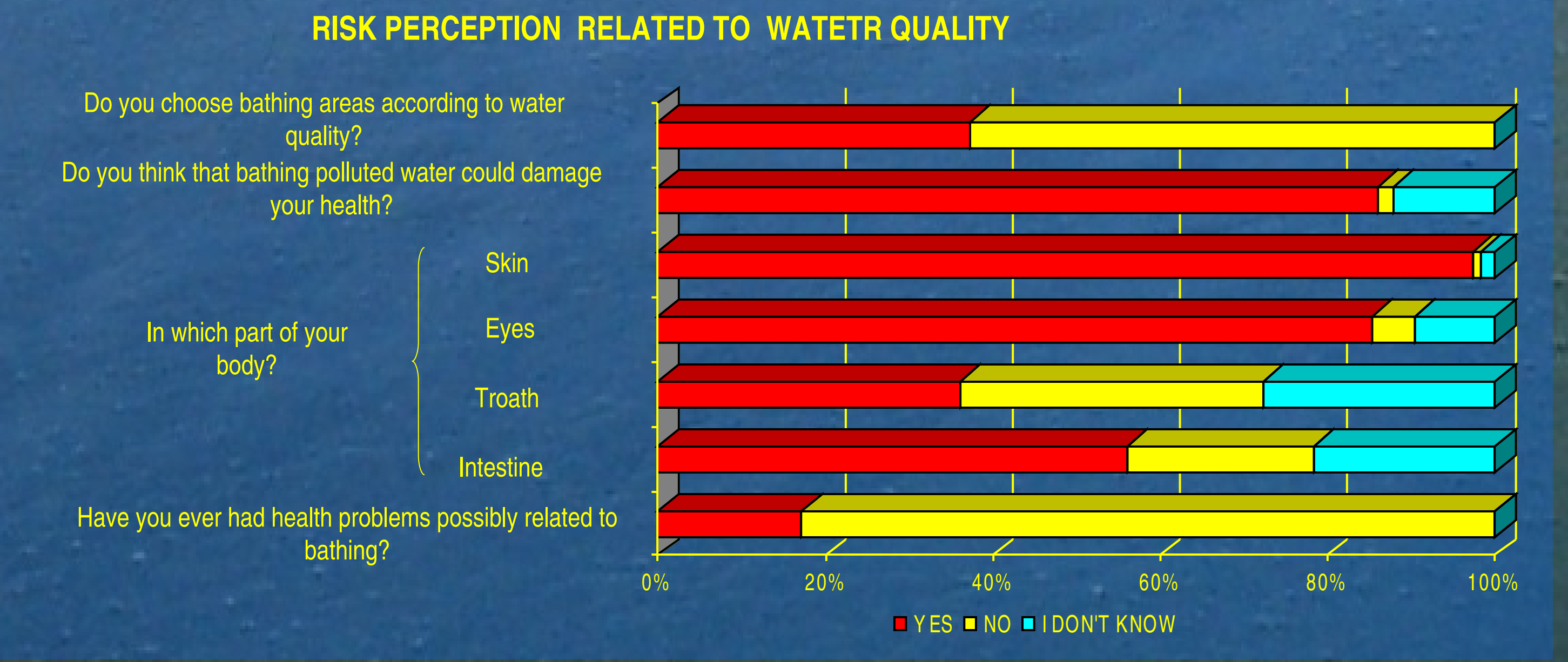
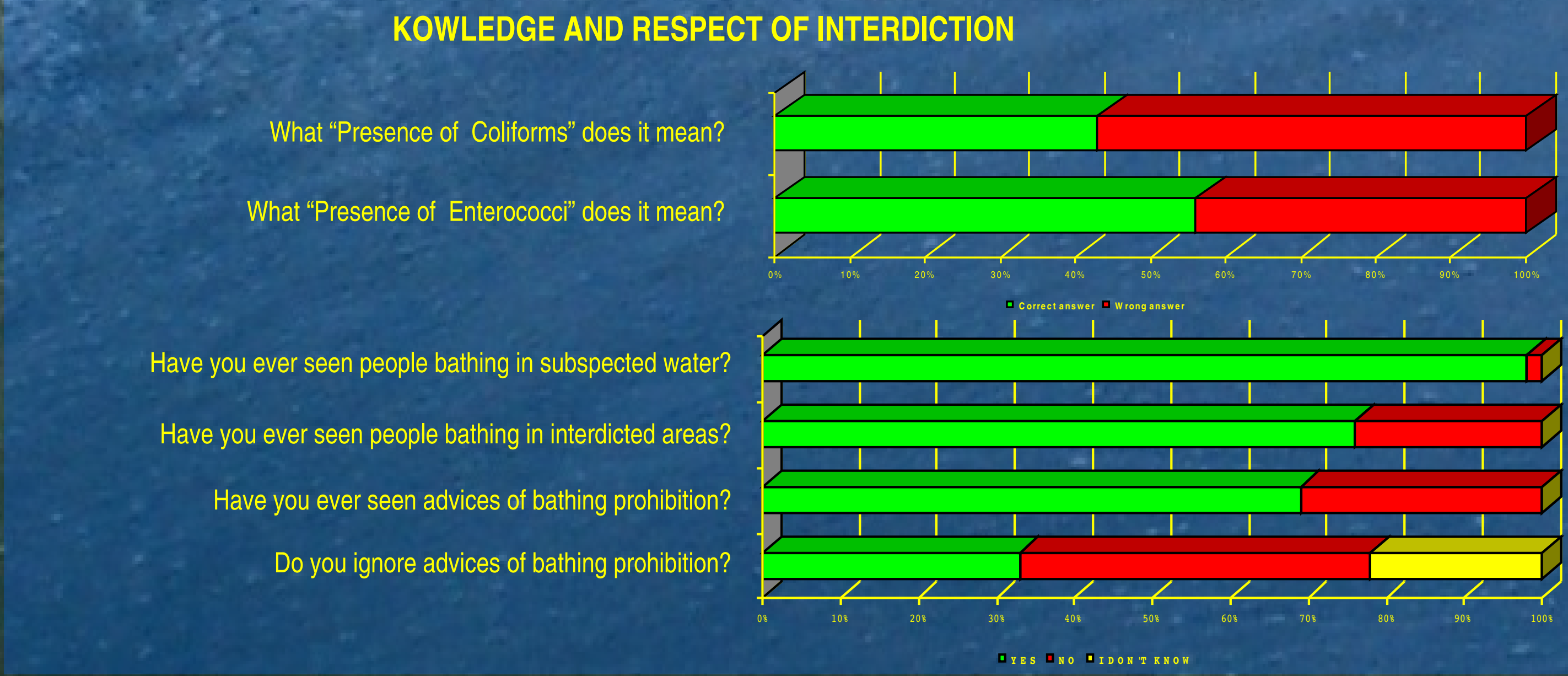
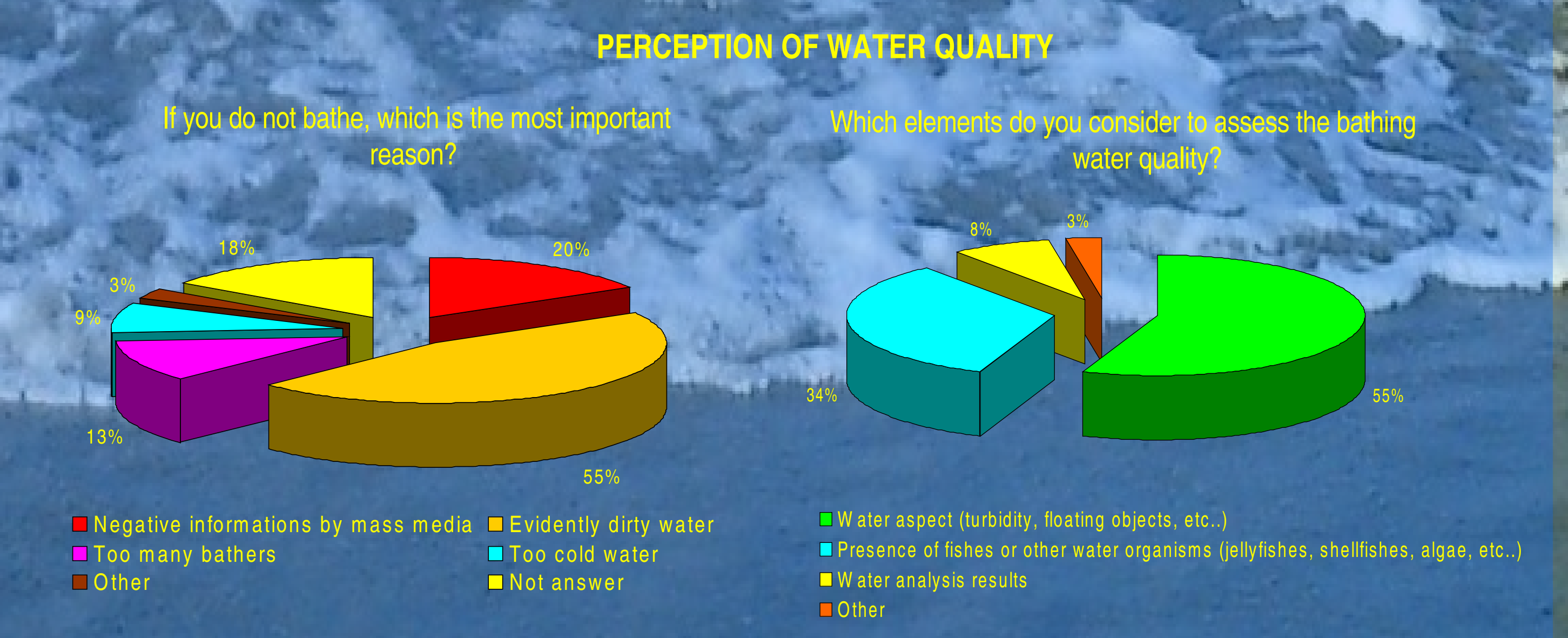
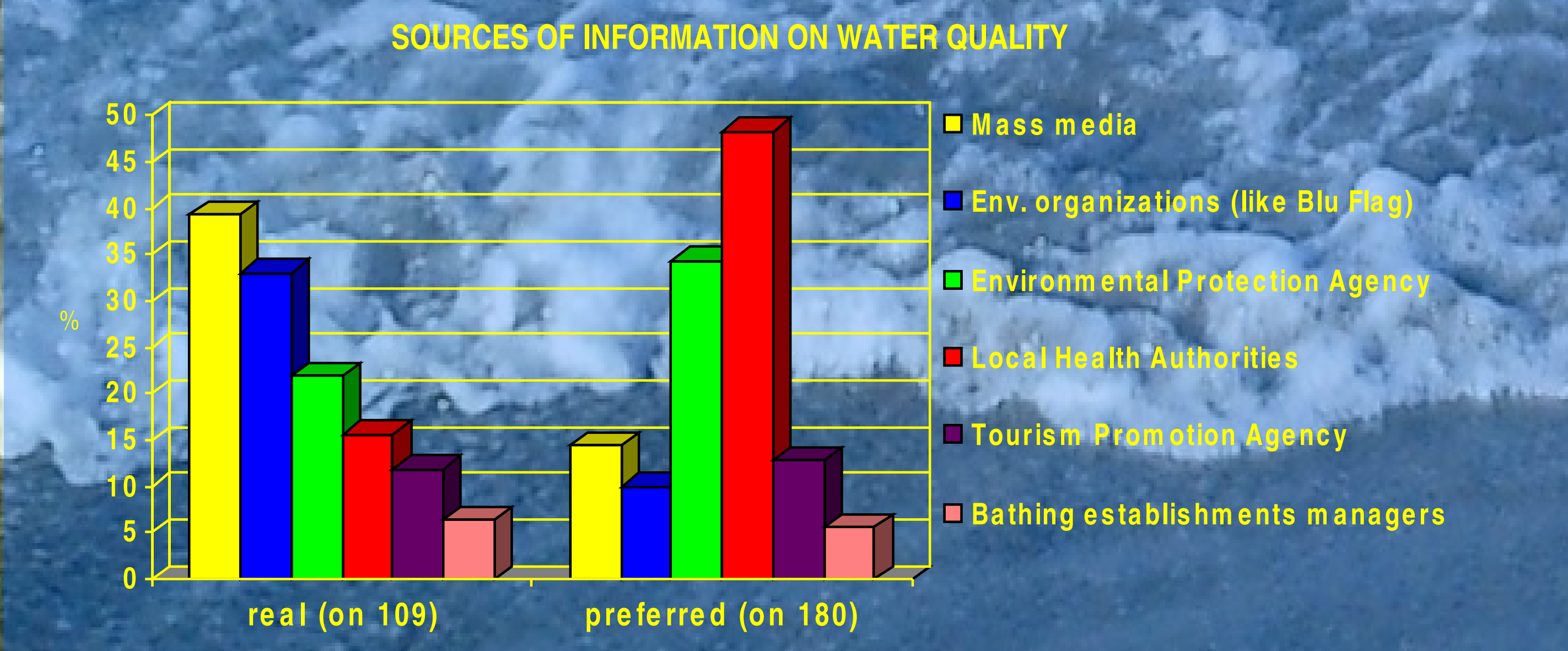
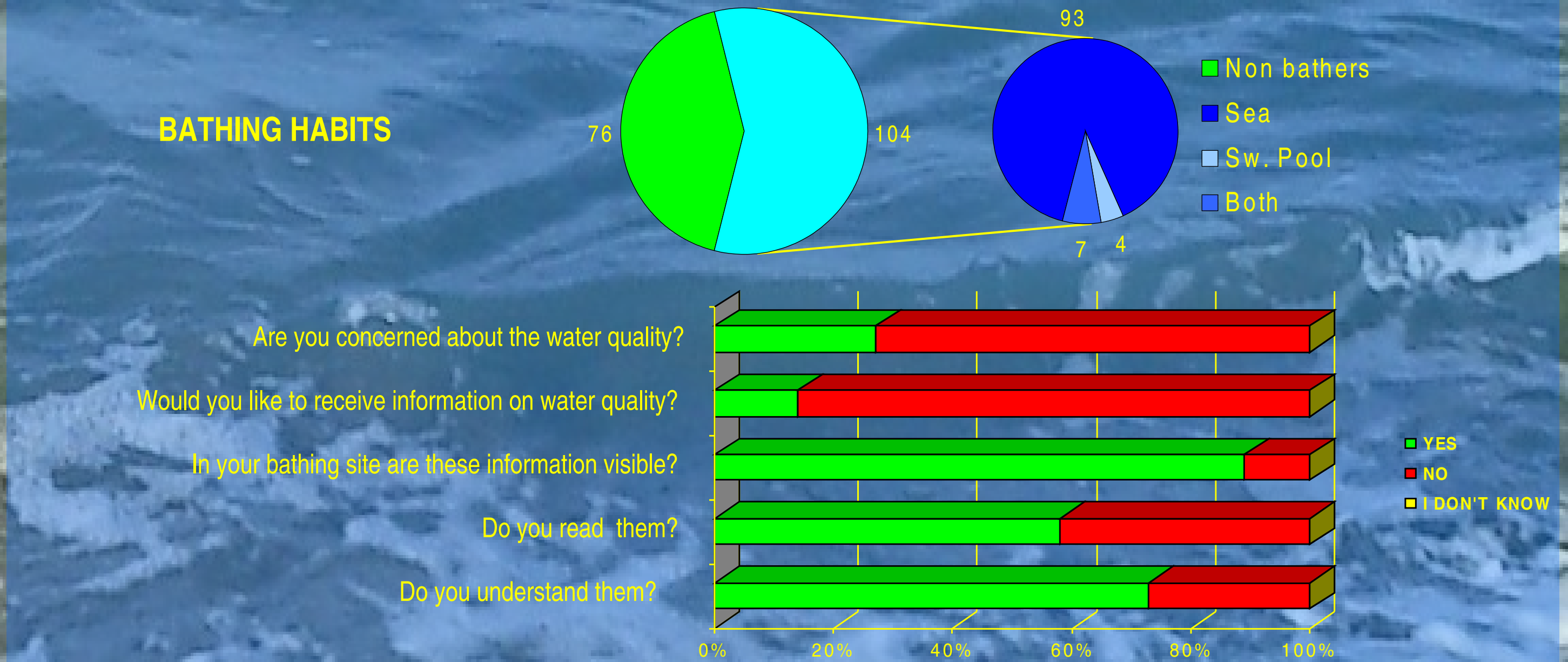
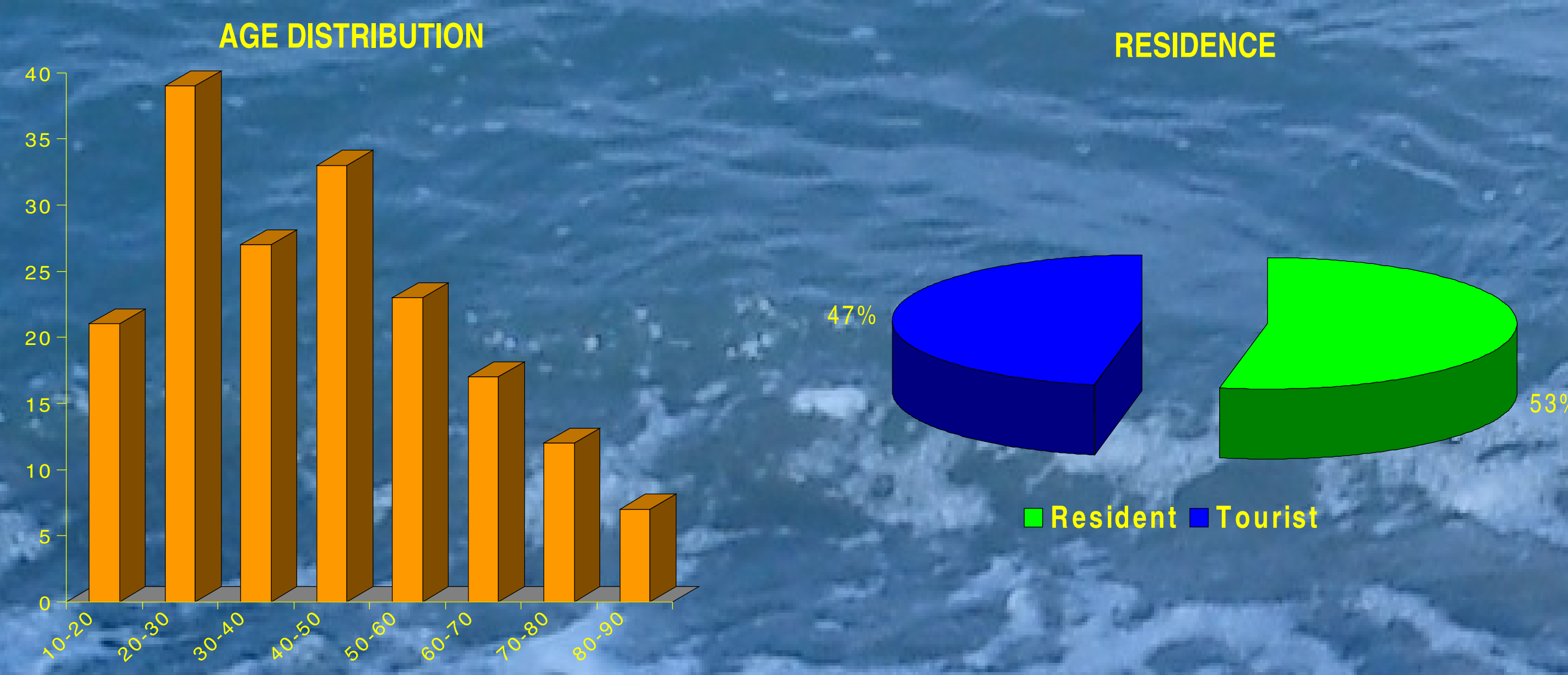
For an initial pilot survey, 180 people visiting beaches of the northern coastal area of Tuscany were interviewed during the bathing season 2005. The used questionnaire (30 questions) included questions on age class and area of residence, bathing habits, sources of information on water quality, knowledge about the meaning of microbial parameters, risk perception and reported health problems possibly related to bathing.

QUESTIONNAIRE ABOUT KNOWLEDGE, RISK PERCEPTION AND BEHAVIORS RELATED TO BATHING WATERS QUALITY



First page of the questionnaire

RESULTS



DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the surveyed population showed a low level of information, knowledge and risk perception related to the quality of bathing waters: the majority of them don't choose destination on the basis of monitoring data, that are however not very visible and understandable. Then it is evident the need of a better information of the public for the active participation of the local population and of beach visitors in the health protection and in the management of recreational water use areas. This implies that the institutions involved in monitoring and risk management should ensure good quality, readily understandable and easily accessible information and maintain effective channels of communication with non-governmental organisations, industry (especially tourism), local and central government, trade associations, resort and tourism operators and elements of the media.



Tuscany a sea of quality, protect it together (Information campaign of Tuscany Region)