Running across Europe
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Running across Europe
The Rise and Size of One of the Largest Sport Markets

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MEASURE was founded in 2010 by KU Leuven (Belgium) and the Mulier Institute (the Netherlands). MEASURE is a network of social scientists and statisticians with an interest in sports participation issues. The letters in MEASURE stand for Meeting for European Sport Participation and Sport Culture Research. The reference to ‘culture’ intimates that the debates over sports participation within MEASURE are not limited to the dissemination of data and statistics. It is recognised that in order to be able to explain differences in sports participation, one needs to understand the position that sports hold within society at large and the broader culture of which these are part and parcel. Analyses of these (sporting) cultures may include quantitative as well as qualitative methods, albeit the former are generally more predominant than the latter within the MEASURE context.

The objectives of MEASURE are to

- improve the access to reliable sports participation data and the opportunity for researchers to exchange information;
- improve the quality of sports participation data;
- improve the understanding of differences in sports participation between countries and social groups; and
- raise interest in sports participation research among policymakers.

To attain these goals, the MEASURE network meets once or twice a year, often in combination with well-attended international conferences. In addition, a website (www.measuresport.eu) is maintained to gather and disseminate relevant recent research reports and policy documents.
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In our modern lives, there is hardly a need to be physically active. We rely on, for example, cars, elevators, tractors, conveyor belts, remote controls and even electric toothbrushes to do our ‘moving’ for us. These machines allow us to save valuable time and dedicate our energy to other needs.

On the other hand, physical activity is an important component of everyone’s health. Physicians and other health professionals consistently point to its role in preventing all sorts of diseases and improving our general well-being. Thirty minutes of moderate physical exercise five days per week is the standard recommendation, though more is generally welcomed and promoted.

However, both research and personal experience tell us that health is not always a strong enough motivation for people to exercise regularly. If people are to remain physically active, they need the incentive of something that they enjoy and feel good about.

The power of sports, and running in particular, is that they provide such an opportunity: the elements of competition – against others, against the clock or against one’s own limits – social interaction and fun linked to recreational running can help to inspire and motivate people of all ages to become and remain physically active; not because they must, but because they want to.

Getting out for a run is enjoyable and refreshing; it helps people to unwind from a busy day and it contributes to self-esteem and a sense of pride. In addition, runners share their experiences with other runners, helping them to maintain long-lasting friendships, or sometimes just to make acquaintances with people they would otherwise never have met.

We at European Athletics and our 50 member federations consider all runners, regardless of their experience, motivation or performance level, as members of the wider community of athletics.

Recent decades have seen tremendous increases in the number of Europeans running on a regular basis and joining mass participation road races. Researchers speak of first and second running ‘waves’ and even a running ‘tsunami’. But we believe there are still far too many people who are missing out on the benefits of regular physical activity.

As we see it, our role goes beyond creating inspiration through the high-performance aspect of our sport; it includes practical measures to
help more people to become and remain runners, and thereby receive
the life-enhancing value that our sport offers.

We are currently working alongside athletics clubs, race promoters,
clothing manufacturers, publishers and others to ensure that mass par-
ticipation events are safe and well-organised, that quality training advice
is available and that other services runners need are provided. Our aim
is to make athletics, including running, ‘Your Sport for Life’.

Service delivery to the mass of current and future runners is, of course,
a huge challenge. It calls, first and foremost, for the best possible under-
standing of the running movement across Europe so that we can plan
and deploy our resources to maximum effect. The contributors to this
book have succeeded in improving our knowledge base by collecting
and analysing the running market data from their countries. I am sure
that their collective results will contribute to the further development of
running and the sport of athletics, as well as to the general health and
well-being of the European population.

On behalf of European Athletics, I thank the authors for their efforts
and I strongly recommend this book to everyone who cares about sport
and public health.

Hansjörg Wirz
President
European Athletics
Editors

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1 TNS BMRB is a leading social research agency for UK and international policymakers. TNS BMRB’s expertise includes the provision of national statistics, public policy analysis, public service performance measurement and improvement, and communications evaluation.
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Hanna Vehmas (PhD) has worked since 1999 as a teacher and a researcher in sport sociology and sport management in the Department of Sport Sciences. Since 2009, she has worked as the Senior Lecturer of the International Master’s Degree Programme in Sport Management and Health Promotion at the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences. In addition to her teaching responsibilities at the University of Jyväskylä, she has visited a number of foreign universities as a visiting lecturer. Her research interests and activities focus on sports participation and the societal role of sport and physical activity; sport- and health-related tourism and the sociology of leisure. Email: hanna.vehmas@sport.jyu.fi

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