Denmark

Running for the Sake of Running? A Profile and Segmentation of Danish Runners

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Introduction

During the last 25 years, running has undergone a remarkable development in Denmark, from being a peripheral sport to Danes’ favourite physical leisure activity today. Almost a third (31%) of Danes over 16 years of age claim to have been running on a regular basis within the last 12 months (Laub, 2013).

By comparison, only 9% of Danes ran on a regular basis in 1993 (Bøje & Eichberg, 1994). But since then, and especially after the turn of the millennium, running has become established as a major trend in Danes’ everyday lives. Today runners are a natural part of the public space, particularly in the larger urban areas, and runners are a common sight on pavements, in parks and other recreational areas. Therefore, if you are not a runner yourself, you will probably bump into one on your way from A to B.

In Denmark, local voluntary sports clubs play a large role in organising sports and setting up physical activities, especially for children and youngsters. However, running is different from most other popular sports/physical activities in Denmark due to the low level of organisation in local clubs. Running is by and large a self-organised activity. Nine out of ten runners follow a self-organised running regimen and only 7% of the active runners are members of running clubs. Commercial fitness centres, which are otherwise popular among adults, have not succeeded in attracting members to participate in structured, day-to-day training either.
In recent years, clubs (and federations) and commercial actors have started to make an effort to attract and retain runners in greater numbers. An important first step in attracting runners has been to gain more knowledge about them and, therefore, more emphasis is put on gathering data and information today.

**Structure and aim of the chapter**

The present chapter aims at presenting a profile of Danish runners and providing empirical support for the organisation of running in Denmark. First, participation in sports in general and in running specifically are presented. Second, a profile of the Danish runner is established based on data from the latest national survey of sports participation (Laub, 2013).

Third, results from the report ‘Running in Denmark – portrait of Danish runners’ (Forsberg, 2012) are presented in order to separate the heterogeneous group of Danish runners into distinct groups based on their motives and ambitions. It is suggested that the Danish running population cannot be targeted as a homogenous entity. To succeed in organising runners it is paramount to take differences between runners into consideration and work with an explicit focus on the different types of runners by offering tailor-made programmes to one or more running types on a local level. The last part of this chapter looks in detail at how two types of runners can be formally organised, for instance, in a running club.

**Data on runners**

This chapter is based on two newly conducted surveys. The first is the latest national survey on sports participation, which was conducted in 2011. In addition to providing information about how many adults run, the survey provides important background information on runners such as age, gender and education. Similar surveys on sports participation have been conducted since 1964 and are used to look at the development of running in a longer time span.

The second is a study solely on running. The study, also conducted in 2011, is in itself an example of the increased focus and attention on running and runners. It is based on a large questionnaire of 4,052 runners which generated a lot of useful information on runners and gave answers to questions such as why people run, how they organise their running and how often they run. The two surveys are described in Table 3.1 below.