

# HEALTHY SPORT IN A HEALTHY SOCIETY

**Building new bridges and partnerships in a world striving for more sport activity, physically fit and active people.**

**Lars Wiskum**, CEO, Sportventure, & **Mogens Kirkeby**, President, International Sport and Culture Association

“Sport is part of every man and woman’s heritage and its absence can never be compensated for.”

Pierre de Coubertin

## New opportunities for the sporting goods industry

During the 80`s, 90`s and in to the new century the sporting goods industry has experienced tremendous growth. We have been through the running/jogging boom, the first fitness craze, a growing wintersport industry and the rise of the fan culture. This along with outdoor trends like fitness walking with poles, more people choosing active holidays, and the general campaigns for healthier lifestyles have lead to continuous record results for most sports companies. Great athletes have turned into superstars and product development and technical innovations have crossed new borders for the industry. Sports lifestyle segment has been growing and the wellness revolution is taking off as a new trend. We dress sporty and watch sport for entertainment. Nevertheless, we are today facing a worldwide epidemic obesity situation; due to lack of physical activity the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations and the European Union urge the national governments and all other stakeholders to take action.

The efforts, innovation and will of sports companies to cross borders and support the challenge of getting more people involved in sport and daily physical activity is clearly needed. Sport and physical activity is a global communicator. Globalisation is culturisation. The sporting goods industry can initiate and support initiatives locally and worldwide to build platforms for sport- and health organisations, NGO`s, communities and others for the purpose of inspiring more people to a healthy lifestyle and more sports activity.

## Sport and physical activity – bridging the gap between knowledge and action

Through the last twenty years the boundaries of the sports arena has been extended in a wider sense to cover also nature and urban areas.

Athletic achievements and competitions in sports can be local events outside your doorstep. Day to day fitness activities like running, riding bikes, fitness walking and exercising in outdoor equipment in parks have become more visible in many counties – especially in western European countries and USA. The obvious reason is that more people around the world start to realize that we get too little exercise through our daily routines. Physical inactivity (a lack of physical activity) is an independent risk factor for chronic diseases, and is estimated to cause 1.9 million deaths globally according to WHO.

The Sporting Goods Industry and its stakeholders can be key partners in changing the culture of sport and physical activity and encouraging more people to move from inactivity to a physical active life.



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## Sport and physical activity on the international agenda

Sport is increasingly a tool for development on the international agenda.

### Timeline of some developments internationally

- 1978 Unesco adopts the International Charter of Physical Education and Sport
- 2001 UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appoints Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace
- 2003 First International Conference on Sport & Development, Magglingen
- 2003 First conference on “International Expert Meeting on Development in and through Sport”
- 2005 International Year of Sport and Physical Education
- 2007 European Commission publishes a “White Paper on Sport”
- 2008 IOC and UN agree on an expanded framework for action to use sport to reach goals of the UN [Sport & Development 2008]

The Sporting Goods industry is a highly visible industry worldwide. It is also one of the biggest industries although it is considered to be a fairly young industry. It is certainly a growing industry with increasing economic relevance and sport incorporates many industrial sectors and services. Sports brands are global and highly visible. They are excellent communicators. Physically active people are key customers to sports brands.

The Start-to-Run project initiated by a sporting goods retailer and Nike in 2005 and organised in Denmark by DGI, a national sports federation, is a good example of how a new way of organising and supporting a grassroot project can be successful. Within a five year period Nike and DGI expect to attract 80.000 new and first time runners and roll out a series of weekly training sessions and fitness runs in 100 cities in Denmark. Start-to-Run concept is developing internationally.

## Innovation as a key driver and motivator

Can a ball or a javelin measure the distance when you are throwing it? Not yet – but it could create

new games and exercise opportunities. Who would have imagined just ten years ago, that walking with poles, like in Nordic Walking, would be a new fitness trend for millions of people and the same time also be a basic for creating new outdoor activity opportunities, like nature fitness trails and outdoor exercise parks? And who could predict that a new outdoor exercise culture inspired from China, where many parks feature training devices, would arise from the growing concern in Europe and USA about rising obesity rates and inactivity levels? In a recent 2007 report about Sport and Physical Activity from the Danish Institute for Sports Studies trampolines was named the fourth most popular sports activity in Denmark for kids and young people between ages 7 and 15, after football, swimming and gymnastics. Why? Because mini trampolines have mushroomed in private gardens around Denmark through the last five years. New sporting devices create new trends.



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*“We have experienced a true prosperity of new concepts and products which now have reached the middleclass mass-consumer. Weightlifting has developed from being an activity practiced by a minority of bodybuilders into being an easy accessible form of exercise at sport facilities and inside and outside the home. The affluent middleclass mass-consumers compose as a group of the population a crucial difference of, to what extent a sport activity can be regarded as popular, peculiar or natural. The garden trampoline is in relation to this an interesting phenomenon”*

**Kasper Lund Kirkegaard**, Analyst, Danish Institute for Sports Studies.

Through cooperation and development of new ideas, technologies and concepts the industry can create new business opportunities. The number of people employed in sports is expected to continue its growth. New initiatives and organisations will be aiming for more focus and networking within innovative, technology-based sport.

## Youth health and sport – a diverse approach is a must!

Every year ISCA invites hundreds of young people from many different countries to various educational sessions. The young meet, exchange ideas and perspectives on sport across cultures and life conditions. These young people are “youth leaders” in sport and will be the future senior sport leaders and the meetings give us valuable impressions of what is important for young people. It answers questions about young people’s priorities and engagement, when it comes to sport and life perspectives in general.

Very clear indications from these sessions the last years are that young people’s priorities go towards:

- Participation - instead of being passive spectator
- Diverse and personalised activities - instead of the traditional standardised disciplines
- Relation between sport activity, culture and lifestyle - instead of an isolated sport focus.



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In other words, it means that the very competitive oriented sport disciplines are loosing attention, especially among young people. The vast majority of young people have a social, recreational and cultural attitude to their sport and are therefore not interested in following very precise rules and competitions regulation, as it is the case of many traditional sport disciplines.

To reach young people in massive scale, a diverse approach from all stakeholders in the sport sector is a must. The challenge for the societies, the sport organisations and the industry is to stimulate – and of course benefit from - an increase in participations leading to

more active and healthier citizens. For most stakeholders this diverse approach means change of priorities.

## Doing the same, but in very different ways

One of the strongest examples on this diverse, personal and cultural focus among young people is the fast developing activity “Parkour”. Parkour is the younger version of Olympic sport discipline, 3000 meter Steeplechase. The philosophy is the same: You move from A to B with some obstacles on our road. The 3000 meter Steeplechase follows very standardised rules and is performed at specific facility - the athletic stadium. Parkour is also about moving from A to B, but here you choose you own rules and facility – and the facility is often the city, using the city environment.

The ideas are not that new. Originally Steeplechase was like Parkour. It was race between towns – from one church steeple to another - with all the natural obstacles along the road. However, the popularity of Parkour, the self production and the internal marketing of the activity are very precise indicators of the current trend and interest among young people.

## Recreational sport is about being a “Prosumer”

In most occasions the personal sport activity is in the context of the idea of being a “Prosumer”. In this situation you are producing as well as consuming your “own” sport activity. This is the case for most grass-root sport activities. If you do not contribute – produce – there is no activity. On the other hand, you have as “prosumer”, a huge influence on the format and profile of the activity. Taking the example of the Steeplechase vs. Parkour, we can even add another important dimension – the marketing of the activity. You will find a few hundred thousands of Google hits on “3000 meter Steeplechase”, but millions when searching for the much younger “Parkour”. This added YouTube video clips of Parkour - some of them viewed by more than 10 million viewers. Knowing the profile of YouTube primary users, there is a good chance, that this is marketing directly from young people to young people – in other words the best way to inspire and motivate more young people.

## The future belongs to those who can describe it – and get involved

In 2010 Singapore will host the 1<sup>st</sup> Summer Youth Olympic games, which will bring together 3.200 enthusiastic young athletes and 800 officials. The 1<sup>st</sup> Summer Youth Olympics will be a prestigious new event. June 2009 one hundred thousand participants are meeting in Frankfurt am Main for a five day sports and cultural week at the German International Gymnastic Festival. A month later 25,000 participants will gather at the Danish Sport for All festival in the city of Holbaek, Denmark. The two sports events, which are open to ordinary sports enthusiasts, will bring together around 125,000 participants – equivalent to the total number of participants at all the Olympic Games from 1896 to Beijing 2008.

According to futurist Gitte Larsen co-operations will replace corporations in the future. Healthy sport for healthy societies is a theme with many stakeholders. And an excellent chance of creating win-win opportunities for all parties involved.

“ People in every nation love sport. Its values- fitness, fair play, teamwork, and the pursuit of excellence – are universal. At its best, it brings people together, no matter what their origin, background, religious belief or economic status.”

Kofi Annan,  
former UN Secretary-General.

## Reach out and be part of healthier societies

More people will be looking for more sports products in a globalised world. User-driven innovation has challenged major global companies to reach out for their target consumers to uncover and understand new market needs. Actors in sport, academia, private sector, non-profit and non-governmental organisations, government agencies, international organisations, the media and the public are interested in the potential of sport as a tool for personal, community, national and international development.

No need for analyzing consumer behaviour to understand the need for a strengthened effort to reach out and be a part of building healthier societies, based on physical activity and sports. Get involved. Be innovative and proactive. ■

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The International Sport and Culture Association is a non-governmental and not-for-profit international umbrella association of organisations working in the fields of Sport for All, Youth and Culture. ISCA supports development of Recreational Sport, Health Sport, and promotion of Sport for All. ISCA facilitates international Sport for All cooperation, organisational development and leadership training. ISCA has members from more than 70 countries on five continent.

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