



KATHOLIEKE UNIVERSITEIT
LEUVEN

The Rise of 'Light Communities' in Sport The Case of Running

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INTRODUCTION

- Focus
 - Popularity of running as a sport
 - Marketing & position strategy of traditional organisations
 - Make profit of running success



INTRODUCTION

- Research questions
 1. Expansion in the market of running?
 2. Developments responsible for running boom
 3. New providers on the running market?
 4. Implications and consequences for traditional athletic associations





Changes in policy-making

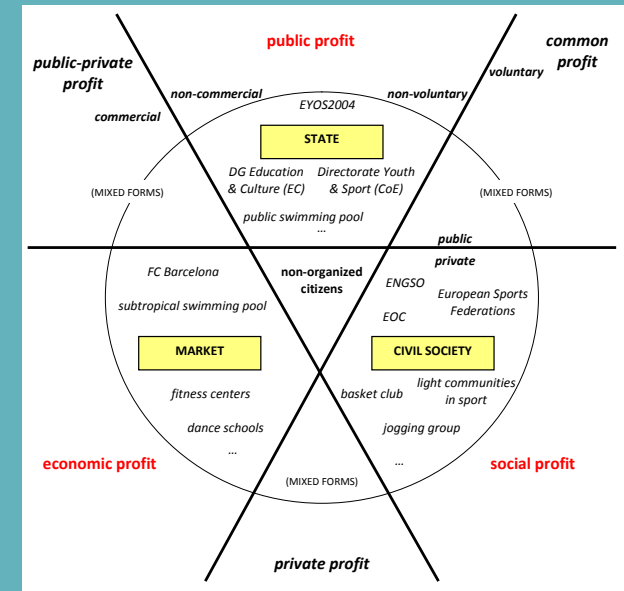
1. Changes in public profit sector

2. Changes in economic profit sector

- Sport has become commercial player

3. Changes in social profit sector

- Voluntary sector
- Informal sector





Changes in public sector

- **General: emergence of transnational policy and structures**
- **Cfr. Globalisation, European integration process, EU sport policy, ...**
- **New public management, competitive tendering, ... → efficiency of public services ↑**
- **Specific: growing interest of public authority in sport success as a growing tool of international promotion**
- **Examples**
 - **White Paper on Sport**
 - **Article on sport in EU Treaty**

Article I – 17: *“The Union shall have competence to carry out supporting, coordinating or complementary action in the field of sport.”*





Changes in commercial sector

- Rise of neo-liberalism → limited role and power for the state
- Emergence of commercial entities in sport (sport products as well as sport services)
- Examples
 - Professional sport: sponsorship, mediatisation, sport events, ...
 - Sport for All: development of commercial fitness markets, tennis clubs, squash centers, ...





Changes in voluntary sector

- Demographic shifts → sport preferences!
- Growing need for lack of volunteers
- Growing need for qualified trainers
- Sport clubs = greedy institutions?
- Greedy institutions = organisations that ask for loyalty and almost undivided commitment from their members (Coser, 1974)
- What else?





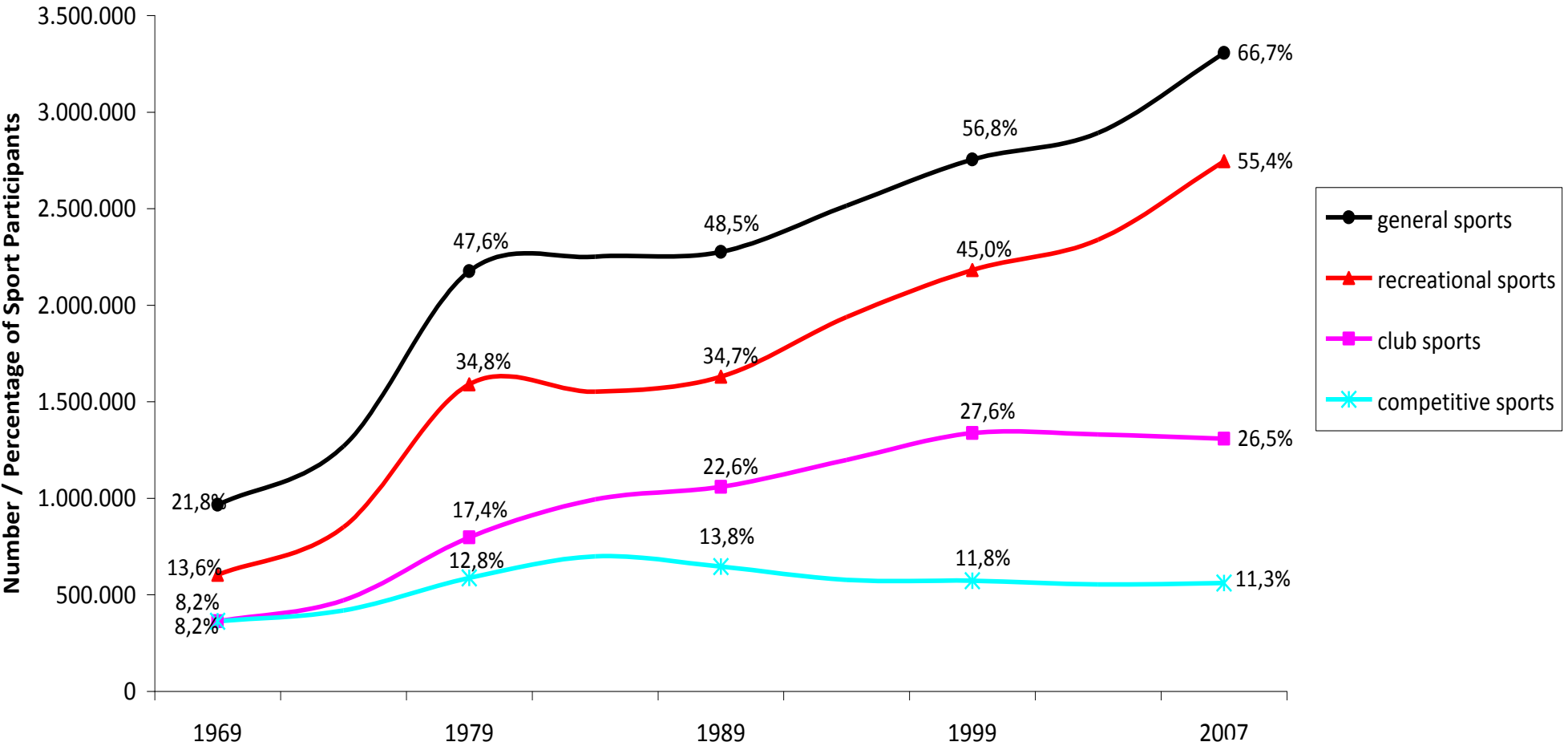
Changes in informal sector

- **Rise of light communities in sport vs greedy institutions**
- Light communities = demand-oriented, flexible and loose communities, with a minimum of rules of conduct, focusing on the achievements their participants seem to demand (Duyvendak & Hurenkamp, 2004)
- **Example?**
- Light running communities = small group of running mates featured by a non club-organised structure based on rather 'weak ties' between the members



New market drivers: light communities

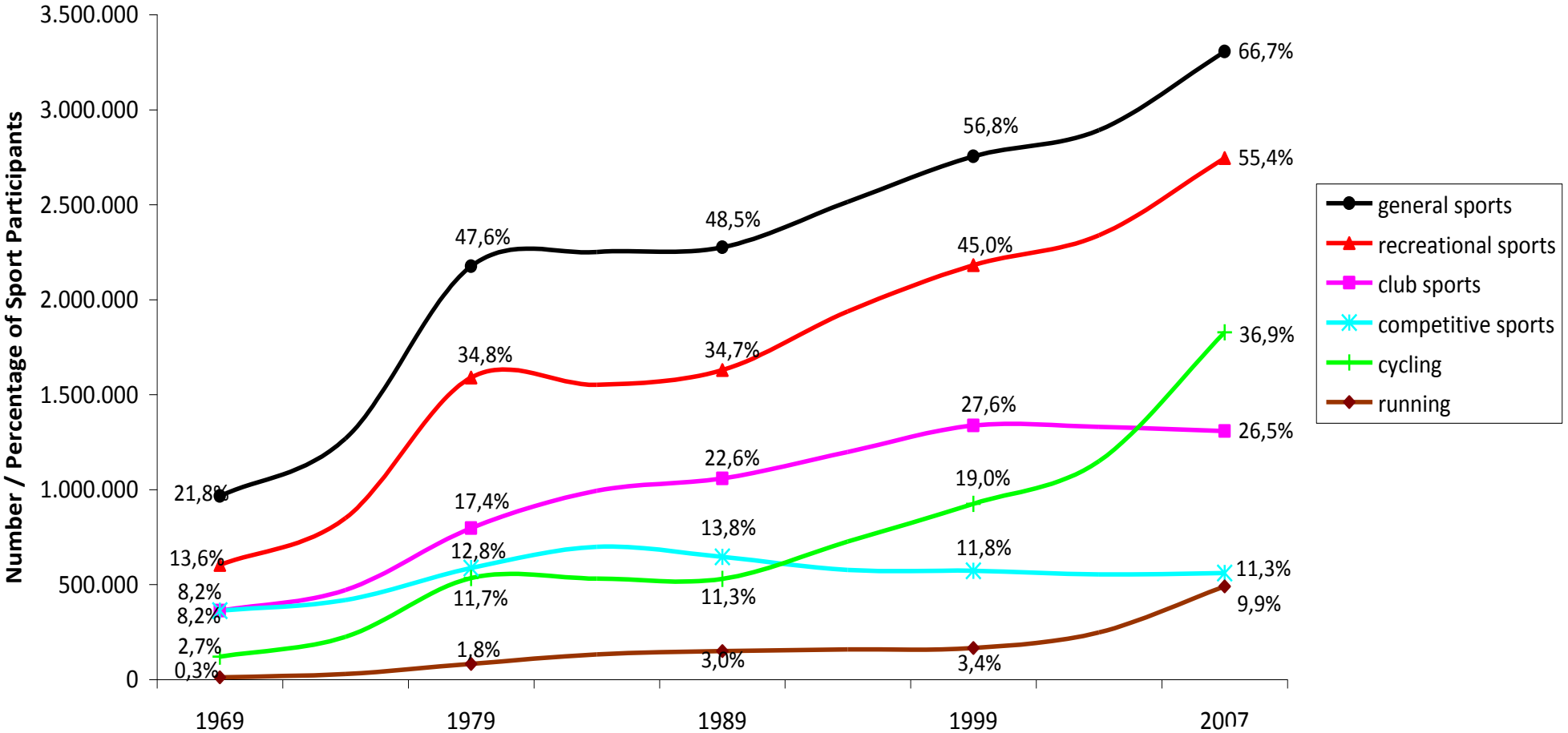
Evolution of Active Sports Participation among 12 to 75 Year Old Subjects in Flanders 1969-2007, percentages i.f.o. total population



Source: Scheerder et al. (2008)

New market drivers: light communities

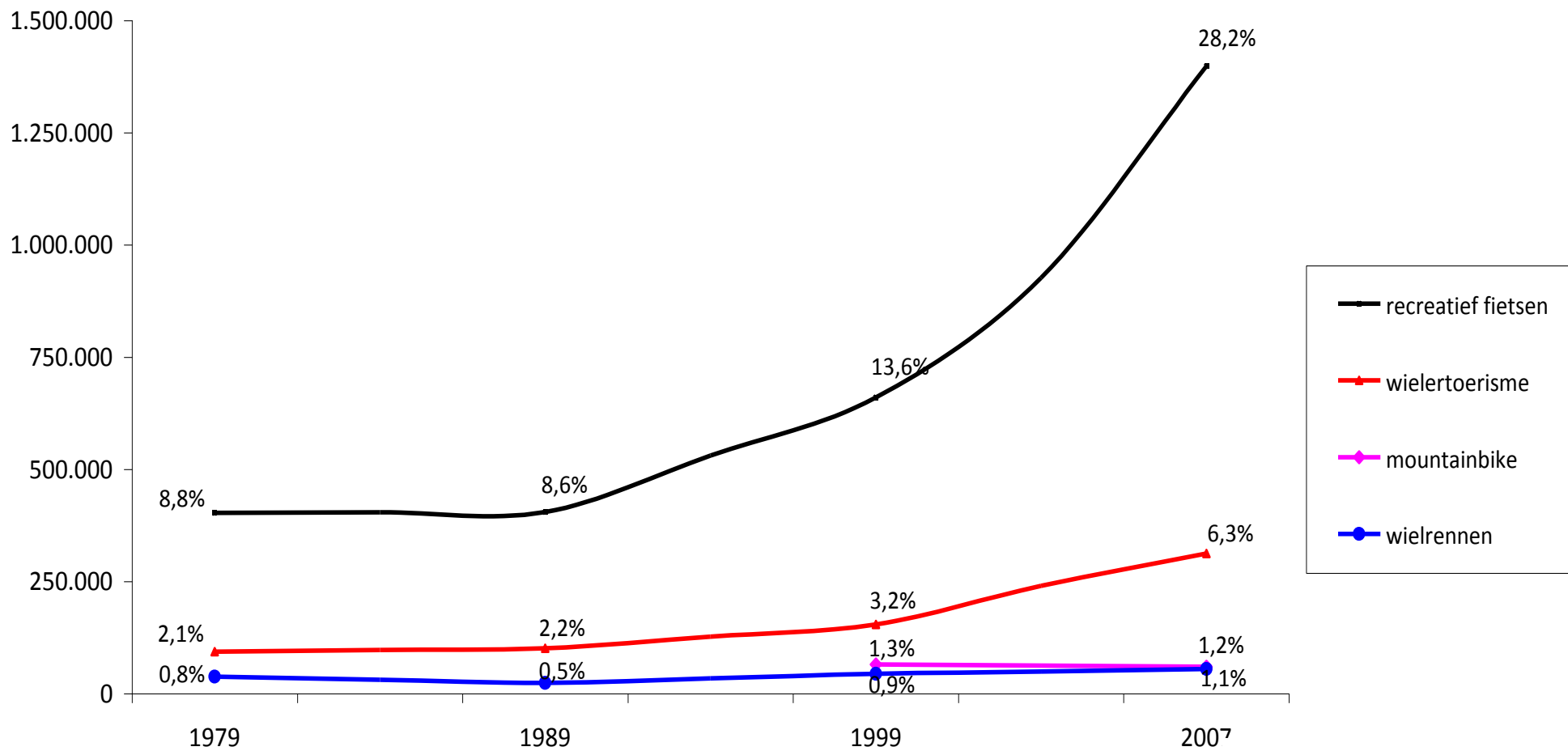
Evolution of Active Sports Participation among 12 to 75 Year Old Subjects in Flanders 1969-2007, percentages i.f.o. total population



Source: Scheerder et al. (2008)

New market drivers: light communities

Evolution of Participation in different forms of cycling among 12 to 75 Year Old Subjects in Flanders 1969-2007, percentages i.f.o. total population



Source: Scheerder et al. (2008)



The rise of light communities: THE CASE OF RUNNING

- **Second wave of running**
- **Traditional services vs actual needs**

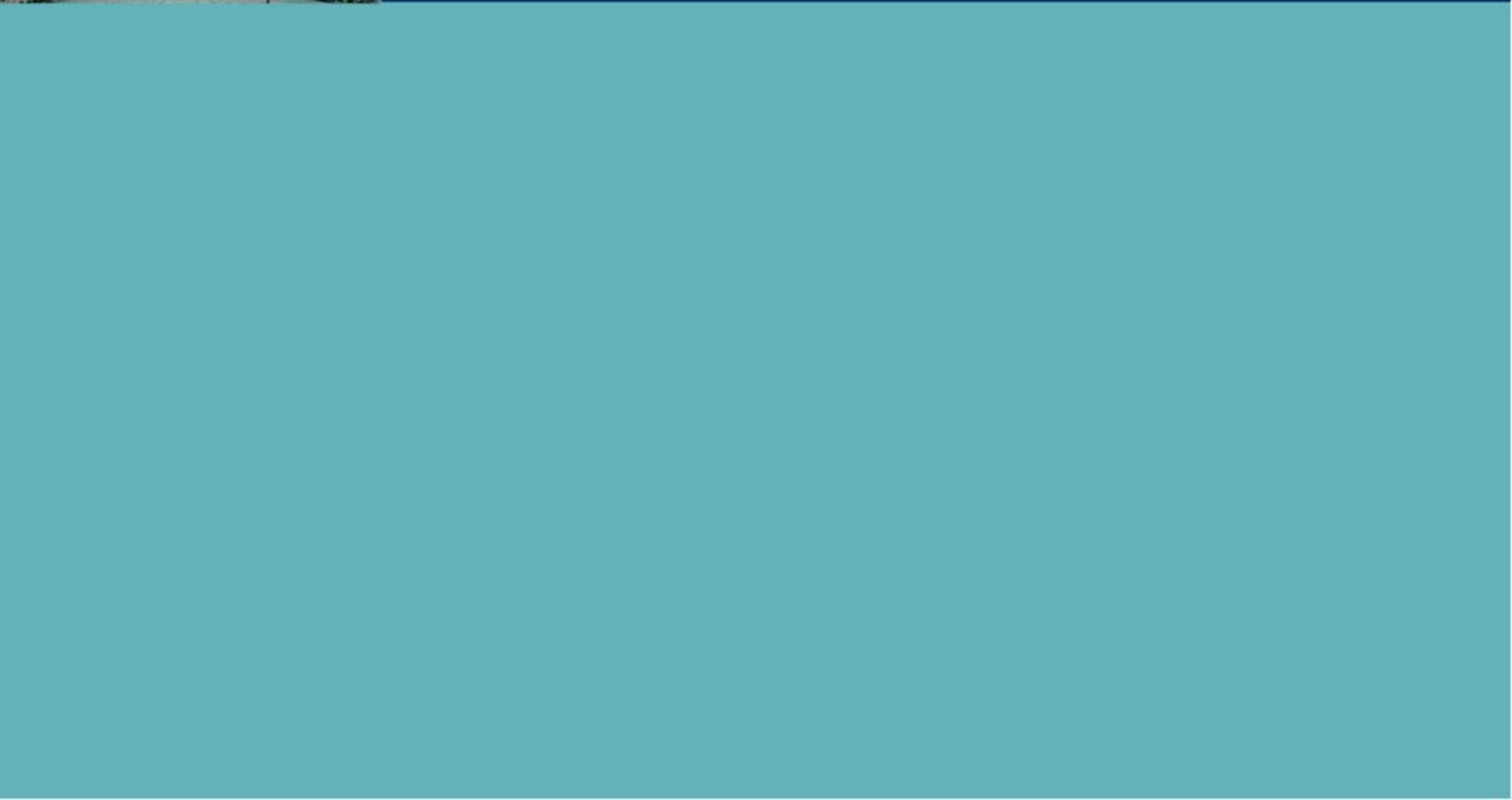


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"I always need motivation to exercise.
Like being chased by the cops."



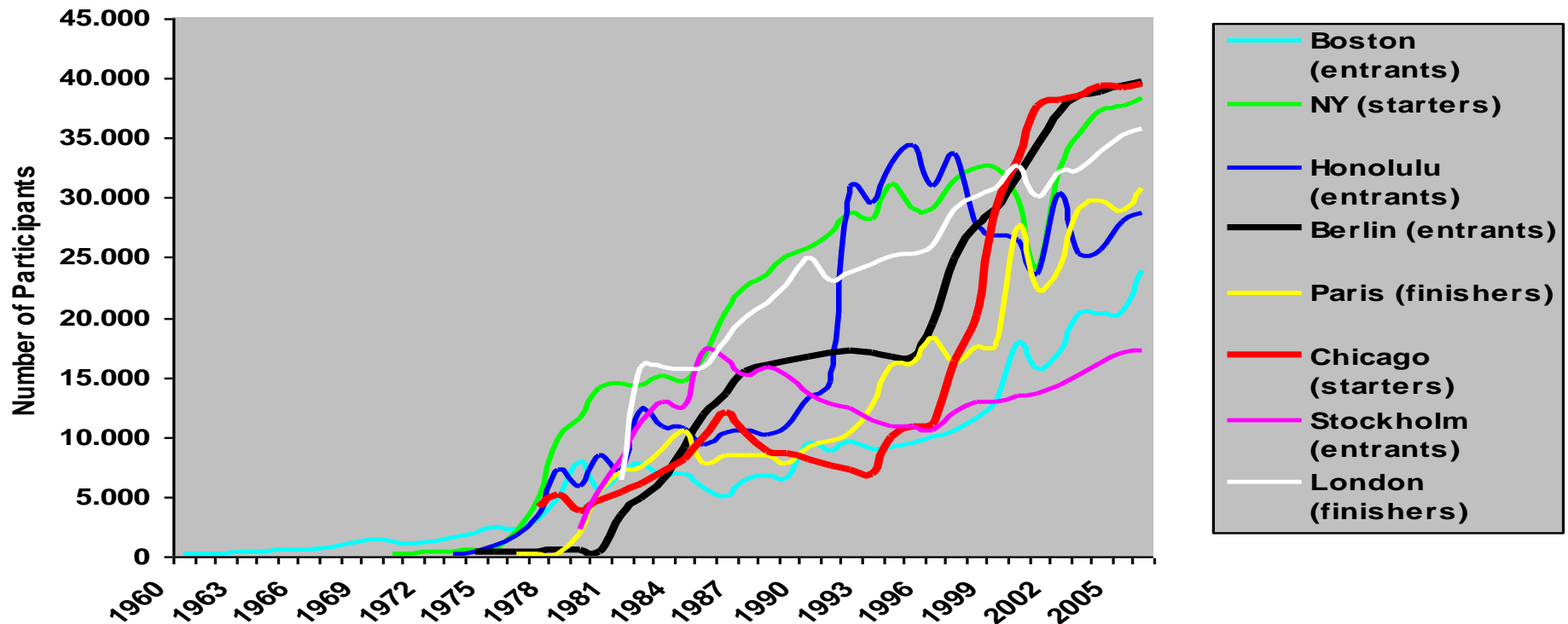
Popularity of running

- First running boom originated in USA
- End of 1960s: from mere competition → massive participation in road races
- During 1970s: trend spread over USA
- During 1980s: imitated in Europe



Popularity of running

Evolution of the Number of Participants in some Major City Marathons, 1960-2006



Source: various internet sites

- Exceptional growth end of 1970s (1st wave) and end of 1990s
→ ***second wave of running***
- Berlin and Chicago Marathon

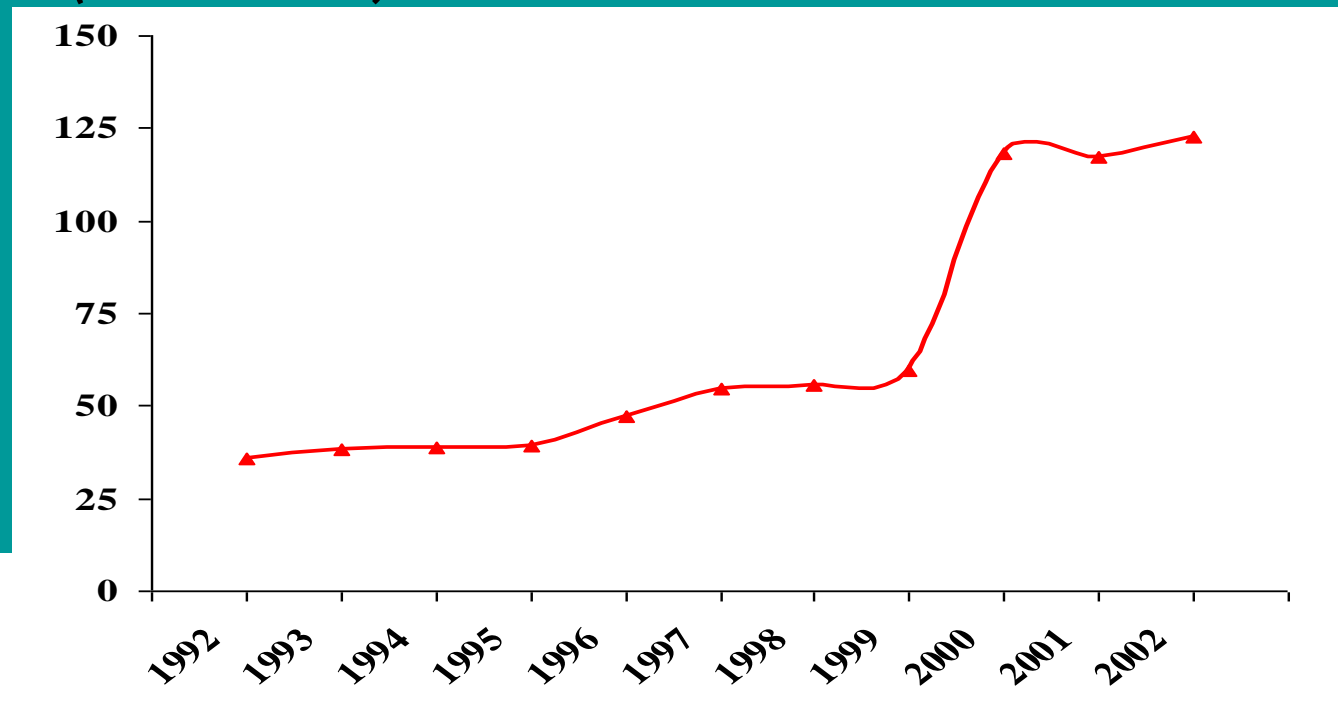
Popularity of running

- Second wave of running also noticeable in sale of running footwear
- Manufacture of running shoes = multi-billion dollar industry worldwide

Number of Pairs Purchased of Running Footwear in the US, 1992-2002 (in millions)



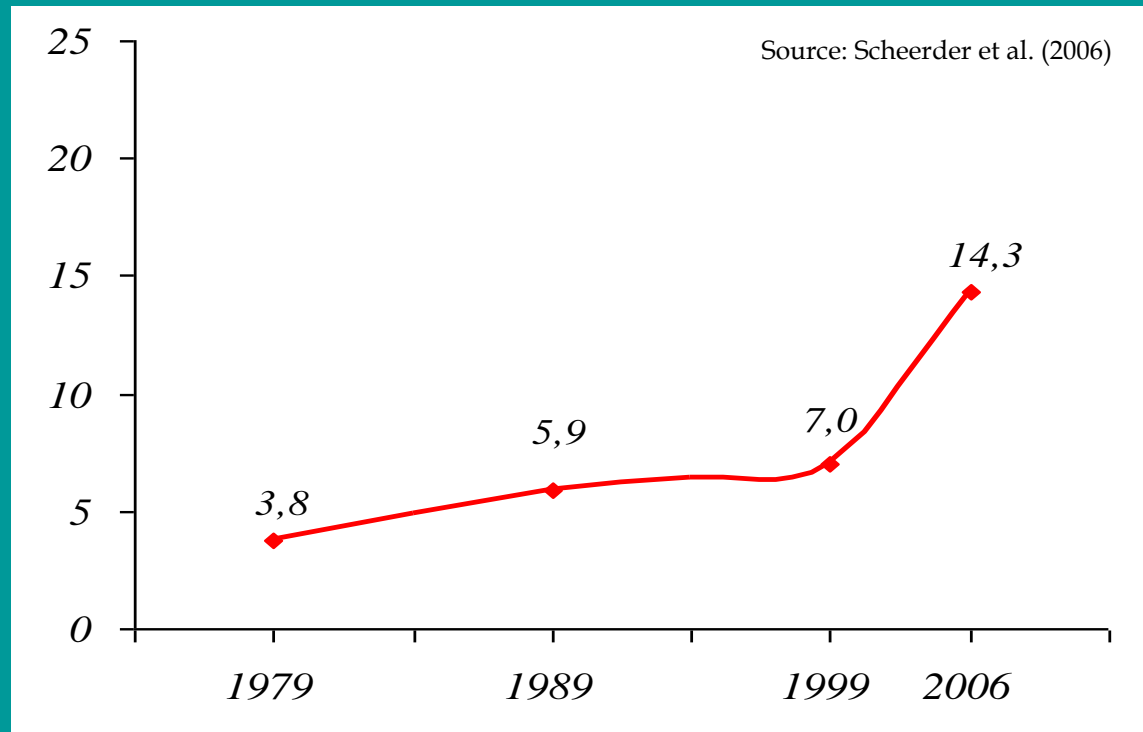
x 1.000.000
Source: www.sgma.com



Popularity of running

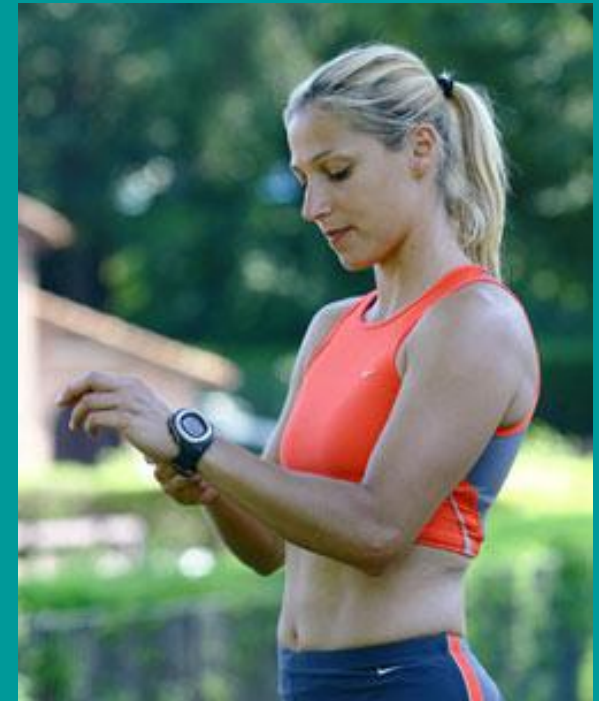
- Research at University of Leuven / Unit of Social Kinesiology & Sport Management
- Same trend in Flanders/Belgium
- Secondary analysis of 4 cross-sectional large-scale surveys among adults 1979-2006
- End of 1970s first boom; second boom betw 1999-2006
- Running in top 5 most popular sports activities

Number of Adult Runners in Flanders, 1979-2006 Percentage of Sports Participants Population



Demographics

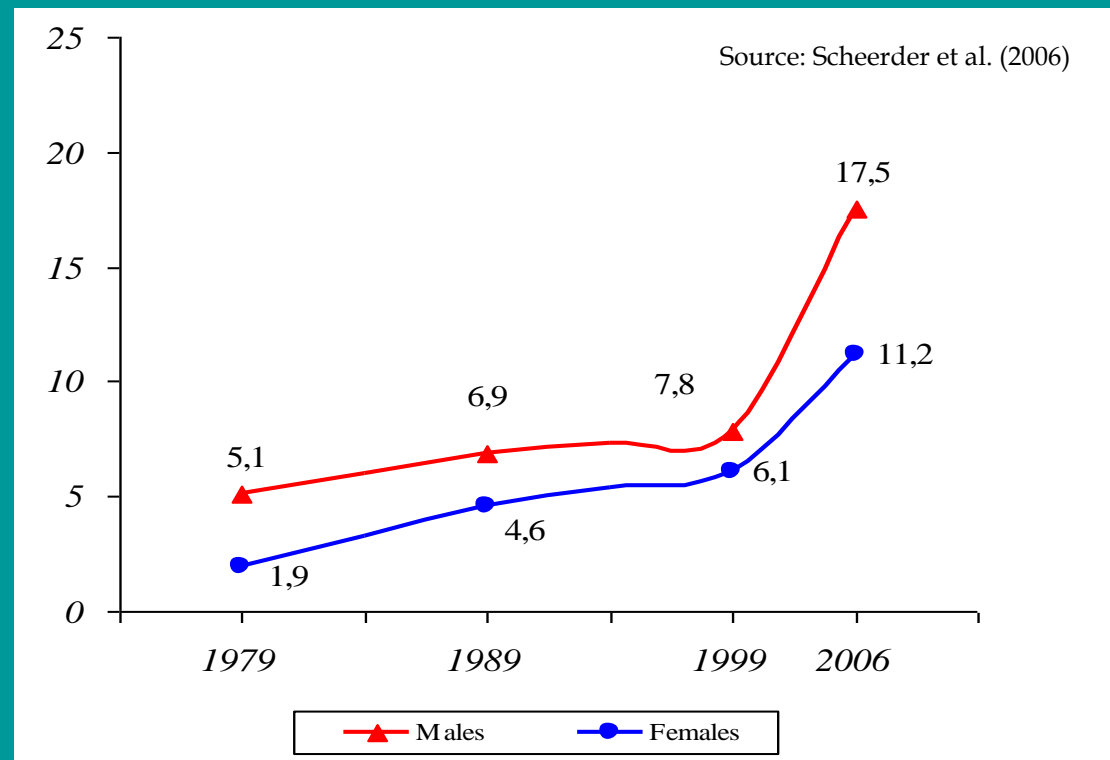
- Along with growing N of runners → demographics changed as well
- Once elite runners, (upper) middle-class, male → now democratised
- Many participants likely to be female
- Cfr. 1970s in US only handful of female marathon finishers vs. 40% at present
- Socio-demographic shifts in Flanders as well



Demographics

- Socio-demographic shifts in Flanders as well
- 1979: 27% females vs. 39% in 2006
- Males x3
- Females x6
- Older adults
- Different social layers

Number of Adult Runners in Flanders, 1979-2006
Percentage of Sports Participants Population



Developments

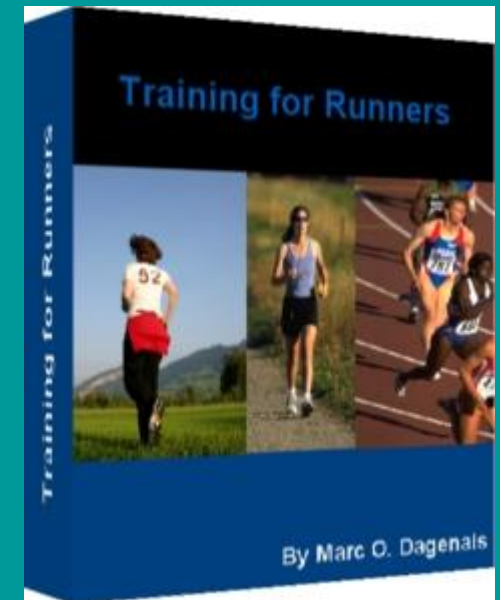
Second wave of running supported by:

1. Success of HEPA

- 60% of sports participants
- Lose weight, keep fit & healthy
- Health maintenance = most important reason for runners

2. Commercialisation + professionalisation in sport (Van Bottenburg, 2006)

- For profit providers meet needs of runners
- Cfr. High level of care wrt running events:
 - On-line registration
 - Well-equipped refreshment stations
 - Accurate timing (microchips)
 - After race services: massage, comfortable changing rooms, ...
- Training advice (internet, fitnesscentres, personal trainers, ...)



New market drivers

Beside traditional athletic clubs

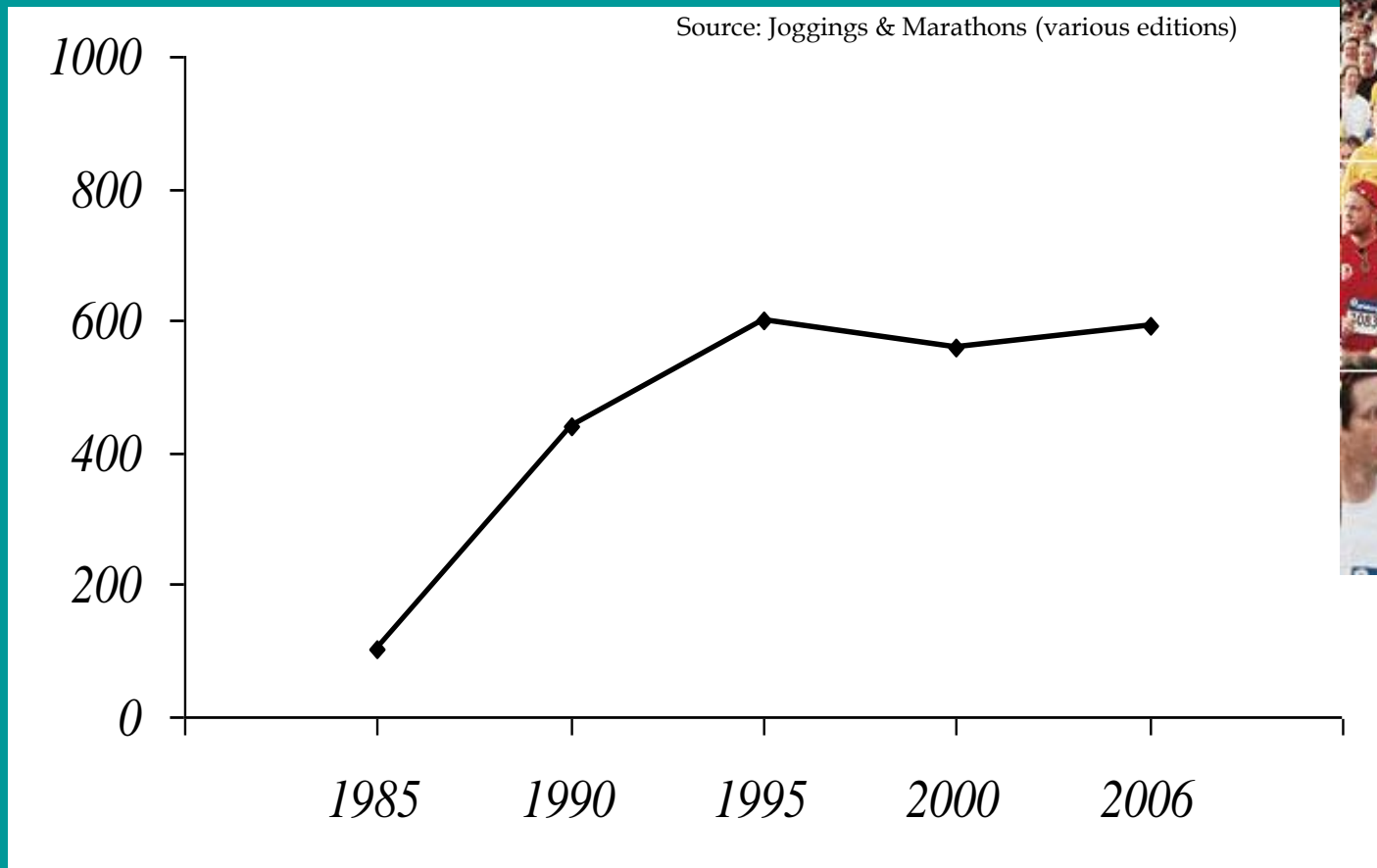
new suppliers entered the market:

1. Rise of (commercial) running events
2. Rise of 'light communities' in sport (Duyvendak & Hurenkamp, 2004)



New market drivers: running events

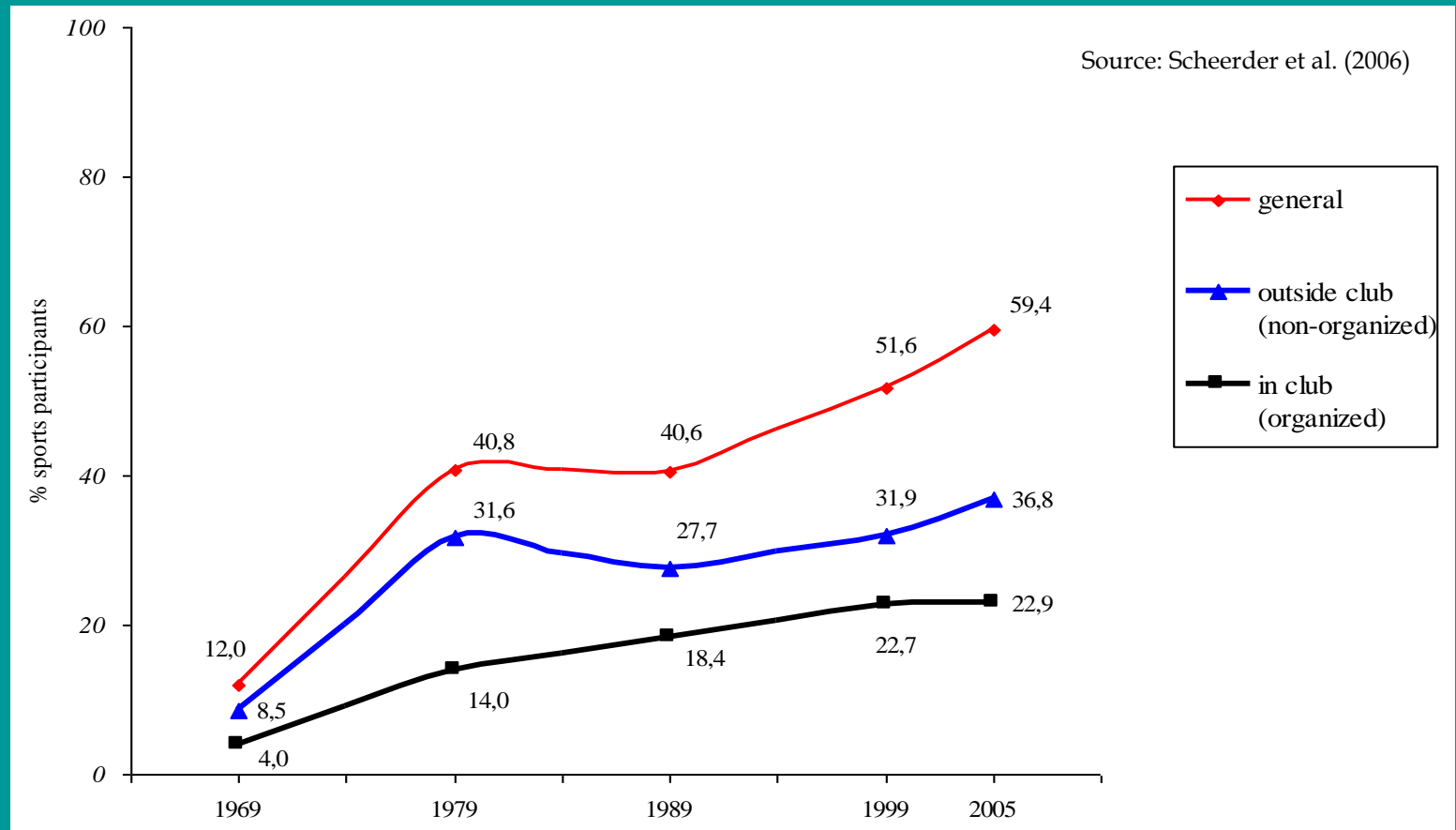
Number of Running Events in Flanders (Belgium), 1985-2006



New market drivers: light communities

- Number of 'non-cluborganised' sports participants increases

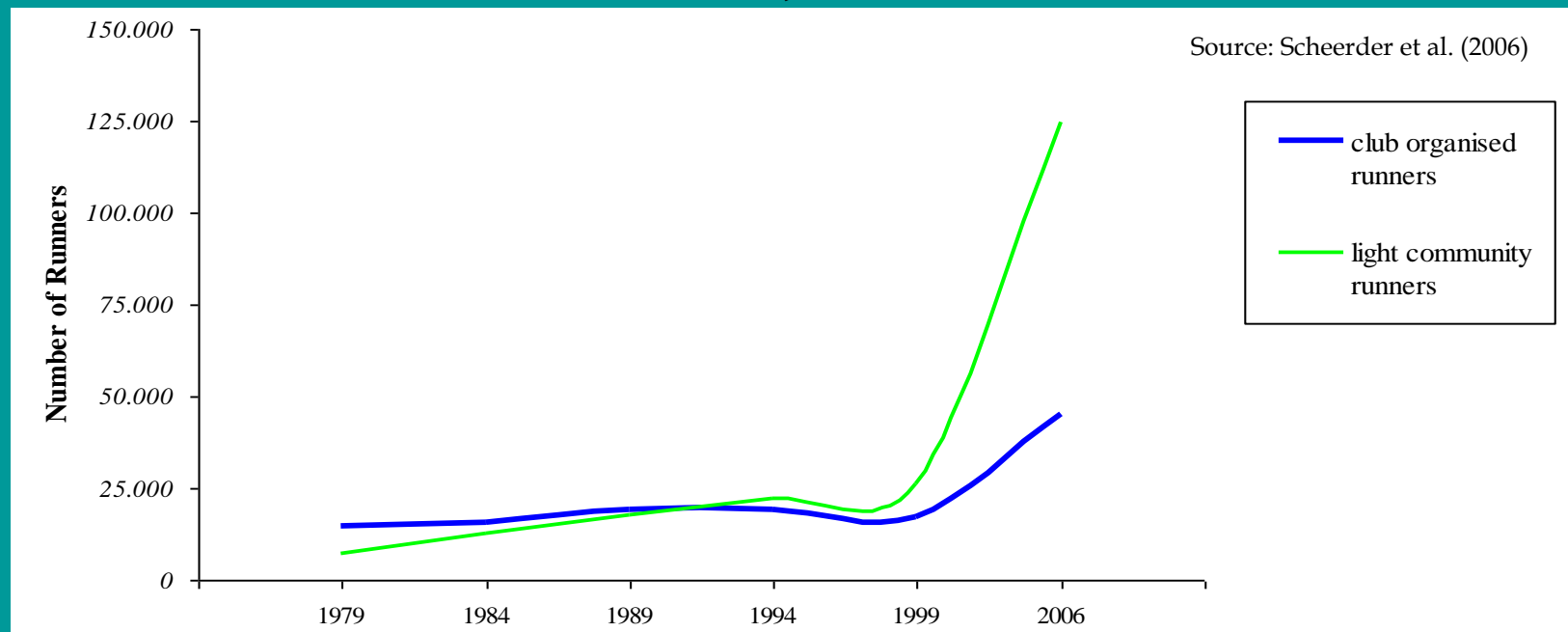
Evolution of Active Sports Involvement among Adults in Flanders 1969-2005, percentages i.f.o. total population



New market drivers: light communities

- Thus 'non-cluborganised' sports participation is popular
- Also in running: only 9% of runners is member of a **CLUB**
- Running = typically non-cluborganised sport
- Most runners → **INDIVIDUALLY** (80%)
- But: growing number participates in '**LIGHT RUNNING COMMUNITIES**' (24%)

Number of Adult Runners in Light Communities vs. Club-organised Runners in Flanders, 1979-2006



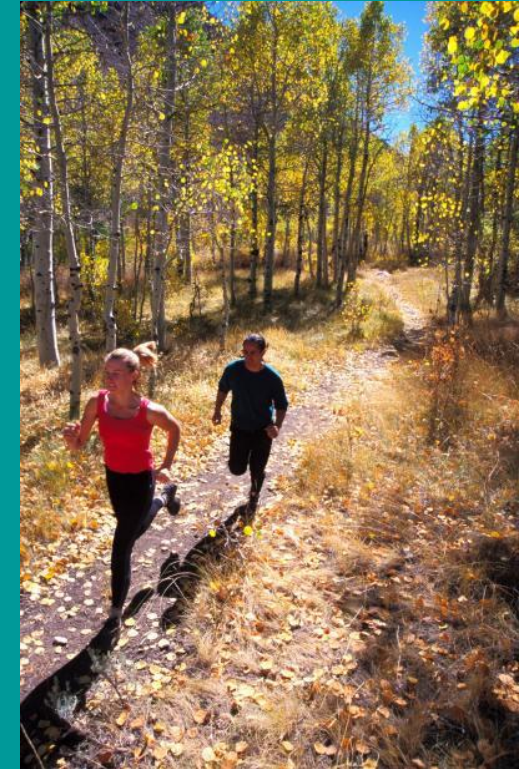
New market drivers: light communities

- **LIGHT COMMUNITIES** = demand-oriented, flexible and loose communities, with a minimum of rules of conduct, focusing on the achievements their participants seem to demand (Duyvendak & Hurenkamp, 2004)
- **LIGHT RUNNING COMMUNITIES** = small group of running mates featured by a non club-organised structure based on rather 'weak ties' between the members (Van Bottenburg, 2006)



New market drivers: light communities

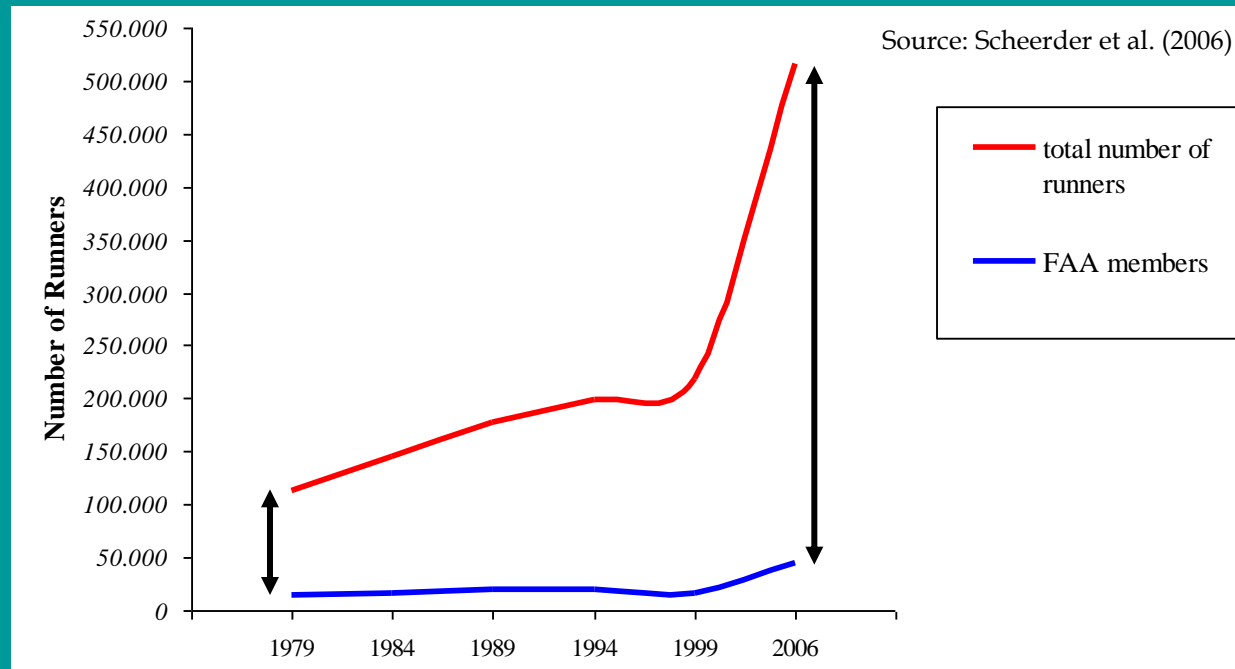
- **LIGHT COMMUNITIES vs GREEDY INSTITUTIONS**
- **Greedy institutions** = organisations that ask for loyalty and almost undivided commitment from their members (Coser, 1974)
- Traditional athletic clubs and associations also try to make total claims on their members
- Problem: loyalty and commitment = scarce resources
→ not only do human beings possess only finite energies for investing in organisations, but their resources of time are also limited!



Marketing implications

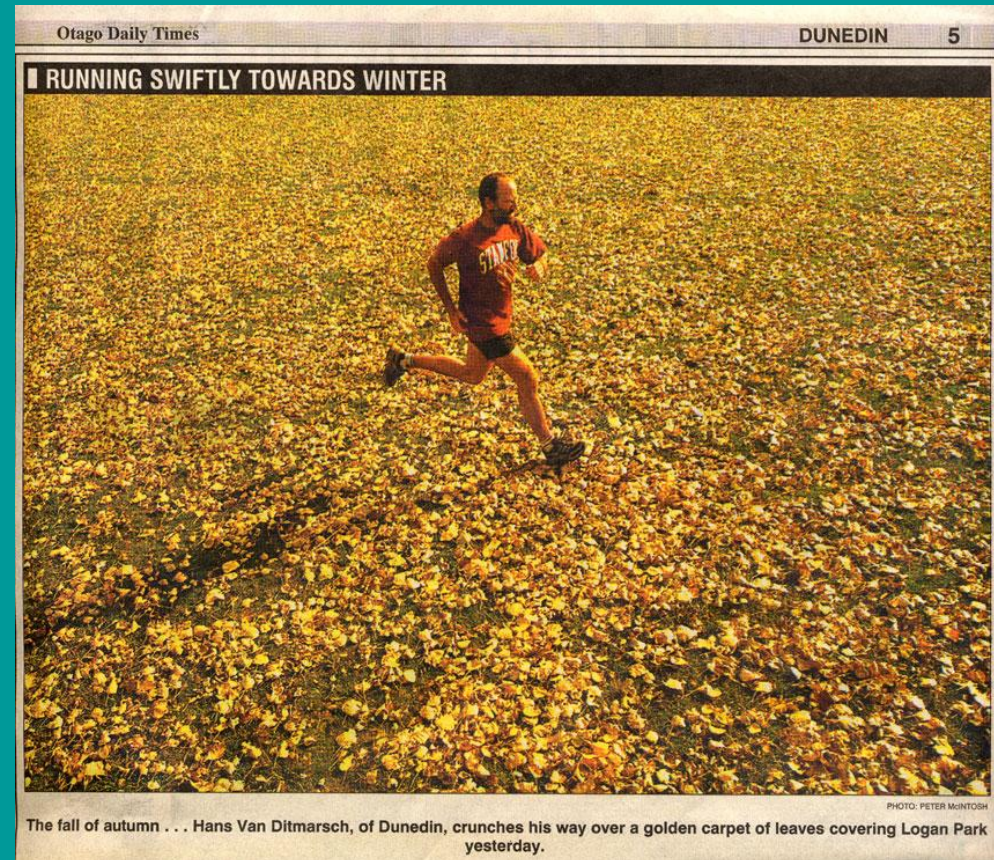
- **Flemish Athletic Association (VAL)** = important player in field of running in Flanders
- Second wave of running should be opportunity
- Yet FAA market share dwindled: 13% (1979) → 9% (2006)

Evolution of the Market Share of the Flemish Athletic Association (FAA) 1979-2006



Marketing implications

- Decline of FAA market share hardly surprising wrt aforementioned developments
 - Growing impact of HEPA
 - Commercialisation and professionalisation
 - Rise of running events
 - Rise of light communities
- FAA lost its monopoly by only partially corresponding to changing needs of today's runners
- **Also challenging policy issue for other sports federations in Europe**



Marketing implications

- Sport participants' profile (motives, attitudes, needs) has changed
→ no longer interested in 'traditional' services of sport clubs

SERVICES OF TRADITIONAL SPORT ORGANISATIONS

— ...
— ...
— ...
— ...

NEW INTERESTS OF SPORT PARTICIPANTS

— ...
— ...
— ...
— ...

Marketing implications

SERVICES OF TRADITIONAL SPORT ORGANISATIONS

- System of competition, tournaments, championships, ...
- (Technical) training & instruction
- Traditional accommodation and facilities (track&field court, ...)
- Conviviality and group bounding

NEW INTERESTS OF SPORT PARTICIPANTS

- Recreational sport activities, health-related PA, ...
- Personal training & advice
- Alternative sport infrastructure (parks, woods, Finnish ring, ...)
- Fit & fun with more than one actor, no intensive affiliation

CONCLUSION

1. Running market has increased → second wave of running
2. New providers have entered the running scene → commercial events, light running communities
3. Traditional providers have lost their monopoly
4. Yet, traditional organisations can make profit:
→ to attract new segments (females, youngsters, non-participants, ...):
 - **Transform from greedy institutions into light communities**
 - **Development of more differentiated package of services**
 - **From product-related to consumer-related marketing**



SPORT PARTICIPATION AND SPORT POLICY: SOME CHALLENGES FOR THE EU

Given these evolutions and facts&figures, what would you suggest wrt the following question?

1. Is there still a role left for the state wrt sport policy making?
2. How can the EU – or other governmental bodies – cope with the growing impact of informal sport participation?



THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

