



SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS IN THE POSTMODERN RUNNING MOVEMENT IN GREECE

Yannis Georgiou¹ⁱ,
Nikolaos Patsantaras¹,
Irene Kamberidou²

¹School of Physical Education and Sport Science,
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens,
Greece

²School of Economics and Political Science,
Department of Sociology,
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens,
Greece

Abstract:

The present study investigates the social and demographic characteristics of participants in the contemporary running movement in Greece, interpreting the phenomenon through the theoretical lens of postmodernity. Drawing on empirical data from 3,228 runners who participated in a large-scale running event, the research examines whether the Greek running movement constitutes merely a form of recreational physical activity or a distinct social and cultural field within the broader sports system. Beyond descriptive statistical mapping, the study integrates theories of new social movements, social stratification, social capital, and systems theory, alongside postmodern sociological perspectives (Habermas, Inglehart) to interpret the structural and symbolic dimensions of participation. The findings indicate that the running movement in Greece is predominantly composed of middle-to-upper social strata, characterized by high educational attainment and relatively stable income levels. Significant gender differences persist, with male participation remaining dominant, although female presence is steadily increasing. The results suggest that running has transcended the boundaries of individual exercise and has become a postmodern field of identity construction, value expression, and symbolic transformation of public space. Participants demonstrate strong elements of individualization combined with selective forms of collective belonging, reflecting broader value shifts toward self-realization, health, autonomy, and experiential lifestyles. The study concludes that the Greek running movement functions

ⁱCorrespondence: email georgiougianis72@gmail.com

as a distinct sports subsystem and as a postmodern social movement that redefines the relationship between social stratification, identity, and the transformation of urban space.

Keywords: running movement; postmodernity; social stratification; identity; social capital

1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, the running movement has emerged as one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding forms of recreational physical activity in Europe and globally. While initially interpreted as a health-oriented leisure practice or as part of the “running boom” phenomenon, contemporary developments suggest a more complex social transformation. The Greek case presents a particularly interesting context: within a society that has undergone profound economic, institutional, and cultural restructuring, participation in organized running events has increased significantly, accompanied by the proliferation of races, informal running communities, and new institutional actors.

The central question addressed in this study is whether the Greek running movement represents simply a popular leisure activity or whether it constitutes a distinct social formation embedded in broader processes of postmodern transformation. Specifically, the research investigates the social and demographic profile of participants and examines how social stratification intersects with identity construction within this field.

The theoretical premise of the study is that the running movement should not be reduced to a physiological or behavioural practice. Rather, it can be interpreted as a postmodern social field in which individuals negotiate identity, lifestyle, health, and social position. Participation in running events reflects broader processes of value transformation, individualization, and reconfiguration of collective belonging characteristic of late modern and postmodern societies.

In this context, the study seeks to answer three interconnected research questions: What are the dominant social and demographic characteristics of participants in the Greek running movement? How do elements of social stratification (education, income, occupation, gender, age) shape participation patterns? To what extent can the Greek running movement be conceptualized as a postmodern social movement and as a distinct subsystem within the broader sports system?

By combining quantitative empirical analysis with a theoretically grounded sociological interpretation, this research aims to contribute to the international literature on running cultures, social movements, and sport sociology, while offering a comprehensive understanding of the Greek case.

2. Literature Review

The rapid expansion of mass participation running over the past decades has attracted increasing scholarly attention within the sociology of sport. What was initially interpreted as a health-oriented leisure trend has gradually been reconceptualized as a complex socio-cultural phenomenon embedded in broader transformations of late modern and postmodern societies (Chase, 2012; Stokvis, 2005). The resurgence of the “running boom” from the late 1990s onward has coincided with processes of urban restructuring, lifestyle diversification, and the increasing individualization of sport participation.

Early interpretations of the running boom emphasized democratization and the accessibility of distance running as a low-cost physical activity. However, more recent research has demonstrated that participation in organized running events is far from socially random. Empirical studies across Europe and North America reveal consistent patterns of overrepresentation of middle and upper socioeconomic strata among race participants (Van Dyck *et al.*, 2017; Gemar, 2020). These findings challenge narratives of complete democratization and instead suggest that running constitutes a socially structured field.

Within the Greek context, systematic sociological mapping of the phenomenon has been limited. Yet the dramatic increase in organized events and participant numbers over the last two decades suggests that similar structural dynamics may be present. The investigation of social composition, therefore, becomes central to understanding whether the Greek running movement reproduces or disrupts broader social inequalities.

The relationship between sport participation and social stratification has long been established in sociological theory. Bourdieu’s (2002) theory of distinction posits that cultural practices, including sport, function as markers of social differentiation. Participation patterns are structured by habitus and by access to economic and cultural capital. Activities that require long-term bodily investment, time flexibility, and symbolic self-discipline are often associated with middle and upper social strata.

Empirical research supports this theoretical proposition. Higher educational attainment and income levels are consistently associated with increased participation in individualized and health-oriented physical activities (Florida, 2002; Veal, 2016). Running, particularly in its organized event-based form, may thus operate as a lifestyle practice that signals commitment to self-regulation, bodily discipline, and future-oriented planning.

Gender inequalities also persist within endurance sport. Although female participation has increased significantly over time (Van Tuyckom *et al.*, 2010), long-distance running historically developed as a male-dominated domain. Contemporary participation patterns therefore reflect both processes of inclusion and the persistence of structural asymmetries (Kamberidou, 2019). These theoretical and empirical insights provide the framework for examining whether the Greek running movement mirrors international stratification patterns or exhibits distinct characteristics.

Beyond structural inequalities, the expansion of mass running has been linked to shifts in value orientations, characteristics of post-industrial societies. Inglehart's (1971) postmaterialist thesis argues that as societies achieve relative economic security, value priorities shift from material survival toward self-expression, autonomy, and quality of life. Health, environmental awareness, and personal fulfilment become central life goals (Georgiou, Patsantaras, & Kamberidou, 2024; Georgiou, Fotiou, & Georgiou, 2025).

Running participation aligns closely with these postmaterialist orientations. Studies have shown that runners frequently emphasize psychological well-being, stress reduction, self-realization, and experiential satisfaction as primary motivations (Stragier *et al.*, 2018; Malchrowicz-Moško & Poczta, 2018). The body becomes a site of reflexive investment and identity construction, reflecting broader processes of individualization.

The Greek case is particularly intriguing given the prolonged economic crisis that affected the country (Patsantaras & Kamberidou, 2022). Economic hardship would theoretically reinforce materialist priorities. However, if participation remains stable or increases despite crisis conditions, this would provide strong empirical support for the embeddedness of postmaterialist orientations in contemporary lifestyle practices.

The development of the running movement can also be interpreted through the lens of the New Social Movements theory. Habermas (1984) argues that contemporary collective movements differ from traditional class-based struggles by emphasizing cultural values, quality of life, and communicative action. These movements operate within civil society and reshape the public sphere through symbolic practices.

Mass running events transform urban space into arenas of collective action. Roads, parks, and city centres are temporarily redefined as athletic spaces. Such events produce forms of communicative interaction and symbolic visibility that extend beyond individual exercise. Even in the absence of explicit political demands, collective participation articulates values related to health, sustainability, and community. This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant for interpreting empirical findings concerning participants' perceptions of urban space and collective belonging.

Participation in running communities has also been examined through the lens of social capital theory. Social networks generated through shared athletic engagement can foster trust, reciprocity, and collective identity. However, such networks may also exhibit homogeneity, reinforcing bonding capital within socially similar groups rather than bridging across social divides (Kamberidou, 2025; Kamberidou, 2019; Kamberidou & Patsantaras, 2007; Ma & Kaplanidou, 2021). If the Greek running movement is predominantly composed of middle-to-upper social strata, the type of social capital generated may reflect class-based clustering rather than broad social integration. The empirical examination of participant composition thus contributes to evaluating whether the movement enhances inclusivity or reinforces stratified networks.

Finally, systems theory provides a macro-sociological framework for interpreting the institutional development of the running movement. According to Luhmann (1995), modern societies differentiate into specialized subsystems characterized by distinct

communicative logics. Sport operates as one such subsystem, governed by codes related to performance and competition (Patsantaras, 1994).

The proliferation of race organizers, sponsorship networks, digital tracking technologies, and specialized markets suggests that mass running may be evolving into a semi-autonomous subsystem within the broader sports field. This differentiation does not eliminate amateur participation but introduces new governance structures and institutional complexities. Understanding whether the Greek running movement exhibits such characteristics requires empirical examination of participation patterns, institutional involvement, and value orientations.

The international literature demonstrates that running movements are shaped by social stratification, postmaterialist value transformation, gender dynamics, identity construction, and institutional differentiation. However, empirical evidence from Greece remains limited (Georgiou, Patsantaras, Kamberidou, 2024; Petridis & Batrakoulis, 2013).

The present study addresses this gap by systematically examining the social and demographic characteristics of participants in a large-scale Greek running event and by interpreting the findings within the theoretical frameworks outlined above. In doing so, it evaluates whether the Greek running movement reproduces international stratification patterns, reflects postmaterialist orientations despite economic crisis conditions, and exhibits characteristics of a differentiated sports subsystem. This theoretical grounding provides the analytical basis for interpreting the empirical results presented in the following section.

3. Material and Methods

The present study adopted a quantitative research design aimed at systematically investigating the social and demographic characteristics of participants in the contemporary Greek running movement. Given the limited sociological mapping of the phenomenon in Greece, despite its rapid expansion over the last two decades, the study was designed to provide both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis within a theoretically grounded sociological framework.

3.1 Research Design

The research followed a cross-sectional survey design. The primary objective was to examine the relationship between social stratification variables—such as gender, age, educational level, income, and occupational status—and patterns of participation, engagement intensity, and motivational orientation in organized running events. The study sought not only to document participation patterns but also to explore the structural conditions under which engagement in the running movement occurs.

3.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 3,228 adult runners who participated in all race categories of a large-scale organized running event in Greece. Participants represented diverse age groups and both genders, although male participation was more prevalent, as discussed in the Results section.

Eligibility criteria required that respondents had participated officially in at least one race of the event and voluntarily agreed to complete the research questionnaire. Participation in the study was anonymous and based on informed consent. No identifying personal data was collected, ensuring compliance with ethical standards governing social research. The size of the sample allows for robust statistical inference and enhances the reliability and generalizability of the findings within the context of organized running events in Greece.

3.3 Research Instrument

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire developed specifically for the purposes of the study. The instrument was based on previously validated questionnaires used in sport sociology research, including instruments developed by Petridis and Batrakoulis (2013) as well as Forsberg (2012). The questionnaire was adapted to the Greek sociocultural context to ensure conceptual clarity and relevance.

The instrument included sections measuring social and demographic characteristics (gender, age, educational level, income, occupational status, and family status), patterns of systematic engagement in running activity (training frequency, years of involvement, participation in organized races), motivational factors for initiation and continuation, and attitudes toward running as a health-related and social practice.

Several items were measured using categorical response formats, while others employed Likert-type scales to assess degrees of agreement or frequency. The structure of the questionnaire allowed the examination of both structural variables and subjective orientations related to participation.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted electronically following the completion of the running event. Participants received information about the aims of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and the anonymity of responses. The electronic format ensured efficient data management and minimized missing responses.

3.5 Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 29.0). Descriptive statistics included frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, allowing for a comprehensive demographic profile of participants. Inferential statistical procedures were applied to examine associations and differences between groups.

3.6 Theoretical Integration

Although the methodological approach is quantitative, the interpretation of the findings is embedded within a broader sociological framework. The analysis draws upon social stratification theory (Bourdieu, 2002; Florida, 2002), postmaterialist value theory (Inglehart, 1971), and the theory of New Social Movements (Habermas, 1984). Additionally, systems theory is employed to examine the potential differentiation of the running movement within the broader sports system. This integration allows the study to move beyond purely statistical description and situate empirical findings within contemporary debates on postmodernity, identity construction, and the transformation of public space.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Social and Demographic Characteristics

With regard to the social and demographic characteristics of the participants, the sample consisted of N = 2,386 men (73.9%) and N = 842 women (26.1%).

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Participants

Gender	N	%
Male	2,386	73.9%
Female	842	26.1%
Total	3,228	100%

Regarding age categories, the group with the highest participation was 36–45 years (N = 1,360, 42.1%), followed by 46–55 years (N = 756, 23.4%) and 26–35 years (N = 737, 22.8%), with no substantial differences between the latter two categories. Similarly, the 15–25 (N = 170, 5.3%) and 56–60 (N = 174, 5.4%) categories presented comparable frequencies. The age group least represented in the survey was 56+ (N = 31, 1%). For analytical purposes, age categories were grouped into three broader classifications: Young Ages (15–35), Middle Ages (36–55), and Older Ages (56+).

Table 2: Age Groups (Grouped Categories)

Age Group	N	%
Young (18–35)	907	28.1%
Middle (36–55)	2,116	65.6%
Older (56+)	205	6.4%
Total	3,228	100%

In terms of occupational status, the majority were private-sector office employees (N = 1,478, 45.8%), followed by manual workers (N = 467, 14.5%) and public-sector office employees (N = 429, 13.3%). All other occupational categories presented percentages below 6%.

Table 3: Occupational Status

Occupation	N	%
Private-sector office employee	1,478	45.8%
Manual worker	467	14.5%
Public-sector office employee	429	13.3%
Light physical work	186	5.8%
Entrepreneur	160	5.0%
Student	154	4.8%
Unemployed / Homemaker	135	4.2%
Retired	124	3.8%
Other	80	2.5%
Farmer	15	0.5%

Concerning educational level, most participants held a postgraduate or doctoral degree (N = 1,231, 38.1%), followed by university graduates (N = 925, 28.7%) and technological institute graduates (N = 388, 12.0%). A percentage of 11.4% (N = 368) had completed secondary education, 9.6% (N = 311) had completed post-secondary or vocational education, while only 0.2% (N = 5) had completed only primary education.

Table 4: Educational Level

Education Level	N	%
M.Sc. / PhD	1,231	38.1%
University	925	28.7%
Technological Institute	388	12.0%
Secondary Education	368	11.4%
Vocational / Technical Education	311	9.6%
Primary Education	5	0.2%

Regarding income levels, most participants reported low-to-moderate annual income: below €12,000 (N = 694, 21.5%), €12,001–20,000 (N = 914, 28.3%), and €20,001–30,000 (N = 666, 20.6%). However, substantial proportions reported medium-to-high income (€30,001–50,000, N = 489, 15.1%) and high income (above €50,001, N = 275, 8.5%), while 5.9% (N = 190) declared no personal income.

Table 5: Annual Income (in Euros)

Income Category	N	%
€12,001–20,000	914	28.3%
< €12,000	694	21.5%
€20,001–30,000	666	20.6%
€30,001–50,000	489	15.1%
> €50,001	275	8.5%
No income	190	5.9%

4.2 Motivations for Running Participation

With regard to motivations for engaging in running, the most frequently reported reason was maintaining good physical condition (N = 2,737, 15.5%), followed by maintaining or improving health and well-being (N = 2,576, 14.6%), mental relaxation and concentration (N = 2,380, 13.5%), avoidance of daily stress (N = 2,125, 12.1%), enjoyment of running (N = 1,984, 11.3%), weight control (N = 1,724, 9.8%), and personal challenge or overcoming limits (N = 1,658, 9.4%).

Table 6: Motivations for Running

Motivation	N	%	Answers (%)
Good physical condition	2,737	15.5%	84,8%
Health & well-being	2,576	14.6%	79,8%
Mental relaxation & concentration	2,380	13.5%	73,7%
Avoiding daily stress	2,125	12.1%	65,8%
Enjoyment of running	1,984	11.3%	61,5%
Weight control	1,724	9.8%	53,4%
Personal challenge	1,658	9.4%	51,4%
Preparation for the race	1,186	6.7%	36,7%
Socializing with friends	516	2.9%	16,0%
Isolation	470	2.7%	14,6%
Training for another sport	213	1.2%	6,6%
Other	18	0.1%	0,6%
Don't know	16	0.1%	0,5%

4.3 Organizational Participation

Participants were asked whether they were currently or had previously been members of a formally organized sports club. The majority reported that they had never been members of such a club (N = 1,444, 44.7%), 32.2% (N = 1,038) reported that they currently run within a formally organized club, and 23.1% (N = 746) stated that they had been members in the past.

Table 7: Membership in a Formally Organized Club

Response	N	%
Yes	1,038	32.2%
No	1,444	44.7%
Member in the past	746	23.1%
Total	3,228	100%

4.4 With Whom Participants Run

The most popular response was running alone (N = 2,821, 53.7%), followed by running with friends (N = 1,180, 22.5%), with a family member (N = 373, 7.1%), with an informally organized running group (N = 317, 6.0%), with members of a sports club (N = 280, 5.3%), with colleagues (N = 191, 3.6%), and with a coach (N = 94, 1.8%).

Table 8: With Whom Participants Run

Running Companions	N	%	Answers (%)
Alone	2,821	53.7%	87,4%
With friends	1,180	22.5%	36,6%
With a family member	373	7.1%	11,6%
Informal running group	317	6.0%	9,8%
Sports club members	280	5.3%	8,7%
With colleagues	191	3.6%	5,9%
With coach	94	1.8%	2,9%

The empirical findings of the present study confirm that the Greek running movement constitutes a socially structured field rather than a randomly distributed leisure activity. The distribution of participation across gender, education, income, and occupational status reveals patterned inclusion, reflecting broader mechanisms of social stratification embedded within contemporary Greek society.

Gender asymmetry remains significant, with male participants forming the majority of runners. Although the historical exclusion of women from long-distance running has gradually diminished, the persistence of male predominance suggests that the democratization of endurance sport remains incomplete (Nilson *et al.*, 2021). From the perspective of social stratification theory, sport participation reflects historically constructed gender hierarchies that continue to influence access, confidence, and embodied legitimacy within specific athletic domains. The transformation of marathon running from an elite male athletic domain into a mass participatory practice does not automatically dissolve structural inequalities; rather, it rearticulates them within new cultural forms (Patsantaras, 2017).

The social composition of the sample strongly supports the theoretical proposition that higher social strata disproportionately engage in individualized physical activities as markers of distinction. As noted in the theoretical framework of the dissertation, upper social groups utilize participation in different social fields, including sport, to express differentiation and reinforce symbolic boundaries (Bourdieu, 2002; Cooper, 1992; Florida, 2002; Vaandrager, 2007). The predominance of highly educated participants with relatively stable income levels confirms that the Greek running movement is socially selective.

Within Bourdieu's framework, sport functions as a space of symbolic capital accumulation. Endurance running, in particular, requires discipline, time management, bodily investment, and long-term commitment. These characteristics resonate strongly with middle-to-upper-class habitus structures, where self-regulation and future-oriented planning are culturally valorized. Thus, participation is not merely recreational but expresses embodied class dispositions.

Income distribution further reinforces this interpretation. While running is often framed as an accessible activity, organized participation in races presupposes financial capacity for equipment, registration fees, travel, and time allocation. Therefore, despite its apparent openness, the movement exhibits structured barriers that indirectly limit

participation among lower socioeconomic groups. This empirical pattern substantiates the argument developed in the dissertation that the running movement, although inclusive at the level of discourse, remains socially stratified in practice.

The value orientations expressed by participants strongly align with postmaterialist theory. According to Inglehart (1971), individuals living under conditions of relative economic security shift from materialist priorities toward postmaterialist values emphasizing autonomy, self-expression, and quality of life. The dominant motivations identified in the data — health improvement, psychological well-being, stress reduction, self-fulfilment, and experiential satisfaction — clearly correspond to these postmaterialist orientations.

Importantly, the limited impact of the prolonged Greek economic crisis on participation levels suggests that engagement in running is not primarily driven by material conditions but by internalized lifestyle commitments. As highlighted in the theoretical discussion of the dissertation, when individuals move beyond survival concerns, they reorganize their hierarchy of needs toward more symbolic and experiential domains. Running appears to function precisely within this domain of postmaterialist value realization.

The findings also resonate strongly with the theory of New Social Movements. As articulated in the theoretical framework, New Social Movements express cultural and value-based claims rather than traditional class-based economic demands, emphasizing quality of life, environmental awareness, and participatory practices (Habermas, 1984). Although the Greek running movement does not articulate explicit political agendas, its collective practices embody value-oriented action. The organization of races and the formation of running communities create temporary public spheres in which health, sustainability, and communal engagement are symbolically enacted.

In Habermasian terms, these events contribute to the expansion of communicative spaces within civil society. Participants interact, exchange meanings, and collectively occupy urban space, thereby transforming the city into a site of communicative action. The redefinition of roads, parks, and public squares as athletic spaces constitutes a symbolic restructuring of the public sphere.

From a systems-theoretical perspective, empirical evidence supports the argument that the running movement exhibits characteristics of subsystem differentiation. As noted in the dissertation, the integration of private actors, corporate sponsors, self-organized collectives, and institutional governance structures indicates processes of institutional transformation within the sports system (Kamberidou & Patsantaras, 2007). According to systems theory (Luhmann, 1995), subsystems differentiate when they develop specific communicative logics. The running movement in Greece demonstrates such differentiation through its own organizational networks, symbolic codes (health, physical and social well-being), and specialized markets.

Simultaneously, the movement reflects processes of individualization characteristic of late modernity. Participants emphasize autonomy and personal improvement while selectively engaging in collective forms of belonging. This dual

structure — individualized participation within loosely organized communities — embodies what conceptualizes as “individualized collectivism,” a core feature of postmodern social formations.

The relationship between identity and participation further deepens this interpretation. Running becomes a medium of identity construction. Through bodily performance, individuals narrate stories of resilience, self-overcoming, and transformation. These narratives are not merely personal but socially recognizable and culturally validated. In this sense, the running movement functions as a field where identity, status, and value orientation converge. Therefore, the empirical findings do not merely describe participation patterns; they substantiate the central theoretical claim: that the Greek running movement constitutes a postmodern social movement and a differentiated sports subsystem embedded in processes of social stratification, value transformation, and identity construction.

The movement simultaneously reproduces structural inequalities and generates new forms of symbolic belonging. It reflects postmaterialist orientations, embodies class-based lifestyle distinction, expands communicative spaces within civil society, and reconfigures urban space as athletic and social terrain. In this respect, it represents a complex and multi-dimensional social phenomenon that cannot be reduced to recreational sport alone.

5. Recommendations

The findings of the present study carry significant theoretical and practical implications for sport policy, public health planning, urban design, and future sociological research. At the policy level, the socially selective composition of the Greek running movement suggests the need for targeted interventions aimed at reducing structural inequalities in access to organized physical activity. Although running appears as an accessible form of exercise, participation in organized events is associated with educational and income-related advantages. Public institutions and local authorities should therefore design inclusive initiatives that facilitate participation among lower socioeconomic groups, women, and socially vulnerable populations. Subsidized entry fees, community-based running programs, and collaboration with public schools and local organizations could contribute to a more socially balanced participation structure.

From a public health perspective, the strong orientation of participants toward physical and psychological well-being confirms the potential of organized running events as vehicles for preventive health promotion. In a context where Greece has experienced prolonged economic and healthcare pressures (Kentikelenis & Papanicolas, 2012; Vandoros *et al.*, 2013), structured physical activity initiatives may serve as low-cost strategies for enhancing population health. Policymakers should therefore integrate mass running events within broader national health promotion frameworks.

Urban planning policies may also benefit from the findings. Participants perceive urban and semi-natural environments as integral to their athletic engagement. This

highlights the importance of safe, accessible, and environmentally sustainable public spaces. Investment in pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, green corridors, and multifunctional urban spaces can reinforce the positive interaction between physical activity and public space transformation.

At the theoretical level, future research should further explore the dual character of the running movement as both an individualized lifestyle practice and a collectively organized social phenomenon. Longitudinal studies could examine whether the social composition of the movement becomes more inclusive over time or whether it continues to reproduce stratified participation patterns. Comparative cross-national studies would also enrich understanding of how cultural, economic, and institutional contexts shape the development of running movements in different societies (Van Dyck *et al.*, 2017; Gemar, 2020).

Finally, qualitative approaches focusing on identity construction, symbolic meaning, and lived experience could complement the present quantitative findings, deepening understanding of how runners narrate their engagement and situate it within broader life trajectories.

6. Conclusion

The present study set out to investigate the social and demographic characteristics of participants in the Greek running movement and to examine whether this phenomenon can be interpreted as an autonomous social movement and a differentiated sports subsystem.

The findings demonstrate that participation in the Greek running movement is socially structured and demographically selective. Runners predominantly originate from middle-to-upper social strata, characterized by higher educational attainment and relatively stable income levels. Gender asymmetries persist, with male participation remaining predominant. These patterns confirm that engagement in organized running events is embedded within broader mechanisms of social stratification.

At the same time, participants display strong postmaterialist value orientations, emphasizing health, self-realization, psychological resilience, and quality of life. Engagement in running appears to transcend purely instrumental rationality and becomes integrated into identity formation and lifestyle construction. The limited impact of prolonged economic crisis on participation levels further suggests that involvement in the movement is anchored in internalized value systems rather than short-term material conditions.

The collective occupation and temporary transformation of urban space through organized events illustrate how the running movement extends beyond individual exercise and contributes to the symbolic reconfiguration of public space. In this sense, the movement embodies characteristics identified within theories of new social movements and systems differentiation, generating value-based and institutional transformations within the broader sports field.

Overall, the Greek running movement emerges as a complex social and cultural formation in which identity, stratification, collective action, and value transformation intersect. It cannot be reduced to a simple recreational trend. Rather, it constitutes a structured social field that reflects core dynamics of postmodern society: individualization, selective collectivism, lifestyle differentiation, and the re-signification of public space.

Creative Commons License Statement

This research work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>. To view the complete legal code, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode.en>. Under the terms of this license, members of the community may copy, distribute, and transmit the article, provided that proper, prominent, and unambiguous attribution is given to the authors, and the material is not used for commercial purposes or modified in any way. Reuse is only allowed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International License.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Yannis Georgiou is a PhD Candidate of Sport Sociology at the School of Physical Education and Sport Science (SPESS) of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens in Greece (NKUA). After his studies in Sports Management, Exercise and Quality of Life, in Dietetics and Sport Nutrition, and in Sport Sociology, at the University of Peloponnese, Democritus University of Thrace, Harokopeio University of Athens, and the NKUA, from where he received four respective master's degrees. Yannis turned his research interest to investigating running movement in Greece in relation to various sociological variables, from the perspective of systemic theory as a distinct social system. His scientific and research interests are in Sport Sociology and Sport Management. He has participated in several conferences as a speaker and published in a number of scientific journals and conference proceedings.

Nikolaos Patsantaras is a Professor of Sport Sociology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA), the School of Physical Education and Sport Science (SPESS), where he completed his undergraduate studies. He continued his graduate and doctoral studies at the University of Konstanz in Germany. He was the Vice-Dean of the SPESS and the former Director of the SPESS Theoretical, Social Sciences and Humanities Division: https://en.phed.uoa.gr/staff/academic_staff/staff/nikolaos_patsantaras

Irene Kamberidou is a Professor of Sociology at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA), the School of Economics and Political Science, the Department of Sociology. Irene is one of the six members of the Gender Equality and

Anti-Discrimination Committee of the NKUA and a member of the Gender Equality Committee of the School of Economics and Political Science. She completed her BA and MA at Emmanuel College and Boston College, Boston and Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, USA, respectively, and her junior year at the Sorbonne (Paris IV), France. Having repatriated to Greece, she completed her PhD at the Sociology Department of Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences in Athens: <http://scholar.uoa.gr/ikamper/home>

References

- Bourdieu, P. (2002). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard University Press. Retrieved from [https://monoskop.org/images/e/e0/Pierre Bourdieu Distinction A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste 1984.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/e/e0/Pierre_Bourdieu_Distinction_A_Social_Critique_of_the_Judgement_of_Taste_1984.pdf)
- Chase, L. (2012). Running with the masses: A history of the Clydesdale movement. *Journal of Sport History*, 39(2), 243–258. <https://doi.org/10.5406/jsporthistory.39.2.243>
- Cooper, P. L. (1992). The “visible hand” on the footrace: Fred Lebow and the marketing of the marathon. *Journal of Sport History*, 19(3), 244–256. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43609652>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications. Retrieved from https://books.google.bg/books/about/Research_Design.html?id=bttwENORfhgC&redir_esc=y
- Forsberg, P., & Analyseinstitut, I. (2012). *Motionsløbere i Danmark. Portræt af motionsløbere i Danmark*. København: Idrættens Analyseinstitut. Retrieved from <https://www.idan.dk/udgivelser/motionsloebere-i-danmark-portraet-af-danske-motionsloebere/>
- Gemar, A. (2020). The social patterning of sport: Regular sports participation and stratification in Canada. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/ceqvx>
- Gemar, A. (2021). Sport as culture: Social class, styles of cultural consumption, and sports engagement in Canada. <https://doi.org/10.31237/osf.io/3ptj6>
- Georgiou, Y., Fotiou, A., & Georgiou, P. A. (2025). Amateur Runners’ Willingness to Pay for Sustainable Environmental Initiatives in Greece. *European Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science*, 12(10). <http://dx.doi.org/10.46827/ejpe.v12i10.6378>
- Georgiou, Y., Patsantaras, N., & Kamberidou, I. (2024). The running tribes: Typology of the long-distance running community of Greece. *European Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science*, 11(3), 1–18. <http://dx.doi.org/10.46827/ejpe.v11i3.5435>
- Habermas, J. (1984). *The theory of communicative action*. Beacon Press. Retrieved from <https://teddykw2.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/jurgen-habermas-theory-of-communicative-action-volume-1.pdf>

- Inglehart, R. (1971). The silent revolution in Europe: Intergenerational change in post-industrial societies. *American Political Science Review*, 65(4), 991–1017. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.2307/1953494>
- Kamberidou, I. (2019). Gender integration in the military: Gender-neutral standards and coed sports. *European Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science*, 5(11), 23–44. DOI [10.5281/zenodo.3364727](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3364727), <https://oapub.org/edu/index.php/ejep/article/view/2566/5204>
- Kamberidou, I. (2025). Bridges to Understanding: Integration and Inclusion through Sport. Presentation at the European Sociological Association (ESA RN35) Midterm Conference *Sociology of Migration after the 2015 'migrant crisis'*, in collaboration with the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA), Nov. 27-28, 2025, Athens GR. Copy at <http://www.tinyurl.com/2xo2u537>
- Kamberidou, I., & Patsantaras, N. (2007). A new concept in European sport governance: sport as social capital. *Biology of Exercise*, 3, 21–34. University of Peloponnese, Faculty of Human Movement and Quality of Life. Copy at <http://www.tinyurl.com/hyhn4ra>
- Kentikelenis, A., & Papanicolas, I. (2012). Economic crisis, austerity and the Greek public health system. *The European journal of public health*, 22(1), 4-5. <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckr190>
- Luhmann, N. (1995). *Social systems*. Stanford University Press. Retrieved from https://books.google.bg/books/about/Social_Systems.html?id=zVZQW4gxXk4C&redir_esc=y
- Ma, S., & Kaplanidou, K. (2021). Social capital and running: A network social capital perspective. *Sustainability*, 13(22), 12398. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132212398>
- Malchrowicz-Moško, E., & Poczta, J. (2018). Running as a form of therapy: Socio-psychological functions of mass running events. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(10), 2262. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph151022262>
- Patsantaras N. & Kamberidou I. (2022). Experiencing the myth: Greekness and the German Hero, *European Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science* Volume 8, Issue 6, 61-82. <http://dx.doi.org/10.46827/ejpe.v8i6.4421>
- Patsantaras, N. (1994). *Der Trainer als Sportberuf. Entwicklung und Ausdifferenzierung einer Profession*. Schorndorf: Verlag Karl Hofmann. Retrieved from <https://www.bisp-surf.de/Record/PU199507101991>
- Patsantaras, N. (2017). Post-modern sport reflections in the shadow of tradition: The case of the 2016 Athens authentic marathon. In the Abstract book Irena Slepíčková (Ed.), of the 14th European Association for Sociology of Sport Conference, “The Values of Sport: Between tradition and (post)modernity”. June 14-17, 2017 Prague, Czech Republic, pp. 61-62.
- Nilson, F., Lundkvist, E., Wagnsson, S., & Gustafsson, H. (2021). Has the second ‘running boom’ democratized running? A study on the sociodemographic characteristics of

- finishers at the world's largest half marathon. *Sport in Society*, 24(4), 659-669. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2019.1703687>
- Petridis, L., & Batrakoulis, A. (2013). The running movement in Greece: Investigating the profile of the modern marathon runners. *Hellenic Journal of Sport & Recreation Management*, 10(2). <http://www.elleda.gr> ISSN 1791-6933
- Stempień, J. R. (2022). Social footprint of the leisure running boom in Poland. *Polish Sociological Review*, 220(4), 525–542. <https://doi.org/10.26412/psr220.06>
- Stokvis, R. (2005). De popularisering van het hardlopen. *Tijdschrift Sociologie*, 1(2), 184–201. Retrieved from <https://openjournals.ugent.be/sociologie/article/id/89331/>
- Stragier, J., Vanden Abeele, M., & De Marez, L. (2018). Recreational athletes' running motivations as predictors of their use of online fitness community features. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 37(8), 815–827. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2018.1484516>
- Van Dyck, D., Cardon, G., De Bourdeaudhuij, I., de Ridder, L., & Willem, A. (2017). Who participates in running events? *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 14(11), 1315. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14111315>
- Van Tuyckom, C., Scheerder, J., & Bracke, P. (2010). Gender and age inequalities in regular sports participation. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 28(10), 1077–1084. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02640414.2010.492229>
- Vandoros, S., Hessel, P., Leone, T., & Avendano, M. (2013). Have health trends worsened in Greece as a result of the financial crisis? *European Journal of Public Health*, 23(5), 727–731. <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckt020>
- Veal, A. J. (2016). Leisure, income inequality and the Veblen effect. *Leisure Studies*, 35(2), 215–240. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2015.1036104>