

# France: The Socioeconomic Impact of a Half Marathon. The Case of Phalempin as Part of an International Study



Claude Sobry, Sarah Mischler, Sorina Cernaianu, Orsolya Czeglédi, and Ricardo Melo

**Abstract** Phalempin is a small town (4500 inhabitants) located 13 km south of Lille, north of *France*) now mostly a dormitory suburb. The territory includes a small forest part of the half marathon. On July 19th, 2016 was run the 32nd edition of the traditional road running, one of the most famous and recognized sport event in the region, organized by two associations with the support of the municipality. Since 2014 the event gathers 3500 participants, the maximum number of runners allowed by the organizers. Three hundred and fifty volunteers help to organize the event. The study is organized mostly around a questionnaire given to all the participants, an interview with the Mayor of the town and two deputies and another one with the organizers. The sample respondents to the questionnaire was  $N = 591$ , 16.9% of the runners, 76.6% of men, 28.4% of women, all French but one from Belgium.

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C. Sobry (✉)

Université de Lille, EA 7369 – URePSSS – Unité de Recherche Pluridisciplinaire Sport Santé Société, IRNIST, Lille, France

e-mail: [claude.sobry@univ-lille.fr](mailto:claude.sobry@univ-lille.fr)

S. Mischler

Université de Strasbourg, Faculté des sciences du sport, Unité de Recherche Sport et Sciences Sociales, Strasbourg, France

e-mail: [sarah.mischler@unistra.fr](mailto:sarah.mischler@unistra.fr)

S. Cernaianu

Université de Lille, EA 7369 – URePSSS – Unité de Recherche Pluridisciplinaire Sport Santé Société, IRNIST, Lille, France

University of Craiova, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Craiova, Romania

O. Czeglédi

STRADEOS/UREPSSS (ULR 7369), Cergy, France

e-mail: [orsolya.czeglédi@univ-lille.fr](mailto:orsolya.czeglédi@univ-lille.fr)

R. Melo

Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra - Coimbra Education School (IPC-ESEC), Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra (CES-UC), Centre for Tourism Research, Development and Innovation (CiTUR), IRNIST, Coimbra, Portugal

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It appears in the results that it is mostly a local race, the loyalty must be developed, and the major motivation is to challenge oneself and pleasure. The expenditures are very low. The wide majority of the respondents underline the quality of the site and of the natural environment. If one of the question was « is it possible to develop tourism in Phalempin thanks to the half marathon?» the answer is clearly no because of the lack of hotels and restaurants, and participants don't come to discover the region, very few spending one night in the town, mostly at friend's. The Major considers that developing tourism is a mere far-off perspective and the organizers work « *for the love of sport* ».

**Keywords** France · Half marathon · Road-running

## Introduction

If the French government targets 100 million tourists, sport events being a tool to bring foreigners in the country, every week between spring and autumn tenth of road races are organized, marathons and half marathons, by associations, municipalities and private societies. The Phalempin half marathon is one of those races organized yearly. The goal of this chapter is to show the interest of organizing a half marathon in a small town for all parties involved, runners, organizers, and town officials. The study followed a perspective of sustainability, thus addressing the economic, social, and environmental aspects. It was also the opportunity to introduce a comparison with the Anglo-Saxon works about the impact of small scale events on a community. It will be interesting to maintain this comparison for the future works of the program.

For many years, sport tourism in France becomes a substitute to mass tourism. France is rich in many exceptional sites in which it is possible to practice sporting activities. It allows the sport tourism operators to meet the expectations of customers looking for personalized touristic-sports proposals, whether they emanate from a national or international clientele. We must remember that France remains the first country in the world in the number of tourists welcomed, with 82.6 million visitors in 2016 and around 89 million (+8%) in 2017.<sup>1</sup>

The French tourism ministry wants to reach 100 million tourists in 2020. Why not but, very important, between 2000 and 2016 the number of tourists has increased only 7% in France when it is 27% in Italia, 41% in the USA, and 63% in Spain.

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<sup>1</sup>When this chapter is written the final numbers are not yet known. These are the estimations of the WTO published at the beginning of 2018. Sources: Le Monde 15.03.2018; Challenges.fr 03.04.2018; INSEE 03.04.2018. This number must certainly be taken with precaution. It counts not only the tourists at the usual meaning of the world but also all the people crossing France, including the long-distance truck drivers.

Moreover, France, the world tourists' first host country is ranked only the fifth concerning the incomes produced by tourism.

In parallel, after a long lean period, France obtained the organization of international competitions: Canoeing World Championship (2017), the Ryder Cup (2018), the Gay Games (2018), the Women's Soccer World Cup (2019), the Rugby World Cup and the World Alpine Skiing Championship (2023), and, the highlight, the summer Olympic Games in 2024, without forgetting the Women's Handball European Championship (2018), the judo, basketball, and the ice hockey world championships, the track and field and the artistic women's gymnastics European championships (2020). It is interesting to note that a report<sup>2</sup> on the use of major sporting events for tourism development was submitted to the Prime Minister, at his request, in July 2018, highlighting the government's interest in the potential economic impact of these sporting events rich in economic and media spinoffs.

Tourist and sporting activities can be grouped according to their place of practice; the French territory offers a variety of possibilities: the mountain and all practices related to snow, the sea and all forms of nautical activities, all outdoor activities, whitewater, hiking or equestrian, cycling, climbing, golf, or air sports.

In 2017, there were 27.8 million hikers in France, 12.7 million swimmers and 11.8 million cyclists to retain here only athletes outside clubs, unlicensed. Between the traditional races, from 5 km to the marathon, the folk races, the Mud days, without forgetting the growing trails in recent years, there are several dozen hiking races that are organized every weekend, throughout the year, and that drain tens of thousands of participants of all ages and fitness.

Tourist and sporting activities can be grouped according to their place of practice, the French territory offering a variety of possibilities: the mountains and all practices related to snow, climbing and hiking, the sea and lakes with all forms of nautical activities, all outdoor activities, whitewater, equestrian, cycling, golf, or air sports. The same could be said of cycling patents, or ski raids, more seasonal, without forgetting all the fixed hiking, walking, cycling (road or mountain bike), hiking (horse riding is the third federation in number of licensees behind football and tennis, with a majority of women, 83%), etc.

## **The Popularity of Long-Distance Running and the Renewal of the Offer**

Over the last few years, multiple running disciplines have appeared. They do not always require a stadium, like trail and ultra-trail running, folklore running, and obstacle races. Obstacle races were created in the United Kingdom in 1987 by Billy

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<sup>2</sup>21 mesures pour optimiser les retombées touristiques des grands événements sportifs organisés en France. Mission conduite par Benjamen DIRX, Patrick DOUSSOT, Lauret QUEIGE. Mission parlementaire du 4 avril au 19 juillet 2018. Rapport remis au premier ministre le 19 juillet 2018.

Wilson (the *Tough Guy Challenge*) and were later imported into France with the *Frappadingue* in 2010; by 2015, France counted 131 obstacle races. There are multiple types of events, like the *Mud Day*, or the *Color Me Rad*, more “fun,” and shorter. North America is also fond of these new types of races, and the number of participants across the Atlantic went from 250,000 in 2010 to four million in 2013.<sup>3</sup>

By organizing these new types of running events, the sports events companies and the regional track and field federations aim to seduce a new, younger crowd, and to attract more female runners than traditional road-running. In 2012, France counted six million runners,<sup>4</sup> of which 2.1 million (35%) were women; in 2015, among the 9.5 million runners, there were four million women, almost 42%. Running is popular among the 15–24 years old.

Between 2012 and 2014, the number of runners in this category increased by 183%, going from 1,296,000 to 3,672,836. We can assume that this increase is mostly due to these new running disciplines as the participants are 25 years old on average, against 45 years old for the participants in more competitive events like the Paris marathon. However, the number of runners increased in all categories except for the seniors (over 50 years old), which showed a slight decrease.

Although these festive and trail running events are pretty recent, they have not replaced the traditional road-running events, and the 10 km, half marathons, and marathons still attract many athletes.

## The Phalempin Half marathon

Phalempin (France) is a municipality of 4500 inhabitants. It is located in the Hauts-de-France region (north of France), 13 km south of Lille, close to the former mining district, in an area with a high density of population. This town has no longer any economic activity, a tile mill, the European market of endive, and some farms. It has gone from being a rural territory to being a dormitory. It includes a small forest (670 ha) (according to the mayor, it would be France’s most visited forest) which is part of the semimarathon, the only sport event in the town.

The Phalempin half marathon is a traditional road-running event. The 32nd edition of the race was held on July 19th, 2016. It was the only running event in the region that day. The race is organized by the organization *Entre Ciel et Vert* and the Phalempin Athletic Club, with the support of the municipality. It is certified by the FFA (Federation Francaise d’Athletisme – French Athletics Federation) and it is

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.runnersworld.comnewswire/2-charts-show-growth-of-non-traditional-races>

<sup>4</sup> The estimates vary depending on the study but the tendency remains the same. In a study led by BVA in January 2017, 13.5 million French respondents declared having practiced running at least once during the 12 months prior to the study. It represents a 12% increase compared to 2012. The study recognized three categories of runners: five million would run at least once a week, 3.9 million would run occasionally, and 4.6 million would run as a side activity to another sport. Source: *La Lettre du Sport* n°902, 14 April 2017.

qualifying for the French championship. Before 2014, the event used to gather between 2500 and 3000 participants. Since then, this number increased to reach 3500 participants, which is the maximum number of runners allowed by the organizers. For them, this increase is due to the general popularity of running, the organizational and environmental qualities of the event, and the “state of mind” in which the race is organized.

Three hundred and fifty volunteers help organize the event. Although it is rather famous and attracts inter-regional and international runners, the vision of the organizers might seem somewhat outdated. They only aspire to the ideas of “satisfaction of a job well done,” “integration in the municipality,” and “togetherness.” They do not strive to generate any profit, and in case there is any, it is invested in better equipment for the following events. This way, the registration fees (14 euro) are very low compared to other races. Similarly, the prizes are considerably lower than those of other events: both men and women categories get 190 euro for first place and 150 euro for second place. Contrary to many other events, the Phalempin half marathon does not dedicate part of its budget to invite guest stars.

Several sources finance the race. Part of the budget comes from public subsidies: 10% comes from the municipality, another 10% comes from the departmental council, and 4% comes from the regional council. However, these subsidies tend to decrease. The rest of the budget comes from sponsors (16%) and registration fees (60%). Besides financial support, the municipality also helps for logistics by providing equipment, trucks, infrastructure, like the gymnasium that is used as a reception area, and technical and administrative staff for 2 months. The federation of municipalities provides the barricades.

There are eight sponsors, which are either local businesses or companies that have a local branch. They participate mostly by giving prizes or by providing equipment (number signs, shirts, drinks, etc.). They all contribute individually and there is no common organization. The number of sponsors tends to increase but it is still limited.

The start and finish areas, which generally feature local businesses offering products linked with the event, are reduced to a few stalls in the gymnasium as there are only two kilometers between the start and the finish lines. Thus, there is no commercial activity in relation to the event. The relations with the economic partners are extremely limited.

There is no promotion of the local hosting facilities or tourism during the registration process. In fact, there are no local hosting facilities as Phalempin is only a few kilometers away from Lesquin, which is the location of the Lille airport and features all the service industry facilities that come with an airport. Tourism is not promoted either. However, both the organizers and the mayor believe that this field could be developed, maybe through the federation of municipalities.

## Method

The French research team decided to study the Phalempin half marathon because it was close to the University of Lille<sup>5</sup> and corresponded to the required criteria but the size of the town.

The general study was based on a questionnaire established by all members of the project. It allowed leading a quantitative study for different events. We planned a semi-structured interview with the representatives of Phalempin and another with the organizers of the race, followed by a nonparticipatory observation based on the observers' knowledge of road-running and its organization, as they were runners and organizers themselves.

For the interview with the organizers we met with four members of the organization board a few weeks prior to the event, at the home of the President of the organization in Phalempin, for about 2 h. We then interviewed the MP and Mayor of Phalempin and two of his deputies on the day of the event, just after the start of the race, in the town hall, for about 50 min.

In order to get as many respondents as possible we posted the questionnaire online, and we worked on several levels to motivate the runners to participate in the study. A few days before the race, we posted a message on the event's website explaining the researchers' interest in the race; the day prior to the race two persons were in charge of giving out flyers presenting the objectives of the study to the runners who came to get their registration kit bag. They briefly explained the aim of the study to incite them to fill in the questionnaire. This process came as a back up to the work of the dozen volunteers who were distributing flyers along with the registration kit bags, and encouraged the runners to answer the questionnaire. The same two persons distributed more flyers on the finish line. Finally, the day after the race, we posted a message on the event's results web page inviting the athletes to click on a link that directed them to the anonymous questionnaire.

We did not pass a questionnaire to the inhabitants for reason of methodological validity.

## Results

### *Profile of the Sample*

The sample was constituted of 591 respondents (N = 591) selected at random. This number corresponded to 16.9% of all registered runners, and to 18.8% of the 3140 finishers. There was a majority of men, 71.6%, for 28.4% women. They were mostly middle-aged; 74.4% were between 25 and 49 years old and only 6.9% were under

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<sup>5</sup> Initially, the study was meant to focus on the Lille marathon but it was cancelled in 2016, like the famous *braderie* during which the race took place, for security reasons due to the terrorist attacks.

25 years old. Men were 40.63 years old on average, against 38.52 years old for women. These statistics match the ones observed for traditional races on the national level.

Almost all of the respondents (590) were French. Only one foreigner (Belgian) filled in the questionnaire. These numbers might be due to the fact that the questionnaire was written in French only. According to the organizers, about 30 participants were foreign, essentially from Belgium, England, and Germany.

Most of the respondents were married (76.8%). They usually had a high level of education: 48.9% had at least a Master's degree, 30.8% had a Bachelor's degree, and only 6.1% had not graduated High School; 80.5% of them were employed. The majority (22.2%) earned between 2000 and 2500 euro per month, and 41.5% earned between 1500 and 2500 euro per month.

### ***A Local Race***

Several elements clearly highlighted the local aspect of the race: 56.9% of the respondents declared having joined the race because they lived close by, although 96.6% of them did not live in Phalempin. The majority (96.3%) did not spend the night in Phalempin or anywhere nearby, while 78.8% of the respondents declared living less than 40 km away from Phalempin. They mostly came by car (94.9%); 3.1% respondents came by foot, and 0.7% by bike. The discovery of a new site was absolutely not a major motivation (levels one and two: 54.4%, levels six and seven: 10.6%, on a scale comprising seven levels going from one: *not important*, to seven: *most important*).

### ***A Loyalty to Develop***

The sample did not show any feeling of loyalty to the event; 333 respondents (56.3%) were there for the first time, while 258 of them (43.7%) had taken part in the race before. Among them, 84.5% had participated between one and five times, and 57.8% between one and three times. The respondents were usually used to this type of race as 48.5% declared having ran between one and five half marathons in 2015, and 72.5% up to ten races, against 10.7% who had not ran any kind of event that year. The respondents said at 97.3% that they would be willing to participate in the event in the future.

## ***Togetherness***

Most of the respondents came accompanied (68%) and 57.6% of them by between one and five people. Most of them came with one or several members of their family (31%), or with friends (28.6%). Only 8.5% were there with members from their club. This number matches the one regarding motivations, as it is not a race that attracts a lot of clubs. This information emphasizes the fact that the athletes were mostly “nonorganized” or “auto-organized,” and that the participants to the race were generally not members of a club.

Among the 3.7% of participants who spent one or two nights in Phalempin or in the area, 90.9% did so at a friend’s or a relative’s house. It highlights the importance of the sense of relations and togetherness of the race, and confirms its local aspect. It appears in the motivations, as 41.7% of respondents declared having joined the race following a friend’s advice. Only two respondents said they spent the night in a hotel.

## ***Motivations***

The analysis of the motivations is interesting and unsettling. Social interaction was not a major motivation: the criteria “*meeting other people*” (socialization) was mostly rated on levels four and five (45%), and most of the answers (79%) rated it between one and five. The discovery of a new place, a new culture, and tourism were not major reasons for entering the race either. The respondents were divided when it came to participating to support friends and family (cheer), as 38.5% rated this criteria between one and three (not important), and almost 30% rated it between five and seven (most important). Twenty-five percent declared being strongly motivated (levels six and seven) by the possibility to participate in a sports competition; this number goes up to a third of the respondents (33.5%) if we also include level five. The majority of respondents (70%) were there to challenge themselves, to push their limits, or to benefit their health (54% graded this last criteria between five and seven). It appeared that the notions of effort and challenge were part of the fun as 53.7% rated “*for pleasure*” on level 7, and this number goes to 89.2% if we include levels five to seven. Whatever its origin, pleasure was the major motivation to participate in the event, with an average grade of 6.07/7 (see Fig. 1). We might explain it partly due to what we noticed concerning the quality of the environment and of the organization, two elements that were actively part of the runners’ comfort and of the pleasure they might find in their effort.



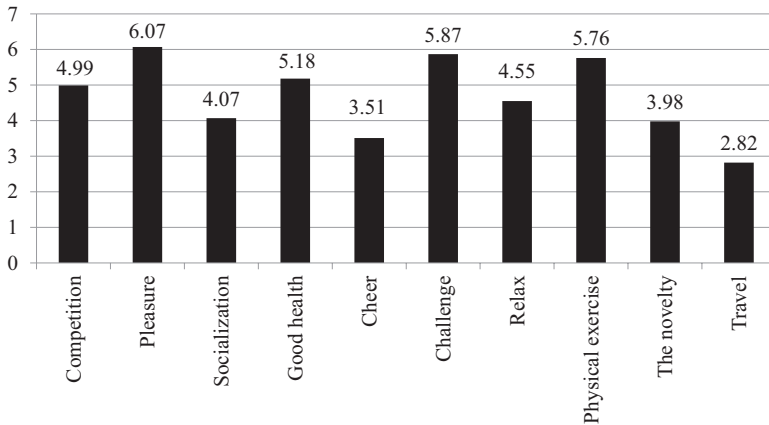


Fig. 1 Motivations (average)

### *Participants' Expenditures*

Eighteen percent of the respondents claimed that they did not spend anything to join the race. However, this statement is hard to believe; indeed, 96.6% were not from Phalempin and 94% drove their car to the event, and therefore had to pay for gas in addition to the registration fee (except, possibly, for the few club members).

Among the rest, 48.6% declared having spent up to 20 euro, which corresponds to the registration fee plus a short trip; 25% said they spent between 21 and 50 euro, and 8% said they spent over 50 euro. The total expenditure for the runners who declared their expenses was 14,712 euro. If we add to that the mere registration fees of the 106 respondents who claimed not to have spent anything, it is an extra 1484 euro, for a total of 16,196 euro.

When asked about expenditures again, this time including the people who came along with the runners, 39% of the respondents claimed not to have spent anything, which once again seems impossible, be it only for the aforementioned reasons. Twenty-one percent said they spent less than 20 euro, 22% between 20 and 50 euro, and 17% more than 50 euro. Extrapolating these numbers to all participants is of course impossible.

### *Environment*

According to Gibson, Kaplinadou, and Kang (2012), “*the study of the environmental impacts associated with event sport tourism is the most underdeveloped aspect in the existing literature.*” One aspect that is for the least poorly analyzed is the carbon footprint of these events, especially for bigscale sport events. Collins, Jones, and Munday (2009) conclude that “*small scale events have a lower carbon footprint*

as the majority of participants tend to be drawn from the local (nontourists) and regional visitors,” which corresponds exactly to our case. This approximation of the social and environmental impacts comes from the fact that the three elements of sustainable development are not estimated following the same unit; as long as these three aspects will not be analyzed with a common unit, the estimation of the economic value will always remain the most important (Andersson & Lundberg, 2013).

### ***Importance of the Site and of the Natural Environment***

Landscape and settings are important travel motivators (Franch, Martini, Buffa, & Parisi, 2008) and are “central in sport” (Moore, Richardson, & Corkill, 2014). The natural environment is a central element to outdoor recreation (Mullins, 2009), as it affects the participants’ experience (Hinch & Higham, 2011). In Phalempin, both organizers and participants enjoy and praise the fact that the local environment offers optimal running conditions, mostly because of the forest, but also due to the general rural environment of the Pévèle, which is an essentially agricultural area.<sup>6</sup> About 82% of the respondents attributed a six or a seven to the quality of the environment. It is undoubtedly also due to the climate; the North of France is renowned for its oceanic climate, which means that it is a rather rainy area. Dewailly (1985) calculated that it rains every other day on average, and added “*thankfully there are nights.*” During the race we studied, the weather was sunny and pleasant. It was perfect for a long run and it unquestionably influenced the participants’ experience positively. The area being flat, it attracts athletes seeking performance (it is a qualifying race for the French championships). It is the quality of the environment that was the most praised by the participants.

### ***Efforts of the Organizers and Town Representatives to Preserve the Environment***

Besides the quality of the natural environment, we must also mention the efforts of the organizers who did their best to reduce the environmental impact of the event. Sixty-eight percent of respondents mentioned these efforts. It means that 32% of them did not find anything noticeable, or that they considered the services in this respect as average, basic, and nonremarkable. Among the participants who had a positive opinion of the organizers’ environment friendly actions, more than 95% appreciated the presence of trash cans next to the aid stations. However, some of

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<sup>6</sup>The Pévèle area is 30 m above sea level. Its name comes from the Latin *pavula*, which means *pasture*.

them mentioned the fact that there was nowhere to dispose of the trash between these areas. Other noticeable environment-friendly actions included the use of paper cups and paper bags at the finish line, water from the public distribution system provided by the sponsor *Eaux du Nord*, a single sponge for the whole race, and the absence of lids on bottles at the aid stations. The runners also liked the audio and visual messages encouraging environment preservation.

The organizers really strove to keep the environment clean. They inserted a message in the widely distributed advertising brochure asking to use the available trash cans to avoid littering and help protect the forest. Portable toilet units were installed near the starting line even though it was located in a natural environment; it is too rare a facility, even during races that take place in an urban environment - and we can imagine the inconvenience for the residents. The municipality provided vehicles and staff to clean up after the race. This cleaning up right after the end of the race is one of the prides of the mayor and the organizers.

### ***Means of Transportation***

Most participants had no other choice but to drive to Phalempin, which caused parking issues. Two respondents emphasized the issue of traffic jams to get to the town. They suggested a few solutions, like free shuttles from the Seclin train station, located five kilometers away, or even from Lille, or a cheaper registration fee for carpooling. Of all the people we spoke to, participants, organizers, and town representatives, nobody mentioned the carbon footprint of such an event, as they only seemed to focus on the visible environmental elements.

Some respondents thought that littering should be prohibited, thinking mostly of the many orange peels and energy gel packets discarded by the runners. Many condemned the use of plastic water bottles during the race, especially as they were barely used before being thrown away on the ground for lack of trash cans. These critics echo the desire of the organizers to set up a “green label” that would include all of the ideas mentioned: promoting carpooling, setting up shuttles, disqualification for littering, etc. They just lack information on this topic.

### **Touristic Attractiveness of the Organizing Municipality**

Seventy percent of respondents said that they would be willing to participate in another sport event organized by the municipality. However, 61% were not seduced by the town itself and would not come back for tourism purposes only. Neither the organizers nor the mayor plan on using this event, which is the town’s major social event to increase tourism. The mayor considers the opportunity for promotion, not for Phalempin as it is too small, with no service industry, and with for sole asset a

forest that is already over-exploited for tourism, but for the whole federation of municipalities. Still, there is no plan for commercial or socioeconomic development.

## **Discussion: Criticism of the Anglo-Saxon Analysis of Small Scale Events**

The Anglo-Saxon sport tourism researchers (Dwyer & Fredline, 2008; Kaplanidou & Vogt, 2007; Misener & Mason, 2006) often consider sports events as a way to promote and to commercialize a destination. For Gibson et al. (2012), *“a small scale sport event portfolio consistent with a community’s infrastructure and human and cultural capital may be a viable form of sustainable tourism development.”* Higham (1999) confirmed this approach, declaring that *“smallscale events often have a positive impact on the host destination, because they typically use existing facilities, and attract local, domestic, and international participants.”* It is indeed the case for the Phalempin half marathon. Still, France probably has a different approach, as the interviews with the mayor and with the organizers clearly showed that the objective of organizing the race was anything but economic, and that the very idea of exploiting it to stimulate the local service industry and to develop tourism was a mere far-off perspective.

Neither the organizers nor the mayor know what is the event’s impact on the municipality; it is thought to be low, which does not seem to bother them. Phalempin features other events organized by other organizations. Moreover, the regional basketball league has settled in the town, which is seen as a factor for attractiveness. And yet, the municipality still considers the half marathon as the event of the year as it is seen as part of social relations. The organizers declare that they work on the race *“for the love of sport.”* The noticeable difference between the works of sport tourism experts and the local reality shows the gap between logic and culture. For instance, the French National Olympic Committee is hostile to the development of organisms like the North American Sports Commissions, as they believe that sport should not be considered as a means to develop a related economic activity (here tourism). The sport movement is not willing to give away the tiniest part of its prerogatives, even if in 1998 Gibson already wrote that *“at a policy level, there needs to be better coordination among agencies responsible for sport and those responsible for tourism.”*

Contrary to North America, Europe has until recently always considered that there should as little interaction as possible between the spheres of sport and economy. If today this perspective has changed, the European vision for popular sport is still strongly conservative. There is a very neat division between *“spectator sport,”* which unquestionably generates an important financial flow, and *“sport for all,”* which many think should be free or at least accessible to the majority. Although it is the case for the Phalempin race, many other events organized by private companies require high registration fees.

This study revealed that the Anglo-Saxon analysis of the impact of small scale sport events does not totally apply to the current French situation. It is due to a different history of the relations between sport and economy. Across the Atlantic, “sport for all” and amateur sport in general are seen as an input in the production of the tourism industry, which uses sport to boost its economy. For the most part, this system works due to private funding. Thus, sport is part of a whole industry that aims to create economic activity, wealth, and jobs.

In France, this kind of sport practices remained a leisure activity until recently, existing and surviving via a few sponsorships and public funding, with no economic objective, and staying on a local scale. Some municipalities have started to adopt a more professional and economic approach of these events and tried to evaluate their impact, but it is still not a common approach. A minority of them, especially the ones based on tourism, try to multiply small scale events during the tourism season in order to attract tourists and to generate activity for local businesses. The situation is slowly changing due to the financial pressure faced by the municipalities. It leads them to limit their funding of sports events, which in turn causes some of these events to disappear. They are also pressured by the evolution of social expectations and the demand for novelty and innovation, in particular coming from the younger generations. It leads the volunteer organizers of traditional sport events to give way to professionals, who bring, besides new ideas, sponsors and equipment that is only affordable or profitable if used for national and/or international competition.

As this study is part of an international project, it will be interesting to observe whether the same conclusions can be drawn for every country, or whether there are noticeable differences.

## Conclusion

The results of the survey conducted with the runners and the interviews with the organizers and the mayor revealed that the Phalempin half marathon is one of the most famous and recognized sport events in the region. It is a local race that does not attract many people from other regions or countries. The participants appreciate the quality of the organization, even if they think that it is average. The rural, wooded environment is part of the event’s success.

The direct and indirect economic impacts on the municipality are very low. It is due to both a lack of hosting infrastructure (hotels, restaurants), combined to a lack of interest of the organizers and town officials regarding the economic aspect. They do not use the race as an opportunity to promote the local cultural heritage or to encourage the runners to come to Phalempin and the surrounding area for tourism. In fact, most of the respondents precised that they did not intend to return to Phalempin for tourism purposes.

The organizers, who do their best to organize the event year after year, are facing two risks. Today, the event has attained the maximum number of participants due to the popularity of running. However, it is facing competition. Several other local

races are becoming more popular each year (the *Course du Chicon*, the *Course des Terrils*, the Touquet half marathon, the *Route du Louvre*, etc.). So there are two possibilities: either the current popularity of running will fade and the athletes will turn to other disciplines to challenge themselves, be healthy, etc., or they will be interested in the ever increasing amount of new running events like obstacle races, trails, folklore races, etc. These factors might be detrimental to the Phalempin half marathon, whose only goal is to bring life to the town and to convey a feeling of “togetherness,” to quote the mayor and the organizers.

Although the area features many road-running events, each organizing team works individually for their own event. They only interact when they need to agree on a date for their event with the Hauts-de-France track and field federation. It could be interesting to consider organizing the road-running events at least on a local level, within the federation of municipalities or the Pévèle area, and to set up a challenge for runners participating in multiple races.<sup>7</sup> We could think of a ranking system depending on the number of races in which an individual, a couple, or a team participates, etc. It would also be possible to coordinate two events over one weekend, on the Saturday and Sunday afternoons. It would motivate some of the participants to stay on site and generate business for the local service industry. An overnight stay might also mean that one or several other individuals would come to accompany the participant, which would increase the potential economic impact. Furthermore, it could be an opportunity to advertise the touristic potential of the area. We could also think of linking a race with another local event during the weekend (a walk to discover the touristic or unusual sites, a food-tasting walk, etc.), with food and festivities at night. This format is already offered by many long-distance events (triathlons, trails). It would be necessary to create a format that would not be detrimental to the runners' condition, while conveying a festive and convivial feeling. For the organizers, it would be a way to get in touch with sponsors as a group: instead of presenting one file for each event, they could group several events into one file. The sense of “togetherness” they seek would apply to the federation of municipalities. If this set of coordinated events gets a “green label,” then the three aspects of sustainable development, social, economic, and environmental, would be taken into account. The initiative of developing a new potential for collaboration with fields other than sport would generate a positive local dynamic.

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. Jurisport n°144/2014, “Décentralisation: l'intercommunalité gagne du terrain”.

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