



THE SITUATION OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS: A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Physical Education (PE) in Europe has evolved from influences and initiatives, which have variously shaped national systems either through assimilation or adaptation. As a geopolitical entity Europe is characterised by diversity, testimony to which are different and various forms of structures and practices but there are some elements of congruence in concepts and delivery. Survey and other research evidence indicates a perceived decline or marginalisation of PE in schools, particularly marked in the 1990s, which has attracted attention of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. In presenting the situational trends and tendencies of PE in schools in the European region, this article draws from three European-wide surveys, a World-wide survey and an extensive literature review including global and regional qualitative studies and national reports. In some countries, there are instances of well implemented programmes and good practices. Equally, there is evidence to generate concern about the situation. The review of PE in Europe is marked by “mixed messages” with indicators of stabilization in some countries juxtaposed between positive, effective policy initiatives in other countries and reticence or little political will to act and continuing concerns in others. There are apparent deficiencies in provision, specifically in curriculum time allocation, subject status, financial, material (inadequacies in facility and equipment supply) and human resources, the quality of the physical education curriculum and its delivery as well as the extent of efficacy of beyond school networks. The crux of the situation is that there is a gap between promise and the reality. The article concludes with suggested strategies, underpinned by development of a “basic needs model”, to assist in converting “promises” into “reality” and so secure a safer future for PE in schools.

Key words: physical education, status, policy, curriculum practices, strategies

Introduction

The story of Physical Education (PE) in Europe contains a rich tapestry of influences and developments, which have evolved from individual and/or “local” institutional initiatives with distinctive identities. These initiatives have variously shaped, or contributed to shaping, national systems either through assimilation or adaptation. Taking evolutionary developments into account, it is unsurprising that different and various forms of structures and practices are evident across Europe and that the region as a geopolitical entity is characterised by diversity but with some elements of congruence in PE and school sport concepts and delivery. Another dimension to the developing PE tapestry in Europe was the widespread perceived decline or marginalisation of physical education in schools, particularly marked in the 1990s and epitomised in the Loopstra and van der Gugten survey [1] conducted on behalf of the European Physical Education Association (EUPEA). This survey indicated that whilst in some countries within the re-

gion, especially in central and eastern Europe, there had been some encouraging developments, the subject appeared to be under greater threat than it had been at the beginning of the decade. Essentially, in most countries there was (1) insufficient curriculum time for PE, especially for primary age groups and the 17–18 year age group, which were well under the minimum; (2) the quality of PE in most countries was not, or was insufficiently, controlled particularly so in primary schools because of PE teacher education programmes with a majority of countries reporting inadequate PE training for primary school teachers; and (3) an undervaluing of the primary school phase for motor development and motor learning. The survey concluded that in a majority of countries there was insufficient quality control and that the political or educational decision-makers were not overly interested in the quality of PE delivered [1]. These and other issues and concerns (decreasing curriculum time allocation, inferior status, lower in value and importance than other subjects, PE lessons cancelled more often than so called “academic subjects”

and resource deficiencies such as funding limitations and impacts on, for example, swimming, which was being omitted from curricula in some countries, were borne out in on-going analyses of national and international documentation regularly reported by Hardman [2–7], in a world-wide PE survey [8] and in a Council of Europe commissioned survey [9] on the situation of PE in schools in Member States, the findings of which spawned a set of Ministerial *Recommendations* [10] on policy principles designed to remedy the school PE and sport situation in the region. Since the Council of Europe *Recommendations*, the developments in school PE policies and practices in Europe have been diverse with a plethora of positive initiatives juxtaposed with evidence to generate continuing disquiet about the situation. It was such disquiet at a time of widespread increasing levels of obesity and numbers of overweight children and young people, concomitant rises in sedentary lifestyle-related illnesses and high adolescent drop-out rates from sporting activity *inter alia* that prompted the European Parliament to engage (2006) in a study of the situation of PE in schools and its prospects in the then 25 and 2 acceding Member States. Specifically, the European Parliament's Committee on Structural and Cohesion Policies, Culture and Education section sought data on subject status, curriculum aims, delivery and content, quality PE criteria, responsible authorities, PE curriculum time allocation, status of PE teachers and teacher qualifications, material resources (facility provision and finance), inclusion issues related to disability, ethnic/religious groups and girls, case studies' information on links with/between health and school sport, pathways to participation in the wider community, the training of PE teachers (PETE) including initial and in-service training (INSET)/continuing professional development (CPD) and policy recommendations¹.

In presenting the situation of PE in schools in the European region, this article draws from the Council of Europe's 2002 commissioned survey [9], a semi-structured questionnaire instrument administered (2005) through the Council of Europe Committee for the Development of Sport (CDDS) unit with responses from representative government level agencies; a semi-structured "update" questionnaire distributed to recognised PE "experts" (2006) and administered in the 27 Euro-

pean Union States to inform the European Parliament's 2006–2007 funded study project [11], an on-going analysis of European data² extracted from of a North Western Counties Physical Education Association and University of Worcester supported and UNESCO, WHO ICSSPE endorsed Follow-up World-wide Survey undertaken by Hardman and Marshall (2005–2007) and an extensive literature review including qualitative studies of PE in global [12] and European [13] contexts and Reports, e.g. the German Sport Confederation "Sprint" Study [14].

At the outset, it is necessary to acknowledge potentially problematic issues surrounding validity and reliability of data generated from questionnaires, especially in terms of nature and size of samples. Nevertheless, in themselves these data do provide an indication of trends and tendencies as well as reveal some highly specific situations. Caution in interpretation is to a large extent alleviated by forms of triangulation embracing the range of questionnaire samples' sets, interviews, the review of research-related literature, including qualitative national studies, case and project studies undertaken and submitted by experts in the respective fields. Such forms of triangulation serve to underpin the questionnaire-generated data and bring a higher degree of validity and reliability to the content of the article.

The general situation of physical education in schools

Within the general education system, all countries in the region have legal requirements (or it is generally practised) with either prescriptive or guideline expectations for PE for both boys and girls for at least some part of the compulsory schooling years. In a majority of countries, national governments have at least some responsibility for the PE curriculum. In some countries there are joint and multiple (national, regional, local and school) levels of responsibility. Responsibility in some countries lies at two levels and where decentralised forms of government are constituted, responsibility is essentially at regional level as in, for example, the Belgian Flemish and French "Language Communities", in the 16 Länder of the Federal Republic of Germany and in the autonomous regions of Spain. Across Europe and

¹ The European Parliament (EP) Project Report can be accessed via the EP website at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/activities/expert/eStudies.do?languages=EN>

² The data include collated semi-structured questionnaire responses from PE teachers, administrators, government level representatives and experts in the field.

particularly in EU countries, administrative and delivery responsibility is frequently devolved to local authorities or even individual schools. Legally, PE has the same status as other subjects in some 90% of countries but its actual status is perceived to be lower in 34% of countries. Thus, its status may be equal in law but may not actually be matched in practice, a not untypical illustration of which is seen in a Portuguese teacher's observation that "...It (PE) can be considered compulsory in the 1st cycle, but, many times it is not taught". Moreover, designation of a subject as "foundation" or "subsidiary" implies a lower hierarchical status position than "core" or "principal" "or main" and in any event, PE is allocated less time in the curriculum than other subjects such as language, mathematics and science. Data related to the issue of implementation are confusing: on the one hand in 85% of countries, the PE curriculum is claimed to be implemented in accordance with regulations but on the other hand, nearly one third of countries indicate that its subject status is inferior and that PE classes are cancelled more often than other subject classes. There is a lower perception of PE teacher status than other subject teachers in over 20% of countries.

Physical education curriculum time allocation

Across Europe, there was a gradual erosion of school PE time allocation throughout the 20th century. **Denmark** experienced reductions from 7 to 4 lessons in 1937, 4 to 3 in 1958 and 3 to 2 in 1970, now it is 1–3 lessons (usually 2, but 3 in grades 4–6) [15]. In **Sweden** the daily provision in 1900 has shrunk to 1–2 lessons in Basic Schools [16] and Sollerhed [17] reported a reduction from 3 to 1 hour per week in the 1990s and cancellation of school sport days; however, in 1999, annual PE and Health "clock hours increased from 460 to 500 clock hours, i.e. 2×50 min" each week. In **France** the number of lessons was reduced from 5 to 3 in 1978 [18]; and in **Greece** reductions of PE time allocation occurred in the 1990s [19]. In former "socialist bloc" countries in central and eastern Europe, the erosion in time allocation has been more confined to post-1990 political reforms. In Hungary for example the former 4–5–6 PE hours per week-staged model in the 1980s has been replaced by a 2/3–1.5/2–1 hours per week-staged model. Over the decade after the (re)-unification of the two Germanys in 1990, Helmke and Umbach [20] indicated reductions as high as 25% in PE timetable allocation in all class stages (except class 4) in the Federal Republic of Germany.

During the last decade, many European countries have undertaken educational reforms. Whilst it is encouraging to see that PE has remained compulsory or is generally practised in all countries and that time allocation has increased in just 16% of countries and remained the same in 68% of countries, in 16% of countries it has actually been reduced. The latter is epitomised by an Irish PE teacher's comment that "PE is being squeezed out of the education system by more and more compulsory academic courses... which hold little benefit compared to PE".

The issue of time allocation is generally complicated (1) by localised control of curricular timetables, which vary considerably between schools and especially in those countries where responsibility for delivery of the curriculum has been divested to individual schools, and (2) practices of offering options or electives, which provide opportunities for additional engagement in PE and/or school sport activity. "Uptake" by pupils of such opportunities can vary within, and between, countries and not all pupils take advantage of any such extra provision. Whatever, the options/electives available may be included in curriculum time allocation indicated in some countries' survey responses and, therefore, may not accurately represent the actual prescribed or expected time allocation for all pupils. Thus, a cautionary note is necessary here because data for some countries do include additional optional or elective lesson hours and hence, provide some distortion of the actual situation in at least some schools in those countries where additional opportunities exist. "Triangulation" of curriculum policy documents, survey data and qualitative data derived from literature [see especially 12, 13] provide a scenario of policy prescription or guidelines not actually being implemented in practice for a variety of reasons. Geographically representative examples illustrate the point. In Austria there is a standard number of lessons but school autonomy prescribed by national Law 283/2003 produces variations and PE can, and in some schools does, give way to other subjects: the standard allocation of 3–4 lessons in secondary schools has been effectively reduced to 2 in lower secondary and 1 in upper secondary levels [21, 22]. In Bulgaria, some reductions are occurring as a result of increased time allocation to foreign language studies, furthermore, there are variations on the duration of lessons because they are determined by school staff, hence some schools offer less PE lesson minutes per week than others. In Cyprus, the 2×40 min lessons in primary schools

are “often abandoned when time is required for the main school subjects such as maths and language” [23]. In the Czech Republic, the third lesson in primary schools is frequently cancelled or has not been even included in the curriculum [24]. According to the curricula in most German Länder, time allocation for school PE is between two and three lessons per week (i.e. between 90 and 135 min per week). The results of the Sprint Study [14] show that there is a wide gap between policy and practice. In the secondary general schools (*Hauptschule*), differences exist between the demands of the curriculum and PE lessons that have been given with 2 hours per week instead of 3 hours, that is 33% of lessons are cancelled [25]. In Ireland despite a recommended 60 min per week, PE is not provided in all primary schools, quality of provision varies and research shows the average amount of time ranges from 12 to 60 min and 75% classes have less than 30 min; at post-primary level, 120 min are recommended (90 min is seen as a minimum but many schools offer less), however, there is a progressive reduction from 75 min (year 1) to 57 min (year 6) [26, p. 386]. In Lithuania, even though there is a legal basis, “it is difficult to put regulations into practice” [27, p. 445]; the School Boards decide PE hours (obligatory and supplementary); the 1995 Law on PE and Sports stipulated 3 lessons but only 26% achieve this in classes 1–4, moreover, 38.9% do not have a third lesson; fewer than 10% schools comply with the 1995 Act for 3 lessons [27, p. 445]. In the Netherlands, there is no specific prescription but there is an average of 90 minutes per week with considerable differences because head teachers determine actual time allocations; additionally facilities represent a considerable problem and present provision makes it difficult or impossible to realise prescribed attainment goals [28]. In Portugal, teacher’s autonomy brings variations to the 3×30 min lessons allocated and only a minority of primary schools have the opportunity to benefit from PE classes [29, p. 556]. Since 2001 in Sweden, an increase in time allocation has occurred and two hours of additional options are popular but for more athletically talented children; schools may be designated as special profile schools (so-called “The School Choice”) and sport can be “the profile...(one) outcome of the various tracks means prevalence of differences in allocated hours: in Basic Schools, the 1–2 lessons (80–100 min) can be increased; 25% have done this but 50% haven’t and 24% have decreased” [16, p. 611]. Pervasive throughout the EU region is the low priority accorded to PE in Vocational

Schools, where usually minimal provision is reported [8, 9, 12, 13, 30, 31].

Despite national policy concerning required, prescribed, recommended or aspirational guidelines, local levels of actual control of curriculum time allocation give rise to variations between schools and, therefore, difficulties in specifying definitive figures for a country or region. However, some general tendencies are identifiable. In primary/basic school years, weekly timetable allocation for PE across Europe is 109 min (range of 30–240 min) with clusters around 60 and 90 min and in secondary and high schools 101 min (range of 45–240 min) with a cluster around 90 min: there is a gradual “tailing off” in upper secondary (high) schools (post 16+ years) in several countries and optional courses become more evident. The figures represent a worrying trend of decreasing time allocation since 2000 when figures were higher with an average of 121 min in primary schools and 117 min in secondary schools [8] and this despite international advocacy supported by an overwhelming medical, scientific, economic, social and cultural case for adequately timetabled PE programmes and plans in some countries to introduce an entitlement of at least 120 min per week.

Physical education curriculum issues

An issue which is becoming significant in an increasing number of countries is that of the relevance to the outside-school world and quality of PE curricula. Within the context of educational reforms, associated philosophical and pedagogical changes, and in response to the obesity epidemic and concepts of active lifestyles in lifelong learning contexts, some curricular changes are now occurring in some parts of the region and some shifts in PE curricular aims and themes are evident with signs that the purpose and function are being redefined to accommodate broader lifelong educational outcomes including healthy well-being. Nevertheless, there remains an orientation towards sports-dominated competition- and performance-related activity programmes as seen in the proportion of time devoted to games, track and field athletics and gymnastics, which collectively account for over 70% of PE curriculum content in both primary and secondary schools (Tab. 1). Such orientation runs counter to societal trends outside of school and raises issues surrounding meaning and relevance to young people’s lifestyles as well as quality issues of programmes provided and delivered. What is, however,

Table 1. PE curriculum activity areas

Activity Area	Primary Schools		Secondary Schools	
	Countries %	Curriculum %	Countries %	Curriculum %
Games	97	41	100	42
Gymnastics	97	17	100	13
Dance	80	78	74	5
Swimming	80	7	74	6
Outdoor adventure	71	4	69	7
Track & Field	94	14	100	17
Other	51	9	63	10

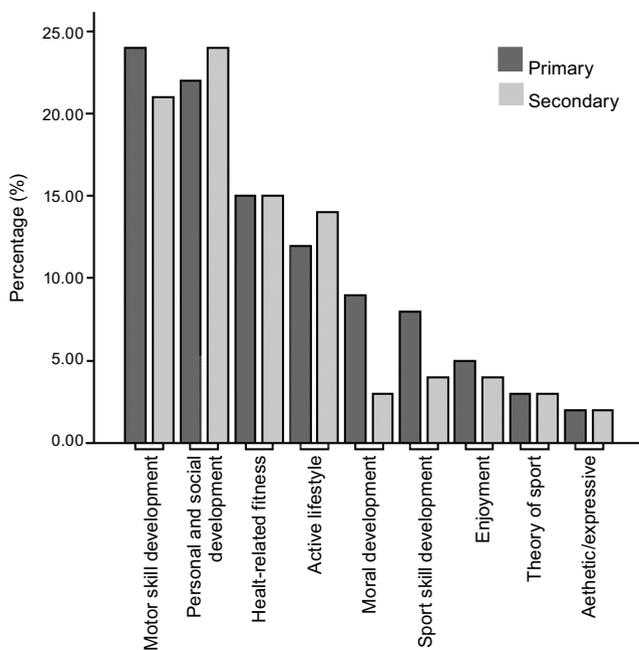


Figure 1. PE curriculum thematic aims

also evident, is increasing attention devoted to quality physical education (QPE) programmes.

From examination of thematic aims of PE curricula, it is possible to discern a number of patterns. These patterns are shown in Fig. 1, which reveals an orientation primarily to the development of motor skills (24% and 21% in primary and secondary schools respectively) and when added to the refinement of sport-specific skills represents a significant component of thematic aims.

The trend towards including broader lifelong educational outcomes is evident in the importance of PE in developing health-related fitness (15% of both primary and secondary schools' curricula) as well as promoting active lifestyles (12% and 14% of primary and secondary schools' PE curricula respectively). Substantial recognition is also apparent in PE's contribution to promoting a pupil's personal and social development (22% and 24% of primary and secondary schools' curricula respectively) and moral (9% and 3% of primary and secondary schools' PE curricula respectively). However,

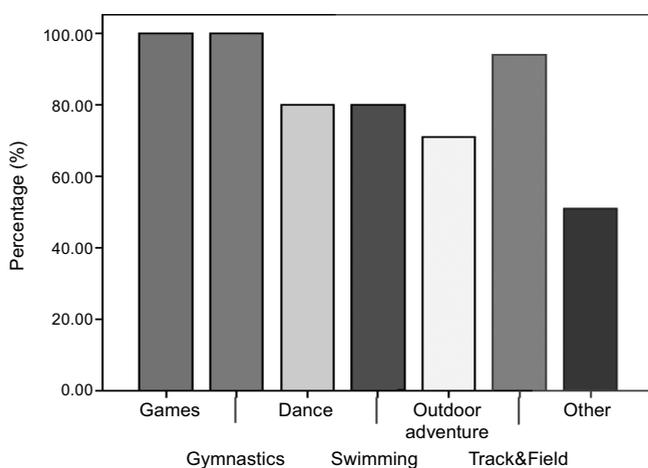


Figure 2. Primary curriculum activities taught across the EU countries

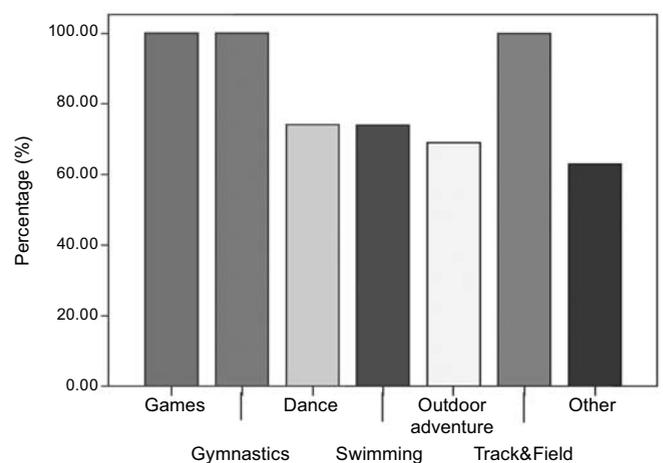


Figure 3. Secondary curriculum activities taught across EU countries

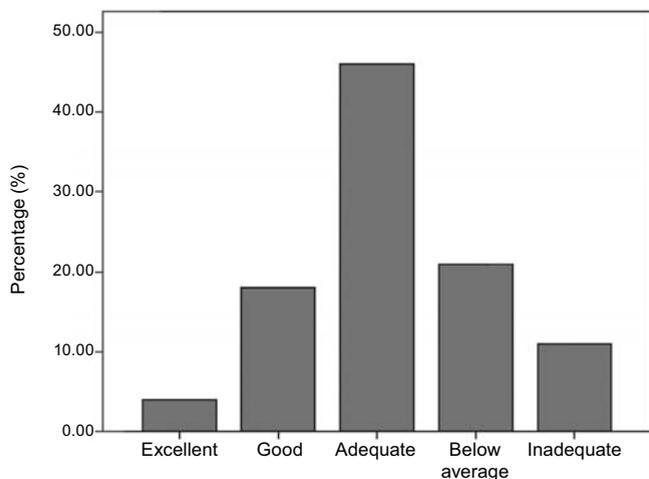


Figure 4. Assessment of the quality of facility provision

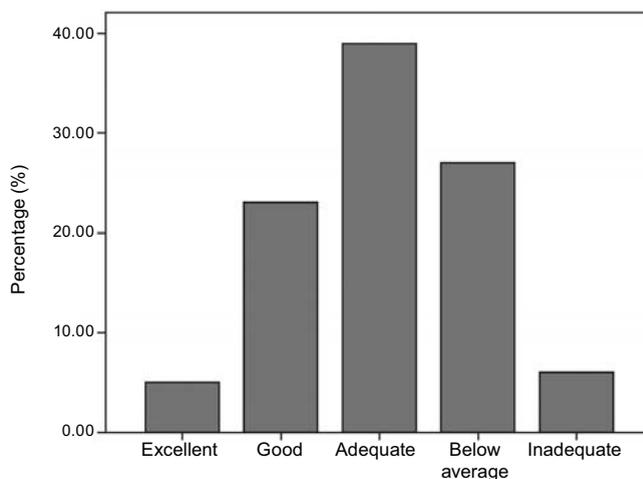


Figure 5. Assessment of the quality of equipment

curricular activity areas in EU countries (see Fig. 2, primary schools, and Fig. 3, secondary schools) reinforce the predisposition to the performance sport discourse mentioned earlier: primary and secondary schools have a predominantly Games (team and individual) orientation followed by Track and Field athletics and Gymnastics. Games and Gymnastics feature in all countries in both primary and secondary schools and they are closely followed by Track and Field athletics in 88% countries (primary schools) and 94% countries (secondary schools).

The proportion of time devoted to each activity area in EU countries is shown in Fig. 2 and 3. This is a situation which is not only seen in the content of curricula but also in structures related to extra-curricular activity and emphasis on school sport.

Illustrative examples underscore the sports discourse emphasis: in Bulgaria, programme documents indicate a broadly based curriculum but in practice PE content covers only basketball and volleyball in secondary schools; in Germany, from analysis of the content of PE lessons, the Sprint Study (2006) reveals a traditional sports discourse, which is also gendered with boys playing football and basketball, doing track and field and German *Turnen*, whilst girls are mainly confronted with *Turnen*, volleyball, basketball and track and field disciplines. This scenario of a discrepancy between what the school offers and what the pupils are looking for regarding sports-related activities is not untypical of the situation in other countries hence, there is little wonder that “drop out” of sport rates continues. For young population groups, the traditional content of PE and/or

sports activity has little relevance to their lifestyle context. Collectively, such “joyless experiences” [32] acquired from unwilling engagement in competitive sport-related PE are a “turn-off” and only serve to increase the “drop-out” rate of participants from school-based and post-school sports-related activity. If PE is to play a valued useful role in the promotion of active lifestyles, it must move beyond interpretations of activity based upon performance criteria: its current frame of reference should be widened. The preservation of PE in its old state is not the way to proceed; it is time to move into the 21st century!

Monitoring of PE

Marked variations are evident in monitoring PE in schools. They vary from regular to irregular or random or not defined. Inspection of PE is a legal and generally practised requirement in around 70% of countries. Countries in which inspections are not undertaken include Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania and Malta. In Cyprus, Italy and Poland there are intimations of a difference between official and actual implementation realities. In Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal and Slovakia, inspections are not a legal requirement. Monitoring is variously undertaken by national inspectors (50%), regional inspectors (25%), local inspectors (8%), school head teachers (8%), or combinations of two or more of these groups (9%). Frequency of monitoring varies from every 6 months to beyond every 5 years with a main cluster (31%) of annual monitoring. The scope of monitoring embraces a range of aspects

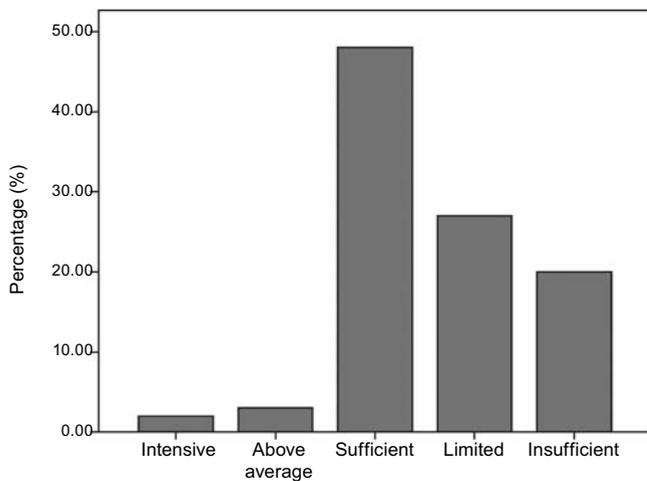


Figure 6. Assessment of the quantity of facility provision

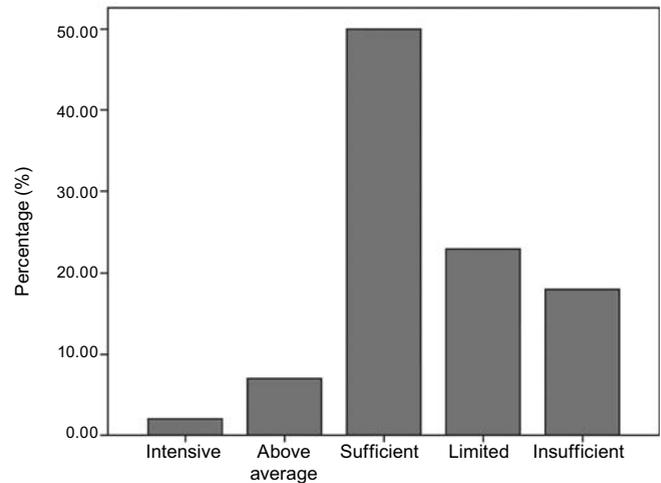


Figure 7. Assessment of the quantity of equipment provision

but predominantly the extent of curriculum implementation and quality of teaching, quality control and/or advisory guidance are given as the reasons for monitoring in over 90% of countries where this occurs.

Resources

Facilities and equipment

A pervasive feature of concern is related to quality and quantity of provision of facilities and equipment because levels of provision can detrimentally affect quality of physical education programmes. Around one-third of countries indicate below average/inadequate quality of facility (Fig. 4) and equipment provision (Fig. 5).

Additionally, nearly half of countries have limited/insufficient quantity of facilities (Fig. 6) and two-fifths of countries have limited/insufficient quantity of equipment (Fig. 7).

There is a marked geopolitical differentiation in quality and quantity of facilities and equipment in Europe. In the more economically prosperous northern and western European countries, quality and quantity of facilities and equipment are regarded as at least adequate and in some instances excellent; in central and eastern European countries inadequacies/insufficiencies in both quality and quantity of facilities and equipment are prevalent. Hence, there is an east-west European divide with central and eastern European countries generally far less well endowed with facilities and equipment, perhaps typically represented in a Serbia-Montenegro

government official's observation that "...Quality of facilities is below average and quantity of equipment is limited". Transcending this east-west divide is the view that in 67% of countries, there are problems of low levels of maintenance of existing PE sites and whilst there are higher expectations of levels and standards of facilities and equipment in more economically developed countries, even here there are indicators of inadequacies and shortages in facilities and equipment as one PE teacher in otherwise generally well resourced England affirms: "...Quantity and quality of EQUIPMENT is very poor. ... Damaged equipment is used frequently; quality and quantity of facilities is very poor; and facilities inadequate or poorly maintained".

PE teaching personnel

Across the region, the quality of teacher preparation for PE is variable and there are examples which suggest lack of commitment to teaching as well as pedagogical and didactical inadequacies in some countries. As previous research [see 9] has also shown, generally throughout Europe, PE teaching degree and diploma qualifications are acquired at universities, pedagogical institutes, national sports academies or specialist PE/Sport institutes. For primary school teaching, qualifications tend to be acquired at pedagogical institutes and or universities, whilst for secondary school teaching, qualifications are predominantly acquired at university level institutions, including specialist Academies and Faculties. In approximately half of the countries, PE/sport teacher graduates are qualified to teach a second

subject at least. A common scenario (94% of countries) is qualified “specialist” PE teachers at secondary level, (though some German Länder and Hungary indicate that, in practice, some generalists are also employed to deliver PE) and “generalist” teachers at primary/elementary level (85%); some countries (67%) do have specialist physical educators in elementary (primary) schools, but the variation is wide and there are marked intra-regional differences. In some countries, the generalist teacher in primary schools is often inadequately or inappropriately prepared to teach PE, especially as minimal hours may be allocated for PE teaching initial training (in some higher education institutions in England, for example, this can be as low as 8–10 contact hours). The former point is well illustrated in Germany by the Sprint Study [14]: in order to teach PE in schools, the successful completion of a PETE programme and the associated qualified teacher status (according to the specific type of school) are prerequisites for all teachers; the reality in schools reveals a different picture because whilst 80% of all state qualified teachers who teach PE lessons have a PE subject degree qualification, every fifth teacher has no formal qualification in the subject; with regard to different school types, the problem is more salient in primary schools (*Grundschule*), where 49% of the teachers delivering the PE curriculum have no specific education in PE subject matter; in the different branches of the secondary school, the figures of formally unqualified teachers decrease considerably – *Hauptschule* (secondary general schools) 30%, *Realschule* (secondary modern schools) 11%, and *Gymnasium* (grammar schools) 2–3% [14].

In 63% of EU countries, there are opportunities for in-service training (INSET)/continuing professional development (CPD) but there are substantial variations in frequency of provision, which ranges from free choice through nothing specifically designated, every year, every two years, every three years to every five years. Duration of INSET/CPD also reveals differences in practice between countries: those with annual training range from 12 to 50 hours, from 3 to 25 days; biennial and triennial training courses of 4 weeks; and five years range from 15 days to 3 weeks or 100 hours over the five year period. Annual INSET/CPD is indicated in 50% of countries, every 2 years in 15% of countries and greater than two years in 35% of countries. No opportunities or strictly limited provision are evident in Bulgaria, **Cyprus**, **Czech Republic**, Finland, **France**, **Germany**, **Italy**, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, **Neth-**

erlands, **Poland**, **Romania**, **Sweden**)³. In some countries, inadequate promotional infrastructure and finance can inhibit participation in INSET/CPD; a Swedish physical educator reports “...Often I have to find in-service training myself and I have also often to pay for it with my own money”.

On a more positive note, there have been significant developments in CPD in the form of European Master’s programmes in Physical Education and Adaptive Physical Activity and in national professional development programmes such as in England. CPD has a key role raising and/or enhancing educational practices and standards and yet, related data presented above show that in some European States CPD can be irregular and unstructured and in some cases may not even be available or accessible and this despite the need for professional development as a continuous process throughout a teacher’s professional career. In primary/elementary schools in particular, where generalist practitioners are often responsible for PE teaching, this represents a potential problem. In such contexts, CPD is not only essential but it also needs to be delivered with appropriate expertise and with up-to-date content that is relevant to practice.

In the light of AEHESIS⁴ PE Area recommendations pertaining to CPD, European-wide developmental changes linked with democratisation processes, political including intergovernmental agencies’ (Council of Europe 2002/2003 and European Parliament 2006/2007) interventions, increasingly widespread recognition of CPD need and value for career development especially since the Bologna Declaration, and emergence of various pathway routes to qualification (linked with employability), an issue in terms of future directions within CPD is consideration of revisiting the European PE Master’s Programme.

³ **Emboldened** text denotes those countries where there is a discrepancy between survey responses.

⁴ As part of the post-Bologna process in harmonising Higher Education provision, an ERASMUS Thematic Network project was initiated in October 2003 to “Align a European Higher Education Structure in Sport Science” (the AEHESIS Project). Amongst other initial objectives, the PE sector’s overarching aim “having in mind the necessity of enhancing the process of recognition and European integration of qualifications” was to formulate a model curriculum for Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE), which could have applicability across higher education institutions in Europe involved with preparation of teachers and hence, represent a degree of harmonisation within the context of the intention and spirit of the Bologna Agreement.

Financial issues

With increasing demands by a range of social institutions and services for financial support, prioritisation of government financial resource investment occurs and PE with its initial high capital costs of facilities and recurrent maintenance, apparatus and equipment costs can be an expensive enterprise. In European countries, funding for school PE/sport provision emanates from several sources: national government; regional/provincial/local government only; joint national and regional/local government; joint national, regional/local government and other mainly private/commercial sectors.

The complexities of funding in education with national budgets and devolvement variously to regional, local and even individual schools together with the added problems of disaggregating amounts invested in, or expended on, PE and school sport render it difficult to provide any definitive information on the financial resources. However, from information derived from survey-generated data and supported by the literature [12, 13], it is possible to report on some aspects of PE funding for school PE and sport⁵. Over half of European countries indicate reductions in financial support for PE in recent years. Reasons given for this situation include low status in relation to other subjects with minimal significance not worthy of support, diversion of financial resources to other subjects and areas of the school, expensive maintenance, low societal value in personal and national development and perceived lack of academic value of the subject, often linking this to the belief that the subject is just another “play time” or recreational experience. Such reductions have had, and continue to have, consequential impacts on school PE and sport.

As already intimated in an earlier section, inadequate funding for facilities, equipment and their maintenance and teaching materials is widespread in central, eastern and southern Europe (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia): there is a shortfall of 600 gymnasias halls and facilities generally are not up to health standards’ requirements in Hungary, where under-funding of extra-curricular activities is also evident. In the Czech Republic, it is alleged that proclaimed objectives cannot be fulfilled because of absence of funds, extra

activities have ceased and the third lesson usually is not delivered because of lack of finance [33]. In Estonia “one of the main problems is that the equipment is very expensive. Also, most of the facilities require reconstruction”. In Lithuania, (despite Article 38 of the Sports Law), PE “is not sufficiently financed” and is reflected in multi-class use of facilities (60–90 pupils) as well as in a shortfall for teachers’ salaries (low PE teachers’ salaries are reported in Poland and Romania). In Poland, many extra-curricular lessons are cancelled because of lack of money to finance teachers/coaches; finance for PE is a low regional/local authority priority and impacts negatively on facility provision (there is no PE audit) – in 1999, 80% gymnasias did not conform to regulations; “lack of financial resources has also led to retreat from the Physical Culture and Sport Statute goal of 225 min by 2000” [34]. In Slovakia there are “problems with lack of finances for maintenance of sports facilities and for reconstruction and acquisition of new sports materials. There are schools existing also without sufficient sports facilities... there is a decrease of financial areas to PE; leave of PE teachers into other, better paid areas; change of structure of pupils’ interest”.

Even in more economically developed western and northern EU countries, there is teacher-based anecdotal evidence to suggest deficiencies in provision due to inadequate or under-funding. Representative illustrations include:

- Austria
 - equipment shortfalls: “There is a very low budget, the financial support for PE is limited; there are big problems to buy new equipment”; “This school has a low budget – therefore, the financial support for PE is very limited; we annually collect money from students to keep our equipment up-to-date”
- Belgium (Flanders)
 - In Flanders “financial support for physical education is minimal”; “financial provision is less than for other subjects (e.g. computer classes)”
 - In Wallonia “financial support given to PE in comparison to other subjects is very poor” and “there is a lack of financial means allocated to sport in schools”
- Finland
 - “a decrease in educational resources (has) led to larger PE classes and one impact of financial constraints has been reduction of PE in lower schools from 3 to 2.5 lessons per week”

⁵ Quotations in this section on *Financial Issues* have been drawn from PE practitioners and academic experts in the domain of PE in Europe. In the interests of confidentiality, names of sources have been withheld.

- Ireland
 - facilities and teachers: “...Facility provision and teachers employment are adversely affected by financial constraints. Many schools have been built with no indoor PE facilities”
- Italy
 - financial support: recurrent financial support is reported as less in PE in comparison with other subjects
- Luxembourg
 - financial support: “financial support to PE (is seen as) poor supply compared to other subjects”
- Spain
 - financial support: “financial support is inadequate; PE is a mistreated subject compared with others – it received below average money”

The considerable financial investment of maintaining, or gaining access to, swimming facilities exposes this important component of the PE curriculum to cancellation of lessons or even omission from curricula in many countries. Two examples will suffice to illustrate the point: in Denmark, swimming was a compulsory subject for all pupils, now “... Many communities tend unfortunately to save the money. Today only 2/3 of all pupils get adequate swimming lessons” (Swedish PE teacher); and in the Netherlands, swimming was removed from the curriculum because of “financial reasons” (Dutch PE teacher).

As the above overview demonstrates, financial considerations have had a number of impacts on school PE/sport in Europe: failure to refurbish/reconstruct/replace/maintain (out)dated and/or provide new facilities; shortages of equipment; inadequately trained teachers; employment of lower salaried unqualified teaching personnel; exit of physical educators to better paid jobs; reductions in numbers of PE lessons, timetable allocation and extra-curricular sports activities; omissions of curriculum activity areas and large class sizes. Part resolution of inadequacies in facilities and equipment and maintenance lies with wider community sharing of resources through multi-purpose and use provision with schools seen as one community entity in a wider community setting. Such provision implies shared cross-sector funding including operational and management costs.

The physical education environment

Within the PE environment, teacher networks exist at schools’ level in most countries; municipal, region/

county and national levels networks exist in around 70% of countries; less widespread are networks of PE/sport teachers, sports clubs and other outside school community providers. This is a situation which can be summarised by apparent inadequate links between school PE and the sports communities in some countries and regular co-operation in others. Voluntary links between school PE and sport and wider community physical activity are reported in only around 36% of countries and, in total, direct school-community links are indicated in only 51% of countries. There are suggestions that many children are not made aware of the multifarious pathways to out-of-school and beyond school physical activity opportunities. Nevertheless, varied and differentiated models linking school activity with out-of-school activity do exist throughout Europe, examples of which are: schools sport federations etc. in France; extra-curricular and out-of-school sport in the Czech Republic; integrated school-community and sport club action projects in Sweden; PE, School Sport, Club Links (PESSCL) in England, where the focus is on links between school PE and sport in the wider community; and the “one stop shop”; “Sport Service Punt” scheme involving vested interest partners from public, voluntary and education sectors in the Netherlands, which provides an exemplar of a coherently implemented multi-sector collaborative co-operation programme.

The school is the principal agent for initiation into organized general public sport and is in a prime position to eradicate excesses (drugs, aggression, violence, money etc.) evident in the sporting spectacle. This feature has particular resonance in the light of PE in schools no longer remaining a “stand alone” option in the resolution of the healthy well-being, active lifelong engagement in physical and sports-related activity concerns of this early part of the 21st century. Professionals and the large-scale European volunteer numbers alike are necessary to the process of facilitating inclusive participation. With more than 70 million members of sports associations, the voluntary-based “Sport for All” movement is one of Europe’s largest social movements. It is served by millions of volunteers, who represent the main resource of the movement and as national studies [see 13] show, they form the “backbone” of sport associations and clubs with around 10% of the 70 million members serving as volunteer coaches, association leaders, assistants etc. In Germany, for example, where 27 million people are members of sports clubs some 2.7 million serve as volunteers in over 90.000 sports clubs.

Volunteerism in sport varies from country to country. Highest levels of volunteerism tend to be located in northern Europe and lowest levels in southern Europe [35].

Conclusions

Arguably, the data provide a distorted continental regional and individual national picture of PE in schools, particularly where questionnaire responses are based on policy principles and as such may mask the truth about actual practice. However, what the various surveys and literature review do reveal are congruent features in several areas of school PE policy and undoubtedly in some specific areas of practice. It is clear that in some countries there have been positive developments, which have contributed to an improved situation in the status of school PE, and there are instances of favourably implemented programmes and good practices. Equally there is evidence to generate sustained considerable disquiet about the situation. Thus, the review of the current situation of PE in Europe is marked by “mixed messages” with indicators of stabilization in some countries juxtaposed between positive, effective policy initiatives in other countries and reticence or little political will to act and continuing concerns in others. Many governments have committed themselves through legislation to making provision for PE but they have been (or are being) slow in translating this into action. The gap between policy and practice intimated by the Council of Europe Deputy Secretary General [36] in September 2002 in her comment “the crux of the issue is that there is too much of a gap between the promise and the reality” (p. 2) remains. The “gap” is seen in the rhetoric of official documentation on principles, policies and aims and actual implementation into practice, which exposes a range of deficiencies in PE in schools in Europe. There are considerable inadequacies in facility and equipment supply frequently associated with under-funding, especially in economically underdeveloped and developing countries and regions at a time of concern over falling fitness standards of young people, increased levels of obesity and related health issues and continuing youth dropout rates from physical/sporting activity engagement. There is evidence of general under-funding of PE/school sport as well as the low remuneration of PE/sport teachers in some countries. There is disquiet about teacher supply and quality: insufficiency and inadequacy of appropriately trained and

qualified PE teachers are widely evident. Curriculum time allocation is a concern in some countries and the overall reduction in average time allocation for school PE curricula in both primary and secondary schools across Europe is a worrying trend.

The amount of curriculum time allocation represents an important issue for the delivery of quality PE. There is considerable scientific evidence to suggest that at least 60 min daily moderate to vigorous physical activity is necessary to sustain a healthy active lifestyle. EUPEA recommends daily PE in the early years of schooling (elementary grades, up to 11 or 12 years of age and 3 hours (180 min) per week in post-elementary (secondary/high schools) grades. In the United States, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) recommends a minimum of 150 min per week for physical education in elementary schools and 225 min per week for middle and high school students. *Recommendations* by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on 30 April 2003 included a significant reference to physical education time allocation: an agreement to “move towards a compulsory legal minimum of 180 min weekly, in three periods, with schools endeavouring to go beyond this minimum where this is possible” [10] and a call for one hour of daily physical activity in or out-of-school settings.

There are notable features concerning differential variations between central and eastern European EU Member states and the “older” 15 Member States. The “east-west divide” highlighted in references to facilities and equipment extends beyond this resource issue to embrace post-2000 PE curriculum time allocation reductions and provision for pupils with disabilities. Compared with the older, “western” Member States (over two thirds report stabilisation), the level of stabilisation of curriculum time allocation (2000–2006) is less in “newer” central and eastern EU Member States and since 2000, PE time allocation has been reduced more extensively in central and eastern EU States than in counterpart “western” EU States. Similarly in the domain of disability, survey data indicate that there are fewer opportunities (only 12% of countries) to “do” PE and for inclusion in “Mainstream” schools in central and eastern EU countries than in other parts of Europe. Moreover in central and eastern Europe inclusion in “normal” PE lessons is less than the overall EU average (32% as opposed to 45%). Also, facility provision for pupils with disabilities is a more acute problem in central and eastern Europe (60% of countries report defi-

ciencies, whereas only 25% report deficiencies in western Europe). Conversely, lack of staff expertise is perceived to be greater in western Europe than in eastern European countries.

Countries, via the relevant agency authorities, should identify existing areas of inadequacies and should strive to develop a basic needs model in which physical education activity has an essential presence and is integrated with educational policies supported by governmental and non-governmental agencies working co-operatively in partnership(s). Satisfaction of these basic needs requires high quality conceptually and contextually adjusted PE curricular programmes, provision of equipment and basic facilities, safe environments and appropriately qualified/experienced personnel, who have the necessary relevant knowledge, skills and general and specific competences according to the level and stage of involvement together with opportunities for enrichment through continuing professional development.

As a school's role extends to encouraging young people to continue participation in physical activity, through the provision of links and co-ordinated opportunities for all young people at all levels and by developing partnerships with the wider community to extend and improve the opportunities available for them to remain physically active, there is a need for wider **community-based partnerships**, for which PE should be seen as the cornerstone of systematic physical activity promotion in schools and recognised as the foundation base of the inclusive participation pyramid. Participation Pathway Partnerships is a key term for future directions in the best interests of PE and sporting, (particularly recreational) activity in and out of schools. If children are to be moved from "play stations" to "play-grounds" [37], bridges and pathways to community provision need to be constructed, especially to stimulate young people to participate in physical activity during their leisure time. The post-school gap is as much in the system as in participation, for many children are not made aware of, and how to negotiate, the multifarious pathways to opportunities. Physical educators are strategically well placed to reach the widest range of young people with positive experiences in, and messages about, participation in physical activity. They have key roles as facilitators and intermediaries between the school and wider local communities. They should identify and develop pathways for young people to continue participating in physical activity after and outside school and ensure that information is available

to young people within school on the opportunities available in the local community. However, it is naïve to assume that the PE professional can take on and fulfil all of these responsibilities. Support, particularly of the human resource kind, is fundamental to the realisation of such ideals. It can be achieved through collaborative, co-operative partnership approaches involving other professionals and committed, dedicated and properly mentored individual and group volunteer enthusiasts.

With the increase in rates of inactivity and associated risk factors of overweight, obesity and personal health amongst children of school age and the limited time allocations to school PE and sport, the sport movement will represent a significant supplementary (and complementary) domain of efforts to stimulate engagement of this target group of young people in physical and sport-related activity across Europe. International non-governmental agencies such as the International Sport and Culture Association (ISCA) and the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO) as well as national and local sports bodies can (and should be encouraged to) contribute to the process of motivation of young people to regularly participate in recreational sport and so adopt physically active lifestyles. Such voluntary sector organisations have important roles in assisting in the transition from school to community-based sport throughout the region [35]. A cause of some concern is that many volunteers lack formal training to work with young people and in a world of rising levels of child abuse as well as the propensity of some volunteers to inculcate perceived and actual negative attitudinal and behavioural norms and values, this is an issue to be addressed. Indeed, the ENGSO incorporated recommendations pertinent to volunteer involvement in its 1998 *Guidelines for Children and Youth Sport* [38]. Nevertheless, volunteers can bring knowledge, skills, commitment and dedication as a free time resource and there is a need to have a balanced view of their work by key actors and appropriate frameworks to work within, not least of which might be adherence to Codes as Ethics, such as those proposed by the European Physical Education Association in 2002. EUPEA's *Code of Ethics and Good Practice Guide* [39] has adopted the principles contained in the Council of Europe's Code of Sports Ethics. The Code offers a framework of guidelines and is intended for use in conjunction with similar guides on ethics produced by governments, education authorities and recognised national governing bodies of sport. It outlines some of the

key issues that need to be addressed in school PE and sport by teachers and helpers (volunteers), who need to operate within an accepted ethical framework of good practice, which guides the individual. Issues include: integrity and respect in relationships, various forms of child abuse and protection there from, bullying, anti-social behaviours, equality and inclusion, stress and burn-out, fair play and a balanced approach to winning, stress and burn-out, fun and enjoyment.

There is a narrow and unjustifiable conception of the role of PE merely to provide experiences, which serve to reinforce achievement-orientated competition performance sport, thus limiting participatory options rather than expanding horizons. Also of some concern are levels of curriculum implementation and monitoring and large class sizes. The falling fitness standards and high youth dropout rates from physical/sporting activity engagement are exacerbated in some countries by insufficient and/or inadequate school-community co-ordination and problems of communication. Physical education delivery will benefit from re-orientation towards placing more responsibility on students for their learning with the managerial responsibility of the teacher progressively transferred to pupils. The enhanced pupil involvement generated by this process will assist in facilitation of opportunities for individual meaningful and socially relevant experiences [40]. Reflective practitioners will translate into reflective students! Initial and in-service training/further professional development should properly address these pedagogical developments. This is particularly important in primary/elementary schools, preparation for which is often generalist rather than specialist.

Finally, it is imperative that **monitoring of developments in physical education** across the world be maintained. The Council of Europe, UNESCO and the WHO have called for monitoring systems to be put into place to regularly review the situation of physical education in each country. The Council of Europe [10] referred to the introduction of provision for a pan-European survey on physical education policies and practices every five years as a priority! The European Parliament's entry into the PE arena with its *Current Situation and Prospects for Physical Education in the European Union* Study is one example of the monitoring process in action and importantly provides an opportunity to assist in converting "Promises" into "Reality" and so helps in the process of surmounting threats to a sustained safe future for physical education in schools. Otherwise with

the Council of Europe Deputy Secretary General's intimation of a gap between "promise" and "reality", there is a real danger that the well intentioned initiatives will remain more "promise" than "reality" in too many countries in Europe and indeed across the world.

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