The 1st European Sport & Physical Exercise Event for Mental Health, which took place from September 21 to September 23, in Athens, Greece, clearly demonstrates its initial aim: the positive influence of sports and physical exercise to mental health. The strongest and undoubted proof is the satisfaction in participants’ smiling faces.

For 3 days, volunteers, coaches, recipients of mental health services, staff and participants from general public play together and share their experiences, gaining finally a sense of emotional fulfillment through sports and physical exercise, dance and artistic activities.

K.S.D.E.O. EDRA (www.edra-coop.gr), which organized the 1st European Sport & Physical Exercise Event for Mental Health, having distinguished itself in its efforts to develop a varied program with numerous activities for attracting participants and visitors, gave the opportunity to everyone -from Greece and other European countries- to play in teams, share their experiences, have fun, make new friends and get the fondest memories.

We fired up by the Greek dances, pumped up by Zumba, Aerobics and Tumbao, participated in track events (sprints, long jump, etc), played basketball games, scored goals, ran and cycled into the leafy paths of the park, introduced ourselves into the secrets of Capoeira, relaxed through Yoga and Tai Chi.

The presence of the Hellenic Football Federation was really strong, as they co-organized the finals at football tournament and offered balls and football shirts of the National Football Team of Greece to the winners. The contribution of the Hellenic Cycling Federation to the cycling race into the Pedion Areos Park, is also noteworthy.

As for the safety and first -aid- services, we should not miss to mention the important contribution of the Volunteers Samaritans, Rescuers and Lifeguards Corp of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Greece, as well as Interamerican Insurance Company, who offered an ambulance for the event.

The EVENTS project is co-funded by the European Commission in the framework of the ERASMUS+ / Sport program and aims to develop a strong connection between the Sport and Physical Activity with the Mental Health. Its main action, the 1st European Mental Health Event, is granted the Patronage of the President of the European Parliament, Antonio Tajani and runs under the auspices of the General Secretary of Sports, Hellenic Football Federation, Hellenic Cycling Federation and the support of the Ministry of Health, the Municipality of Galatsi and Attica Region. The Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Science offers the scientific support.
The institutional framework for the design of the 1st European Sport & Physical Exercise Event consists of the following:

- European Pillar of Social Rights (2017)
- European Commission’s Communication “Developing the European Dimension in Sport”
- “European Framework for Action on Mental Health and Wellbeing”
- “European Mental Health Action Plan 2013-2020”
- WHO-Europe-Mental-Health-Action-Plan-2013-2020
- “Athens Declaration on the Mental Health Consequences of Crises and Disasters”
- Mental Health and Chronic Physical Illnesses - The need for continued and integrated care, World Federation for Mental Health, 2010
- European Disability Strategy (2010-2020)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Mental Health Declaration of Human Rights
- The Swedish PAP Best European Practice

Moreover, numerous researches and essays on the contribution of physical exercise in Mental Health worldwide have also been taken into consideration.

The main reasons for our specialized perspective are the following:

1. A mental disorder isn’t necessarily a disability, as a mental patient may be fully functional in the broader context of social life.
2. A mental disorder is often temporary.
3. The idea of Prevention seems that it has not been applied as a term in cases such as the ones mentioned above, whereas it plays a significant role in the field of Mental Health.
4. We do believe that, as mental disorders are usually “less obvious” than, for instance, disability cases, the need of taking action against their stigma and discrimination, as well as empowering – at the same time– people, who suffer from mental illnesses, to fight for their rights, is of high importance and emergency.

Participants from 14 countries and 23 cities

Breaking stereotypes, quite often of a corporatism perspective, the 1st European Sport and Physical Exercise Event for Mental Health addressed to all kind of typical mental disorders: those related to drug addictions as well as neurodegenerative diseases, as for instance Alzheimer.

Last but not least, it is of high importance to mention that the 1st European Sport and Physical Exercise Event for Mental Health provided a common ground of coexistence and collaboration among the official sector through units of the National Health Systems, third sector’s entities, Local Authorities, Educational institutions and Sport organisations including of course all kind of active involvement of the community. Health is a common affair for all.
“Panoramic” view of the 1st European Sport & Physical Exercise Event for Mental Health in Athens

384 participants from Mental Health Organisations besides the general public 22 activities

17 coaches 60 volunteers


EUROPEAN ORGANISATIONS FUNDACION INTRAS (SPAIN) | GOLBASI SPORIUM SPOR KULUBU VE DERNEGI (TURKEY) | ASOCIACION OLIMPIAS (LITHUANIA) | OZARA ZAVID MARIBOR (SLOVENIA) | SSOI RIJEKA (CROATIA) | ANARP (PORTUGAL) | FIRST FORTNIGHT (IRELAND) | MERSEYSIDE EXPANDING HORIZON (UK) | FOKUS PRAHA (CZECH REPUBLIC) | COOS MARCHE (ITALY) | BAVARIAN RED CROSS (GERMANY) | UNAFAM (FRANCE) | NADJA CENTRE FOUNDATION (BULGARY) | CESIE (ITALY)

Let’s be active and all together make true the wish of Antonio Tajani, so the 1st European Sport & Physical Exercise Event for Mental Health becomes “a start of a wonderful tradition”.
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President of K.S.D.E.O. EDRA
Klimentini Diakomanoli
Head of Press
at the European Commission
Representation in Greece
Paraskevi Theofilou
Head of General Department of Mental Health Services, Ministry of Health
George Markopoulos
Mayor
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Nikos Andreopoulous  
Project Manager of the EVENTS project, Secretary General of ENALMH
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Vladimiro Petsas
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