The last ten years have seen important political, economic and socio-cultural changes not only in Europe but all over the world. These developments have had a great effect on work and leisure, and have also influenced sport and the living conditions of individuals generally. Ten years after the great political changes in Europe which marked the end of the Cold War and the partition of Germany as well as the beginning of economic and political reforms in Eastern Europe it is now time to make a first appraisal of the changes that have taken place in the field of sport and to reflect generally on the interactions between developments in sport on the one hand and social changes on the other.

The contributions of the first part of this volume describe and analyse political, cultural and social changes in sport as well as their causes and effects in different epochs and regions, from China to Portugal and from Finland to Germany. The topics range from women’s sport and physical education at schools to workers’ sports. Sport has always played a particularly important role in the production and demonstration of national identity. This is illustrated using the example of “lieux de mémoire”, which can be places but may also be sporting activities like a journey across a continent by car.

In several contributions the economic aspects of sporting activities are examined and the reciprocal influence of economics and sport analysed. Here it becomes clear that nature sports, too – or even nature sports especially – are subject to the rules of the market as well as objects of marketing. A major focus of the contributions in this volume, however, is on the political and economic changes of the past decade and their effects on the sport system as a whole as well as on the conditions in which sporting activities take place in Eastern Europe. It can be clearly demonstrated that the price for „liberation“ from political pressures has been the loss of financial resources.

A further focus is on the „special case“ of East Germany. Here, the authors describe the sport system and the mechanisms which contributed to its functioning as well as the reality experienced in different sports and at different performance levels. Several contributions are devoted the development of sport in the period after 1989.