

Chapter 8

Netherlands: Sports Clubs at the Heart of Society and Sports Policy



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Abstract Sports clubs in the Netherlands have an important societal position. They play a role in the everyday life of many Dutch people, and they are increasingly asked to take up roles in public health promotion and societal integration. Given their characteristics, it is not surprising that sports clubs are ascribed these roles in policies. On average, Dutch sports clubs have a relative large organisational capacity, because they have relatively large numbers of members and volunteers and they often possess their own sports facilities. These traits make them interesting potential partners for national and local policy-makers from different policy domains. Sports clubs also ascribe this societal position and role as policy partner to themselves. However, this chapter also shows that Dutch sports clubs are still mainly focused on organising their core sports activities, which is challenging enough for many clubs. Policy initiatives aimed at strengthening sports clubs could help to enrich their societal functions. In addition, this chapter illustrates that clubs have difficulty to get their members active in democratic decision-making and volunteering. New ways of designing the volunteering positions are needed to maintain the clubs' strengths.

8.1 Sports Policy and Historical Context

With a quantity of 23,870 (Nederlands Olympisch Comité * Nederlandse Sport Federatie [NOC*NSF] 2018), sports clubs are, and always have been, the core of sports activity in the Netherlands. From the beginning, at the end of the nineteenth century, sports clubs were mainly run by the elite and could not yet count on

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governmental contributions. Sports clubs had become networks in which like-minded people connected, such as in the context of religious and/or political beliefs. After World War II, the local governments wanted sports to become a more democratic phenomenon and demanded sports clubs to abolish the balloting committees in order to receive a subsidy (Stokvis 2010). Everybody who wanted to become a member should have the opportunity to do so. Since the 1960s and 1970s, the expectations towards sports clubs with regard to their functions for society increased. Sports clubs were urged to offer more services, for example, in playing a role in the integration of ethnic minorities into society and for health promotion (Van der Werff et al. 2015). Furthermore, traditional bonds, mainly by religion, that initiated the establishment of different sports clubs in municipalities lost a great part of their social meaning and as a result sports clubs merged. It is also from this period onwards that sports clubs are no longer the only context of sports participation. As a result of the individualisation and health orientation, people started to participate in sports outside of sports club. In the last decades, the growth in sports participation in the Netherlands is mostly related to sports participation in fitness centres, informal groups, or alone (Hoekman and Breedveld 2013). Despite these processes of individualisation, participation in voluntary work remains high in the Netherlands, also with regard to voluntary work related to sports (European Commission 2018). Under the income law, volunteers working for sports clubs can receive compensations up to an amount of EUR 1700 per year.

Based on the number of sports clubs in the Netherlands, they still are the key sports providers, even though the amount and variety of commercial sports providers that offer sports activities is increasing. Sports clubs receive support from the government, related to the provision of public services in communities. So although, on the one hand, sports clubs are characterised by a great independence from the state because of their autonomy, there is, on the other hand, a strong link with the government. The government support comes with conditions, and it seems that these conditions are becoming more demanding over time. The commercial sector is still hardly regarded as a partner for the government in setting up policies and interventions (Hoekman and Breedveld 2013; Hoekman and Reitsma 2018).

With regard to sports policies, the Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sports (VWS) is responsible for the national policies on sports and regularly includes sports clubs in these policies. The national government supports sports primarily because it promotes social values and contributes to key government objectives in the fields of prevention and health, youth policy, education, integration, communities, safety and international policy (Hoekman and Breedveld 2013). Local governments play the most important role for local sport. Ninety per cent of government spending on sports is provided by local municipalities (Van den Dool and Hoekman 2017). Most of the local sports budget is spent on sports facilities, by providing these facilities against reduced fees to sports clubs. Without these reduced fees for sports facilities and additional subsidies of municipalities to sports clubs, sports clubs would have a hard time balancing their budget. Apart from this financial support of the local government, for most sports clubs, the membership fees are the main means of income. In addition, there are revenues from sports activities, catering services, events and subsidies (Lucassen and Van der Roest 2018). In the Netherlands, sports clubs are not

subsidised directly by the national government but through national governing bodies for sports or through municipalities. Sports federations provide support to their clubs, while clubs at the same time transfer money to the federations. As from first January 2019, sports clubs can apply for a subsidy to cover parts of their investments in making their sports facilities more sustainable and accessible.

In light of several regulatory responsibilities which are decentralised to the jurisdiction of municipalities, local sports clubs are recently being stimulated to participate in policy programmes aiming to enhance active living and social cohesion (Hoekman and Reitsma 2018). Municipalities persuade sports clubs to fulfil a wider role within the community in exchange for the reduced fees that sports clubs pay to use the municipal sports facilities (Van der Werff et al. 2015). With this, the responsibilities and tasks of sports clubs have widened over time. Sports clubs are now encouraged to develop and employ activities that do not only benefit their members but also the (local) community. For example, they are invited to play a central role in communities that face demographical transition (Van der Roest et al. 2017a). This is visible in policy on the local level as well as on the national level.

Recently, VWS, the Municipalities and Sports Association (VSG) and the sports federations (NOC*NSF) have joined forces and signed a National Sports Agreement together with social organisations and companies. By supporting providers, by encouraging children to exercise more and more effectively and by making sports facilities more attractive and accessible, the coalition focuses on strengthening sports providers, involving everyone in sports and contributing with sports to a healthy population and unity in society (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn, and Sport [VWS] et al. 2018). Within this National Sports Agreement, sports clubs are often mentioned and positioned as an important policy partner. In addition to the above, the government aims to achieve a positive sports culture by preventing undesirable behaviour at and around the clubs. With the agreement, the coalition wants to remain sports and exercise providers to fulfil their societal obligations. Neighbourhood Sports Coaches are financed by the government on the national and local level who will help people who currently experience barriers to engaging in sports. They will also help sports providers, among which sports clubs, to provide better services to these people. Furthermore, Neighbourhood Sports Coaches will help sports providers strengthen their position through cooperation. This means cooperation within their own branch of sports, cooperation with other sports or cooperation with partners from, for example, education, welfare organisations, childcare and companies. Furthermore, the NOC*NSF, sports federations, sports councils and municipalities pay attention to club support in order to strengthen the sports clubs in the Netherlands.

In general, we conclude that the sports clubs in the Netherlands have a central position in local sports policies and national policy programmes. Although sports clubs are financially supported by the government, they are autonomous. Voluntary sports clubs in the Netherlands profit from high levels of participation in voluntary work and the Dutch culture of working together. Sports clubs are of great value to the Dutch sporting landscape and are central in the sports infrastructure in the Netherlands.

8.2 Structure and Context

The Netherlands is characterised by high sports membership rates. The Eurobarometer shows that the Netherlands ranks at the top with regard to the participation in sports clubs. In the Netherlands, 27% of the population are members of a sports club, compared to the European average of 12% (European Commission 2018). Furthermore, the Netherlands is densely populated with more than 400 inhabitants per square kilometre (PopulationPyramid 2018). Consequently, the membership size of sports clubs is relatively large in the Netherlands. The Netherlands has almost 24,000 sports clubs (NOC*NSF 2018). Almost half have 300 members or more (47%, see Fig. 8.1). In fact compared to other European countries, most large clubs (with more than 500 members) are found in the Netherlands (30%). Only 55% of all Dutch sports clubs can be described as small clubs with a membership number up to 300. Larger sports clubs are more often team sports with own facilities, whereas smaller clubs tend to offer more often individual sports and have more often no facilities of their own (Van Kalmthout and Van Ginneken 2017).

In 2017, the number of sports club memberships (of all sports federations affiliated to NOC*NSF) amounted to 5,194,000 spread over 4,368,000 people (NOC*NSF 2018). In recent years, these numbers are quite stable, despite various programmes to stimulate sports participation. As Fig. 8.2 shows, within the last 5 years, the same amount of sports clubs have experienced an increase in total membership (30%) as clubs that have experienced a decrease (29%). The clubs where the number of members increased are mainly team sports, larger clubs and clubs with own facilities (Van Kalmthout and Van Ginneken 2017).

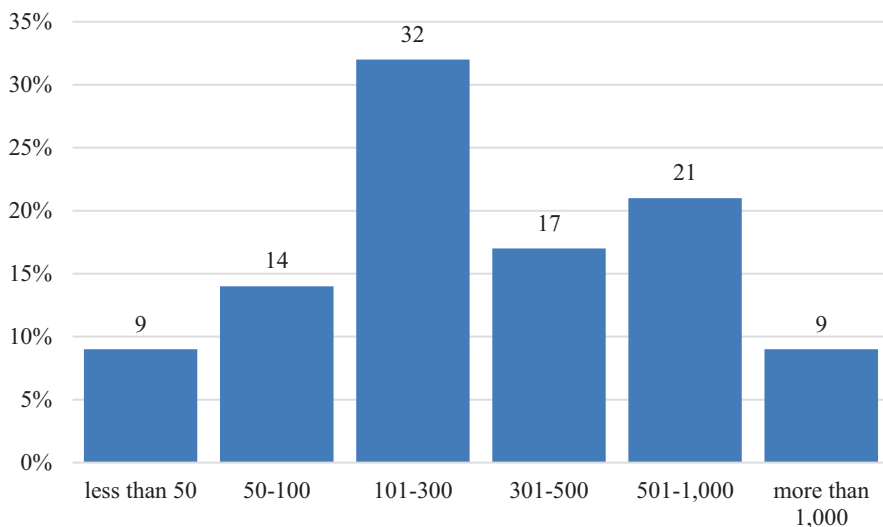


Fig. 8.1 Club size (number of members; club survey, $n = 1015$)

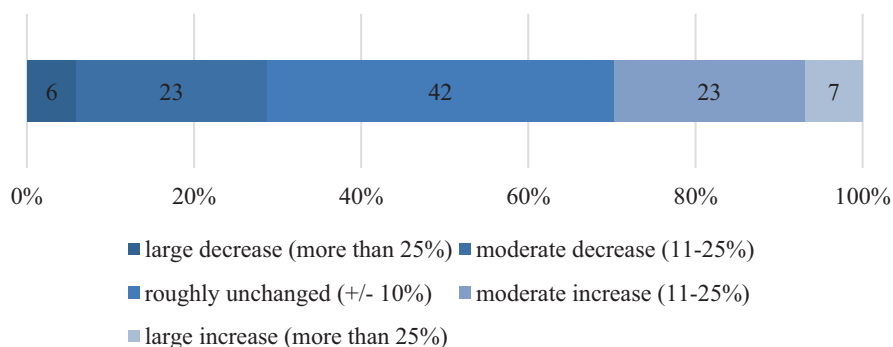


Fig. 8.2 Membership development within the last 5 years (club survey, $n = 1010$)

Table 8.1 Problems with recruitment/retention of members (club survey, $n = 933$)

	No problem (%)	A small problem (%)	A medium problem (%)	A big problem (%)	A very big problem (%)
Problems with recruitment and retention of members	24	25	32	15	3

Although sports clubs form the backbone and stronghold of the sporting landscape in the Netherlands, they are not without concern and experience serious challenges. In the Netherlands, three quarters of all clubs had experienced (somewhat) difficulties with regard to recruitment and retention of members within the last 5 years (see Table 8.1). A third of the Dutch clubs regard the membership development as a threat to the future of the organisation (Van Kalmthout and Van Ginneken 2017). In particular, clubs that already have experienced a decrease in membership in recent years consider problems with recruitment and retention of members as a threat to the survival of the organisation. Five per cent of the board members of clubs expect these problems within 1 or 2 years (Van Kalmthout and Van Ginneken 2017).

Sports clubs in the Netherlands have a long history. Although it is uncertain when the first sports club was founded, it is known that the oldest field sports club in the Netherlands that still exists dates from 1875 (Van der Werff et al. 2015). The first soccer club was founded in 1879. Almost two out of three clubs were founded between 1946 and 1989 (59%; see Fig. 8.3). Only 7% of all Dutch sports clubs are younger clubs that have been founded since the turn of the millennium. Compared to other European countries (with an average of 30%), this percentage is the lowest in the Netherlands.

In the Netherlands, it is not very common for a sports club to offer several types of sports. A vast majority of the sports clubs are single sports clubs, providing only one sport for their members (91%; see Fig. 8.4). Only one out of ten sport clubs is a

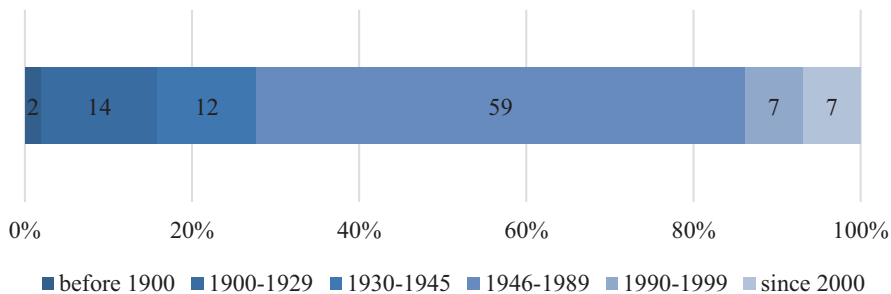


Fig. 8.3 Year of foundation (club survey, $n = 1005$)

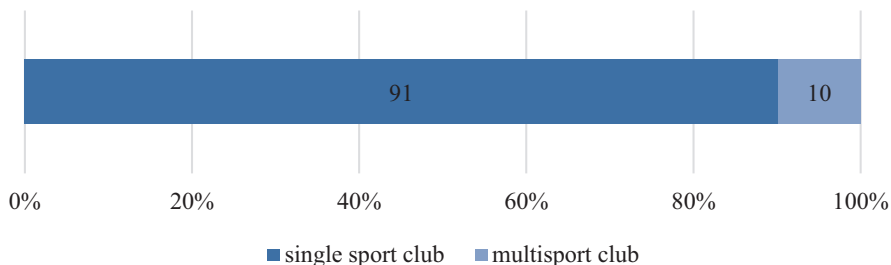


Fig. 8.4 Single or multisport club (club survey, $n = 1001$)

Table 8.2 Most common sports offered by sports clubs (top ten; club survey, $n = 1000$)

Rank	Sport	%
1	Football	25
2	Tennis	13
3	Korfball	6
4	Volleyball	6
5	Track and field	5
6	Swimming	5
7	Boules	4
8	Handball	4
9	Gymnastics (all sorts)	4
10	Basketball	4

so-called multisport club in which two or more sports can be practised. Although Dutch sports clubs are mostly single sports clubs, they have on average more members than sports clubs in other countries. It might be more important in other countries to start a multisport club to reach a proper size to function as a sports club, than is the case in a dense country with a high membership rate, such as the Netherlands.

The most commonly offered sport in the Netherlands is football, which one in four Dutch clubs offer to their members (see Table 8.2). Besides football, a mixture of team and (semi-)individual sports are popular like tennis, korfball and volleyball.

Table 8.3 Ownership of facilities, payment of usage fees and the share of revenues that stem from public funding (club survey, own facilities $n = 933$, public facilities $n = 933$, usage fee for public facilities $n = 511$, share of revenues $n = 895$)

Share of clubs that use own facilities (%)	Share of clubs that use public facilities (%)	Share of clubs that pay usage fee for public facilities (% of clubs that use public facilities)	Share of total revenues in clubs that stem from direct public funding (%)
53	55	96	5

Table 8.4 Problems with the availability of facilities and the financial situation (club survey, availability of facilities $n = 933$, financial situation $n = 933$)

	No problem (%)	A small problem (%)	A medium problem (%)	A big problem (%)	A very big problem (%)
Problems with the availability of sports facilities	60	15	12	9	4
Problems with the financial situation of the club	54	21	17	6	2

With regard to facility usage, the number of Dutch sports clubs making use of club-owned (53%) and publicly owned facilities (55%) is nearly the same (see Table 8.3). The Netherlands has a high proportion of clubs that use own facilities. Nearly all clubs that use public facilities report that they have to pay a usage fee. It is common for municipalities to charge a reduced fee for using public sports facilities. Direct financial support in the form of monetary subsidies is low. Only 5% of the total revenues of sports clubs come from public money. Most sports clubs profit from the indirect subsidies of municipalities to sports clubs by providing the sports facilities for a reduced fee.

Looking at the problems related to the availability of sports facilities, almost two out of three clubs state they have no problems in this area. Thirteen per cent of Dutch sports clubs face substantial problems (see Table 8.4). Especially the clubs without own facilities, often the indoor sports, do not always have access to the sports facilities at the desired hours (Van Kalmthout and Van Ginneken 2017). They often have to deal with other users and/or have to make arrangements with the manager of the sports facility (Van Kalmthout and Van Ginneken 2017). A similar picture can be seen regarding the severity of problems regarding the financial situation of sports clubs. It is especially the outdoor sports and the clubs with their own facilities that have a positive financial result every year and have the ability to pay unforeseen expenses (Van Kalmthout and Van Ginneken 2017).

Sports clubs thrive on volunteers, though half of the Dutch sports clubs now employ paid staff (51%; see Table 8.5). However, the proportion of paid staff in the Netherlands is low. Paid staff are particularly employed in positions related to the area of sports and training. Only 6% of the clubs employ a paid manager in a leading position.

Table 8.5 Paid staff and paid manager/s in clubs (club survey, paid staff $n = 971$, paid manager/s $n = 961$)

Share of clubs with paid staff (%)	Share of clubs with paid manager/s (%)
51	6

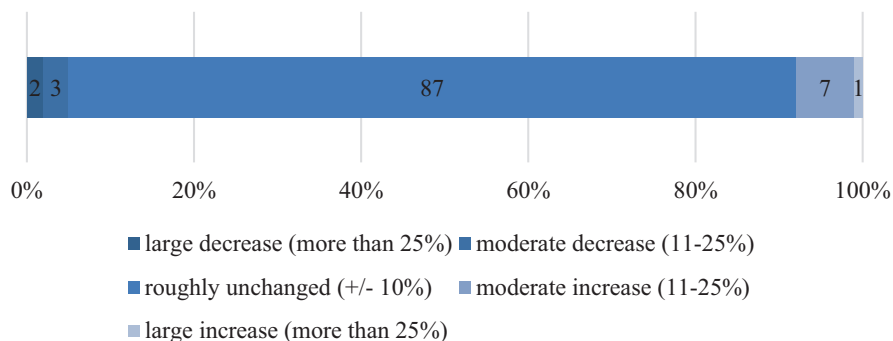


Fig. 8.5 Development in the number of paid staff in the last 5 years (club survey, $n = 784$)

Looking at the development of paid staff within the last 5 years, the vast majority of Dutch clubs have the impression that the number of paid staff has been roughly unchanged (87%; see Fig. 8.5). Only 5% of clubs indicate a large or moderate decrease in the number of paid staff in the last 5 years and 7% of the sports clubs signal a moderate increase. In total, one fifth of the sports clubs state that they have too few qualified employees. Especially larger clubs and team sports indicate that they have too few qualified employees (Van Kalmthout and Van Ginneken 2017).

With a long history of sports clubs and a high percentage of sports club memberships, the Netherlands has an evident sports club culture. Sports clubs are well rooted in society and hold a central position in sports policy. Within sports policy, high expectations of sports clubs’ potential to contribute to society at large are expressed. However, with the limited professionalisation of sports clubs, it has to be seen whether sports clubs are capable to live up to these expectations.

8.3 Sports Participation and Health Promotion

In the Netherlands, studies have identified the healthification of national sports policy (Stuij and Stokvis 2015). This illustrates the enlarged focus on the external benefits of sports. Sports is more about increasing the health of the population than it is about sports in itself. Similar processes have been identified at the level of local authorities. Hoekman and Van der Maat (2017) conclude that improving the health of the population is the main goal of local sports policy. As voluntary sports clubs are important cooperating partners of local sports policy, this focus on health also

Table 8.6 The attitude of clubs towards health-enhancing physical activity (club survey, offering health-enhancing physical activity programmes $n = 937$, sports clubs disciplines suit health-enhancing physical activity $n = 937$)

	Don't agree at all (%)	Don't agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)
Our club is committed to offering health-enhancing physical activity programmes	2	8	32	42	16
Our club feels that our sports discipline(s) is/are suitable as health-enhancing physical activity	2	3	16	53	26

has an impact on them. Local authorities persuade local sports clubs to increase their societal meaning and contribute to the broader goals of local sports policy.

In 2015, we asked for the opinion of board members of the sports clubs on topics related to health-enhancing physical activity (see Table 8.6) to see what function they ascribe themselves in this regard. In the Netherlands, half of the sports clubs seem to be committed on offering health enhancing physical activity programmes. One out of ten clubs does not agree (at all) with this statement, and a third of all Dutch sports clubs have no clear opinion on this issue, meaning that approximately half of the clubs do not have a commitment to health promotion. This indicates that the function ascribed to sports clubs in policy related to health promotion does not suit every sports club in the Netherlands. Other research showed that 13% of the sports clubs are involved in projects to increase peoples' health or healthy lifestyle (e.g. healthy sports canteen, lowering alcohol consumption; Van Kalmthout and Van Ginneken 2017). These numbers clearly illustrate that not all sports clubs have the desire or abilities to live up to the expectations from policy. This might be related to problems that clubs face in finding volunteers, which makes it more difficult to organise additional activities in the neighbourhood or at schools (van der Werff et al. 2015).

However, it is not only the special programmes particularly developed for health-enhancements provided by the sports clubs that contribute to people's health. Regular participation in sports activities at sport clubs can as well enhance a person's health. Most Dutch clubs (79%; see Table 8.6) feel that the sports activities they offer have a health-enhancing character. Only few do not agree (at all; 5%) with this statement or have no clear opinion (16%). This means that the majority of the sports clubs in the Netherlands are convinced that participating in the sports they offer is improving people's health. When looking at motives of people to practise sports, 80% of the Dutch population mentions health-related benefits (Van den Dool 2019). However, health-related motives are most common for sports participants outside of the sports club context.

As the health-enhancing value of sports clubs is related to the sports practices within sports clubs, it is good to note that not all members of sports clubs are necessarily participating in these sports activities. People can be affiliated to the club in different ways: as sports participants, as members, as board members in the

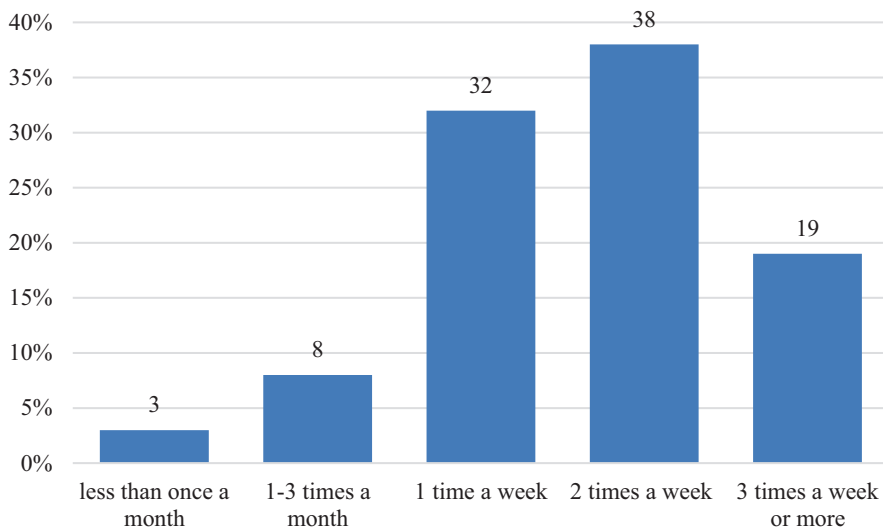


Fig. 8.6 Frequency of sports participation (member survey, $n = 1287$)

decision-making process and as volunteers. In 2015, 70% of the individuals affiliated to a club in the Netherlands actually participated in sports in the club (Van der Roest et al. 2017b). There can be a large variation in the frequency of their participation: some are intensively involved in the sports activities, and others participate occasionally. In the Netherlands, 57% of the individuals affiliated with a club participate in sports two times a week or more (see Fig. 8.6). A third of the individuals affiliated with a club take part in a sports activity once a week, meaning that most members of sports clubs participate in sports regularly.

Many sports club affiliates also take part in sports activities outside of their sports clubs. Almost half of the sports club affiliates do sports outside of any organised setting alone (Breuer et al. 2017). And one out of five practise sports outside of any organised setting with friends and/or family and one out of five attend a privately owned gym/fitness centre. Just 14% only exercise or participate in sports in the sports club.

In the Netherlands, more than two thirds of the club members are taking part in competitive sports, and one out of five have participated in competitive sports (see Table 8.7). It is only one out of ten who never have participated in competitive sports at all, meaning that it is quite common for members of sports clubs to participate in competitive sports activities in their clubs. In addition to sporting activities, 88% of the sports clubs offered other activities for their members, mostly social activities such as festive activities (Van der Werff et al. 2015). Most of the activities organised by the clubs are exclusively for their members. However, 77% of the sports clubs have organised activities that were open to non-members as well (Van der Werff et al. 2015).

It seems that health promotion has become an important aspect of Dutch sport. On the one hand, improving the health of the population is one of the main goals of

Table 8.7 Participation in competitive sports (member survey, $n = 1298$)

	Yes (%)	No, but I used to (%)	No, never (%)
Participation in competitive sports in the club	69	21	9

Dutch sports policy. Also, the Dutch population and sports clubs in general increasingly value sport as a means to improve people's health.

8.4 Social Integration

The prominent position of sports clubs in Dutch society makes the organisations important partners in the government's social integration policy. Given the high percentage of people who are active in sports clubs in the Netherlands (European Commission 2018), it is of great importance to policy-makers to get people with all sorts of backgrounds active in sports clubs. In the latest policy that was developed by the Dutch government in cooperation with local councils and sports organisations, inclusion is the key theme (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid et al. 2018). The policy aims at enlarging representation of various groups in sports clubs, both in sports participation as in volunteering. They do so by increasing the social accessibility of sports clubs (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid et al. 2018).

At the club level, a paradox has emerged around the integration of different population groups. At the one hand, a large share of club representatives (65%; see Table 8.8) indicate that they try to offer sports to as many population groups as possible. On the other hand, a large group of clubs does not necessarily strive to help socially vulnerable groups to integrate in their clubs; they are undecided on this matter (46%; see Table 8.8). This seems to reflect the notion that sports clubs are open to anyone who wants to join, as long as the new entrants assimilate within the existing situation (Elling et al. 2001). Evaluations of earlier Dutch policies that aimed at social integration of minority groups also found that sports clubs try to recruit new members, irrespective of their background. At the same time, many sports clubs still acknowledge that they are relatively homogenous (Elling et al. 2018; Hoekman et al. 2011).

However, much has changed in the last 50 years, when sports clubs were still relatively homogeneous. Nowadays, many clubs can be characterised as open clubs (65% can be classified as open to some extent; Van der Roest et al. 2017a) that are an important site in everyday lives (Elling et al. 2018). Open sports clubs offer new types and forms of sports that are more accessible to social groups that usually did not participate. Examples include fitness and health offers for parents of youth members who are usually too busy to find time for sports participation and football fitness initiatives for retired football players (NOC*NSF n.d.).

Apart from these innovative sports offers, sports clubs that have their own facility at their disposal can use this facility for non-sports-related activities as well. In doing so, they can attract social groups to their clubs who are not interested in

Table 8.8 Attitudes of sports clubs towards the integration of different population groups (club survey, offer sports to as many population groups $n = 937$, helping socially vulnerable groups $n = 937$)

	Don't agree at all (%)	Don't agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)
Our club tries to offer sports to as many population groups as possible	2	8	26	50	15
Our club strives to help socially vulnerable groups become better integrated into our club	3	9	46	35	8

Table 8.9 Representation of different population groups in sports clubs (club survey, people with disabilities $n = 943$, people with migration background $n = 936$, elderly $n = 947$, women $n = 1015$)

	0%	1–10%	11–25%	26–50%	51–75%	More than 75%
People with disabilities	38	57	3	0	0	1
People with migration background	22	62	10	3	2	1
Elderly (65+ years)	11	44	22	10	7	6
Women	2	12	21	39	20	6

actively engaging in sports. Examples of this kind of innovation include day care centres in sports clubs' facilities or offering meals to the elderly in the neighbourhood (L'abée 2018).

According to Elling et al. (2018), the social diversity in Dutch sports clubs has increased in recent years, even though they note that this fact cannot always be substantiated with hard numbers. The current representation of different population groups in Dutch sports clubs is presented in Table 8.9. Women and elderly people seem to be well represented in sports clubs. For people with a migration background and people with a disability, it appears to be more difficult to participate in sports clubs. The majority of clubs (84%; see Table 8.9) have less than 10% of people with a migration background among their members, while 22% of the Dutch population has a migration background (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek [CBS] 2016). For people with disabilities, research has consequently found that they are underrepresented in sports clubs (Brandsema et al. 2017).

Research into the limitations that clubs experience in integrating people with a disability has found that clubs put forward that they lack the right volunteers (trainers, coaches and supervisors) to help these people to become active in their clubs (Elling et al. 2018). Spaaij et al. (2020) show that this kind of argument could be an example of self-victimisation of club administrators. In bringing forward the barriers and challenges the club faces, they resist the call for more diversity in the club.

Only a small share of clubs have special initiatives for different population groups. Research in the SIVSCE project has found that Dutch clubs consequently are among the countries with the least special initiatives for these different groups (see Fig. 8.7, cf. Breuer et al. 2017).

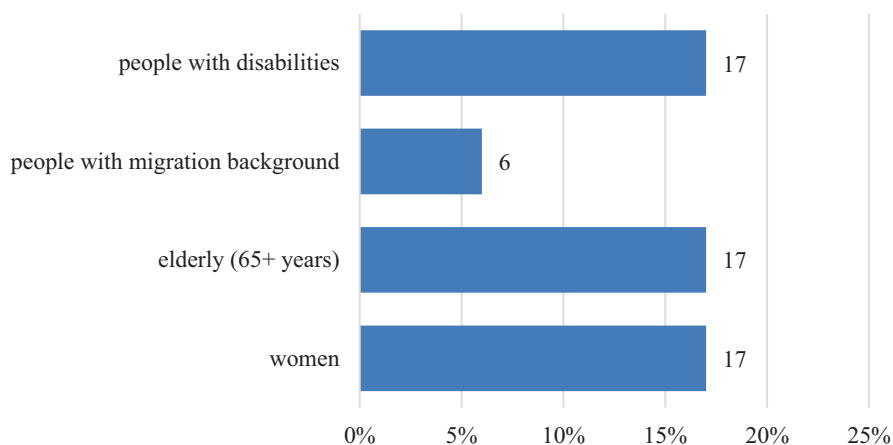


Fig. 8.7 Share of clubs that have special initiatives for different population groups (club survey, people with disabilities $n = 951$, people with migration background $n = 951$, elderly $n = 951$, women $n = 951$)

Table 8.10 Attitudes of sports clubs towards companionship and conviviality as well as sporting success and competitions (club survey, companionship $n = 934$, competitive sports $n = 934$)

	Don't agree at all (%)	Don't agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)
Our club sets high value on companionship and conviviality	0	0	3	44	53
Our club sets high value on sporting success and competition	1	4	25	51	19

This is striking, given the relative big size of sports clubs in the Netherlands compared to other countries, as was observed in Sect. 8.2. One could expect that given the larger size, clubs are better equipped to cater for (the needs of) different population groups (cf. Wicker and Breuer 2014). However, in the Dutch case this does not compensate for a generally lower tendency of clubs to have these initiatives. Possible explanations for the limited tendency are hard to confirm. Dollee (2017) found that, in the case of disability sports, many sports clubs are not aware of the fact that they are not accessible to people with a disability.

The high value on sporting success and competition (70% agree that this is an objective for the club; see Table 8.10) does not necessarily mean that Dutch sports clubs put less emphasis on companionship and conviviality (97% of Dutch clubs sets high value on these values, see Table 8.10). Dutch sports clubs on average show high agreement on statements regarding these objectives, whereas other countries that also put emphasis on sporting success (England, Hungary, Poland) devote less attention to companionship and conviviality (Breuer et al. 2017).

The coincidence of these objectives might be explained by the fact that Dutch sports clubs possess their own facility relatively often compared to clubs in other

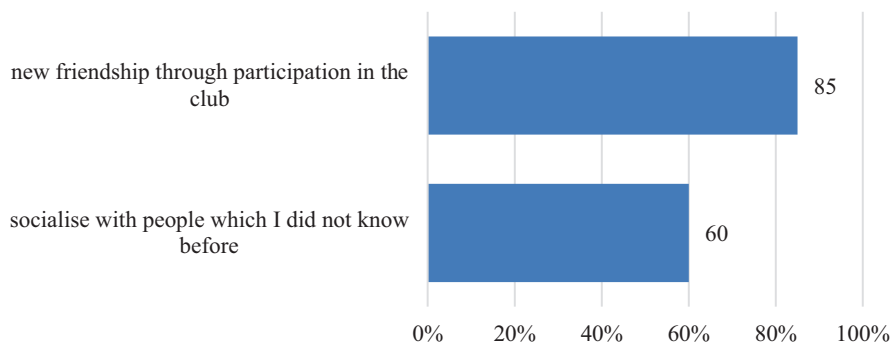


Fig. 8.8 Formation of social relations (member survey, new friendship $n = 1571$, socialise with people $n = 1557$)

Table 8.11 Frequency of participation in the club's social life (member survey, social gatherings $n = 1514$, stay behind after trainings $n = 1521$)

	Never (%)	Once a year or less (%)	Once every half-year (%)	Once every 3 months (%)	Once a month (%)	Once every 2 weeks (%)	At least once a week (%)
Participation in the club's social gatherings	15	27	27	18	6	3	5
Stay behind after trainings, matches or tournaments to talk to other people from the club	8	3	4	6	15	18	46

countries (Breuer et al. 2017). Dutch clubs have the possibility to organise social gatherings in their own facility and open their club houses for social moments after training, matches or tournaments.

The large share of people who stay behind after their sports activities clearly has a socialisation effect on the members. Many respondents indicate that they have made new friendships and indicate that they socialise with people they did not know before (85% and 60%, respectively; see Fig. 8.8). However, it must be noted that even though many people socialise at the club, the percentage of people who socialise with others they did not know before is only average compared to other countries. This could reflect the relative homogeneity that still characterises Dutch sports clubs (Van Bottenburg 2007; Van Haaften 2019) (Table 8.11).

The modest extent to which Dutch club members socialise with others they did not know before brings questions about the bridging capacity of these clubs. Among sociologists, there is debate whether clubs and associations can promote bonding as well as bridging social capital, as suggested by Putnam (2000).

Nevertheless, Dutch sports clubs clearly fulfil an important role in promoting bonding social capital. As was mentioned before, Dutch sports clubs have a lively

Table 8.12 Number of people from the club known by name (member survey, $n = 1657$)

	None (%)	1–2 people (%)	3–5 people (%)	6–10 people (%)	11–20 people (%)	21–50 people (%)	More than 50 people (%)
People known by name	0	0	2	5	16	34	42

Table 8.13 Attitudes of members towards social life in the club (member survey, proud to belong $n = 1606$, most important social group $n = 1610$, respect me for who I am $n = 1517$)

	Strongly disagree (%)	Partially disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Partially agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
I am proud to belong to the club	1	3	24	42	29
The club is one of the most important social groups I belong to	6	20	30	32	13
Other people from the club respect me for who I am	1	3	18	59	19

social life to offer to their members and clubs take a rather central position in Dutch everyday life. This finding also emerges from Table 8.12, where 42% of the members and volunteers indicate that they know more than 50 people by name in their clubs.

It goes without saying that the large share of big clubs in the Netherlands (Fig. 8.1) is probably related to this figure.

Dutch sports club members are quite demure when it comes to questions of pride or social belonging. In comparison to other countries, only few members and volunteers strongly agree with the statements in Table 8.13 (29%, 13% and 19%, respectively). The Netherlands comes last in all international comparisons in the SIVSCE study when it comes to pride, the importance of the social group and the extent to which they feel respected by others. However, this is only the case when these matters are sorted on those who strongly agree with the statement. The fractions of respondents who disagree with the statement are very comparable to other countries in the study (Van der Roest et al. 2017b). Therefore, possible explanations for the modest strong agreement with the statements should be found in methodological issues rather than substantive differences within sports clubs.

Dutch sports clubs clearly play a role in social integration. They create or foster large social networks in which people can socialise and make new friends. However, their prominent role in society and their large size can also produce expectations among policy-makers to which they cannot yet live up to. Representation of different population groups is modest, and few clubs have special initiatives to try to offer their sports to specific groups. New policies to make clubs more open could change this characteristic in the future.

8.5 Democratic Decision-Making and Involvement

Democratic decision-making is one of the main characteristics of voluntary associations in general (Smith 2000). In many countries, the democratic element is one prerequisite for the public funding of these organisations. Yet, only relatively small amounts of members participate in formal democratic decision-making in the Netherlands (Ibsen et al. 2019).

The reasons for not participating in the club's democracy are of course diverse. The distinction and the interplay between individual characteristics and organisational characteristics are important to consider in this respect. Ibsen et al. (2019) have shown that individual characteristics and club size are the most important elements in whether one participates or not. The attitude of sports clubs towards democratic decision-making barely makes a difference in explaining variation between clubs. This partly explains why a majority of Dutch sports clubs agrees that they aim to involve members in making important decisions, but only a minority of members participates in democratic decision-making.

Whether decision-making is delegated among committees yields mixed results. In almost half of the clubs (48%; see Table 8.14), decision-making is decentralised to some extent. Interestingly, a quarter of club administrators are undecided whether decisions are delegated to committees. It is unclear what this exactly means, but it might indicate that delegation of decisions to committees in these clubs is only limited to smaller decisions or bound within specific rules and frameworks.

Figure 8.9 shows that more than one third of members in the surveyed clubs have participated in the last general assembly. It is likely that this figure gives an overestimation of the average number of people really present at general assemblies, as the people who have responded to this survey are probably more inclined to attend. Figures from the Dutch Sports Clubs Panel, which are based on judgements made by club administrators, show average attendances of approximately 28% (Van der Roest et al. 2016).

The Netherlands is among the countries that score the lowest on attending the general assembly, which could be due to the fact that Dutch sports clubs are quite big. Earlier research has indicated that organisational size is one the most important indicators for the percentage of members attending the general assembly (Ibsen and Seippel 2010; Thiel and Mayer 2009; Van der Roest et al. 2016; Wicker et al. 2014).

Table 8.14 Attitudes of sports clubs towards democratic decision-making and involvement (club survey, involve members in decision-making $n = 934$, delegate decision-making $n = 934$)

	Don't agree at all (%)	Don't agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)
Our club aims to involve members when making important decisions	0	2	9	58	31
Our club delegates decision-making from the board to committees	6	22	25	41	7

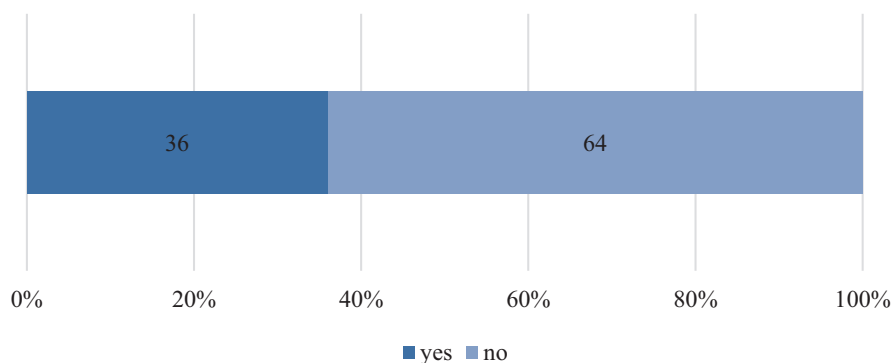


Fig. 8.9 Participation at last general assembly (member survey, $n = 1712$)

Table 8.15 Broader democratic participation of members (member survey, participation in member meetings $n = 1556$, speak my mind to key persons $n = 1465$, share my view with other members $n = 1472$)

	Never (%)	Once a year or less (%)	Once every half-year (%)	Once every 3 months (%)	Once a month (%)	Several times a month (%)
Participation in member meetings or other club meetings	31	31	19	8	6	6
I speak my mind to key persons in the club	25	14	14	15	13	19
I share my views with other members in the club	16	9	11	15	18	31

This probably also goes for the broader democratic participation options members have if they want to influence the organisation's course. One could hypothesise that as clubs become bigger, members become increasingly detached from the club (cf. Van der Roest 2016).

Table 8.15 shows that participation in other meetings than the general assembly is only occasional for most members. Almost two thirds of the members (62%; see Table 8.15) visit a meeting only once a year. Furthermore, the extent to which members share their views with either key persons or other members is quite dispersed over the different categories. For some members (32% speak their mind to key persons at least once a month; see Table 8.15), it is quite natural to try to influence decision-making, but others will hardly or never engage in these issues (25% never speak their mind, 14% only do so once a year or less; see Table 8.15).

The limited extent to which members and volunteers try to engage in the democratic process in their clubs is also apparent in Fig. 8.10, where almost half of the respondents (47%) indicate that they have never tried to influence decision-making in the club. Slightly more than a quarter of the respondents have done so in the last 3 months.

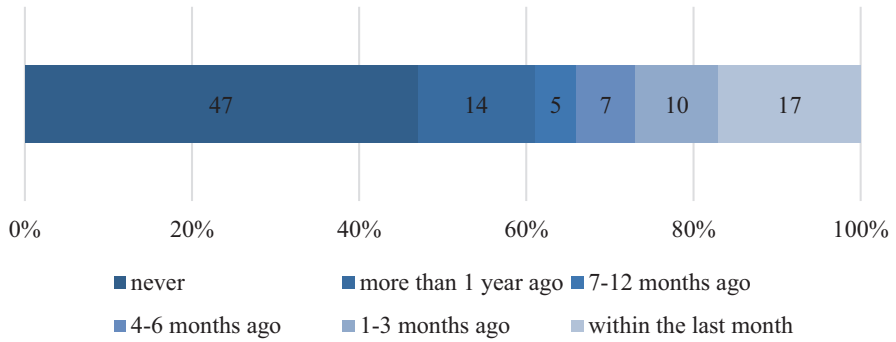


Fig. 8.10 Time since last attempt to influence decision-making in the club (member survey, $n = 1683$)

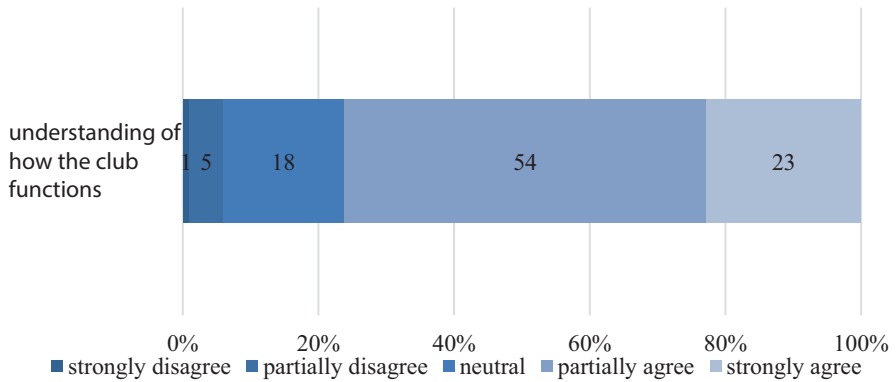


Fig. 8.11 Member's knowledge of how the club functions (member survey, $n = 1579$)

In order to influence decision-making in sports clubs, one needs to understand how the club functions. Even if members do not regularly try to influence decision-making, it is important that they at least have some understanding of how the club works. They need to have a basic understanding of the democratic structure of the club, but they also need to have an understanding of the design, execution and evaluation of the activities in the club (Van Eekeren 2016). Van Eekeren argues that this is necessary to obtain legitimacy and to live up to the societal expectation to create public value in sports clubs.

A large majority of members and volunteers acknowledge that they indeed understand how the club functions. Only a minority of 6% indicates that they do not understand. When the Dutch numbers are compared to the other countries in the SIVSCE survey, it is again striking that only 23% strongly agree with the statement, compared to an average of 42% in all countries (cf. Van der Roest et al. 2017b) (Fig. 8.11).

Overall, Dutch sports clubs do not stand out in international comparison when it comes to democratic decision-making. The attendance at the general assemblies is relatively low, while the scores on informal ways of decision-making are around the average. A possible explanation for these scores can be the relatively big size of sports clubs in the Netherlands, which influences the extent to which members participate. The question that pops up is whether Dutch sports clubs have a low participation rate in general, for example, in the extent to which its members volunteer for the club.

8.6 Voluntary Work

Voluntary work is one of the most important resources for sports clubs. Ten per cent of the Dutch population is active as volunteers within sports, and sports clubs are highly dependent on them. In total, 84% of all clubs had volunteers active in their club in 2015 (De Heij 2018).

As became clear in the previous section, sports clubs in the Netherlands have a limited percentage of members who are active in the club's decision-making and democracy. The relatively big club size of Dutch clubs could potentially also mean that they face problems regarding voluntary work. After all, the increased heterogeneity that comes with increased size could make it more difficult for members to identify with the club and become active as a volunteer (Wicker et al. 2014). However, bigger clubs also might be better equipped for developing strategies to recruit and retain volunteers. Therefore, it is interesting to first examine the attitudes of sports clubs' administrators towards voluntary work.

As becomes clear from Table 8.16, administrators in sports clubs believe voluntary work is central to sports clubs. This is no surprise, as almost all administrators themselves are volunteers. More than half (54%) of the respondents even think that

Table 8.16 Attitudes of sports clubs towards voluntary work (club survey, run by volunteers $n = 954$, members as customers $n = 954$, demonstrating passion $n = 954$, all members can be volunteers $n = 954$)

	Don't agree at all (%)	Don't agree (%)	Undecided (%)	Agree (%)	Totally agree (%)
Our club should be run exclusively by volunteers	4	20	22	31	23
Our club considers members as customers that cannot be expected to contribute with voluntary work	49	38	9	4	1
Our club's members demonstrate passion, dedication and energy for the work that needs to be done	1	8	25	53	13
All members can be volunteers regardless of their qualifications	2	4	6	43	46

Table 8.17 Total number of volunteers in clubs (club survey, fixed position(s) $n = 971$, no fixed position(s) $n = 961$)

Range (number of volunteers)	0–5	6–10	11–20	21–50	More than 50
Total number of volunteers in fixed position(s) (share of clubs in %)	5	10	15	27	43
Total number of volunteers in no fixed position(s) (share of clubs in %)	22	16	19	25	18

clubs should be run exclusively by volunteers. An even bigger share of administrators (87%) think that members cannot be seen as customers, which implies that they will promote volunteering in the club at least to some extent. The disagreement on this statement is quite big, in comparison with other countries in the SIVSCE study. Only Norwegian administrators show a bigger disagreement on this statement (88%, Breuer et al. 2017).

This could be a sign of the volunteering culture that seems to be present in Dutch sports clubs. International comparisons find that the percentage of people who actively engage in voluntary work in sports clubs are highest in the Netherlands (Curtis et al. 2001; Dekker and De Hart 2009; European Commission 2018; McCloughan et al. 2011). For example, the European Commission (2018) has found that 19% of Dutch citizens engage in voluntary work that supports sporting activities.

From Table 8.17, the volunteering culture is further explicated. In 43% of the clubs, more than 50 members are volunteers in a fixed position. The number of volunteers in not fixed positions, the so-called episodic volunteers, is more dispersed over the categories. Episodic volunteers have become more prominent and more important in many associations these days (Cnaan and Handy 2005).

Still, many of the tasks in sports clubs are performed by volunteers in fixed positions. This is not surprising given the continuous activities that most sports clubs offer. In most cases, coaching teams and athletes or governing the club from a board position requires continuity.

Figure 8.12 shows that indeed board members and coaches/instructors make up for a large share of fixed volunteers. Almost half of the fixed volunteers are active in either of these tasks. A quarter of volunteers in fixed positions are active in other tasks. Examples of these other tasks could consist of committees or tending the bar.

The volunteering culture that becomes apparent here does not mean that the Dutch sports club sector is free of problems. On the contrary, problems in the recruitment and retention of volunteers are increasingly a theme among media outlets, policy-makers and researchers. Among sports clubs' administrators, it is also the most important theme for many years (Van Kalmthout 2014) (Table 8.18).

Finding appropriate volunteers at the board level is indicated as one of the biggest challenges by clubs. This is not surprising, given the continuous nature of the work and the desired qualifications one needs to have to volunteer at this level. Improved technical demands and the growing size of the average Dutch sports clubs possibly limit the number of people who believe they can serve on a board. Furthermore, only few clubs have made voluntary work in boards more accessible

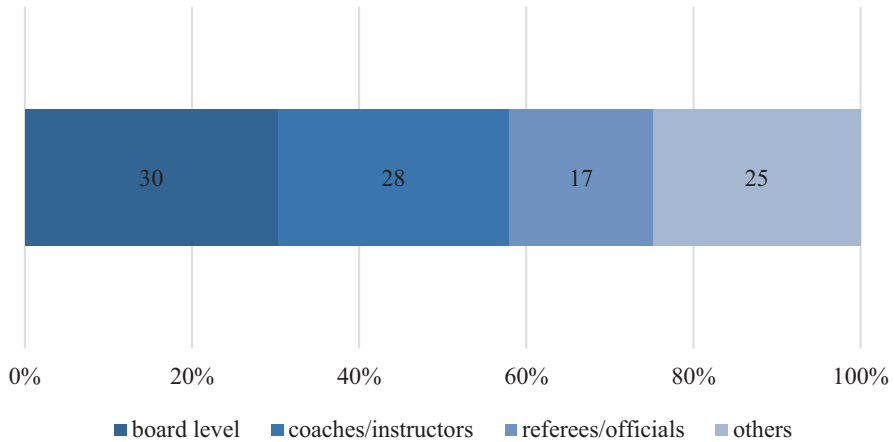


Fig. 8.12 Distribution of volunteers in fixed positions according to their tasks (club survey, *n* = 970)

Table 8.18 Problems with the recruitment and retention of volunteers (club survey, board level *n* = 933, coaches/instructors *n* = 933, referees/officials *n* = 933)

	No problem (%)	A small problem (%)	A medium problem (%)	A big problem (%)	A very big problem (%)
Problems with the recruitment and retention of volunteers on the board level	18	26	29	20	7
Problems with the recruitment and retention of coaches/instructors	33	24	28	12	2
Problems with the recruitment and retention of referees/officials	38	20	21	18	4

in terms of flexibility. Ter Haar et al. (2017) argue that modernisation of functions in the board is necessary if clubs want to attract the right people for these positions.

Even though finding volunteers is indeed a problem for sports clubs, recent developments show relatively little development in this matter. Contrary to popular thought, sports clubs do not rapidly lose volunteers. Figure 8.13 shows stability in two thirds of the clubs, while the proportion of clubs with decreases and increases in volunteers is balanced.

Sports clubs can take a multitude of measures to recruit and retain volunteers. These measures range from deploying paid staff and remunerating volunteers to encouraging and motivating volunteers verbally. The most widely used measure to recruit volunteers is using the network of current members and volunteers to find new volunteers. In comparison with other countries in our study, Dutch clubs relatively often have a written plan to recruit volunteers, and they seldom reward volunteers with benefits in kind (cf. Breuer et al. 2017).

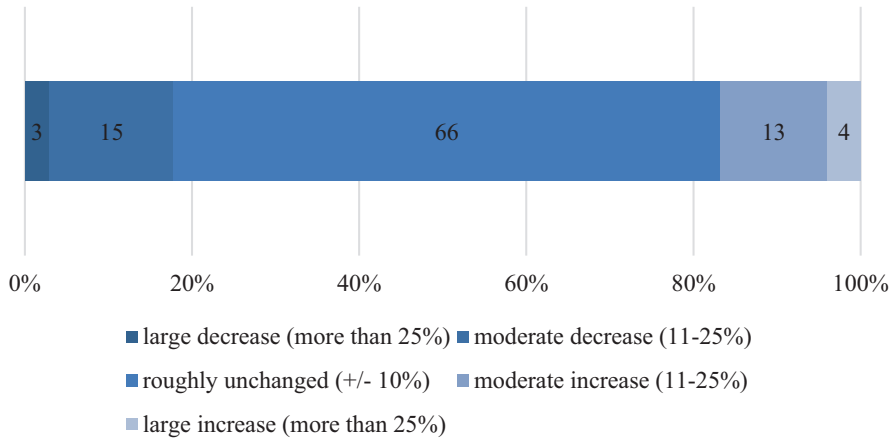


Fig. 8.13 Development in the number of volunteers in the last 5 years (club survey, $n = 948$)

Interestingly, the two respective measures that Dutch clubs relatively often and relatively seldom take are among the measures that Østerlund (2013) found to be among the most effective ways of recruiting volunteers. Developing a specific strategy (11%, relatively high compared to other countries) is quite effective, while rewarding volunteers with material incentives (16%, relatively low compared to other countries) is also found to be a good way to recruit volunteers (Table 8.19).

Another quite effective way of making sure the club has enough volunteers is to oblige members and parents of youth members to volunteer. Although one could argue when volunteering becomes obligatory it is no longer volunteering, many clubs use this means to ensure they have enough volunteers. Half of the clubs inform members that they are expected to contribute, while 39% inform parents of children that they should contribute to the club. Unfortunately, we have no information on the type of tasks or the frequency to which these obligatory volunteers contribute.

The volunteers who have participated in the survey are quite active volunteers. More than half of the volunteers in the sample (55%; see Table 8.20) volunteer more than once a week.

In Table 8.21, the image of active volunteers is confirmed. A remark that must be made is that Table 8.21 only deals with volunteers in fixed positions. In this sense, it is not surprising that half of them spend more than 10 hours per month on their tasks. Six per cent even spend more than 50 hours on their voluntary work.

Voluntary work is a crucial resource for sports clubs in the Netherlands. Many clubs are dependent on the voluntary efforts that are made by their members and volunteers. Although clubs are not free of problems in recruiting and retaining their volunteers, many clubs seem to maintain a sufficient number of volunteers to run their clubs. This does not mean that new recruitment and retention measures are not necessary. Modernisation of board positions and rewarding volunteers with material incentives are among the most prominent measures Dutch clubs still have to take in order to stay vital.

Table 8.19 Measures taken by sports clubs to recruit and retain volunteers (club survey, encourage verbally $n = 957$, social gatherings $n = 957$, recruit through current network $n = 957$, pay for training $n = 957$, inform members $n = 957$, inform parents $n = 957$, benefits in kind $n = 957$, recruitment outside $n = 957$, management $n = 957$, written strategy $n = 957$, club does not do anything in particular $n = 957$)

	Yes (%)
The club encourages and motivates its volunteers verbally	66
The club arranges parties and social gatherings for the volunteers to strengthen group identity	51
The club mainly recruits through the networks of current volunteers and members	72
The club pays for volunteers to take training or gain qualification	44
The club informs members that they are expected to contribute with voluntary work	49
The club informs parents of children who are members that they are expected to contribute with voluntary work	39
The club rewards its volunteers with benefits in kind	16
The club tries to recruit volunteers from outside existing club members	19
The club has a volunteer or paid staff member with specific responsibility for volunteer management	15
The club has a written strategy for volunteer recruitment	11
The club does not do anything in particular	8

Table 8.20 Frequency of voluntary work of volunteers (member survey, $n = 1319$)

	Once a year or less (%)	Once every 6 months (%)	Once every quarter (%)	Once a month (%)	Every other week (%)	Once a week (%)	2–4 days a week (%)	5 days a week or more (%)
Frequency of voluntary work of volunteers	4	8	11	14	7	25	26	4

Table 8.21 Hours spent on voluntary work by volunteers in fixed positions on an average month in the season (member survey, $n = 948$)

	0–5	6–10	11–20	21–50	More than 50
Hours spent on voluntary work of members per month (share of volunteers in %)	28	23	23	20	6

8.7 Conclusion

Sports clubs in the Netherlands have an established position within Dutch society, they constitute an institutionalised part of everyday life, and they fulfil a central position in Dutch sports policy. This chapter has shown that Dutch sports clubs have a relatively big size, measured by the total number of members. Another striking feature of Dutch sports clubs is the fact that they often possess their own facilities. In other countries, most sports clubs are dependent on public facilities, limiting their

opportunities to freely organise activities and to generate their own income. In the Netherlands, these structural features partly shape the way clubs are organised.

Dutch sports clubs are important partners for national and local governments in sports policy and increasingly in other domains as well. On the national level, the value of sports clubs is acknowledged not only in sports policies but also in prevention and health as well as social and educational policies. Municipal sports budgets are largely spent on sports facilities that are used by sports clubs. In addition, sports clubs are recognised as valuable partners for sports policy and in connection with this also for other domains. To illustrate, health promotion has become an important aspect of Dutch sports and one of the main goals of local sports policy. Also, the Dutch population and sports clubs in general increasingly value sports as a means to improve people's health.

The roles that are ascribed to sports clubs are not surprising given their characteristics. The organisational capacity that comes with their size, their volunteers and the ownership of facilities makes them interesting potential partners. Sports clubs often confirm this image by applying for subsidies and grants that underline their societal value. Partly, they are forced to do so because of declining fixed subsidies. However, it is questionable whether sports clubs can live up to the expectations of governments. This chapter shows that sports clubs – despite the image they try to present – are still mainly focused on organising their core sports activities.

It seems that organising these sports activities is still challenging enough for many sports clubs. Overall, clubs struggle to get their members active in democratic decision-making, both formally and informally. Furthermore, societal developments call for Dutch sports clubs, as other European clubs, to design their volunteering positions in new ways. Trends such as flexibilisation and individualisation ask for more flexibility in volunteering positions. At the board level, the increased need for specific expertise and an increased demand for accountability further hamper the availability of suitable board members.

Overall, to live up to the societal functions regarding social integration and volunteering, Dutch sports clubs need to be strengthened. The National Sports Agreement appears to be a step in the right direction. Above all, this agreement tries to make the voluntary sports sector more inclusive, and it tries to support sports clubs in their core competencies. This could lead to a situation in which clubs more automatically incorporate diversity in their sports and volunteering activities, enabling them to strengthen their societal position.

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