

3 The Netherlands

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Sport in the Netherlands has never been a hierarchically governed sector with national authorities acting as an overpowering agency. Rather, sport developed from the late nineteenth century from below through private initiatives of citizens who organized their sport in voluntary organizations (in Dutch: *sportverenigingen*), with local governments facilitating and stimulating this activity. National sport organizations were founded to coordinate the regulation and organization of sport competitions, and for decades they did so without government interference at a national level. It was only after the Second World War that the central government developed ambitions for and through sport.

In the last decades, the national as well as the provincial and local governments have become more strongly involved in sport policy, with increased budgets, aspirations and instruments. Compared to other sectors, however, self-organizing and relatively autonomous networks of civil-society organizations still play a central role in the coordination of sport and sport policies. Together with government and semi-government organizations, and to a lesser extent commercial organizations, these voluntary sport organizations form a policy network which determines the sport governance structure in the Netherlands. In this network, each actor can only achieve goals by building alliances and coalitions with other actors.

To get a more complete understanding of the interdependencies that exist between the actors in the Dutch sport policy network, the following sections discuss the development of the sporting culture and structure in the Netherlands; this is followed by an analysis of the development of government concern for and interference in sport, as well as the rationales, objectives and strategies of the actors involved in the sport policy network. The chapter concludes with comments about the intended and unintended consequences of government policies and initiatives in the area of organized sport participation.

Dutch sporting culture

With over 16 million people living on 3.4 million hectares land area, the Netherlands is a densely populated and highly urbanized country. The country is prosperous and has an open economy, which depends heavily on foreign trade. Dutch society strongly emphasises equality, with few visible signs of status differentiation, quite informal manners, and a relatively tolerant attitude towards religious, ethnic and cultural diversity. This finds expression in a decentralized administrative power

and a policy-making process based on consensus decision-making at central, provincial and local government levels, including continuous consultations with industrial associations, labour unions, non-governmental organizations and other political lobby groups (the so-called 'polder model').

These are only a few main characteristics of Dutch society that have impacted the sporting culture in the Netherlands. Characteristic of the densely populated Dutch country is its culture of planning and ordering, based on blueprints and decision-making according to the polder model. Since the Second World War, sport facilities have been part of these planning and ordering procedures. This has resulted in a remarkable infrastructure of sport facilities, with 60 per cent of the population living within only five kilometres of their favourite sport facility, and a unique, extensive network of local, regional and national bicycle paths and lanes (Tiessen-Raaphorst & Breedveld 2009).

This infrastructure – with 32,000 hectares of sport grounds (0.8 per cent of the total surface area) – and the high income and educational levels in the Netherlands are reflected in a high percentage of the population taking part in sport. According to the Social and Cultural Planning Office, which has collected longitudinal data on sport participation every four years since 1979, the percentage of the Dutch population participating at least once a year in sport (excluding walking and cycling) rose from 53 per cent in 1979 to 71 per cent in 2007, out of a current population of 16.4 million (Kamphuis & Van den Dool 2008).¹ At present, 65 per cent participate in sport at least once a month; 37 per cent do so at least once a week (Tiessen-Raaphorst & Breedveld 2009). Older data suggest that this level of sport participation is quite high compared with other European countries. The Eurobarometer surveys of 2003 and 2004, commissioned by the European Commission and offering comparable survey data on sport behaviour in the member states of the European Union, signified that only the Scandinavian countries and Ireland showed higher levels (cf. Van Bottenburg *et al.* 2005).

The emphasis on equality is echoed in limited and decreasing differences in sport participation within Dutch society. Today, more women (72%) than men (69%) take part in sport, which figures were 50 and 56 per cent respectively in 1979. As people get older, participation tends to decline significantly, but these differences have strongly diminished over the last decades. In 2007, more than 90 per cent of young people below 20 years of age participated in sport (outside of school),² whereas 55 per cent of people between 50 and 64 years of age and 41 per cent of the 65 to 79 year age group participated. In 1979, these figures were 80 (<20 years of age), 20 (50–64) and 8 per cent (65–79) respectively. The sport participation level among members of non-Western ethnic minorities has also substantially increased over the last ten years, lagging behind only slightly (2 percentage points) as compared to the native Dutch population. The greatest differences in sport participation can still be found with respect to the education and income level of the population, as illustrated in Table 3.1 (NOC*NSF 2009, Kamphuis & Van den Dool 2008).

The relatively high percentage of sport participants is one of the reasons that the Dutch perform quite well in several sports on the international podium: especially in speed skating, swimming, cycling, athletics, equestrian sports, rowing, field hockey and judo (eight sports that account for 94 per cent of all 78 gold

Table 3.1 Sport participation, more than once a year, excluding cycling and walking and sport at school, Dutch population, 6–79 years, by gender, age groups, education and income level, 1979–2007

		1979	1987	1995	2003	2007
Total		53	59	64	69	71
Gender	Men	56	60	63	68	69
	Women	60	57	64	69	72
Age groups	6–11 years	79	85	89	93	95
	12–19 years	81	82	85	90	92
	20–34 years	66	72	74	77	81
	35–49 years	46	58	64	70	72
	50–64 years	20	31	45	54	55
Education level	65–79 years	8	19	26	33	41
	Lower	35	42	45	51	53
	Middle	62	66	70	72	73
	Higher	65	70	76	79	79
Income level	Lower	41	54	51	56	63
	Middle	54	54	66	70	70
	Higher	62	68	74	79	78

Source: Kamphuis & Van den Dool 2008

medals that Dutch athletes have won at the Olympic Summer and Winter Games between 1948 and 2010); and football (with the adventurous, creative and attacking but sometimes rather naïve and self-destructive playing style of the Dutch national team). World-famous athletes like Fanny Blankers Koen ('The Flying Dutchman', winning four gold medals in athletics, London 1948), Anton Geesink (the first non-Japanese Olympic champion in judo, Tokyo 1964), and the famous Dutch 'total football' team (reaching two consecutive World Cup finals in 1974 and 1978 and winning the European Championship in 1988) showed the world in the first post-war decades that the sporting climate in the Netherlands not only stimulates a lot of people to participate in sport, but also creates good conditions for top-level sport. The introduction of a deliberate, systematic and planned elite sport policy in the 1990s, with the nationally embraced ambition to rank among the top ten countries in the sport world, has given a further impetus to achieving international sporting success. In the last decade, the Dutch have won almost half of all their gold medals since 1948, ranking tenth in Sydney, seventeenth in Athens and twelfth in Beijing (Van Bottenburg 2009).

Dutch sporting structure

Voluntary sport clubs are the most important framework for organized sport activities – more than schools, municipal organizations or commercial providers. At present, almost a third of the total population, and half of the sporting population, are members of sport clubs in the Netherlands (Tiessen-Raaphorst & Breedveld 2009). Although the percentage of the Dutch population who participate in sport in the context of a sport club has not increased as strongly as the percentage of Dutch people who take part in sport generally, the total number of club members has risen without interruption since the earliest years of collecting membership

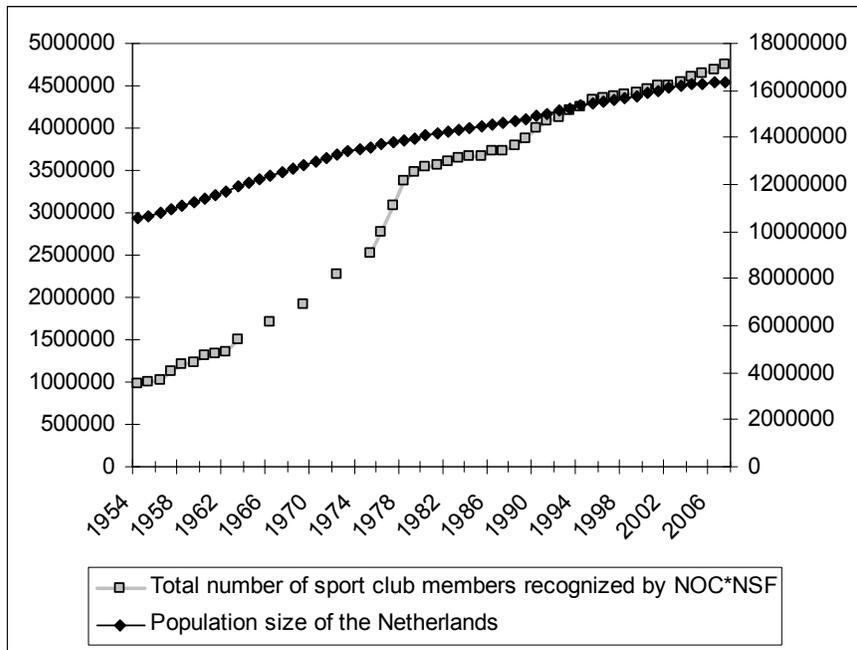


Figure 3.1 Membership figures for Dutch national sport associations relative to the national population, 1954–2007

figures for all national sport associations, as illustrated in Figure 3.1. In 2007, there were 4.7 million officially registered club members in the Netherlands, affiliated to 27,000 sport clubs (NOC*NSF 2008b). As a percentage of the total population, this is probably one of the highest degrees of club-related sport participation in the world (Van Bottenburg *et al.* 2005).

These sport clubs are autonomous bodies founded and run by members. Today, approximately 1.5 million volunteers (mainly club members, parents of youth club members, and former club members) and 13,000 paid employees (3,600 full-time equivalents) are involved in running these clubs (Goossens *et al.* 2008). Financially, the sport clubs depend mainly on their own members and only to a lesser extent on external relations and support: on average membership fees cover 58 per cent and canteen income 13 per cent of the overall budget of sport clubs, whereas sponsorship counts for 9 per cent and local governmental subsidies for 4 per cent (Kalmthout *et al.* 2009).

Sport clubs are generally affiliated to a national sport association. The Royal Netherlands Football Association has always been the biggest sport association by far, with 1.1 million club members in 2007 (which is 23 per cent of the overall number of club members), followed by the national association of tennis, golf, gymnastics, field hockey, pedestrian sports and skating. The club membership figures of the national associations of pedestrian sports, hockey and especially golf – which multiplied by twelve in the last twenty years – have risen quite rapidly over

the last twenty years, while membership of the national associations of gymnastics, volleyball, badminton and handball declined (Hover 2002; Maanen & Venekamp 1991; NOC*NSF 1993–2007). With respect to non-organized and mainly non-competitive forms of participation, completely different sports come to the fore, with swimming, cycling, fitness/aerobics, running and walking the most practised sports (Kamphuis & Van den Dool, 2008).

Like sport clubs, the national sport associations are private not-for-profit institutions. The bigger ones are managed by a director and a professional staff, under the supervision of a board of volunteers, which is responsible to the General Assembly, the highest decision-making body. The General Assembly is composed of all members of the association, which are typically representatives of the affiliated sport clubs. Overall, these national sport associations spend over €200 million per year on sport for all and elite sport. This is derived from subsidies from the central government, grants from lottery money, sponsorship and, above all, membership subscriptions (from the affiliated sport clubs).

Most national sport associations, which number 72 in total, are united in NOC*NSF. This umbrella organization was created in 1993 after a merger of the Netherlands Olympic Committee (founded in 1912) and the Netherlands Sports Federation (founded in 1959). NOC*NSF is an independent legal entity that pursues its own policy, with responsibilities in both elite sport and sport for all. However, its membership organizations convene twice a year for the General Assembly, which is the highest decision-making authority of NOC*NSF, for the approval of policy and budget plans. It also acts as the political interlocutor of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and has the task of distributing money from the national games of chance (Lotto) to its member associations by mutual arrangement. A part of this lottery money goes to the umbrella organization itself. Besides this, the umbrella organization is mainly financed by subsidies from the central government, sponsorship, and to a lesser extent membership fees and other benefits (NOC*NSF 2008a).

While the system of voluntary organizations still dominates the Dutch world of sport, the popularity of commercial sport providers is increasing. Compared to the 27,000 sport clubs with 4.7 million club members, there are over 3,200 commercial providers in the Netherlands, such as fitness and health clubs, sailing and surfing schools, and riding stables. Of these commercial providers, 1,700 are commercial fitness clubs, which welcome over two million visitors a year. The number of fitness clubs has more than doubled since 1990, while the number of sport clubs declined over 20 per cent during the same period (although their average membership rose from 115 to 177). In 2008, the average commercial fitness club had five times as many members as the average sport club and their average turnover was ten times the average budget of a sport club. As profit organizations, these fitness clubs receive very little or no government subsidies or privileges (Goossens *et al.* 2008; Lucassen *et al.* 2008; NOC*NSF 2009).

The sport clubs and their national associations, on the other hand, are more strongly interwoven with, and – at least partly – dependent on, the local and central government. First, most local sport clubs make use of facilities which do not belong or only partly belong to the club's own property. Most of these facilities are owned by the local governments, and rented to the sport clubs at a discounted

(subsidized) rate. Second, most local sport clubs and national sport associations receive subsidies from the local and central governments respectively: the clubs most often based on the number of youth members; the associations related to their contribution to governmental projects designed to achieve non-sport policy goals such as enhancing social inclusion, promoting public health and furthering national pride.

The 443 municipalities are by far the most important government actor in the Dutch sporting structure: they account for 87 per cent of public spending on sport, mainly for the construction and financial management of sport facilities and venues (Goossens 2008). The twelve Dutch provinces are responsible for regional planning and environmental matters and fund so-called provincial sport councils, which provide assistance to sport clubs and other sport providers at the local level. The role of the central government is primarily one of coordination and encouragement, although – as will be shown in the next sections – it has gained in significance in sport policy over the last decades.

The emergence of Dutch sport policy

German occupiers first initiated a national sport policy in the Netherlands. In 1941, they made physical education compulsory in all primary schools and commanded that all sport clubs should be affiliated with a national sport federation under the auspices of the Departement van Opvoeding, Wetenschap en Kultuurbescherming (Department of Education, Science and Cultural Protection). The department created a physical education and sport division to implement this decree (Swijtink 1992).³

In the context of Dutch society, this was a radical measure that turned the sport sector upside down during the war years. Before 1940, physical education was an optional subject in primary education, while the organization and development of sport were left in the hands of voluntary clubs and associations. These local voluntary sport clubs, founded and run by and for sport-loving citizens, had dominated the sport scene since the adoption of English sports in the second half of the nineteenth century. The sport clubs were relatively stable organizations specializing in one branch of sport, such as football clubs, tennis clubs, rowing clubs, cycling clubs and skating clubs. They operated in a highly autonomous fashion. State influence in the field of sport remained ad hoc and limited until the Second World War broke out. For example, the Dutch parliament had only once debated a sport issue prior to 1939: a proposal by the Minister of Education for the government to act as guarantor up to one million Dutch guilders for the National Olympic Committee to organize the Olympic Games of Amsterdam in 1928 was rejected (Arnoldussen 1994).⁴ This rejection did not express an ‘initial government antipathy towards sport’, as Bloyce and Smith (2010) comment with respect to the United Kingdom, but rather was indicative of disinterest.

This is not to suggest that government involvement in sport started only with the German occupation. It is a myth that sport could have grown from its early beginnings in the second half of the nineteenth century into a relatively popular activity in the late 1930s (in 1938 there were about 400,000 sport club members, while 6,000,000 spectators attended sport matches) without any government

involvement and support (Van Bottenburg 1999). From the beginning, private initiatives to practise sport and form clubs to organize sport activities were given space and support by local authorities. In the nineteenth century, several local governments exploited swimming pools and gymnasiums and gave permission to sport clubs to make use of municipal land. After 1900, the bigger cities also started creating and maintaining sport facilities, and somewhat reluctantly subsidized sport clubs to give lessons to the working class in sports such as swimming and gymnastics, mainly to improve their health and hygiene (Stokvis 1979; Van Bottenburg 1999).

However, it makes sense to speak of an active sport policy by the Dutch government only after 1940, at both national and local level. At the national level, the Dutch government stopped intervening in the internal affairs of the sport associations as the German occupiers did, but the government involvement in sport continued at a higher level than before the war. The central government started to stimulate sport as an extra-curricular activity organized by sport clubs (Swijtink 1992). Local authorities increased their investments in sport as well (Stokvis 1979).

With a total budget of less than one million guilders, equivalent to the contemporary purchasing power of €3 million, the scale of central government incentives remained small until the 1960s (Van Bottenburg 2002a). In an indirect way, though, the central government gave far stronger support to the development of sport between 1945 and 1954. During this period, subsidies were provided to local governments to reconstruct houses and infrastructure destroyed during wartime and, in doing so, to promote employment. Out of this money, local governments invested 24 million guilders to create about 750 sport fields and grounds, but as preference was given to house-building, indoor sport centres could not be built with this money (De Heer 2000).

By investing in local sport infrastructure, the local authorities aimed to contribute to the reconstruction of destroyed sport fields and the creation of a favourable living environment. The national authorities stressed the contribution of sport to the ‘renewal of man and society’ in general and the moral uplifting of the post-war youth generations in particular. In their view, sport offered a meaningful way of spending leisure time – especially for the youth, who outnumbered other age groups by far among sport club participants – and could thus act as a tool to combat what was widely regarded in the first post-war decennium as ‘the youth problem’. The central government tried to tackle this problem by supporting the coaches and supervisors of youth members in sport clubs. Thus, the first subsidy provided by the central government in the field of sport in 1946 concerned the training of sport instructors (Stokvis 1979).

The governmentalization of sport

The popularization of sport accelerated from the 1950s onwards. The general economic growth and the accompanying increases in standard of living, leisure time and education opportunities contributed to an unprecedented rise in the number of sport participants and sport club members in the Netherlands. The total number of sport club members increased from one million in 1955 to two million in 1970

and 3.5 million in 1980 (see Figure 3.1). In the 1980s, the percentage of sport participants continued to grow only slowly, while the percentage of club members relative to the total number of sport participants stagnated and started to decline in the 1990s (Breedveld *et al.* 2008).

The extraordinary growth in sport participation in the post war decades was complemented by an increasing willingness by government to invest in sport. At the local level, net public spending on sport increased from 12 million Dutch guilders in 1959 to 385 million in 1971 and 1,094 million in 1981 (Van Bottenburg 1999). At the national level, the government's sport budget rose from three million Dutch guilders in 1964 to 11 million in 1972 and 43 million in 1982 (Van Bottenburg 2002a). This sharp increase in spending was made possible by a long-lasting period of economic growth, during which the gross national income of the Netherlands multiplied and tax revenues increased. The tenfold increase of tax revenues between 1960 and 1980 provided the government with the financial means to provide a net of social provisions and services that would constitute the so-called welfare state (Stokvis 1979).

In addition to government subsidies, sport organizations received funding from lottery money, which became important with the legalization of the football pool in 1960 and the introduction of a televised lottery in 1975. Since the introduction of these lotteries, their net profits have been divided among sport organizations (receiving almost three-quarters) and the nation's leading charity in the field of health and culture (one-quarter). These lottery revenues have never been seen as government money in the Netherlands, but are perceived as money from private sources (De Heer 2000). The significance of the lottery money lies in the fact that it is received directly by the sport organizations without interference of the central government, thus making them more independent. This was particularly important after 1994 (see the next section), when the pressure on sport organizations to contribute explicitly to public sport policy goals in return for receiving governmental subsidies increased.

At the local level, the increasing government sport budgets were mainly allocated to the construction and improvement of sport facilities. Between 1959 and 1975, the number of sport fields tripled and the number of sport centres and swimming pools doubled. Moreover, many sport fields were provided with expensive drainage systems which allowed for greater use. In 1975, local municipalities paid, on average, 75 per cent of the construction and operating costs of the sport facilities, while the sport clubs contributed only 25 per cent. This allowed sport clubs to reduce subscription rates significantly and thus contribute further to the rise of the number of sport participants. An unintended consequence of this development, however, was that the sport clubs became more dependent on the financial support of the local government (Stokvis 1979).

At the national level, the same was true for the national sport associations. Government subsidies and lottery money enabled these associations to professionalize and develop their services. Backed by this funding, the sport associations appointed a number of professionals to promote sport participation, develop membership recruitment policies, and support volunteers at the club level, such as trainers, coaches, supervisors, referees and board members, with courses and information services. They also founded the Netherlands Sport Federation (NSF)

as their umbrella organization, which acted to lobby and negotiate with the central government on behalf of the organized sport sector, and to distribute government subsidies and lottery money to its member organizations. This subsidization not only contributed to their organizational power, but also created new forms of (inter)dependencies between organized sport and the central government. From the 1960s, the salaries of paid professionals within the sport associations, as well as organizational costs, were financed for the most part by government subsidies and lottery money. In order to justify these government subsidies, the national sport associations had to professionalize their accounting and personnel management, as well as keep and submit membership records of both their association and affiliated local clubs (Stokvis 1979).

The growing interdependencies between municipalities and sport clubs at the local level, and the central government and sport organizations at the national level, changed the balance of power between government and organized sport and created room for the development of government ambitions. Sport was increasingly considered as a merit good which needed and justified public funding. Especially between the 1950s and 1980s, public service positions for sport affairs were created and filled, building up an identifiable new professional group with its own expertise, training, conferences, journals and consultative bodies. With the development of this staff, the government at both local and national level became less dependent on sport organizations in the development and implementation of sport policy.

The development of a new professional workforce in the sport sector became significant after 1965. In that year a new department was established (the Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Social Work). The ideological meaning of this new department was expressed by a leading politician at that time as a 'conscious attempt to break new ground leading from the welfare state to the state of well-being' (De Haan & Duyvendak 2002). Sport became part of this new department instead of the Ministry of Education, Arts and Science, and was thus transferred from an educational to a recreational frame of reference. This transfer was a logical step in the central government's ambition to offer its citizens space and facilities for recreation and sport as compensation of work, with the aim to offer opportunities for self-realization and to prevent heart and vascular diseases.

Working from this frame of reference, the social democratic Minister of Culture, Recreation and Social Work officially announced the promotion and organization of recreational forms of sport outside sport clubs;⁵ this would be implemented by (semi-)government bodies at the local level. In doing so, the central government tried to meet the perceived societal need for freedom of expression and informal, casual, non-structured forms of self-development, as well as respond to the resistance against competitive, hierarchical and institutional rules of behaviour, which could also be witnessed in, for example, dance and pop music. As this policy line threatened their monopoly position, it met with stern opposition from the NSF and the sport associations (Stokvis 1979; Van Bottenburg 1999; Van Bottenburg 2002a). Nonetheless, both the NSF and the local and central government came to terms to support two national promotion campaigns to promote 'sportive recreation': Trim je Fit! (which means 'jog yourself fit') between 1968 and 1972, initiated by NSF, and Sportreal ('sportive recreation for all') in 1976, a joint project of

NSF and the central government (De Heer 2000). Interestingly, it was mainly the number of organized sport participants that rose during the 1970s; and this increase had already started before these campaigns were launched (Stokvis 1989).

The politicization of sport

At the end of the 1970s, the government ambitions with respect to sport and recreation in the welfare state were significantly tempered by the worldwide economic crisis. Between 1979 and 1982, the Netherlands witnessed an economic decline accompanied by a sharply rising unemployment rate, heading towards 12 per cent in 1983, and a national debt that jumped in the 1980s from 44 to 71 per cent of the national income. Interest payments on this debt tripled, taking away funds from other areas of investment and burdening future budgets with higher interest payments. To reduce the level of government expenditure, successive centre-right and centre-left Cabinets restructured the government finances, agreed on wage restraint with employers' organizations and trade unions, and reformed the social welfare system. Moreover, they pursued a policy of liberalization and privatization of public utilities and services (Andeweg & Irwin 2002).

In this economic and political atmosphere, public sport policy was given a lower profile in the 1980s and early 1990s than previously. The new political credo was that people had to become less dependent on the government in their sport and leisure activities. 'The minister of leisure is no Santa Claus,' Joop van der Reijden, the State secretary of sport, declared in 1984 (quoted in Van Bottenburg 2002b: 322). Sport promotion by the central government was confined to target groups facing specific barriers in sport participation, instead of the population as a whole. Sport clubs were confronted with frozen subsidies. And sport facilities like swimming pools and sport halls were privatized or run in a more business-like way, with less-subsidized and thus higher tariffs than before (Goossens *et al.* 2008).

It was notable during this period of economic crisis and withdrawing government support that the growth in sport participation stagnated for the first time in the Netherlands. The total number of voluntary sport clubs also started to decline. Their overall membership still grew, albeit at a far lower pace than before (see Figure 3.1). Insofar as there was growth in the 1980s, it came from the commercial sport and leisure industry. The number of commercial fitness clubs rose – without any governmental subsidies – from a mere 300 in 1980 to around 800 in 1990. This industry continued to grow substantially in the following decades. Moreover, other commercial providers of sport expanded in the 1990s, such as yachting marinas, riding stables and climbing halls (Goossens *et al.* 2008; Lucassen *et al.* 2008). As such, the commercial leisure industry in the Netherlands rapidly moved into a mass participation market that increasingly overlapped and competed with public and voluntary providers, as was the case in the UK, for example (Houlihan & White 2002).

The sport sector was not hit as hard by the public sector reforms during the 1980s as the field of welfare. While the welfare system was operated by professional social workers who were increasingly under attack for being ineffective and creating a 'culture of dependency' among their client groups (Illich *et al.* 2010), the sport sector was not dominated by professionalized bureaucracies but for the most

part was still run and administrated by volunteers. The government sport budget was still relatively small compared to other parts of the social welfare policy system. Substantial savings could not be achieved in this area. Nevertheless, the government's detached attitude towards the national sport organizations, and its motion to withdraw its concern for the sport sector, cooled off their mutual relationship during the 1980s (Van Bottenburg 2002b).

To improve the relationship with the government and put sport back on the political agenda, the Dutch sport organizations started a powerful lobby in the 1990s, backed by prominent businessmen and politicians, stressing the societal meaning of sport participation and elite sport. This lobby was reinforced by the merger of the Netherlands Sports Federation with the Netherlands Olympic Committee in 1993, creating NOC*NSF as the overall umbrella organization for both sport for all and elite sport. In several publications, conferences and debates, sport – and elite sport as its flagship – was presented and discussed as a source of inspiration, offering unique opportunities to improve the quality of life in Dutch society (ATKearney 1992; Stam 1996; Van Bottenburg & Schuyt 1996). As has been found in other European countries, this 'sport lobby' received strong support from Members of Parliament and civil servants in ministerial sport departments. These groups articulated a common belief regarding the importance of sport and sport policy, even though they represented different institutions (cf. Bergsgard *et al.* 2007).

This support extended to the new cabinet that took office in 1994. The new cabinet was a political novelty, because it was formed by social democrats and right- and left-wing liberals, but without the Christian Democrats who had been in power since 1918. It promised a fresh approach, with a combination of economic reforms, such as tax decreases and flexibility of the labour market, and a progressive outlook on ethical issues, such as same-sex marriage and euthanasia. Erica Terpstra, a former Olympic medallist and president of NOC*NSF between 2003 and 2010, was appointed State secretary of sport. Under this cabinet, the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Culture was changed into the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. This change symbolized, first, the predominance of health over welfare and, second, the promotion of sport. For the first time in history, the term 'sport' appeared in the name of a Dutch ministry.

Also new was a motion proposed by three Members of Parliament in 1995, to ask the new cabinet for an 'integral interdepartmental sport policy document, acknowledging the unique chances that sport offers for a well-balanced development of society at large'.⁶ This policy document, published in 1996 (Ministerie van VWS 1996), reflected not only a Dutch but also an international tendency in this period to stress the growing social and cultural significance of sport and its multidimensional and malleable character to help achieve non-sport policy goals (Bergsgard *et al.* 2007; Bloyce & Smith 2010). The document strongly emphasized the alleged educational, social, health and economic functions of sport, and the assumed utility of sport as a means for social development, social integration, public health and job creation.

In time, the sport lobby resulted in a substantial increase in the central government's sport budget. Immediately after the cabinet took power, Terpstra allocated 35 million guilders to the Fund for the Elite Athlete, to cover expenses of officially

recognized elite athletes from the fund's interest, and later to also pay stipends to them.⁷ Three years later, the leaders of most parliamentary parties promised to double the central government's sport budget after the elections of 1998. Assisted by the strong economic growth rates in the Netherlands, which remained at a relatively high level until 2000, this was indeed effected (Breedveld 2003; Van Bottenburg 2002b). Between 1998 and 2008, the sport budget even multiplied by four, as illustrated in Table 3.2.

However, the sport budget of the central government did not rise without significant changes in the distribution and destination of allocated funds. To a large extent, the additional money did not go directly to NOC*NSF and the national sport associations. About 80 per cent went to local government sport projects designed to increase the quality of the local sport infrastructure and to further the utilization of sport for wider societal goals, on the condition that the local authorities themselves contributed an additional 50 per cent of the project costs (Van der Poel 2003). This was partly a way to stimulate local governments to raise their spending, and thus to create a multiplier effect. Indeed, the net local public spending increased from €611 million in 1998 to €895 million in 2006 (see Table 3.2). It was also partly a means of pushing responsibilities down in order to bridge the 'implementation gap' (Kjaer 2004) in sport policy, comparable to what happened in the same period in Canada, Germany, Norway and the UK (Bergsgard *et al.* 2007).

Moreover, in 2003 the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport discontinued the institutional subsidies for national sport associations on the basis of their membership figures. The underlying idea of this change was that the government should not financially support societal institutions just because they exist, but because of their contribution to society. The institutional subsidies were therefore converted into subsidies for projects that contributed to explicit goals of the central governmental sport policy (Van der Poel 2006). This switch in policy implied a move to a more contractual-based relationship between national sport organizations and governing bodies. It clearly increased the pressure on the national sport organizations to demonstrate that they deliver (public) value for (public) money (Houlihan & White 2002).

Another change in the distribution and destination of the rising public sport budget was that substantially more money was allocated to elite sport. Until the 1980s, the central government did not develop a separate elite sport policy. An

Table 3.2 Net spending on sport by local, provincial and central government and from the lotteries coordinated by the Stichting Nationale Sporttotalisator, 1971–2006

	1971	1981	1991	1994	1998	2000	2003	2006
Local authorities	175	496	483	496	611	660	813	895
Provincial authorities	NA	NA	7	7	5	5	10	10
Central government	5	19	18	36	28	60	72	118
Total public spending	NA	NA	508	539	644	725	895	1023
Lottery	10	25	21	36	33	33	43	44

Sources: De Heer 2000; Goossens 2008; Van Bottenburg 1999

Note: the amounts before 2000 have been converted from Dutch guilders into euros

illustrative example of this is that elite sport was only first included as a separate entry in the national sport budget in 1987, in the sum of approximately €2 million (Pouw 1999). From the 1990s onwards, however, the Dutch government endorsed elite sport as a policy tool. The elite sport budget gradually rose to €10 million in 1999, followed by a sharp rise to €30 million in 2008.

This policy change started with the establishment of a Fund for the Elite Athlete in 1994 and was followed by a systematic and coherent elite sport policy process directed towards improving the 'elite sport climate' (Van Bottenburg 2000).⁸ Initially, the main goal of this policy was to utilize the social value of elite sport, by giving support to national sport organizations, improving the social conditions of elite athletes, and counteracting negative side-effects of elite sport (Ministerie van VWS 1998). Although this policy goal reflected a paradigm shift compared to the government's attitude towards elite sport in the 1980s and before, the government was criticized for its vagueness and lack of ambition. In response to these critics and the public enthusiasm for the historically unparalleled successes of Dutch athletes at the Olympics of 2000 and 2004, the government aligned its elite sport policy goals with the sport organizations. In a new sport policy document, published in 2005, the government declared that it 'supports the aim of the sports sector to ensure the Netherlands ranks among the top ten countries in the international sports world'. As a rationale for this policy goal, the government referred to the importance of elite sport 'as a symbol for ambition, as a source of relaxation and for the benefit of our national image at home as well as abroad' (Ministerie van VWS 2005).

Although the money spent on elite sport increased significantly, its share in the overall sport budget of the central government declined from 36 per cent in 1999 to 28 per cent in 2008 because the net spending on sport for all increased even more (Van Bottenburg 2009). The advocacy coalition for high performance achievement in Olympic sports has undoubtedly become stronger in both sport organizations and government sport policy departments, but other advocacy coalitions have gained influence as well (cf. Houlihan & White 2002). This is particularly true for a cluster of interest groups that urge for higher rates of physical activity among Dutch citizens in the battle against obesity, heart and vascular diseases, and diabetes that are directly related to a lack of exercise. In 1995, a national mass media action plan promoting health-extending physical activities, entitled *The Netherlands on the Move!*, was launched by NOC*NSF, the Dutch Heart Foundation and the Dutch Cancer Foundation. Ten years later, this was followed by a *National Action Plan for Sport & Exercise*. This action plan was initiated by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and directed towards the adult population that does not meet what is called the 'Dutch Healthy Exercise Standard' (thirty minutes' exercise a day).

In general terms, the current central government's sport policy 'focuses primarily on the use of sport for social purposes' (Ministerie van VWS 2005). Improving health (exercise), increasing social cohesion (participate) and stimulating top-class sport (perform) are the three anchor points for this policy. These anchor points should lead to 'the development of a sports society', because 'sport stands for values that the government considers vital', such as leading a healthy lifestyle, participating and delivering top performances, and living in a society where people interact with one another (Ministerie van VWS 2005).

The governmental ambitions to use sport as a means to achieve non-sporting objectives have led to both a politicization of sport (Bergsgard *et al.* 2007) and a widening implementation gap. In the field of sport, this steering problem of the central government exists not only because the ability of central government to give direction to society has been weakened generally (Kjaer 2004), but also because the non-profit and voluntary sport organizations are not established and equipped to meet the governmental demands, and the national authorities themselves only recently stimulated and financed the development of an implementation structure. In that respect, the establishment of the Netherlands Institute for Sport and Physical Activity (NISB) is important. It was founded in 1999 as a merger of several sports development organizations, and has – with substantial subsidies from the central government – rapidly grown into a key institute in the implementation and assessment of sport policy projects, which are mainly directed to the promotion of health-enhancing physical activity outside sport clubs.⁹

The implementation of government sport policy is currently the responsibility of the provinces, municipalities, sport organizations and a range of semi-government and intermediary sport policy and sport service organizations (like NISB) that together form the sport policy network. However, more than implementing the central government sport policy, these ‘partners’ in the sport policy networks also strive for their own ambitions and strategies (Van der Poel 2003), often leading to extensive consultations to build a consensus on the policy goals and the implementation strategy.

Conclusions

In the second half of the twentieth century, being active in sports has become an increasingly popular pastime in the Netherlands. This increase has been connected more closely to a general growth in the level of prosperity and education than to national promotion campaigns by the central government and national sport organizations. The large-scale construction of sport facilities and venues by local authorities and the expanding infrastructure of non-profit sport clubs and growth of commercial sport providers have been highly important to meet these growing sport and recreational needs of the Dutch population.

Until the 1990s, the main contribution of the central government consisted of the subsidization of sport organizations. This enabled national sport associations to professionalize their organization in ways that would have been unthinkable had they remained solely reliant on their members’ subscription fees. An unintended consequence of these subsidies, however, was that the sports associations became more dependent on the financial support of the central government.

This became especially important after 1996, when the central government increasingly came to see sport as a means to achieve non-sport policy goals, in particular to enhance health, social inclusion, national pride and international prestige. This ambition resulted in a sharp growth in the central government’s sport budget, but also increased pressure on national sport organizations to contribute explicitly to public sport policy goals in return for receiving governmental subsidies. A similar change occurred at the local level in the relationship between municipalities and sport clubs. However, this instrumental approach to sport by

the government poorly matched the *raison d'être*, principal goals and organizational capacities of the local sport clubs and national sport associations, which were primarily focused on – and framed to – the organization of sport participation and competition for their affiliated members. Their limited capacity to meet the government's ambitions to use sport for non-sport goals generated criticism of the local voluntary sport clubs and their national associations, leading to changes in the distribution and destination of government subsidies and the foundation of a new, powerful organization for sport policy implementation. Interestingly, this instrumentalization of sport was initially advocated by the sport organizations themselves to put sport on the political agenda again in the early 1990s.

A change in the destination of the rising central government's sport budget that did not conflict with the rationale of the governing sport bodies was the increased importance that the Dutch government has attached to elite sport since the mid 1990s. This change reflected a paradigm shift in the attitude of the government towards elite sport compared to the 1980s and before. In 2005, the government even sharpened its elite sport ambition by declaring that it supported the aim of the sport organizations to belong to the top ten countries of the world. Unlike in many other countries, however, achieving this ambition has not been at the expense of sport for all. The ratio between the government expenses for elite sport and sport for all has been quite stable since the mid 1990s at about 25 per cent for elite sport and 75 percent for sport for all. Thanks to a significant growth of the overall sport budget, the advocates of elite sport and sport for all found themselves playing a positive sum game, in which both lobby groups could win. A fundamental discussion about this ratio has been put off indefinitely; in the hope of an ever increasing sport budget.

Notes

- 1 Based on a four-yearly household survey (Aanvullend Voorzieningen Onderzoek [Facilities Usage Survey]). From 1979 to 2009, the response groups varied between 13,000 and 17,000 persons of 15 to 79 years of age. A five-yearly Time Use Study, making use of one-week diaries of 1,300 to 3,400 persons, showed that the Dutch spent an average of 2.6 hours per week on sport and physical exercise in their leisure time in 2005, compared to just 1.5 hours in 1975. Recently other, sport-specific research instruments have been added to these longitudinal data; in particular, the Richtlijn Sport Onderzoek [Guideline Sport Survey]. According to this sport-specific survey, with a response group of 4,200 persons between 5 and 80 years of age, 68 per cent of the Dutch population practised sport at least once a month (including recreational cycling and walking) in 2008.
- 2 Apart from sport participation in sport clubs, primary school children (aged 4–11 years) receive two 45-minute PE lessons per week at school. At 40 per cent of the schools, these lessons are given by a gym teacher. At the other schools a regular teacher gives PE. Children in secondary schools (12 years and older) receive PE lessons on average for more than two hours per week, usually taught by a gym teacher (SCP 2007).
- 3 The same was true for Germany: here too the federal sports associations lost their independence and were incorporated into the German National Socialist Reichsbund of Physical Activities. Bergsgard, N. A., Houlihan, B., Mangset, P., Nodland, S. I. & Rommetvedt, H. (2007) *Sport policy. A comparative analysis of stability and change*, Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- 4 This would have the same 'purchasing power' as €6.8 million today (<http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/calculate.php>).

- 5 This was stated in the first official national sport policy document, published in 1974: Ministerie van CRM (1974). *Nota sportbeleid. Nota van de minister van CRM aan de Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal*, Den Haag: CRM.
- 6 Motion Essers-Middel-Fermida, Tweede Kamer, vergaderjaar 1995–1996, 24400 XVI, nr. 50.
- 7 35 million guilders had the same purchasing power as €21 million today (<http://www.iisg.nl/hpw/calculate.php>).
- 8 The social and organizational environment that provides the circumstances in which athletes can develop into elite sports athletes and can continue at the highest levels in their branch of sport. Bottenburg, M. v. (2000) *Het topsportklimaat in Nederland*. 's-Hertogenbosch: Diopter.
- 9 In 2008, NISB had 88 employees (73 fte), compared to 41 (27 fte) in 2002.

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