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Ethnic participation in Dutch amateur football clubs

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ABSTRACT

Sports, especially when organised within clubs, are often celebrated for their ability to link different ethnic groups together. However, various studies indicate the persistence of a gap between majority and ethnic minority sports participation. This study explores the participation of multiple ethnic groups in the Netherlands' most popular organised sport. Three explanations for ethnic disparities in sports participation are discussed and explored: a lack of resources, discrimination and ethnic specific sport preferences. The article concludes that resources and discrimination do not seem to substantially structure ethnic participation in amateur football. Ethnic preferences seem to have more merit explaining differing participation rates. A combination of a high number of amateur football clubs, subsidies and geographic concentration of minority groups might be responsible for these findings.

KEYWORDS

Migration; ethnic group;
voluntary sports club;
participation; exclusion

Amateur football: a reflection of society?

Over the past decades, many affluent democracies have rapidly diversified along ethnic lines due to immigration, a trend which is only expected to continue in the future. To ensure cohesion between citizens in light of these new differences, policy makers have increasingly put their faith in sports and especially club-organised sports activities (Elling, De Knop, & Knoppers, 2001; Krouwel, Boonstra, Duyvendak, & Veldboer, 2006; Vermeulen & Verweel, 2009).

The instrumental use of sports for addressing ethnic differences by policy makers can be understood as part of the emergence of a much wider, global discourse underpinning the proliferation of the 'Sport for development and peace' (SDP) sector since the turn of the century (Giulianotti, 2011; Kidd, 2008). Central to this discourse is the representation of sports as an inherently open and integrative social domain, wherein the entry and movement of both people and their associated capital are largely unaffected by social structure, especially ethnic background.

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Various sport sociological scholars (Coakley, 2009; Collins, 2014; Giulianotti, 2016; Jarvie, 1991) have resisted this popular conceptualisation of sports. They argue that sports participants are not disconnected from, but instead embedded within a social world marked by difference, barriers, inequalities, and conflict, making the sports domain much less of the neutral and level playing field policy makers believe or hope it to be.

Ethnic disparities in sports participation are a case in point. Multiple studies have shown that despite the democratisation of sports, sports participation still tends to be ethnically stratified. In general, ethnic minorities tend to be less active in sports than their majority counterparts and they are less likely to participate in club-organised sports (Bottenburg, Rijnen, & Sterkenburg, 2005; Coumans, 2015; Higgins & Dale, 2013; Johnston, Delva, & O'Malley, 2007; Nielsen, Hermansen, Bugge, Dencker, & Andersen, 2013; Stamatakis & Chaudhury, 2008; Vogels, 2014; Wijtzes et al., 2014). This gap limits the potential of sports as a shared activity to bring people with various ethnic backgrounds together. Furthermore, it leads to an unequal ethnic distribution of the potential additional benefits that sports activities bring beyond leisure, such as opportunities for social capital formation (Janssens & Verweel, 2014) and positive (indirect) effects on health (Basterfield et al., 2015; Hardie Murphy, Rowe, & Woods, 2016; Pate, Trost, Levin, & Dowda, 2000).

There appears to be a lack of clarity about the reasons for the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in sports. Authors taking a critical approach have stressed the prevalence of exclusionary factors, most notably the unequal ethnic distribution of resources and discrimination, which favour participation of the dominant ethnic group over minority groups (Collins, 2014; Elling & Claringbould, 2005). However, it remains difficult to generalise findings from studies which typically use qualitative methods and rely on specific cases or limited data. Moreover, as ethnicity also seems to be related to differing sports participation interests (Elling & Knoppers, 2005; Harrison, Lee, & Belcher, 1999), it becomes challenging to disentangle processes of exclusion from ethnic differences in preferences.

Furthermore, most quantitative studies on ethnic sports participation so far have suffered from a few drawbacks, further complicating matters. Firstly, categorizations used for ethnic groups tend to be relatively few and broad. As experiences and positions within countries can vary substantially between ethnic groups, frequently used terms such as 'immigrant background' or 'non-white' may obscure substantial differences. Secondly, the use of longitudinal data has been scarce up until now. This means that we know relatively little about how time and demographic change are related to ethnic differences in sport participation. Thirdly, definitions of sports participation are quite often rather general. As interest and participation of ethnic groups could vary substantially between different types of sports, between popular and less popular sports, individual and team sports, and organised and non-organised sports, we would benefit from more specific accounts of ethnic sports participation.

A distinctive characteristic of the sports domain in Europe is its strong reliance on a network of sports clubs and overarching federations (Bottenburg et al., 2005). With both Europe's highest estimated share of sports activities taking place within the context of sports clubs (23%), and the highest percentage of citizens who are a member

of sports clubs (27%), the Netherlands serves as a prime example of organising sports in this way (Eurobarometer, 2014). This paper zooms in on the most expansive organised sport in the Netherlands, namely amateur football. With well over one million members of amateur football clubs, it is hard to overemphasise the social significance of recreational football for Dutch citizens. The research question I have formulated for the purpose of this study is twofold:

To what extent is Dutch amateur football an ethnic reflection of the Dutch population and what factors best explain differences in participation between ethnic groups?

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In the section below, I will introduce two different theoretical perspectives on how to understand ethnic differences in participation in voluntary activities. These are subsequently broken down into three key explanations for the potential differences in ethnic group's representation in Dutch amateur football. Afterwards, in the methodological section, I provide insight in the data and measures I have used. In the third section I will present the results of this study and the extent to which these match the expectations formulated earlier. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of the main findings and a discussion of their implications.

Three explanations for ethnic differences in participation in sports

Ethnic marginality or subcultures?

Ethnic disparities in leisure activities have enjoyed a fair share of academic interest since four decades. In a study on differences in outdoor recreation participation between Whites and African Americans, Washburne (1978) proposed an influential framework of two opposing theoretical perspectives to account for the African Americans' lower participation.

The first perspective is known as the marginality perspective. This perspective assumes that ethnic disparities in leisure participation and behaviour are primarily a result of ethnic inequality and the inferior position of ethnic minorities. Consequently, differences between ethnic groups are a result of experienced constraints on their respectively ability to gain access to and join in on leisure activities.

The second perspective has been described as the subcultural perspective¹. From this perspective it is assumed that ethnic groups do not experience and hold the same socialisation patterns, cultural values and norms, and, consequentially, develop diverging cultural tastes and behaviours which translate to different participation rates.

Ethnic marginality

Ethnic differences in resources

Historically, the central focus of the ethnic marginality perspective has been on differences socioeconomic resources. Like most activities, participation in sports, especially when organised within clubs, requires a certain amount resources at one's disposal.

The relatively disadvantaged positions of ethnic minority members might therefore act as a barrier to gain access to the sports domain (Collins, 2014; Wiertz, 2016).

Earlier research suggests that this indeed might be the case. Multiple studies show that part of the difference in participation between ethnic minority and majority groups coincides with differences in socioeconomic status (Higgins & Dale, 2013; Johnston et al., 2007; Wijtzes et al., 2014). While this does not necessarily imply a causal mechanism, it seems plausible that participation in sports, especially organised competitive sports like amateur football, requires a financial investment in terms of sports clothing, membership fees and transportation, which ethnic minorities on average might be less likely to meet.

In addition to economic resources, a lack of appropriate cultural resources might also act as a barrier for participation. An insufficient mastery of the language might be the most apparent example, but Elling and Claringbould (2005) and Vogels (2014) have suggested that there might be more subtle mechanisms at play, particularly relevant for club organised sports. For instance, ethnic minority members may be less familiar and comfortable with the sports club culture(s) in the Netherlands than ethnically Dutch individuals are. A lack of this tacit knowledge might discourage or prevent a part of ethnic minority members to effectively access a sports organisation and become or stay on as a member, regardless of their financial resources.

If ethnic differences in economic and cultural resources would have a substantial impact on amateur football club participation, we would expect the participation of various ethnic groups to be stratified accordingly. This would mean that ethnic groups which tend to have less economic and/or cultural resources will show relatively low participation rates in amateur football. Furthermore, assimilation theory would lead us to expect that participation of ethnic minority groups, especially in the case of relatively disadvantaged groups, will rise over time and between subsequent generations as a result of their socio-economic and cultural integration in the host society (Alba & Nee, 1997; Vogels, 2014). This leads to the first two expectations for this paper:

E1: Ethnic minority groups with relatively few economic or cultural resources will be underrepresented in amateur football compared to ethnic groups with more economic or cultural resources.

E2: Ethnic minority participation in amateur football will increase over time due to the accumulation of economic and cultural resources.

Ethnic prejudice and discrimination

Even when ethnic minority groups might possess the resources necessary to participate in leisure activities they might be constrained in their ability to do so because of ethnic prejudice and discriminatory practices². Prejudice is something many individuals belonging to ethnic minorities face and which, through experiences with discrimination or anticipation thereof, acts as a barrier or deterrent to participation in various social spheres, including the domain of sports (Stodolska & Floyd, 2016). While sports settings on average rank relatively low in terms of places where Dutch citizens report unwanted behaviour, including discrimination, amateur football clubs are overrepresented (Schipper-van Veldhoven & Steenbergen, 2014). Furthermore, there have been

multiple known examples of clubs showing inclinations to formally exclude (certain) ethnic minorities from membership. While these inclinations were not formalised, they do hint towards the existence of ethnic prejudice in amateur football, which could be accompanied by informal forms of discrimination.

Not all ethnic minority groups, however, face prejudice to the same extent. Therefore, the likelihood of being subjected to discrimination likely varies per group. Studies on ethnic social distance in the Netherlands revealed a clear hierarchy in the desirability of ethnic out groups, consisting of ethnically Dutch as the most desirable group, followed by Northern European, Southern European, ethnic minorities from former Dutch colonies such as Suriname, and predominantly Muslim groups, most notably Turkish and Moroccan citizens at the bottom as least desirable group (Verkuyten, Hagendoorn, & Masson, 1996). Additionally, Hagendoorn and Sniderman (2001) concluded that for this latter group, native Dutch tend to view people with Moroccan backgrounds more negatively than persons with a Turkish background. Later studies indicate that this hierarchy seems to persist over time (Huijnk & Andriessen, 2016). However, in the last two decades, a large group of Middle and Eastern Europeans have migrated to the Netherlands. While it is difficult to exactly pinpoint where they fall within the ethnic hierarchy in the Netherlands outlined above, it seems that Eastern Europeans, who form the biggest share of this group, also face substantial prejudice from the ethnically Dutch population (Dagevos & Gijsberts, 2013).

Data on self-reported experiences of discrimination by ethnic minorities in the Netherlands largely confirms the above ethnic hierarchy (Andriessen, Fernee, & Wittebrood, 2014). Belonging to a predominately Muslim ethnic minority, such as Turkish and Moroccan citizens, bears the greatest risk of discrimination, while having darker skin³, as in citizens of former Dutch colonies, seems less associated with being a target of discrimination. Middle and Eastern European individuals are ranked lower than Surinamese and Antilleans with regards to experiencing discrimination.

In a club sport dominated by ethnically Dutch members, we may find club cultures which primarily revolve around the ethnic Dutch group and are potentially less accommodating or sometimes even hostile towards minorities (see for example van Slobbe, Vermeulen & Koster, 2013) based on the above hierarchy. If this is the case, I would expect that:

E3: Participation of predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities in amateur football will be relatively low.

E4: Participation of citizens with a postcolonial back ground, dark skin or Middle and Eastern European background in voluntary sports football clubs will be lower than ethnically Dutch, but higher than predominantly Muslim ethnic groups.

Ethnic subcultures: Ethnic differences in preferences and tastes

While the previous two explanations, from a marginality perspective, focussed on exclusionary processes which could affect ethnic participation in sport, it would be naïve to assume that ethnic groups all show an equal interest in participating in sports in general, or certain sports in particular. Key to the subcultural perspective is that

ethnic groups may differ in their socialisation and the cultural value, tastes and behaviours they acquire and demonstrate. Consequently, ethnic differences in sports participation may occur as a result of diverging preferences.

Firstly, the family unit is likely to be an important instigator of this process. Not only are families considered to be a crucial agent in the sport socialisation of young individuals with long lasting effects (Birchwood, Roberts, & Pollock, 2008; Kay, 2004; Wheeler, 2012). But it is also seen as a key driver behind ethnic segregation of social networks due to its highly ethnic homogenous composition (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001). Because football is not as popular and developed as a recreational sport in every part of the world, ethnic groups will likely vary substantially in the amount to which they can draw on family members' experiences and are socialised by them. As such, it seems reasonable to expect that ethnic groups with backgrounds from countries in which amateur football is relatively underdeveloped are less likely to be interested to participate in an amateur football club, resulting in lower participation rates.

Secondly, Harrison (2001) suggests that athletic success of ethnic groups in specific sports can foster so-called 'positive self-stereotypes'. This entails that individuals link their ethnic background to their capability to excel in certain sports. He notes that this process can be especially powerful in the case of ethnic minority groups, as these self-stereotypes can function as a form of pride in a context where minority groups tend to be compared unfavourably to the majority group. If we reason in the opposite direction, however, this would also mean that a lack of athletic success and ethnic role models could highly diminish a sports appeal and direct interests to other sports or outside of the sports domain all together. These notions lead to the following and final expectation:

E5: Participation of ethnic minorities from countries where football on the amateur and/or elite level is relatively underdeveloped will be lower than that of other ethnic groups.

Methodology

Data

For the purpose of this study, the Royal Dutch Football Association (KNVB) provided data of all club memberships from playing seasons 2005/2006 to 2014/2015. In addition to individual club memberships, these data contained individual members' gender, date of birth and address. These individual characteristics were used to match these data with microdata from Statistics Netherlands (CBS), which contains the country of origin of Dutch citizens and their parents. Around 94% of the roughly 2.2 million individual members from the original data were successfully matched with micro data from CBS.

Figures on the countries of origin of the total Dutch population have been retrieved from StatLine. This is an openly accessible online platform maintained by CBS, through which Dutch country-level statistics based on the same data are published.

Measures

Ethnicity

The Netherlands is characterised by what van Sterkenburg, Knoppers and de Leeuw (2012) have described as a layered system of ethnic classification. The basis of this system is similar to other continental European countries, such as Germany or Belgium, wherein ethnic categorizations are not based on the concept of race, as is the case in the United States, but on a primary distinction between an 'indigenous' majority population (autochtonen) and a 'foreign' minority population (allochtonen) whose roots are believed to lie somewhere else. In this system the notion of background is very important. The vast majority of people who are classified as 'allochtonen' have Dutch citizenship. However, they are considered foreign because either they themselves or a past generation is originally from a different place. In the past the 'allochtonen' category has often been split into a West and non-Western category, which can then be broken down further into specific national backgrounds. In public discourse and day to day life however, the term usually refers to the non-Western variant, and more specifically four of the most sizable minority groups in the Netherlands: citizens with Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese and Antillean backgrounds. The first two groups have moved to the Netherlands as part of labour immigration waves in the 1960s and 1970s. The latter two groups have moved to the Netherlands as part of decolonisation. People with Indonesian backgrounds are another ex-colonial group, but they are seldom associated with the former four groups. Much more recently a new wave of labour immigrants has entered the Netherlands from Middle and Eastern Europe, most notably Poland. Many of them do not have Dutch citizenship because this not a requirement to live and work in the Netherlands. The majority of them is however registered in the municipality where they live and are thus included in the data.

Following this layered system of classification, I distinguish between five single nationality minority backgrounds: Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, Antillean and Indonesian. Normally the first four of these categories are used in Dutch studies which include ethnic background. People with an Indonesian background were added as a separate category because they form one of the Netherlands' biggest ethnic minority groups, with a specific colonial history that is clearly identifiable within the Dutch context. Furthermore, I choose to forgo the Western and non-Western minority categories and replace them with a set of six more specified ethnic categories referring to socio-cultural regions of origin, similar to and inspired by Dronkers and Velden (2013): 1) Northern/Western/Southern European and Anglo-Saxon, 2) Middle and Eastern European, 3) North African and Muslim Asian, 4) Sub-Saharan African, 5) Non-Muslim Asian and Oceanian (excluding Australia and New Zealand) and 6) Middle and South American. A detailed list of all countries making up these six categories can be found in an online appendix.

To determine an individual's ethnic background, I follow the operationalisation procedure which is customary for Statistics Netherlands and Dutch academic researchers. This means that if somebody has two parents who are both born in the Netherlands this person is considered ethnically Dutch⁴. If someone has at least one parent who is born outside of the Netherlands, this person is believed to have an ethnic minority

background. If the individual is born outside of the Netherlands, the ethnic background is determined by the official country of birth (e.g. a person who is born in Turkey and has one or more parent who is born outside of the Netherlands will be considered to have a Turkish background). If an individual is born in the Netherlands, the country of birth of the parents is used to determine his or her ethnic background. In these cases, the country of birth of the mother is used over that of the father, unless the Netherlands is also her country of birth (e.g. a person who is born in the Netherlands with a mother born in Turkey and a father born in Morocco will be considered to have a Turkish background).

Club membership

An individual is considered a member of an amateur football club when he or she is registered as a member at a club during the playing season. A playing season was measured as beginning on 15 August of a certain year and ending on 15 May of the following year. People who were registered as a member at a club after 15 May but terminated their membership prior to 15 August were left out.

Results

A diversifying football sector lagging behind the general population

The first notable thing in [Table 1](#) is the fact that the amateur football sector in the Netherlands, perhaps quite unsurprisingly, mainly consists of ethnically Dutch members – i.e. members with two parents born in the Netherlands. However, while 84.87% of the members are ethnically Dutch in 2005, we can witness a clear and gradual decrease of this share to 83.15% of the members in 2014. While the proportion of Dutch members in amateur football has shrunk over time, their number in [Table 2](#) shows an increase over time. Therefore, the data from [Tables 1](#) and [2](#) on Dutch members primarily show that ethnic minorities have increasingly found their way into amateur football clubs in the past years and that this growth has not been matched by an equal growth of Dutch members, resulting in a gradual reduction of the share of ethnically Dutch members and an increase of the ethnic minority group as a whole. [Tables 3](#) and [4](#) show that in comparison to the general population, Dutch members are overrepresented in amateur football. While 84.87% of the members in 2005 are ethnically Dutch, only 80.73% of the general population can be classified as such in the same year. This is in line with observations showing that ethnic minorities in the Netherlands on average are less likely to be engaged in associational activities than the Dutch population (Huijnk & Andriessen, 2016). However, the difference is not very pronounced, which could suggest that amateur football clubs in general have a relatively low threshold for participation by ethnic minorities in comparison to other types of civil society organisations.

Furthermore, we can see that the share of Dutch people within the general population also dropped over time. The same explanation holds true here, namely that this is not due to the number of ethnically Dutch people – the number grows every single year except for 2013 - but because the growth of ethnic minorities surpasses that of their Dutch counterparts. By comparing [Tables 1](#) and [3](#) we can also see that the

Table 1. Members of Dutch amateur football clubs in percentages per ethnic background for the years 2005–2014.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Dutch	84.87%	84.67%	84.67%	84.44%	84.27%	84.00%	83.85%	83.65%	83.40%	83.15%
Turkish	2.69%	2.60%	2.53%	2.60%	2.65%	2.65%	2.56%	2.51%	2.54%	2.45%
Moroccan	1.99%	2.12%	2.13%	2.22%	2.32%	2.42%	2.53%	2.63%	2.72%	2.77%
Indonesian	1.42%	1.36%	1.31%	1.25%	1.20%	1.14%	1.10%	1.07%	1.03%	0.99%
Surinamese	1.75%	1.77%	1.75%	1.73%	1.71%	1.71%	1.69%	1.68%	1.65%	1.65%
Antillean	0.64%	0.67%	0.68%	0.68%	0.69%	0.72%	0.74%	0.75%	0.76%	0.78%
Northern/Western/Southern European & Anglo-Saxon	3.32%	3.35%	3.37%	3.37%	3.37%	3.36%	3.36%	3.37%	3.37%	3.41%
Middle & Eastern European	0.83%	0.86%	0.88%	0.92%	0.94%	0.98%	1.01%	1.07%	1.12%	1.19%
North African & Muslim Asian	1.00%	1.02%	1.03%	1.07%	1.10%	1.18%	1.23%	1.27%	1.33%	1.43%
Sub-Saharan African	0.78%	0.81%	0.84%	0.88%	0.91%	0.96%	0.99%	1.02%	1.06%	1.10%
Non-Muslim Asian & Oceanian	0.36%	0.40%	0.42%	0.43%	0.43%	0.46%	0.49%	0.51%	0.53%	0.57%
Middle and South American	0.35%	0.38%	0.39%	0.40%	0.41%	0.43%	0.46%	0.47%	0.49%	0.52%
Subtotal	1,128,241	1,166,525	1,191,365	1,218,031	1,223,192	1,233,977	1,234,238	1,235,775	1,226,901	1,235,183
Ethnicity unknown	4.87%	4.64%	4.51%	4.42%	4.23%	4.11%	3.98%	3.92%	4.03%	4.07%
Total	1,186,037	1,223,278	1,247,673	1,274,376	1,277,217	1,286,898	1,285,362	1,286,182	1,278,431	1,287,577

Years refer to the start of a playing season beginning on 15 August and ending on 15 May of the following year.

Results based on calculations by the author using a combination of membership data from the Royal Dutch Football association and non-public microdata from Statistics Netherlands.

Table 2. Members of Dutch amateur football clubs in numbers per ethnic background for the years 2005–2014.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Dutch	957,567	987,682	1,008,751	1,028,538	1,030,815	1,036,533	1,034,871	1,033,723	1,023,204	1,027,014
Turkish	30,406	30,341	30,195	31,714	32,399	32,679	31,598	31,024	31,179	30,277
Moroccan	22,480	24,723	25,351	27,020	28,358	29,874	31,174	32,522	33,365	34,183
Indonesian	15,981	15,848	15,603	15,168	14,628	14,075	13,530	13,220	12,685	12,191
Surinamese	19,711	20,647	20,873	21,123	20,973	21,068	20,897	20,771	20,304	20,386
Antillean	7,241	7,838	8,087	8,332	8,434	8,896	9,133	9,227	9,299	9,655
Northern/Western/Southern European	37,502	39,128	40,092	41,081	41,169	41,457	41,505	41,600	41,364	42,090
& Anglo-Saxon										
Middle & Eastern European	9,309	9,998	10,465	11,206	11,456	12,057	12,500	13,208	13,778	14,696
North African & Muslim Asian	11,251	11,844	12,303	13,042	13,475	14,504	15,138	15,753	16,274	17,693
Sub-Saharan African	8,770	9,458	10,035	10,688	11,157	11,826	12,167	12,589	12,982	13,591
Non-Muslim Asian & Oceanian	4,079	4,615	4,952	5,202	5,286	5,659	6,057	6,290	6,465	7,040
Middle and South American	3,944	4,403	4,658	4,917	5,042	5,349	5,667	5,848	6,002	6,367
Subtotal	1,128,241	1,166,525	1,191,365	1,218,031	1,223,192	1,233,977	1,234,237	1,235,775	1,226,901	1,235,183
Ethnicity unknown	57,796	56,753	56,308	56,345	54,025	52,921	51,125	50,407	51,530	52,394
Total	1,186,037	1,223,278	1,247,673	1,274,376	1,277,217	1,286,898	1,285,362	1,286,182	1,278,431	1,287,577

Years refer to the start of a playing season beginning on 15 August and ending on 15 May of the following year.

Results based on calculations by the author using a combination of membership data from the Royal Dutch Football association and non-public microdata from Statistics Netherlands.

Table 3. The Dutch population in percentages per ethnic background for the years 2005–2014.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Dutch	80.73%	80.62%	80.40%	80.06%	79.73%	79.42%	79.11%	78.88%	78.64%	78.31%
Turkish	2.23%	2.25%	2.27%	2.29%	2.32%	2.34%	2.35%	2.36%	2.36%	2.35%
Moroccan	1.98%	2.01%	2.04%	2.07%	2.11%	2.14%	2.17%	2.20%	2.23%	2.25%
Indonesian	2.41%	2.38%	2.36%	2.33%	2.31%	2.28%	2.26%	2.23%	2.21%	2.19%
Surinamese	2.03%	2.04%	2.05%	2.05%	2.07%	2.07%	2.07%	2.07%	2.07%	2.06%
Antillean	0.79%	0.79%	0.80%	0.82%	0.84%	0.85%	0.86%	0.87%	0.87%	0.88%
Northern/Western/Southern European & Anglo-Saxon	5.08%	5.06%	5.06%	5.10%	5.11%	5.13%	5.15%	5.16%	5.17%	5.19%
Middle & Eastern European	1.26%	1.31%	1.42%	1.54%	1.64%	1.76%	1.90%	2.01%	2.11%	2.25%
North African & Muslim Asian	1.32%	1.32%	1.34%	1.39%	1.46%	1.51%	1.55%	1.58%	1.63%	1.71%
Sub-Saharan African	0.80%	0.80%	0.80%	0.83%	0.85%	0.87%	0.88%	0.89%	0.91%	0.94%
Non-Muslim Asian & Oceanian	0.94%	0.96%	0.99%	1.04%	1.07%	1.11%	1.15%	1.19%	1.23%	1.27%
Middle and South American	0.43%	0.45%	0.46%	0.48%	0.50%	0.52%	0.54%	0.56%	0.58%	0.60%
Subtotal	16,334,145	16,357,929	16,405,335	16,485,718	16,574,918	16,655,729	16,730,276	16,779,503	16,829,214	16,900,651
Rest	65	63	64	69	71	70	72	72	75	75
Total Dutch population	16,334,210	16,357,992	16,405,399	16,485,787	16,574,989	16,655,799	16,730,348	16,779,575	16,829,289	16,900,726

Reference date is 31 December of each year.

Table 4. The Dutch population in numbers per ethnic background for the years 2005-2014.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Dutch	13,186,595	13,187,586	13,189,983	13,198,081	13,215,386	13,228,780	13,236,155	13,236,494	13,234,545	13,235,405
Turkish	364,333	368,600	372,714	378,330	383,957	388,967	392,923	395,302	396,414	396,555
Moroccan	323,239	329,493	335,127	341,528	349,005	355,883	362,954	368,838	374,996	380,755
Indonesian	393,057	389,940	387,124	384,497	382,411	380,047	377,618	374,847	372,233	369,661
Surinamese	331,890	333,504	335,799	338,678	342,279	344,734	346,797	347,631	348,291	348,662
Antillean	129,683	129,965	131,841	134,774	138,420	141,345	143,992	145,499	146,855	148,926
Northern/Western/Southern European & Anglo-Saxon	828,971	827,514	830,406	840,260	847,540	855,091	861,443	866,268	870,858	877,179
Middle & Eastern European	205,614	214,636	232,342	253,790	271,941	293,309	318,101	336,482	354,899	380,873
North African & Muslim Asian	215,771	216,007	220,313	229,276	241,602	251,087	258,986	264,415	273,578	288,959
Sub-Saharan African	130,624	130,375	131,968	136,310	141,300	144,499	147,727	149,880	152,610	158,042
Non-Muslim Asian & Oceanian	153,511	157,237	162,208	170,932	177,876	184,785	192,835	199,848	206,484	214,345
Middle and South American	70,857	73,072	75,510	79,262	83,201	87,202	90,745	93,999	97,451	101,289
Subtotal	16,334,145	16,357,929	16,405,335	16,485,718	16,574,918	16,655,729	16,730,276	16,779,503	16,829,214	16,900,651
Rest	65	63	64	69	71	70	72	72	75	75
Total Dutch population	16,334,210	16,357,992	16,405,399	16,485,787	16,574,989	16,655,799	16,730,348	16,779,575	16,829,289	16,900,726

Reference date is 31 December of each year.

relative share of Dutch people within the population drops slightly faster than the share of Dutch members in amateur football. This implies that while ethnic minorities have increasingly found their way into amateur football, this development lags behind the change in the total population.

So far, this pattern is largely in line with what previous studies have indicated about ethnic participation in sports, although it must be noted that the gap between ethnic minority and majority members is not very large. However, when we zoom in on the membership figures of specific ethnic groups in amateur football, the picture becomes more heterogeneous. In the section below, I discuss these figures in light of the three explanations for ethnic disparities in sport participation outlined earlier in this paper.

Not a matter of resources

The first explanation for ethnic disparities in sports participation discussed in this paper focussed on ethnic inequalities in resources. A lack of economic and cultural resources might act as barrier for entry and thus serve as an explanation for ethnic differences in participation in amateur football clubs. When we look at the participation figures of ethnic minorities in amateur football we do not find much evidence which supports this explanation.

On average, citizens with a Turkish and Moroccan background are among the most disadvantaged in the Netherlands. They tend to have the lowest average incomes and score relatively low on indicators of cultural resources such as language proficiency and educational attainment (Huijnk & Andriessen, 2016). However, when we look at their membership rates of amateur football clubs, they are among the highest of all ethnic backgrounds. In 2005 Turkish members were in fact the best represented group in amateur football with 8,35% of the Turkish Dutch population being identified as a member of football club, even surpassing ethnically Dutch citizens. While the representation of Moroccan citizens was somewhat lower in 2005 their numbers rose quickly over time. In 2008 they surpassed the membership rate of ethnically Dutch citizens and by 2011 they have taken over the position of best represented group in amateur football.

A group in the Netherlands that does relatively well in terms of economic and cultural resources are citizens with a Northern, Western, Southern European or Anglo-Saxon background. This group has the highest average income and educational level of all ethnic minority groups. While this category is relatively big in amateur football in absolute terms (Tables 1 and 2), their representation in comparison to their share in the Dutch is in fact well below average (4.52–4.85%, Table 5). In terms of economic position and educational level, other minority groups tend to fall between the two aforementioned extremes. We would expect the representation of the remaining groups to be higher than that of Turkish and Moroccan citizens but lower than that of Northern, Western, Southern European or Anglo-Saxon background, but they are not. Overall, these figures are not in line with the idea that differences in economic and cultural resources serve as a primary explanation for differences in sport participation between ethnic groups as was formulated as the first expectation in this paper.

Table 5. Shares of the total population with a known membership to an amateur football club per ethnic group for the years 2005–2014.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Dutch	7.26%	7.49%	7.65%	7.79%	7.80%	7.84%	7.82%	7.81%	7.73%	7.76%
Turkish	8.35%	8.23%	8.10%	8.38%	8.44%	8.40%	8.04%	7.85%	7.87%	7.64%
Moroccan	6.95%	7.50%	7.56%	7.91%	8.13%	8.39%	8.59%	8.82%	8.90%	8.98%
Indonesian	4.07%	4.06%	4.03%	3.94%	3.83%	3.70%	3.58%	3.53%	3.41%	3.30%
Surinamese	5.94%	6.19%	6.22%	6.24%	6.13%	6.11%	6.03%	5.98%	5.83%	5.85%
Antillean	5.58%	6.03%	6.13%	6.18%	6.09%	6.29%	6.34%	6.34%	6.33%	6.48%
Northern/Western/Southern European & Anglo-Saxon	4.52%	4.73%	4.83%	4.89%	4.86%	4.85%	4.82%	4.80%	4.75%	4.80%
Middle & Eastern European	4.53%	4.66%	4.50%	4.42%	4.21%	4.11%	3.93%	3.93%	3.88%	3.86%
North African & Muslim Asian	5.21%	5.48%	5.58%	5.69%	5.58%	5.78%	5.85%	5.96%	5.95%	6.12%
Sub-Saharan African	6.71%	7.25%	7.60%	7.84%	7.90%	8.18%	8.24%	8.40%	8.51%	8.60%
Non-Muslim Asian & Oceanian	2.66%	2.94%	3.05%	3.04%	2.97%	3.06%	3.14%	3.15%	3.13%	3.28%
Middle and South American	5.57%	6.03%	6.17%	6.20%	6.06%	6.13%	6.24%	6.22%	6.16%	6.29%
Average of above categories	5.61%	5.88%	5.95%	6.04%	6.00%	6.07%	6.05%	6.06%	6.04%	6.08%
Total population	6.91%	7.13%	7.26%	7.39%	7.38%	7.41%	7.38%	7.36%	7.29%	7.31%

In general, educational and income levels have risen for ethnic minority groups over the years and between first and second generations. Additionally, important forms of cultural capital such as educational level and language proficiency have improved substantially for vulnerable groups, like Turkish and Moroccan citizens. While differences in economic and cultural resources do not seem to align with differences in amateur football participation between groups, we might still witness an increase in the representation of minority groups over time due to the fact that an additional share of these groups will be enabled to join amateur football clubs. Table 5 only provides very limited evidence for this idea. While we do see greater increases in participation rates for many minority groups compared to ethnically Dutch citizens or citizens with a Northern, Western, Southern European or Anglo-Saxon background, these differences are quite small. Moreover, while the representation of Moroccan citizens in amateur football rises substantially over time, the representation of Turkish citizens actually declines within the same timeframe, despite the improvement in the average position of both groups.

Different trends in the age distribution within these groups are better able to account for much of the change over time. Between 2005 and 2015, the number of Moroccan Dutch citizens aged between 0 and 25 has risen by roughly 10,000, while the number of Turkish Dutch citizens within the same age group has declined by almost 16,000 (Statistics Netherlands, n.d.). Because participation in amateur football is highly skewed towards young individuals, these demographic developments are likely to have a substantial impact on representation. Ageing also aligns with the slightly dwindling participation of Surinamese citizens, and the low and declining number of members with an Indonesian background. For this latter group this has to do with the fact that many young people with an Indonesian background belong to the third generation and are therefore classified as ethnically Dutch in government statistics.

The main exception to the story outlined above, are citizens with a Middle or Eastern European background. As can be seen in Tables 3 and 4, the number and

share of this group within the total Dutch population has increased significantly between 2005 and 2014. While the number of members with a Middle or Eastern European background of amateur football clubs also has risen within these years, this growth is strongly outpaced by the growth in the total population. Therefore, their relative participation in amateur football has declined over time, as is depicted in [Table 5](#). This could be explained by the recent migration of many Middle and Eastern European individuals to the Netherlands, in comparison to other minority groups. Aside from the potential lack of important cultural and/or economic resources, recent migrants have a relative precarious position which complicates long term commitments such as a club membership. This is illustrated by Gijsberts and Lubbers' (2015) study, which shows that Polish and Bulgarian migrants are likely to move within the Netherlands or return to their home country.

To summarise, the two first expectations of this paper were not confirmed. Except for recent migration, the results do not support the idea that differences in resources are the primary cause of ethnic disparities in club membership rates of amateur football clubs.

Not a matter of discrimination either

The second explanation for ethnic differences in sports participation is discrimination. Ethnic prejudice might cause ethnic minorities to be discriminated against within amateur football clubs. This could in turn discourage them to become or stay on as a member, resulting in a gap in participation. As may have been clear already from the previous section, the ethnic participation figures on Dutch amateur football do not provide evidence for this idea. The third expectation of this paper, namely that predominantly Muslim ethnic minorities, most notably citizens with a Turkish or Moroccan background, are most at risk for being discriminated against, and therefore will have relatively low participation rates, is not supported. Participation rates of Turkish and Moroccan citizens rivals or even goes beyond that of ethnically Dutch citizens, and participation of North African citizens and of Muslim countries is roughly around the average.

The fourth expectation of this paper and the second expectation regarding discrimination, states that minority groups with postcolonial backgrounds, minority groups with a darker skin complexion and people with a Middle or Eastern European background may also be at risk of discrimination resulting in comparatively low participation rates, although higher than the previous group. The results do not reflect this expectation. The participation rate of people with a Sub-Saharan African background ends up as one of the highest of all ethnic groups in 2014, slightly below Moroccans. Participation figures for people with Surinamese, Antillean, Indonesian and Middle and Eastern European backgrounds end up being below the participation of Turkish and Moroccan citizens, with the participation of the previous two being around the average levels of participation, while the participation of the latter two is substantially lower but can be better explained by other reasons. All in all, ethnic prejudice and discrimination do not seem to substantially structure participation of ethnic minority groups. To be clear, by this I do not wish to claim that members do not experience

and/or suffer from prejudice or discrimination in sports. On the basis of the results presented in this study, it is solely argued that ethnic prejudice and discrimination cannot account for ethnic disparities in membership of amateur football clubs.

But a matter of preference

The last explanation for differences in ethnic participation in sports in general and amateur football specifically is that ethnic groups tend to vary in their sport preferences and ambitions. While interest in football spans the entire globe, it is not equally developed as a recreational and elite sport in every part of the world. Through socialisation by family members and stereotypical images, ethnic minority groups could differ in the extent to which they are encouraged to participate in amateur football. This was formulated as the fifth expectation of this paper.

We find substantial support for this expectation in the participation figures of people with a non-Muslim Asian and Oceanian background. Over 40% of Dutch citizens who fall within this category originate from China. The Chinese population in the Netherlands does relatively well in economic and educational terms and experiences less stigmatisation than various other ethnic minority groups (Gijsberts, Huijnk, & Vogels, 2014). Despite this, representation of non-Muslim Asian and Oceanian citizens is among the lowest of all groups.

Liang (2016) notes that organised amateur football has been relatively underdeveloped in China and a community-based football culture has been lacking. Additionally, as a recreational sport, football in China faces strong competition from very popular sports such as table tennis, badminton and basketball. It is therefore likely that Dutch Chinese citizens experience relatively little socialisation into amateur football within the family. On top of that, stereotypical images of Asians and sports cater much more towards sports such as table tennis and badminton, in which they dominate on the elite level, than towards football. Together, this could result in a relatively low interest of citizens with a non-Muslim Asian and Oceanian background to participate in amateur football clubs and explain why they are so poorly represented as a group.

Discussion and conclusion

This article set out to explore to what extent different ethnic groups participate in the Netherland's most popular club organised sport and how these differences could be explained. Its primary research question was:

To what extent is Dutch amateur football an ethnic reflection of the Dutch population and what factors best explain differences in participation between ethnic groups?

In general, we see that ethnic minorities have increasingly found their way to amateur football clubs and that amateur football as a whole is diversifying. This is in line with the democratisation of sports which has been mentioned in the past (Elling & Claringbould, 2005). Despite this development, we also see that there still exists a gap between the participation of ethnically Dutch citizens and citizens with a minority background.

When we look more closely at differences in participation between specific ethnic groups, we are presented with a more heterogeneous picture. In this paper, I have provided three explanations which could account for ethnic differences in sports participation. The first two explanations are derived from the marginality perspective and focussed on barriers to participate. Either a lack of resources or experiences with prejudice and discrimination could prevent citizens from finding their way into amateur football clubs and/or remain there over time. The figures on participation presented in the study have provided very little evidence for the idea that these are valid explanations for ethnic disparities in membership rates of Dutch amateur football clubs. Groups with the most precarious positions in terms of resources and vulnerability to be discriminated against, show some of the highest membership rates. The third explanation was instead derived from the subcultural perspective and focussed on differing degrees of interest in amateur football and/or attitudes that facilitate participation. The results of this paper suggest that this perspective has more merit explaining ethnic disparities in sports. Not only can it better account for non-participation but it might also serve as an explanation for high participation of relatively marginalised groups. However, the validity of subcultural explanations might depend on certain structural conditions which mitigate constraints and therefore allow preference to play a more substantial role.

Two structural aspects might be of particular interest within the Dutch context. The first is the high number of policies on the national and local level which seek to lower the financial threshold to participate in organised sport for lower income groups. Additionally, many local Dutch governments have special subsidies to stimulate the participation of ethnic minority groups in sport and or tie funding to club's ability to incorporate ethnic minorities. As this coincides with a vast network of amateur football clubs and the strong concentration of ethnic minority members in the metropolitan area, the threshold for membership is likely to be relatively low.

Secondly, the high number of amateur football clubs and the substantial geographical concentration of ethnic minority members mean that many of them will have the option to choose to participate in clubs with a relative high degree of ethnic peers and/or ethnic minority members. Not only could this potentially lower the threshold for cultural resources in order to participate in amateur football clubs, but it could also make prejudice and discrimination less of an issue in practice. This would be line with Wiertz's (2016) study which indicates that Dutch civil society is relatively segregated and Bradbury's (2011) suggestion that minority clubs can play an important role for ethnic minorities to deal with racism in and outside football.

Future research should investigate the sorting tendencies of minority groups over various clubs and teams, especially of those most marginalised, and the interrelations between sports settings and feelings of belonging (see for example Walseth, 2006). While ethnic segregation might be helpful for creating safe, meaningful, and accessible sporting environments for ethnic (minority) groups, it may simultaneously limit the potential for inter-ethnic bridging that sports are often lauded for. A substantial share of the contact between ethnic groups could in fact take place within the sports arena, which in turn could also lead to or enhance ethnic tensions instead of alleviating them (Krouwel et al., 2006; Walseth, 2008).

Furthermore, this study also indicates that we should be wary of broad group definitions which obscure a world of difference and refrain from jumping to quick conclusions that disparities in sports participations are a product of barriers. In line with the subcultural perspective, McPherson (2004) notes that attitudes and interests are primarily transmitted through socially – not in the least ethnically – homogenous networks. Consequently cultural tastes and behaviours tend to be located in so called socio-demographic niches made up of socially similar individuals, making it less likely for dissimilar individuals to be exposed to tastes and behaviours or maintain them over time (Mark, 2003). This is probably no different for sporting attitudes and behaviours. In this light, studies on self-reported reasons for a lack of sports participation which have sometimes pointed to a lack of time or money need to be taken with some caution, as these findings could very well be an artefact of differing socialisation and interests. The degree to which constraints are experienced by individuals and form barriers which they cannot overcome will depend on the extent to which an activity is socially valuable to them.

Additionally, two important limitations of this study must also be considered. First, while this is one of the first studies to use such comprehensive data on ethnicity and club membership within a single sport, the duration of membership has not been considered. Ethnic groups could differ in their turnover rate due to various reasons, including the three explanations given in this paper. Secondly, Elling and Knoppers' (2005) study suggests that 'non-Western' ethnic minority members might in fact be more interested in participating in football than ethnic majority members. While we do see substantial participation rates for multiple minority groups, it remains unclear to what extent there remains a gap between interest and participation, and consequently, to what extent resources and discrimination could still play a role.

Finally, I would like to end this paper with a reflective note. A main objective of this paper was to go beyond the broad classifications for people with immigrant backgrounds and reveal part of the heterogeneity which lies behind them. By doing so, I encountered substantial differences which not only question the impact of exclusion in relation to sporting preferences on ethnic sports participation, but also challenge dominant conceptions about minority groups. Citizens with a Turkish and Moroccan backgrounds are a case in point. While commonly portrayed as two of least 'integrated' or 'participating' groups in the Netherlands, they show membership rates which are in fact similar to or even higher than ethnically Dutch citizens. This not only illustrates their attachment to the Netherlands' number one associational sport, but also reemphasizes Thiel and Seiberth's (2017) assertion that "the stranger is not as different from the 'local' as many believe."

Notes

1. The original name is ethnicity perspective. Later subcultural perspective or hypothesis is also used (Floyd, Shinew, McGuire, & Noe, 1994), which is a more fitting and clearer description.
2. Discrimination is less often directly associated with the marginality perspective. However, as a form of ethnic disadvantage and constraint on participation it fits with its underlying assumptions.

3. An anonymous reviewer pointed towards the possibility of darker skin not being a vulnerability for exclusion but also as a potential marker for active and concentrated recruitment efforts. Studies in the past have indeed pointed to the relation between blackness, and emphasis on physicality and natural ability in sports contexts, potentially leading to selective demand and overrepresentation (see for example McDonald, Rodriguez, & George, 2018). In the Dutch context, van Sterkenburg, Knoppers and de Leeuw (2012) find an emphasis on the physicality - positive or negative - of football players with Surinamese backgrounds in Dutch sports commentary, but not for players with Antillean backgrounds, who fall in the same ex-colonial 'Black' category. Moreover, in the Dutch organized sports system, very little if any actual 'recruiting' is done on the amateur level and joining mainly happens on a strictly voluntary basis through network ties. If selective recruitment based on natural ability exists within the Dutch context, it is more likely to happen during scouting of amateur players by professional clubs and within the development of professional football careers.
4. Consequently, only first and second generation minorities are included. Third generation minorities are categorized as ethnically Dutch in population statistics. While it could be argued that classifying this group as Dutch is problematic, explorations on the third generation population indicates that this group is still very small and young for most backgrounds. Additionally, it can also be argued that focussing on the first and second generations ensures the existence of a migration experience within the family and prevents individuals from remaining 'strangers' (Thiel & Seiberth, 2017) forever.

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