

# Summary

## Report on sport 2018

Editors:

Hugo van der Poel, Resie Hoeijmakers (Mulier Instituut)

Ine Pulles, Annet Tiessen-Raaphorst (SCP)

Original title:

Rapportage sport 2018

978 90 377 0893 6

## Summary and discussion

Hugo van der Poel (Mulier Instituut)

The series of *Report on Sport (Rapportage Sport)* began in 2003 at the request of the Sports Directorate of the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (vws). The last edition was published in 2014. This sixth *Report on Sport* is edited by the Mulier Institute (MI) and the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (scp) in collaboration with a number of research institutes.

The *Report on Sport* aims to bring together and describe the sports statistics and monitoring activities in the Netherlands in the various areas of sport, and to use this as a basis to ascertain the direction in which sport is developing at a national level. Chapters 2 to 8 inclusive of the report describe trends and developments; the emphasis in these chapters is on new statistics and developments covering the period 2014-2018, although to maintain a long-term perspective we have tried where possible to present data series going back as far as 2000. This information is supplemented in chapters 9 to 12 by a focus on the societal significance of sport from a social, economic and spatial planning perspective, as well as for international and trade relations. While a number of these chapters also describe trends and developments, the principal focus is not so much on the trends as such as on the question of what we know about the societal significance of sport.

The main long-term developments which emerge from the existing sports statistics are brought together in section S.1 in a list of key indicators. These key indicators provide a broad picture of developments in sport. The list is based on the report 'Strengthening the sports data infrastructure' (*Versterking data-infrastructuur sport*) (Tiessen-Raaphorst & De Haan 2012), with further detailing by vws in collaboration with sports research institutes. In section S.2 we formulate a number of challenges facing (the world of) sport in the Netherlands based on the developments observed in this report as well as insights garnered from other recent publications, in particular foresight studies on sport and public health. In section S.3 we reflect on the significance of sport for society. Finally, in section S.4 we present our findings based on the design and content of the National Agreement on Sport (Nationaal Sportakkoord).

### S.1 Key indicators for sport: a predominantly stable picture

The dominant picture is one of little change in the Dutch sports landscape. Table S.1 shows limited changes in four key indicators: a slight reduction in antisocial behaviour by those participating in and attending matches and contests; a rise in the number of injuries per 1,000 hours spent playing sport; and slight falls in the employment rate in sport and the number of minutes spent teaching PE in primary schools. The rest of the indicators show a

stable picture over the last ten years. However, it is worth adding a number of caveats to this finding.

First, it is uncertain whether the observed stability is despite or because of the policy on and investments in sports facilities, stimulating sport and elite sport. It may be that we would have observed different developments if the government had not pursued a specific sports policy. Which of these two options is the correct one is not easy to determine, as illustrated by the review of government policy on sport in the period 2010-2016 carried out by AEF (2017). What is certain is that sports policy is not the only factor influencing sports participation; demographic, economic and societal developments also play a role. When it comes to elite sport, the international competition also has an impact.

Second, the key indicators give an average picture for the whole population, for all regions in the Netherlands and for all branches of sport together. The key indicators are presented in digital format at [www.sportenbewegenincijfers.nl](http://www.sportenbewegenincijfers.nl); where indicators are based on population surveys, it is possible to break them down by background characteristics. It then becomes clear that there are wide differences in engagement in sport between, for example, those with a higher and lower education level, or by age or migration background.

Third, the finding 'stable' is surprising in some cases. For example, there has been virtually no change in the key indicators for PE, whereas this has been the focus of much (political) attention, partly because of clear indications that children's motor skills are developing less well than a few decades ago. A stable rate of participation in sport in an ageing population is equally remarkable. Older people participate in sport less than young people, mainly due to health problems. Evidently, however, the participation in sport by both young and older people is rising to such a degree that it compensates for the anticipated decline due to population ageing. Although the share of the population who are members of a sports club is stable, according to Statistics Netherlands (CBS) there has been a slow but steady decline both in the number of sports clubs and in the total membership of clubs and associations that are affiliated to the Dutch sports federation NOC\*NSF (Dutch Olympic Committee\*Dutch Sports Federation). This means that organised sport is losing 'market share' in the total sports landscape, which in addition to sports clubs consists of various forms of sport that are organised differently, are not organised or are offered commercially. A final example is that the performance of Dutch elite athletes is reasonably stable and high. In recent years, however, this has been accompanied by an increase in the contribution by central government to elite sport and the targeting of the available resources on an ever more select group of sports, namely those which have the greatest chance of delivering medal success. At the same time, support among the Dutch public for the policy on elite sports is waning, as is the appreciation of and pride in Dutch sporting achievements. Here again, the stable picture masks a number of changes, which could influence the score on the key indicators in the future.

Table S.1  
Key indicators for sport






	key indicator	definition	current figure	trend
PE 	PE (primary school)	total minutes' PE per week in primary school	groups 1-2 113 min. groups 3-8 89 min.	slight fall
VO 	PE (secondary school)	total minutes' PE per week in secondary school, averages per week per school year across all school types, except 6 <sup>th</sup> school year (only pre-university education)	1 <sup>st</sup> school year: 146 min. 4 <sup>th</sup> school year: 96 min. 6 <sup>th</sup> school year: 59 min.	stable
physical activity and sedentary behaviour 	physical activity	share of the population aged 4 years and older who engage in sufficient physical activity based on the Physical Activity Guidelines (Bewegrichtlijnen) 2017	47%	stable
	sedentary behaviour	number of hours spent sitting per day by the population aged 4 years and older	8.7 hours	-
sportinjuries 	risk of injury	number of injuries per 1,000 hours of sports participation in the population aged 4-79 years	2.0	increase

Table S.1  
(Continued)






	key indicator	definition	current figure	trend
sports participation and club membership 	weekly sports participation	share of the population aged 4 years and older who take part in sport once a week or more	57%	stable
	sports participation 12 times per year	share of the population aged 6 years and older who take part in sport 12 times a year and so meet the RSO (Sports Participation Guideline) norm.	70%	stable
	club membership	share of the population aged 6 years and older who are members of a sports club	31%	stable
top-ten ambition 	international medal table	position of the Netherlands in the international medal rankings, Olympic sports	9 <sup>th</sup> position	fluctuates, stable since 2015
matches and events 	safe sports climate –feeling safe	share of those aged 12 years and older who play sport and/or attend matches monthly who usually feel safe in and around matches and events	75%	stable

Table S.1  
(Continued)











	key indicator	definition	current figure	trend
	safe sports climate - antisocial behaviour	share of those aged 12 years and older who play sport and/or attend matches monthly who have experienced or witnessed antisocial behaviour in sport during the last 12 months	34%	slight fall
	sports participation through attendance	share of the population aged 12 years and older who attend sports matches/events monthly	20%	stable
	sports participation via media	share of the population aged 6 years and older who follow sport weekly via media	59%	stable
sports economy 	volunteering	share of the population aged 12 years and older who are active as volunteers in sport at least once a month	10%	stable
	Gross Domestic Product from sport	Gross Domestic Product (GDP) deriving from sport as a share of total GDP	1%	stable
	employment in sport	absolute employment volume in sport	90,000 FTE	fall

Table S.1  
(Continued)

	key indicator	definition	current figure	trend
sport and physical activity provision 	satisfaction with sport and physical activity provision	share of the population aged 12 years and older who are satisfied with the local sport and physical activity provision	86%	stable
	sports facilities	density of sports facilities per 10,000 inhabitants	21.1	stable
	activity-friendly environment	score (five-point scale) for the public space for the opportunities for people to take part in sport and physical activity <sup>a</sup>	2.61 per 10,000 inhabitants	stable
prevalence of doping in grassroots sport 	performance-enhancing substances	share of those aged 15 years and older who play sport weekly who report that they have used performance-enhancing substances in the last year <sup>b</sup>	0.7%	-

a The index is made up of six elements: sports facilities, play and activity centres, travel infrastructure, outdoor space and distance to facilities.

b These may be either doping agents (e.g. anabolic steroids and EPO) or sports dietary supplements (e.g. supplements containing creatine or protein).

Finally, we should note that ‘stable’ tells us nothing about ‘good’ or ‘bad’, or about ‘large’ or ‘small’. For example, satisfaction with the provision of sports and activity facilities in the Netherlands is very high – so high in fact that there is more scope for it to fall than to rise further. It can then be regarded as quite an achievement that this satisfaction remains stable at this high level. A comparable reasoning applies for the achievements of Dutch elite athletes and for sports participation. Conversely, the indicator ‘sedentary behaviour’ is also high, including by international standards, at an average of 8.7 hours per day. For this indicator, a good performance would be achieving a downward trend in the number of hours spent sitting each day. In short, the way stability should be interpreted for the different indicators varies depending on the context in which the underlying values are established.

## 5.2 Challenges for sport

The ‘Sports Policy Review’ (*Beleidsdoorlichting Sport*) (AEF 2017) shows that it is very difficult for several reasons to say anything about the (causal) relationship between the identified trends and the policy pursued, and therefore about the effectiveness of government policy during the period studied, 2010-2016. Two important reasons for this are the absence of clearly defined objectives and the lack of insights into the operative mechanisms. A further challenge for measuring the impact of interventions in the social domain and/or aimed at bringing about behavioural change is to isolate the impact of policy measures from other forces that influence the achievement of the envisaged goal. Particularly where that goal involves bringing about a change in behaviour (in this case, increasing the participation in sport and physical activity) over a longer period, this is virtually impossible. This does not apply for the policy on elite sport: the ‘top ten ambition’ is clear and measurable, and international comparative research on the factors that explain the relative success of countries at elite sport level has led to a good understanding of the determining factors.

This *Report on Sport* is not a policy review. To a much greater extent than in policy accountability documents, the importance of this report lies in placing items on the policy agenda. If we review the trends in sport, a number of developments stand out which warrant attention and which may require new or modified policy. Because the trends appear fairly stable, as stated earlier, in this concluding discussion we try to look at the social developments ‘behind’ those trends, drawing on insights from the Sport Foresight Study (*Sport Toekomstverkenning*) (Van Bakel et al. 2017) and the Public Health Foresight Study (*Volksgezondheid Toekomstverkenning*) (RIVM 2014). We cite four developments which warrant attention in the form of ‘challenges for (the world of) sport’. The first two challenges stem from societal developments confronting sport; the last two are related to developments in sport itself.

### Demographic trends

A first challenge for sports organisations and sports policy, which we can distil from the trends and foresight studies, relates to finding answers to demographic trends, such as the influx of people with a migration background, the growing differences in the population



profile in the *Randstad* (the densely populated conurbation in the west of the Netherlands comprising the major cities Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and The Hague) compared with the other Dutch provinces, and the ageing of the population. Over the next two decades, the number of people in the Netherlands aged over 65 is set to increase by 200,000 per year (an average of 500 per municipality), resulting in a total of 4.8 million over-65s in 2040. The Public Health Foresight Study (*Volksgezondheid Toekomstverkenning*) ([www.vtv2018.nl/](http://www.vtv2018.nl/)) posits a life expectancy of 86 years in 2040 and a tripling of the number of people aged over 90 to 340,000. The number of single over-65s is projected to rise by almost 90% to 1.73 million, and the number of lonely over-75s by 700,000 to 1.3 million. That is an average annual increase of 75 per municipality. At present, one in seven members of the Dutch population are aged over 65; in 20 years' time that will be one in four. In some parts of the country this 'grey pressure' will be even higher, with one in three inhabitants being aged over 65 in 2040. By 2040, 54% of the population (9.8 million people) are projected to have one or more chronic illnesses; if long-term conditions are also included, the figure rises to 12 million (66%).

These figures imply that the Netherlands is on the cusp of an unprecedented demographic 'transition' as members of the post-war birth cohort retire or approach retirement. The 'grey pressure' is set to accelerate, and the population increase in the coming years will be due entirely to the influx and family reunification of migrants, largely of non-Western origin. Since age, migration background and education are closely correlated with sports participation and preferences (the 'demand' for sport; see [www.sportenbewegeningcijfers.nl/kernindicatoren](http://www.sportenbewegeningcijfers.nl/kernindicatoren)), these demographic trends will require a good deal of adaptation of organisations and policy in relation to sport (the 'supply' of sport).

How are sports clubs and fitness centres, swimming pools and providers of running events dealing with the ageing of the population and of their own members? What are the sports preferences of people with a non-Western migration background and how can providers respond to this? Will new forms of 'dedicated' sports provision (Ghanaian and Eritrean football clubs, fitness centres for women, 'pink' tennis clubs, rollator racing) develop, and/or will we see providers with a more 'mixed' membership? Questions such as these are not new, but they will become more important as they occur on a growing scale, probably leading to a further increase in the internal differentiation of the sports landscape. The idea of the 'phase of life approach' appears to fit in with this greater internal differentiation in sport. Sport is not only something for or practised by young people, but is for people of all ages and in all phases of life and with all kinds of different backgrounds. This has been said for a long time, but as the participation in sport and physical activity increases among groups who lag behind in this regard, there is a great deal to be gained by tailoring the sports provision more closely to the differences in motives, capacities, disabilities and perceived obstacles in the different phases of life. It is for example important to develop a sports offer that is attractive for older people whose working career is behind them and who have some degree of mobility and/or health impairment. The phase of life

approach is an example of a target group approach as recommended in the Sports Policy Review (*Beleidsdoorlichting Sport*) (AEF 2017) as a way of increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of sports policy.

Given the wide local differences in demographic developments, it is increasingly important for an effective sports policy to have an understanding of the local situation, to see which groups lag behind in participation in sport and physical activity, what the obstacles for them are or will be, what their preferences are and how the provision can be tailored accordingly. Naturally, the market is also doing this. Local authorities in the Netherlands have a particular role to play in providing or supporting sports provision which the market is not providing, or not to a sufficient degree.

### Organisation and funding

A second challenge concerns the organisation of sport in the Netherlands, and as a corollary to this, the funding of sport, in which several public authorities, sports organisations and commercial operators have a variety of roles and interests. Those involved in the world of sport are very aware of this challenge. Both the National Agreement on Sport and the programme of the Dutch Sports Council identify challenges in these areas and research is being initiated on this. We refer to ‘steering issues’, with money being the main steering instrument in many cases - hence the simultaneous focus on the organisation and funding of sport here. There are of course other steering instruments, such as legislation and regulations, which we will come to shortly. We see at least three key ‘steering issues’: the relationship between elite and grassroots sport, the relationship between government, sport and the business community, and the relationship between central and local government.

The first steering instrument concerns the question of the right distribution of money and attention between grassroots and elite sport or, formulated in slightly broader terms, how to shape the ‘sports pyramid’. Grassroots sport forms the base of that pyramid, with processes of selection, talent development and competition supporting the tip in steadily ascending order. This cuts across the whole of sport: within sports facilities and halls in the distribution and timetabling of hours for ‘recreational’ and ‘talented’ sport, and within sports clubs in the division of attention between ‘the first team’ and the rest. Within sports organisations the question is how the resources for the elite sports programme should be distributed, including talent development, organisation of elite sporting events and support for sports clubs. NOC\*NSF has to decide how best to distribute the available resources among the 76 sports organisations which make up its members.

The ‘focus policy’ of NOC\*NSF means that hard choices are made for those branches of sport and sports organisations which ‘guarantee’ success in terms of contributing to the ‘top ten ambition’. That is a different focus from encouraging sports participants in general to develop their talents and helping sports organisations to develop a ‘pyramid’ within their sport, regardless of the chances of winning medals at European and World Cham-

pionships or the Olympic and Paralympic Games. It is an undisguised rational choice to join as effectively and efficiently as possible in the ever fiercer global struggle for medals, ignoring any thought of a 'proportional' distribution of lottery and sponsorship funding across the different branches of sport, or any notion of 'solidarity' between 'strong' and 'weak' sports organisations. Additionally, this focus policy also raises questions regarding the nurturing of talented athletes to become elite athletes. How wise is it to invest money in developing talent in non-focus sports such as korfbal, wrestling, ice hockey or basketball? And is the idea of a pyramid still a realistic image, in which talents progress through the top of the national rankings into international competition? Which tennis player reaches the top of their sport through this system? What can the ladies' handball team and the 'Orange lionesses' teach us, with virtually all their members playing in foreign competitions? And finally, how much awareness is there within grassroots sport that it forms 'the basis' for elite sport? The main growth in grassroots sports is occurring in forms of sport which are organised differently, not organised at all or commercially organised, and which evidently appeal more to the motivations of today's sports participants and/or throw up fewer obstacles with a more flexible offer in terms of times and types of sport, without imposing obligations to do something in return, such as working in the bar or volunteering. These are not necessarily the same sports as is focussed on with elite sports. Should sports clubs and facilities such as swimming pools and ice rinks decide to compete with these other providers and offer more flexible forms of grassroots sport, with more emphasis on health and socialising? Or should they go in the other direction and focus more heavily on the actual sport content of their offer and the associated (hours for) training, selection and participation in competitions?

A question which frequently arises is whether it makes sense to try and make these judgments within a single administrative organisation or whether 'elite sport' should be a separate entity from grassroots or amateur sport, so that it can focus more on achieving its own targets. Football is one sport which is already well on the way to this situation, with a 'football business' existing alongside amateur football, with professional football organisations, a privatised training system for talented prospects, more and more football academies, a paid competition, its own income from sponsorship and media rights, more or less commercially run stadiums, etc. An elite sport 'business' is also emerging in other sports, such as darts, tennis and skating, but the various federations appear to be still looking for the best way to coexist with these commercial variants of their sport.

A second 'steering issue' concerns the relationship between the government, sport and the business community. It is a striking development with central government spending on elite sport growing sharply while at the same time public pride and appreciation of elite sport is diminishing. What is the public interest ('goal') of elite sport which justifies this public expenditure on elite sport, and in particular the sharp rise in that expenditure in recent years? And if that interest is clear, how can the government direct the way the resources are spent and the deployment of measures in order to achieve that goal? At present, the 'top ten ambition' lies at the heart of the sports policy pursued by central gov-

ernment, which is in reality adopting the focus policy of *NOC\*NSF* by making available the necessary funds to that organisation. Who is steering whom here?

The Sport Foresight Study points to the growing international competition for a place in the top ten in the medal rankings: other countries are bigger, are becoming wealthier and are developing the same ambitions as the Netherlands. How long will the Netherlands be able and willing to hold on to its 'top ten ambition', and more particularly to allow the government spending that funds this ambition to continue rising? If the focus policy implies that talent development and international elite sport are in reality only achievable in a few selected branches of sport, and the Dutch public are less proud and attach less value to the achievements of the selected athletes, 'putting the Netherlands on the map' then appears to be the only remaining legitimisation for continuing with the elite sports policy. To what extent is this in the interests of the Netherlands, and to what extent does it benefit business and media organisations? What constitutes an appropriate steering model here and an appropriate distribution of the costs?

How commercially attractive a particular form of elite sport is depends largely on the number of 'followers' (including through the newspapers and social media); the more followers, the more opportunities there are for advertising, marketing and selling merchandise. For these commercial operators, sport is a means of drawing attention to the advertising or branding of a particular brand of soap, car or beer. Globalisation, and in particular the deregulation of gambling policy, also makes it attractive to organise matches and contests on which people can bet. Formula 1 races and skating competitions in Gulf States are in reality part of the 'entertainment industry'. This begs the question of whether governments should be willing or even allowed to be involved, and if so, with what aim in mind: are we talking about sports policy here, or more generally about a market regulation policy?

The relationships between public authorities, sport and business are also changing in grassroots sport. European regulations and pronouncements by the Court of Justice of the European Union make it increasingly desirable for the government to be explicit about the public interest of sport. The point of departure in Europe is the market, not the public interest. Unless explicitly defined and laid down otherwise, sport is a product or service like any other and is therefore subject to the rules governing the free European market for goods, services, labour and capital. The Dutch Public Enterprises (Market Activities) Act (*Wet markt en overheid*) for example regards the government as a market operator, which must not 'distort' the market with public provision. As a 'market operator' the government must as a minimum charge the total cost price. This means that the cost of hiring playing fields and sports halls rises and access to swimming pools becomes more expensive. Only where sport and the provision of sports facilities is deemed to be a service of general economic interest (SGEI) is the government permitted to provide them as a public service. To do this, it must demonstrate that the sports provision concerned will not be made available by the market. One problem with this 'merit goods' approach, such as providing the opportunity to practise sport, is that, while facilities are created, they may not be sufficient in the eyes of a (democratically elected and controlled) government. But when is some-

thing ‘sufficient’, and what is the public interest that justifies the government (as with education and healthcare) providing additional facilities? It is likely to require new court rulings before it becomes clear how far the ‘merit goods’ argument extends (enabling the government to continue supporting sport) and where the commercial interests begin.

A third ‘steering issue’ concerns the relationship between central and local government. That relationship appears to be becoming closer. In many other policy domains, central government is decentralising and devolving tasks and powers to local authorities. When it comes to sports policy, central government, local authorities and those involved in sport are signing up to a National Agreement on Sport to provide a common direction and implementation. It is interesting in this regard to see that, for the first time in half a century, central government is devoting attention to sports facilities. Until now, these have formed part of the ‘municipal autonomy’; they still are, but, because ‘Brussels’ has decreed that providing opportunities to practise sport may no longer be taxed (with VAT at 6%), in turn meaning that the VAT paid on the purchase of resources and services to facilitate sports participation can no longer be reclaimed, it has become apparent that this VAT differential effectively means that central government is contributing around 240 million euros per year to the development and maintenance of municipal sports facilities. As central government neither had nor has any plans to cut back on this contribution, a compensating amount of 240 million euros has been added to the sports budget of the national government. Two schemes are in place to ensure that this money ultimately becomes available for a ‘sustainable sports infrastructure’. Expressed in monetary terms, this attention for sports facilities has come ‘out of nowhere’ to develop into the most important theme in government sports policy (which from January 2019 will have a total budget of just over 400 million euros), and from a topic on which no policy was pursued to one where some national steering is possible. This is reflected in the National Agreement on Sport, which is aimed at sustainability, accessibility and optimisation of the distribution and operation of sports facilities. The proposed creation of a national expertise platform on sports facilities is a good example of how, whilst retaining the municipal autonomy, some ‘national policy’ can have added value in areas such as coordination, knowledge development and knowledge sharing.

But while central government is showing greater involvement than previously in municipal policy on sports facilities, just as it does through the scheme for neighbourhood sports coaches, at the same time local authorities are being called upon to lead, coordinate and promote the sports policy. This is also the view expressed in the report by the Dutch Sports Council ‘The fun of physical activity’ (*Plezier in bewegen*) (Nederlandse Sportraad et al. 2018), in which the three councils argue that increasing the amount of physical activity taught in schools should not only be a matter for schools themselves, but should also be shaped in local collaboration. In this relationship, too, the question is who is steering whom. It appears that sports policy is primarily a matter of ‘local control’, with central government creating the frameworks and overseeing coordination, bringing parties together and ensuring the development and sharing of knowledge.

## Sport as an end or sport as a means

As a form of play, sport is something of an ‘island’, separate from daily life and (increasingly important in this age) from the market. In *Homo Ludens* (1997 [1938]), the standard work on the role of play in culture and society, Johan Huizinga describes play as a free activity which has its own system (rules), carves its own place in space and time and creates community ties, enabling it to take place more or less outside people’s normal everyday lives. By highlighting the ‘free’ character of play, Huizinga emphasises its non-instrumental nature: people have an urge to engage in play (‘intrinsic motivation’), but there is not a need or duty to do so (‘extrinsic motivation’). Huizinga goes even further by warning against linking material interests to play: that opens the door to all kinds of ‘false play’, abuse of play for unrelated purposes and ultimately the decline of play as a free and creative activity. Clearly, Huizinga would have difficulty with the perspective of the ‘societal significance or impact of sport’, or in other words the targeted use of ‘sport as a means’ to achieve goals that lie outside sport. He is not the only commentator, nor the last, who wrestles with the relationship between ‘sport as an end’ and ‘sport as a means’, and reflecting on this relationship is accordingly the third challenge for sport and those involved in it.

The Sport Foresight Study (Van Bakel et al. 2017) presents four perspectives from which to consider the future of sport. One of these perspectives is ‘United through Friendship’. This perspective stresses the social character of sport (Huizinga’s ‘community ties’) and comes closest to the notion of ‘sport as an end’. The perspective ‘Feel fit’ focuses mainly on the health benefits of sport and therefore on using sport as a means to an end. An interesting aspect of the Sport Foresight Study is that it also looks at the interaction between the different perspectives, considering how focusing on one perspective impacts positively or negatively on the other perspectives. It stems from this that focusing on ‘Feel fit’ does not automatically contribute to boosting the collective performance of sport through clubs. ‘Working on your health’ is after all something that people can also do – and often more efficiently and effectively – by running in the public space or visiting a gym. Conversely, a maximum focus on sport practised through clubs is felt to have a (slightly) positive impact on health, because people involved in most kinds of club-based sport are engaging in physical activity.

Participation in sport through sports clubs based on the ‘play’ perspective is stagnating in the Netherlands, partly due to the demographic developments outlined earlier. The growth in the share of the Dutch population with a migration background and the number of older people is leading to an increase in the size of groups which on average participate less in club-based sport. There is a danger in ‘traditional’ or ‘organised’ branches of sport of a self-reinforcing negative spiral emerging if traditional forms of competition and organisation are adhered to strictly. Every form of competitive sport needs a certain minimum scale. When member numbers are low, it is more difficult to form teams with equivalent players, and it is necessary to travel further to find well-matched opponents. Longer travel

distances and imbalanced teams and competitions make participating in competitive sport less appealing, causing people to drop out, thus making it even more difficult to put together good teams, and so on. This problem is clearly apparent in sports such as handball, korfbal and table tennis.

The Sport Foresight Study argues that club sport and elite sport will not automatically benefit from (strengthening) the health perspective. On the other hand, growth in play-based club sport will deliver positive side-effects in the form of health gains and a stronger basis for elite sport. In this sense it is striking that, where the emphasis in Dutch government sports policy in recent years appeared to lie on using sport as a means, the new Minister of Sport, Bruno Bruins, places enjoyment of sport (the ‘intrinsic motivation’) at the heart of policy, and that this has become the guiding theme running through the National Agreement on Sport. This is in fact entirely in line with the ‘Sports Agenda 2017+’ developed by NOC\*NSF, which has for some years emphasised the pleasure of practising sport. The National Agreement on Sport devotes virtually no attention to economic or societal effects. The ambition is that everyone should be able to enjoy practising sport in his or her own way (‘inclusive sport and physical activity’). The proposed measures (‘the policy’) relate not so much to achieving certain effects (e.g. through ‘effective interventions’) as to improving the parameters to enable everyone to engage in sport. We will return in section 5.3 to this relationship between sport as a means and sport as an end.

### Definition of ‘sport’

Attempts to define what constitutes sport are anything but new, and are regarded by many as tiring, unproductive and/or insoluble. There is a preference for ‘parking’ this fourth challenge outside the framework of (policy) practice, as a subject on which scientists can expend their academic energies (e.g. Crum 1991; Steenbergen 2004). Yet it is difficult to deny that the conceptual vagueness of the concept ‘sport’ has an influence on sports policy and practice. The Court of Justice of the European Union (ECJ 2017) has for example ruled that bridge is not a sport, because it does not have a physical component. By implication, the Court would probably also not be willing to regard activities such as chess and draughts as sports, and it is anybody’s guess what the Court would think of ‘sport fishing’ – all activities which are nonetheless recognised as sports/sports organisations by NOC\*NSF. This Court ruling, motivated by a particular view of what is and is not classed as sport, has practical consequences. The fact that providing the opportunity to practise sport may no longer be subjected to VAT, for example, means that providing opportunities to engage in ‘mind sports, or in any event bridge, must be subject to VAT. And can bridge still be eligible for grants intended to stimulate participation in sport?

The ‘theoretical’ discussion of how to define sport is also reflected in policy practice in relation to the emergence of new forms of sport. An interesting case in point here are e-sports: when does a computer game become a sport? Is it eligible for grants intended to promote sport? And is ‘sports regulation’ (e.g. rules on doping and the exemption from VAT men-

tioned earlier) applicable? When is a new sport taken into account in calculating the total participation in sport? Is it possible that the sports participation figure is stable because we are including more and more activities (yoga, boot camps, beach volleyball) in it? And what happens to this participation figure (especially among older people) if we leave out mind sports?

The dilemma that presents itself here can be outlined as follows. Either we regard sport as a particular kind of play, namely one which involves a 'physical activity component', in which case it is not necessary to add the epithet 'and physical activity', because it is already inherent in the word 'sport'. This would mean that some physical activities such as fitness training, running, cycling and yoga, would fall outside this definition of sport because the play element is lacking; the same applies for mind sports, because there is no physical component. Or we apply a definition of sport which includes activities such as bridge and chess and does not necessarily imply a form of 'physical activity'. In that case, adding the epithet 'and physical activity' is not superfluous because it is not inherent in the definition of sport. But which forms of physical activity should then be included and which should not? And on what grounds will sport then be defined in relation to the broader concept of 'play'? In practice, the second definition of sport (and physical activity) is almost always applied, following the analogy of the 'expanding family' as used by Crum (1991). More and more new activities are then generously included in the family of sport and physical activity which resemble or stem from existing forms of sport and physical activity or which share a number of characteristics with them. As a result, we see an ever more varied and expansive sports landscape develop.

This proliferation of sports increases the internal differentiation in the sports landscape and makes it increasingly difficult to determine the significance or impact of sport: the economic, social, health and spatial effects of yoga are different from those of amateur football, professional cycling, kite surfing, airsoft, sport fishing and bridge. To measure effects such as these, it is key to ascertain the operative mechanisms within and of specific activities, and the generic notion of sport becomes less and less important. But defining sport is important when the question of whether or not an activity can be classed as a sport determines whether the sports organisation concerned is able to affiliate to the NOC\*NSF, or whether the rules on doping apply to it, or whether it is possible to apply for grants to help build a facility to house it, and whether it can escape the European rules on market forces. It is not impossible that it will ultimately prove necessary to pass a Sports Act to define and enshrine the special (play-based) nature of sport. Such a law would have to specify the parameters of what is classed as sport and what is not, and the apparently 'academic' discussion about the definition of sport would acquire material consequences.

In section S.4 we confront these four challenges with the themes from the National Agreement on Sport. Before doing so, in the next section we offer a brief reflection on the significance of sport.



### 5.3 The significance of sport

The motive to take part in sport and the effect or significance of doing so can be related, but that is not necessarily the case. While the effect on their health is the main motive given by most people for engaging in sport and physical activity, there are also people whose main motivation is different, such as being outdoors, relaxation, the opportunity to socialise, pitting themselves against others, pushing their own boundaries. Yet people who play golf for the socialising and to be outdoors may also experience the unintended side-effect of health benefits.

Reasons for taking part in sport will normally be positive (to become healthier, relaxation, etc.), but the side-effects of sport need not be so positive (e.g. injuries, creation of waste and parking or noise nuisance). We focus on the societal, economic, spatial and international value of sports. An interesting question here is which form of sport generates the most (positive and negative) side-effects. It is plausible that the societal significance of grassroots sport is greater than that of elite sport, because (many) more people participate in it and there is a wider range of (side-)effects. It is however equally plausible that sport in which people participate based on the 'play' perspective (club sport with a competition element) generates both the widest array of positive as well as negative side-effects. An example is an amateur football club: all the positive and negative societal, economic and spatial (side-)effects are actually or potentially present here. Fewer effects can be observed in professional football and the Dutch national team (as a form of elite sport); the main effects here are economic – top-class football is a sector which creates both income and employment. This sector is probably also of some significance in international relations, though this is difficult to demonstrate and its extent is limited. The same applies for its effects in the social, health and spatial domain. If we compare amateur football with fitness training, the latter will have greater health effects, if only because twice as many people participate. On the other hand, the spatial impact of football is greater, and probably so are the social effects.

Against the backdrop of the relationship between 'sport as an end' and 'sport as a means' (see section 5.2), it is also important to stress that the participant's motive need not coincide with the appreciation of his or her participation by a third party. Someone who buys a pair of tennis shoes does so in order to be able to play tennis – that is their motive – whether for relaxation, to be outdoors or to pit themselves against others. The purchase will in any event not have been intended to help the sports shop generate sales or to contribute to the sports economy. Yet these are nonetheless effects, albeit unintended, of the buyer's desire to play tennis. As a corollary to this, it should be clear that the majority of the social, economic and spatial effects described are in essence unintended side-effects of the participation in sport and physical activity. Only the health effects and, to a lesser extent, social effects such as a sense of belonging, socialising and bonding with others, frequently coincide with the reason for playing sport.

All in all, it could be said that ‘the’ societal significance of sport goes far beyond that ‘intended’ by the participant themselves. The goal of the participant (health, relaxation) is simultaneously a means for one or more other parties. For example, the goal of the tennis player of experiencing pleasure from playing tennis can be seen by the government as a means of promoting health, and for the retailer in the sports shop as a means of boosting revenue. Huizinga regarded and appreciated play as a ‘free activity’. In ‘false play’, the participation is driven by a need or compulsion that serves the interests of others, such as governments and commercial companies. However, there is no question of false play if side-effects occur through the performance of free activities (‘sport as an end’), which are supported by third parties because of those side-effects (‘sport as a means’). Seen in this way, ‘sport as an end’ and ‘sport as a means’ are not each other’s opposites, but are two sides of the same coin.

Few people will participate in sport in order to increase the number of hectares of sports fields registered in the land-use statistics; in that sense, use of space is a side-effect of playing sport. But the fact that a piece of land is in use as a football field is not only an effect of the existence of a club whose members play football on that field; it is also a condition for being able to use it again the following week to train or play a match. This shift in emphasis is very clear in the increasingly popular concept of ‘activity-friendly environment’ as expressed in the forthcoming Environment and Planning Act (Omgevingswet). This concept is based on the idea that the way the physical space is configured can have a positive impact on physical activity or, put differently, that people’s propensity to engage in physical activity can be influenced to some degree by the way in which the local environment is configured. An activity-friendly environment encourages people to engage in physical activity, just as a safe or positive sporting climate, good availability of training facilities and low financial contributions have a positive impact on participation in sport and physical activity. These factors influence behaviour because they change the range of options available and the assessment of ‘easy’ and ‘difficult’ choices, but do not directly impinge on the character of sport as a ‘free activity’.

In the *Report on Sport* the societal value of sports are primarily descriptive in nature. They illustrate the significance of sport, but do not investigate the causality and mechanisms through which or because of which those effects arise. This is also not the task of a Report on Sport – though for sports scientists it is an excellent challenge to obtain more understanding of this. Nonetheless, in regard to the social value of sports we permitted ourselves to take a few tentative steps in this direction. It transpires that the literature demonstrates and substantiates the health effects of sport and physical activity, among other things by comparing large groups of people with each other using more or less standardised outcome measures. In the social sciences, there is still an ongoing debate about explanatory theories in this context and no unambiguous outcomes of research are available. It is probable that we would arrive at the same conclusion if we were to dive more deeply into the (explanations for the) economic, spatial and international significance of sport and physical activity.

## S.4 The themes of the National Agreement on Sport

The signing of the National Agreement on Sport makes Dutch sports policy a ‘modern policy’ in the sense that sport is adopting an approach that is also used in many other policy domains. In all those cases, signing an agreement implies an acceptance that achieving policy objectives requires input from many parties, and that working together with a task distribution that is clear for all is more efficient than engaging in a ‘top-down’ regulated process with parties working against each other. The three main signatories to the National Agreement – the world of sport, represented by NOC\*NSF, local authorities (Association for Sport and Municipalities/Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VSG/VNG)) and central government (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS)) – have come together and taken a step towards the achievement of shared ambitions with a jointly determined raft of measures. In the autumn of 2018 the agreements will be broadly translated into working agreements, specific measures and allocated implementation tasks; time will then tell what this approach delivers.

On the face of it, sports research institutes and centres of expertise appear to have had little or no involvement in the National Agreement on Sport. The Agreement proposes many measures to achieve the formulated ambitions; what is often lacking is substantiation for the deployment of precisely those measures and not others. What are the grounds for expecting that a particular measure will deliver the desired effect? And how much understanding is there of the effectiveness of that measure and of the potential for the occurrence of desirable and undesirable side-effects? Those who compiled the National Agreement are not to blame for this lack of substantiation of their measures, because the knowledge required for this is often not available. However, this is a problem that warrants attention. This could perhaps be a fifth challenge for sport in the Netherlands, and is certainly worthy of an addendum to the National Agreement: how will we ensure that, like the Climate Agreement and all those other agreements, the National Agreement on Sport can also be ‘quantified’?

If we go back to the challenges for sport formulated in section S.2 and confront them with the themes running through the National Agreement (‘inclusive sport and physical activity’, ‘sustainable sports infrastructure’, ‘vital sports providers’, ‘positive sports culture’, ‘mastering physical activity from an early age’, and in 2019 also ‘elite sport that inspires’), a number of things stand out.

There is a lack of a broader perspective in the National Agreement on the far-reaching demographic developments confronting sport in the Netherlands, such as population ageing and the influx of (non-Western) migrants (the first challenge in section S.2). Little attention is given to the question of how sport should relate and respond to the rapidly growing group of older people in Dutch society and the rising average age of club members. This also applies for the reception of and interaction with the growing group of (non-Western)

migrants and for the role that sport and sports clubs could play in helping this group to integrate in Dutch society.

The theme ‘mastering physical activity from an early age’ is aimed at reversing the decline in children’s motor skills and fitness and the rise in child obesity. The challenge of responding to demographic changes requires that this endeavour be broadened to include all phases of life, and in particular the retirement phase.

The signing of an outline agreement between central government, organised sport and municipalities is in itself already a way of addressing the second challenge concerning the organisation and funding of sport. vws, vsg and NOC\*NSF observe in the National Agreement on Sport that the ‘sports sector is developing rapidly’, that new types of sports providers ‘are entering the market’ and that ‘the sports provision has increased in its variety’, and announce research into the organisation and funding of sport. The ‘partnership’ between central government and municipalities has already been discussed in section 5.2. Also interesting in this connection is the relationship between NOC\*NSF, as an association with 76 affiliated member organisations, and the 380 Dutch municipalities. Where in the past NOC\*NSF defended the interests of sports organisations and negotiated with the national government, it is uncertain how the 76 NOC\*NSF member organisations and the 380 municipalities will coordinate their policy, actions and measures at local level. A regional support structure might be helpful here, linked to the existing structure of health and safety regions.

The definition of ‘sport’ and therefore of ‘the world of sport’ is not explicitly raised in the National Agreement on Sport, but indirectly and implicitly does play a role in various themes in the Agreement. For example, the title of the theme ‘vital sports providers’ suggests that the vitality of the entire landscape of sports provision requires attention – not just sports clubs, but also commercial providers (gyms, events organisers, climbing centres, sport schools, self-employed operators offering boot camp sessions in the park, etc.). However, the measures discussed in the National Agreement and the suggested indicators to be monitored relate almost exclusively to sports clubs. Questions can perhaps also be raised regarding what the government can and should do when it comes to the vitality of commercial operators, and whether it is not simply in the nature of ‘the market’ that businesses which do not survive should fall by the wayside. The point is that the title of the theme suggests a broad approach to the concept of sport/the world of sport (the entire sports provision), whereas the central focus in the elaboration of this theme appears to be more on ‘traditional’ play-based club sport and therefore to imply a more limited interpretation of ‘sport’.

In the other themes, too, the National Agreement focuses explicitly or implicitly on play-based club sport. The theme ‘mastering physical activity from a young age’ is the only theme which appears to be embedded in a broader concern about the decline in children’s motor skills and fitness, and in which physical education is brought into the picture outside the realm of club sport. The theme ‘sustainable sports infrastructure’ refers to the activity-friendly environment and the opening up of sports facilities. This suggests a ‘broad’

approach to sport, but here again the majority of the ambitions formulated and measures proposed relate to publicly funded facilities for housing club sport.

While the National Agreement on Sport may not offer a clear definition, then, it does contain a clear focus on traditionally organised forms of participation in sport. This focus may be logical, given the three signatories to the Agreement. Whilst they appear to adopt a fairly broad interpretation of sport, when it comes to actual measures and input, their consensus seems to be based mainly on a definition in terms of play-based club sport.

The most important ambition in the National Agreement on Sport concerns inclusive sport and physical activity: everyone, regardless of gender, sexual preference, disability or origin, should be able to enjoy the pleasure that sport and physical activity can provide. The emphasis in the Agreement is thus fairly clearly on 'sport as an end', with positive side-effects being assumed but not held up as guiding or driving principles or emphasised as a means of justifying the (spending on) sports policy. The increased societal significance of sport is thus mainly an indirect effect. To the extent that participation in sport and physical activity generates social, economic, spatial or international side-effects, these will logically and 'automatically' increase as more people participate more intensively in sport and physical activity.