

# ***NATIONAL REPORT***



**COUNTRY:**  
***The Netherlands***

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# 1. SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL SPORT SYSTEM/ARCHITECTURE

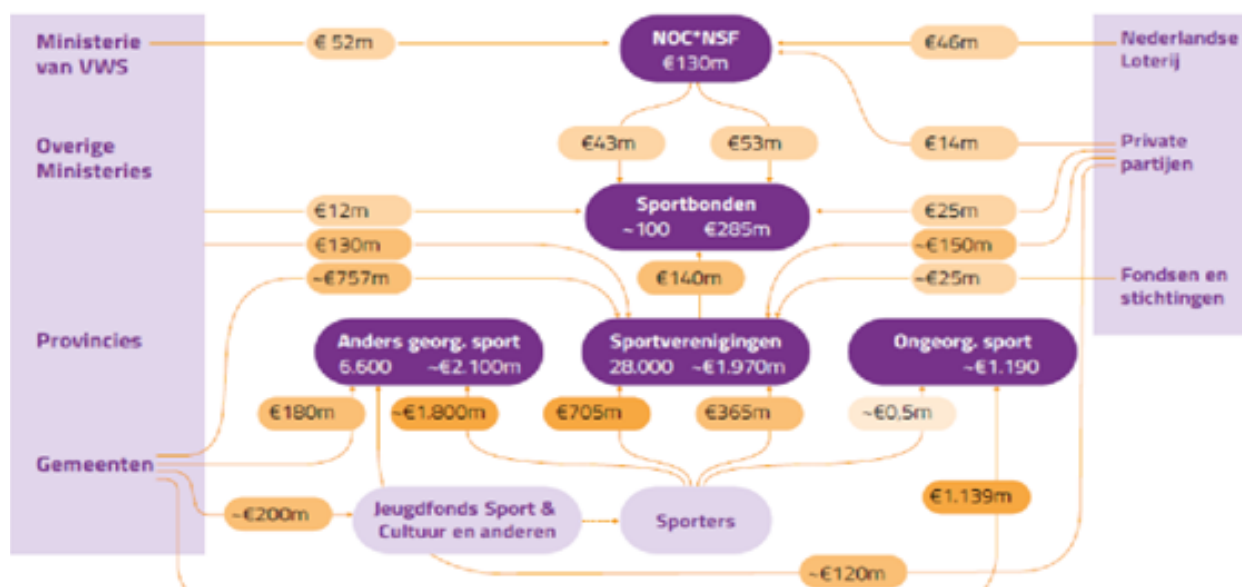
The Netherlands is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy with a head of government - the prime minister - and a head of state - the monarch. A council of ministers holds executive power. The country is divided into 12 provinces and 388 municipalities. It is also divided into 22 water districts, governed by an executive board that has authority in matters of water management. The Netherlands also includes six overseas countries and territories in the Caribbean. These territories are not part of the EU.

The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports (HWS) is the ministry responsible for sport in The Netherlands. It has the authority to develop and enforce policy. Secondly, the ministry is responsible for financial endorsements in sports. Together with the Dutch government, the Ministry has the ability to create and enforce law to regulate sport. In The Netherlands, there are no specific rules regulating sport. The general law of The Netherlands must be used to solve any problems.

Sport promotes health and brings pleasure, pride, and solidarity. That is why it demands attention. This attention is important because clubs and federations experience difficulties finding volunteers. They also face difficulties with regards to financial possibilities to further professionalize amateur and top-level sport. The Dutch government aims, together with the sport sector and municipalities, to enhance sport in financial and organisational ways. Federations and clubs that flourish occupy a central position in this strategy.

In 2014, the NOC\*NSF already had the ambition of being one of the 10 best countries in the world in terms of sport performance. Since then, the NOC\*NSF has focused on proven successful programmes (equestrian sports, field hockey, judo, rowing, ice skating, cycling, sailing and swimming). Furthermore, available resources are used for potential successful programmes. Municipalities need to save on sport and assume sport facilities to be self-reliant. At the same time, they focus on the affordability of sport and accessibility for low-income people and people with disabilities.<sup>1</sup>

Here is an overview of how the sport system is financed by public authorities (left) and the private sector (right) including Dutch Lotteries).<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup>EOSE, ESSA National Report – Analysis of Labour Market Realities and Challenges in the Sport and Physical Activity Sector – Netherlands, 2021

<sup>2</sup>KPMG (2019), Brancheraport Sport

## 2. TO WHAT EXTENT IS THERE A SPORT DIPLOMACY STRATEGY?

There is a “Nationaal Sport Akkoord”<sup>3</sup>, which consists of six partial agreements and one of those partial agreements is called “Elite Sports, that inspire.”<sup>4</sup>

One aspect of the “Elite Sports that inspire” part is the objective of having a widely supported sports events strategy in the Netherlands. The national government and regional governments and the private sector reflect together on how to develop a national events strategy.

This strategy means that every city, every organiser should refer to it in order to avoid competing for the same event, which has happened in the past. For example, the start of the Tour de France in 2010 was organised in Rotterdam, but The Hague bid for the same event.

This strategy focuses on the fact that all events should be sustainable and aims at hosting multi-sport and multi-city events. If one event is organised in one city, the idea is that the event should be translated into other events or related events in other cities.

Meanwhile, a lot of attention has been paid to Paralympic sports, for many years. The idea for a new elite multisport event for disabled people, which is a combination of European Championships, is actually owned by a private company. This company wants to join forces with local governments, but also with the national government.

One of the inspirations is possibly that it should inspire people to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

Before the national sport agreement, there was no formal policy on this issue of sport diplomacy, but there was indeed an informal policy. Anton Geesink<sup>5</sup>, for instance, the All-Round Judo Olympic Champion from Tokyo 1964, or Johan Cruyff<sup>6</sup>, the football player, were very frequently involved in all kinds of international contacts, between the Netherlands and foreign countries.

There were also several bids for international events, such as the 2028 Olympics and others. There is close cooperation between national sports federations or national organisations and the government to make proposals to the international federations. The idea is that it somehow promotes the Netherlands as a country, which has many nice things to offer.

“Several municipalities invested several millions in hosting international sport events [...] to build a track record - e.g. world championships in judo (Rotterdam, 2009), gymnastics (Rotterdam, 2010), cycling (Valkenburg, 2012), hockey (The Hague, 2014), beach volleyball (The Hague, 2015), and other events such as the European Athletics Championships (Amsterdam, 2016), and the European Youth Olympic Festival (Utrecht, 2013).”<sup>7</sup>

The idea that several cities together host an event has already been mentioned and implemented in 2020, when the European Soccer Championships took place in the Netherlands. The idea of sport as a vehicle through which international contacts can be influenced has been accepted for a long time.

In recent years, Dutch international business missions have usually included sports people. They act as a sort of lubricant between the delegations of countries.

<sup>3</sup>Freely translated into “National Sport Agreement” - <https://www.sportakkoord.nl/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2020/12/Nationaal-Sportakkoord.pdf> - accessed May 6, 2022

<sup>4</sup><https://nocnsf.nl/en/elite-sports-in-the-netherlands> - accessed May 6, 2022

<sup>5</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton\\_Geesink](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anton_Geesink) - accessed May 6, 2022

<sup>6</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johan\\_Cruyff](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johan_Cruyff) - accessed May 6, 2022

<sup>7</sup>Waardenburg, M. & van Bottenburg, M. (2013). Sport Policy in the Netherlands. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 5(3): 465-475.

Sport is a lubricant for international contacts between governments:

- On the issue of international trade, sport is involved, but also on the issue of sport and development, so international development aid is connected with Sports Aid, for instance, in the Score project from the Soccer Union.<sup>8</sup>
- Sport is part of Development Programmes for countries in Africa and on other continents.
- The role of King Willem Alexander, as a member of the Olympic Committee, appears to be very important in this respect.

The sports events strategy<sup>9</sup> is a formalized strategy until 2030. It describes how the sector is going to achieve the objective defined in the national sports agreement.

### **3. WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT OF SPORT DIPLOMACY GOVERNANCE AND WHO ARE THE MAIN ACTORS?**

In addition to the national sports agreement, there are several organisations active in this field. One example is the Orange Sports Forum<sup>10</sup>, which is a coalition of international and national enterprises that have been participating in trade delegations to other countries, such as China or Japan in the unlocking to the Beijing (winter) and Tokyo (summer) Olympics.

The Orange Sports Forum consists of 11 organisations that are active in trade and sport. Trade delegations are not the core business of the organisation, but it has a role in sport diplomacy and the same is true of some umbrella organisations like the NOC NSF, which develop ideas about how to use sports in international diplomacy issues.

The VSG<sup>11</sup>, translated as the Association of Sports and Municipalities, organises trips abroad with people from the sports industry and people from local, regional and national governments, basically to export knowledge, services and products, but also to import knowledge and experience.

The Minister in charge of health and sport is quite involved. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister were present in the trade mission to Tokyo, before the Olympics in Japan.

A review was done a couple of years ago of the events that were attended by the Royal Family or members of the Royal family and the Prime Minister for example. It is worth noting that international sport events are seen and used as a platform for networking, from a government perspective, as well as from a business perspective.

In some circumstances, there are discussions about whether people should attend or not, with regard to human rights in the organising country.

Diplomats (ambassadors and economic attachés) take part in promoting international events

<sup>8</sup><https://www.scp.nl/binaries/scp/documenten/monitors/2018/12/12/rapportage-sport-2018/Rapportage+sport+2018+web.pdf> - accessed May 7, 2022

<sup>9</sup>Nederelandse Topsportevenementen Strategie 2021-2030 - <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2020/11/25/startdocument-nederlandse-topsportevenementen-strategie-nts-2021-2030> - accessed May 7, 2022

<sup>10</sup><https://www.orangesportsforum.com/> - accessed May 7, 2022 - "To create and maintain a national and international sports network. Cooperation is key to stimulating Dutch exports. Therefore, a strong national and international network is vital. In order to make this feasible, we organise networks and information conferences for companies, organisations and institutions. Naturally, Holland Sports & Industry works closely with the Dutch government (e.g. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Sport) and the Dutch embassies and consulates worldwide"

<sup>11</sup><https://sportengemeenten.nl/visie-beleidsplein-artikel/?id=24557> - accessed May 7, 2022

and are involved in trade missions in foreign countries with sports people. One example is the Embassy of the Netherlands in Tokyo, which was involved in an Olympic Tokyo project, to help the NOC to achieve their goals.

Three provinces (Brabant, Gelderland and Limburg) are quite active and have a formal support policy. This is quite interesting because a regional government is not obliged to have a policy or to intervene in this sports sector, but they do it because it helps them achieve their economic or environmental objectives. They focus on some specific type of sports to have some specialisation, for example, cycling and the equine industry in Limburg, and they try to cooperate with the private sector.

Regarding the role of the country's sports bodies in sport diplomacy actions, at least the national soccer association, the volleyball association and the hockey association work most prominently in this area. The issues on which the media are most active are the more critical ones, concerning for instance, Qatar and the human rights situation of workers over there. In the past, several discussions over the participation or non-participation of Dutch athletes in international events concerned the Melbourne Olympics (1956), the FIFA World Cup in Argentina (1978) and the Moscow Olympics (1980).

The private sector is also present in this field. The reference to the Orange Sports forum is relevant to this question. Industry is currently involved, for example, at the House in the Olympic Games, which is a showcase for Dutch industry. We should not overlook the role of private companies, in terms of sports sponsoring and partnerships. For example, the company ABN-AMRO became the sponsor and supplier of Ajax Football Club because Ajax opened up contacts to Asia. Sports or professional sports offer very interesting networks for private companies and *vice versa*, of course.

Regarding the role and place of sportsmen and sportswomen in the Netherlands, it is clear that athletes open doors. The World Table Tennis Championships in Rotterdam in 2011 are a good example. The delegation of the organising committee wanted to visit and try to find some partners in Asia. They asked Bettina Vriesekoop<sup>12</sup>, the famous former table tennis player, to be part of the delegation. Everybody in China opened the door to her (and the delegation) because she was a Table Tennis hero and helped start discussions through informal talk about sports.

When an Olympic champion puts his medal up for sale, considering that he will help Ukrainians by selling his medal, this is a diplomatic initiative as the line between sports and diplomacy and sports and politics is not very clear.

## **4. TOOLS OF SPORT DIPLOMACY**

Regarding the public economic resources available for sport diplomacy activities, the most accurate description of the situation is that a little bit of money comes from everywhere. As an example, the Innovation Authority of the Netherlands has subsidized an initiative like the Orange Sports Forum.

Concerning the level of national budget dedicated to sport diplomacy, the experts are unable to put an exact figure on the level of national budget dedicated to sport diplomacy, as they come from a variety of departments.

The Netherlands has organised a few types of sport diplomacy activities. For example, in International Development policy, for instance, regarding Surinam or the Antilles, sport diplomacy is a part of it. Some activities focus on the development of facilities or leadership.

<sup>12</sup>[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bettine\\_Vriesekoop](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bettine_Vriesekoop) - accessed May 7, 2022.

The NOC\*NSF has set up some projects in a specific city to contribute to local goals. For example, the Geo project<sup>13</sup> was developed in Rio de Janeiro (2016). In Tokyo (2021), “The Gamechanger Project”<sup>14</sup> was launched to help the local authorities develop policies for disabled people because the position of disabled people in Holland is very different to those in Japan.

## 5. SPORT DIPLOMACY’S FUTURE

The major weakness of the Netherlands is that an overall sport diplomacy strategy is currently lacking. Several actors are taking initiatives but these are not integrated, or even planned for the next few years.

The Netherlands is still becoming aware of the possibilities of sport diplomacy at this stage. National reflection is needed on what possibilities sport diplomacy can have for the country. Generating a strategy from that reflection, and then an evaluation of the situation, would really help the country to be more efficient in this area.

Most countries have some kind of sport diplomacy strategy. It is a national sports diplomacy strategy very much aimed at their national interests, and not at international interests.

The Netherlands should at least think about which international interests we would try to improve by having a common EU sport diplomacy policy. For instance, considering the current war in Ukraine and the way in which we handle international events in which Russian sportsmen compete could be a very concrete issue.

One advantage of a European strategy is that countries would be forced to think about the long term because of that European strategy and possible synergy effects by joining forces.

## 6. REFERENCES

- **Jo Lucassen** currently works at the Netherlands Mulier Institute - Sports research for Policy and Society and at the Association of Physical Education Teachers. He does Qualitative Social Research, Social Policy Research and Quantitative Social Research on sports organisations, sport development, physical education and coach education.
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