

SPORT AND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
Study visit to the
Netherlands 17-19 March



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PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The proposed recommendation to be made by the Sport and Human Rights Committee concerns all Member States and its relevance depends on the diversity of the sources that contributed to its drafting. It is therefore important to draw on experiences and organisations that have provided real added value in addressing the issue of combating all forms of discrimination in sport.

This is why it became necessary to study the organisation of sport in the Netherlands, not only in its competitive dimension, but also as an activity accessible to all. The aim of the visit was to understand the unique approach to sport in the Netherlands, which has enabled this small European country to stand out for its remarkable performances at the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

More generally, aim was to check whether the initial proposals made within the Committee, which are based solely on French observations or specific features, have any generalisable value. It would be desirable extend this first experiment to the observation other remarkable initiatives emanating from member states of the Council of Europe.

This study visit included :

- meetings with sports leaders, elected representatives, heads of refugee reception centres and educational associations,
- visits to sports facilities, centres and schools.

THE FRAMEWORK OF THE VISIT

The Haarlemmermeer

Until the 17th century, Haarlemmermeer was a marshy lake that had grown larger due to storms and erosion. It threatened the surrounding towns of Amsterdam, Haarlem and Leiden. During the reign of King William I (1849-1852), the lake was drained using three large steam pumps - a technological feat of the time. Haarlemmermeer is a symbol of Dutch engineering in water management.

Haarlemmermeer has a population of over 160,000 and lies on average 4 to 5 metres below sea level. It is home not only to Hoofddorp, its largest town, but also to Schiphol airport, one of Europe's largest air hubs.

Hoofddorp and Haarlemmermeer represent a unique region of the Netherlands, where the transformation of the landscape and society are particularly visible. Once a farming village in the Haarlemmermeer polder, Hoofddorp is now a dynamic town. Over the decades, the region has become a major economic and logistics centre, raising challenges in terms of growth, quality of life and sustainability.

It is a perfect illustration of the development of many of the suburban areas around the major metropolises, and offers a unique observation framework that is representative of the place of sport in Dutch society.

The Committee delegation was up of Heleen Jansen (IAW), who initiated the project, Christian SAINT-LEZER (AEDE-FR), Hombeline DEHAYE (ESAN) and Maja Sijtsma (AEDE-NL), who took us from one meeting to the next over the three days.

THE PROGRAMME

Monday 17th March	Tuesday 18th March	Wednesday 19 March
<p>11 a.m. AMSTERDAM Caland Lyceum A meeting with the educational team at this school, where sport plays an essential role. Presentation of the European Sports Charter</p>	<p>11 h ARNHEM Papendal National Sports Centre Tour of the facilities, interview with a hotel manager.</p>	<p>10 a.m. HARLEEM Meeting with Mrs Sedee, Deputy Mayor in charge of sports</p>
<p>1 pm AMSTERDAM Johan Cruyff Academy tour of the school, meeting with the management. Presentation of the European Sports Charter.</p>	<p>1 p.m. Lunch with the head of the European Teachers' Association</p>	
<p>3.30 pm HAARLEEM Mendel College A meeting with the educational team at this school, where sport plays an essential role. Presentation of the European Sports Charter.</p>	<p>5pm HOOFDDORP Visit the sports facilities.</p>	<p>12h DEN HAAG Parliament of the Netherlands Meeting with Mr Mohammed Mohandis MP, spokesman for the Parliament of the Netherlands group on sport, author a motion to reintroduce swimming lessons in primary schools.</p>
<p>6 pm HOOFDDORP De REIGERS hockey club Meeting with Marjolijn van Dam and Bas van Eijndhoven.</p>	<p>6 pm HOOFDDORP ZPCH Koning Willem Alexander Sport complex Swimming club Tour of the complex Interview with the Chairman and coaches.</p>	<p>6pm HOOFDDORP Crossfit gym Meeting with the manager in charge of the senior citizens programme</p>

The delegation would like to highlight the quality of the welcome at all the sites visited and the availability of all the people it spoke to.

In each facility visited, information documents on the Council of Europe were presented.

The following report on the study visit highlights 3 strong characteristics of the Dutch system that emerged from the visits and interviews:

- **the , a sporting culture**
- **a link between education and sport**
- **quality structures**

and then looks at the lessons to be .

THE NETHERLANDS, A SPORTING CULTURE

Given the country's geography (water all over the land, no relief, small surface area), two physical activities are part of the fundamental learning process: **knowing how to swim and getting around on a bicycle**. So it's hardly surprising that these two sports won the most medals at the recent Olympic and Paralympic Games.



Knowing how to swim is a fundamental skill in Dutch culture, and is codified in the Zwem ABC, which defines successive levels of proficiency. The A and B diplomas are valuable intermediate stages, but only those who have obtained the C national swimming diploma meet the national swimming safety standard.

Learning to swim, at the age of 4, is the responsibility of various providers: swimming pools, swimming schools and swimming clubs. Within the same swimming pool, it is possible to find different organisations offering lessons. This is what we found during our visit to the Koning Willem Alexander Sport complex, where a private company, De Watervrienden, rents out one pool and provides the first levels of proficiency, while a sports club occupies the other pool and has a more sporting and competitive vocation. Observation of the sessions and interviews with the people in charge (president and coaches) highlighted the very professional dimension, in the good sense of the word, of the sports club.

Attractive though this picture may be, it should not obscure the difficulties that have emerged in recent years. As Mohammed Mohandis MP pointed out in an interview that will remain a highlight of the study visit, 12% to 13% of young people in the Netherlands do not have level C of the Zwemdiploma. Hence the motion he proposed to Parliament to include swimming lessons in the school curriculum, a proposal that was adopted and gave rise to a statutory text. It should be noted that the MP learnt to swim at the same time as his daughter, which gave his proposal a certain resonance.

Learning to swim represents a significant cost in a country with a high standard of living, and it is hardly surprising that it is the most disadvantaged groups, particularly those from immigrant backgrounds, who make up this percentage of non-swimmers. The new regulations are an appropriate response to this situation.



The bicycle is a symbol of the Netherlands, with 22 million bicycles for a population of 17 million, everyone's pedalling fast!

The return journey from the training session is by bike and in a group, not in the parents' car.

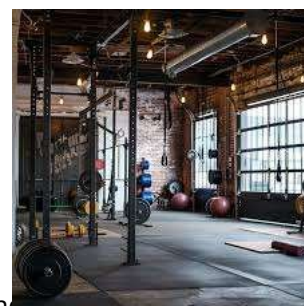
With or without accompaniment, 49% of primary school pupils in the Netherlands use bicycles on their journeys to and from school, while only 14% travel by car, mainly children who live a long way from school. The remainder are divided between walkers and those who use public transport, especially the in large towns. As they get older, in secondary education, the proportion of these journeys made by bike increases still further.

An additional argument is that pedalling makes for better work! Walking or cycling to school helps children to concentrate better at school. This was demonstrated in Denmark, another cycling country, in a 2012 study. After examining the habits of 25,000 schoolchildren aged between 5 and 19, it emerged that physical exercise to get to school on one's own had a positive effect on the ability to concentrate for the next four hours.

Sport for seniors

This sporting practice extends to all ages. The Zilver Fitness programme, an adaptation of Crossfit for the over-55s, aims to maintain the physical capacities ("to be stronger, fitter, more flexible") needed for a life without physical constraints. The social dimension of sport is emphasised by the person in charge, as seniors, sometimes isolated from their families, meet up for a coffee (a must in the Netherlands) or for another activity.

This physical activity is upstream of the major health problem of the risk of falling (two thirds of accidental deaths in the over-65s), for which a specific programme *entitled "Gym sessions to learn how to... fall!"* has been developed by therapists for the over-65s and is delivered in around a hundred centres across the country.



Sport and disability

Disabled people are part of the same dynamic; although the number of people taking part is no higher than in France as a whole (28% take part in a weekly activity), access to facilities is easier. For example, 100% of station and metro platforms are accessible to people with disabilities.

These facilities are reflected in the observation made by the newspaper L'Equipe after the Paralympic Games: *"...The Netherlands also owes its success to its ultra-specialised training centres, where Olympic and Paralympic athletes come together, with the latter having access to the very best, just like able-bodied athletes. This is not yet the case in France."*

Sport as a factor of social cohesion

During our interview, the president of the swimming club emphasised the social dimension of this sporting commitment. This observation was also made in the other clubs we visited, where the relationships between members extend beyond training time, and the quality of the people involved is very high.

The facilities that encourage these social links are a feature of Dutch sport for teenagers and seniors .



Physical
practi

is part of the country's culture.

As we have seen, families are often involved in the running of the club, as is the case with football and hockey clubs, where the club house is run by players or volunteer parents.

The majority of clubs, according to the people we spoke to, are run by volunteers who spend their evenings training or managing after their working day.

But in the Netherlands, as elsewhere, there is less spontaneous involvement by the families of club members in the running of the clubs.

In a society that some consider to be rather individualistic, sport is a strong social bond.

life, whatever your age. With more than 10 million Dutch people
week (one of the highest rates in the world), the evidence is clear: **sport**

A LINK BETWEEN EDUCATION AND SPORT

It was necessary try assess the role played by the education system in this appetite for sport and physical activity.

Visits to the three schools and fruitful discussions with the heads of the schools highlighted a number of factors that have a positive impact on school sports.

- **Partnerships at different levels**

- From TEAM-NL, an offshoot of the Dutch Olympic Committee, which supports the best performers, to agreements with local sports federations or clubs, there are 31 specialised schools across the country for students who want to combine their studies with intensive sports activities.
- The three establishments visited present a representative sample of these partnerships and, over and above their specific nature, share common characteristics.

- **A number hours of lessons compatible with sporting activities and adjustable timetables**

- The 20 to 24 hours a week of lessons (10 less than in France for the same age group) are the subject of a truly personalised timetable on a daily, weekly or longer-term basis to enable each athlete to combine study and training. For example, lessons are concentrated outside competition periods (no lessons in January or February for skiers who are away from school) and online monitoring is provided by the teachers.

- **A large amount of time devoted to training**

Pupils spend an average of 13 hours a week training. For example, the basketball player we met gave us his daily schedule:

Training 8am-9.30am, lessons 10am-3.30pm, training 4pm-5.30pm. As not all the pupils live close to the school, this means very long days. The player interviewed had to travel 2 hours a day.



- **Full inclusion in the school**

- There is no differentiation: the school mixes students who are top sportsmen and women with those who are not, so that they can learn from each other.
- The requirement for results is the same, and retention in the structure depends on results.

- **Organised support for both sporting and academic success**

- Extra lessons are organised at the request of students. (tutors are present in the study rooms).
- Possibility of a two-year annual programme.
- Facilities for local examinations. (adjustments to the timetable)
- Free workshops open to all (Mendel College):
 - advice on mental health.
 - Fashion and lifestyle.
 - Eating habits.
 - How to be a sportsman.



- **Committed teams of teachers recruited as part of the project**

Flexible and personalised support for student athletes mean that teachers have to be more available and have real teaching and learning skills to adapt to different school careers.

These teachers are recruited by the head of the school (a fundamental difference from France) after acceptance of the school's project. They receive an annual bonus (15 hours at Mendel College).

- **A permanent relationship between education and sport**

The combined academic and sports programme requires a high level of motivation on the part of the students, as well as a regular link between the two areas of training. This means personalised support, teachers trained in coaching, and an ongoing relationship with families to guarantee a stable, coherent environment that provides structure for the student and the athlete.

- **An original philosophical approach**



Illustrated by the Johann Cruyff Academy during an interview with its head, the aim of the institution, which offers WMBO (sport management, sport business and coaching) vocational training, is to work on the human aspect, the athlete and the future professional.

This is reflected in the school's motto:

Get smarter, perform better

- **Differentiated funding**

School fees are the same for all pupils at the two lycées visited, whether they are in the sports stream or not, as the school does not receive any special subsidy from the Ministry for the sports stream.

the sporting part. This is the responsibility of the sports movement (Olympic Committee and federations). Families contribute, but in the event of difficulties, solutions are found internally to enable the project to continue.

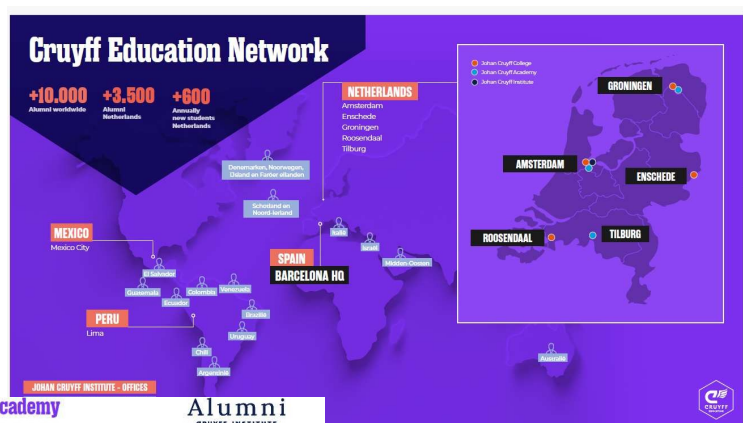
Establishments have greater management autonomy than in France, enabling them to adapt to different situations. (Fungibility of credits)

- **Developments in primary education**

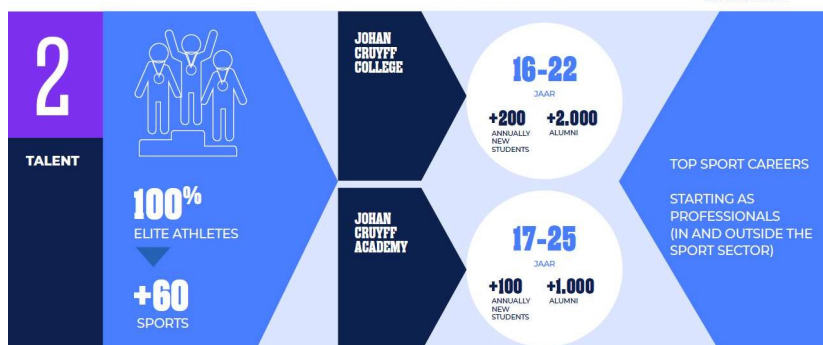
The 2018 education reform introduced a requirement for primary schools to have a teacher trained in teaching physical education in each school. This measure has led to a significant increase in practice time, although not all schools have reached the required 120 minutes/week.

- **The specific case of the Johann Cruyff Academy**

Cruyff Education is part of the World of Johan Cruyff, international initiatives based on Johan Cruyff's integral vision of the future of the sports sector. Cruyff Education provides academic training at vocational level, with the aim of providing a qualification that is independent of sporting success.



Facts and Figures - Johan Cruyff College and Johan Cruyff Academy



reserved for top-level athletes, 50-60% of whom go on to become professional sportsmen and women.

The sports facility is attached to a large school (4,000 pupils).

In the world of Johann Cruyff, there are three levels of training available to sportsmen and women:

- At college level: a vocational pathway: sport and business, sport and coaching.
- At academy level: a bachelor's degree in sport and marketing
- At the institute level: various online masters courses or in Barcelona.

Students have an average of 20 hours of lessons per week plus 2 to 3 hours of training per day.

The mix of sportsmen and women in the classes and the staggered timetables for training require a real capacity on the part of the teachers.

There are no boarding facilities and some students have daily commutes of over 2 hours.

QUALITY STRUCTURES

The various visits made to the Haarlemmermeer sector have enabled us appreciate the quality of the facilities, a sign of the significant investment made by the state and local authorities.

In terms of both the equipment on offer and the maintenance of the structures, it has been found the conditions for participants are excellent.



Complex Koning Willem
Alexander Sport

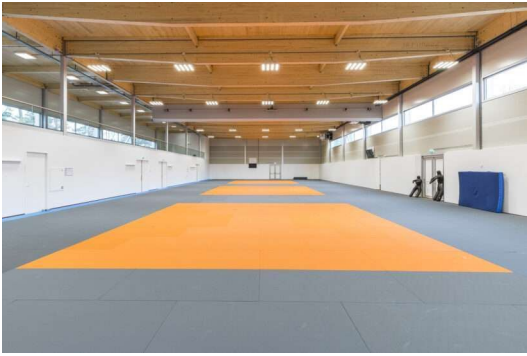
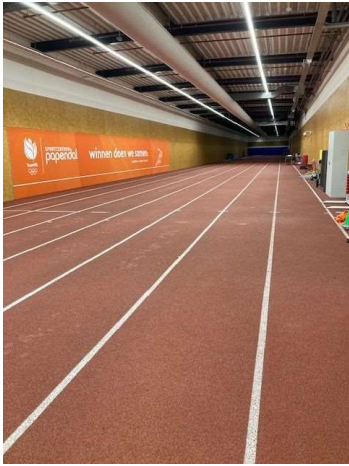


Each of the facilities visited includes a social area with a bar and fast food outlets, making it easier for families to get to know each other.... and encouraging them to get involved.

By way of example, the Koning Willem Alexander Sport complex, which includes two swimming pools, two team sports halls, a fitness area and a gym, not to mention a catering area, cost nearly €65 million, according to the deputy mayor we met, an investment that cannot be repeated because it is based solely on local resources.



The Papendal Centre, owned by the Dutch Olympic Committee, includes not only accommodation for sportsmen and women and a wide range of training facilities, but also a high-quality hotel open to the public and hosting numerous conferences. 25% of the hotel's revenue will go towards the resources of the Olympic movement. The fact that we were unable to talk to the people in charge of **Dutch Sport's Strategic Plan 2032** (what a mystery!) meant that we were unable to find out more about the conditions under which this remarkable, high-quality structure is used.



WHAT LESSONS CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS VISIT, BEYOND THE OBSERVATIONS MADE ABOVE?

Despite all the efforts made and the many contacts made, it was not possible during the stay to meet the head of the refugee centre and find out whether physical activities offered to migrants as part of their integration into society.

However, we were able to obtain some responses from sports associations that occasionally welcome refugees but find that they do not stay long enough to integrate into the club.

Interviews with policy-makers provided an interesting insight into sport in the Netherlands and, over and above the observations made during our visits, enabled us to take into account issues that are not necessarily different from those encountered in other countries.

Financing to be found

Ms Sedee, deputy mayor of Hoofddorp, spoke to us about the population increase in the Haarlemmermeer and the need to anticipate the creation of a new 100-hectare residential area, including the sports facilities that will be required. Local authority budget constraints mean that creating a new complex on the same scale as the previous one is out of the question.

One of the central elements of this project is Sportpark21, located in the north-western part of the park. This area will be dedicated to sporting activities, including the finest baseball stadium in the Netherlands. New sports will also find their place here, encouraging innovation and diversification in the range of disciplines available to residents.

One point for local authorities to consider is how to develop the associated infrastructure. Should they opt for shared clubhouses or allow existing clubs to keep their own facilities? This decision is all the more delicate given that most sports associations operate thanks to the commitment of volunteers. A balance will have to be struck to ensure the viability of the project while respecting the needs of the various stakeholders.

Preserving volunteer work

The issue of volunteering was raised several times over the three days. Dutch sport is based on a strong commitment from volunteers, and although we noted a high level of commitment from the volunteers we met, they expressed concern about the generational turnover. As elsewhere, particularly in France, it is becoming difficult to ask the parents and close relatives of sportsmen and women to get involved on a regular basis in the management or running of the sports association. The clubs we visited are certainly fairly exemplary in terms of the involvement of volunteers, but it is not certain that this is the case everywhere and that the behaviour of "consumer parents who do not wish to get involved", as categorised by a French coach, will not spread and undermine the Dutch model.

Sport for all under threat

Sport is a paid activity in the Netherlands, as elsewhere, and perhaps even more so. Enrolment in the sports clubs we visited entails an annual expenditure of no less than 200 euros per child, and although the average income level is 10 to 15% higher than in France, it is not certain that the most disadvantaged families can offer their children a sporting activity.

There are, however, a number of funds that enable every child to enrol in a sports club (<https://www.leergelddenhaag.nl/aanvragen/sport-en-cultuur>), but the administrative formalities are an obstacle for many of them.

This issue was addressed during a very interesting meeting with Mr Mohandis, the MP behind a bill to reintroduce learning to swim at school and the author of a proposal to make access to sport free up to the age of 18. This follows the example of the free access to libraries launched in 2022, which resulted in a 25% increase in use.

This ambitious initiative is intended to provide a response to the twin problems of safety and health.

Firstly, safety: the 12% to 13% of young people who can't swim belong to the most disadvantaged sections of society, and while the introduction of swimming lessons in school curricula may help to improve this rate, those under school age will not be protected from the risk of drowning.

On the subject of health, the MP showed himself to be very aware of the risks associated with an excessively sedentary lifestyle, addiction to screens... and other addictive products, hence his proposal to work on a law that would make sport free up to the age of 18, as he considers, in line with the Committee's position, that sport and physical activity are the best assets for a healthy life and increased life expectancy in good health. His communicative ambition is for the Netherlands to be the first country in the world to give all young people free access to the sport of their choice. The Committee will be following the development of this project, which, whatever its outcome, will be full of lessons to be learned.

CONCLUSION

The visit showed that sport is an essential part of Dutch culture. It is natural for the country's inhabitants to take part in sport, whatever their age, gender, physical ability, level of performance or professional activity. However, the most vulnerable sections of the population do not have the same level of access to sporting activities. According to Mr Mohandis, awareness of the need for everyone to be physically active in order to preserve their health and thus reduce the burden on public health spending is not shared by all MPs.

The length of our visit did not allow us, despite its dense programme, to go into greater depth on the issue of the excesses of sport (violence, doping, hatred, racism) which are also present in the Netherlands, the latest Ajax Amsterdam-Maccabi Tel Aviv football match being a sad example.

In the end, although we didn't get all the answers to our many questions, was easier for us to understand, at the end of these three days, why the Netherlands has the best ratio of Olympic medals to population on the European continent.

And to sum up the impression left by this visit, let's remember this phrase heard on the first day: *"You want it, we help you.* By offering a structured, caring and ambitious framework, it aims to enable each individual to succeed according to his or her choices, with a balance between high standards and humanity.

