

# Understanding the Distribution and Usage Patterns of Indoor Sports Facilities in the Netherlands: Implications for Policy and Practice

Schadenberg, Björn<sup>1</sup> and Hoekman, Remco<sup>2</sup>

1: Mulier Institute, Netherlands, The; 2: Department of Sociology, Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

b.schadenberg@mulierinstituut.nl

## Introduction and Aim

Providing access to sport facilities is considered a primary element of effective sport participation policies (Nicholson et al., 2011). Furthermore, the construction and operation of (public) sport facilities take up the vast majority of the governmental sport budgets in various countries (e.g. Hallmann & Petry, 2013). This would suggest the need for more information and indicators by which to gauge such facilities' adequacy. However, such indicators are currently lacking, at least in the case of the Netherlands, and little is known on the adequacy of (public) sport facilities. In the Netherlands some planning guidelines are in place, particularly for indoor sports facilities, however these are rather outdated. To illustrate, these guidelines for indoor sports facilities were developed in the previous century and never critically reflected upon. Considering the evolving sport sector since then and changes in sport participation and facility use patterns, we anticipate that a revision of these guidelines is in order. The aim of this study is to revise the existing planning guidelines for indoor sports facilities and develop a more sophisticated planning instrument to support well-informed policymaking on this topic. Furthermore, we aim to enhance the understanding of the usage of indoor sports facilities in order to contribute to a more efficient operation of indoor sports facilities.

## Theoretical Background

Within governments there is currently an increased emphasis on evidence-based policies, effectiveness, reflexivity and accountability (Sanderson, 2002; Mansfield, 2016). This is also the case for local policies related to sport facilities in the Netherlands, in which increased efficiency in sport facility operation is argued for (Hoekman, Van der Roest & Van der Poel, 2018). Consequently, a better insight in the presence and usage of indoor sports facilities is needed to identify ways to improve the efficiency in sport facility operation. Furthermore, with regard to sports facility planning a more reflexive approach, contesting the existing planning guidelines, is appropriate to develop a more sophisticated planning instrument with key indicators on the supply and demand of indoor sports facilities.

## Methods

In this study we analyse the actual number and types of indoor sports facilities and the theoretical need based on the existing planning guidelines. Data is provided by the Database Sport Supply (DSS), a national dataset offering geographical information on (nearly) all sport facilities in the Netherlands. This data is linked with population statistics from Statistics Netherlands to allow comparison between the theoretical need and the actual supply. To confront these findings with the actual use of (public) sports facilities, we selected 23 municipalities for an in-depth follow-up study. Within these municipalities usage data is collected of all public indoor sports facilities, amounting to 293 indoor sports facilities. For each facility data is available on the use per day, per hour, the number of used courts, the kind of activity that took place and the (type of) user, throughout a whole year or season.

## Results

The first results show that the actual number of indoor sports facilities extent the theoretical need based on current planning guidelines. However, the average overall usage of indoor sports facilities during the year or season (i.e. the used/capacity ratio) is between 40 and 50 percent, including sport activities, physical education lesson and other use. This may indicate that too many indoor sport facilities are provided for. Although, off season use by ‘outdoor sports’ and increase of use by schools lead to an average overall usage between 60 and 70 percent during the winter.

In the upcoming period we will further analyse usage patterns of different types of indoor sports facilities to enhance our understanding of the utilization of these indoor sport facilities and consequently identify opportunities and barriers for better use of indoor sport facilities. In addition, these analyses form a good starting point to revise the current planning guideline.

## Conclusions and Implications

So far, we conclude that the current planning guidelines for indoor sports facilities are outdated and do not correspond with the actual presence of indoor sports facilities in the Netherlands. The analyses of the occupation rates of indoor sports facilities made clear that these facilities are not used to its full potential. In our presentation we will further zoom in on this topic and provide an explanation for these outcomes. Furthermore, we will elaborate on the implications of our findings and present, based on these findings, a revised planning instrument for indoor sports facilities that is attuned to the needs of the different user groups of indoor sport facilities.

## References

- Hallmann, K. & Petry, K. (Eds.) (2013). *Comparative sport development: systems, participation and public policy*. New York: Springer Science+Business Media.
- Hoekman, R., van der Roest, J. W., & van der Poel, H. (2018). From welfare state to participation society? Austerity measures and local sport policy in the Netherlands. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 10(1), 131-146.
- Mansfield, L. (2016). Resourcefulness, reciprocity and reflexivity: the three Rs of partnership in sport for public health research. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 8(4), 713-729.
- Nicholson, M., Hoyer, R., & Houlihan, B. (2011). *Participation in sport: international policy perspectives*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Sanderson, I. (2002). Evaluation, policy learning and evidence-based policy making. *Public Administration*, 80(1), 1-22.