

Evaluating Board Composition, Diversity, and Governance in National Sport Federations: Assessing the Impact of Board Size in the Netherlands

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Abstract

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of board characteristics in the National Sports Federation of the Netherlands. The Netherlands has implemented regulations to promote board diversity, emphasising the importance of ensuring diverse representation. This study utilises a cross-sectional and descriptive research design, employing content analysis of publicly accessible data. The study's findings indicate an increasing presence of women in leadership roles, specifically on boards and in managerial positions, within sports organisations. There is a growing emphasis on gender-balanced boards as a means to enhance governance and decision-making through the inclusion of diverse perspectives. The study conducted a comparative analysis of the Netherlands in relation to other countries in order to enhance the argument. The study contributes to the existing theoretical literature on board diversity and governance in sports organisations. The study emphasises the importance of sports organisations developing policies that prioritise diversity and inclusivity, involving all relevant stakeholders in the governance processes.

Keywords: Board Composition, Board Diversity, Board Governance, National Sports Federation, Netherlands

1. Introduction

The board's decisions and operations rely on the members of the Board and Nomination Committee. The role of boards in sports governance receives significant attention due to their responsibilities and power. There has been a recent focus on inadequate sports governance practices and performance, which has raised concerns about the effectiveness and credibility of the board members. To address the existing challenges, it is crucial to thoroughly examine the composition and attributes of national sports federations (McLeod, Star, & Shilbury, 2023). The discipline of national sports governance emphasises the importance of professional and strategic decision-making practices in influencing the overall performance of the sports industry. The complexities and challenges of contemporary sporting networks are primarily associated with the structure of the governing board within these networks (Ingram & O'Boyle, 2018). The volunteer board's authority and decisions have broader implications for professional and enhanced performance.

The challenges in sports governance and operations can be addressed by evaluating the effectiveness of boards in national sports federations. Scholars and researchers focus on the composition and characteristics of board members (McKeag et al., 2022). Factors such as board composition, including size, gender diversity, and occupational diversity, influence the board's performance. In order to

establish an effective governance structure, it is necessary to enhance the parameters associated with good governance. The size of the board is a significant factor that influences organisational effectiveness and subsequently leads to improved organisational efficiency. Enhanced governance and performance in the sports sector are positively correlated with diversity (Wicker & Kerwin, 2022). Effective management in sports organisations relies heavily on governance.

Therefore, it is crucial to thoroughly examine the factors that pose challenges to the board. Previous research has extensively examined the factors that affect board composition and the subsequent impact of board composition and characteristics on governance and performance. Prakash, Modi, and Chanda (2021) conducted a study examining the board composition of national sports federations in the United States. In his study, McLeod (2019) examined the significance of board and directors in National sports organisations, with a particular focus on board structure and composition. Sterling analysed the process of board composition and its influence on the development of national sports organisations.

While, Esteban Salvador et al. (2023) highlighted the significance of gender diversity on sports boards and its influence on the governance and performance of the sports sector. There is a significant body of literature available that explores the board structure, composition, and effects

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on sports governance. However, researchers primarily conduct studies within the framework of European countries, the United States, and BRICS countries. The lack of sufficient literature on the topic in the Netherlands necessitates further research to examine the challenges faced in the formation and governance of sports boards in this region.

Although there is a growing understanding and awareness of the influence of diversity and board size on governance standards, it is necessary to further investigate their broader impact on sports governance. The paper adhered strictly to the composition process and the necessary factors for establishing effective governance practices. The objective of this study is to conduct a thorough analysis of the composition, diversity, and governance of the Board of the National Sports Federation of the Netherlands. The primary emphasis is placed on the size of the board and its capacity to make decisions and formulate policies that will contribute to the long-term performance of the national sports sector.

2. Literature Review

Agency theory is an economic perspective that conceptualises the corporation as a compilation of contracts driven by self-interest. An agency relationship is established when a principal grants authority to an agent to act on their behalf. Agency theory provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics between coaches and athletes, who often serve as the directors and stakeholders within sports federations (McLeod, Shilbury, & Ferkins, 2021a; McLeod, Shilbury, & Zeimers, 2021b; Sandahl & Tingl f, 2021; Slack, Byers, & Thurston, 2020). Coaches can enhance both individual performance and team success by understanding these dynamics and directly addressing challenges (Comiskey, 2022; Flaherty, 2022). This tool can be utilised to analyse the functioning of boards in sport federations, specifically in terms of their responsibilities in monitoring and advocating for the interests of stakeholders, including athletes, coaches, and sponsors (O'Boyle & Shilbury, 2019; Van Mullem & Gano-Overway, 2021).

Coaches, like corporate executives, prioritise the overall success of the team (Dong et al., 2021). Seemann,  stfkova, and Binasova (2019) have found that individuals in this role are responsible for strategy development, training supervision, and decision-making. Players, similar to agents, are responsible for implementing this strategy during the game. However, it is important to note that while coaches primarily emphasise team achievements, athletes may sometimes prioritise individual accolades over the objectives of the team (Martens & Vealey, 2023).

This study aims to gather information on the operational processes of nomination committees (NCs) in the field of sports and evaluate their capacity to influence board composition. The significance of this endeavour lies in its ability to shed light on the processes preceding the establishment of power structures and practices in sports organisations (Feddersen et al., 2021). The analysis outlines six components of NC processes: election of the NC at the general assembly (GA), monitoring of the incumbent board, preparation for nominee identification, assembling a list of potential nominees, evaluating potential nominees, and submitting proposed nominees to the GA (Dodok &  ubo ova, 2019). The studies emphasise three elements that have a significant impact on board composition within and across these components. This study examines the relationship between board composition, diversity, and governance in national sport federations (Parent et al., 2023).

This study investigated the role of national sport federation (NSF) boards in Australia, India, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This study investigated the influence of board size, vocational variety, and gender diversity on board performance. The study reveals that the average board size of Indian NSFs is larger compared to the board sizes observed in the Western nations under examination (McLeod et al., 2023). Diversity is increasingly valued in sports organisations (Spaij, Knoppers, & Jeanes, 2020). Despite the recognised importance of gender diversity in leadership, women leaders remain underrepresented (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). Recent scholarly research has shown an increasing interest in the study of diversity and its impact on group performance (Gomez & Bernet, 2019; Khatib et al., 2021). The model is partially validated using survey data obtained from the National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) in Finland (Turconi & Shaw, 2023). This study highlights that gender-diverse organisational boards may not fully realise their benefits due to gender-based recruitment or selection processes. These processes not only affect the functioning of sports organisations but also restrict women's representation on sports organisation boards (Mikkonen, Stenvall, & Lehtonen, 2021). Research suggests that sport organisations possess untapped potential for developing NCs, regardless of whether an "appropriate" board prioritises organisational efficiency or safeguards representation and democracy (Stenling et al., 2023).

This study examined the composition of national sport federation (NSF) boards in BRICS countries. The study focused on the impact of board diversity (occupational and gender) and board size on the effectiveness of NSFs, which is a commonly acknowledged factor (Begovic, 2019). The results indicate that in the BRICS nations, most NSF

directors (45.1% of the total) come from athletic backgrounds. However, this trend is not observed in China, where bureaucrats are more prevalent in this role (61.9%) (McKeag et al., 2022). Inside directors have a negative impact on leverage, in line with agency theory. This suggests that inside directors, who have privileged access to internal information, should exercise caution when considering debt financing to reduce conflicts between managers and shareholders (McLeod et al., 2021a; McLeod et al., 2021b). The presence of independent or external directors has a positive and significant impact on leverage, which aligns with the principles of resource dependence theory (Pham & Nguyen, 2019). Gender diversity on corporate boards has a positive impact on leverage, supporting the resource dependence theory. This is because boards with a diverse gender composition enhance a firm's reputation and attractiveness to lenders (Yakubu & Oumarou, 2023).

Effective organisational management relies heavily on governance (Abdollahbeigi & Salehi, 2020). Scholars are increasingly focusing on effective governance (Schmidt & Wood, 2019). The AGGIS Initiative introduced good governance criteria, which encompassed democratisation processes, for international sports organisations (Di Marco, 2019). The involvement of athletes as stakeholders is a significant concern in terms of good governance and democratisation (Mittag et al., 2022; Morales & Schubert, 2022). However, athletes are often impacted by governance choices, yet they have limited decision-making power (Grigaliūnaitė & Eimontas, 2018). Prior research suggests that effective sport governance should encompass several key elements, including the governing body's role and responsibilities, organisational structure, accountability mechanisms, democratic processes such as elections and appointments, transparent communication practices, and the promotion of solidarity within the sport community (Gauthier, 2023; O'Boyle & Shilbury, 2019).

The Sports Governance Observer (SGO) technique is utilised to assess the governance of 47 National Governing Bodies (NGBs) in the United States (Girginov, 2023; Pielke Jr et al., 2020). Although the SGO offers advantages, it also possesses significant limitations. Good governance measures extend beyond a company's public communication (Pielke Jr et al., 2020). Sport organisations in the United Kingdom that receive government assistance are required to comply with a specific set of criteria pertaining to transparency, accountability, and financial integrity (Parent et al., 2021).

Sport administrators recognise the importance of management for both the daily operations and overall administration of their sport organisations (Edmund, 2021). Effective governance in national sport federations can contribute to overall success, both administratively and athletically. The prominence of good governance in

the political agenda of international and national sport organisations has increased in recent years due to mismanagement and a legitimacy problem (Ghai & Zipp, 2020). Although good governance is becoming increasingly important in the global and domestic sports sectors, many sport federations still need to adapt and implement their standards more effectively. This can lead to discrepancies between the principles of good governance and their actual application (Kivisilta, 2020). Existing literature lacks research on the relationship between board size and governance of national sport federations in the Netherlands. This study aims to examine the relationship between board size and governance in national sport federations. It will assess the composition and diversity of the boards.

3. Research Method

This study aimed to examine the changing patterns of board characteristics within the National Sports Federation of the Netherlands. This study employs a cross-sectional and descriptive research design to examine the board characteristics of the National Sports Federations in the Netherlands. Secondary data is used to present descriptive statistics on these board characteristics at a specific point in time. The current methodology aligns with the findings of Heydenrych and Case (2018), who posit that utilising publicly accessible secondary data presents several benefits, including access to extensive datasets. To meet the objectives of the study, we needed to employ an appropriate approach to conduct a thorough data analysis. To achieve the intended objective, the study employed a content analysis methodology. The content analysis methodology is linked to the examination of written material and serves as a systematic framework for classifying a substantial amount of information (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2017).

The primary aim of conducting a textual analysis is to identify and examine trends, patterns, and the frequency of research conducted on a particular topic or area, as well as the relationships between them. Therefore, the primary objective of content analysis is to comprehensively depict the material contained within a given document. In order to perform the content analysis, the researcher utilised a variety of data sources, including national statistics, published reports, journal articles, corporate reports, documents, and market research databases. Gaston, Blundell, and Fletcher (2020) and Morgan, LePeau, and Commodore (2022) both utilised secondary data sources to examine gender diversity in sports leadership in the United States and assess board governance and equality through content analysis, respectively.

The study aimed to investigate various board characteristics, including board diversity and board governance. Board diversity often correlates with gender diversity (Song, Yoon, & Kang, 2020). Using female directors on a board as a measure of gender diversity is common practice. Research has shown that having female representation on a board is an important indicator of board diversity (Beji et al., 2021; Reddy & Jadhav, 2019; Song et al., 2020). Board governance pertains to the procedural aspects of the board. The present study utilised statistical data extracted from reports and documents to substantiate the analysis.

4. Findings of the Study

In the Netherlands, gender diversity continues to be a concern, as evidenced by the fact that in 2014, 94% of the board of directors in sports federations were male (Statista, 2016). This indicates that women were limited to just 6% representation on the board of directors. Claringbould and Knoppers (2008) criticised the underrepresentation of women as board members in Dutch sports organisations. The study also noted that the composition of the board has an impact on board governance and perceptions. Despite the increasing focus on female representation, the underrepresentation of women on the board was not seen as a gender imbalance. Peeters, Elling, and Van Sterkenburg (2021) found a parallel perspective wherein men's football is considered the norm and standard, despite the increasing focus on female representation. Figure 1 illustrates a significant gender imbalance in 2014, with only 4% of chair positions held by females and over 73% of secretarial positions occupied by males. Adriaanse (2016) found that there is a skewed gender diversity in the governance of sports associations in the Netherlands, with males dominating notable management positions.

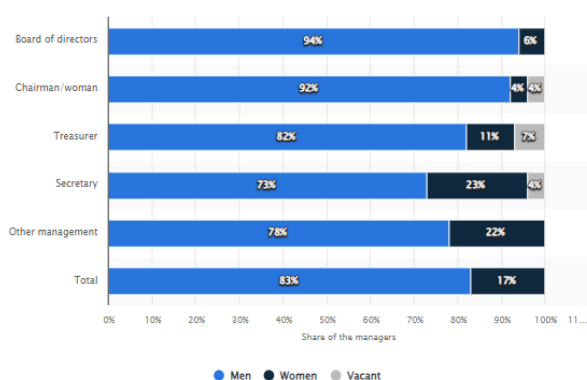


Figure 1. Gender diversity in sports federations in the Netherlands in 2014, by role (Statista, 2016)

Consistent with the preceding analysis, an examination of the gender diversity data for 2019 indicates a higher percentage of males serving as presidents and vice presidents, as depicted in Table 1 and Figure 2. According to Fasting (2019), of the 25 presidents, 92% were male and only 2% were female, highlighting an ongoing concern regarding gender representation in presidential appointments. Figure 2 illustrates the significant representation of males in board positions within sports federations (n=123). The Netherlands has seen a growing emphasis on gender diversity, as evidenced by the increasing presence of women on company boards (Zillman, 2018). Similarly, there has been a notable rise in female representation within sports organisations, with the percentage of female board members increasing from 6% in 2014 to 24% in 2019. This shift signifies a positive trend in promoting gender diversity within sports federations and increasing attention to female representation in organisational settings.

Table 1

Gender Diversity in 2019.

Gender	Presidents	Vice-president	Board member
Male	23	16	123
Female	2	4	39
Total	25	20	162

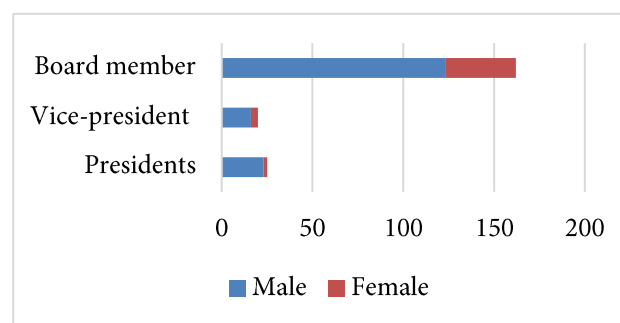


Figure 2. Gender diversity in sports federations in the Netherlands in 2019

Figure 3 presents a comparative analysis of the female representation among elite-level coaches in different countries, including the Netherlands. The data reveals a significant underrepresentation of women as coaches in most countries, with Croatia, Portugal, and Denmark having the lowest percentages (Fasting, 2019). The Netherlands has a 19% representation of female elite-level coaches in its sports federation. Promoting gender diversity is crucial to increase the employment of women in this role. Lithuania boasts the highest proportion of female representation among elite coaches, with 36% of coaches being female. The figure suggests the potential to promote gender diversity by hiring female elite coaches.

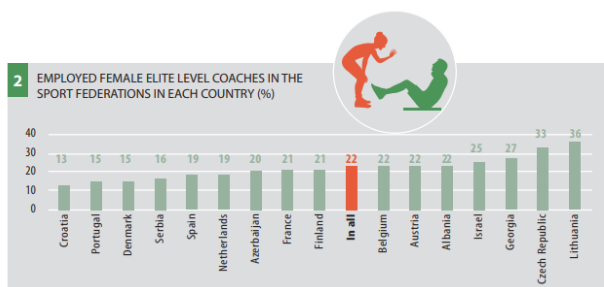


Figure 3. Female Coaches in Sports Federations (Fasting, 2019)

Figure 4 illustrates the division of coaching roles based on their respective responsibilities. It reveals that the equestrian discipline has the highest proportion of registered female coaches, accounting for 88% of coaching positions. This demonstrates the prevalence of women in coaching positions. In gymnastics, most coaches, specifically 85%, are female. This suggests a significant female dominance in the field of gymnastic coaching. In swimming, the gender representation of registered coaches is relatively balanced, with women comprising 53% of the total. In the Netherlands, the coaching staff in handball demonstrates a gender balance, as there is an equal distribution of 50% female coaches and 50% male coaches (Council of Europe, 2019).

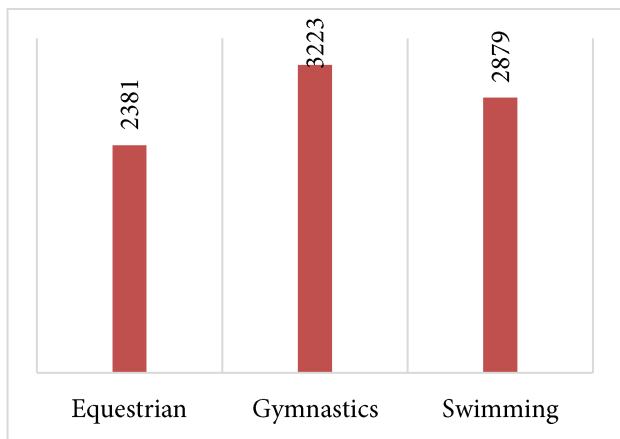


Figure 4. Federations with highest representation of female coaches

According to Fasting (2019), the gender diversity within National Olympic Committees (NOCs) varies across different NOC boards. In the Netherlands, there has been a significant increase in women's representation, with women now holding a majority of 57% of board positions. This exemplifies the organisations' and NOCs' dedication to inclusivity and equal participation of both genders. This underscores the increasing necessity of promoting female participation in leadership positions. In addition to the Netherlands, Finland, Israel, and France are three countries that have at least one female board member. Figure 5 illustrates the initiatives undertaken by sports

federations, NOCs, and ministries in various countries, including the Netherlands, to promote the inclusion of women in leadership positions, particularly on boards. In recent years, 53% of the sports federations in the listed countries have actively worked towards enhancing women's involvement in sports organisations. This demonstrates the dedication to promoting gender diversity in countries such as the Netherlands.

The data indicates that 56% of Dutch federations have implemented initiatives to enhance female representation on their boards and in decision-making roles. In comparison to Spain, France, and Finland, the Netherlands has lower perceptions, with percentages of 85%, 94%, and 79%, respectively. However, the Netherlands ranks sixth in terms of gender diversity in sports organisations, which contradicts previous research findings (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008). Similarly, Claringbould and van Liere (2018) examined the process of achieving gender equality within the Olympic sports federation in the Netherlands. Georgia, Portugal, and the Czech Republic rank poorly in terms of their efforts to promote the inclusion of women in decision-making positions. The analysis of Figure 1 indicates that most regulatory bodies are actively promoting gender diversity.

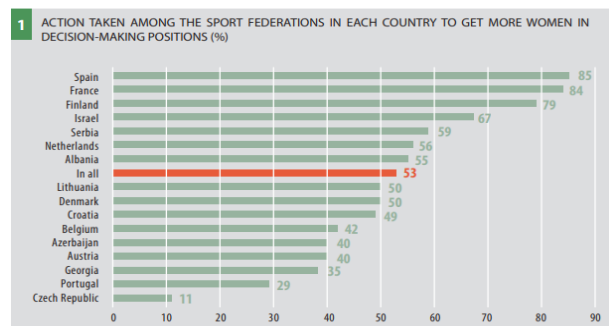


Figure 5. Actions take for Gender Diversity (Fasting, 2019)

5. Discussion

The study's findings indicate a notable rise in female representation on boards and in managerial roles within sports organisations in the Netherlands. The finding is supported by a report published by Fasting (2019). The report indicates that the Netherlands is one of the leading countries in terms of ministries and sports federations taking significant measures. Specifically, 56% of sports federations in the country have developed strategies to increase the representation of women in key decision-making roles. This demonstrates a shared dedication from the government and sports organisations to enhance the presence of women in influential positions, thereby potentially augmenting female representation in leadership roles. Esteban Salvador et al.

(2023) found that female employment in the sports federation significantly predicts female representation at the chairperson's position.

Furthermore, 19% of the sports federations within the country have opted to hire female coaches. Moreover, around 24% of sports federations have taken steps to enhance the recruitment of female coaches. This presents a valuable opportunity to showcase female role models and mentors for young female athletes, as well as to promote gender diversity in sports organisations. It is essential to have role models and mentors for aspiring female athletes and coaches in order to promote diversity in sports at all levels. In the Netherlands, 57% of sports federations have achieved gender balance in their board composition, ensuring a diverse representation of board members. The achievement of having a significant percentage of sports federations with gender equality on their boards is commendable. This accomplishment has the potential to enhance decision-making processes and governance mechanisms within these federations by incorporating diverse perspectives.

The findings suggest that greater gender diversity in managerial roles and on corporate boards can improve governance mechanisms and decision-making effectiveness. Gender bias in recruitment can impede the advantages of gender diversity in board composition within sports organisations, as well as hinder women's representation in leadership positions (Mikkonen et al., 2021). The notable rise in female representation in sports organisations in the Netherlands signifies a significant step towards achieving gender balance within these organisations. The study demonstrates that the sports federations in the country have successfully achieved gender balance and equality in sports governance, resulting in a board that is representative of both genders. In addition, Dutch sports federations conform to global trends by promoting female representation in sports leadership positions. This can serve as a model for sports federations in other regions.

6. Conclusion

This study emphasises the notable advancements made by sports federations in the Netherlands regarding gender diversity in their board composition and the resulting effects on organisational governance. The organization's efforts to hire more women as coaches and managers have contributed to the increase in female representation in the Netherlands' sports federation. The inclusion of women in leadership roles improves decision-making processes and aligns governance mechanisms with global standards of

diversity and inclusion. The study highlights the Netherlands as a model for other nations to improve gender diversity in leadership positions within their sports federations.

6.1 Research Implications

6.1.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study have important theoretical implications for the existing literature on governance in sports organisations. This study is based on agency theory and contributes to the existing theoretical literature on this topic. This study provides theoretical insights into the effective governance of national sports federations through the utilisation of optimal board size and board diversity. The study emphasises the importance of representation and inclusion in the governing bodies of national sports federations, specifically in relation to board composition and diversity. Furthermore, this study offers theoretical insights regarding the correlation between governance structure and performance within sports federations. This study contributes to the existing literature on gender diversity in sports federations' governing bodies, expanding our knowledge of governance mechanisms in sports. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of comprehending the interactions between governing bodies and their primary stakeholders. The study's emphasis on the Netherlands' context contributes theoretically to future research on governing bodies in sports by facilitating comparative analysis.

6.1.2 Practical Implications

This study provides practical implications for sports organisations to evaluate and adjust the gender diversity of their boards in order to align with the organisation's specific needs and objectives. The study suggests that sports organisations should align their board size and gender diversity with their governance mechanisms and strategic goals. The study suggests that sports organisations should develop diversity policies and inclusive recruitment plans to attract a diverse group of talented individuals for their boards and governing bodies. A diverse board can improve organisational decision-making processes. The study suggests that sports organisations should develop policies to engage athletes, coaches, and other stakeholders in governance processes.

6.2 Limitations and Future Directions

This study provides significant insights into the governance structures of the National Sports Federation of the Netherlands using a secondary research approach. The availability of relevant data poses a challenge for researchers conducting secondary studies. The scarcity of

data on the board size and composition of the National Sports Federation in the Netherlands posed a constraint in this study. Future research can address this limitation by integrating primary data. Primary data can be collected using qualitative methods to gain insights into the experiences of employees in sports organisations or quantitative methods to evaluate causal hypotheses. This

study specifically examines the Netherlands' National Sports Federation, which may restrict the applicability of its results to other sports organisations in different demographics. Future research should focus on studying different demographics that have distinct governing structures and mechanisms in order to obtain comprehensive findings.

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