

Blue print structure

Introduction

In the following paper you are expected to describe how your country is politically, socially and economically organized. For instance, what happens to people when they fall ill? What happens when you lose your job? Is there any help when you have a baby and need to work full time? Do young persons in your country have the possibilities to fully explore their talents in sports? And are immigrants coming to your country helped to set up their new life, or not? It is also important to analyse that when there is support for above mentioned needs, by whom it is organised? Is it the government who takes care of all these needs, is it non governmental organizations (NGO'S) or is the help organized by the people themselves.

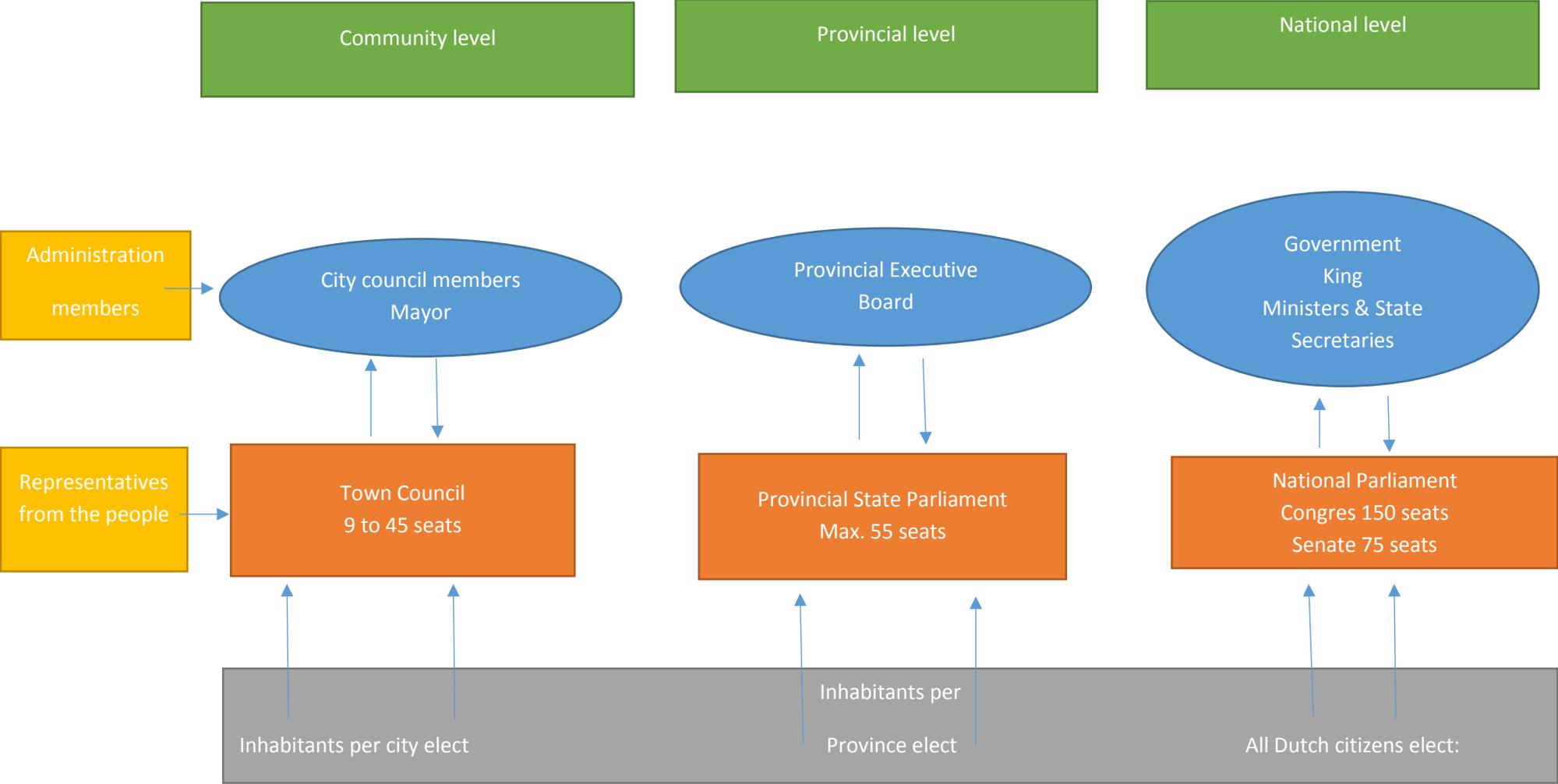
It is important to gather this knowledge about your own society in order to firstly understand how your country, or better: Civil Society, works regarding these social needs. Secondly, to be able to compare your country with the other participating countries (Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Italy, Turkey), and thirdly, to be able to create viable and durable social-economical solutions to real existing social needs in these countries to be solved by you.

To understand how your country works, we start with exploring how the political level is organized.

The Political Level

Try to visualise the political structure in your country in a scheme like the one given on the next page.

The Dutch Democracy



Now we have visualized the governing structure, it is important to look at the political parties that represent the people in the different councils or parliaments. Most of the political parties have based their ideas on an ideology. An ideology is a coherent structure of ideas on how a country should be governed and how the wealth should be divided and what will be leading values on which laws will be based.

The main ideologies in the Netherlands are:

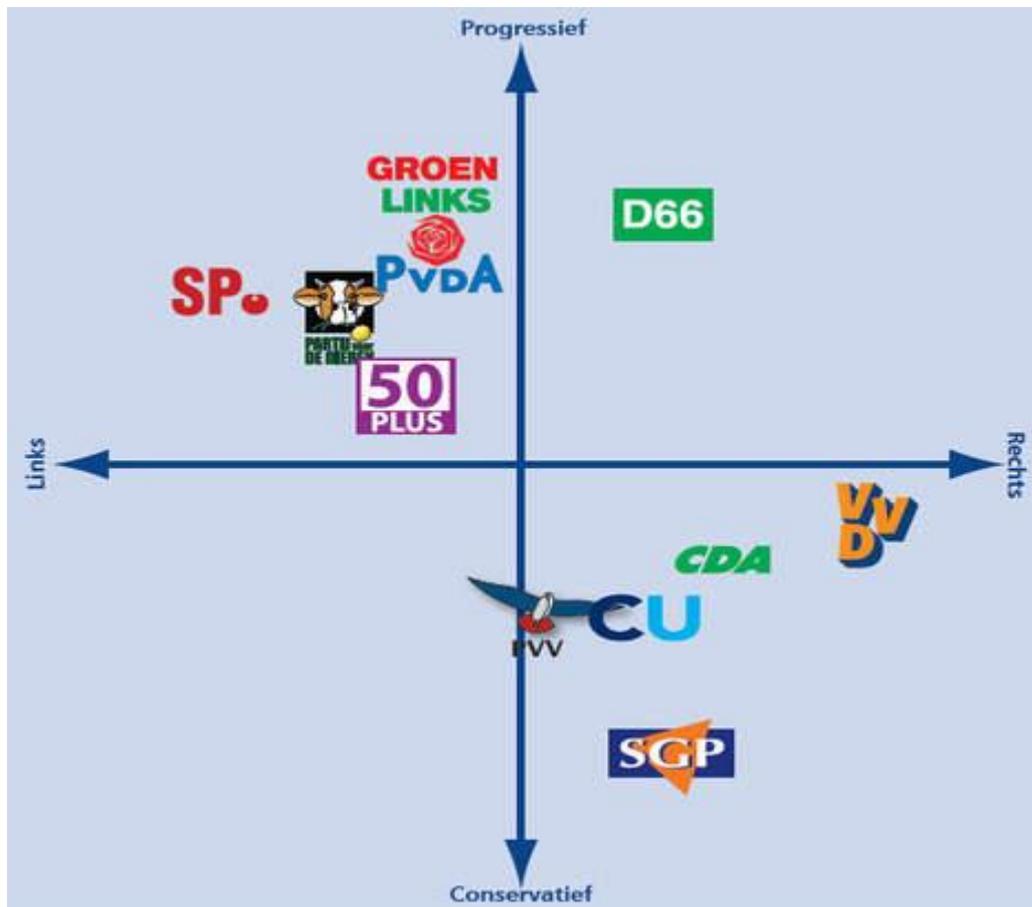
Ideology:	Socialism/Social Democrats
Main value:	Equality
Main stand point:	Fair distribution of income knowledge and power
Governing role:	Emphasis on an active role for government regarding socio-economic subjects

Ideology:	Confessionalism/Christian Democrats
Main value:	Harmony between employers and employees
Main stand point:	Responsibility for society should be evenly spread between government and citizens (Civil Society plays an important role).
Governing role:	Emphasis on responsibility for each other and civil society should full fill important civil tasks

Ideology:	Liberalism/Liberal Democrats
Main value:	Freedom
Main stand point:	Personal and economic freedom for citizens
Governing role:	Government provides order and security.

On the following pages you will find dan overview of the Dutch political parties which are respresented in the national parliament and provincial and city councils. The parties are

shown on an horizontal axis from left to right and a vertical axis ranging from progressive to conservative.



Left and right in politics means the following:

Left: government has a big responsibility regarding the social and economic situation of people.

Middle: government should only be responsible for social and economic matters that can't be arranged for by the people themselves.,

Right: government should not interfere with social and economic matters of the people because people should be free to develop their social economic situation.

Conservative versus progressive

For conservative politicians it is important to protect the level of development already achieved. They preferably don't want to change much and preserve and protect what is already won by the people.

Progressive politicians preferably want to change society for the better. They put an emphasis on the problems in our societies and want to solve those by using new measures and policies.

Current Dutch Government

After the March 2017 national elections, the liberal party VVD became for the third time in a row the biggest political party winning 33 seats. This means that the VVD takes the initiative to form a new government. The parliament appointed adviser investigates which party or parties can and wants to form a coalition with the VVD party to form a majority in the national parliament of 150 seats. This is a specific Dutch feature as it never happens that a single party wins a majority of seats. Therefore the Netherlands are always governed by a coalition government.

The appointed adviser soon came to the conclusion that the liberals should try to form a coalition with the Christian Democrats which won 19 seats, with Democrats 66 who won 19 seats and GroenLinks, the Green Left who won 14 seats. This coalition would then hold a majority of 85 seats in the parliament. The coalition talks were however unsuccessful and several weeks after the election the Green Left party then broke off talks with the other parties. The parliament appointed adviser found another party, the Christen Unie winning only 5 seats, willing to take the place of Green Left.

After months of negotiating a new government made up of liberals, conservatives and a progressive party, D66, was presented on October 26. This coalition holds only a narrow majority margin of 1 seat.



The new government on the steps of Noordeinde Palace with King Willem-Alexander in the middle and left of the King the Prime Minister Mark Rutte.

The newly elected administration will govern the country for the next 4 years. The leaders of the 4 coalition parties, VVD, CDA, D66, CU, negotiated a so called coalition agreement with a number of major topics they want to accomplish or change are:

- Reform of the tax system, lower taxes for all
- All coal fired energy plants will close in 2030
- A limit of 750 refugees allowed into the country
- More funding for education and smaller classes
- 6 weeks paid leave for first time fathers
- After 3 years everybody is entitled to a permanent contract

THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

The main provincial tasks are planning and environment. In a densely populated area like the Netherlands, the need for housing, good infrastructure and industrial development, are usually contradictory to the needs for nature conservation, agricultural activities and recreational needs.

However, the planning for the above mentioned areas need of course to take national planning into account. Therefore the activities of our Provincial authorities is a result of the out come of wat the national government decides.

The Provincial council is also elected every 4 years. The members of the Provincial Council then elect the members of the Provincial Executive from among the members of their own coalition (just like on the national level there is always a coalition of parties because it never happens that a single party wins the majority of seats by itself). The King's commissioner is the chairman of both the Provincial Executive and the Provincial Council. The King's commissioner is not elected but appointed by the King.

The Provincial government is relatively invisible and therefore regarded as less important. That is also the reason why you don't need to further investigate this political level.



The provincial council of the provence of Flevoland

THE LOCAL POLITICAL LEVEL

The administrative level that is closest to citizens is the local council. Traditionally, it has been the task of local government to see to the smooth running of public life in the council district. This not only includes keeping the registration of births, deaths and marriages up to date and performing marriage ceremonies but also such tasks as administering the regional police and organising the garbage collection, as well as the maintaining of parks and public lighting and issuing building permits. It also regulates social benefits, the care of the youth and the elderly and disabled persons.

The municipal council takes the most important decisions in the council district. Just like the Provincial Councils and the Second Chamber, local councillors are directly elected every four years. The number of councillors depends on the number of people living in a district. The maximum number is even though 45 members.

In contrast to general elections, people who do not have Dutch nationality have a right to participate in local elections provided they have been resident in the Netherlands for at least five years.

The day to day running of the district is in the hands of the executive board, consisting of a mayor and aldermen. The mayor is appointed in a similar procedure to that of the King's Commissioner in the provinces.



The municipal council of the city of Almere (approx. 200.000 inhabitants).

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE MARKET IN THE NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands is a welfare state, which means that the government plays an active role in ensuring the welfare and well-being of its people. By welfare we mean the extent to which people have access to sufficient means to meet their needs. Under well-being we understand the degree to which people are satisfied with their physical and mental health.

To a certain extent, the government in the Netherlands, has a duty to take care of its citizens. Central to this is the solidarity concept: in a group or society there is a willingness to share the risks with each other. In turn, the government is expected to pass laws and implement measures to enforce this solidarity. For example: you have a job but your best friend has become redundant. He then receives the statutory unemployment benefit, which you and all other employed people fund. And here we see collective interest at work: you find this acceptable because you could also find yourself in the same situation.

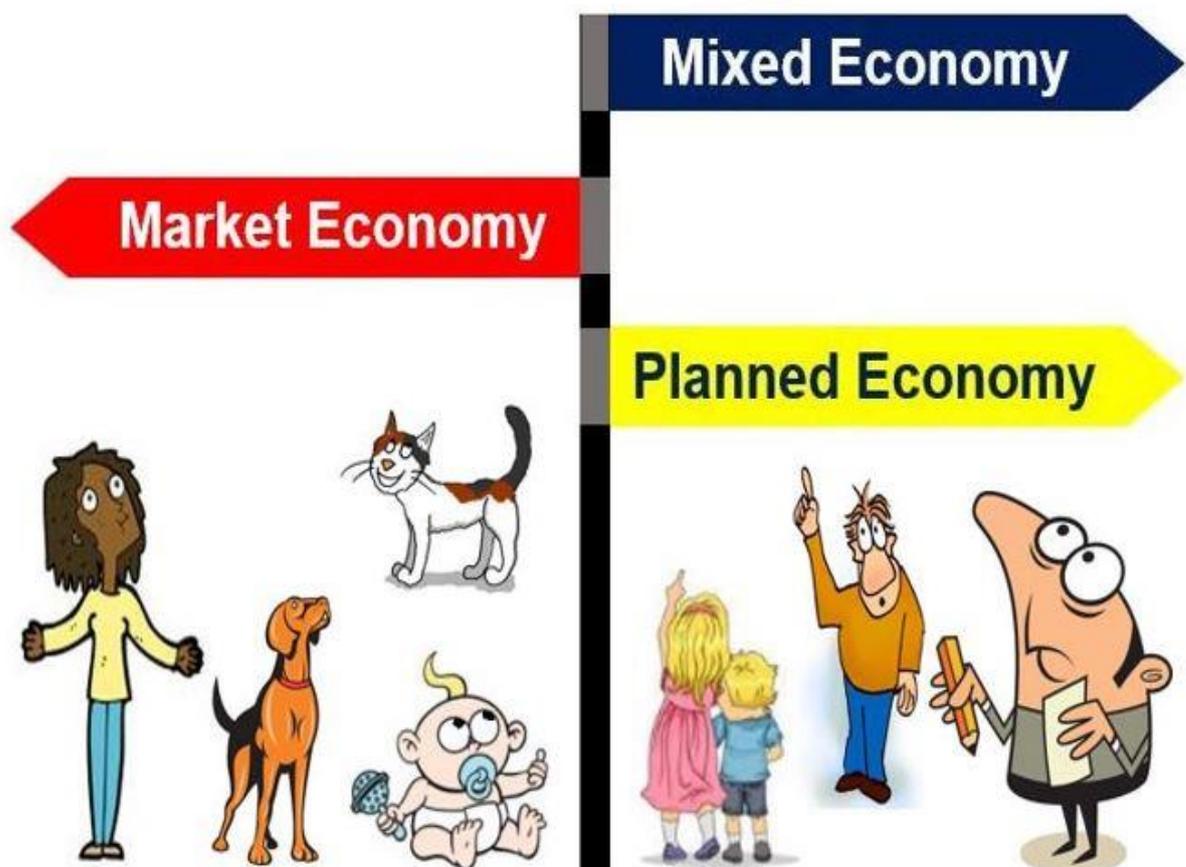
Functions of the Dutch welfare state

The aim of the welfare state is two fold: provision of welfare and well-being. Consequently, it is not just about benefits and insurances but also about creating conditions in which the population can undertake social and economic activities. Think of the creation of a good entrepreneurial climate, a well-functioning infrastructure and facilities such as education, day care for infants and school attending children and garbage collection. The four functions of the welfare state are:

- An insurance function; all working persons pay social contributions for when you fall ill or become disabled or when you lose your job. In addition all working persons pay taxes. Tax money is used to provide a state pension after the age of 67 and to pay families a child allowance. All these benefits together are called the social security system and provide you with income when you can't provide yourself an income.

- A care function; all the people have health insurance for when they need health care by a doctor or hospital or dentist.
- A functioning education system in which you can improve and work yourself up in society to find a job on the labour market. Well educated people find better jobs with a higher salary and pay therefor higher taxes and social contributions from which the education system and economy profit.
- A bonding function. Its collective character, sharing the risks with each other, creates bonds between people and makes people interdependent.

3 Economic Systems



The economy; is it a free market or a planned economy

A welfare state is a mix of a planned economy and a free market. In the previous chapter about the way politics are organized, we read about the three main ideologies which are socialism (Social democrats), confessionalism (Christian democrats) and liberalism (Liberal democrats). But to understand what a planned economy is we need to know a fourth ideology called Communism, which has lost its popularity over the last decades.

Communism

Communism evolved out of Socialism in early twentieth century when the socialists found themselves in a conflict over how to fight poverty and create equality. The socialists wanted to reach their equality goal by democratic means. But the people that didn't agree with this course, wanted to achieve equality by starting a revolution and they split off from the socialists and called themselves communists. This happened in many European countries more or less at the same time. In some countries like Russia, a successful communist revolution took place after which the Soviet Union was founded and its main value became equality. The working class had taken over power from the Czar and formed a people's government. Unfortunately the Soviet Union developed into a dictatorship like all other communist countries did.



The communist economy

In a communist economic system nobody owns his or her own enterprise but all companies, land and capital belong to the state, there is no private property. People are equal (there is no social class) and earn an equal salary and the state makes five year plans for the economy which spells out what should be produced and how much, and for what price it will be sold. And there is no competition from other companies. Everything is planned, therefore we call this a planned economy. In a communistic system the government takes complete responsibility for the care of its citizens. There is no room for individual initiative.

The free market economy (capitalism)

In a capitalist free-market economy like the United States, the main value is freedom and the government does not take an active role in the economy. Companies produce on the principle of supply and demand and there is heavy competition in each market. Taxes are low but everyone has to insure themselves against unemployment or illness with commercial enterprises who ask high prices. And you have to pay high school and university fees. In American politics, the emphasis is not put on sharing the risks but on the risk of sharing. If other people make more use of collective facilities than you, then that means that you have to pay more into the system than you get out of it. Moreover, a free market economy raise low tax burdens on people and companies, issues less regulations and laws on companies in

order to have as much freedom as possible to produce products. The more freedom companies have, less tax and regulations, the more job opportunities will be created is the central idea. And when you lose your job, the insurance for which you paid is usually not lasting very long. Health care and education are considered to be facilities that people should pay for themselves.

The Netherlands as mentioned, is a welfare state, meaning that the role government plays in the economy is a lot bigger than in the United States and taxes are also higher to provide free education and health care. But the people own their own homes and companies, so called private property. Based on free market forces, companies decide themselves what they produce and how they produce it. However, the government's influence on the economy is relatively big. Government is involved together with trade unions and employers to adjust the salaries of employees in so called Collective Labour Agreements. And the government forces employers by law to create safe and healthy conditions for employees to carry out their work. And the government has created a progressive tax system in which you pay more tax when you earn more.

The Civil Society

Definition

The meaning of civil society is people who take private initiative to organise support for other people. This support or help for other people are matters that are not organized by the State or the market. The Civil Society is made up out of active citizens that take responsibility for their society, their direct surroundings. They develop initiatives and create communities to achieve a social goal.

This idea of an active civil society is traditionally part of the ideology of the Christian Democrats. The Christian ideal is that people help each other when they are sick for instance. If everybody would take care of their ill relatives and friends, there would be less

need for an extensive health care system as we have nowadays. In other words, there would be less need for government organization. In the recent past (19 and early 20th century), The Netherlands didn't have a welfare state yet and health care, care for the elderly and the poor people, was mainly organized by the Church. When The Netherlands started to rebuild their country after W.O.II, the economy grew and there was enough money to construct a welfare state in which health care became free, elderly people were helped in elderly homes and the poor were offered benefits. However, a well functioning democracy needs a well functioning civil society. Even though government is nowadays responsible for many social tasks, there is still a thriving civil society made up out of people that voluntarily organise all kinds of activities for other people, at home or abroad, with the aim to do something for the other without expecting something in return. This is the contrary of activities organised by commercial companies because they expect money in return for their services.

The current government of socialists and liberals have during their term, redefined the civil society. This was mainly an initiative of the liberals as they believe strongly in 'small government' (government should basically take care of security, infrastructure, law and order) and greater responsibility for citizens to take their destiny into their own hands. In order to achieve their political goal of having less governmental organised tasks, they renamed the civil society in 'participation society', meaning that every citizen should play an active role instead of a passive role and looking to the government for help.

Part of the civil society are also the so called non-governmental organizations (NGO's) with a not for profit aim. There are many well known (international) organizations like Medecins Sans Frontieres which provides free health care in countries struck by war, conflict or disaster. Greenpeace who strives for a better environment. Or national initiatives like the Cancer Foundation which collects money to conduct research in cancer cure treatments. Or foundations founded by celebrities in sports like former tennis player Krajicek and former soccer player Johan Cruyff aiming to construct sport facilities in poor neighbourhoods for children in order to exercise (healthy) and develop their talents.

If you want to become an active citizen in The Netherlands, all you have to do is go online and register yourself with one of the several volunteer recruitment organizations where you

can choose to become a volunteer helping out in a national park, foster home, museum, library, or elderly day care centre.

Facts and figures

Almost half the population (49%) older than 15 years have deployed themselves at least once as a volunteer in 2015 in The Netherlands.

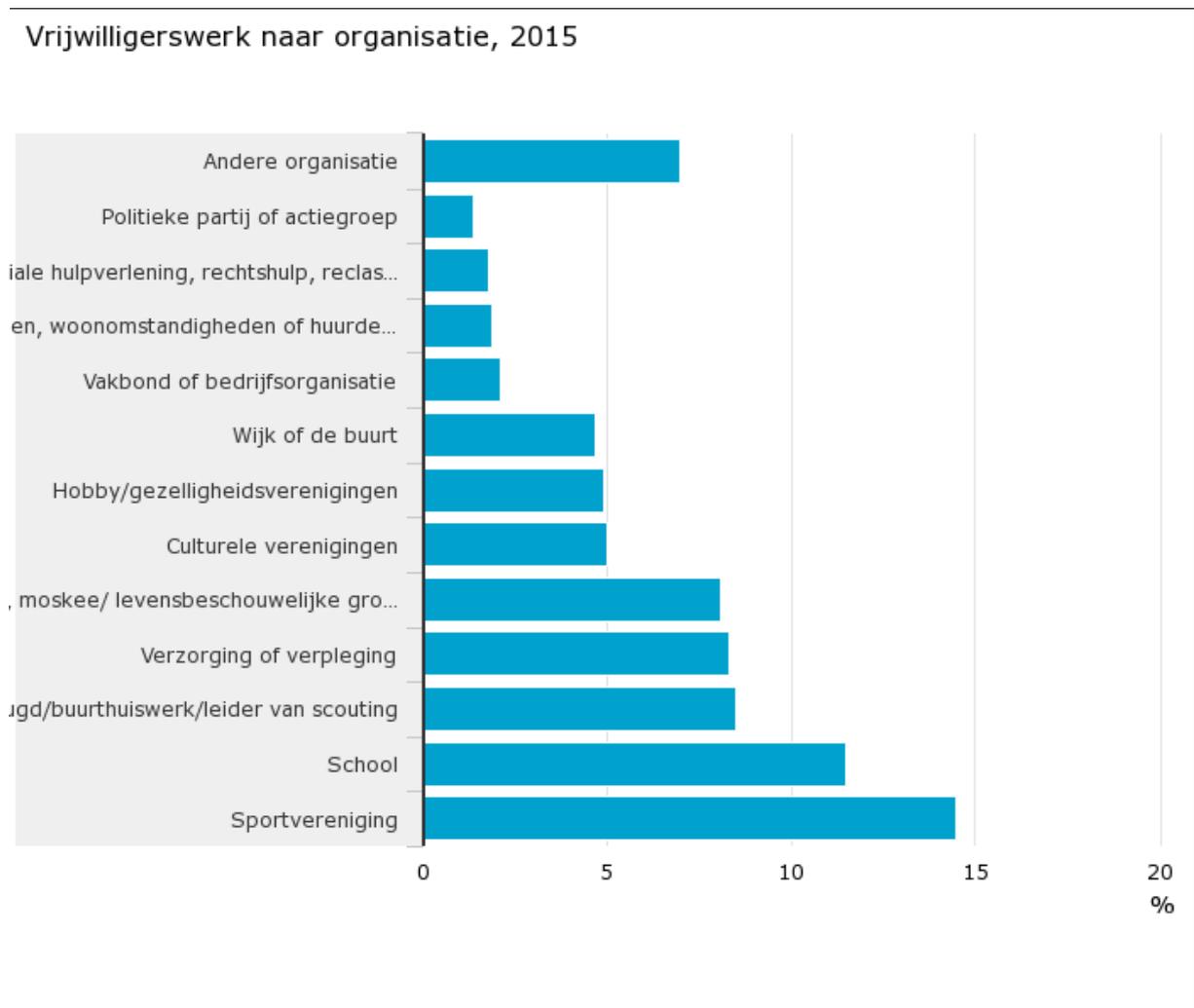


Figure above telling that most volunteers are volunteering at sports foundations and the less volunteers are found volunteering at political parties.

The most active citizens are people between 25 and 45 years of age and most of these volunteers live outside the big cities. And an average of 4 hours per week is spent by volunteers on their tasks. In 2012 and 2013 the number of teenage volunteers is significantly

high because of the compulsory character of the 'maatschappelijke stage') a civil society duty for a week for teenagers. Research shows that after such an apprenticeship in the civil society, many teenagers become volunteer. However, in 2014 it was decided to abolish the mandatory character and let schools decide themselves whether to keep doing this or to abandon this civil society duty. The expectation is that many schools will continue doing so but there are no figures known yet, neither the impact on active volunteering by teenagers.

[An inspiring example](#)

A civil society example in which Baken Park Lyceum in Almere took part was a theater project conducted by homeless people. One of our teachers was asked to create an educational project about slavery, racism and colonialism. The art teacher translated this theme to our current times and asked Amsterdam based homeless people to tell their stories of migration, homelessness and racism. These stories formed the basis for the play which was together created and performed by students and the homeless participants.

Now that you have studied the political, market and civil society of The Netherlands, it is time to become actively involved for a week and to do Something 4 Nothing in The Netherlands.