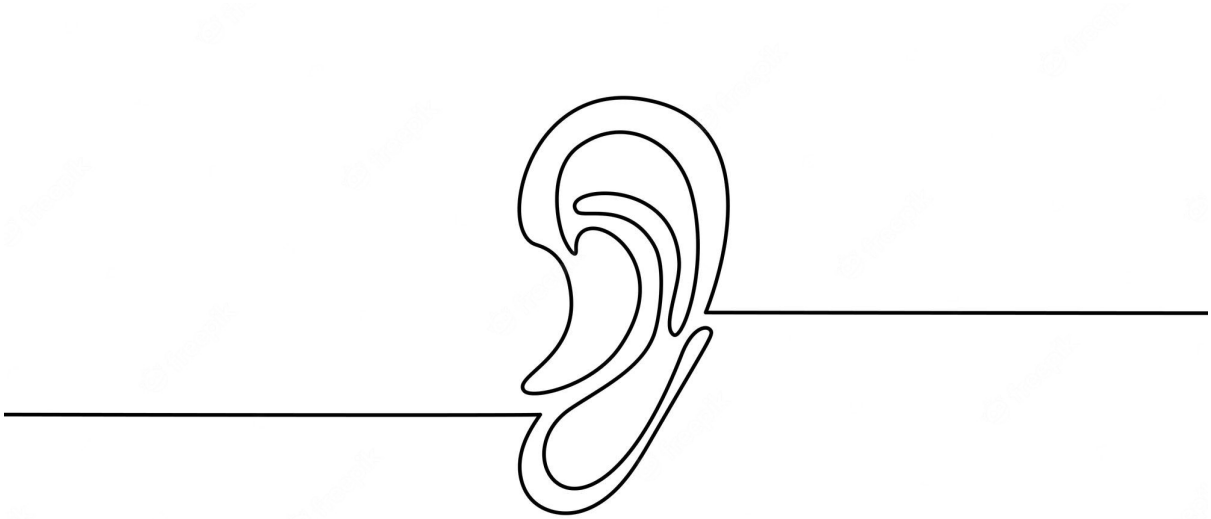
Silence on the field

Deaf and hard of hearing football, futsal, and other team sports players' experiences of sports inclusion and participation



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"[…] Increasing sports participation by lowering barriers... More acceptance. Better accessibility and reciprocal understanding of how to interact with one another – the emphasis on the reciprocity because you'll achieve more together."[1]

[1] As remarked by one of the interlocutors (10 February 2022)

Preface

This thesis is the final research product as part of the master's in Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at the University of Leiden, following the track of Sociology of Policy in Practice, and the internship carried out at Mulier Institute. Mulier Institute's main vision is to comprehend the act of sports and sports policies as taking place within society. In doing so, it is the hope that by understanding the role of sports within that society and in its members' lives, policies and other sports organizations can better adapt to making sports accessible and achievable for everyone.

This research is part of that contribution, focusing on inclusion and participation within team sports as personally experienced by its players with a partial to fully reduced hearing, as well as others involved in team sports. Throughout its process, I kept these questions in mind: how do current sports policies define and implement the concept of inclusion; and most importantly, if it comes to feeling included in a team, what exactly encompasses that and what does not? How is one's hearing part of feeling either included or excluded? And finally, what role does one's hearing have in their life- and identity-making outside of sport; and what influence does it have in turn?

While doing so, I have been aware of my dual role as both a researcher and a fellow hard of hearing person who, on top of sharing the physical aspect of reduced hearing, also shared the experience of having played team sports. While I brought my own personal ones as a starting point, it has truly been rewarding to hold interviews with others that, over time, felt more like conversations in which similar and sometimes opposing experiences were exchanged. Thus, these rich conversations have not only been valuable in encompassing the experiences of inclusion within team sports, but they have also been insightful for me and possibly other deaf and hard of hearing people. Therefore, rather than participants of this research, they have felt like interlocutors: fellow partners in conversation.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would therefore like to sincerely thank all of the interlocutors who have engaged in this research and shared with me their personal stories placed both on and off the field. All of you have given valuable insights to be considered for future sports policies and projects, and, in sharing anecdotes and overall experiences as part of your lives, you have given me personal insights as well. Living in the 'hearing' world all my life I knew no other people like me who had experiences like my own. Hearing all of yours – as far as I am able – has been insightful for the research in that our experiences are sometimes so similar but also vastly different – but that despite these differences, the

‘deaf’ world or community you have given me a peek of, has always been welcome to ‘outsiders’ nonetheless – of which one was me. For that, I am truly thankful and inspired!

Then, I would like to thank Dr. Jasmijn Rana, for whom I am very grateful for providing me with support, guidance, and the valuable insights and space I – physically and mentally – needed in order to thrive. Your uplifting attitude and comments on my progress have motivated me well, and I am thankful to have had you as my supervisor at the university!

I am grateful to Drs. Caroline van Lindert, whom I would like to thank for her guidance and sincere support throughout this research and the internship at Mulier Institute. Especially towards the end, I have tremendously valued our meetings regarding this research and the personal progress that went behind it. I also appreciate having been able to observe your own work as a researcher specialising in disability and sports and so, even though choosing an internship at the beginning of this year was a mandatory matter, I truly am pleased to have chosen this one. While I already had a strong affinity when it came to any type of disability and its lived experiences, I am grateful for the opportunity I have been given to incorporate this into my master’s thesis, and for being able to see the work you have long been doing regarding this subject.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and especially my partner, Niels. This year has been intense and at the same time rewarding, and I am grateful you have always continued to be the pillar I sometimes had to lean on at home. You allowed yourself to be a verbal sense of an ethnographic notebook – to which I would just narrate my reflective thoughts endlessly, still anonymously, and above all enthusiastically. I’m really thankful for your support, as without it I would have probably had a lot fewer clarifying thoughts during the process of this research!

Acronyms

BAHA – Bone Anchored Hearing Aid

CI – Cochlear Implant

KNDSB – Koninklijke Nederlandse Doven Sport Bond (Royal Dutch Deaf Sports Union)

KNVB – Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbal Bond (Royal Dutch Football Union)

NGT – Nederlandse GebarenTaal (Dutch Sign Language)

NSA – National Sports Agreement (Nationaal Sportakkoord)

NmG – Nederlands met Gebaren (Dutch with Signs)

NOC*NSF – Nederlands Olympisch Comité * Nederlandse Sport Federatie (Dutch Olympic Committee * Dutch Sports Federation)

OS – Ongehoord Sportief (Unheard Sportive, program)

VNG – Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten (Union of Dutch Municipalities)

VSG – Vereniging Sport en Gemeenten (Union of Sports and Municipalities)

VWS – Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports)

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1. Introduction

Walking out of the changing room and onto the handball field – a small, confined space to a large confined one – I was met with many echoing sounds. From the several thuds as bags were dropped on the floor to the squeaking of shoes just barely sliding over it; from the chatter of my fellow team players waiting for their turn to the shouting of those currently playing; from the ball being passed around to it being thrown against one of the goalposts, resulting in a loud bang; from the seemingly frustrated yelling of the player who had missed the goal to doors falling shut as more people walked in.

While these sounds sometimes echoed and sometimes travelled far to the other side, most of them would occur at the same time or at the least consecutively. With the size of the field and the number of people on it, the use of sight was necessary and sometimes even predominant. When the coach whistled to pause the practice and give out new instructions, it prompted me to walk or sometimes jog close enough to see and thus hear them. Sometimes I was too late, and they already moved around too much for me to be able to see their face – on the other hand, they only did so to visually display their instructions, which slightly helped me understand them. Yet, detailed complementary comments about our actions were left unheard or misunderstood.

With that only came a few options. I looked around and saw which players were closest to me, assessing whether they were the people I felt comfortable enough with to be dependent on and asking to repeat the coach's comments. More often than not, I would simply choose to move to the back of the line, giving space to other players to act out the new instructions first and then observe them. To take in their motions was a passive way of understanding what was expected of me, and one that did not affect the others in any way. Rather than hearing I thus often tended to just 'see', making my practice of playing handball a visually dependent one.

I held the same approach during games but had a different experience than the one in practices – in games, there was much less opportunity to stand aside and merely observe, as they were fast-paced and generally not paused until the break halfway through. Several offensives and defences could take place within a couple of minutes, and within each of those many things occurred: players constantly moved around, either with and without the ball or either as offence or defence; and because of that, players were constantly communicating about these moves – they were either about opponents who had to be watched, or instructions decided and shouted out by the offensing centre-back player. As these instructions could be overheard by the defence team, they were sometimes able to reposition themselves accordingly before the instructed moves had even taken place. This advantage was one I did not have and one I often did not need during the offence, as I used to mostly be a centre-back player myself. As I was the one deciding the upcoming systems and moves, my hearing played no role.

These anecdotes are descriptions of my general personal experiences playing a team sport with a partially reduced hearing, and its purpose is to introduce the reader to a way of playing sports that may sometimes be overlooked or at times misunderstood. Not solely handball but other team sports rely on communication between players and coaches, in whatever sorts, to play the sport and work as a team. Miscommunication occurs when there is a mismatch in the types of communication used within. In my example, having a partially reduced hearing did not always fit the verbal aspect of communication as expressed during the sport since I could not rely on sound as often. I was therefore not always fully able to participate both on and off the field. In this way, the times I was able to participate I was and did not always feel included.

It is these aspects of participation and hence that of inclusion within team sports that this thesis focuses on, considering the perspectives and experiences of deaf and hard of hearing people as well as those in between. This ranges from players to trainers; from people involved in boards of sports clubs to those organizing sports and related activities at a national level, such as tournaments and other events. Overall, almost all of them have a full or partially reduced hearing or are in close relation with others who do. As participants and interlocutors of this research, they – despite their differences – have shown a shared interest in making sports participation possible and accessible for people with a hearing impairment, especially when that includes themselves. The aim of this research, then, is to comprehend this shared interest, visualising what went before and behind the act of playing and exploring the ways inclusive sports participation could be fulfilled.

Contemporary sports policies, such as the *Nationaal Sportakkoord* (NSA, National Sportsagreement), have also taken up this task (Bruins et al. 2018). Set up and overseen by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport as well as her collaborating partners of the Union of Sports and Municipalities (*Vereniging Sport en Gemeenten*, VSG); Union of Dutch Municipalities (*Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten*, VNG); and the Dutch Olympic Committee/Dutch Sports Federation (Nederlands Olympisch Comité/Nederlandse Sport Federatie, NOC*NSF), they laid out different themes that encompass their vision on how sports within society should be. In short, it was to unite people and make it inclusive for everyone with any type of impairment. Overall, the agreement values sport as a tool for building bridges between people and cultures, among things, and for creating meeting spaces and relationship opportunities between them.

Two of the six goals as part of this policy are relevant for and applied in this research, of which one is to achieve and uphold a positive sports culture. This denotes a sports environment in which people can play sports in “a fun, safe, fair and carefree matter” (Ibid: 8). The second goal relevant to this research and which is also the largest within, is the operationalising of inclusive sports and physical activity for every citizen. Inclusion here assumes that “barriers based on age, physical or mental health, ethnic background, sexual orientation or social position are taken away” (Ibid: 8). To do so, the policy proposes the following conditions: to improve financial, practical, and social

accessibility; and to have the arrangements made to do achieve these accessibilities traceable and easy to find by the people they are intended for (Ibid: 15-16).

Out of this policy, the program *Ongehoord Sportief* (OS, Unheard Sportive) was set up by the *Koninklijke Nederlandse Doven Sport Bond* (KNDSB, Royal Dutch Deaf Sports Union); and *Gehandicaptensport Nederland*, a national non-profit organisation involved in the operationalising of different types and shapes of sports for people with different kinds of impairments. The OS program is aimed specifically at those with an auditory impairment and is funded by the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport as well as NOC*NSF. Its main goal is to improve the integration of deaf sports into the regular ones, as well as to build networks of organisations and people between which valuable tools, experiences and knowledge can be shared to support this integration [2]. One of the interlocutors of this research, Lucas, is part of this ongoing project. Both the current developments of the project and his corresponding experiences will be elaborated on in chapter five. The general structure of this thesis will be further outlined below.

Despite the OS program still being in development and its results not yet being measurable in full, this research will still consider one of the desired results within this project: which is to integrate deaf and hard of hearing people in general sports and, at the least, make sports possible and accessible for them. The project is also of collaborative nature, as not only are Lucas and other deaf or hard of hearing people involved in the development and implementation of the project, but another interlocutor part of this research, Thomas, also played a key role in its planning. This too will be discussed in the second chapter.

1.1 Relevance

While the motivation and value of this research are already personally prevalent for me as a fellow hard of hearing person and team player, with each generating their own experiences, the research itself is also valuable in societal ways. Considering the NSA policy and OS program, the aim of the thesis is to observe to the best extent possible how both may have directly, indirectly, or not at all played a role in the personal experiences of sports inclusion and participation so far. Doing so will allow for a better overview of how well both are fitted and adapted to the people they are aimed at. Any type of accessibility and especially barriers as brought forward by the interlocutors are highly valuable in painting the picture of what sports means for deaf and hard of hearing people today.

[2] Ongehoord Sportief: integratie van en kennis over sport voor mensen met een auditieve beperking, https://www.gehandicaptensport.nl/actueel/nieuws/1141/ongehoord-sportief-integratie-van-en-kennis-over-sport-voor-mensen-met-een-auditieve-beperking, accessed 15 december 2021.

While sports itself is, as has been stated in the NSA, a valuable space and place for people to meet and be together (Bruins et al., 2018), it is only one of the ways in which the deaf and hard of hearing community and culture in The Netherlands is created and maintained. This research has added value in making visible the ways deaf and hard of hearing people play team sports and the role it has in the making of their (social) lives. Therefore, while the main focus is on the sports sphere and the experiences within, it is also the intention to encompass the deaf and hard of hearing 'ways of being' outside of sports. Understanding what reduced hearing means to an individual and the role it has in their daily life and in interaction with others will also help understand how sport itself can either help or obstruct in doing so. Thus, this thesis may serve as an opportunity and especially lens to look into a deaf and hard of hearing world that may otherwise go unnoticed or misunderstood by others outside of it. Sport, in this way, builds one of the pathways between which the worlds can be connected.

Not only in between worlds can sport form pathways or lenses – but it is also an opportunity to review academic concepts from a less general angle of view. As the research is situated in the team sports sphere and mostly the deaf and hard of hearing world, the same can be done for the concepts used – which are mostly inclusion, participation, disability, and identity. By placing them in these interrelated spheres of sport and community, the academic understanding of the concepts as isolated theories can instead shift towards an understanding in which their experiences and meanings may overlap, impact, or parallel one another – therefore creating not a static bounded definition for each but rather fluid interrelated ones.

1.2 Research questions and structure

All combined, it leads to the following research question:

How do people with a partial to fully reduced hearing experience participation and inclusion in different composed football and futsal teams, and other team sports?

In terms of sport, the main focus of this research will be on football and futsal, as they are the most popular sport in The Netherlands and therefore have much more people involved in the playing and organising of it. Therefore, the sport both provides an opportunity and an example for other sports to see how inclusion and participation should be improved or are already improved. The research question has thus been divided into several sub-questions accordingly:

- How is one's hearing as a disability and identity understood by football, futsal, and other team players?

- How do football and futsal players reflect on participation and inclusion, and how are inclusive sports organised in the deaf branch?
- How are participation and inclusion experienced by players of other team sports, and how can they be compared to football and futsal?

In the first chapter, I intend to first lay out a clear understanding of how reduced hearing is lived with outside of the sports sphere – both in the past and present times. Having interlocutors reflect on their reduced hearing and corresponding experiences from their past also helps to comprehend how these experiences have built and led to what their personal view on and attitude to their hearing is today – hence, directly or indirectly shaping present experiences on the sports field. However, as out of this shared physical characteristic communities, cultures, and a shared language have arisen, to understand personal experiences on the sports field well enough means we should also aim to understand the experiences off the field. Therefore, this chapter reflects upon the reduced hearing as lived experiences by the interlocutors, relating it to their senses of identity, feelings of belonging, or possible experiences of having a disability.

The second chapter is where I introduce the sports sphere of football and futsal and its experiences of inclusion and participation. I do so by briefly focusing on deaf and hard of hearing players in general teams and 'G-teams'. G-teams are often part of general sports clubs – not only football or futsal – and are intended for children or adults with physical and intellectual impairments. Here, the G is short for *gehandicapt*, which is Dutch for handicapped. However, similar to how 'disability', 'deaf' or 'deafmute' are labels not always agreed with – which the first chapter will dive into – to call one's impairment or reduced hearing a handicap is also not always accepted. Alternative views and their corresponding team labels – such as *Gezellig* (convivial) – will also be outlined in this chapter.

The second chapter will continue to elaborate on what I refer to as the 'deaf branch' of football and futsal. Compared to other types of impairments or sports intended for deaf and hard of hearing, the branch of deaf football and futsal is considerably large and includes many types of football or futsal played. For example, football takes place outside on a respectively large field, while futsal is inside on a much smaller field, making their different physical environments a valuable comparison point in understanding inclusion and participation experiences. Additionally, within the deaf branch, there are also specific teams or events organised. For example, there is a national deaf football team participating in international tournaments and a deaf futsal competition that takes place three times a year. They are only two of many examples that illustrate the deaf side of football and futsal as separated from the general 'branch' and should therefore be analysed as such.

The chapter will also review how the OS program and NSA policy, as well as the KNDSB, KNVB or NOC*NSF are involved in the organising of this deaf branch.

Lastly, the third chapter will encompass the experiences regarding inclusion and participation of deaf and hard of hearing people who have played in other team sports – sometimes prior to, after or while also playing football or futsal. Some of the interlocutors no longer play team sports, and it is therefore highly valuable to try and determine in what ways their reduced hearing may have played a role in this, thus how this could be improved. Understanding how sports participation may be lower for some could also help understand why it is high for others. Comparing the circumstances and environments of different team sports may help to uncover certain similarities or differences, from which not only each team sport could learn, but also the organisations responsible for establishing sports policies and projects. Therefore, the OS program or NSA policy may just be necessarily relevant to analyse here as a way of understanding what they have done or could do more for other team sports to achieve higher inclusion and participation by comparing the extent of their involvement in the (deaf) football and futsal branch.

Before diving into these chapters, I will first discuss the theoretical approaches used in this research, following with the methodology used to re-enact these theories. I will then also reflect on the ethics and positionality as part of the research process.

After the chapters discussed above, I will give concluding remarks concerning the concepts, experiences, NSA policy as well as the OS program. This will also include discussion points for future research that could be considered by the reader. Then, I will conclude the thesis with an appendix, which includes a Dutch summary and the topic list used.

2. Theoretical framework

To encompass both the research questions and the interlocutors' stories, the following concepts have been utilised: participation and inclusion; disability and ableism; identity and belonging. I have divided them into intra-related pairs, seeing as they sometimes overlap, corroborate, or deviate from each other in either the theoretical framework here, or the personal experiences told by interlocutors in later chapters. That is not to say that all pairs cannot be interrelated – as an individual's view of their hearing as identity can reflect whether they view themselves as having a disability or not; or how feeling like they belong in a group also mirrors their feelings of inclusion within. However, dividing the six concepts into three pairs allows for a clearer overview and comparison points of how they are academically and empirically linked to one another. Furthermore, Bourdieu's habitus and corresponding cultural capital also provide a valuable framework to be interwoven throughout the research and will therefore be outlined as well.

2.1 Inclusion and (social) participation

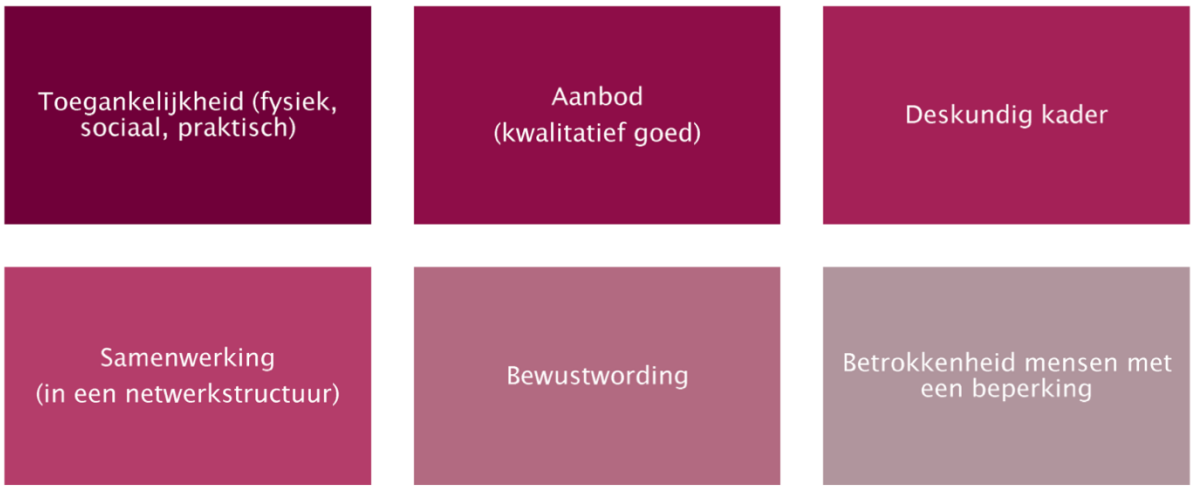
When it comes to lived experiences, these concepts can either coexist perfectly aligned next to each other and therefore complement one another – but how they are intended or experienced can also differ. Anyhow, when it comes to the sports environment, Valet argues that it "is a paradigmatic field of society, since it reflects a world of winners and losers" (2018: 138) or, in this research, the division between hearing and deaf sports. Therefore, how inclusion and participation are experienced in both may vary greatly.

Van Lindert and De Jonge (2022) have outlined inclusion within sports and regarding people with impairments, in which they determined several principles to assess inclusion. These included: equal and equivalent opportunities; full participation and belonging; acknowledgment of an individual's agency; active and social involvement; accessibility, thus no barriers; diversity and its normalising thereof. In other words, an ideal situation according to these requirements is to give in individual opportunities that fit their needs and gives them equal result as another able-bodied or hearing person; to be able to play a sport and fully engage socially as well; to be listened to and given the power to make their own choices; to be able to be actively and socially involved in a group; to experience no barriers and thus have full access to an environment; and to be in one in which differences are normalised and not ridiculed.

Here, a distinction is made between social involvement and physical participation.

Van Lindert & De Jonge, 2022, p. 79

Then, in order to achieve these principles and therefore inclusive sports for people with impairments, they outlined the tools with which they could be achieved. First, accessibility is named again, but here in its specific forms: physically, socially, and practically – all three pose potential barriers to deaf or hard of hearing people. Second, they propose the offering of inclusive sports or at least adapted sports. Then, expert framework, to engage people in knowledge about inclusion and impairment – which also aligns with the second-last of awareness: especially with an invisible impairment like a reduced hearing, people are generally not aware of what it entails. Then, they proposed collaboration as between people and organisations, which also aligned with their last proposal of the involvement of people with an impairment. To achieve inclusion is to not dive into academic meanings endlessly, it is almost more important to understand how the people themselves define and experience it, and to then work from there.



Van Lindert & De Jonge, 2022, p. 82

These requirements, and especially principles will help outline how inclusion is defined by deaf and hard of hearing people themselves. Additionally, providing both equal and equivalent opportunities mirrors this approach, as being equal may otherwise be ableist, giving the same treatments to different groups of people, while they need different things. Therefore, utilising equity is when treatments are adapted to the different groups and therefore everyone has an equal outcome. Kiuppis (2018) also agreed with this view, stating that organising specific measures for specific people and therefore achieving equality, is not necessarily discriminative.

As different from inclusion, "participation is not understood in terms of a role to play but in terms of an involvement in a life situation that can mean 'being included or engaged in an area or being accepted or having access to needed resources" (Altman, 2001; cited in Mitra, 2006: 238). In other words, there is a difference between co-existing with others versus co-existing alongside others, the first being more of an inclusive take and the latter as 'mere' participative.

Valet also differentiates between the two as having an uneven causal relationship: while better inclusion would also improve participation – better participation would not necessarily improve inclusion (2018: 138). In a similar context, Kiuppis (2018) argues that not participating in a sport does not necessarily mean they are excluded, as it is based on autonomy and freedom of choice. In other words, it is only when an individual chooses to participate in a sport but is unable to do so by external barriers, that they are being excluded.

Valet argues that "inclusion through social participation and supportive settings becomes responsive to the diversity of people's backgrounds, interests, experiences, knowledge, and skills (2018: 138). Thus, inclusion cannot be a solid, fixed concept, but it is instead embodied and then utilised by the people it is imposed on, and influenced by how the group of people is composed in terms of diversity.

Furthermore, social participation is not the same as inclusion; instead, it encompasses all the ways an individual socially engage in an environment and with other people. Key elements brought forward by Valet were to observe an individual doing an activity; an interaction; social exchange; and lack of compulsion (ibid.). In other words, without being forced by an external factor as an environment or other person, an individual will first do something, then with at least one other person; and lastly, it needs some form of exchange, where each person needs something from the other. This could be in words – to make conversation or provide information – or in actions, such as during sports.

2.2 Disability and ableism

There have been many scholars who, over a prolonged period of time, have attempted to define the concept of disability by constructing and utilizing a diverse set of models. The medical model of disability emerged at first, which was one that pathologically interpreted disability as a broken bodily function or peculiarity which needed to be fixed (Ginsburg and Rapp, 2013). In this way, the medical model viewed disability as an 'absence' of abled-bodied functions, such as missing a body part or sensory functions – which, in this research, is focused on reduced hearing.

Shortly thereafter as a response to the medical model, the social model of disability emerged. Rather than disability as something occurring internally, the social model viewed disability as a result of interactions between an individual's impairment and their environment. External barriers would arise, hence disabling the individual from participating in that environment, and therefore being excluded (ibid.). As Waldschmidt further outlined, "impairment and disability […] do not have a causal relationship; it is not impairments per se which disable, but societal practices of 'disablement' which result in disability" (2017: 21). Shakespeare also distinguishes between impairment and disability, arguing that the latter is defined as the result of oppression and less as the "socio-cultural implications of impairment" (2004: 16). Through the social model these ableist practices were acknowledged, and therefore also the barriers emerging out of them. Moreover, the way these practices and barriers are interpreted by people with impairments also influences their way of making sense of themselves as placed within society. As Báar holds, "[…] disability can manifest itself as a social and cultural identity which can be a source of pride and of a vibrant subculture. People in different cultural settings give different meanings to disability […]" (2017: 281). How disability and its meanings are thus sometimes imposed on its individuals and influence their identity- and personal meaning-making themselves will be explored in the theoretical section on inclusion and belonging.

The International Classification of Function, Disability and Health model established by the World Health Organisation (2002) is a model that 'defines' disability based on its – extent of – functioning. It includes several qualifiers to observe this extent: a capacity qualifier, as the ability to execute tasks; and a performance qualifier, as the actual lived experiences (World Health Organisation, 2002: 11). In other words, it does not bind an individual solely to their disability – instead, they are assessed based on the qualifiers, which will be unique for each individual, and out of these assessments the 'degree' of disability becomes apparent. Overall, it is dependent on an individual's own preference in the tasks they would like to execute; and the way they experience this. It adheres to what is proposed by Sen (1987) as a 'standard of living', which is a way of living individually and subjectively given meaning through objects of value and created through value-yielding acts. Unique to each individual, objects are what to them improves their way or standard of living – in the context of this research, that could be their sense of belonging or opportunity to grow skills in sports. On the other hand, there are the

objects' values, which are also individually determined and what denote the extent of value they have put on the object. As the same set of objects can be differently valued by each individual, what they deem as a standard of living is therefore diverse, meaning that what is a good standard of living to one may be a problematic one to another. This subjective view is formed through what Sen calls social conditioning (ibid.: 8), but what could also be interpreted as habitus, which I will outline further below. As argued by Sen, it is through social conditioning that an individual exhibits certain value-yielding acts that in turn generate desire for these acts or objects. However, to have a desire for a certain aspect of standard of living does not necessarily mean it is valued by the individual, and possibly not even enough for the individual to want to act upon it – especially if the object can possibly generate other unwanted experiences such as – in the context of this research – exclusion. For example, a deaf football player may desire the sport's settings as they are provided in the mainstream hearing world, but not value its general setting to want to participate in it, as they may feel excluded. Even further so, the deaf individual may have an object of value in the deaf sports spheres based on belonging, of which its value precedes that of the desire of the mainstream sports – especially if they are excluding and therefore restrict an individual's standard of living.

Therefore, disability is a subject concept influenced by both the impairment as well as its – potentially restrictive – environments. In regard to sports, Ellis (2015: 125) has given several examples of how the unique set of the individual's impairment and their own preferences, as well as the type of environment brought on by the sports they play – such as its rules, size of the field, and so on – leads to diverse ways of experiencing one's impairment and ability to play sports.

Then, ableism as a behaviourial practice itself is generally argued to encompass "prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviours toward persons with a disability. Definitions of ableism hinge on one's understanding of normal ability and the rights and benefits afforded to persons deemed 'normal'" (Wolbring, 2012: 78). Thus, internalising ableism as adopting oppressing perspectives that discriminate against people with an impairment or disability means that even those people will adapt themselves to be as 'able-bodied' as possible. Adaptations made the other way around does not occur as often when it comes to ableism, as people are often part of their own norms and habits.

Thus, in regard to Bourdieu's habitus, Brittain et al. (2020) argue that the concept explains how the socialisation of an individual over a prolonged period of time will generate certain social rules and values an individual consciously or unconsciously adheres to. If there are ableist rules and values, the individual would therefore internalise and embody the impairment as a disability and may even see it as part of their identity – solely because others have defined them as such.

The cultural model is value to consider as well, as it regards "disability not as a given entity or fact, but describes it as a discourse or as a process, situation, or event" (Waldschmidt, 2017: 25). According to Waldschmidt, while this model similarly considers the interaction with the environment and its influence thereof, it also considers the diversity of them and the disparity within in what may be seen as 'normal' and 'abnormal' (2017: 24). Indeed, through "culturally determined behaviour in which one develops and excels in an identity, community and worldview that embraces disability rather than rejecting it" (Devlieger, 2005: 8). Therefore, rather than a disability as a fixed concept, in interaction with one's environments a disability or reduced hearing becomes "a state of being" (ibid.), something that is changed by social environments and in turn also influences them. In other words, depending on the environment an individual is in, they may not experience themselves as being impaired or disabled at all, but instead as normal and even belonging. With each different culture comes its specific representations, values, and perspectives on what is a disability and what is not a disability (Waldschmidt, 2017: 23), and therefore the expectations put on an individual. Disability can therefore still be regarded as a social construct; but within the cultural model, it is about how it is experienced and defined by the individual rather than imposed by the society they are in.

2.3 Habitus

Bourdieu's cultural capital indicates a similar view, as it denotes a shared set of symbolic goods, skills, and titles that are "symbolically appropriated" by an individual (1985: 186). When it is embodied, thus the symbolic meaning assumed, it becomes a habitus. Bourdieu posits habitus as "the product of history, [that] produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history" (ibid.: 82). In order words, habitus is the result – and cause – of interactions between an individual and their environment, in which patterns of behaviour and social norms arise to which an individual adheres and then acts upon, internalising it as their way of being and, as Bourdieu posits, creating their system of dispositions. Dispositions are understood as "perceptions, appreciations, and actions" (ibid.: 83) and are based on the values and norms expressed through these schemes. As an individual continuously interacts with their environments, these values and norms will shift over time, both creating and changing their cultural capital, and acquiring new meanings and dispositions.

In this research, it is partially the reason why a distinction is made between the 'hearing' and 'deaf' worlds, simply because people growing up in each will have met different people, formed different or maybe slightly overlapping environments, and therefore acquired different sets of cultural resources (ibid: 186). One relevant example here is the resource of sign language and, depending on the type of family a deaf or hard of hearing individual is born into, whether it is accessible for this individual. Particularly, in acquiring and learning this resource, an individual may meet others with similar resources and therefore likely increase their sense of belonging and hearing-related identity.

However, if an individual is born into a hearing family not familiar with sign language and also unwilling to gain familiarity, the individual will embody a cultural capital in which sign language is not the norm and they are expected to communicate verbally even at the cost of their energy, sense of belong and so on – which brings us back to ableism. "[It] is taught and reinforced through an individual's habitus and is used to regulate access to all forms of capital" (Mitra, 2006: 216).

2.4 Identity and belonging

It goes to say that Bourdieu's habitus and cultural capital also help to understand how a sense of self can emerge out of an individual's interactions with their environments. As Beckner and Helme agree, a sense of self, or "identity is constructed and maintained through one's communication and relationships with others" (2018: 394). Considering Bourdieu's theory will thus allow observing a fluid identity in contextual spaces of habitus and capital. Translating this way of observing into the results of this research would allow for a better understanding of how external environments influence an otherwise stable sense of self or identity. Thus, whether changes in hearing or deaf schools; sports; or worlds, in general, have any sort of impact on one's sense of identity and especially belonging, is 'observable' in this way. It would also help in distinguishing between identities that are imposed and those that are self-ascribed.

Belonging or its lack thereof could also be a concept regarded as a disparity between an individual's identity and their habitus or cultural capital, denoting a disconnection between how an individual identifies and the world they were previously in. A disconnection would mean that, in this sense, they no longer feel like they belong in the world or space they once were in.

Sensing who we are is, according to Romdenh-Romluc (2016), also not necessarily settled. As we go through life and live it in our bodies, we may become used to what this body does and can achieve – or not. While we may have a settled sense of self, we also have one that may change throughout our lives – which is one built upon personal emotional attitudes towards our own bodies. This attitude is, for example, based on our bodily habits, the capacities we know we have; and the cultural ideas that are linked to our body – either by us or by others. Therefore, there is a sense of self that is constantly influenced and changing. Considering the subject of this research, it could for example not only include a body in which the reduced hearing is not stable but instead a progressive one, which often means an individual will continue to lose more hearing over time, and therefore not have an 'objective body'. Now, their body is not 'static' or 'settled', but constantly changing, and therefore needs continuous mental adaptation to what the 'self' is: the body is 'lived'. However, even for those for whom reduced hearing is stable and will likely not change in their lifetime, they may still be influenced by external factors such as other people with similar hearing deficiencies that may influence their own emotional attitudes toward their own reduced hearing: being faced with bodily

habits that were actually obstructing fluent communication before, therefore changing our perspective on the capabilities we think we have in particular environments – and not necessarily have to be oppressed by abled bodied systems who hold other cultural ideas about what a reduced hearing should mean. Instead, a deaf world can be introduced in which the body is lived, although not often in sound, but instead in movements as expressed in sign language.

On the other hand, a sense of belonging may not always be present. As Healy (2020) argues, we should also look at the other side of belonging; to not just focus on the ways in which people can belong, but also on the ways in which they don't. One example that she provided was that of 'non-belonging', which encompasses a sense of belonging in which an individual has never been part of a certain group. Furthermore, there is also disparity in senses: while an individual may feel as if they belong in a certain group – or deaf world – it may not always be agreed upon by its people, as they may hold different values to what being part of the group entails. In the deaf community, there can be varying views on this.

Mahar et al. argue a sense of belonging as "a selective feeling of value and respect derived from a reciprocal relationship to an external referent that is built on a foundation of shared experiences, beliefs or personal characteristics." (2013: 1026). In other words, not only should an individual feel a sense of connection with the environment they are in, or the people they are with – here, as based on shared experiences and values – there should also be a reciprocal relationship in between. Considering reciprocity in observation communication between hearing, hard of hearing, and deaf people may help to understand how it is of mutual form and influence, and mostly, how it impacts experiences of inclusion and belonging.

3. Methodology and ethics

3.1 Methods

For this research, I have mostly used the method of interviews, both offline and mostly online. Complementarily, I carried out observations during football and futsal practices and games, and 'participated' as being part of the audience to, also in turn, observe them and their reactions. However, in the analysis of observations and interviews, I also considered my own viewpoint as a hard of hearing handball player. Both as a reflection and comparison point, small parts of my own experiences are interwoven throughout the stories. While it is therefore a somewhat autoethnographic method, it is not a prominent one.

In total, I have conducted eighteen interviews, of which four were with policy-related officials. Two of those four, however, also have a reduced hearing and shared experience in playing team sports. They have therefore served a dual role as an interviewee. Furthermore, I have conducted one survey consisting of open-ended questions that paralleled the guidelines of a topic list, which can be found in the appendix of this thesis.

Apart from semi-structured interviews, I have done observations during games and practices of both football and futsal, which physically took place fifteen times in total. Three games were shared through live streams and observed in that way. Some of them were cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. Nonetheless, they helped affirm the interviews' contents, as I chose to not go to just one deaf sports association but to several. I watched online live streams of international futsal games played by the Dutch team as well. I also conduced 'passive online observations' in following some of their main social media accounts – not the players necessarily, but the teams and associations – which proved valuable. Increased promotion of general deaf and hard of hearing associations or non-profit organisations of organised social events for deaf and hard of hearing people, also showed how actively people were trying to 'find and stay engaged with each other' online. Observing these accounts of sports clubs and general associations allowed me access to personal photos in which I, for example, recognised several of my interlocutors. They were sometimes part of the futsal and football world, and sometimes 'only' part of the deaf and hard of hearing world, but nonetheless related to one another.

One pitfall in the research was the language barrier. With hearing as a spectrum comes the same kind of spectrum based on the communication tools people use. I use the part of hearing I have left with my hearing aids as complementary assets, and my sight to lipread, but others may exclusively make use of sign language. For interviews held with those, I always arranged a sign interpreter, and with most football and futsal events I brought one with me. With them often being different ones, also

allowed me to hear their experiences in the deaf and hard of hearing world each time. Therefore, while they were there to sign and translate for me, the times they did not we were often engaged in conversation about topics in relation to reduced hearing and identity.

Nonetheless, I did notice how different interpreters may also lead to different communication styles and qualities. In other words, if an interpreter does not sign well or cannot understand the signing person well enough, communication is not as fluent as it could be and could actually lead to misunderstandings. This meant that the sign interpreter had to 'match' the interviewee's style, but also match my use of verbal words. I was dependent on the sign interpreter's interpretation of the interviewee's signs, thus meanings, and attempted to counter this by repeating back these answers as a paraphrasing tool during the interviews, just to check whether I understood things correctly. Often, these conversations went well, and sometimes they did not, but then again it is hard to tell whether that was because of the interpreter, my interviewing style, or a possible extent of the interviewee's discomfort during the interview.

The biggest risk of things being left out, however, was during games and practices. Even with two people observing – the interpreter and I – things still happened quickly, or they happened too far away for the interpreter to be able to understand the signs on the field. As one noted, sign language is not just about hand movements, but it is strongly complemented by facial expressions and body stance. However, interpreters not always being able to understand things due to distance is just as much part of the deaf football experience as playing football itself. The 'missing out' on conversations held by interpreters may not be so different from the conversations I have missed out on as a hard of hearing handball player in a hearing team, similarly to other hard of hearing football players I have spoken to for this research.

3.2 Positionality: a hard of hearing anthropologist

Once the subject and its research questions, as well as methods had been established, I was aware of how my positionality would possibly come into play. While I already shared the experience of having played a team sport, which is handball, it was chiefly the fact I was born hard of hearing that I knew was going to make the research slightly more personal than another research subject would have been. As I have grown up in the hearing world and have only recently begun to explore the 'other' one, I am aware of the bias I would possibly have during this time. As I was not only curious to be there as a researcher to find out about experiences of inclusion, but also as a hard of hearing person trying to assess what this new world was like and whether it could be one to stay in well after this research has finished, I knew I had to be conscious of not getting personal too much. Here, with 'personal' I refer to conversations held with other people with a reduced hearing that were not necessarily about sports or inclusion but more so about our hearing or other general things. However, I should also argue that while not every conversation may have related to sports or inclusion, it has still been a valuable way

of doing research. Sharing this physical characteristic with my interlocutors has given me the rare opportunity to actually stand in their shoes and observe how things can be like – at times, I actually do not need to as their situations are almost the same as some I have had before while playing handball or in general daily life.

What does this shared characteristic also bring? I will argue that it, at the least, generates a sense of trust between myself and the interviewees. A lot of semi-structured interviews have turned into conversations that would last much longer than the average interview. They simply lasted longer because interviewees asked me my own questions too, out of curiosity. In this way, I was able to hear their experiences regarding inclusion and their own reduced hearing while making myself familiar with sharing some of my own. This familiarity has helped in building some sense of trust, but also in giving a personal touch to an otherwise possibly formal process.

It is this personal touch that I think has also given me the rare opportunity to make observations I would otherwise have not made that well, had I not had the shared physical and sensorial characteristics with the interlocutors. While I arrived as a researcher I mostly talked with people as a fellow hard of hearing person, and while they were not always about sports or inclusion experiences, they did include our hearing or other general things instead. Rather, just like in interviews my hearing also gave them the opportunity for others to ask me questions, hence making me familiar and less of a 'professional' around whom they may have acted more different if things were more formal.

Getting familiar with this new world myself has also given me the opportunity to experience what it can be like for a fellow hard of hearing outsider looking for a better place to identify with and belong. Being able to write out my personal experiences as a hard of hearing person in this research will also give valuable insights into what it can be like for others looking to also join the deaf and hard of hearing world – either through sports or any other way.

Additionally, in terms of representation present within the research, it is my first and foremost approach to tell the stories of others – only adding my own as complementary to the main story and argument. Being hard of hearing and also having my own experiences makes it much more valuable in being able to represent others in this research with a similarly reduced hearing or possibly similar experiences. It is also not without reason that current inclusion debates have a recurring slogan of "not about us without us". Thus, as a hard of hearing person who sometimes feels a bit 'in between worlds' or at the least bordering the hearing one, I can now act out that experience in trying to serve as a bridge between the worlds and make sure valuable knowledge and experiences are crossed over to the 'other side', and then utilised. I hope to do so with this thesis.

As almost all observations within football and futsal have taken place in teams consisting of males, I am also aware of my positionality as a female. While I consciously did not join any meetings in the changing rooms prior to or after games and such to avoid an otherwise too intimate situation, I realise

that my gender could have still impacted the way communication occurred between myself and others. While I have not encountered any behaviour that could somehow indicate other underlying assumptions or prejudices, it is not possible to know what went through their minds and whether my gender did have any influence at all, as I could not have known how they were like before meeting me before actually meeting them.

3.3 Ethics

For this research, I have followed the guidelines as propositioned by the *Antropologen Beroepsvereniging*, which is to avoid harm; remain confidential and only work under informed consent; remain integral; and to carefully store all data assembled in this research.

I have made use of a consent form that I sent to all interviewees. This form described the subject and the goal of the research, elaborating on the process behind it. In addition to my contact information, I provided a list of the obligations I need to follow as a researcher, such as keeping them anonymous at all times and always adhering to their personal wishes regarding their participation in the research. Additionally, a list of rights is included for them which, for example, contains the right to withdraw from the research at any time. It then means that it is my obligation as the researcher to then destroy all their identifiable information and, if the interview has already occurred, destroy its recording and transcript. If a participant has already done the interview but regrets specific things said during the interview, they also have the right to demand these specific parts are withdrawn. When transcribing the interview, I simply skip these parts, and if I happen to have already transcribed everything I simply delete, and destroy these specific sections.

Furthermore, while the transcripts are safely stored for some time, they do not include any identifying information. Empirical descriptions in the chapters that could be identifiable are changed or made into general knowledge. For example, if an interviewee describes having to travel from their home in a particular city to their sports club in another particular city, I will not write names, but instead only describe the two cities as the distance between them in terms of kilometres, going from A to B. In that way, the reader can still comprehend the distance the interviewee has to travel without knowing their exact locations.

The consent form also includes the statement that their information will not be shared with third parties without their personal consent, in neither present nor future times. Finally, these forms are signed by both the participant and me.

Making sure that participants stay anonymous has sometimes proven challenging. A prominent insight of this research and mentioned by several participants is that they view the deaf world as a small one, where everyone knows almost everyone. Because of this sense of familiarity, some if not most of the

participants know each other in one way or another. Not only through snowball sampling was this a consequence, but in the football world, there is a strong network of 'social togetherness' and especially collaboration. In attempting to map the deaf football and futsal world, I have interviewed colleagues, team players, their coaches, and so on. Naturally, it means that all things talked about in interviews remain un-traceable. In an overall sense, identifiable information will never be shared in this research or verbally with anyone else. This includes the places participants live or the sports association they are part of, for example.

Another ethical point considered in this research is the use of sign and speech-to-text interpreters I have had to use in most interviews and almost all observations. They are legally obligated to remain confidential, which means that whatever they translate they will not share with third parties. However, in the case of sign interpreters, their interpretation and translation of the participant's words and then my own interpretation of this translation may make for a slightly warped observation of what the participant means to tell. However, it is a given assumption that sign interpreters are skilled enough to interpret not only the signs but the contexts and emotions behind them. As emotions are often heavily displayed through facial expressions in sign language, these were something I was also able to grasp myself.

In the case of speech-to-text interpreters, interpretation of stories was less of an issue. Here, they literally write out what is being said, in a sense acting as a live subtitle tool. For this, they use a special confidential text program that cannot be publicly accessed. Additionally, as interviews with sign interpreters generally take longer, and my partially reduced hearing itself also slows down transcribing them, I have asked speech-to-text interpreters to help transcribe. However, I have only selected interviews with participants whom I have specifically asked if this was okay to do so. Hence, if the participants did not consent to their interview being transcribed by a text interpreter, I would not act on this method.

In terms of observations, people part of these are not directly named unless they have been interviewed as well – and thus named with pseudonyms. Others part of these observations with whom I have only briefly or not at all conversed, will be referred to by mere descriptions that explain their position within that situation or observation. Additionally, conversations I have held with sign interpreters accompanying me to these observations were sometimes also about their experiences with deaf people and signing work. For those who had compelling stories related to the subject of this research, I have also asked for consent to use their experiences. To them, I also refer to anonymous descriptions.

4. “It’s a small world”

While born in a hearing family and growing up in a world of communication by verbal means, the way I perceived this world through my senses was and is a mostly visual one. Without the full ability to hear and perceive sound the way others around me do, I have always relied more on my eyes than I have on my ears. In most situations in which there are several people involved and especially more conversations held than the one I am having; my hearing aids are not enough to follow every word – on the contrary, they sometimes receive so many sounds and conversations I have difficulty differentiating between the one I am participating in and the others happening around me. By using my sight and registering the way other peoples’ lips move, I am often able to ‘read’ the words. Sometimes I am also able to ‘read the room’, feeling the atmosphere and observing emotions from peoples’ faces that seemed to go unnoticed by others. These emotions, the atmosphere, and the way people talked – they are all assets to the way I produce the context that goes behind the words being said. Without the context, the words are just words: where a sentence begins and ends, and another one follows, remains unclear. Then especially the meanings attached to them get lost.

At times, I will take risks in filling in these puzzles. What words do I catch and which ones I cannot? How do they relate to one another? Is there a theme – does it have to do with what was said before? Sometimes, when I do not have answers to these questions I just ‘dive’ into the conversation and respond to a self-completed puzzle, solely to be part of it. Sometimes my puzzle is correct, and sometimes it is not, triggering confused faces from my company and a few seconds of silence. Two indicators that have been there since I was young and that I have grown familiar with, like two old friends that sometimes pop up in conversations and will remind me I misunderstood its subject.

Responses to confusion and miscommunication by both me and my company are diverse at times. Depending on the people I am with, it is a significant difference in response that depends on whether they know about my partially reduced hearing or not, and whether they have ‘met’ my two old friends before. “Chris, no, again…” They often say smirkingly, shaking their heads or rolling their eyes, and it is the smile that indicates to me that they are not annoyed. Rather, they seem to be reminded yet again of a characteristic that is simply part of who I am and have always been.

Defining a reduced hearing and its sometimes corresponding identities and communities cannot simply be based on and explained by mere ‘facts’ and ‘theories’ but are instead built upon the past and present meanings and experiences brought forward by those with a reduced hearing. While many types of hearing technology are produced and then adjusted to the unique hearing needs of a person, it is exactly this uniqueness that can make the understanding of a person’s experiences a wicked one. While these experiences have a significant influence on how a person identifies with their hearing, as they grow older and their lives take more shape, the person they have become – and are still becoming

– in regard to their hearing, in turn also influences their future choices for other education, work, and thus sport.

4.1 My hearing and I

First, if we are to dive into the lived experiences with a reduced hearing, how are we to refer to it? In theory, policy, and personal perspective – there are many labels used and attached to situations, objects, and people, providing discourses to make sense of information and our own daily lives. They derive from meanings and in turn, also generate meaning. Especially when we use labels to refer to a person or a group of people, it is important that the meaning we have attached to the label, and thus to the person, resonates with the meaning the person has themselves.

So far, I have referred to people as having reduced hearing; a characteristic that is physical, biological even, and something outside of our personal beings. I have thus also consciously avoided the use of hearing loss (*gehoorverlies*). The 'loss' may incorrectly refer to something lost that was never lost in the first place: biologically, as some are already born with a reduced hearing and thus a full ability of hearing was never existent; and culturally, as for some a reduced hearing is simply not something that feels as if they lost something, but instead embodied as their being and meaning-making in daily life.

Similarly, a 'lack of hearing' would indicate an individual 'lacking' something: in their body, their being, their life – or, if we were to adhere to the medical model of disability, a lack of health, and potentially a lack of power or self-sustainability (Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013). It could be argued that in that view, the use of hearing technology is what supports this model. Here, people are given hearing technology to 'fix their lack of hearing' and either given hearing aids; Bone Anchored Hearing Aids (BAHA's); or Cochlear Implants (CI's). The latter two are often recommended for those with the most severely reduced hearing, and they have to be placed surgically. However, no matter the type of hearing devices used, sensory perceptions of an individual's world are changed nonetheless, and they are therefore influenced in their hearing-related experiences and attitudes. Furthermore, for some this also changes how they label themselves. Thomas, for example, was born with an extent of reduced hearing that has almost placed him on what could be called the 'border' between what is 'deaf' and what is 'hard of hearing'.

> *"I also say like, I am hard of hearing [myself]. Because if I take out my hearing aids – which is a conscious choice to not wear them anymore – then I actually act like a deaf person."*

Here, Thomas makes clear how the use of hearing technology changes not only the way he labels himself, but also how he feels and acts upon. This has also been reflected on by Maud: while she identifies as deaf without wearing her CI, if she does wear it, she considers herself hard of hearing instead. The distinction she makes between the two is based on the fact that the CI gives her a partial

hearing ability she would otherwise not have, and therefore she does not feel deaf when she is wearing the CI. However, while she thus seems to tie the specific extent of reduced hearing to a specific label, she also situates her hearing as being related to and influenced by her social environment.

> *"[…] Because for a time, I always went to a deaf camping. And it was a time of being able to be myself. Taking the CI off. And truly being myself."*

Additionally, Lisa was born hearing but contracted meningitis at only eight months old, leading her to become fully deaf, a label that she had always gone by. In terms of those used in social environments, she recalled the tactics one of her friends usually employs.

> *"Someone I know from the deaf community, they say 'I am deaf'. But when they are with hearing people, they say 'I am hard of hearing'. So, there are people who introduce themselves differently in both groups of people."*

Indeed, some of the interlocutors, such Lucas, applies a similar approach – only the other way around.

> *"I can't hear anything with both ears, and only use a CI for the left one. Officially I'm deaf, but I sometimes swap these terms. Sometimes I say deaf, other times hard of hearing. It is kind of dependent of the situation. Because sometimes when I say hard of hearing, people don't really have a good picture of what that actually entails. And if I say deaf, then it's like 'Oh yeah okay, so you don't hear anything, or at least much less'."*

To him, using hard of hearing as a label often generated confusion from hearing people. Per his explanation, he believed this confusion arose out of the fact that most hard of hearing people are often able to speak clearly and hear 'good enough' for both to go mostly unnoticed by hearing people – or otherwise misunderstood. In other words, Lucas has recognised the misconception regarding what it means to be hard of hearing, and rather than making his personal experience thereof known, he instead utilises another label of which he has observed holds a heavier weight in mainstream society. Similarly, Anke also shifts between labels. While she became hard of hearing during birth, she became fully deaf at a later time. However, depending on the situation she is in, she will still use both to express herself. A recent one is whether the people she aims to communicate with are wearing masks – then, she will classify herself as deaf. In other situations, she will either say she is hard of hearing or just *"not able to hear very well."*

By shifting between labels, they are able to control what expectations are put on them by others – and it is these expectations that Beckner and Helme also consider as decisive in how a reduced hearing is experienced and lived with. Furthermore, they make note of the fact that, unlike some other impairments, reduced hearing is an invisible one that normally goes unnoticed (2018: 395). Personally, I have also made this distinction. While family members have sometimes referred to my reduced hearing as a handicap – therefore imposed – this did not feel as such to me. I regarded and still regard myself as hard of hearing, and handicapped instead as something that was visible: as being in a wheelchair; blind; and so on. This aspect of invisibility was also remarked upon by Maureen, who

was born with a mildly to severely reduced hearing that further progressed to a severely reduced hearing over time. For her, making known the invisible thing that set her apart from her hearing peers, was difficult.

> *"If you're hard of hearing, you actually try to be invisible. Which is also what you don't want at all, you do want to be visible, to take your place. But you don't want to stand out with your hearing. So, you don't ask for attention, while you actually need it in order to improve communication."*

Here, Maureen had put somewhat paradoxical expectations on herself that could have partly been imposed by her social environment in terms of how she ought to fit into the group. She wanted to be like the others, thus hiding her reduced hearing, but therefore also neglecting the adaptions that she needed to be able to do precisely what she wanted to do in the first place, which was to participate. Similarly, Martijn only became severely hard of hearing far into adulthood, which means

he was also used to a 'hearing kind' of life and spoke well verbally. However, as he still talks the same as any hearing person, unlike other people who have not always learned verbal speech as well, with Martijn, this also goes unnoticed.

Hence, an invisible impairment places more responsibility directly on an individual to make their needs known, as otherwise conflicting expectations of them by themselves and others may arise. On the other hand, it also gives an individual control, hence agency, about how they wish to present themselves to the outside world – for example, Lucas sometimes does not share his reduced hearing at all. Similarly, Willem will also not necessarily express himself as being deaf on one side – even when a situation of misunderstanding and confusion arises. Instead, he directly refers to the misunderstanding at hand and does not mention his hearing ever. One could argue that by never really consciously expressing one's reduced hearing and the adaptations they need, they may also not be aware of all the ways in which they are unconsciously hindered and the supportive tools they therefore denied themselves. This example of a way of living I will elaborate on in subchapter 4.2.

Shifting in expectations also arise in regard to hearing technology. While it is a tool that can help overcome auditory barriers, it is precisely this function that may wrongly lead to hearing people assuming no other adaptations needs to be done – that the 'lack' of hearing has now been 'filled up'. Similar to Maud regarding herself as hard of hearing once she wears her CI, as to Thomas when he still wore his, Lucas noticed that regarding himself as hard of hearing often led to these ignorant yet ableist attitudes based on misconceptions. Contrarily – hearing technology is by far not that advanced yet (Sparrow, 2005), and may also never be able to achieve the same full and especially natural ability to hear as other hearing people do. For example, Willem lives next to a girl who was born deaf. She was surgically provided a CI – twice, as the first time was not successful. However, one could argue the second was not either, as she did gain some ability in hearing, but this went alongside permanent

balancing issues. Thus, from solely going for the CI as a tool to overcome auditory barriers, she now needed a tricycle to overcome new physical ones.

Apart from the surgeries having their own set of risks – from a cultural viewpoint, the core of Deaf communities also does not accept this technology. Here, the distinction between 'deaf' and 'Deaf' is made based on the different meanings attached to them. While 'deaf' denotes the more biological state of a severely reduced hearing, 'Deaf' is what constitutes its cultural norms, values, language and, eventually, identity (Beckner & Helme, 2018). It is therefore the people who have a strong Deaf identity that are especially against the idea and purpose of hearing technology, which makes a disparity when it comes to identity as self-ascribed or as imposed, visible. As Sparrow observes, "These critics reject the very idea of trying to find a 'cure' for deafness. Indeed they have compared it to genocide. They argue that deaf people should not be thought of as disabled but as members of a minority cultural group" (2005: 135). However, it must be noted that even within the deaf community itself there are disparities in what its people think constitutes as 'deaf', 'Deaf', or 'hard of hearing'. For example, Ben – who was born and identifies as deaf – also distinguishes between the three, finding Deaf a bit intense or farfetched in its meaning sometimes, and hard of hearing as having a negative connotation. In Dutch, it is translated to *slechthorend*, where 'slecht' indicates 'bad'.

> *"With* slechthorend, *you have the component* 'slecht'. *And it renders a negative picture. And what is beautiful, the word 'deaf'; no matter the form of communication, everyone belongs. You are more of a unity; no islands, but together."*

Thus, Ben has a different view of these labels than other deaf people as mentioned by Sparrow (2005). I will elaborate on these disparities in meaning-making in subchapter 4.3.

Disabilities, impairments, or handicaps

A somewhat general consensus that arose was in regard to how labels such as disability, impairment, or handicap were viewed by the interlocutors of this research. The models discussed in the theoretical framework and briefly above, also reflect these viewpoints.

If I first get Google to translate disability to Dutch, I am met with some strong words: *onbekwaamheid*, *onvermogen*, *onbevoegdheid*, and even *diskwalificatie* (disqualification) as if I should interpret that as being disqualified from participating in a particular setting or society. Then, when I zoom in on each Dutch translation and see how they may in turn be translated back to English, I am met with 'incapacity', 'incompetence', 'inability', 'incapability', 'ineptness', or 'impotence'. Especially the last one indicates a sense of helplessness, a lack of control, power, or agency – which parallels the medical model of disability. Overall, many 'on-s' and 'in-s' in both languages that denote a sense of non-functioning and that is imposed on those with an intellectual or physical 'variation'.

Similarly, there is impairment – Dutch for *beperking* – that indicates a meaning of being impaired (*beperkt*) – or again, disabled – in an individual's desired object of value (Sen, 1987). There

is also the label of handicap, which seems to refer to a circumstance of impediment – and is a label upon which *Gehandicaptensport Nederland*'s name is based. The organisation itself has defined *gehandicaptensport* (handicapped sports) as sports specifically being altered to and intended for people with a handicap[3]. Reflecting on what handicap meant to Ben, he remarked:

> *"Handicap sounds too heavy. It's also about interpretation – you could name it differently, like impairment. Just depends on which word you get a good feeling with. […] With handicap, there's that negative interpretation. The focus on everything you cannot do. But if you look at what we can do…"*

Even the way 'handicap' is expressed in Dutch sign language denotes an interpretation of someone walking funny, Ben remarked. He displayed the sign by clenching both his hands into fists, except for the index fingers, which were pointing straight down. Then, he moved his hands up and down briefly. I noticed he had also slightly raised his shoulders and rocked his upper body from side to side, as if the execution of the sign and his interpretation thereof had also translated to the rest of his body.

For Willem, 'handicap' is also a label he does not really resonate with. As his hearing was something he was already not eager to often share with people, even when miscommunication arose, to view his hearing as a handicap was a step too far. Yet, he remarked that it did often feel like one. For him, living his life in a hearing world meant he was always consciously re-positioning himself in particular settings accordingly, just to make sure that the people he was conversing with are on the side of his hearing ear. Therefore, while he may not always express himself about his hearing, it was a daily occurrence to always be re-positioning himself in a space. Then, in terms of daily occurrences of communication barriers, it is what made Anke view her reduced hearing as a handicap sometimes. While this view was not prevalent in determining how Anke viewed her own hearing, as she felt she was fully functioning and capable based on her other bodily functions to do what she wanted to do. Nonetheless, even simply sharing the experiences of communication barriers with similar others, whether that would be referred to as a handicap or not, created a sense of recognisability between her and others that she values most. Through stories and frustrations shared, what may have briefly been a handicap has now turned into a shared social construct (Mitra, 2006: 238).

Similar to Anke, Esmee also regards a handicap as something that indicates that one is obstructed in their daily functioning.

> *"Handicap to me means that you're dependent on someone else. And without that person, you can't do anything. I myself am not dependent. I can just easily do my own thing. I can take part in education, travel… I don't need to catch a taxi. I can go with public transport independently, or biking, all by myself."*

In other words, Esmee may not necessarily view handicap as a starting point for shared experiences like Anke does, but she does distinguish it from her hearing in either being dependent or independent.

[3] https://www.gehandicaptensport.nl, Accessed 16th July 2022.

While she remarked that her hearing sometimes felt like an impairment, slightly obstructing her in what she wanted to do, she also recalled that being in the deaf world made any feeling of impairment disappear.

Lastly, Thijs thinks that having a handicap is often associated with being 'less than', or at least feeling less 'normal'. Not even considering his reduced hearing, he told me of a time when he had to temporarily use a wheelchair and gained another perspective.

> *"I went to the theatre. I was in a wheelchair, being pushed by my then-girlfriend, 'standing' with a group of people. […] I was in a wheelchair, and I will never forget it! I was sitting there, looking at the people, and at a certain point, I don't know how it happened, […] these people slowly turned. And I was there, like, with my back towards them! I was alone. I have never felt as lonely as then. You're already sitting low; they didn't know I was deaf or hard of hearing. They judge me because I'm in a wheelchair. Unsolicited! […] But I also realised something else, that people are also afraid. You have the same with deaf people. With deaf and hard of hearing people signing, you'll see them go 'whaa, what should I do?!' It is ignorance that creates fear. And an attitude you take because you don't know what to do. It's also [our] task, to turn that back around.* Another

In order words, Thijs encountered ableist behaviour – although the people were not consciously discriminative, their prejudices based on ignorance surrounding disabilities, impairments, or handicaps slowly crept in. Thus, it changed both their literal physical stance during that evening, but also Thijs' experience of inclusion during.

4.2 A non-hearing's habitus: "I didn't know any better"

In the United States, roughly 96 percent of deaf and hard of hearing children are born to hearing parents (Mitchell & Karchmer, 2004: 153). While this study was conducted on both another continent and almost two decades ago, its numbers are still relevant. Not only should the children of this study be close in age to most interlocutors of this research now – by hearing all their life stories, I noticed a similar division: almost all of them have hearing parents. While some also have siblings with similarly reduced hearing, the remainder only has hearing family members.

Although I recognise myself as also being part of this trend, I seem to be one of the exceptions when it comes to my journey through school. While from kindergarten to now in university I have always attended regular hearing schools, many interlocutors have instead switched between both regular and deaf education more than once. For example, Noah was born deaf and wore hearing aids all to the age of six, alongside attending deaf elementary school. It was at that age that he received his CI transplant to one ear, which corresponded with his transfer to regular school soon after. Almost to the exact same age, Maud received her CI transplant at the age of eight and then

transferred to regular school. Both of their parents, as well as other interlocutors' hearing parents, had found importance in getting their children familiar with the hearing world: for them to improve their integration and navigation within, but also improve their social skills and verbal speech. Additionally, deaf schools have never been able to provide education that exceeds what is known as HAVO in The Netherlands. This meant that some interlocutors were sent to regular school instead, solely to give them the academic opportunities they would otherwise not have. However, while there may have been improvement in their academic growth – the same was not really to say about being in the hearing world and with hearing classmates. For many, it was a completely new experience or, as some say, a shock. One of them is Tim, who was born severely hard of hearing.

> *"If you've been in a class with hard of hearing people all this time, and you suddenly go to the hearing world, that really was a* 'wereld van verschil'. *The classmates did try but go explain that you must talk clearly to me, to not look away while talking. […] We put a lot of time into it of course, with giving explanations."*

A 'world of difference' it was indeed to Tim, who had never had to repeatedly express his hard of hearing needs and identity so evidently before. Going from a world in which he was just one of the many and the same as all of them, he went into one where he became the odd one out. Additionally, with always needing his energy to focus on what was said by teachers in class, he could not really engage with hearing classmates and therefore felt isolated: *"You feel very closed off from the outside world."* It is also this aspect of energy – to be tense, on edge, or simply drained – that was often remarked by interlocutors when they recalled their memories taking place in the hearing world – either in school, sports, or other social activities.

Similarly, Ben attended a school that hosted both deaf and hard of hearing pupils, but in which the majority was still hard of hearing and verbally communicating with each other. As Ben was only one of the three deaf people in his class, he did not feel part of the whole group.

> *"I remember some kids were able to sign, but not all of them, yet we were still mixed together in one class. I don't know the reason for that, though… to improve people's pronunciation? I don't know. […] I did feel… different from the others. You're still a bit of an outsider, not always able to integrate with the rest…. Always a group that could sign and a group that could not."*

In other words, while the differences in the extent of the reduced hearing were not as relevant to Ben, it was the corresponding form of communication through which he distinguished between himself and others. With Dutch sign language as his native language, he thus preferred to go to a deaf school instead.

As for Thijs, he had a more unusual path. Born severely hard of hearing and it only being discovered when he was already six years old, he had always attended regular education up to that point. Recalling himself as being very shy, modest, and not at all talkative before, being sent to deaf school was a turning point for him.

"I felt at home immediately! […] You were accepted, and my fear disappeared quickly. Under the guise of 'we are all swimming in the same pond.' […] My world existed out of two worlds. School, where I could be myself – and at home [in the hearing world] where no one knew I was hard of hearing."

In other words, while the deaf world allowed him to gain self-confidence and be more open regarding his hearing – if he was back in the hearing world, he would still feel a sense of shame and an apparent need to hide his body difference. To him, his identity based on his hearing was therefore fluid; 'made' by his environment rather than by himself.

A last important observation made was that some interlocutors had what is called '*ambulante begeleiders*' in regular schools, to help with practicalities such as arranging interpreters, or overseeing formal adaptations if oral tests were planned. For those that did not have one, many of them think it would have helped tremendously.

Playing sports

To attend deaf or hard of hearing schools meant that traveling time was often significantly long – even with the taxi specifically picking up the pupils and bringing them home. Lisa, for example, was on the road for at least two hours a day. Others opted instead to choose the boarding school, which had them be away from home from Monday till Friday.

Both of these factors – time and location – influenced their sports choices during childhood. As deaf sports clubs were also not as prevalent in The Netherlands as the schools were – even less so today – they influenced the sports choices made during interlocutors' childhoods. For example, when Lisa wanted to join the deaf football team, she would need to be driven there by her parents as it was quite far away, therefore needing a lot of time for that so as well. Already not being home early due to traveling back home from deaf school and having necessary mundane activities like dinner part of her day, it made it unfeasible to join the deaf team. Instead, she opted to play in a hearing team, although she only did so for around two years. She found it difficult to become a proper part of the team, as fellow team players would say things like *"You are different, I don't want that"* or *"You're deaf, it's difficult, never mind."* Their unwillingness to be open to diversity, in that sense, is what lead to Lisa not feeling like she belonged there at all.

Other interlocutors also played football or futsal throughout their childhoods – sometimes briefly, like Lisa; and sometimes for a very long time, even up till now, like Noah. Many were introduced to the sport – like Thomas, Daan, Noah and Thijs – simply by going out on the streets in their neighbourhoods, meeting other children, and playing together. In the social sense they were not often able to participate fluently – in the case of Daan, often only through a *"Hey, how are you doing?"* and in the case of Thomas, teaching the hearing children some signs for superficial communication. However, they liked the sport so much and sometimes excelled in it so well, that they were able to fit

well into the group in that regard. Furthermore, as both Daan and Noah were quite good at the game, they were better able to navigate through the hearing team. For Daan, the realisation of how important his skills were to be considered as part of the team and to feel like it himself as well, arose when he suffered an injury and could not play temporarily. When he decided to keep coming to the games to be supportive of his team, he realised how excluded he felt now that he could not play himself. Both physically and metaphorically, he was standing on the side-lines.

Others, like Maud and Esmee, never really opted for hearing football teams, going for deaf teams immediately instead. To Maud, being able to fluently communicate with everyone, and on top of that in her native language, was the most important thing. For Esmee, it was a significant difference that she was able to say more, let her wishes known, and work together with her team players.

Dispositional personalities

In accordance with Bourdieu's habitus as based on a system of dispositions (1985: 82), the environments an individual grows up in and the way they have internalised these structures and social norms of those environments are decisive – guided by certain values and norms, an individual makes both meanings of those as well as themselves, and in turn express these in their way of thinking and behaving, thus being. A similar pattern arose in some interviews, where external influencing structures such as family dynamics, choices of schools, and use of sign language were influential on people's experiences with their hearing, shaping their character along the way. At the same time, their character as a result of these structures also impacted the attitude they had towards their hearing, and therefore also the one they exhibited to their environments. As aforementioned, Thijs changed his outgoing personality to that of a reserved one once the taxi bringing him home from deaf school turned into his street.

Furthermore, both Lisa and Maud describe themselves as being very open and having a positive attitude towards themselves and their environments. While Lisa had to grow into this attitude, needing more time to learn how to navigate in the hearing world while deaf, they both recognised the value of radiating positivity while making their hearing needs known. In return, they would often get positive responses and a willingness to adapt to their needs. Furthermore, Anna remarked that while Maud was always very natural in making contact with others, she was much shyer and more introverted herself. Thus, while both she and Maud were sent to hearing school partly to improve their navigation within the hearing world, and thus their social skills, Anna felt that it had the opposite effect: while she was able to excel academic-wise, in the social aspect she was actually off worse compared to when she was in deaf education.

A relaxed stance is taken by Daan who, from as early as he can remember, was never really focused on his reduced hearing as part of his daily life and being. Growing up in a hearing family and in a hearing world – such as being part of a hearing football team – he was used to the way of navigation he had already formed himself.

"I didn't know any better. I had a hearing device, and I could talk. Whatever deafness meant – I wasn't focused on it. I was just living my own life."

Here, Daan's interaction with his environment provided him with a disposition of his hearing that determined his adhering values and perceptions, and thus his behaviour. With the family dynamics, living in a hearing society and playing football with hearing children, the aspect of non-hearing was not prevalent in their structures and patterns, and thus Daan adopted these as such, hence creating a habitus in which his hearing was not a prominent part.

4.3 Ambiguous belonging: two overflowing worlds

So far, I have shown how past experiences as placed in schools and partly in sports, have influenced people's attitudes towards their hearing then and now. For some, it has been through attending deaf school or deaf sports that they have met those with similarly reduced hearing, and who are now often still their friends. Furthermore, through making friends and thus interacting with similar others, their identity shifted. Several have said to now feel more like themselves in the deaf world, despite being born in the hearing one. Even while switching between hearing and deaf schools or sports, most still felt more drawn to the deaf side, like Noah.

"At one point, I noticed I missed the deaf people, and the culture… so I went to parties of the deaf world and made a lot of contact there. And gradually it is now more the deaf and less the hearing world."

Similarly, when I was asked about my own life path by a deaf futsal player during one of the observations, I recalled how I had always lived in the hearing world somewhat successfully but always with its bumps and barriers, realising at one point how for granted and normal I had taken these. Being somewhat tired, I was now, in my twenties, exploring the deaf world. *"You see that a lot,"* the futsal player had commented, *"many hard of hearing people who, once they are an adult, are on edge, drained of their energy, looking for a place where they can be comfortable."*

While not all hard of hearing or one-sided deaf people feel the need to take the same path, such as Gijs and Willem, it is telling that many do – possibly because some are given hearing technology and sent to regular education first.

There are other paths that both lead into the deaf world as well as uphold it, and that are also regularly visited by some interlocutors. Contrary to Gupta and Ferguson's (1992) rejection of the idea of nonidentifiable places as part of a community, the Dutch deaf community has several. There are the *Gebarencafés* throughout the country that host community-related parties, but also organise workshops like sign language courses. There is Sencity, a festival for the deaf and hard of hearing in which they create a multisensory experience by utilising almost all the senses. Then, there is also what

was first called the *Dovencampings* (Deaf campings) and now *Gebarencampings* (Signing campings). For many interlocutors, this was where they went during summer holidays as children, meeting each other and making friends that some still have to this day. Then, there is also the organisation of which two interlocutors are part, and which is focused on young hard of hearing people. Several times a year, they organise events like camps and smaller get-togethers like going bowling. For Tim, it was in this organisation and meeting other hard of hearing adolescents that he was able to overcome his feelings of isolation during hearing high school – his sense of identity shifted and he now feels strongly part of this group. As Báar suggests, disability – or hard of hearing, I would argue – "can manifest itself as a social and cultural identity which can be a source of pride and of a vibrant subculture" (2017: 281). In interaction with other hard of hearing people, Tim indeed changed his attitude toward his hearing, going from one where he de-prioritised it to another in which he was proudly expressing it.

Furthermore, there are also online groups and social media accounts through which people keep in contact – especially as most live spread throughout the country. The remarks of *"it is a small world"* and *"everyone knows everyone"* as expressed during interviews and observations become especially prevalent here. Through the social media accounts, it appeared that some of whom I never thought would know each other, actually do, as photos were posted in which I recognised several people I had not realised were close friends.

Similarly, many deaf and some hard of hearing people work in the same job spheres, alongside each other. Apart from sports, the aspect of work in regard to one's hearing also constitutes their standard of living as posited by Sen (1987). In between both worlds, how and to what extent objects of value are placed within both, constitutes the choices made. For example, Maureen wanted to work for and with others with a similar hearing, which is part of her object of value to belong, and therefore chose to do so. On the other hand, if an individual has a good income as an object of value that transcends their object of value in regard to belonging, they may choose to work a job in the hearing world instead – especially if the job does not impede the individual's other objects of value.

However, some may work deaf- or hard of hearing-related jobs as they are not able to find one in the hearing world. Thijs, for example, knew people who are facing these issues currently or at least recently, and with whom their reduced hearing was posed as the problem – by whom, it was not specified. As it may not always be people who deny and therefore exclude deaf or hard of hearing individuals in their jobs, certain circumstances that go with one can already hinder too much. For example, Noah was interested in becoming a sports teacher in elementary school, but the excited sounds and screams of the children he would have to teach proved to be too impeding for him to be able to do his job. Others who did work a 'hearing' job would potentially get burned out due to the misunderstandings and amount of energy it took as Maud had experienced. Thus, by being excluded from the hearing world in this way, some also naturally found each other in having shared experiences.

By observing how the deaf community is structured both socially, structurally, and online, it has become prevalent that it does not always depend on the physical proximity of relationships. Despite the increased distance between them, there is a strong sense of attachment and connection – and thanks to online media, this has become quite easy to uphold.

Bordering belonging

As aforementioned, many deaf and hard of hearing people have, even when going back and forth between both the hearing and deaf worlds, still realised they feel most at home in the deaf world. Of utmost importance is the fluent communication they are then able to do, by making use of sign language. For Anke, it is also simply exchanging their experiences as being deaf or hard of hearing that makes her feel familiar and belong with them. Moreover, Thomas felt a shift in his sense of self depending on who he was with: *"while we are all together because we are deaf, I do not feel 'deaf' when I am with them.*" In order words, while it is through interaction with other deaf and hard of hearing people that he generates a deaf identity – it is in the hearing world in which this difference becomes distinct. Therefore, even interaction with hearing family members is not always easy, as it is for Daan.

> *"If I'm with my [hearing] family, conversations are very short. But when deaf people are together, it lasts much longer. If I'm with the deaf, you really have to drag me away."*

Ben also distinguishes between the two.

> *"There were two different worlds. In the deaf world, I had my whole life, while in the hearing world, I was the only [deaf] one. Back then, it did feel like being thrown into the deep end."*

In terms of either being uncomfortable or comfortable, Anna had a similar view.

> *"Well, deaf culture to me is like coming home, like a warm bath. Why? Because I don't have to try to explain what I didn't hear or understand. Your facial expressions are observed quickly, and if it's not going well, they'll know it quickly. Or if you're feeling weird."*

Tim has a similar view, describing a world as related to hard of hearing people.

> *"It is just a very beautiful world, of course. Mistakes cannot be made because everyone is hard of hearing. Everyone watches out for each other. Now as well, for example, we are both hard of hearing and we can just talk about it!"*

In asking interlocutors how they view deaf culture, they often give both similar and different descriptions. Simple behaviour aspects that are often implicit yet different from how hearing people behave, such as tapping someone to gain their attention before speaking; flicking a light on and off to notify others if they want to speak; stomping on the floor to have it shake and make others feel it. Then, the use of sign language for some is paramount.

However, it also means that behaviour not adapted to multisensory communication is therefore mistrusted by some. For example, if sign language is not used and instead communicated verbally, some deaf people will assume they are being talked about. As I was told by one of the

interpreters brought along to an observation: to talk without signing is, by some, seen as a form of disrespect. Additionally, eye contact is a strong part of it. When I spoke with a deaf futsal player twice by use of a sign interpreter, it is the norm that the interpreter is never looked at. However, as I am hard of hearing, I had to in order to hear her. Then, both times in conversation, once I did, the player suddenly continued walking. As per my impression, it seemed he thought I had broken off the conversation by breaking off eye contact.

Furthermore, a small implicit difference is as Anna recalled the simple act of announcing where one is going before they leave a room full of deaf people. As an example, she gave that of simply going to the bathroom, explaining that deaf people cannot hear its door opening and closing and will instead only see someone suddenly standing up and walking away.

Hence, what an individual means or needs to be considered 'cultural' deaf, differs. As Cue et al. argue, to be deaf could also be viewed as having "the same embodiment: [in] communication, language, and understanding" (2019: 415). Still, some deaf people do not see hard of hearing people as part of their community despite most likely having shared hearing-related experiences. Others are less focused on this aspect, such as Ben.

> *"If people are hard of hearing, and they are on the outside [of the group], then I think: you also belong here. If you cannot sign, it doesn't matter. I know how it feels."*

Thomas had a similar view, remarking instead that the hearing world has things to offer, too.

> *"I think it is good to be proud of your own identity, to protect your deaf identity and your own native language. Really good, to aim for recognition, for yourself, is very important. But the biggest thing about society is that the largest group is hearing, abled people. So handicaps, impairments – personally, bodily, deaf, or wheelchair… that is often a small group within society. We do have a dependency on the main society, that is hearing. So, I think you should work together with that main part, with the majority. We cannot go without them, and we should do it together."*

Rather than viewing hard of hearing people as opposed to deaf people he, along with Anna and Maud, prefers to see them as one group – not hard of hearing people being 'bordered' between the deaf and hearing worlds.

Hence, the non-belonging as argued by Healy (2020) is prevalent here. She explains non-belonging as something that occurs when, despite an individual themselves feeling like they belong in a group; they are not recognised as such by the group itself. However, as here the community is not bounded, these experiences and perspectives of non-belonging are also diverse. It is also what made Thomas divert from a deaf futsal club that held the view of wanting to stay a club of solely deaf members – while both Thomas and Ben think that it is much more fruitful to integrate into hearing society as well.

Similarly, experiences of non-belonging occur in the hearing world, where hard of hearing people may feel socially excluded in hearing sports teams. One example was already given by Lisa earlier in this chapter, describing how hearing team players were not willing to accommodate her. These experiences of exclusion and non-belonging will be elaborated on in chapter six.

4.4 Conclusion

In exploring interlocutors' identities and attitudes regarding their hearing, I have described how they or others they know have sometimes struggled with navigating their hearing in particular environments and with particular people. Through the lens of Bourdieu's habitus, I observed the family dynamics they were born into and the choices regarding education – and for some, sports – have influenced their life paths and navigations.

Eventually, it leads to the question of how they fit into an environment or with particular people, and why. For some, to be deaf as confirmed by a hearing test is a prerequisite and sometimes the exclusive requirement to be part of the deaf community, while for others – such as Ben and Thomas – to be hard of hearing and simply be able to do a bit of sign language is good enough already. There are also hard of hearing people who have no clear knowledge of or experience within the deaf community, having grown up in the hearing world instead.

This dichotomy in how, when, and especially if a person is part of a bigger whole aligns with how identity has been theoretically explored earlier: how there is a self-acclaimed sense of identity and belonging, and how there is one imposed by others – two ways that can either align or clash with one another. Although there is not a full distinct line that separates the hearing and deaf world, and thus who belongs where, there are people and organisations that see and implement one, nonetheless. I will elaborate on this also in the next chapter. However, it signifies that some have always lived in one particular world, but a lot of people have also and are still shifting in between. A few life paths in terms of education as described earlier in this chapter have demonstrated this shift and how it also happened more than once. At certain moments in their lives, they had to choose between either the world they had grown up in and felt they belonged to or the world that could offer them the facilities – such as higher leveled education – they needed to achieve certain life goals. Interestingly, even those still shifting depending on which environment or which people they are with, recall feeling most at home in the deaf world. Therefore, when we attempt to understand how deaf and heard of hearing people experience playing team sports – whether that is football, futsal, or another sport – we should also consider the 'backstage', how not only their past has had a decisive role in the choices made and the lifepath walked in terms of both school and sports, but also how their present identity as formed by this lifepath influences choices and experiences today.

5. Lotgenoten

Translating their sense of belonging in the deaf world into sports, for many, to play with similar others is paramount. As Maud had remarked: *"Actually, I always had moments where I was like, I need to be with a* lotgenoot*, and recharge."* Here, while 'lotgenoot' would literally translate to 'fellow sufferer', Maud and others who used the term hold a different meaning to it. Instead, it refers to the people with whom they share similar experiences in regard to their reduced hearing – and through these experiences, they feel a sense of belonging with one another.

As this translates to sports as well, it is relevant to consider while reflecting on experiences of sports inclusion and participation. As the main focus of this research is on football and futsal, this chapter will encompass both the acts of playing the sports, as well as the organisation of it. In distinguishing between the types of teams – hearing, G-, deaf, international – most interlocuters are part of the deaf teams: either within the deaf competition, hearing competition, or the NDE (*Nederlands Doven Elftal*, Dutch Deaf Team). Hence, while all types of teams and their players' experiences are explored, the main focus is on the deaf branch of football and futsal. Therefore, I first aim to somewhat map out the current status of all organisations involved in this branch, such as the KNDSB (Koninklijke *Nederlandse Doven Sports Bond,* Royal Dutch Sports Union), NOC*NSF, Gehandicaptensport Nederland, and the KNVB (*Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbal Bond*, Royal Dutch Football Union). Thereafter, I will explore the fields of football and futsal and its players' personal experiences, aiming to compare the teams based on their differences as well as similarities.

5.1 Organising inclusive football and futsal

To achieve inclusive sports, the NSA stated that taking away any type of barriers was the main purpose of its policy. To do so, they formulated specific conditions to achieve: social accessibility, to make everyone feel welcome; practical accessibility, to provide support in tools or travel; and financial accessibility, so everyone can join regardless of their social-economic status (Bruins et al., 2018: 15).

The program OS deriving out of this policy, with its purpose to achieve integration of deaf and hard of hearing players into regular sports as well as building networks of knowledge and experience, is yet still in development. Lucas, who is involved in the program and supposed to become one of the contact points within these networks was still in training. Per his interpretation, the program would not be able to fully launch until 2023, which means that observing any of its results is not feasible for this research.

However, some of their goals have been set in motion, nonetheless. As part of my observations, I focused on a few deaf teams that had recently integrated into a hearing futsal club, of

which there are now six teams – for clarity, I will refer to this club as INCU (Integrated Club). While some teams are part of the hearing competition, hence playing against hearing futsal players, others are part of the deaf competition that occurs three times a year. Additionally, while some players choose to stick to deaf competition and their fellow deaf team players, others opt for playing in hearing competition as well. Even further so, several are also part of the NDE, National Deaf Football team, and thus heavily involved in the (deaf) football world.

As of this year, KNVB has taken over the responsibility from the KNDSB in organising both deaf and hearing competitions. Now being fully part of the KNVB, players need to register there as well before they are allowed to play deaf competition. However, the competition itself also has its demands, stating that a certain amount of reduced hearing is required before a player is allowed to participate. Hence, anyone who would hear 'too well' would therefore be excluded. Furthermore, those that did have the required reduced hearing but had worn a CI for a very long time, and therefore never learned sign language, needed to learn the language in order to participate. What else is arranged for the hard of hearing and other players falling 'in between' the regular and deaf competition, KNVB's employee could not give clear plans yet – partly because the program OS was still in development.

The KNDSB kept responsibility, along with Gehandicaptensport, in overseeing international tournaments like the Deaflympics, (Deaf) European Championship, and (Deaf) World Championship, receiving funds from the NOC*NSF to do so – which was especially important as, according to an interlocutor, deaf sports could not be part of the Paralympics that were overseen by the NOC*NSF.

In recent years there has been a disparity in visions in how the funds should be delegated – both within the union as well as compared to players or other people involved. For one interlocutor, there is a strong sense of hierarchy present. As there have been many times players had to gather funds themselves in order to participate in tournaments, senses of distrust have also arisen here and there. This could be partly because, as one interlocutor involved within the KNDSB has remarked, the union is focused on all the types of deaf sports in The Netherlands, while the NOC*NSF focuses on each sport separately. A good collaboration so far has therefore not yet been possible. It may also explain why the KNDSB have not yet tried to become part of the NOC*NSF – especially as their employee has stated that once they do, they could be given more – financial – support.

This year, the NDE (*Nederlands Doven Elftal*, Dutch Deaf Team) participated in the Deaflympics, but not without – financial – hurdles. While the NDE's attendance was cancelled at first due to a lack of money, people fought hard to get the money themselves instead – which they did successfully through their own personal networks. Similarly, when INCU wanted to participate in a European tournament in Spain, they had a similar issue. Thomas, who is part of the club, remarked that this situation confirmed his view that being integrated into a hearing club would also provide better opportunities, as it was through their networks that they found people willing to sponsor their deaf team. Additionally, when they play regionally rather than internationally, clubs like INCU have

to apply to their municipality or provincial government for funds instead – which is not always granted. Its main purpose is to, as Thomas remarked, keep the funds given by the NOC*NSF available for the international tournaments instead. In this way, no matter where an individual lives or in which sports club they play, they all have a chance to be part of the international team and play these tournaments, or at least become a supporter.

5.2 On the field: the act of playing

One international team to support is the NDE, the national deaf football team. Comprised of both deaf and some hard of hearing players, with the minimum requirement of 55 dB in reduced hearing, they are part of the KNDSB and have played in the Deaflympics this year. Only a few years ago, they were coached and trained by hearing people, who could not do sign language, leading to misunderstandings despite using sign interpreters. Thijs, who is involved with the team, had remarked:

> *"To be hard of hearing is one, knowing sign language is two, but – you have probably experienced it yourself – it is about the culture. About understanding. How should I say it? Hierarchy is too far-fetched. But it is a different kind of group position. Namely, the ignorance, to be able to emphasise with… […] To feel misunderstood. Miscommunication. Facial expressions, it is all entwined!"*

While the previous coaches would hold long speeches prior to a practice or game and not visualise much in their communication, they now keep things brief – as was also recommended by Ben as an inclusion tool, so that (not) hearing would not take too much focus and energy – visualise everything alongside the sign interpreter, and approach players individually. Specifically, by giving individual attention communication can be adapted to what the player is accustomed to – for some, that is sign language, while for the hard of hearing clear, loud speech would sometimes suffice. As a way to also cater to those who are not fluent in sign language, Thijs made sure a text interpreter would also be implemented. He did describe the process of doing so, as there had been some sense of shame within the team about using text interpreters. Even those who would benefit from having those, said they would be fine nonetheless by focusing on facial expressions and lipreading. Still, Thijs recognised the importance of diverse supporting tools himself, pursued in providing text interpreters anyway, resulting in several players making use of them nonetheless.

Noah is a player of the NDE himself, for just a few years now. At five, he was already playing football and did so in hearing teams. With his brothers being part of the club, and his mother functioning as his sign interpreter until around the age of thirteen, he was able to play football well and feel included at the same time. By being part of one team for a long time, he was able to, in a sense, create a habitus as imposed on himself and his team players, where certain desirable behaviours

in terms of clear communication aspired. Rather than meeting new hearing people every day, week, or year, and hence having to explain oneself repetitively when it comes to what they need to be included and fully play – which is what Maud was tired of, hence playing in deaf teams only – Noah was now able to be part of the hearing world and shape it more according to what he needed in regard to his hearing. One way was to discuss everything that needed to be discussed prior to the game, while everyone was sitting still, rather than during. However, while his fellow team players were open and adapting to these, opponents were sometimes not. During one game, at which his brother was watching, Noah had watched him suddenly running onto the field. Later, Noah had asked him what it was about.

> *"He told me that the opponent called me a* dove kwartel*, very loudly. I just asked who it was and a few minutes later I tackled him."*

Noah did experience exclusive behaviour when he transferred to another hearing football club in a rural area. There, it was the coach who was unwilling to adapt – despite several conversations with the board of the club and both Noah and the coach. As Noah had said, it was especially his dialect that was difficult to hear, and so while the coach would speak more general Dutch at first after these conversations, he would very quickly shift back to his dialect. Furthermore, while he gave Noah somewhat individual attention, he would only curtly tell Noah what he needed to do, but never as explicit in explaining why, like he did with the other players. Thus, Noah soon went to another nearby hearing club at which he knew a deaf player. There, he became part of a team that was already both open and accustomed to what the other deaf player needed, and it was therefore much easier to blend in. The tactics they used were to keep talks short, repeat things without trouble, paper to draw and write on, and visualise through body movements.

One of the reasons he chose to play hearing football, was because he wanted to fully get better at the sport in order to become a player of the NDE – as did Daan, years before that. Both felt that the deaf sports branch could not provide the same quality – and to be a member of a hearing club is also a requirement to be part of the NDE.

Within the NDE, there is a mix of deaf and hard of hearing players who all meet the required reduced hearing limit. However, it also means not everyone is able to do sign language or hear well – especially as here, hearing devices need to be taken out, such as Noah's. *"Then I really am deaf, and then I think it is a pity [the hard of hearing players] cannot sign. I then have to keep asking 'what are you saying? What are you saying?'."* While they do take time and effort to communicate with each other nonetheless, by pointing and using facial expressions; playing together can still cause friction sometimes. Even with other arrangements made, such as making sure everyone is in close proximity before a talk by the coach or trainer is held, and agreeing on certain signs that signify certain meanings – which is an inclusion tool I had also tried out while playing handball. Still, Noah thinks

that it comes from childhood and that any deaf or hard of hearing child, irrespective of getting a CI or going to regular education, should learn sign language.

Daan had a similar path through football. Starting to play with other hearing children at a young age, he appeared to be quite good at it and therefore joined a hearing team. As similar to Noah he was part of one hearing team for some time, which allowed him to become used to the way of playing within the team and how to navigate through. Here, the coach also used communication tools like pen and paper to communicate with him, and would talk with him individually after team meetings were held, as Daan was unable to follow those. However, while the individual attention from the coach did allow Daan to know what had been discussed, he was never able to participate in the discussion himself, and hence being part of it.

Yet, as briefly mentioned in subchapter 4.2 focusing on dispositional personalities, he did not really make a point of his hearing or what he may have really needed in the team, as he was also not really conscious of what his hearing may actually entail in his daily life. Here, he was able to participate well physically, as his good skills allowed him to do so, but in the social sense, he was not really part of the group at all. This realisation also particularly came to him when he suffered an injury that put him out of the game for around eight months. While he continued to come to his hearing team's games at first to support, he was literally and figuratively standing on the side-lines. Contact with his players and the club itself, which were always quite supportive before, quickly dwindled down, and Daan realised that without playing the sport, he could not really be part of the team in any other way. Hence, while physical participation was always achieved, social participation was not.

Reflecting on this time, Daan thus thinks that he was mostly accepted by the team because he could provide his skills, hence contributing to the winning of games. Furthermore, he was able to compare between his experiences in the hearing team and those in the deaf school he was attending in the same time period, remarking that there really was a difference in how talkative he was in both worlds – being much more social in the deaf one and very quiet in the hearing one, other than the 'how are you doing?' as mentioned before. He thus remarked that when he played in the deaf football teams, he was able to stay and talk with the players after practices and games – to even be kicked out of the canteen at closing time because he stayed that long – while in the hearing team, he always went home quickly.

That is not to say the act of playing football on the hearing team was a negative experience. In a sense, having Daan not being very focused on his hearing, and therefore not viewing it as an issue or some sort of obstacle, and using humour instead, likely helped his fellow team players not be too uptight or hesitant about it.

> *"The team would always laugh because of me when I'd ask what had just been discussed. Because two minutes later I'd be like 'what?' Then they had to laugh. […] You should not make problems out of everything. You're just deaf."*

His team players helped solve practical issues during the games, such as the whistle by the referee not being heard by Daan who would then unknowingly continue playing. They would wave in his peripheral sight, tap on his shoulder, or stop him from further movement. Daan also recalled how opponents would use the same tactic once they found out he was deaf, but to achieve the opposite: to make Daan give away the ball and take over to start an offense.

While Daan had accepted this way of playing where there was a slight form of dependency on his team players, Thijs used to have a lot more shame about potentially not hearing things, causing him to play the ball to his team players very often and very quickly, just to make sure he would not be the one with the ball if the referee were to whistle.

On the contrary, both Gijs and Willem have been part of a hearing football club for a very long time and have never felt any sense of shame or strong discomfort surrounding their hearing. While Willem only acquired his reduced hearing much later in life, Gijs lived with it from a very young age already. Still, they have grown up in similar habitus consisting of hearing values and ways of doing. However, their team has a similar nature to that of Daan's one from the past, in which humour is at its forefront. While both Gijs and Willem are sometimes yelled at by their fellow players with *"He, dove!"* (He, deafo!), it is only to simply refer to them in a quick and amusing manner, which is also how they interpret it. However, the meaning by the expression can be diverse, as both Noah and Tim have been called this during school, and not so much as a way of simply calling them, but to make fun of them instead. With Noah, the *"Oh, you mean the deaf one"* was also a way in how he was categorised by others, and therefore differentiated from the rest.

The team Gijs and Willem are part of also plays much more with having fun as the goal rather than wanting to win specifically, which means that mistakes made during the game, or misunderstandings arising out of their reduced hearing, are not scolded, but instead just snickered about. In using humour they communicate on the field, and not only Gijs and Willem are sometimes ridiculed for their actions with the expression as mentioned above – all players are always joked about.

However, in a way similar to Daan who was not really focused on his hearing when he was young, the same has been for Gijs all the way up to now. In fact, it was only when he was approached for an interview, that he started to become more conscious of the role his hearing had in his life and has continued being more aware of it in both sports and outside of it. While playing football he was never really aware of what he was missing, as he often navigated his hearing by having one-on-one conversations with fellow team players rather than group conversations, he had good examples of daily life in which he felt hindered. One was needing to sit on the specific side of people as he was fully deaf in one ear, but having partners or friends still automatically sitting on that spot. He would therefore either have to make his need known – again – or try to navigate the social situation in a less ideal way. This example shows that not every hearing and able-bodied person is open to or at least

conscious of adapting to others, even when they have known them for a long time, and should have formed some sort of interdependent habitus by then.

Like all aforementioned interlocutors, Tim has also been part of a G-team for a very long time since his childhood. While he is the only one with a reduced hearing, as the others have other physical and sometimes intellectual impairments, he still feels in place here. As has been briefly remarked by a deaf futsal player about the extent of diversity in teams – which can be found further below on page fifty – the diversity of impairments in his team also means that there is not one dominant way in which they are expected to play football. Additionally, as Tim has grown up with his fellow team players, they are both used to each other's behaviours and needs, and almost all of them are still accompanied by at least one of their parents. In doing so, each player can be given individual attention when necessary, especially those with intellectual impairments who may need to cool off sometimes.

For Tim, to be able to form friendships was also important – without forming social relationships with others, he would not feel as if he belonged in the group much, and not gather as much satisfaction from playing football. While Tim has tried to implement the use of flags by referees in his games, as they do in deaf competitions, this has not yet really happened – even though he prefers this strongly over the use of whistles. Nonetheless, he will make his reduced hearing and the possibility of the whistle known to the referees before games start. Furthermore, he makes sure that in practice, he is never the first one to start a new exercise – instead, he moves to the back of the line to observe his fellow team players, as I have also always done myself.

Tim has noticed prejudices towards being part of a G-team – for which he prefers to not use the 'G', but instead say *"mijn eigen teampie"* (my own teampy). He had noticed that whenever he would play other football tournaments, such as those at school, he would be asked in which team he played. When he said G-team, he would be put in the 'lowest' team; whereas if he just said 'D5', using a general term, he would be placed in a higher team. Here, the assumptions in relation to what is a 'handicap' hindered him from playing football at the proper skill-level, and thus he was forced to obscure that fact sometimes.

Futsal

While football is a generally known sport, futsal is much different – in terms of size, players as well as gameplay.

> *"It is similar but [the field size] is a big difference. Even only with the running and moving around, the pace of it. […] And outside… communication-wise… outside you have way more time to communicate with each other than inside. There, one, two, or three seconds is already very costly, and there is less time to communicate with each other. A different way of receiving the ball […] the ball is also smaller and heavier than the one from outside."*

The description provided by Ben gives a short but clear perspective on how both differ. The physical aspect already formed differences in auditory perception – as sounds could not echo as much outside as they could inside – the gameplay was also significant. While football had eleven players in total, in futsal there were only five. The pace of the game was also much slower in football than in futsal, which either allowed for enough time to discuss tactics on the field, or too little. However, while futsal players may have less time to discuss tactics with each other, they did have the benefit of using a tool that was mentioned before; namely that of stomping on the floor. Furthermore, as the small size of the field – which is the same as with handball – they are in much closer proximity to each other and can therefore communicate much easier with those at the side-lines. The further people are from one another, the more extensive and larger their signing will be. Yet, as one of the interpreters brought along to a futsal game has remarked; if they are too far away so that facial expressions cannot be seen, or small signs cannot be distinguished, communication gets difficult, nonetheless.

Other ways of gameplay were also different in futsal. During observations in which Ben and his team were playing against the hearing opponents, I noticed the fast pace in the duration of the breaks halfway through the games. Rather than the five to fifteen minutes usually given during football games – or my own handball games for that matter – with futsal, this sometimes was no longer than one minute. I observed some of these breaks during which some players seemed to want to contribute to the discussion about the gameplay and new instructions, but for which there simply was no time. Additionally, deaf and hard of hearing people cannot just start signing like others may start talking, as for communicating in sign direct eye contact is needed. While a hearing person may be able to distinguish between two people talking, a deaf person cannot look at two. Therefore, without making sure others are looking, an individual cannot just start signing if they wish to be understood. Needing to pat people on their shoulders, wait before they turn around, and then try to have everyone's attention in a group is a considerable factor in why one-minute breaks are quite limited for them.

With the INCU playing in the hearing competition, both the opponents and the referee of the game were always hearing. Both would be informed of the team's 'deaf nature' prior to the game, sometimes by verbal communication, and sometimes by writing on paper. Referees, then, would sometimes adapt well, by using a lot more hand movements other than the known signs that exhibit rules and decisions. One would also not talk at all throughout the game, making his communication between both teams therefore equal. As with other games, I had noticed how the hearing opponents were often able to communicate with the referee, letting known their frustrations or disagreements about decisions made, and being responded to by the referee. Other referees would, rather than enlarging their bodily movements, instead amplify their voice when speaking – this was, for some of the fully deaf players, still not feasible to communicate. Furthermore, the flags as visual cues used by referees in the deaf competition were not implemented here – instead, the whistle was blown and

sometimes not heard by deaf players. However, by informing the involved parties of their hearing, potential misunderstandings or frustrations could be avoided.

Responses by the opposing teams could differ as well. While all that I observed responded well to the INCU team being mostly deaf, the way it sometimes played out was not the same. With the first game I attended, I had noticed the overheated and sometimes aggressive behaviour by one of the opponents and relaying this to Thomas, he had nodded. *"During the last game against them, that guy went for one of our player's throats."* At another game the INCU team had won but at which I was not present, Thomas also told of the moment in which their keeper – who was hearing – had overheard the coach of the other team. In a quite emotional, angry manner, he had made expressions like *"You have lost to a deaf team!"*, *"You should be ashamed of yourself!"* and *"Such a shame!"*. A similar experience had been told by Daan who, many years ago, played in a deaf team against hearing opponents. Here too, the initial reaction to the team being deaf was a welcome one. It was only when the deaf team was winning that the other team would become much more frustrated and angrier, and similar remarks as those by the other coach were made. Therefore, while it seems that hearing players can be receptive to other 'types' of people and playing, there is an underlying prejudice nonetheless that negatively impacts the gameplay and its experience.

Contrary to the deaf competitions and international tournaments, as well as some deaf futsal clubs, the INCU has, as appears, taken the approach of playing not only against hearing people but also with them. The several deaf teams as part of the regular hearing futsal club have also given opportunities for hearing players to be part of these teams. *"Kind of funny, an inverted world"* Ben had remarked when I asked about the communication dynamics deriving out of this. He recalled that in one case, one of the hearing players was sometimes not able to follow the group discussion. For these players, they used similar tactics to communicate as has been done for Ben when he was part of a hearing football team: in using body language and re-enacting the intended movements of the game – moreover, some deaf players would verbally express themselves, even when it is not their preferred way of communicating

Ben also tries to make sure that if certain situations arise, especially in which there are emotions involved and it seems like a heated discussion is emerging, he will relay what is happening to the hearing person not able to understand what it is about. *"I thought, we are equal to each other, he should also know what we are talking about."* To him, communicating with others while not really speaking the same language is a matter of trial and error, and *with "hands and feet"* one can come a long way. Similarly, Thomas, who is also involved in the INCU, has a similar point of view.

"At this club, everyone is equivalent, is what we have as a rule."

To emphasise, is how Thomas used the description of *gelijkwaardig* rather than *gelijk*, which translates to equal. In doing so, he made an interesting distinction between being equally treated and regarded as having an equal worth compared to others. Similar to comparing equality to equity, it

denotes the aspect of using equity to achieve equality: to not give everyone the same inclusion tools, which would therefore lead to different outcomes, but different tools so that they could all achieve the same inclusive experiences. As he further outlined:

> *"For me, it doesn't matter if you're deaf or hearing, that's my vision. As long as you have experience and knowledge [in futsal] you're welcome."*

In welcoming people, including me, to visit the teams and see how they play, he actually recommends not bringing any type of interpreter to encourage working together.

> *"I actually recommend people, especially if they are hard of hearing and are not really familiar with sign language, to come and to not bring a sign interpreter with them. I think that by working together, figuring it out on the go, and making use of the communication signals that we do know, we can come a long way. And a lot of them learn quite quickly actually. I will also often verbally say things if it helps since I learned to do that anyway"*

Contrary to Thomas' vision, Daan reflected upon the deaf players he knew and about possibly integrating them into the hearing sports teams – denoting that almost all of them were set on having an interpreter brought along – without those, they would not want to be part of hearing teams. Whether this is also part of why Thomas had a different vision in terms of playing football than other deaf clubs, cannot be said for certain, but could be there could be a reciprocal influence of some sort.

> *"The main problem of deaf sports is actually its character, like the 'I am deaf, deaf power' is very prominent. So that identity, that you're very much deaf, is present. But I myself am also a bit more integrated into the hearing society and deaf society. […] Main reason is that the deaf people will also immediately look for other deaf people, and the hard of hearing people are often a bit in between two worlds, the hearing and deaf ones."*

The openness exhibited by the INCU I experienced as well, through players I met and interviewed. Especially by visiting several of the games and becoming a familiar face – by simply being there, I would already be acknowledged with a simple wave or raising of the eyebrows. After one game, however, I was even approached by one of the supporters, likely either a member of the club or otherwise closely related. He and I had already seen each other before the game, taking the same public transport route and walking the same path to the sports hall. Even then, when he passed me and was two meters ahead, he had turned around briefly, looking at me curiously. Then, while at the sports hall and the game ongoing, he had probably realised I was involved with the club somehow. It seems that for him, and likely other deaf people, the small thing in common was enough for him to approach and make small talk. While I had my interpreter there, he made most use of lipreading, talking about learning sign language, and inviting me to attend a course at the *Gebarencafé* nearby.

In creating an inclusive setting at the INCU, hence having a 'deaf board' alongside the hearing one at the regular club, they have also implemented some behavioural rules. As had already been remarked by one of the deaf players, there already is a high diversity within the teams – not just in regard to

hearing, but also in backgrounds, nationality, and culture. While this diversity meant that discussions regarding political, religious, or other possibly sensitive topics could not be carried out at the club to ensure the atmosphere stayed positive – the player also argued that it was the heterogeneity of their teams that made it easier to welcome others. If it were to be a homogeneous setting, anything or any person slightly deviating from the 'norm' would therefore stand out much more and possibly be excluded. This also aligns with Valet's take on diversity leading to inclusion, arguing that what is inclusion, depends on how a group or team is composed in terms of backgrounds, culture, and meanings. (2018: 138).

5.3 To feel included

To know how interlocutors would define inclusion helps understand their main thoughts regarding the concept and what for them when it comes to inclusive experiences, is most important.

Ben does not really differentiate between deaf, hearing, and hard of hearing people, finding it most important that there is mutual respect for each other's way of communicating and seeing each other as equal as they are. Having a shared language of some sort would work best, although that would mean by virtue that that is sign language. Unless hearing, sign language is an ability that can be learned, whereas hearing is not. Yet, Ben has his own view.

> *"It is nice if they put energy into learning sign language, but then we would not have to do anything in return, and that does not feel fair. We can also do our best and use another mode of communication, like writing things down."*

Along with the term awareness, it was also how he explained his perspective on inclusion:

> *"Awareness and equality. Accessibility for people with a hearing impairment, and knowing what needs to be adapted."*

Noah had an extensive line of thought, ticking off several aspects as mentioned in the theoretical framework. For him, inclusion was "to belong and participate", and to have opportunities and freedom to choose between sports. Furthermore, he would like to see an equal quality in skills and training given between both the hearing and deaf sports.

Thomas found similar importance in participation.

> *"Inclusion is that everyone, either with or without impairments, can participate full-fledged."*

While 'full-fledged' was the translation of what Thomas described as *volwaardig*, in terms of meaning, it resonated more with participating as fully worthy. Here, he seemed to have a more equivalent rather than an equal point of view in regard to inclusion.

For Maud, it corresponded with her sense of belonging in the deaf world.

> *"Inclusion… deaf culture… yeah, to belong. And not having to constantly explain what barriers I'm facing. Things that would help, like flickering lights, stomping on the floor."*

Here, Maud already gives some examples of how deaf and hard of hearing people navigate in group settings and ways to gather attention. Moreover, she also seems to regard inclusion as the same as deaf culture, or at least what deaf culture entails. Hence, in aiming to define inclusion in terms of social accessibility or physical accessibility, considering the overall atmosphere as an expression of a culture is also significant in understanding the bigger picture of the sports experiences for deaf and hard of hearing people.

The aspect of accessibility is one I also noticed during one of the football practices of the National Deaf Football team (*Nederlands Doven Elftal, NDE*) when I went to the canteen located next to the field, the interpreter of that evening in tow. When it came to ordering a drink at the bar, I realised quickly that both people behind the bar were likely deaf. While approaching them, they had already been in conversation through solely sign language, never verbally expressing themselves. As we ordered our drinks with the help of the interpreter and me at least signing 'thank you', conversation arose, and it became apparent that they were there specifically for the NDE that evening. They had been asked to do so through a What's App group in which volunteers of any kind were regularly requested to help in deaf-oriented activities. Thus, by making use of their own network – its people and their willingness to participate – they were able to make playing sports beyond the field accessible: from the arrival at the club to the departure after, communication types of barriers were almost non-existent.

A lack of barriers is also what prevailed in Ben's description of the 'ideal picture' within football and futsal: an image in which everything is "automatically perfect"; in which every person can do sign language; or have easy access to a sign interpreter to make communication go fluently.

On the contrary, group conversations in a changing room of a hearing sports club were deemed difficult. Several people would talk over each other, and so even if Ben would follow some by lipreading – because they happened at the same time, understanding the context of the whole conversation itself was not possible. As possible solutions, Ben thought of some.

> *"If someone wants to say something they could raise a hand, so you're able to understand each person. Like, 'you finished? Okay, next'. And use body language or facial expressions. A basic set of signs… could also help a lot."*

Even the simple act of raising one's hand, waiting for attention, and then speaking would already help tremendously – not just for the deaf but also for hard of hearing people. While deaf people would need to focus to catch the signs; they and hard of hearing people also need to focus in order to read lips. By focusing on the speaker's face and utilising the words that we can still hear, we are better able to comprehend and follow what is being said. On the other hand, if people start to talk and we have to look around first to see whom it is coming from – as especially with hearing devices, the sense of direction with sound is absent – it means that we are already missing the first part of a sentence. In

those moments, we are left to fill in our own puzzles. Situations like these are also what Ben does not like to happen or do. If people were to only use verbal communication, Ben would have had to constantly ask and check again with others about what is said – thus becoming dependent on others – therefore always having to 'catch up' to the conversation. *"But, I also want to join in, I am also curious. I want to be myself! That's why I went into the deaf world – there, I can be myself.*" Thomas gave a relevant metaphor to visualise where Ben and other deaf people come from.

> *"When you see each other it is a lot of fun, and that is also the case with hearing people, but you still notice that it is much easier to become good friends with other deaf people. Because it is your own language, your own native language. It may be the same if I was a deaf German guy, and I meet another German guy and a Chinese guy, then I will be automatically drawn a bit more to the German guy, because there already is a language difference with the Chinese one, for example. And I think it is the same with hearing people. With deaf people, it is my own language, and it just goes much more fluently."*

5.4 The role of interpreters

So far, it has become apparent how significant sign language is as part of the deaf community and identity. Some have recalled other deaf people being adamant about only communicating in sign language, not deviating to lipreading or simple pen and paper, and thus not wanting to communicate with those who cannot sign. It is not surprising, as almost all interlocutors who can sign have said that to at least communicate with hearing people – whether that is in school, sports, at work or somewhere else – they heavily prefer to use an interpreter. Moreover, for Lisa it is a decisive factor in whether she will attend social events of her hearing family, or not. In this way, she chooses not to participate in order to not feel excluded. Hence, for her and many others, having interpreters is their way of achieving inclusion in a hearing world.

Sign language is what binds deaf people and, as Noah remarked, *"is the main attribute of deaf culture."* At the same time, it also excludes others. Even hard of hearing people who share the familiarity in having a reduced hearing and a desire to be 'part of something' and to 'belong', may experience barriers again in the deaf world – this time not because they could not hear something, but because they could not understand what was being signed. Like myself, there are several other hard of hearing interlocutors who never learned to sign – or only did so much later in life.

Sign interpreters then come into play, as a bridge built over the obstacle. For some interviews as well as most of the football and futsal games, I arranged for them beforehand. Doing so allowed me to experience quite literally what this was like for the interlocutors trying to arrange one for their games, events, or classes in school. As some had remarked, it did really take a portion of my time a

day, communicating with several interpreters and trying to make plans. Throughout, I noticed the discrepancy in supply and demand of them – while interpreters were needed often, there were not enough of them. I hence not only used the official website, but also a Facebook group called 'Last-minute Interpreter', I was surprised by what the group classified as 'last-minute'. As their last-minute mark indicated 'two months before the particular event', while arranging my interpreters, I was therefore always 'late'.

Some deaf or hard of hearing people need interpreters so regularly, that they develop familiarity and sometimes even friendship with some. Anna, for example, keeps a list of interpreters she likes and orders them based on the area in which they live and whether they interpret signs or text. Additionally, at least two people had asked beforehand which interpreter I had arranged for their interview, being curious whether they would know them. As signing is like handwriting, and thus something that develops over time and cannot be read by everyone, some people are well aware of which interpreters are the best fit for their signing style. Especially those having grown up with the language as being their native one and thus having grown fluent in it, tend to have a fast-paced, sometimes 'lazy' way of signing. They do not always bother to fully complete signs as they understand them so well anyway, and the signs follow up on each other quite rapidly. As one of the sign interpreters had commented on a deaf player of the INCU, he was a 'tough one' to translate for. *"With him, I always run out of breath or get an itchy throat just trying to keep up with his signing,"* the interpreter had said and signed at the same time, amusing both me and the deaf player.

The same sign interpreter turned out to be a 'CODA' (Child of Deaf Adults), as he told me while we were watching one of the futsal games of the deaf competition that day. While his parents were deaf, both his brother and himself were born hearing, and thus they grew up bilingually. For a time in his life, he had said, he did not want anything to do with the deaf community, going as far as having a sense of aversion against it, and going his own way for a while instead. Still, he was familiar with the community and the people within and was known himself in this world as well. Over time, this aversion dissolved, and he decided to put this familiarity and signing skills to use as an interpreter.

His being part of the deaf community while not being deaf himself was an interesting yet valuable point during the observation that day. Firstly, it seemed that being able to do sign language, and having grown up in the deaf community was more valued in what deaf identity entailed than being deaf itself. Secondly, while he was only there to translate our surroundings of situations and people for me, it was through his familiarity with them that I got into contact with some. This, I will elaborate on in the next subchapter.

The familiarity and therefore accessibility that sign interpreters sometimes provided were also observant during the first futsal game I attended of a futsal club. A different sign interpreter and I had already been sitting in the audience and chatting a bit, during which it came to light that she had met

her deaf husband during her sign language studies, which made her so familiar with the deaf community. This familiarity grew thanks to her husband and his relations but also because of her own work as an interpreter – which is why she recognised some of the deaf players, recalling having translated for them some time ago.

Still, even with years since she last saw them, these players seem to also recognise her, even from far away. Two of them – of which one later turned out to be Ben – separately from each other asked the same 'what are you doing here?' question, to which she gave the same work-related reasons – all in sign language and with the same twenty-meter distance in between, as the sound was not necessary anyway.

They had looked at me with the same curious expression, also asking a similar question about who I was and why I was there. This time through the interpreter, I briefly introduced myself. It provided an opportunity for the week after, at which I was now recognised by Ben, making myself a familiar face.

5.5 To feel excluded: playing in deaf teams

I had already been inside briefly, walking past people that I did not know and watching several games already being played. Today was one of the three days in the year on which the deaf futsal competition was planned, and each time located somewhere else in the country.

I met the interpreter at the entrance, and we walked up the stand to watch the games from higher up, along with the rest of the audience. They filled up half of the chairs, yet I still had not yet seen a familiar face. It was actually when we just walked into these stands that the interpreter's face became the 'familiar one'. We were immediately stopped by someone unknown to me, who asked my interpreter in sign language what he was doing here. *"I'm here for work!"* the interpreter had replied, both signing and saying it out loud and therefore making it understandable and accessible for both the stranger and me. The interpreter's answer prompted the stranger's curious expression to shift to me, and he asked me a similar question in sign language. It was the combination of some of his signs being familiar to those hearing people often use as complementary to their verbal words, and the ability of lipreading I had acquired over time since I was a child in navigating the hearing world, that made me able to understand him without needing the interpreter. His sentence had started with a 'w' and his expression had turned into that of a questioning one – raising his eyebrows, which is the particular expression deaf people used to make clear they are asking something – and I knew it was either one of a 'who' or a 'why' he was directing at me. I explained who I was and why I was there, consciously doing so at a louder volume and slightly slower pace than I normally did. I noticed that he also not once looked at the signing interpreter but was instead focused on my mouth. He too seemed to have acquired the ability to lipread.

The stranger introduced himself as well, telling me about the two daughters he had that each had to different extents a reduced hearing. One of them was playing that day, with her reduced hearing being deemed just 'severe enough' to be allowed to join. Indeed, there is a minimum requirement of reduced hearing, meaning that people with a mildly reduced hearing would likely not be able to participate. This was not only the case in deaf competitions but also in the NDE during Deaflympics and other international tournaments, as well as in some deaf futsal clubs – here, the requirement was even higher, where no hard of hearing person could become a member at all.

Not without reason, the deaf competition has the rule of not wearing any hearing devices implemented so that the act of playing is as equal as possible. The same rule was once not known for Thomas who, when he played in the competition himself, had worn his hearing aids until after the game – only then it was discovered, and his team was given an automatic 0 – 5 loss as a penalty.

As I and some other hard of hearing may or may just not be able to join the deaf teams as we would hear too well, and therefore be excluded. At the same time, to be in a world where auditory functioning and communication are dominating, and hearing teams are not always possible or desirable for some, by creating an event with non-hearing boundaries they are able to fully create an environment where they are with similar others and can be themselves. However, when the KNVB took over the organisation of the deaf competitions, they scheduled these games as two ten-minute plays each, and not without reason Thomas had argued for longer play. As he remarked, deaf people wanted to socialise and talk with each other in between games as well, and with the deaf competition providing the opportunity to do so, they also needed more time.

> *"With hearing people that may be possible, you can also meet each other on the streets and you have a higher chance at seeing each other in daily life outside of sport. But with the deaf, sport really is a way of meeting each other. […] Deaf people use sport as a social activity, not just to perform but really as a social thing."*

Therefore, the deaf competition is not just the establishment of physical sports, but also that of the social settings in which players and supporters can engage and catch up with one another. Especially as the teams are mixed – those that are team players in the INCU were now in opposing deaf teams, for example – it makes it possible to meet many different people in one day. While not every deaf person in the community is part of this event, it is one of the ways in which the community is upheld. Therefore, in not being able to do sign language, I was an exception here – although I had an interpreter, it is not the same. Even when I was wearing my hearing aids, like others in the audience were, I could not converse with them.

In essence, to be able to sign is the most natural way to communicate with deaf people and be a part of them – which is what they also state themselves. It is not without reason that the hearing players who sometimes play in the deaf teams of INCU are slowly learning signs, or at least communicating slowly and clearly. While bringing along an interpreter is possible – although Thomas

would thus encourage to try it first, if necessary also bring one's own hearing friends – it does not provide the same fluency in communication that knowing sign would provide. While interpreters helped make me feel part of the conversations, I was still a few seconds behind. Even in being able to follow everything being said, if I wanted to join in on the conversation, I had to sometimes 'interrupt'. Signing itself is a way of communication that goes much faster than verbal communication, with one of the reasons being that they make no use of articles while hearing people do. Furthermore, the structure of a sentence is differently placed, and overall fewer words are used to convey the message. The combination of the fast-paced language and it having to be translated made the sense of 'being behind' in the conversation similar to following a conversation between hearing people. In a similar sense, I am able to follow the conversation but not always able to participate in it.

Proximity of deaf football

Another aspect of accessible playing in deaf teams, which is not at all related to the people within, is that of the proximity to the few locations throughout the country at which deaf football takes place. While some are so dedicated in wanting to participate that they are willing to travel far, others are less so. This is not just because of the aspect of time – as Maud herself had stopped playing in the deaf football competition partly because it takes place on Sundays and she wanted to be home in time for work the next day – but also that of travelling costs. As Thijs has remarked, when I asked him where the players of the NDE come from, as they do practices in Utrecht:

> *"Friesland, Overijssel, Brabant, Groningen, Utrecht, North-Holland, even Limburg. But the last one never really comes. […] Players have to pay for everything themselves. So it is about travelling, to ask for days off from work, unemployment among the deaf and hard of hearing people is also pretty high."*

Thus, as the costs of travelling can already be quite high, for some it is also not affordable. Then, he remarked that many worked as on-call workers with a flex-contract as well, meaning that they could never be sure to join the football practice that day, and were sometimes forced to work rather than participate in the sport instead. Thus, to Thijs, this is an important aspect that would do well to be considered by the KNDSB and the NOC*NSF. While the NOC*NSF has remarked that they are willing to make the KNDSB part of their organisation like they have with the KNVB and the Paralympics, whether this is actually happening anytime soon remains unknown.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered the experiences of players in football and futsal teams in both their past and present, through which both a number of barriers as well as inclusive tools have emerged. Barriers here included the lack of sign language used in hearing as well as deaf teams; a disparity

between physical sports participation and social participation for some; the inability to communicate with hearing referees and opponents; and the prejudices that sometimes arise of opponents when they are on the losing side nonetheless, creating a hostile atmosphere.
Ways to inclusive sports, on the other hand, were that of self-invented signs; the use of sign and text interpreters; using pen and paper to write and draw; then, for the coach to also keep talks brief and clear, and visualise what they mean in their body movements; give individual attention to each player to be able to adapt to their way of communicating and playing sports.

Through habitus and forming specific norms and dispositions in (hearing) teams by being part of one over a prolonged period of time, has often proved successful in implementing behavioural changes or other inclusive tools to improve sports participation. Yet, not everyone is always fully aware of what their hearing entails and thus what they need to be able to participate fully in a team, so this is more difficult to achieve. Furthermore, a distinction should be made between physical participation and social participation, as it is the first why deaf people choose hearing teams (to improve their skills), and the latter why they choose deaf teams (to socialise and belong). Here, Sen's standard of living (1987) is relevant, as people determine themselves where their objects of value lie (to improve football skills or to socialise fluently with others, for example), and how much value each object has to them. Therefore, people make varying choices based on what they would like to achieve during that time period. However, in an ideal situation, they would not have to choose at all, providing that both worlds can offer a good quality of physical participation and training, and social connection and belonging.

6. Standing on the side-lines

6.1 An autoethnography: an island within hearing teams

Walking into the changing room, I sat down on one of the wooden benches drilled into each of the four walls, with space in between that allowed for doors and passage to the showers. Being in this room at least three times a week, I had already tried out every spot to sit down and change into my sports clothing and knew that no matter which one I chose, the echoic acoustics of the space would still be there. Hence, I did strategically situate myself taking social dynamics into regard: I looked for my twin sister to see if I could sit nearby her, as I was familiar with the sound of her voice; or placed myself near the girls whom I knew often dominated conversations – then, I thought, I will understand at least the brim of these talks.

As other girls trickled inside, the echoing would decrease, and with that change came an increase in chatting and laughter. I observed as they emerged between duos or within slightly bigger groups, either taking place on a bench or crossing over to the other side of the changing room. I only knew so because I noticed who held eye contact with whom, and whose lips were moving at which time. Through hearing, however, it had become a web of sounds within which I could not efficiently differentiate what was said by whom. The use of hearing aids helped to an extent, amplifying these sounds, and sometimes bringing specific ones to the forefront – but in that same regard removing my agency and control in choosing what and whom I wanted to focus on conversation-wise. I was therefore often left to my own thoughts, while still sometimes looking at people as if I was actually hearing them – in hindsight, I was reinforcing the sense of invisibility in relation to my hearing, not making known the moments in which I could not participate. I did not hear a word, thus did not say a word, and felt like an island within the team. To this anecdote, Maud had said, as they had asked for my experience out of interest, *"Good that you have found us now!"*.

Playing on the field itself, the position I had to take on the field was highly influential. From first being the centre-back player who shouted out the intended systems for the team to carry out, I was slowly transferred to the wing position, which was the furthest position from the first one. Now not hearing every shout, I was focused on the ball but had to look around often, too. At all times, I had to take note of where all players were positioned on the field and whether our centre-back player may be about to shout new cues. Not always able to do so, I would hear shouting but not yet be focused on it, thus missing what was said and – in the fast pace of the sport – being unable to convey this confusion in time. I would know a system was about to be started, but be unsure which players were involved, thus entirely shifting my focus from the ball to my fellow players, waiting to see what moves would be made. Only when most of them would look at me at least once and the centre-back player would repeat herself in a slightly frustrated tone, would I realise I was supposed to start the system.

In the years played, we only briefly attempted the use of signs as standing for the systems used, to be carried out by the centre-back player as a way for me to understand her immediately. However, it was a change of gameplay no one of my hearing team players, let alone the centre-back ones were used to. To change a particular habit of gameplay needed time and proper repetition – both of which did not occur as much for the habit to stick. Truthfully, as I had become used to how I was part of the team and the 'role' I had within, I did not want to make a point out of it and therefore a point of my hearing. On the contrary, I did do so once playing in another handball club years later, and it was in these teams where the signs were implemented well. The two aspects I think influenced this difference, are that I was not only much more vocal about my hearing needs, but I was also actively working with it. Therefore, I did not only place the responsibility of inclusive facilities onto the other hearing players but in collaborating with them and seeing what worked best, took control of what I needed myself. While I had therefore always been able to participate in the sport physically, to be involved socially needed more time and attention.

6.2 Experiencing inclusion and exclusion in other team sports

Playing in hearing teams

Similar to my own experiences and of the futsal and football players, in the life stories told by the interlocutors who played other team sports a division between physical participation and social participation is evident. Furthermore, different life phases also seemed to influence their experiences and way of doing with their hearing; in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood – and each had its challenges.

For Esmee, being a deaf child while playing hockey in a hearing team was different from being a deaf adolescent playing hockey in a hearing team, despite it often being with the same girls. Throughout, her perception and experience in regard to being deaf slowly changed.

> *"In the beginning, it really was a lot of fun. It was very convivial in the team. But later, when we got older; I noticed it got more about having fun than being serious. The consequence was that I couldn't really understand anything in the group. I think after 5 or 6 years, I stopped playing hockey there because I could no longer participate in the team."*

Personally, I had also noticed these shifts. Playing handball from the age of six, I was never really conscious of my hearing anyway and just played the way I was able to. For some time, this worked fine, but the older I got, the more aware I became of how much I was not hearing between people. Because I had never made a point of my hearing-related needs before, I found it difficult to suddenly start doing that somehow, and so I never did – or just briefly, in regard to the self-invented signs. Only when I left I was able to break out of the habitus created there, consciously forming a new one once I joined another club – in this way, I was able to start afresh.

In terms of social developments within teams, Anna also had a similar experience in a hearing basketball team as stretched out from her childhood into adolescence.

> *"It went fine. You are a child, you are just playing, you're doing what you have to do. No difficulty with communication. If you grow into adolescence, people start to talk more. In the changing room, I didn't understand anything."*

Furthermore, Anna would recall that as a child, if she was not able to hear other children well and would ask them to reiterate what they had said, they would often exclaim things such as *"Never mind, not important!"* and in this sense, denying her to participate in the group socially – while during games, she was also often just delegated to certain positions on the field without any explanation, making the act of playing basketball with others also a not very team-like one. Moreover, she never had a fixed position or two on the field, unlike other team players in this research, and was therefore always insecure about whether she could even play at all; and where exactly she would have to be on the field.

> *"Fellow team players would get annoyed, you'd be pushed aside like, 'stand over there!' You're not feeling part of the team. You can score, but… nothing is explained."*

Here, Anna could not meet the expectations imposed on her by her fellow team players – while she needed more time to adjust on the field, or to focus on someone in order to hear them; her team players seemed to favour hasty gameplay in which there was no patience for time. Furthermore, to be given a fixed position for her to play on appeared to help tremendously; as she was a goalkeeper of a football team briefly – in both knowing what she could expect and being able to oversee the whole field rather than be in the middle of it, helped her participate in the sports well.

Here, the role of the coaches can be influential. Anna had had many coaches, of which many were open and relaxed, encouraging her to 'just go play and do her best'. However, she also once had a coach who, without being willing to put in any effort or consideration for possible adaptations or solutions, had decided that it was simply impossible for Anna to play in the team. *"[He] was like: 'go sit on the bench, it's not going to work out'."* Here, the impact of the coach becomes apparent, as Noah was also affected by a coach's excluding and ableist behaviour, prompting him to go to another hearing football team instead.

On a more positive note, when Maud first started doing gymnastics, the coach was of tremendous support for her to participate along with the other gymnasts by adapting his behaviour to what Maud needed' he looked at her directly, allowing her to both lipread and practicing the use of her CI. She remarked that she never felt different from the others, as he allowed her to participate in every exercise – contrary to what Anna had experienced. Rather than being put as the 'odd one out', Maud could merge with the hearing children.

That is not to say every hearing team or group within sports can be welcome as long as the coach or trainer takes the exemplifying role of inclusive behaviour. Later on in her childhood, Maud decided to leave a hearing football team – even though she sincerely enjoyed playing the sport – as

she found out the players were talking negatively behind her back, hence creating an atmosphere of hostility in which she did not feel welcome. Furthermore, she also played tennis, and while practices often also took place in groups, as the act of playing itself was one-to-one, communication was much easier nonetheless.

The team sport Maureen participated in since she was young was volleyball. As per her parents' reasoning, making her a member of the local volleyball club would not only be good health-wise, it would also help integrate her into the local neighbourhood. *"I liked the sport, but I of course could not hear everything. Thus, as a solution I would hold one-on-one conversations instead – everything else would go past me."* While she first did not like this way of participating in the group, reflectively, she found it taught her well how to *"keep standing in the hearing world"* – which is also what Maud had reflected on about being sent to hearing school by her parents. Not just meeting, making and building contact, but mostly to make Maureen familiar with the people living in her neighbourhood. The better they knew her, the better they also knew how to greet and talk with her if they were to meet her in the supermarket – in this way, creating a sense of habitus (Bourdieu, 1987). In the way of making herself familiar over a longer amount of time, she gradually took her place in the group. She found that the more she made herself part of the group the more others would adapt to her – a change she found contributed to her self-confidence. The more she took in space in the team, the better player she also became. *"In this gameplay, you have to claim the ball, and not be in doubt – not about whether you heard something or not, or whether the ball was meant for you or not."* At this point, even when she would make mistakes due to not hearing instructions, all it would lead to was a shrug rather than any sense of shame.

On the contrary, Anke did feel insecure sometimes while playing volleyball in a hearing team. Not being able to hear her team players' shouting, such as those claiming the ball, it would lead to collisions between Anke and other players. Some trainers were also not helpful in finding solutions, leaving her to make them up herself instead. Furthermore, not all players were as considerable either, and conversations held in the showers and the canteen after games or practices were impossible for her to follow.

Maureen also reflected on the diversity within hearing teams and how these dynamics influenced her making her hearing needs known, by giving the example of being in a hearing class: *"[…] you're just one of the many. It's difficult to adjust for just that one if the rest of the group is going along well enough already."* Yet, she also remarks that the more part of a group she can be, and the better the conversations she can follow, making here hearing needs is also less difficult.

> *"The weird thing is, the more you can hear, the easier it is to make it known when you don't. While, if you don't hear anything at all, then you feel as like, 'I don't have the space. Can I say I don't hear it if I don't hear anything anyways?' So, then I'd have to say it all the time."*

It did lead to situations in which, even though Maureen was using her hearing aid and some supporting hearing technology, conversations would still be missed, and social isolation would sometimes arise. Furthermore, Maureen had noticed that, because of her hearing, she was often placed in teams with friends with whom she was familiar, despite being better at volleyball than they were.

> *"In that sense, is that what you call 'consider' other's needs? […] I also once had friction with trainers who acted rather bluntly. Standing there yelling, with a lot of facial expressions, negativity. That I'm thinking, why are you doing this, you're not doing it with others either? Then when I once made it heard, he said 'yes, but otherwise you won't hear me'. But there is not really a difference in hearing, there is only a difference in me suddenly seeing him yelling and looking very angry. And although I may not hear what is being said, I can hear the emotion behind it."*

She immediately gives an example of how emotion plays a large role in speech, despite people not always hearing what is being said. Similar to facial expressions, they convey a certain message.

The existence and use of interpreters were not yet really prevalent during some childhoods of interlocutors, while they remark that was exactly something that would have helped them participate in hearing teams, like Esmee, Anna, and Maud. As both Anke and Lisa had remarked, whether other hearing people are willing to adapt and learn about what communication works best, can always be different depending on who an individual meets, and therefore impact the way they experience sports participation and inclusion differently. It was already a difference Lisa had noticed in school, in that some hearing people were completely uninterested, and others were very curious and open. Yet, to have to continuously talk about one's needs in regard to their hearing, even if it is to people who are open to hearing and working with it, can get repetitive and tiring – which is why some prefer to stay in deaf sports, nonetheless. There, they never have to make a point out of their hearing. The more people they meet who do not share the familiarity of having a reduced hearing, the more energy it takes to strive for accessibility. Hence, using interpreters in hearing teams or worlds takes away the aspect of draining energy and provides a quick, direct path to accessibility.

Playing in deaf teams

Apart from basketball Anna also played tennis and dancing, and with the latter two she did so in both hearing and deaf teams. For her, being in hearing teams generally gave the same obstacles and issues, in not being able to follow others and participate in conversations. On the contrary, in deaf teams, she felt like she could actually achieve what she wanted to play sports for: to spend time with others through sports and have sincere fun while doing so.

Similar to the deaf teams of INCU being part of a hearing futsal club, Lucas plays volleyball in a deaf volleyball club that has integrated into a hearing one. The result is that of practices in which people

with both hearing and reduced hearing play with one another. There is also a somewhat even division in the number of players when it comes to hearing – at the least, when exercises are planned, they are divided equivalently to achieve equal teams in terms of hearing and skills.

> "On the one side there are three hearing and three deaf people, and on the other, there is one hearing and one deaf person. But if the trainer starts explaining something, there is an interpreter next to him who will start signing. And then questions are asked to check like, does everyone understand? If not, further explanations are given. And if it is clear, everyone will start doing the exercise. And the trainer will walk around, with the interpreter in tow. So if he gets to a deaf person, then the interpreter will just sign. And if a whistle is being blown, everyone will start waving or tapping each other like, we have to go back."

Lucas also describes the contact occurring between the hearing and deaf people, remarking that the hearing people will know to talk very calmly and articulate very well. They also use signs sometimes, to show how something needs to be done. Hence, there is much less talk and more so bodily movements through which everyone communicates. Either way, Lucas describes a good inclusive environment in which all people are able to participate: first, time and dedication are given to explaining exercises and making sure everyone understands them, which was not always the case for other interlocutors; they make use of a sign interpreter for those that need it, and hearing people are familiar with how to communicate with deaf people if no sign interpreters are present. Similarly to what Thomas encourages hearing newcomers to do, they will figure communication out on the go and use both lipreading and self-invented signs to express their messages.

As aforementioned, Anke and Maureen have also played in volleyball teams. While both did not always have positive experiences in hearing teams – both of them did while individually part of the National Deaf Volleyball team. As Anke had remarked; while she faced many barriers in the hearing team, in the deaf one, she had none. Rather, she had a very strong sense of feeling at home. While the travel distances to the deaf volleyball teams were a downside, as were the prominent differences in skills between the deaf players, she still preferred this over hearing teams – there, she would be dependent on the coach and them reiterating what they said every time, which did not happen. To her, the deaf team is the only team in which she could truly be herself.

What does it mean to be included: a 'dream'

Asking what people thought was the ideal situation to truly be themselves and play sports, I received different answers.

In terms of the 'ideal picture', Maureen thinks of a team at best if it is made of deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing people altogether. *"But then it is really about the knowledge the players and*

coach have. And with the club, its board. So, knowledge about what it is like being hard of hearing, the influence it can have on playing sports, and how it influences how you interact with each other."
Maud had remarked: "if something is not going well, that you can talk. Openness. As a team, making sure everyone is feeling good. And just playing and having fun."
Anke had a more singular wish, in that it would be nice if the coach and all players speak coherently, but to her, that will stay an illusion.

6.3 Conclusion

In all kinds of team sports, the aspect of communication is key. However, the attitudes brought forward by hearing people, which can be quite diverse as based within teams, opponents and others involved, is also influencing in how participation and social participation is experienced. In turn, how one expresses themselves and their hearing, such as making oneself becoming a significant member of a team, others are also quicker to adapt in behaviour – as one of the interlocutors had shared, by making herself more involved in the team, others were adhering as better fit to her. In a way, this is also why social participation needs to be created and improved in the first place – not only so that deaf and hard of hearing people can interact with hearing others, and possibly feel like they belong in the team; but also to generate a starting point from which they can involve themselves in the hearing teams, and therefore better able to express what they need.

However, people's identity in regard to their hearing is still decisive in whether they prefer to play deaf sports, regardless of how inclusive hearing sports may be. It is namely in deaf sports where they do not need to make a point of their hearing at all which, for some, holds a strong preference over being part of a team that may offer better quality in the sport. Furthermore, in making known the adaptations they need from hearing people, they are categorising themselves as the 'odd one out' who needs different attention than the others. This, when one has been part of a team for so long and already adapted themselves to how the team is composed – hence a sense of habitus – to suddenly change or break this down is difficult. Furthermore, to utilise the influencing role of the coach and trainer in this setting, where they can express exemplifying behaviour for the others to follow – and thereby taking the responsibility and energy away from the deaf or hard of hearing individual themselves – it may be much easier to achieve an inclusive environment.

7. Concluding remarks

This thesis focused on experiences of inclusion and sports participation of deaf and hard of hearing football, futsal, and other team sports players, mainly through conducting interviews as well as making observations at several football and futsal locations. Both methods have provided different yet valuable insights into how experiences of sports participation and inclusion are not only fabricated on and alongside the sports field but are also shaped throughout an individual's life path in interactions with their different environments, hence creating a habitus through which they make sense and meaning of their reduced hearing. Therefore, in analysing the NSA policy and their goal of inclusive sports and physical activity, I have comprehended not only the acts of playing sport but the 'background' of people's lives as well. Contrary to other types of impairments, hard of hearing and especially deaf people make up a community through their shared characteristic, which is built upon a shared language, norms, and values. To translate this into experiences on the sports field is therefore paramount.

First, to comprehend experiences of sports participation it is necessary to understand what these different environments entail and how they influenced and influence an individual's life path. Here, family dynamics, education, and sports experiences in the interlocutors' childhoods have been considered as shaping factors in their present lives. While most deaf children are born in hearing families, given hearing devices, and sent to hearing education; the research has shown that interlocutors in the same boat have struggled to navigate these choices. Many of them have shifted between deaf and hearing education, having to either choose between quality of education in hearing schools or the high sense of belonging they experienced in the deaf ones. Here, the ability to do sign language is paramount, and an influencing factor in both education and sports. It is also the base of what deaf interlocutors understand the deaf culture and community to be. While there is disparity about who belongs to the community or not, especially in regard to hard of hearing people – relating to Healy's 'non-belonging' (2020) – to be able to do sign language is, no matter the extent of reduced hearing, a significant ability and connecting tool that may include an individual in the community anyway. On the other hand, those who have not been taught sign language are therefore excluded. Thus, one of the goals of program OS which was to establish networks of knowledge and experience in regard to deaf sports and as integrated in hearing sports, will allow deaf and hard of hearing children and adolescents who indeed may not be able to do sign language; have mostly grown up in the hearing world; and possibly struggled just like interlocutors have – to find a pathway through sports into the deaf community nonetheless.

Unlike other types of impairments, out of this shared physical characteristic the deaf community has shaped their own culture with their own language, values, and norms: a habitus. While its people are spread throughout the country, there are several meeting spaces through which deaf people and some hard of hearing people meet and uphold a sense of community. Both education and

sports have provided the social settings for deaf people to meet in, and therefore, deaf sports have an important value within the community, such as the deaf futsal competition – however, as they uphold a minimum requirement of reduced hearing in order to play, some hard of hearing individuals are excluded nonetheless.

Second, while integrating deaf teams and clubs into hearing clubs – as one of the goals of program OS – is therefore not wholeheartedly welcomed by all, those that have and are already participating in this kind of system experience valuable advantages. While deaf competition is only three times a year and often far away yet allows deaf people to reconcile and be themselves with one another; playing in hearing competitions has provided the opportunity to play games at least once a week and close to home. In terms of practical accessibility, this is thus better achieved in hearing sports. Furthermore, the integration into hearing clubs has also allowed them to become familiar to its hearing players as well, giving rise to 'reverse integration' in which hearing players are playing in the deaf teams as well. Similarly, the integrated volleyball deaf teams in a hearing club have organised practices in which both train together, and where there is no such thing as a majority or minority of either hearing or deaf players. Evenly divided, the act of playing volleyball has made a much more equal way of playing sports. As one of the interlocutors experienced, being the only severely hard of hearing player in a hearing team with specific needs in regard to hearing adaptations is much more difficult to make known and achieve. While physical sports participation is therefore feasible, for many, social participation and accessibility were different yet paramount in their experiences of inclusion. While a reduced hearing within a hearing team did not only affect communication on the field, socially connecting with other team players was tiring and too difficult for some. Similar to the shifting from hearing to deaf education, they often opt for deaf sports instead, where they are able to fully and socially immerse themselves, hence creating a sense of belonging with similar others.

On the other hand, the financial aspect of accessibility is important here as well. Not just the costs of travelling to faraway locations for deaf sports can be significant for some – the organisation of deaf sports is not always as equal to hearing sports either. While the KNDSB searches for sponsors and has funds from the NOC*NSF for international tournaments like Deaflympics, World Championship, and European Championship – players and others involved often still need to pay additional costs for these, sometimes setting up crowdfunding. Even with the collaborative nature of the deaf community making it possible to gather the necessary finances, the responsibility should not be theirs solely. Moreover, as many can have trouble finding work in the hearing world, they cannot always easily afford to play in all hearing, deaf and international competitions – especially when the membership of one requires the memberships of the others. Therefore, improving inclusive sports experiences means also improving financial hurdles, and I would argue that placing the KNDSB under NOC*NSF rather than a separate entity would also allow for more financial support, and is a valuable first step towards an inclusive sports environment for deaf and hard of hearing people.

Whether part of the hearing, deaf or G-teams, several directly observable behaviour and tools to generate inclusive sports experiences have also been told and observed. First, the role of the coach is central, as they are the ones that communicate directly with all team players, giving instructions and motivating talks. It is helpful to keep these instructions and talks short and clear and long sentences that may be difficult to comprehend. The use of body movements as a way of re-enacting the intended exercise, as well as making sure to look directly at the hard of hearing or deaf individual – so that lipreading is possible – are also helpful in participating. Expectations put on the individual should also not always be the same as with hearing ones: using patience and time in interaction allows more space for the individual to understand and navigate within the team, especially in a hearing one. Further inclusive tools are visualising ones, such as using pen and paper to write things on, or a printed-out sports field on which tactics can be drawn.

Not just in regard to coaches and trainers but for team players as well, the use of sign or text interpreters is also quite helpful – and in terms of signs, several interlocutors including me have created self-invented ones to be used during the act of playing itself, which are meant to indicate the planned tactics. Another important aspect is the attitude of coaches, trainers, and team players, in being open to adapting to better fit communication. While this would not just include articulating well and facing the individual directly so that they can lipread, it is also helpful to physically make known one's intention to speak first without doing the act of speaking – for example, by tapping hard of hearing or deaf individuals so they can turn around and look at you first; or waving in their peripheral sight with the same purpose. Another tool to draw attention is by flickering the lights of changing rooms or other spaces; or the stomping of the floor in inside team sports, which can be felt by others on the same floor. Especially the latter two are already implemented in deaf sports.

Overall, however, the role of sign language has shown to be paramount in the deaf community and therefore in the sports context as well. While for many the aforementioned inclusive behaviour and tools are very helpful – it is still the use and ability of sign language in how they distinguish the hearing from the deaf world. As sign language is their native language, they can never feel as included in and belong to environments where this is not the main form of communication as it is in the deaf world. There, while they are together because they share this physical characteristic, it is precisely by being together that they are not aware of this characteristic at all. Therefore, to convey similar experiences of inclusion and belonging to the hearing sports means that sign language should be regarded as the main way of doing so. Therefore, to learn its basics can be included in general trainings for coaches, as well as offered as part of possible budgets granted by clubs' municipalities, the KNVB or Gehandicaptensport.

7.1 Limitations

The ability of sign language is also related to the limitations of this research. While sign and text interpreters are fully useful to communicate with deaf and hard of hearing people, not being able to

sign also hinders the spontaneity of doing observations and holding conversations. Much less fluently if I could have directly conversed with others, interpreters are still some sort of obstacle in between that generate a sense of distance between myself and others. Therefore, it is highly important to learn the language of the people one focuses its research on. It will also take away the double-interpretation of words said by people – first by the interpreter, then by me – and therefore compose a story most true to their words (or signs).

Another limitation has been the finding of interlocutors who are hard of hearing or deaf and part of hearing or G-teams. Other than deaf teams, which can directly be found under the KNDSB or KNVB, team players part of hearing and G-teams are not necessarily 'registered' anywhere. Therefore, I have not been able to give an equal overview of experiences in all types of teams.

Furthermore, I have chosen football and futsal as the main sports to focus on, as they are the largest in The Netherlands, and therefore have many more sports-related events and experiences than other deaf team sports do. While football and futsal have given great exemplifying insights into experiences of inclusion and participation of deaf and hard of hearing people – other team sports are not as popular, and therefore do not yet offer the same facilities or exist as deaf sports at all. It would therefore be valuable for sports organisations to see how they could be formed nonetheless, potentially by integrating them into hearing clubs as well.

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Appendix

Nederlandse samenvatting (Dutch summary)

Dit onderzoek heeft zich gericht op de ervaringen van dove en slechthorende veld- en zaalvoetballers, evenals andere teamsporters, met betrekking tot inclusie en participatie in de sport. Hierbij zijn er achttien semigestructureerde interviews en één survey afgenomen, waarvan een paar met betrokkenen binnen de dovensport of andere gerelateerde organisaties of projecten. Verder hebben er zo'n vijftien tot twintig observaties plaatsgevonden op meerdere locaties binnen veld- en zaalvoetbal, waaronder bij het Nederlands Dovenelftal, de dove zaalvoetbal competitie, en bij de horende zaalvoetbal competitie. Hierbij zijn de wedstrijden van specifieke dove teams geïntegreerd in een club (ten behoeve van privacy vernoemd als de INCU) bijgewoond. Daarnaast zijn een aantal zaalvoetbal toernooien via livestreams bekeken, gezien deze in het buitenland plaatsvonden.

Als een slechthorende (oud-)handballer heb ik mijn eigen ervaringen van inclusie en participatie in teamsport meegenomen, doch niet als centrale draad door de hoofdstukken heen. In plaats daarvan heeft het de mogelijkheid gegeven overeenkomsten en verschillen in ervaringen te herkennen en te reflecteren. Daarbij heeft het vooral unieke inzichten in ervaringen kunnen bieden voor een ander slechthorend persoon die opgegroeid is in de horende wereld, en die mogelijk de dove wereld in zou willen stappen – bijvoorbeeld door middel van sport.

Het is daarom ook dat ik mij eerst heb gericht op de ervaringen en houding van mensen met betrekking tot hun gehoor zelf. Door te reflecteren op hun levensweg vanaf het moment dat zij een verminderd gehoor hadden – wat voornamelijk vanaf de geboorte al zo was en voor anderen progressief of plotseling op een later moment – werd ook zichtbaarder hoe dit gehoor specifiek invloed had op hun algemene manier van leven. Onderscheid hierin is vooral gemaakt in het opgroeien in de horende en dove wereld; het hebben geleerd van gebarentaal of niet; het in contact zijn met andere slechthorenden of doven; en de familiedynamiek van waaruit belangrijke beslissingen zijn gemaakt, zoals het type reguliere of dove school die men heeft doorlopen. Al deze factoren hebben invloed gehad op hoe mensen kijken naar en zich gedragen met hun gehoor, en in welke 'wereld' zij zich het meest thuis voelen. Daaruit kwam voort dat alhoewel veel mensen als kinderen van horende én dove scholen en sporten onderdeel zijn geweest, zij zich uiteindelijk het meest thuis voelen in de dove wereld en sport. Het gebruik van gebarentaal is hierbij de vooraanstaande rol en, zoals door de meesten geacht, de basis van de dovengemeenschap. Het gebruik van gehoorapparatuur is voor sommigen een manier om in de horende wereld te kunnen participeren, maar druist voor anderen tegen hun dovengemeenschapsgevoel in.

Als het Nationaal Sportakkoord en project Ongehoord Sportief dan in de ervaringen van inclusie en participatie worden meegenomen, is het van belang aan te duiden hoe dit verschil in werelden en bijbehorende taal met thuisgevoel van grote invloed zijn. Inclusief sporten en bewegen,

als één van de doelen van het Nationaal Sportakkoord, is hier dus niet alleen de simpele handelingen of middelen op en langs het veld – het gaat ook om een thuisgevoel die moet worden gecreëerd – en bij doven wordt dit eigenlijk alleen door middel van gebarentaal ervaren.

Het integreren van dove teams en clubs in horende clubs, één van de doelen van project Ongehoord Sportief, is bij de INCU en een volleybalvereniging al succesvol gebleken. Bij de INCU zijn meerdere heren- en damesteams die in de horende competitie, dove competitie en internationale toernooien kunnen spelen. En net zoals dat deze verandering horende spelers heeft aangetrokken bij de dove teams in horende competities mee te doen – het daarmee creëren van een zogeheten 'omgekeerd integratie' – trainen de horende, dove en slechthorende volleyballers ook gemengd met elkaar. Juist door lang contact tussen verschillende mensen kan een habitus worden gecreëerd: een bepaald kader vanuit waar men waarneemt, denkt en handelt (Bourdieu, 1987). Daarbij is wel een punt dat dit vooral succesvol blijkt als er meerdere dove of slechthorende spelers in een team zitten en daarmee geen dominerende meerderheid van één groep en hún habitus overheerst. Vanuit ervaringen van andere spelers is namelijk gebleken dat de enige slechthorende of dove in een horende team zijn een stuk meer barrières opleverde. Niet alleen is er gebrek aan onderlinge herkenning wegens gebrek aan andere slechthorenden of doven, aanpassingen zijn ook moeilijker toe te passen. Hier moet daarom ook onderscheid worden gemaakt tussen fysieke participatie – het fysiek mee kunnen doen tijdens de sport zelf, en sociale participatie – het kunnen volgen van en meepraten met gesprekken en sociaal betrokken zijn in de groep. Alhoewel fysieke participatie nog steeds anders kan zijn, in de zin dat communicatie niet altijd wordt opgevangen, is het vooral sociale participatie die voor velen bepalend is in hun ervaringen en keuzes binnen sport.

Qua toegankelijkheid is niet alleen het fysieke en sociale aspect een belangrijk onderdeel, maar ook het financiële. Gezien spelers zich moeten aanmelden bij meerdere clubs (horende, dove) als zij bijvoorbeeld bij het Nederlands Dovenelftal maar ook bij de dove competitie zelf willen spelen, moeten zij ook vaak van ver reizen om deze doof-gerelateerde evenementen te kunnen bijwonen. Voor sommigen brengt dit dus hoge kosten met zich mee. Zoals door sommige participanten is gedeeld heeft een aanzienlijk deel van doven en sommige slechthorenden moeite met het vinden van een baan in de horende wereld die én voor hen werkt in verband met hun gehoor, én een gelijkstaand inkomen biedt. Het dan moeten betalen van extra kosten om te kunnen sporten creëert dan wel een drempel. Daarnaast is vooral het mogelijk maken van internationale toernooien zoals de Deaflympics, Wereldkampioenschap en Europees kampioenschap, waarbij het financiële aspect een hinder is gebleken. Alhoewel fondsen vanuit de KNDSB dit vooral moeten dekken, is dat niet altijd genoeg. Het gevolg is dat de mensen zelf geld bij elkaar moeten verzamelen, wat ze door middel van geldinzamelingsacties en het samenwerkende karakter van de dovengemeenschap ook daadwerkelijk is gelukt – maar het niet zou moeten. Een welkome stap is, zoals een medewerker van NOC*NSF zelf al heeft beaamd, het integreren van de KNDSB binnen hun organisatie zoals de KNVB dat is. Op deze manier kan het NOC*NSF meer of hogere budgetten doorvoeren naar de KNDSB die vallen binnen

de eisen vanuit het Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, of hen op andere manieren ondersteunen.

Naast de indirecte ervaringen van inclusie en thuisgevoel is er dus ook sprake van meer direct observeerbare handelingen en middelen die inclusie in sport kunnen verbeteren – in welk soort team dan ook. Deze kwamen voort uit de ervaringen en tips die zijn gedeeld door de participanten. Naast dat het gebruik van gebarentaal al is genoemd als het vooraanstaande onderdeel, is het zelf bedenken van gebaren die vervolgens staan voor bepaalde system of tactieken in een sport ook aan te raden. Ook mimiek, lichaamshouding en mogelijkheid tot liplezen zijn behulpzaam, wat betekent dat mensen die communiceren met doven of slechthorenden aangeraden worden te allen tijde hen aan te kijken. Dit geldt dus ook voor de coach of trainer wanneer instructies of besprekingen worden gedeeld. Het is daarbij nuttig om deze instructies en besprekingen zo kort en krachtig mogelijk te houden, gezien lange zinnen en toespraken veel focus en energie kunnen kosten en de draad ervan kan worden kwijtgeraakt. Het hierbij inzetten van een schrijf- of gebarentolk kan ook behulpzaam zijn, afhankelijk van wat het individu nodig heeft en of zij zelf gebarentaal kunnen. Ook de algemene omgang vanuit de coach en spelers jegens het individu kan anders, en meer gebaseerd op geduld en tijd – hierdoor krijgt het individu genoeg ruimte om binnen het team te navigeren – vooral als dit een ‘horend’ team betreft. Andere handelingen die hierbij ondersteunen en die in de dove wereld al worden gebruikt, is het aantikken van een persoon en hen laten omdraaien alvorens men iets begint te zeggen. Dit geeft het individu namelijk de kans te focussen op het geluid of, in het gebrek daaraan, het mondbeeld. Ook het zwaaien of fladderen met de hand in iemands zicht; het knipperen met het licht in een kleedkamer; of het stompen op een vloer van een sportzaal zijn handelingen die helpen aandacht van doven en slechthorenden te vragen, en die binnen de dovensport ook al worden toegepast.

Met betrekking tot inclusieve middelen gebruiken sommigen al gehoorapparatuur; anders wordt pen en papier ook gebruikt om boodschappen op te schrijven; en maken sommige teams ook gebruik van magneetborden waarop het veld is afgebeeld en waarmee een bepaalde speelwijze kan worden gevisualiseerd. Dit is uiteraard ook toe te passen op een whiteboard type bord, waarin tactieken juist met de stift worden uitgedrukt.

In het willen bereiken van inclusie en participatie voor doven en slechthorenden in welke sport dan ook, is het dus van belang niet alleen te kijken naar de directe observeerbare handelingen en middelen die plaatsvinden op het sportveld of in de kleedkamer, maar ook naar hoe het gehoor – of, in het geval van een andere lichaamsvariatie, bijvoorbeeld zicht of mobiliteit – ook een algemene rol speelt in het leven van een individu: hoe het gehoor en het individu zelf zich navigeert binnen werk, school en sociale interacties hebben indirecte gevolgen voor hoe sport zelf ervaren wordt.

Topic list

Category 1 to 4 are originally composed for the deaf and hard of hearing players of this research. For some interlocutors, this could be in combination with category 5, and this one is aimed at official actors, focusing on the NSA policy, program OS, and/or other events or projects going on. That is not to say they are exhaustive – as players themselves can also form views on how the processes of these policies, programs, and so on. This is especially so for those involved in sports clubs' organisation.

For the survey, I have typed out categories 1 to 4 from bullet points into sentences as if they were spoken out loud. The respondent had an unlimited amount of space to answer these questions.

1. **Hearing / identity**

- Audiogram: medically, what is the extent of reduced hearing?
- Labels used: socially, how does one identify themselves? To reflect on: handicap, disability, impairment); the 'to have vs to be' in regard to an impairment or reduced hearing
- Use of language: verbal Dutch, NGT, NmG, or other
- Use of hearing devices: which ones, why, or why not? Effect on one's identity/labels used
- Experiences with strangers in regard to one's hearing (the aspect of invisibility included)
- Experiences with friends, families, and other acquaintances in regard to one's hearing (the aspect of invisibility included)
- Effect on one's own attitude: as an identity, the role of invisibility, use of hearing devices, language (in past and present, denoting a fluent sense of identity and belonging)

2. **Role of the social and physical environment: past and present**

- Role of the family: choices made in regard to education (regular, deaf, other?); choices made in regard to languages learned
- Role of friends: from which environments (hearing, deaf); the foundation of friendships, the role of one's hearing as part of this foundation
- Also: the potential presence of other deaf or hard of hearing people in one's environments (or not): what was/is the influence? Reflecting on the past, would one have liked it differently?
- Thus: what kind of support systems (social, financial, etc) were in place or desired?

3. **Inclusion and participation**

- Individual's experiences with their environments and the people within; plus, what are the type of environments/worlds/networks they are part of – and are they deliberately chosen?
- Sense of belonging, feeling at home
- Sense of solidarity/togetherness
- Sense of being different/odd one out

- Therefore: where/with whom one can truly be themselves?
- One's individual attitude as cause and result of influential environments/people?
- To what extent does one have to adapt themselves to particular environments: with specific sports, education, people vs to what extent they adapt (or cannot/unwilling) to adapt to the individual
- What is inclusion? How could this be achieved? (Mostly sports, side-focus on daily life)

4. **Football / futsal / other team sports**

- Choices made in types of teams, and why + role of their networks/habitus
- Full to sufficient accessibility to play the sport? In types of accessibility (social, financial, etc); attitude of the sports club; its distance to one's home
- Compositions of the team sports in terms of number of deaf or hard of hearing players + coach and trainer: mapping the space
- Category 3 placed in the context of sports (and partly education): inclusion in sports; invisibility; attitudes/experiences with players and coaches or trainers
- Thus: individual experiences of inclusion (solidarity; belonging) or exclusion (odd one out) within a team or club
- Expectations from the club/players/coach on the individual and/vs the expectations of the individual on themselves
- Which supporting/inclusive tools (or not) that help sports/social participation? Implicit (behaviour, habits, prolonged period of time) and explicit (verbal expressions, anecdotes). Such as social or financial tools; physical attributes; behaviour; sign language; adapted expectations;
- The 'dream': the most ideal situation for the individual while playing team sports: describing how/when they feel best and truthfully like themselves; where they are able to achieve what they would like to achieve (sports, social, belonging, recognition, team building, etc) + what is needed to achieve this?

5. **Policies / policy officers / others involved**

- Used definitions and labels of concepts and goals as part of the policy / program / etc, such as: inclusion, reduced hearing, impairment, integration
- Reflection on potential exclusion by aiming for inclusion
- Current developments after implemented policy / program
- Is it already raising (research) questions in regard to sport?
- Role of interviewee in policy's or program's process and result: their tasks
- Their expectations of its processes and goals
- Extent of involvement with the focusgroup (deaf and hard of hearing people)

- Funding: how is it delegated, what are future plans?
- Attitudes of sports clubs in regard to policies and programs