



Report

Evaluation European Para Championships 2023

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Commissioned by European Para Championships bv

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We develop knowledge and research methods through exploratory and in-depth studies.

We interpret research findings and translate them into policy practice.

We support policy decisions with expertise and advice.

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Abbreviations

EPC bv	European Para Championships bv (organizer)
EPC 2023	European Para Championships 2023
Foundation SFE	Foundation Sports For Everyone

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European Para Championships in numbers

Sport disciplines (number)	10
Competition days (number)	13
Locations (number)	7
Budget EPC 2023 organization (million euros)	30
Athletes (number)	1,134
Countries represented (number)	41
Ancillary activities (number)	38
Overall evaluation EPC 2023 by athletes (average rating scale 1-10)	8.5
Overall evaluation EPC 2023 by staff (average rating scale 1-10)	8.5
Overall evaluation EPC 2023 by visitors (average rating scale 1-10)	8.5
Overall evaluation EPC 2023 by volunteers (average rating scale 1-10)	8.6
Evaluation helpfulness volunteers by athletes (average rating scale 1-10)	8.8
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Extent to which expectations by athletes were met or exceeded (%)	94
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Introduction

This chapter provides the introduction of the evaluation of the European Para Championships 2023. The background, the objectives and research methods are described. Lastly, a reading guide is presented.

1.1 Background

The European Para Championships (EPC) 2023 are a new international multi-sport event for elite athletes with physical disabilities. The event combines European Championships (ECs) in ten sport disciplines: para archery, para badminton, boccia, para cycling, goalball, para judo, shooting para sport, para taekwondo, wheelchair basketball and wheelchair tennis.

The EPC 2023 took place at seven locations in Rotterdam:

- Rotterdam Ahoy (indoor).¹
- Rotterdam Ahoy (outdoor).
- City Centre Court Schouwburgplein.
- City Centre Court Kop van Zuid.
- City Centre Court Willem Alexander baan.
- City Centre Court Tennis Club Victoria.
- City Centre Court Scheepvaartkwartier.

The EPC 2023 concept was conceived by sport event organizer Team TOC, and its subsidiary, European Para Championships bv, owns the event concept. The inaugural event took place from August 8 to August 20, 2023, in Rotterdam. 1,134 athletes from 41 countries competed for European titles and qualification for the 2024 Paralympic Games in Paris (European Para Championships bv, 2023). With 33 medals, the Netherlands reached the third place in the medal table, after Italy (48 medals) and France (67 medals).

European Para Championships bv aims to establish the EPC as a recurring event on the international elite sports event calendar, with plans to organize it every four years in different European cities after 2023.

European Para Championships bv has requested the Mulier Institute and Rebel to carry out an evaluation of the EPC 2023.

1.2 Objective

The objective of the study is twofold:

1. Evaluating the EPC 2023 through the perspective of the seven stakeholder groups: (1) organization and partners, (2) athletes and

¹ Rotterdam Ahoy is a multi-purpose complex with a convention center and indoor arena's.

- staff, (3) visitors, (4) media partners, (5) sport federations, (6) volunteers and (7) residents of Rotterdam;
- 2. Inventory of the activities organized around EPC 2023 in the Netherlands.

The results can offer lessons for the future. Lessons for European Para Championships bv as well as for the Dutch sports events sector in general. Additionally, international dissemination of the research findings can contribute to the ambitions of stakeholders to further strengthen the positioning of the Netherlands as a ‘leading country’ in the field of elite (para) sports events.

This evaluation covers many aspects of the EPC 2023. Various organizations and persons were involved in the organization of this event. European Para Championships bv was responsible for most of the work, but was not in the position to manage all aspects of the event (e.g. parking prices near Rotterdam Ahoy, food and drinks in Rotterdam Ahoy).

1.3 Method

The project is divided into seven subprojects, in which both quantitative and qualitative research has been conducted. Data collection occurred through document analysis, face-to-face surveys (interviews) and online surveys (table 1.1). The face-to-face and the online surveys were in Dutch or in English.

Table 1.1
Methods per subproject

Subprojects	Document analysis	Face-to-face surveys	Online surveys
Organization and partners	•	•	
Athletes and staff		•	•
Visitors		•	•
Media partners	•	•	
Sport federations	•	•	
Volunteers			•
Residents of Rotterdam			•

Organization and partners

Thirteen persons were interviewed in the weeks after the EPC 2023. Some were consulted before the event too.

Athletes and staff

125 athletes and 136 staff members completed the survey. During the event, the surveys were conducted face-to-face. After the EPC 2023, the online survey was distributed via WhatsApp and email.

Visitors

436 visitors completed the survey. During the event, the surveys were conducted face-to-face. After the EPC 2023, the online survey was distributed via email to all ticket buyers.

Media partners

Two media professionals were interviewed in the weeks after the EPC 2023.

Sport federations

Ten interviews were conducted during and after the EPC 2023 with representatives of the sport federations.

Volunteers

195 volunteers completed in the online survey in the two weeks after the EPC 2023.

Residents of Rotterdam

3,635 residents of Rotterdam completed the survey and 53 residents partially completed the survey.

More information about the methods per subproject can be found in appendix 1.



Reading guide

This report is structured per subproject: 2) organization and partners, 3) Athletes and staff, 4) visitors, 5) media partners, 6) sport federations, 7) volunteers, 8) residents of Rotterdam. Lastly, a conclusion and recommendations will be given in chapter 9.



GER		NED	
1. OBERMÄLLER M.	2	0. de JONGE F.	1
4. GÜNTHER M.	2	1. POGGENMISCH R.	2
6. HUBER C.	2	2. OP den OTHEN M.	3
8. HELL T.	2	3. CIGEL A.	4
9. SCHÖNBERG L.	2	7. de ROEP P.	7
10. WÄLDL E.	2	11. BELLERS M.	11
11. SÄSSLER J.	2	12. EYEN G.	12
12. ALBRECHT J.	2	15. ZANTINGHE G.	15
13. SCHNIG T.	2	17. TWIGET A.	17
14. HANCOCK A.	2	21. van TRIP C.	21
15. BLADE A.	2	23. KORNHART M.	23
16. LAUBMANN J.	2	28. van LERIE L.	28

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Organization and partners

This chapter describes the goals as regards the organization of the EPC 2023. Thereafter, the results about the EPC 2023 as a sport event are presented. The EPC 2023 were also seen as a platform for supplemental activities. Finally, a conclusion is described.

2.1 Goals of the organizations involved

The EPC is intended to be more than just a sport event. With this event, partners aim to contribute to a variety of goals. That contribution is made not only by the 2023 edition, but also by future EPCs and by other events and activities.

The Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport stated that they did not specify particular objectives for this event, as – in their opinion - this did not suit their position as grantor. The organizer of the EPC 2023 did formulate a number of conditions for a successful event. However, as far as we could observe, goals for the EPC 2023 are mostly formulated on a general level.

This makes it difficult to evaluate whether the goals for the EPC 2023 have been met. As a result, we were asked to evaluate the extent to which the EPC 2023 contributed to various (policy) goals, and what lessons can be learned from the 2023 edition to increase the impact of future EPCs - as opposed to answering the question if the event was a success.

From the literature review and interviews with partners², we derived seven goals to which the EPC 2023 could contribute:

- Encouraging participation in sports and physical activity by people with disabilities.
- Improving the accessibility (practical, social and physical) of sports.
- Increasing public awareness about the position and abilities of disabled people. Relating to this goal, the organizer stated sufficient public attention (full stands and broad media exposure) as an important condition for success.
- Strengthening the image of the Netherlands as a leader in the organization of international (para) sport events.
- The professionalization and further development of paralympic sports. Relating to this goal, the organizer stated the creation of cross-pollination between National Federation's (NFs), clubs and athletes as an important condition for success.
- Creating an internationally oriented storyline and ensuring the continuity of the EPC (legacy).

² Representatives of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, EPC bv, Foundation SFE, Foundation Disability Sports, the association of Sports and Municipalities, NOC*NSF and the 'Rotterdam partners': the municipality of Rotterdam (including expert Rita van Driel), Rotterdam Topsport, Rotterdam Sportsupport and Foundation MEE.

- Encouraging inclusive working. Although this appeared in earlier documentation, it seems to have been abandoned as a specific goal during the preparation phase.

The relevance of these goals varies by partner and target group. The table below illustrates that in a simplified manner.

Table 2.1
Goals of partner organizations

Goal	Municipality of Rotterdam and partners	Foundation SFE	Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport	NOC*NSF	EPC bv	Target group
Participation in sport and physical activity	•	•				Citizens, people with disability
Accessibility	•					People with disability
Public awareness	•	•				Citizens
Image of the Netherlands			•	•		IFs
Professionalization					•	IFs, NFs, athletes
Continuity of EPC						Various

Some of these goals could be achieved through the sport event itself, some through the platform that the event offers for creating positive impact to society, and some through the combination of the two. In this chapter, we distinguish between the EPC as a sport event on the one hand (paragraph 2.2) and the EPC as a platform on the other (paragraph 2.3).

2.2 The EPC 2023 as a sport event

The event

In short, the timeline up until the EPC 2023 was as follows:

- August 2019: idea of the EPC was born.
- September-December 2019: desk research.
- January 2020: 'kick-off' meeting in Eindhoven about the EPC concept.
- 2019-2021: brainstorm meetings with potential stakeholders.
- December 2020: the European Paralympic Committee formally confirms to support the EPC 2023, as well as the ambition to organize the event every four years. The committee also gives European Para Championships bv the right to use the event as regional championships or regional games.
- February 2021: mostly positive results of feasibility study and study as regards potential societal value (Hover & Heijnen, 2021; Koning, Gerdes & Hover, 2021).

- December 2022: official confirmation of funding from the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports.
- April 2022: press release on first EPC to be held in Rotterdam.
- February 2023: the Foundation SFE was founded.
- 6-20 August 2023: the European Para Championships 2023 were held.

The first steps towards the EPC as a new international sport event were made in 2019. Sport marketing agency Team TOC is the initiator of the event. In January 2020, they brought together (potential) key stakeholders – including NOC*NSF and the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport – in Eindhoven for the first time to discuss the idea.

In the preparation phase for the EPC 2023, Team TOC acted as initiator and coordinator, and maintained contact with potential host cities, broadcasters, International Federation's (IFs), NFs and the ministry as intended grantor.

Because the EPC was a new concept and no one knew what to expect, it took a lot of effort from Team TOC to get things off the ground.

'There are four crucial players in this, and in the beginning they were all waiting for each other: the media [broadcasters], IFs, the host city and the ministry (grantor). The media want to know which sports will be competing, if the national government had confirmed and if there is an enthusiastic host city. IFs want to know whether a host city has been established, the national government is confirmed, the media is involved, and so on. At some point the local organizing committee just started making agreements with the IFs, because otherwise the specific European Championships would be awarded to another country. So they decided to take the financial and organizational risk with little commitments.'

A crucial precondition in establishing the EPC was finding an interested host city early in the process. Team TOC identified a few potential host cities and started talks with the cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Amsterdam did not prove to be a feasible opportunity, mainly because of another large international sport event that was held in the same period (World Gymnaestrada).

Meetings with the city of Rotterdam did give a positive outcome, as the EPC fit well in the local sport policy (Municipality of Rotterdam, 2021). Rotterdam agreed to host the first edition of the EPC, but at that time there was no financial commitment from the municipality agreed upon yet.

It was clear from the start that organizing the EPC 2023 would not be financially feasible without government funding. The total budget of the EPC 2023 was around 30 million euros, of which approximately 50 per cent was covered by grants: (14 million euros from the ministry and 1 million euros from the municipality of Rotterdam).

The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport has formulated specific rules for providing grants for sport events. Certain events can be classified as 'extraordinary'. In that case, a custom-made funding scheme is set up.

Because the yearly budget of the ministry for elite sport events is limited (around 8 million euros per year), their preferred option was to generate an occasional financial contribution from state treasury (through the Ministry of Finance) for the grant. However, that route did not yield success. One factor that worked to the ministry's disadvantage was the discontinuity in government officials.

'Common sport events can apply for a grant of 2.5 million euros at maximum: no Parliamentary approval is required for each specific case. Extraordinary events can ask for a much higher financial support, which has to be approved by Parliament beforehand. This makes the political decision-making process more complex and-time consuming. The process for the EPC 2023 was extra complicated because the cabinet lost its parliamentary majority and there was a high number of shifts in ministers and secretaries of state for sports in that period.'

Eventually, the ministry did manage to bring together the funds. A relatively large part came from their regular budget for elite sport events (combining budgets of 2022, 2023 and 2024), another part came from different areas of the sport budget (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, 2022).

The confirmation that the Dutch government would actually provide the requested grant to the organizer, came with the letter to parliament in December 2022. EPC bv is the grantee and will have to report to the ministry about the efforts undertaken and the ways in which the grant is utilized.

In order to approve the grant application, the ministry had to assess whether it would contribute to their policy objectives, which was found to be the case. But they were (legally) not allowed to add additional performance requirements for the grantee.

The city of Rotterdam initially told the organizer that they had insufficient resources to provide funding for the EPC 2023. The city's budget for hosting sport events is limited and usually established beforehand for many years to come; at that time, there were also hopes of winning bids for the first stages of the Tour de France and the Youth Olympic Games in the near future.

After talks between Team TOC, the ministry and the municipality, Rotterdam ultimately decided to contribute 1 million euros to the event.

● Reflections by interviewees

Taking into account how difficult it was to keep everyone on board and to get this new sport event off the ground, many interviewees praise the perseverance by a

few individuals – mostly from Team TOC and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. It is generally felt that if persons from these organisations would not have taken such a big effort in pushing through, the preparations for the EPC 2023 could have ceased at many points in time.

Also, the amount of risk the organizer seemed willing to take, given the relatively long state of uncertainty the EPC 2023 was in, is valued by several interviewees. This relates to the commitment of government funding. The organizer struggled with the timing of this commitment, as it came no sooner than in the fall of 2022, while the event was to be held in August 2023. According to the organizer, this eventually did not influence the speed of preparations too much, but it did take long before it became clear what the level of ambition for the event was that the organizer could work with. Eventually, the organization managed to go for the most ambitious of the scenarios.

Other interviewees highlight another downside of this timing issue: it made it hard to attract private sponsoring – as this generally requires plenty of preparation time and takes a long haul.

Another difficulty for the organizer is the timing of the cash transfers. The government grant was made available in separate parts in 2022 and 2023, and the last part will be transferred in 2024. The organizer therefore had to finance relatively large amounts of money and carry substantial interest costs.

Activities

For a sketch of the program of the EPC 2023, see chapter 1.

Results

In this paragraph, we will focus on the most important findings coming from interviews with partners that were closely involved with the event.

● Organization

The way in which the EPC 2023 were organized is perceived as very professional by most interviewees. Several people pointed out that they noticed pride and appreciation among athletes about all the things that were organized for them.

A few interviewees wonder whether the EPC 2023 were not set up too big. They especially point out the opening ceremony as being a bit over the top, but on the other hand acknowledge that the EPC 2023 has now set a high standard for future editions.

'The high level of organization also affected business visitors; they rated the EPC [2023] very highly as a result.'

'The EPC [2023] were big, sometimes if felt almost "too" big. On the one hand, that's good, because you really want to show that you take athletes seriously. But was it all necessary? And also: with such a high level, don't you set the bar too high for future EPCs?'

It is also pointed out by several interviewees that the EPC 2023 were a cost effective sport event, as it was organized with a relatively small budget compared to other international elite multi-sport events.

● **Bringing it to the people**

An important aspect of the EPC 2023 was the concept of bringing disability sports to the people (potential visitors). The main venue was Rotterdam Ahoy, but for several matches, the organization selected iconic spots in the city centre of Rotterdam. Many interviewees mention the activities that took place at Schouwburgplein (boccia in particular) and at Kop van Zuid as memorable.

Several interviewees point out that the attendance rates at Rotterdam Ahoy were perceived as relatively low at certain times.

'I was looking at boccia on Schouwburgplein, standing behind two ladies who literally said to each other that they were impressed by the capabilities of the athletes. That is the type of spin-off from such a sport event that you only get to experience if you are there.'

'Boccia at Schouwburgplein was my personal highlight. It is a relatively unknown sport for many people, which was really marketed well in this set-up and where many people stuck around.'

'The enthusiasm for road cycling was limited. And I heard the athletes themselves were also not too enthusiastic about the track [near the Willem Alexander baan].'

● **Multi-sport event**

The number of sports in the EPC 2023 was satisfying, considering it was the first time this new event was hosted, as was pointed out by a few interviewees. One person emphasizes that wheelchair basketball was the only sport that can draw enough attention on its own; the other sports benefitted from that and also from each other.

It appears that the multi-sport aspect of this new sport event worked out well. Some interviewees state that the appreciation from IFs and athletes about the combination of sports was noticeable. One person also specifically points out the

'Athlete's home' at Rotterdam Ahoy as a successful way of stimulating encounters between people from different sports. Furthermore, combining ten sports in one event made it possible to attract more media attention for a parasport event.

'The EPC [2023] was different in design from the European Games. There you saw that it was not so much perceived as a multi-sport event. But at the EPC [2023] there were an opening ceremony, mixing of different athletes/teams in the same hotel and many sports held at one location (Rotterdam Ahoy). Good chance it was actually experienced as a multi-sport event by the athletes now, more so than at the European Games.'

● National Sport Federations

A few interviewees raised their concerns about the contribution that NFs (can) make when it comes to sports for disabled people. There are differences between NFs, but in general there is a feeling that most of them lack the capacity and knowledge to bring parasport to a higher level.

One person states that it is often given too little priority, especially within NFs that represent both sports for people with and without disabilities. It is also acknowledged that there can be big differences between the NFs of European countries.

'Look at taekwondo, for example. The Dutch taekwondo federation does not have a separate section for elite [para]sports. But internationally, taekwondo on the elite level is huge.'

● Image of the Netherlands

One interviewee mentions that the responses from other countries about the EPC 2023 have been very positive. Also, the IPC has praised the pioneering role the Netherlands has taken in organizing this first-timer.

If the EPC 2023 will probably been given a follow-up in the years the come, this could reflect positively on the Netherlands as a country raising the bar in (para)sport events. It might indirectly also help people throughout the Dutch sports sector getting into more notable strategic international positions. Whether this impact will actually be made is hard to tell.

Lessons and recommendations

From the results of the interviews with main partners of the EPC 2023, we have extracted the following lessons and recommendations for future EPCs and for other sport events in the Netherlands:

- There were discussions in the pre-EPC 2023 period about whether or not to ask an entrance fee (for sports taking place in the indoor venue Rotterdam Ahoy) (Hover & Heijnen, 2021). It seems that there is support for the decision to do so. However, although the entrance fee was regarded as quite

reasonable, in combination with the costs for transportation and for food/drinks, it could still build up to an expensive day trip, especially for families or other groups. It is recommended to reconsider the price objective and get a grip on price elasticity.

- In general, the attendance rate at Rotterdam Ahoy was perceived as relatively low. However, it is possible that the organisation of separate championships would have attracted less visitors than the EPC 2023 and that expectations as regards the number of visitors during the EPC 2023 ran (unrealistically) high. Future hosts of the EPC could use the insights of the 2023 edition about peak and off-peak hours, and adapt a strategy to stimulate attendance in the off-peak periods.
- Two aspects in which the EPC 2023 was rated as quite successful were: bringing the sports to the people and promoting cross-pollination between different sports/athletes. Future EPCs can learn from the 2023 edition on those aspects. However, there is also a trade-off to be considered: the more sports are spread across different (public) venues, the more opportunity to bring it to the people, but also the less potential for cross-pollination between athletes.
- For the next EPCs, it is recommended to rethink the selection of 'big' and 'small' sports, to make the event more robust. Volleyball, rugby and swimming are examples of well-known crowd-pullers. Obviously this requires major organisational challenges. It could also lower the number of (potential) host cities as sport facilities are required (e.g. swimming pool).

2.3 The EPC 2023 as a platform

The platform

In 2021, Rebel and the Mulier Institute conducted a preliminary study of the societal impact that could potentially be achieved with the EPC 2023 (Koning, Gerdes & Hover, 2021). The authors concluded that there was a sound potential for positive societal impact, mainly through the platform that such an event creates to build an extensive program for social activities (leveraging).

Also, two preconditions were mentioned in the study to generate this impact: starting preparations for a social program well in advance of the event (preferably in 2021) and setting up a distinct body that is made responsible for the program.

In February 2023, the Foundation SFE was founded. The EPC 2023 were the direct cause to establish this foundation, but the scope of the foundation is broader than that and the goal is to maintain it for a longer period of time.

The foundation was granted 250,000 euros by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and also received contributions from Fonds Gehandicaptensport and the EPC by The statutory goal of the foundation is: 'to develop a social program aimed at increasing sports participation and that can be adapted on top of various national and international para(top) sporting events'.

Activities

Appendix 2 contains a list of activities that were organized by the main partners of the EPC 2023 and that were aimed at creating a positive societal impact.

- NOC*NSF and the Vereniging Sport en Gemeenten (VSG) mainly used the momentum of the EPC 2023 to host meetings in Rotterdam Ahoy with stakeholders on various topics.
- The collaborating partners of Rotterdam undertook multiple activities focusing on promotion of participation in sports and physical activity, accessibility and public awareness. Those were held in and around Rotterdam Ahoy and in other parts of Rotterdam.
- Fonds Gehandicaptensport organized own activities (such as clinics in Rotterdam Ahoy) and collaborated with the Foundation SFE in a large school program, reaching >500 schools and >5,000 children across the country.
- The NFs organised several activities.

Results

● General picture

The general picture we get from interviewees is that, in the end, a decent number of activities was held around the EPC 2023 and that these were positively appreciated, but that a lot of potential to make impact was left untapped. Several reasons are brought forward, which we discuss below.

'We had some nice examples of activities in Rotterdam. A stand specifically for the visual impaired is one of them, which will probably be repeated for other (sport) events. And also, the activities held at the Sport Plaza by Feyenoord were appreciated highly.'

● Timing of the event

One of the reasons was the timing of the event. Multiple people felt that the organization waited too long with providing clarity on when they could host meetings in Rotterdam Ahoy. On the other hand, European Para Championships bv states that organizations could have taken action as well, by letting the organiser know which meetings they wanted to organise. Save-the-dates for meetings were necessarily sent out relatively late – in some occasions only just before the start of the summer holidays. This led to a disappointing turnout.

Another aspect that was mentioned by several interviewees was the timing of the event in the summer holiday period. They felt that this timing was detrimental to attendance numbers, the involvement of key stakeholders and the impact of the social program. According to the European Para Championships bv it was not possible to organise the EPC 2023 in another period in Rotterdam because of limited availability of Rotterdam Ahoy and budget (according to the organiser it would have been much more expensive to organise the EPC 2023 in another moment in time).

For most athletes and staff this timing in the summer period is probably of less concern, because they are used to adapting their schedule to a major tournament, as was mentioned by one of the interviewees. An important reason to host the EPC 2023 in summer, according to the organization, were the costs to rent out Rotterdam Ahoy; these would have been much higher in other times of the year, which would make the event financially unfeasible.

'The reach of the school program would have been much better if the event was hosted in another period, because the EPC 2023 then could have functioned as a school trip. Compare it to the Invictus Games 2022, where that worked out quite well. Of all the children taking part in the school program, there were few registrations of them visiting Rotterdam Ahoy.'

● Venue costs

The costs to book a meeting room in Rotterdam Ahoy were perceived as high by several interviewees. They would have preferred that the organization made a deal with the venue to rent spaces upfront and rent those out to external partners for a more reasonable rate. Also, one points out that the rooms in Rotterdam Ahoy were not all that representative to receive guests.

● Unfamiliarity

A third bottleneck in reaching more impact through the platform the EPC 2023 had to offer, was the unfamiliarity among stakeholders. Several people stated the expectation that more stakeholders will come forward during next editions of the EPC, now that they have seen what the event is all about.

Two interviewees specifically point out that NFs did not seem fully aware of the magnitude of the event and the podium that it had to offer them.

'I had expected more commitment from the NFs. I also think that not all NFs realized what opportunities lay here. On the other hand, we still see that a lot of NFs are struggling with resources and most of the time there is a lack of technical know-how concerning parasport'

'Was paralympic sport in the Netherlands ready to seize the opportunities of a major event like the EPC? No, I don't think so. But then again, people are actually learning from this. The EPC [2023] were an accelerator. To be honest, I don't think we would have been ready in 2027, 2031 or 2035 either. You need an stimulus as the EPC to get things going.'

● Diffuse roles and responsibilities

However, the most important aspect that all interviewees address is the lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of the organization involved. At various interfaces, the expectations were not well aligned. People were sometimes

expecting others to execute activities, while the others did not feel responsible for them.

These interfaces issues especially occurred in the coordination between on the one hand the Foundation SFE and on the other hand the 'Maatschappelijk Activatie Programma' (Societal Activation Programme), the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport and the collaborating partners in the city of Rotterdam.

'People were waiting for each other to take next step. It did not help that the foundation was pretty new in the field. They do not yet have a position and their mission is unclear for other stakeholders. Moreover, the foundation is lacking serious capacity to organize things.'

'Instead of parties trying to strengthen each other, they mostly avoided each other. For example, the Foundation SFE and Fonds Gehandicaptensport focused mainly on areas outside Rotterdam, because many things were already being organized in Rotterdam by the collaborating parties. That is a missed opportunity.'

There has also been some criticism about the role of NOC*NSF. The expectation among different parties was that NOC*NSF would take a leading position in the social activation program of the EPC 2023. This was not laid down in documentation, as far as we know, but a topic that was discussed during meetings. In the end, NOC*NSF decided not to take on this responsibility, which led to disappointment among stakeholders. NOC*NSF took a seat in the Committee of Recommendation of the Foundation SFE and appointed a colleague with the responsibility of stimulating social activities by NFs and coordination with the Foundation SFE.

Lessons and recommendations

From the results of the interviews with main partners of the EPC 2023, we have extracted the following lessons and recommendations for future EPCs and for other sport events in the Netherlands:

- It is worth investigating whether other arrangements can be made with the main event venue, and also what role the municipality could play in this, with the aim of improving (financial) accessibility for visitors and meeting organizers. There should always be a conscious decision about the trade-off between hosting a new sport event during the holiday period (which is favourable budget-wise) or not (which is favourable for attendance rates and for the reach of the social program).
- Although there will probably not be another large sport event requiring such large contribution from the State anytime soon, it can also not be ruled out in the future. In that case, funding will have to be arranged earlier. Further reflection within the ministry on how to smoothen this process, and also about what role the parliament can have in enforcing financial support on

behalf of the State, would be advisable. In addition, the ministry could reflect on the role they want to play in these types of events, as a large financial contribution is needed, and if there are other mechanisms in place to have more control over the outcome.

- The EPC 2023 missed a single party that took charge and coordinated all activities within the social program. The Foundation SFE was established to take that role, but was founded only half a year before the event took place and it had a limited budget. Looking forward, it is recommended to use the findings in this evaluation study to organize one or more meetings about how to better coordinate supplemental social programs in the future. Key participants in that conversation could be (non-exhaustive): the Foundation SFE, the ministry, partners in Rotterdam, The Association of Sports and Municipalities, Foundation Disability Sports (Fonds Gehandicaptensport), Societal Organization in Sports (Maatschappelijke Organisaties in de Sport), NOC*NSF and the National Fund for Sports (Nationaal Fonds voor de Sport). Also, for future events it is advisable to capture responsibilities and commitments early in the process by signing a letter of intent or reaching a collaboration agreement between the main partners.

2.4 Conclusion

All things considered, we conclude that the EPC 2023 was of a high standard. Very few concessions were made regarding the concept and quality of the event. This is reflected in the current interest that potential future host cities have expressed.

The expectation of European Para Championships by are that multiple cities will submit a bid for the EPC 2027. A point of concern for future host cities is the way in which NFs will be involved in the organization, as this turned out to be a difficult feature of the EPC 2023.

Many Dutch NFs seem to miss the capacity and knowledge level to seriously invest in parasport. The NFs were not able to explore and see the magnitude of this new sport event. That in itself is to be considered an important result of the EPC 2023: because it was a first-timer, the EPC 2023 has set a standard for future elite parasport events, has created valuable new content, and has opened up the eyes of stakeholders about the potential reach of the event.

Partners seem quite proud of the activities that they collectively managed to organize in such a short time frame. However, the platform that the EPC 2023 created had much more potential for positive impact. With more clarity on the responsibilities of the partners involved and a qualified body taking charge and coordinating all activities, more of that potential can be released. An important result of the EPC 2023 are those lessons that can be learned from the preparation phase and from how things were eventually arranged.



Athletes and staff

First we outline the profile of the athletes and staff members. Next, we describe the visit characteristics. Lastly, we present the evaluation of aspects of the EPC 2023 through the eyes of the athletes and staff.

3.1 Profile

Gender

The proportion of men (63%) among the responding athletes was greater than the proportion of women (37%). The same applied to the staff (men: 65%, women: 35%).

Age

The average age of the athletes was 36 years and the average age of staff members was 44 years.

Nationality

The most common nationality was British (athletes 17%, staff 16%). 11 percent of the athletes and 9 percent of the staff members had a Dutch nationality and 8 percent of both groups had a French nationality. The other nationalities (athletes 64%, staff 67%) included Polish, Slovakian and Swiss.

3.2 Characteristics

Sports

1,134 athletes from 41 countries participated in the EPC 2023 (table 3.1). Most athletes participated in basketball and para cycling (European Para Championships bv, 2023).

Table 3.1
Athletes and staff members at the EPC 2023
 (in absolute numbers)

Sport	Athletes	Staff
Boccia	103	191
Shooting para sport	129	132
Para archery	110	99
Wheelchair basketball	208	133
Para badminton	132	89
Wheelchair tennis	52	57
Para cycling	201	212
Goalball	43	40
Para judo	93	66
Para taekwondo	63	53
Total	1,134	*

Source: European Para Championships bv. (2023)

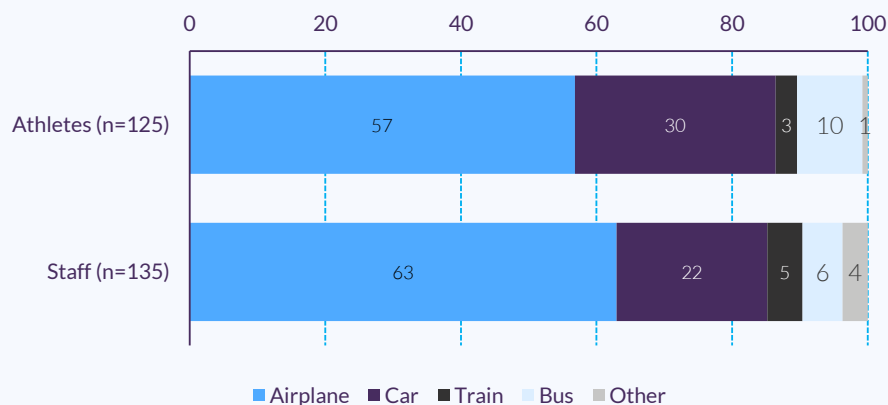
* A total cannot be determined as the same staff members are involved in multiple sports.

The majority of the athletes and staff members who responded were active in boccia or shooting para sport (see appendix 1).

Mode of transportation

Approximately six out of ten athletes and staff members travelled the longest distance by airplane to the EPC 2023 (figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1
Mode of transportation by which athletes and staff members travelled the longest distance to the EPC 2023
 (percentages)



Source: Mulier Institute, survey among athletes and staff at the EPC, 2023.

3.3 Event evaluation

The average rating given for the overall organization of the EPC 2023 is an 8.5 by the athletes and an 8.5 by the staff members (on a scale from one to ten).

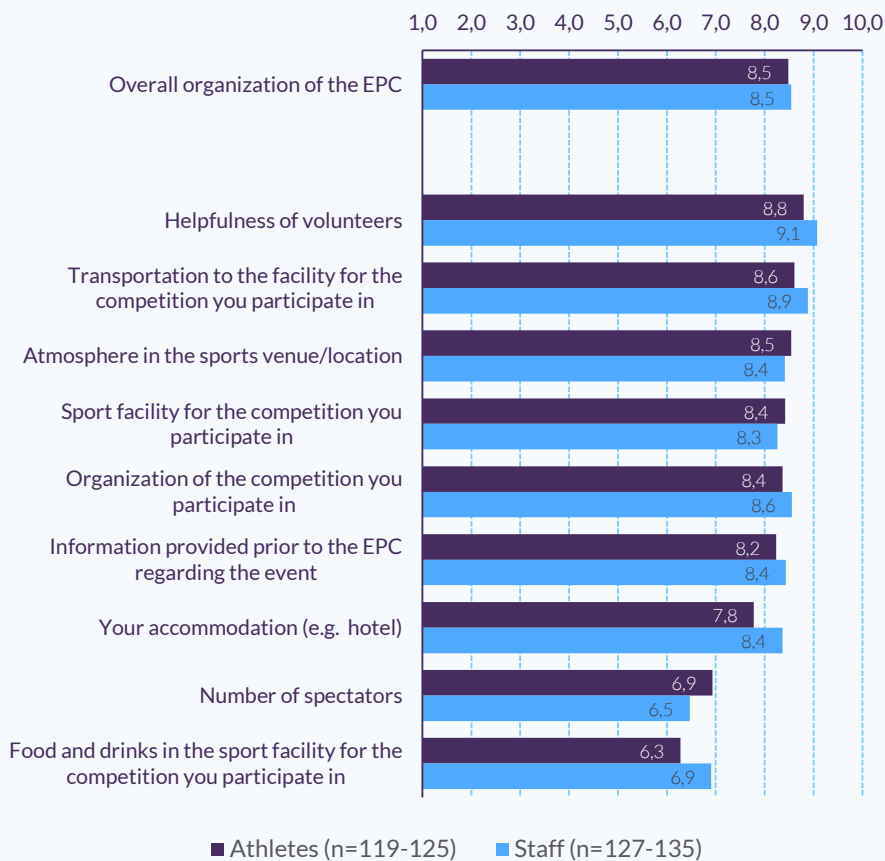
Differences in ratings given by athletes and staff members to specific aspects of the EPC 2023 are minimal. On two aspects the ratings differ significantly between the athletes and the staff members: foods and drinks, and accommodation. Foods and drinks are rated 6.3 by the athletes and 6.9 by the staff members. Accommodation is rated 7.8 by the athletes and 8.4 by the staff members.

It is not clear why the evaluation of the number of spectators is not evaluated more positively. Possibly expectations among athletes and staff ran high – although it was the first time an EPC was organised, resulting in an absence of any reference. European Para Championships bv states that ECs for separate types of sports attracted less spectators than the EC as a part of the EPC 2023.

Overall, transportation to the facility where competition took place and the helpfulness of volunteers are rated the highest (figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2
Average ratings provided by athletes and staff regarding aspects of the EPC 2023

(rating 1 (low) - 10 (high))



Source: Mulier Institute, survey among athletes and staff at the EPC, 2023.

Athletes and staff members were able to provide comments on specific topics. The positive judgment of the helpfulness of volunteers stands out. In addition, athletes and staff members mentioned that the enthusiastic speakers contributed positively to the atmosphere. Furthermore, the option to travel by bus or by public transport received positive comments.

'Very enthusiastic speakers, chapeau to them!'
 Staff member – Para Cycling

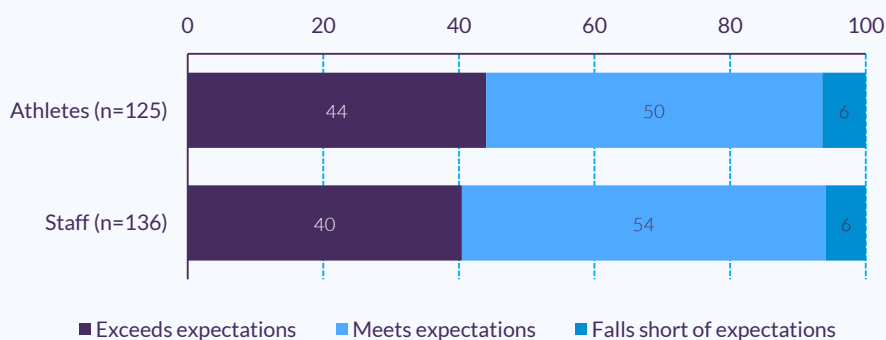
'I feel so proud that I was part of the inaugural EPC.'
 Athlete – Para Archery

The lack of choice in food and the restricted hours to get food were mentioned most by athletes and staff members. The food was provided every three hours. Athletes and staff noted that in some hotels and locations, the modifications for people with disabilities sometimes fell short of expectations.

'Good nutritional options, but just not much choice.'
 Athlete – Para Badminton

For half of the athletes and more than half of the staff members, the EPC 2023 met their expectations. For approximately two in five athletes and staff members, the EPC 2023 exceeded their expectations (figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3
To what extent the EPC 2023 met the expectations of the athletes and staff
 (percentages)

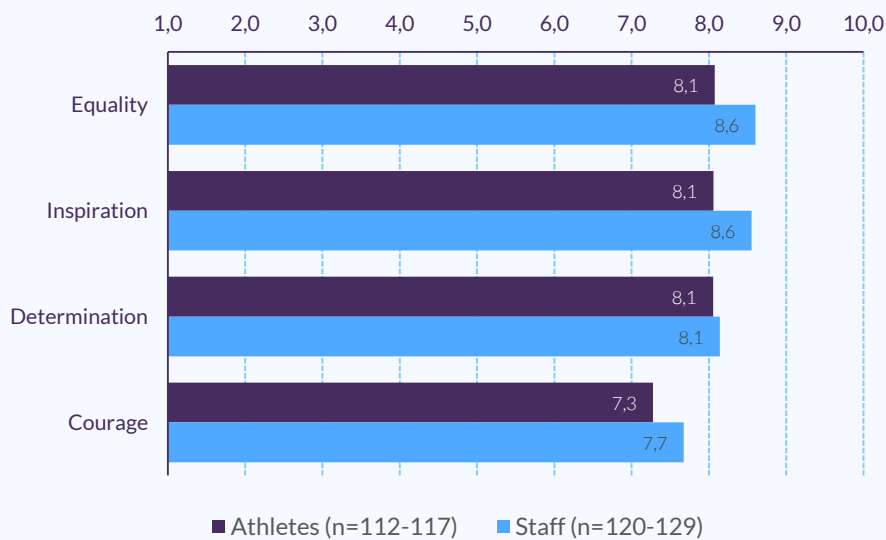


Source: Mulier Instituut, survey among athletes and staff at the EPC, 2023.

The four paralympic values are: equality, inspiration, determination and courage. The values 'inspiration' and 'equality' were associated more with the EPC 2023 by the staff members (both 8.6) in comparison to the athletes (both 8.1) (figure 3.4). Furthermore, it is notable that female athletes and staff members associated all paralympic values with the EPC 2023 more than male athletes and staff members (when the groups are combined).

Figure 3.4
Average ratings on association with the paralympic values of the EPC 2023 provided by athletes and staff

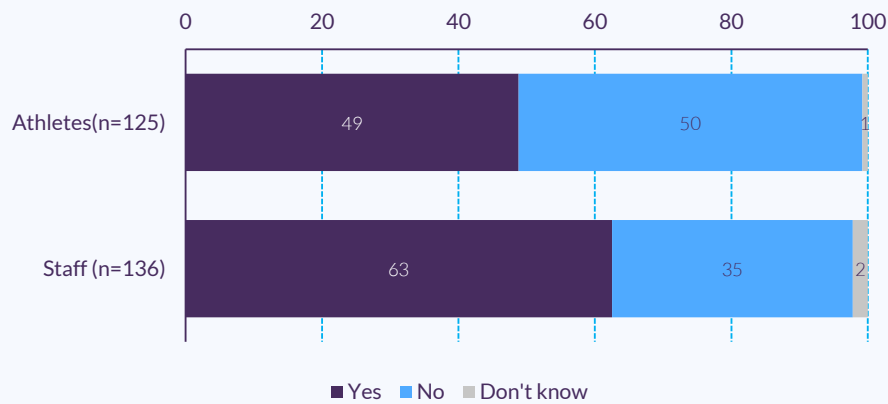
(rating 1 (low) - 10 (high))



Source: Mulier Institute, survey among athletes and staff at the EPC, 2023.

Half of the athletes (49%) and almost two thirds of the staff members (63%) had participated in a multi-sport event before (figure 3.5).

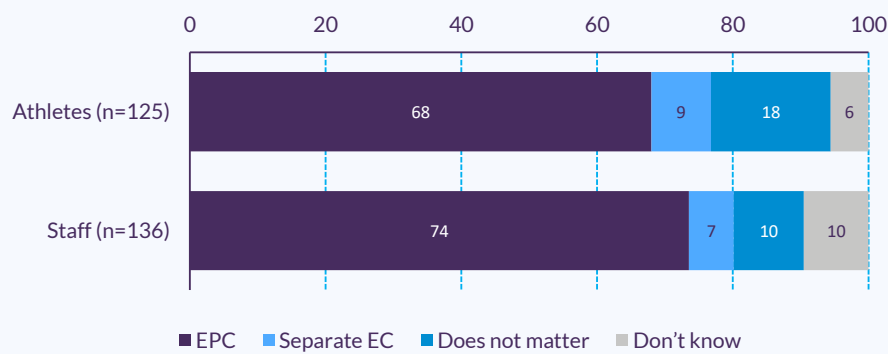
Figure 3.5
Participation of athletes and staff in a multi-sport event before the EPC 2023
 (percentages)



Source: Mulier Institute, survey among athletes and staff at the EPC, 2023.

Approximately seven out of ten athletes and staff members preferred the EPC 2023 to separate ECs. Athletes and staff members with a British and French nationality more often preferred the EPC 2023 to separate ECs (both 81%) than athletes and staff members with a Dutch or other nationality (Dutch 73%, other 67%) (athletes and staff combined) (figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6
Preference athletes and staff: EPC 2023 or separate EC
 (percentages)

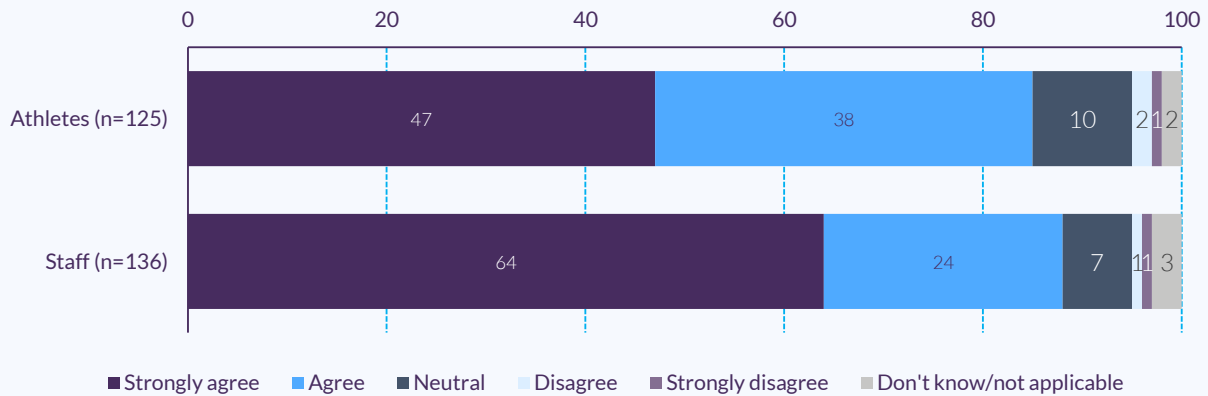


Source: Mulier Institute, survey among athletes and staff at the EPC, 2023.

3.4 Attitudes towards aspects of the EPC 2023

The majority of the athletes and staff members felt proud to participate in the EPC 2023 ((strongly) agree: athletes 85%, staff 88%) (figure 3.7).

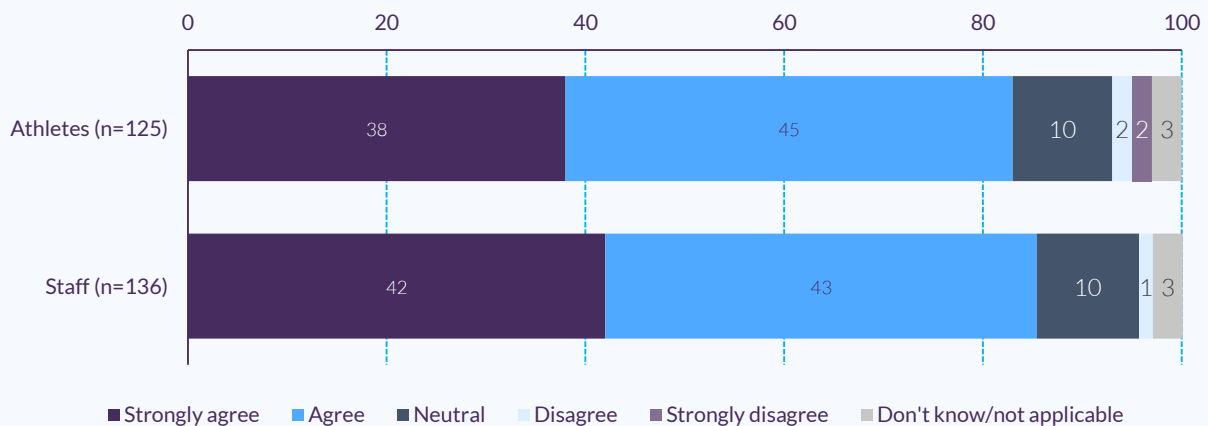
Figure 3.7
Attitudes of athletes and staff to the statement: 'I feel proud to participate in the first EPC 2023'
 (percentages)



Source: Mulier Institute, survey among athletes and staff at the EPC, 2023.

More than eight out of ten athletes (83%) and staff members (85%) expect that they will talk about the EPC 2023 with their friends and family (figure 3.8).

Figure 3.8
Attitudes of athletes and staff to the statement: 'I expect that I will talk about the EPC 2023 with friends and family after the event'
 (percentages)

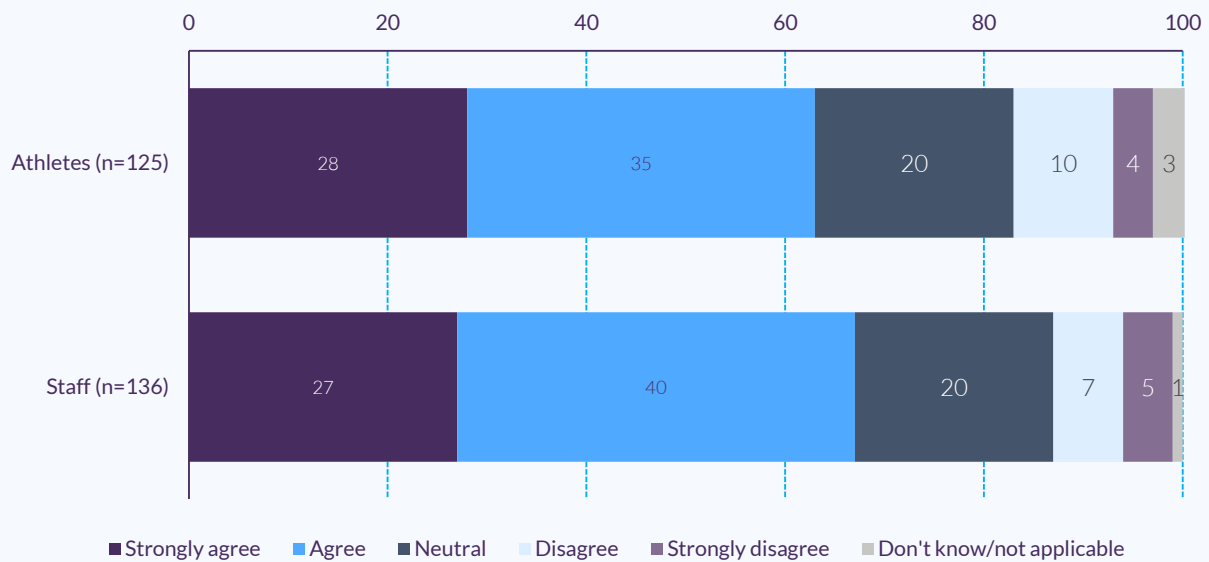


Source: Mulier Institute, survey among athletes and staff at the EPC, 2023.

Two thirds of the athletes and staff members argue that the EPC 2023 offer athletes and staff sufficient opportunities to meet athletes who participate in other sports (figure 3.9). Specifically cyclists mentioned that they had no multisport

feeling because the track was so far away from Rotterdam Ahoy and therefore difficult to reach for other athletes and spectators.

Figure 3.9
Attitudes of athletes and staff to the statement: ‘The EPC 2023 offer athletes and staff sufficient opportunities to meet athletes of other sports’
 (percentages)



Source: Mulier Institute, survey among athletes and staff at the EPC, 2023.

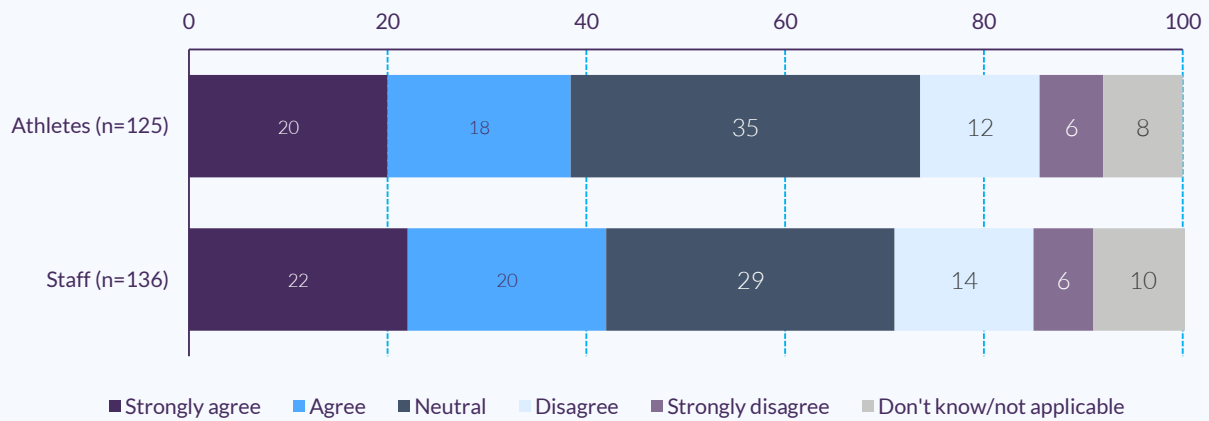
The concept of the EPC 2023 implies that the event is solely accessible for athletes with disabilities. This is somewhat different from the Olympic and Paralympic Games as these events can be seen as twins because they are organised in roughly the same location and (one after the other) in the same period. Athletes and staff who participated in the EPC 2023 were asked how they perceive the EPC 2023 concept, aimed at athletes with disabilities.

Opinions are divided as regards the fact that only athletes with disabilities were allowed to participate in the EPC 2023. Less than half of the athletes and staff members (strongly) agree with this event concept (staff: 42%, athletes: 38%; figure 3.10). One third of the athletes and staff members holds a neutral attitude and a small part (strongly) disagrees (staff: 20%, athletes: 18%).

Figure 3.10

Attitudes of athletes and staff to the statement: 'It is good that athletes without disabilities are not allowed to participate in the EPC 2023 with their own program'

(percentages)



Source: Mulier Institute, survey among athletes and staff at the EPC, 2023.

3.5 Conclusion

The majority of athletes and staff members were male and their average age was 35.7 years (athletes) and 44 years (staff) old. Athletes and staff members from 30 (out of 41 participating) different countries filled out the survey.

The average rating for the overall organization of the EPC 2023 by the athletes and staff members was 8.5. Athletes and staff members were most positive about the transportation to the facility (athletes: 8.6, staff: 8.9) and the helpfulness of volunteers (athletes: 8.8, staff: 9.1). The lowest ratings were given to the food and drinks (athletes: 6.3, staff: 6.9) and to the number of spectators (athletes: 6.9, staff: 6.5).

Approximately seven out of ten (71%) preferred the EPC 2023 to separate ECs. Athletes and staff members predominantly felt proud to be part of the first EPC 2023 (athletes: 85%, staff: 88%) and felt they would tell their friends and family about the EPC 2023 (athletes: 85%, staff: 88%).



Visitors

First we outline the profile of visitors. Next, we present characteristics of the visit. Lastly, we present the evaluation of the EPC 2023 through the eyes of the visitors.

4.1 Profile

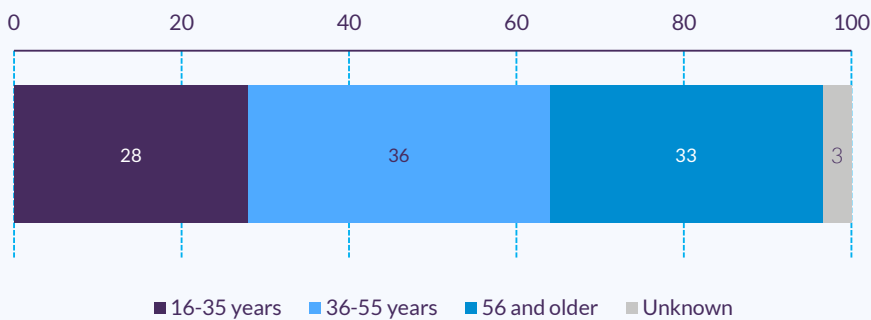
Gender

The proportion of women (54%) who visited the EPC 2023 was slightly higher than the proportion of men (46%).

Age

Almost seven out of ten visitors of the EPC 2023 were older than 35 years (figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1
Age of the visitors at the EPC 2023
(percentages)



Source: Mulier Institute, survey among EPC visitors, 2023.

Nationality

Eight in ten visitors of the EPC 2023 had the Dutch nationality (79%). 44 percent of the Dutch visitors lived in South Holland, where Rotterdam is located, and 19 percent were residents of Rotterdam. The visitors who had another nationality (21%) were mainly British (3%) or German (5%).

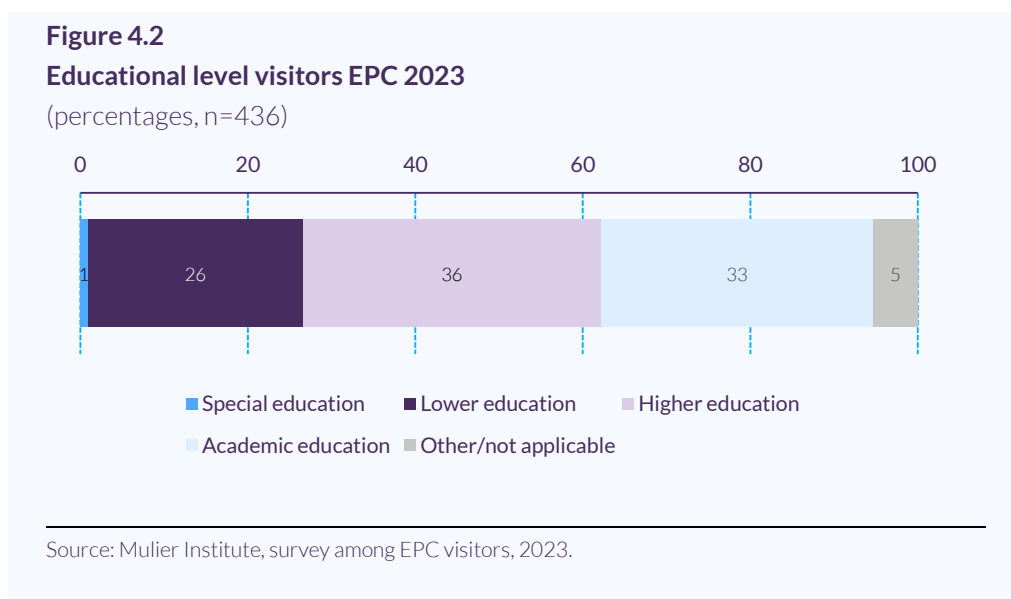
Disability or chronic condition

Eight in ten visitors of the EPC 2023 had no disability or chronic condition (78%). Of the visitors with a disability or chronic condition (21%)³, 22 percent experiences many limitations, 68 percent some limitations, and 11 percent no limitations in daily life due to their disability or chronic condition.

³ 1 percent of the visitors of the EPC 2023 chose the option 'don't know/refuse to answer'.

Educational level

Most visitors of the EPC 2023 had a higher (36%) or academic (33%) educational level (figure 4.2).



4.2 Characteristics of the visit

A total of 12,398 visitor tickets for Rotterdam Ahoy were sold. These are not unique visitors. The other locations were free to visit (European Para Championships bv, 2023).

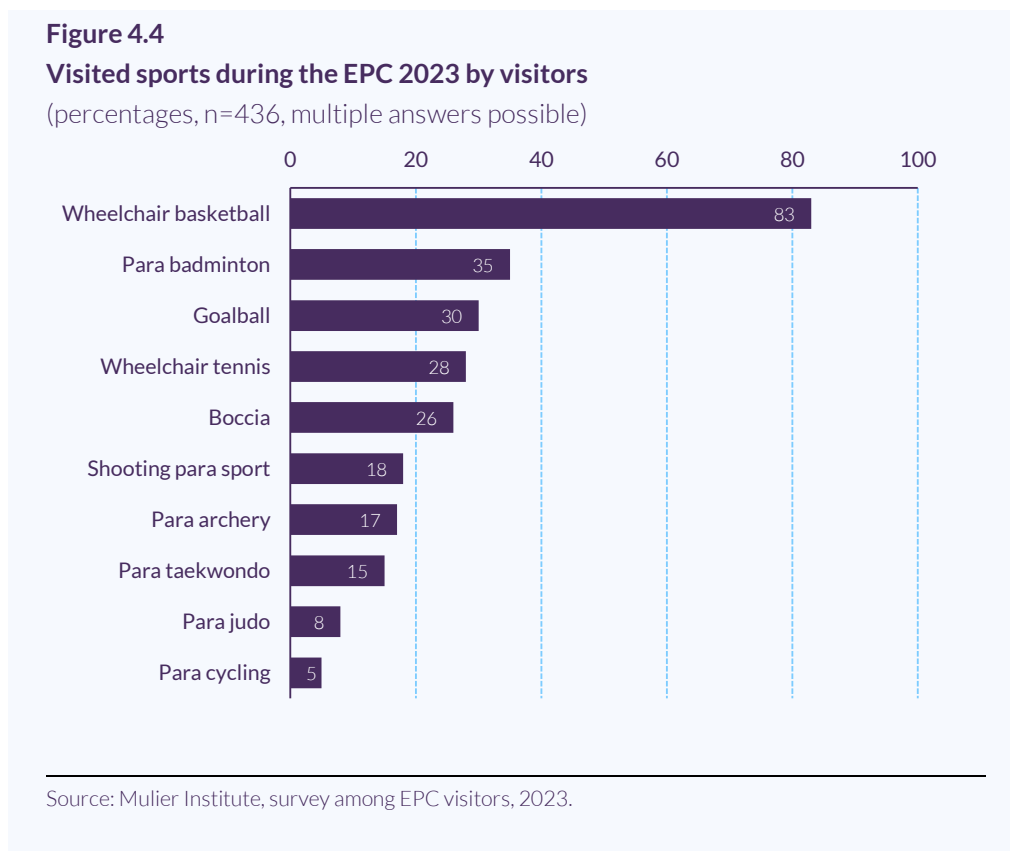
Days

Almost half of the visitors visited the EPC 2023 one day (49%). Nearly one in five visitors visited the EPC 2023 more than three days (figure 4.3).



Attended sport competitions

Wheelchair basketball was the most attended sport by visitors⁴ (83%) and para cycling was the least attended sport (5%) (figure 4.4).



Visitors who did not have the Dutch nationality were more likely to visit boccia (Dutch: 23%, other nationality: 39%).

In addition, visitors in the younger age group (16-35 years) visited goalball and wheelchair tennis more often than the older age groups (36-55, 56 and older). Visitors in the older age groups (36-55, 56 and older) visited para badminton more often than visitors in the youngest age group. Lastly, visitors in the oldest age group (56 and older) were most present at the wheelchair basketball games.

Mode of transportation

53 percent of the visitors travelled the longest distance to the EPC 2023 by a form of transportation other than the car (figure 4.5). Visitors with a disability travelled the longest distance to the EPC 2023 significantly more often by car (and thus had to pay for parking) than visitors without a disability. Some visitors mentioned in an open-ended question that the prices of the parking were too high.⁵

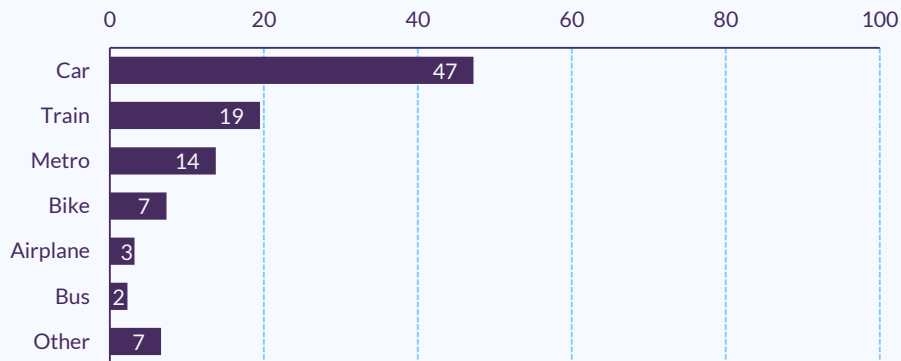
⁴ These results were obtained through the survey and are not the actual figures of the number of sports visited.

⁵ The organization of the EPC 2023 had no control over the parking and parking fees at Rotterdam Ahoy.

Figure 4.5

Mode of transportation by which visitors travelled the longest distance to the EPC 2023

(percentages, n=436)



Source: Mulier Institute, survey among EPC visitors, 2023.

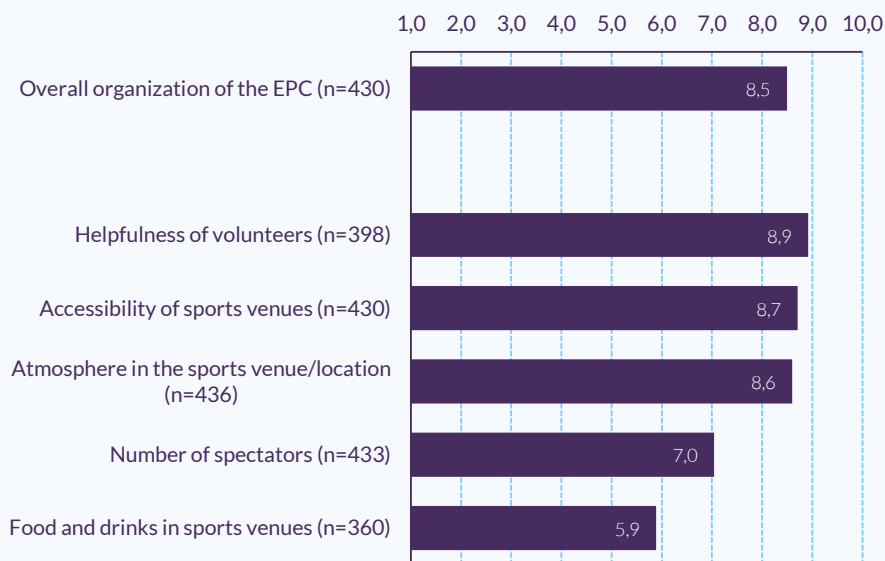
4.3 Event evaluation

The average rating for the overall organization of the EPC 2023 was 8.5 (figure 4.6). Helpfulness of volunteers was rated highest (8.9). The number of spectators (7.0) and the food and drinks in sports venues was rated lowest (5.9). Visitors in the oldest age groups (56 and older) rated the overall organization, accessibility of sport venues, atmosphere in the sports venue/locations, food and drinks in sports venues significantly higher than visitors in the youngest age group (16-35 years).

Figure 4.6

Average ratings provided by visitors regarding several aspects of the EPC 2023

(rating 1 (low) - 10 (high))



Source: Mulier Institute, survey among EPC visitors, 2023.

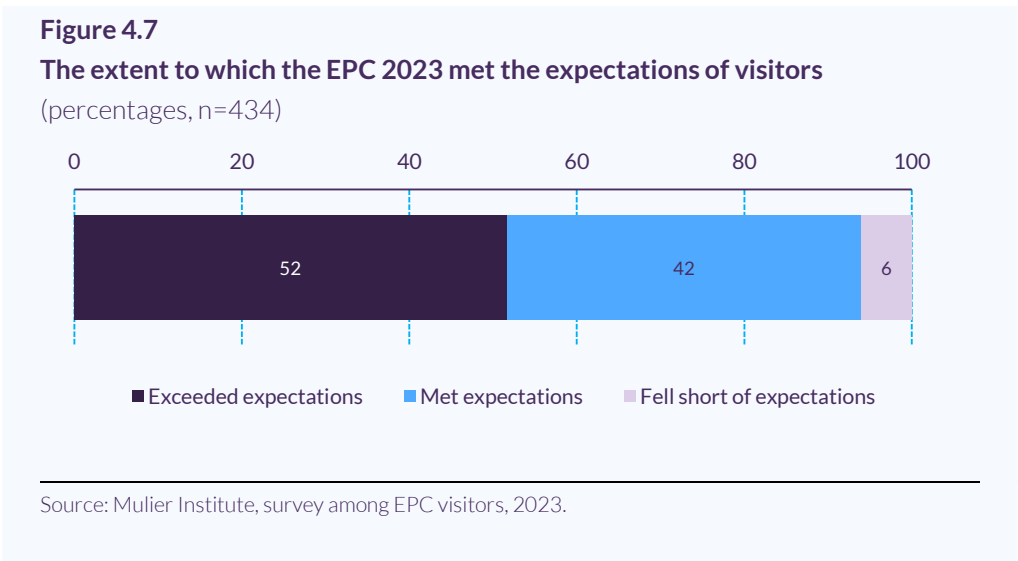
The positivity of the visitors about the organization of the event and the amazing experience they had, stands out.

'The organization of the event was amazing! Compliments to them!'

There were also some points for improvement. Specifically as regards prices and choices of food and drinks⁶, the accessibility of the website of the EPC 2023 (difficult to find the schedules of the matches) and the promotion of the EPC 2023 prior to and during the event. Visitors would have appreciated more attention in newspapers and on TV.

'The website looked good, but it was not clear who was playing where.'

For over the half of the visitors (52%) the EPC 2023 exceeded their expectations and for 42 percent, it met their expectations (figure 4.7).



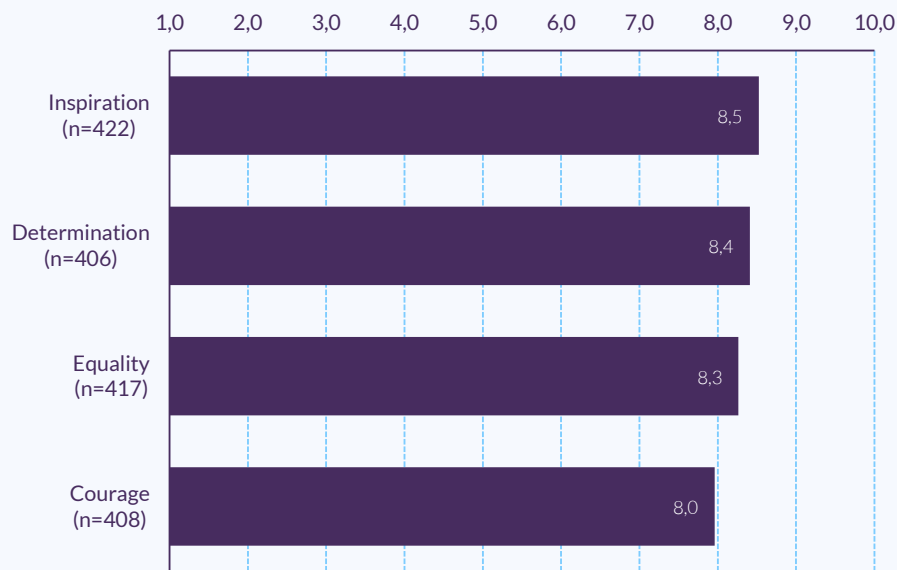
Inspiration (8.5) and determination (8.4) were most associated with the paralympic values by visitors (figure 4.8). Courage was rated significantly higher by the older age groups (36-55: 8.0, 56 and older: 8.3) compared to the younger age group (16-35: 7.5).

⁶ Rotterdam Ahoy was responsible for the pricing and the availability of food and drinks.

Figure 4.8

Average ratings on association of the EPC 2023 with the paralympic values, provided by visitors

(rating 1 (low) - 10 (high))



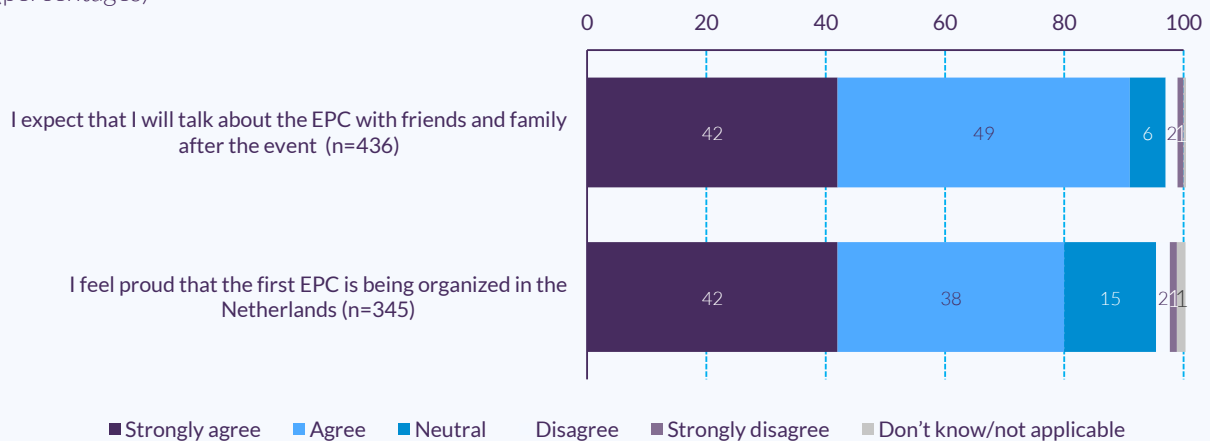
Source: Mulier Institute, survey among EPC visitors, 2023.

Most visitors expect that they will talk about the EPC 2023 with friends and family (91%) (figure 4.9). Furthermore, only visitors of Dutch nationality were asked if they felt proud that the first EPC was organized in the Netherlands: eight out of ten visitors of Dutch nationality felt proud that the first EPC 2023 was organized in the Netherlands (80%).

Figure 4.9

Talking with friends and family about the EPC 2023, according to all visitors, and feeling proud that the first EPC 2023 is being organized in the Netherlands, according to visitors of Dutch nationality

(percentages)

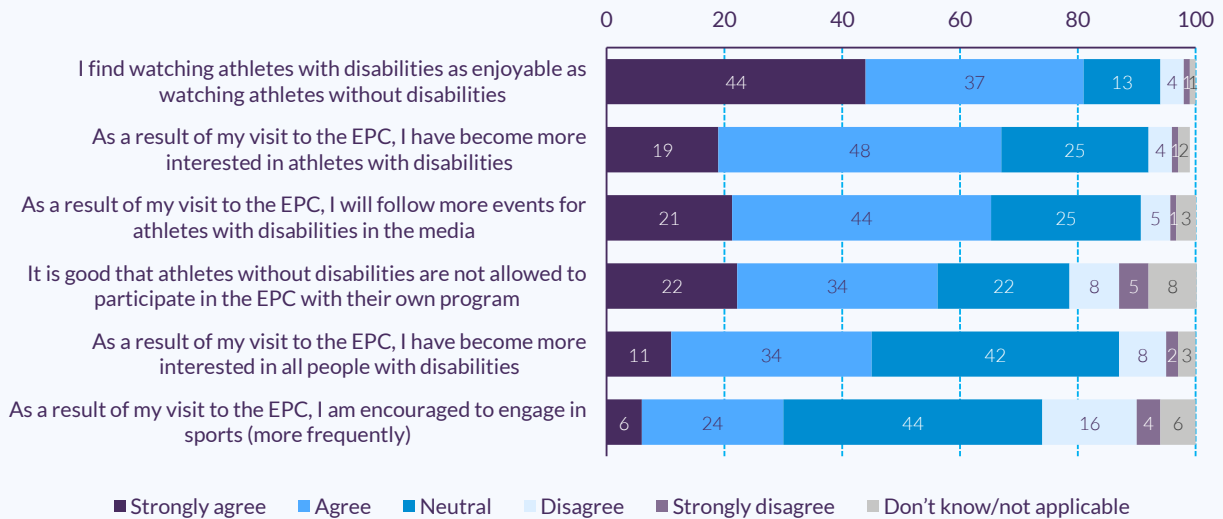


Source: Mulier Institute, survey among EPC visitors, 2023.

4.4 Attitudes towards aspects of the EPC 2023

Four out of five visitors of the EPC 2023 found watching athletes with disabilities as enjoyable as watching athletes without disabilities (81% (strongly) agrees) (figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10
Attitudes of EPC 2023 visitors towards sports, athletes and people with disabilities
 (percentages, n=436)



Source: Mulier Institute, survey among EPC visitors, 2023.

4.5 Conclusion

About half of the visitors of the EPC 2023 were male. The visitors were mostly Dutch (79%) and had no disability (78%). Half of the visitors (49%) visited the EPC 2023 one day and travelled the longest distance to the EPC 2023 by a form of transportation other than the car (53%).

The average rating for the overall organization of the EPC 2023 was 8.5. Visitors were most positive about the helpfulness of the volunteers (8.9). Food and drinks (5.9) were rated relatively low. Inspiration (8.5) and determination (8.4) were most commonly associated with the EPC 2023 by visitors.

For half of the visitors (52%) the EPC 2023 exceeded their expectations and for 42 percent, it met their expectations. Eight out of ten Dutch visitors felt proud that the first EPC 2023 was being organized in the Netherlands.

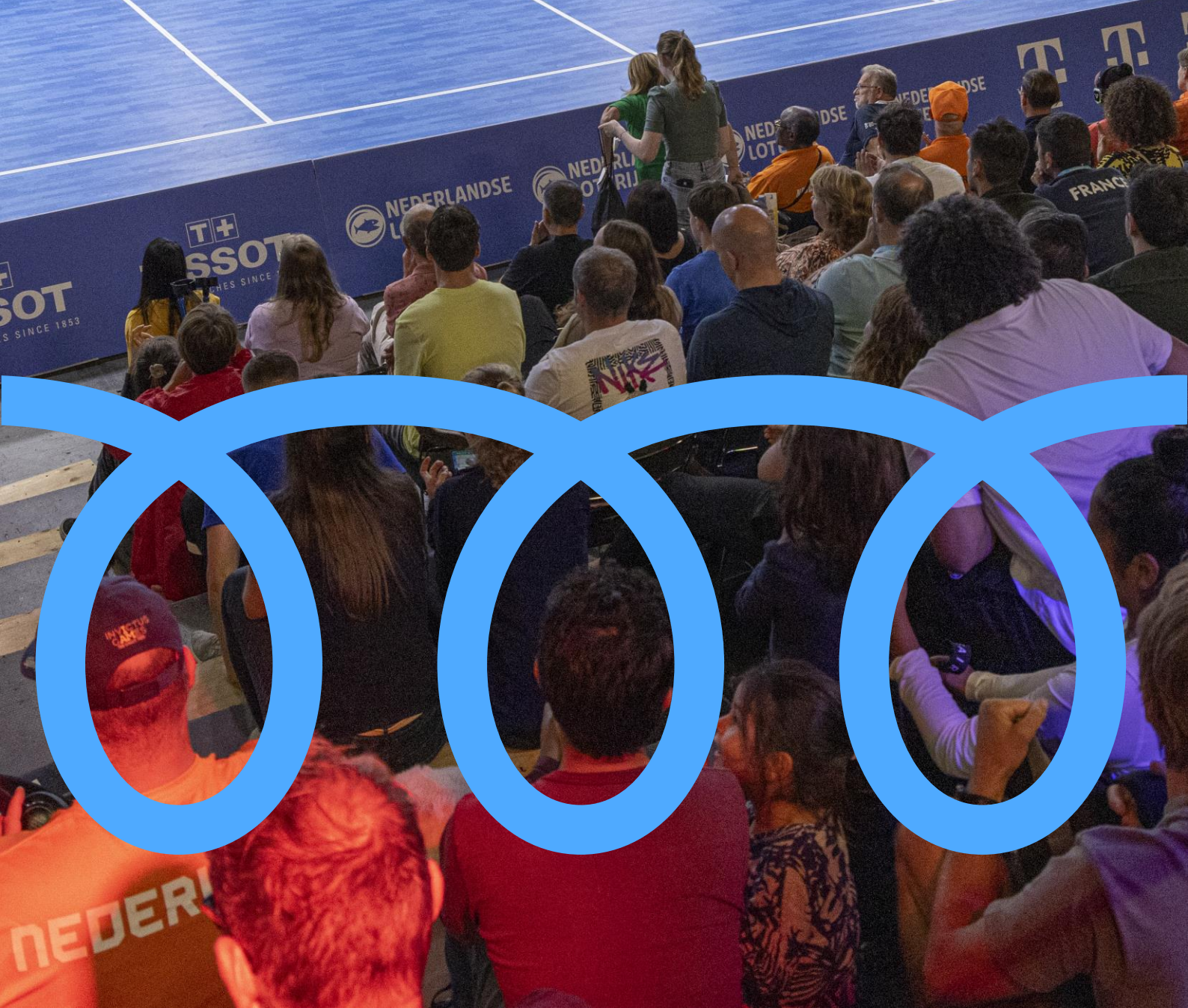
23



GOOD LUCK



SWEDEN	NETHERLANDS
9	2
2:57	



NEDERLANDSE

Media partners

In this chapter, we discuss the perspective of media partners involved in the creation, distribution and broadcasting of content related to the EPC 2023. Furthermore, we provide a profile of the partners, show the exposure and engagement created, and conclude with a reflection on the obstacles and accelerators to increase public attention.

5.1 Background

The relation of the media partners with the event differed. One of the media partners was responsible for the production and distribution of content, the other is an organization broadcasting and creating content on a national scale.

Furthermore, the partners have extensive experience in the sport event sector. The experience with para sport events varied between the partners. One of the partners has broader experience with other multi-para sport events, and can therefore make comparisons.

5.2 Exposure

Preliminary results show that some of the live streams reached 30,000-60,000 people. This was reached by wheelchair basketball and wheelchair tennis, as well as para-cycling. One of the partners said this is roughly the same as the number of viewers for an abled-volleyball European Cup match.

Another platform where live broadcasts were available was TikTok. According to the organization, over 1.1 million people followed a final event live on TikTok.

According to a partner who distributed media content, the event was spread to 180 countries via 25 TV channels. This means that the EPC 2023 were visible in nearly all countries on earth (195 in total).

5.3 Strengths and weaknesses

Strengths

Both partners mentioned several aspects of EPC 2023 that helped them to increase the visibility of the event. One of those is the clustering of sports into one event.

'By combining multiple sports, it was easier for us to find people to focus on the event. We were able to make reports of the less popular sports as well.'

According to one of the media partners, another key aspect that enabled the EPC 2023 to obtain more broadcasting time was the high quality of the live streams.

'The quality of the content available to us was high, which is something para ECs and WCs can still improve upon. The quality was a big contributor to the amount of broadcasting time we were able to arrange for the EPC [2023].'

Not only the quality of the streams was important, the free availability of these streams helped as well.

'In the end we were able to generate a lot more attention for this event due to the free streams that the EPC [2023] provided. The reports we wrote were a lot more detailed than exclusively the results.'

Weaknesses

High quality and freely available content of a multi-sport event were seen as the key success factors to increase the visibility for para sports in a busy sports event summer. But providing this leads to increased costs. These costs do not necessarily translate into financial returns, according to one of the partners. They mention that their commercial objectives related to the EPC 2023 were not achieved, while their objectives in terms of reach were exceeded.

'Commercially, it is a challenging market. Usually, federations are happy with any visibility, and give away broadcasting rights for free. Niche sports always struggle to find media budget. ... Many traditional media organizations do not want to spend money on these sports. Even in the public domain you see a high focus on mainstream sport events such as the men's football world cup. While these events will find a broadcasting channel regardless of public funding.'

Furthermore, one of the few aspects where the EPC 2023 organization could have empowered the media partners more, is in the communication prior to the event. According to one media partner, the competition schedules were shared late. Consequently, it was harder for them to find someone to create content regarding specific events.⁷

'For quite some time there was no competition program available to see with the exact dates and times a star athlete would play. This is important to request broadcasting time, which is done at least two weeks in advance.'

One of the media partners highlighted that it was challenging to obtain broadcasting time due to multiple large sport events going on simultaneously. The Women's Football World Cup and the Cycling World Championships overlapped in time with

⁷ European Para Championships bv has limited influence of schedules, since draws, fixtures and match programmes are determined by the various IFs.

the EPC 2023. Hence, the timing of the event is considered to be important to optimize the visibility.

5.4 Conclusion

The media partners were positively impressed by the number of viewers and the distribution internationally of EPC 2023 content. Especially online platforms such as TikTok reached millions of people.

Key strengths highlighted by the media partners are the multi-sport aspect combined with high-quality, freely available livestreams.

For media partners, it is important to have detailed insight into the competition program more than two weeks in advance to request broadcasting time. As these services are accompanied with increased cost, a continued struggle for media budget remains.



THEATER
ROTTERDAM

JOYRIDE
VANAF 6 JULI TOEGEBIJ PATRIS

WELCOME

BOCCIA

WHEELCHAIR TENNIS

TISSOT

MATRIX

ITF

DEVELOP

VEN MOESSEL

OFFICIAL BALL

TISSOT

MATRIX

ITF

EUROPEAN PARALYMPIC COMMITTEE

WELCOME

#EPC2023

WELCOME

WELCOME

WELCOME

WELCOME

#EPC2023

TISSOT
MATRIX
FITNESS EQUIPMENT
EUROPEAN PARALYMPIC COMMITTEE
ITF

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DUNLOP

WELCOME

Sport federations

This chapter shares the perspectives of five national and five international sport federations. We describe their experiences, starting with their roles. Furthermore, we list the objectives they reflect on in their evaluation. The evaluation of all aspects of the event is the third and final part before the conclusion.

6.1 Roles

During the event, the international sport federations are primarily responsible for the competition aspects of their sport, such as arranging and managing officials to guide the competition. In most sports, the national federations supported these activities, and were involved in some of the logistics of the event.

One national federation explicitly stated they did not have an active role in the event. The representative of this federation said that they never actively organize any activities or competition aspects. They are open to facilitate side-events with materials if it is organized by the event organizer, which was not the case at the EPC 2023.

A few national federations did take an active role in organizing side-activities next to their role in the competition. They organized clinics in Rotterdam Ahoy for visitors to experience their sports.

6.2 Objectives

Besides a smooth organization of the competition itself, a key objective of all federations is to promote their sports. The federations mention several key aspects how an event can contribute to this objective:

- Athlete experience.
- Level of competition.
- Spectator experience.
- Activation and integration.

In the next section, we will discuss to what extent the federations feel that European Para Championships bv has successfully managed these aspects. Before we dive into them, we include an overarching evaluation of the event.

Then, the evaluation continues with a few different themes which include comments concerning multiple objectives. The first one is the competition venue, followed by communication, and the timing of the event. Lastly, we discuss a few comments in which the federations look ahead towards future editions of the EPC.

6.3 Evaluation

Overall evaluation

The federations are unanimous in their positive overall evaluation of the EPC 2023. One explicitly stated it was the best event they ever had. Expectations of some federations were exceeded, while others described the concept as innovative and revolutionary. On the bigger picture, the EPC 2023 were a success according to the federations.

'It was good to see the event being presented on the same level as non-para sports.'

One federation was in the unique position to compare the EPC 2023 with a world championship where para and non-para sports were organized together. When asked which format they preferred, the answer remained undecided.

'It is impossible to compare the EPC [2023] with the combined para and non-para world championship from a few years ago. The world championship connected the community, while this event had an Olympic feeling to it.'

Venue

The experiences of the federations vary depending on the location. Specifically Rotterdam Ahoy and the City Centre Courts were perceived as positive contributions to the experience of athletes and spectators. The day-ticket format at Rotterdam Ahoy was mentioned as a key success factor, contributing to the overall experience of everyone involved.

'We care the most about the athlete experience, which was almost at the level of the paralympic games. Going to the Paralympics can be overwhelming for athletes, this gives them a good idea of what a multi-sport event will be like.'

But this does not apply to all sports, as wheelchair tennis and para-cycling were not organized at the central hub in Rotterdam Ahoy. This was due to technical limitations according to European Para Championships bv. Some comments were made concerning the small number of spectators, and distance from other sports. Hence, the visibility of these sports and the athlete experience was not on the level some of them had hoped for.

'Our venue was too far outside the city center, very isolated. There were barely any spectators, and we did not feel part of a multi-sport event because of it.'

Organizational and logistical challenges were also experienced by two federations whose sports were partially held at the City Centre Courts. One representative mentioned that there was uncertainty around the municipal permits up to six weeks before the event. According to European Para Championships bv, this perception is not quite right. Nevertheless, the atmosphere and uniqueness of the City Centre Courts made it well worth it.

'The City Centre Courts were amazing, the logistics were difficult and a few emergency measures were taken, but it was a huge success. It is comparable to the Paralympics.'

Multiple federations mentioned that their sports can struggle to gain attention from the public, while this is crucial to them to obtain funding to further develop and promote their sports. Bringing the sports into the City Centre Courts has been perceived as a very successful method to gain attention, something they don't think they would have been able to achieve by themselves.

According to some federations, the City Centre Courts allowed para-sports to make a step towards the general public and accelerate the integration of disabled people in society. Three federations mentioned that they recognized more opportunities related to integration at Rotterdam Ahoy. The central hub for almost all sports brought together a large network of organizations involved in para-sports and disabled people in general.

According to some of the federations, the EPC 2023 should increase the ease of access for their business partners into the hospitality areas, and connect the labour market for people with disabilities, so that athletes and spectators can connect with potential employers.

In terms of accessibility, the central hub at Rotterdam Ahoy was positively evaluated. A few federations said that multi-para-sport events in Europe often have insufficient accessible sleeping accommodations available in the host city. Rotterdam is no exception. Yet, by keeping the competition site and accommodation close together, accessible shower facilities can be made available at the competition site.

Communication

All federations explicitly stated that clear communication with the event organizer is critical for them to work towards their objectives. All but one federation mentioned obstacles they faced which were related to the communication with European Para Championships bv.

Due to limited and late communication before the event, the number of unexpected circumstances was inconvenient for some federations. Some federations explicitly

reflect on their own role in communication and felt they could have been more proactive as well.

'Communication on this could have been better, it caused friction on a lot of aspects. I don't think it was smart to set one manager on nine [there were ten sports] sports. We were able to handle unexpected situation quite well, but we faced a lot of difficulties ahead of the event. Meeting at least once a month and creating a playbook would help, this is something you can involve the federations in.'

In two cases, the athletes were affected according to the federations. In one case, the course of the race was not communicated with the federation or athletes, which meant the athletes could not train well for specific elements in the race. In the other case, the accessibility around the field-of-play for athletes in wheelchairs was limited, as the number of athletes turned out lower than expected.

The federations mention that it is important to communicate about sport specific details clearly and well ahead of the event, and to remain flexible in the design of the competition sites until the registrations are finished.

Two national federations mentioned that the communication from the European Para Championships by regarding activation and integration programs started later than they had hoped for. They felt their federation could have contributed more to the promotion of their sports if they had been involved in an earlier stage.

The federations mentioned they organized clinics at Rotterdam Ahoy on their own initiative. This resulted in an activation that started during the event itself. According to one federation, this is too late, as the event itself should be grand final of the activation program rather than the start.

As mentioned in chapter 2, the formal responsibility for the activation program was placed with a separate entity, which remains a point of interest. Several national federations mentioned that the structure and responsibilities regarding the activation program were unclear to them.

'The elite level is not the only thing that matters to us. We know that athletic success does not directly lead to more participation. This event had an amazing opportunity to connect the broader public. It is unfortunate that the activation program took too long to get off the ground.'

Timing

The fact that the event was held during the summer holidays for schools meant that it was unable to attract groups of school classes (for activation programs). The federations usually experience this as a successful method to spread awareness as

regards their sports. Despite that the federations agreed to the timing of the event, they perceived this as less desirable.

Some international federations mentioned that the integration of disabled children in the regular school system actually forms a challenge for them. It is harder to find potential new participants for the para disciplines. They also see that some schools have overprotective attitudes towards sport participation for children with disabilities. Engaging schools in an event like this would have been a great opportunity to overcome these challenges.

'A challenge our federation experiences is finding people with visual impairments. This is the case specifically for Europe as many other continents have segregated education system for blind children, making it easier to present our sport there.'

The timing of the event had other consequences for the level of competition as well, which were clear from the moment an IF decided to participate in the EPC 2023.

The majority of the sports were able to attract the best European athletes, yet for some sports, the EPC 2023 overlapped the world championships. These were the Cycling World Championships from August 3-13, and the IBSA World Games for blind athletes from August 18-27.

Federations noticed that some of the elite athletes did not participate in the EPC 2023, likely in fear of injuries, and the number of points they could win at the EPC 2023 would not make a difference in their qualification for the Paralympic Games in 2024.

'The timing of a multi-sport event is also a challenge. Multiple sports had world championships within a month of the European championships. Hopefully if this becomes a regular event, international federations can plan around it.'

Towards future editions

Besides the two sports that had a world championship in the period of the EPC 2023, two federations mentioned that some athletes did not participate in the event due to financial reasons.

One federation mentioned that the travel costs have increased to a level where some athletes can no longer find the resources to participate. For the other federation, this was the first time a European Championship was organized. The athletes in this sport are used to tournaments with prize money, the lack of which caused some athletes to decide not to participate in the EPC 2023.

The federations hope that future editions will be able to find funding for all elite athletes to participate.

'Not all the highest ranked athletes participated. One of the main reasons is that there is no prize money at this event. Furthermore, the points awarded at this event were not enough for the highest ranked athletes to make a difference in qualification for Paris. This is something for us to consider whether we want to give the ticket to a lower ranked player in that case. However, we also don't want countries to spend all their money on this event, and skip other events.'

In their final remarks regarding the EPC 2023, some federations look ahead to a next edition. First and foremost, they agree that the bar for the next edition of the EPC has been set exceptionally high. They add that the requirements for the sport will likely be different in another country, which makes timely and clear communication even more important.

'My only concern is that the next organizers will have a hard time improving the event from this point.'

6.4 Conclusion

Overall, the federations are predominantly positive, some stating that this is the best event they have ever had. Their main objective is to promote their sports, which they hope to achieve through four aspects: a great athlete experience, as well as spectator experience, a high level of competition, and activation and integration activities.

Towards these four aspects, Rotterdam Ahoy and the City Centre Courts made a large contribution, though some federations at TV Victoria (wheelchair tennis) and the Willem Alexander baan (para cycling) did not feel part of a multi-sport event.

Many federations addressed challenges in the communication with the organization of the EPC 2023, which had limited influence on the experience of athletes and spectators.

Regarding the activation and integration, multiple federations feel like the EPC 2023 had more opportunities that remain unexploited.

Lastly, the event was organized within the same month of world championships for some sports. This was a reason for some elite athletes not to participate, lowering the level of competition.



NEDERLANDSE
TENNIS FEDERATIE

EUROPEAN
CHAMPIONS

Volunteers

First we outline the profile of the volunteers. Next, we present the evaluation of the EPC 2023 through the eyes of the volunteers. Lastly, we present attitudes towards aspects of the EPC 2023.

7.1 Profile

About 450 volunteers helped during the EPC 2023: 304 were volunteers from EventMakers; the other volunteers were recruited via the sports federations (EventMakers, personal communication).⁸

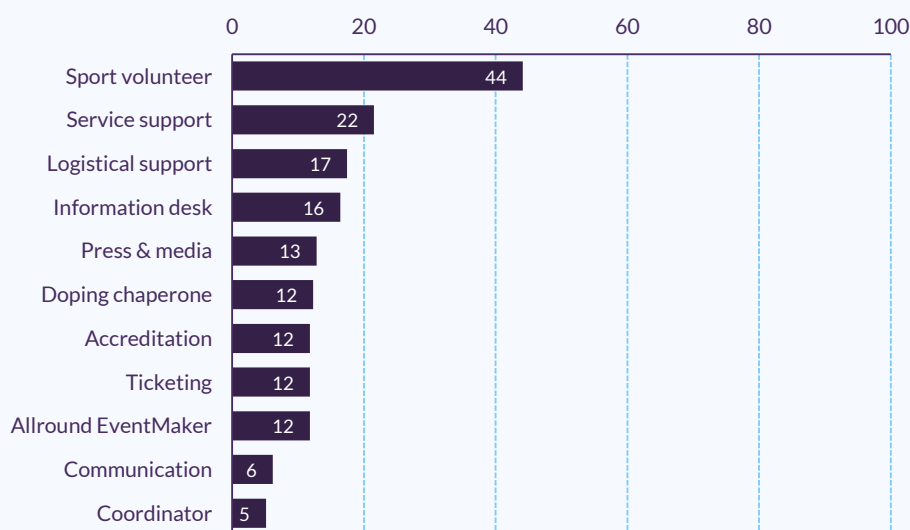
Roles and sports

The volunteers who responded to the survey held multiple positions. Some of the most frequently mentioned positions are sport specific volunteer (44%), service support (22%), and the information desk (16%). The least mentioned positions are coordinator (5%), and communications (6%) (figure 7.1).

Figure 7.1

Positions held by volunteers during the EPC 2023

(percentages, n=195)



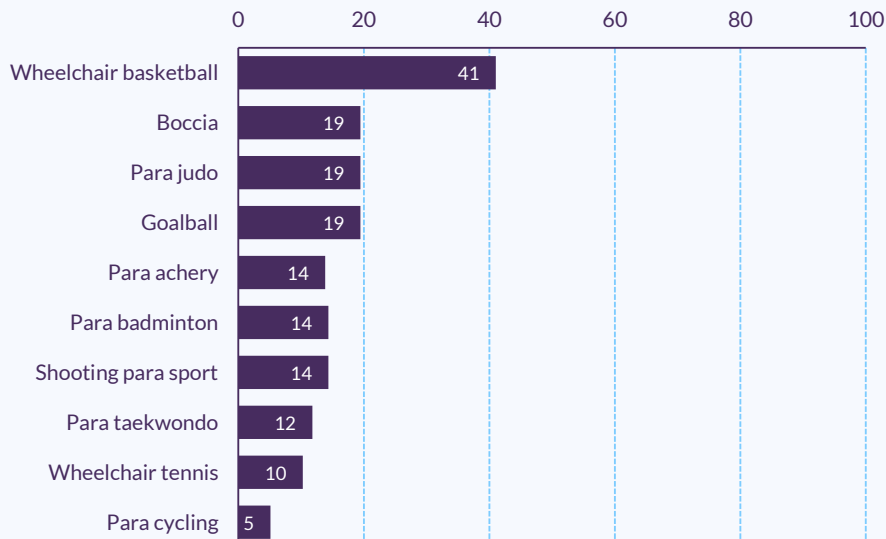
Source: Mulier Institute and EventMakers, survey among volunteers at the EPC, 2023.

Of all sports, wheelchair basketball is mentioned the most: over four in ten volunteers have assisted this sport. There is a low representation of volunteers who assisted the para cycling event: only 5 percent indicated to have helped at this sport.

⁸ EventMakers is a national platform for volunteers for sport events and a commercial service for volunteer management.

Not all volunteer work was directly related to a specific sport: nearly three in ten volunteers stated this was the case for them (figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2
Sports where the volunteers assisted during the EPC 2023
(percentages, n=195)

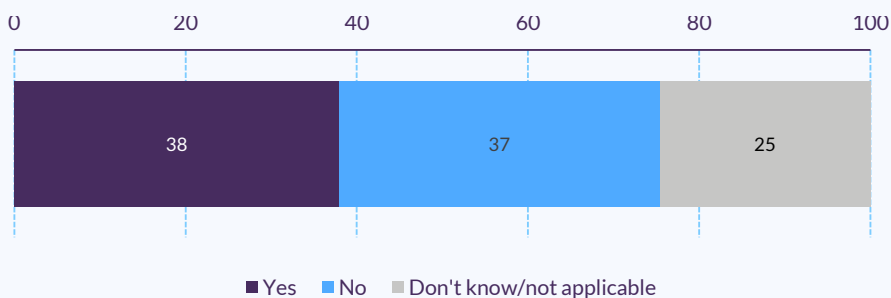


Source: Mulier Institute and EventMakers, survey among volunteers at the EPC, 2023.

Vacation days and prior experience

Nearly four in ten volunteers used their vacation days to work at the EPC 2023 (figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3
Vacation days used to volunteer at the EPC 2023 by volunteers
(percentages, n=195)

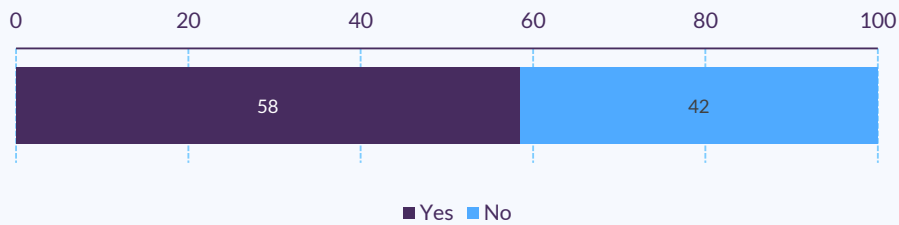


Source: Mulier Institute and EventMakers, survey among volunteers at the EPC, 2023.

More than half of the volunteers (58%) have volunteered before at an international sports event for athletes with a disability (figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4
Previous volunteer experience at an international sports event for athletes with disabilities by volunteers of the EPC 2023

(percentages, n=195)



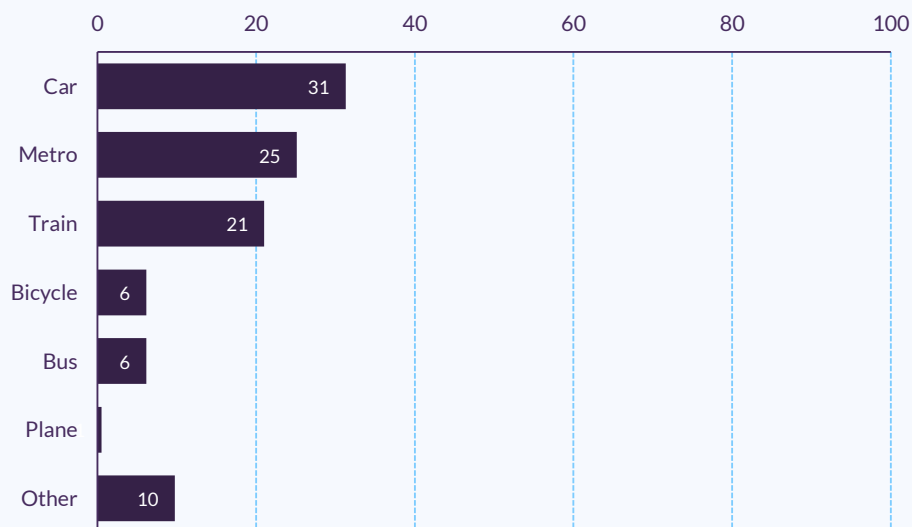
Source: Mulier Institute and EventMakers, survey among volunteers at the EPC, 2023.

Mode of transportation

More than half the volunteers travelled the longest distance to the EPC 2023 with public transport (metro, train and bus). Three in ten used a car (figure 7.5).

Figure 7.5
Mode of transportation by which volunteers travelled the longest distance to the EPC 2023

(percentages, n=195)



Source: Mulier Institute and EventMakers, survey among volunteers at the EPC, 2023.

'The tram and metro ran perfectly, the free RET day passes were very pleasant.'

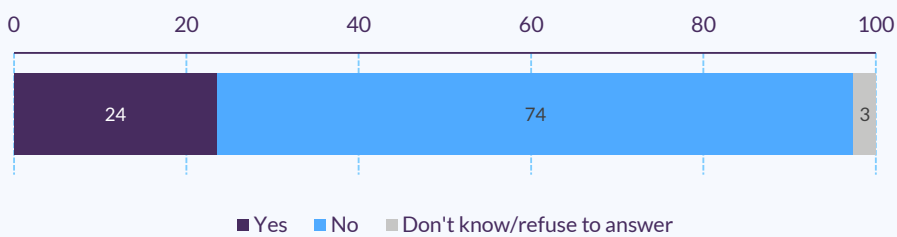
Disabilities volunteers

24 percent of the volunteers had a disability or chronic condition (figure 7.6). Of these volunteers, the majority (67%) experiences some limitations in daily life due to their condition. 15 percent experiences many limitations and the remainder (17%) experience no limitations in daily life.

Figure 7.6

Volunteers at the EPC 2023 with a disability or chronic condition

(percentages, n=195)



Source: Mulier Institute and EventMakers, survey among volunteers at the EPC, 2023.

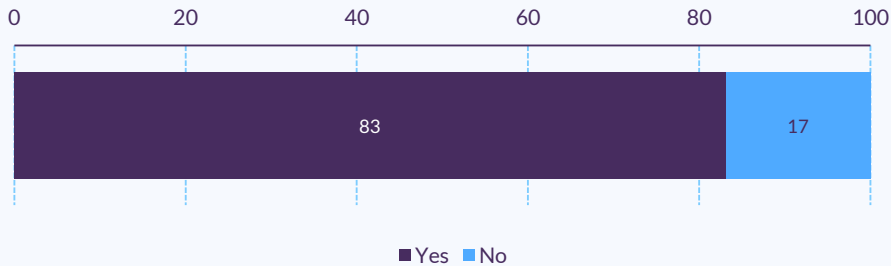
Sport participation

Eight in ten volunteers (83%) have participated in sports in the past 12 months. Sport participation in the past year is less common among volunteers with a disability or chronic condition (67%) (figure 7.7).

Figure 7.7

Sport participation in the past 12 months by volunteers at the EPC 2023

(percentages, n=195)

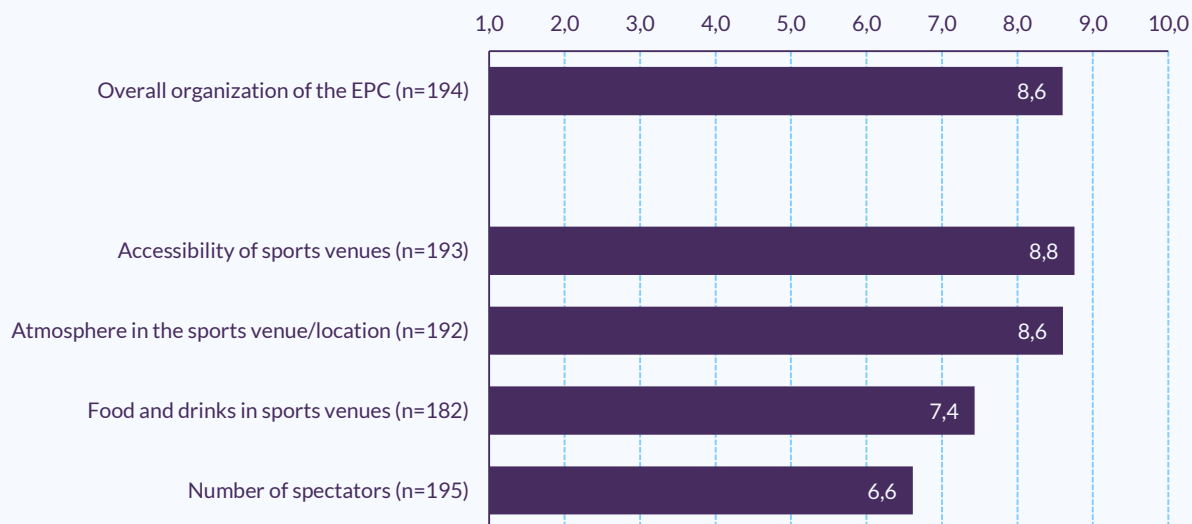


Source: Mulier Institute and EventMakers, survey among volunteers at the EPC, 2023.

7.2 Event evaluation

On a scale of one to ten, volunteers rated the organization of the EPC 2023 as a whole with an average of 8.6. They highlighted the atmosphere and accessibility of the venue(s) as the most positive aspects of the event (figure 7.8).

Figure 7.8
Average ratings provided by volunteers regarding aspects of the EPC 2023
(rating 1 (low) - 10 (high))



Source: Mulier Institute and EventMakers, survey among volunteers at the EPC, 2023.

'I look back with satisfaction. Admiration for the perseverance of the athletes and the engagement of the entourage around them.'

The experiences of volunteers varied depending on the location and day they worked. For example, volunteers who worked at the tennis venue TV Victoria had hoped for a better atmosphere and more spectators. This feeling was shared by other volunteers who worked on weekdays at Rotterdam Ahoy. The weekends at Rotterdam Ahoy made a better impression on the volunteers.

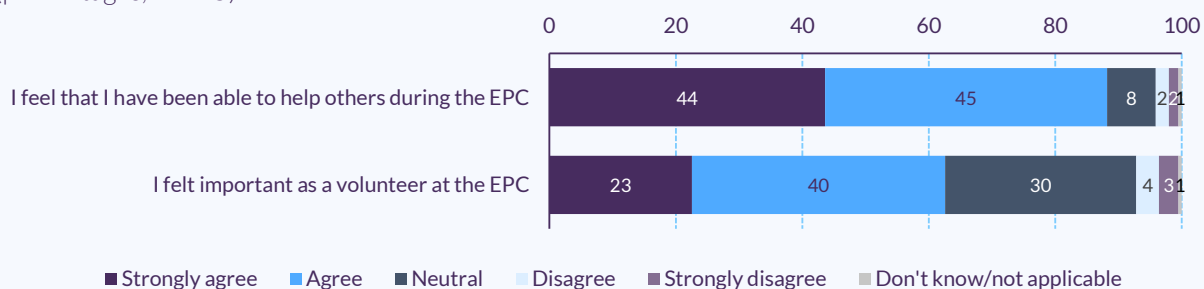
Volunteers mentioned the tennis and cycling venues because of their challenging accessibility. These venues were further away from the city centre and were not easy to reach by public transport.

Two points for improvement mentioned by volunteers at nearly all venues are the minimal workload and the quality and variety of the food. At certain moments there were too many volunteers for the work that needed to be done. The limited

workload of volunteers made many of them feel somewhat redundant. Volunteers were highly appreciated by athletes, staff, and visitors, and this can be attributed to their availability, time commitment, and the rest they seemingly had. Nevertheless, 63 percent of the volunteers felt important during the EPC 2023 (figure 7.9).

'I was involved with judo and basketball, I actually watched more games as a spectator than I worked as a volunteer. The number of volunteers was too high for the work to be done. Despite, I had enough fun watching the games.'

Figure 7.9
Feelings of helpfulness and importance of volunteers at the EPC 2023
 (percentages, n=195)



Source: Mulier Instituut and EventMakers, survey among volunteers at the EPC, 2023.

Similarly, regardless of role or location, volunteers expressed their discontent with the quality, quantity or variety of the catering available to them. Volunteers mentioned that there was no suitable option for their allergies, or that there was not enough for them.

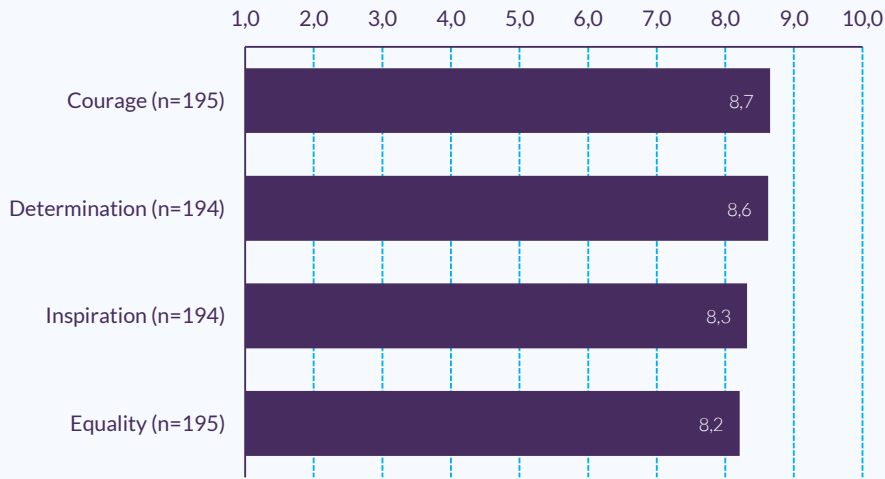
Despite the critical feedback on some aspects of the event, the positive comments dominate in the reflections of volunteers. The volunteers associate the EPC 2023 to a high degree with the paralympic values of courage (8.2), determination (8.7), inspiration (8.6) and equality (8.3) (figure 7.10).

'It was a truly inspiring event, fun to see and definitely fun to be able to help.'

Figure 7.10

Average ratings on association of the EPC 2023 with the paralympic values, provided by volunteers

(rating 1 (low) - 10 (high))



Source: Mulier Institute and EventMakers, survey among volunteers at the EPC, 2023.

7.3 Attitudes towards aspects of the EPC 2023

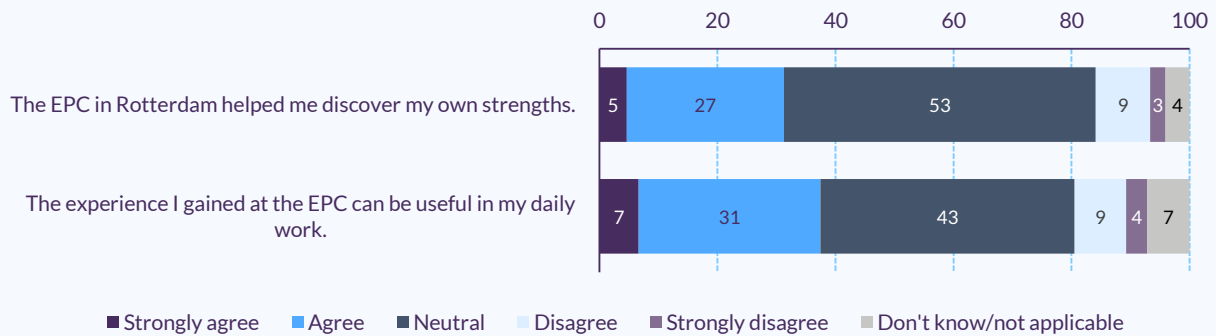
For roughly one in three (32%) volunteers, the EPC 2023 helped them to discover or develop their skills. A similar share of the volunteers agreed that the event formed a useful experience for their daily work (figure 7.11). Additionally, the EPC 2023 attracted volunteers from multiple nationalities.

'Thank you for a great experience. I felt very welcome and apart of the Dutch community which was very helpful in making me feel settled. I am still trying to find my feet in the Netherlands but I've no doubt I'll help out or participate again given the opportunity.'

Figure 7.11

Personal and professional development of volunteers as a consequence of their work at the EPC 2023

(percentages, n=195)



Source: Mulier Institute and EventMakers, survey among volunteers at the EPC, 2023.

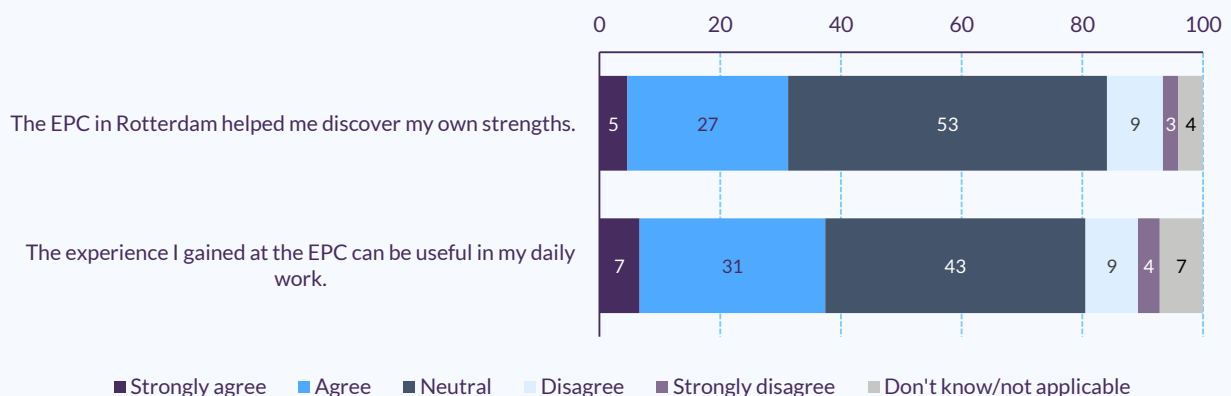
Nearly nine out of ten volunteers (87%) enjoyed watching the competition and felt proud that the first EPC 2023 was organized in the Netherlands (83%). Furthermore, half of them made new friendships during the event (figure 7.12).

'I work with children with a disability, so I was naturally interested. I have seen that there are a lot of possibilities for people with disabilities to participate in sports.'

Figure 7.12

Personal experiences of volunteers at the EPC 2023

(percentages, n=195)



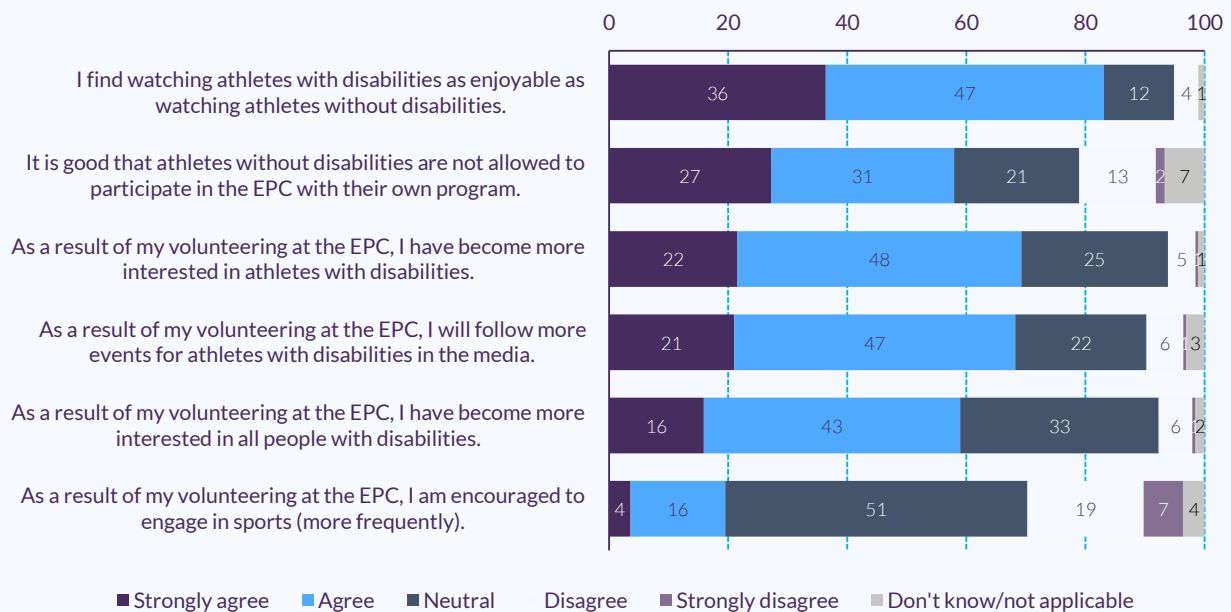
Source: Mulier Institute and EventMakers, survey among volunteers at the EPC, 2023.

Being a volunteer stimulated one in five volunteers (20%) to participate in sports more frequently themselves. Nearly seven in ten volunteers (68%) agreed that they are more likely to follow events for athletes with a disability in the media. Roughly 60 percent agreed that their experiences during the EPC 2023 increased their interest in athletes and other people with disabilities (figure 7.13).

Figure 7.13

Attitudes of EPC 2023 volunteers towards sports, athletes and people with disabilities

(percentages, n=195)



Source: Mulier Institute and EventMakers, survey among volunteers at the EPC, 2023.

7.4 Conclusion

Volunteers generally reflect very positively on their experiences during the EPC 2023. Overall, they award the event a rating of 8.6 points out of 10. Especially the overall organization and the atmosphere stood out to most volunteers.

Though these experiences varied depending on the location and day, the atmosphere on weekdays at Rotterdam Ahoy and the external tennis and cycling venues was disappointing according to multiple volunteers. Other points for improvement highlighted by the volunteers were the workload and catering.

Around one in three volunteers was able to discover or develop their personal and professional skills during the event. It also made roughly 70 percent of them more interested in athletes and other people with disabilities.



Residents of Rotterdam

First we describe the profile of the residents. Next, we present the sports characteristics of the residents and their thoughts on people with disabilities. Lastly, we evaluate the EPC 2023 through the eyes of the residents of Rotterdam.

8.1 Profile

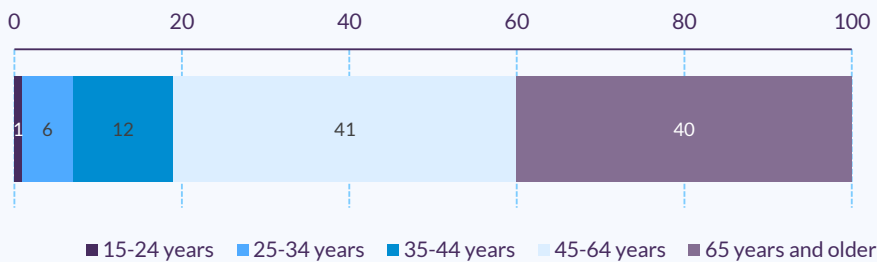
Gender

The proportion of men among the responding residents was greater (57%) than the proportion of women (43%).

Age

Eight in ten residents were older than 45 years (figure 8.1).

Figure 8.1
Age distribution among the responding residents of Rotterdam
(percentages, n=3,635)



Source: Dujardin, M. (2023). *European Para Championships 2023: measurement: Digitaal Stadspanel Rotterdam*. Municipality of Rotterdam.

Disability or chronic condition

14 percent of the residents had a disability or chronic condition. 27 percent experience barriers in daily life and 59 percent experience some barriers in daily life.

8.2 Sports

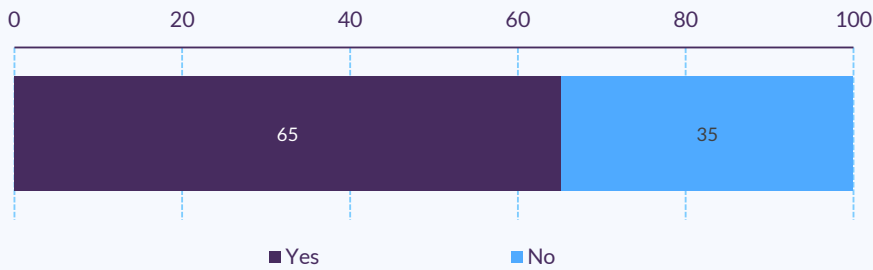
Sports participation and involvement

Almost two thirds of the residents participated in sports in the past 12 months (65%) (figure 8.2).

Figure 8.2

Sport participation in the past 12 months by responding residents of Rotterdam

(percentages, n=3,688)



Source: Dujardin, M. (2023). *European Para Championships 2023: measurement: Digitaal Stadspanel Rotterdam*. Municipality of Rotterdam.

Few residents (14%) followed sports daily in the past year via different channels (newspapers, magazines, television, websites, applications, social media, radio and/or podcasts). More than half of the residents never followed sports in the past year or only a few times (53%). Furthermore, most residents never visited a sports game or sports event in the past year (75%), or they did this a few times (17%).

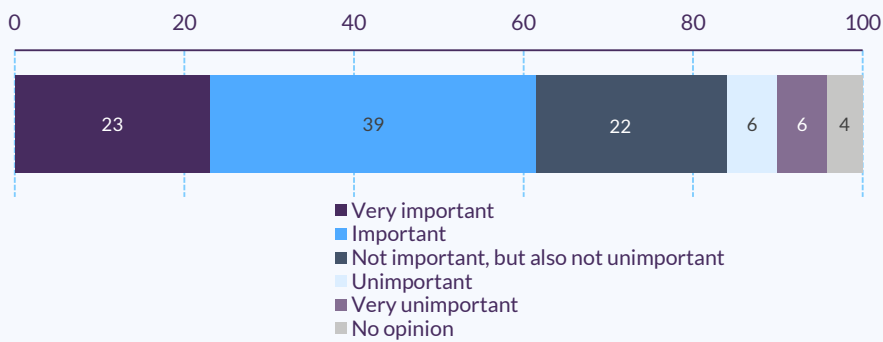
Interest and support

62 percent of the residents considered it (very) important for the city of Rotterdam to host large international sports events (figure 8.3).

Figure 8.3

Importance of the organization of large international sports events in Rotterdam according to residents

(percentages, n=3,670)



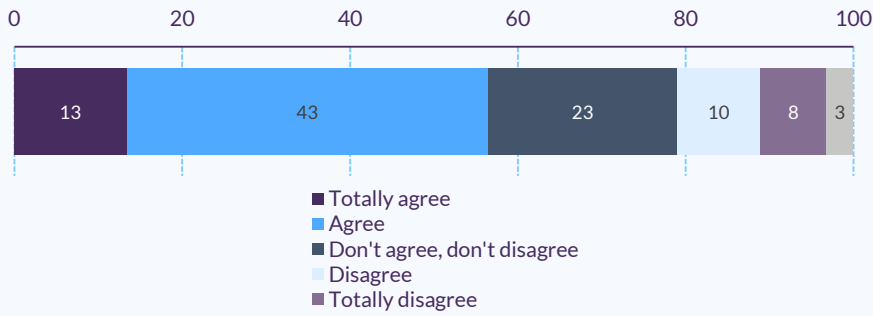
Source: Dujardin, M. (2023). *European Para Championships 2023: measurement: Digitaal Stadspanel Rotterdam*. Municipality of Rotterdam.

More than half of the residents agrees with the fact that the city of Rotterdam contributes financially to large sports events (56%) (figure 8.4). The overlap is significant: residents who found it important that large international sports events

take place in the city, generally also agree that the municipality should contribute financially.

Figure 8.4
Agreement of residents with the financial contribution of the city of Rotterdam to large sports events

(percentages, n=3,665)

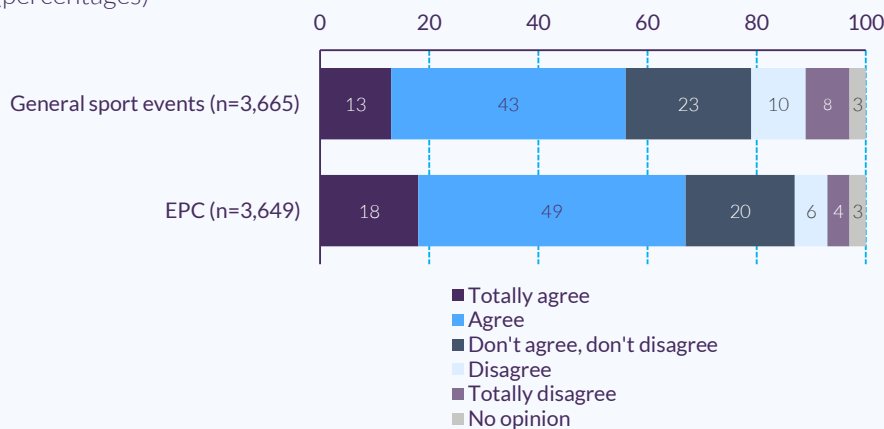


Source: Dujardin, M. (2023). *European Para Championships 2023: measurement: Digitaal Stadspanel Rotterdam*. Municipality of Rotterdam.

About two thirds of the residents have a positive attitude towards the city of Rotterdam spending money on the EPC 2023 (67% (totally) agree). The residents have a less positive attitude towards the city of Rotterdam spending money on general sports events (56% (totally) agree) (figure 8.5). People with hindering disabilities or chronic conditions disagreed more often with the city of Rotterdam spending money on large sports events, as well as spending with money on the EPC 2023 (23% versus 17% and 13% versus 9%).

Figure 8.5
The extent to which responding residents agree with the city of Rotterdam spending money on international sports events vs. the EPC 2023

(percentages)

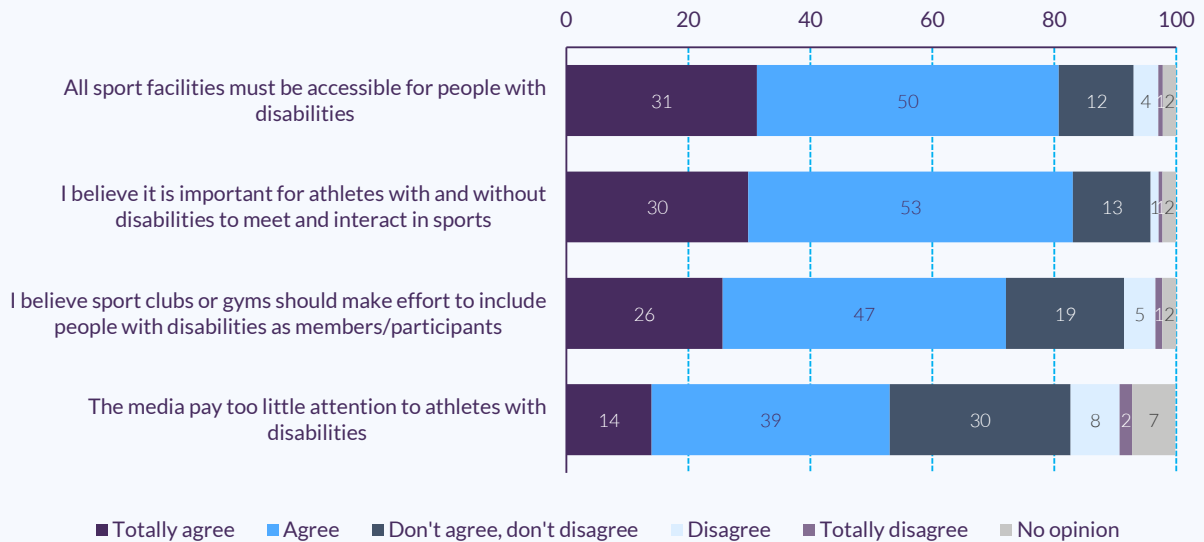


Source: Dujardin, M. (2023). *European Para Championships 2023: measurement: Digitaal Stadspanel Rotterdam*. Municipality of Rotterdam.

8.3 People with disabilities

More than eight in ten residents (83%) were positive about the importance for athletes with and without disabilities to meet and interact in sports. Furthermore, the accessibility of all sport facilities for people with disabilities was found important (81%) (figure 8.6).

Figure 8.6
Attitudes of residents towards statements about people/athletes with disabilities
 (percentages, n=3,640)



Source: Dujardin, M. (2023). *European Para Championships 2023: measurement: Digitaal Stadspanel Rotterdam*. Municipality of Rotterdam.

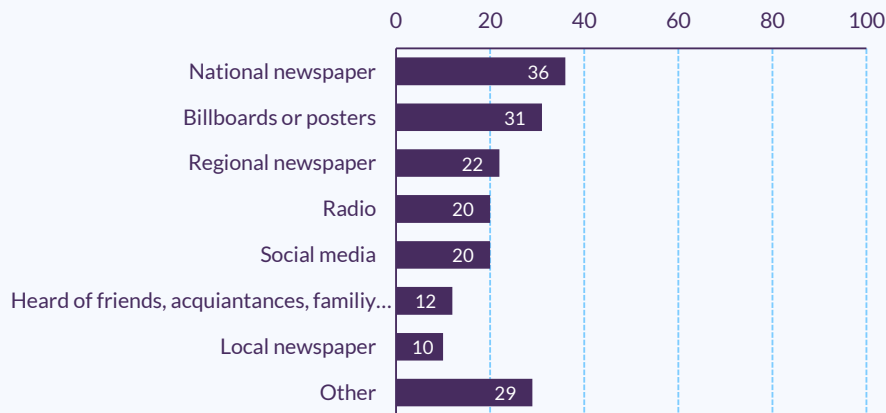
8.4 The EPC 2023

Two thirds of the residents had heard of the European Para Championships (66%) and 81 percent of these residents knew that the EPC 2023 took place in Rotterdam in August. People with hindering disabilities had heard of the EPC 2023 less often (61% versus 66%). Figure 8.7 shows via which channel people had heard of the EPC 2023.

Figure 8.7

The way in which residents who knew that the EPC 2023 took place, heard of the EPC 2023

(percentages, n=1,719)



Source: Dujardin, M. (2023). *European Para Championships 2023: measurement: Digitaal Stadspanel Rotterdam*. Municipality of Rotterdam.

28 percent of the residents who knew about the EPC 2023, visited (5%) or followed (23%) the event.

'I believe that a much attention should be given to these activities as to all European and global sports events, both on sports channels and in the media.'

8.5 Conclusion

The majority of the responding residents were men (57%) and were of older age (45-64, 65 and older: 81%). 65 percent participated in sports in the last 12 months. Almost two thirds of the responding residents (62%) had a positive attitude towards large sports events being organized in the city of Rotterdam, and 56 percent agrees with the city spending money on sports events. 14 percent of the residents had a disability.

Two thirds of the residents had heard of the EPC 2023, and they mainly knew about the EPC 2023 through the national newspaper (36%) or billboards and posters (31%). Residents were more positive about the city of Rotterdam spending money on the EPC 2023 (67%) than about the city spending money on general sports events (56%).



Conclusion and recommendations

In this last chapter, we present our conclusion, starting with a brief sketch of the run-up to the EPC 2023. Additionally, recommendations are presented.

9.1 Conclusion

Run-up

Between 2019 and 2022, the EPC were just an idea. An idea that sprouted from the brain of a Dutch sport event organizer. He saw that the Pan American Games and the Southeast Asian Games had a similar event for elite athletes with disabilities (the Parapan American Games and the ASEAN Para Games respectively), but the European Games (1st edition in Baku in Azerbaijan in 2015) and the European Championships (1st edition in 2018 in Berlin and Glasgow) did not. Moreover, there were points of improvement as regards the organization, attractiveness and visibility of the separate European championships for elite athletes with a disability.

For some types of sport, a European Championships for disabled athletes was absent until 2023 (wheelchair tennis). Combining European championships for several types of sport has the potential to create synergy, where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The EPC 2023 fits in the concept of sport event bundling (Bezold & Wieser, 2023), in which championships of different sports are combined in one sport event.

Road to the EPC 2023

The road to the EPC 2023 was challenging and bumpy. It requires determination, investments and persuasiveness from the potential organizer to get a non-existing international multi-sport event off the ground.

The support from the ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport was indispensable to create this new event. The substantial financial contribution of the ministry – 14 million euros, covering nearly 50 per cent of the costs of the EPC 2023 – was highly valued by European Para Championships bv.

The official confirmation of funding from the Dutch ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports was sent in December 2022. It would have helped the organizer if the money was made available earlier. It is expected that this would have been possible if there was more continuity in national government officials. Now, the organizer had to pre-finance a lot itself and contend with uncertainty in the run-up to the event.

Another major breakthrough in the preparation phase was the confirmation of the European Paralympic Committee to support the EPC 2023 (December 2020).

The municipality of Rotterdam invested 1 million euros in the EPC 2023. A larger contribution of Rotterdam would have been a possibility if there had been more

time. Rotterdam already reserved a substantial part of its budget on other international sport events.

The COVID-19 pandemic made the way to the EPC 2023 even more demanding. The Dutch sport event sector was hit immediately and hard (Hover & Heijnen, 2022), as was the sport event industry worldwide (Grix et al., 2021; Smith & Skinner, 2022).

The EPC 2023

Between 8-20 August 2023, the EPC took place on seven locations in and around the municipality of Rotterdam. Very few concessions were made regarding the ideal event concept. Rotterdam Ahoy, a multi-purpose complex, was the central hub where most of the competition took place. Furthermore, there were other locations: the City Centre Courts.

1,134 athletes, representing 41 countries, competed in ten sport disciplines: para archery, para badminton, boccia, para cycling, goalball, para judo, shooting para sport, para taekwondo, wheelchair basketball and wheelchair tennis. With 33 medals, the Netherlands reached the third place in the medal table, after Italy (48 medals) and France (67 medals).

All aspects considered, the EPC 2023 were experienced as a success by those serviced. Athletes, staff, visitors and volunteers rated the EPC 2023 with 8.5 or higher overall (on a scale from 1-10).

Additionally, the event met or exceeded expectations of nearly all athletes, staff and visitors, more than eight out of ten athletes and staff felt proud to participate in the EPC 2023, and approximately seven out of ten athletes and staff prefer the EPC 2023 to separate European Championships. Two out of three adult residents of the municipality of Rotterdam support the municipality investing taxpayers' money in the EPC 2023.

Media partners were impressed by the number of people reached with EPC 2023-content, including TikTok. The synergy of the sports helped the EPC 2023 to gain visibility. Media content was of high quality and free availability contributed to reaching large audiences.

National and international sport federations praised the opportunities of the EPC 2023, especially as a means to promote their sports. The concept of City Centre Courts was received with enthusiasm by sport federations.

Besides praise, there were also points of improvement. European Para Championships bv and partners, including the municipality of Rotterdam, the national and international sport federations and the Foundation SFE, formulated indicators and objectives of the EPC 2023 on a very general level. Setting more specific objectives is challenging as reference numbers and experiences were absent because the event was never organized before. Indicators and objectives

formulated on a general level limits possibilities for objective evaluation whether objectives or 'targets' are met.

According to athletes, staff, visitors and volunteers the quality, variety and availability of foods and drinks required more attention. In addition, they mention the large differences as regards the number of spectators. Some matches led to full stands with many enthusiastic supporters, especially in Rotterdam Ahoy in the weekend. Other matches, particularly during weekdays on City Centre Courts relatively far away from the city centre and Rotterdam Ahoy (para cycling and wheelchair tennis), attracted relatively few visitors.

Roughly three out of ten athletes and staff members state that the EPC 2023 did not offer them sufficient opportunities to meet athletes of other sports. This is perhaps the result of the decentralization in terms of place (7 venues) and time (13 days).

Volunteers point at a structurally low workload, with the possibility of undermining their motivation. On the other hand: it is expected that the high number of volunteers contributed to the high valuation of volunteers by visitors, athletes and staff.

While media partners reached large audiences with EPC 2023 content, not all their commercial objectives were met, as a result of substantial costs they had to make. Moreover, media partners mentioned that if competition schedules had been shared earlier, there would have been more possibilities to obtain more broadcasting time. Lastly, media partners experienced competition between international sport events as regards broadcasting time (e.g. UCI Cycling World Championships 2023).

The involvement of national sport federations varied: one federation was barely involved, others cooperated more intensely. The distribution of the EPC 2023 over seven venues and thirteen days led to some disappointment among some sport federations, as they had expected to see more visitors (wheelchair tennis, para cycling), leading to an even better athlete experience.

There were also points of improvement as regards the communication between the sport federations and European Para Championships bv, for example with respect to sport specific details which are important for athletes and staff.

The organization in the summer holiday period made it impossible to invite schools for visiting the EPC 2023, lowering visitor numbers. On the other hand, it was relatively cheap for the organizer to rent Rotterdam Ahoy in the summer holiday period.

Sport federations argue that the absence of prize money lowered the number and level of athletes. The introduction of prize money would have led to increased costs.

Ancillary activities

Before, during and after the EPC 2023, 38 ancillary activities were set up, mostly in and around Rotterdam. Just as for the EPC 2023, objectives of these ancillary activities were formulated on a general level, making evaluation unfeasible.

The Foundation SFE was set up in February 2023, with the task to develop a social program aimed at increasing sports participation and that can be adapted on top of various national and international para sport events. Results show that the number of ancillary activities was positively appreciated, especially in Rotterdam.

On the other hand, there is consensus that a lot of potential for the (para) sport sector and society was left untapped. One of the causes is that the EPC 2023 was a new event, resulting in unfamiliarity and a bit of a 'wait-and-see attitude' among stakeholders.

In addition, the distribution of responsibilities and tasks was unclear and expectations and perspectives of those involved differed. This mainly concerned the Foundation SFE, the national sport federations, NOC*NSF and the association of sport and municipalities. The fact that the foundation SFE was set up only six months before the event made coordination even more challenging.

9.2 Recommendations

Based on our evaluation we formulate three recommendations.

- Develop the concept of the EPC further. This evaluation offers insights and lessons for the development of the event, although future EPCs will be organised in other cities, in another (sport and societal) context and in a different time frame. The City Centre Courts that were free to visit, the helpfulness of the volunteers, the social media campaign (e.g. TikTok) and the high-end overall organization are strengths that can be retained. Decentralization of the competition in terms of time and space, the absence of prize money, significant differences in the attractiveness of the sports for the general public, organization during the summer holiday (no chance to invite pupils and students via educational organizations) and timely communication with international sport federations and media partners are points of attention. Lastly, it is the question whether there is a potential for a World Para Championships (WPC).
- Set objectives for the EPC and for ancillary activities, so they can be monitored and evaluated. An organiser who is responsible for achieving event objectives and a separate entity (like the Foundation SFE) which focusses on non-event objectives (e.g. societal impact) can act as a good model. In order for legacy of para sport events to be successful, there needs to be a separate entity responsible for developing plans, securing resources, and ensuring that the leveraging is embedded in broader policies (Misener, 2015; Misener et al., 2015).
- Be good and tell it. The idea of the EPC became reality. With the EPC 2023, the Netherlands (European Para Championships bv) built on a basis of previous events for athletes with disabilities, especially the Paralympic

Games in 1980 in Arnhem (Meijer, 2014) and to a lesser extent the World Championships for the Disabled in 1990 in Assen (Verhaag & Kemper, 2013). This recommendation fits with the advice of the Dutch Sport Council to promote the Netherlands as a guide country in paralympic (elite) sports (NLsportraad, 2022). The EPC 2023 are history, but their contribution to further strengthening the position of the Netherlands as an international leading and innovative country in elite disability sports (events) can last for decades. The story of the EPC 2023 has the potential to open doors and create wonder and appreciation worldwide.

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Appendix 1 Additional information about methods of subprojects

Athletes and staff

The aim was to measure the value, satisfaction, and experiences of athletes and staff (including trainers and coaches). This encompassed overall satisfaction as well as specific aspects such as sports facilities, transportation, accommodation, catering, volunteers and the atmosphere.

For athletes and staff who have previously participated in (separate) para European Championships, their experiences are compared with their EPC 2023 experience. Personal characteristics are collected as well (including gender, age, sports discipline and country of origin).

1.134 athletes and 830 staff members from 41 countries have collected their accreditation. The staff consisted of (assistant) team managers, (assistant) coaches, mental coaches, doctors, physiotherapists, paramedical assistants, sports assistants, mechanics, press officers, video analysts, and federation crew (European Para Championships bv, 2023).



Data collection

Data collection occurred through structured face-to-face surveys conducted in both English and Dutch during the EPC 2023 or by filling in a survey (containing the same questions) on a phone or computer. The face-to-face surveys were administered by researchers and research assistants from the Mulier Institute. This occurred during the EPC 2023. Athletes and staff were also reached afterwards via email and Whatsapp messenger (group chats with team managers).

In total, 125 athletes and 136 staff filled in the survey completely (table A1.1).

Table A1.1
Surveys conducted per day among athletes and staff
 (in absolute numbers)

Day	Athletes	Staff	Total
August 10 th	9	10	19
August 11 th	8	7	15
August 12 th	1	0	1
August 13 th	6	10	16
August 14 th	6	4	10
August 15 th	4	2	6
August 16 th	3	3	6
August 17 th	9	9	18
August 18 th	6	7	13
August 19 th	3	9	12
August 20 th	1	0	1
After the EPC (aug. 23 th – sept 4 th)	80	64	144
<i>Total</i>	136	125	261

Source: Mulier Institute, survey among athletes and staff at the EPC, 2023.

The majority of the athletes and staff members were from boccia and shooting para sport (table A1.2). Staff members have completed the survey for all sports. No athletes of para judo or para taekwondo completed the survey. Mainly because these players were blind and/or their hearing was impaired, and because they didn't understand and speak English well. Therefore communication was complicated. Athletes or staff members from 30 out of the 41 participating countries filled out the survey. When interpreting the results, the composition of the sample must be taken into account.

Table A1.2
Response per sport
 (percentages)

Sport	Athletes (n=125)	Staff (n=136)
Boccia	21	25
Shooting para sport	24	18
Para archery	12	16
Wheelchair basketball	13	14
Para badminton	13	13
Wheelchair tennis	4	14
Para cycling	8	8
Goalball	5	6
Para judo		5
Para taekwondo		2

Source: Mulier Institute, survey among athletes and staff at the EPC, 2023.

Visitors

The aim was to measure the value, satisfaction, and experiences of the visitors. This includes overall satisfaction as well as specific aspects (such as entrance fees, catering, atmosphere). Personal characteristics were collected too. The survey was tested in collaboration with the MEE Rotterdam foundation.



Data collection

Data collection primarily took place through an online survey, supplemented by face-to-face surveys (both in English and Dutch). The face-to-face surveys were administered by researchers and research assistants from the Mulier Institute. This occurred during the EPC 2023. The online survey was sent per email shortly after the last day of the EPC 2023. Emails were sent by European Para Championships bv to the visitors. Those who filled out the survey completely had a chance to win a prize.

436 visitors filled in the survey completely (table A1.3).

Table A1.3
Surveys conducted per day among visitors
 (in absolute numbers)

Day	
August 9 th	1
August 10 th	10
August 11 th	16
August 13 th	27
August 14 th	1
August 16 th	12
August 17 th	1
August 18 th	5
August 19 th	6
August 20 th	4
After the EPC (aug. 21 th – sept 3 th)	353
<i>Total</i>	436

Source: Mulier Institute, survey among visitors at the EPC, 2023.

Media partners

The aim was to reflect on the experiences of media partners related to the EPC 2023. This includes an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of this new concept, and how it can generate (more) media attention in the future.



Data collection

Based on a list of 5 media partners, we found 2 people willing to participate in an interview. Both interviews were conducted online in the weeks following the EPC 2023.

Sport federations

The aim was to identify the objectives of national and international sport federations, and reflect on the contribution of the EPC 2023 to these objectives. This includes evaluations of the venue, communication with the organizers, the timing of the event and a view towards future editions of the EPC.



Data collection

A list contact details from representatives of 10 national and 10 international sport federations was provided by the European Para Championships bv. After inviting 19 of the 20 federations via e-mail, the target to complete 10 interviews was reached. The 10 conducted interviews include 5 national and 5 international federations.

3 interviews were conducted in-person during the EPC and 7 were held online in the weeks following the event.

Volunteers

The aim was to measure the value, satisfaction, and experiences of the volunteers. This included overall satisfaction as well as specific aspects (such as competence, network development, catering).



Data collection

Data collection took place through an online survey (in Dutch and English) in Google Forms, after the EPC 2023. The Mulier Institute was able to add questions to the EventMakers survey. Emails containing the survey were sent by EventMakers, who were responsible for the data collection. EventMakers sent invitations to 33 English-speaking and 453 Dutch-speaking volunteers.

195 volunteers filled in the survey completely. The Mulier Institute was granted access to the data.

No background characteristics were queried in the survey by EventMakers. Of the 304 volunteers of EventMakers it is known that the average age is 53 years. 46 percent is male and 54 percent is female. When interpreting the results, it must be taken into account that it is not known whether the volunteers who responded to the survey are representative of all volunteers.

Residents of Rotterdam

The aim was to measure the value, awareness, and attitudes of the residents of the municipality of Rotterdam towards the EPC 2023. We surveyed residents' attitudes towards the EPC 2023, parasports, and the allocation of municipal tax funds to elite (para) sports events. This is an important group because residents serve as hosts, and the municipality invests one million euros in the EPC 2023.



Data collection

Data collection took place through an online survey among residents aged 15 and older of Rotterdam, shortly after the EPC 2023 (end of August). The municipality of Rotterdam collected and analysed the data via the digital city panel. 3,645 residents filled in the survey completely.

The panel members who participated in the survey are not representative of all residents of Rotterdam. Especially older residents and highly educated residents have completed the survey (table A1.4). When interpreting the results, the composition of the sample must be taken into account.

Table A1.4
Characteristics of the panel members who participated in the survey
versus the population of Rotterdam 2022
 (percentages)

	Respondents of surveys	Residents of Rotterdam
Gender		
Men	57	49
Women	43	51
Age		
15 to 24 years	1	16
25 to 34 years	6	21
35 to 44 years	12	16
45 to 64 years	41	29
65 years and older	40	18
Educational level		
Low educated	12	31
Medium educated	25	37
High educated	62	32
Household composition		
Single	29	48
Couple without children living at home	44	20
Couple with children living at home	21	17
Single parent with children living at home	4	10
Otherwise	2	4

Source: Dujardin, M. (2023). *European Para Championships 2023: measurement: Digitaal Stadspanel Rotterdam*. Municipality of Rotterdam.

Appendix 2 Ancillary activities of the EPC 2023

In this appendix, an overview is provided of various ancillary activities organized before, during, and after the EPC 2023.

Table A2.1
Activities prior to the EPC 2023

Activity	Date(s)	Where	By whom	Attendees
○ School soccer tournament	15, 22, 29 March 5, 19 April	Rotterdam: North, South, Olympia)	School sports	Unknown
○ Cruyff Court tournaments	19, 24, 29, 30 March 7, 12, 13, 14, 26 April	Rotterdam: Rozenburg, Lombardijen, Feyenoord, Delfshaven, Prinsenpark & de Esch, Vosbergenpad, Multiplein & Afrikaanderplein, Zuiderpark.	Neighborhood sports	Unknown
○ Mini-Final (with EPC announcement)	28, 30 March 4, 6, 13, 14, 18 April 9, 11, 16 May	Rotterdam: Centrum & Noord, Delfshaven, Overschie, Hilligersberg-Schiebroek, IJsselmonde Olympia, Feyenoord Olympia, Charlois, Hoogvliet & Pernis, XerxesDZB, NOC Kralingen.	School sports & Events	Unknown
○ WorldCup Waterpolo women	11, 12 April	Rotterdam	Team Events	Unknown
○ Tennis tournament (with EPC announcement)	12 April 17, 24, 31 May	Rotterdam: Delfshaven & Overschie, IJsselmonde, Centrum & Noord, Feyenoord.	School sports & Events	Unknown
○ Nations League soccer: Fanzone and Side-Events EPC	14, 18 June	Rotterdam	Team Events & RTS	Unknown
○ Para-Final & the Final special education and primary education	22 June	Rotterdam	School sports & Events	Unknown
○ CHIO and attention 'working like a horse' special education and EPC	22 - 24 June	Rotterdam	Team Events	Unknown

○ NC NL – ‘sports square’ promotion and promotion EPC	24 June	Rotterdam	Team Events	Unknown
○ Youth Holiday land Rotterdam Ahoy with EPC	17 - 28 July	Rotterdam Ahoy	Team Events	Unknown
○ (s)Cool on Wheels (together with The Disability Sport Fund)	Unknown	School program at 105 schools	The Disability Sport Fund (<i>Fonds Gehandicaptensport</i>)	5,600 children (of which 815 with a disability)
○ Give attention to the EPC and sporting with a disability	Unknown	During sport/youth events, during meetings Unique Sports.	Rotterdam Sport Support, Sports company Rotterdam, Events, Regional Consultants, Unique Sports	Unknown

Source: Municipality of Rotterdam and the Foundation Sports for Everyone, 2023.

Table A2.2
Activities during the EPC

Activity	Date(s)	Where	By whom	Attendees
○ EPC – ‘sports square’ promotion para-sports	8 – 20 August	Rotterdam Ahoy	Sport providers in Rotterdam	Average of 259 per day
○ Blind stand at the opening ceremony, Basketball, Goalball, Badminton and Shooting games	8-20 August	Rotterdam Ahoy	Unknown	Unknown
○ (s)Cool on Wheels clinics of several sports	8-20 August	Rotterdam Ahoy	Disability Sport Fund (<i>Fonds Gehandicaptensport</i>)	Unknown
○ Handbike battle	8-20 August (not all days)	Unknown	Unique Sports, FGS	Unknown
○ Screens with live games	Unknown	Unknown	City of Rotterdam	Unknown
○ Inspirational night inclusive playgrounds	11 August	Rotterdam Ahoy	City of Rotterdam	Unknown
○ Rehabilitation centre Rijndam	11 August	Rotterdam Ahoy	Unknown	Unknown
○ Entrepreneurship event for entrepreneurial Rotterdam	16 August	Rotterdam Ahoy	Rotterdam Elite sports	Unknown
○ Expert meeting wheelchair sports	16 August	Rotterdam Ahoy	The Hague University of Applied Sciences	Unknown
○ Network meeting Social Organization in sports	16 August	Rotterdam Ahoy	Social Organization in sports	Unknown
○ Congress ‘The Social Power of Sport’ + press moment Dutch Association of Paralympic Participants	17 August	Rotterdam Ahoy	SportNXT	Unknown
○ Event for Unlimited sports	17 August	Rotterdam Ahoy	Department Sports, Education and Culture	Unknown
○ Activities Sport Plaza ((wheelchair) basketball, Fifa, wheelchair tennis, Padel, soccer, goalball)	14-17 August	Rotterdam Ahoy	Feyenoord	Unknown
○ Meeting Social Activation Program	18 August	Rotterdam Ahoy	NOC*NSF	Unknown
○ Promotion hand biking	18 August	Willem Alexander track	Team Sports service South-Holland, KNWU, Sports foundation Zuidplas, Senzup.	Unknown
○ Attribution administrative meeting Drechtsteden	18 August	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
○ Meeting Sports Judiciary of Sports Federations	18 August	Rotterdam Ahoy	NOC*NSF	Unknown
○ Meeting alderman, policy officers, coordinators sport and prevention	Unknown	Rotterdam Ahoy	Unknown	Unknown

○ Meeting 'inclusive sports'	18 August	Rotterdam Ahoy	Unique Sports House, city of Rotterdam	Unknown
○ Meeting Dutch Association of Paralympic Participants	19 August	Rotterdam Ahoy	NOC*NSF	Unknown
○ VVD Thematic network for sports and physical activity	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
○ Network event and job market for companies and job seekers	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Source: Municipality of Rotterdam and the Foundation Sports for Everyone, 2023.

Table A2.3
Activities after the EPC

Activity	Date(s)	Where	By whom	Attendees
○ Swimming Rotterdam Qualification Meet '23 Olympic Games '24 Qualification	30 November – 3 December	Swim Centre Rotterdam	Team Events	Unknown
○ Goalball open days at Hercules Utrecht	Unknown	Utrecht	Dutch Disability Sports (Gehandicaptensport Nederland)	Unknown
○ National open training Boccia	16 September	Utrecht	Dutch Disability Sports (Gehandicaptensport Nederland)	Unknown
○ Blind stand at multiple sport events	Unknown	Unknown	Rotterdam Elite sports, city of Rotterdam	Unknown

Source: Municipality of Rotterdam and the Foundation Sports for Everyone, 2023.

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