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Racing for or against the environment? An analysis of how the Dutch government dealt with hosting a Formula One Grand Prix

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Racing for or against the environment?

An analysis of how the Dutch government dealt with
hosting a Formula One Grand Prix



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Introduction

Many people enjoy watching sports. Whether it is a big international competition, like the Olympic Games, or a match between two local sports clubs, we turn on the television to watch or go out to see the match. Watching sports often helps us forget about our own worries and about all the national and international political issues that keep getting broadcast on the news almost twenty-four hours a day. However, sports might not be as indifferent to politics as it seems. There are many examples to be found of politics and sports interacting. Think for instance about athletes taking the knee during the national anthem to make a statement about racism, like Colin Kaepernick did in 2016 (Boren, 2020). Or an even more recent example can be found when, during the 2020 European football championship, the UEFA forbade a football stadium being illuminated in rainbow colors during a match against Hungary, which was a protest against Hungary's recent laws banning most LGBTQ+ movies and books for children (Connolly, 2021). This decision by the UEFA in turn sparked a protest in which many other football stadiums were lit up in rainbow colors instead. Of course, politics also interact with sports in the area of policymaking. This can range from investments to regulation, court battles, and public-private partnerships (Gift & Miner, 2017).

This is why it is strange that political science research has largely neglected sports. According to Gift and Miner (2017) sports are deeply human and bring out the best and the worst of people and their political tendencies, and therefore politics cannot be evaded. In their article, they have created the concept of an 'iron sports triangle' to describe interactions between sports and politics (pp. 149-150). This triangle comprises three prominent actors which all pursue their own interests: 'fans want winning teams, owners want profits, and politicians want reelection' (p. 150). Kaal (2021) also writes on the importance of researching sports and its relation to politics. He states that 'sport has become political through practices of governance and policy making' (p. 367). During the second half of the 20th century, first states, and later international and supranational institutions, became more involved in sports, through budget allocation, regulation, and policy making. On the other hand, international sports organizations (ISOs), or as Kaal (2021) calls them 'profit-oriented, business-friendly elite INGOs' (p. 377) also play a political role by influencing host governments to change laws to fit their own purpose or the organization of an event.

This last part is interesting in the context of climate change. As Monbiot (2006) wrote, sports affect the environment and contribute to climate change. In support of this argument, he gives examples of the emissions from vehicles in motor sports, the ecological footprint of fans travelling to sports events, and the way the building of sports locations hurt the environment. Orr and Inoue (2019) also describe the interaction between sport and the environment, and they call this the bidirectional relationship (p. 454). In one way, sports affect the environment in the ways as described by Monbiot (2006). In the other way, the environment also affects sports by providing resources, like playing fields and the weather conditions. When these change, the sports events and the sports organizations will be affected through cancellations and, sometimes, consequently financial problems. Because of these financial interests of big international sports organizations, they will lobby host governments for law changes to be able to organize their events and they might even lobby for certain exemptions from environmental laws to keep their event going and still gain profits from it.

Research question

Based on the concept of the ‘iron sports triangle’, I want to see how governments manage the different interests of fans, owners, and politicians, and whether the outcome of that could align with the public good, in this case the environment, or whether it will result in special interests, such as profit and entertainment, being favored. In this thesis, I want to look at how governments navigate hosting mega sports events in a time where climate change and sustainability are high on the political agenda. Therefore, I want to focus on the question: *how do host governments influence the sustainability of organizing a Formula One Grand Prix?*

I will focus on Formula One, because it is one of the most polluting sports. In 2018 the sport emitted 256.551 tons of CO₂, which is more than some countries, mainly small island nations, emit (Formula One, 2021). Of those emissions, 7,3% is related to event operations, which is still 18.728 tons of CO₂. This is, however, still excluding the emissions from fans travelling to events. Next to that, Formula One also has the reputation of being very polluting, due to the fact that it is a category in motor sports. This might influence the way host governments think about hosting a Formula One event, due to the backlash it might receive for environmental concerns. This could be different to the Olympic Games, where governments might think more of the Games bringing people from all across the world together and where environmental concerns might not be at the forefront. Formula One is also interesting to look at, because most often countries host Grands Prix multiple years in a row, whereas the Olympic Games or the

FIFA World Cup are one-off events, although the organization takes years. This might affect the way the ISOs and host governments interact with each other. In my research I focused on the case of Zandvoort in The Netherlands. I found that the different levels of government were all concerned about the image of the event regarding its sustainability. This might have contributed to the fact that barely any financial support was given and this in turn might have affected the way in which the governments enforced environmental laws and regulations.

Reading guide

This thesis is divided into several sections. After this introduction, the literature review will follow. Here I will go into further detail on the relationship between sports and politics, and I will discuss the definition of mega-events, and interactions between ISOs and host governments. Next will be the section on the methodological approach, where I will discuss why I chose the case of the Dutch Grand Prix and will provide more context on this case. I will also explain how I went about analyzing the documents using content analysis. Fourth, will be the actual analysis and the results. The last section will be the conclusion where I will also discuss the implications and limitations of my research and provide suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Sports and politics

As mentioned before in the introduction, sports and politics have many ways in which they can interact. Here I will elaborate more on why it is important and useful for political science to do research on the interaction between sports and politics and society.

Gift and Miner (2017) write extensively on sports and politics intersecting. One important point to highlight here is their argument on the iron sports triangle. As I mentioned in the introduction, this triangle comprises fans, owners, and politicians, who all have different interests. The interactions within this triangle result in a policy formulation. This concept could thus play an important role in seeing how a host government deals with the organization of an event. Next to that, sports also provide a frame through which to analyze certain topics, such as corruption and political empowerment, social movements, and public policy making. This is because sports can mimic political spheres, for instance, the IOC looks like other international organizations. Therefore, looking at sports can provide useful insights on politics at large. They also give a methodological reason to research sports which relates to the unpredictable quality of sports. This quality means that sports can provide a special opportunity for the application of causal identification strategies. According to them, what research there is does not look at intersections of sports and electoral politics or policymaking processes, but more at the historical relevance of interactions between the two. According to them, the reason is that sports are too thematic. However, this thematic aspect could still be useful because specific issue areas like this may bring with them their own unique qualities. They give the example of thinking that the environment is just a special case of public policy politics, but this ignores the way in which this policy area implicates certain other problems and actors.

Kaal (2021) did the historical research that Gift and Miner (2017) discussed. His argument is that sports have been used to construct political communities and identities and this therefore calls for an analysis of the role of sports in the postwar political history. He discusses the role sport has played in international relations and looks at the IOC and the FIFA as actors, but mostly from a Western European perspective. In his article, various ways in which sports and politics have interacted in the past are considered. For example, on the one hand, politicians have used sports to show themselves as being fit to run for office or to gain attention from people who are not normally very interested in politics. On the other hand, athletes have also used politics for communication about certain issues, such as racism or women's rights. In the

early twentieth century, sports showed the ability of building group identities during the rise of mass spectator sports. However, the building of these sport stadiums also provided a venue for (trans)national movements that mobilized against building these and the organization of international sports events, because of their effects on the environment and society. The growing media attention has made it difficult for the sports organizations to ignore those protests and this in turn has resulted in them taking over some of the goals that have been advocated by these groups. So, in conclusion, according to Kaal (2021) sports provide us a window to look at how certain social issues that were rooted in civil organizations became connected with the state in different ways.

Koch (2013) adds that elite sport in particular is an interesting topic to focus on, because it can call into focus similarities between elite sports and nationalist discourses and how these can support authoritarian regimes. While using the example of the Astana cycling team in Kazakhstan, she shows how sports can successfully link people to a homeland and the state without having to use force, because most people will automatically cheer for their homeland. The cycling team also gave Kazakhstan more international prestige. This type of sportwashing can also be found in Formula One, for example in Saudi Arabia and Qatar which were recently added to the calendar. The governments from these countries use the event to show themselves to the international community and build a better reputation for themselves. This might give them a big interest in keeping to host these events. De Waele and Trif (2020) also discuss the interactions between soccer and authoritarian regimes. They argue that, historically, authoritarian leaders have faced strains by allowing soccer games, because some games in stadiums resulted in protests and riots, which then led to authoritarian leaders restricting free speech. However, as Kaal (2021) argued as well, leaders also used soccer to show their own health or for international prestige. Authoritarian leaders may also use international sports events, more generally, to make themselves more money and to fortify their own reputation (Gift & Miner, 2017). Nevertheless, Gift and Miner (2017) show that, sports events can be a mechanism for regime change as well. With all the media attention, the spotlight is also on the country hosting it. This may serve to delegitimize the dictators.

As may be clear from the writing above, sports can also have the ability to unite people, whether it is for the actual sport or for protests against it. A famous example of sports having the ability of creating social cohesion can be found in Putnam's (2000) book 'Bowling Alone'. In this book he discussed the disengagement from and decrease of trust in politics from the American

people. He partly ascribes this to the weakened social capital: social networks have collapsed, less people are members of civic, social, cultural or sports organizations. His famous example comes from the historical comparison of the bowling alley: nowadays there are more people bowling than ever before, however, most people are doing it alone and not as a member of a bowling league. Another way for sports to create unity is that fan bases cluster geographically, for certain clubs or whole countries. However, it can also divide groups of people who are fans of opposing teams (Gift & Miner, 2017). Kaal (2021) confirms this and writes that the experiences of struggles and victories contribute to the formation of communities and a common identity. He gives an example of how a European ‘collective memory’ was created through certain soccer events and persons. Activities and rituals surrounding sports events, such as waving flags in the crowd and singing the national anthem help with this as well. This unifying effect might also play a role in governments’ decisions to organizing events. When there is a popular national athlete that is making most of the public proud, this might affect a government’s decision to host an event and to what extent they are willing to go for making the organization possible.

Sports, ISOs, and the environment

As already briefly mentioned above, sports do not just interact with politics, but also with international relations. Most sports have their own national, regional, or global governing bodies, and these may face the same kinds of problems that other international organizations do. But apart from studying interactions within these organizations, one can also look at how sports organizations as societal organizations play a role in governmental policymaking and implementation (Kaal, 2021). As Gift and Miner (2017) write, governments are involved in sports policymaking and therefore sports organizations may have an interest in lobbying or talking to those governments. Those sports organizations, and in particular the ISOs, have political power: as Kaal (2021) has shown, they have the ability to make governments change laws for an event they are organizing or for another purpose. Schmidt (2017) also describes this in her article where she has looked at how ISOs can work together with host governments and NGOs. She shows how public and private organizations can share the ability to regulate the organization of events by using a case study of cooperation between the IOC and others, including for example the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and WWF, for making the Olympic Games more sustainable. Here the IOC has a very powerful position and is indeed able to lobby governments for law changes for the event, however, she also warns that concluding that the IOC is all-powerful underestimates the complexity of all the actors

involved. It also depends on the country and city for how much needs to be changed: a city with very advanced sustainable technology will need less. Although these organizations put a lot of effort into making the events more environmentally friendly, this is hard to enforce. According to her, this is because when it becomes clear a host country is not abiding the agreement and ensuring that the event is sustainable, it is too late to withdraw from that place. Most preparations will have already been done or are tied to sponsorship contracts, but it will also be hard to find a new place on such a short-term.

Fermeglia (2017) also discusses this and writes that bidding requirements by the IOC and FIFA generally encourage host countries/cities to adopt ambitious climate policies and regulations to reduce the event's carbon footprint. The general goals are written down in the organization agreements between host countries and the International Sports Organization (ISO), which is a legally binding document. Therefore, the host country has contractual obligations to make sure these policies are set out. However, host countries rarely incorporate the environmental commitments they made in the bidding process into national legislation and ISOs lack effective institutional safeguards and enforcement mechanisms. Therefore, in reality, they prove incapable of discouraging violations or inactivity with regards to the environmental aspects of organizing such an event. On the other hand, he finds that municipalities and local communities sometimes do put more concrete climate-oriented initiatives into place, with the aim of establishing mandatory green standards or ensuring kinds of public services.

Mega events

Because the arguments made above are based on mega events, it is important to discuss what a mega event is and whether Formula One Grands Prix are mega events. In his article Müller (2015) discusses different definitions for mega events and eventually he gives his own. I will use his definition, because it is essentially a combination of all the most common characteristics given by other authors and also because he gives a clear scale for when to define an event as major, mega, or giga. He defines mega events as: 'ambulatory occasions of a fixed duration that attract a large number of visitors, have a large mediated reach, come with large costs and have large impacts on the built environment and the population' (Müller, 2015, p. 638). Four variables are discernable here. First there is visitor attractiveness which is about how many fans will come to the event, so to measure this a proxy of tickets sold can be used. The second variable is mediated reach, which is important because the media can show the atmosphere surrounding an event and they play an important role in creating an image of the host country.

For this variable, he uses the value of broadcasting rights. The third variable is the cost, which more or less speaks for itself as to how it is defined, but the higher the costs, the more stakeholders there are. The fourth and last variable is the transformative impact, which translates to the impact of the event on the population and the environment. To measure this, he uses the capital investments of the host country.

Even though no single Grand Prix comes close to meeting these criteria, the whole Formula One championship does. According to the latest numbers available, Formula One had over four million attendants during the 2019 season (Formula One, 2019). The broadcasting rights value of Formula One reaches almost \$1 billion, with some deals per country reaching the price of \$1 billion dollars alone for multiple years (Rencken, 2021). The variables cost and transformative impact are more difficult to determine. There is a hosting fee, which differs per country but with the average price of \$30.6 million that the organizer needs to pay to Formula One Management (FOM), and for other costs it depends on what type of circuit it is, whether a new one needs to be build, and what the state of the infrastructure around the circuit and in the country is. These costs can be up to \$1 billion dollars for when a new track is necessary (Sylt, 2017). These variables applied to Formula One would satisfy the parameters Müller (2015) sets for mega events and will in turn affect the way host countries consider hosting such an event.

Formula One

The research mentioned above was mostly done on the IOC and the Olympics, but Fairley et al. (2011) have looked at Formula One in Australia. The government of the state of Victoria had to contribute public money and then argued that it was important to do so, because the event would bring economic benefits and global exposure and the money enabled an event to be organized which provides entertainment to the broader public. Although research showed that these types of events do not always bring economic benefits, they still contributed and went to great lengths to ensure that the event would happen and continue in the future. For the Australian GP they introduced a new law in which they exempted the Grand Prix organization from existing laws relating to the environment and freedom of information. Tranter and Lowes (2009) also took the Australian Grand Prix as a case study. Therefore, they make the same argument that the government exempts this event from existing environmental laws. However, they also add to it by arguing that Formula One, and motorsports in general, have an even bigger impact on the environment because they promote a certain lifestyle and behavior, influencing driver behavior and potentially increasing sales of cars. This is not taken into account enough

by the politicians deciding to hold the race. The race organizers convince them with arguments such as economic benefits and entertainment for the public, which in turn gives those politicians a ‘winner image’.

Preliminary answer

Based on the aforementioned research, I would expect to find that national host governments might not influence the environmental aspects of the organization of Grands Prix in a positive way. They will give dispensation from environmental regulations and will thereby not be effectively protecting the environment. This could be for economic reasons, or for the prestige of holding the event, or even another reason. It also helps that they are certain of contracts for the coming years. Notwithstanding, municipalities and local communities might try to counter this by coming up with their own climate-oriented initiatives.

However, it could also be argued that it would be the other way around. So, then I might find that host governments are more inclined to keep to the agreements made and thus to make sure environmental standards for such events are put in place and monitored. Because most of the research mentioned above was based on examination of the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cups and FIA Formula One championships differ in certain aspects from those. While FIA is also an IOC-recognized International Sports Federation which supports the IOC objectives and FIIFA and both FIA and Formula One are also signatories of the UNFCCC Sports for Climate Action Framework, the interaction between the organization of Formula One Races and host governments could be different. Olympic Games and World Cups are one-off events, and although their organization takes multiple years, it can be seen as a single interaction between the ISO and the host government. Formula One Grands Prix, on the other hand, are, most of the time, recurring events. Most countries host Grands Prix for multiple years. This creates repeated interaction between the host governments and the ISO, which might make the government more inclined to keep to their agreement on sustainability.

Methods and analysis

In this section I will discuss my methods and the analysis. First, I will explain my case selection and why I chose to look at the case of Zandvoort in The Netherlands. Then I will provide more context on this case: the history, how a Grand Prix gets organized and what the division of competences is between the different levels of government. After that I will discuss the method I used, what documents I analyzed and how I went about that analysis. Lastly, I will present my results and consider their implications.

The case of Zandvoort

For this case study, I have decided to analyze the case of the Dutch Grand Prix, which takes place in Zandvoort. Formula One Grands Prix have been held there between 1952 and 1985 and then not for a long time. In 2020 the Dutch Grand Prix would make a comeback, however this got postponed to 2021, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Because this makes it a relatively new addition to the Formula One Calendar, it is ensured that the most recent environmental standards are known to both the government and Formula One so that they can be applied here. Next to that, the Dutch Grand Prix has a confirmed multi-year contract (NOS, 2021). This makes the application of the theory of repeated interaction between the host government and the ISO possible. Last, but not least, the concept of the iron sports triangle developed by Gift and Miner (2017) is clearly visible here. The politicians looking for reelection and owners wanting profit can be found at every race. However, it is the Dutch fans wanting a winning team or driver that makes this case more interesting. There is currently one Dutch driver in Formula One, Max Verstappen, who is fighting for wins and, in 2021 has been in a tight battle for the championship. He has popularized the sport in The Netherlands, and even before there was a Dutch Grand Prix, there were special grandstands for his fans at other races. While other countries also have their own favorite drivers, there never went to such lengths. This shows the influence he has on the Dutch fans, and the influence Dutch fans can have on Grands Prix organizers. This could thus play an important role in the policymaking process relating to the Dutch Grand Prix, because there is societal pressure to make the event happen. What makes this case the most interesting, however, is that the Dutch state did not contribute financially even though the organizers asked for it (Mitchell, 2019). They announced that although the event would bring great economics and promotional benefits to the country, this would not justify spending public money, they would thus not contribute financially with subsidies from public money. This was the case for all the levels of government. However, they were willing

to play a facilitating role with regards to visa, taxes, and security and pay for infrastructure improvements. This gives the state less of an interest in hosting the event, making it as big as possible, and organizing future editions. This also provides the opportunity to compare this case to the Australian one by Fairley et al. (2011) and Tranter and Lowes (2009).

The organization of the Dutch Grand Prix

Article 12 of the 2021 Formula One Sporting Regulations states: ‘An organizer is a body nominated by the ASN and appointed by the FIA. Upon deciding to grant an application to hold an Event, the FIA will invite the relevant ASN to organize it or to nominate an organizer. If the ASN is not in a position to do so, the FIA may itself appoint an organizer. The organizer must be a club or body acceptable to the FIA and must enter into an organization agreement with the FIA when it applies to organize the Event.’ This means that for a Grand Prix to be held somewhere, the national motorsport organization must look for an organizer, otherwise the FIA will appoint one themselves. The organizer of the Dutch Grand Prix was DGP Race B.V., which is a company consisting of a partnership between the Circuit of Zandvoort, Sportvibes and TIG Sports (Gemeente Zandvoort, 2021). This is the organization that concluded an organization agreement with Formula One Management (FOM).

Of course, the host government also plays a major role in the organization of such an event with thousands of visitors. For the Dutch Grand Prix, there was a division of competences between three different levels of government: local, regional, and national (Noord-Holland, 2021). Overall, the municipality of Zandvoort played the biggest role in the organization of the Grand Prix. On the local level, they were responsible for all the permits relating to environmental law, building and construction, and events. Next to that, they had the main and directing role in preparing the area for the crowds and the event itself, (Zandvoort, 2021). On the regional level, the province of Noord-Holland was authorized for all the permits relating to nature conservation, geological monuments, and helicopter flights. They were mainly responsible for permits needed for adjustments of the circuit which would change the landscape. On the national level, different ministries played a role. The Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management was authorized for making decisions when it comes to changes to the railway, which were needed for crowd management. When these changes would affect nature, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food would get the authority over these decisions. The government also has a facilitating role with regards to maintaining certain public rules, such as

taxes, security, visa, and indeed infrastructure, such as the railroads (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2019).

Method of analysis

For the analysis I looked at documents from three levels of government: municipal (Zandvoort), regional (province of Noord-Holland), and national (The Netherlands). I looked at approved permits and whether there are any conditions set in them relating to environmental standards. I went through policy plans and strategies to see the broader plans for mitigating the environmental impact of hosting a Grand Prix. I also looked at two letters from the Gedeputeerde Staten of Noord-Holland, the provincial government, which went into further detail on two of the permits they gave by providing additional motivation for why the permit was granted. There were some letters from the municipal government to the city council about the Formula One event, however, these were only related to measures against the coronavirus, and were therefore not relevant to my research. Next to these types of documents, the case study of Zandvoort allowed me to use governmental communication (emails) related to Formula One in Zandvoort, obtained through WOB-requests. A WOB-request is a request to make information public based on the 'open government law'. Through these requests, emails, texts, or any other forms of governmental communication are made public, although it is mostly anonymous, and some confidential parts can be left out. However, this can still give an important and interesting overview of the process through which certain decisions are made.

I analyzed these documents through content analysis. In Appendix A the coding scheme I used can be found. I looked for three different variables. First, I wanted to see how strict the different levels of government would be with applying environmental laws. As based on the relevant literature I would expect them to easily give exemptions for the event. This variable would mostly be relevant for analyzing the permits. I would only note the stricter conditions if these were more specifically for the Formula One event, and not if these would be applied to everyone who asked for such a permit. For example, requiring the permit holder to notify the government when an activity is going to happen, is a condition set for everyone and is therefore not very relevant for this research. Second, I looked at whether the government would be worried about the reaction from the public about organizing the Dutch Grand Prix. Since people might be indignant at the fact that they must keep to environmental regulations, but then a Formula One race would be organized, which has the reputation of being polluting. This could then also have played a role in the extent to which the government would contribute financially. Third and

lastly, I looked at whether the governments together with the organizers planned to be more ambitious regarding the sustainability for the following editions of the event and to reevaluate the first edition to see if they can do better. This would then show whether sustainability would be high on the agenda or not and whether they would be willing to improve.

Results and implications

The coding results from the analysis can be found in Appendix B. Here I will discuss the general findings and highlight some interesting discoveries. The first thing to note after doing the analysis is that the case of Zandvoort is much different from the Australian Grand Prix researched by Tranter and Lowes (2009) and Fairley et al. (2011). While Zandvoort really wanted to use the event as an opportunity to further develop within the Amsterdam region and would thus have an interest in allowing the event, no outright exemptions were given for the Dutch Grand Prix. Hosting the event would be of interest to the whole country as it would provide promotion options for tourism and potentially bring in sponsorship money, however the central government of The Netherlands was also not prepared to give millions of euros in subsidies for the event. As noted in different mails and letters from one of the WOB-requests, the national government was not willing to give the requested €5 million a year but was willing to facilitate with questions relating to visa and taxes (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2019b). This kind of financial contribution was not viable for them, as this would be half of the budget for sport events in a year and they thought this unfair to other sports events as well. Next to that, they argued that since the event has a lot of international prestige, businesses should be willing to contribute as they might profit from it as well, by for example having their names on billboards surrounding the circuit. As was also emphasized in this document, the national government explicitly did not want to freely give exemptions from laws and regulations. The whole Grand Prix had to be organized within the existing legal framework for these kinds of events.

This might have had something to do with the fact that the government was aware that people might worry about the environmental aspects of the event. They knew many people would be interested in seeing Max Verstappen race in his home country. However, they were also aware that not everyone might feel the same regarding the sustainability of it. Since the event was about motorsport and many changes had to be made to the circuit and the surrounding area, this raised more questions from the public about the sustainability of it all than other sports event might have done. The province of Noord-Holland specifically acknowledged

this, but also commented that this public division is no valid reason to deny a request for a permit, as with all environmental permit requests there are proponents and opponents. To address the sustainability of the event, the municipality of Zandvoort together with the organizers made a sustainable strategy with help from a consultancy firm specialized in sustainable event organizing. The municipality admitted in this sustainability strategy that they were aware the sustainability of the event would get a lot of attention. Therefore, Zandvoort put in extra effort to take away some of the concerns of and create more support among the residents by providing additional information and inviting them to see the operations. This shows the government was certainly aware of the way organizing this event looked and were willing to put in the effort to convince people that it was not going to be all bad. As I said before, this might also have affected the willingness of the government to provide financial support. Since not everyone would get behind the idea of spending a lot of public money on this type of event, they would only facilitate the organizers in certain areas.

Not only were the organizers and governments trying to take away worries among the public by making the event more environmentally friendly, but they were also generally very ambitious in their wording. They emphasized multiple times that they wanted the Dutch Grand Prix to be the ‘greenest race on the calendar’, for the event to ‘take pole position on the area of sustainability’, or for it to become ‘a benchmark for the sustainable organization and execution of a Formula One race and its side events’. For the future editions of the event, they promised to be even more sustainable after analyzing how the first edition went, specifically with regards to using a circular system for conserving raw materials. They also said they were aiming for only using renewable energy in 2022, which at the time of writing the project plan would have been the third and potentially last edition, but which should now be the second one. A last ambition I will highlight is the one to go even further than music festivals and not just use compostable materials and separate the waste, but also implement a deposit system on packaging. The governments and the organizers were thus definitely trying to set high goals and make their environmental plans ambitious. Whether this has to do with actual concerns for the environment or more with public support for the event is disputable. The question also remains whether these ambitions will become reality and all their goals will be implemented.

While the last question will remain unanswered for a while because it is only possible to reflect on that after all the editions have been held, a question that can be answered now is to what extent the government would allow the organizers to harm the environment for the

preparations and during the first edition of the event. For this part, I looked at the permits granted and potential extra conditions in them. It is important to note, that the actual racing already fell within a previously granted permit for the Circuit of Zandvoort. They have a permit allowing them to organize activities with cars during the year and in it they are given the possibility to have twelve days during which they can exceed noise limitations. The Dutch Grand Prix would fall within these twelve days, so no extra permit for this was needed for the event. All other permits needed were granted. However, this does not mean that no attention was paid to environmental concerns. Most permits were given without needing to put in extra requirements, but this was only done after considering whether the activities would be harmful to the environment and the surrounding nature. This also depended on the area for which the permit was requested. Some activities would harm the area, but since no special animal or plants species were found there, the permit would still be granted. This happened specifically with permits for activities in areas with artificial dunes.

In other areas where the activities would be harmful to certain protected species, especially the natterjack toad and the sand lizard, they would still grant the permit, but put in extra requirements. These would force the organizers to look for these species while working, ensure they would not be harmed or killed and force them to at least try to provide other living areas for them. In this way, the government tried to make sure there would at least be compensation for the harm done. For some other permits, exceptions were made relating to the date the permit would go into force. This could harm the environment because the activity would already be allowed to happen without environmental organizations having the opportunity to appeal the decision and argue for more environmental protection. Where this was done, Zandvoort argued that it was necessary to do so because of safety concerns for visitors. For example, in several permits it was argued that road work needed to be done first due to possible time constraints, so that at least evacuations were possible and safe. It is also interesting to note, that sometimes they would give the exception of the permit going into force earlier to protect the environment. This was done, for example, when allowing the building activities to start earlier would ensure they would be finished before the breeding season of animals, so as not to disturb them during that time.

This analysis shows that it can be possible to host motorsport events without completely neglecting the environment, and even make sustainability a selling point of the event. However, questions remain whether the efforts from both the governments and the organizers

are successful. Unfortunately, I was unable to include this in my research as more environmental research on the effects of the event and reflections on the events are needed, and this will only be available after the initial three editions. When the case of Zandvoort is compared to the Australian one, the most interesting difference is the fact that the Dutch government was unwilling to give financial support. As they were less dependent on earning back their money through the event, because they did not contribute in the first place, they also had less of an interest in the event happening. This ensured they could mostly apply the existing environmental laws and regulations in a way they normally would.

Discussion and conclusion

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, I wanted to see how governments manage the different interests of fans, owners, and politicians, and whether the outcome of this could align with the public good, here the environment, or whether it will result in special interests, like profits, being favored. My research question therefore was: how do host governments influence the sustainability of the organization of a Formula One Grand Prix? In the case of Zandvoort, the Dutch government has tried to find a balance between financial, environmental, and safety interests. Not contributing financially with subsidies, but only playing a facilitating role, ensured they did not have a special interest in the event, as they would only pay something if the event would occur. This, together with the awareness of how they public could react, might be the reason why they did not freely give out exemptions for the event. Instead, they applied the normal environmental laws and regulations. However, they were sometimes less strict with certain requirements when it came to time constraints for building which would either endanger the safety of visitors or disturb the breeding season of animals. They also researched to what extent the environment would be harmed. If there would be damage to the environment, they would put extra requirements in place to at least compensate the harm, but also try to rehabilitate it. For this, special attention was paid to endangered species. When harm would happen to 'normal' species or artificial nature, they would already be less strict. On the one hand an argument could be made that this is also nature and should be protected as much as any other species. On the other, it could also be argued that this would lead to no permits being granted for anything, not for events, but also not for building new houses, because it could always harm the environment in some way. This is open for discussion.

This research project shows how the Dutch government has dealt with hosting a Grand Prix and thus how they dealt with aa big economic actor in the area of sport. It shows all the different aspects they must consider, such as financial contributions, public opinion, safety, and of course the environment. This case study has also provided an opportunity for comparison with the research done on the Australian Grand Prix by Fairley et al. (2010) and Tranter and Lowes (2009). Whereas the Australian government created a new law with all kinds of exemptions, the Dutch government was more open. There were outright exemptions regarding environmental laws, and people could still access information through their right to freedom of information by filing a WOB-request.

A weakness of this project is that some important documents were not available to me. One important permit, the permit for the event, was unavailable, and so were some other WOB-requests for the other levels of government. Unfortunately, since the process for WOB-requests takes a long time, it was not viable for me to wait for the ones already being processed or to request some myself. Now, I could only base myself on the internal discussions within the national government and could not see how this played out in the lower levels and whether these thoughts were any different. The event permit being unavailable was a lesser problem, as most of the information in it, was also used in the sustainability strategy and project plan.

Another weakness is that this was just a single case study and the circumstances under which an event is organized may differ elsewhere. Nevertheless, since the case study was done on a democratic decentralized unitary state, this case is representative for states with a similar division of powers. Whenever circumstances still differ, a comparative case study might be done to research the reason for this and whether this might indeed have something to do with financial support from the host government. This case study is indeed unrepresentative of hybrid or authoritarian regimes, and therefore I would recommend further study on how these types of regimes handle hosting such an event. For example, it would be interesting to see how the government of Saudi Arabia, handles sustainability, while their state oil company Aramco, is one of the main sponsors of Formula One and they have an interest in the event for improving their international reputation.

A strength of this case study is that it clearly shows how the host government deals with hosting a Grand Prix. It shows how they think and what they might want from it; it is essentially the end product of a long process of debates within the government. On the other hand, this provides little insight into the different influences on final government decisions. No questions or resolutions from parliament or the municipal council were considered. Additionally, although this research has shown that public opinion does play a strong role in the decision-making, more research could be done on how exactly the public opinion on sports events like this is formed and what the effects are of fans' or outsiders' activism on how events are organized. But it would also be useful to see how this activism influences ISOs and bidding processes for other mega sporting events.

Last, but not least, the aim of this thesis was not to come up with policy recommendations. However, this case could serve as an example to other host governments that hosting mega

sporting events can be possible within existing environmental regulations. Exemptions are not necessary to keep an event in a country. So, while one could argue that it is better to not organize these events at all, this thesis has shown that the race to save the environment does not have to be put on hold in order to host a race.

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Appendix A: Coding table

Table 1. Coding scheme

| Variables | Levels | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| a. Requirements | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stricter conditions than permit 2. Permit is given without extra conditions 3. Looser conditions than normally allowed with permit | <p>‘We will set the following conditions’;</p> <p>‘We grant this permit’;</p> <p>‘We will grant you these exemptions’</p> |
| b. Level of concern about reaction from the public | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Worried about reaction from the public 2. Neutral 3. Confident public will accept the event happening | <p>‘We are concerned about’;</p> <p>‘We worry that the public...’;</p> <p>‘The public might feel that...’;</p> <p>‘We know the public would like...’</p> |
| c. Ambitions for (future) events’ sustainability | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Will do more 2. Will do the same as others 3. Might do something 4. Will do less | <p>‘We will set a benchmark for others...’;</p> <p>‘We will do what they do there...’;</p> <p>‘We aim to do...’;</p> <p>‘We will not implement this...’</p> |

Appendix B: Results

All documents were originally in Dutch. Translations are my own

Table 2. Results municipality of Zandvoort: sustainable strategy and project plan

| Name of document | Code | Text |
|---|------|--|
| Formule 1 Heineken Dutch Grand Prix Duurzame Strategie 2020–2022. (Gemeente Zandvoort, 2019a) | C1 | ‘DGP Race BV and the municipality of Zandvoort have pronounced the ambition to organize an event as sustainable as possible and become the greenest race on the calendar’ (p. 2). |
| Formule 1 Heineken Dutch Grand Prix Duurzame Strategie 2020–2022. (Gemeente Zandvoort, 2019a) | C1 | ‘On the area of sustainability, the Formula 1 Heineken Dutch Grand Prix takes Pole Position. [...]. Through realistic and effective actions, the event will grow to become a benchmark for the sustainable organization and execution of a Formula One race and side events’ (p. 3). |
| Formule 1 Heineken Dutch Grand Prix Duurzame Strategie 2020–2022. (Gemeente Zandvoort, 2019a) | C3 | ‘Considering the nature and the size of the event, is the logistics load caused by racing teams and the organization inevitable. By charting their emissions, it will become possible to limit the emissions and possibly compensate them’ (p. 7). |
| Formule 1 Heineken Dutch Grand Prix Duurzame Strategie 2020–2022. | B2 | ‘Organizing the Dutch Grand Prix and the side events will cause a regional impact. The economic impact will be |

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| (Gemeente Zandvoort, 2019a) | | positive, and the ecological impact will get a lot of attention’ (p. 11). |
| Formule 1 Heineken Dutch Grand Prix Duurzame Strategie 2020–2022. (Gemeente Zandvoort, 2019a) | B3 | ‘By involving local residents with the event, providing them with information, and inviting them to see the operation, local support will be created’ (p. 13). |
| Formule 1 Heineken Dutch Grand Prix Duurzame Strategie 2020–2022. (Gemeente Zandvoort, 2019a) | C1 | ‘Renewable energy is one of the key points of the province of Noord-Holland. The Formula 1 Dutch Grand Prix will use her innovative power in the area of generating and using renewable energy to be an example for the whole region and other Formula One events. By mapping the total energy use of the event, we will strive to work with only renewable energy in 2022’ (p. 18). |
| Projectplan Formula 1 Heineken Dutch Grand Prix 2020. (Gemeente Zandvoort, 2019b) | C1 | ‘The municipality of Zandvoort and DGP have asked Green Events to come up with an ambitious, but also realistic sustainability strategy and plan of action together with the organization. This plan of action describes the |

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| | | developed vision, the goals for 2022 and the strategy for the coming three years to work towards these goals. In this plan there will be a link with the Sustainable Development Goals’ (p. 47). |
| Projectplan Formula 1 Heineken Dutch Grand Prix 2020. (Gemeente Zandvoort, 2019b) | C1 | ‘Using compostable materials, waste separation, using cleaning teams, is ‘common sense’ within the festival world and therefore also within the DGP. As DGP we wish to go even further by implementing deposits on certain packaging materials’ (p. 47). |
| Projectplan Formula 1 Heineken Dutch Grand Prix 2020. (Gemeente Zandvoort, 2019b) | C1 | ‘As part of the sustainability we want to use a circular system for conserving raw materials. For the first year, it will therefore be important to set a good basis from which to work to the eventual goals’ (p. 48). |

Table 2. Results municipality of Zandvoort: permits

| Name of document | Code | Text |
|---|-------------|--|
| Besluit op aanvraag omgevingsvergunning voor het tijdelijk plaatsen van een bijeenkomstgebouw | A1 | ‘We decide to grant the requested environmental permit’ (p. 1). + ‘The prescribed improvement of |

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| (Gemeente Zandvoort, 2019a) | | the ground is mandatory and crucial for a correct execution and to be able to comply with regulations from the Building Decision’ (p. 4). |
| Besluit op aanvraag omgevingsvergunning voor het egaliseren van de grond ter hoogte van locatie 4 en 6 ten behoeve van het optimaliseren van het circuitgebied in Circuit Zandvoort (Omgevingsdienst IJmond, (2019b) | A2 | ‘We decide to grant the requested environmental permit’ (p. 1). + ‘The adjustments do not affect natural dunes, but an artificially created zone to provide acoustic protection for the circuit. The possibility for reparations will not be disproportionately reduced, because the adjustments will improve the management of the area...’ (p. 5). + ‘Considering the fact that the present landscape values at locations 4 and 6 are limited, [...], the conclusion that the adjustments will not or cannot lead to disproportionate damage to the landscape values is justified’ (pp. 5-6). |
| Besluit op aanvraag omgevingsvergunning voor het uitvoeren van grondwerkzaamheden aan | A3 | ‘We decide to grant the requested environmental permit’ (p. 1). + ‘... the environmental permit will go |

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| <p>wal locatie T14 (Omgevingsdienst IJmond, 2019c)</p> | | <p>into force immediately after publication’ (p. 2). + ‘In particular, it is of the utmost importance that when the tight planning for preparations cannot succeed or is delayed, the continuation of the Formula 1-event is in danger. [...] When the Formula 1-event cannot happen, this will have negative social and economic consequences for the region of Zandvoort and the image of sports in The Netherlands’ (p. 2). + ‘The existing dunes near location T14 have no intrinsic landscape value...’ (p. 6).</p> |
| <p>Besluit op aanvraag omgevingsvergunning (Omgevingsdienst IJmond, 2019d)</p> | <p>A1</p> | <p>‘The director of Omgevingsdienst IJmond decides after substantive considerations, on the behalf of the college of mayor and aldermen of Zandvoort, to grant the environmental permit’ (p. 11). + ‘No other of bigger negative consequences for the environment than allowed on the basis of this environmental permit’ (p. 24). + ‘Based on the</p> |

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|---|----|---|
| | | <p>aforementioned, there are only environmentally neutral changes’ (p. 33). + ‘At the latest four months after this permit has gone into effect, research will have to be done on the places of the extensions of pitboxes’ (p. 34). + ‘At the latest before 1 March 2020, a plan for measuring the noise levels has to be made’ (p. 35).</p> |
| <p>Besluit op aanvraag omgevingsvergunning voor de realisatie van 3 voetgangerstunnels op het circuit (Omgevingsdienst IJmond, 2019e)</p> | A2 | <p>‘We decide to grant the requested environmental permit’ (p. 1).</p> |
| <p>Besluit op aanvraag omgevingsvergunning voor de realisatie van een fanzone (Omgevingsdienst IJmond, 2020a)</p> | A3 | <p>‘We decide to grant the requested environmental permit’ (p. 1). + ‘... the environmental permit will go into force immediately after publication’ (p. 2). + ‘Of importance is the fact that the fanzone plays a big role in crowd management, especially in the case of evacuations and calamities and therefore it contributes to the safety of visitors of the Formula 1-event. Next to that it is important to note</p> |

| | | |
|---|----|---|
| | | that there is a planning risk regarding the breeding of protected animals when the permit is not allowed to go into force immediately' (p. 2). + 'The location is no habitat of protected plant and animal species' (p. 7). + 'A fanzone with a wide range of activities will contribute to a memorable event for visitors, residents and entrepreneurs, what is considered fitting for an event with international prestige' (p. 9). |
| Besluit op aanvraag omgevingsvergunning voor de realisatie van een fanzone (Omgevingsdienst IJmond, 2020a) | A1 | 'The slope on the southern side of the location, needs to get planting approved by the municipality. This planting needs to be maintained at all times' (p. 5). |
| Besluit op aanvraag omgevingsvergunning voor het tijdelijk plaatsen van twee tribunes (Omgevingsdienst IJmond, 2020b) | A2 | 'We decide to grant the requested environmental permit' (p. 1). + 'The stands will be temporary only for the Formula 1-event on the circuit of Zandvoort. [...] Placing temporary stands is necessary because the Formula 1-event will lead to more visitors than regular events on the circuit. Next to that, it is not desirable that |

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| | | visitors have to sit in the dunes' (p. 8). |
| <p>Besluit op aanvraag omgevingsvergunning voor de realisatie van een toegangsweg (Omgevingsdienst IJmond, 2020c)</p> | A3 | <p>'We decide to grant the requested environmental permit' (p. 1). + '... the environmental permit will go into force immediately after publication' (p. 2). + 'Of the utmost importance is the fact that the new access road during the Formula 1-event will function as route for emergency services and for evacuations. This road therefore contributes to the safety of visitors. It has also been considered that a risk in the planning will exist regarding the breeding period of protected plant and animal species when the permit will not go into force immediately' (p. 3).</p> |
| <p>Besluit op aanvraag omgevingsvergunning voor het plaatsen van keerwanden voor verkanting T3 (Omgevingsdienst IJmond, 2020d)</p> | A2 | <p>'We decide to grant the requested environmental permit' (p. 1).</p> |
| <p>Besluit op aanvraag omgevingsvergunning voor het aanbrengen van halfverharding nabij locaties</p> | A1 | <p>'We decide to grant the requested environmental permit' (p.1). + 'After the term ends (31 December</p> |

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| T4 en T6 (Omgevingsdienst IJmond, 2020e) | | 2025), the temporary semi-pavement needs to be removed and the locations 4 and 6 need to be reorganized as instructed in the plantingplan within one year. This plan needs to be send for approval to the college of mayor and aldermen before it is put into action' (p. 5). |
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Table 3. Results Province of Noord-Holland: permits

| Name of document | Code | Text |
|---|---|---|
| Ontheffing Wet natuurbescherming Zandvoort (Omgevingsdienst Noord-Holland Noord, 2019a) | A2/3 (This is an exemption from certain environmental laws, however, everyone can request this. The regular conditions for this exemption are applied here) | 'We decide to grant the exemption to Circuit Park Zandvoort Exploitatie b.v.' (p. 1). + 'Mitigating and compensating measures for the sand lizard and natterjack toad need to be taken' (p. 2). + 'The planned operations are necessary to be able to receive the increased number of visitors. Locations where the least amount of disturbance would happen were chosen. Not building extra stands was not a solution, because visitors would then ruin the dune area. Not realizing alternative entrance roads was not a solution, because the number |

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| | | of visitors and possible calamities would lead to unacceptable risks and unsafe situations’ (p. 5). |
| Vergunning Wet natuurbescherming Circuit Park Zandvoort (Omgevingsdienst Noord-Holland Noord, 2019b) | A1 | ‘Hereby you receive our approval for a permit [...] for using Circuit Park Zandvoort and carrying out the adjustments needed on and around the terrain of the circuit. These adjustments are needed for the event Formula 1 Dutch Grand Prix’ (p. 1). + Extra requirements regarding working hours put in place, to ensure no working during night times, so as not to disturb species (pp. 3-4). + Possible effects on different species are considered but ruled insignificant in its disturbance (pp. 6-9). |
| Ontheffing tijdelijke halfverharding tribunes. (Omgevingsdienst Noord-Holland Noord, 2021) | A1 | ‘We decide to grant Circuitpark Zandvoort Exploitatie B.V. in Zandvoort the exemption. [...] We attach the following conditions to this decision [...]’ (p. 2). + Conditions are added relating to creating more space for the natterjack toad and the sand lizard + ‘No other solution is |

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| | | possible. Placing extra stands and thereby allocating places is important to ensure evacuation options. The stands are an integral part of the safety plan of the Dutch Grand Prix' (p. 8). |
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Table 4. Results Province of Noord-Holland: letters from Gedeputeerde Staten

| Name of document | Code | Text |
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| Beslissing op bezwaar vergunning Wet natuurbescherming Circuitpark (Gedeputeerde Staten van Noord-Holland, 2020a) | A1 | 'We will add a new condition regarding the calculation of nitrogen emissions. Next to that, registration of the number of cars using the circuit, the registration of the maximum of 50 days of using the access road, and registration of the actual numbers of flights will be necessary' (pp. 3-4). |
| Beslissing op bezwaar ontheffing Wet natuurbescherming Circuitpark Zandvoort (Gedeputeerde Staten van Noord-Holland, 2020b) | B2 | 'The Commission thinks it relevant that motorsport knows both proponents and opponents. We acknowledge that this is indeed the case, but this is also the case when it is about permits or exemptions for the environmental protection law. This fact can therefore not be a convincing reason to deny the request' (pp. 4-5). |

Table 5. Results national government of The Netherlands: WOB-requests

| Name of document | Code | Text |
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| Besluit op WOB-verzoek over Formule 1 Grand Prix in Zandvoort en gevolgen van stikstofarrest van de Raad van State (Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2020) | B1 | ‘I was triggered while listening to the radio this morning. Who and what is going to answer when the question is asked whether the F1 in Zandvoort is in danger because of the recent judgement from the Raad van State [about nitrogen emissions]?’ (p. 13). |
| Besluit WOB-verzoek over Formule 1 (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2019b) | A2 | ‘Unfortunately, I have to inform you that we will not contribute financially to the organization of the GP Formula 1. However, we, as the central government, want to offer you support on the areas of fiscality, visa, entrance procedures, employment permits, and safety measures, Of course, within the applicable laws and regulations’ (p. 17). |
| Besluit WOB-verzoek over Formule 1 (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2019b) | B3 | ‘Let me start by saying that I would enjoy it if Formula 1 comes to The Netherlands. Many people in The Netherlands will enjoy watching Max Verstappen racing here’ (p. 47). |
| Besluit WOB-verzoek over Formule 1 (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2019b) | A2 | ‘Model guarantees have been created for organizers to ensure that in the bidding phase they know the |

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| | | <p>applicable laws and regulations. This is to prevent sport unions from signing contracts with conditions that cannot be realized in The Netherlands. [...] F1 is not a national event and that means is must mostly be organized locally/regionally' (p. 64).</p> |
| <p>Besluit WOB-verzoek over Formule 1 (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2019b)</p> | <p>A2</p> | <p>'Every big international sporting event calls on the central government when it comes to requesting visa, fixing employment permits, creating clarity on which taxes need to be paid, and which safety and commercial regulations are applicable. We will facilitate event organizers as much as possible, by possibly speeding up procedures and working from one point of contact' (p. 90).</p> |