

**A large sustainability investment:
perceptions of the club members of football
club V.V. Veenendaal in the Netherlands**

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Colophon

Title: A large sustainability investment: perceptions of the club members of football club VV Veenendaal in the Netherlands

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Summary

This thesis examines the perception of sustainability initiatives among members of Voetbal Vereniging Veenendaal (VVV), a local football club in the Netherlands. The research aimed at understanding how club members and board members perceive and respond to the club's efforts to become carbon neutral. The research question guiding this study is: *How do members of football club VVV from Veenendaal experience the club's major investment in sustainability?* The relevance of this study lies in addressing a gap in the literature on sustainability within local sports clubs, a topic that has received limited scholarly attention despite its potential impact on tackling climate change. After the literature review, five factors were selected to be examined in this study. These factors include attachment to the club, social status, general environmental disposition, social norms and expectations, and provided information. A mixed-methods approach was utilised, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection. A survey was distributed to 46 members of the club, and additional interview questions were asked to three board members and one club member, in order to provide a comprehensive picture of perceptions and attitudes toward the club's sustainability initiatives.

Correlations were carried out between the five factors, with nine out of ten significant results. Overall, the results highlight the interplay between the five factors in shaping the members' perceptions and behaviours regarding sustainability initiatives within the club. The results of the interviews showed that sustainability issues are not prominent in conversations and engagement within the club and between members of the club. Other findings show that there is a general awareness of climate change among club members, although the depth of understanding and the personal concern varies. Some members express support for the club's sustainability efforts and recognize the importance of environmental responsibility. However, the majority of the members show passive involvement, and view the financial benefits as one of the most important reasons for this investment. Board members, on the other hand, demonstrate a strong commitment to sustainability. The motivations towards the investment, however, are generally equal to the club members' perspectives, by primarily considering the cost savings through energy efficiency. Recommendations for further research include the possibility to further investigate a new theoretical framework to better understand the dynamics of implementing sustainability initiatives in local sports clubs.

Preface

Dear reader,

Hereby I present to you my master thesis about the perceptions of the club members of V.V. Veenendaal regarding the sustainability initiatives. This thesis is the completion of my masters' degree in Environment and Society Studies at the Radboud University Nijmegen. Even though the research had been done by me as an author, I would like to thank some people for helping me through this extensive process and through the hiccups I have encountered.

First I would like to thank the representatives of the university for guiding me from start to finish in the making of this thesis. In particular, I would like to thank my supervisor Duncan Liefferink, for his wisdom and his patience due to the delay of my submission. All the sessions and feedback have helped me through several hard tasks and without his help I could not have done it.

Secondly I would like to thank my friends, family and loved ones for all the support I received from them. Also, thank you for the brainstorm sessions and the wisdom some of you provided me with.

Lastly, I would like to thank the people associated with the subject of my thesis: V.V. Veenendaal. I am pleased with all the people who responded on my survey, took part in several conducted interviews and the welcoming environment I was given. I could always ask for more information and no question was too much to ask.

Enjoy reading my thesis!

Melinda Kutlutürk

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1. Introduction

1.1 Problem statement

It is widely accepted that the world's climate is changing as a result of human activities. Over the past century one sixth of the planet's forests have been destroyed, an area the size of the United States, with resulting biodiversity loss (Ritchie, 2021). As global temperatures increase, in large part due to the release of greenhouse gasses from industrial activities, sea levels are rising and could increase by as much 60cms before the end of the 21st century, presenting particularly serious problems to low lying nations like the Netherlands (Church et al., 2013). The negative impacts that human activities and climate change are having on air quality, as well as the emergence of extreme weather events, are also well documented (De Sario, 2013). Each of these increasingly urgent developments underlines the need to change the way that we live, a necessity for which everyone shares responsibility.

The United Nations climate change conferences have sought to tackle climate crisis on a global scale (United Nations, 2022). Though so much more needs to be done, solutions to the crisis are continuously emerging in the Netherlands. For instance, the call to shift towards circular economies and regenerative practices is catching on. Initiatives are also emerging to keep track of the carbon footprint of companies, businesses and buildings, while fossil fuels are slowly being replaced by more sustainable alternatives, such as wind and solar power (OECD, 2020; UNECE, 2022).

Large football arenas have been part of this shift towards sustainable energy (FIFA, 2022). However, while diverse initiatives to tackle climate change are emerging in the Netherlands, local and recreational level sports clubs have done little to transition to more sustainable models. Football is one of the most popular sports in the world, and the most popular team sport in the Netherlands (NOCNSF, 2021) and the Dutch football federation (KNVB) is by far the biggest federation in the country with 1.150.000 members as of 2021 (ibid.). Most Dutch cities and villages have a football club meaning that local football clubs could lead by example, introducing their own sustainability measures. One club that is attempting to do just that is Voetbal Vereniging Veenendaal (VVV).

1.2 Introducing the research

This research delves into the perceptions of club members regarding the sustainability initiatives undertaken by Voetbal Vereniging Veenendaal (VVV), a football club situated in Veenendaal, the Netherlands. The study seeks to fill a notable gap in existing research (as described in chapter 1.6) by exploring how club members perceive the club's efforts towards sustainability, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. By focusing on VVV as a case study, this study intends to uncover insights into members' attitudes towards these measures, their views on climate change, and the potential wider impacts of sustainability initiatives within a local football club context, such as behavioural changes by for example reducing their energy consumption and practicing other eco-friendly practices in their daily lives (Gionfriddo, Rizzi, Daddi & Iraldo, 2023). Perception is an important factor in successfully implementing change (Wicker & Thormann, 2022), and this research aims to unravel the complexity of the role of perception in the acceptance and implementation of sustainability initiatives, specifically within the context of a local sports club. The research employs a combination of interviews and surveys to gather comprehensive perspectives.

The way in which club members perceive and interpret the sustainability measures of Voetbal Vereniging Veenendaal (VVV) can have a significant influence on the ultimate acceptance and effectiveness of these initiatives (Blumrodt, Desbordes & Bodin, 2013). The theoretical question focuses on understanding the processes behind these dynamics. How do individual club members' attitudes, beliefs, club attachment, and experiences influence their perceptions of the sustainability efforts? How can these perceptions then influence the level of involvement, support and possible resistance to these initiatives?

Taking VVV as a case study, this research provides an opportunity to understand the internal mechanisms that drive the sustainability measures within a local sports club. It is expected that this analysis will not only help to understand the challenges of VVV, but also provide broader insights applicable to similar contexts (Bamberg & Möser, 2007). This research explores and seeks to understand the dynamics between perception, attitudes, sustainability and the local sports club culture.

1.3 Research aim

This research aims to explore the attitudes and perceptions of club members regarding sustainability and the investments involved. It fills an area of limited attention in the research literature by focusing on local sports clubs, where club members' perceptions have rarely been explored in depth. This study is exploratory in nature, with the aim of gaining in-depth insights into how club members experience and understand their club's sustainability efforts.

Moreover, not only are the opinions and perceptions of club members examined, but the views of the association's board are also included in this research. This brings a holistic perspective, involving both members and executives within the club. Through this broad approach, this study aims to create a more comprehensive understanding of how sustainability initiatives are perceived and assessed within local sports clubs.

1.4 Research question

As mentioned in the previous section, it is unclear how VVV members perceive the club's decision to invest in becoming carbon neutral. Therefore, the aim of this investigation is to answer the following main research question:

How do members of football club VVV in Veenendaal perceive the club's large investment in sustainability?

To gain a better understanding of club members' perceptions and the broader implications of the club's initiatives, additional sub-questions were formulated. To gain a broader perspective from VVV members, the following sub-question was devised: How do club members experience climate change? This sub-question not only provides deeper insight into the views of club members, but also sheds light on the perspective of the VVV board in seeking support for their sustainability investments. Recognizing that each individual has a unique background and upbringing that influences their beliefs and perceptions, this study aims to investigate whether there are common factors within the VVV community that significantly influence members' perspectives on climate change. In order to gain a deeper understanding in this matter, this sub-question is also extended to the board. This leads to the second sub-question: How does

the board of VVV experience climate change? By exploring the board's perspective on climate change, an understanding of the organisational stance on environmental issues can be provided and can be informative to the decision-making process related to the reason for this sustainability investment. Furthermore, to delve deeper into the perceptions of the board members, the next sub-question is: How do board members view the sustainability initiatives of VVV? Understanding the board members' views can help identify potential areas of support or resistance within the club's management, as well as the level of commitment the board has towards sustainability and their underlying motivations, such as environmental responsibility, cost savings or improving the club's reputation.

1.5 Introducing Voetbal Vereniging Veenendaal

Located in Veenendaal, the Netherlands, VVV has its own sports location, three football fields, its own clubhouse, including a canteen, and is made up of 480 members. The origins of football club VVV date back to 1926 when an unregistered team entered a local competition with the name Voor Ons Plezier (For Our Pleasure). On June 5, 1927, Jos van Loosdrecht founded Voetbal Vereniging Veenendaal, making it the oldest football club in Veenendaal (V.V. Veenendaal, 2024). A notable aspect of its early history is the religious context of Veenendaal as a traditionally Christian city. In the early years, VVV played matches on Sundays, which led to several issues such as not having a football field within the city and therefore having to play outside the city borders in Rhenen. The field was situated on a hill, which made for a uncomfortable situation where the field was not level. This took until 1960, after a municipal reorganization. During the 1950s, VVV was at its peak, especially in the years when the club played in the second division, at the time the second nationwide football level in the Netherlands (V.V. Veenendaal, 2024). The team attracted significant attention and achieved large attendance figures. On March 20, 1950, for example, Veenendaal played a national cup game in front of a record 11,000 spectators against first division side Vitesse from Arnhem, with Wim Bleyenbergh scoring four goals in a 4–2 win (source: Appendix 1). In 1985, the Sponsor Team Veenendaal (STV) was founded, which was a first at the time. STV functioned as a forerunner of today's business clubs in amateur football. After a long period of success, less glorious times followed for V.V. Veenendaal in the 1990s and the beginning of the twenty-first century. The club last won the championship in 1992 and in the 1990s it was still in the 2nd division.

Nowadays V.V. Veenendaal plays in the fourth division, which in today's football pyramid is the ninth level out of ten levels nationwide (KNVB, 2022a).

Over the years, VVV has undergone several changes, including a move to the Groene Velden II sports park in the 2008-2009 season (source: Appendix 1). The club moved sites, because of a housing plan of the local government. The new sports park was built exactly like the old one with three fields, six locker rooms, a shed for training materials and a main building including a board room and a canteen, again neighbouring Sport Vereniging Panter (source: Appendix 1). In the 2011-2012 season the club abandoned their religious heritage, by switching the first teams playing day from Sunday to Saturday. The board which was in place at the old 'Salamander' sports park refused to switch days. Although members generally wished for a change, the board decided to take a vote while members were taking a break from their annual meeting. The new board, which took their position after moving to the new sports park, took a new vote and the members voted to change days (source: Appendix 1). Despite these changes, VVV continues to embody the essence of a community-oriented sports club. Nowadays, VVV gives priority to being a club for the people, inclusive for everyone, where fun is paramount. Their club-wide motto is: "From pleasure to prestatation". In this context the club offers free memberships to kids who come from less fortunate families.

VVV is aware of its responsibility to lead by example in the local community and the sports club is aiming to become carbon-neutral (source: Appendix 1). To achieve this the club is installing a heat pump, investing in solar panels that will provide enough energy to meet the needs of the whole location, and is also switching to LED lightning. The club's facilities are frequently used by club members, local schools and other sports clubs in the daytime. During the working day it is used by schools and other sports clubs, while during after work hours and weekends it is used by club members, since that is the time when most football training and competitions are taking place.

1.6 Scientific and societal relevance

This research is relevant for several reasons. To start with, it addresses a gap in the existing literature by examining football club members' perceptions of sustainability initiatives, an area that has received limited scholarly attention. Despite the KNVB offering funding and tools for local football clubs to invest in sustainability, it appears that few clubs take up the offer, possibly because it has not been widely promoted (KNVB, 2022). Existing research mainly

focuses on the connection between corporate social responsibility within football clubs (Blumrodt, Desbordes & Bodin, 2013; Kolyperas, 2012; Liu, Wilson, Plumley & Chen, 2019; Lobillo Mora, Ginesta & de San Eugenio Vela, 2021; Ráthonyi-Ódor, Bába & Ráthonyi, 2019). For example, the study of Liu, Wilson, Plumley & Chen (2019) examines perceptions of corporate social responsibility performance in professional football and its impact on fans' intentions to support the club. The example used is from Chinese football. In other words, this study provides insights into the relationship between corporate social responsibility in the sports industry and consumer behavior. The main difference between the two studies lies in the context, since the study of Liu, Wilson, Plumley & Chen (2019) focuses on professional football and this study on amateur and local football, and the focus, namely the perception of sustainability investments by club members versus perception of corporate social responsibility performance by fans. One research is found with similar interest, namely a Master's thesis on environmental sustainability in football clubs' strategy and the perception of Sporting Clube de Portugal's fans (Carvalho, 2023). The study of Carvalho (2023) focuses on the level of impact these perceptions of club members have on their attachment and support to the club. However, no other research has been found on the perception of club members in local sports clubs, since the research mentioned above contain professional football clubs. As a result, there is a lack of research on the process of implementing sustainability investments at local football clubs. This research can contribute to scientific knowledge by exploring how VVV members perceive the decision to implement sustainability measures, the factors that influence their perception, and their views on climate change, thereby increasing the understanding of football clubs and how they might help to address the climate crisis. Understanding how members perceive and interact with sustainability measures at local sports club level can provide valuable insights for the broader field of environmental sustainability and sport. Additionally, this research focuses on a specific football club, Voetbal Vereniging Veenendaal, creating a detailed case study that can provide practical insights for both the club itself and similar sports organizations. By uncovering the attitudes and perceptions of VVV members, the research aims to provide actionable recommendations that can increase the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives within the club and potentially serve as a model for other local sports clubs. Involving both club members and the association's board in the research will also add depth and completeness to the research. Exploring the perspectives of both stakeholders provide a holistic understanding of the dynamics surrounding sustainability initiatives within the club, providing a nuanced view of how these efforts are perceived at different levels of the organization.

Moreover, the societal relevance of the research extends beyond the boundaries of VVV. Local sports clubs are an integral part of communities, promoting social interaction and involvement. By examining how these clubs perceive and interact with sustainability initiatives, the findings of this study can serve as a blueprint for similar efforts at other sports clubs and community organizations. The study's findings could potentially have a broader impact in raising awareness and encouraging sustainable practices at grassroots level. The results of VVV's transition to carbon neutrality could inspire similar initiatives at other sports clubs, contributing to a more significant shift towards sustainability in local community sports.

1.7 Research structure

This research is structured to provide a comprehensive exploration. Chapter 2 delves into the existing literature and theoretical frameworks regarding sustainability perceptions, views on climate change and the role of local sports clubs in environmental initiatives. This foundation forms the basis for understanding the context and theoretical underpinnings of the research. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology and describes the approach to data collection and analysis. It provides transparency into the methods used to ensure the reliability and validity of the study's findings. Chapter 4 presents the results of the research and provides insight into how members of Voetbal Vereniging Veenendaal experience the club's major investment in sustainability. The findings are presented and analysed to answer the main research question and sub-questions. Chapter 5 will draw a conclusion, summarizing the key findings and connecting them to the theoretical framework, after which implications will be drawn. It discusses the practical implications for VVV and similar sports clubs, as well as the broader social implications of the research.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of existing literature on theories, particularly towards perceptions of environmental sustainability. This review will construct a platform from which the research can be conducted and the questions posed in chapter one can be answered. The chapter begins with definitions of terminology that is repeatedly used in this study in section 2.2. It then provides background information and context on models for understanding sustainability and a process of change towards sustainability in section 2.3. In section 2.4, behavioural theories are explored, followed by theories of support for sustainability in section 2.5. The chapter concludes with a summary of the most salient points and indications of how these could be operationalised in section 2.6.

2.2 Terminology

Before delving deeper into the theories and concepts of this study, it is necessary to lay a solid foundation by examining and defining key terminologies. These terms are: attitudes, perception, awareness and norms. These terms are selected because they are equivalent to the term *perceive*, as stated in the research question. They have nuanced meanings that can vary in different academic contexts and disciplines. By examining the terminology used in relevant literature, the goal is to establish a common understanding that enables a coherent discourse in the research.

Firstly, the term *attitude* will be explored. Attitude refers to a person's evaluative stance or emotional feeling toward a particular object, person, problem, or behaviour (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). In the context of sustainable actions, attitudes can significantly influence individuals' willingness to undertake and support initiatives related to environmental, social and economic sustainability. According to Eagly and Chaiken (1993) attitudes include cognitive, affective, and behavioural components. The cognitive component includes thoughts about the object, the

affective component includes emotions and feelings associated with it, and the behavioural component concerns the person's actions or intentions toward the object. In this study, it is important to understand the attitudes of members, stakeholders and sports club management towards sustainability initiatives. By including attitudes in the analysis, there can be investigated how positive or negative evaluations influence the level of commitment and support for sustainable actions within the sports community.

Secondly, the term *perception* is used in accordance with the explanation of Wicker and Thormann (2022). They define perception as the way something is viewed, understood or interpreted. Here it is recognized that a certain behaviour, such as using public transport, may represent a low-cost effort for some individuals, while for others it is a high-cost effort, as Wicker and Thormann (2022) argue. This emphasizes the subjective nature of assessing the costs associated with specific behaviours and the importance of considering individual perspectives and interpretations when analysing behaviour, as perceptions play an important role in shaping the perceived costs and benefits associated with different actions. By including the concept of perception in this study, it can be investigated how different interpretations of sustainable actions influence the level of involvement and support. This may include understanding how members, sponsors and sports club management view the environmental, social and economic benefits of sustainability initiatives, which ultimately determines the success and acceptance of such investments within the sporting community.

Thirdly, the term *awareness* is introduced, as by Lichtfouse et al. (2013). In this context, awareness refers to the ability to perceive, feel or be aware of different elements, including events, objects, thoughts, emotions and sensory patterns. In the context of this research, it involves understanding the environment, understanding the impact of human behaviour on the environment and recognizing the need for protection (Lichtfouse, et al., 2013). Linking this concept to this study towards sustainability investments in sports clubs emphasises how stakeholders within these clubs, such as members, players and management, perceive and internalise environmental issues.

By examining environmental awareness in the context of sports clubs, this study can delve into how individuals involved in these organisations understand environmental challenges. This includes exploring how increased environmental awareness influences decision-making processes, shapes attitudes towards sustainable practices and contributes to the overall success and acceptance of sustainability investments within the domain of sports clubs. Understanding

the dynamics of environmental awareness becomes important in promoting sustainability within sports organisations and garnering support for environmentally friendly initiatives.

The fourth term that is outlined here is *norms*, which is here seen as including values and beliefs. Personal norms and altruistic values or belief systems can be seen as key to social movements, which, unlike interest groups that often purely function to satisfy self-interest, are organised around a set of principles within socially minded organisations that go beyond self-interest (Stern, 2000). Relating this to this study shifts the focus to how individual stakeholders within sports clubs perceive and align with these norms, values and belief systems. Examining personal norms may become relevant to understanding how individuals within sports clubs integrate sustainability considerations into their decision-making processes. For instance, personal norms may influence members' willingness to support and actively engage in sustainability initiatives.

Moreover, altruistic values and belief systems, when embedded in sports clubs, can serve as a driver for the adoption of sustainable practices (Trendafiova, Ziakas & Sparvero, 2017). Research on the interaction between norms, values and sustainability investments sheds light on the intrinsic motivations of members and the board, which could potentially influence the extent to which sports clubs commit to and prioritise environmentally conscious initiatives. In essence, this research highlights how attitudes, perception, awareness and norms are intricately intertwined: awareness becomes an important factor in influencing decision-making processes, shaping attitudes towards sustainability and contributing to the overall success and acceptance of sustainability investments in the field of sports clubs. Recognizing personal norms and altruistic values as integral components of norms illuminates how individual stakeholders align with socially oriented principles, influencing their willingness to support and participate in sustainability initiatives, as perceptions intricately shape the perceived costs and benefits associated with sustainable actions. For more detailed relationships between these key terms, see the paragraphs 2.4 and 2.5.

2.3 Context of the literature

Before delving into the theories, context will be provided in order to understand the place of VVV in the field of sustainability.

2.3.1 Three pillars of sustainability

The first model is *the three pillars of sustainability model*, that emphasizes the interconnectedness of environmental protection, economic development and social equality (Farmer, 2022; Frenken & Schor, 2017; Ranjbari, Morales-Alonso, Shams Esfandabadi & Carrasco-Gallego, 2019; Ranjbari, Esfandabadi, Zanetti, Scagnelli, Siebers, Aghbashlo & Tabatabaei, 2021). Those pillars are in direct connection with each other and a balance between them results in balanced sustainability. The environmental protection pillar is about the existence of the planet (Farmer, 2022; Frenken & Schor, 2017; Ranjbari, et al., 2019; Ranjbari, et al., 2021). More specifically, this pillar is about maintaining and enhancing the environment that we are currently familiar with. In the current case, it is needed to support the environment to get to a certain degree of environmental quality. In order to do so, it is needed to become more sustainable and environmentally friendly in our daily practices, such as recycling and the usage of renewable energy sources. The environmental protection pillar is of direct influence of the other two pillars. For instance, natural disasters, such as floods and wildfires, shake up the other two pillars. The economic development and social equity pillars are therefore relying on a stable environmental protection pillar. In other words, they are only able to prosper if there is balance in the environmental protection pillar.

The second pillar is economic development (Farmer, 2022; Frenken & Schor, 2017; Ranjbari, et al., 2019; Ranjbari, et al., 2021). Without the economy, there is no human society. However, at the same time, there is no economy without natural resources. Therefore a balance must be found between businesses and their environmental footprint. Businesses that are not willing to become (more) sustainable are making the other pillars unsteady.

The third pillar is the pillar of social equity (Farmer, 2022; Frenken & Schor, 2017; Ranjbari, et al., 2019; Ranjbari, et al., 2021). Social equity refers to a variety of social factors. Those factors are income rate, socio-demographics, gender and socioeconomic class, amongst others. This pillar also refers to the journey towards sustainability by an individual, since individuals are able to choose more environmentally friendly options in their daily lives. To put it more broadly, this pillar refers to the quality of life by an individual or a social system. However, the scope of these options differ when looking at the factors that are named above. This pillar is therefore harder to get balanced than the other two mentioned. Also, certain problems such as war, low education rates and widespread poverty are symptoms of an unbalanced social equity.

The first pillar, environmental protection, is seen as the most important pillar by the authors (Farmer, 2022; Frenken & Schor, 2017; Ranjbari, et al., 2019; Ranjbari, et al., 2021). Without the environment, there is no chance of existence of the economic development and social equity. If we protect our environment, then we are also protecting our future. In other words, without the environmental protection pillar, the other pillars would collapse.

These three pillars provide a framework for understanding the balance required for sustainable environmental, economic and social impact. For sports clubs, the integration of sustainable practices aligns directly to the environmental protection pillar. Sustainable initiatives contribute to maintaining and improving environmental quality that is important for the overall sustainability model.

Furthermore, the economic development pillar resonates with the financial aspects of sport clubs. Finding a balance between economic activities and their impact on the environment is imperative. Sports clubs, as economic entities, must recognize the importance of sustainable business practices to ensure stability not only in the economic pillar, but also in the interconnected environmental and social pillars.

The social equity pillar, which includes factors such as socio-demographics and individual choices, draws attention to the role of sports clubs in promoting sustainable behaviour within their communities. Encouraging environmentally friendly choices among club members and stakeholders contribute to a balanced pillar of social equity.

By prioritizing environmental protection through environmentally conscious practices, fostering economic stability through sustainable business approaches, and by promoting social equity within their communities, sports clubs can make an integral contribution to a balanced and resilient sustainability model. This interconnectedness highlights that sports organizations, like this sustainability model, must strive for balance between these three pillars to ensure sustainable and meaningful contributions to a sustainable future.

2.3.2 Three waves of change

While the three pillars of sustainability is a useful model for visualizing the interconnectivity of sustainability, McCullough et al.'s (2016) three waves framework provides an indication of the pathways sports clubs could follow to become more sustainable. The framework is illustrated through waves because a wave has a fluid transition from one wave to another, and there is no clear beginning nor ending. The process to a sustainable sports club will therefore be a never ending process, however, it will improve fluidly. The first wave highlights the need to take action, initiated by a certain pressure. This need to take action is also initiated by the employees that gain general knowledge about sustainability and the general environment, and this knowledge is mainly gained by the (inter)national and local dialogue that has been going on for a longer period of time (McCullough, Pfahl & Nguyen, 2016). This gained knowledge provides the open-door to more common and evident sustainability initiatives, such as waste management and recycling. The second wave contains the growth of the gained knowledge. Where the employees are aware of the environmental issue during the first wave, this will become actual knowledge during the second. This knowledge is also gained by the implementation effects of the appointed initiatives. The successes of the first initiatives are being measured after which larger initiatives will occur with more sophisticated strategies and planning. The third wave contains the implementation of highly impactful and rigorous initiatives that are not initiated anymore by the employees but by the board or other higher-functioned people. For example, certifications and other labelling will be pursued. This results in more sports clubs aiming at reaching the targets of the certifications, which will result in a more normative approach to sustainability within the sports clubs. The final effect will be the awareness and engagement of the involved stakeholders to become more sustainable within their businesses.

This model can be helpful for situating at what stage a sports club is at in their development of sustainability initiatives, thereby providing a base from which to understand behavioural patterns of the people involved in the club. In the case of VVV, it can be assumed that the sports club is in the third wave of environmental sustainability, looking at the recent substantial investments aimed at transitioning the accommodation to full sustainability. However, it is important to note that this is the first major investment in this area. Prior to these plans, the club had only implemented smaller sustainability initiatives in response to stakeholder demands, including the municipality. An example of this is the recycling of glass bottles. Furthermore,

there have been no other initiatives, such as sorting waste or making waste sorting bins available.

2.3.3 Theory of the three P's

The theory of the three P's, also known as the *Triple Bottom Line* (TBL) or sustainability triangle, focuses on the simultaneous optimization of three key aspects of business performance: people, planet and profit (Elkington, 2013). These concepts provide a framework that encourages organizations to pursue not only financial gain, but also to promote social justice and environmental conservation.

The first P stands for people, and it represents the social dimension of sustainability and refers to an organization's impact on people, both internally and externally (Elkington, 2013). This includes aspects such as working conditions, health and safety, community engagement and ethical supply chain practices. The pursuit of positive social outcomes means that organizations not only maximize profits, but also strive for the well-being and development of their employees, customers and wider society.

The second P stands for planet, and refers to the ecological dimension of sustainability and emphasizes the responsibility of organizations towards the environment and natural resources (Elkington, 2013). This includes reducing the environmental footprint through sustainable use of resources, energy efficiency, waste reduction, pollution reduction and biodiversity conservation. Organizations are encouraged to embrace environmentally friendly practices and strive for a positive impact on the environment, both locally and globally.

The third P stands for profit, and is the traditional economic aspect of sustainability. It refers to an organization's financial performance and profitability (Elkington, 2013). While profitability remains essential to the survival of a business, the three Ps emphasize that profit should not come at the expense of human rights or environmental conservation. Instead, it strives for a profit model that integrates sustainability and creates long-term value, both for the company and for society as a whole.

The concept of the three Ps recognizes that economic, social and environmental aspects are interrelated and influence each other. By balancing these three dimensions, (sports) organizations can strive for sustainable development that promotes economic prosperity as well as social justice and environmental conservation. This theory is now seen as a central concept in the sustainability discussion and is now used worldwide as a guideline for sustainable entrepreneurship.

2.3.4. Conclusion

For this research it was decided to continue with the *three pillars of sustainability* model. The reason for this is that this model better suits the specific context of sports clubs and their sustainability initiatives. Sports clubs such as VVV often deal with a wide range of stakeholders, including members, players, administrators and the local community. The *three pillars* model offers a more integrated approach that makes it possible to balance the diverse and sometimes conflicting interests of these groups. Furthermore, this model helps to clarify that sustainability initiatives should not only focus on ecological improvements, but also on social benefits and economic feasibility. This makes it a useful tool for sustainability within sports clubs. By focusing on the three pillars of environment, economy and society, we can better understand how these elements influence each other and how a balanced approach can lead to sustainable growth and acceptance of sustainability initiatives within the club.

2.4 Behavioural theories

Understanding club members' perceptions of the sustainability investment has become a focal point in this research, drawing on various behavioural theories to unravel the intricacies of human behaviour in this context. Behavioural theories provide valuable frameworks to explore the multifaceted aspects of people's responses and attitudes toward sustainability initiatives within their sports clubs. By delving into these theories, the goal is to decipher the factors that determine the perception of club members.

2.4.1 Theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behaviour

The early behavioural theories, such as the *theory of reasoned action* (TRA) developed by Azjen and Fishbein (1975), and the *theory of planned behaviour* (TPB) introduced by Azjen (1985), provide a basis for understanding how individuals make decisions and take actions based on their beliefs and perceptions. These theories can be applied to environmental behaviour and, by extension, sustainable investments in the context of sports organizations. The TRA states that behavioural intentions are the result of an individual's beliefs and information about the likelihood that a specific behaviour will lead to a particular outcome. In the context of sustainability, this suggests that individuals are likely to engage in environmentally friendly practices if they believe these actions will contribute to positive outcomes, such as a healthier environment or improved community relations. Building on the TRA, the TPB includes the element of perceived behavioural control, suggesting that an individual's actual control over a behaviour influences their intentions and subsequent actions.

However, it is important to recognize a shift in focus from the control of the individual, as emphasized in the TPB, to the ability of the organization to exercise control over sustainable practices. In the context of sustainable investments by a sports organization, this transition implies that the organization's influence and control over sustainable behaviour can influence the intentions and actions of its members. Madden et al.'s (1992) study emphasizes that increased precision in predicting intentions could result from improved behavioural control.

The more effectively a sports organization can monitor and influence sustainable behaviour, the more accurately it can predict and shape its members' intentions regarding environmentally friendly practices.

Two expectations for this study emerge from this literature. First, sports clubs looking to integrate sustainability into their operations are expected to shape the beliefs and perceptions of their members regarding the positive outcomes associated with sustainable practices. This requires a supportive environment and infrastructure that facilitates the adoption of sustainable behaviour in sports clubs, which strengthens the concept of perceived behavioural control. Second, it is expected that awareness of the importance of behavioural control can encourage sports clubs to actively involve their members in the decision-making process regarding

sustainability initiatives. This participation can increase feelings of control and ownership, which in turn further influences intentions and actions.

2.4.2 Value-belief-norm theory of environmentalism

Building on the foundational theories of reasoned action and planned behaviour, Stern's (2000) value-belief-norm theory of environmentalism offers deeper insights into the psychological underpinnings of behaviour. According to Stern, this theory proposes a sequential process in which a person's values serve as a catalyst for the formation of beliefs. These beliefs in turn form norms that are subsequently expressed in behaviour.

The transition from values and beliefs to norms is an important step in Stern's theory. Norms, in this context, refer to the perceived social expectations and standards regarding environmentally responsible behaviour within the sports club community. As individuals are inclined to align their beliefs with these perceived norms (Stern, 2000), their intentions to engage in sustainable actions within the club become clearer. The ecological significance of this behavioural process lies in the intention to actively contribute to changing the environment. In the context of this study, this could manifest as individuals expressing a genuine desire to participate in initiatives that promote environmental well-being.

Extending Stern's theory in conjunction with Madden et al.'s (1992) analysis of the theory of planned behaviour, it becomes clear that being able to influence people's values could influence their beliefs (Engqvist Jonsson & Nilsson, 2014). Therefore, efforts to shape and reinforce specific values related to sustainability within a sports club may in turn encourage individuals to adopt beliefs that prioritize environmental responsibility. As a result, this controlled and influenced alignment of values and beliefs within a sports club is expected to manifest in observable behaviours that contribute positively to the overall sustainability of the club. Essentially, Stern's value-belief-norm theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding the complex process through which individuals' values, beliefs, and subsequent behavioural norms are linked.

2.4.3 Theory of cognitive dissonance

However, a person's intentions and actual behaviour are not always the same. The *theory of cognitive dissonance* (Festinger, 1957) explains this inconsistency. Opinions, beliefs, ideas and intentions are psychological values, which are not always in line with the reality and actual behaviour of a person. Festinger gives the example of smoking cigarettes. When a person is smoking cigarettes but is aware of the fact that smoking causes cancer, it results in a psychological dissonance. This dissonance is experienced as uncomfortable, for that reason people try to lessen this feeling. An example is the knowledge that smoking can cause cancer, but still having the notion that it may not happen to you. However, this may not be an easy task. In other words, this theory states that "*human beings are a rationalizing animal instead of a rational one: we attempt to be rational instead of actually being it*" (Festinger, 1957).

The inconsistency between people's intent and the actual impact of their actions, raises questions about the environmental significance of changing behaviours (Stern, 2000). Focusing specifically on environmental behaviour, intent-oriented theories of behaviour are distinct from impact-oriented theories in two ways. First, they highlight environmental intent as an independent cause of behaviour, while implicitly highlighting that environmental intent may not result in actual impacts. A possible example of this could be the intent to plant trees in order to capture carbon, with very little or no experience in doing so, often resulting in dead trees (Brancalion et al., 2020). On the other hand, environmental intent can lead directly to impact, such as Terry's (2012) finding that the intent to give up plastic led to actually doing so, with many positive personal and environmental consequences.

Similar to the challenges faced by individuals trying to quit smoking, integrating sustainable practices into a sports club's operations can pose challenges. In this context, the theory of cognitive dissonance suggests that despite the awareness and intention to be environmentally responsible, the organization may face internal conflict and resistance to change. Even though club members have the intention to be more sustainable, that does not mean that they are willing to give up or adapt their customs and habits to achieve this. For example, club members may not be willing to adapt to the different lighting while playing football on the fields, even if it is LED lighting.

The theory of cognitive dissonance sheds light on the interplay between intentions, beliefs and actions. When applied to this study, it highlights the need to align awareness with concrete environmentally responsible behaviour, recognizing and addressing the potential conflicts that can arise in the pursuit of sustainable investments.

2.4.4 Integrated behavioural model

Building on the practical environmental chain perspective and integrating a behavioural model, Montaña & Kasprzyk (2008) propose a nuanced approach to understanding and influencing environmental behaviour. According to their model: “*a particular behaviour is most likely to occur if (1) a person has a strong intention to perform it and the knowledge and skill to do so, (2) there is no serious environmental constraint preventing performance, (3) the behaviour is salient, and (4) the person has performed the behaviour previously*” (Montaña & Kasprzyk, 2008). Therefore, aligning environmental intentions, whether arising from planned behaviour or other sources, with the appropriate knowledge and skills in a space that encourages the implementation of a particular salient action, is likely to lead to coherent environmental interventions. In other words, behaviour is the result of intentions, according to Montaña & Kasprzyk (2008).

Promoting environmentally responsible behaviour among club members requires more than just intention. Members must be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in sustainable practices. This not only means understanding the importance of sustainability, but also having practical knowledge about environmentally friendly initiatives. Moreover, sport clubs must create an environment that facilitates and encourages sustainable actions.

Creating a favourable atmosphere eliminates barriers to environmentally responsible behaviour. It could be argued that environmental values and beliefs, arising from carefully structured action plans and guided by planned behaviour, can help construct impact from intention. This approach can be a way for sports clubs to guide members towards environmentally responsible behaviour.

2.5 Theories of support for sustainability

An investigation that is particularly pertinent to this research is that conducted by Thormann and Wicker (2021) into non-profit sport clubs. Their research explored the willingness-to-pay (WTP) for environmental measures in non-profit sport clubs by looking into sport-specific, club-specific, environmental, and socio-demographic factors. The research was conducted in Germany, with 3036 respondents from a large number and variety of sports clubs in the country.

The results of their investigation showed that more than 64% of participants were willing to pay for environmental measures in their sports clubs. This finding was accompanied by the fact that the level of support for sustainability measures increases with members' educational levels, which has a direct impact on their environmental consciousness. If non-profit sport clubs are to successfully introduce sustainability measures, then it appears vital that club members should be well informed about environmental issues and the club's role in tackling these issues. What's more, Thormann and Wicker (2021) found that when club members are personally attached to their sports club, they are more likely to have a higher WTP rate for environmental sustainability. In summary, the level of education among members, how well informed they are, and their feelings of connection to their club, are all expected to be important factors when implementing sustainability measures. These expectations will be tested in this study.

When people do not understand how sustainability measures might benefit them directly, the decision to invest could be interpreted as altruistic. According to Schwartz' (1973) norm-activation theory of altruism, altruistic behaviour may result from feelings of moral obligation and the awareness that not performing this altruistic behaviour might have negative consequences. While this may result in pro-sustainability personal norms, it comes from a desire to avoid negative consequences and guilt, rather than identification with positive aspects of change. Therefore, this theory suggests that social pressure is an important ingredient for sustainable behaviour within local football clubs. However, Schwartz also found that when feelings of moral obligation are behind a process of change, people may actually resist changing their behaviour. When individuals feel compelled to act in a certain way because of a sense of moral obligation, they may resist change because they see it as a restriction on their freedom or autonomy. Despite the presence of social pressure to adopt sustainable behaviour, individuals may resist such changes if they feel that their actions are dictated by external expectations rather than arising from their own internal motivations or beliefs. Therefore, this theory suggests that

while social pressure can indeed play an important role in promoting sustainable behaviour within local football clubs, promoting genuine intrinsic motivations and positive identification with sustainability goals can ultimately lead to more sustainable and effective behavioural changes over time.

Whether awareness of sustainability issues stem from a positive desire to make change, a sense of guilt, or a mixture of both, it appears widely accepted that awareness itself is key to people taking responsibility, normalising sustainable practices, and taking action through their behaviour. As De Groot and Steg's (2009) model demonstrates (see *Figure 1* below).

Figure 1

Graphical representation of the norm activation model (De Groot & Steg, 2009)



Note. Republished from “The Norm Activation Model” by De Groot & Steg (2009). *The Journal of social psychology*, 149(4), 425-449.

However, Stern (2000) underscores the complexity of people's behaviour towards sustainability, and shares that there is a need to do thorough interdisciplinary research in order to fully understand it. Table 1 below (Stern, 2000), demonstrates the extent of the range of variables that can influence sustainable behaviour. Stern's (2000) work, in which he points out that environmentally significant changes in behaviour stem from a complex interaction of different individually specific factors, some of the most salient of which are: environmental predisposition of members; perception of material costs; social norms and expectations that could exist within a sports club; personal social status of the people involved and how they might perceive support for an environmental intervention could impact that social status; as well as the financial resources available both to the clubs and to individuals. That all of these variables interact gives an idea of the complexity of what influences sustainable behaviour and suggests that people's adoption of sustainability measures is likely to be very personal and may not simply depend on raising awareness. For instance, some people might feel a mixture of guilt from social norms and expectations, as well as an environmental predisposition but consider that the material costs are too high relative to the possible rewards. Another relevant example

could be that people wish to improve or solidify their social status by taking, or indeed not taking, action on environmental issues. However, they might not have the financial resources, knowledge and/or skills to do so, or feel that financial resources that are available would be better invested elsewhere.

Table 1

Major types of environmentally significant behaviours and causal variables that influence them (Stern, 2000)

Causal variables	Environmentally significant behaviors
<i>Attitudinal</i>	<i>Environmental activism</i>
General environmentalist predisposition ^a	<i>Nonactivist public-sphere behaviors</i>
Behavior-specific norms and beliefs ^b	Environmental citizenship
Nonenvironmental attitudes	(e.g., petitioning, joining groups)
(e.g., about product attributes)	Policy support
Perceived costs and benefits of action	
<i>Personal capabilities</i>	<i>Private-sphere environmentalism</i>
Literacy	Consumer purchase behaviors
Social status	Maintenance of household equipment
Financial resources	Changes in equipment use, lifestyle (curtailment)
Behavior-specific knowledge and skills	Waste disposal behaviors
	“Green consumerism”
<i>Contextual factors</i>	<i>Other</i>
Material costs and rewards	Behaviors affecting organizational decisions
Laws and regulations	
Available technology	
Social norms and expectations	
Supportive policies	
Advertising	
<i>Habit and routine</i>	

^aThe VBN theory incorporates various attitudinal variables believed to create this predisposition.

^bThese norms and beliefs figure prominently in applications of norm-activation theory and the theory of planned behavior to specific proenvironmental behaviors.

Note. Republished from the “New Environmental Theories: Toward a Coherent Theory of Environmentally Significant Behavior” by Stern (2000). *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3), 407-424.

2.6 Operationalisation

In order to gain a better understanding of sports club members’ perceptions of sustainability, it is important to investigate the different factors at the root of these perceptions, to understand the complexity of their behaviour towards sustainability. It is also important to gain a deeper understanding of the club’s board’s perspective. Ultimately this will make it possible to answer the research question and find out whether there is space for growth in awareness among board and other club members. As mentioned above by Stern (2000), people’s behaviour towards

sustainability is a complex matter and there is a need to do thorough interdisciplinary research in order to fully understand it. Therefore, this study will focus on five factors drawn from several researches.

The first factor is mainly drawn from Stern (2000), which is the **general environmental disposition**. This factor is critical because it assesses people's general attitudes and concerns towards the environment. As mentioned before, altruistic or self-transcending values are the most important motivators in encouraging people to adopt pro-environmental behaviour, which is in line with the principles of norm-activation theory (Schwartz, 1973). In the context of a football club, understanding the general environmental disposition of club members can provide insight into their predisposition to sustainability initiatives undertaken by the club (Stern, 2000).

The second factor is also drawn from Stern (2000) and includes **social status**. Social status plays an important role in influencing behaviour. In the case of a football club, the social status of members within the club community can influence the way they perceive and interact with sustainability efforts. Those with higher social status can influence others' perceptions and behaviour towards sustainability, according to Stern (2000).

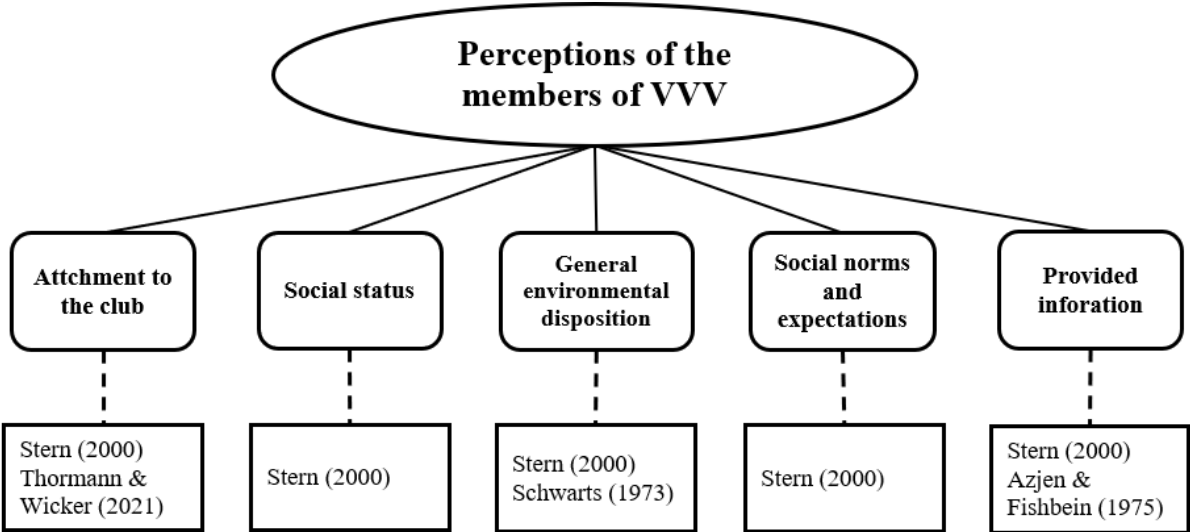
The third factor is drawn from Stern (2000) as well, and is **social norms and expectations**. Social norms within a club environment can shape the behaviour of individuals. Stern's (2000) theory suggests that planned behaviour, which could be made possible through cogent information, can lead to personal environmental values and norms being formed. This in turn can impact beliefs and finally behaviour. By examining the social norms and expectations regarding sustainability within the football club, there can be understood how these norms influence members' perceptions of the club's sustainability investments and if this is shaped and/or in line with their expectations of the club (Stern, 2000).

The fourth factor is a mixture of Stern's (2000) and Thormann and Wicker's (2021) theories and is **attachment to the club**. Attachment to the club reflects members' emotional bond and loyalty to the club. Understanding how attachment to the club influences perceptions of sustainability investments can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives in engaging club members (Stern, 2000). It was also established, primarily based on Thormann and Wicker's (2021) theory, that club members are more likely to be willing to pay for sustainability measures when they feel a personal connection to their club. Their willingness enhances with their level of education and when information is communicated in a way that makes it possible for them to understand the need for sustainability.

This combines well with the fifth factor that will be examined in this study, which is **provided information**. Provided information is a combination of the theories of Azjen and Fishbein (1975) and Stern (2000). The information provided to club members about sustainability initiatives can influence their perceptions and behaviour. The *theory of reasoned action* (Azjen and Fishbein, 1975) states that an individual's behavioural intentions arise from their beliefs and understanding of the likelihood that a particular action will result in a specific outcome. Thus, the information conveyed to club members about sustainability initiatives has a significant impact on their perceptions and subsequent behaviour. Ensuring that clear and relevant information is disseminated within the club can influence how members perceive and support sustainability efforts (Stern, 2000).

By integrating these factors into the research design, through a focus on these factors in the surveys and interviews with club members and club management, a comprehensive insight can be gained into how members of football club VVV in Veenendaal perceive the club's investments in sustainability. See *Figure 2* for the graphical overview of these factors and their relevant literature.

Figure 2
Overview of the factors used for the operationalisation of this study plus its relevant literature



3. Methodology and methods

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the methodology and methods of this investigation will be presented, as will the reasoning behind the selection of a particular methodological approach and the use of specific methods. The chapter will begin in section 3.2 with an analysis of research philosophies in order to establish the methodological background of this research. The research approach will then be discussed in section 3.3, followed by the research methods in section 3.4, validity and reliability in section 3.5, finally the research ethics in section 3.6.

3.2 Research philosophy

Research philosophy refers to the fundamental assumptions, beliefs and principles that form the underlying basis of a research study. It includes the broad theoretical orientation used in designing, conducting and interpreting the research. The research philosophy determines the direction and focus of the research, as well as the methods used to collect and analyse data. By defining a clear research philosophy, researchers can justify their methodological choices, ensure consistency in the approach to research and strengthen the validity and reliability of the research results. Furthermore, a well-defined research philosophy helps position the research within the broader scientific discourse and understand the implications of the findings for theory development and practice.

The research by Moon & Blackman (2014) is used for this study. This research focuses on providing a guide for natural scientists to understand social science research. The article emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and understanding between natural and social scientists. By looking into Moon & Blackman (2014), the research philosophy of this study is in line with the post-positive perspective. The post-positive approach states that “*multiple methods are necessary to identify a valid belief because all methods are imperfect*” (Moon & Blackman, 2014). It takes a critical stance towards the idea that there is a single, objective truth. Instead, post-positivism recognizes that all knowledge is fallible and that scientific findings are always subject to revision (Moon & Blackman, 2014). This perspective

states that although we can never fully know reality, we can improve our knowledge through systematic and methodological approaches. It often uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to get the most complete picture of the research question possible, while remaining critical of the data obtained. In this research, the post-positivist perspective is closely aligned with the methods used. A mixed methods approach is used, collecting both quantitative (surveys) and qualitative (interviews) data. Post-positivism means that researchers use systematic and empirical methods to approach reality, but take into account the influence of contextual factors and prejudices. This approach "attempts to balance the objective search for knowledge with a recognition of the subjective influences that shape our understanding" (Moon & Blackman, 2014). This is similar to the methods of this study, which uses surveys to collect quantitative data and interviews to gain deeper insights into participants' personal experiences and interpretations.

Similar to post-positivism, this study recognizes the limitations of the methods used and seeks a critical evaluation of the results to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings. This approach reflects the post-positivist belief that although our knowledge is never definitive, it is still possible to gain valuable insights through critical and systematic methods.

In Moon and Blackman's (2014) article, various research philosophies commonly used in social science research are discussed. Besides post-positivism, other prominent paradigms include constructivism, interpretivism, and pragmatism. Let's discuss why these other philosophies may not fully align with this research.

The constructivist approach, while valuable in many social science studies, is less well suited to this particular study because of the differences in epistemological assumptions and research goals. In a constructivist approach, the emphasis is on understanding how individuals construct their own realities through social interactions and cultural contexts (Moon & Blackman, 2014). This often leads to highly subjective interpretations of reality, with the researcher trying to understand the meanings and perceptions of the participants in their own terms. While a constructivist approach would focus primarily on individuals' unique and contextual constructions of reality, a post-positivist approach allows researchers to gain broader insights using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This allows conclusions to be drawn that go beyond individual constructions of meaning. A post-positivist approach is therefore more

appropriate for this study because it strikes a balance between recognizing subjective influences and pursuing objective, generalizable knowledge.

Interpretivism focuses on understanding social phenomena through the subjective meanings that individuals attribute to them (Moon & Blackman, 2014). It emphasizes the importance of context and cultural understanding in interpreting human behaviour. While the use of interviews aligns with interpretivist principles of exploring subjective meanings, the inclusion of surveys for quantitative data collection suggests a desire for broader generalizability and statistical analysis, which is more characteristic of a mixed method or pragmatic approach than pure interpretivism.

Pragmatism integrates aspects of both positivism and interpretivism, emphasizing the importance of practical consequences and problem solving in research (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Pragmatists often advocate a flexible approach based on multiple methods and philosophies, depending on the research question and context. Although pragmatism can be attractive because of its flexibility and focus on practical results, this philosophy is less suitable for this study. The reason is because the study is not only aimed at solving a concrete problem, but also at deeply understanding the perceptions and behaviours of club members regarding sustainability. A pragmatist approach could risk simplifying the complexity of these perceptions by placing too much emphasis on direct applicability rather than on theoretical depth and critical reflection.

Although elements of constructivism, interpretivism and pragmatism may be present in this study, the emphasis on understanding both subjective perceptions and experiences within a social context best aligns with post-positivism.

3.3 Research design

This research will be based on a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach. Qualitative research methodologies are ideal when conducting varied and complex research, which is the case of this investigation. On the other hand, supporting a qualitative approach with quantitative methods can provide a form of triangulation, increasing the reliability of the results (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Carter et al., 2014). The mixed-methods approach was chosen to provide a

comprehensive understanding of the research question by triangulating data from various sources. Quantitative surveys will provide structured data on member perceptions and provide insight into the prevalence of certain attitudes within the club. Qualitative interviews will complement this by providing in-depth insights into the underlying motivations, experiences and perspectives, enabling a richer understanding of this study.

The first part of the analysis is the quantitative aspect. This involves distributing surveys among club members. These surveys aim to collect structured data on members' perceptions of the club's sustainability initiatives. The survey questions are designed to assess members' awareness of these sustainability efforts, their attitudes toward these initiatives, and their perceived impact on the club's operations and community involvement. Survey responses will provide quantitative insights into club members' overall perceptions and attitudes towards sustainability in general and the sustainability initiatives taken by the club.

The second part of the analysis complements the quantitative studies with qualitative interviews. These interviews are conducted with three board members and one club member. These interviews provide an opportunity to delve deeper into individuals' subjective experiences, opinions and perspectives regarding the club's sustainability efforts. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to allow flexibility in exploring diverse viewpoints and uncovering nuanced insights, leading to open conversations (Longhurst, 2003). The club member will be asked about their personal experiences with sustainability initiatives and their motivations for supporting or opposing such efforts. Similarly, interviews with the three board members will focus on understanding the rationale behind the club's sustainability investments, the challenges encountered in implementation, and their perceptions of member responses to these initiatives.

3.3.1 Case study approach

This research uses a case study methodology. Voetbal Vereniging Veenendaal is considered as the primary focus of analysis. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of club members' perceptions, providing detailed insights into the dynamics of sustainability initiatives within the club. By focusing on a single club, the study can take into account the unique organizational culture, community dynamics, and sustainability context specific to VVV,

increasing the depth and richness of the findings. Additionally, a detailed exploration of VVV as a case study can provide insights and lessons that may apply to other football clubs or organizations interested in sustainability initiatives, increasing the wider relevance and impact of the research.

Although it is initially not feasible to generalize the results of this study to all football clubs in the Netherlands, VVV was chosen as a case study for several reasons. Firstly, VVV is one of the forerunners in the sustainability investments of, among others, the building, making it a relevant example for investigating members' perceptions of such initiatives. Secondly, VVV offers accessibility and collaboration, facilitating data collection. This access to club members and board members for data collection is seen as important to the success of the research.

In short, the case study approach combined with a mixed-methods design provides a comprehensive understanding of how club members and the board of VVV perceive the club's sustainability investments. Quantitative survey data will provide broad insights into the prevalence of certain attitudes and perceptions within club members, while qualitative interviews will provide rich contextual detail and deeper insights into individuals' underlying motivations and experiences. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, this research aims to provide a thorough insight into the complexity surrounding the perception of the sustainability initiatives within football club VVV in Veenendaal.

3.4 Research methods

This research is structured based on triangulation, using both survey methodology and semi-structured interviews. The survey serves as a quantitative tool to identify broad patterns and trends, while the interviews serve to deepen and explain these findings.

The survey was conducted digitally via Google Forms among the club's members. The sample was selected in consultation with the club's board, who distributed the questionnaire among their members. This aimed for a representative sample to represent diverse perspectives within the club population.

The questionnaire is structured around the five factors established in Chapter 2: attachment to the club, general environmental disposition, provided information, social norms and expectations, and social status. Each of these factors is represented by a variety of questions.

For the factor *attachment to the club*, questions were asked such as "How often do you visit VVV?" and "How connected do you feel to VVV?". These questions are aimed at measuring the level of involvement and connection of club members with the club. They help understand the emotional bonds and loyalty that members feel towards the club and how these factors may influence their perceptions of the sustainability initiatives. The factor *general environmental disposition* includes the questions "How important do you think sustainability is in general?" and "Are you working on a more sustainable lifestyle in your spare time? If so, what?". These questions gauge club members' general attitudes toward sustainability and their willingness to integrate sustainable practices into their daily lives. By asking about specific behaviors such as waste separation and purchasing seasonal products, insight can be gained into the extent to which members are involved in sustainable activities both inside and outside the club. The factor *provided information* contains questions in the questionnaire such as "To what extent are you aware of VVV's sustainability plans?". This question examines the extent to which club members are aware of the club's sustainability efforts and plans. It provides insight into the effectiveness of communication and information dissemination within the club members. The factor *social norms and expectations* contained questions such as "To what extent are people in your social circles concerned with sustainability?". These questions help understand the role of the social environment in shaping individual attitudes and behaviors regarding sustainability. Lastly, the factor *social status* will be investigated, among other means, through the question: "Choose three themes that are most important to you: health, sustainability, nature, economy, your (socioeconomic) status". This provides insights into how club members prioritize these aspects.

As mentioned above, the questionnaire includes a question about the relative importance of various themes, including nature, sustainability, health, economy and personal socioeconomic status. This allows this research to understand priorities and values of club members from a broader perspective.

The survey was filled in by 46 members of the club. This meant that the response rate is approximately 10%. The collected survey data were analyzed using statistical software SPSS,

which allowed quantitative analyzes to be carried out to identify patterns and relationships between the different factors and variables. The full questionnaire can be found in *Appendix 2*.

In addition to the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three board members and one club member. In the case of the board members, this provides a representative sample of the boards' vision, given that the board contains of a total of five members. One interview is even conducted with the chairman of VVV. The decision to conduct interviews with only one club member, despite the club having approximately 450 members, acknowledges that this sample does not represent all club members. However, there is merit in including such an interview. While it may not capture the full spectrum of perspectives within the club, it provides a unique viewpoint that can offer qualitative insights into how sustainability initiatives are perceived and experienced by individual members. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of diverse opinions and attitudes towards sustainability within the club, complementing the quantitative data gathered from surveys and other sources.

Semi-structured interviews supported by surveys were seen as appropriate methods for this investigation. These interviews are designed to delve deeper into the survey findings and to understand the reasoning and considerations behind the club board's sustainability investments. Even though club members and board members are involved with the club in different ways, the purpose of the interviews will be the same – to investigate their perspectives of the club's transition to sustainability. The questions focus on perceptions of sustainability investments within the club, the motivations of the board behind these investments, and the personal opinions of the interviewees about these initiatives. Examples are “How do the club members/the board view this sustainability investment?” and “What do you think of this sustainability investment?” See the semi-structured interview questions in *Appendix 2*. The interviews were manually coded to identify themes and patterns in the respondents' responses.

3.5 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are important aspects that ensure the credibility of research results. In the context of this research into the perception of sustainability initiatives within VVV, both internal and external validity, as well as reliability, have been carefully considered.

Validity refers to the extent to which the results measure what they are supposed to measure (Yin, 2003). Also, according to Yin (2003), in the context of case study research, internal validity refers to the extent to which the identified causal relationships between variables within the case are correct. In other words, it is about assessing the validity of the conclusions drawn within the specific case, without attributing these conclusions to external factors or alternative explanations. In the case of this case study, internal validity means that the identified factors influencing club members' sustainability perceptions are causally linked to those perceptions within the club and are not influenced by external variables or other explanations. By engaging directly with both board members and wider club participants, the research captures context-specific insights into their perceptions of sustainability. The formulation of interview questions, together with the iterative nature of the interviews, ensures that the study effectively addresses the intended constructs, thereby increasing internal validity.

External validity refers to the generalizability of the research results beyond the specific context in which the study was conducted (Yin, 2003). Although the primary focus is on VVV, the inclusion of diverse perspectives and experiences within the club aims to increase external validity. As described in the 'research design' section, this research uses a case study approach where Voetbal Vereniging Veenendaal is considered as the focal point of the analysis. This approach provides the opportunity for an in-depth exploration of club members' perceptions, providing insights into the dynamics of the sustainability initiatives within the club. However, fully generalizing the results of this study to all football clubs in the Netherlands is not feasible, as a case study provides detailed information specific to this club, which inherently differs from other sports clubs. This limitation is acknowledged, and efforts have been made to tackle this issue. By conducting the analysis with existing literature on sustainability initiatives in sports organisations, the insights gained from VVV can be contextualized.

Reliability refers to the consistency and replicability of the study's findings (Yin, 2003). This study addresses reliability through triangulation – the use of multiple data sources and methods.

The combination of interviews and surveys, along with the standardized nature of certain survey questions, promotes consistency in data collection. The questionnaire is designed with attention to internal consistency, which means that the questions within each factor are consistent with each other and measure what they mean (Yin, 2003). However, it is important to recognize that the reliability of findings in a case study, by its very nature, can be influenced by the context-specific nature of the research (Yin, 2003). Case studies are inherently focused on a particular setting or organization, and the results may not always be directly transferable to other contexts. Recognizing this limitation, this study employs a mixed-method approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative data. While the qualitative aspect provides context-specific insights, the quantitative component adds a layer of standardized data collection. The use of established research tools for the quantitative phase increases the reliability of the responses within the scope of this case study.

3.6 Ethics

Ethics matter for scientific integrity and research validity. Before conducting the interviews, all participants were given information about their participation. This process ensured that individuals were fully informed of the research objectives, the nature of their participation and the use of the data collected before commencing the interviews. When interviewees consented, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed for use in this report. In addition, respondents of the interviews were given the opportunity to provide feedback to the transcripts.

4. Results

This chapter describes the results of both the surveys of a variety of club members and the interviews with three board members and one club member of Voetbal Vereniging Veenendaal, looking at the perceptions and attitudes towards VVV's sustainability initiatives. The survey included responses from forty-six club members, covering a range of twenty questions, including both open-ended and multiple-choice questions. Subsequently, as a follow-up to the survey, interviews were conducted with three board members and one club member, with the aim of gaining deeper insight into the members' responses and uncovering the underlying motivations ('why' questions) behind their answers. The club member was further questioned about these survey answers and whether they resonated with the findings from the questionnaire. The board members were then interviewed to not only share their perspectives on the survey questions, but also to explain their stance on the club members' responses to the survey.

This results chapter is split into two main sections: Section 4.1 outlines the survey findings, while Section 4.2 delves deeper into the interview questions.

4.1 Survey

The survey component of this study aimed at establishing correlations between the five factors – club attachment, social status, general environmental disposition, social norms and expectations, and the information provided – and club members' perceptions regarding sustainability and the investment in VV Veenendaal. Section 4.1 of the analysis presents the results of the survey, which consists of both multiple choice and open questions. Before we delve deeper into the specific research results, an overview of the demographic information of the participants is first provided in section 4.1.1. The correlations between the five factors mentioned above and the club members' perceptions will then be examined, identifying correlations and other relationships. For the closed questions, the correlations between each of the five factors in section 4.1.2 are examined. Regarding the open questions, we will address each question separately and outline the main findings in section 4.1.3.

4.1.1 Descriptive statistics

4.1.1.1 Age and gender

Regarding the age distribution of the participants, responses ranged from 19 to 58 years old. The majority of respondents, a total of 23 people, were in the 21-25 age category. Moreover, 9 respondents were between 30 and 40 years old, while 8 respondents were between 41 and 58 years old. In terms of gender representation, the survey showed uneven participation. Specifically, 7 women and 39 men participated in the survey.

4.1.1.2 Level of education

The highest level of education among respondents varied, reflecting the diverse educational background within the surveyed group. One respondent indicated that he/she had completed secondary school (middelbare school), while five respondents indicated that he had a secondary vocational education (MBO) diploma. In addition, eight respondents indicate that they have obtained a higher vocational (HBO) or university (WO) diploma. However, it is notable that the majority of respondents were still pursuing their education. In concrete terms, there were 11 people who followed an intermediate vocational education (MBO) course and 21 people with a higher vocational education/university education (HBO/WO). This distribution is consistent with the age majority of respondents falling into the 21-25 category, indicating that many participants were at a stage in their lives where they were completing or pursuing higher education.

4.1.1.3 Level of income

The gross annual income of the respondents was also requested in the survey, whereby different income categories were distinguished. A significant number of participants reported their income within these categories. Eight people earn less than €15.000 per year, while four respondents reported earning between €15.000 and €25.000 per year. Nine people reported an income between €25.000 and €40.000 per year, and the largest number, thirteen people, earned between €40.000 and €60.000 per year. In addition, four people reported earning more than €60.000 per year. It is also notable that eight respondents indicated that they would prefer not to answer or that they did not know, indicating that some respondents were reluctant to share their income.

4.1.2 Multiple-choice questions

In this study into the perception of members of football club VVV from Veenendaal about the club's significant investments in sustainability, various factors were delved into to understand how these investments are experienced. The research question aimed to uncover club members' attitudes and views towards sustainability initiatives. The research component of the study focused on five key factors: attachment to the club, social status, general environmental disposition, social norms and expectations, and the information provided to members. These factors have proven to be important in understanding how individuals within the club experience and interact with sustainability efforts, as mentioned in Chapter 2. They will be examined in the following order:

- 1) Attachment to the club and social status
- 2) Attachment to the club and general environmental disposition
- 3) Attachment to the club and social norms and expectations
- 4) Attachment to the club and provided information
- 5) Social status and general environmental disposition
- 6) Social status and social norms and expectations
- 7) Social status and provided information
- 8) General environmental disposition and social norms and expectations
- 9) General environmental disposition and provided information
- 10) Social norms and expectations and provided information

Table 2

Graphic overview of the division and layout of this paragraph

	Attachment to the club	Social status	General environmental disposition	Social norms and expectation	Provided information
Attachment to the club	X	1	2	3	4
Social status	X	X	5	6	7
General env. disposition	X	X	X	8	9
Social norms and exp.	X	X	X	X	10
Provided information	X	X	X	X	X

By systematically examining the correlations and causal relationships between these factors, the underlying relationships and dynamics that influence members' perceptions of the club's sustainability measures will be uncovered. Each correlation and causation was explored to reveal insights into how the factors club attachment, social status, general environmental disposition, social norms and expectation and provided information interact to shape individuals' attitudes towards sustainability initiatives.

4.1.2.1 Attachment to the club and social status

The correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between attachment to the club and social status. This provides insight into how individuals' social background can influence their emotional bond with the club. The results revealed a statistically significant correlation between attachment to the club and social status ($r = -0.337$, $p < 0.001$, see *Table 3*). This indicates that as the social status of the club member increases, the attachment to the club tends to decrease, and vice versa.

Table 3

Correlation attachment to the club and social status^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	3,239	,867		3,736	,001
	Age	,020	,014	,353	1,378	,178
	Gender	,105	,279	,072	,376	,709
	Level of education	,174	,095	,351	1,841	,075
	Level of income	-,165	,099	-,384	-1,657	,107

a. Dependent Variable: Attachment to the club

The coefficient of determination, also known as the R-squared, is 0.113 (see *Table 4*), indicating that 11.3% of the variance in attachment to the club can be explained by social status. While this indicates a statistically significant relationship, it is important to note that the magnitude of the relationship is relatively small, accounting for only 11.3% of the variance in attachment to the club. This indicates that other factors beyond social status play a significant role in determining individuals' attachment to the club.

Table 4*R-squared attachment to the club and social status*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Est.	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	,337 ^a	,113	,006	,56767	,113	1,055	4	33	,394

a. Predictors: (Constant: Attachment to the club), Income, Level of education, Gender, Age

4.1.2.2 Attachment to the club and general environmental disposition

To investigate the relationship between attachment to the club and the general environmental disposition, further correlation analyses were conducted. The results indicated a statistically significant negative correlation between these variables ($r = -0.05$, $p < 0.001$). This means that as attachment to the club increases, the general environmental disposition tends to decrease, and vice versa (see *Table 5* and *Table 6*). These results indicate a difference point of view from the literature, which will be further elaborated on in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Table 5*Correlations attachment to the club and general environmental disposition*

		Gen. Env. Disp.	Attachm. to the club
General environmental disposition	Pearson Correlation	1	-,291*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,050
	N	46	46
Attachment to the club	Pearson Correlation	-,291*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,050	
	N	46	46

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 6*Coefficients attachment to the club and general environmental disposition*

	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Attachment tot he club	4,825	,260		18,557	,000
General environmental disposition	-,327	,082	-,614	-3,968	,000

4.1.2.3 Attachment to the club and social norms and expectations

The next two factors that will be examined are attachment to the club and social norms and expectations. There is no statistical significance in almost all relationships including attachment to the club and social norms and expectations ($p > 0.05$), although a weak correlation ($r = 0.122$) was observed (see *Table 7*). This weak correlation implies that while social factors may indeed have some influence on individuals' level of attachment to the club, the impact may vary and may not be consistently influential in all cases or scenarios. In other words, while social norms and expectations may play a role in shaping attachment levels for some individuals, they may not be universally influential or significant in determining club attachment for everyone.

Table 7*Correlations attachment to the club and social norms and expectations*

		Soc. norms and exp.	Attachm. to the club
Social norms and expectations	Pearson Correlation	1	-,231
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,122
	N	46	46
Attachment tot he club	Pearson Correlation	-,231	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,122	
	N	46	46

There is a notable exception: the relationship between the existence of contacts within the club beyond one's own team and the level of attachment to the club. This particular relationship proved to be statistically significant ($p = 0.016$). This outcome suggests that individuals who have established contacts and connections within the broader club community, extending beyond their immediate team, tend to exhibit higher levels of engagement. This relationship could work both ways: increased engagement may lead to more contacts and connections within

the club, or vice versa. However, it is important to note that statistical correlation does not necessarily imply causation. There could be other underlying factors that influence both variables simultaneously, creating a common cause for the observed correlation. Further research is needed to explore this further.

4.1.2.4 Attachment to the club and provided information

To investigate the relationship between attachment to the club and the provided information, further correlation analyses were conducted. A statistically significant positive correlation of 0.0325 was observed between the members' level of attachment to the club and the amount of information they had received regarding the sustainability plans (see *Table 8*). This suggests that individuals who are more informed about sustainability plans tend to be more engaged with the club, or that club members that are more engaged with the club are more open to the information provided. This correlation does not imply causation, hence this result calls for further discussion to ascertain the nature and directionality of the relationship between these two factors.

While statistically significant, the effect size is relatively small. This means that while there is some relationship between club attachment and information about sustainability plans, the practical significance of this relationship may be limited. In practical terms, this result suggests that providing more information about sustainability plans could potentially help increase individuals' engagement and attachment to the club, albeit modestly. Thus, while it is beneficial to inform club members about sustainability initiatives, factors other than providing information can also play an important role in fostering attachment and engagement with the club.

Table 8

Correlations attachment to the club and provided information

		Attachment to the club	Provided information
Attachment to the club	Pearson Correlation	1	,275
	Sig. (1-tailed)		,0325
	N	46	46
Provided information	Pearson Correlation	,275	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	,0325	
	N	46	46

4.1.2.5 Social status and general environmental disposition

A regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between social status and the general environmental disposition. This analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship between social status and the importance individuals placed on sustainability ($p = 0.008$, see *Table 9*). Higher social status was predictive of a greater emphasis on sustainability. However, the explanatory power of the model, as indicated by R-squared (0.335), suggests that social status alone is not a strong predictor of general environmental disposition. In other words, while social status does have an impact on individuals' attitudes towards sustainability, it is not the only factor influencing their environmental disposition. Other variables not included in the regression model may also play an important role in shaping individuals' attitudes toward sustainability. Therefore, while social status may contribute to differences in environmental attitudes, it is only one piece of the puzzle, and additional factors should be considered to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of the general environmental disposition.

Table 9

Regression social status and general environmental disposition^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9,902	4	2,476	4,174	,008 ^b
	Residual	19,572	33	,593		
	Total	29,474	37			

a. Dependent Variable: General environmental disposition

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social status

4.1.2.6 Social status and social norms and expectations

A regression analysis was also conducted to examine the relationship between social status and social norms and expectations at VVV. This analysis demonstrated a significant relationship between social status and social norms and expectations ($p = 0.024$), suggesting that club members with higher social status tend to adhere more closely to social norms and expectations regarding sustainability (see *Table 10*). However, the R-squared value (0.281) suggests that social status explains only a moderate proportion of the variance in social norms and expectations related to sustainability, highlighting the influence of other factors. This implies

that although social status does have an impact on adherence to social norms and expectations, there are other factors besides social status that also play an important role in shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviour in this regard. To fully understand and address social norms and expectations related to sustainability at VVV, it is therefore important to consider a broader range of factors beyond just social status.

Table 10

Regression social status and social norms and expectations^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4,420	4	1,105	3,229	,024 ^b
	Residual	11,291	33	,342		
	Total	15,711	37			

a. Dependent Variable: Social norms and expectations

b. Predictors: (Constant), Social status

4.1.2.7 Social status and provided information

The next regression analysis examined the relationship between social status and provided information. Social status was found to be a statistically significant predictor of the amount of information individuals received about the sustainability plans ($p = 0.027$). To be more specific, individuals with higher social status tend to receive more information about VVV's sustainability plans. Therefore, higher social status was associated with receiving more information.

The results regarding each item falling under 'provided information' also provide interesting findings. Consequently, the components age, gender and income will be examined individually.

4.1.2.7.1 Provided information and age:

A statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -0.000$) was observed between age and the amount of information individuals had about sustainability plan, see *Table 11*. Younger members of the club tended to be less informed about the sustainability plans, while older members of the club were more informed. This suggests that younger club members tend to have less information about the sustainability plans of VVV compared to the older members of VVV, who are more informed.

Table 11*Correlations provided information and age*

		Provided information	Age
Provided information	Pearson Correlation	1	,510*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	46	46
Age	Pearson Correlation	,510*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	46	46

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.2.1.7.2 Provided information and gender:

A statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.016$) was found between gender and the amount of information individuals received about sustainability plans, as mentioned in *Table 12*. Specifically, the Pearson correlation coefficient of -0.354 suggests a moderate negative relationship between gender and awareness of VVV's sustainability plans. Interestingly, the findings indicate that women tend to be better informed about VVV's sustainability plans than men. This implies a gender disparity in access to information regarding VVV's sustainability. Further exploration to this discrepancy could shed light on understanding the significance of this difference and the underlying factors contributing to it.

Table 12*Correlations provided information and gender*

		Provided information	Gender
Provided information	Pearson Correlation	1	-,354*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,016
	N	46	46
Gender	Pearson Correlation	-,354*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,016	
	N	46	46

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4.2.1.7.3 Provided information and income:

A significant positive correlation ($r = 0.004$) was identified between income and the amount of information individuals received about sustainability plans. This suggests that higher income was associated with receiving more information.

4.1.2.8 General environmental disposition and social norms and expectations

To explore the correlation between general environmental disposition and social norms and expectations, additional correlation analysis were undertaken. A significant positive correlation was found ($r = 0.000$) between social norms and expectations related to sustainability and the importance club members attributed to sustainability (see *Table 13*). This indicates that when social norms and expectations emphasize sustainability values, individuals are more likely to consider sustainability as important. When sustainability values are emphasized and reinforced within a social context, individuals are more likely to prioritize sustainability in their own beliefs and behaviour.

Table 13

Correlations general environmental disposition and social norms and expectations

		Social norms and exp.	Gen. env. disposition
Social norms and expectations	Pearson Correlation	1	,661*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	46	46
General environmental disposition	Pearson Correlation	,661*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	46	46

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.1.2.9 General environmental disposition and provided information

Additional correlation analysis was performed, this time to delve into the relationship between general environmental disposition and provided information. A statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.013$, $p < 0.05$) was found between the amount of information provided to club members and their perceived general environmental disposition, as mentioned in *Table 14*. This suggests that those who received more information about the sustainability plans tended to place

a higher importance on sustainability, or that the club members that place a higher importance on sustainability are more willing to be informed about the sustainability plans. The other way around is also possible, since the club members that perceived less information about VVV's sustainability plans tended to place a lower importance on sustainability. As mentioned above, a correlation does not imply causation. Therefore, this result calls for further discussion to determine the underlying nature and direction of the relationship between these two factors.

Table 14

Correlations general environmental disposition and provided information

		Provided information	Gen. env. disp.
Provided information	Pearson Correlation	1	,364*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,013
	N	46	46
General environmental disposition	Pearson Correlation	,364*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,013	
	N	46	46

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4.1.2.10 Social norms and expectations and provided information

The last correlation conducted was to explore the relationship between social norms and expectations and provided information. There was a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.000$) between the amount of information provided and individuals' adherence to social norms and expectations related to sustainability (see *Table 15*). This implies that well-informed individuals are more likely to adopt sustainability-related social norms and expectations, whereas those with limited information may be less inclined to do so. Again, establishing a correlation does not automatically imply a causal relationship and therefore underscore the need for further discussion to determine the underlying nature and direction of the relationship between these two factors.

Table 15*Correlations social norms and expectations and provided information*

		Provided information	Soc. norms and exp.
Provided information	Pearson Correlation	1	,522*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	46	46
Social norms and expectations	Pearson Correlation	,522*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	46	46

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.1.3 Question “choose three themes”

In addition to the multiple choice questions, a rating question is also added to the survey. This question is “**Choose three themes that are most important to you: health, sustainability, nature, economy, your (socioeconomic) status.**” This question derived from different theories provided in Chapter 2 and provide a general overview of what the respondents perceive is more and/or less important, without focusing directly on sustainability and the club itself. The options *sustainability* and *nature* refer to the factor general environmental disposition. *Economy* and *health* derived from the 3 P’s theory of Elkington (2013), referring to resp. profit and people. Lastly, *your (socioeconomic) status* refers directly to the factor your social status.

Out of the 46 respondents:

- 44 respondents chose health
- 33 respondents chose your (socioeconomic) status
- 29 respondents chose economy
- 17 respondents chose nature
- 12 respondents chose sustainability

Where 43 members of the club responded with three themes, three club members chose two themes. The reason behind this choice is undiscovered. The elaborate results of the findings are explained below.

4.1.3.1 Health

No significant correlations were observed between the theme of health and any of the examined factors. This suggests that the members' choices regarding the health theme were not significantly influenced by the factors under investigation (see *Table 16*). For this reason, this result will not be further explored for this research. However, it is noteworthy that all but two respondents completed this section, showing a high level of importance, even though unrelated to this study.

Table 16

Descriptive statistics theme health

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	44	95,7	100,0	100,0
Missing	System	2	4,3		
Total		46	100,0		

4.1.3.2 Your (socioeconomic) status

The theme of *your (socioeconomic) status* revealed several significant correlations. Firstly, social norms and expectations exhibited a significant correlation ($p = 0.011$) with the theme *your (socioeconomic) status*, meaning that societal influences or perceptions play a substantial role in shaping members' perceptions of their social status, and vice versa. Age demonstrated a significant correlation ($p = 0.010$) with social status, meaning that younger individuals are more frequently choosing this theme and older individuals are less frequently choosing this theme (see *Table 17*). This suggests that younger club members put a higher value on social status than older club members. Additionally, income level exhibited a significant correlation ($p = 0.002$) with the selection of social status, indicating that club members with lower incomes were more inclined to opt for this theme and vice versa. Moreover, this theme also exhibited a significant correlation with the factor attachment to the club ($p = 0.009$), also mentioned in *Table 17*. This means that members who place a higher emphasis on their social status tend to have a stronger attachment to the club.

Table 17

Correlation of theme your (socioeconomic) status with the factors attachment to the club, general environmental disposition, social norms and expectations, and social status^a

		Factor attachm. to the club	Factor gen. env. Disp.	Factor social norms and exp.	Age	Gender	Level of education	Level of income
Theme your (soc.ec.) status	Pearson Correlation	,383	-,239	-,370	-,377	,137	-,129	-,491
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,009	,110	,011	,010	,363	,393	,002
	N	46	46	46	46	46	46	38

a. The factor social status is divided in the different subcategories Age, Gender, Level of education and Level of income

4.1.3.3 Economy

The theme of economy revealed a significant correlation ($p = 0.041$) with gender, indicating that men were more inclined to select the economy theme and women were less inclined to do so (see *Table 18*). Also, as mentioned in *Table 19*, 69.2% of the men chose the theme economy, where only 28,6% of the women chose this theme. This indicates that there is a gender disparity in the preference for the economy theme among the participants.

Table 18

Correlation of theme economy and the other themes

		Age	Gender	Level of education	Level of income
Theme economy	Pearson Correlation	-,069	,303	,080	,014
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,649	,041	,596	,935
	N	46	46	46	38

Table 19
Crosstabulation themes and gender^a

		Gender		Total
		Female	Male	
Theme health	Count	7	37	44
	% within Gender	100,0%	94,9%	
Theme nature	Count	3	14	17
	% within Gender	42,9%	35,9%	
Theme economy	Count	2	27	29
	% within Gender	28,6%	69,2%	
Theme sustainability	Count	5	7	12
	% within Gender	71,4%	17,9%	
Theme your (soc.ec.) status	Count	4	29	33
	% within Gender	57,1%	74,4%	
Total	Count	7	39	46

a. Percentages and totals are based on respondents.

4.1.3.4 Nature

An intriguing finding emerged for the theme of nature, where a significant correlation ($p = 0.002$) was identified with attachment to the club (see *Table 20*). Specifically, individuals who did not select the nature theme displayed higher levels of attachment to the club. This result is in line with the result in section 4.1.2.2, where the factor attachment to the club showed a significant negative correlation with the factor general environmental disposition, meaning that a higher general environmental disposition significantly correlates with a lower level of attachment to the club.

Table 20*Correlations theme nature with the other themes and the factor attachment to the club*

		Factor				
		attachment to the club	Theme health	Theme economy	Theme sustainability	Theme your (soc.ec.) status
Theme nature	Pearson	-,443	,163	-,533	-,045	-,420
	Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,002	,278	,000	,769	,004
N		46	46	46	46	46

4.1.3.5 Sustainability

The theme of sustainability produced several significant findings (see *Table 21*). Firstly, a significant correlation ($p = 0.000$) was observed between the factor general environmental disposition and the sustainability theme, suggesting that club members with a stronger environmental disposition were more likely to choose sustainability. Secondly, gender exhibited a significant correlation ($p = 0.002$), with women showing a greater preference for the sustainability theme compared to men, see *Table 19*. Lastly, there is a significant correlation between the theme sustainability and the level of income ($p = 0.029$). This result indicates that club members with higher income levels are more likely to choose sustainability. Lastly, income level also played a role in theme selection, with a significant correlation ($p = 0.029$), indicating that individuals with higher incomes were more likely to opt for sustainability, and club members with lower income levels were less likely to opt for this theme.

Table 21*Correlations theme sustainability with the factors attachment to the club, general environmental disposition, social norms and expectations, and social status^a*

		Attachm. to the club	Gen. env. disp.	Social norms and exp.	Age	Gender	Level of education	Level of income
Theme sustainability	Pearson	-,050	,534	,372	,278	-,437	,000	,354
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,744	,000	,011	,061	,002	1,000	,029
N		46	46	46	46	46	46	38

a. The factor social status is divided in the different subcategories Age, Gender, Level of education and Level of income

4.1.3.6 Conclusion

It has become clear that the factors attachment to the club, social status, general environmental disposition, social norms and expectations, and the provided information all play a role in how individuals experience sustainability initiatives within the club. Out of the ten correlations, only one correlation appeared to not have a statistical significant result, which is the correlation between attachment to the club and social norms and expectations. However, while most of the correlations are statistically significant, the modest size of the effects highlights the importance of considering the other factors and other possible influences. This result suggests that there is an interplay between several factors that influence individuals' perceptions and behaviors regarding sustainability initiatives within the club. Specifically, it indicates that the relationships between the factors attachment to the club, social status, general environmental disposition, social norms and expectations, and the information provided are not isolated, but rather interrelated. It is worth noting that the analysis showed a pattern, which is the interaction between all five factors, whereby they mutually attenuate or weaken each other. Examples include a higher general environmental disposition correlating with a higher social norms and expectations, or a lower social status correlating with less provided information. However, a notable finding is the contradiction between higher club attachment and lower levels of general environmental disposition, while a higher social status correlates with higher levels of general environmental disposition. This finding raises questions about how these factors interact with each other, therefore this will be delved deeper into for further research using qualitative research methods (section 4.2) to provide deeper insights into the underlying mechanisms driving these correlations.

4.1.4. Open-end questions

In the survey, three open-end questions were posed to the club members. These questions are linked to one of the five factors, and they will be addressed individually. The three questions posed are as follows:

- 1) Do you engage in a more sustainable lifestyle in your free time? If so, what practices do you follow?
- 2) What is the general consensus at the football club regarding sustainability?

- 3) Do you perceive a difference in the vision on sustainability between your team and the rest of the club? If so, what is the difference?

4.1.4.1 Question one – sustainable lifestyle

The first open-end question in this survey is "**Do you engage in a more sustainable lifestyle in your free time? If so, what practices do you follow? (Consider activities such as waste separation, primarily purchasing seasonal vegetables, etc.)**". This question is included to gain a deeper understanding of members' personal sustainability practices outside of the club context, shedding light on their individual contribution to sustainability efforts. The responses revealed a spectrum of practices and attitudes. Detailed responses can be found in *Appendix 3*.

While 14 respondents indicated that they were not actively engaged in any sustainability-related activities during their leisure time, the other 32 showcased a commendable commitment to sustainability. Common sustainable practices included waste separation and reducing plastic usage, reflecting an awareness of environmental concerns. Many respondents mentioned cycling as a sustainable mode of transportation, highlighting its eco-friendly and health-conscious appeal. Some participants extended their sustainable efforts to broader initiatives, such as using electric vehicles, installing solar panels, and actively conserving water. These actions exemplified a holistic approach to sustainability that encompasses environmental and energy conservation.

Interestingly, one respondent demonstrated a comprehensive commitment to sustainable living by adopting a range of practices, including minimizing plastic use, opting for organic products, following a vegetarian diet, and prioritizing seasonal vegetables. This multifaceted approach underscores the significance of lifestyle choices in contributing to sustainability goals.

However, it is important to note that a subset of respondents expressed limited engagement with sustainability, stating that they did not actively pursue eco-friendly practices in their free time. Additionally, some participants cited government-imposed measures, such as waste separation and bottle deposit systems, as their primary sustainability actions, indicating a degree of passivity in their approach.

In summary, the survey results reveal a diverse landscape of sustainability practices within the surveyed group, ranging from enthusiastic adoption to more passive engagement. However, passive and/or limited engagement does dominate the responses.

4.1.3.3 Question two – general environmental consensus

The question **“What is the general consensus at the football club regarding sustainability?”** showed a variety of responses. Obtaining an answer to this question will gain insight into the general attitudes and perceptions of the club's members towards sustainability. By gauging the general sentiment within the club, it is possible to determine how sustainability is perceived and appreciated by the members. Detailed responses can again be found in *Appendix 3*.

Ten respondents expressed support for sustainability efforts within the club, viewing them as a positive and necessary step forward. However, a notable number of 24 respondents indicated a lack of interest or awareness regarding sustainability matters, suggesting that sustainability may not be a primary concern for these members. Phrases such as “weet ik niet” or “geen idee” (meaning: I do not know) were common in their responses, reflecting a possible disconnect with the sustainability initiatives.

Additionally, six respondents emphasized the importance of cost considerations, highlighting that sustainability initiatives should not impose significant financial burdens on the club or its members. They indicated that while they were open to sustainability efforts, they preferred if they were financially feasible and beneficial for the club. Some respondents, five in total, were sceptical about the motivations behind sustainability initiatives. They expressed concerns about potential “greenwashing” or insincere efforts, questioning the authenticity of sustainability measures. These members were cautious about the intentions behind sustainability initiatives and emphasized the importance of genuine commitment to sustainability goals.

Despite varying opinions, some respondents, three in total, emphasized the importance of sustainability for the club's long-term continuity and viability. They recognized sustainability as crucial to the club's future and stressed the need for ongoing efforts in this regard. Others, however, had mixed feelings; two acknowledged the importance of sustainability while also finding it somewhat excessive. They recognized the need for sustainability initiatives, but expressed reservations about their extent or implementation within the club.

Overall, the responses to the question revealed a diverse range of perspectives within the club regarding sustainability, from strong support to scepticism and mixed feelings. Therefore, there can be concluded that there is no general consensus about sustainability.

4.1.3.4 Question three – vision at the club

The next question examines whether there is a difference in perception regarding sustainability between different groups within the football club, in particular between individual teams and the wider club community. The question is "**Do you have regular contact within the club outside of your own team? If yes, do you perceive a difference in the perception on sustainability between your team and the rest of the club? If so, what is the difference?**". This question provides insight into possible variations in the approach to sustainability within the club. By investigating whether members who regularly interact with other teams notice a difference in views on sustainability, we can better understand how sustainability is understood and valued by different subgroups within the club.

Out of the 46 respondents, 45 respondents acknowledged having more extensive contacts beyond their immediate team within the club. Notably, the respondents mostly expressed a lack of awareness or active consideration of such distinctions. For a total of 26 times, responses such as 'I do not know' and 'we do not talk about this' were given. They indicated that they had not specifically noticed any discernible differences in sustainability perspectives, implying that this aspect may not have been a focal point of their attention. Other respondents, 19 in total, contended that there was, in fact, no perceptible distinction in sustainability viewpoints between their team and the rest of the club. Their responses suggested a degree of uniformity or alignment in the club's overall stance on sustainability.

There is one exception. One respondent's perspective provided additional insight into this matter. They expressed uncertainty, stating, "I do not know exactly." However, they went on to emphasize a prevailing sentiment within the club: a collective belief that there is a shared responsibility to engage in sustainable practices. Although this finding is intriguing, it will not be further investigated in this study due to its basis on the response of a single participant.

Although most respondents indicated that they had regular contact outside their own team, there was generally little awareness or discussion about any differences in views on sustainability within the club. The majority of respondents said they had noticed no clear distinction, while others said there was no discernible difference between their team and the rest of the club.

4.2 Interviews

The second part of this results section will delve deeper into the underlying reasons for these findings through the utilization of interviews. It is also important to note that correlation does not equal causation, and further in-depth analysis is needed to understand the complex dynamics behind the correlations found. Therefore, interviews with one club member and three board members will further explore the underlying motives and reasoning behind the observed correlations. This will help to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that influence club members' perceptions and attitudes towards sustainability. The interviews conducted are with three board members and one club member. The board members responded to a slightly different questions than the club member, see *Appendix 2*. Therefore, these interviews will be analysed separately. Section 4.2.1 shows the results of the interviews with the three board members, whereas section 4.2.2 shows the results of the interviews with the club member.

4.2.1 Results of the interviews with board members

This part of the research included interviews with three board members, highlighting various aspects of the sustainability investment and a deeper insight of the survey's results.

4.2.1.1 Overall view on the sustainability investment

To gain a deeper insight in the reasons behind the sustainability investment, board members were first asked several questions behind their motives.

The board showed a diverse range of perspectives on the sustainability investment. Some board members emphasized the double value of the investment, highlighting both the environmental and financial aspects. The pursuit of a sustainable future for both the environment and the financial stability of the association was explicitly mentioned.

"Because we want to be more sustainable for the environment, but certainly also for our wallet. To be honest." – board member 2.

All board members initially acknowledged that they had not thought primarily from an environmental perspective, but rather from a financial perspective. However, this insight evolved into a broader vision in which this investment was considered a necessary and future-proof choice.

"We expect that in a few years it will actually be mandatory to make your sports park more sustainable. We actually just looked at it, do we think it is important? Yes. Do we want to be at the forefront? Yes. Can we afford it? Yes. And then we decided to invest." – board member 1.

The choice to invest was mainly motivated by a combination of social responsibility and the possible profit resulting from the investment. The urge to upgrade the football club's building to the latest sustainability standards played a role, in addition to the desire to contribute to a larger social goal. The experiences of other sports clubs that had already made such investments were also cited as persuasive factors.

"Well, actually we also want to update the building to the latest values and standards that exist here, regarding sustainability. And in this way we can also contribute. But also because many other clubs have already taken this path. And you heard from them that it also yields a lot of returns. So that was also a decisive factor for us. We also have a trainer among the youth who works at an installation company. Who also provided us with advice. And that made us decide to also look at a heat pump. And well, everything else we have used." – board member 2.

Moreover, it turned out that personal belief played an important role for two board members. The desire to contribute to a more sustainable world, regardless of immediate profitability, was explicitly mentioned as a motivating factor for the investment.

Q: "But would you have done it if there was little or no profit to be made from it? A: Well, I think so, because the whole of the Netherlands is working on it. And yes, the whole world is working on it. I also want to become a grandmother one day and I want my little one to be able to live a normal life. I want that." – board member 2.

There can be said that there are different reasons for this investment. The reasons mentioned are to be 1) more sustainable, 2) to be ahead of what will be mandatory in the future, and 3) for financial benefits. This shows that there is not only one factor that plays a role for choosing this investment by the board members, but that several different factors are seen as important and are decisive for the investment. This is in line with the findings from the survey section. The factor general environmental disposition is present within both the club members as the board members. Additionally, the board of VVV shows a degree of social norms and expectations, by expecting that the sustainability initiatives at the club will become commonplace within the near future. Furthermore, the financial aspect is also mentioned several times in the open-ended responses by the member of the club. This is also in line with the results of the survey.

4.2.1.2 Club member perception

The board members were also asked to how they think this investment is perceived by the club members. While some board members indicated that there was little interest among members, it was also noted that those who were aware or actively involved responded positively to the investment. During the annual members meeting (in Dutch: algemene ledenvergadering), unanimous support was expressed for the sustainability initiatives, with no member voting against. However, the majority of club members seemed to show more interest in sporting aspects, such as the demand for a second artificial turf field, than in the association's sustainability efforts. This result has been recurring throughout this study. While there were some members who may have had critical questions, these comments have remained largely unspoken until now.

"The only thing being asked is, when will there be a second artificial turf field? People find the game more important. Most people, let me put it this way, there will probably be people who want to ask some critical questions about that. But so far I haven't heard them." – board member 2.

4.2.1.3 Attachment to the club and social status

The question was asked to why attachment to the club has a negative correlation with social status, since almost all the other factors show a positive correlation. This appears to be

somewhat noticeable but not consistent by the board members. There are opinions that certain individuals with higher status show more commitment, while others do not perceive it that way. However, particularly the club's chairman does not see this connection within the club. It is suggested that some may act out of personal interest or status-related motives, but this does not appear to be a general pattern. Therefore, there seems to be a disconnect to the perceptions of the board members and the club members.

Also, although mentioned in the survey section that there is a correlation between attachment to the club and the value placed on sustainability, this connection is not consistently experienced by the board. It is indicated that the choice for sustainability does not necessarily arise from environmental awareness, and it does not seem to have any influence on the involvement of the members. Again, there seems to be another disconnect to the perceptions of the board members and the club members.

Furthermore, according to the board, the club members are not directly influenced and/or impacted by the club initiatives. Members are mainly focused on playing football, and therefore they show little involvement in sustainability initiatives. As the board members noted, club members are simply not at a football club to think about and/or prioritize sustainability. Playing football and socializing are the main reasons for being at the club. The board also mentioned that the club appears to be ahead of municipal sustainability initiatives, but still member interests and attachment remains low. This is again suggesting that sustainability issues are not prominent within this club's culture. By asking the question what the board needs to get everyone on board with the sustainability investment, the three board members showed the same response. One board member suggests that sharing a compelling story about sustainability investments can be helpful. The chairman confirms that there is already "a good story", however, in general, members do not seem to have a need for further involvement in sustainability initiatives within the club. It can therefore be concluded that the primary interest of the members lie in playing football and socializing, rather than engaging in sustainability initiatives.

4.2.2 Results of the club member's interview

This part of the results section delves deeper into the perception of one club member of VVV. This interview highlights the deeper understanding of the survey's results amongst the club members. Even though interviewing one club member yield additional valuable information, the standpoint from one club member may not be representative to the perception of all club members. However, this perspective offers valuable insights into the results of the survey, thereby enriching this analysis.

The member views the club's sustainability investments primarily from an economic perspective. The emphasis is on cost savings as a positive aspect, with the environmental benefit considered secondary. The board's choice of these investments is probably seen as an economic decision, especially because of rising energy prices due to events such as the Ukraine war. This is in line with previous results presented in this study, indicating a preference for economic motives over motives for sustainability.

The member has limited involvement with the club, focusing mainly on playing football and occasionally contributing to social activities, with less interest in decision-making within the club. Rather than feeling too young, the member feels disengaged from decisions made by those with more expertise. This response is in line with the survey result.

The investment in sustainability is generally positively assessed by the member because of the financial benefits. If the investment had not saved money but had environmental objectives, the member would have been less enthusiastic. Financial aspects is seen as more important to the club than individual environmental interests. As mentioned earlier, this finding is also reflected in the survey results.

The attitude towards sustainability and the environment in the member's daily life is limited to simple actions such as waste separation and electric driving, while more complex or labour-intensive efforts seem less attractive. This observation is also consistent with the findings of the survey.

Within the football club, sustainability does not seem to be central to the conversations, with a more general assessment that people are mainly concerned with football and have such

discussions elsewhere, for example at home. There seems to be little focus on status within the club, and sustainability does not seem to feature prominently in conversations within the football community. This results is also consistent with earlier results in this study, aligning with the survey results and the findings of the interviews with the board members. The club member also mentioned that the sustainability investment does not appear to be strong within the club even after it has been implemented. It is therefore assumed that this element is not prominent in the conversations and engagement within the team or the wider club.

“But there [in the canteen] you talk more about Ajax and Feyenoord, not necessarily about sustainability. The level is not that high in a football canteen.” – club member

In summary, the sustainability investment within the football club appears to be viewed more as a practical economic choice than as an important and widely supported community issue by this club member. This member's involvement appears to be more focused on the sporting aspect and less on broader club matters, including sustainability. This observation largely aligns with the results of the survey, which indicated limited interest in adopting a sustainable lifestyle among club members. It also aligns with the observations of the board of VVV.

Additionally, the perception of greenwashing also seems present, as mentioned in the survey, since the member would be less enthusiastic if there would be no financial gain in this initiative. However, the five factors mentioned above do not appear to be highly prominent in this member's perspective, which contrasts with the survey results where they seemed more prevalent, but is showing that the low effects sizes of the survey results are likely to be also present by this member of the club.

4.3 Conclusion to the results section

The culmination of the survey and interview results paints a comprehensive picture of the multifaceted dynamics between sustainability, club attachment, provided information, and social factors within the context of VVV's sustainability initiatives.

The survey results revealed intriguing correlations between various factors and individuals' perceptions within the club. Notably, attachment to the club demonstrated complex associations with social status, general environmental disposition, provided information, and social norms.

While certain correlations emerged, such as higher information leading to increased attachment, the intricate interplay among these factors suggests a nuanced relationship that extends beyond straightforward causation.

Moreover, the survey highlighted diverse perspectives on sustainability practices among club members. While some showcased commendable commitment to sustainability, others exhibited limited engagement or passive involvement. These variations in attitudes underscore the complexity of fostering a unified sustainability culture within the club.

The interviews with board members shed light on the rationale behind the club's sustainability investments. The motivations ranged from financial considerations to social responsibility and a desire to align with evolving environmental standards. While some members perceived positive responses to the investment, others noted a lack of pronounced interest or focus on sustainability matters within the club.

Interestingly, the interview with the club member echoed similar sentiments, emphasizing an economic perspective on sustainability investments and a prevailing focus on football-related discussions rather than sustainability discourse within the club setting. Limited engagement with sustainability initiatives was evident, showing a disconnect between the club's sustainability endeavours and the predominant interests and conversations among members.

Commonalities between survey and interview results

A notable commonality is the emphasis on economic considerations. Both respondents and interviewees emphasized that financial benefits are a primary motivator for supporting sustainability initiatives. This is consistent with the literature on the theory of planned behaviour and the value-belief-norm theory, which emphasize the role of economic and personal benefits in shaping pro-environmental behaviour. For example, board members mentioned that financial savings from sustainability measures were a key driver, a sentiment echoed by the club member who viewed sustainability investments as practical economic choices rather than moral imperatives.

Furthermore, both data sets indicate varying degrees of commitment to sustainability practices. While some members actively engage in sustainable behaviour, others show passive

involvement or limited interest. This difference reflects the complex interplay of personal beliefs, social norms and organizational culture, as highlighted in the theoretical framework.

Alignment with literature

The findings from both the survey and interviews are consistent with several theoretical constructs discussed in the literature review. The theory of planned behavior, which emphasizes the influence of attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control, is reflected in the important role of social norms and information provision in shaping members' sustainability perceptions. Similarly, value-belief-norm theory's emphasis on personal values and beliefs is evident in the correlation between general environmentalism and support for sustainability initiatives.

Moreover, cognitive dissonance theory and findings by Thormann & Wicker (2021), which suggest that emotional connections can influence financial support for sustainability, are corroborated by the strong link between club attachment and positive perceptions of sustainability measures. This indicates that members with a stronger emotional bond with VVV are more likely to endorse sustainability efforts, a finding consistent with the theoretical framework.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This study aimed at finding an answer to the question “*How do members of football club VVV in Veenendaal perceive the club’s large investment in sustainability?*” This explorative research focuses on the perception of club members on the sustainability initiatives at Voetbal Vereniging Veenendaal, a Dutch football club, with the aim of filling a gap in the existing literature. By examining members' attitudes towards sustainability and their views on the sustainability initiatives within the club, the study seeks to understand the role of perception in implementing such measures. Using a combination of interviews and surveys, the research aims to uncover insights into the dynamics that influence the acceptance and effectiveness of sustainability initiatives within a local sports club. The relevance of the study lies in its contribution to scientific knowledge by examining club members' perceptions of sustainability investments, which have received limited scientific attention. By focusing on a specific football club, VVV, the research aims to provide practical insights for both the club and similar organisations, and potentially serve as a model for sustainable practices. Furthermore, its social relevance extends to encouraging sustainable practices at the grassroots, contributing to a broader shift towards sustainability in local communities.

5.1 Theoretical reflection

Chapter 2 showed the literature review, aiming to provide a theoretical basis for understanding perceptions of environmental sustainability. It starts by defining key concepts such as attitudes, perceptions, awareness and norms. The chapter also contextualizes the literature review within the framework of sustainability, by e.g. discussing *the three pillars of sustainability* (Farmer, 2022; Frenken & Schor, 2017; Ranjbari, et al., 2019; Ranjbari, et al., 2021): environmental protection, economic development and social justice. These pillars emphasize the interconnectedness of sustainability and emphasize the importance of balancing environmental, economic and social impacts for long-term sustainability. In addition, the three-wave framework of McCullough et al. (2016) has been discussed, as a model for understanding the progress of sustainability initiatives within organizations, where it is suggested that VVV is in the third wave of this model. The theory of the three Ps (people, planet, profit) by Elkington (2013) is presented as a framework for organizational sustainability, emphasizing the integration of social, environmental and economic dimensions. This theory underlines the

importance of balancing these aspects to achieve sustainable development. For this study, it is chosen to utilize the theory of the *three pillars of sustainability*.

Subsequently, the literature review applied various behavioural theories to understand the perception of club members towards sustainable investments. The theories of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1985), reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975), and cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) provide a framework for understanding how individuals make decisions and act based on their beliefs and perceptions. Stern's value-belief-norm theory of environmentalism (2000) provides insight into the psychological basis of behaviour, while the willingness-to-pay theory for environmental measures (Thormann & Wicker, 2021) highlighted factors influencing support for sustainability. The integrated behavioural model (Montaño & Kasprzyk, 2008) emphasizes that behaviour is likely to occur when there is strong intention, knowledge and skills are present, there is no serious environmental barrier and the behaviour is relevant. The theories with support for sustainability include the willingness-to-pay for environmental measures in non-profit sports clubs (Thormann & Wicker, 2021). This study shows that education level, information level and emotional connection with the club are important factors influencing support for sustainability.

From this theoretical framework, five factors were selected to be examined in this study into the perceptions of sustainability among club members of VVV. These factors include attachment to the club, social status, general environmental disposition, social norms and expectations, and provided information.

5.2 Methodological reflection

The methodology and methods used in this study started with an explanation of the research philosophy and that this research is in line with the constructivism approach. The study employed a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach, using surveys and semi-structured interviews. The survey was filled in by 46 club members, and the interviews were conducted with three board members and one club member. The mixed method approach proved to be advantageous in capturing both the breadth and depth of members' perceptions. The perceptions of the members also proved to be of value for this study. The surveys provided a broad overview of general attitudes and trends, while the interviews offered deeper insights into specific

viewpoints and the rationale behind various opinions. This combination allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the club members' perspective.

5.3 Answering the sub-questions

Several sub-questions were also formulated in this study. The data collected for the first sub-question '*how do club members experience climate change?*' shows that there is a mixed picture among VVV members about their experiences and perceptions regarding climate change. A significant portion of club members are aware of climate change and recognize its impact on the environment. However, this awareness varies in the depth of understanding. Some members have extensive knowledge of the causes and consequences of climate change, while others have a more superficial understanding. The degree of personal involvement and concern about climate change also varies among members. A group of members feel personally addressed and are actively engaged in sustainable practices in their daily lives. Others see climate change as an abstract problem that affects them less directly.

The second sub-question '*How do board members experience climate change?*' showed less variety in responses. VVV board members demonstrate an awareness of climate change and the need to take action. However, the financial benefits also play an important role, for one club member possible a significant role, suggesting that this initiative would not have taken place if there was no financial gain for the club.

The third sub-question '*how do board members view the sustainability initiatives of VVV?*' also showed a variety of responses. In general, the board is motivated to implement sustainability initiatives within the club. This motivation is based on both a moral responsibility to contribute to tackling climate change, and the benefits that these sustainability initiatives can provide, such as cost savings. However, for one of the three board members, this was mainly initiated in order to tackle climate change, while the other two board members mainly prioritized the financial benefits of these initiatives. Furthermore, the board is convinced that they have used all possible means of communication. Lack of information provided to some members is therefore seen by the board as something that is to a certain extent inevitable.

5.4 Conclusion of the literature and results section

Both the literature section and the results section emphasize the complexity of human behaviour regarding sustainability. Although theoretical frameworks in the literature section provide a framework for understanding this behaviour, the results of the study show that the behaviour of individuals within the football club is influenced by a wide range of factors, including personal beliefs, social norms, and organizational culture.

The research shows that there are complex and nuanced relationships between sustainability, club involvement, access to information and socioeconomic factors. While some members show a strong commitment to sustainability, others show limited interest or passive involvement. Furthermore, this research highlights that financial considerations and social responsibility are important drivers for sustainability investments within the club, but that there remains a lack of expressed interest in sustainability topics among VVV members.

The selection of the five factors were grounded in the theoretical framework discussed in the literature review. The theories of planned behaviour and reasoned action emphasized the role of attitudes, social norms, and perceived control in shaping behaviour, which have directly influenced the inclusion of social norms and expectations as a factor. The value-belief-norm theory emphasized the importance of personal values and beliefs, which leads to the consideration of the factor general environmental disposition. Attachment to the club was included based on cognitive dissonance theory and the findings of Thormann & Wicker (2021), which suggest that emotional connections can influence willingness to financially support sustainability. Social status was taken into account due to its relevance in willingness-to-pay theory, as financial capacity can have a significant impact on support for sustainability measures. Finally, the provided information has been chosen based on the integrated behavioural model, which underlines the importance of knowledge and skills in performing behaviour.

Correlations were carried out between the five factors, with nine out of ten significant results. When asked to choose three themes that were most important to club members, health, your (socioeconomic) status and economy emerged as the most frequently chosen themes, while nature and sustainability were the least chosen options. Overall, the results highlight the interplay between the five factors in shaping individuals' perceptions and behaviours regarding

sustainability initiatives within the club. Also, various perspectives on sustainability within the club were shown, ranging from active involvement to passive interest, with passive interest being the mostly chosen answer.

Interviews were then conducted with three board members and one club member to gain deeper insight into the survey responses. The interviews with three board members illustrated the reasons behind sustainability investments, including financial considerations, social responsibility and adherence to environmental and energy standards. One club member mainly emphasized the economics of sustainability investments and showed limited involvement in broader club matters. Overall, this interview result showed that sustainability issues are not prominent in conversations and engagement within the club and between members of the club. On one hand, the board members and the club members share the same values. Although their perceptions towards sustainability and the primary reason for the investment differ, the financial benefits are regarded one of the important reasons to support the investment. This suggests that despite the differing perceptions and motivations, both the board members and the club members recognize the financial advantages as a key factor in supporting these investments.

When analysing the results, it became clear that the choices of factors were partially validated. Attachment to the club, general environmental disposition, and the information provided were indeed significant in shaping members' perceptions of sustainability initiatives. Members who felt a strong emotional connection to VVV and who had a positive environmental disposition were more likely to support the club's sustainability efforts. Furthermore, those who were well-informed about the initiatives showed a greater understanding and acceptance of these measures. However, the significance of social status and social norms and expectations was less pronounced than expected. Social norms and expectations, while important, did not have as strong an influence as the other factors, possibly due to limited external pressure within the club's immediate community to prioritize sustainability. This suggests that future research might benefit from a more targeted investigation into these factors and perhaps exploring additional factors that might influence these perceptions more strongly.

The findings of this study deviate from some theoretical expectations. Thormann and Wicker's (2021) *willingness-to-pay* theory concluded that when club members are personally attached to their sports club, then their willingness to pay for sustainability investments increases. Even though the results show a positive attachment to VVV, the limited interest indicates a low level

of willingness to pay for sustainability. A sidenote is that the members of VVV did not have to pay an increased amount of contribution to the club for the sustainability plans to happen, so this may have influenced their perceived necessity or urgency to financially support such initiatives. Consequently, the absence of an immediate financial obligation could explain the discrepancy between their attachment to the club and their willingness to pay for the sustainability initiatives.

Additionally, although theories such as the *three waves of change* (McCullough et al., (2016) and the *triple bottom line* (Elkington, 2013) predict steady and positive growth in sustainability engagement, results show that the actual engagement and interest in sustainability among VVV members is limited. The results in this study are therefore again not in line with the theory. This suggests that there is a need for a new approach for implementing sustainability initiatives within sports clubs.

5.5 Practical recommendations

Some recommendations for sports clubs that are aiming to becoming more sustainable will lastly be given. The discrepancies between theory and practice identified in this study indicate the need for a new theoretical framework. This new framework should take into account the specific context of sports clubs and the different motivations and barriers that members experience with regard to sustainability. For instance, the issue of lack of interest, which is not addressed in the current theoretical framework, warrants further investigation, as do strategies for reversing this trend within sports clubs. Therefore, additional research could help to understand how sustainability initiatives can be more effectively integrated and supported, to deepen these insights and to find innovative ways to anchor sustainability in local sports clubs. Also, the less pronounced influence of social status in the interviews compared to the survey suggests a need for further research. Although willingness to pay theory posits that financial capacity has a significant impact on support for sustainability, the interviews indicate that financial benefits, rather than social status per se, are more important in this context. This nuance highlights the complexity of these relationships and suggests that future research should consider additional factors that could more strongly influence sustainability perceptions. Finally, future research about this topic would benefit from more than one interview with a member of the club, in order to gain a more complete in-depth understanding of the perceptions of club members towards sustainability initiatives.

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