WLVT
We Lead Volleyball Together

Monitor and evaluation plan

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We Lead Volleyball Together

Youth leadership development in grassroots volleyball clubs
A cross-national study or organisational pathways, challenges and learning processes

This full report is available upon request.

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1. Introduction

Sport has long been understood as a context in which leadership competencies can develop, and a body of research supports the view that structured participation in sport provides meaningful opportunities for young people to acquire skills that extend beyond the sporting context (Gould & Voelker, 2010; Pierce, Erickson, & Sarkar, 2020). However, the translation of this general claim into effective programme design for grassroots volunteer organisations remains poorly understood. Research on experience-based leadership development in sport suggests that leadership grows through authentic organisational participation rather than through training activities alone, and that the conditions enabling such participation to vary considerably across club contexts (Frawley, Favaloro, & Schulenkorf, 2018). Programmes that do not consider the actual capacity and culture of the organisations they target risk creating materials and activities that cannot be implemented and executed effectively.

A gender dimension runs through this challenge. Women and girls remain substantially underrepresented in sport leadership and governance roles, including in volleyball, despite constituting a large proportion of participants (Burton, 2015). Targeted programmes aimed at developing young female leaders in sport have shown promise, but the evidence base for what works in grassroots club contexts specifically is limited (Voelker, 2016; Taylor, 2016). The We Lead Volleyball Together project was designed with this gap in mind, focusing in particular on creating pathways for young women to move from participation into leadership within their clubs.

Grassroots sport clubs in Europe face a well-documented and growing challenge in sustaining their volunteer workforce. Coaches, board members, event organisers, and committee volunteers collectively underpin an infrastructure that clubs could not maintain through paid labour alone, yet the conditions that once made voluntary contribution to sport organisations a cultural norm are eroding (Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006). Declining volunteer retention, ageing leadership structures, and the difficulty of attracting younger members into governance and organisational roles are recurrent concerns across national volleyball federations and grassroots club networks alike. The capacity to identify and develop young leaders is therefore not a peripheral aspiration for these organisations; it has become a condition of their medium-term survival.

This plan presents the evaluation and monitoring approach of the WLVT project, covering all four partner countries: Denmark, Norway, Iceland, and the Netherlands.

2. Evaluation framework

This plan employs a mixed-methods design, combining a quantitative pre- and post-programme survey with a series of semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews. The two components are designed to address complementary questions. The quantitative strand examines whether, and in what direction, participants' self-assessed leadership skills and programme attitudes changed over the course of the WLVT intervention, providing a broad picture of change across the full sample.

The qualitative strand examines the conditions under which youth leadership develops in grassroots clubs from the perspective of those responsible for creating and sustaining those conditions, providing contextual depth that survey data alone cannot offer. The two components are presented separately in the findings and integrated analytically in the discussion.

Observed changes in self-reported leadership skills between the pre- and post-survey cannot be attributed with certainty to the WLVT programme, since other factors affecting participants' experience of their clubs and their own leadership development may have changed during the same period. This limitation is acknowledged throughout the analysis and shapes the language used to describe findings.

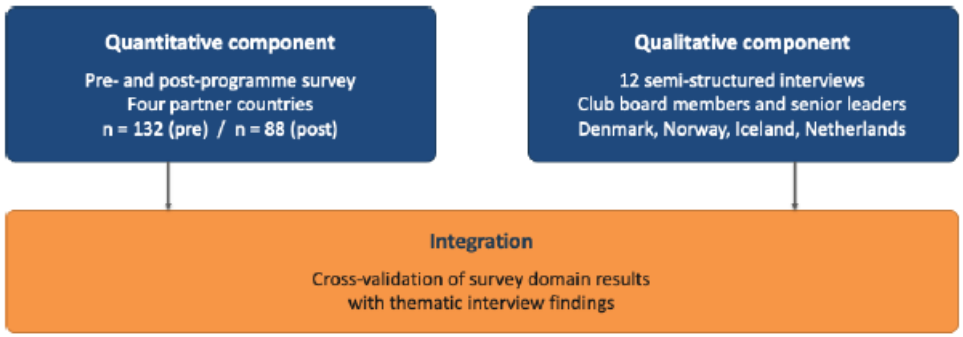


Figure 1: Mixed-methods evaluation design, combining the quantitative survey and qualitative interview components, with integration of findings at the analysis stage.

3. Monitoring methodology

3.1 Quantitative monitoring

3.1.1 Survey instrument development

The survey instrument was developed specifically for the WLVT project and draws on two distinct measurement traditions. The first concerns participants' attitudes toward the programme itself, and the second concerns self-assessed leadership skills across five theoretically grounded domains. The attitude scale consists of four bipolar items assessed on a five-point scale: beneficial versus useless; enjoyable versus boring; easy versus difficult; and relaxing versus stressful. This scale structure is adapted from attitude measurement within the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which conceptualises attitudes as evaluative appraisals of a behaviour or experience. Bipolar scale formats of this kind have been used in sport and physical activity research to capture the affective and instrumental dimensions of participants' orientations toward programmes and interventions. The items were administered in forward form before the programme ("I think participating in the WLVT programme will be...") and in retrospective form after its completion ("I think participating in the WLVT programme was..."), allowing direct comparison of anticipated and actual experience.

The leadership skills self-assessment draws on five conceptually distinct domains developed to reflect the multidimensional nature of youth leadership in a grassroots sport context. Each domain contains between 6 and 9 items rated on a 5-point agreement scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

The first domain, understanding barriers and opportunities, contains nine items addressing structural agency: the degree to which young people feel heard, trusted, and able to exercise genuine influence within their clubs. This domain was designed to capture the structural dimension of leadership development that existing instruments tend to underweight. Items in this domain include whether adults take young people's opinions seriously, whether participants feel they have influence on club decisions, and whether experience and seniority are perceived as barriers to leading. The inclusion of these items reflects the conceptual framework's emphasis on structural empowerment as a prerequisite for meaningful youth leadership, consistent with research on the role of adult gatekeeping and organisational culture in enabling or suppressing youth initiative (Pierce et al., 2020; De Clerck et al., 2022).

The second domain, exploring talents, contains seven items addressing life skills and cross contextual leadership transfer: communication, time management, confident decision-making, feedback orientation, and the application of leadership skills beyond sport. This domain reflects research demonstrating that life skills developed through sport are most

developmentally significant when they transfer to other life domains, and that this transfer is an explicit and measurable outcome rather than an automatic by -product of participation (Gould & Carson, 2008; Pierce et al., 2020).

The third domain, practice and build skills, contains seven items addressing practical leadership competencies: goal setting, organisation, delegation, problem-solving, initiative, and managing pressure. These items are grounded in the practitioner-oriented leadership development literature, which identifies concrete task management and decision-making skills as central to effective leadership in sport organisational contexts (Cotterill, 2017; Frawley et al., 2018).

The fourth domain, teamwork leadership, contains seven items addressing relational and transformational leadership behaviours: setting a positive example, encouraging others, resolving conflict, building trust, and inspiring teammates to reach their potential. These items reflect the motivational and social dimensions of athlete leadership identified by Cotterill and Fransen (2016) and are consistent with the positive psychology framework proposed by Barnes and Larcus (2015), in which effective leadership in sport builds on participants' existing social and relational strengths.

The fifth domain, inclusive leadership, contains seven items that address inclusive behaviours: ensuring all team members have opportunities to contribute, recognising diversity, managing inclusion-related conflict fairly, and making leadership opportunities accessible. The inclusion of this domain reflects the WLVT programme's particular focus on gender equity in volleyball leadership and is grounded in research demonstrating that inclusive leadership behaviours are both teachable and measurable in sport settings (Voelker, 2016; Duguay et al., 2016).

The questionnaire was translated from English into Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, and Dutch using “Grammarly” as an initial AI-assisted translation tool. Each translated version was subsequently reviewed independently by at least two native speakers of the target language, who checked for accuracy of meaning, terminological consistency, and naturalness of expression in the relevant national context. Reviewers were asked to flag any items where the translation altered the intended meaning or where local phrasing conventions might affect how respondents interpreted the question. While it does not constitute formal back-translation with psychometric equivalence testing, the native speaker review stage provided a meaningful check against systematic translation errors and ensured that the instrument was appropriate for administration in each partner country.

3.1.2 Administration and sample

The survey was administered digitally to programme participants at two time points: immediately before the start of the WLVT intervention and upon its completion. A total of 132 participants completed the pre -programme questionnaire across all four partner countries. Of

these, 88 completed the post-programme questionnaire, representing a retention rate of approximately 67 per cent. Among pre -programme respondents, 97 identified as female and 35 as male; among post-programme respondents, 68 identified as female and 20 as male. The mean age was 19.4 years (SD = 4.3) at baseline and 19.9 years (SD = 4.1) at follow-up.

For reporting purposes, scale responses were collapsed into three categories: positive (responses 4 and 5), neutral (response 3), and negative (responses 1 and 2). This approach simplifies interpretation but reduces the precision of the data and should not be taken to imply that movements between adjacent scale points carry equivalent significance.

3.2 Qualitative component

3.2.1 Interview design and sample

The qualitative component comprises 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews with club board members and senior leaders from grassroots volleyball organisations participating in the WLVT project, three from each partner country.

The sampling logic was purposive. All interviewees held formal governance or senior leadership roles, including board members, chairpersons, and club managers. This is an important scope condition with direct analytical implications. The interviews capture the perspectives of those responsible for organisational strategy and volunteer management, not those of the young people who participated in the programme, nor those of coaches who work directly with young players. Claims about life skills, leadership development, and programme impact that appear in the findings therefore reflect adult interpretations of what young people experience, not self-reports from the young participants themselves. This is a substantive limitation that affects the validity of several thematic findings, particularly those concerning life skills development and the longer -term trajectories of young leaders.

The decision to interview club leaders instead of participants was pragmatic. Club leaders were more accessible, their institutional perspective was central to understanding the organisational conditions for youth leadership, and they held a breadth of club-level knowledge that individual young participants could not provide. However, a comprehensive evaluation would complement this perspective with direct interview evidence from young people and, ideally, from coaches.

3.2.2 Interview Instrument

The interview question guide was developed by the project team and organised around eight thematic areas: the current situation and vision for youth leadership; empowerment and delegation; inclusion and diversity; sustainability of leadership development; international

cooperation; organisational culture and capacity; life skills and broader impact; and future priorities and success criteria. The shared guide was designed to enable systematic cross -club and cross -national comparison, while the semi-structured format allowed interviewees to elaborate on issues most relevant to their particular context.

The question guide was informed by the project's conceptual framework and by established practices in qualitative sport management research. However, it was not subject to a formal pilot phase with comparable respondents prior to the main data collection, and several questions were interpreted differently by different interviewees, particularly those concerning diversity and inclusion, reflecting the varying degrees to which these issues are organisationally salient across the four national contexts.

4. Data collection and analysis

Interviews were conducted in the interviewees' first language: Danish, Norwegian, Icelandic, Dutch, or English. Icelandic and Dutch interviews were subsequently translated and summarised into English for analysis. Where direct quotations are used, they have been translated as faithfully as possible while preserving the meaning and register of the original. Attribution throughout refers to the club name rather than the individual interviewee to protect privacy while maintaining traceability of claims to specific organisational contexts.

Analysis was thematic and followed a recursive process of familiarisation, coding, and pattern identification across the 12 transcripts. Both within-country and cross -country patterns were examined, with attention to divergences as well as convergences. The analytical goal was to move beyond descriptive summary toward interpretation: connecting what interviewees said to the broader organisational and structural conditions that shape youth leadership in grassroots sport. A clear distinction is maintained throughout the findings between claims grounded directly in interview evidence and contextualising insights drawn from the literature.

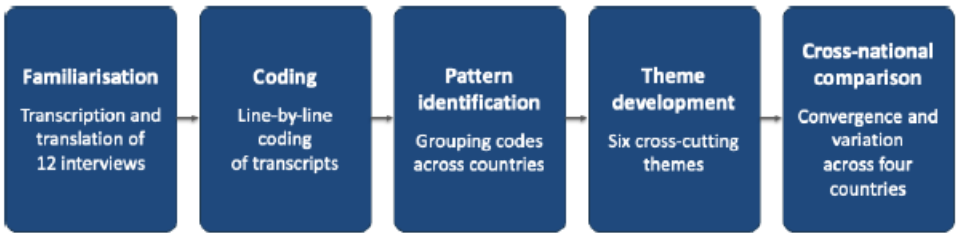


Figure 2: Thematic analysis process applied to the twelve qualitative interviews

Participating clubs were self-selected for their orientation toward youth leadership, and interviews with club leaders about their own programmes carry an inherent risk of social desirability bias.

5. Partnership approach and knowledge transfer

The original project application envisaged a collaboration with university partners in Denmark, Norway, and Iceland, who would have contributed to the data collection and analysis process in their respective national contexts. In practice, this arrangement proved unworkable. The demands placed on academic collaborators, including ethical approval procedures, institutional coordination, and the time required to familiarise external researchers with the project's conceptual and methodological framework, proved too extensive relative to the scope of involvement that was realistic for partner universities. Following a collective discussion among the project partners, the consortium agreed not to continue with this model.

The approach that replaced it proved better suited to purpose. The research team at The Hague University of Applied Sciences trained the national federation staff directly in survey administration and interview procedures. Federation representatives received practical instruction on when and how to administer the questionnaires, how to conduct semi-structured interviews, and how to ensure consistent data quality across the four national contexts. This approach resolved the practical coordination challenges associated with engaging external university partners. Federation staff gained direct familiarity with applied evaluation methods, building organisational capacity that extends beyond the WLVT project itself. From a European partnership perspective, this model of embedded capacity building, in which the research institution equips practitioner partners to carry out data collection themselves.

6. Summary of evaluation findings

The monitoring and evaluation activities provided valuable insights into the implementation and outcomes of the We Lead Volleyball Together project across Denmark, Norway, Iceland and the Netherlands. A mixed-methods approach, combining pre- and post-programme surveys with qualitative interviews, enabled the partnership to assess both measurable changes in participants' leadership development and the organisational conditions influencing programme implementation.

The quantitative evaluation showed that participants entered the programme with relatively strong interpersonal and teamwork skills, while reporting lower levels of structural empowerment within their clubs. Following participation in the programme, improvements

were observed across all leadership domains, with the most notable increases relating to participants' perceptions of being heard, trusted and supported by adults within their clubs. Changes in practical leadership skills were more limited, suggesting that organisational conditions play an important role in enabling young people to apply and further develop these competencies.

The qualitative evaluation complemented these findings by identifying the organisational practices that support sustainable youth leadership. Across all partner countries, clubs emphasised the importance of personal recruitment, gradual delegation of responsibilities, mentoring and supportive club cultures. At the same time, several structural barriers were identified, including limited volunteer capacity, educational mobility, time constraints and the absence of formal systems for recruiting and supporting young leaders. Clubs also highlighted the value of volunteer coordinators, stronger mentoring structures and simplified programme materials to improve implementation.

Overall, the evaluation indicates that the WLVT project successfully strengthened awareness of youth leadership and contributed to increased perceptions of inclusion and empowerment among participants. The findings also demonstrate that long-term impact depends not only on developing individual leadership skills but also on creating organisational structures and cultures that actively support youth participation. These findings informed the recommendations for future implementation and the further development of youth leadership programmes within grassroots volleyball organisations.

7. Methodological reflections

Two methodological features shape how the findings should be read.

The quantitative data reflect the experience of those who completed both survey waves. Participants who did not return for the post-programme survey may have disengaged for reasons that are themselves analytically relevant, including dissatisfaction or departure from the club. The post-programme findings therefore describe the programme's more committed participants rather than its full intake, and observed gains are best understood as indicative rather than representative. The near-zero changes in the Practice and Skills domain suggests that even among retained participants, the programme's contribution in that area was modest.

The qualitative findings are constructed entirely from adult perspectives. Every account of what young people gained, how they responded, and what they experienced is filtered through the interpretive frame of club leaders, who are simultaneously observing their own programmes and have an interest in presenting them positively. The consistency of the life

skills narrative, the graduated responsibility accounts, and the structural agency findings across 12 interviews supports the view that these are real patterns rather than artefacts of the interview framing. But the absence of direct youth voice is a substantive scope limitation, and future evaluations of WLVT and comparable programmes would benefit significantly from integrating young people's accounts alongside those of club leadership.

Annexes

A: Survey instrument

Below the complete survey instruments are provided. It contains the English version pre-programme and post -programme. It is presented in its administered form, as used during data collection in the respective partner country. Dutch, Danish, Norwegian and English versions are available.

English Version

This questionnaire aims to assess various aspects of your personal, educational, and sports-related backgrounds, along with your attitudes towards the "We Lead Volleyball Together (WLVT)" project. It includes several sections that explore your perspectives on leadership, self-assessment of leadership skills, and perceptions of your talents and abilities. It is designed to identify areas where you can grow and overcome obstacles to effective leadership.

Your responses will help us better understand leadership development needs and opportunities in youth sports. Please read each question carefully and answer honestly. There are no right or wrong answers—your personal views and experiences are what matter most.

- Be Honest: Your answers should reflect your true feelings and experiences.
- Take Your Time : There is no time limit, so feel free to think carefully about each answer.
- Complete Each Section: Try to answer every question to the best of your ability, as each response is important.

Thank you for taking part in this survey.

Personal/Educational/Sports Related Information

1. Age (numbers):
2. Gender (options – Male – Female – I don't prefer to say - Other)
3. Country of residence
4. Involvement in Leadership/Management/Volunteering Roles

Participants' attitudes toward the program:

(*taken from a scale used to calculate participants' attitudes in a survey used to connect Planned Behavioural Control over parents' behaviour.)

I think participating in the WLVT program will be:

1. Beneficial - Useless

    1 = Useless

2 = Somewhat Useless
3 = Neutral
4 = Somewhat Beneficial
5 = Beneficial

2. Fun - Boring
1 = Boring
2 = Somewhat Boring
3 = Neutral
4 = Somewhat Fun
5 = Fun

3. Easy - Difficult
1 = Difficult
2 = Somewhat Difficult
3 = Neutral
4 = Somewhat Easy
5 = Easy

4. Relaxing - Stressful
1 = Stressful
2 = Somewhat Stressful
3 = Neutral
4 = Somewhat Relaxing
5 = Relaxing

Leadership Skills Self-Assessment

Please rate each of the following statements based on how much you agree with it. Use the following scale:
1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Neither disagree nor disagree
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly Agree

Understand barriers & opportunities in leadership

1. I listen to others' perspectives before making decisions.
2. I am confident in sharing my own ideas, even if others might disagree.
3. I can change how I act as a leader based on what the situation needs.
4. I believe I should be given more chances to take on leadership roles.

5. I see opportunities for young players like me to step up and lead.
6. The experience and seniority can be barriers for me when I want to lead.
7. Building strong relationships can create new leadership opportunities.
8. I feel that I have an influence on the decisions made within my volleyball club.
9. Adults in the volleyball club take my opinion seriously and support me in taking initiatives.

Exploring talents

1. I can effectively communicate my ideas and thoughts to others.
2. I apply leadership skills in other areas of my life outside sports.
3. I manage time effectively, balancing my responsibilities.
4. I am confident in making decisions in personal and professional settings.
5. I can communicate effectively with people in different aspects of my life (family, work, friends).
6. I adapt my leadership style depending on the team's needs during the game.
7. I am open to feedback and use it to improve my skills and performance.

Practice and build skills

1. I seek opportunities to improve my leadership skills.
2. I am organized and can delegate tasks efficiently.
3. I am clear about goals and expectations for myself and others.
4. I develop effective strategies to achieve objectives.
5. I take initiative in solving problems when they arise.
6. I handle the pressures of competition with calm and focus, setting an example for others.
7. I handle stress and challenges by staying calm and focused.

Build leadership skills in teamwork

1. I set a positive example for others to follow.
2. I support and encourage others to perform at their best.
3. I am respectful in disagreements with others.
4. I build strong relationships based on trust with teammates and colleagues.
5. I help resolve conflicts within a team or group.
6. I inspire others to work hard and reach their potential.
7. I inspire my team to go beyond their current limits and achieve their full potential.

Inclusive Leadership

1. I make sure everyone on the team has a chance to share their ideas.
2. I ask for input from teammates who may be quieter.
3. I help create a team environment where everyone feels respected and included.
4. I appreciate and celebrate the different backgrounds and perspectives on the team.
5. I make sure everyone has the same chances to take on responsibilities and opportunities.

6. I handle any conflicts about inclusion and respect in a fair way.
7. I encourage teamwork by making sure everyone feels valued and supported.

B: Survey administration protocol

The survey was administered to participants at two time points within each programme cycle, following a consistent protocol across all four partner countries. The pre-programme questionnaire was distributed to participants at the start of fieldwork, prior to the first educational workshop. The post-programme questionnaire was administered at the close of the final educational workshop, once all programme activities had been completed. This pre-post measurement cycle was repeated twice during the project, yielding two full rounds of data collection across the four national contexts. Federation partners were responsible for distributing and collecting the questionnaires within their respective countries, having received training from the research team at The Hague University of Applied Sciences on administration procedures and data return.

C: Interview question guide

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS for CLUB BOARD MEMBERS

Add brief explanation:

Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with us. This interview is part of our Erasmus+ project, which aims to explore how volleyball clubs can strengthen pathways for young leaders. By young leaders we mean motivated and engaged young people who take initiative, assume responsibility, and contribute to their clubs and communities through leadership roles.

The purpose of this conversation is to understand how clubs currently approach youth leadership, what opportunities and challenges exist, and how clubs envision the role of young leaders in the future. Your perspective as a board member is essential, since you are directly involved in shaping the club's culture, structures, and priorities.

The interview will cover a number of themes, including the current situation and vision for youth leadership, empowerment and inclusion, sustainability of leadership pathways, organizational culture, life skills, and future priorities. There are no right or wrong answers and we are interested in your honest views and experiences.

The discussion will take around 30 to 45 minutes. All information will be treated confidentially and will be used only for research and development within the project.

A. Current Situation and Vision

1. How would you describe the current role of young leaders in your club's leadership structure?
2. Why do you think it is important (or not) to develop leadership pathways for young people in volleyball?

B. Empowerment and Delegation

3. How do you think the club currently empowers (or does not empower) young leaders to take initiative and responsibility?
4. What would need to change in the club to truly empower young leaders beyond token participation?

C. Inclusion and Diversity

5. How does your club currently identify and recruit diverse young leaders?

D. Sustainability of Leadership Development

6. How confident are you that the young leaders currently involved in your club will be leaders in 5 years? Why or why not?
7. What structures or policies would you recommend the club adopt to ensure that leadership development is ongoing and not dependent on one-time projects?

F. Organizational Culture and Capacity

8. Over the past five years, how has your club's ability to support and integrate young leaders evolved?
9. Do you feel that your club has a culture that values leadership development as a strategic priority? Why or why not?

G. Life Skills and Broader Impact

10. What types of life skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, resilience) do young leaders develop through their involvement in volleyball administration?
11. Do you believe that volleyball leadership prepares young people for broader societal leadership roles (outside of sport)? Why or why not?

H. Future Priorities and Success Criteria

12. How would you define success for this leadership initiative, for the club, for the young leaders, and for you personally?

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