

**Experiencing Engagement: An Autoethnographic Analysis of Civic Engagement
Strategies at the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023 in Aotearoa New Zealand**

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Abstract

This thesis explores the civic engagement strategies employed during the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023, using an analytic autoethnographic approach. Drawing primarily on personal experience as both a fan and researcher, supported by semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and content analysis of public reports, the study explores how the tournament fostered bonding, bridging, and linking forms of social capital. Guided by Putnam's Social Capital Theory and Anderson's framework for Analytic Autoethnography, I investigate how community participation, volunteerism, public engagement, and legacy initiatives contribute to social cohesion and civic identity. Data collection included field notes from matches and Fan Festival visits, observations of community programming, content analysis, and interviews with professionals involved in national and city-level event coordination. My findings are presented in the form of six vignettes and four themes. The discussion proposes that civic engagement emerges through formal strategies but also through informal, spontaneous interactions among fans, volunteers, and local communities. The tournament's inclusive and decentralised approach enabled people across New Zealand to feel involved in a national moment of celebration and connection. Participants noted the importance of cultural responsiveness, early stakeholder engagement, and sustained follow-up to maintain civic momentum beyond the event itself. The study extends the literature on sport, social capital, and event legacy by offering a reflexive, experience-based account of engagement practices at a major international tournament. It also demonstrates the value of analytic autoethnographic methods for uncovering the emotional, relational, and narrative dimensions of civic participation, providing insights for scholars and event strategists seeking to enhance social outcomes through sport.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: *Aaron Jefferson*

Date: *03 July 2025*

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This research was approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 25 July 2023, under application number 23/154. It was conducted in accordance with AUT's Code of Conduct for Research. In line with the conditions of approval, participants were assured of limited confidentiality and were offered a summary of the research findings.

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Ngā mihi nui.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Framing this study through civic engagement

Adler and Goggin (2005) define civic engagement as the ways in which citizens participate in the life of their community to improve conditions for others or help shape the future of their community. This broad definition includes a spectrum of activities such as volunteering, voting, advocacy, cultural participation, and informal social exchange. Importantly, Ekman and Amnå (2012) expand this framework by distinguishing between active engagement, such as organizing events or campaigning, and latent forms of engagement, such as quietly following public debates or participating in private dialogue. This distinction is particularly relevant in the context of sport events, where engagement may take both visible forms, such as attending matches or volunteering, and more subtle forms, such as identity reinforcement, cultural expression, or symbolic affiliation. These varied expressions of civic engagement reflect the multifaceted ways individuals connect to their communities and shape collective experiences.

Civic engagement plays a dual role in the context of sport mega-events: it enables the practical delivery of the event while also serving as a site for social connection, identity affirmation, and public meaning-making. Civic engagement offers a means of interpreting how large-scale sporting events can foster a sense of collective identity, shared purpose, and emotional connection within and across diverse communities (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Ekman & Amna, 2012). This study examines how individuals and groups actively participated in and made meaning from the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup in Aotearoa New Zealand¹ through their involvement in public activities, social rituals, and symbolic practices. This civic lens also provides a framework for analysing the event's broader social outcomes, particularly in relation to the development of social capital and cultural belonging.

Large events such as the FIFA Women's World Cup offer communities the opportunity to come together around shared rituals, narratives, and moments of national or cultural pride (Hallmann et al, 2023). While logistical elements such as volunteering and community programming are important forms of engagement, sport events also provide a symbolic stage for expressions of belonging, aspiration, and cultural solidarity. Scholars such as Misener and Mason (2006) and Chalip (2006), and more recently Hallmann et al (2023), have emphasised the capacity of sport events to strengthen civic ties and to function

¹ This thesis uses the form "Aotearoa New Zealand" in line with established academic practice (University of Auckland, n.d.). When Māori and English place names are presented together on first mention, I follow Te Pūkenga's Te Reo Māori writing style guide, which adopts an orthographic convention that begins with te reo Māori followed by the English equivalent; accordingly, I use forms such as "Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland)" on first mention (Te Pūkenga, 2022).

as vehicles for both bonding and bridging social capital. Schulenkorf (2017) builds on this perspective, arguing that sport, when strategically managed, can promote community development through inclusive engagement and empowerment. Recent research also supports these ideas empirically: the 2017 World Masters Games and the Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup fostered bonding, bridging, and linking social capital among residents and volunteers by promoting cultural identity, community interaction, and state-led initiatives (Hallmann et al, 2023; Turkmani et al., 2024). These insights frame the event not just as a spectacle but as a lived social experience with deep civic potential.

The 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup provided me with a unique opportunity to observe and analyse civic engagement within the specific social and cultural landscape of New Zealand. As a co-hosted event delivered across multiple urban centres, the tournament invited diverse communities to engage through a range of participatory avenues. These included formal initiatives such as government-supported fan festivals, youth programmes, and city branding efforts, as well as informal engagement through family attendance, local business participation, and online expression. Through these activities, individuals and communities enacted various forms of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital (Putnam, 2000), with implications for both short-term enthusiasm and longer-term civic legacy. My study explores how these modes of participation reflect broader patterns of identity formation and public life in a small, bicultural, and increasingly multicultural nation.

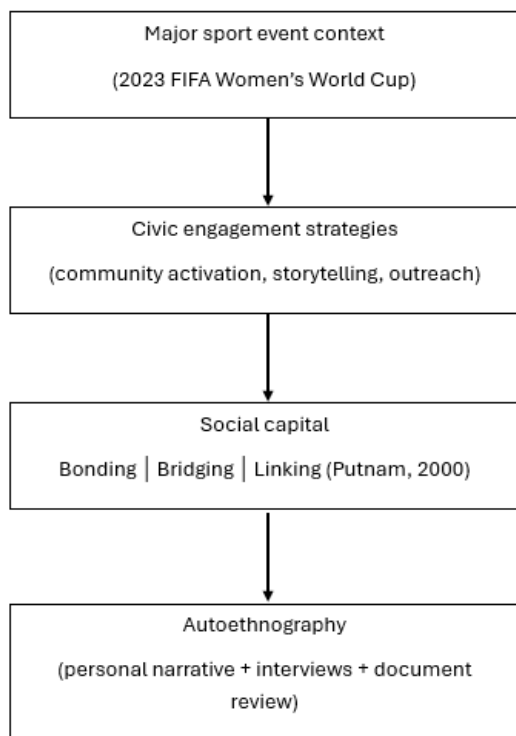
To explore these dynamics in depth, my research adopts an analytic autoethnographic approach that centres the researcher's personal experience as the primary mode of inquiry. Autoethnography allows for the systematic analysis of lived experiences in ways that illuminate cultural and social phenomena (Anderson, 2006). Unlike many traditional forms of study, personal observations, fieldnotes, and memory work are positioned as the core data source, reflecting the affective, reflexive, and embodied dimensions of civic engagement. Semi-structured interviews and content analysis of public documents are incorporated in a supplementary role, not as representative samples, but as indicative material that enriches and contextualises the primary narrative. This methodological strategy, which is explained fully in Chapter Three, reflects a commitment to interpreting sport event experiences through both personal immersion and wider contextual insight.

Social capital provides a foundational lens for understanding how civic engagement emerges and operates within major sport events. Drawing on Putnam's (2000) conceptualisation of bonding, bridging, and linking ties, social capital helps explain how community relationships are activated, expanded, and strengthened through event-based strategies. These ideas provide a way to interpret how organisers of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup sought to foster engagement across diverse communities, institutions,

and cultural contexts. At the same time, my analytic autoethnographic approach offers insight into how these strategies were experienced at the individual and interpersonal levels. Introducing social capital here therefore anchors the study's conceptual framing and highlights how civic engagement, social connectedness, and lived experience intersect within the wider environment of a major sport event.

Figure 1

Conceptual relationships between civic engagement, social capital, analytic autoethnography, and major sport events



1.2 Personal Narrative

My name is Aaron Jefferson, and I am a postgraduate student in Sport Leadership and Management. I grew up and lived in the United States for the first three decades of my life. As I began my studies at Auckland University of Technology, I became increasingly interested in how major sporting events foster civic participation and shape cultural identity. The FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023 offered me a rare opportunity to explore these dynamics through both personal and academic lenses. I was particularly drawn to the ways in which civic engagement strategies around global events could help build meaningful connections across diverse communities and contribute to the development of both national and local identity.

I was made aware of the term “autoethnography” by a professor who recommended that I consider it as a methodology for my thesis research. I learned that autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience to understand cultural experience (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). I knew I wanted to study how the event organizers would approach the challenges and opportunities associated with civic engagement. But before this recommendation, and my subsequent research on autoethnography as a research methodology, I had never considered the possibility of putting myself, my own lived experiences, biases, and perspectives under my own research microscope.

There are two different strands of autoethnographic research, these being evocative and analytic. Evocative autoethnography prioritises emotional resonance and narrative depth (Wright, 2019b), while analytic autoethnography, as Anderson (2006) emphasises, is grounded in theoretical engagement and methodological transparency. I was drawn to this structured approach because it allowed me to investigate not only what I experienced, but why those experiences mattered in the context of civic life. Intuitively, I understood from decades of lived experience as an athlete and sports fan how major sports events can contribute to building civic identity and social connection (Chalip, 2006).

I recall memories of travelling from my home in Rochester, Minnesota, with my friend and his father to watch a Minnesota Vikings football game in Minneapolis. The Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome was a towering and imposing figure in the big city skyline, and it was packed with over 60,000 Vikings fans from all walks of life cheering on their Vikings with a common passion. I also remember my little sister and I, both attending the University of Minnesota, went to the first Minnesota Golden Gophers football game back on campus, at the then TCF Bank Stadium on campus. I still have the free Maroon-and-Gold hat they gave to everyone in the student section from that game, and it is still one of my most cherished possessions. These experiences, and many others like them, formed the basis in my interest in understanding how such events foster civic engagement on a larger scale, especially in the culturally rich context of New Zealand.

These formative experiences informed my interest in the topic and became central to the methodological approach of this thesis (my thesis). Within this autoethnography, I treat my own civic experiences not simply as contextual background, but as a source of data to be critically analysed alongside external materials. After more than ten years living in New Zealand, I have developed strong ties to the local sports community while still viewing certain aspects of civic life with the perspective of an “outsider”. My professional experience includes work in community affairs, policy analysis, and sports event management. These roles have deepened my interest in how major sport events intersect with civic engagement and shape a sense of belonging. This combination of personal passion and professional

curiosity guided my approach to this research, as I sought to explore how the Women's FIFA World Cup may influence social connection and identity in New Zealand.

My first encounter with the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023 came in a Facebook Messenger group chat, comprised mostly of the remnants of a football team I began playing for back in 2012. Imagine a group of mates, mostly men in their thirties and forties, whose primary mode of social interaction was pub quizzes and the occasional live football match. That was us. The tone of the message had the typical "Hey, we should go to this" kind of vibe. But it was an immediate thumbs up from me. I wanted in on all of it, and there wasn't a second thought. I made the decision that I'd go to every game I could attend, and every fan experience they would build. And now, I had a group of close friends with the desire, ability, and means to attend with me. It was an organic display of bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000) that had been developed over eleven years of friendship.

Collectively, we recalled our first group New Zealand tournament experience (and my first time attending a FIFA event), the 2015 FIFA U20 World Cup. I still vividly remember braving the freezing rain alongside them to see the final match, a hard-fought Serbian win over Brazil. It was also a testament to the linking capital between event organizers and attendees that had been earned years in advance, with the quality of execution of the 2015 tournament. We *knew* it was going to be a good show, and that gave us confidence to go all in for 2023. The first physical steps in my journey as a fan and a researcher at the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup began several months before the tournament started.

On the 21st of January 2023, the New Zealand women's national team (affectionately known as the "Football Ferns") played the second of two friendly matches against the then-reigning World Cup champions, the United States of America (the "USWNT"). The Chief Executive Officer of NZ Football at the time described the two-match series as "an opportunity for Kiwis [an equally affectionate name given to someone from New Zealand] to see some of the trailblazers in the game before New Zealand's biggest ever sports event kicks off, and a fantastic opportunity to set new crowd records for women's football in Aotearoa" (New Zealand Football, 2023). His statement clearly shows NZ Football's intention to offer the matches as an accessible opportunity for the community to come together to celebrate and cheer on the Football Ferns in an unprecedented way. That intention is further confirmed by his statement that "[w]ith family-friendly kick off times and affordable tickets, there's no better way to round off the kiwi summer than with the opportunity to watch the world's best in our backyard." His statement turned out to be somewhat prophetic.

12,720 people, including myself, made the friendly warm up match the highest attended women's football match in New Zealand history (ESPN, 2023), narrowly eclipsing the record attendance of 12,508 people set just days prior in Te Whanganui-a-Tara (Wellington) (U.S.

Soccer, 2023). The draw of seeing the historically dominant USWNT was undoubtedly a significant factor in the high attendance figures. From my own perspective, the opportunity to attend such an event, at such a reasonable price was too good of a chance to ignore (adult tickets were NZ\$20). After seeing that a significant majority of attendees were cheering on the Football Ferns, however, I came away from the game certain that the New Zealand public were ready to support their team and show pride in their country in an unprecedented way in the upcoming tournament.

As this thesis adopts an analytic autoethnographic approach, the personal narrative presented here is intentionally subjective and grounded in my own perspective as an immigrant, a fan, and a researcher. Following Anderson (2006), the aim of sharing these experiences is not to claim an objective or universal truth, but to evoke questions, reflection, and possible disagreement from the reader. Autoethnography invites dialogue rather than certainty, and my intention is for these stories to prompt resonance, challenge, and critical engagement. What is offered here is truth as seen through my eyes, and it is up to the reader to interpret, question, and evaluate these experiences alongside their own understandings.

1.3 Football in New Zealand

Sport NZ (2024) states in their Active NZ report that football is now the most widely played team sport in New Zealand, with participation numbers reaching new heights in recent years. They report that in 2024, more than 142,000 players were actively engaged in football and futsal programmes, reflecting a six percent increase from the previous year. Additionally, they report an estimated 30,000 additional players participated through New Zealand Secondary Schools, underscoring the sport's appeal among youth. This growth demonstrates football's broad reach, driven by targeted development programmes and increased visibility through major international events. Inclusive participation efforts have also supported these gains, especially among underrepresented populations (Sport NZ, 2024). These figures mark a milestone for the sport and position it as a leading force in shaping participation-based sport in the country.

Despite its popularity, the football landscape in New Zealand has lacked professional opportunities. Unlike rugby and cricket, which have established professional leagues and strong media presences, football in New Zealand has lacked a robust domestic structure. The Wellington Phoenix, competing in Australia's A-League since 2007, is a notable exception. Until recently, there was no full-season domestic league for women, and most players competed in amateur, regional competitions that were under-resourced compared to other codes (New Zealand Football, 2020).

For women in particular, the gap between grassroots and elite pathways has been a persistent challenge. The National Women's League offered regional representation but was a short-format, under-resourced competition with limited visibility. In 2018, New Zealand Football, the national governing body for football competitions in New Zealand, acknowledged the need to professionalise the women's game, citing structural barriers and a lack of elite domestic opportunities (New Zealand Football, 2018a). Most female players balanced football with work or study, with few receiving financial compensation and even fewer accessing sustainable performance environments (New Zealand Football, 2018a). As a result, many had to move overseas to pursue elite competition and dedicated support systems (New Zealand Football, 2018b). These constraints underscored the need for a long-term strategy to improve the competitive structure and sustainability of women's football in New Zealand.

This professional shortfall also extended to the media landscape. Sport NZ's gender reporting from 2020 highlighted a persistent underrepresentation of women's sport in mainstream coverage, with football receiving far less attention despite high participation rates (Sport New Zealand, 2020). This imbalance affects sponsorship, investment, and public interest, reinforcing the perception that football, especially women's football, is a secondary or peripheral sport. Nevertheless, there were signs of progress before the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023. Football was increasingly the sport of choice among school-age girls, driven by visible role models such as the Football Ferns (Sport New Zealand, 2020) and growing international opportunities through FIFA youth competitions (FIFA, 2008). Hosting the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup in 2008 was a pivotal moment. The event introduced young fans to elite-level women's play and left a lasting legacy in local communities through increased club participation and improved infrastructure (FIFA, 2008).

Further momentum came from the FIFA U-20 Men's World Cup in 2015, the largest football tournament held in New Zealand at the time. Matches drew over 500,000 spectators nationwide, and New Zealand Football credited the event with boosting the sport's visibility and strengthening grassroots engagement (FIFA, 2008). These international events helped position football as a serious contender within New Zealand's sporting hierarchy. At the same time, the broader sporting landscape was changing. New Zealand hosted the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup in 2022 and the Women's Rugby World Cup in 2021, which demonstrated growing interest in women's sport (Brice et al., 2022). These events contributed to rising attention around gender equity and placed pressure on national sport organisations to strengthen development pathways and leadership opportunities.

In summary, prior to 2023, football in New Zealand was already characterised by strong participation, a growing youth base, and increased cultural relevance, particularly

among women, young people, and diverse communities. Football remained popular but institutionally marginalised, especially compared to rugby and cricket. The years leading up to the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023 represented a critical inflection point, as football confronted both its grassroots momentum and its professional limitations. Whether the sport could transform that potential into lasting structural change remained an open question.

1.4 Hosting Major Women's Sport Events

In the years leading up to the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023, New Zealand emerged as a key host nation for global women's sporting events. This trajectory was shaped by its role as host of the 2022 ICC Women's Cricket World Cup and the 2021–2022 Women's Rugby World Cup (Brice et al., 2022). These events not only demonstrated the country's logistical and organisational capabilities but also reinforced New Zealand's emerging leadership in women's sport (MBIE, 2023; Sport New Zealand, 2022).

Originally scheduled for 2021, the 2022 Cricket World Cup was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was staged across six cities and culminated in a high-profile final at Hagley Oval in Christchurch. Despite pandemic-related constraints, the tournament received strong domestic support and significant viewership. New Zealand Cricket framed the event as a platform for gender equity in sport, highlighting investments in infrastructure, media partnerships, and grassroots outreach. The event attracted global attention and reinforced New Zealand's reputation as a capable host (ICC, 2022; Sport New Zealand, 2022).

When New Zealand hosted the 2021 Women's Rugby World Cup, fixtures were held across three venues in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) and Northland (World Rugby, 2022). The Black Ferns (New Zealand's national women's rugby team) went on a championship run culminating in a sold-out Eden Park final that captured the national imagination. For many observers, the tournament represented a turning point in the visibility and legitimacy of women's rugby. Public reception was overwhelmingly positive, with widespread media coverage and a celebratory atmosphere that extended beyond the stadiums (RNZ, 2022). Rugby New Zealand and World Rugby hailed the event as a cultural milestone that showed its commercial and community potential (World Rugby, 2022; RNZ, 2022).

Both events were allocated significant funding for event delivery and legacy programmes focused on increasing girls' participation, improving venue accessibility, and supporting women in coaching and leadership roles. Through two special initiatives, the Major Events Fund and the Sport Recovery Package, the central government of New Zealand provided this core funding for both tournaments' legacy programmes (Sport New Zealand, 2023). For the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2022, New Zealand Cricket managed the delivery of the Cric-Kids bilingual education programme and venue upgrades

for gender-neutral facilities (Sport New Zealand, 2022; New Zealand Cricket, 2022). For the Rugby World Cup 2021, New Zealand Rugby managed the national Trophy Tour, sustainability initiatives, and ChildFund partnership to support Pacific women and girls (World Rugby, 2021; World Rugby, 2022). These legacy activities demonstrate how government investment and NSO leadership combined to embed long-term community and participation benefits. And they set the stage for 2023.

1.5 Research Questions

As outlined in this chapter, this study has civic engagement as its central conceptual lens, with a specific focus on how it was designed, experienced, and expressed during the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023. Using Putnam's (2000) model of Social Capital and Anderson's (2006) Analytic Autoethnography as guiding frameworks, the research aims to investigate the lived dimensions of civic participation, especially in a small-nation context like New Zealand. The primary analytic method is autoethnography, through which I examine my own experiences as a fan-researcher embedded in the event. These reflections are supported by semi-structured interviews with several key stakeholders and a content analysis of public documents. Both are used in a supplementary and illustrative capacity to contextualise the personal narrative. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- What were the characteristics of civic engagement strategies employed by event organizers before, during, and after the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023?
- How did these strategies influence community identity and participation?
- To what extent did the expectations of event planners regarding civic engagement align with the actual outcomes observed during and after the event?

1.6 Thesis Structure Overview

This thesis is structured across six chapters. Chapter One (Introduction) outlines the background and conceptual grounding for the study, situating the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023 within New Zealand's football and major Women's sport event hosting history. It introduces the study's civic engagement focus and research questions and provides an overview of the methodological and theoretical approaches used. Chapter Two (Literature Review) explores the academic foundations of this research, with emphasis on civic engagement, social capital theory, and the role autoethnography can play in the study of sport. It identifies the need for more reflexive, culturally situated accounts of sport event legacy, particularly in small-nation and women's sport contexts. This chapter

also builds upon the event-related information presented in this opening chapter, focusing on the impact of mega sports events that have been hosted in New Zealand over the past couple of decades. There is also a section that covers the evolution and expansion of the FIFA Women's World Cup. Chapter Three (Methodology) details the study's analytic autoethnographic design, which centres my lived experience as the primary mode of inquiry. It also describes how semi-structured stakeholder interviews and content analysis of public reports were used in a supportive and indicative capacity to enrich the core autoethnographic analysis.

Chapter Four (Findings & Discussion, Part One) presents the participant observational data drawn primarily from my extensive set of fieldnotes, post-event reflections, and the memories triggered by the four themes drawn from interviews and public documents. These are shared through a series of autoethnographic vignettes that illustrate lived civic encounters across tournament matches, Fan Festival activities, and cultural initiative. The chapter's discussion connects the personal narratives to the principles of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. Chapter Five (Findings & Discussion, Part Two) explores four key insights developed from the analysis of stakeholder interviews and public documents. The discussion synthesises elements of my personal narrative with private and published institutional insight, examining how strategic intentions translated into meaningful civic experiences. Finally, Chapter Six (Conclusions & Recommendations) summarises the study's contributions to theory and practice, reflects on the methodological value of analytic autoethnography, and offers recommendations for future research, policy, and sport event planning.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The study is guided by Putnam's Social Capital Theory as its primary theoretical framework (Putnam, 2000) and employs Anderson's Analytic Autoethnography as its central methodological approach (Anderson, 2006). Understanding civic engagement is crucial because it reflects how communities participate in shaping collective outcomes and shared identity (Adler & Goggin, 2005). As outlined in Chapter One, the aim of this research is to explore the civic engagement strategies evident (personally observed) at the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023.

This literature review approaches civic engagement as the core conceptual lens through which all other frameworks are interpreted. It begins by examining civic engagement as a general concept and then considers how it has been understood and operationalised in the context of sport events. The chapter then explores Putnam's Social Capital Theory, first through its foundational concepts and then through its application in sport mega-event research. Autoethnography is then introduced as the methodological approach that underpins this study, with particular attention to its value in capturing lived experience, identity, and civic meaning. The chapter examines New Zealand's record of hosting major sporting events and its evolving approach to civic legacy, drawing on recent scholarship and local case studies, and reviewing some of the impacts associated to previous mega sports events hosted in New Zealand. Building upon the contextualised material shared in the previous chapter, the chapter also introduces the FIFA Women's World Cup, noting the surprising lack of previous academic research available on this inspiring/aspiring mega event.

2.2 Civic Engagement

Adler and Goggin (2005) explain that civic engagement describes how an active citizen participates in the life of a community to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future. This idea resonates strongly with my professional background among civic-minded practitioners who have used sport to improve community life. Adler and Goggin's framework provides a shared vocabulary that practitioners and researchers can use to evaluate and communicate the impact of civic efforts. Importantly, they describe engagement not just as volunteering or voting but as a broader process involving agency, dialogue, and collective problem-solving, which is relevant in major sport event contexts where civic ideals like legacy and inclusion often justify investment and participation.

While Adler and Goggin (2005) emphasise civic engagement as active participation in collective life, other scholars have critiqued this perspective for overlooking passive or less visible forms of engagement. For example, Ekman and Amnå (2012) argue that everyday talk, passive following, or private reflection can also constitute meaningful civic participation, expanding the concept beyond formal acts like voting or volunteering. Norris (2002) similarly observes that traditional forms of political participation have evolved alongside new types of civic activism and informal community involvement, which suggests that civic engagement is increasingly diverse in form and scope. Bennett (2012) extends this view by arguing that contemporary civic engagement often emerges through personalized and digitally mediated networks, particularly among youth and event-based publics who operate outside formal institutions. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) add that engagement often depends on individual resources, psychological readiness, and social networks, underscoring that participation is shaped by both personal capacities and community structures. Together, these perspectives show how the understanding of civic engagement has shifted from strictly institutional involvement to include more fluid, informal, and individual experiences.

Civic engagement appears through both formal and informal channels and often unfolds across traditional activities such as voting and volunteering as well as latent or standby forms of participation. This is especially important in sport contexts, where initial engagement may emerge from symbolic support, personal identity, or passive consumption before developing into direct involvement such as volunteering or community advocacy. Rich, Spaaij, and Misener (2021) argue that sport clubs and events function as civic spaces where individuals move from passive spectators to active community participants, experiencing a shift in identity and collective agency. Civic engagement is more than a checklist of democratic behaviours; however, it is also a lived and relational experience rooted in identity and belonging.

Adler and Goggin (2005) distinguish between two frameworks: “service”, meaning doing for, and “civic”, meaning doing with. This distinction is crucial for understanding how sport event organisers aim to involve people not just as labour but as co-authors of a shared cultural moment. The narrative of legacy often merges the practical delivery of the event with the symbolic task of nation-building, positioning sport as a powerful stage for participatory citizenship. Boykoff (2024) extends this idea by framing sports mega-events as contested civic arenas where nationhood, political power, and cultural identity are performed and reimagined. These symbolic performances can both reinforce dominant national narratives and open space for grassroots civic expression.

Understanding civic engagement in this broad and evolving sense is central to this thesis. It establishes a foundation for analysing how organisers, volunteers, and community members shaped and experienced the civic dimensions of the FIFA Women’s World Cup

Australia & New Zealand 2023. The next section considers how this concept has been studied specifically in relation to sport events.

2.3 Social Capital

Putnam's Social Capital is a foundational concept for understanding how networks of trust and cooperation contribute to civic life and community well-being (Hallmann et al, 2023). Bourdieu (1986) defined it as a resource embedded in social networks that individuals and groups can use to maintain or improve their social position. Putnam (2000) popularised the term by describing social capital as the connections among individuals and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. He argued that communities rich in social capital tend to experience higher levels of civic participation, better governance, and stronger social cohesion. His emphasis on trust and collective benefit has made social capital a core idea in research on civic engagement and democratic resilience. For example, Gang et al. (2023) examined volunteer experiences at the PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games and found that both bonding and bridging social capital were fostered through strategic use of core and peripheral event spaces, demonstrating how physical proximity and informal interaction shape community formation at mega-events. Similarly, in Hallmann et al (2023) captured the post-event thoughts of serious leisure volunteers who actively participated in the 2017 World Masters Games, hosted in New Zealand, noting the importance of the friendships and fellowships made through being a part of the team.

Other scholars provide different perspectives on how social capital operates. Unlike Putnam's community-oriented approach, Bourdieu's view highlights how access to social capital often reproduces social hierarchies and advantages for certain groups (Bourdieu, 1986). Prior to Putnam's seminal contribution, Coleman (1988) offered yet another perspective, focusing on how family and community networks facilitate positive outcomes for children and adolescents, such as educational attainment. Critics argue that Putnam's portrayal of social capital sometimes romanticises community life and overlooks the unequal distribution of power and resources within networks (Portes, 1998). This critique also emerges in sport contexts, where Numerato and Baglioni (2012) illustrate how tight-knit associations can reinforce exclusionary power dynamics, using trust and shared norms to marginalise outsiders and manipulate governance practices.

Some studies have also challenged the universal applicability of social capital, noting that its Western bias may limit its relevance in different cultural contexts (Siisiäinen, 2000). Despite these debates, however, it remains a valuable framework for examining how social ties influence participation, trust, and cooperation in diverse settings. In this research, social capital theory provides a lens for analysing how different types of relationships, including bonding, bridging and linking social capital were fostered through civic strategies at the FIFA

Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023. These three forms of social capital are examined further through an autoethnographic account of lived experience, supported by interviews with institutional actors and a content analysis of public legacy documents. The following section looks at the connection between civic engagement and social capital in the context of sport.

2.4 Civic Engagement and Social Capital in Sport

Sport has long been recognised as a fertile setting for civic engagement and social capital development. Scholars argue that participation in sport, whether through playing, volunteering, or spectating, creates opportunities for community members to interact, build trust, and strengthen social networks (Nicholson & Hoye, 2008). These connections often extend beyond the sporting context, contributing to wider community cohesion and collective identity (Jarvie, 2003). As Misener and Mason (2006) note, sport clubs and events can act as “social anchors” that support volunteerism and community capacity building.

In the context of mega-events, researchers have examined how large-scale sport competitions such as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympic Games can catalyse civic participation and generate social capital within host communities (Misener & Mason, 2008; Grix, 2013). Civic engagement at these events often involves large volunteer programmes, local community festivals, and legacy projects designed to foster sustained involvement (Wright & Kobayashi, 2018). These activities are frequently promoted by policymakers and organisers as ways to build community pride, strengthen local networks, and leave a lasting social legacy (Chalip, 2006). Recognising both the potential and limitations of this model, Schulenkorf (2017) argues that a shift from uncritical optimism to more strategic, community-focused planning has improved the ability of sport-for-development programmes to generate meaningful outcomes. When civic initiatives are designed inclusively and intentionally, sport events can more effectively support community engagement and the development of social capital (Wright & Kobayashi, 2018).

Supporting this view, Wang et al. (2022) found that volunteer management practices such as orientation, training, and recognition enhance volunteer satisfaction. Their study also shows that these practices contribute to the development of social capital, which in turn supports deeper engagement and stronger community cohesion during large-scale sport events. However, studies also highlight tensions and limitations in this narrative. While some research suggests that mega-events can mobilise communities and enhance local social ties, other scholars argue that the promised social capital often proves temporary or unevenly distributed (Misener & Mason, 2006a; Grix, 2013; Hallmann et al, 2023). Critics point out that top-down event planning may exclude marginalised groups or fail to translate short-term enthusiasm into lasting civic benefits (Black, 2008). This critique resonates with

broader concerns about whether the symbolic rhetoric of civic engagement aligns with the realities of power dynamics and resource allocation in host communities. Such findings support the use of qualitative and interpretive methods such as autoethnography to explore how these events are experienced by individuals and communities on the ground (Wright, 2017).

Rather than focusing solely on financial returns, local evaluations and academic research are beginning to recognise the civic, infrastructural, and symbolic dimensions of hosting major sporting events. For this research, understanding how civic engagement and social capital interact in a sport mega-event context is vital for analysing the civic strategies used during the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023. By examining how local organisers, volunteers, and community members experienced and contributed to the event, this study seeks to unpack both the opportunities and challenges of generating bonding social capital (within close-knit groups), bridging capital (across diverse communities), and linking capital (between individuals and institutions) through sport-based civic initiatives.

2.5 Creative Analytical Practice and Autoethnography

Creative Analytical Practice (CAP) is a qualitative research paradigm that treats writing as a method of inquiry, where language does not simply reflect knowledge but actively produces it (Wright, 2021). Through CAP, the act of writing becomes a central means of discovery, allowing researchers to explore and express their experiences in ways that are layered, emotionally resonant, and socially situated (Wright, 2019a). Richardson (2001) positions writing-stories as both personal and political, blurring the boundary between researcher and subject, and challenging the separation between academic and lived knowledge. This approach is especially relevant in studies of civic engagement and identity, where memory, emotion, and social context are inseparable from interpretation.

Narratives of national identity have long been embedded in event planning (Wright & Barron, 2021). Reflexive storytelling methods such as autoethnography can reveal how individuals internalise and make meaning of their participation in sport events, especially in smaller nations or local contexts where institutional narratives may not fully reflect community experience (Wright, 2019a; 2021). Sparkes (2002), as cited by Cooper, Grenier, and Macaulay (2017), explains that autoethnographies involve a level of critical self-reflexivity that raises awareness of broader social inequities, which can ultimately lead to positive reform efforts aimed at increasing equity for all. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010) describe autoethnography as both a process and a product, where a researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to explore how personal lived experiences are connected to cultural and social contexts.

Autoethnography offers a compelling response to the methodological blind spots left by dominant approaches to studying social capital in sport event contexts (Wright, 2021). Much of the existing research has centred on community networks and bonding, primarily through traditional quantitative assessments (Putnam, 2000; Adler & Goggin, 2005; Misener & Mason, 2006a; Preuss, 2015). While these studies have significantly advanced understanding by employing surveys and statistical models to capture impacts at the community level, they often overlook the subjective, lived, emotional, and culturally embedded nature of participation. For instance, research by Jamieson (2014) emphasizes quantifiable indicators such as community participation rates but largely sidesteps the personal and communal narratives behind these figures. Qualitative research has gone some way in addressing this gap, particularly through interviews and case studies of sport events in both urban and rural settings (Wright, 2018). However, this body of work also tends to prioritise structured data collection over subjective, reflective accounts.

Studies such as Zhou and Kaplanidou (2018) and Zhou et al. (2021) have developed tools to measure social capital through event participation, but they pay limited attention to the organic formation of emotional bonds or the construction of civic identity. Such omissions are particularly striking in smaller or culturally distinct contexts, where institutional narratives often fail to capture the complexity of local experience. Integrating social capital theory and autoethnography is especially powerful in contexts like New Zealand, where civic engagement operates across bicultural frameworks, informal community networks, and event-driven public life. In such settings, the social capital generated by sport events is not only a theoretical construct but a lived, negotiated, and culturally grounded reality (Hallmann et al, 2023). By documenting and analysing these lived experiences through an autoethnographic lens, this study contributes a methodological and contextual model for understanding how major sport events can activate and sustain civic life.

Autoethnography is also a particularly valuable research method for the study of civic engagement strategies around major sports events (Wright, 2021). Misener and Mason (2006b) argued that “sporting events represent important leisure and tourism activities within the city and take on ideological importance in the construction of citizen identity” (p. 395). Furthermore, understanding how sporting events contribute to a community’s sense of place and identity is essential for urban planners and event organisers seeking to foster meaningful civic engagement (Misener & Mason, 2006b). Over the past decade, autoethnography has shifted from the margins of academic inquiry to a more widely accepted methodological approach in sport studies (Wright, 2017). Wright (2017) reflects on this transition, noting that personal narratives, which were once treated with scepticism or viewed as too subjective, are now increasingly embraced by editors, conference organisers, and scholars alike. In another publication, Wright (2019) describes how his own hesitations

about contributing to a growing field of narrative scholarship eventually gave way to recognition that lived experience holds scholarly value, especially when it speaks to identity, memory, and meaning making in sport contexts.

Wright (2021) shows that the emergence of sport-specific autoethnographies signals that this genre no longer needs to justify its presence. Instead, it invites sport management researchers to engage with it more fully and critically. In this way, autoethnography not only captures what sport means to individuals, but how those meanings evolve over time and contribute to the collective understanding of community and civic life. In sum, autoethnography provides a methodological foundation for addressing gaps in how sport event studies have traditionally captured civic engagement and social capital. By including memories, emotions, and the entanglement of personal and public life, autoethnography expands the methodological toolkit available to sport management scholars interested in the civic dimensions of event hosting (Wright, 2021).

By combining critical self-reflection with contextual analysis, this approach allows for a deeper understanding of how events are experienced both personally and collectively. By integrating interviews alongside my personal reflections, I was able to strengthen the credibility of my interpretations and reduce the risk of overemphasising individual perspective. This was particularly important given my dual role as a fan and a researcher, where reflexivity helped me navigate the boundaries between participation and analysis in a way that revealed the layered nature of civic engagement. Further information about autoethnography, specifically Anderson's Analytic Autoethnography, can be found within the following chapter. Within the following section, I will explore some of the research undertaken on sporting events hosted in New Zealand over the past couple of decades, including a couple of FIFA tournaments that featured prominently in the successful bid to host the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup.

2.6 Sport Event Hosting in New Zealand

Scholars of sport event management have shown that hosting successful mega-events requires careful attention to the event lifecycle, which spans bidding, planning, delivery, and evaluation phases (Brochado et al., 2022; Preuss, 2015). Each phase involves distinct stakeholder interactions and strategic considerations that directly influence how civic engagement opportunities and social legacies are realised. Co-ordinated planning, clear communication, and alignment with broader policy goals are essential for ensuring that events generate not only economic returns but also meaningful social capital and community trust (Emery, 2002; Chalip, 2006; Preuss, 2015).

New Zealand has established itself as a strategic and effective host of major international sport events, using them to advance national branding, tourism, infrastructure

investment, and more recently, gender equity objectives. Key examples include the 2011 Rugby World Cup, the 36th America's Cup, and the trilogy of women's sport mega-events hosted between 2022 and 2023. While each event has been evaluated in terms of economic returns and media exposure, several domestic studies also point to more complex legacy narratives, particularly around regional development, civic pride, and institutional collaboration. New Zealand's approach to hosting sport mega-events has evolved from a focus on short-term tourism and broadcast returns to more deliberate, long-term legacy strategies. Recent events have emphasized institutional coordination, legacy planning, and alignment with regional and cultural development goals. These trends reflect both the nation's unique geopolitical scale and its increasingly strategic use of sport to achieve broader policy outcomes.

The 2011 Rugby World Cup was a milestone in New Zealand's mega-event history. One defining feature of New Zealand's event management strategy is the emphasis on cross-agency collaboration. The implementation of the Major Events Management Act (MEMA) during the 2011 Rugby World Cup created a framework for safeguarding commercial rights and controlling ambush marketing, which was crucial to maintaining relationships with global sporting bodies and sponsors (Nixon, 2015). MEMA has since become a foundational piece of New Zealand's event infrastructure, supporting everything from city permitting to stakeholder consultation. In combination with logistical coordination across central and local government, the act has helped institutionalize a model that balances risk management with the delivery of public value. This approach reflects insights from event management theory that effective pre-event planning and clear stakeholder coordination are critical for managing risk, aligning expectations, and ensuring that the social and civic aims of mega-events are realised alongside economic goals (Emery, 2002; Chalip, 2006; Preuss, 2015).

Jackson and Scherer (2013) show how the 2011 Rugby World Cup's "Stadium of 4 million" campaign not only invoked collective belonging, to create public buy-in and reinforce a global rugby image, but also a narrative of national unity that strategically framed the country's population as rugby-driven, and a globally relevant host. However, they also note that such narratives often mask uneven benefit distribution and reflect elite perspectives (Jackson & Scherer, 2013). Despite this celebratory framing, the Rugby World Cup 2011 drew significant public scrutiny over its economic justification and legacy value. Projected surpluses gave way to an acknowledged financial loss of up to \$40 million, raising questions about cost-effectiveness for smaller host nations (Jackson & Scherer, 2013). Infrastructure upgrades such as Eden Park and the Dunedin stadium attracted public resistance due to high taxpayer investment and perceived imbalances in benefit distribution (Jackson & Scherer, 2013).

Nixon (2015) similarly critiques the operational execution of the 2011 Rugby World Cup tournament, identifying shortcomings in ticketing systems and opening night transportation that exposed weaknesses in event risk management. However, Nixon also notes that MEMA played a vital role in securing New Zealand's hosting rights and in protecting the commercial integrity of the event. Similarly, the 36th America's Cup in 2021, also protected by MEMA, presented a more mixed outcome (Wright & Barron, 2021). While global broadcast and digital media coverage of the 2021 America's Cup Regatta delivered an estimated \$292.5 million in exposure value, New Zealand's strictly enforced COVID-19 international border closures ensured that the major event incurred a net financial loss of \$156 million (Fresh Info Limited, 2021, Wright & Barron, 2024). Nonetheless, the report noted significant non-financial legacies, including the redevelopment of Auckland's waterfront and increased public engagement with marine culture. Legacy infrastructure such as wharf extensions and the Hobson Wharf breakwater became lasting public assets and were consistent with Auckland's strategic goals. The Cup also served as a vehicle for soft power diplomacy, reinforcing national identity and showcasing the country's event-hosting capabilities despite pandemic-related constraints (Wright & Barron, 2024).

Event evaluations now frequently include cultural metrics alongside economic indicators. The 36th America's Cup, though deemed a financial loss, was found to have contributed to Auckland's place-branding through redevelopment of its waterfront and celebration of maritime heritage (Fresh Info Limited, 2021; Wright & Barron, 2021). Public infrastructure investments such as wharf upgrades and the Hobson Wharf breakwater created lasting assets, while the integration of te ao Māori design elements added cultural resonance. Although the event occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, its legacy report highlights increased civic engagement and international visibility. This supports the argument that mega-events can still deliver symbolic and place-based value even under constrained conditions.

In addition to these major events, New Zealand has more recently positioned itself as a leader in gender-focused legacy planning. Brice et al. (2022) describe how the country leveraged the Women's Cricket World Cup (2022), Women's Rugby World Cup (2022), and FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023 through coordinated policies developed by Sport NZ and partner organisations. These events were not only milestones for women's sport but were also used to activate broader social change agendas, including bicultural inclusion, youth engagement, and the expansion of community sport pathways. Critical legacy scholarship cautions against assuming symbolic unity equates to structural equity. In response, recent planning efforts, especially around women's tournaments, have intentionally expanded the definition of legacy to include grassroots engagement, youth leadership, and cultural inclusion (Brice et al., 2022). Cross-sector collaboration and legacy

programmes like Aotearoa United and Puawānanga were central to this approach, highlighting the evolving complexity of mega-event planning in small nations.

Recent legacy evaluations point to more ambitious frameworks. Sport NZ's involvement in the Women's World Cup events of 2022 and 2023 illustrates a shift toward equity-driven planning. This emphasis on planning aligns with legacy frameworks in event management literature, which distinguish between planned and unplanned outcomes and highlight the importance of embedding social objectives throughout the event lifecycle (Preuss, 2015; Chalip, 2006). Brice et al. (2022) describe how programmes such as Aotearoa United and Puawānanga were developed not only to promote participation in women's sport, but also to deliver long-term cultural and community outcomes. These initiatives involved coordination between national sport organisations, government ministries, and iwi partners, reflecting a co-governance ethos rooted in Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The legacy was conceptualised not as a static output, but as a dynamic process spanning investment in people, infrastructure, and cultural capability.

From legal frameworks and volunteer mobilisation to bicultural programming and placemaking, local event management now functions not just to host, but to transform. This transformation depends on effectively coordinating stakeholders such as residents, volunteers, government agencies, and national sport organisations, each of whom contributes unique motivations, resources, and constraints to event planning and legacy outcomes (Emery, 2002; Chalip, 2006; Teixeira et al., 2022). Evaluations by Sport NZ and MBIE increasingly reflect this shift, offering a broader definition of impact that includes who participates, who benefits, and how legacies are sustained after the final whistle.

2.7 New Zealand's Hosting FIFA

New Zealand first hosted a FIFA tournament in 1999, staging the Men's U-17 World Championship across four cities: Auckland, Christchurch, Ahuriri (Napier), and Ōtepoti (Dunedin) (New Zealand Football, 2017). The event brought together 16 national teams and introduced organisers to FIFA's expectations and operational standards. Although the tournament lacked the visibility of senior-level competitions, it demonstrated that international football could be successfully integrated into New Zealand's sporting calendar. The experience laid the groundwork for future bids, contributing to the development of infrastructure and building institutional confidence among national and local stakeholders (New Zealand Football, 2017).

In 2008, New Zealand hosted the inaugural FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup, the country's first global women's football tournament (New Zealand Football, 2015). Matches were held across Auckland, Kirikiriroa (Hamilton), Wellington, and Ōtautahi (Christchurch), culminating in a final at North Harbour Stadium. For many spectators, this was their first

opportunity to experience elite international women's football live. The event generated a visible increase in media coverage and boosted engagement among girls and young women who saw elite role models competing on home soil. FIFA praised the organisation and cultural integration of the tournament, describing it as "a landmark moment" for the development of women's football in the region (FIFA, 2008). According to New Zealand Football, the legacy of the event extended well beyond the pitch. It included significant investments in club infrastructure and a noticeable boost in junior football participation across several host cities (New Zealand Football, 2015). The success of the 2008 tournament helped establish New Zealand's credibility as a capable and committed host for future women's football events.

The 2015 FIFA U-20 World Cup represented a new level of ambition. It was the largest football tournament staged in the country at the time, featuring 24 teams competing across seven cities (New Zealand Football, 2015). The event drew global attention and highlighted New Zealand's ability to manage complex, multi-city logistics for a major international tournament. Beyond the logistical achievements, the tournament was seen as a transformative moment for football's profile in New Zealand. New Zealand Football (2015) reported economic benefits including increased tourism and local spending, as well as upgrades to facilities that supported both the tournament and long-term player development. Youth participation also increased, particularly in areas that had hosted matches, indicating that the event had both symbolic and practical legacies (New Zealand Football, 2015).

In 2018, New Zealand submitted a bid to host the 2020 FIFA Futsal World Cup. Although the tournament was ultimately awarded to Lithuania, the bid process provided an important opportunity for domestic stakeholders to further engage with FIFA's evolving requirements and global standards (New Zealand Football, 2023). The experience offered lessons in areas such as bid preparation, international positioning, and infrastructure planning for indoor sport formats. While the bid was not successful, it reinforced the importance of strategic alignment and long-term investment. The experience helped refine New Zealand's eventual approach to the much larger and ultimately successful joint bid for the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup (New Zealand Football, 2023).

Together, these events, spanning from 1999 to 2020, provided a valuable foundation of institutional knowledge and reinforced New Zealand's ability to deliver world-class football tournaments. Each event contributed to national and local capacity in areas such as venue management, volunteer coordination, logistics, and cultural programming. Just as importantly, they helped embed football more deeply into New Zealand's sporting identity and popular consciousness. While rugby and cricket continue to dominate the professional and media landscape, football's growth at the grassroots level has been strengthened by the visibility and community engagement generated through hosting these events (Sport New

Zealand, 2022). By the time New Zealand submitted its joint bid for the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023, it was not an emerging host but a nation with decades of practical experience, proven capability, and public investment in the sport.

2.8 FIFA Women's World Cup

The FIFA Women's World Cup has evolved into perhaps the most prestigious tournament in international women's sport. Since its launch in 1991 with just 12 participating nations, the competition has steadily expanded in both scale and impact, reaching 32 teams by 2023 (Lewis et al., 2023; Reuters, 2019). Over the decades, the tournament has not only grown in sporting legitimacy but has also become a global cultural phenomenon. Title wins by the United States (four), Germany (two), and single victories by Norway, Japan, and Spain reflect both competitive diversity and shifting geopolitical influence in the women's game (Olympics.com, 2023). Public interest has also continued to grow in parallel with on-field performance, as total global viewership increased from 1.12 billion in 2019 to over 2 billion in 2023 (Time, 2023). The 2023 edition also became the most attended FIFA Women's World Cup ever, with over 1.98 million fans at matches and hundreds of thousands more engaging through FIFA Fan Festivals across host cities (New Zealand Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment [MBIE], 2023). These trends underscore the tournament's ascent not only as a high-performance competition but also as an event of global cultural significance. This trajectory set the stage for the landmark 2023 co-hosting arrangement between Australia and New Zealand, which further elevated the tournament's cultural and political importance.

Despite this progress, the tournament has long faced challenges rooted in gender inequity. FIFA has documented persistent disparities in investment, infrastructure, and institutional support between the men's and women's games (FIFA, 2024). For example, while the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup prize pool was increased to USD \$110 million, it remained far below the USD \$440 million allocated for the 2022 Men's World Cup (FIFA, 2024; Taylor, 2023). As Poppelwell-Scevak (2022) notes, these disparities reflect a systemic undervaluation of women's football. She notes that although FIFA has introduced a Women's Football Strategy and adopted a human rights framework, there are no clear enforcement mechanisms to address the pay gap. Bundling women's media rights with those of the men's tournament further obscures the commercial value of the women's game, reinforcing perceptions that it cannot generate revenue independently (Poppelwell-Scevak, 2022).

According to FIFA (2019), the 1999 tournament in the United States drew over 90,000 spectators to the final and marked a turning point in public engagement. FIFA states that in 2019, the France-hosted edition reached a global audience of 1.12 billion, including

over 82 million live viewers for the final (FIFA, 2019). These milestones highlight both growing commercial appeal and cultural significance. The 2023 tournament furthered this impact. In Australia, the Matildas' historic run to the semifinals spurred increased grassroots participation and new public investment (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023). In New Zealand, civic engagement efforts tied the tournament to broader social goals, including inclusion and bicultural representation (MBIE, 2023). While structural disparities remain, the FIFA Women's World Cup continues to act as a catalyst for cultural change and gender equity.

2.9 Chapter Summary

My literature review demonstrates how civic engagement, social capital, and autoethnography intersect to provide a robust foundation for examining community experiences at mega-events in New Zealand. While previous research has shown that sport events can foster social capital, little attention has been paid to how these processes are felt and enacted at the level of personal memory, emotion, and identity within New Zealand's unique bicultural context. This study responds to that gap by using an analytic autoethnographic approach that treats lived experience as an analytically rich source of insight. In doing so, it contributes to an emerging strand of scholarship that connects individual narratives to structural theories of civic life, offering new understanding of how bonding, bridging, and linking social capital are expressed in practice. Ultimately, this approach offers both a methodological model and a more grounded understanding of what civic engagement can mean in the context of contemporary sport mega-events.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research Aim & Questions

My research is situated at the intersection of social capital theory, civic engagement, and autoethnography, addressing how these concepts unfold in the context of a major sport event hosted in New Zealand. This chapter outlines the philosophical foundations, research design, data collection methods, and analytical strategies used to address the studies aim and questions, bringing my lived experiences into dialogue with external perspectives and documentary evidence. It also reinforces the role of reflexivity in analytic autoethnography, where the researcher's lived experience is not treated as anecdotal detail but as a central source of analytical insight.

The overarching aim is twofold: first, to contribute to scholarly discussions on civic engagement, illustrating how social capital operates in practice at a global sporting event; and second, to deepen personal understanding of New Zealand's civic culture and collective identity through reflexive, experiential inquiry. To achieve these goals, this study explores the following three research questions, developed through an iterative review of relevant literature and refined during the design phase:

1. What were the characteristics of civic engagement strategies employed by event organisers before, during, and after the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023?
2. How did these strategies influence community identity and participation?
3. To what extent did the expectations of event planners regarding civic engagement align with the actual outcomes observed during and after the event?

These questions are investigated using a mixed-methods design with analytic autoethnography as the primary methodology and method, supported by semi-structured stakeholder interviews and content analysis to provide contextual insight. This structure enables a contextualisation of personal, institutional, and community perspectives while maintaining a clear analytic focus on lived experience.

3.2 Research Paradigm

This study is grounded in a critical realist ontology, a constructivist epistemology, and an interpretivist paradigm, providing a coherent philosophical foundation for examining civic engagement during the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023. A critical

realist ontology acknowledges that social structures and cultural practices exist independently of individual perceptions, while also recognising that such structures are not always directly observable (Byers, 2013). In this research, civic engagement initiatives are treated as real and tangible, even though individual experiences of these initiatives may differ in how they are perceived and interpreted.

A constructivist epistemology guides how knowledge is understood and developed, emphasising that meaning is co-constructed through interaction and context (Berbary, 2019). This perspective supports a flexible, participant-centred approach to exploring how diverse stakeholders experienced and contributed to civic engagement efforts. This constructivist position underpins the use of analytic autoethnography by recognising that my lived experiences during the tournament are a legitimate and meaningful source of civic insight. The interpretivist paradigm values subjective interpretations and situates knowledge within specific social contexts (Anderson, 2006; Berbary, 2019). This aligns with the core principles of analytic autoethnography, where my role as a researcher-participant enhances reflexivity and deepens understanding of the connections between individual experience and broader community dynamics. Importantly, this interpretivist stance supports the prioritisation of analytic autoethnography as the core method of this study. The following section further outlines how the philosophical foundations described above were translated into a coherent research design.

3.3 Research Design

The design centres on analytic autoethnography as the primary methodological approach. The integrated design ensures that the study captures multiple perspectives by situating my lived experience alongside institutional and documentary insights, aligning methodological choices with the research aim and questions. Semi-structured stakeholder interviews and content analysis are used to contextualise and enrich understanding, but it is through personal reflection and reflexive engagement that meaning is primarily generated. This approach reflects the view that knowledge can be situated, subjective, and understood through the lived lens of the researcher-participant.

3.3.1 Analytic Autoethnography

I adopted Anderson's (2006) framework of analytic autoethnography as the primary methodological approach for this study. This model offers a structured and rigorous way to connect personal experience with broader civic and cultural phenomena. Analytic autoethnography is distinguished from more narrative or evocative forms by its commitment to theoretical engagement, methodological transparency, and integration of empirical

material (Anderson, 2006; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). This approach aligns with my interpretivist paradigm and centres my lived experience as the primary analytic lens for examining how civic engagement strategies unfolded and were experienced during the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023.

Given my dual role as participant and researcher, analytic autoethnography provides a method well suited to capturing the layered, reflexive nature of civic identity and participation. While I incorporated interview excerpts and publicly available documents to enrich the narrative, these sources were used in a strictly supplementary and illustrative capacity. This prioritisation ensures that the core meaning-making process in this study emerges through self-reflexive interpretation, not external validation. As Cooper, Grenier, and Macaulay (2017) argue, critical self-reflection within autoethnographic research can illuminate broader structural dynamics and contribute to reform-oriented inquiry. Wright (2017) similarly notes the power of personal narrative to expose cultural tensions and foster nuanced academic insight.

A key strength of analytic autoethnography is its reflexive emphasis, which positions the researcher as both an observer and a participant, creating opportunities to link individual insights to broader societal phenomena (Anderson, 2011). To address the potential risk of excessive self-focus, which is an issue highlighted by Anderson (2006), this study complements personal reflection with semi-structured stakeholder interviews and a content analysis of public documents. This mixed-methods approach enriches the credibility and depth of the findings by contextualising my autoethnographic reflections with perspectives drawn from interviews and public documents. By adopting analytic autoethnography within a mixed-methods design, this research contributes both a deeply personal and critically contextualised account of how civic engagement strategies were experienced and enacted during a major international sporting event in New Zealand.

Consistent with Anderson's (2006) formulation of analytic autoethnography, my role in this study is positioned as both researcher and participant, meaning the interpretations presented are intentionally subjective and grounded in lived experience. The purpose of analytic autoethnography is not to establish objective or universal truths, but to connect the self to broader social realities in a way that encourages reflection, resonance, and critical questioning from readers (Anderson, 2006; Wright, 2017, 2019a). By acknowledging my interpretive presence within the research process, I emphasise that the analysis offered here represents one possible reading of the civic dynamics surrounding the tournament, inviting readers to consider, challenge, or extend these insights through their own perspectives (Ellis et al., 2011).

3.3.2 Mixed Methods and Contextual Integration

Analytic autoethnography provides a valuable lens for examining my lived experience of civic engagement during a major sport event. However, I recognised early on that personal experience alone could not fully capture the complexity of the broader civic strategies at play. To enrich and contextualise the core narrative, I incorporated a mixed-methods approach that drew on semi-structured stakeholder interviews and a content analysis of publicly available documents. Anderson (2006, p. 385) cautions that “autoethnography loses its sociological promise when it devolves into self-absorption,” and emphasises the importance of sustained “dialogic engagement with others in the social worlds they seek to understand.” In response, I complemented my autoethnographic reflections with semi-structured interviews and an analysis of publicly available documents related to the event. These additional sources were used to deepen the interpretive framing of my personal narrative rather than to displace or validate it.

Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) argue that strong autoethnographic research benefits from integrating personal experience with other forms of data and cultural context. The design deliberately integrates three sources of data, using interviews and content analysis to contextualise and enrich the core autoethnographic narrative. Integrating these methods not only increases the depth and credibility of the findings but also aligns with the interpretivist paradigm and constructivist epistemology that underpin this research. By combining multiple perspectives within a mixed-methods framework, this study presents a layered and situated account of civic engagement. It is grounded primarily in reflexive personal experience and supported by institutional and documentary perspectives. These supporting methods were not intended to verify findings but to provide cultural and institutional framing that could enhance the core autoethnographic analysis.

3.4 Methods: Data Collection

To operationalise this mixed-methods design, I gathered data through three sources: personal participation and observation at World Cup events (serving as the foundation of the study’s analytic autoethnographic approach), along with semi-structured interviews and a content analysis of relevant public materials. This structure reflects the interpretivist paradigm and constructivist epistemology guiding the study, positioning personal reflection and experiential insight as the primary mode of inquiry (Anderson, 2006; Ellis et al., 2011). The interview and content analysis methods were incorporated to provide supplementary, illustrative context rather than generalisable or representative data. Each method contributed to a more layered understanding of civic engagement by highlighting both lived experience and institutional framing. The following subsections explain how each method was designed and conducted to address the research aim and questions.

3.4.1 Event Participation & Observation

Participant observation was used to document how civic engagement strategies were enacted during the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023. This method aligns with the interpretivist paradigm and analytic autoethnographic approach by situating my experiences within wider social and cultural contexts (Anderson, 2006). I attended multiple tournament matches, fan festivals, and training sessions across several host cities in New Zealand, focusing on interactions among spectators, organisers, and local communities. Observations included activities such as fan celebrations, cultural performances, community participation areas, and informal social interactions. Data were recorded through field notes taken during and immediately after events, along with photographs and short video clips where appropriate.

I considered volunteering for the tournament but ultimately chose not to, as doing so would have significantly limited my ability to observe, attend multiple matches, and interact freely with fans in stadiums and community spaces. Remaining in a participant-observer role allowed me to maintain a broader perspective on civic engagement, rather than focusing on one operational aspect of the tournament. I kept a detailed record of my experiences during the tournament, combining several forms of personal media. I would record my personal thoughts on my smartphone's notebook app, take photos and videos of meaningful scenes with the camera app, and take note of meaningful interactions I made with other fans. This way, I would be able to be confident that my recollections were accurate and consistent as time passed. These records provided contextual insights that informed my reflections and supported a deeper understanding of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital within the tournament's civic engagement framework.

3.4.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather insights from stakeholders directly involved in planning and implementing civic engagement strategies for the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023. This method aligns with the interpretivist paradigm and the analytic autoethnographic approach by enabling an in-depth exploration of participant experiences while allowing flexibility to adapt questions based on individual responses (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Semi-structured interviews are particularly well suited for generating rich, context-specific data that complements personal observations and content analysis, providing contextual insight that enriches the core autoethnographic narrative (Patton, 2015).

Participants were selected using purposeful sampling to ensure that each interviewee possessed direct experience and specialised knowledge relevant to the study's aim of exploring civic engagement strategies in the context of a major sport event. Purposeful sampling is well established in qualitative research as an effective strategy for identifying information-rich cases that can provide deep, relevant insights (Patton, 2015; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). In this study, the selection criteria focused on individuals in leadership or strategic roles within event marketing, communications, legacy planning, and local event delivery. Recruitment was conducted through professional networks, LinkedIn outreach, and referrals from research advisors, resulting in four interviews with three key stakeholders representing both FIFA-affiliated organisations and local community bodies. These participants were not intended to represent a broad or statistically valid sample, but rather to offer insight into institutional strategies that could be interpreted alongside personal reflections.

An interview guide was developed to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility for participants to expand on issues they considered significant. Questions were designed to encourage reflection on how civic engagement strategies were conceptualised, implemented, and evaluated during the tournament, with an emphasis on themes related to bonding, bridging, and linking social capital (Putnam, 2000). This flexible approach to question design is recommended for semi-structured interviews as it supports the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participant (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Throughout each interview, prompts and follow-up questions were used to explore unanticipated insights and to allow participants to share experiences in their own words.

The interviews were conducted both in person and online, depending on participant availability and location. Each session lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. Verbatim transcripts were prepared to support accurate analysis. Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the process, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to review transcripts, as detailed in Section 3.4.4. Interview transcripts were reviewed using a flexible, interpretive approach that acknowledged my active role as a researcher in identifying patterns and insights relevant to the civic engagement strategies explored in this study.

3.4.3 Content Analysis

Content analysis was employed to examine a range of materials that documented how civic engagement strategies were planned, communicated, and evaluated during the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023. This approach aligns with the study's interpretivist paradigm and complements the analytic autoethnographic framework by providing an institutional and public-facing perspective that contextualises personal

observations and stakeholder interviews. Using content analysis allowed me to explore how organisations framed civic engagement initiatives and to identify recurring themes and narratives related to social capital and community participation.

The materials selected for content analysis included official reports produced by FIFA and government agencies, legacy and leverage documents, marketing and promotional materials, media releases, and awards summaries related to event outcomes. Purposeful sampling guided the selection process to ensure that each source directly addressed themes of civic engagement, community impact, and social capital development. Key examples include the MBIE Puawānanga Leverage and Legacy Report, the Striking Success evaluation, the New Zealand Football Legacy Impact Report, and communications related to the Equalize youth programme and NZEA Event Awards. These sources provided diverse perspectives on how civic engagement strategies were designed and publicly represented throughout the tournament.

The selected materials were examined using thematic coding, following the principles outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). This process involved identifying patterns and recurring ideas related to bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, as well as broader themes of community participation and legacy. Content analysis was conducted iteratively alongside the review of interview transcripts and observation notes, ensuring that insights from each data source informed and complemented one another. This approach deepened the study's interpretive framing by illustrating how civic engagement was represented across institutional and documentary sources.

3.4.4 Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 25 July 2023 under application number 23/154. The study was conducted in accordance with AUT's Code of Conduct for Research, ensuring that all procedures respected participants' rights and maintained high ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained at multiple stages, including at the time of recruitment, immediately before each interview, and through written confirmation prior to participation. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

To protect participant confidentiality, all identifying information was removed from interview transcripts, and pseudonyms were used in all reporting. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the researcher. Where necessary, formal organisational permissions were obtained to conduct observations at event venues and associated spaces. Participants were given the

opportunity to review their transcripts to ensure accuracy and were offered a summary of the research findings upon completion of the study.

3.5 Data Analysis

While the analysis incorporates multiple data sources, the autoethnographic material served as the primary basis for theme development, with interview and content data providing secondary support and context. The empirical and secondary data collected through semi-structured interviews and content analysis were interpreted using a flexible, inductive process that focused on identifying meaningful patterns and civic engagement strategies. In contrast, my personal observations were analysed through a creative analytical practice approach, which emphasises narrative form, reflexivity, and the emotional texture of lived experience (Richardson, 2001; Wright 2021). This relatively recent method of narrative inquiry aligns with the interpretivist paradigm and analytic autoethnographic framework by allowing patterns to emerge from the data while remaining sensitive to context and reflexivity. Six personal narratives are presented in the form of short episodic vignettes, capturing the key findings from the analytic autoethnography (Wright, 2017, 2019a). Using an established creative analytical practice approach to data analysis ensured that insights from my subjective social introspection were initially separated from the key stakeholder perspectives, shared during the interviews, and the publicly accessible institutional content.

The data analysis process in this study involved two distinct yet complementary approaches. My personal observations were interpreted using a creative analytical practice framework, which prioritises narrative construction, reflexive insight, and emotional depth to reveal how civic engagement was experienced on the ground (Richardson, 2001). This form of analysis allowed me to explore how bonding, bridging, and linking social capital were expressed through lived moments, without fragmenting those experiences into coded segments. In parallel, the interview transcripts and public documents were reviewed through a flexible and inductive process that focused on identifying recurring patterns, values, and strategies related to civic participation and institutional intent. I engaged closely with this material by reading and rereading transcripts, making reflective notes, and grouping observations that aligned with the study's theoretical framework. These two approaches, narrative reflection and institutional analysis, were then brought together to produce an integrated understanding of how civic engagement unfolded during the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia and New Zealand 2023.

3.6 Rigour and Trustworthiness

To enhance the rigour and trustworthiness of this research, several strategies were employed throughout the study. Drawing on multiple data sources strengthened the credibility of the findings by offering complementary institutional and experiential perspectives on civic engagement. Reflexive journaling and iterative self-questioning supported confirmability by acknowledging my positionality and making my interpretive decisions transparent. As the analytic autoethnographic approach prioritises personal reflection (Anderson, 2006), this reflexive process was central to ensuring methodological rigour (Wright, 2017). Member checking was conducted by providing interview transcripts to participants for review and correction (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Consistency in the analytical approach and careful attention to interpretive clarity contributed to the study's dependability. Rich contextual descriptions, drawn from both personal reflection and institutional insight, support readers in assessing the potential transferability of findings to other civic or sport event settings (Wright, 2021).

3.7 Chapter Summary

This study adopted a mixed-methods design, integrating personal experience with systematic empirical evidence, both primary and secondary data, to explore both individual and community dimensions of civic participation. Analytic autoethnography was the central methodology and method, with interviews and content analysis used in a supplementary, illustrative capacity to contextualise the primary narrative. Specifically, an analytic autoethnographic approach (Anderson, 2006; Ellis et al., 2011) serves as the methodological core, supported by semi-structured stakeholder interviews and a content analysis of public documents. This design enables a multi-layered analysis of how civic engagement initiatives at the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023 fostered social connections, shaped identities, and contributed to bonding, bridging, and linking social capital (Putnam, 2000).

This chapter has outlined the philosophical foundations, research design, data collection methods, analysis procedures, and measures taken to ensure the rigour and trustworthiness of the study. Together, these elements provide a coherent and transparent account of how the research aim and questions were addressed using a mixed-methods, analytic autoethnographic approach. The following chapter presents the findings that emerged from this process, highlighting key themes and insights into how civic engagement was experienced and enacted during the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023.

Chapter 4: Findings & Discussion (Part One)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and discussion from my analytic autoethnographic research into civic engagement during the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup. As discussed within the previous chapter, the source of my data comes from three primary sources: my participant observational fieldnotes and experiences as a fan-researcher; the four semi-structured interviews with three key stakeholders involved in the tournament's delivery; and a content analysis of official documents and relevant legacy reports. This chapter focuses on the first source of knowledge, capturing the autoethnographic narrative of my lived 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup experience. These findings are packaged and presented in the form of six short episodic vignettes that can be consumed as a series, or as six individual stories, inspired by the Creative Analytical Practice (CAP)CA produced over the past decade (Wright, 2017, Wright, 2019a, Wright 2019b).

These vignettes contribute primarily to the first two research questions introduced in Chapter One. They explore the characteristics of civic engagement strategies employed before and during the tournament, and how these strategies influenced community identity and participation. Through my lived experience as both a fan and researcher, I present insights into how civic engagement was enacted across public spaces, match environments, and cultural gatherings, offering a grounded perspective on bonding, bridging, and linking social capital.

My individual memories essentially offer a continuation of the personal narrative shared in Chapter One (section 1.2) and can be consumed individually or as a collective. The aim of this chapter is to help you to see the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup through my eyes, and from my perspective. The stories are descriptive, but also missing key details, allowing you room to read between the lines and temporarily place yourself in my shoes. The aim is to leave you wanting to know more, and with a series of questions that you would like answered (Wright, 2019b). If you find yourself able to resonate with my lived experience, then I will have achieved my goal. If you fail to trust or believe my story, however, I will have failed (Wright, 2019b).

The first vignette, entitled 'Small World', captures some of the unforgettable memories created on July 22nd 2023, before and during the first USA fixture at the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup. The second vignette, entitled 'Dancers, drums, cowbells, and claps', is inspired by my overnight trip to watch Zambia play Costa Rica at Waikato Stadium, Hamilton, eleven days later (31 July, 2023). The third, 'As luck would have it', is linked to the final USA group fixture, while the fourth, 'Another World Record', is linked to the World Cup

Semi-Final between Spain and Sweden. The final two vignettes are not linked to fixtures attended, but event-related participant observations made within the fan zones and other in public spaces.

4.2 Small World - USA vs Vietnam

The first official match of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup was one I will never forget. The day started out with a visit to a nearby pizza place for lunch with one of my football friends and his family. Only a 10-minute walk from Eden Park, often referred to as "New Zealand's National Stadium" (Eden Park, n.d.), the restaurant was situated in the city's Kingsland neighbourhood (Eden Park, n.d.), a short walk from an easily accessible rail station, and dozens of restaurant options. Unfortunately, because I was running late and I wanted to catch as much of the game as possible, I had to rush the pre-game pizza, finish as much of my pint as possible and rush straight to the stadium. Getting to the stadium was as much a part of the tournament experience as the game itself.

I observed that the train station and the trains themselves were packed with fans of both the United States (USWNT) and Vietnam. It was a living, moving collage of red, white and blue, mixed with bright pops of red and yellow. This visual representation of cultural coexistence illustrates how large-scale sporting events can act as platforms for fostering social integration (Anderson, 2006). Outside the stadium, the presence of ample signage, volunteer event staff, merchandise booths, and the buzz of the seemingly endless crowd belied the significance of the match. I was at the World Cup. I was in and amongst what previously I had only been able to dream about while watching previous tournaments on my TV at home.

I was in Sports Heaven. But first, it was time to get officially kitted out in my team's colours and show my national pride! A conveniently placed merchandise stall sat near the stadium entrance, stocked with merchandise from both teams. I purchased a reasonably priced, officially branded team scarf and hat, and basically sprinted the remaining 50 meters or so to gates. I made it in time, but the real miracle of Sports Heaven happened as soon as I left the street surrounding the venue and entered the stadium. I come from a relatively small, rural town in Minnesota, called Rochester. In my youth, it had a population of roughly 85,000 people and was surrounded by never-ending fields of wheat and corn, with the occasional barn or grazing cows dotting the landscape. It's so small, that in the 13 years since I first moved to New Zealand, I had been accustomed to resorting to using Google Maps to explain where I was from. I have met the occasional American in New Zealand, but even then, they're usually from a larger city or state and would often be just as clueless about the location of my home as the Kiwis.

Imagine, then, my surprise as I arrived at my seat and began chatting with the American fans in my area. It was the typical, “Hi, are you from the United States?”... “Oh, you are? That’s great!”... “Whereabouts?” But the answer from the young woman in the seat to my immediate right, threw me off. “Whereabouts?”... Her reply was, “Oh, Rochester, Minnesota. You’ve probably never heard of it.” After I gathered my jaw off the floor, I spent the better part of the first half of my first World Cup match recalling beloved Rochester landmarks and hangouts, rather than focusing on the match. It was an invaluable opportunity to experience both bonding and bridging social capital. It was bonding because our shared hometown meant shared memories and histories, even though we’d never met before. It was bridging because I had called New Zealand my home for over ten years. I was, practically speaking, a local. They were tourists with an opportunity to learn about the host city, the host country and its people from the perspective of someone who was, in some meaningful ways, like them: an American, a Minnesotan, a supporter of the US Women’s National Team.

This experience illustrates elements of both bonding and bridging social capital. The spontaneous connection with a fellow Minnesotan, combined with the cultural immersion of the event setting itself, show how civic engagement strategies facilitated shared meaning among fans from many backgrounds. These informal moments of identification and exchange help address Research Question Two by showing how public rituals and interpersonal encounters can shape a sense of belonging and civic identity through a global event, hosted in a local context. These experiences also hint at linking social capital, as the structured environment created by event organisers enabled these connections to occur. The visibility and support of institutional efforts, including accessible transport, clear signage, and organised fan engagement, helped frame these interactions within a broader civic infrastructure.

4.3 Dancers, drums, cowbells, and claps - Zambia vs Costa Rica

I still remember the first time I met my good friend from Costa Rica, Paulo (a pseudonym), way back in 2012. I had just moved to the city and my priority was to find a football team that I could train with, and with any luck, maybe even join. Being new to the city, and still relatively broke, my best option was to learn the city bus routes and rely on them to take me to and from training sessions. I met Paulo on my first bus ride to my first training session. I figured he was going to the same place, because he was the only other person on the bus in full soccer kit. As fate would have it, we both made the team, and would spend the next 11 years playing competitively with a core group of friends.

When it was announced by FIFA that the Costa Rican national women’s team would be playing a group stage game in Hamilton, our response was immediate. We were going, and we were going to make a big deal out of it. He had friends from Costa Rica travelling to

the game, and we all booked an overnight stay so we could stay out late to take in the atmosphere around the stadium after the game. It was the perfect opportunity for me to interact with fans who had a different background than me, but who shared the same underlying love of the game. It was an opportunity to participate in and experience bridging social capital in action. By interacting with a culturally distinct group, I was actively engaging in what Anderson (2011) describes as a process of 'cultural reflexivity,' where individuals reflect on their own identity through exposure to new social networks. This aligns with Putnam's (2000) assertion that bridging social capital emerges when individuals form connections across different social or cultural backgrounds, creating networks of shared understanding.

On the day of the match, I made the quick 90-minute drive from Auckland to Hamilton and met with Paulo and his friends at a local hotel near the stadium. The first order of business was for everyone to change into our team gear. Paulo and his friends donned combinations and patterns of red, white, and blue, the colours of the Costa Rican women's national team. This shared ritual of donning national colours, even as a neutral spectator, exemplifies bonding social capital by reinforcing collective identity and shared cultural pride (Putnam, 2000). And I, not having purchased any Costa Rican kit and being a neutral observer of the match, cheekily donned my red, white, and blue US Women's national team hat and scarf, hoping to blend in as much as possible. I didn't, really. But that was ok with them and with me. It was game time.

We parked about three city blocks from the stadium, and made our way up Tristram Street, which was blocked off as a pedestrian walkway right up to the stadium entrance. World Cup-branded banners hung from street poles lining the walkway, and the streets were food stalls and small cultural displays. The most memorable display was a large tent with a stage, where eight Costa Rican dancers were performing a traditional Costan Rican folk dance called the Tambito, accompanied by speakers playing Tambito, by Ligia Guzmán and Álvaro Rodríguez (Guzmán & Rodríguez, n.d.). The women dancers were wearing long, bright skirts and waving them rhythmically to the drums of the song (see Figure 2). We all stopped to watch the performance, and Paulo's friends even banged their drums to accompany the song. The entire atmosphere was fit for a major event, and I observed that the cultures of the visiting teams were on full display throughout the event. My experience of sitting in the middle of the Costa Rican fans was one that I will never forget. The rhythm of their songs, chants, and anthems was kept by the ever-present bang of drums, cowbells, and clapping hands (see Figure 3).

Figure 2

Costa Rican dancers performing traditional folk dances before the Zambia vs Costa Rica match



Note. Photo taken at Waikato Stadium, 31 July 2023.

Figure 3

Costa Rican supporters performing traditional chants



Note. Photo taken at Waikato Stadium, 31 July 2023.

My limited understanding of Spanish (gained from years of primary school and high school Spanish classes in the United States) allowed me to catch the gist of what we were chanting. And I felt confident that whatever I lacked in language ability, I could more than compensate for with high levels of passion and energy. Midway through the match, I worked up the courage to introduce myself to some of the Zambian supporters watching the game as well. Among them was a family who had also travelled from Auckland to watch the match (see Figure 4). Their son was already an accomplished junior football player and had played at many of the same local clubs that I'd done in my time as a player. We briefly bonded over talking about our favourite clubs to play at, the positions we played, and the quality of the match we were watching. Both parents were fans of the game as well and made it a family tradition to bring their son to as many professional football events as possible.

Figure 4

Zambian fans celebrating their team's first ever FIFA Women's World Cup victory



Note. Photo taken at Waikato Stadium, 31 July 2023.

Although I wasn't able to participate in their chants, due to the language barrier, there was a bit more to celebrate on their side, as the Zambian women's national team scored three goals to win their first ever World Cup match (Reuters,2023). After the match, Paulo's friends and I slowly made our way to a local pub down the street from the stadium. The

television above the bar was playing highlights from the match we had just watched, and the chalk sign at the corner of the bar had a welcome message to the World Cup fans. We spent the next hour or so talking about our experiences during the rest of the tournament and sharing stories of previous tournaments. I learned their World Cup journey had started when two of them won a Costa Rican radio contest to visit a previous Women's World Cup. They enjoyed themselves so much that they made it a tradition every four years to travel to the World Cup as a group. Over time the group had grown to around eight friends. It was the kind of group that I could see myself joining one day.

This experience demonstrates how civic engagement strategies fostered bridging social capital by enabling cultural connection and mutual appreciation among diverse fan groups. The interactions with Costa Rican and Zambian supporters illustrate how the event created opportunities for cross-cultural exchange through shared fan traditions, chants, and celebrations. These experiences respond directly to Research Question Two by highlighting how community identity was influenced not only through formal programming, but also through informal, organic expressions of shared enthusiasm and sportsmanship. This also reflects linking social capital, as the institutional decision to foreground cultural performances and pedestrian-friendly event zones created the conditions for community interaction and intercultural learning. These civic strategies encouraged grassroots participation while being supported by organisational resources and planning.

4.4. 'As luck would have it' - Portugal vs USA

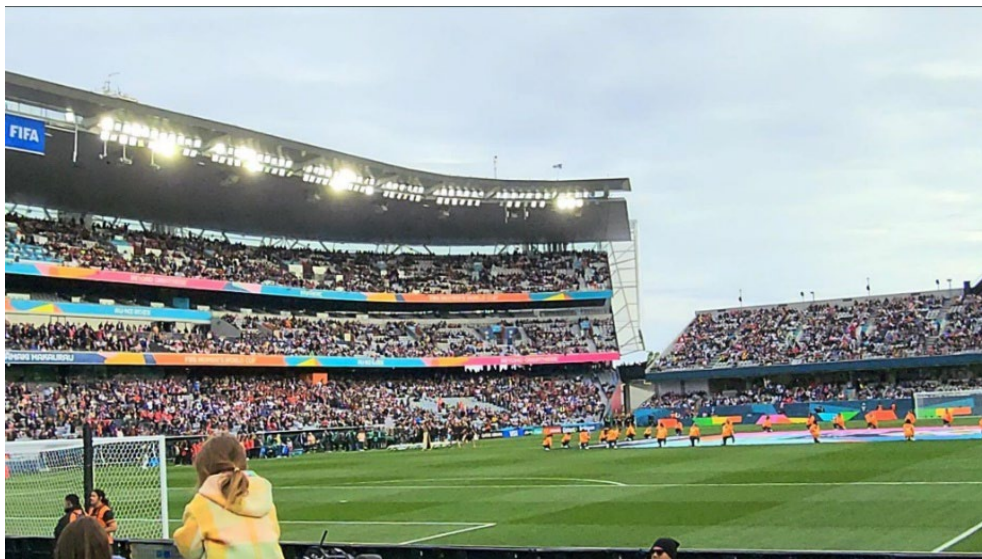
The day after the Zambia vs Costa Rica fixture, I was heading back to Eden Park to attend the final group stage match for the United States women's national team versus Portugal (see Figure 5). The circumstances of the game were very tense, as the United States needed at least a draw to advance out of the group stages and into the round of sixteen. For a team that was the defending champion, and four-time winners of the tournament (NBC Sports, 2023), the prospect of not even making the knockout stage of the tournament was unfathomable. Before the match even started, I encountered another tense situation outside of the stadium gates. Another US fan was speaking with a ticket volunteer, looking very upset. I asked him what was wrong, and he told me that his friend, who had both of their tickets, couldn't make it to the game and couldn't send his ticket.

As luck would have it, one of my friends had also told me he couldn't make it, and I therefore had an extra ticket. I didn't hesitate to offer him the ticket, knowing that the kick-off time was fast approaching. The ticket volunteer snapped into action and quickly got my ticket transferred to the grateful fan, getting us to our seats just in time for the start of the game. We sat together and watched the first half of the game together before going our separate

ways, so he could find his friends. But before he left, I learned that he was from Southern California, very close to where some of my extended family lived. We talked about how much we both loved California and I got to tell him why I loved New Zealand, why things were different to California, and why things were the same. It was an excellent opportunity for me to bond with another football fan who could identify with the place that I'd spent much of my childhood.

Figure 5

View from the stands inside Eden Park during the USA vs Portugal match



Note. Photo taken in Tāmaki Makaurau, 1 August 2023.

This vignette offers a glimpse into how informal acts of generosity and shared experience can continue to bonding social capital in a major sport event setting. The spontaneous and organic exchange between strangers, brought together by a common interest, reflects the ways in which civic identity can be strengthened through personal connections. Additionally, the involvement of the ticket volunteer demonstrates a form of linking social capital, as institutional actors helped facilitate access and participation. This moment underscores how small acts of institutional support can enable meaningful individual experiences within a larger civic framework. The moment speaks to Research Question Two by showing how individual acts of engagement, outside of formal programming, can reinforce a sense of community participation and belonging within a larger collective experience.

4.5 Another World Record - Spain vs Sweden

My last match experience at the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023 came at the semi-final match between Spain and Sweden, played on 15 August 2023 at Eden Park. The match attendance of 43,217 would set yet another record for a Women's World Cup match in New Zealand, surpassing records set just days before (The Sporting News, 2023). Spain, the eventual champions of the tournament, won a thrilling, back and forth match 2-1, with all three goals coming in the last nine minutes of the match (ESPN, 2023). It was, by far, the highest stakes (and highest quality) match I had ever seen with my own eyes.

Besides yet another opportunity to watch world class football, the match was also an opportunity for me to bond with my master's thesis advisor, who accompanied me to the game. We rarely had the opportunity to connect outside of an academic setting, so this was a chance for us to just be fans of the game and share stories of our experiences at different sporting events. We talked broadly about my thesis and the observations I had made during the tournament. He, having attended and written about many events in the past, was eager to share his experience and advice on how I could analyse my observations. It was an informal, one-on-one class session on autoethnography, interrupted only by the roars of the other 43,000 students in attendance during big moments of the match. Our conversation was effectively the beginning of my academic analysis of my experiences. But more importantly, it was a moment of tremendous encouragement, giving me confidence that I could synthesize my thoughts and feelings into a cohesive narrative for others' benefit.

This vignette illustrates how civic engagement can be expressed through both personal and institutional relationships. Attending the semi-final with my thesis advisor created space for bonding social capital, as we connected through shared interests and informal dialogue beyond the academic setting. At the same time, the exchange also reflects linking social capital. My advisor brought institutional expertise and analytical insight that helped shape my reflections and confidence as a researcher. This moment contributes to Research Question Two by showing how civic identity and participation are influenced not only by collective experiences in the crowd, but also through mentorship and interactions with individuals who hold knowledge and authority within broader event or academic contexts.

4.6 Fan Zones & Cultural Spaces

In addition to the group and knock-out fixtures, the FIFA Fan Festivals in Auckland and Hamilton played a central role in fostering civic engagement during the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023 (see Figure 6). These free public events provided an immersive experience that extended beyond the stadiums, offering fans and local

communities an opportunity to celebrate the tournament together in shared public spaces (FIFA, 2023c). The festivals were designed to increase accessibility to the event and enhance community participation, aligning with broader social impact initiatives aimed at leveraging the tournament to generate lasting benefits.

Figure 6

Fan Festival in Auckland



Beyond entertainment, these festivals fostered bonding social capital, as they strengthened existing ties within local communities by providing a space for shared celebration. Events like these contribute to community cohesion by reinforcing collective identity and shared cultural experiences (Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital was also evident, as attendees from diverse backgrounds—including local fans, international visitors, and different ethnic groups—came together, creating new connections beyond pre-existing social networks (Anderson, 2006). The Auckland Fan Festival was held at The Cloud on Queen’s Wharf, a prominent waterfront location in the city centre. This venue hosted a range of activities, including live match screenings on a giant LED screen, which allowed fans to experience the excitement of the World Cup in a collective environment. In addition to football-related programming, the festival featured live performances from New Zealand artists such as JessB, Ladi6, Troy Kingi, Tuawahine, Hollie Smith, and Kaylee Bell. I also witnessed a pōwhiri, or traditional Māori greeting ceremony, by Te Whare Karioi. Created in 1986 by Ngāti Whātua, an iwi located in Auckland, Te Whare Karioi describe themselves as follows:

TWK is a vehicle to express Māori culture, values, and way of life. Karioi is a word that is used in Te Ao Māori for entertainment in general. This whare is a

central place for all rangatahi (youth) to come together, sing, dance, whakawhanaungatanga (create relationships) and to continue to tell their stories the way they love to tell them, as they know best - through kapa haka. (Entertainment Group, n.d.)

The atmosphere for the pōwhiri was spirited and celebratory. The crowd, a standing room only group of hundreds of fans, was blanketed by red and blue lights, while Te Whare Karioi beamed on stage under the spotlights. I didn't understand the words of the pōwhiri, but I understood the significance of the event organizers displaying it proudly, front and centre of the largest fan crowd in New Zealand's largest city. The performance, and many others like it, reinforced the cultural significance of the event. The Fan Zones integrated Pacific Island and Māori cultural showcases throughout the event space, further enhancing local engagement and representation (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Te Whare Karioi pōwhiri performance at the Auckland Fan Festival



This moment exemplified linking social capital, as the pōwhiri was not just a cultural showcase but also an opportunity for different groups—including Māori performers, residents, and international visitors—to engage in a shared experience facilitated by institutional event organizers (Anderson, 2011). The presence of indigenous traditions within a FIFA-sanctioned global event highlights how linking social capital connects grassroots communities with larger institutional frameworks, empowering historically marginalized voices in international spaces (Putnam, 2000).

The Fan Zone in Auckland also featured interactive activities, including FIFA gaming competitions such as the Auckland Tāmaki Makaurau eCup, and provided additional avenues for participation and engagement (FIFAE, 2023). My favourite, and perhaps the most visually appealing, activity was the futsal pitch constructed at the end of the wharf, on which The Cloud was built. Called the FIFA Unity Pitch, it was a portable futsal-sized field designed to promote football and celebrate cultural diversity (FIFA, 2023c).

During the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023, it travelled across various host cities in New Zealand, including Auckland, Hamilton, Dunedin, Wellington, and Napier, serving as a centrepiece for community engagement and football-related activities (FIFA, 2023c). In Auckland, the pitch overlooked the harbour, and at nighttime, the city lights across the water created a picturesque environment. I would later learn that after the tournament, FIFA gifted two Unity Pitches to Auckland communities, further ensuring a legacy of accessible football facilities for local youth (FIFA, 2023c).

The Unity Pitch embodied bridging social capital as it facilitated interaction among people from different cultural, geographic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, offering a shared space for casual play and structured engagement (Anderson, 2006). As a mobile initiative, it also extended beyond traditional football communities, offering new opportunities for engagement in diverse locations (see Figure 8).

I went to the Fan Zone in Auckland on three occasions. One of which was an opportunity to meet with my primary thesis advisor and several of his students who were researching similar subjects. It was a tremendous learning experience, as we all took time to share our research interests and take in the environment together. We compared observations and personal stories from our time at the tournament so far, which provided me with a broadened perspective with which to view the tournament moments that would follow. At the end of our visit, I was even able to arrange going to a match with my thesis advisor, so we could discuss my project in detail.

This gathering was a prime example of bonding social capital, as it strengthened relationships among a small, academically connected group. We were able to deepen our ties through shared intellectual interests and discussions about the broader social and cultural impacts of the event (Anderson, 2011). The opportunity to attend a match together added another layer to our engagement, as it allowed for an informal, yet meaningful, exchange of ideas beyond the classroom.

Figure 8

The FIFA Unity Pitch at Auckland Fan Festival, Queen's Wharf



4.7 Public Places, Signage & Branding

In addition to the festivals, public signage and branding played a crucial role in enhancing the visibility and cultural identity of the event. FIFA collaborated with local artists to create an identity that celebrated the heritage and culture of the host nations. The tournament's brand identity incorporated vibrant local landscapes and rich colours from Australia and New Zealand, inspired by elements such as rainforests, mountains, and oceans (Creative Review, 2023). A radial motif featuring 32 colourful squares symbolized the tournament's expansion to 32 teams and reflected indigenous cultural patterns from both host nations (NZ Football, 2023). New Zealand artist Fiona Collis contributed to this effort by designing patterns signifying unity and cultural exchange, which were used in public signage and promotional materials (Creative Review, 2023).

During the tournament, I lived near the central business district of Auckland and frequented central businesses, bus stations, rail stations, and public places. I also took public transportation to each of the matches I attended in the city (see Figure 9). World Cup signage was dispersed throughout these spaces, with the designs promising not only world-class football, but also a once-in-a-lifetime cultural experience (see Figure 10). I also observed World Cup posters on the sides of local convenience shops (called "dairies") in the same spaces upcoming concerts were typically advertised. The posters are impossible to miss as you walk down the street, and as a frequent concertgoer, I was already in the habit of noticing when they were updated. It was, for me, an effective and ever-present reminder of the tournament and a way to keep me excited as the tournament approached. These

ever-present reminders of the tournament reflect linking social capital in action, as they connected local communities with the institutional narrative of a globally significant event.

Figure 9

Public transportation (rail) to semi-final game in Auckland



Figure 10

World Cup-themed signage on public transport in Auckland



4.8. Chapter Discussion

Anderson's (2006) analytic autoethnography positions the researcher as both participant and analyst within the cultural world under study. Prior to this tournament, my experiences at major sports events were almost exclusively in the United States and were regular-season professional or university games. All major events, to be sure, but not on the

scale of the FIFA Women's World Cup. According to the New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment (MBIE) (2024a), "the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023 was the largest women's sporting event in history, captivating an audience of well over a billion people across the globe." I was one of two million people across New Zealand and Australia to attend a match (700,000 of which were New Zealanders), one of 170,000 to attend a New Zealand Host City FIFA Fan Festival, and one of 42,217 people to set the attendance record for a New Zealand women's sporting event at the semi-final match between Spain and Sweden. These statistics put into perspective the scale of the challenge for event organizers to design and implement effective civic engagement strategies.

My experiences attending matches with friends and engaging with local football communities revealed how bonding social capital operated on the ground during the tournament. When critically reflecting on the depth and breadth of my participant observations, I found that civic engagement manifested most meaningfully through the informal, interpersonal connections I made across matches, Fan Zones, and community events. As both a fan and a researcher, I was uniquely positioned to observe how moments of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital unfolded in real time. I observed not only organised initiatives, but also spontaneous interactions and cultural rituals. This dual perspective allowed me to witness how national identity and civic pride were expressed, negotiated, and shared. While I also followed several matches hosted in Australia on television, these moments lacked the interpersonal connection and communal intensity of my in-person experiences in New Zealand. Ultimately, it was the lived, local, and collective dimensions of engagement that left the most lasting impression.

Attending the non-matchday events was also a personally meaningful exercise in bonding social capital. As someone whose home country is the United States, I often considered myself an outsider in the New Zealand context. Yet, being surrounded by impressive individuals from such diverse backgrounds, I found that what set me apart also connected me to others who shared many of my own experiences. While the bonding capital I experienced was powerful, arguably the more transformative form of civic engagement came from examples of bridging social capital. Shared public spaces like the Fan Zones and in-stadium seating became focal points for cross-cultural exchange. My favourite personal example took place at the Zambia vs. Costa Rica match in Hamilton. My Costa Rican friends in the fan section taught me chants and drummed throughout the game, while a family among the Zambian fans invited me over to cheer with them in the second half. Both encounters were unexpected moments that revealed how the tournament facilitated outward-looking connection, in line with Putnam's (2000) description of bridging capital.

These experiences were not confined to match days. I saw them manifest especially strongly at Fan Festivals, including the Unity Pitch in Auckland's Cloud on Queen's Wharf. There, curated activities for tamariki (children) and whānau (families), including cultural workshops, live music, and community art, encouraged residents and tourists from different ethnic and social backgrounds to play together. One of the most visible expressions of civic engagement witnessed during the tournament was the way fans from all over the world actively participated in the event-related activities, many of which were primarily created to engage the host community. Poi making, mini-football matches, and storytelling sessions, produced moments of spontaneous host-guest interaction and value co-creation, helping to build a sense of belonging and cultural learning. These experiences can be understood through the dual lenses of bonding social capital, which reinforces close personal ties, and bridging social capital, which fosters inclusive connections between socially diverse groups.

Cumulatively, I spent more of my time during the tournament at the Fan Festivals, than at the actual matches. It felt to me that the Fan Festivals were the places where the world was gathering. Rather than fans of two nations focussed on the success of their own teams at a match, the Fan Festivals were filled fans from every participating nation, gathered for the specific purpose of cultural engagement and exchange. Every visit was a new experience, with football and fandom serving as the brick and mortar of bridging social capital.

As Putnam (2000) articulates, bonding capital reinforces shared identities amongst homogenous groups, while bridging capital creates broader identities and reciprocity. On several occasions, I saw firsthand how the tournament succeeded in activating both forms of civic connection. Bonding social capital was most apparent to me in the context of pre-existing social groups that used the tournament as a vehicle for reconnection. For example, my own friend group, a collection of former football teammates who first met over a decade earlier, reconvened specifically to attend World Cup matches and Fan Zones together. While we had remained in casual contact through group chats and pub quiz nights, the tournament galvanized everyone's attention and excitement. We not only attended games, but discussed results daily, players who were standing out, and bragging rights over whose country was doing the best. These were expressions of shared identity and reaffirmations of existing social bonds between longtime friends.

4.9 Chapter Summary

Through personal interactions with culturally diverse fans and experiences in public fan spaces, I observed firsthand how the tournament fostered meaningful intercultural connection. Bridging social capital was fostered through a range of intercultural initiatives that brought diverse communities together in shared experiences. One of the most

prominent examples was the Equalize campaign, a storytelling platform designed to amplify voices from across New Zealand. In sum, from what I saw, touched, heard and felt, the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup provided fertile ground for the cultivation of both bonding and bridging social capital. Fan participation operated not just at the level of spectatorship but as a civic act, encouraging the renewal of old ties and the creation of new ones across demographic, cultural, and geographic boundaries. As the following chapter will show, this was supported and amplified by deeper forms of institutional engagement that reflect the third category in Putnam's model: linking capital.

The following chapter reveals the key findings and critical discussion to emerge from four professional conversations and the content analysis of three publicly available legacy documents. I have chosen to present this analysis through the employment of a reflexive thematic synthesis. When combined with the personal narratives shared above, they offer valuable, equally valid, critical insights that expand on and contextualise the civic dynamics associated with the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup in New Zealand.

Chapter 5: Findings & Discussion (Part Two)

5.1 Introduction

As captured in Chapter One (section 1.2), I began this study with the intention of exploring the civic engagement strategies deployed before, during, and after 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup. As a globally significant mega-event co-hosted by a small nation with a distinct bicultural identity, the sports event management, civic engagement and social capital literature all implied that this 'once-in-a-lifetime' tournament offered me a rare opportunity to examine how sport serves as a platform for civic inclusion, cultural storytelling, and national pride. I have structured the discussion around the central analytical lens of Putnam's Social Capital Theory, while Anderson's Analytic Autoethnography provides the reflexive scaffolding for incorporating both personal and institutional narratives throughout the research process.

The six inter-related autoethnographic vignettes shared within the previous chapter (Sections 4.2 to 4.7) reveal some meaningful memories (lasting legacies) from my personal engagement with the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup. The critical insights shared within this second findings and discussion chapter allow me to situate my individual fan experience within wider systems of event planning, storytelling, and cultural strategy. As such, the chapter offers the opportunity for synthesis by bringing personal, organisational, and societal perspectives into conversation with one another and reflecting on their implications through a critical, interpretive lens.

This chapter directly addresses the third research question introduced in Chapter One: to what extent did the expectations of event planners regarding civic engagement align with the actual outcomes observed during and after the event. While Chapter Four focused on lived experiences from the perspective of a participant-observer, this chapter explores how civic engagement was understood, planned for, and evaluated by professionals involved in the delivery of the tournament. The interview and content analysis data allow me to examine the relationship between strategic intent and experiential reality, offering insight into how engagement efforts were communicated, adapted, and interpreted across various contexts. By situating these institutional narratives alongside my own, I aim to critically assess how alignment, tension, and transformation occurred between planning frameworks and on-the-ground experiences of civic life during the FIFA Women's World Cup in New Zealand.

The insights presented within the following sections are not intended to validate the personal narrative shared through the use of Creative Analytical Practice (CAP), but rather to situate my analytic autoethnography within broader institutional, strategic, and social frameworks. The interview excerpts come from three professionals engaged with the tournament's civic and storytelling strategies, all of whom have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity (refer to section 3.4.2). The names of my three participants have been changed to Maria Thompson (a National Sport Organisation official), Claire Patel (a public storytelling and engagement strategist), and Ben Riley (an Auckland city government marketing coordinator). Public documents referenced include the MBIE Puawānanga report (2024a), NZ Football's legacy strategy (New Zealand Football, 2022) and Equalise programme summaries provided by New Zealand Story Group (New Zealand Story, 2023). Taken together, these sources offer complementary perspectives that situate my autoethnographic insights within wider civic, organisational, and cultural contexts..

The analysis of interview transcripts and public documents was guided by an interpretive approach that focused on identifying recurring patterns and insights related to civic engagement. Through this process, four central insights were developed from the four interviews and three legacy documents. These are: (1) bonding social capital and volunteer identity,

(2) bridging civic connection across cultures,

(3) linking institutions and legacy planning

(4) strategic storytelling and civic momentum.

While this study draws on multiple forms of data, including interviews and content analysis, these sources are not intended to verify or validate the autoethnographic narrative. Instead, following Anderson's (2006) and Wright's (2017, 2019a) discussions of analytic autoethnography, the supplementary materials serve to contextualise and enrich the personal account by offering additional institutional and social perspectives. Their purpose is to illuminate the wider civic environment within which my lived experiences unfolded, rather than to provide empirical confirmation. This approach aligns with reflexive thematic analysis, which emphasises interpretation, subjectivity, and meaning-making over claims of objective truth (Braun & Clarke, 2022). By presenting these data sources together, the intention is to create a multi-layered narrative rather than a triangulated or hierarchical one.

5.2 Bonding Social Capital and Volunteer Identity

Putnam (2000) conceptualises social capital (SC) as the connections that exist among individuals, and the social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. His framework is often divided into three interrelated dimensions: bonding SC (within-group cohesion), bridging SC (connections across social groups), and

linking SC (relationships across vertical hierarchies, such as between individuals and institutions). These categories provided a useful framework for understanding the types of civic engagement that emerged through the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, ranging from friends reconnecting over shared fandom to new institutional partnerships between local football clubs and national governing bodies.

Beyond fan participation and cultural celebration, perhaps the most structurally enduring form of civic engagement fostered by the month-long mega event was linking social capital, or the relationships formed between individuals or communities and institutions of differing power and authority. As Putnam (2000) defines it, linking capital requires norms of respect and trust between people who are interacting across institutionalized power or authority gradients in our society. The tournament's expansive volunteer program, legacy infrastructure investments, and cross-sectoral partnerships provide clear examples of this vertical engagement at scale.

A key theme that emerged from the data was that the engagement of local clubs and volunteers was a key part of the civic engagement strategy for planners. In New Zealand, there were over 1,500 individual volunteers needed for the tournament. I spoke with Maria Thompson, the senior leader at a National Sports Organisation, about how they approached that challenge. She emphasized the great attention that was placed on recruitment, retention, and bonding. Recruitment was done early so staff and volunteers could be well-informed and prepared to handle their roles. Every volunteer was provided with official World Cup Adidas gear to identify themselves as part of the team.

The volunteer program was one of the clearest embodiments of linking capital in practice. According to the Puawānanga Leverage and Legacy Report (MBIE, 2024b), over 6,000 volunteers contributed more than 50,000 hours of service across the country, with a 95% attendance rate, indicating a high degree of volunteer satisfaction (New Zealand Football, 2023). These volunteers performed a wide range of duties, including ushering guests, directing traffic, supporting team logistics, and staffing Fan Zones. Shifts were managed to avoid burnout, and volunteers were given meals if they worked a certain number of hours.

By treating volunteers with manaakitanga and gratitude, event organizers fostered the development of bonding social capital. Maria pointed out, many of these volunteers would sacrifice the opportunity to see live matches in their city, explaining, 'Some of those volunteers would never have got to see a minute of football'. Her comment underscores that the connection between volunteers and the institutions managing the event was not transactional, but emotional and civic in nature. Thompson added,

“...that's how we show manaakitanga and hospitality to our guests... there were many volunteers along the way, showing us where to go, opening our doors, pushing the lift... they were looking after different groups... they were always smiling, you know, and we made sure we always thanked them. But they were genuinely enjoying the part they played. And that was incredibly special to see”. (Maria Thompson)

The participant reflections consistently pointed to the social cohesion generated through volunteering and local club participation during the tournament. The mobilisation of volunteers was viewed not only as essential for operational delivery, but also as a powerful expression of civic pride and commitment. *“If we didn't have volunteers, our game wouldn't exist,”* said Thompson, highlighting how deeply embedded voluntary service is in New Zealand football culture. She described how some individuals volunteered despite financial or physical barriers, noting that *“there were volunteers who had additional needs... low vision, and wheelchairs... and FIFA... made sure that there was no barrier to becoming a volunteer”*. The emotional and social resonance of these acts was frequently cited. One volunteer *“closed her business down for the hours that she was volunteering... she's self-employed... but she just felt so strongly that she could give back to the game”*. These examples point to a deeper ethic of service, reinforced by Thompson's own framing of civic duty: *“We were raised to give service to others... If I've got these skills or experience or curiosity, then I'm gonna serve my club and then my federation”*.

Although it was not a volunteer initiative, the Equalise programme, also contributed to a shared sense of purpose and pride among its contributors. Claire Patel, the public storytelling and engagement strategist behind the campaign, explained how, *‘We were equitable in that everybody got paid a flat fee... irrelevant of your stature or value, you were all paid the exact same’*. This approach reinforced a collective ethos and helped foster inclusive engagement within the civic storytelling space. The content found within the public documents echoed these perspectives, highlighting how volunteer involvement and grassroots club networks contributed to the sense of shared ownership that communities felt during the tournament. These contributions were framed as central to the event's social legacy, reinforcing the role of local actors in delivering civic outcomes at scale (MBIE, 2024a). Taken together, the interview and document data underscore the importance of bonding social capital not only as a byproduct of civic engagement, but as a key mechanism through which the tournament generated lasting meaning for participants and communities.

5.3 Bridging Civic Connection Across Cultures

Local football clubs and their members also played a pivotal role in the civic infrastructure that supported the tournament's success. According to New Zealand Football, there are over 400 affiliated clubs across the country, with more than 145,000 participants engaged at various levels of play and administration (New Zealand Football, 2023, p. 3). Although I no longer played football on a competitive level, I was still connected to my local club (Western Springs AFC) through group chats and social gatherings with those still playing. Before and during the tournament, my club group chat was the planning hub for organizing tickets, transportation, and entertainment. Without the proactive support of my club and its members, my World Cup experience would have suffered.

These clubs weren't passive beneficiaries of the World Cup's footprint either. They were co-constructors of its legacy. Initially, some clubs expressed hesitation around participation due to concerns about disruption to their regular seasons and uncertainties about funding requirements for facility upgrades. However, as Maria Thompson recounted, once clubs were confirmed as Team Base Camps, their enthusiasm and engagement deepened significantly. National teams selected their preferred venues, creating tangible, international connections, albeit temporarily. This direct association with elite international teams generated an immense sense of pride and connection among club members. As Thompson explained:

Yeah, and there was also... as the sites or clubs were selected by [national teams], there was a real sense of connection to those teams. Like, Western Springs with Norway... Argentina stayed at Ellerslie... the famous Spain stayed in Palmerston. (Maria Thompson)

Despite the logistical challenges of relocating teams, rescheduling matches, and modifying facilities to meet FIFA standards, club communities rallied. Resilience was rewarded. Alongside host cities, the NSO reassured clubs that exclusive-use periods would be offset by significant investments, including new pitches, lighting, and floodlights, to ensure a lasting infrastructural legacy. Perhaps most importantly, these improvements were not just material. They allowed clubs and their members to, in Thompson's words, '*see and feel and know that they were part of history*'. This strengthened intra-club relationships, fostered a sense of ownership and pride, and deepened communal bonds, all of which are considered hallmarks of bonding social capital.

Youth engagement was also a central pillar of the tournament's legacy strategy, particularly in efforts to strengthen community ties and build bonding social capital. Two national programmes, Fantails (ages 3–12) and Kicking It (ages 13–19), were introduced to provide inclusive, low-pressure entry points for girls into football. By emphasizing fun, friendship, and belonging over competition, these initiatives reshaped community sport into a

space where girls of all abilities felt valued. This helped to reinforce relationships within clubs and whānau, building trust and a sense of shared identity among participants, families, and local organisers (MBIE, 2024a).

Another key initiative was Kōtuitui, a culturally responsive programme designed to foster cultural intelligence and social connection among rangatahi (MBIE, 2024). Co-designed with Māori and Pacific partners, it aimed to *‘celebrate the parts of our country and our people that we want to see more visible’* as Thompson explained. Originally adapted from Sport NZ’s In Our Backyard framework, Kōtuitui evolved into a bespoke schools’ programme that used football to deepen understanding of New Zealand’s bicultural and multicultural identity. *‘It wasn’t just Māori and Pākehā’*, she added. *‘It was Māori and everybody else that lives in Aotearoa now, but also with our Pacific partners as well’*. These initiatives reinforced intra-community ties and created meaningful pathways for young people to feel seen, supported, and connected.

The tournament was frequently referred to as being ‘a catalyst’ for bringing together diverse communities in ways that challenged traditional gender and cultural divisions. The three interviewees all noted the visibility of new types of audiences in stadiums and fan zones, describing a shift from typical football demographics toward broader public participation. *‘If you went to matches you would have seen it yourself then that was a different crowd from regular football fixtures at Eden Park’*, said Ben Riley, who helped coordinate Auckland’s civic-facing activations. Riley noted that the event placed women’s sport *‘front and centre’*, offering a rare opportunity for it to be an event that was *‘obviously going to empower women’s sport in general’*. Maria Thompson echoed this sense of social change, describing how the event *‘wasn’t ‘the women’s game’... So that was really encouraging’*. She described seeing ‘young boys and men wearing named shirts of female players’, a striking shift in who identified with elite female athletes. These cross-gender forms of engagement were understood as a sign of changing cultural expectations, extending beyond sport and into broader attitudes around inclusion and representation.

Storytelling also emerged as a strategy for cultural bridging. Thompson highlighted how *‘being able to pass on learning or skill through storytelling... just is a really good fit with who we are, with our indigenous people, but also with our Pacific partners as well’*. Claire Patel described intentional efforts to ensure sessions included *“school-age children... to hear this story and to be exposed to the speakers, many of whom shared experiences shaped by migration, cultural identity, and marginalisation’*. The publicly available published material also pointed to this shift. NZ Football’s legacy strategy referenced efforts to elevate participation and visibility for groups underrepresented in the sport, while the Equalise programme focused on showcasing wāhine from diverse professions and cultural backgrounds as public role models (New Zealand Football, 2022; New Zealand Story, 2023).

These individual efforts reflect an expanded view of civic inclusion, where culture, identity, and sport intersect to create new modes of connection.

As noted in the previous section, the Equalise speaker series was viewed as an important mechanism to develop bridging social capital. Featuring a diverse array of wāhine speakers from different sectors like sports, business, activism, and the arts, the series promoted female narratives that transcended football. One speaker, Forough Amin, recounted her experience growing up in Iran and fighting for women's rights. Claire Patel observed that her talk was particularly resonant for young attendees, stating, '*Forough talks about what it's like to be a girl growing up in Iran... and it's powerful stuff*'. These emotional connections forged through shared stories enabled people from different social and cultural backgrounds to identify with each other, reinforcing the value of bridging capital in strengthening civic identity. 'We wanted to transcend sport... and have people from creative, business, and community backgrounds,' explained Patel. The inclusion of wāhine leaders, athletes, artists, and migrant advocates like Forough Amin created space for shared vulnerability, connection, and solidarity across cultural lines.

These efforts were complemented by city-led programmes at FIFA Fan Festivals, particularly in Auckland and Hamilton. Cultural programming such as pōwhiri, poi workshops, tā moko demonstrations, and multilingual signage demonstrated a visible commitment to biculturalism and multicultural inclusion (MBIE, 2024a, pp. 13–17). The presence of Māori flags, te reo Māori, and First Nations artwork at venues reflected a wider strategy to centre indigenous and diverse cultural voices. Together, these initiatives enabled participants and audiences to connect across difference, cultivating empathy and a shared sense of purpose, which are hallmarks of bridging social capital.

The FIFA Fan Festivals served as vital hubs of intercultural interaction and civic celebration, fostering bridging social capital by creating shared, inclusive spaces for diverse communities to gather. The festivals were held in all four New Zealand host cities (Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, and Dunedin) and featured free-entry programming that blended sport, music, food, and cultural performance. Activities included poi workshops, drag shows, kapa haka, and tā moko demonstrations, highlighting both Māori culture and the broader multicultural fabric of Aotearoa (MBIE, 2024a, pp. 16–17). The visual and symbolic landscape of the festivals reinforced this ethos of inclusion. Bilingual signage, the flying of the Tino Rangatiratanga flag, and the presence of indigenous and migrant artists created an environment where guests of all backgrounds felt welcome.

According to Riley, these spaces were intentionally framed as accessible civic celebrations: '*It was about building awareness, yes, but also about making sure that people could feel a part of it, even if they didn't have a ticket*'. Patel also observed how the atmosphere of these public events created new pathways for connection. '*There was a huge*

sense of connection... between all the women and the younger women and really finding solid middle ground'. This sense of relational closeness across cultural, generational, and identity lines exemplifies the role of Fan Festivals in cultivating bridging social capital and reframing football as a space for everyone.

5.4 Linking Institutions and Legacy Planning

In line with this, FIFA and the New Zealand Government also invested heavily in infrastructure that extended beyond the short-term needs of the tournament. Roughly \$24 million was allocated for upgrades to over 30 sporting facilities, with a specific emphasis on gender-equal amenities, including gender-neutral changing rooms, individual shower stalls, and enhanced lighting to increase usable training hours. These upgrades were not simply logistical necessities, they were part of a larger effort to align institutional infrastructure with civic values of inclusion and accessibility, especially for women and girls (MBIE, 2024b). As Maria Thompson emphasised, many local clubs have now begun reevaluating their facilities through an equity lens, seeking advice from New Zealand Football on how to interpret 'gender equal' upgrades in practice.

Perhaps the most revealing indicator of linking capital at work was the adoption of formalized, values-based governance frameworks following the event. One example is the 'Xero Together Stronger' plan, a gender equity initiative launched during the World Cup by Northern Region Football in partnership with several clubs that received legacy upgrades. This framework outlines steps for both federations and local clubs to embed gender equity into their operational practices and facility design. As Thompson noted, *'What's important about those kinds of plans is... it brings it into awareness. It's not a bit here, and a bit there. It's visible'*.

The success of these initiatives also owes much to the structure and delivery of the event itself. Unlike traditional event organizing committees, FIFA set up a dedicated local subsidiary (LFS) in New Zealand, which worked closely with national agencies such as MBIE and Sport New Zealand. This enabled more efficient coordination between global and local leaders and allowed for governance decisions to be made with an eye toward both international standards and local priorities. Local governments, club representatives, and cultural advisors were also brought into the planning process, helping to legitimize institutional decision-making and embed civic values into event delivery.

The symbolic dimension of linking capital was reinforced through visible cultural commitments. The inclusion of pōwhiri ceremonies at key events, te reo Māori in signage, and the flying of the Tino Rangatiratanga flag alongside the national flag at all match venues were powerful visual affirmations of institutional respect for Māori culture. As Ben Riley described, *'The Tino Rangatiratanga flag flying next to the New Zealand flag was deeply*

powerful. We were telling our story visually to the world'. These gestures transcended symbolic inclusion, reflecting the coordinated efforts between FIFA, New Zealand Football, and local iwi to embed bicultural values into the tournament experience. As such, the tournament also served as a catalyst for institutional transformation within the national football system. As Thompson explained, several key reforms were implemented that went beyond the immediate requirements of hosting the event. These included rewriting organisational statutes to reflect inclusive values, such as eliminating gendered language, creating pathways for neurodiverse applicants, and embedding principles aligned with Te Tiriti o Waitangi. These efforts reflected a deliberate attempt to carry forward the equity and inclusion themes embedded in the World Cup's civic engagement strategies.

Legacy-linked programmes also produced formal roadmaps for change. For example, the Northern Region Football Federation developed a gender equity agreement with nine upgraded clubs and released a region-wide equity plan to help other clubs follow suit. *'That talks through what it actually means to be equitable from a gender basis... it brings it into the awareness at this stage, where it's all together in different plans and programmes'* Thompson explained. These reforms were reinforced by strong leadership and a proactive approach. *'We want to stay aspirational'*, she emphasised, *'and we want to stay thriving... we can be quite innovative in the way we do that'*. In this way, institutional learning did not end with the tournament. It continued through structural adaptation, linking grassroots communities with governance bodies via shared visions of equity, innovation, and cultural recognition.

As I engaged with both grassroots and institutional aspects of the tournament, I noticed how public trust was cultivated through visible investments and civic partnerships. The delivery of the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023 in New Zealand was supported by an unprecedented level of government investment, with a total of \$55 million allocated, including \$24 million for infrastructure upgrades and \$9 million for the Puawānanga leverage and legacy programme (MBIE, 2024a, p. 11). These investments created opportunities for communities and local clubs to engage with national institutions in ways that reflected the principles of linking social capital, by building trust and cooperation between citizens and those in power.

As noted previously, local community clubs selected as training sites or base camps were direct beneficiaries of this institutional support. According to Thompson, while some clubs were initially hesitant about disruptions to their season, *'our federations worked really hard with their clubs... they had to reschedule games, they had to get new pitches... but it was well worth it for the fact we were co-hosting the biggest women's event in the world'*. The process also fostered cross-sectoral alignment between local government, national sport bodies, and community stakeholders. *'When the Ferns came home... they were out at*

schools... they felt this strong sense of being home', she concluded, underscoring how national identity and institutional collaboration were actively cultivated. Such alignment allowed civic institutions and everyday citizens to interact meaningfully through a shared goal: ensuring a successful and enduring legacy for the event.

Across interviews and public documents, legacy planning was framed as an opportunity not only to improve infrastructure but to shift organisational culture within New Zealand football. Thompson spoke about gender equity as a long-term institutional commitment, noting that facility upgrades funded through the tournament included gender-neutral spaces, increased accessibility, and extended training hours through the addition of floodlights. These changes were described not as temporary benefits but as structural improvements designed to increase participation and safety at the community level. Riley also highlighted the scale of investment in local venues, pointing to enhanced playing surfaces and night-time accessibility at clubs such as Bay Olympic and Papakura. He viewed these changes as the most visible markers of tournament legacy and described them as contributing to the future growth of the game. Thompson also added that legacy was also being pursued through partnerships, including new financial literacy initiatives for clubs and governance reform efforts aimed at better serving neurodiverse communities.

Claire Patel reinforced this orientation toward long-term change, pointing to equity-focused governance practices emerging in local sport bodies and city agencies. She described how cities varied in their capacity to support these changes but generally showed strong willingness to engage with the legacy agenda. NZ Football's planning documents echoed these priorities, framing the tournament not only as a major event but as a moment to recalibrate organisational norms around equity, inclusion, and community alignment (New Zealand Football, 2022). The MBIE Puawānanga report similarly characterised these shifts as critical to building sustainable civic infrastructure (MBIE, 2024a). Together, these perspectives suggest that the legacy of the tournament was imagined not as a one-off investment, but as a platform for institutional evolution.

5.5 Strategic Storytelling and Civic Momentum

According to the Puawānanga Leverage and Legacy Report, more than 50% of New Zealanders participated in the tournament in some form, whether through match attendance, volunteering, Fan Festival activities, or cultural events (MBIE, 2024b). This number is significant not only for its size but for the context in which it occurred. As Maria Thompson pointed out, *'Football is not our national game'*. The fact that more than half of the population engaged with a sport often considered less popular than rugby or cricket highlights the civic momentum that the event was able to generate. The 50% figure aligned with government legacy goals in terms of reach, but interviews suggest the depth of engagement went

beyond what was anticipated. As Thompson also noted, *'Even in Ubers, the drivers were talking about the Women's World Cup. It wasn't just sport—it was ours as a country'*. These informal indicators such as casual conversations, children wearing player jerseys, and strangers discussing matches in cafes, suggest a level of national embrace that extended beyond the bounds of institutional expectations. The civic identity of the event had spilled beyond stadiums and Fan Zones into everyday life.

One of the more intangible but powerful civic legacies of the tournament was the sense of momentum generated through public storytelling. Campaigns like Equalize brought together women from across sport, business, culture, and activism to share stories of leadership, resilience, and identity. The storytelling was both local and global, with sessions featuring voices like Natalie Portman and Jacinda Ardern alongside community-based leaders. *'There was a huge sense of connection... between all the women and the younger women and really finding solid middle ground'*, Claire Patel observed. It was more than just a speaking series, Equalize became a social platform. The events were designed not only to inspire, but to create sustained networks. *'That connection between speakers... that's going to lead to something'*, Patel predicted. *'We'll see some things come from those speakers for sure'*.

The civic narrative model, platforming lived experience, allowing vulnerability, and encouraging intergenerational exchange, was unusual for a sporting mega-event, but it has since been cited in legacy reports as one of the most socially valuable initiatives (MBIE, 2024a, p. 19). Where traditional sport legacy focuses on participation rates or infrastructure, this narrative continuation seeded deeper change. It modelled the idea that civic pride is not just built through medals or match wins, but through stories that inspire ongoing conversation, community leadership, and public imagination. Visibility is not merely a communication outcome; it is also a civic one.

A significant outcome of the tournament was the long-term shift in New Zealand's football media visibility and accessibility. Increased public familiarity with players like Hannah Wilkinson and Anna Leat fosters stronger identification with national teams and greater participation in local clubs. Historically, women's football in the country suffered from limited coverage. As Thompson recalled, *'Five or six years ago, we might have had one men's national league game broadcast on weekends, and no women's ones'*. The success of the World Cup accelerated a change: now, all national league games, both men's and women's, are broadcast on FIFA+, making football freely available to a global audience (MBIE, 2024a, p. 18). The shift reflects a form of linking social capital in which public institutions leveraged global partnerships to expand access for local audiences.

'Now we have our national leagues on FIFA+, we have more games live-streamed... it raises the profile not just of the game, but of our players, and our coaches, and our

officials’, Thompson added. Moreover, the visibility attached to the 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup has also extended to leadership recognition. Former Football Ferns have reconnected with the game through mentorship and coaching roles after being honoured in cap ceremonies, a symbolic gesture with lasting emotional and institutional significance. Together, these developments point to a legacy of enhanced access, representation, and institutional accountability in New Zealand’s football ecosystem.

The three interviewees identified strategic storytelling as being a key driver of civic engagement throughout the tournament, particularly in shaping how the public connected with players, cultural symbols, and the event’s broader narrative. Thompson discussed the importance of personalising the national team through targeted campaigns, *‘So one of the big campaigns that was done... was connecting... so people knew who Hannah Wilkinson was, so they knew who Anna Leat, the goalkeeper was...’*. This framing strategy was intended to create not only audience recognition but aspirational identification, particularly among young fans. Claire Patel offered a complementary perspective, explaining how the Equalise programme aimed to highlight wāhine across various sectors to elevate visibility and connection. *‘We wanted to use the platform of the Women’s World Cup in New Zealand to celebrate that, to really harness that and celebrate that and showcase all of the amazing wāhine, the trailblazers in New Zealand’*. According to Patel, Equalise served as the catalyst for new professional networks and cultural conversations that would not have emerged otherwise. *‘None of those... the facilitation of those connections wouldn’t have happened without Equalise’*.

Ben Riley spoke to the civic energy that emerged through public storytelling and visibility, noting how strategic media coordination contributed to public momentum. *‘We front-ended a lot of our media efforts to make sure that the first match was a sellout because we knew if Eden Park sells out for a non-traditional sporting event... New Zealand was gonna wake up...’*. That phrase, to me, captures the high stakes of that moment. Filling the stadium would not only mark a record for women’s football in New Zealand, it would demonstrate to the world, and to New Zealanders themselves, that the public was ready to embrace women’s sport as a celebrated part of national life. Riley described how the success of that first match shifted the tone of national conversation around the tournament: *‘It didn’t just wake up, it caught fire’*. This strategic priority influenced the timeline and intensity of media efforts. Riley described how Auckland’s local organizing team deliberately front-loaded its paid and earned media strategy, aligning with FIFA’s local subsidiary (LFS) to coordinate messaging and avoid duplicative efforts across host cities.

The goal was simple, but ambitious: generate critical mass early, so that public interest would build through social media and word of mouth. The sellout of Eden Park, officially recorded at over 42,000 spectators, achieved this goal, setting a national

attendance record for women's sport and becoming an historic milestone (MBIE, 2024b). The success of this strategy had a multiplier effect. Following the sold-out opener, demand for match tickets surged nationwide. As Maria Thompson observed, '*That [opening] match changed everything... Ticket sales skyrocketed. People connected to the event on a civic level*'. This quote indicates that what had begun as a media campaign transitioned into a civic movement that tapped into national pride, curiosity, and the desire to be part of something historic. Importantly, these campaigns were not limited to sport-centric messaging.

As noted within the previous theme, the organisers embedded civic and cultural narratives into their promotional materials, emphasising the mega event as an opportunity to celebrate New Zealand's values of diversity, inclusiveness, leadership, and manaakitanga. This was reflected in promotional visuals that included Māori motifs, bilingual signage, and references to the country's global leadership in gender equity. Rather than positioning the World Cup as an imported spectacle, the campaign localized its meaning, presenting the tournament as an expression of who New Zealand is and who it aspires to be. Such perspectives were also evident within the public documents. Similarly, Equalise was designed not just as a one-time event series, but as an ongoing platform for visibility and public dialogue (New Zealand Story, 2023).

Cultural initiatives such as the poi project and the opening ceremony were consistently framed as moments of national pride, combining creative expression with expressions of kotahitanga and manaakitanga (MBIE, 2024a; New Zealand Football, 2022). Collectively, these efforts underscored the power of narrative, imagery, and symbolism in shaping civic participation before, during, and beyond the tournament. Together, the themes introduced in this section provide a broader view of how civic engagement was interpreted and enacted by institutional actors during the tournament. The cultural integration extended to programming choices. Fan Festivals included kapa haka, poi workshops, and tā moko demonstrations. These choices weren't superficial or symbolic. They represented a conscious effort to create civic spaces in which tangata whenua were visible, respected, and celebrated. As Riley noted: '*It wasn't just about football. It was about showing the best of Aotearoa*'. The result was a form of cultural bridging and institutional modelling.

There was a collective belief that the community groups who were invited to be a part of the experience saw themselves reflected in the delivery of a global event, and national agencies practiced a more inclusive mode of public representation. These choices have already begun to influence how future events are being planned. As Maria noted, '*We learnt with the World Cup that you can plant a seed, and it spreads quickly*'. While the formal post-event impact evaluations capture many outcomes of the World Cup, some of its most meaningful legacies were informal, emotional, and deeply personal, yet no less civic. Acts of

community service, driven by passion rather than pay, reflected a powerful sense of civic responsibility. Emotional milestones also demonstrate how civic engagement isn't about infrastructure, but recognition, memory, and intergenerational connection. For example, the recognition of former Football Ferns through ceremonial cap presentations.

Some of the former Football Fern players, now grandparents, had never been publicly acknowledged. *'One of them said to me, "My grandchildren didn't know I was a Fern... now they'll know,"* Thompson shared. Such kinds of moments are difficult to measure but critically important. They reinforce the emotional bonds between people and their communities, institutions, and histories. They also reflect what Anderson (2006) identifies as the 'everyday impact' often overlooked in large-scale evaluations of social programmes. Together, these reflections point to a broader understanding of legacy, rooted in people, stories, and shared pride, rather than just economic figures or policy outcomes. They remind us that legacy is felt, not built.

5.6 Chapter Discussion

Arguably, the most lasting legacies of the tournament were not only structural but emotional and cultural, rooted in how people experienced inclusion and recognition cultural visibility was a defining element of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup and a lasting part of its civic engagement. From the outset, planners appear to have made deliberate efforts to centre Māori and Pacific cultures within the event branding, ceremonies, and community engagement initiatives. According to the Striking Success report, Māori cultural expression was integrated into the official Draw, the Play-Off Tournament, and the tournament itself via pōwhiri, signage, and storytelling (MBIE, 2024a, pp. 13–15). The consistent presence of te reo Māori and the flying of the Tino Rangatiratanga flag signalled a national commitment to bicultural partnership and inclusion.

The tournament fostered a robust form of linking social capital by creating new relationships between citizens, volunteers, local clubs, and national and international institutions. These relationships were grounded not only in logistical coordination but in shared civic aspirations. Complementing the social capital dynamics already explored, the findings reveal how strategic marketing and public storytelling helped activate civic participation and shape national identity. The unprecedented civic visibility and national enthusiasm surrounding the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup did not occur by accident. It was the result of deliberate, targeted marketing and public relations campaigns. These strategies played a critical role in increasing public awareness and reinforcing a shared sense of civic pride. Event organisers ensured these campaigns were framed not merely around ticket sales or match hype, but around broader themes of identity, equity, and inclusion.

In essence, strategic marketing and storytelling acted as both the spark and fuel of civic engagement. It brought people into the tent, sometimes literally, and then gave them reasons to stay, cheer, reflect, and return. The campaigns didn't just sell tickets, they told a story: of women's excellence, of national pride, and of a civic moment worth remembering. As the next section explores, these efforts aligned in many ways with the legacy goals outlined by event planners and produced outcomes that exceeded initial expectations. While the civic engagement strategies surrounding the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup were thoughtfully planned and broadly publicised, the lived outcomes often exceeded expectations, both in scale and in character. Evaluating the crossover between strategic intention and actual public response reveals a critical insight: that civic engagement, while structured by policy, often unfolds in surprising, organic, and deeply resonant ways.

The ripple effects were also visible in youth engagement and visibility. Civic leaders emphasised the importance of creating spaces where young people could interact with the tournament in meaningful ways (MBIE, 2024b). Open training sessions, community panels, and legacy programmes like Fantails and Football Whānau extended engagement beyond a single match or weekend. These initiatives were not merely symbolic; they fostered long-term interest. For example, Maria Thompson mentioned that local clubs were already reporting increased inquiries from girls and young women about how to join or rejoin football. However, she also cautioned that true participation data would only become reliable in subsequent seasons, given the tournament's timing at the end of the winter football calendar.

Despite this enthusiasm, not all outcomes perfectly matched the hoped-for plan. For example, the Football Ferns' early exit from the tournament could have dampened national interest. However, the opposite occurred. The opening match's historic crowd, paired with the team's spirited performance, created a psychological inflection point. Ben Riley described the national response as a fire being lit: 'That result was beyond expectation... and New Zealand caught fire'. Following the early exit of the host team, the focus of the narrative shifted away from competitive success toward civic celebration and pride in hosting. This shift likely contributed to the sustained momentum that carried through to the later rounds of the tournament, including sold-out knockout stage matches.

5.7. Chapter Summary

Within this chapter, I complemented the personal narrative shared in Chapter Four with an interpretive analysis of institutional perspectives. Key insights were developed from a combination of the four semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and three published legacy reports. In sum, while planning and strategy created the scaffolding for civic engagement, the civic life of the event emerged through social interactions, emotional

resonance, and authentic cultural storytelling. The outcome, according to the four key stakeholders who agreed to be interviewed for this study, was an unforgettable national moment of belonging, pride, and identity. More importantly, it was viewed as an event that created a social legacy for generations to come. The following and final chapter reveals how these unpredictable but profound outcomes underscore the value of using analytic autoethnography in civic studies. The method enabled a deeper, more textured understanding of engagement. One that could capture not only what people did, but what it meant to them.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. Introduction

Throughout this thesis, I have consistently and creatively employed creative analytical practice (CAP) through the use of analytic autoethnography as both a methodological framework and a method of allowing the personal to intersect with the structural (Wright, 2019a, Wright 2019b). Anderson's non-conventional, often questioned, version of autoethnography insists on theoretical engagement and the integration of multiple data sources (Wright, 2017). Analytic Autoethnography, as Anderson (2006) explains, is not about evocative/subjective personal storytelling for its own sake; it is about connecting the self to larger social realities through systematic reflection and engagement with external data. In this context, for this thesis, it enabled me to move fluidly back and forth between my lived experiences (what I saw, what I heard, what I felt, and what I touched), the interview data (what I was told, what I was shown) and the public legacy reports (what I read, what others wanted people to see). As Anderson (2006) explains:

The purpose of analytic ethnography is not simply to document personal experience, but to use empirical data to gain insight into some broader set of social phenomena than that provided by the data themselves.
(Anderson, 2006, pp. 386–387)

Anderson's (2006) conception of autoethnography allowed me to embody the case study, rather than merely observe and evaluate it. The use of analytic autoethnography allowed emotional, relational, and symbolic dimensions of civic life to be brought to the forefront, when these dimensions are often missed in conventional sport event evaluation frameworks that prioritise economic or logistical outputs (refer to section 2.5). Similarly, Putnam's (2000) Social Capital Theory helped me interpret the findings by framing them within the categories of bonding, bridging, and linking capital. This final chapter reflects on how the method enabled deeper insights into the lived experiences of civic engagement that might have otherwise remained hidden. Through integrating theory and practice with a personal lived experience, I have achieved my aim and answered my three research questions (see below). In doing so, I have also been able to unpack how civic engagement initiatives manifest across fan culture, volunteer networks, local governance, cultural performance, and strategic storytelling.

Importantly, this non-traditional, unconventional, method also required vulnerability and discipline. As Ellis et al. (2010) explain, autoethnographers are often criticized as "self-absorbed narcissists who don't fulfil scholarly obligations of hypothesizing, analysing, and theorizing" (para. 37). To counter this critique, I contextualised personal experience with public documents and stakeholder interviews, consciously dialoguing between "what I felt"

and “what others said or planned.” This not only strengthened the credibility of the findings but enriched their interpretive nuance (Wright, 2017).

Adopting this approach within the context of New Zealand added further depth for me personally. As a cultural outsider who has long made this country my adopted home, I moved through the tournament not just as a researcher or a fan, but as someone whose own civic identity was still evolving. The methodology gave me license and creative freedom to reflect critically on these experiences, while also positioning them within the broader civic ecosystem being constructed around the World Cup. In sum, autoethnography made it possible to see the civic engagement strategies not only as policies and actions, but as lived experiences, charged with emotion, identity, and meaning. It is precisely this ability to blend personal voice with theoretical insight that makes the method so well-suited to the study of mega-events. Events that are not only public, but deeply personal to the communities they touch.

6.2 Conclusions

Through the completion of this thesis, I set out to examine the civic engagement strategies developed and experienced during the FIFA Women’s World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023 in New Zealand. Framed through Putnam’s Social Capital Theory and Anderson’s Analytic Autoethnography, the research explored three interlinked questions:

1. What were the characteristics of civic engagement strategies employed by event organizers before, during, and after the FIFA Women’s World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023 in New Zealand?
2. How did these strategies influence community identity and participation?
3. To what extent did the expectations of event planners regarding civic engagement align with the actual outcomes observed during and after the event?

In answering these questions, this thesis has offered both analytical and experiential insight into the mechanics and meanings of civic engagement within a mega-event context. These findings were interpreted primarily through my own lived experiences and participant observations as a fan-researcher, with interviews and public documents providing supplementary context for understanding how engagement was constructed and felt during the tournament. The discussion presented key areas of analysis that, when woven together, demonstrate how the World Cup catalysed not just participation, but belonging, transformation, and legacy.

Four core themes emerged from the analysis, summarising the key findings of this research. First, fan participation fostered bonding and bridging social capital. Close-knit

communities like longstanding football friend groups used the tournament as an opportunity to reconnect. At the same time, new relationships were formed across social and cultural boundaries, particularly in Fan Zones and shared stadium spaces. These moments of cultural exchange, from shared chants to shared celebrations and heartache, reflect how sport can both reinforce and expand civic ties. Second, the tournament created robust linking social capital, particularly through the volunteer programme and the gender-equal facility upgrades implemented in clubs around the country. With over 6,000 volunteers contributing more than 50,000 hours and a 95% attendance rate, the civic connection between individuals and institutions was both deep and widespread. New Zealand Football, local clubs, and government agencies worked collaboratively to create tangible improvements, including floodlights, changing rooms, and advice for equitable club governance, that will significantly outlast the event itself.

Third, storytelling became a vehicle for civic expression. Initiatives such as the Equalise speaker series elevated the voices of wāhine leaders across sectors, encouraging intergenerational dialogue and fostering civic connection through empathy and shared experience. Symbolic gestures like the flying of the Tino Rangatiratanga flag above matches and the incorporation of te reo Māori in public signage reinforced the idea that civic engagement during the World Cup was as much about identity and values as it was about attendance or participation. Fourth, strategic marketing campaigns succeeded in converting awareness into civic momentum. The sell-out of Eden Park was a carefully orchestrated goal that became a symbolic tipping point. What began as a media strategy evolved into a national conversation. Marketing professionals, cultural leaders, and institutional partners shaped narratives that emphasized inclusion, representation, and national pride.

Together, these findings illustrate that civic engagement in this context was not a monolithic concept, but a layered and multifaceted reality experienced differently by fans, organizers, volunteers, and communities. For example, in attending the USA vs. Vietnam match at Eden Park, I described the moment of discovering that the person seated next to me was also from Rochester, Minnesota. In a stadium of over 42,000 people, this encounter may seem like chance. But in the context of autoethnography, it became a point of reflection and a symbol of the global nature of sport, and the shared belonging that arises from such spaces. For me, that moment was not simply anecdotal; it revealed the emotional glue of civic identity.

6.3 Contributions to Knowledge

My thesis makes three primary contributions to academic and practical understandings of civic engagement and sport event legacy. This study also contributes to methodological practice by illustrating how analytic autoethnography can generate civic

insight through lived interpretation, while still integrating institutional and community perspectives. It demonstrates the usefulness of autoethnography in civic studies, particularly within the context of large-scale events. The reflexive dimension of the research allowed for emotional and symbolic insights to be interpreted alongside institutional and structural data. It further expands Putnam's SCT into the field of sports event management, showing how bonding, bridging, and linking capital can be built simultaneously across different layers of civic life. To the best of my knowledge, it provides the first empirical case study of civic engagement within a women's mega-sporting event in New Zealand (if not the world). It captures elements of event policy and legacy planning, through the eyes of the fan, the researcher and the leader. In doing so, it offers an innovative conceptual lens that can be applied to future events in other cultural contexts.

6.4 Limitations

As with all qualitative work, certain limitations are inherent and unavoidable. As such, they need to be acknowledged. This study was conducted shortly after the tournament concluded, meaning that long-term outcomes, particularly in club governance, community participation, or infrastructure use, could not yet be measured. The external deadlines attached to the completion of this masters study also impacted the approach adopted and outcomes generated as a result.

Only four stakeholder interviews were conducted, which, while rich in insight, do not represent all perspectives and prevent my ability to offer any generalisable statements. Broader engagement, and an increased number of interviews, may not have yielded additional findings or resulted in different themes, but would have allowed me to offer more insight from the industry professionals involved in delivering civic engagement through the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup. The interviews were not intended to generalise findings but rather to enrich the personal narrative by offering complementary institutional perspectives. Finally, while autoethnography is grounded in reflexivity, it is also inherently subjective. My perspective as an immigrant, a fan, and an academic shapes the lens through which my findings are interpreted. This was addressed through theoretical engagement and integration of stakeholder perspectives. Though the employment of autoethnography, however, I hoped to turn a well-documented weakness of qualitative inquiry into a strength.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Over the course of writing this thesis, several areas for further study have emerged that would help deepen and diversify academic understanding of civic engagement in the context of sport mega-events:

6.5.1 Longitudinal Tracking of Civic Engagement Outcomes

One of the most promising areas for future research is the longitudinal assessment of civic engagement outcomes using tools like FIFA's five-year legacy reporting framework. While this study provided an immediate post-event snapshot of community participation, volunteerism, and engagement, long-term tracking can assess the durability of these outcomes. Key indicators to monitor might include changes in club membership, sustained volunteer retention, the growth and continuity of youth programmes like Fantails and Kicking It, and the long-term usage of upgraded facilities.

Researchers conducting this type of work could benefit from partnering with local clubs, national federations, and government agencies to gather both quantitative measures such as participation data and qualitative insights from interviews or community reports. Using a combination of these approaches would allow future studies to better understand how engagement evolves over time. This includes identifying the reasons some initiatives are sustained while others fade away. A more comprehensive tracking effort could help distinguish between legacy outcomes that are primarily symbolic and those that lead to meaningful, lasting civic transformation.

6.5.2 Deeper Analysis of Gender Equity in Sport Governance

This study identified early signs of structural reform aimed at promoting gender equity in New Zealand's football landscape. Examples include updates to club constitutions and the development of initiatives such as Xero's 'Together Stronger' plan. These changes are promising, but they were just beginning to take shape during the time of this research. Future studies should follow up on how these reforms are being rolled out, whether they are being evaluated, and how people within the system are experiencing them in practice.

Researchers could explore the perspectives of women in coaching, administrative, and leadership roles to assess whether governance reforms have led to meaningful change. Studies might also compare regions or clubs to see how gender equity policies are being interpreted and applied. Investigating challenges to implementation, or highlighting success stories, would offer important insights for sport organisations aiming to promote equity more effectively. This type of work would also support broader conversations about inclusion and representation across all levels of sport governance.

6.5.3 Cross-Cultural and Cross-Code Comparative Studies

It would be valuable for future researchers to carry out comparative case studies that look at civic engagement strategies across different sporting codes, cultures, or countries.

This would help assess whether the types of engagement observed during the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023 in New Zealand are unique to this setting or can be applied elsewhere. Events in other small nations, for example, or events hosted by Indigenous-led organisations, could offer useful points of comparison.

Researchers might compare civic initiatives from women's and men's sport events or examine how different types of legacy planning play out in various social contexts. These comparisons could help identify which approaches to civic engagement are adaptable across cultures and which depend more heavily on local traditions or political systems. Insights from such studies would be especially useful for practitioners planning future events and looking to build meaningful, inclusive public engagement.

6.5.4 Expanded Use of Autoethnographic and Hybrid Methodologies

This thesis highlighted the strengths of analytic autoethnography in capturing aspects of civic engagement that are difficult to measure through conventional methods. Emotional responses, personal connections, and cultural reflections all played a major role in shaping how people experienced the World Cup. Future research should continue exploring how hybrid approaches can offer a fuller understanding of those experiences.

Potential areas for growth include collaborative autoethnographies that bring in multiple perspectives, digital approaches that reflect the online and social media components of engagement, or creative methods like storytelling, photography, and public art. These approaches allow researchers to explore not only what happened during civic events, but how people made sense of those experiences in their everyday lives. Used thoughtfully, these methods can help bridge the gap between academic research and lived community realities.

6.6 Final Thoughts

In the end, what made this tournament memorable was not only its matches, but the meaning people, myself included, found in them. My experience, and that of those I interacted with, went beyond attending a sports event. It felt like being part of something special. Similarly, the local volunteers reported that they took pride in the role they played. The local clubs didn't just receive funding, they began to imagine new ways of being equitable and inclusive. And for many, including myself, the event was not just a sporting event, it reflected who the people of New Zealand are and offered a vision of who they might become in the future.

As a fan of the game of football, the first time I heard the FIFA Women's World Cup Australia & New Zealand 2023 was coming to my home of New Zealand, I knew I had to go.

I didn't know I would attend as a researcher. I had no idea I would speak directly with so many brilliant people who were directly involved in the tournament. And I had never deeply considered the concepts of civic engagement and personal narrative. All I wanted was to cheer on the United States Women's National Team and spend time with my friends. But I got to do all of that. And for that, I am eternally grateful to my adopted home country.

I was in Sports Heaven. I was in and amongst what previously I had only been able to dream about... I was in my country, with my people, and it was beautiful.

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Appendix A- Participant Information Sheet

The logo for AUT (Auckland University of Technology) is displayed in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters on a black rectangular background.The logo for Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau is displayed in white, sans-serif capital letters on a red rectangular background.

Date Information Sheet Produced:

21 June 2023

Project Title

Exploring the role of civic engagement around the hosting of major sports events; the 2023 FIFA Women's in New Zealand.

An Invitation

My name is Aaron Jefferson, and I am a student at AUT pursuing a Master of Business degree in Sport Leadership and Management. As part of that qualification, I am required to complete my master's thesis, which explores the role of civic engagement in delivering the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup. I am inviting you to be interviewed about your experience in engaging the public in for this event.

What is the purpose of this research?

Civic engagement has been identified as a crucial component in the planning and execution of major sports events, to improve the experience of local residents, attendees, and other stakeholders. The purpose of this research is to identify, describe, and analyse the civic engagement strategies employed by the organizers and stakeholders of a major international sports event, in order to add to the existing body of academic knowledge in this topic by providing readers with valuable insights and advice for future events.

The findings of this research may also be used for academic publications and presentations.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You were invited to participate in this research because you may be able to provide thoughtful insight on the planning and/or execution of the event's civic engagement strategy. Invitations to participate in this research were sent through professional social networking site LinkedIn or through similar networking platforms and shared with relevant professionals.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. If you choose to participate, please reply to the primary researcher Aaron Jefferson at vqg5037@autuni.ac.nz. You will be asked to complete a Consent Form, which is attached to your invitation. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any words given by you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

The research methodology for my thesis includes my own observations of the event itself, which includes me attending civic engagement activations and observing signage, crowd sizes, and public speakers. The study will include content analysis of promotional materials published for the event, as well as semi-structured confidential interviews of key decision makers and stakeholders who have knowledge of the events' civic engagement strategies. Interview participants will be asked to participate in an interview after the event. Insights from the observations, content analysis, and interviews will be analysed for similar themes and lessons. The final report will gather those themes and related them to the existing academic knowledge in the field.

For your interview you will be asked to share your perspectives, knowledge, and insights for about one hour, at a professional or public location (such as at the AUT offices or a public venue). I will record and transcribe the interviews in order to identify and analyse key themes across all of the participants.

What are the discomforts and risks?

Due to the small number of potential participants with direct knowledge of the event's civic engagement strategies, I cannot guarantee that readers will not be able to determine your identity.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

In order to promote confidentiality, I will not reveal your name, professional role, or any other personal information in the study. I will use pseudonyms and generic role descriptions.

What are the benefits?

This research will give you the opportunity to thoughtfully evaluate your experience in civic engagement for this tournament, share your insights with the readers, and learn from the insights provided by peer professionals. As the researcher, I will benefit from being able to compare existing research on civic engagement strategies in a sports event context with the lived experiences and knowledge of those who are actively engaged in the field. I will also receive the qualification of Master of Business upon completion of this thesis.

How will my privacy be protected?

In order to provide confidentiality, your name, professional role, or any other personal information will not be published in the study. I will use pseudonyms and generic role descriptions.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

You will be asked to participate one interview, approximately one hour in length.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You will have approximately 4 weeks from the 18th of August to consider this invitation before interviews begin on the 18th of September.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

If you choose, you will be given a copy of the completed thesis. This will be emailed to you upon successful completion of the thesis requirements.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr. Richard Wright, Richard.wright@aut.ac.nz, +64 9921 9999 Ext.7312.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Aaron Jefferson, vqg5037@autuni.ac.nz, +64 9921 9999 Ext.7312

Researcher Contact Details:

Aaron Jefferson, vqg5037@autuni.ac.nz, +64 9921 9999 Ext.7312

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr. Richard Wright, Richard.wright@aut.ac.nz, +64 9921 9999 Ext.7312.

Approved by the University of Technology Ethics Committee 25 July 2023, AUTECH Reference number 23/154.

Appendix B – Participant Consent Form



TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

Project title: *Exploring the role of civic engagement around the hosting of major sports events; the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup in Australia & New Zealand.*

Project Supervisor: *Dr. Richard Wright*

Researcher: *Aaron Jefferson*

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 21 June 2023.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes No

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....
.....
.....
.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 25 July 2023 AUTEC Reference number 23/154

Appendix C – Permission to Access Form



TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

Project title: *Exploring the role of civic engagement around the hosting of major sports events; the 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup in New Zealand.*

Project Supervisor: *Dr. Richard Wright*

Researcher: *Aaron Jefferson*

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 21 June 2023.
- ~~I give permission for the researcher to undertake research within~~

- I give permission for the researcher to access: *staff name*
_____), an employee of: *organization name*

Principal’s CEO’s signature:

.....

Principal’s CEO’s name:

.....

Principal’s CEO’s Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....
.....
.....
.....

Date:

***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 25 July
AUTEC Reference number 23/154***

Appendix D – Ethics Approval

The logo for Auckland University of Technology (AUT) features the letters 'AUT' in a bold, white, sans-serif font against a black background.

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

25 July 2023

Richard Wright

Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Richard

Re Ethics Application: **23/154 Exploring the role of civic engagement around the hosting of major sports events; the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup in Australia & New Zealand.**

Thank you for your responses to AUTEK's conditions.

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 25 July 2026.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. Amendment of the Information Sheet as follows:
 - a. Removal of the word participant from "participant observations" as it reads as though the participant will be observed and they are only being interviewed;
 - b. Removal of the word each from "each interview" as it reads as though the participant will be doing more than one interview and they are not;
 - c. Amend the level of confidentiality offer to 'limited' to reflect the person given to condition 8 in the previous letter;
2. A Consent and Release Form is not required for online interviews. Use the normal Consent Form;
3. AUTEK recommends sending a summary of the research to participants rather than or in addition to the link to the whole thesis.

Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEK unless requested but must be completed before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTEK.
2. All public facing documents must have the AUTEK approval number and be of a high standard of spelling and grammar. Dates on the Information Sheet(s) and Consent Form(s) must be consistent.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEK prior to being implemented.
4. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
5. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project.
6. Any serious or adverse events must be reported to AUTEK, this includes unforeseen issues that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
7. AUTEK grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management permission for access from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

The application number and title need to be referenced on all correspondence related to this project.

All forms are available online <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEK Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: ADJEFFERSON@OUTLOOK.COM; melody.johnston@aut.ac.nz