

Understanding the Sport Participation Environment: Squash in New South Wales

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Abstract

The promotion of all types of physical activity is becoming more prominent in health policy. Yet, sport participation offers additional benefits that go beyond just the physical health benefits, such as better physical role functioning, vitality, social functioning, mental health, and life satisfaction, when compared to participants of purely physical activity. Sport participation in Australia has seen a significant decline across all sports, with squash witnessing a disproportionately higher decline than others. Research on the key factors that influence sport participation is important to enable policy makers and sport managers to implement initiatives that best promote, and support, community sport participation. The context of this research is to explore the decline of squash participation in New South Wales (NSW) using the broad lens of the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) to guide the research. The SEM highlights the key factors that influence sport participation, such as policy, environmental, organisational, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors. The purpose of this study was to firstly, identify the key factors that have influenced squash participation in NSW and secondly, investigate potential opportunities that could address factors that have contributed to a decline of participation. A qualitative methodology using mixed methods was used to collect data. The core interview data was collected through semi-structured interviews from seven participants, and the themes that were identified from this data guided the secondary document analysis. Using thematic analysis, an understanding of the key themes that have influences squash participation and how they could be addressed to increase participation was identified. The four key themes that were identified were: facilities, development programs and pathways offered, governance, and trust between key stakeholders. Opportunities for change were then discussed relating to each of the themes. Each of the themes, and sub-themes, interacted with various levels of the SEM. Overall, this approach has generated a unique perspective of the wider environment that has influenced squash participation in NSW.

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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 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 by student:

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Ethics Approval

Ethics approval was granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 6th September 2021 21/296

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

There is growing evidence that participation in sport has health advantages beyond the physical, in that it can radically improve mental and social health (Clearinghouse for Sport, n.d.). Research has shown that participation in organised sport can deliver increased health outcomes due to the social nature of participation (Westerbeek & Eime, 2021). For children and adolescents, involvement in sport is related to not only higher rates of physical fitness, greater involvement of physical activity over time and lower rates of obesity, it also contributes to higher rates of self-esteem, more positive social interactions, and decreased levels of depressive symptoms (Vella et al., 2017). Similarly, the benefits to adults participating in sport includes improved general well-being and reduced stress. Older adults also gain significant social health benefits through sport providing a sense of belonging and socialization (Eime et al., 2013). The benefits associated with sport participation highlights the reasons why governments invest in resources and policies to increase sport participation (Sport Australia, 2021).

There is an established view of sport participation and sport policy, centred on the function that sport is assumed to have numerous democratic, social, educational and health benefits (Hoekman, 2017). However, over recent years, national governing agencies have increasingly shifted from traditional, organized, and competitive club-based sport promotion to less structured, non-competitive, and individual forms of physical activity (Westerbeek & Eime, 2021). This shift to promoting physical activity can be seen in Sport Australia's Strategic Plan for sport participation, 'Sport 2030'. The primary target is to increase the number of Australia's being active which is focused around 'more Australians, more active, more often', through the promotion of any type of physical activity (Sport Australia, 2018). However, this shift to emphasising physical activity, rather than sport, has problematic implications. For example,

participation in club-based sport offers better physical role functioning, vitality, social functioning, mental health, and life satisfaction when compared to those that participate in informal physical activities due to the community-based nature of a sports club (Eime et al., 2013).

Understanding declining sport participation trends is important for policy makers to implement initiatives that support community sport participation. It has been found that two-thirds of all Australian children participate in organised sports per year (Clearinghouse for Sport, 2022). However, these participation rates significantly decline in late childhood and early adolescence (Westerbeek & Eime, 2021). The trend of declining sport participation continues as the population continues to age. Although there is an overall trend of declining participation in sport, some sports have recorded increases in participation in Australia. Sports such as basketball and AFL have recorded increases of approximately 60% between 2001 and 2016 (Neal, 2020). While other sports, such as squash, have recorded a 65% decline in participation between the same time frames (Neal, 2020). The significant decline in participation of squash within Australia provides an interesting context to explore the role of the wider organisational environment and its effect on participation rates.

Individual predictors of sport participation are dependent on a mix of biological, social, and economic variables. Vella et al. (2014) found that predictors of participation in organized sport, and predictors of dropout, have a large amount of overlap. Educational attainment and household income are important explanatory variables in models of sport participation (Breuer et al., 2011). However, individual characteristics are not the only influencing factors for people. For sporting organisations, the Office of Sport (n.d) highlighted nine key drivers to participation that operate across the establishment and covers all elements of a participant's experience, such as governance, management, alignment, product design, facilities and access, commercial model, marketing and communication, market insights, delivery, and partnerships. This highlights the complexity of sport participation and the importance of using a model that incorporates a wider lens to assess the numerous factors that impact participation to gain an in-depth understanding of participation trends (Rowe et al., 2013).

The majority of research exploring sport participation largely focuses on individual predictors of sport participation. However, these methods do not necessarily provide a broad insight into the influence of these wider factors such as organisation and governance influences on participation, which is inherently complex (Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006; Rhodri et al., 2016). Predictors of participation in sport is multi-dimensional and operate across individual, interpersonal, community, organisational and societal levels (Rowe et al., 2013). When involved in sport, at any level, individual experience and their interpretation of other actions is an essential influencer of participation behaviour (Guillan, 2019). As individuals interact with the environment around them, they accumulate experiences. They learn what does and does not work for themselves and within the organization, creating a ‘historical horizon’ to make judgements and interpretations (Shilbury et al., 2013). Every individual provides an assortment of components to the whole of the operation of a sporting organization (Guillen, 2019). This individual perception and interpretation of the environment is why it is important to understand needs of individual squash players, as well as those in management and governance.

Despite the popularity of squash internationally, there is little research that investigates the management of squash organisations. By using a framework that is capable of exploring the multiple and complex aspects of a sport environment, an understanding of squash in Australia can be achieved. The Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) provides sports management researchers with a framework to shape their research when examining sport participation as it investigates the various levels of the sporting organisations environment and how it influences on behaviour (Rowe et al., 2013).

This research utilised a descriptive qualitative approach to assess sport participation in squash. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven individuals with extensive experience within squash in NSW. Participants were purposefully selected using the SEM as a foundation to ensure each level was addressed. The themes that were extracted from the interview data were then used to guide secondary document analysis to provide additional context to these ideas. This assisted the researcher to

extract rich data in relation to the participants experiences in squash in NSW and what they perceived to have influenced participation.

1.2 Research Context

The purpose of this research paper is to examine the wider environment of squash in New South Wales (NSW) and identify how this has influenced participation in squash. Squash has an extensive and rich history in NSW with the first courts being established in 1913 (Mudford, 1998). At its height, squash in Australia saw an estimated one million players participating in the sport regularly however, squash has experienced a significant and continual decline in participation since. Squash in NSW is primarily managed by Squash NSW, the state sport organisation (SSO), who operates under the national sporting organisation (NSO), Squash Australia, to implement participation programs, competitions, and provide support to affiliated facilities and players.

Squash NSW is a small regional sport organisation that primarily relies on government funding, income generated from the Sydney Pennant competitions, and affiliation fees. Squash in Australia has seen a 65% decline in participation since 2001 (Neal, 2021). This decline has been attributed to significant loss of facilities and the lack of successful Australian elite squash players boosting exposure (Neal, 2020).

A significant decline of squash facilities across NSW has coincided with the decrease in participation numbers. Previous studies have shown that a loss of sport facilities can have a negative impact on participation as the availability of sport infrastructure and participation in sport (Sherry, Schulenkorf, & Phillips, 2016). -The decline in squash participation had a major influence on the funding available through the loss of competition and affiliation fees. Funding availability has a significant impact on a sport organisations ability to implement programmes and promote participation (Jones, 2008) Nevertheless, sport participation is influenced by factors that cover more than just facilities and funding (Eime et al., 2013; Rowe et al., 2013). The decline in participation of squash in NSW provides an

interesting scope to assess the major themes that have influenced this trend with the use of the SEM as a guiding lens.

1.3 Research Aim and Design

The aim of this research is to identify and build an understanding of the factors that influence participation in squash in New South Wales (NSW). This knowledge can be used to inform sport managers to potentially influence participation positively as well as influence further research to adopt a SEM when looking at complex phenomenon such as participation. The following research questions are explored:

- How did the wider organisational environment influence participation of squash in NSW?
- What can be done within the organisational environment to increase squash participation in NSW?

1.4 Structure of Dissertation

The structure of the current dissertation is presented in five chapters. This chapter presents a discussion of the research gap regarding sport participation and the need to adopt a wider lens to assess sport participation as well as an overview of the aim and objectives of the research. Chapter two provides a review of the current literature framed around sport participation. An overview of the development of the SEM and its use in recent sport participation research and each of the key factors is provided as well. The final section covers the history of squash in NSW and how the SEM would be beneficial lens to frame this research. Chapter three highlights and validates the methodology used for this research. Chapter four presents the results of the current research based on the key themes found in the data gathered from the interviews and the secondary document analysis. Chapter five contains a discussion of the findings and their relationship with current literature. This section also includes managerial implication for sport managers to positively influence participation as well as limitation of the current research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Australia has seen a significant decline in squash participation. This is different to other countries, such as the United States, which had a significant growth in participation in the past decade (US Squash, n.d.; World Squash Federation, n.d.). Since the 1980's, squash participation in Australia has declined from one million participants to an estimated 100,000 playing in 2020 (Neal, 2020). This research explores the wider squash environment including barriers, and opportunities, to better understand participation decline in Australia. This chapter is a literature review covering the importance of sport participation, the 'Socio-Economic Model of Sport Participation', and an overview of squash in New South Wales (NSW), Australia.

2.1 Sport Participation

Participation in sport provides significant health benefits, creates social capital, and provides economic opportunities that positively impacts society (Clearinghouse for Sport, n.d.). Research on the key factors that influence sport participation is important to enable policy makers to implement initiatives that best promote, and support, community sport participation. However, there is a foundational constraint

to the application of sport participation research, as there is no common definition of sport participation in existing literature. Researchers tend to take one of two definitions of sport participation. Some argue that sport participation is broad, and includes all physical activity such as walking, going to the gym, and gardening (May, 2021). In contrast, others focus on a narrower scope of sport participation distinguishing it from physical activity or active recreation (Ruseski et al., 2011). May (2021) identifies a sport participant as a person who takes part in a sport activity that has rules, goals, and requires specific skills, whether in a formal or informal capacity. Zourikian et al. (n.d.) goes further to define physical activity as bodily movement that increases energy expenditure such as gardening and walking, while exercise is like physical activity, but this is specifically planned, structured and repetitive such as jogging and gym; specifying the difference between these activities from sport.

In Australia, the line between sport, physical activity and active recreation is becoming less distinguished, as national policy frameworks and participation strategies shift focus to physical activity more broadly, rather than organised sport specifically (Rowe et al., 2018). From an organisational perspective, the distinction between physical activity and competitive sport is important, as the delivery of sport within a club requires specific strategies to target certain population groups, which requires specialised insights that extend past a basic understanding of physical activity and leisure (Rowe et al., 2018). Therefore, research is needed to build on existing knowledge with respect to sport participation, rather than physical activity as a whole, to better inform sport organisations and community sport clubs on strategies to influence participation.

Initiatives targeted at increasing participation in sport have two distinct categories that are the primary focus of organisations when they are trying to implement a program. These programmes are either designed for the purpose of ‘sport development’ or ‘sport for development’ (Shilbury et al., 2008). Sport development focuses on elite progression, with sport organisations primary focus being to nurture and progress talented athletes, whereas ‘sport for development’ programmes focus on the role sport can play in contributing to community wellness (Rowe et al., 2013). From a community sport perspective,

sport development encompasses both competitive and informal sport. For example, many community sport organisations in Australia seek to promote community wellness, rather than simply promoting sport in the community, to bring about elite level success (Rowe et al., 2013).

In Australia, there has been a 27% decline in sport participation across all sports, from 2019 to 2020 (Clearinghouse for Sport, 2021). Currently, there is approximately 80% of Australian adults participate in at least one session of physical activity a week. However, sport participation statistics state that 55% of females, and 70% of men participate in at least one structured sport a week (Clearinghouse for Sport, 2021). This highlights a significant disparity in both sport participation and physical activity as well as the gender difference of participation in Australia. Although the promotion of all types of physical activity is important, sport participation offers additional benefits that go beyond just the physical health benefits, as it significantly improves mental and social health, as well as provide behavioural and developmental benefits (Westerbeek & Emie, 2021). Furthermore, it is argued that those that participate in club-based sport have better physical role functioning, vitality, social functioning, mental health, and life satisfaction than gymnasium and walking participants (Emie et al., 2013).

To increase participation in sport it is essential that physical education at the school-aged population is a priority. This is the primary phase that physical literacy is developed and without this it is difficult to develop these skills later in life and can be a significant factor to why adults report that they do not participate in sport (Westerbeek & Emie, 2021). This highlights the importance of promoting sport from an early age to ensure that the wider population can access the benefits that are associated with life-long sport participation.

Participation literature is fragmented and spans across multiple disciplines. However, much of the research focuses on both sport and active recreation participation without considering the wider environmental implications that affect sport organisations (Rowe et al., 2013). Nonetheless, studies that use cross-collaboration across a range of macro- and micro- environmental factors have proven to provide useful insights that can influence the sport industry (Hoekman, 2018). Westerbeek and Eime (2021) found

that some of the primary factors that focus on the wider environment that act as key influences of sport participation are funding, community, policy, technology, and environmental factors. Research that has a wider view of sport participation has the potential to provide sport organisations with insights that can be used to implement innovative programs and practices that can increase participation.

This dissertation is an investigation of the broad environment of sport participation through the lens of the socio-ecological model to assess the factors that have resulted in the decline in participation of squash in NSW, Australia. The socio-ecological model enables participation trends to be assessed with the individual, as the centre of sport, while also considering multiple nesting layers that address interpersonal influences, organisational and facility components, the community, and policy and governance. This broad overview of human behaviour, and the systems in place to influence it, enables researchers to gain a richer look at the key aspects that have influenced sport participation in squash in NSW.

2.2 The Socio-Ecological Model

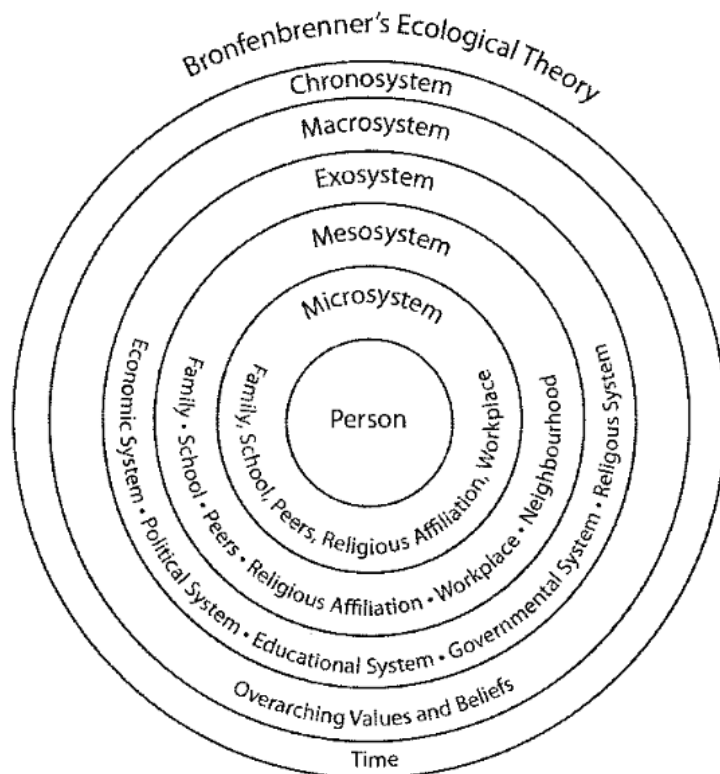
There is increasing recognition that human behaviour is not uni-dimensional, but rather a multi-dimensional phenomenon with social and environmental factors interacting with each other to influence behavioural outcomes (Vella, 2014). This understanding has resulted in an increase in the use of the socio-ecological model (SEM) to assess behavioural trends (Rouseevell et al., 2012). Social ecology acts as a set of theoretical principals that assist researchers to understand the interconnectedness between a wide range of personal and environmental factors that impact human behaviour (Stokols, 1996). This model has been used extensively within health research, however, there is little application of the model in the assessment of how social and environmental elements influence participation rates within a sport context.

The SEM was first introduced by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the 1970's using the conceptual model to assess human development (Bronfennrenner, 1977, Kalanowski, 2017;). Bronfennrenner's (1977) theory was

illustrated by nesting circles which placed the individual in the centre encircled by several systems (Figure 1). The microsystem, closest to the individual, contains the greatest influences and incorporates the interactions and relationships of the direct surroundings (Bronfenrenner, 1977). The second circle is the mesosystem, that looks beyond immediate interactions, which includes those the individual has a direct connection with such as work and school. The ecosystem does not directly impact the individual but applies both negative and positive interactive influences on the individual such as community settings and social groups. The macrosystem incorporates societal and cultural values and impacts. Finally, the chronosystem contains both internal and external elements of time and historical content. The SEM asserts that health is influenced by the interaction between the characteristics of the individual, the community, and the environment that includes the physical, social, and political components (Kalanowski, 2017).

Figure 1.

Bronfenbrenner's Socio-ecological Model



An early adoption of the SEM model was used in the health promotion sector to target health promotion interventions (McLeroy et al., 1988). They followed the original SEM's five primary factors, starting as a broad scope and progressing to an individual level with a sport specific application. The outer most layer refers to public policy factors that relate to local, state, and national laws and policies. The next layer refers to community factors that addresses relationships among organisations, institutions, and informal networks within (McLeroy et al., 1988). The third layer refers to the institutional factors related to social institutions with organisational characteristics and formal rules and regulations for operation (McLeroy et al., 1988). The fourth layer refers to interpersonal processes and primary groups relating to the formal and informal social network and social support systems (McLeroy et al., 1988). Finally, the fifth layer refers to intrapersonal characteristics for the individual such as knowledge, attitudes, behaviour, self-concept, skills and includes the developmental history of the individual (McLeroy et al., 1988). The use of the SEM model within health promotion argued that our beliefs, understandings, and theories are the primary determinants of behaviour. The use of these five factors for analysis of health-related behaviours is useful for using this model to explore sport participation, as it highlights the importance of factors that exist outside of just the individual motivators. This provides policy makers insight into potential interventions to modify behaviour that influence governance, organisational, environmental, and social factors, as well as individual factors to better influence health-related behaviours like sport participation (McLeroy et al., 1988).

Recent research has applied the SEM as a framework to explore factors that impact sport participation from a wider organisational perspective (Rowe et al., 2013). It is believed that no one factor, or set of factors, sufficiently explains human behaviour (Kalanowski, 2017). The SEM's multifaceted approach has made it an attractive model to apply to the study of sport participation behaviour, as with human development, as there are different social and environmental implications that influence the behaviour of an individual throughout their life span. Rowe et al. (2013) used the SEM to develop a

conceptual model that utilised four main categories, rather than being nesting layers, as standalone concepts that interact with each other to influence behaviour. Furthermore, Eime et al. (2013) developed a ‘Health through Sport’, conceptual model, underpinned by the SEM, that depicts the relationship between determinants driving participation in sport, as well as reporting the physical, psychological, and social benefits of participating in organized sport. Similarly, to the Bronfenbrenner (1977) approach, the model contains five primary layers that start as a broad scope and progresses to an individual level.

SEM’s have been applied to explore influencing factors to sport participation in multiple cases. Casey et al. (2009) used the socio-ecological approach to examine participation of sport among adolescent girls in rural areas and found that activities need to be fun, involve friends and be supported by family and teachers through positive role modelling. Furthermore, they found on an organisational level, girls find male physical education teachers as a potential constraint, and that they view club sports as being overly competitive. Vella et al. (2015) explored the determinants of participation and dropout in organised sports through a socio-ecological lens, and found that the key determinants of sport participation were gender, household income, main spoken language at home, parental education, being taken to a sport event, and access to a specialised physical education teacher during primary school. Whilst research on sport participation using the SEM has been based on individuals’ factors, increasingly research has examined sport participation in a broader manner.

Whilst research on sport participation has largely been based on individual factors, research is increasingly being examined in a broader manner. Predictors of participation in sport is complex and operate across individual, interpersonal, community, environmental and policy-driven factors (Eime et al. 2013). An understanding of individual experience can be obtained by studying what people think, their ideas, and the meanings that are important to them (Shilbury et al., 2021). When involved in a sport organisation, at any level, individual experience and their interpretation of other actions is an essential influencer of their behaviour within the organisation (Guillan, 2019). For this study, a combination of

Eime et al.'s (2013) 'Health through Sport' model and with Rowe et al.'s (2013) model was utilised to explore the influencing factors of the decline of squash participation in NSW.

2.2.1 Public Policy Factors

Public policy is the outer most factor of the SEM, representing legislation and policy relating to sport, health, funding, workplace, environmental and facilities (Rowe et al., 2013). This layer also includes education and research which describes public policy, and its influences on sport organisations (Golden & Earp, 2012; Rowe et al., 2013). Although public policy does not directly influence the individual, it does influence sport institutions and organisations that ultimately affect sport participation.

In Australia, national sport organisations (NSOs) are non-profit organisations that rely on federal and state government grants, supplemented by revenues from memberships, competition, program fees and sponsorship. The structure of sport organisations reflects Australia's federated model of government in which state sport organisations (SSO) are affiliated to the NSO, and are responsible for the management of the sport in their state (O'Boyle & Shilbury, 2016). The responsibility of SSO's is to deliver programs designed to foster participation, as well as identify and develop elite athletes based on initiatives established by NSO's. The relationship between the NSO and the SSO are central to the strategic governing function of the sport (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015).

A primary role of NSO's and SSO's is policy development. The role of policy development in a sport organisation is to address an issue, or achieve specific outcomes that may need to be addressed, such as the implementation of Child Protection Policy to protect the interests and safety of children participating in a sport (Sam, 2009; Squash NSW, n.d.). Sport policy is often seen as being about the allocation of resources, however this can be difficult for policy makers to prioritise the initiatives that need to be address (sportanddev.org, n.d.). Sam (2009) signalled three broad characteristics of problems which can be applied to sport policy: (1) difficulties in problem definition, (2) uncertainties regarding causal chains and mechanisms, and (3) a propensity for remedies to result in new or unintended problems

or to exacerbate existing challenges. These issues can be seen in the results of Sport Australia's sport policy being based on the ideal that funding to high-performance sport will 'trickle down' to promote grassroots participation. However, the effectiveness of this approach has been continually questioned and many grassroots sports operate with limited resources (Hassen, 2018).

According to the SEM the availability of resources is a major influencer of sport participation for sport organisations (Rowe et al., 2013). When an organisation's resources are limited, this creates significant difficulties for directors and managers to be able to implement meaningful change (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015). The funding network for sport organisations is complicated, yet essential, to the operation of an organisation and the implementation of programs that promote participation in sport (Jones, 2008). The Australian Government invests approximately \$248.8 million into sport, including \$132.8 million in high performance programs and \$40.8 million for the national sporting school's programs (Colbeck, 2021). The significant investment that is invested into NSO's in Australia highlights the importance that the government places on sport. However, the disparity of funding allocations based on international achievement emphasizes the importance of high-performance success to Sport Australia. Funding for Olympic high-performance programs, such as swimming, can be 11 times more compared to non-Olympic sports such as squash (Sport Australia, 2020). This means that sports like squash are unable to provide adequate support for the emerging and current high-performance athletes, which creates a continued cycle of under-performance on the world stage, and therefore a continual decline in funding.

The Australian Institute of Sport (AIS), in collaboration with Sport Australia, created the high-performance strategic plan 'The Winning Edge' (Clearinghouse for Sport, 2021). The goal of this strategic plan is to re-establish Australia as a top Commonwealth Games nation within the 2012–2022 period. This focus on Commonwealth Games excellence in Australia's high-performance planning can be seen in a comparative study of 15-countries Sport Policy factors Leading to International Sporting Success (SPLISS). Australia was identified as a nation that significantly prioritizes funding elite sport over community sport (De Bosscher et al., 2015). This study found that most countries that prioritise elite

preparation were more successful, than those that did not. Nonetheless, the Australian Government, have recently announced they will be taking a more practical view of where to invest in the nation's sport delivery system, putting a higher priority on grassroots and community sport than they previously have (Department of Health, 2022).

The 'Sport 2030' strategic plan reflects a shift in Sport Australia's priorities, from a primary focus on elite sport to integrating a population-based holistic and lifelong approach to sport and physical activity (Department of Health, 2022). The expressed priorities are now to build a more active Australia, safeguard the integrity of sport, achieve sporting excellence, and strengthen Australia's sport industry (Department of Health, 2022). The specific targets set to achieve this are through improving physical health, improving mental health and personal development, strengthening communities, and growing the economy (Westerbrook & Eime, 2021). This could potentially benefit participation efforts by providing more resources to sport organisations to implement their programs and develop new initiatives.

It is evident that many sport organisations in Australia are constrained by funding disparity and prohibitive institutional contexts which they exist in, which will have a significant constraining influence on their ability to positively influence participation (Smith et al., 2015). Funding cuts force organisation to be overly operational and short-term oriented in their approach, causing destabilization of future success and the undermining of the stakeholder relationships (Bestock et al., 2017). The strategy of retrenchment is a common reaction to the reduction of funding for sport organisations. Retrenchment is the process of "turning the organisation into one that is smaller, doing less, consuming fewer resources, but still doing something and doing it well" (Bestock et al., 2017, p. 8). However, the restructuring of an organisation can trigger alterations that cause additional pressures at a time when resources are already limited (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006). Furthermore, these changes create barriers to the future coordination and cooperation of sport organisations, particularly in elite sport where the loss of funding creates an environment of distrust between the organisation, coaches, and athletes (Bestock et al., 2017).

According to the SEM, public policy has a considerable influence on sport participation as it primarily influences how a sport organisation operates, the funding and resources that is available to an organisation, and what the organisation determines the primary direction will be. Previously, Sport Australia has highlighted high-performance sport as their primary focus for funding, with performance on a significant world stage like the Olympics and the Commonwealth Games as a significant factor that influences their financial contributes to each sport (Clearinghouse for Sport, 2021). However, Sport Australia's latest strategic plan has shifted their focus to grassroots participation. This is a notable change in policy that influences the funding distribution to sport organisations. This highlights the significance of sport policy and its influence on the resources that are available to sport organisation (Department of Health, 2022).

The policy factors associated with sport are essential to the development, funding, and resource availability of sport. Considering this SEM lens when looking at sport participation is paramount as these factors have a significant influence on participation within a sport through its influence on how a sport organisation operates, what they can deliver, and how they are able to deliver the sport. Although, policy, governance and funding are essential to organisational operation, research has shown that there is a need to look at the whole delivery system across macro, meso, and micro levels to capture the bigger picture and inform sport management strategies for mass participation (Kumar et al., 2018).

2.2.2 Environmental Factors

The environmental factor of the SEM refers to the community that the sport is operating within. This includes accessibility to the sport, facilities, transportation, delivery of services and resources (Golden & Earp, 2012; Rowe et al., 2013). Community sport provides the opportunity for as many people as possible to participate in sport (Department of Health, 2022). Community sport infrastructure in Australia is estimated to produce \$6.3 billion in economic benefit, \$4.9 billion worth of health benefits and \$5.1 billion worth of social benefit (Australian Sports Commission, 2018). Nonetheless, studies have

shown that government support for facilities in western countries is demand-led, meaning that additional facilities are only provided when the demand is already high (Hoekman, 2018).

It has been argued that there is a clear link between the availability of sport infrastructure and participation in sport (Sherry et al., 2016). Furthermore, research has highlighted that the type of facilities and their condition impacts how individuals engage in activities and who participates (Sherry et al., 2016). Some countries are beginning to prioritise the social value and health benefits of sport through concentrating on developing and improving local sport infrastructure, supporting voluntary sport clubs, initiating programs and partnerships, and paying special attention to children, lower socio-economic status, and other disadvantaged groups (Hoekman, 2018).

Research has shown that community sport expenditures can compensate for social inequalities in sport participation, and therefore contribute to the sport for all goal that NSOs are now striving towards (Beenackers et al., 2012). However, studies have shown that public expenditure in sport predominantly reaches higher socio-economic status groups as they participate in more subsidized leisure time and tend to make more use of public facilities (Hoekman, 2018). Hoekman (2018) found communities with lower participation rates tend to focus financial resources on sport by trying to solve the issue of low sport participation, while communities with high participation rates relocate money for other purposes that make the sport more attractive. This pattern could explain why sport organisations with high participation and revenue are able to put in place initiatives designed to grow participation, where smaller sports struggle to implement successful initiatives to maintain participation.

Research has shown that sport is not only beneficial to physical health but also social health. It has been shown to promote community pride, social inclusion, reduce crime rates and anti-social behaviours, as well as increase the levels of trust within the community (Sport Australia, 2018). However, many sport organisations are under pressure due to the declining number of volunteers, reduced government support, inadequate facilities, and youth trends towards inactivity and obesity (Misener & Doherty, 2009). A large-scale study of sports clubs found that regardless of the size of the organisation,

growth was difficult due to a shortage of facilities and a need for better planning and management of existing clubs (Misener & Doherty, 2009). However, clubs that experience improvements in participation found that this was attributed to factors such as strong focus on the needs of members, the ability to raise funds from within the club and focus on short-term planning and flexibility. This highlights that although there are similar difficulties experienced at the club level of sport no matter the size of the sport organisation the opportunity to grow participation within a club needs to be focused on members, resources, and planning. Resources and planning were highlighted as key influencing factors to sport participation.

Although there is a perceived lack of resources required to grow sport participation, the perceptions of the practises and actions of sport organisations, whether negative or positive, also has an influence on how people think about and act towards the organisation, and its activities (Lock et al., 2013). Studies have shown that parents and children identify greater potential benefits when engaged in club sport compared to other avenues for sport, however, parents' existing negative attitudes and perceptions towards club sport may be a key barrier to their children's involvement (Clearinghouse for Sport, n.d.). This supports the SEM concept that how sport organisations deliver their programmes and activities are important, as it can influence an individual sport participation.

Another key component to the environmental factor of the SEM is accessibility to sport. Accessibility and transportation have been highlighted as an important influence in whether an individual participates in sport, or not. For example, travelling long distances to play sport has been identified as a major deterrent for sport participation (Wicker, 2020). In adolescents, travelling deters participation as it is up to the parents if they are willing to take the child to the sport (Casey et al., 2009). In adults, it has been found that commuting to trainings, tournaments, or weekly competitions, can have a negative effect on happiness in sport due to travel-related stressors, being away from the family, and disruption of the usual routine (Wicker, 2020).

According to the SEM, media and promotion can also have an impact on individual's perception of sport, and the delivery of it which impacts their willingness to participate in a sport (Golden & Earp, 2012). Developments in technology have seen fans accessibility to sport content become endless, between the development of portable devices, social media and video streaming sites, fans can access their favourite sports anytime and anywhere (Sanderson, 2022). Although there is a global concern regarding declining participation in sports, for some sporting events, such as the Olympic Games or the Superbowl, consumption has been seen to increase due to the development of sport technology (Billings, 2011). In addition, for sports that have aging demographics, such as squash, sport becomes less attractive to advertisers as they are commonly wanting to appeal to the younger demographics (Billings, 2011).

The environmental factors associated with sport are essential to participation as the accessibility to quality facilities, and the community benefits associated with them, has been found to be a key influencer of individuals ability to participate in a sport. Considering this lens when looking at sport participation is essential as the environment that a sport is operating in directly influences an individual's ability and internal motivation to participate in a sport. However, this factor does not act in isolation, as research has shown that is the culture within a club and the competitions offered being attractive as significant motivators to participate in a sport even if travel is required (Wicker, 2020).

2.2.3 Organisational Factors

The organisational factor of the SEM refers to the structured community which the individuals belong too, such as the sport organisation (Eime et al., 2015). This includes factors such as culture, partnerships, community engagement, governance, and quality of sports programs and competitions (Scarneo et al., 2019). Sport organisations do not operate in a vacuum. Contemporary sport organisations are increasingly engaged in cross sector collaboration with other institutions, such as government agencies, the media, health organisations. Due to this crossover within the industry, a sport organisation can be influenced by a range of interconnected macro-environmental factors (Hassen, 2018).

The culture within any organisation is the combined perception of its members. An organisations culture possesses three levels; a superficial layer that shows how the organisation is observed to operate; a layer of values the organisations members adopt as what they believe is important; and the deeper layer of things members assume are correct because they have shared experiences with other members (Field, 2017). The accumulation of people with similar assumptions builds a strong culture that is difficult to change. Therefore, ensuring that members experience is positive is paramount to ensuring that individuals continue to participate in a sport (Lussier & Kimball, n.d.).

The landscape of sport in Australia is changing. In the past two decades there has been a noticeable shift from volunteer-based operation to professionalized paid roles that manage sport organisations (Ferkins & Shillbury, 2015). Cuskully (2014) argued that volunteers are the most crucial factor to the success of a sport organisation as they adopt multiple roles such as coaches, officials, administrators, and committee members. However, in Australia, the number of volunteers in sport is in continual decline, as the current sporting system is struggling to retain them (Sport Australia, 2021). Although volunteers are paramount to the function of a sport, there are some significant governing roles that should not be held by volunteers as they pose a conflict of interest (Sport Australia, 2021). The appointment of underqualified individuals in key leadership roles is a common practise in sport and is particularly apparent in less popular sports, like squash, as they lack the funding to appoint a skilled board.

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) suggests that individuals that have been appointed onto a board should be independent from the sport, and their position to be determined by their skill set (Ingram & O'Boyle, 2017). The ASC goes further to state that the board should be “a blend of expertise, skills and diversity necessary to effectively carry out its role” and “have all directors being independent, regardless of whether they are elected or appointed.” (Sport Australia, 2022). However, it is difficult to attract individuals that have the appropriate skill set, with it being easier to attract those that have a predisposed connection with the sport (Ingram & O'Boyle, 2017). According to the SEM a lack of human

resources capacity, such as volunteers with professional competencies, limits the ability for an organisation to generate social capital from key stakeholders (Misener & Doherty, 2009).

Research into the federated structures of Australian NSOs has shown that they are intrinsically problematic in enabling accountability to those to positions of leadership (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2015). It is the participants, not the State and Territory associations, who are directly regulated, and most affected by NSO decisions, and are therefore the ones to whom accountability is owed by NSO's board (Freeburn, 2010). Ferkins and Shilbury (2015) conducted a study with Squash Victoria on how the board of representatives operated. They found that there was a large disconnect between the board and the members of Squash Victoria. This disconnect from the board and the people they are supposed to be working for, the members, could be a contributing factor into the decline in participation of sport in Australia. From a SEM lens, this has a significant effect on the culture within the sport, and the perception key stakeholders have on the sport organisation which are key influencers of sport participation.

Organisational capacity refers to an organisation's capability to achieve its mission and objectives based on the extent to which it has certain attributes that have been recognised as important to objective achievement (Misener & Doherty, 2009). The overall capacity for a non-profit organisation to produce the outputs and outcomes it desires is a function of its ability to draw on a variety of resources, human resources, finances, relationships, and networks, infrastructure, and processes, and planning and development. Further studies that have identified the critical aspects for optimal operation of a non-profit organisation have shown varying results of the different attributes that are important for success. Misener and Doherty (2009) identified the critical aspects that had the largest influence, such as human resource capacity, engaged individuals, strong associational networks, and effective partnerships. The inconsistency of power and professional competence, and the equivocal distribution of tasks has been shown to impede well-grounded decision-making (Misener & Doherty, 2009). It was also found that in addition to unskilled individuals within an organisation impacting participation, a lack of strategic

direction has a negative impact on measuring progress. Thiel and Mayer (2008) found the absence of explicit organisational objectives makes it exceedingly difficult to validate successful development. Organisations that have experienced the highest increases in capacity were those that undertook a reassessment of their aspirations and their strategy (McKinsey & Company, 2001).

Technology and media have revolutionized the way sport is consumed, the bulk of memories relating to sport now coming from a television screen rather than live viewing (Billings, 2008). Deloitte (2016) suggested the six most influential business trends to impact the professional sport industry in 2016 were: the proliferation of ‘over the top’ media streaming services where consumers can always access sport content through numerous devices; sport betting; wearables and cognitive analytics such as personal GPS; innovation of sport sponsorships as assets (rising of social media and new platforms for fan engagement); and esports (professional electronic gaming). These trends represent opportunities for economic and technological growth in the sport sector, however it also represents a challenge to traditional operations and impacts of sport (Hassen, 2018).

The trends identified by Deloitte (2016) highlight the significant entrepreneurial opportunities within the sport industry. However, these opportunities are not evenly distributed (Hassen, 2018). For example, some sport organisations can generate revenue through memberships, gate takings, sale of merchandise, sponsorship, and sale of media rights. However, some sports do not host large scale event or attract media interest, therefore, having to rely on government funding to operate.

Although technology has rapidly improved the accessibility of sport, many of the mediums to access matches require additional cost. One of the primary indicators for sport participation is economic status. Research shows that individuals who are lower income are significantly less likely to participate in sport (Wicker, 2012). The introduction of app-based streaming services has made the accessibility of sports higher, however, it has potentially further separated classes in their ability to access sport, making free-to-air sport a concept of the past and many sports only being shown on private broadcasting services or paid apps individuals of lower socioeconomic status have a reduced exposure to sport (Farris, 2020).

According to the SEM exposure and viewing access to a sport has an impacts individuals want to participate in a sport; however, this increase in cost to access different sports poses a disadvantage to lower-socio-economic individuals as they do not have the resources to access the sport (Golden & Earp, 2012; Farris, 2020).

The organisational factors in sport are crucial to influencing participation as it considers the governing body that influences the region the sport is operating within. This lens focuses on the organisation's capacity, culture, governance, products, and partnerships which directly influences both the wider environment that the sport operates in and the individual experience within that environment. Nonetheless, the implementation and maintenance of these factors are not solely up to the sport organisation, but the facility coordinators and participants as well who have a significant influence on the sport environment.

2.2.4 Inter-Personal Factors

The inter-personal factors of the SEM refer to key relationships between the individual and others within the sport. This includes coaches, officials, club managers/owners and other players (Scarneo et al. 2019; Rowe et al. 2013). These are all external contributors that directly influence an individual to participate in sport and are the primary role models.

One of the key individuals that influence and interact with participants of sport are coaches. High-quality coaching throughout grassroots to high-performance is essential to the retention of participants in sport (Sport Australia, N.d.). Coaches play many roles in the lives of sport participants, not only are they responsible for the technical development of the athletes but also the development of the individuals that goes beyond the sport. Coaches obtain the role of mentors, teachers, managers, leaders, parent figures, and moral educators; however, many coaches report that they feel ill-prepared for these additional roles (Phillips & Schulenkorf, 2017). Emphasizing how important it is for sport organisations to ensure they

have the appropriate resources and training for coaches and officials to encourage continual participation in a sport.

Sport Australia identified issues were being experienced within the coaching sector across all sports. Stating the significant issues that clubs and associations struggle with is finding enough coaches, high turnover, not enough new coaches coming through, having trouble to get people to do coaching courses and coaches tend to coach how they have been coached which may not be optimal for all participants (Sport Australia, n.d.). Furthermore, at the junior level, coaches tend to be enthusiastic parents that may not have the appropriate skills or knowledge.

The SEM illustrates that high quality coaches are key to encouraging participation in sport. In England, the national sport organisation recognized the need to develop resources for all sport organisations to access the appropriate training for their coaches, making high quality resources available to all sports. This initiative has been successful in reducing the impact of issues experienced by Sport Australia such as under qualified coaches. However, the resources for coach development in Australia is left up each individual sports resulting in sports that do not have sufficient resources to develop initiatives of this calibre are left without these important resources. Therefore, sports that do not have the appropriate resources to support the development of coaches are being further disadvantaged.

Another key aspect of the inter-personal factor is the influence that the sporting community has on participants as role models for individuals (Rowe et al., 2013). It has been proposed that the effectiveness of a role model to influence learners to carry out a particular behaviour is dependent on the characteristics of these models. If a role model has a similar background to a 'learner' and demonstrates a highly skilled activity, then there is more chance for the learner to carry out a particular behaviour (Young et al., 2015). This has been shown in research in other sports, where it has shown that the success of the National sporting team increased the frequency of participation in amateur players (Mutter & Powlowski, 2014).

Young et al. (2015) found in a study of young girls in Australia that those that had a sporting role model were significantly more physically active than girls whose role models did not play sport. It was found that the most identified role models were family, friends and then sporting stars as the most prominent groups selected. These findings have also been reflected in males, with studies showing that strong parental support for sport was one of the strongest predictors of sport participation (Vella et al., 2014).

Although parent participation is a significant indicator of sport participation in youths, the internal motivators that push a parent can vary. Clearinghouse for Sport (n.d.) found that most parents agree that physical activity is good for their child and fear being seen as a bad parent if their child does not participate in sport. However, it is important for parents and sport clubs to recognize that many children require an active role in choosing their sport or activity. This indicates the importance of early exposure to an activity to drive interest in an activity and participation in sport.

The interpersonal factors associated with sport participation focus on the individuals participating within the sport whether at a professional, volunteer or playing level and the relationships that are developed between these individuals. This lens has a considerable influence on sport participation as it highlights the importance of each role within the sport environment and how it has a significant influence on the direct individual's enjoyment of a sport (Kumar et al., 2018). However, research on sport participation highlighted that the most common influencer of participation is facility proximity to their home and the activities offered (Kumar et al., 2018). This further highlights the benefit of adopting a scope that looks at multiple levels of sport participation, such as the SEM, in research to obtain a wider view of the sporting environment.

2.2.5 Intra-Personal Factor

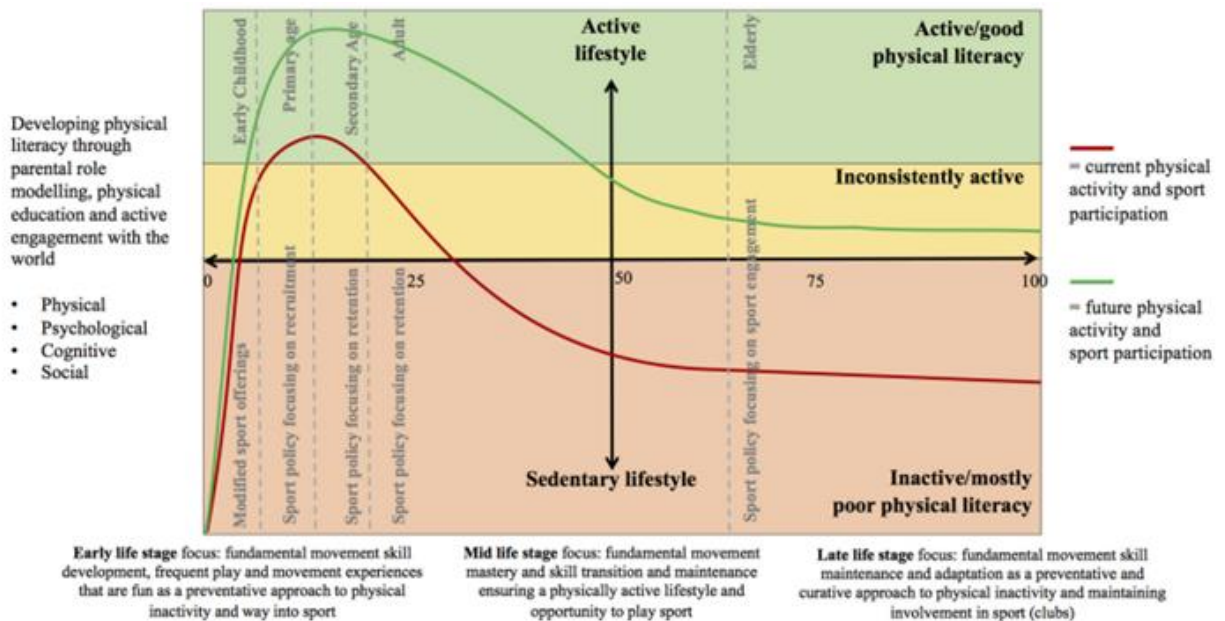
The intrapersonal factor of the SEM focuses on the physical and cognitive characteristics of an individual, this includes physical literacy, age, injury history, socioeconomic status, and genetic

predisposition (Emie et al., 2013; Rowe et al., 2013; Scarneo et al., 2019). These are the aspects of the individual that influences their ability and internal drive to participate in sport. There are multiple internal and external motivators that drives an individual to participate in sport and physical activity. Research has found that throughout our life span these underlying reasons tend to change with participation in sport characterised as high in youths and begins to decline as they transition into adulthood (Allender et al., 2006).

Research has shown that continued sport participation is dictated by the type of sporting career an individual has had when they were a youth participant (Vanreusal et al. 1997). This is due to primary and secondary age being a key period to develop physical literacy, a key factor in the SEM, the importance of this period has been highlighted in the Physical Activity and Sport Participation (PASP) Framework. The PASP outlines several insights critical to lifelong participation in sport: firstly, developing physical literacy is foundational and critical, secondly, the development of people's fundamental movement skills is crucial, but people need to become holistically physically literate, developing psychological, cognitive, and social elements, thirdly, parents and physical education teachers and the wider environment are important facilitators of developing physical literacy, and finally, there are three major developmental life stages to develop high levels of physical activity, early-life, mid-life, and late-life. This model highlights that the more active an individual is in the initial stages of life, the more likely they will be to continually live an active lifestyle throughout their lifetime and develop good physical literacy. Of particular importance is the development of athletic skills through the primary school age group, this is where the largest peak of skill development and sport participation. These stages and trends of sport participation can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2

The Physical Activity and Sport Participation Framework



(Westerbeek & Eime 2021)

It is clear that sport participation has a host of health benefits however, all athletic endeavours pose the risk of potential injury which bring long-term consequences for the individual. Sport injuries have been shown to shorten sporting careers, resulting in ceasing of participating in sport, and negatively influence professional athletes earning potential, which can influence continual participation in sports. In adolescents, they are particularly vulnerable to injuries related to the growing process. Although participating in sport is essential to bone health and is crucial in the prevention of osteoporosis later in life, overuse injuries related to the growing process can be an issue for adolescents (Wojtyś, 2017).

-The higher risks of injury during adolescence when participating in sport highlights the importance of early education relating to the concept of injury prevention particularly active recovery to ensure continual participation into adulthood. Improving preventative practises with coaches as well, requires not only the improvement of information distribution to improve coach awareness by the sport organisation, but also to improve the adoption and implementation dependability of injury prevention programs. The coach education practises need to directly address issues related to relative advantage, compatibility, and complexity (Norcross et al. n.d).

Studies have identified additional crucial factors that have a significant influence on sport participation is gender (male), household income and educational level of the individual, these have a positive effect on sport participation, while age, migration background and time needed has a negative impact (Wicker, 2012). Regarding educational level, there is consensus that higher educational levels are associated with greater participation in sport (Hoekman, 2017). Nonetheless, most studies show that there is a significant gender difference in sport participation with men being more active than woman. The appearance of children and the time needed to take care of them was commonly reported to be a significant contributing factor to decline in participation in young adults (Wicker, 2012).

The SEM also highlights the socio-economic status as an important influencing factor for sport participation (Rowe et al., 2013). The impact of socio-economic status and sport participation is argued to be due to sporting habitus being class specific (Hoekman, 2018). This explains the social stratification of sport participation found in participation studies. Sports such as boxing are practised more by the lower socioeconomic classes, while non-contact sports, such as tennis and golf, are popular among the higher socioeconomic classes. It is theorised that this is due to sports like boxing, not requiring specific infrastructure to participate in. Squash in Australia was originally seen as a sport for the middle class, with many clubs being ‘private boys clubs’ and the working-class or public clubs were not welcome to participate in competitions (Mudford, 1998). This had a lasting negative impact on how the sport was viewed by the Australian community.

According to the intrapersonal factor of the SEM, the decline of sport participation is most significantly impacted by age, most notably during the transition from youth to adulthood (Eime et al, 2013; Rowe et al, 2013). This has been noted as the most significant timeframe in a person’s lifespan where sport and physical activity participation drop-out, particularly for woman and girls (Clearinghouse for Sport, n.d.). The particularly large impact on woman and girls has been attributed to the need to look after family and work. Ruseski et al. (2011) has shown that each additional hour an individual spends looking after their relatives or children reduces the probability that they participate in sport.

Research conducted by ESPN, it has been shown that sports avidity in men peaks around 12-17 and 18-24 ages and slowly declines as they age even though as men age, they watch more sports on television (Gantz & Lewis, 2021). However, woman sports avidity peaks at 2-17, then is the lowest between 18-49. But it does modestly increase again later for 50+ woman (Billings, 2011). This is a similar pattern with sport participation showing that avidity in adolescence is largely associated with external factors such as peers (parents, siblings, and friends). While the decline of avidity as people move into adulthood is due to factors such as reduced free-time due to work and family commitments. This interaction of internal and external factors that interact with each other to influence various aspects of sport behaviour highlights the importance of using a SEM to assess sport participation trends.

The majority of sport participation research investigates adolescent participation however, Clearing House for Sport (n.d.), found that in adults sport participation was significantly affected by, (1) sport delivery that focusses on competition rather than fun, (2) a lack of flexibility around scheduling of sport in traditional sport clubs, (3) organising individuals and teams according to talent rather than retaining friendship groups, (4) limited opportunities for people with limited sport competency to join sport clubs, and (5) self-conscious amongst adolescents and embarrassed because of their lack of sporting ability. This highlights the importance of ensuring that sporting clubs and organisations offer a range of products that cater to a range of competition levels and to put a higher focus on fun and inclusivity for all levels rather than winning.

The intrapersonal factors associated with participation in sport are essential as it focuses on the individual and their internal motivators to participate in a sport such as enjoyment as well as, the external motivators such as physical literacy and socioeconomic status. Research has found that these factors have significant influence on both families and individuals' participation in sport. However, there are numerous other factors that influence aspects of sport that have a significant influence on the individual and their ability to participate in a sport.

2.3 Squash in New South Wales

Squash was founded in the 1830's in England. It is a racquet sport that is played between two individuals (singles) or two teams of two players (doubles). On a four walled court, a small rubber ball is hit at the front wall between boundary lines with the objective of forcing your opponent into error. Squash was brought to Australia in 1913, with the first national governing body (Squash Australia) being established in 1934. During the 1960's NSW was the premier squash state and the headquarters state for the Squash Racquets Australia Association (Mudford, 1998).

At the peak of popularity, there was estimated to be approximately one million Australians playing the sport regularly throughout the 1990's and 1980's (Neal, 2020). This popularity was theorized to be riding on the success of superstar athletes such as NSW born Heather McKay, who did not lose a match between 1963 and 1981, and Sport Australia Hall of Famer Geoff Hunt (Neal, 2020). However, currently Australia has not provided a World Champion in over 10 years and in 2021, Australia has no players in the top 20 Professional Squash Association (PSA) rankings (Squash Australia, n.d.). This highlights squash as an interesting lens to assess what wider environmental implications have influenced participation in the sport as a once thriving enterprise.

2.3.1 State Associations

The first official state association for squash in Australia was the NSW Woman's Squash Racquets Association. At this time, woman could play at only two centres in Sydney. The Squash Racquets Association NSW was formed some years later in 1938, and in the same year the Ladies NSW Championships was played in conjunction with the men's (Mudford, 1998). Eventually the two associations amalgamated in 1986 due to pressure from the NSW Department of Sport requiring only one governing body to be able to be successful in grant applications. However, this resulted in the disappearance of many support structures for squash in NSW.

The 1950's saw the formation of the Squash Courts Owners Association (SCOA) which often had a strained relationship with Squash Rackets Association New South Wales (SRANSW). During this time

significant constitutional changes that influenced the operation of Squash in NSW significantly. Most notably, regarding voting rights of a club delegate, restrictions were imposed on public clubs in an attempt to ensure that clubs conformed to the private club model. This was said to have negative ramifications for the sports to this day (Mudford, 1998).

Administratively, the period between the 1960's and 1992 saw an evolution of how the sport was directed in NSW. The introduction of court registration fees and player registration fees created friction between court owners, players and the SRANSW. Many players and owners could not see the benefit for themselves of these fees, particularly the rural clubs, even though 50% of their fees was put aside for promotion of the sport in the regions. However, there is no indication of whether these funds were used for this (Mudford, 1998). The Squash Courts Operators Association made this situation more tense when they communicated to court owners to not pay these fees.

During the time where the association introduced registration fees, a part-time administrative position was established however, it was seen as too much work for too little pay. This resulted in the position being amended to become a full-time role to which Ted Barlow held for the next 26 years (Mudford, 1998). Currently, Squash NSW has four paid staff that are all on a part-time basis (Squash NSW, 2021).

At present, clubs are required to pay an affiliation fee to the state association, Squash NSW, as well as each player is required to pay a player affiliation fee. Out of the approximately 180 clubs in NSW only 150 of the clubs' affiliate to the state association. Additionally, players are required to pay a \$60 affiliation fee, however the only players that tend to pay this fee are those that play in the Sydney Pennant competition, with very little players in the country opting to affiliate (Squash NSW, 2010; Squash NSW; 2019).

In 1961, there was the formation of the Referee Association, which attempted to set refereeing questions for education of players. However, due to a lack of interest from players this concept was

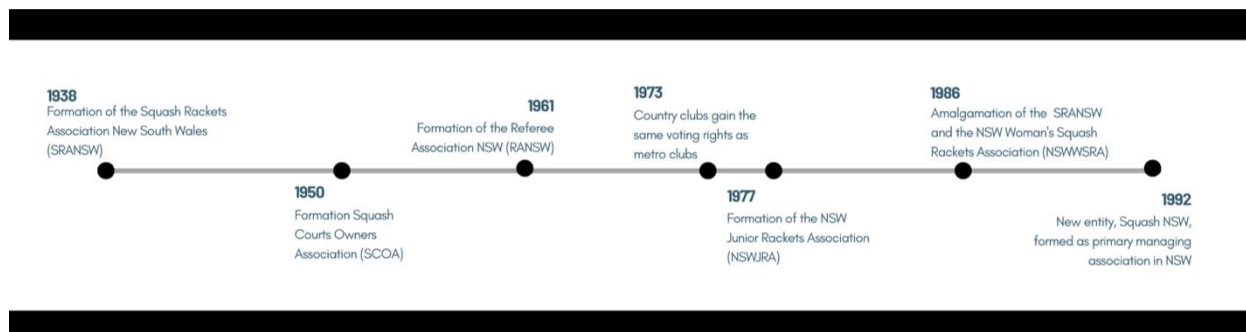
quickly abandoned. In 1977, there was the formation of the NSW Junior Racquets Association which initially had some success in implementing a competition in Sydney however, the amalgamation of SRANSW and WSRANSW saw the disappearance of this association as well. Both associations were eventually designed as sub-committees that worked alongside SRANSW and eventually squash NSW.

Relationships between the SRANSW and rural delegates was often described as strained as well, it was commonly seen that the SRANSW was a metropolitan association rather than a state association. This was largely attributed to distances, lack of resources and lack of communication capabilities. To improve these relationships, in 1973 the constitution was changed so that the country clubs had the same voting rights as Sydney clubs. In the 1980s an additional position on the board was introduced that a country delegate was added to the board.

In 1992 a new entity, Squash NSW was formed, currently very few of these associations exist anymore and there is little to no documentation on what occurred between 1992 and now that indicates what happened to the SCOA, WSRANSW or the SRANSW. According to the SEM, governance is an essential factor to sport participation, the instability that is highlighted in the NSW sport organisation for squash since the establishment of official governing bodies and the amalgamation of these associations highlights a potential contributing factor to the decline of participation of the sport. This further highlights the interesting environment that squash in NSW poses to assess the factors that influence sport participation.

Figure 3

Timeline of the Key Governing Bodies of Squash in NSW



2.3.2 Squash Courts

In Sydney, the first ‘public’ squash court were the Sydney Squash Club built in 1926 (now demolished). Early on, all courts in NSW were privately owned, this was largely due to the huge financial investment required to build courts and the exclusive nature of the clubs. This meant that the sport was played by ‘middle class’ men and woman as many of the clubs were exclusive to these individuals only (Mudford, 1998). Public courts did not appear until the mid-1950’s when wartime building restrictions ended, this saw a shift from an ‘elitist’ sport, to one which the average player was the ‘working class’ playing out of a public court.

SRANSW’s proposal to purchase their own squash courts was first visited in 1947. This was then revisited in 1961 with multiple attempts to purchase different sites failing until 1975 when land at Thornleigh was purchased and the court were built and open in 1979. Initially, Thornleigh Squash Club was a moderate financial success however, after the initial operator changed roles there was a period of significant economic loss. SRANSW decided to introduce a salaried manager role to operate the courts which improved the situation however not enough to pay off the loan. This left the Sydney Pennant players having to foot the bill with a levy charge that was introduced to pay for the courts initially.

It took 10 years to complete the Thornleigh Squash Club project. Unfortunately, a decline in squash participation made the project much less successful than expected. In 1992, Squash NSW changed Thornleigh from a management contract to a commercial lease arrangement. Rather than becoming a headquarters for squash in NSW, it became a source of income.

The relinquishment of the burden of responsibility to Thornleigh Squash Club highlights how the decline of participation in squash not only affected clubs but also had a detrimental effect on the sport organisation as there attempt to implement a strategy that was following suit with other sports in creating a ‘Centre of Excellence,’ failed due to a reduction in resources related to the decline of players. The SEM highlights resources as a key factor that influences a sport organisation and clubs to be able to successfully operate and provide products that are attractive to participants. The resources available to the sport organisation addresses another factor that has a significant influence on participation in sport and further expands on how the environment that squash in NSW has operated in offers an interesting lens to research sport participation.

2.3.3 Competitions and Participation

The first squash racquets championship of New South Wales was held at the Royal Sydney Golf Club in 1935, and in 1939 the first interclub competition commenced; however, this was never completed due to the outbreak of World War II. Post-war it recommenced and grew quickly, eventually being separated into regions, north, south, east, and west, to reduce the travel time for players.

During the 1960’s the northern, southern, eastern and western regions became District Associations that essentially had full control over the Pennant competition within their boundaries. Problems with these competitions were seen across the region with starting times, district boundaries, Pennant rules and unaffiliated players. To alleviate these issues, individual districts attempted to implement different systems which caused variations between how squash was played between the regions. However, eventually these inconsistencies were overcome as regions would adopt the most efficient systems, eventually making the competition rules integrated throughout the state.

The 1980’s saw participation in the Sydney Pennant peak with a total of 3,763 4-person teams in 1983 (Mudford, 1998). However, after this peak there was a continuous decline of participation in squash, currently there is only 157 teams playing in the Sydney Pennant. This was attributed to five major factors;

firstly, an oversupply of squash courts managed by operators with little knowledge of the squash industry. Secondly, the general economic decline of the 80's coupled with the economic crash in 1989 proved fatal to many clubs. Thirdly, the high land value where the courts reside meant the land was worth more than the business. A fourth factor has been attributed to the change in social climate, licencing laws were being relaxed attracting more young people away from sport. Finally, there was a lack of forward thinking from both administrators and court owners. Between 1970 and 1985 was a 'time of plenty' where squash was prospering without any real effort, a period which planning for anticipated issues should have been actioned (Mudford, 1998).

Between 2002 and 2004 there was the introduction of 'matrix' which was a system used to allocate points for match outcomes. This system enabled players to be assigned a ranking number that indicated what playing level they were. The ranking system had a positive influence on Squash in NSW, motivating players, particularly in the Sydney Pennant metro region, to improve their ranking. However, Squash NSW and Squash Australia frequently highlighted in Annual Reports their concern on the lack of uptake from squash centres across NSW, particularly regional clubs (Squash Australia, 2010; Squash NSW, 2010). To incentivize clubs to use the ranking system Squash NSW offered their member affiliation for a significant discount on the facility affiliation. Although it was stated this initiative had a positive influence on club uptake of the new system there was still a considerable number of clubs that were not interested in utilising this new tool.

In 2018, the ranking system changed to SportyHQ, a combined ranking and event management platform, this platform used a different algorithm and had a lot more tools for players and clubs to use (Squash NSW, 2018). The release of the new platform was a huge technological advancement for Squash in Australia; however, once again, the uptake and use of the platform was not widely accepted. The underlying reason for the shift to SportyHQ was to offer a more substantial product that could help with club management, tournament control, and member management as well as, better tracking of competitive and social players in NSW.

The products offered by a sport was highlighted as a significant influencing factor to participation in sport in the SEM (Eime et al., 2013; Scarneo et al., 2019). The hesitance to adopt the products offered to squash facilities shows that there is space for development in what is available to the clubs and participants. Furthermore, the decline in participation of the primary competition offered by the sport organisation suggests there is a need for the adoption of separate products for clubs and individuals involved in squash. This poses an interesting lens to further investigate the environment that has influenced the underlying reason players and clubs are reluctant to adopt the products that are being offered, particularly when it is clear there is a significant decline in squash participation.

2.4 Conclusion

The squash participation environment is complex and has an extensive history within the NSW sporting domain. The history of squash in NSW highlights how the sport has experienced substantial highs regarding participation, however, the popularity of the sport in Australia has seen a continual decline since. Predictors of participation in sport is complex and operate across individual factors such as physical literacy and socio-economic status, interpersonal factors such as quality coaches and role models within the sport, organisational which includes governance and programs, environmental which includes facilities and resources and finally, policy-driven factors which refers to public policy that relates to sport. The use of the SEM to assess the wider participation environment of squash is uniquely appropriate as a lens to explore squash in NSW as the multi-factor nature of the model enables a broader assessment of the numerous contributing factors that influence the population to participate in sport.

Chapter 3. Methods

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is an outline of the methodology of this research project. Section 3.1 is an overview of the purpose and aims of the project. Section 3.2 provides a summary of the methodology, and identifies the philosophical standpoint and subjective worldview of the researcher. Section 3.3 outlines the participant selection procedure. Last, Section 3.5 explains the data collection methods, the interview questions, in addition to an overview of the thematic analysis.

3.2 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study was to examine the wider environment of squash in New South Wales (NSW) and identify how this has influenced participation in squash. This was achieved by identifying factors that have negatively influenced participation and setting out recommendations that will help the sport to thrive again. The purpose of this study was to provide insight into how the state governing body (Squash NSW) can better facilitate participation in squash, considering the barriers and opportunities within its wider environment. The following research questions were explored:

- How did the wider organisational environment influence participation of squash in NSW?
- What can be done within the organisational environment to increase squash participation in NSW?

3.3 Research Approach and Research Paradigm

3.3.1 *Research Paradigm*

A research paradigm refers to an inherent body of interconnected theoretical and methodological beliefs that dictates the selection, evaluation, and criticism of a researchers' views (Grant & Giddings, 2002). A researcher's worldview (paradigm) is the way in which their understanding of the world influences the research and impacts how the researcher interprets and analyses the data (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). For this research project, an interpretivist paradigm was appropriate as it is required to examine various realities and truths. The interpretivist paradigm refers to an approach that emphasises the meaningful nature of people's participation in social and cultural life (Melnikovas, 2018). An interpretivist researcher interacts with participants to understand their experiences and the meaning they ascribe to them in an attempt to gain an understanding of the individual's descriptions of experiences, and their explanation of them (Grant & Giddings, 2002). As individuals interact with other individuals and society, they ascribe meaning and names to different social phenomena, making interpretivism subjective (Rohman & Alharthi, 2016). The subjectivity of the researcher occurs during the exploration of phenomena as knowledge generation is inherently subjective and situated (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The researcher has selected an interpretivist paradigm for this research as it enables different individual experiences to be recorded, and allows for a range of concepts and themes to emerge from interviews. This is particularly important as there is a broad range of factors that influence participation in sport, from policy at national level to an individual's physical competency.

The use of descriptive approaches complements the interpretivist paradigm as this enables the researcher to uncover data that was rich in detail and provided an in-depth picture of the key themes. This enabled the researcher to discover patterns in the data that appear under broad themes to understand a phenomenon (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Furthermore, due to the diverse nature of sport participation, it was important for the researcher to be accepting of the differing experiences proposed by interviewees. These various realities include experiences that occur in the physical world, and internal perspective that are unique to the individual (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.4 Research Method

Multi-methods were utilised to explore the wider environment that has influenced squash participation in NSW. An instrumental case study was utilised, which enables an understanding of a broader phenomenon and facilitates the development of new theories and ideas (Crowe et al., 2011). This method is beneficial as it uses a particular case to gain a broader appreciation of an issue. In this research project, an instrumental case study was utilised to explore squash in NSW to provide feedback on the broader issue of declining participation in sport. This involved utilising the Socio-Ecological Model (SEM) as a lens to explore the key areas that influence sport participation. Using the SEM enabled a comprehensive exploration of how the wider environment influences participation in squash. The use of multiple methods, within an instrumental case study, is especially appropriate as it allowed the researcher to take a rich data yield from two qualitative methods (Almalki, 2016; Mills et al., 2010). Use of multiple methods in this project mitigated the design weakness had interviews alone been used (Emerald Publishing, n.d.).

An inductive approach was utilised as it takes the focus from the working title rather than existing theory (Woiceshyn & Daellenbach, 2018). The objective was to move from research question to observation and description, to analysis, and finally theory, rather than solely a yes or no response to questions (Melnikovas, 2018). A multi-methods approach enabled the use of different qualitative methods to explore a wider range of experiences in a similar scope to the participant to procure an

accurate answer to the research question (Emerald Publishing, n.d.). Using this interview method enabled each participant to contribute a variety of perspectives on the wider sport environment providing a better understanding of the whole organisation (Guillien, 2019).

3.5 Research Design

3.5.1 Recruitment of Participants

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of interviewees. Purposive sampling was appropriate as it allows the researcher to select participants based on the inclusion criteria (Palinkas et al., 2015). A purposive selection of participants was important in this research project, as it was crucial to sample an array of individuals across the squash environment as appropriate using an SEM theory to help guide the selection process. When selecting participants that would enable the researcher to address the squash environment at an intrapersonal level, the researcher placed posters in eight squash clubs within the NSW region advertising for participants. This participant was then selected based on their experience in squash, and the length of time they had been involved in the sport. This selection of participants was guided by Palinkas et al.'s (2015) method of purposeful sampling. Additionally, the key layers evident in the SEM model were a significant guiding factor in participant selection, with the aim of interviewing participants who could speak to a particular layer in relation to squash in NSW (Palinkas et al., 2015). Seven individuals were interviewed, which is in line with the number of participants in other studies that have investigated individuals with a specific knowledge in a certain sport (Clarke et al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015).

3.5.2 Inclusion Criteria

Due to the complex nature of sport participation, and the multiple aspects that influence an individual's decision to choose to participate in a particular sport, the SEM was used to guide the inclusion criteria to ensure the wider environment that has influenced participation in squash is fully considered. All the participants had to have been involved in squash in the past 10 years to ensure that

they had a current view of the sport, as well as past experiences within the sport. The criterion was based on ensuring that at least one participant was interviewed from each of the factors associated with the SEM (Environmental, Organisational, Interpersonal, and Intrapersonal factors). To be included in this study participants had to fit the following criterion:

- a) Over the age of 18 years old
- b) Community factor: A employee of Squash Australia and/or facilities manager of a squash club with NSW
- c) Organisational factor: A former Squash NSW Board member.
- d) Interpersonal factor: Squash NSW accredited coach with at least two years' experience coaching in NSW
- e) Intrapersonal factor: Squash NSW affiliated or ex-affiliate that has played squash in NSW for at least five years.

The researcher's engagement in squash in NSW is as both a player and an administrator for the state body. Therefore, current board members and employees reporting to the researcher at Squash NSW were not included.

3.5.3 Document Analysis

Documents related to squash participation in NSW were gathered and analysed in order to gain a wider understanding. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents that requires data to be examined and interpreted to produce meaning, provide understanding, and develop practical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). By collecting information through different methods, the researcher substantiated the findings across data sets and therefore reduced the effect of potential biases that could result from a single data collection technique. The researcher selected documents that enabled further expansion and/or discussion on the themes identified from the interview data that relate to the layers of

the SEM. The documents analysed include both printed and electronic material, these documents are list in Table 1:

Table 1

Documents Accessed for Secondary Squash Participation Data Analysis

Document	Source	Socio-ecological layer
Squash Australia: A Plan for an Active Community	Squash Australia (Website)	Policy Environment
Squash NSW Annual Report 2010 2013-2014 2014-2015 2015-2016 2016-2017 2018-2019 2019-2020 2020-2021	Squash NSW (Website)	Policy Environment Organisational Interpersonal Intrapersonal
Participation Grants and Funding for Sport and Recreation	Clearinghouse for Sport (Website)	Policy Organisational
Squash Australia Annual Report 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021	Squash Australia (Website)	Policy Organisational Environment
Squash Australia Participation Framework	Squash Australia (Website)	Policy Organisational Interpersonal Intrapersonal
Sport 2030	Sport Australia (Website)	Policy Organisational
World Squash Federation – Strategic Plan 2016-2020 2022-2025	World Squash Federation (Website)	Policy Organisational
Community Sport Infrastructure Resource Library	Office of Sport	Policy Environment Organisational

3.5.4 Participants

Seven individuals participated in this study, of which three were female and four were male. The first participant was a previous member of the Squash NSW Board. The second participant was an employee of Squash Australia, working in the participation and facilities division. The next two participants were facilities managers; one operating a not-for-profit centre and the other being a private operator. The fifth participant was the chief executive officer (CEO) of Squash NSW, who has extensive experience within the sport management sector and an in-depth understanding of sport organisations. The sixth participant was a squash coach in NSW and previous professional squash player, competing internationally. The seventh participant was a squash player in Sydney and previously played in regional NSW as a junior. All participants, except participant seven, were approached based on the researchers' extended network through email, this was based on the participants prior knowledge and associated with the inclusion criteria. The seventh participant volunteered to participate in the study as a result of seeing an advertisement. Most of the participants had experiences relating to multiple layers of the socio-ecological model. These details, as well as the initials by which they will be referred subsequently are outlined in Table 2:

Table 2

Interviewee Profiles

Name	Experience	Socio-Ecological Factor
P1	Squash NSW CEO	Organisational Facilities
P2	Squash NSW Board Member/player	Organisational Facilities Intrapersonal
P3	Squash Australia Employee/player	Policy Organisational Facilities Intrapersonal
P4	Squash NSW Coach/player	Interpersonal

		Intrapersonal
P5	Player	Organisational Intrapersonal
P6	Club owner/player	Organisational Facilities
P7	Club manager/player	Organisational Facilities Interpersonal Intrapersonal

3. Data Collection

To explore the environment that has influenced squash participation, a qualitative, multiple methods approach was utilised. This featured both semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The interviewees enabled an in-depth view of real-life experiences to be established. These ideas were then further considered in the context of data acquired from a variety of documents including annual reports and strategic plans put forth by international, national, and state sport organisations.

Qualitative research commonly utilises interviews as a method of data collection as it enables a researcher to gather descriptions of lifeworld of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena (Opdenakker, 2006). Ideally, interviews are conducted face-to-face, as this interview method enables social cues such as body language to guide the interviewer's approach. However, due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, many of the interviews had to be conducted via video chat. Krouwel et al. (2019) found that in-person face-to-face interviews are marginally superior to video-call interviews for qualitative research, however, the difference is so marginal that the travel constraints justify the use of video call interviews. The use of semi-structured interview questions allowed the interviewer to use questions that were pre-determined by the thematic framework, however, there was no set order or phrasing for the questioning (George, 2022). This meant that the interviews could produce detailed and rich data due to their open-ended nature.

The supplemental data collected through document analysis was considered alongside the interview data and ultimately further informed the final themes (Morse, 2009). Documents that addressed

specific aspects outlined in the SEM were prioritised. Although the interview data and secondary data sets are separate, they interact and sometimes overlap, as one can inform or facilitate understanding of another theme but also contradict.

Overall, the data that was collected related to each of the five factors of the SEM (Rowe et al., 2013). For the policy factor, secondary data was collected from international (World Squash Federation), national (Sport Australia) and state (Sport NSW) sport organisations in relation to policies and reports that have influenced squash in NSW. This is in addition to documents from the Australian Government, the NSW Government, Sport Australia, and NSW Sport that related to grants, health policy and facilities. Data collection occurred primarily from online public sources.

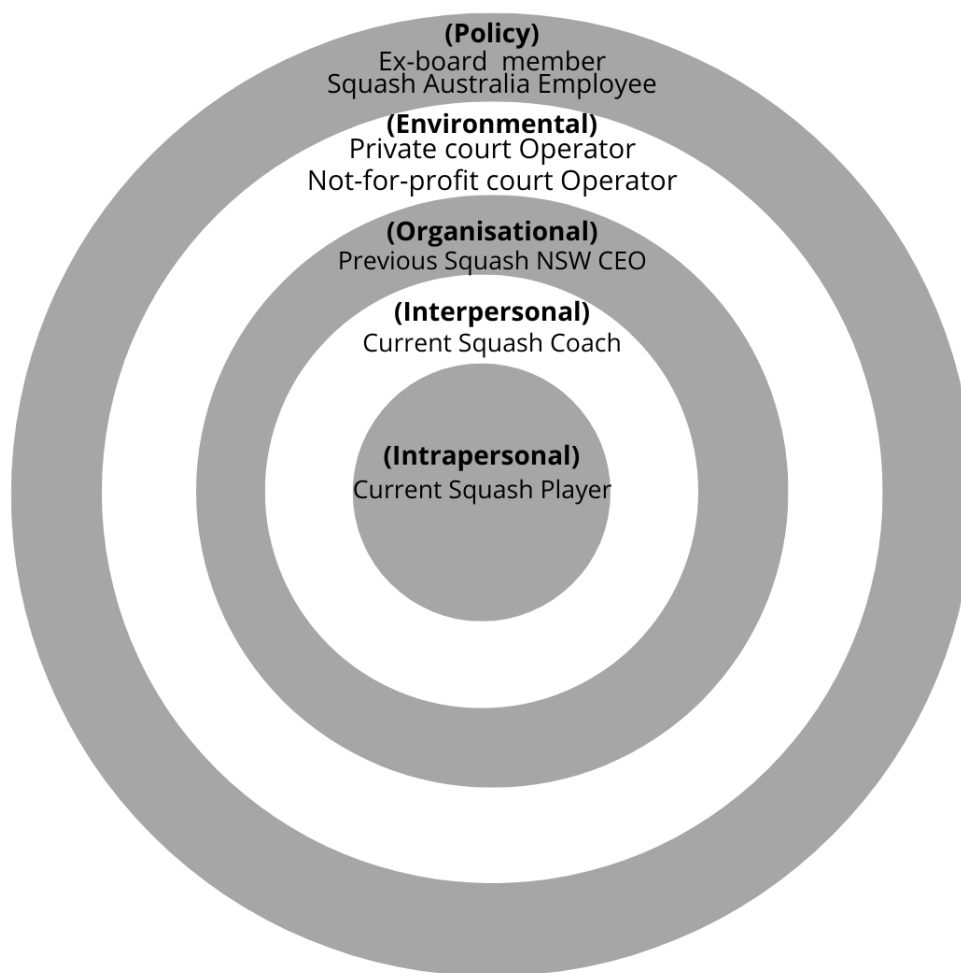
For the environmental factor, secondary data related to sport facility policies and funding was explored in relation to the NSW region. In addition, a representative from Squash Australia was interviewed to better understand the participation environment from a national sporting organisation perspective, as well as individuals from both a not-for-profit squash club and a privately operated squash club in NSW. For the Organisational factor, secondary data related to coaches, volunteers, employees, board members, partnerships and community engagement, and sports programs and competitions was collected from Squash NSW annual reports and Sport Australia's library of sport literature, Clearinghouse for Sport. In addition, a former Squash NSW board member with knowledge of the wider participation environment was interviewed as well as a former CEO to provide perspectives of the organisation of squash within NSW region, and the influence of the other factors of the organisation.

For the interpersonal factor, a representative from the Squash NSW coaching team was interviewed to provide insight into the interpersonal components of Squash NSW, such as mentoring and coaching. Secondary data from Squash NSW archives and annual reports relating to coaching, mentor programs, and volunteers was collected as well. Finally, for the intrapersonal factor, a current squash participant of a club within the NSW region was interviewed to provide insights into intrapersonal aspects of squash in NSW such as general awareness of the sport, support to improve knowledge of the game and

physical literacy of the game as well as their views on the products that are offered by the sporting organisation. Secondary data was collected from the 2010 Squash NSW Annual report and Squash Australia review as these included survey results addressing members views of squash in NSW and Australia. This individual had to be club members for a minimum of five years to be able to provide a perspective on what has influenced their own participation as well as those they are familiar with. *Figure 4* provides an overview of interviewees based on each of the SEM factors.

Figure 4

Participant Selection and the Socio-ecological Model



3.7 Data Analysis

Due to data collection requiring qualitative mixed methods there was a core component (interview data) and a supplemental component (document analysis) to be analysed. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews and secondary data collection from an array of public sources such as annual reports and strategic plans. The data was analysed in an inductive and descriptive manner which utilised thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. Thematic analysis organises and describes data in rich detail, and it interprets various aspects of the research topic which made it appropriate for this research project (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As sport participation is influenced by an array of phenomena, thematic analysis is suitable for this subject matter as it enables diverse perspectives to be drawn from.

To identify the key themes and sub-themes in the data, the researcher adopted a six-phase model of analysis as outlined by Braun et al. (2016). The first phase, 'familiarization,' required the researcher to become intimately familiar with the content. This involved critical engagement, reading and re-reading all data items and making notes about what interested the researcher. The second phase, 'coding', required the researcher to identify and label the data that was of relevance to the research question. When reviewing the dictated text from the interview data, text was tagged in relation to the layer of the SEM that it addressed. For example, if a participant discussed an issue with public policy, that text was coded as correlating with the policy layer of the SEM. To ensure a systematic, coherent, and robust set of coded themes the data was coded twice. The third phase, 'theme development', required the researcher to organise the codes and coded data into themes. This enabled the researcher to develop a rich analysis of the data represented by the finalised themes. Braun et al. (2016) states that the key aspect of higher-level analysis is that theme development moves the analytic narrative beyond simply summarising and describing the themes to provide commentary on their implications and importance. The fourth and fifth phases, 'refinement' and 'theme development', involved the researcher to use the coded data to ensure that it firstly fit within the data and is not misrepresenting the data

through poor coding, and secondly, ensured that the themes were telling a story that was addressing the research question in a coherent and compelling manner. Next, the researcher provided a brief definition of each idea which captured the essence of each theme and its scope. The final phase, 'writing up', required the researcher to compile, develop and edit the existing themes and position them within the overall report.

To ensure rigour in this research project, the methodological recommendations outlined by Cypress (2017) and Baxter and Eyles (1997) were used. To ensure external and internal validity, reliability, and objectivity in this qualitative research project arrangements for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were identified. Credibility refers to the accurate and truthful depiction of a participant's lived experiences (Cypress, 2017). Implementing procedures that address credibility is important to ensure that the data reflects the participant's experiences, not the interviewer's interpretation (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). To alleviate self-selection bias in this study, the multi-level stakeholder requirements were implemented to include various perspectives of individual participation of squash in NSW. Baxter and Eyles (1997) identified three strategies to be applied to the interview processes that improve the credibility of the data analysis methods: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation. Due to the researcher's role within Squash NSW, they have had prolonged engagement with numerous individuals who are currently involved with Squash in NSW. In this study, persistent observation was addressed using multiple stakeholders from various levels of Squash in NSW. This ensures that there is not a one-sided view of squash in NSW. Finally, triangulation was achieved by cross-checking the data and interpretations within each theme and across each stakeholder level by multiple researchers, in this case, the researchers' supervisors (Cypress, 2017).

There were four analytical techniques used after data was collected to ensure credibility: peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checking (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Peer debriefing was done by sharing data with project supervisors to identify potential misinterpretations or missing interpretations. Negative case analysis was consistently performed throughout the study by

continually revising the research aims with the interview data being collected to explore the multiple dimensions of the study themes and ensure robust data interpretations. Finally, participants of this study were given access to the constructs and themes that had been obtained from the data. This was to ensure that there was a system that enabled participants to check for falsified information. Implementing these four techniques ensured that the researchers interpretations represented the participants experience and ensured the themes uncovered were credible constructs.

In a qualitative research paradigm, experiences and context is highly dependent on time, people, and the setting of the study. Therefore, transferability was managed by ensuring that the participant sample includes an array of perspectives from individuals that have been involved in squash at various levels of the organisation and sport through the sampling techniques employed. Additionally, the use of detailed descriptions relating to how the constructs and hypothesis were developed and what they mean to the population determined how much the themes can be transferred to other contexts (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Dependability is framed around ensuring that there is consistency in the administration of the interviews between participants, as well as how the data is interpreted. Therefore, to ensure dependability the analytical constructs of this study was clearly defined prior to the interviews, this was to ensure that there is no variation in the interpretations of the different data sets (Cypress, 2017). Additionally, the use of triangulation methods, which utilised other researchers to overlook the consistency of the interpretation made from the data ensured dependability of the results. Finally, ‘confirmability’ is important to maintain self-awareness as the instrument for the study. Throughout the study an audit trail containing the raw data, data reduction and analysis products, notes, materials, and dispositions was kept. This enabled the examination of the processes that were used for data collection, analysis, and interpretations. The use of this reflective processes assisted the researcher in reducing the effect of their own biases, assumptions, beliefs, and presumptions that they were aware of (Cypress, 2017). This research project employed techniques outlined by previous research to ensure rigour. This is important as it guided the methods used to safeguard the reliability and validity of the results produced.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is an outline of the factors that have influenced participation of squash in NSW through the lens of the socio-ecological model (SEM). The SEM highlights the key factors that influence sport participation as policy, environmental, organisational, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. The key concepts were identified through thematic analysis of the interview transcripts and secondary data collected from a variety of sources. This analysis found four primary themes that seem to have a significant influence on participation in squash: 1) facilities, 2) development programs and products offered, 3) trust between key stakeholders, and 4) governance. Within each of the themes, constraints have been identified that negatively impact participation in squash. The identification of these constraints addresses Research Question 1. Opportunities were then conceived relating to each of the themes. These are put forth for the purpose of positively influence squash participation, which addresses Research Question 2. In the subsequent sections of this chapter each of the themes is considered through the lens of each of the five SEM factors. Overall, this approach has generated a unique perspective of the wider environment that has influenced squash participation in New South Wales (NSW).

Section 4.2 addresses the factors that have influenced participation in squash and the sub-themes that have been highlighted as constraining factors to participation in squash. Finally, secondary source data related to each theme is also discussed. Section 4.3 identifies the opportunities that are related to the key themes to positively influence participation and address some of the constraints previously highlighted in section 4.2. Table 3 lists the key themes influencing squash participation as

well as sub-themes which take the form of constraints. Opportunities related to these themes that will positively impact squash participation in NSW are also presented.

Table 3

Themes, Sub-Themes and Opportunities with the Organisational Environment of Squash in NSW

Research Question 1: How did the wider organisational environment influence participation of squash in NSW?	
Theme	Sub-Theme
Facilities	Facility Loss
	Facility Management
Development Programs and Products Offered	In-schools Programs
	Junior Programs
	Senior Programs
Trust between Key Stakeholders	Culture
Governance	Organisational Governance
	Grants and Funding
	Exposure
Research Question 2: What can be done within the organisational environment to increase squash participation in NSW?	
Theme	Opportunities
Facilities	Education on resources available for facilities
	Mapping the facility gaps to inform grant application
	Utilise technology to improve facilities
	Focus on retaining current facilities
	Partner with other Racquet sports (New facilities proposals)
Development Programs and Products Offered	Introduce innovative competitions to entire state
	Redesign schools' programs
	Adjust Junior State Team requirements
	Improve accessibility to coaching/refereeing qualifications
	Partner with other racquet sport (In-schools delivery)
Trust between Key Stakeholders	Improve member benefits to develop trust
	Improve communication to improve transparency
Governance	Development and implementation of Strategic plan
	Up skill young persons for key leadership positions
	Improve utilisation of asset 'Thornleigh Squash and Fitness'

Note. Themes are a key influencer of sport participation. Sub-themes are key constraints to participation associated to the theme. Opportunities are concepts stated by participants that are can positively influence squash participation in relation to the key themes.

4.2 Research Question 1: Organisational Influences of Squash Participation

This section is exclusively addressing research question 1 which examines the key influencing factors of squash participation. Furthermore, the sub-themes that lay within the primary factors as constraining aspects to participation will be investigated. This will be covering the key themes: facilities, development programs and products offered, trust between stakeholders, and governance.

4.2.1 Facilities

The first theme that was evident from the interview and document data was the influence of facilities on squash participation. The first of two sub-themes within this set of insights were the number of facilities and their condition. Numerous squash courts have been lost and others are in poor condition. The second sub-theme pertained to the way in which the organisation and the facilities are being managed, which also seems to be a constraint to participation. The SEM was useful in investigating facility-related themes that have influenced participation of squash in NSW. The constraints associated with this theme interacted with four of the five layers in the SEM. Firstly, at the policy and organisational level, the state and national sport organisation have a significant role in accessing government funding to build new courts and assist current courts operators to access funding as well. The SEM states at the policy level, funding and the facilities policies are key influencers of sport participation and at the organisational level, skilled members in key leadership positions are important (Ingram & O'Boyle, 2017; Scarneo et al., 2019). Skilled members in key leadership positions are particularly important to utilise government facilities resources and to assist their members to best utilise these funds as well. This difficulty in accessing government funding, and getting adequate assistance from the governing bodies, was identified as a major constraint for participation in squash numerous participants addressed. When discussing why it was so difficult for the sporting organisation to get more courts built, one participant stated:

“Why would a government or local council build squash courts in an area when we can't tell them how many people play. While there is a saying 'build it and people will come' what we need to

remember is that governments and members of parliament will support projects in sport that will get them votes.” – Participant 1

This quote highlights how policy and governance can influence the resources available to a sport organisation and club managers to develop facilities. This theme also related to the environmental layer of the SEM as it has identified accessibility to a sport as a key influencer of sport participation, a decline of available facilities in NSW creates a significant constraint on individuals' ability to access a sport. Furthermore, the SEM highlights quality facilities as a crucial factor. The poor upkeep of facilities in NSW has a considerable influence on the perception that an individual has towards the sport. When discussing the support available to clubs when applying for facilities grants a participant stated:

“I don't think that the associations are equipped to support them [clubs] because it [applying for grants] is so hard and expensive.” – Participant 7

Furthermore, in relation to the intrapersonal layer, the physical and social environment within the facilities, and the accessibility to squash courts throughout the state, was highlighted as a direct influence on individual's desire and ability to participate in squash.

“There are a lot of courts that are in a pretty poor condition, [In Pennant] you hear a lot of players complain about having to go and play at certain clubs because the courts are so shocking.” – Participant 5

4.2.1.1 Facility Loss

In relation to the wider constraint related to facilities, one specific constraint outlined by all the participants was that there has been a significant loss of squash facilities in NSW. One participant stated that “Since 1994 we have lost 80% of facilities in NSW” (Participant 6).

Numerous participants highlighted the loss of facilities as being primarily due to a property boom in Sydney resulting in the property value of squash courts increasing exponentially. This meant that the value of operating a squash court was not as viable as the sum that they would be given out right, one participant stated:

“Land values have gone through the roof for example Concord, Nancy she had a 2-court centre in the middle of concord for years, she sold it at 80 years old for 2.2 million dollars and then the last squash courts in the area were gone.” – Participant 7

This is an example of courts that were lost in the inner west of Sydney. The loss of this facility created a 30-kilometre gap from Sydney’s Central Business District to the next closest courts in Western Sydney. After the loss of a facility if there is not another centre that is in close proximity, then that club disappears. A participant stated:

“Best case scenario players would just go join another club but that is not always possible.” – Participant 4

The difficulty in joining another club is particularly challenging for players in rural NSW. One participant highlighted that the land mass of the state is so vast that if a club is sold in one town it is likely that the next facility will not be a viable option to travel to regularly to play due to the large distance (Participant 2). Additionally, many of the participants further stated that although there is an issue of facility loss, the quality of the courts remaining are not of a standard that members, current and prospective, expect from sporting facilities. For example, one participant stated:

“Commercial developers would come along and say they want to buy up squash courts for commercial development. We have lost facilities and then the facilities that we do have are tired and rundown and are not quality environments that communities expect in 2021.” - Participant 1

4.2.1.2 Facility Management

As noted in the previous section, it came through strongly that the loss of facilities was an important issue related to participation, but the way in which facilities have been managed is a separate and equally important insight. Due to many of the facilities in NSW being privately owned, participants identified that it is difficult to gain government support as grants are frequently aimed at not-for-profit organisations. For example, one private facility operator stated “I have never received a grant. It is hard being a lease holder as a lot of grants available are for not-for-profits” (Participant 6). This leaves the cost of maintenance on the facility owner, and with the continual decline of squash participation in NSW, the

pool of paying members is diminishing. Furthermore, participants identified that the facilities, both private and not-for-profit, struggle to attract staff with adequate experience to submit a viable application for funding, as well as utilise the funding efficiently. One participant discussed the grant that had been approved for their facility upgrade stating:

“We have applied several times and it is only because a club member with a lot of experience in government and policies in writing and that is reason, we were able to get this grant. . . I couldn't have followed through with the project and that side of things and we would have had to have spent a lot more money on that side of things [if it were not for that club member].” – Participant

7

Another participant attributed the difficulty in gaining grant funding to the notion that squash facilities are usually run by individuals that love the sport, but do not necessarily have the required business and operational ‘know-how’. The participant stated that a lot of people hold on to courts for the sake of it and are not willing to trial alternate approaches.

“A lot of them [court owners] are stuck in the past in the sense that they are not willing to move with the sport and move forward. If you're not a part of the solution you are a part of the problem.” – Participant 3

The issue in gaining funding is further magnified by the lack of resources available to court owners and operators from state and national governing bodies. The Squash Australia representative stated that there is no collaboration on grant applications. The organisation has no idea that facilities are applying for grants until they are asked for a letter of support, then they never hear from the club again about whether they were successful or not. Additionally, there are no tools to assist clubs in how to write grant applications. One participant discussed how they would love help with grant writing as their skills lay in customer relations and partnership building, not administration. The lack of material resources for clubs has been attributed to a lack of human resources.

“The participation space is a staffing issue, you don't have the full-time staff you need to be able to do what you need to, and you have high turnover.” – Participant 3

Another participant discussed a lack of human resources stating that Squash NSW employs only four part-time employees who have seen three different CEOs in the past two years. “This significantly restricts the organisation ability to act on additional projects outside the day-to-day operations” (Participant 1). One participant highlighted that these issues have created a cycle where facilities are being lost, and because participation is declining, councils are not seeing the demand to build new facilities. This issue is then enhanced as private court owners tend to be unwilling to assist in creating demand for more facilities as it does not benefit them financially. The participant specified:

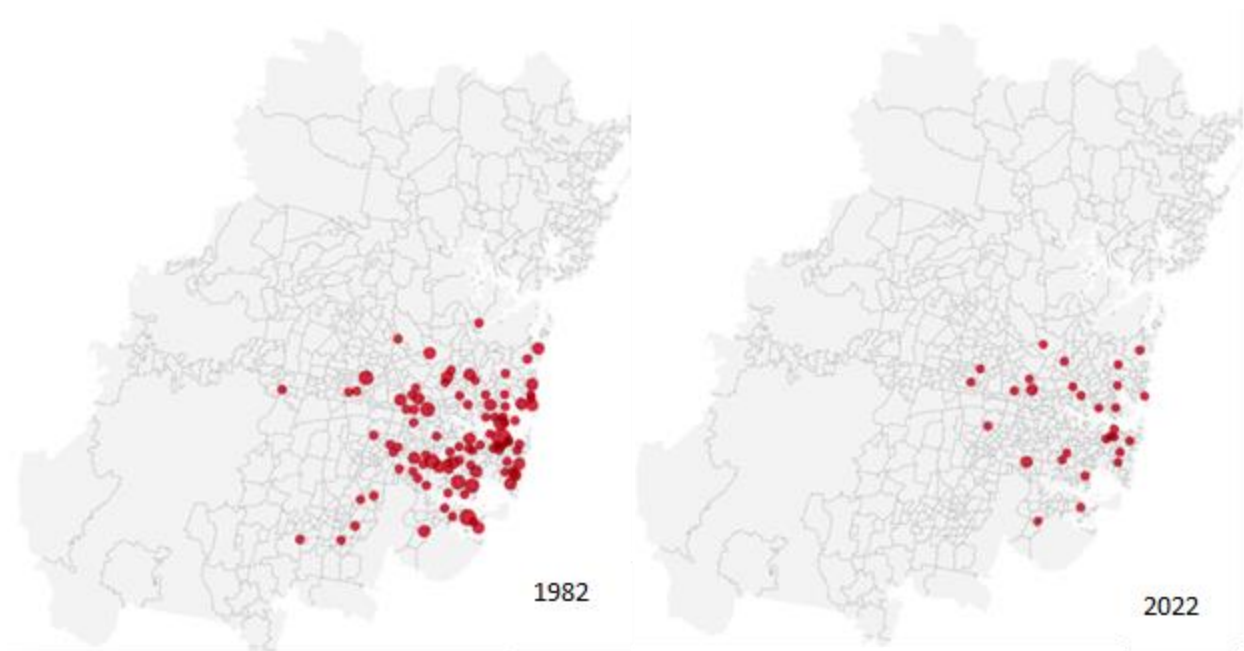
“There is a decline in facilities and a lack of maintenance and upgrade but, at the same time the participation rates, there is a lack of demand for new facilities. . . Squash is run by private providers with their own commercial interest and that is their livelihood, they are only focused on themselves.” – Participant 1

4.2.1.3 Complementary Document Insights

There are currently 170 squash clubs with a total of 460 courts in all of NSW. Data has found that in NSW they have lost a substantial number of facilities. The Squash NSW 2020 Annual Report indicated that there are currently 40 squash clubs in metro Sydney, which is down 80% from 30 years ago. Furthermore, there are 80 regional towns that have no squash courts. This means 30% of regional NSW are without squash facilities (Squash NSW, 2021). Figure 5 maps out squash facilities in Sydney in 1982 and now in 2022.

Figure 5

Squash Centres in Sydney: 1982 and 2022



(Fitzsimmons, 2022)

A common constraint discussed during the interviews was the inadequate quality of the facilities that are operating. According to Sport Australia records of entities that have accessed grant funding in NSW since 2004, neither Squash NSW nor NSW squash clubs, except for one, have received facilities up-grade grant in the 10-year history available (NSW Government, 2022; Sport NSW, 2022).

Furthermore, a lack of resources from the national and state organisation to assist clubs in the maintenance of squash courts was a primary reason for the poor condition of many courts. An example of courts being inadequately maintained is that numerous courts in Sydney Metro have a varnish finish on their flooring. However, the Squash Australia Active Community Plan, which contains a strategic direction for facilities, states that squash courts should have a matte finish on the flooring to avoid the court becoming slippery if there is any moisture on the court (Squash Australia, n.d.).

Both Squash Australia and Squash NSW's primary objective with facilities is to grow the number of facilities in Australia and NSW (Squash Australia, n.d.; Squash NSW, 2021). Squash Australia Facilities Plan further states that there is a need to focus on working with government entities to create

council-built facilities due to “An over-reliance on private providers in the provision of squash courts is one of the significant risks to the sustainability of the sport in Australia” (Squash Australia, n.d., p. 18).

It is common for the grants and funding system for sports implemented by the Australian Government to require sporting organisations and clubs to have the funds to contribute a percentage of the grant request. This enables facility operators and sporting organisations to access additional facilities funds such as the Multi-Sport Community Facility Fund, which requires a 50% co-contribution with a minimum of one million dollars grant request. Moreover, the building of council facilities is dependent on participation rates in the area (Sport Australia, n.d.).

4.2.3 Development Programs and Products

4.2.3.1 Introduction

The next most prominent theme that was highlighted as having a significant influence on squash participation, was the lack of junior development programs and products offered. This theme included three sub-themes that emphasised the lack of in-schools programs, junior development pathways and senior competitions as constraints to participation of squash in NSW. The SEM highlights that the products that are being offered by sporting organisation and clubs as an essential factor that influences individuals’ participation in a sport. The constraints associated with the lack of development programs and products offered by Squash NSW and clubs within NSW is considered through the lens of three out of five of the SEM factors. On an organisational level, a primary aspect of this factor is the use of funding. The prominence of grant funding is the foundation of the school’s sporting program and is the basis for Squash NSW to be able to implement sport programs. However, one participant highlighted that if there is not a teacher or Principal that is familiar with squash, then it is unlikely that Squash NSW will get the opportunity to show the students what squash is (Participant 2).

On a community level, some of the primary factors that influence participation according to the SEM are resources and capacity building. A lack of development programs and products offered is considered through the lens of this SEM as a primary constraint. Associated with this theme is the lack of coaches to carry out programs and pathways, which are essential in building the capacity of an

organisation. This is also considered through the lens of the interpersonal factors of the SEM as it states the quality coaches are essential to sport participation. As well as the need for a junior pathway to develop young players to become the next high-performance athletes. On an intrapersonal level, an essential aspect is physical literacy. The implementation of development programs is essential to the development of physical literacy.

4.2.3.2 In-schools

The lack of junior development programs that are offered by clubs and Squash NSW was touched upon by six out of the seven participants. One of the primary reasons for this is the lack of junior players in NSW. One participant stated, “When I look at when I was a junior coming through [20 years ago] there was a lot of depth” (Participant 6). This decrease in junior participation was firstly attributed by another participant to the lack of in-schools squash programs and grassroots programs. While discussing the OzSquash program, an in-school sporting program offered by Squash Australia to be delivered by the state organisation, it was highlighted that the delivery of in-schools programs has numerous constraints.

“We are not in-schools, we are not in-schools at all. We have got our programs, but we don't have deliverers at the moment. That's the biggest one.” – Participant 3

Two participants highlighted a lack human resources in NSW as a major constraint to the OzSquash program, with one participant attributing this to there being no visible career path as full-time squash coaches, as there is not enough demand for squash in schools (Participant 3). Another participant identified how Squash NSW have no school development officers, and the community engagement coordinator is only on one day a week, yet in sports such as AFL there are hundreds of development officers that are in schools every week delivering their Sporting Schools program (Participant 1).

One participant explained how the sporting school's platform operates, stating that when a school uses the Sporting Schools platform to request a sports program, the request goes straight to the state to be assigned to a coach. Due to the high turnaround of staff, or lack of dedicated staff to managing sporting schools at Squash NSW, the small number of applications that have been submitted are frequently missed.

“If they [the state] miss it [the booking] then the school misses out. Schools have a very limited window on when they can apply to sign up for squash and have the grant funding received to them. They can't sign up for term 3 then we miss it, and they can't say 'oh I will just sign up for term 4', they have missed it and lost that funding.” – Participant 3

Additionally, one participant highlighted that there are young players are not utilised for coaching. For example, in soccer the high school students are refereeing and coaching the under sixes, however this is not seen in squash (Participant JW). Another participant further explained the issue with coaches and the Sporting Schools' program as being overshadowed by the lack of unity among current private coaches and the sporting organisation. One participant explained:

“A private coach goes in and delivers his own school's program; they are not getting sporting schools funding. So, then squash is not getting recognised on a sporting schools' level because sporting schools doesn't know about it. If the school applies through sporting schools, then that reflects a lot better on the national body as you gain more kids playing.” – Participant 3

4.2.3.2 Junior Programs

As highlighted in the previous section, the programs exposing squash to junior players was a critical issue related to participation, but the lack of development programs for the juniors that do decide to participate in squash is a separate and equally important insight. One participant highlighted when we do get kids in from the in-schools program there is no pathway to retain them, for example, they stated: “for females, 17 is the highest age to stop playing squash and there being nothing for them to continue on to” (Participant 3). This has been attributed to a lack of education on the pathways that are available to them.

“For juniors, you play well and you either go on to play PSA (Professional Squash Association) or that's it they are pretty much cut off if you don't go do anything. . . We used to have squash in AIS (Australian Institute of Sport) but no longer. It was cut because the funding wasn't there but that is because we don't have any world champions anymore.” – Participant 3

Furthermore, another participant stated there is no one within the national or state organisation pushing to retain high-performance players. They explained that they had decided to play in another state once they moved out of the NSW junior pathways due to the lack of support from Squash NSW. Furthermore, once their professional career was over, they did not have anyone approach them to ask what they could do within the organisation, or what they wanted to do with squash next (Participant 4). This resulted in them leaving the sport completely for some time. It was family connections to the sport that fielded their return to the sport.

On a state level, two participants attributed the decline in high-performance junior participation to there being a lack of performance standards in the selection criteria for the junior state team, which created a poor culture within the players. One participant further expanded on this idea stating that this has created a culture of “if I participate a little more than someone else, I will go straight into the [state] team,” establishing a lack of competitive drive to improve their skills (Participant 4). This culture resulted in the redesign of the JPP, which increased the number of tournaments and training camps that needed to be attended in the selection criteria to qualify for the junior state team. However, one participant highlighted that:

“There are too many camps, the feedback that I hear is that players don't want to go but they do because they have to not because they want to, they also go to hang out with their friends which is good, but players get better playing matches. . . They [juniors] need to be playing more senior tournaments.” – Participant JM

When discussing constraints for junior's, another participant stated that there are issues with youths having a lot of commitments with school and multiple extracurricular commitments, and in a sport that requires a lot of travel, this can negatively affect participation (Participant 7).

4.2.3.3 Senior Programs

As previously mentioned, Junior programs were a critical issue related to participation, but the way in which juniors transition into senior competition and the products that are offered are a crucial contributor to participation as well. When discussing the progression from junior to senior squash, one

participant explained that there had not been a high-performance academy that transitions junior players to senior, professional squash since 2004. This is correlates with the fact that there has been no NSW players in the top 20 since then (Participant 7). They further explain that the high-performance academy was different to the current JPP, as the JPP was targeted at developing talented junior players while the high-performance academy was directed at professional senior player. Nonetheless, during their involvement in the high-performance academy, they found that they did improve and learnt more about what it took to be a high-performance athlete, but they could not sustain their participation, stating “the travel and cost was painful, because we had to drive to Campbelltown, SCG, Thornleigh and with living in the northern beaches the travel was too much” (Participant 7). This issue with travel and cost is also evident with casual players, with one participant stating:

“Playing squash in Sydney is very expensive, I didn't play at all the first year I was here because the cost was so high. A lot of clubs here charge \$40+ for an hour of court hire, and if you are wanting to play a couple of times a week as well as play competitions you can be paying \$130+ plus a week just on squash.” - Participant 5

When asked about senior weekend tournaments in NSW, one participant stated that there needs to be a lot more tournaments. “All clubs should have two a year, but there are only a select few clubs that hold tournaments” (Participant 6).

Finally, when further discussing products offered in NSW, the Sydney Pennant competition was mentioned multiple times as a constraint on products offered. For Squash NSW, the Sydney Pennant is their primary income which highlights the importance of the competition, and its success for the sporting organisation. However, participation in this competition has been seen to continually decline. It was highlighted numerous times that this is due to the competition being too time consuming.

“People are time poor now. If you look at OzPlay data, gym and walking, the things that people wouldn't consider traditional sport, are the top sports. It is because you can do it in your own time, it's more accessible, 24-hour gyms, you can walk wherever you want.” – Participant LD

One participant also highlighted how squash does not offer a product that is attractive to the modern individual. In other sports, such as cricket and rugby union, they introduced alternatives that are less time consuming to boost participation.

“One in three families split, mums are working, no one has any time, in Sydney it’s a shit fight to get anywhere, so people want their sport to be instant and I don’t see an instant product in squash, there is no 20/20, there is no 7’s.” – Participant RG

This highlights the lack of products that are offered in squash and how the current products do not cater to society today. However, there are further issues that are associated with the private nature of most of the clubs in NSW. Multiple participants highlighted on how the squash facility managers of private businesses do not want to participate in initiatives offered by squash NSW because they do not see the benefit for themselves. As a private facility manager one participant highlighted:

“I understand when clubs like Eleanora do not put teams into the Sydney pennant, he gets all the registration fees without having to pay Squash NSW. However, this is then not helping the sport as well. We are not Thornleigh where there is funding available.” – Participant JM

The participant further highlighted the importance of actively hosting events, stating that “the clubs that are active on social media, hosting tournaments and junior programs seem to be the clubs that are doing well” (Participant 6).

4.2.3.4 Complementary Document Insights

The school’s program that is supported by Sport Australia offers a grant based in-schools program called Sporting Schools. This program enables schools to apply for funding that can then be used to fund sport organisations to run their own sporting program in the school. The schools can select from over 35 sports. Squash Australia currently offers a 5-week OzSquash program that can either be coach-delivered or teacher-delivered (Squash NSW, N.d.). The recognition of the number of schools that choose a sport within the Sporting Schools program is essential to being able to gain further funding programs and getting access to funded high school programs. Currently squash is third to last in the national sporting schools ranking (Sport Australia, n.d.). Since October 2016 Squash NSW has had 44 Sporting

Schools requests across the state, with 2017 being the most successful year with 19 school bookings and 2021 being the least successful with two bookings (Sporting Schools, 2022).

The Squash NSW Sporting Schools coaching network has 25 coaches listed, but over 50% of them are invalid, meaning they are unable to conduct OzSquash programs with the Sporting School's program (Sporting Schools, 2022). On the Squash NSW coaching register there is approximately 150 Level 1 and Level 2 certified coaches, and only one Level 3 coach (Squash NSW, N.d.). In the past eight years there have been seven coaching clinics for members of Squash NSW to qualify to become a Level 2 Club Development Coach. From these clinics 22 new coaches were recorded to have become certified (Squash NSW, n.d.).

Squash Australia has an extensive participant and athlete development pathway that have six levels; Foundation 1, Foundation 2, Talent Development 1, Talent Development 2, Achieve Excellence and Retain. Through all six of these levels, the pathway addresses players, coaches, and parents' roles at each level, as well as additional requirements that go beyond the game such as sleep, nutrition, and psychological components (Squash Australia, n.d.). In this document, it highlights that juniors that are in the high-performance level should be playing at least 10 tournaments a year, with a majority of these being senior tournaments.

One participant mentioned the criteria for the junior performance pathways requires junior players to attend too many training camps to qualify for a position in the state team. The JPP has increased the criteria to be eligible for the state team. With each player being required to play one gold event, the NSW Junior State Tiles, three silver tournaments (two must be in NSW, the third can be out of state or a tournament of higher ranking such as the Australian Junior Open) and three bronze tournaments as well as, participating in two one-day regional pathway camps, three two-day state performance camps and one state team camp (Squash NSW, 2021). Whereas previously to qualify a player had to play three bronze tournaments, one silver tournament and one gold tournament, as well as attend two training camps.

An additional constraint that was highlight is the cost to play squash, there is considerable variation between council-built courts and privately operated courts. A case study highlighted in the Squash Australia Facilities plan stated that the Coleambully Squash Club charges \$5 for court hire and is a club built on council land which is owned by the community, their objective to ensure that squash is affordable to which 10% of the township are members of the courts (Squash Australia, 2018). This is significantly cheaper than the \$35-40 per hour that is common in clubs in Sydney (Thornleigh Squash and Fitness, n.d.; Willoughby Squash Club, n.d.; Bondi Squash Club, n.d.).

One participant mentioned that the clubs that are hosting events are in a small field, in NSW there are 38 junior and senior tournaments in NSW for 2022 between 21 clubs, with select clubs hosting significantly more than others. This small field is also seen in the Pennant Competition where there are currently only 25 clubs that participate in the competition, this has decreased from the 30 clubs that were participating in the Sydney pennant competition three years ago.

The Sydney Pennant is a weekly four-person team's event with each season running for 17 weeks twice a year. When looking at the decline of participation in pennant there has been a 35% decline in players participating between 2013 spring Pennant and the 2019 Spring pennant (Squash NSW, 2014; Squash NSW, 2019). It should be noted that COVID has had a further negative impact on participation in the Pennant competition, however, there has been a less than 1% decrease in between the 2019 Spring Pennant (before COVID) and the 2022 Autumn Pennant (Squash NSW, 2018; Squash NSW, 2021). Lastly, the results from a survey in the 2010 Squash NSW annual report highlighted that the over reliance on the pennant income avenue as problematic and there is a need for the exploration of other commercial revenue streams (Squash NSW, 2010).

4.2.2 Trust between key stakeholders

4.2.2.1 Introduction

The next most common theme that was identified as a significant influence on participation of squash in NSW was a lack of trust between players, club owners/managers and the sport organisations. This highlighted a 'toxic culture' in the sport as a constraining sub theme on participation. The SEM states

culture within a sporting organisation is essential to the prolonged participation within a sport. A lack of trust between stakeholders is considered through the lens of three of the five levels associated with the SEM. At a policy level, a disconnected sporting organisation detracts from government agencies wanting to support initiatives therefore harming the organisations' ability to gain funding to support facilities projects and program development initiatives. At an organisational level, partnerships and culture was stated as a significant influencer of participation in sport, the toxic culture highlighted in squash is largely influenced by the nature of the relationships between key stakeholders which has a negative impact on individuals' enjoyment of a sport and negatively influences businesses and organisations want to associate with the sport organisation and clubs. At the interpersonal level, the foundation of this factor is the relationships between individuals within the sport, one participant highlighted that the lack of trust had a significant impact on the sport.

“Squash in NSW is very fragile because of the [toxic] culture and feeling around Squash NSW.” –

Participant 4

4.2.2.2 Culture

As mentioned above, a toxic culture within the sport has had a significant influence on participation in Squash. This was mentioned by multiple participants, they highlighted that the culture from Squash Australia to Squash NSW to the club managers to the players is shrouded in negative interactions that has caused a decline in individuals wanting to be involved in squash. The issue of trust and culture was a prominent theme one participant observed, as an individual that has not previously been involved in squash, that the communities' views of the state sporting organisation was not positive.

“There is a fair degree of scepticism towards Squash NSW. There seems to be a fair degree of negativity towards Squash NSW based on a perceived lack of leadership, action, relationship building and the lack of a viable value proposition from Squash NSW to its stakeholder.” –

Participant 1

When discussing the issue of trust between stakeholders, one participant highlighted that the lack of trust has resulted in many clubs not wanting to be affiliated with Squash NSW or Squash Australia.

“Squash NSW doesn't offer anything that the clubs cannot obtain themselves, which is why the clubs question the value of becoming an affiliated member and club” (Participant 2). Another participant stated this has been further amplified as there is no one prepared to talk or help each other (Participant 4). When another participant was asked about the culture between the state organisation and the clubs, they specified that a lack of working together can be attributed to the fact that many clubs are privately run in Sydney and the clubs are competing against each other (Participant 6).

Furthermore, multiple participants highlighted that there is a disconnect between the squash community and the governing bodies, one participant stated that there are too many people that are self-interested rather than growing the sport (Participant 2). When discussing the apparent disconnect within the sport another participant identified this as being a larger issue stating that:

“It [the squash community] is disconnected, there doesn't seem to be a united community with a common vision. This creates an issue as Governments want to support sports that are united not fragmented.” – Participant 1

4.2.2.3 Complementary Document Insights

A lack of trust within the organisation was identified as a key constraint to participation in squash, and this was also identified in the results of a survey that was published the 2010 Squash NSW Annual Report, this stated that a major concern for players in NSW is the lack of recognition of conflicting interests as well as poor communication from the organisation to the players which resulted in distrust from its members (Squash NSW, 2010). Conflicts of interest within the organisation was highlighted again in the 2014 annual report which mentioned a significant legal battle with a previous manager of the Thornleigh Squash Club (Squash NSW, 2014). These legal proceedings were also mentioned briefly by two of the seven participants.

Of the 170-squash centres in NSW there are currently only 78 clubs affiliated with Squash NSW. Squash NSW affiliation provides clubs with covering Personal Accident Insurance, Public and Products Liability, Professional Indemnity Insurance and Management Liability Insurance as well as access to

online competitions and member management platform, SportyHQ, ability to access grants such as active kids, ability to vote at the Annual General Meeting and ability to host (Squash NSW, n.d.).

4.2.3 Governance

4.2.3.1 Introduction

The fourth theme that was identified as a key influencer of participation of squash in NSW was ‘Governance’, this highlighted two sub-themes that were significant constraining factors. These sub-themes were poor organisational governance and difficulty in gaining access to grants and funding. The SEM states that policy and governance is a primary factor that influences participation in sport, as it influences how the sporting organisation operates and its strategic direction, protocols, and funding. These issues associated with governance is considered through the lens of three of the five factors connected with the SEM, at a policy level governance is influenced by national policy that directs how the organisation interacts with its participants and stakeholders such as the Child Protection (Working with Children) Act 2012, that determines individuals that work with children are required to have their working with children check, restricting who can be involved with the organisation (NSW Government, 2022). At an environmental level, the relationship that individuals have with those that are in governing position is a key influencer of individuals perception of the sporting organisation. Finally, at an organisational level governance influences the strategic direction for sporting organisation and what programs are introduced to address participation in the state.

The sub-theme associated with governance highlighted a lack of media and marketing around squash as a sport being a significant constraint to participation. The SEM highlights that exposure of a sport through media and marketing is an import aspect of the organisational factor as it influences individuals’ knowledge and impression of the sport. The issues associated with a lack of exposure is considered through the lens of four of the five layers of the SEM, for the environmental and intrapersonal factors the way that individuals are exposed to a sport influences their perception of the sport and the culture that is present in that sport. At an organisational level, increasing the sports exposure through the sale of media rights has the potential to be a significant financial contributor to the organisation.

4.2.3.2 Organisational Governance

Five of the seven participants highlighted issues relating to governance that have influenced participation in squash. One participant discussed the primary reason that participation has declined was due to a lack of governance:

“[blaming the lack of facilities] a convenient excuse of why the sports died because it hides the underlying issue of governance around program development, player participation and core fundamentals of profiling the sport.” – Participant 6

This suggests that although a decrease of facilities has been a key constraint to squash participation, there are other factors that have had a large effect as well. Another participant attributed the lack of strategic direction within Squash NSW being due to the organisational operation being influenced by indecision and frequent changes in board members (Participant 7). Furthermore, two participants highlighted how the frequent changes in these key leadership positions was one of the primary factors that influenced Squash NSW ability to implement adequate programs that targeted participation, with one participant stated when asked about how they thought Squash NSW had influenced participation.

“There has been a lot of change recently and it has been really hard to get on to anything because you get a new CEO, and they change then suddenly it’s all starting over again.” – Participant 4

This highlights that the frequent changes in key leadership roles is a significant constraint to the operation of the organisation. Numerous participants highlighted that the boards lacked strategic direction is a significant constraint on the organisation however, when asked how the board can influence participation rates of squash in NSW another participant highlighted:

“The whole notion of increasing participation and what direct influence the board can have on that, in my opinion, is problematic. The board is made up of passionate squash people and yes, they may have some views on potentially what we should be doing strategically. But at the end of the day, the implementation of participation programs and the growth of the sport at a participation level will be contingent on our clubs.” – Participant 1

This quote helps us understand that the board is important for business strategy, however, the direct impact on participation that they can have, is limited. This suggests that the facility operators and staff have more of a direct influence on individual participation. Nonetheless, a different participant highlighted that the board had not been acting in professional manner stating

"There was a CEO that wasn't performing, and I asked if they had run a governance or performance review with that CEO, they said no, I said Well you then don't have a right to force them out because they haven't done anything wrong, appraise them, or given them the opportunity to discuss their behaviour or their approach to the business. Also, you haven't given them a strategic plan, also you haven't given them direction that you want to move in." -

Participant 2

This quote emphasises an issue with professionalism within the sporting organisation and a lack of accountability between employees and the board.

4.2.3.3 Grant and Funding

As illustrated in the previous section, it came through strongly that the governing bodies of the sport organisation was a prominent issue related to participation, but the financial resources available to the organisation and the facilities is a separate and equally important insight. Three out of the seven participants commented on the lack of funding available to court operators and the lack of support that is provided from the sporting organisations in gaining additional funding as a key containing sub-theme to participation. One participant talked as a private court operator "[in relation to gaining grant funding] I don't believe they [court owners] are supported at all. Most of the time centres are out on their own going for the grant applications themselves" (Participant 4). Yet, another participant when asked about the support received from Squash NSW and Squash Australia in grant applications stated that "I don't think that the associations are equipped to support them [clubs] because it [applying for grants] is so hard and expensive" (Participant 7).

These quotes highlight that clubs are needing assistance with funding applications however, those that are available to assist clubs are not qualified to provide the assistance needed. Furthermore, when asked

about the accessibility to funding for Squash NSW one participant highlighted the difficulty in gaining funding as a smaller sport stating:

“Squash Australia is resource deficient; its funding is primarily from the sports commission and that funding is primarily targeted at elite programs for Commonwealth games representation and our performance at Birmingham next year is going to be critical to retain that level of funding.” –

Participant 1

This highlights the importance of high-performance outcomes to maintain the current level of funding for the sport. However, a major issue that influences Squash Australia and Squash NSW in being able to obtain funding is their ability to report participation numbers to government agencies and councils so they can highlight that there is interest in squash as a sport, one participant emphasized that this is a significant issue for Squash Australia.

"We are underselling ourselves in every way possible because of that [no data on participation rates] Sport Australia doesn't want to give us more funding, which means we can't support the states more because we only have so much that we can do, states aren't able to apply for as much funding because we don't look like a popular sport to them and that's why we rely heavily on that OzPlay data because that's coming from people's mouths themselves." – Participant 1

This highlights the importance of data collection for a sporting organisation and a significant issue with squash in both NSW and across Australia and its inadequate data collection processes.

4.2.2.3 Exposure

As mentioned in the previous section, a considerable influencer of participation in sport is exposure through media and marketing. Five of the seven participants highlighted that people are not exposed to squash anymore. With one participant stating that the dated look of the facilities in NSW also negativity affects individuals being exposed to the sport as people do not realise those building are squash courts.

“We don't have any visibility for the sport, the buildings are old and dingy, there is no signage to say what it is. People will walk past and be like 'oh I didn't know there was squash here.’” –

Participant 4

Another participant stated that “Whenever I talk to people that have played squash in the past, they say how great the sport is and how much they loved playing, but they didn't know where the courts were anymore” (Participant 5). This was attributed by a different participant to the lack of visibility squash has in the media.

“It is not visible, you don't see it on TV, you don't see it on Foxtel, you don't see it on free-to-air, you don't see it on any platform. Unless you are a squashie and you YouTube it because we don't see it.” – Participant 1

However, to watch squash live is difficult one participant stated that getting access to watch the big Australia tournaments involves you having to use a special streaming service and even then, it is poor quality, delayed, and does not have commentary or scores (Participant 5). Furthermore, many squash facilities and the organisation are not actively engaging individuals on social media, one participant stated that “we [as the squash community] need to be on social media, we need to be seen and we just are not” (Participant 3).

The lack of exposure can also be seen in the lack of promotion of the top players from NSW, one participant highlighted that we need higher players to build and aspire to be better (Participant 7). Another participant continued that “we need to highlight them [top athletes]. Why are we not promoting what we have, visually that's acknowledgment of that player and where they come from” (Participant 4). One participant as a non-squash player stated:

“The kids don't see any heroes, so the kids don't have anyone to role model. I can't tell you who the number 1 player is in Australia. In the 70s and 80s I knew Heather McKay and Geoff Hunt.” – Participant 1

However, as was highlighted by another participant that Australia currently has no players in the top 20 in the world, there is one female in the top 30 and no male players in the top 100 (Participant 5). With another participant claiming that participation of squash is declining because there is a lack of exciting stars from here (Participant 6).

4.2.3.4 Complementary Document Insights

Multiple participants highlighted an instability in key leadership roles as a major influencer of instability within the sporting organisation, according to twelve years of Squash NSW Annual Reports (2010-2021), Squash NSW changed from a solely operational board to a hiring a part-time CEO in 2011, since then, there has been six CEOs with three transitions of this leadership role in the past two years. Furthermore, the strategic direction remained unchanged for ten years with it being updated in 2020.

In 2022/2023 Sport Australia allocated \$450,000 (AUD) in participation growth funding (Sport Australia, 2022), previous sport participation funds have not included squash such as the Australian Sport: A Pathway to Success initiative that saw 29 sports receive funding for participation initiatives (Squash Australia, 2010). The participation plan for Squash Australia is dated between 2016-2020 (Squash Australia, n.d.). In 2021, Squash Australia offered funding to appoint a Junior Performance Pathway Officer and a Community Engagement Coordinator. This enabled two individuals to be employed by the state organisation to develop a plan for participation and schools' programs (Squash NSW, n.d.).

In the section above, multiple participants highlighted that a lack of exposure of the sport is a significant influencing factor to squash participation. This can be seen in the coverage of the sport during major international events. During the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games, squash was not broadcasted live on Television with the full matches only being accessible through the media providers app even though Australia had numerous players that were competing for a medal position. Australia is the most successful Commonwealth Games country in squash with a total of 11 gold medals (Squash Australia, 2022).

Squash NSW Facebook following was 1500 followers in 2018 however, in 2022 Squash NSW following is 950 followers. In the 2018 Annual Report the Board outlined a strategy to improve marketing and communication from an organisational perspective, this outlined three key goals firstly to improve two-way communication between the organisation and its members. Secondly, to improve the products offered to increase participation and thirdly, to utilise the increase in smartphone technology and broadband capabilities to increase visibility of the sport (Squash NSW, 2019).

In the Squash Australia Marketing Plan, this outlined five key objectives, firstly ‘Whole of sport strategy’ which states the objective to provide a unified, cohesive strategy for the organisation to operate under a one source model (Squash Australia, 2022). Secondly ‘create increased participation’ which highlights the objective of putting squash into the position as a leading recreational sport. Thirdly, ‘raise the profile of squash in Australia’ outlines the objective to make squash visible and to reposition the perception of squash. Fourthly, ‘modernising squash communication channels’ this highlights the objective of engaging and communicating effectively with all internal and external stakeholders and better connect with target markets to grow the Australian audiences. Finally, ‘create role models’ this highlights the objective to strategically use elite players as brand ambassadors for the sport (Squash Australia, 2021).

4.3 Research Question 2: Organisational Measures to Increase Squash Participation

The following section is organised around the same five themes as the previous section. However, this section addresses the opportunities that emerged through the interviews to increase squash participation in NSW.

4.3.1 Facilities

4.3.1.1 Opportunities

As noted in the previous section, it came through strongly that the facilities have an important influence related to participation. When discussing facilities, two participants highlighted that there needs to be a shift in the focus of what the sport need to adapt due to the continual decline of squash participation in NSW. The focus should be on retaining what we have rather than growth. One participant explained:

“Retention, keeping what we got is just as important as trying to grow. Because we haven't seen any significant growth in the last 5, 10, 15 years. . . Our participation strategy is going to need to be holistic and all encompassing. Improving our environments so when parents and students come into a squash club it is not tired and rundown.” – Participant 1

This quote highlights the need to support clubs in improving the products that they currently offer. When discussing the potential of building new courts, two participants discussed that in order to increase the

feasibility of new facility builds, smaller racquet sports need to partner together. This creates a mutually beneficial proposal that will be attractive to local councils. Participant RT described how they are starting to build those relationships within NSW:

"I formed the Central Coast Squash Association with eight people, and we have developed a solid plan to work with Badminton NSW, Pickleball Australia, Table Tennis Australia, in forming an alliance." – Participant 7

One participant went further to suggest that locations need to be dictated by where there are gaps in the state, commenting that:

"Squash NSW should map out where there aren't squash courts look at the communities that don't have facilities and then work with local governments that not only cater to squash but also other sports to ensure there is a holistic approach to fitness and sport and engagement. Squash will fit into this because in every community there is a squash player because in the 80s it spawned an entire generation of players. . . Because then you can understand the historical gaps but also understand a hidden reef of players that haven't been able to physically play squash in NSW or in Sydney due to the share tyranny of distance and traffic."- Participant 2

These quotes suggest that to ensure participation in squash does not continue to decline, there is a need to create partnerships with other racquet sports to create multi-sport complexes. However, there is also a need to focus on providing support for the current facilities to improve their facility quality and environment. One participant highlighted that with proper planning Squash NSW would have the ability to access more funding to build community centres:

"We [Thornleigh] did a grant application properly and we got it, 1million dollars. With a proper plan we could get 20 or 30 million because there is money available, there is a 2 billion dollar float available. If we could get 10% of that for squash, we could build community centres with the facilities." – Participant 2

Another participant highlighted how there is a need to forget the private factor and rather focus on getting facilities built on public land (Participant 7). Two participants illustrated the sport needs to adopt a

hub and spoke model (Participant 2), stating ‘each region requires a Squash NSW operated, nine-plus court centres then smaller centres that feed into them’ (Participant 7). Another key aspect that was mentioned is that the courts that are built need to have movable walls, this will assist in creating partnerships with other sports as it makes the space more versatile (Participant 3)

An additional key sub-theme that has had a constraining influence on squash facilities in NSW was that the centres that are currently open in NSW are commonly maintained poorly. However, two participants highlighted that some of the worst conditioned centres and poorest maintained can be the busiest purely because of the person behind the desk (Participant 2; Participant 7). One participant went further exclaiming how important it is to identify people early that have charisma and connectivity then partnering them with a solid business model of how to maintain a successful business (Participant 7). This quote highlights the importance of both having a plan as well as the correct people to implement this. Furthermore, another participant highlighted how current facilities need to adopt modern technologies to become more accessible and interactive with their community. The utilisation of technologies such as interactive squash courts and 24/7 security is important to modernise the sport (Participant 3).

“Woden in ACT opened up to being 24/7 they got a lot more people starting to come in because they were only ever open from 11am on a weekday, but you have people that want to come in at 6/7am before work.” – Participant LD

4.3.2 Development programs and products offered

4.3.2.2 Opportunities

A key sub-theme that came out of the interviewees was that the OzSquash program that is available from Squash Australia is not flexible enough for schools and coaches. The requirements of the program are that it must be 5-weeks in length, whereas other sports offer the ability for teachers to choose how long the program is (Participant 3). Multiple interviewees claimed that there is a need to redevelop the school's program to make it more attractive (Participant 3; Participant 4; Participant 6). One participant discussed Squash Australia's plan for OzSquash:

“We are looking at redoing the squash in schools' program. Trying to make it so that there are more options to try and fit in 3, 6, and 8-week programs, whatever the schools want to do. But also make it more adaptable, so at the moment it's not that it is reliant on going to a squash court, it is reliant on having a wall, but focus more on hand eye-coordination skills. I think it is too focused on here you go here is squash.’ – Participant 3

This quote highlights that there are steps being taken to improve the products currently being offered for Squash in Australia at the national level. Additionally, another participant highlighted ‘Sporting Schools’ as another area that needs to be partnered with other sports such as badminton and tennis, shifting the focus of teaching children about one racquet sport to educating these kids about general racquet skills that can be applied to all racquet sports (Participant 1). This will also enable these struggling sports to better utilise their skills and diminished resources. Improvement of OzSquash numbers will mean Squash Australia will be able to access more resources for the state organisation to utilise such as grants that fund sport organisations to provide in-school programs for high-school students, the current sporting schools program is only directed at primary school’s (Participant 3).

Another key sub-theme that is a constraint to OzSquash programs was the lack of coaches to deliver the program. One participant attributed this to the difficulty in becoming a certified coach. Two participants highlighted that Squash Australia had been working at redeveloping the current coaching accreditation systems and released their online coaching and refereeing platform to gain level 1 and 2 certifications with the assistance of Sport Australia (Participant 3, Participant 4). Furthermore, one participant stated there needs to be a push for attracting and educating teachers, the only schools that participate in OzSquash are the ones that have a teacher that plays or has previously played (Participant 3). The participant went on to highlight a successful program being implemented by one state sporting organisation:

“In Australian Capital Territory (ACT) we offer \$5 Fridays for teachers, they come down, play for an hour and we have someone there to teach them how to run in [OzSquash]. They then get a free beer on a Friday afternoon as a social activity.” – Participant 3

When talking about senior competitions one participant also commented that there is a need to offer a product other than the Sydney Pennant because people are time poor and want a more time efficient, and casual version of their sport (Participant 1). Nonetheless, many of the other participants stated that they did not know what can be done to improve the competition (Participant 2, Participant 6). One participant suggested for the competition in Sydney:

“There have been suggestions of making the comp three person teams rather than four, which they did in the Western Sydney region. It worked for a little while, but they are seeing a significant decline in pennant participation again.” – Participant 5

This suggests there may need to be a completely different product offered rather than changing the current competition. Particularly as one participant highlighted how they enjoy the pennant competition and enjoy travelling to different clubs and socialising with different players (Participant 5). It was suggested the option for timed matches was an ideal alternative scoring system, this would mean players would be able to arrive for a specific time block so they know exactly how long they will be at the facility (Participant 3). This format of squash has become increasingly popular with one club hosting numerous ‘timed tournaments’ on the Squash NSW annual calendar; in 2018 there were no tournaments with alternative scoring methods now in 2022 there are eight (Squash NSW, n.d.).

Finally, one participant mentioned that Squash NSW needs to implement competitions in Regional NSW to increase revenue and provide products for the more than just Metro NSW (Participant 6). This is particularly important to improving trust between the two regions as numerous participants highlighted that there is a significant divide between regional and metro NSW, with many regional clubs feeling like Sydney clubs get preferential treatment and feel as though they are not supported (Participant 4; Squash NSW, n.d.).

4.3.3 Trust between stakeholders

4.3.2.3 Opportunities

An important sub-theme that was discussed frequently was the constraints that were associated with the negative relationship between players, club managers and Squash NSW and the bad perception

of the sport that has resulted from this negative environment. One participant attributed this to how in the past there has not been a real drive to provide value to the members, and there has been an unrealistic expectation that could never be provided by Squash NSW (Participant 7). Another participant highlighted how it is important for Squash NSW to provide value to its members to increase trust between the two parties, they stated:

“What we need to do is to develop some trust and demonstrate to our members the value of being a member of Squash NSW and that value proposition is around the resources that we provide to support them.” – Participant 1

As a previous CEO of Squash NSW, participant RG stated that it is important for the organisation to under promise and over deliver through focusing on delivering half a dozen member benefits that are realistic and achievable (Participant 1). Another participant discussed how Andrew Gaze, Former professional basketball players, changed people’s perspective of basketball within their state through reaching out to smaller communities and making sure there were community centres that were built in these areas to sustain the sport (Participant 2).

4.3.4 Governance

4.3.4.1 Opportunities

One of the key sub-themes that was highlighted by numerous participants was the lack of strategic direction from the board. One participant illustrated how there is a need to create the narrative for squash to say, “squash is still here, here are the health benefits, health and wellbeing, its indoors so you’re not exposed to the elements, and its non-contact” (Participant 1). The foundation of this plan should be around Squash NSW outlining three pillars to drive this story.

“Strategic objective, which covers three pillars, they being participation, profile, and performance. Participation is around building grassroots participation and incorporate junior pathways such as the JPP, so we are producing elite players to hopefully represent the state and then the country. Profile is around increasing the interest and awareness of the squash product by advocating and promoting the sport across NSW particularly targeted at primary school aged

children. Performance is around providing some leadership and advocacy, in other words representing the sport, at governance level, potential sponsorship level engaging with our stakeholders, they being our clubs, members and centres and participants.” - Participant 1

This highlights key points that need to be addressed to increase participation in sport. One participant highlighted how they had pushed for a strategic plan that was not a strategic plan from squash Australia, although the plan would feed into this, it had to be an individual plan for NSW to develop the sport (Participant 2). However, this plan was not completed (Squash NSW, n.d.).

Another key sub-theme that was identified as a constraining factor to participation in squash was the lack of skilled individuals working in the sport. One participant highlighted that there is a need to try and educate young people that are coming through the sport so that they have the skill set to join key leadership roles and contribute to the development of the sport with fresh eyes (Participant 4). This is particularly important as documents curated by Sport Australia state the importance of a diversity of ages within leadership positions, particularly the board of representatives (Sport Australia, n.d.).

Finally, a key factor that the SEM identified as a key influencer of participation in sport is the resources available. One participant identified how Squash NSW was not utilising their largest asset, stating:

“It’s [Thornleigh Squash and Fitness] sitting there as a 3-million-dollar asset, with some land attached to it that sitting there dormant, there is our opportunity. Why don’t we monetise that land to give us the opportunity to invest in the sport.” – Participant 1

They went further to state that the not-for-profit entity that is leasing Thornleigh Squash and Fitness had ‘served it’s purpose’ and it was time for Squash NSW to take control back.

“It (ASM) has served its purpose. It’s time to take control back. Rex [Centre Manager] needs to be employed by Squash NSW as the centre of Excellence Coordinator reporting to the CEO and get Peter Sinodinos back on the board as his portfolio being Thornleigh. You increase your revenue base.” – Participant 1

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the study which shows that there are five key themes that have significantly influenced participation of squash in NSW: facilities, development programs and products offered, governance, trust between stakeholders, and exposure. Each of these themes presented sub-themes that were constraining factors on participation with the most prevalent constraint being the loss of facilities. The final section highlights the opportunities that were presented as potential initiatives that could address the constraining factors and have a positive influence on participation.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is a discussion of the findings of the research project. Sport participation in Australia has seen a significant decline across all sports in recent years, with squash witnessing a disproportionately higher decline than other sports (Clearinghouse for Sport, 2021; Neal, 2020). Research into sport participation provides sport managers with insights that can be used to implement innovative programs and practices that can be targeted to increase sport participation. The findings from interview data and secondary document analysis highlighted four key themes that have impacted squash participation in New South Wales (NSW): facilities, developmental programs and products, governance, and trust between key stakeholders. Each of these themes consists of sub-themes that have presented significant constraints on squash participation. These five factors and sub-themes were consistent with key factors that have been identified by the Socio Ecological Model (SEM) as primary influences of sport participation (Eime et al. 2013; Golden & Earp, 2012; Rowe et al. 2013; Scarneo et al. 2019). The most common constraint to squash participation was the loss of facilities and the poor environment within facilities currently

operating. Grassroots and junior participation pathways in squash also appeared to be a significant issue from the data that was gathered in this current research. Furthermore, the organisational governance and poor culture associated with Squash NSW was frequently highlighted. A discussion of these themes in relation to the SEM factors and how they have influenced squash participation in NSW is presented. Also in this chapter is a discussion related to the second research question which deals with potential solutions.

The use of the SEM multifaceted approach to assess the organisational environment that has influenced squash participation was particularly useful in this context. Sport participation is multi-dimensional phenomenon with social and environmental factors interacting with each other to influence behavioural outcomes throughout a person's life (Vella et al. 2014). The SEM was used as a lens to guide the data collection process from both the interview data and the secondary data analysis. The key themes that have subsequently identified using thematic analysis have been used to produce the following discussion.

5.2 Facilities

Facilities was the most discussed theme relating to the squash participation in NSW. The first of two sub-themes within this key theme were the number of facilities and their condition. Countless squash courts have been lost over the past two decades and others are in poor condition. The second sub-theme pertained to the way in which the organisation and the facilities are being managed, which also is a constraint to participation. This is in line with the SEM as the environmental factor highlights that accessibility to sport facilities and the environment that they exist in is a significant influencer of individual participation (Golden & Earp, 2012; Rowe et al. 2013).

With the identification of constraints associated with the key themes, there was also opportunities identified to increase squash participation. In conjunction with the facilities theme one of the key opportunities identified was the need to educate facility managers of the resources that are available to them to maintain and upgrade their centres, as well as encourage the use of technology that would make

the courts more accessible. Furthermore, to increase the likelihood of obtaining grants there is a need to map out facility gaps, in addition to partnering with other sports to advocate for multisport centres. Due to the funding opportunities that the NSW Government offer, favouring multi-sport centres that have the potential to cater to a larger variety of individuals (Sport NSW, n.d.).

5.1.1 Loss of Facilities

A key issue identified from this study was that the decline of squash participation in NSW is connected to the closure of squash facilities. Accessibility to squash has significantly reduced with facility closures (Neal, 2020). Within Sydney, the number of clubs has declined by approximately 80% since the 1980's, to the point only 44 Squash NSW affiliated clubs are operating (Squash Australia, n.d.). Yet, some sports have witnessed increases in participation whilst having fewer fixtures. Soccer in Australia saw a 46% increase in participation rates between 2001 and 2016, in the Sydney metro region there are only 35 clubs operating (Football NSW, n.d.; Australian Leisure Management, 2017). Research has shown that individuals are willing to travel for sport if they deem it important and their willingness to travel is seen as a sign of dedication to the activity (Sun, 2017). However, multiple studies have outlined that a key predictor of participation in sport is the ease of access to sport facilities (Hoekman, 2018; Lee et al., 2016; Sherry et al., 2016). This suggests that individuals have differing motivators to participate in sport, some need a strong external drive, such as team training, to ensure willingness to travel long distances for sport (Sun, 2017). Whereas some individuals are driven by convenience (Lee et al., 2016; Sherry et al., 2016).

In NSW, the closure of squash facilities was primarily attributed to large corporations buying out the club owners and leaseholders because the facilities were built on prime real estate locations. Research has shown that there is a clear link between the availability of sport infrastructure and participation in sport (Sherry et al., 2016). This has been highlighted in the current study as the significant decline in squash facilities has had a consequential impact on participation. Furthermore, due to the size and set up that is standard for a multi-court squash centre, to maximise profits they became attractive to property

developers as they are structurally ideal for redevelopment (Beech, 2015; Fitzsimmons, 2022). In regional NSW, a property developer purchased courts for the purpose of gaining approval for high-density housing development. They have then resold these courts with the development approval for a significantly higher rate than when it was purchased in 2019, this was attributed to a property-boom in Wagga (Burfitt, 2021). This study found that the real estate demand in NSW, had a significant negative impact on squash facilities with many other clubs being closed as the value of the facility and redevelopment potential outweighed the financial viability of running a squash centre (Abbracciavento, 2017).

Whilst the loss of facilities is a key constraint to squash participation, the environment that a sport is operating in and their condition has a significant impact on how individuals engage in activities and who participates (Sherry et al., 2016). In addition to the loss of facilities, the condition of many of the facilities that are available to use are not up to the standard that society expects, instead they are frequently run down and poorly maintained.

To enable a squash facility owner or organisation to improve their infrastructure government support in the form of grants are essential however, this study found that the state organisation and facility managers struggle to access these opportunities. Facilities grants require a percentage of the total amount to be paid to apply for a grant, which requires applicants to have sufficient resources from the beginning. The latest NSW Government Multi-use Facilities Grant requires applicants to provide a minimum 50% co-contribution to apply for funding, however, there is the opportunity to request for financial hardship, exempting an applicant from the full 50% required co-contribution (Sport Australia, 2021). This exemption is in cases where the location of the potential facility is of a low socio-economic region, or the applicant has been significantly affected by COVID-19 or a natural disaster (Sport Australia, 2021). Yet, it has been found that in Australia, grants were more likely to be delivered in marginal electorates and in those regions that are held by the ruling party (Leigh & McAllister, 2021). Further studies have shown that government support for facilities in western countries are demand-led, therefore additional facilities are only provided when the demand is already high (Hoekman, 2018). This is consistent with the current

research as participants stated grant applications were unsuccessful as Squash NSW is unable to report the states true participation rates. It is interesting to note, there is no consistent evidence that electorates which received more sports grant funding tended to swing towards the government, which poses the question as to why this is a pattern (Leigh & McAllister, 2021).

It was highlighting numerous times that individuals that have held key leadership roles in squash do not possess the skills that are required to lodge a viable grant application. One participant stated that they had never utilised a grant in the 30 years that they had been involved in squash in NSW as he did not have the administrative skills to lodge one. Furthermore, it was discussed how Thornleigh Squash and Fitness had not been able to access adequate government facilities funding up until 2019 when the application process was overseen by a board member who was highly skills in this application process. With this participant further stating that they would not have been able to follow through with the project management of the recent facility upgrade grant they had secured, and the project would have been significantly more expensive without the members expertise. This in line with current research which has shown that having highly skilled individuals in key roles is essential to organisational success (Bradbury et al. 2021; Ingram & O'Boyle, 2017; Misener & Doherty, 2009; Sport Australia, 2021)

5.1.2 Facility Management

The way in which sport facilities are managed and maintained is key to an individual's perception and enjoyment of a sport, however there is few resources available to adequately manage facilities for professional and volunteer run businesses (Casey et al. 2011). Interview data highlighted that most facilities in NSW could not apply for grant funding as facilities grants are only available to Not-for-Profit organisations, this is problematic for squash facility operators as most are run by private owners. However, this is not the case, many facilities grants released by Sport Australia and the NSW Government are available to private entities (Sport Australia, n.d.), this shows the need to educate court operators on what resources are available to them and how to utilise them effectively.

Another key aspect to being able to apply for grant funding is the applicant's ability to report how this project will benefit the community and the potential interest that would result in a new facility or facility upgrade (Leigh & McAllister, 2021). A major downfall for Squash NSW and facilities operators is that clubs and players are not registering themselves on the Squash Australia official management platform, SportyHQ, therefore they are unable to report confidently who plays squash in NSW. Squash NSW and Squash Australia annual reports frequently commented on the lack of uptake of SportyHQ, from squash centres across NSW and the country, but particularly with regional clubs. As mentioned above, there are substantial incentives for governments to direct public goods to enhance their own electoral prospects, however they require data to show the potential benefit (Leigh & McAllister, 2021).

To be able to report the potential benefits to electoral prospects, keeping participation numbers is essential however, court operators struggle to keep a record of casual players with many of the courts in NSW having no record of casual players. Participation numbers are important as local funding allocations for sports infrastructure has been directed disproportionately to win marginal electorates (Leigh & McAllister, 2021). This highlights how without sufficient data to present to councils regarding the demand of a sport there is a low chance that facilities will be supported to be built.

It was mentioned that privately operated facilities were a constraint to participation as private operators are often self-serving and focusing on individual profit rather than what is the best practise for the sport, this created a negative culture within squash. However, there is little research into the difference between private and public sport facilities (Lozano et al. 2021). Nonetheless, Government agencies are resistant to invest in organisations that have management system that appears to be disorganised and disconnected with its members (Casey et al. 2011)

Participants suggested that partnerships with other sports was essential to the improvement of facilities available in NSW. Bradbury et al. (2021) found that partnerships with other sports clubs lead to significant improvement membership and community involvement. The study showed two merged rugby clubs, and a partnership with a polo club, bought land and developed a substantial multi-purpose building.

The new way of doing business ensured the costs of land ownership became viable by sharing the overhead with the polo club, while the building costs, including debt repayment, were met by a combination of increased revenue derived from a larger membership base and through diversification from the new building's revenue streams. This resulted in an increase in financial resources, meaning the clubs were able to hire additional staff and improve their facilities. This highlights how partnering with other sports or clubs can enable the sharing of key resources to better benefit both organisations and increases the sustainability of both sports (Bradbury et al. 2021).

Another constraint that was briefly touched on was the disconnect between metro and rural facilities in NSW. Sport managers face unique challenges in rural areas from their counterparts operating in metropolitan centres. Hoekman et al. (2016) found that people in rural regions participated in more weekly sport than metropolitan regions however, rural areas are constrained by a lack of specialty sporting facilities and therefore sport options are more limited. It is common for the rural NSW squash players and owners to feel as if they have been forgotten due to a lack of support from a national and state level. This issue has been attributed to the sheer size of NSW, making it difficult to get resources out to rural NSW. Metro areas tend to offer a higher variety in sport and present smaller travel distances compared to rural environments (Hoekman et al., 2016). In contrast, rural areas, present favourable social environments in terms of higher socio-economic status and safer neighbourhoods. This suggests that constraining factors affect metro and rural areas to varying degrees.

5.3 Development pathways and products offered

The development pathways and products offered was the second most common factor outlined as influencing participation of squash. Three sub-themes emerged as constraining factors to squash participation that need to be addressed. Firstly, hosting more in-schools programs was essential to children being exposed to squash early, Next, the junior programs design was not optimal to create a competitive environment, and finally, the senior products offered are not designed to cater for the modern

family. This is in line with the SEM as the quality of products offered with in a sport is a primary factor that influences sport participation according to the organisational factor (Scarneo et al., 2019).

The Squash NSW Annual reports highlighted to increase squash participation there is a need to better promote events, junior pathways, and the pennant from an organisational perspective (Squash NSW, 2016). However, the data found other opportunities to increase participation associated with the products and development program's theme. Interview data emphasised these opportunities, stating there is a need to introduce new innovative competitions, redesign the schools' programs, adjust the Junior State Team requirements, improve the coaching/refereeing qualification accessibility, and partner with other sports to increase resources and boost squash participation.

5.2.1 In-schools

The first program that was heavily criticised was the lack of in-schools programs being executed in schools. In NSW, most sports that do not fit in to the top five sports in Australia, AFL, Cricket, Netball, Swimming and Rugby, find it is difficult to get their programs in schools as most schools get a limited number of grants to fund external sporting programs being introduced to the school (Australian Sports Commission, 2022). Currently, squash is third from the bottom for sports being delivered in Australia, with only three being delivered in 2022. Squash in schools had a brief period in the mid-late 2010's where there was a small amount of success with Sporting Schools, 24 programs were completed in 2017 (Sporting Schools, 2022). This success was attributed to passionate coaches that would travel all over NSW to expose schools to squash and then work to connect those participants with local clubs however, this program had to be abandoned as the initiative ran out of funding. Due to OzSquash's mediocre performance in Sporting Schools, Squash Australia has proposed a redevelopment of the program.

The lack of human resources available to ensure a successful program was a huge detriment to Squash in Australia, when a booking request for Sporting Schools has been collected there is a lack of

coaches that can be used to fill it. When an organisation's resources are limited, this creates significant difficulties for managers to be able to implement meaningful change (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015). The grant funding network for sport organisations is complicated, yet essential, to the implementation of programs that promote participation in sport (Jones, 2008). The issues that have arisen from the lack of human resources dedicated to sporting schools' programs has created a negative perception of squash and has decreased the likelihood of schools that have tried OzSquash to implement the program again, particularly when their request for a program is not responded too and the schools have lost their funding.

The development of partnerships between other racquet sports was proposed as an opportunity to bring resources together. Partnerships between organisations have shown to help improve key constraints to sport participation such as funding and human resources (Bradbury et al., 2021). Partnerships help organisations establish and foster relationships with other organisations within their community. Through partnerships, organisations have experienced greater community connection, improving their once scarce resources, and thus sustainability (Bradbury et al., 2021). This was highlighted in the current study as a method of addressing the issue in-schools programs through the availability for more individuals dedicated to the implementation of sporting schools' programs

5.2.2 Junior Programs

Junior programs were one of the most extensively discussed constraints on participation of squash. When examining the Junior Performance Pathways (JPP) there were conflicting opinions on the state team criteria with one participant stating that the increase the volume of state team criteria was to increase the competitiveness between the players for team selection. However, another participant said that the criteria was too much, and the players would better benefit playing senior tournaments. The Squash Australia Player Development pathway states that players in the high-performance level need to be playing at least 10 tournament a year, ideally being senior tournaments that ensure the players are exposed to a higher variation in player skills and capabilities (Squash Australia, 2018). One study found that one of the indicators for elite success in junior athletes was having success in senior competitions as

this was reported to implement a drive to achieve more and establish goals (Hollings et al., 2014). However, it is important to consider junior athletes that are at advanced age and beginning the transition from junior to senior competition. Young junior participants are encouraged to avoid early specialisation and participate in competitions that are framed around fun with their peers (Sport Australia, n.d.). It is interesting to note that research has found that those that have been selected as a top junior athlete rarely make it to elite senior competitions (Barreiros et al., 2014). This suggests there may be a need to redesign of the Junior Performance criteria to cater to each age groups as each stage requires a different primary focus for optimal development.

5.2.3 Senior Products

The final sub-theme that was highlighted as a constraining factor to squash participation was the current senior products did not cater to modern families. There are critical transitional points during early life stages for sport policy makers to consider. Every stage requires different policy focus, and these move from offering modified sport to recruiting young children into sport, to retaining adolescence and adults as sport participants, to retaining elderly as actively involved and engaged in sport clubs (Westerbeek & Eime, 2021). Squash Australia has attempted to implement an initiative that boosts Australia's athletic success on the world stage. However, this is difficult when Squash as a sport is overlooked for sport participation grants introduced by Sport Australia such as the Australian Sport: A Pathway to Success initiative that saw 29 sports receive funding to support participation initiative; squash was not one of these sports selected (Squash Australia 2010). This further highlights the difficulties experienced for Australian squash organisations and the lack of resources available to them.

In 2012 the Australian Sports Commission designed a strategic plan where "International Success" was a major strategic outcome for their 2016-2022 scheme which was adopted in Squash Australia's strategic plan (Squash Australia, 2012.). Nonetheless, the 2022 Australian Commonwealth Games squash team were the least successful since squash was introduced to the games in 1998. Key members of the team had been to four or more Commonwealth Games, with the men's team being

compiled of players that have retired from the professional circuit. This is a 'virtuous circle,' if the team most likely to win medals is from 12 years ago, investment must go into them to retain funding. However, there is a need to be investing in the next wave of players as young players elite performance benefit from the experience of high-level international senior competitions (Manjone, 2008). This is particularly important as non-selection for elite sport teams has shown to result in early retirement from sport and procure a lot of bitterness towards a sport organisation if there is the feeling of ill-treatment and a lack of communication (Fish, 1994). The selection of ex-professional players over currently active players could have had a significant negative influence on the players that missed selection.

This research showed that while transitioning into a professional career, players have reported feelings of neglect from the national and state sport organisation, this resulted in players to become discouraged and pursue other regions to play or retire early. Ewen (2010) found that a lack of support during an athlete's transitions throughout their career (from junior to senior to retirement) leaves athletes with negative feelings towards the sport (Ewen, 2010). The underutilization of talented individuals, whether they are an athlete, coach, or administrator, has been shown to result in the loss of the individual to better resourced regions in the sport or to other sports (Migure, 2008).

Another key sub-theme that was highlighted as a constraining factor to participation was the senior competitions offered in the state. Multiple participants highlighted that people are time poor therefore, the product that squash is offering needs to become attractive to modern society and young families. One day cricket is an example of modifying a product to increase market share for the sport (Shilbury et al. 2009). The introduction of one-day cricket games is evidence of a modification process to make sport more 'telegenic' and commercially valuable to provide content for mass media application (Bester, 2012). However, it is important that the process of industrialisation, capital accumulation and mediatisation that is transforming a sport and its cultural basis is carefully analysed so that sport does not become a product of media and is focused on providing valuable content (Bester, 2012).

The decline of females playing squash in NSW was addressed as a constraint to other females participating in squash. Studies have shown that females and males tend to prefer to play sport against their own sex (Casey et al., 2009). One participant highlighted they nearly gave up on playing squash as they did not enjoy playing men and that female participation in squash was so low that there was rarely a woman's division at any competition. Women and girls tend to be more outcome focused when participating in sport, health, and social benefits, and tend to find men to be overly competitive and critical of competence.

With only 13.3% of participants in the 2021 Sydney Pennant being female, there is little to no opportunity to field women divisions in most of the regions (Squash NSW, 2022). Furthermore, due to the lack of females when there is a female division there is such a large variation in players ability that competitions become unenjoyable as the result is predictable. This is an issue because the 'uncertainty of outcome' is a key aspect for enjoyment of a sport (Becker, 2012). There is a significant disparity in female sport participation compared to male sport participation in Australia however, squash in NSW has an exponentially larger gap compared to the country average (Clearinghouse for Sport, 2021; Squash NSW, 2021). The development of female-only products that are attractive to female participants is a potential method to boost squash participation, particularly as research has shown that retention of female players is lower in male-dominated competitions (Eime et al. 2022).

5.4 Trust between Key Stakeholders

A large body of evidence with the current research indicated that there is a significant issue relating to trust within squash in NSW. There was one sub-theme associated with trust that were seen as constraining factors to squash participation, 'toxic' culture associated with disconnect between Squash NSW and its members. According to the SEM organisational and interpersonal factor, disconnect from the board and the members is a contributing factor into the decline in participation as it has a negative influence on trust within the organisation (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015). Furthermore, the a disconnect sport organisation has a significant negative impact on its the ability to obtain funding as government agencies

do not want to invest in unorganised entities, this is a significant constraint to participation according to the policy factor of the SEM.

The primary opportunity that was discussed in conjunction with Trust between key stakeholders was the improvement of member benefits. Furthermore, an improvement in the communication between Squash NSW and its members would be beneficial to improve transparency and build intra-organisational trust.

5.4.1 Culture

Data suggests that a negative culture exists across multiple stakeholder levels of Squash in NSW. The culture within any organisation is the combined perception of its members and is comprised of superficial, inter-personal and interpersonal layers (Cerna, 2014; Field, 2017). The accumulation of people with similar presumptions builds a strong culture that is difficult to change. Consequently, ensuring that members experience is positive is vital to ensuring that individuals continue to participate in squash (Lussier & Kimball, n.d.).

A key influence of culture is the organisational trust, trust is indispensable for social and economic relations, it holds an organisation together as it influences accountability mechanisms, capacity building and strategic thinking (Cerna, 2014). For multiple participants, a disconnect between keys the Squash Australia, Squash NSW, facility managers and players had a significant influence on squash participation. A disconnect between the board and the members has an extremely detrimental effect on sport participation as this has a considerable influence on trust of the organisation (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015). This disconnect was attributed to the lack of perceived value or assistance that Squash Australia and Squash NSW is providing its members. Regardless of the business model adopted by an organisation, thought should be given to the perceived value and benefit the member will obtain from the way the organisation delivers its products and services, referred to as value proposition. Innovative value propositions strive to find a solution to a member problem or satisfy a member need (Bradbury et al., 2018).

Culture within the organisation has also been influenced by frequent changes to the key leadership positions. Squash NSW has seen frequent changes of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) particularly in the past five years. Bradbury et al. (2021) highlighted two critical success factors that are essential through significant changes within an organisation: skilled individuals in governance and clear and frequent communication. Due to a lack of strong strategic direction, each time there is a change in leadership the organisation is seen as falling into disarray. Furthermore, without the presence of strong, stable leadership the assimilation of any strategy is hindered, particularly if the members do not trust the organisation as trust is essential to willingness to adopt new initiatives (Azhar et al., 2013; Shah, 2014). This has had a significant negative impact on squash participation as the SEM highlight positive relationships and governance as crucial factors for sport participation.

5.5 Governance

From the interview and document data explored in this dissertation, it was clear that the way squash is governed has a considerable influence on participation. Three factors were identified to be constraints to squash participation. Firstly, the organisational governance, which addressed skilled staffing issues, this is a significant component to the policy, organisation, and interpersonal factors of the SEM. Secondly, the grants and funding available to Squash NSW had a significant influence on the initiatives that could be implemented to target participation, this is identified in the policy and organisational factors of the SEM. Finally, exposure from media and marketing which is a significant component to the organisational factor of the SEM.

Within the theme of governance there were opportunities that were identified to increase squash participation. The primary theme highlighted the need to develop and implement a strategic plan for the board to be able to prioritise resource distribution as well as putting in place methods to up skill young persons to increase skill and diversity within key leadership positions. Additionally, to improve available resources Squash NSW should improve the utilisation of the asset 'Thornleigh Squash and Fitness'.

5.3.1 Organisational Governance

There is a perception that the board has a considerable influence on participation of squash in NSW, according to the SEM governance is a key influencing factor of sport participation. Although there has been some support in literature for community-development approaches in increasing sport participation, the dominant strategies are often developed by national or provincial sporting organisations have little or no community involvement in Australia (Miessener & Doherty, 2009). However, as one participant highlighted, although the board can provide strategic direction, initiatives that are targeting participation are up to the community and how active the clubs are at implementing these programs. This highlights how although the community is the driving force for participation, the initiatives that are available for them to utilise is up to the board. Which can be problematic as the Sport Australia suggests that initiatives targeting community participation need to have the input of its members to better understand their needs and wants (Clearinghouse for Sport, 2022).

One major criticism from the participants was of the Squash NSW board was the lack of vision and strategy for the past 20-30 years. As well as the lack of defined strategic direction this also meant when there was a major change in a leadership position, the appearance of no real plan forward meant that the organisations direction was restarted all over again. Numerous studies have illustrated the importance of a strong strategic plan that is frequently readdressed and updated to ensure organisational success (McKinsey & Company, 2001; Misener & Doherty, 2009; Shilbury & Ferkins, 2015). A primary aspect that was identified as an effective measure to improve organisational capacity is the reassessment of a not-for-profits vision and strategic plan (Sport Australia, 2022). Because organisations exist to provide value for their members, it is necessary for them to continually re-visit their operating model and underlying processes, to be able to adapt to environmental changes and ongoing competitive pressures (Bradbury et al., 2018).

One of the first official sporting association for squash in Australia was the New South Wales Woman's Squash Rackets Association, however this was amalgamated with the New South Wales

Squash Racquets association as Sport Australia only recognises one governing body for each state. The amalgamation of this association saw female representation in key leadership roles in squash decline (Mudford, 1998; Squash NSW, 2010). Sport Australia (n.d.) states that governing boards should be comprised of 50% female representation. However, this has never been the case for Squash NSW in the records for the past 20 years, they have had a maximum of two females in key leadership positions at one time. Research has shown that a lack of representation from diverse backgrounds is detrimental to the operation of sport organisation, particularly when implementing participation policy as individuals' worldviews are based on their own experiences, without representation of diverse experiences, different perspectives will not be considered, and programs will not cater to diverse needs (Takos et al. 2015).

5.3.2 Grants and Funding

Squash in Australia is heavily dependent on performing well in the Commonwealth games, it is the only big international event that Australia has recently been a high contender. However, the Commonwealth Games Federation, in October 2021, voted to relax the rules behind hosts requirements to enable the host city to have more of a choice in what sports are being played (Thatcher, 2021). This could result in the Commonwealth Games following the path of the Olympic games in adopting more 'street sports' such as breakdancing and 3x3 basketball and dropping sports that require specific infrastructure, like squash, to reduce the cost of hosting major events. This change in direction has been pushed by the lack of cities applying to these major events with many in the past recording significant economic loss due to the construction of specialty facilities that become obsolete once the event is over (Muller et al. 2021).

According to the SEM funding is a key contributing factor to participation in sport as this determines that resources available to the sport organisation and facility managers to implement initiatives that are essential to driving participation. Squash in Australia is primarily reliant on government funding, which is problematic, as mentioned above this is dependent on world stage performance. Furthermore, Squash NSW does not have any financial sponsors, this means their resources

are completely dependent on government funding, affiliation fees, and Sydney Pennant fees. The sourcing of sponsors is crucial for the survival of a sport organisation and in many organisations, sponsorship is their primary source of income reducing their reliance on government funding (Becker, 2012). However, reliance of sponsorship funds means there is a shift to the sponsor's needs becoming more prevalent than other stakeholders, proving to be a source of conflict with members. This research shows there is a significant strain on the relationship between the sport organisation and its members, therefore the future partnerships that are coined will need to be carefully curated to ensure these relationships are not further strained. However, the formation of partnerships with other racquet sport could prove to be a beneficial method of sharing resources for the betterment of all parties (Bradbury et al., 2021).

5.3.2 Exposure

This study highlighted the lack of visibility in the media that squash has in Australia as a significant constraining factor to squash participation. It is not on any local sporting channels, and the only way to access the major squash events is to have a subscription to a specific app that is related to squash, Squash TV. One participant brought to light that the coverage of the squash at the Commonwealth games in the Gold Coast was extremely poor, only consisting of highlights and there were no full matches played on free-to-air television until the finals. This is even though Australia has the highest total number of gold medals won for squash at the Commonwealth Games ever.

To address the reason squash is not televised Vanity Fair authored an article insisting that it is too hard to see the ball during a squash game making it an unenjoyable sport to watch (Beem, 2008). However, there have been major developments in the camera quality for streaming of squash and with the use of a white ball for PSA matches that are notoriously filmed on glass courts rather than the classic white, concrete walls. There has been an increase in exposure for squash in countries such as New Zealand, with their major sports media services, Sky TV, reaching an agreement with PSA to show their major tournaments for the first time since 2015 (Squash New Zealand, 2022). Meanwhile, Squash

Australia does not have an adequate streaming service for major Australia tournaments or a platform for the states to utilise to display their major tournaments.

Another key constraint that was discovered as an influencing factor of why squash is not visible was that there are no exciting Australian stars for players to role model. One participant highlighted how in New Zealand all the players talk about world number 1 Paul Coll and World number 5, Joelle King. However, Australia does not have a single player in the top 30. Australia dominated the squash world throughout the 80's and 90's producing some of the biggest names in the sport however, currently there is a lack of positive Australian role models on the world stage. A lack of positive role models is a critical barrier to sport participation. Athletes are considered the main asset of a sport organisation, as they are instrumental in attracting fans, sponsors, and media exposure (Bester, 2012).

On the other hand, role models in sport are not always famous players. Studies have outlined adolescent girls are more likely to identify a family member, most notably their mother, as a positive roles model rather than a professional sporting person. This highlights the need for initiatives designed to attract or retain adolescent girls to include family members, as adolescents with role models that play sport are much more likely to be physically active than those whose role model does not play sport (Young et al. 2015). Suggesting both high-performance athletes as well as interpersonal relationships are important influencers of sport participation (Rowe et al., 2013).

Another issue that was identified as a constraint in the exposure of squash was the social media presence or clubs and Squash NSW, with Squash NSW's losing over 600 followers over the past 4 years (Squash NSW, 2018; Squash NSW, 2021). This is an issue as communication, relationship development and promotion are fostered through exchanges and interactions facilitated by social media (Filo et al., 2015). Research has shown that social media usage is higher among young persons and is motivated by interactivity, information gathering, entertainment, fandom and camaraderie which creates positive psychological outcomes towards brands (Filo et al., 2015). This underlines that marketing through social media also has the potential to build trust between members and encourage relationship building within

the community. This has the potential to influence another key theme that was seen as a significant constraining factor through the building of trust between key stakeholders.

5.6 Managerial implication

There are a variety of managerial implication that have arisen from this study which should be noted by sport managers including those involved in squash. The factors identified here can assist in implementing initiatives to boost participation in squash, or at least help sport managers address the key contributing factors influencing sport participation. The findings of this research have identified four key themes that have the largest influence on squash participation: Facilities, development programs and products offered, governance, trust between key stakeholders and exposure. Each of these factors has sub-themes that were found to be significant constraints on squash participation.

It is important to address the factors influencing sport participation to mitigate the constraining factors negatively impacting participation. Some constraints, like squash not being shown on television, although important for ensuring the community is exposed to the sport, are largely out of the sport managers control and is determined by the media networks. However, the key themes that influence participation in squash is manageable to address to not just boost participation but also improve the operation of sport organisation. All participants recognised a lack of resources as a key constraint to participation of squash. This constraint had a significant influence on each key theme that was identified. The implementation of a mentor program would be beneficial to alleviate the constraining factors associated with a lack of skilled individuals linked to the facilities, governance and development program and products offered themes. Additionally, this would offer the opportunity to improve the feeling of support and occupation satisfaction with staff and players transitioning into senior competitions and a professional career in squash (Mamo & Andrew, 2019). Case studies conducted by the Australian Sports Commission (n.d.) highlights how mentoring programs have the potential to significantly improve the quality of coaches and referees as well as increase a new coach/referee's self-efficacy enabling them to be successful in their new role.

As mentioned above, the establishment of partnerships with other racquet sports would be a beneficial action for Squash NSW to investigate. Partnerships increases key resources available to the organisation to address constraints to participation (Bradbury et al., 2021). They are crucial when considering that participation in physical activity is influenced by a range of factors including intrapersonal (e.g., cognitions and emotions), interpersonal (e.g., coaches, family, and friends), and physical and policy environments (e.g., policy, transport, facilities) (Casey et al., 2009). As mentioned before, a lack of resources is a constraining factor to themes, facilities, governance, and product and development programs, that were outlined as constraining factors to participation of squash, partnerships could alleviate this issue.

Facilities is a key theme that influences sport participation, this has significant difficulties associated with managing policy, funding, and construction management. There is a need to focus on the establishment of council-built facilities to ensure the protection of the courts from commercial developers however, due to a lack of data on the demand for squash and a lack of skilled individuals driving the grant application process squash incurs further difficulties to highlight the need for squash facilities. Therefore, these findings suggest three key steps need to occur to assist in reducing the constraining influence of these themes. Firstly, there is a need to develop processes that better record participation rates including casual players for facilities to easily adopt. Secondly, improve communication between facilities and the sport organisation so that resources regarding facilities maintenance and grant opportunities are better received as well as improve the connectedness of the organisation at all levels (Moshenko, 2017). Finally, as mentioned above, a mentor program would provide the squash community the opportunity to develop essential sport management skills, such as grant writing, to increase the skills of individuals working in squash (Bower, 2020). Although this would not guarantee the success of an application for government funding, it would improve the likelihood of an application being successful.

Although governance was seen as a key theme, the board does not have a direct influence on participation this is up to those that have direct contact with the community. Nonetheless, strategic

direction of the organisation and frequent redevelopment of this plan has a significant effect on how these individuals can influence the community (Misener & Doherty, 2009). Ferkins & Shilbury (2010) found that a board's strategic role is significantly impacted by inter-organisational relationships, this can be seen in the negative perspective members have on Squash NSW. The board's ability to implement its strategic priorities could be improved by creating collaborative partnerships with NSW entities and engaging in a power-sharing approach that seeks to develop the community's capability (Ferkins & Shilbury 2010).

The development programs and products offered as a constraint to participation may be manageable, as the modification of a product to increase market share for the sport (Shilbury et al. 2009), that could make the sport more attractive to a different population of participants. The indoor aspect of squash makes it attractive as it is shielded from the elements however, the products offered by squash are seen as time consuming. This suggests there is a need for the development of an alternative match structure that would be more attractive to the community.

5.7 Future research

The current research highlight factors that have a significant impact on participation of squash. The findings of this study have identified key themes that were identified as constraints on participation as well as themes that provide opportunities to address these constraints and have a positive influence on participation of squash. The broad, complex nature of sport participation causes significant issues in identifying a single factor that is the primary influence for an individual to participate in a sport. Therefore, the use of the SEM, which provides a broad scope to consider the multiple factors that contribute to an individual's ability and want to play a sport. Therefore, future research should utilise this model to assess participation in other sports that are experiencing similar decline as well as sports that are experiencing increases in participation to provide a deeper understanding of key factors that influence that participation.

Future studies also need to adopt a narrow focus on the specific way the individual factors of the SEM influence each key theme that influences the participation of sport. For example, studying the specific way that facilities are affected by the policy factor and the affect this has on participation of sport could be studied to provide a richer analysis of the role that facilities as an external influencer have on an individual's participation of sport. As mentioned above, the number of facilities and the state of these facilities have a significant influence on participation of sport. Therefore, conducting research focusing on policy around government funding and the impact on the resources available to sport organisations to build and upgrade facilities is warranted.

Another option for future research is the adoption of the SEM to explore important phenomena in other sport contexts. For example, this approach could be adopted to volunteers and address how policy, environment, organisation, interpersonal and intrapersonal factors influence willingness to volunteer in a sport environment. As mentioned above, volunteers are essential to the function of sport, this study provide more accurate information on volunteer's experiences in sport.

5.8 Limitations

The current study relied on a select few participants recollection, that are predominantly involved in the metropolitan, and their experiences of squash in NSW. Although most of the population are situated in the metropolitan region of NSW, the land area of NSW is significant and covers different populations with different experiences. Future research could focus on the key factors that influence participation if squash in rural NSW to better capture the experiences of a wider variety of persons that participate in the sport. This could provide a more accurate interpretation of the key influencers of participation in squash.

The sample size for interview data collection of this study is considered to be small for this type of research. To further improve the data collected, particularly under the intrapersonal lens of the SEM, a questionnaire distributed to the current players in NSW would have been beneficial. This would have

enabled the researcher to reveal a vast number of people's experiences, understandings, and interpretations of social processes and circumstances relating to their individual experience of squash in NSW. Questionnaires aim not just at determining attitudes and opinions but at identifying and classifying the logic of different sets of responses, at seeking patterns or commonality or divergence in responses, and at exploring how they relate to concepts, structures, and processes that shape social life (McGuirk & O'Neill, 2016).

Ensuring that there is a diverse sample of individuals is essential to ensuring that the interpretation that have come from the data are applicable to the wider population (Hebl & Avery, 2013). The researcher did not actively seek variations in physical literacy within this study. Since players with a higher level of physical literacy in squash were interviewed, it would be beneficial to focus on only beginners and inexperienced players to squash. This would provide a deeper analysis of initial influencers that attracted the player and an early, unbiased view of the sport compared to those that have been involved influenced by the sport for a long period of time.

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Appendix A – Interview Script

Interview Questions

Indicative Interview Questions – Coaches

- 1- Please tell me about your role as a coach of Squash NSW.
- 2- How did you become a squash coach?
- 3- What is your experience like with of Squash NSW? (i.e., do you feel isolated, supported, empowered etc.)
- 4- Why do you believe there is a lack of high ranked players coming out of NSW?
- 5- What is your opinion on past junior development programs?
- 6- How has coaching programs developed over the past decade?
- 7- What do you believe the primary reason is that there is a lack of coaching to deliver grass roots programs?
- 8- What are your thoughts on adult development programs and how necessary are they for clubs to implement?
- 9- What do you believe to be cause of declining participation of Squash in NSW?
- 10- What changes do you believe should happen to influence participation?

Indicative Interview Questions – Facilities or Club manager/owner

- 1- Please tell me about your role as a facilities coordinator of Squash Australia.
- 2- What do you believe is the role of facilities and participation? What has changed in facilities in Squash?
- 3- How do you believe the role of a facilities manager has changed and what is the biggest struggle that you have found and its effect on participation?
- 4- How accessible do you believe it is for facilities to gain government funding? – How has the NSO and SSO supported clubs in gaining funding for upgrades?
- 5- What is your experience like with of Squash NSW? (i.e., do you feel isolated, supported, empowered etc.)
- 6- What do you believe the reason is behind the declining number of squash clubs in NSW?
- 7- What do you believe to be causes of declining participation of Squash in NSW/Australia?
- 8- What change in the environment of the delivery of squash in the last 5 years that has influence participation rates? – why do you think that is? – What impact do you think that has impacted
- 9- What changes do you believe should happen to influence participation?

Indicative Interview Questions – Players

- 1- What attracted you to play squash?
- 2- What is your experience like with Squash NSW? (i.e., do you feel isolated, supported, empowered etc.)
- 3- What do you believe to be cause of declining participation of Squash in NSW?
- 4- How has squash changed since you started playing?
- 5- If you were to stop playing squash, what do you believe the reasoning behind that would be?
- 6- In your experience, how accessible do you think coaching is for beginner players to improve their squash skills? What about more advanced players?
- 7- (PSA Player) What were some of the biggest struggles playing squash professionally and how did you overcome them to reach # world ranking?
- 8- What changes do you believe should happen to influence participation?

NOTES:

- Mission creep: Clearly articulate that I am interested in factors that influence participation. After a tangent ask, do you think that what you have said contributes to the current participation environment?

Indicative Interview Questions – Board member

- 1- Please tell me about your role as a board member of Squash NSW.
- 2- How did you become a board member?
- 3- What was your experience like as board member of Squash NSW? (i.e., do you feel isolated, supported, empowered etc.)
- 4- What do you think was the result as it relates to participation in squash of you being on the board member of Squash NSW?
- 5- What do you think some of the most significant policies that have been implemented by the board that focuses on increasing participation (positive and negative)?
- 6- What do you think the board from a managerial perspective needs to improve on to increase participation?
- 7- What do you believe the basis is for club owners/managers and members to have a negative view of Squash NSW?
- 8- What do you see the role of Squash NSW as an organisation in increasing participation in squash?
- 9- Have the staff of Squash NSW ever reported on participation in a board meeting and how did the board respond?
- 10- What do you believe to be contributing factors of declining participation of Squash in NSW? – Most important? – what causes are less known? – what causes do you think are overstated?
- 11- What change in the environment of the delivery of squash in the last 5 years that has influence participation rates? – why do you think that is? – What impact do you think that has impacted
- 12- What changes do you believe should happen to influence participation?
- 13- What have you seen else where that should be implemented into squash?

Appendix B – Participant Information Sheet



AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced

05/07/2021

Project Title

Understanding the sport participation environment: Squash in New South Wales

An Invitation

Hello,

My name is Brooke Pryor, and I am completing this study as part of my dissertation, a requirement for the Master of Sport, Exercise, and Health in which I am undertaking at Auckland University of Technology.

There is limited research that investigates the wider organisational environment has on participation in sport. I am interested in providing insight into how a state governing body (Squash NSW) can better facilitate participation in squash. This will be done by identifying factors that have negatively influenced participation and setting out implications that will help participation in the sport thrive again.

I would like to invite you to participant in this research as your experience and insight will be of great value.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to fulfil the dissertation requirements for the Master of Sport, Exercise, and Health. In addition to providing literature to be used in future academic publications presentations. Furthermore, the aim of this research is to identify factors that have negatively influenced participation and setting out implications that will help participation in the sport thrive again.

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

Those considered for this study are individuals who have extensive knowledge of and/or involvement with squash in NSW. You have been invited to participate based on the following criteria:

- Extensive knowledge of and/or position within Squash NSW or Squash Australia.
- Affiliated player and/or coach of squash in NSW.
- Availability and willingness to engage in the interview process and share their experiences and insights.

All participant's contact details have been obtained from Squash NSW Website or via their expression of interest in response to an advert in the Squash NSW newsletter.

What will happen in this research?

To participate in this research, you will be interviewed for approximately an hour (maximum) about your experiences and insights on the perceptions of Squash in NSW. You will be interviewed by the researcher at local squash club near you, however in the case of state-wide restrictions on movement and socialization, interviews will be conducted via zoom, and these will be confidential sessions.

All sessions will be recorded and transcribed. Data will only be used for the purpose in which it is collected.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. 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 data that is identifiable as belonging to 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.

If you agree to participate in this research, please sign the attached Consent Form and return it to the researcher, rqc5281@autuni.ac.nz.

However, in the case of interviews needing to be conducted via Zoom, consent will be recorded at the beginning of the session and stored separately from your interview data to ensure confidentiality is maintained.

What are the discomforts and risks?

A low level of discomfort and risk to participants may occur in this study. Participants may experience a low level of discomfort or embarrassment if they are not accustomed to voicing their experiences and insights. Some participants may also experience discomfort or feel at risk when discussing information in relation to the chosen National Sport Organisation.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

In order to alleviate these discomforts and risks, your identity will remain confidential, and will not be disclosed in the final written report. In the interview, only appropriate questions will be asked, and you are not required to answer questions if you do not feel comfortable. You will also have the opportunity to provide feedback to the researcher if you wish to extract or remove any parts of the conversation.

While it is not expected that you will experience a high level of discomfort, Beyond Blue and Australian Counselling services is able to offer confidential counselling support for adult participants. To access these services, you will need to:

- Call Beyond Blue who offer 24/7 counselling services in Australia. Please phone 1800 22 4643 to talk to a registered counsellor or visit <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/> to access confidential online chat forum.
- Alternatively, visit <https://www.australiacounselling.com.au/> to find a counsellor near you.

What are the benefits?

The purpose of this study is to provide insight into how a state governing body, Squash NSW, can better facilitate participation in squash. For participants, this research provides an opportunity to confidentially share and reflect upon their experiences and insights. The findings of this study could be used to inform individuals that are responsible for the coordination of squash in NSW how they could better manage squash in the region. For the wider community, this is important because sport participation has a multitude of benefits no matter the age of the individual. Furthermore, this research will enable the researcher to fulfil the requirements of their qualification.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your identity will be kept classified and will not be disclosed in the written report. Any material paraphrased or quoted from transcripts will be confidential and will only be identified with a pseudonym or label, for example 'Participant A'. No information that would enable an individual's identity to be disclosed will be used in this research paper. Nonetheless, due to the study being focused on a single sporting community and the small number of participants, details that you provide could be used to identify you by members within the community.

As mentioned, you will also have the opportunity to provide feedback to the researcher if you wish to extract or remove any parts of the conversation. Furthermore, you will be provided a full copy of your own transcript to review.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The cost of participation is time. The interview will take approximately an hour (maximum). With the potential of a second interview to discuss new ideas that may have emerged from other discussions

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You have two weeks to consider whether or not you are willing to participate in the research.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes, an electronic summary of the research findings will be emailed to you upon completion of the study.

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, Mel Johnston, melody.johnston@aut.ac.nz.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 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:

Researcher Contact Details:

Brooke Pryor, rqc5281@autuni.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Mel Johnston, melody.johnston@autuni.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 06 September 2021 AUTEC Reference number 21/296

Appendix C – Consent Form



Consent Form

For use when interviews are involved.

Project title: ***Understand the Sport Participation Environment: Squash in New South Wales***

Project Supervisor: ***Melody Johnson***

Researcher: ***Brooke Pryor***

I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 12 August 2021.

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 agree to participate in a second interview if required (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

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 06 September 2021
Reference number 21/296***

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix D – Ethics Approval



6 September 2021

Melody Johnston
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Melody

Re Ethics Application: **21/296 Understanding the sport participation environment: Squash in New South Wales.**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 6 September 2024.

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 AUTECH in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTECH prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTECH Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.
8. AUTECH grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research 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.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>

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

The AUTECH Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Rqc5281@autuni.ac.nz; Michael Naylor