

Article

Community Sport, Australian Sport Policy and Advocacy: A Qualitative Study of Stakeholder Perspectives

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ABSTRACT: This article explored aspects of the community sport policy process in rural New South Wales, Australia, focusing on the views of community sport club (CSC) officials relating to policy matters. Community sport represents a complicated policy arena, and rural communities face a level of disparity compared with better-resourced urban CSCs, particularly concerning policy implementation and advocacy issues. Officials at CSCs from ten different sports ($n = 10$) in a rural setting participated in semi-structured interviews to pinpoint themes common in the community sport policy process. Further, the research identified aspects of the connections that impact CSCs, including those with government and National Sporting Organisations (NSOs). To highlight the beliefs and attitudes of the CSC officials, the interviews had two key thematic foci—*implementation and advocacy*—and the findings highlighted sub-themes relating to the fundamental interests of CSCs. Overall, the research accentuated the hierarchical nature—a *power imbalance*—of sport policy processes, the potential for CSCs to have a *bottom-up* role in policy creation, and the consideration of a policy analysis and evaluation structure such as the Advocacy Coalition Framework. Finally, the outcome points to enthusiasm for strengthening community sport by giving CSCs a voice through localized advocacy.

Keywords: Advocacy; Community sport; Clubs; Policy; Power; Sustainability



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1. Introduction

Community sport is the foundation of sporting activity, and community sport clubs (CSCs)—a “cluster of competitive, but not high-performance sports” [1]—have a significant role in providing organized sport for the wider population [2,3]. Though community sport can have “multifarious meanings and diverse applications in different parts of the world” [4], community sport is defined herein as organized physical activity provided by a CSC (or group of CSCs) within a local setting [5]. Set against a complicated backdrop globally, however, it is argued that the community sport policy sector is conflicted, disorganized [6–12], and “fragmented, fractious and ineffective” [13]. From a general perspective, sport policy is a highly politicized field often subject to legislators’ “whim and caprice” [7]. Further, sport policy represents policy residue [14] that struggles for recognition because its social importance is perhaps less distinct from strategic objectives associated with the economy, education, welfare, and political relations.

In rural Australia, the nature of physical activity and community sport differs from urban community sport [15–18]. Rural CSCs and the communities they represent, however, have long been shown to be somewhat of an afterthought for policy and government investment in Australia [16,17]. This situation is not unique to sport; most rural sectors would hold such views [19–22], nor is it unique to Australia [23]. Yet, community sport is the glue that holds communities together [17,24,25], offering a unique opportunity for enhancing social cohesion [4,26,27], and greater opportunities for inclusion [4,28–30]. Further, community sport plays a critical role in intimate community settings [28,31] and provides many localized social, political, and economic benefits [4,15,17,32]. From a policy perspective, community sport might, therefore, be considered critical to the architects of sport policy, particularly given that participation in sport and physical activity is of significant value to society [32–35].

Based on the analysis of interviews, this study sought to identify themes common among CSC officials concerning policy impacting their sport. To determine the principal aspects of the policy process for community sport, the principal focus was on viewpoints of policy implementation and the potential for advocacy. Within that environment, the role of power was considered in relation to policy implementation. To appreciate power imbalances in the policy process, this paper outlines the notion of power because “any discussion of the policy-making process must necessarily be grounded in an extrinsic consideration of the nature of power within the state” [36]. Further, understanding power relations provides the basis for a more robust analysis of policy implementation issues and the potential for a collaborative bottom-up influence of policy. With such context, connecting the dimensions of advocacy requires the application of relevant theory to make sense of the policy process [37,38].

To better understand the interconnected nature of policy processes [39], a key feature of this paper is the potential of meso-level analytical frameworks to help assess power-based relationships between the various stakeholders involved in an Australian rural context. With the following points in mind—*power, implementation, and advocacy*—and the contemplation of policy frameworks such as the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), the study addresses two key research questions: (1) *what examples of specific implementation issues are impacting community sport?*; and (2) *is there potential to contemplate an advocatorial environment for policy influence and change?* This latter question is a fundamental consideration of how policy frameworks like the ACF—and the aspect of bottom-up policy influence—might apply to advocacy for community sport and encourage a more inclusive policy environment from the perspective of CSCs. Overall, the key findings contribute to a greater understanding of CSC concerns and opinions on the viability of localized advocacy and its influence within an Australian rural context.

2. Literature Review

The application of numerous theories—the more, the better [40]—provides a valuable foundation for comprehending issues facing CSCs when considering the policy process and the potential of localized advocacy. The notion of power forms a fundamental initial consideration for this research due to the potential imbalance of influences in policy implementation processes. To support the objectives of this research, the ACF and the potential for bottom-up influence of policy give rise to a situation where perhaps the disparity in power relations becomes less acute.

2.1. Background

In Australia, where there is an historical objective to make sport “more accessible, equitable and fair for all Australians” [41], the complex policy situation presents barriers to that aim. There are numerous concerns for community sport, including scant resources, decreasing participation levels, fluctuations in volunteer numbers, difficulties with diversity, challenges with inclusion, variations in skills desirable for managing CSCs, and problematic policy matters [4,11,28,30,42–49]. Issues facing the community sport environment include, for example, the challenging and unclear position of CSCs in health promotion and broader social responsibilities [28,50].

Such concerns result from, in part, the range of stakeholders involved in policy processes and the access to resources [28,51,52]. For community sport in Australia, such a scenario can, in turn, create a degree of tension for the actors involved in the policy process [28,47,48,53,54]. From a policy process standpoint, friction occurs due to the variation in primary value priorities that influence the policy process [55] and the different social contexts and local conditions that affect the decisions of stakeholders involved in policy [56,57].

Defined as local sport clubs that are primarily non-profit, voluntary, amateur, community, and grassroots sport organisations [58] that provide recreational and competitive sporting opportunities for communities [59], CSCs face perennial resource and finance issues and, invariably turn to predictable methods like *sausage sizzles* (barbecues or similar) in local shopping precincts to raise funds. CSCs also operate with human capital (i.e., volunteers) that is subject to time constraints and often lack the range of skills required for managing CSCs and thus face constant challenges in pursuing objectives or following a strategic plan [3,9, 60–65].

CSCs operate in an increasingly competitive environment [2] that brings expectations from both government and NSOs to professionalize certain aspects of their activities [66,67]. The complex conditions facing CSCs include the understanding of reasonable governance procedures [68,69], increasing CSC membership and the retention rate, professional and suitably vetted staff, executive boards with relevant skillsets, well-maintained facilities, and modern and functioning equipment [52,70,71]. Further, there is an expectation to keep membership fees low because community sport is costly [72,73]. Yet, with volunteers at the helm [74], CSCs invariably struggle to cover costs and are often year-to-year operations, creating sustainability issues, particularly concerning human and financial resources [75]. In addition, due to CSCs being implementers of policy [76–79], the challenges facing CSCs give rise to a power imbalance affecting community sport.

2.2. Power

For this investigation, power represents the ability for a key actor to influence the decision-making process in the face of opposition from other actors [80]. Power is ubiquitous at all levels of social relations, no less so at the micro-level [81,82]. From a policy perspective and the impact on power-based relationships, essential norms relate to “the distribution of power at the societal level; the significance of the pursuit and protection of interests; and the relationship between the state and society” [83]. Thus, for community sport, power is construed as a dominant, universal, and pervasive feature of all social relations [84,85]. Individual actors in CSCs, NSOs, and government are connected in numerous ways, so the policy process might, in theory, be based on “the cooperation of a whole network of local and individualized tactics of power in which everybody is involved” [86].

When considering critical stakeholders in the power process, however, namely the government and NSOs, CSCs are ultimately viewed as instruments of sport policy [87–90]. The organisation ultimately in control of resources (e.g., government and NSOs) can exert power over the resource-seeking organisation (e.g., the CSC) by attaching conditions to, for example, revenue derived from government grants (e.g., content and control) [91]. Reliance upon external revenues such as third-party subsidies can harm the autonomy of CSCs [92,93], as can dependence upon a more traditional and unsophisticated list of opportunities for raising revenue, such as sausage sizzles, collection tin rattling and raffles, which can impact volunteer motivation and increase levels of frustration [94–97]. Thus, the importance of power in the policy process is referenced in the connection between power and issues that affect grassroots implementation.

2.3. Implementation

For CSCs to consider policy concerns and better realize capacity [74], barriers to implementation need to be considered concerning developing CSC capabilities [49,98]. Implementation is “the process of interaction between the setting of goals and the actions geared to achieve them” [99]. Further, implementation relies on the interaction of actors that are part of a process to work in tandem to deliver the final policy objectives. When it comes to policy implementation, CSCs face various challenges, including an over-reliance on volunteers, financial insecurity, insufficient resources, skills deficit, a poor participation culture, infrastructure issues such as sparse or deteriorating facilities, the relationship between school sport and community sport, difficulties meeting expectations of stakeholders, issues with policy implementation, and problematic relationships with government and NSOs and their objectives [3,49,64,93].

To better understand the policy process involving CSCs, the importance of implementing actors is essential. In the public policy process, consideration of actors and their interaction is crucial to a scenario that differentiates between “government intention and actual results” [100]. Yet, implementation is often a complicated and lengthy procedure between those creating and enacting policy and stakeholders responsible for putting policy into action [101]. Forming a policy-action continuum, key stakeholders such as government, NSOs, and local implementers like CSCs are positioned as theoretically cooperative elements in an adaptive policy process [101]. Policy might thus be construed not as a restrictive factor but a negotiated process “which inevitably undergoes interpretation and modification and, in some cases, subversion” [101]. Such an assertion supports the notion of shaping the preferences of policy actors with the power imbalances that impact policy processes and outcomes [102,103]. For this investigation, the consideration of a policy analysis framework that has the potential to cater to the numerous stakeholders involved in sport policy involving CSCs, such as the ACF, has merit.

2.4. Advocacy Coalition Framework

Within the complex community sport policy ecosystem, CSCs—the *policy implementers*—face the challenge of a mainly top-down policy process, which can be counter-productive to the policymakers’ objectives [44,76,79]. To better understand policy processes, the potential of meso-level analytical frameworks to help manage the power relations impacting stakeholders is essential. Some constraints relating to meso-level theory include micro-level concerns and intricate matters impacting the implementation processes [36]. From a theoretical perspective, however, analytical frameworks of the policy process help interpret how best to manage stakeholder interests, offering “the very tools to understand the broader questions of public policy” [104]. Further, analytical frameworks offer examples of interconnected ideas [105–107], contributing to understanding advocacy and community sport.

In terms of identifying a meso-level theory applicable to advocacy and community sport policy, the ACF provides two key features: (i) It caters for a macro-level assumption that policymaking takes place within sub-systems by specialists whose behaviours are subject to influence from the broader socio-economic and political system [108,109]; and (ii) it considers micro-level observations of individuals facing issues such as limited resources, a distinct feature of community sport and CSCs [64,110], within the sub-system contributing to overall system instability [109,111].

Houlihan (2005) suggests that, for the analysis of sport policy, the ACF has greater application than alternative frameworks and can identify and explain the policy process in an environment often stymied by macro-political motives.

A particular focus of the ACF is the bottom-up influence of the policy process, viewed as crucial because it allows the synthesis of bottom-up input with a more traditional top-down approach to policy creation [108,112,113]. The ACF aims to synthesize top-down and bottom-up aspects of policy [114] and includes practical evidence, technical information, and the subsequent influence on the policy creation and implementation process [55,115]. The ACF comprises two brief distinctions: (i) a top-down process, meaning to commence with a macro-policy directive; and (ii) a bottom-up process, meaning to start with an analysis of actors involved with policy implementation, while understanding that actors often have to manipulate policy to address local conditions [116]. Within that context, it is critical to assess actor attitudes and beliefs as part of the policy process [117].

In community sport, although both top-down and bottom-up management processes can be applied or are viewed as worthy of consideration, in the policy process [118,119], national sport policy creation and implementation is often viewed simplistically as a manageable process of interconnection through a top-down process without concerns about power imbalance or the distortion of relationships [120,121]. Despite the role of a central government sport funding agency like the Australian Sports Commission (an agency of the Australian Federal Government) that, among other things, seeks to create more opportunities for physical activity for Australians [122], sport policy development is ultimately dependent upon several separate organisations cooperating to fulfil policy objectives [123], which can lead to a power imbalance [124].

Accordingly, rather than attempting to analyse matters solely from a top-down perspective in sport, there is merit in considering a bottom-up approach and then reviewing and enacting the opinions of stakeholders in community sport; in other words, take community sport “as the point of departure” [76], gain an understanding of actor attitudes and beliefs [117], and work *upwards* from that position [36]. Indeed, the lowest point of the implementation process should be where any review of the efficacy of policy processes commences [125–128] because it offers the opportunity to address the reality of implementation.

3. Method

With the objective of outlining policy implementation issues impacting community sport and the potential for an advocatorial environment to influence policy, the study addressed the research questions by identifying strategic policy challenges for community sport and views on localized support for CSCs. To gain insight from an implementation perspective and the potential for advocacy, interviews were analyzed to classify themes relating to processes influencing policy—including power dynamics impacting CSC relationships—and those relating to creating an advocacy structure. Notably, policy processes—and how they impact stakeholders—are not always apparent and are usually connected to subtle variations in policy and specific experiences or results [129]. Hence, the method applied in this paper seeks, in part, to identify policy nuances based on the experiences of the CSC officials participating in the research.

3.1. Design

The research design adopted a qualitative method through the application of interviews, the most common approach for accumulating qualitative data in sport science [130]. Qualitative research is applied across various sport disciplines and is becoming more mainstream [131], to the point that it has been described as a more authoritative method than a quantitative approach [132,133]. Further, qualitative methods offer a useful way to probe the nuances in participant experiences [134]; simply, semi-structured interviews allow for responses to be explored where quantitative methods do not. Adopting said outlook catered for a better understanding of the lived experience of a specific population group—in this case, the CSC officials - and is based on approaches similar to sport-related research [134,135,136–139].

The research incorporated ten (10) semi-structured interviews intended to elicit themes - as per the research questions - typical in the community sport policy process. The interview questions ($n = 12$) focussed on higher-order themes of (a) implementation and (b) advocacy to understand better empirical data with the potential practical application of a policy framework like the ACF. Participants answered questions about government and NSO policy implementation processes and associated outcomes that impacted their CSC. Owing to a likely variation in the understanding of policy and advocacy, participants were e-mailed the guiding questions before the interview to give them time to digest content and expectations. Using open-ended questions allowed the participants to expand their answers during the interviews [140]. Through cautious but precise probing where relevant, the researcher requested participants to elaborate on statements and perspectives that would impact the thematic analysis [141]. Questions were

presented individually and specifically to each CSC official. The interview protocol began with informed consent procedures. From an ethical standpoint, all participants were advised of the confidential and voluntary nature of their involvement in the research, which was approved by the University of Canberra Human Research Ethics Committee (project number 20180310, approved 26 September 2018). The interviews were recorded digitally and then transcribed verbatim. All participants were thanked and reminded of the purpose of the research.

3.2. Participants

Interview participants ($n = 10$) were purposively sampled CSC officials in the Illawarra, NSW, a sufficient number, particularly compared to sampling adopted in comparative research in Australia [142]. Participants were recruited based on their willingness to participate, a situation ascertained by a previous survey response (Authors, submitted) and their position within a CSC. The participants were all senior CSC officials (e.g., President/Secretary/Treasurer) in the following sports: *Australian Rules Football, Cricket, Lifesaving, Netball, Soccer, Swimming, Rugby League, Rugby Union, Touch Rugby, and Track & Field Athletics*. The sports were selected based on the results of the previously mentioned surveys.

3.3. Measurement

Aligned with the research questions, the interview questions addressed the nature of community sport and policy, and responses were collected in a process that facilitated straightforward content analysis with questions grouped into the two higher-order themes: (i) those with an implementation focus and (ii) those with an advocacy focus. The interview questions are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Questions.

Interview Questions	
Implementation Focus	
1.	What are the challenges faced by your club in the implementation of its plans and activities?
2.	Where does the club get its funds to run its activities?
3.	What policies is your club involved in that support the local community?
4.	What are the strategic policy priorities of your club? How are policies made and implemented within the club?
5.	What do you consider are the key issues in relation to growing and sustaining participation in community sport?
6.	Can you provide details of policies (either local, state or national) that have been problematic to your club?
Advocacy Focus	
1.	What do you see as the major tensions or challenges in the community sport policy system?
2.	In what ways do you feel that your club is able to influence (i) national level sport related policy, and (ii) local level sport-related policy?
3.	How does your club address the needs of every stakeholder linked to your club?
4.	How would you view the feasibility of a cooperative relationship with clubs from other sports?
5.	What examples of advocacy (e.g., representation with a community focus, as opposed to legal representation) has your club benefitted from?
6.	To what extent do you think an advocacy group might benefit your club and community sport as a whole?

The justification process for the type and number of interview questions initially involved framing the questions following direction from qualitative research literature [143,144]. The number of questions ($n = 12$) was based on the two higher-order themes to maintain a clear focus on each section and kept to this number in recognition of the voluntary participation and to avoid loss of interest/focus [143]. The questions were *structural* [143] and designed to uncover themes and provide a platform for testing hypotheses [145]. In this instance, the questions offered a sequence toward establishing a clear connection between the Findings and future research opportunities. As already noted, the number of participants was based on sampling adopted in similar research in Australia [142] and the nature of the questions followed examples in other research, including some with an Australian focus [134,135,136–139]. Finally, a pilot study was conducted involving individuals with characteristics similar to the participants [144]. Input from seven PhD qualified sport academics at the author's institution was garnered, a process involving several revisions to the questions.

3.4. Data Collection

The data collection occurred using semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face by the researcher. Interviews ranged between 42–80 min, with a mean duration of 61 min. Semi-structured interviews suited this research project's requirements due to all CSC participants having different lived experiences of the policy process [146,147]. The conversations were audio-recorded, then transcribed verbatim by an independent transcription service, allowing for the collection of thorough, genuine, and quality data [148].

3.5. Data Analysis

A content analysis procedure was adopted to analyse the interview data. All the data were coded in line with each interview question to identify themes [149]. Each interview encompassed the same questions and a structure in sections and paragraph styles; a code symbolized each question, with the data organized into lower-order themes and sub-themes. The classification for the lower-order themes was based on the overall aim of each question, with examples shown in Table 2. The sub-themes were guided and extracted based on the responses to questions and the critical references made by participants, thus producing the sequence of themes and effecting a logical structure for the data [144,145,150]. The analysis employed NVivo 14 software, a tool frequently applied in qualitative research in health and sport in Australia [142,151,152]. The author coded the data; it is not uncommon for qualitative studies to use a single coder [153]. By way of example, as per Table 2, straightforward labelling (i.e., using ‘Q’ followed by the question number) was applied to each question, which gave rise to a specific lower-order theme.

Table 2. Example of labelling of interview questions & lower-order themes.

Interview Question	Question Code	Lower-Order Theme
Q1: What are the challenges faced by your club in the implementation of its plans and activities?	Q1– Implementation challenges faced by the club	Q1_Implementation Challenges
Q7: What do you see as the major tensions or challenges in the community sport policy system?	Q7– Tensions in community sport policy	Q7_Policy tensions

Each interview transcript was then broken down based on the initial codes and lower-order theme, producing sub-themes based on representative quotes from the interview participants [154,155]. The associated probing (where required) in the interviews allowed the author to gain more meaningful responses, thus producing more detailed sub-themes (see Table A1 in the Appendix). To improve reliability, data for each sub-theme is only provided for questions where two or more respondents referred to applicable variables in their responses. This was to ensure data shown in the Findings was more balanced, representative of more than one participant so as to avoid an associated response bias [156], and to point simply to the phenomena being studied based on the qualitative approach to the research [148,157]. In addition, to help visualize the Findings, Figures 1–12 were produced to provide insight into the most prominent sub-themes.

3.6. Limitations

Regarding the interview participants, it is acknowledged that a degree of bias in responses was possible. Yet, given the research’s overall purpose, the participants provided a sound platform for understanding community sport issues within *their* community. Indeed, the participants were knowledgeable about community sport and offered various viewpoints and opinions across multiple sports. Gathering the views from the CSC officials allowed for an understanding, albeit limited to a particular geographical region of rural Australia, of the policy implementation process along with the opinions on localized advocacy, alongside the impact of power in CSC relationships.

4. Findings

Delineated initially into the two higher-order themes - *implementation and advocacy* - the Findings elicit key outcomes and processual anomalies impacting CSCs. The Findings were divided into (a) the initial two higher-order themes, followed by (b) lower-order themes, (c) sub-themes, and (d) sample verbatim responses. In accordance with the lower-order themes relating to each question, the analysis yielded numerous sub-themes for each question. Table A1 in the Appendix highlights each sub-theme, the number of participants referring to a sub-theme and the total number of references. Thereafter, two verbatim responses per sub-theme are shown, along with the sport (a full range of responses are available in the supplementary file). To visualise the Findings for each question under the banner of each higher-order theme, Figures 1–12 provide details for the frequency of participant responses to each question (the lower-order theme) and the production of the applicable sub-theme. Each figure has a supporting text explanation that elicits the connection between the lower-order theme and the sub-theme(s) for each data set. In Figures 1–6, as follows, detail relating to the Implementation questions is provided.

Q1: What are the challenges faced by your club in the implementation of its plans and activities? Funding, Time, and Volunteers are registered as the dominant sub-themes relating to implementation challenges. Funding provided the most apparent concerns with references to it being the ‘number one’ challenge.

Q2: Where does the club get its funds to run its activities? Sponsorship from third parties is presented as the main sub-theme and critical funding source, along with grants and revenue raised from fundraising events (e.g., annual club dinner). BBQs (e.g., sausage sizzles) were a popular source of funding.

Q3: What policies is your club involved in that support the local community? The overwhelming sub-theme was that connections with the local community were significant, with seven participants referring to the concept.

Q4: What are the strategic policy priorities of your club? How are policies made and implemented within the club? Recruitment is presented as the dominant sub-theme, linked primarily to maintaining/growing club membership to remain sustainable.

Q5: What do you consider are the key issues in relation to growing and sustaining participation in community sport? Following on from Q4 above, sustainability is a stand-out point. Further, interest (the maintenance thereof) is another crucial sub-theme.

Q6: Can you provide details of policies (either local, state or national) that have been problematic to your club? There was a strong response with the dominant sub-theme relating to NSOs and the difficulties for CSCs in addressing/managing policy edicts.

Additional observations in Table A1 in the Appendix provide details of the number of references the participants made in connection with a particular sub-theme. By way of notable example, in the implementation higher-order section, Q1 elicited a strong reaction to the Funding sub-theme, with 15 references to the subject, perhaps unsurprising given the perennial nature of issues surrounding the funding of community sport [158]. For Q2, there was a strong response relating to Grants, which invariably require a vital skill set to complete well [159]. Other notable examples include the issues relating to participation numbers, which impact the sustainability of a CSC, as shown in Q5, and policy issues, which, as per Q6, provoked a very high reaction with 31 responses from eight participants. In Figures 7–12, as follows, detail relating to the Advocacy questions is provided.



Figure 1. Sub-Themes & Frequency for Question 1.

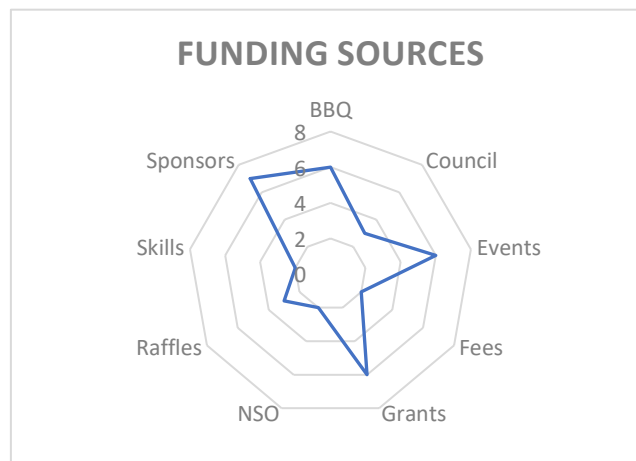


Figure 2. Sub-Themes & Frequency for Question 2.

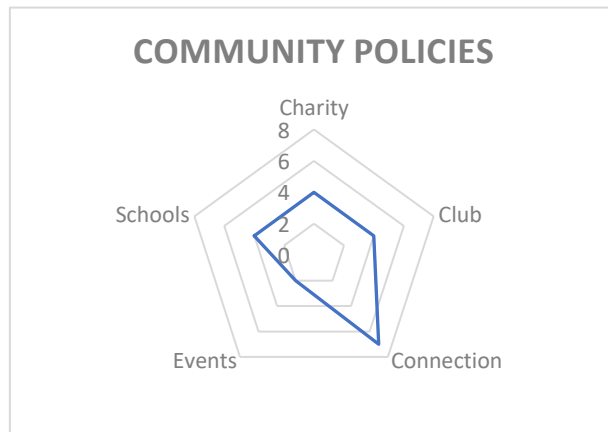


Figure 3. Sub-Themes & Frequency for Question 3.



Figure 4. Sub-Themes & Frequency for Question 4.



Figure 5. Sub-Themes & Frequency for Question 5.

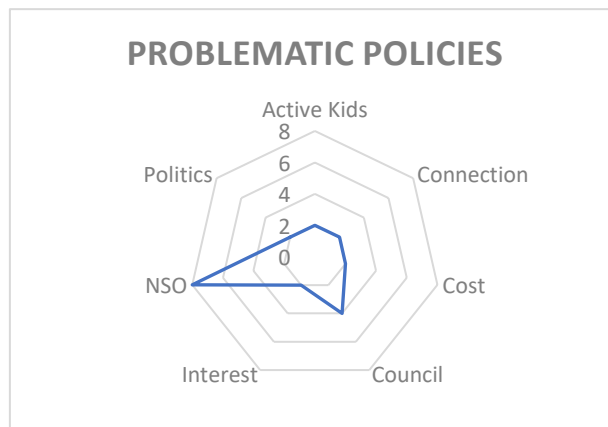


Figure 6. Sub-Themes & Frequency for Question 6.

Q7: What do you see as the major tensions or challenges in the community sport policy system? The two dominant sub-themes corresponding to policy challenges related to the hierarchical nature of policy and the disconnect clubs felt with their sport overall.

Q8: In what ways do you feel that your club is able to influence (i) national level sport related policy, and (ii) local level sport-related policy? The dominant sub-theme is related to policy (e.g., the hierarchical nature as per Q7 above) and the lack of influence at a local level.

Q9: How does your club address the needs of every stakeholder linked to your club? The dominant sub-themes of player and family demonstrated a key issue for community sport in terms of maintaining interest among members and their families.

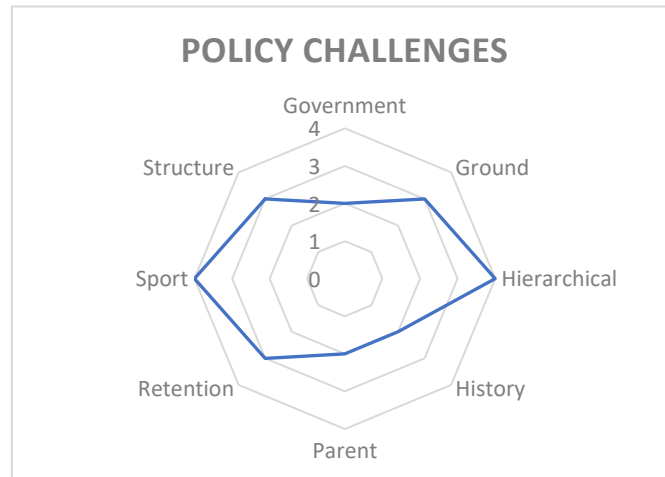


Figure 7. Sub-Themes & Frequency for Question 7.

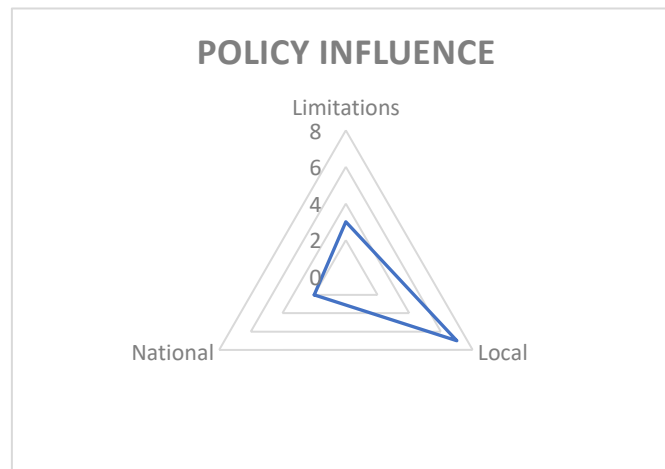


Figure 8. Sub-Themes & Frequency for Question 8.



Figure 9. Sub-Themes & Frequency for Question 9.

Q10: How would you view the feasibility of a cooperative relationship with clubs from other sports? The standout sub-theme was the concept of cooperation, notably with all ten participants indicating support for a cooperative environment.

Q11: What examples of advocacy (e.g., representation with a community focus, as opposed to legal representation) has your club benefitted from? Most participants referred to issues with the idea and that, in general, there is a distinct absence of advocacy (i.e., nothing).

Q12: To what extent do you think an advocacy group might benefit your club and community sport as a whole? All participants agreed that advocacy had the potential to help, and the vast majority cited the supportive element as being important.

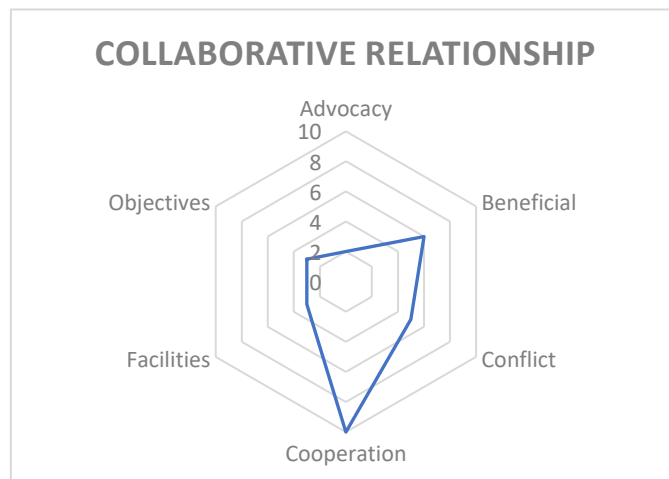


Figure 10. Sub-Themes & Frequency for Question 10.

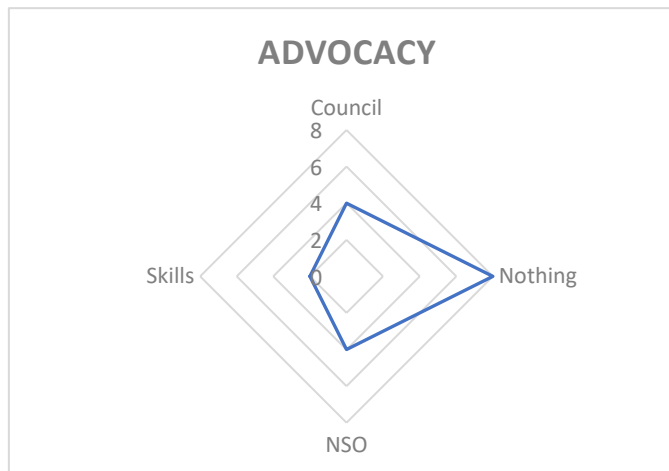


Figure 11. Sub-Themes & Frequency for Question 11.

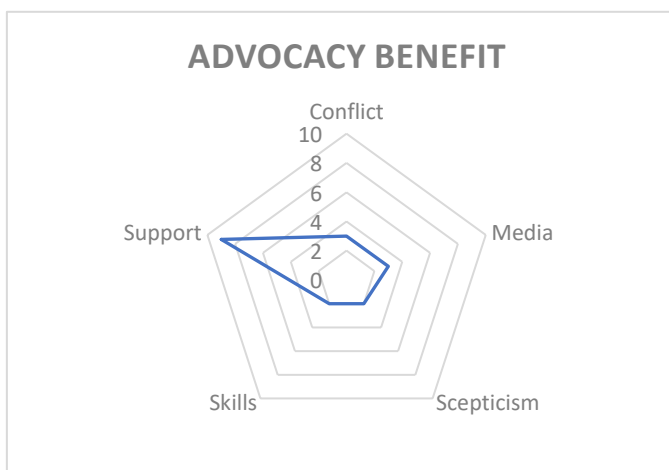


Figure 12. Sub-Themes & Frequency for Question 12.

Table A1 in the Appendix provides further details on the number of times participants have referred to a particular sub-theme. In the advocacy higher-order section, Q7 drew attention to concerns about the hierarchical nature of policy impacting CSCs with 15 references to the stratified makeup of sport policy. There were a significant number of references for Q8; a combination of 47 references relating to the ability of CSCs to have any influence over policy, either locally or nationally [76]. Notably, Q10 produced a strong response, with 20 references across all participants, to the potential of cooperation among CSCs, with networks being of clear potential in community sport [160]. In Q12, under the support sub-theme, nine participants made 15 references relating to the benefits of a central body advocating for CSCs.

5. Discussion

Based on the two research questions, this study aimed to illuminate CSC concerns about policy implementation and the significance of an advocacy structure incorporating CSC views. The Findings identified a relationship between implementation and advocacy (higher-order themes) by way of CSCs navigating a hierarchy with an uneven distribution of financial and human resources, implementation issues, the potential bottom-up role of CSCs in policy creation, and consideration of a framework such as the ACF.

Some critical connections between concepts and overarching themes were identified. From a pecuniary perspective, the analysis identified that CSCs lack adequate funding, either directly or indirectly (Q2), a predictable feature of community sport [158]. Further, the results demonstrate that volunteers contribute significantly to community sport development. Regarding parental motivation for volunteering, CSCs rely significantly on support from parents and providing interest in the role is a constant challenge [161,162]. The issue of sustainability arose noticeably in Q4, where it was recognized there were issues with recruitment and interest, both from a volunteer and membership standpoint. Also, when considering the potential for advocacy, the participants noted the potential for a more collaborative approach to issues impacting them (Q10). Further, there is a predominant view advocacy has the potential to help influence the implementation process through coordinated support and a well-defined hierarchy that communicates and liaises with local people.

Notably, when considering the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the sub-themes surfaced at different stages throughout the interview. This finding reflected the problematic nature of each point raised and why, for some participants, there were pressing concerns that overlapped throughout much of the interview. Further, it was clear that several specific factors inhibited the implementation of the policy by CSCs. These include both shared and conflicting values and opinions (especially when considering the government and NSO objectives contrasted with those of CSCs), challenges associated with implementation, such as resource issues and relationships, a lack of discussion regarding the policy process, and insular, top-down approaches to the creation and implementation of policy. Further, the Findings pinpoint specific strategic challenges for CSCs and their views—attitudes and beliefs—on focussed support.

As remarked, the ACF emphasizes systems relating to actor attitudes and beliefs as the fundamental characteristics of the policy process [117]. When considering the Findings under the advocacy higher-order theme, some apparent attitudes were identified. The participants judged that governments and NSOs do not adequately consult CSCs and that there is a clear power imbalance in the policy process [36]. The participants opined that CSCs do not have a voice and are expected/need to increase participation but have limited resources or funding to facilitate this. Concerning beliefs, key issues included a lack of consultation, an absence of significance in the policy process, and a precise scenario highlighting that CSC officials are not policy actors. For CSCs, such beliefs are essential in realising more significant reforms beyond micro-community issues. Based on the sentiment at Q12, for example, the core driver for the participants is the potential for an independent voice to support and guide CSCs.

Regarding the overall Findings under the advocacy higher-order theme, it is appropriate to suggest that ACF offers a platform to address critical advocacy requirements and implementation issues. The Findings suggest that a collective voice is essential and could shift actor beliefs to the point that CSC officials consider their opinions worthy of merit. The upper end of the hierarchy would be obliged to include CSCs as actors in the policy process and consider—and act upon—their viewpoints. Acknowledging the concerns of rural CSCs might be facilitated by a localized/rural association advocating for CSCs in consultation with NSOs and the government, a positive shift away from historically less inclusive policy processes [16,17]. A line of communication from CSC to NSO and government might, at worst, allow for CSC voices to be heard and, at best, influence policy to address CSC concerns.

In achieving potential independent and collective representation, the likelihood is that attitudes will be more favourable as more localized advice and representation could follow. Further, CSC officials might develop an increased capacity to contribute to policy impacting grassroots sport through bottom-up influence and as a result of resources (e.g.,

funding) flowing to CSCs (the policy implementers). Where policy beliefs were concerned, this was the Achilles heel for CSCs. The potential of a bottom-up focus for an advocacy coalition relies on collective support for this belief. On this very point, however, the key findings indicate there is unanimity with this belief due to the interconnections and relationships between the various sub-themes.

For CSCs, a form of advocacy might impact resource concerns by way of a cooperative relationship with (a) governments and NSOs in terms of policy development and (b) a similarly collaborative relationship with community partners and stakeholders. Such a step would be constructive in potentially addressing the issues surrounding the conflicted, ineffective, and politicized sport policy process [6–14], especially the impact on CSCs. Under the umbrella of the ACF, power relations and resource dependency are considered, which may influence policy processes and sustainability. The ACF supports how CSCs might benefit from synchronized and collective activities [163] instead of casual or *ad hoc* varieties. Indeed, an advocacy coalition may assist with recognising CSCs in the policy process by increasing the stages of formality between CSCs, a development based on the organization’s maturity, budget growth and independence and stronger links with other organisations, particularly at committee or board level [164]. Some specific conclusions that can be drawn from the Findings based on the higher-order themes are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Key Conclusions Generated from.

Higher-Order Themes	Key Conclusions
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural CSCs have limited or insufficient funding Funding mainly relied on sponsorship or donations from local companies, but this is an unreliable financing source Funding rural CSCs is needed to ensure policies and sports programs are sustained Working together as a team and incorporating or soliciting the help of volunteers refocuses CSC implementation efforts CSC implementation processes based on the ACF framework would promote sustainability, the sourcing of funding and the pooling of resources to address common challenges
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addressing issues relating to CSC volunteer turnover and momentum loss because better policy implementation outcomes take time Effectively manage stakeholder/partner expectations Support rural community sport through elaborate and well-coordinated activities that foster coexistence and policy dissemination Emphasise policy awareness and training in rural community sport to broaden the management and organisation scope CSCs will be better able to influence policy development by way of strategic support through advocacy

Overall, the research highlighted the stratified domain—a *power imbalance*—of sport policy, including resource and implementation issues, the potential bottom-up role of CSCs in policy creation, and considering a policy analysis structure such as the Advocacy Coalition Framework. The outcome of this research points to enthusiasm for strengthening community sport—and communities [17,24,25]—by giving CSCs a voice through localized advocacy, especially from a rural perspective. Relationships and the role of power in communities has the potential to help influence the policy-making process and encourage autonomous capacity for CSCs to have a positive impact on matters directly affecting the local environment and benefitting the local community from social, political, and economic perspectives [4,15,17,32].

5.1. Future Direction

With the preceding context, considering power, implementation, and advocacy provides a platform for acknowledging and acting upon the views of community sport stakeholders, such as CSCs. The research indicates that a better understanding of implementation issues and the ability to influence policy based on an advocacy structure may lead to a greater likelihood for CSCs to achieve capacity [3,74]. In this instance, such capacity might be termed *collaborative capacity* [164–167], meaning the collective ability of a group of CSCs to combine various resources to produce constructive outcomes [167]. The hypothesis linked to the ACF is that policy actors such as CSCs will be better able to influence policy development by way of strategic support through advocacy.

Critically, the role of an advocacy coalition may prove a significant force within the sport policy process [49,76,112], especially in the process of “bargaining and negotiation over the control of resources” [101]. Further, an advocacy coalition involved with otherwise stretched CSCs may help focus resources and efforts within community sport [74]. Notably, several studies support the ACF as a potentially helpful framework for policy analysis in sport

settings [168–172]. Indeed, the ACF serves as a “valuable starting point for the development of analytical frameworks capable of illuminating the sport policy area” [170] and provides sufficient merit and utility for its application as an analytical framework for sport policy [14,168,169,173].

For progress to be made in connection with policy processes involving community sport in rural communities, particularly due to the nature of the sector [15–18], governments and NSOs will likely need to have improved comprehension of CSC resource structures. Further, exploration of the potential to develop external relationships with various community institutions [64] might be considered because these relationships can be fostered based on a reciprocal understanding of the scarcity of resources [90,93,174,175]. There is the potential for CSCs to establish relationships with other institutions [176–178] due to the aforementioned scant resources [49,64,90,93,174,175]. It was noted that CSCs also formed strategic alliances to improve access to resources [179,180]. An increase in reliance upon external resources, however, increases the dependence on other organisations and consequently decreases the autonomy of CSCs [181].

Comprehending the impact of the interview outcomes with issues in the community sport policy process, this research has demonstrated that an advocative approach to community sport policy in a rural environment may help with the management and policy challenges facing CSCs. Indeed, the analysis herein provides evidence of support for advocacy concerning community sport policy and a more inclusive approach to policy creation. Based on the two higher-order themes probed in the research, Table 4 below is proffered as a broad conceptual pathway for the consideration for advocacy in community sport policy processes connected with each of the findings.

Table 4. Results with recommendations for community sport advocacy.

Higher-Order Themes	Recommendations
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move beyond the assumption of CSCs as only policy implementers and recognize their diversity and independence • Identify, locate, and assess the size of the formal (and semi-formal) market • Provide pathways for CSCs to influence policy formulation
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be clear about any offer/support for CSCs and assess the need and potential for support • Raise awareness, secure support, and develop bottom-up strategies • Ensure the advocacy group has the potential to be effective and is sustainable

In conjunction with the ACF’s focus on incorporating the impact of attitudes and beliefs, the themes identified in this research point to the potential for the practical application of a policy framework. The research outcome highlights two key points: first, the interview data blends with that identified in the literature and supports a practical intervention through localized advocacy; second, it provides topical testimony that the policy process involving community sport is complicated. When judging the issues impacting CSCs, theoretical factors based on advocacy offer insight and pathways for improvement [37,38]. Indeed, when considering advocacy in community sport, future sport policy research would benefit from contemplating frameworks connecting organizations directly with policy processes [39].

To that end, to move from a theoretical position and to establish empirical evidence based on the Findings, there is merit in operationalizing a coordinated approach through localized collaboration for community sport [76,112,182–184]. This proposal would comprise creating a coalition of rural CSCs to actively shape community sport policy from a bottom-up perspective. Future research might seek to establish an alliance within a rural community to test the potential of CSCs advocating for their interests. This approach would help illuminate the reality of implementation and help address or manage the issues facing CSCs. From an ACF perspective, the impact of an advocacy coalition would be demonstrated by the reciprocal accord between the CSCs and their separate but ultimately collective characteristics [163]. In so doing, advocacy in a rural setting would serve to mitigate the otherwise reduced policy focus in rural communities [16,17], increase the likelihood of localized sport strengthening communities [17,24,25], enhance social cohesion and inclusion [4,26–30], and generally improve social, political, and economic benefits [4,15,17,32].

6. Conclusions

Through the application of interviews, this paper has identified the views of CSC officials on various matters of concern, including funding problems, resource issues, hierarchical pressure, and support (or lack thereof) from an Australian rural context. Applying theoretical perspectives helps to understand the phenomena and illuminate potential opportunities for an improved policy process [39]. Collectively, the Findings of this study point to policy issues that impact CSCs and their ability to remain sustainable in an ecosystem fraught with challenges. The research drew attention to the *power imbalance* in the sport policy process, implementation issues for CSCs, and the potential bottom-

up role of CSCs in policy creation and evaluation [76–79]. Within such a complex environment, localized advocacy for CSCs may be an avenue for addressing policy implementation issues, especially from a rural perspective. Future research might seek to establish a collaborative structure for rural CSCs and observe its efficacy in addressing the challenges facing CSCs.

Based on the objectives of this investigation, the ACF is proffered as a robust model for application to the community sport policy process. The ACF encourages policy input based on a top-down/bottom-up basis and offers the potential to understand what is essential for advocacy at a localized level. In support of these points, with the rural community in mind, the data gathered for this research can provide clarity to (i) the attitudes and beliefs of key individuals from a bottom-up perspective and (ii) the potential for a collective, inclusive approach to policy creation and implementation—*an advocacy coalition*. The interview findings indicate that, in a rural setting, there is a clear appetite for bottom-up policy influence by giving CSCs a voice through localized advocacy. As per Houlihan (2005,2016), Fahlén & Skille (2017), Halkyard (2019), and Jedlicka (2022), the ACF offers significant utility as a framework for the exploration of sport policy and application of advocacy.

Appendix

Table A1. Sub-Themes, Participants, & References.

IMPLEMENTATION (Higher-Order Theme)			
Question	Lower-Order Theme	Sub-Theme	Participants, References (n=, n =) Sample References (n=2) & Sport
1	Implementation Challenges	Coaches	2, 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trying to get coaches as well, that’s probably the final challenge (AFL) So I think the biggest problem was offering the same coaching (Soccer)
		Council	5, 10 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council has been our major hold-up of funds (T&F Athletics) It is fragmented, but I would say it’s definitely not supported by our Councils (Swimming)
		Decisions	2, 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just getting things approved, if you want to get something implemented (Surf Lifesaving) To actually lead the club, it’s just trying to get enough committee members (AFL)
		Facilities	4, 9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main challenges are access and awareness (League) A government facility rather than a local council facility, so we actually have no control over anything (Union)
		Funding	7, 15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If we want to implement other things, then we have to increase team fees, but that can’t happen directly, so basically it’s self-funded (Touch) The number one challenge is funding (League)
		NSO	3, 9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Everything is strongly recommended, but if you don’t follow it, funding seems to disappear (Cricket) Rugby Australia policy, well who knows what that is, they change that every week because that’s what they do (Union)
		Participants	4, 8 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The primary challenge is actually getting enough players (AFL) Key issues is maintaining and keeping your older and your better sportsmen at the club, and to try and keep them participating (Soccer)
		Resources	3, 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of resources and training people within the club (T&F Athletics) So I think the biggest problem was offering the same coaching and equipment and activities (Surf Lifesaving)
		Time	7, 11 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where one person’s done three jobs and things like that (Netball) We’ve got so many jobs, and in a perfect corporate world, you’d say right, you’re on social media. You’re the marketing guy, you’re the sponsorship guy. I do all of them (League)
		Volunteers	7, 12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteers are hard to come by (Cricket) Our biggest problem is sometimes manpower, like volunteers (Touch)
2	Funding Sources	BBQ	6, 7 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sausage sizzle at Bunnings (Netball) All our funding is run by Bunnings barbeques (Swimming)
		Council	3, 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well and the TAFE have said “If you can get a grant we’ll support it, you can do whatever you want. But we’re not going to give you tenure.” (Union) We applied to the State, I’ve talked to the State representative, and nothing really came out of the that (Netball)
		Events	6, 9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our major carnival, which is once a year, well, we probably make quite a few thousand (Swimming) We ran a fundraising night at the local restaurant, and like a ladies’ night (Netball)
		Fees	2, 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The club gets its funds to run activities through our memberships (Surf Lifesaving) At the moment it would just be solely on registration (Netball)
		Grants	6, 15 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our local members have helped us with that sort of stuff, but it’s piecemeal (League) So we can’t access any council grants or anything like that (Union)
		NSO	2, 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nothing coming from a state organisation (Netball) We do get a certain amount of money through SSA, which is our swimming association (Swimming)

3	Community Policies	Raffles	3, 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chook raffles (League) • We also run their meat raffle on Friday night (Union)
		Skills	2, 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone like say my husband, he's got the skills to write it, but he's just over it! (Swimming) • We've got a really good skillset with rugby league, but we haven't got that strategic skillset (League)
		Sponsors	7, 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do get outside sponsorship from the local community (Touch) • A little bit of sponsorship, local (Netball)
		Charity	4, 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We formed a good relationship with the Lions, who are also a charity organisation (Soccer) • Fund raising activities for the Cancer Council, Relay for Life (Touch)
		Club	4, 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It should be a bit of sharing, caring club (Swimming) • So we don't actually have any written policies in general because without tenure there's no point in having a strategic plan because at any time we could fold (Union)
		Connection	7, 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We just look after ourselves (Netball) • We have a definite mindset of plugging into the community (Soccer)
		Events	2, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have teams in Relay for Life and we put teams in all of those things and support those type of avenues (Touch) • We run a certain number of events where anyone with a disability can come along and participate, and we have members volunteering their time (Surf Lifesaving)
4	Strategic Policies	Schools	4, 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect with the schools ... to try and ... get numbers (Cricket) • Support an elite touch program in a sporting school (Touch)
		Competition	2, 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next step up from that is NRC now (Union) • Also try and build up the level of our competition, or the kids and the level of where they're competing, to try and encourage better swimmers to come to our club (Soccer)
		Interest	3, 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's a drop off in the social structure of that as it goes, and education ways of things where if they're studying in years 11 and 12 (Cricket) • I think one of the key issues is keeping people interested (Soccer)
		Recruitment	5, 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main policy is to grow our membership in our club in our area (T&F Athletics) • I think we would class ourselves as being just very grassroots, just survival really, just to sustain that (Swimming)
		Strategy	3, 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working on a strategic level is a really difficult thing for us, because we're always on the edge financially, and we don't actually know whether we're going to compete the next year (League) • We're in a growth building exercise. We want to build our competition back up to what it was in the not far gone past, because there's too many sports now that are direct competition to us (Touch)
		Survive	2, 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our strategic policy is survive (Union) • We're just in our own bubble trying to keep alive, from year to year. And sometimes from month to month (League)
		Coaching	2, 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would dearly like to see more professional coaching (AFL) • It's also making sure that your coaching staff are as good as your national and your state coaches (Soccer)
5	Participation Issues	Cost	3, 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding. It's all about funding (T&F Athletics) • You get parents that are struggling, we have players that are definitely struggling to pay registration fee, but we don't wipe them out (Cricket)
		Council	2, 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it's State government funded. If you Google State or Federal funded, Find Your 30 is finding 30 min of exercise and we're trying to play off that. My next promotional tool will be Find Your 30 (Touch) • It becomes cost councils slowly increase the costs of grounds. But they've got to be, the upkeep of those, it's a vicious circle in many ways (Cricket)
		Facilities	2, 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So like our netball courts are dismal. They look unsafe (Netball) • We're also limited in our ability because we don't have anywhere to store any equipment, so we don't have a club house or a shipping container to lock anything in (T&F Athletics)

		Inclusion	2, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And sometimes it's not inclusive for certain clubs (Soccer) • I think if we're not mindful of those needs, and parents are feeling that, they'll go elsewhere (Surf Lifesaving)
		Interest	5, 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you've got eight teams, and then you cut it to three teams, where do all those players go? They lose interest in rugby, they lose interest in sport (Union) • Another key issue is keeping the interest of children coming into the sport (Soccer)
		Parents	2, 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have to have a parent. It's not safe (Swimming) • I guess the issue would be parents' high expectations, and how to manage those in relation to potentially other families who might feel uncomfortable (Surf Lifesaving)
		Policy	2, 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like Illawarra Rugby board see that they get more attention than us, but we can't change that locally, it has to be changed at the fundamental state level (Union) • Obviously the Active Kids bonus has been a bonus, but from our club perspective, it has not helped at all (Swimming)
		Strategies	3, 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They're doing some things and they're implementing some things that will take time over years (League) • Where you get two parents that's working during the week, they prefer something that's short, quick and down in Victoria to overcome this, they decided to have Friday afternoon and Friday night, particularly in daylight saving (Cricket)
		Sustainability	5, 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The key issue is the age group at our local levels (Union) • It's really hard when you have kids running around doing sport after school all the time when everyone's working, so I think sustainment of participation is really hard (Swimming)
		Time	2, 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's simply because of parents being available to take them there (Cricket) • There's things you have to meet, standards, procedures and policies and safety, so who turns up? Hardly anyone (Swimming)
6	Problematic Policies	Active Kids	2, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West advertising on their website the Active sports situation, you use that money to help pay fees and things. I don't know that that has caused any problems to be quite honest (Cricket) • But they just found the implementation of trying to do it themselves was hard (Union)
		Connection	2, 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's a real disconnect (League) • But gone are the days where anybody was welcome to play rugby. Rugby used to be the sport for everybody (Union)
		Cost	2, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost for changing that would be astronomical, impossible (Netball) • They change that every one or two years, and they're not cheap (Cricket)
		Council	4, 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The inflexibility, the total I think, disregard of sport and no engagement at all and if you have to engage, it's a fight (Swimming) • An umpire actually did hurt herself, and sued (Netball)
		Interest	2, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No-one's really swimming, they're just not. The clubs aren't full of older people, but I don't know what they're doing (Swimming) • I think this is where it's all come back again, where the policies of certain qualifying times are very, very stringent, and I actually find that it doesn't encourage the children to take part and try and achieve those levels. It actually puts them off, because they just can't reach them (Soccer)
		NSO	8, 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's implemented from above ... and creates a liability issue (Swimming) • They don't know how to manage it or deal with it. There's no one person they can push us toward or have a certain document ready for us. It's having to reinvent the wheel at every step (T&F Athletics)
		Politics	2, 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They keep putting impediments in your way. You can't just turn up and play anymore (Union) • That's where I probably got very jaded with the situation with the local communities because their seemed to be a lot of politics involved with the trials and people who were invited to the work trials (AFL)
		ADVOCACY (Higher-Order Theme)		
Q	Lower-Order Theme	Sub-Theme	Participants, References (n=, n=)	Sample References (n=2) & Sport
7	Policy Challenges	Government	2, 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They had this, and that's slowly drifted out of the point where P.E. is not even in some schools these days, because of the pressure that's put on schools and principals (Cricket) • Don't know what the social cost is with government funding and all that sort of stuff (League)

		Ground	3, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mind you we're the only club in Illawarra that actually has courts. Nobody else in our area has any, Netball Illawarra. We're the only ones (Netball) • Ground use is one, definitely. You get overlaps and you also get certain sports that don't want others using the same ground, if you know what I mean. It's not as bad as what it is, but when Aussie Rules started to come in here, some of the cricket clubs didn't want the sharing of the ground, because it supposedly damages the centre wicket situation (Cricket)
		Hierarchical	4, 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They're taking membership, but there's no real feedback about where they're working with government and what they're putting forward for clubs (T&F Athletics) • Country Rugby, they're basically a silent body until rep season comes around. We've got no idea what they do, what their policies are (Union)
		History	2, 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whereas we all used to run around when we were young, but no-one was any fitter than anyone else (Swimming) • You go back quite a number of years, and you tell them you had P.E. and sport, and it was gazetted in there, P.E. and sport, the old blue curriculum, it was there in the '60s. You had one of the major sections was P.E. and sport (Cricket)
		Parent	2, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And every sport has different, we spent a couple of years in baseball as well with one of our boys, and that's astronomical. We walked in to sign up, 650 bucks lighter. So there's been that argument, and there's a lot of advocates, I'm talking about just parent volunteer advocates, for making it free rego and the club absorbing the cost, just to get more people in (League) • But the parents took up the baton and taught our kids how to participate and how it was important and I felt really lucky for that, but I don't think a lot of other kids get that and then sport becomes hard (Swimming)
		Retention	3, 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We're not fostering and growing them because our club is not that strong, they are going to other clubs, or actually just stopping (AFL) • There have been challenges in the terms of all the qualifying for your top competitor people from the community sport to progress through the system (Soccer)
		Sport	4, 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apart from the fees going up, I'm not getting anything out of this (Swimming) • I think the biggest problem was offering the same coaching and equipment and activities that you do in different states (Soccer)
		Structure	3, 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is fragmented, but I would say it's definitely not supported by our Councils (Swimming) • There's not too many like, there's no policy saying that you can't be a certain age to play the game, no policy to say you can't be a certain gender, so I can't see too many barriers (Touch)
8	Policy Influence	Limitations	3, 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But like I said, we're just a bunch of bloody volunteers. I'm a retired copper. I don't know what I'm doing, I'm just having a crack (League) • A lot of the affiliates don't understand the way that works or the way they can work that, so a lot of people put their hands up in the air and say "that's the way it is, you can't change anything" (Touch)
		Local	7, 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And then at the local level, well we try to change policy of Illawarra Rugby to benefit us and grow rugby in Illawarra, but they don't have any resources (Union) • Illawarra Cricket Association this year has no president, no vice president, has no junior president (Cricket)
		National	2, 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have the ability to make those changes, but they don't realise it. They just go with whatever the State and National bodies dictate and are modelled (Touch) • So if they have policy changes or constitution changes in our Association, we need to be there, two of us at a club level need to go and be part of that kind of level (Netball)
9	Stakeholder Needs	Council	2, 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We try and keep the TAFE happy by mowing the ground and that (Union) • The Council's policy or the Council's lease on our club has limited us (Netball)
		Difficulties	3, 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's very difficult, everything's a bit patchy and I spend a lot of time with band aid solutions, but that's just part of any club (T&F Athletics) • Trying to restructure, we can only go a certain extent (Cricket)
		Experience	4, 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it needs to bring people to be able to interact and they always try and encourage club activities (Soccer) • Take along some nippers or invite these people along to our barbecues (Surf Lifesaving)

10	Collaborative Relationship	Family	7, 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At club level we should be doing more for the mums and the dads, and trying to get them interested and putting more into the club (AFL) • I think with our families and our participants I guess just communication's the biggest thing (Netball)
		Members	3, 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's important to us is maintaining and developing our sponsors and keeping our fans happy (League) • I want that feedback. I don't want the guys to walk away because of something that we didn't do, because we didn't know. I'd rather them walk away after I've said "I can't do that" (Touch)
		NSO	3, 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They're now putting it up to \$18 at Homebush, plus we all have to pay to get into the pool and Swimming New South Wales collect that money. It's cheaper for me to walk in and pay a spectator fee at Homebush than it is to pay through Swimming New South Wales (Swimming) • And Illawarra Rugby, well are they a stakeholder in our club? Not really, but you try and do what they say (Union)
		Player	8, 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are they at 15 and 16? They're all studying for their H.S.C. and then leaving. There's nowhere for them to even swim then, so where is my daughter going to swim? With ten years old's (Swimming) • The children would be happier with their parents there (AFL)
		Sponsors	6, 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In terms of our local businesses that provide sponsorship to us, just making them, providing lots of opportunities for them to be known in the community, and using every opportunity we can to flash their name around the place (Netball) • With some sponsors, they may have a meet and greet, or sometimes we do invite them along (Surf Lifesaving)
		Advocacy	2, 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would love that. But not only that, I've often thought, because I used to do this in the cops, I used to run a bunch of specialists through a region, and I would love the treasurer of every club to all get together and meet every three months and say how are you doing? What are you doing? What am I doing? (League) • Who do we communicate, and choose one over the other, and who are they. Like that's the thing (Union)
		Beneficial	6, 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I see that as being very beneficial (T&F Athletics) • I guess sharing of knowledge would be helpful (Netball)
		Conflict	5, 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wouldn't say there were barriers, but it was never sort of "oh yeah, let's get to it" (Touch) • The cricket club didn't want the Aussie Rules using those premises. They were their old premises and everything else, and the Aussie Rules club went on their own and got a government grant to fix those up (Cricket)
		Cooperation	10, 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think, there's a benefit in being cooperative (AFL) • Whether we have a team, the club would go with anything really. Like we don't do anything in Summer, so if our kids want to go play for all one team or club, if the club approached us and said would you promote our sport over Summer, we'd say yeah, why not (Union)
		Facilities	3, 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yeah, even facilities. The local football were going to run a presentation day and they couldn't use their facilities at the time, so they asked if they could hire ours out for the day (Netball) • It can work with registrations between one another and everything else (Cricket)
11	Advocacy Examples	Objectives	3, 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you want participation and you want children to be involved in sport, and the community, you've got to work together to get it working (Cricket) • Everyone has one objective which is participation and being part of community sport (T&F Athletics)
		Council	4, 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You feel like you're very alone, kind of thing. And even after I went to the Council and did a presentation and things like that and then they said "Ring me tomorrow." And I went "OK, cool." I rang in tomorrow... he just said ring the Tradies and ask for sponsorship (Netball) • Obviously working with the council, advocating on behalf of your club's interest, but is there any other examples of external, to support? It's usually a no (Surf Lifesaving)
		Nothing	8, 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We don't have an advocate or anyone we can go to. We have to do it ourselves (Touch) • Not that I'm aware of (AFL)
		NSO	4, 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't know if Swimming New South Wales needs to step up in this way, but there's no-one learning to be a technical official, because there's no pay or benefit (Swimming) • Clearly the relationship with the State Association is not very good (Netball)

12	Advocacy Benefit	Skills	2, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We don't utilise anyone outside of our own group. It would be good if we could, because a lot of us don't have the skills required, but we do have it within our members, because they have to register individually and ask their occupation (Touch) • I think where we're at, at the moment, is a really good position with really good people that are taking on roles and will at least I think, think beyond... whereas we're I've been in surf clubs before, I wanted to shoot myself, but you think "do these people know what they're doing?" It's a nightmare (Swimming)
		Conflict	3, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You don't see children out in the streets playing sport, kicking balls around or playing cricket as much these days. They're inside playing their computer games, or they're on the computer. But there's two reasons for that. One it's new, and they find that easy, and parents know where their children are and anything else. But another one is, no-one is providing another opportunity (Cricket) • Because the clubs work so individually, they end up actually working against each other. Simple things like times and trying to... it takes us into the third, fourth, sometimes fifth game of the season before we get the game plan for the rest of the year. So, families just can't plan for the rest of the year, because they don't know when they're playing, and they don't know where they're playing (AFL)
		Media	3, 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • But the slogan of ARU used to be "Try Rugby", and "Rugby is the sport for everybody", I don't see any promotion anymore. Obviously Foxtel and Fox Sports own the rights to broadcasting Wallabies games and Super Rugby and now Channel 7 has the rights to Shute Shield in Sydney (Union) • I think there is definitely big groups that seem to be able to, through lobbying or anything else, seem to be able to get more money than the amateur side of things. More amateur side of sports. And they suffer. And they're not advertised. They're not media, they don't gain media influence to the point (Cricket)
		Scepticism	2, 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No, probably not ...There's a few key members in there, definitely (Surf Lifesaving) • still sometimes think it's like the neighbourhood aid meetings, people just get together and just discuss things, but actually doesn't... I don't know if anything will actually come out of it (Netball)
		Skills	2, 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skillset dependent on your database, well, we can pull lawyers, all of them out of our database and go to them and ask the question and most of the time, if I knew who it was (Touch) • I think where we're at, at the moment, is a really good position with really good people that are taking on roles and will at least I think, think beyond... whereas we're I've been in surf clubs before, I wanted to shoot myself, but you think "do these people know what they're doing?" It's a nightmare (Swimming)
		Support	9, 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I guess supporting each other is a good thing, like everyone is volunteers and everyone, I guess having... sharing ideas and supporting each other with the grant process (Netball) • I think if you have a central body pulling that or managing it, it's certainly going to push the sport (AFL)

Author Contribution

The author completed all stages of the research and writing independently and without input/contribution from third parties.

Ethics Statement

Approved by the University of Canberra Human Research Ethics Committee (project number 20180310).

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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The author declares no conflict of interest.

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