

Dr. Andreas Franke-Thiele · Apr 15, 2024

# The future of squash: integration into multifunctional sports facilities

"In the future, people with changing health and sports needs will flock to multi-sport facilities that offer individual and team sports, as well as health programs and social arrangements."



Dr. Andreas Franke Thiele

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In a world where health awareness and sporting preferences are changing, the demand for multifunctional sports facilities that offer both individual and team sports, health programs and social events is increasing. Recent empirical reports, regularly published by the Squash Facilities Network (SFN), underline this trend and provide valuable insights for future developments (see Squash Facilities Network 2024).

"Squash belongs in multifunctional facilities - alongside fitness, wellness, fun and socialising. This is the way to find new members. This is where we can get people excited about the sport," says Kevin Nafar, the manager of the Kaifu Lodge, who is also head of the squash department. "Everyone has to pass the courts on the way to the changing rooms. Many stop in fascination, some reach for their rackets afterwards." The sound of the ball hitting the wall sounds to him like the heartbeat of the centre, he says." (Rainer Grünberg, Hamburger Abendblatt, January 19, 2024).

*The economic superiority of multifunctional facilities* compared to monosport centers is obvious and the potential for the integration of other sports that could be economically significant in addition to squash is considerable - especially in the area of fitness training - as can be seen, for example, from the key data of the German fitness industry 2024 .

*Corporate health management* is identified as a prosperous business area in this regard (see p. 10, 12, 25) and should be integrated into future systems. So-called corporate fitness is mentioned as an aggregator. *Positioning on the market* makes sense in the dominant areas of training and health (see p. 39). The consideration of *gender-specific offers* is already evident from the fact that - with an upward trend - the majority of those currently training are already women (53.9%, see p. 42). Overall, sales and additional income in the industry have increased and there is a *good investment climate* (see p. 48).

**Eurostat (2022)** differentiates in its statistics between *aerobic sports* and *muscle strengthening* . 67% of the German population over 15 years of age do *aerobic sports* at least once a week. (This also includes squash! Author's note.) 47% of the German population over 15 years of age take part in *muscle strengthening activities at least once a week*. (cf. Eurostat 2022)

**Taken together, this is where the greatest potential lies for multi-sport sports facilities of the future, covering both areas - endurance sports and strength training!**

In the category of *aerobic sports*, squash has all the advantages of a fun sport that combines speed, strength and endurance and can be played by all age and ability groups.

"Doing sports is trendy. The enthusiasm for movement-intensive activities is evidence, on the one hand, of an increasing awareness of health, but on the other hand also of an increased need for exercise and thus a balance to work and leisure time at the desk or screen" (Leisure Monitor 2023).

**Squash can be positioned on this wave! Squash must recruit young talent from the bottom up and make fitness, health, gender, social and age options visible. Clubs, schools, company sports and sustainable, multi-sport sports facilities play a special role in this. The studies mentioned prove that a sporting and economic kick-off now is promising.**

#### **Five key megatrends for the future of sports facilities**

SQUASH OF THE FUTURE will develop against the backdrop of 'megatrends' identified by the **Zukunftsinstitut** (2024):

- Individualization
- Health
- Connectivity
- Silver Society
- Digitalization.

**The trend towards individualization** is currently developing 'from self-realization to social recommitment'. The 'search for community centers' (cf. Zukunftsinstitut 2024) contained therein must be taken into account here, for example in squash and in sports facilities in general. Social arrangements of tournament forms and social arrangements in the catering industry, for example, play a role here.

**The trend towards health** is unbroken. Therefore, the health value of squash in recreational sport should be made more visible in the future in order to acquire corresponding customers. Interesting target groups here are, for example, coronary and cancer patients who should exercise in a controlled manner and ask about corresponding options in the centers. Health checks and medical care can be offered in conjunction with strength and endurance training in future multi-sport squash centers. The catering industry can also meet the health need and make corresponding offers.

**The trend towards connectivity** is met when internal and external communication options are offered in the sports center. Wi-Fi for customers, charging options for cell phones, seating areas for conversations, communication options with trainers and service staff are already standard in many cases and will become more important in the future.

**The Silver Society** is an important economic factor. It is no longer a tolerated marginal phenomenon, but is positioning itself extensively and formulating specific demands. Offers for seniors and their potential have already been presented as best practices in the Squash Facilities Network (SFN) 2024. In the fitness area of multi-sport sports facilities, comprehensive options for silver-agers are also economically important. Overall, this potential should also be taken into account architecturally when building new facilities. There is also preliminary work in the area of the methodological and content-related design of offers for the Silver Society, which can be read in Franke-Thiele (2024).

**The trend towards digitalization** is already visible in some areas. Be it the fact that entry to the sports center is digital or the booking of the squash courts. This trend also includes offers in the exercise area such as squash box, multiball and multifunctional courts, which need to be further developed. These will be mentioned again later in the text.

These trends show that the sports sector is constantly evolving, integrating both technological and societal changes to meet the modern needs of athletes.

#### **Youth studies show: Sport is a central part of young people's lives**

Recent youth studies provide insightful information about the importance of sport among young people and its significance for market development in the area of sports facilities. According to the current [Shell Youth Study](#), active sport participation is of great importance among young people (see there, p. 29), and the [Bertelsmann Youth Study](#) (see there, p. 3) shows that 74% of the young people surveyed see sport as an important part of their lives. These results underline the potential for the further development of sports such as squash, which could become increasingly popular with the younger generation.

Further social studies, such as the latest future study by the [Foundation for Future Issues](#), led by Prof. Opaschowski, confirm that enthusiasm for sport continues across all age groups. "Germany has never been more sporty," according to the study. Growing health awareness and the desire to remain active and fit even in old age are contributing to the fact that sporting activity continues to increase among the population. The study also asks how clubs and commercial providers are reacting to this trend and adapting their offerings accordingly.

#### **Future of squash: adaptation to market and society**

A recent analysis based on 2022 data from [PwC](#) identifies key market forces that will have a lasting impact on the world of sport. These include the significant growth in women's sport, the increasing importance of institutional investors and the ongoing development of smart sports facilities. *Squash, a sport with tradition and innovation, has already taken significant steps to address these trends and even actively shape them.*

**Growth in women's sport:** Women's sport is experiencing unprecedented growth worldwide. This is also reflected in the world of squash. The World Squash Federation (WSF) has made gender equality one of its main strategies. To support this, special gender-balanced coaching courses are offered and all-female coaching opportunities are made available free of charge. These measures are part of the global effort to promote squash as an inclusive sport, which is underlined by the celebration of International Women's Day. (See Wooldridge 2024). The ongoing efforts to integrate and promote women in squash are regularly documented on the Squash Facilities Network (SFN) website.

**The role of institutional investors:** As institutional investors become increasingly interested in sports facilities, particularly those that offer innovative and inclusive programs, the opportunity for squash to benefit through improved infrastructure and increased visibility also increases. These investors bring not only financial resources but also increased awareness for the professionalization and marketing of the sport.

**Development of smart sports facilities:** Technological development in sports facilities is progressing rapidly. In squash, this includes digitalized booking and admission systems for temporarily unmanned centers as well as training-relevant technologies such as the squash box, multi-ball

and multifunctional courts. (see Sports&Leisureclub F10, multi-ball and squash box). These innovations allow for more precise training design and offer players improved opportunities to improve performance and interact with the sport.

The developments are in line with the analysis by [INNCH market research](#) , which already pointed out in 2017 that the motivation for sport today is less about the adrenaline rush, but rather about maintaining fitness and performance. Squash has the potential to become a trend sport again - not as an outdated gladiator fight, but as an attractive form of physical activity that combines health and fun (see INNCH 2017).

### SFN Academy: A future-oriented educational project for the squash industry

The growing demands on the management of sports facilities make qualified personnel indispensable. According to the latest [key data on the German fitness industry](#) , published in 2024 by the Employers' Association of German Fitness and Health Facilities (DSSV), Deloitte and the German University for Prevention and Health Management, the availability of skilled workers and the use of advanced digital tools are crucial to increasing business productivity and promoting the economic development of sports facilities (see p. 10 and 58ff).

In response to this need, the Squash Facilities Network (SFN) has taken the initiative and plans to establish its own academy, the SFN Academy. The aim is to train managers for the complex challenges in multi-sport facilities. The academy will offer courses in specific areas such as squash facility management and fitness facility management. In addition, the educational offering also covers future-oriented areas such as health management, leisure management, future management, silver management, gender management, youth management and social management.

These comprehensive training programs are designed to close the gap between the current skills of the often long-standing coaches who traditionally take on management tasks and the required qualifications. As Markus Gaebel from the Squash Facilities Network emphasized in an interview on March 18, 2024, there is a clear need for specifically trained managers, especially in existing squash centers and multi-sport facilities that offer squash.

The SFN Academy will not only improve the quality of management and operation of sports facilities, but will also help ensure that these facilities are economically and socially successful in the long term. This proactive approach to education and human resource development sets new standards in the sports industry and shows the way for the future of sports management.

In the spirit of the *scenario method*, a final vision for the future development of squash can be presented as follows:

### The vision

Squash is expanding and profiting from the construction of future, multi-sport leisure sports facilities that follow social and sports-cultural developments. Fitness is a financial anchor for the economic success of such facilities. A chain of "Squash&More" facilities stabilizes and economizes the development. To meet the increasing demands on management, training and further education are offered at an independent academy. Squash is being made more visible again in all forms of leisure and competitive sport. Of particular importance are sport-specific developments in women's sport, company sport, the Silver Society and school-based youth training for the "Youth Trains for the Olympics" competition.

*Dr. Andreas Franke-Thiele*, 14 April 2024

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