

EDINBURGH FUTURES, FOOTBALL AND THE CITY

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“Scotland could be a world leader in this space by integrating football and sport into a broad range of government portfolios, such as finance, education, transport, and equalities. Football can be designed to tackle some of the current societal challenges, as its power could be utilised in the development of social outcomes (rather than outputs) as the primary objectives (for instance, the socio-economic, health and environmental benefits). Government departments, by collaborating with each other, alongside experts, organisations, and private investors, could help meet the Government’s ambition and targets, as set out in the National Performance Framework and the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework.”[2]

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Introduction

1. Edinburgh Futures, Football and the City is an introductory briefing paper developed to support the partnership event held at the University of Edinburgh on 20 June 2024, funded through the Future Cities initiative and hosted by the Academy of Sport.

2. The event, research and dialogue are not an end but remain an open invitation to collaborate, consider what questions are important and how this expertise can support the football industry and the City of Edinburgh. Edinburgh Futures, Football and the City have the potential to harness this collaborative capability and expertise to help international efforts striving to address national and international challenges.

3. The collaboration also serves as a contribution to the invitation to respond to The City of Edinburgh’s live consultation on sport and physical activity in the city while recognising that some of the content is equally applicable to other cities.

4. Edinburgh Futures, Football and the City is supported by a small Future Cities Research Grant from the University of Edinburgh and series of research reports produced by Edinburgh’s Academy of Sport since 2020 in which we have endeavoured to support clubs and national teams understand the fan base better and build back better from the Covid-19 Pandemic. We are grateful to the local and national football industry for supporting this work.

5. This report draws upon some of this evidence and includes several themes:

- Football and Edinburgh as a Smart City
- Football More than a Game
- Football and the City of Edinburgh
- Stadiums of the Future
- Football and Locality
- Football Sentiment
- Football and Inequality
- Football as a Community Asset
- Football as City Soft Power and International Reach
- Edinburgh Futures, Football and the City

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[2] https://www.scottishfa.co.uk/media/9581/sfa-weall-scotland-project-policy-briefing_oct22.pdf [Online] (Accessed 31 May 2024).

66. The growing commercialisation of football and offer of social mobility, education and economic rewards, has started to see football academies becoming increasingly gentrified on class background. Former Scottish international Andy McLaren noted that working class children are being priced out of football. As Britain and Scotland are living with the impact of austerity and the financial crisis, poverty has become endemic in society.

67. The Scottish Government report that 21% of working-age adults were living in relative poverty after housing costs in 2020-23. Furthermore, Scottish government poverty statistics show 240 000 children (24% of all children) remained locked in poverty in Scotland in the period 2020 to 2023. This coupled with rising costs of transport, cost of food for a healthy diet, and time constraints has put extreme pressure on working class families and their ability to put in place the infrastructure and support for their child to go to football club academies.

68. Economic inequality in football is not only expressed in supporter and playing dynamics. In a 2011 study Eran Yashiv^[1] explored the dominance of elite football clubs in Europe, attributing their success to large fan bases, rich histories, and significant revenues, which enabled them to acquire star players crucial for commercial and athletic achievements. This success cycle, where high revenues attract top talent, enhances TV coverage and merchandise sales, leading to further financial gains, creates a skewed distribution with a few clubs monopolizing trophies and revenues, creating an unequal playing field.

69. Historical patterns from Scotland, show the dominance of one city, Glasgow, with limited potential of new clubs to have structures in place to change this. This has detrimental effects on competitive balance of the league, placing greater burdens on clubs and the ability to serve as custodians for their communities. Until structural changes occur, it is likely that football will continue to reflect and perpetuate significant inequalities both in sports and business.

70. Football Clubs and supporter groups across Scotland and Britain have mobilised in response to and the need to address perceived social inequalities. Supporter groups have been heavily involved in supporting and running foodbanks in communities in most at need. Research by the food charity sustain has found that over 5 million people in the UK (population: 65 million) struggle to get enough to eat. Another charity, the Trussell Trust, has recorded an increase of 123% in the use of food banks over the past five years. There are over 40 foodbanks in Edinburgh. Football clubs, including the Edinburgh clubs, in communities were part of the much-needed local response to local need during the Covid pandemic.

71. Football clubs and their community trusts are active in supporting their communities and addressing local inequalities. Heart of Midlothian reached out to over 9,000 people, helping to combat social isolation, level the education playing field, boost physical and mental health for children and adults and provide support for people living with dementia. Hibernian in a response to refugees, put in place a dedicated lunch club for the Ukrainian community, which is being extended to all members of the community. Spartans Community Foundation activities include weekly youth clubs, day trips, residential and holiday clubs, with all the youth work activities free of charge. These are a few of the numerous ways in which football clubs in Edinburgh are addressing inequality and need in local communities.

72. The need for football clubs to be conscious of the shifting levels of inequality around local stadiums is likely to be needed more than ever looking into the future but the resources, capacity and scale of operations remain challenging. Consequently, it is worth commenting further upon football as a community asset.

[47] Yashiv, E. (2011) In brief... Unequal shares: the economics of elite football clubs. <https://cep.lse.ac.uk/new/publications/abstract.asp?index=3795> [online]. (Accessed 10 June 2024).

Football as a Community Asset

73. When John Hope[48] founded the first organised football club in the world in 1824, in Edinburgh, it was never just about football it was about helping the Edinburgh poor become healthier. Football is played by children, young people and adults across Scotland, in the streets, in parks, in halls, on pitches and stadiums. Football has scale and reach in Scottish and Edinburgh society. It has a presence and relevance in our poorer communities that offers the potential to enable health and wellbeing and reduce but not solve the impact of poverty. A new approach is required to make sustainable change and we believe that football can offer the platform to improve communities across Scotland.

74. The reach of football clubs is significant – currently there are 160,000 registered players, with a further 50,000 coaches and volunteers. If we include the number of parents, fans, and influencers in the local community, the SFA estimate that football clubs' impact on more than 900,000 people on a weekly basis. One of the ambitions of national governing body for football is to use the power of football[49] to inspire change. The network of football across Scotland and Edinburgh is also significant, From the Scottish Professional Football League (SPFL) and Scottish Women's Premier League (SWPL), down to grassroots level, there are over 2500 clubs in Scotland, assisting with education and attainment, affecting justice outcomes, developing societal change, and contributing to the local and national economy and employability.

75. The Social Return on Investment (SROI) model, alluded to earlier[50], substantiates the fact that community football in Scotland is worth £728 million[51] pounds per annum, and has significant Health, Social and Economic outcomes. Community Football Clubs are key to the fabric of Scottish and Edinburgh communities.

76. We have some of the best community football clubs in Europe. Organisations that are deep rooted in their community, which help support players, coaches, volunteers, and parents. The role of these clubs in the city and beyond is fundamental and is often part of the 'glue' to connect communities far beyond other statutory and non-statutory organisations. The breadth and diversity of the communities that these clubs service is considerable, and many operate within areas of significant deprivation.

77. The Wellbeing Economy Alliance Scotland[52] were asked by the SFA to produce an independent report that would enable us to better understand the role of Scottish football in designing an economy in the service of people and planet. The report states that:

“Scotland could be a world leader in this space by integrating football and sport into a broad range of government portfolios, such as finance, education, transport, and equalities. Football can be designed to tackle some of the current societal challenges, as its power could be utilised in the development of social outcomes (rather than outputs) as the primary objectives (for instance, the socio-economic, health and environmental benefits). Government departments, by collaborating with each other, alongside experts, organisations, and private investors, could help meet the Government's ambition and targets, as set out in the National Performance Framework and the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework”. [53]

78. The Diffley Partnership[54] research included a national survey of over 2,000 adults within Scotland, a survey of community football clubs followed by in-depth discussions with key members of these clubs. (86%) of club representatives believe the football club helps to bring the local community together.

[48] Jarvie, G (2022) 'Power of Sport' Scottish Government Talk. Birmingham 2022, Commonwealth Games, Birmingham

[49] Commonwealth Moves: The Implications of COVID-19 for Community Sport and Sport for Development. London: Commonwealth

Secretariat: Commonwealth Secretariat (2020) Commonwealth Moves: Resourcing the Sustainability and Recovery of the Sport Sector during the Coronavirus Pandemic. London: Commonwealth Secretariat. [online] (Accessed 31 May 2024).

[50] <https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/football-development/news/0264-10fe1ac0497c-ffe49c301d3e-1000--explainer-football-s-social-value/> [online] (Accessed 31 May 2024).

[51] <https://uefa-roi-model.substancedataportal.net/> [online] (Accessed 31 May 2024).

[52][53] https://www.scottishfa.co.uk/media/9581/sfa-weall-scotland-project-policy-briefing_oct22.pdf [Online] (Accessed 31 May 2024).

[54] <https://www.scottishfa.co.uk/media/9725/scottish-fa-community-football-in-scotland-insights-post-covid-and-beyond-report.pdf> [Online] (Accessed 31 May 2024).

79. The Social Value Lab[55] carried out an evaluation of support for community football clubs in Scotland. Evidence was gathered from survey and consultations with players, volunteers, and officials from community football clubs that participate in the Scottish FA's club accreditation scheme[56]. Almost all (98%) participants agreed that they were happier because of being part of a football club, and over three quarters (78%) agreed that it helped their mental health in general. Half (50%) of the players agreed that it helped them cope with stress and anxiety, which represents almost all (98%) of respondents for whom this was an issue.

80. It would be a mistake to suggest that this report is suggesting that football is the solution to the problems or challenges that the city, community or broader society at large may have. Nor is it being suggested here that football in and of itself does not have its challenges. But what is being argued here is that football can enable and does deliver significant non-football outcomes that should be recognised as part of any city plan for sport and physical activity. It should also be recognised and supported across government portfolios.

Football as City Soft Power and International Reach

81. Scottish, UK and International Organizations, including governments have an extraordinary opportunity to engage with international audiences and fans through not just football's local reach but also its international reach. Cities have an extraordinary opportunity to engage with other cities and fans through football's international reach.

82. Edinburgh has the opportunity to represent, communicate, negotiate and trade with Munich, one of Edinburgh's twinned cities since 1954, because of Scotland's qualification for the European Football Championships. Edinburgh's twin and sister cities also include Nice (1958), Kyiv (1989), Dunedin (1974), Vancouver (1977), Krakow (1995), Xi'an (1985), Florence (1964), San Diego (1977), Aalborg (1991) and most recently Shenzhen (2019).

83. It maybe superficial and certainly more work needs to be done but some of our earlier 2021 research involving 4 premier men's clubs supports the idea that clubs in the City of Edinburgh and beyond have international reach.[57] Between April and June 2021, the online engagement of the two of Edinburgh's football clubs, namely Hibernian and Hearts, accounted for at least 31 different countries.[58] Internationally Elite women's football mirrors that of their male counterparts and is global in nature and as the game in Scotland becomes increasingly professional one of the consequences is the flow of players between countries.

84. One of the places that is clearly beginning to move on this is Wales. Laura McAllister, former Welsh footballer, Vice-President of UEFA and Professor of Governance and Policy at Cardiff University helped along with others to produce the report Creating a Sports Diplomacy Strategy for Wales.[59] The report subsequently influenced the Global Wales Strategy which significantly anchored Welsh sport and Welsh sporting assets as being key to enabling Wales connect, help and become more friendly with the countries it wanted to co-operate with.

85. The former Chair of Scotland's Sustainable Growth Commission asserted:

"I can think of no other business, institution or organisation with the communication reach of football. Every week it dominates swathes of broadcast media, social media, and crucially, public discussion. Scottish football conversations also travel, facilitate by the dissolving of geographical boundaries through social media."

86. Arguably Scotland does not have the same political levers as Wales or the United Kingdom, but the Welsh have muted several interesting suggestions all of which could be adapted to a city to city or Scotland context. For the purposes of this talk we have replaced the word sport with football but given it is Scotland's most popular sport the suggestions are still worth considering. That aside Scottish sport in general should take a serious look at what Wales has done and it too can and should follow suit[60].

[55] <https://www.scottishfa.co.uk/media/9726/evaluation-of-scottish-fa-club-support-for-quality-mark-clubs-report.pdf> [Online] (Accessed 31 May 2024).

[56] <https://www.scottishfa.co.uk/football-development/club-services/club-accreditation/> [Online] (Accessed 31 May 2024).

[57][58] Jarvie, C, Barret, J, Delgado, J, Widdop, P, Mason, R et al (2021). Micro-Briefing: International Engagement Through Scottish Football Clubs. <https://www.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/2-international-engagement-thro-scottish-football-clubs-sept2021.pdf> University of Edinburgh: Edinburgh. [online] (Accessed 29 May 2024).

[59] British Council Wales (2020). Towards a Welsh Sports Diplomacy Strategy: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/aos-towards-a-welsh-sports-diplomacy-strategy.pdf> [Online] (Accessed 4 June 2024).

[60] We are grateful for being able to access some of the work of Gavin Price who has helped with Stuart Murray to help position sport within Global Wales thinking and policy. Some this work has been adapted here to Scotland: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-sports-diplomacy-should-play-key-role-advancing-future-price-nuz9c/> [Online] (Accessed 4 June 2024). For a more in-depth discussion see Jarvie, C, Murray, S and McDonald, S (2017). Scotland, Diplomacy and Influence through Promoting Sport Scottish Affairs 26 (1) 1-22.

- Conduct a stock take review of existing UK Trade Agreements to identify clauses and content linking the football sector and international trade.
- Ensure the Scottish Government presses the UK Government to negotiate effective trading relationships in Scotland and the United Kingdom's best interests and consistently engages Scottish stakeholders and non-state actors, such as football, as an active and valued partner in the negotiation process.
- Horizon scan and synergise the international football and Scottish and UK ministerial calendars to identify and take advantage of future opportunities for trade, tourism and wider cultural relations building.
- Consider hosting conferences, running trade missions and other events focusing on the intersection of football diplomacy/cultural relations, international trade and connected fields.

87. Football as an engagement tool has an army of talented local professional teams, athletes, and organisations engaging with local but also global audiences and stakeholders. Football creating a space that inspires the public to participate through a wide variety of people-to-people cultural, technical, and knowledge exchanges. Tapping into what football offers as a tool to bridge divides, make the other a little less foreign and provide multiple spaces and opportunities for dialogue is an asset that cities and countries have at their disposal.

88. Footballers can be ambassadors in a multitude of different ways partly because of the international reach, scale and popularity of football to carry or deliver a key message. Didier Drogba, the current Vice-President of Peace and Sport, intervened in the civil war embroiling the Ivory Coast at the time. Football men and women may not be able to stop wars with their words, but they do hold power.

89. Team Australia has just announced a whole nation approach to building better international relations with sport being a key plank in this strategy.[61] The approach talks about how sport including soccer is a way to engage with international partners through sports diplomacy, to show the world who Australia is, what Australia values and what Australia can bring, both on and off the sporting field. There is much in this that Cities, Cultural and External Relations portfolios in Scotland can learn from this, and football certainly is a big part of this as yet untapped potential.

90. Football is not a solution to the problems of the world nor should it. However, it should be seen as more of a key tool in the armoury of Scotland's and the United Kingdom's politicians as they pursue international interests and quest for influence on the world stage, if not an enlarged common good.

91. One final point on this before a few concluding comments on this theme is the role of universities. On the one hand universities can help clubs, organisations, councils and governments be better informed about football and sport in a challenging, changing world but they are also key conduits for connecting and talking with other parts of the world. They are also significant conduits for football exchanges, not just football, in helping to build cultural relations between countries. Universities play a significant and active role in international relations, including harnessing their resources to facilitate cross-sector collaboration.

92. The contemporary world needs spaces that can hold a plurality of politics. Spaces which engage with ordinary people and cultures with all their varied histories and disagreement.[62] Football geopolitically could and should do more to help enable such space. At the same time Edinburgh, Scotland and the United Kingdom should grasp the opportunity that football gives it. There is more to this than any national or international orthodoxy of football being seen simply as soft power or cost-effective diplomacy tool.

[61] Asia-Pacific Development. Diplomacy. Defence Dialogue (2024). <https://asiapacific4d.com/idea/whole-of-nation/> [Online] (Accessed 4 June 2024).

[62] Jarvie, G. (2023). Sport, Cultural Relations and Peacebuilding. London: British Council.

93. Football can offer cities good news stories about work that quietly goes on in local communities on an almost daily basis. Good storytelling knows no borders and properly presented, gets attention. Clear, consistent good news football stories often cut through the noise and get people to tune in.

94. Football can be a pillar of connectivity, locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. The world today is an uncertain place Edinburgh and indeed Scotland like other places faces complex strategic issues and risk. Football matters not just in Scotland or the United Kingdom but in a global, plural twenty-first century. Football is an asset that offers cities and nations spaces for dialogue, trade, and relationship building.

95. Can any city afford to ignore any avenue or asset that can mitigate risk, enable influence, and contribute to greater mutual understanding?

Edinburgh Futures, Football and the City

96. The world is increasingly complex and dynamic, and we are now in an era of giga changes that are impacting upon every aspect of contemporary life. Globalisation, digitalisation, and commercialisation are converging in ways that are fundamentally changing why decisions are made, how decisions are made, and who is involved in making them. These changes radically impact upon our cities, changing them socially, politically, and economically.

97. At the heart of these changes, cities are embracing digital technologies and a growing consumer culture. Indeed, in a backdrop of these changes Edinburgh has refocussed and has ambitions of becoming a world-leading smart city – a digitally inclusive, data-rich, and sustainable capital with services, including AI services that are informing futures.

98. The Edinburgh Futures Institute partly funded out of City deal funding is a resource open to the city. It recognises that some of the biggest challenges facing cities and indeed societies locally and globally are complex and interconnected. Recognising that insight, innovation and impact comes from bringing people and knowledge together, and that addressing the challenges of our time requires radical and creative collaborations.

99. Edinburgh Futures, Football and The City proposes that football has a part to play in this.

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