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### EDINBURGH FUTURES, FOOTBALL AND THE CITY

Grant Jarvie [1], Paul Widdop, Jake Barrett, Danny Bisland, Jen Malone

*“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]

*“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, facilitated by the dissolving of geographical boundaries through social media”.*

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

## Football and Edinburgh as a Smart City

6. Sport is embedded in the infrastructure of the city in both a physical and cultural sense. Edinburgh remains the only city in Scotland to host the Commonwealth Games twice. One of the venues of these Games, Meadowbank, introduces itself as the biggest club in town. The city is the home venue for at least three major football clubs. In the midst of the West End lies Murrayfield Stadium, the largest sports stadium in Scotland, with a capacity of over 67,000. One of the largest recorded crowds for a football match in Edinburgh was at Murrayfield when Heart of Midlothian played Barcelona FC, in 2007, in front of 58,000. Liverpool and Napoli attracted more than 65,000 for a pre-season friendly in 2014. Manchester United are scheduled to play Rangers at Murrayfield on July 20, 2024, having played Olympique Lyonnais the previous year in front of more than 48,000.

7. We know that football is a game rooted in traditions, symbolism, myths, narratives and the social fabric of Edinburgh. 77% of football supporters surveyed believed that The City of Edinburgh is extremely important to their lives. The importance of football clubs as community assets should not be underestimated. They are cultural heritage, a place of physical importance, sometimes the essence of places, and a central node in the networks of the city.

8. Technology is having an increasingly important part to play in the shaping and enabling of communities. How communities interact, consume, and become part of civil society involves technology. How we understand this both now and in the future is evolving, as is our use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Both are impacting upon football clubs. Football stadiums around the world are using SMART technology to connect locally and globally to fans. Heart of Midlothian and Hibernian social demographic data shows that fans of both clubs are not exclusively but primarily citizens of Edinburgh. The future of stadiums, fans and football should not be divorced from the future of cities. To some extent they are symbiotic, they need each other.

9. Edinburgh presents itself as a SMART City but does not yet present itself as Global City of Sport or fully capitalise upon success in football, event hosting opportunities or the capability of university sport, to enable city soft power and cultural relations building. If anything, football is a pillar of connectivity for the City of Edinburgh that has still to be fully grasped or even understood, by various forms of government, sport and educational institutions.

10. Football is the most popular sport in the world with an estimated number of 265 million people playing and 3.5 billion considering themselves football fans, according to FIFA.[3] [4] In Scotland, football has a rich history of at least 600 years and is enjoyed by diverse groups across cities, communities and broader society. As part of the sporting family, it has since 2015 had an international mandate to deliver against the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

11. The proposition at the heart of this paper is that football is much more than a game for the City of Edinburgh. Mutual opportunities present themselves for both the city and football stakeholders, not least of which are the citizens of Edinburgh who are football fans. For a city that has significant football assets, football could be more visible in Edinburgh's present and future thinking as a fair, pioneering, welcoming, globally connected, thriving SMART city. [5]

12. Football can further enable the City of Edinburgh's SMART capabilities. Football clubs fan engagement strategies and off-field data can help Edinburgh understand a section of its citizens a little bit better as well as enhancing its international reach. Football as a tool and asset should be recognized more for what it does and can do while not ignoring the challenges that come with football.

[3] <https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/55621f9fdc8ea7b4/original/mzidOqmguxkcmruvema-pdf.pdf>

[4] <https://www.allianz.com/en/about-us/sports-culture/football/allianz-football.html>

[5] Edinburgh City Council (2023). Thriving, Welcoming, Fair and Pioneering - [Edinburgh City Vision 2050](#) [online] (cited 22 April 2024).

## Football More than a Game

13. Global data continues to show a strong link between grassroots sport participation and sustainable development.[6] Research on the social returns generated through sport shows that for every US \$1 invested in a sporting intervention generates up to US \$124 in value.[7] A 2020 systematic review of international cost benefit analysis suggests social returns generated through sport of between 1:3 and 1:124 depending on the scale and outcomes that are being looked for.[8] As alluded to above since 2015 sport has had an international mandate to enable the 2030 sustainable development goals. Yet sport, and in this specific case football, remains an underutilized and, often, a misunderstood asset, publicly, privately, internationally, nationally, locally and civically.

14. Football is a social, cultural and economic asset to Scotland. An asset that has traction in communities, scale and international reach. In 2023 more people on average walked through the turnstiles in Scotland than any European Country. 21.3 attendees per 1,000 people attended its matches across its top four divisions with a weekly average support of 117,000 fans.[9] This was well clear of the Netherlands in second place with England and Wales lying fifth with 11.4 attendees per 1,000.[10] The growth of women's football in Scotland is such that the SWPL for season 2022-2023 exceeded 100,000 in its inaugural year with games moving more to the major stadiums over the course of the season.[11] Easter Road and Tynecastle have been venues for derby matches in both the men and women's game. At the beginning of the 2023-24 season the number of people attending SWPL matches in August was up 30 per cent on the same period in 2022.

15. The Scottish Football Associations (SFA) Social Return on Investment (SROI) data suggests that the game delivers a return of more than £1.25bn to Scottish society. Key figures from the report refer to £200 million directly into the economy, £300 million of social benefits, including crime reduction and increased social cohesion and £700 million worth of health benefits.[12] Due to the popularity of football in Scotland clubs have the opportunity, scale and reach to help those on the margins of Scottish society. Football in Scotland creates about 40,000 jobs based on employment linked directly to current football participation. 97% of players say that being part of a football club helps their fitness. 41 % of youth under the age of 16 currently play. Football is followed by at least 1.8million adults in Scotland.[13]

16. It may not compare with the Scottish Premier League or the big five world football leagues but cities such as Paris rank first in the 2023 Sports Cities Ranking despite the fact that the Olympic games have not yet started at the time of writing this report.[14] Manchester ranked 5th in the 2023 international league of sport cities, with its renowned football clubs, exemplify how strong sports franchises can fuel a city's position as an internationally perceived strong sports city.[15] In this league table for 2023, London ranks 3rd and Glasgow the highest ranked Scottish city, comes in at 30. [16] Hosting sporting events and having international reach through football clubs is certainly part of the game here.

17. The Active City Index[1] is designed to help cities harness the power of sport through a data driven approach which also ranks cities. Again, it recognizes the significance of sport in delivering non-sporting outcomes around significant economic,

[6] UNESCO (2023). Impact Investment in Sport. Paris: UNESCO.

[7] [8] Gosselin, V., Boccanfuso, D. and Laberge, S. 2020. Social return on investment (SROI) method to evaluate physical activity and sport interventions: A systematic review. *International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 17(26). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-020-00931-w>.

[9] [10] BBC Sport (2023). Scottish Football the Best Supported in Europe. *Scottish Government (2019) Review of the Scottish Sporting Landscape*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. [online] (cited 22 April 2024).

[11] The domestic record attendance was broken on three occasions during the 2022-23 season. First at Easter Road in November 2022 with 8,066 in attendance Hibernian v Heart of Midlothian. 15, 822 attended Celtic v Heart of Midlothian towards the end of the season.

[12][13] Scottish Football Association (2018). Social Return on Investment: Measuring the Value of Football Participation in Scotland. <https://www.scottishfa.co.uk/media/4961/sfa-uefa-grow-pp-screens-mar19-web.pdf> [online] (cited 25 April 2024).

[14-16] BCW Sports (2023). Paris tops BCW Sports Ranking of 2023 Cities. <https://www.bcw-global.com/newsroom/bcw-sports/paris-tops-bcw-2023-ranking-of-sports-cities> [online] (cited 25 April 2024). The 2023 Ranking of Sports Cities ranks the top 100 cities that are most strongly associated with sport from around the world based on a combination of perception-based analysis and in-depth quantitative analysis.

[17] The Active Cities Index is a data-driven global benchmarking report to assess sports delivery across cities around the world.

social and health outcomes. There are three key components to this sports infrastructure; sports events, and sports policy.[18] In terms of infrastructure Stockholm comes out top with 0.75 facilities per 1,000 residents; for events Paris comes out top with 100 major sporting events held in the city between 2018 and 2024 and finally in terms of policy Amsterdam comes out on top in terms of sports policy content, implementation and impact. Overall, the top three cities in this index were Stockholm, Paris and Auckland.

18. London's global city of sport strategy (2023-2030) acknowledges the value of sport in promoting health and wellbeing but also sees it as vehicle for social and economic advancement.[19] The vision is one that sees London as leading global city of sport and to do this it sees itself investing in facilities; activating streets and public spaces as safe spaces for sport and physical activity; celebrating the impact of sport; attracting high quality events and supporting high quality events.[20]

19. It puts forward the proposition that sport can help the city reach new and diverse audiences and is a crucial tool for our soft power as a global city to boost domestic trade and global influence.[21] The strategy comes on the back of an evaluation of the impact of major sporting events on the cities soft power, trade and investment impacts.[22] The intention being to provide an evidenced platform that would encourage the event and sport sector to work together to maximise future impacts and enhance future return on investments for the City of London.

20. The points that are being made here is that football is not just about football outcomes but also about non-football outcomes. It has been with us a long time in Scotland. It is an important tool, and some cities make more of it than others. Building a reputation as a top sports city or a future sport city is a long game. Cities that reign supreme in these rankings are those that embarked on this journey long ago and actively integrate sporting assets into their city future strategies and culture.

## Football and the City of Edinburgh

21. The City of Edinburgh has a long association with football clubs. In John Hope's football club of 1824 Edinburgh can lay claim to be the home of the first organised football club in the world. Following a match between the Edinburgh University Football Club and the 93rd Sutherland Highlanders, played at Holyrood Park on the 25 January 1851, a large medallion was presented by the university club to the regiment. The act allows Edinburgh to lay claim to the fact that it presented one of the first football trophies.

22. Between 1824 and the present, football clubs have been a regular feature of the cities landscape with past and present clubs including: Boroughmuir Thistle F.C, Civil Service Strollers F.C, Craigroyston Football Club (FC.), Edina Hibs (FC.), Edinburgh Athletic (FC.), Edinburgh City (FC.), Edinburgh Southern (FC.), Edinburgh United (FC.), Edinburgh University Associational Football Club (AFC), Ferranti Thistle (FC.), Heart of Midlothian (FC.), Heart of Midlothian Women's (FC.), Hutchison Vale (FC.), Hibernian (FC.), Hibernian Women's (FC.), Leith Amateurs (FC.), Leith Athletic (FC.), Lothian Thistle Hutchison Vale (FC.), Meadowbank Thistle (FC.), Muirhouse Rovers (FC.), Murrayfield Amateurs (FC.), Polton Vale (FC.), Salvesen Community (FC.), St Bernard's (FC.), Spartans Women's (FC.), The Spartans (FC.), Tollcross United (FC.), Tynecastle (FC.), and Tynecastle Boys Club (FC.), to name but a few. The city has three teams playing in the Scottish Women's Premier League (SWPL) one in SWPL 2, two in the Cinch Premier League and two in league two. In addition, the city hosts the Homeless World Cup Headquarters.

23. Football in Edinburgh, as with many other cities is more than just a Game, this is not just a flippant comment, it reflects the social significance of football as an instrument of hope and social change. Spartans FC was formed in 1951, by ex-Edinburgh University students. The 'Spartans Family' consists of 3 parts – an Adult Section, Youth Section and the Academy (the charitable arm). The social return on investment for

[18] Should your city have a dedicated sports policy? Should your city have a non-public and public sport policy?

[19-21] City of London (2023). Global City of Sport: A Sport Strategy for the Square Mile. <https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/assets/about-us/working-with-the-community/sport-strategy.pdf> [online] (cited 13 May 2024).

[22] Ernst Young (2021). The Impact of Major Sporting Events: Study of Soft Power, Trade and Investment Impacts. London: Ernst Young.



clubs such as Spartans suggests a 6.3 million (Euros) worth of impact for the City of Edinburgh.[23] More specifically 2.9 million direct contribution to the economy (facility spend, player spend, job creation), 1.5 million of social benefits (education, facility development, volunteering) and 1.8 million of healthcare savings from football participation (CVD and cancers, mental health, subjective wellbeing).[24]

24. Heart of Midlothian FC became the largest fan owned club in the United Kingdom with the supporter's trust taking control of 75% of the football club's capital for less than £100,000. Edinburgh clubs have also been at the forefront of advancing women's football within the new SWPL set up. In 2022 the then attendance record was broken when 8,066 fans attended the inaugural Capital Cup game between Hibernian and Hearts. In December 2022 Hibernian reached the Scottish Women's Premier League Cup final and played Rangers at Tynecastle Park, the first to be broadcast live on Sky Sports and helping to take the women's game in Scotland to a new audience.

25. The Homeless World Cup with its headquarters here in Edinburgh is a testament to what a charity can do with collaborative partners through using football as a tool to tackle homelessness.[25] It calls for Cities to end homelessness and to build around what football can enable, by focusing upon four solutions, football, housing first[26], mental health programmes and employment[27] as well as learning from what works in other cities.

26. Football is played in a variety of formats, has a flexible approach that allows the game to be enjoyed by people from nursery aged children through to older citizens, via walking football and recreational activity. This broad appeal, scale, flexibility and reach makes football a significant tool that is more than a game. Its ability to deliver across communities, offers a platform to influence and develop both the City of Edinburgh and broader Scottish society. It has impact on a wide number of key thematic areas, both on and off the pitch.

27. At the time of preparing this brief The City of Edinburgh sport and physical activity strategy (2024-2034) was out for consultation until June 26, 2024.[1] Premised upon a vision that everyone enjoys the benefits of an active life it aims to address the issue of unequal participation rates in sport and physical activity. The strategy in the making considers both the national policy context and the specific city landscape of Edinburgh. It is designed to align with the city's key plans and strategies, ensuring that all efforts work together to provide the best outcomes for Edinburgh's citizens.

28. A search of the draft strategy and key strategies supporting it would reveal that the word football, as yet does not get mention and yet there are many areas in which the work of football clubs in the city delivers against city priorities. Something that club CEO's have repeatedly made the case for in City of Edinburgh Business talks. Football connects with many of the city's key strategic priorities not least of which is Edinburgh's drive to be a SMART City enhancing the data and digital capability of not just its operations but also its citizens.

## Stadiums of the Future

29. Edinburgh has for some time had a data driven innovation approach to enabling the city and advancing data and digital capability amongst the citizens of Edinburgh. Developments have been boosted by the Edinburgh and South-East Scotland City Regional Deal. The original Data Driven Innovation (DDI) idea, which still holds, being to position the city and the region as the data capital of Europe. Numerous external evaluations place Edinburgh as the top European location activity for DDI (Inclusive of AI).

30. You can't talk of future cities or smart cities without more than a passing comment on the stadiums of the future, their technological capability and the fan experience of the not-so-distant future.[29] Is the

[23][24] Scottish Football Association (2021) Spartans Community Football Academy: UEFA Grow Social Return on Investment. <https://www.scottishfa.co.uk/media/6088/community-club-social-return-on-investment-model.pdf> [online] (Accessed 13 May 2024).

[25] Homeless World Cup (2023) Cities Ending Homelessness: A Global Initiative of The Homeless World Cup and Catalyst 2030. <https://catalyst2030.net/wp-content/uploads/Cities-Ending-Homelessness-single-pages-interactive-2023-07-11.pdf> [online] (Accessed 13 May 2024).

[26] Housing First is a recovery-oriented approach that prioritises connecting people experiencing homelessness with permanent housing and then provides voluntary, wraparound support to meet their individual needs. It helps people to avoid sliding back into homelessness. Although the offer of housing is unconditional, residents still have to be good tenants by paying their rent and being responsible for their behaviour.

[27] Founded in Edinburgh in 2016, Invisible Cities now operates in six UK cities, with five members of staff supported by a team of volunteers. To date it has trained more than 100 people, many of whom have gone on to be tour guides and develop their own special tours.

[28] City of Edinburgh Council (2024). Draft Physical Activity and Sport Strategy (2024-2034). <https://consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk/sfc/physicalactivityandsportstrategy/> [online] (Accessed 14 May 2024)

[29] Jan Kees Mons (2020). 10 Basic Features of Future Stadiums. <https://sporttomorrow.com/the-top-10-features-of-future-stadiums/> [online] (Accessed 4 June 2024); Omar Zerrard (2022) 5 Ways Technology Changed the Stadium Experience. <https://www.n3xtsports.com/insights-fans-sports-stadium-development-technology-nfl-us-open/> [online] (Accessed 4 June 2024).

requirement of the fan changing and is technology and SMART stadiums part of enabling a new norm that reduces risks for clubs? To what extent do we really understand the fan experience and is technology and AI a key to enabling a new norm? Whatever ones view on this it seems hard to ignore the fact that connected and interactive stadiums are key enablers of increased fan satisfaction and maybe even an expectation of more tech savvy generations. Furthermore, how can we tap into 'the opportunity of fandom' through technology.

31. This is not necessarily about increasing capacity since some developments are about reducing capacity and improving quality and flexibility. The modern CEO needs to reflect upon whether to go for a high-volume low margin strategy or a low volume high margin strategy in terms of stadium flexibility.

32. Some new stadiums are enabled by successful event bidding which can kick start even the most seemingly dormant of projects. Valencia's Nou Mestalla for so long referred to as a ghost ground and having seen off 4 Club Presidents, all of whom promised to see the project completed, has been brought back to life. The advent of Spain, Portugal, and Morocco co-hosting the 2030 FIFA Men's World Cup kicked new life into a stadium currently expected to have a 70,000 capacity while also ushering in new developments such as Grand Stadia Casablanca with its capacity of 115,000 and a timeline of 2030.

33. Although Real Madrid rejected the offer, the redesign and development of Spanish stadia redevelopment was augmented by LaLiga's 1.994-billion-euro investment deal with CVC Capital Partners. The rationale being that the digitalisation of its stakeholder's stadia would help raise the value of not just member clubs but the league.

34. Fiorentina, Hertha Berlin, both Inter and AC Milan, Roma, Seville, Paris Saint Germain and many others are all weighing up replace or upgrade options. Sustainable growth and income diversification is a common argument that you hear but the rationale is

just the same for Scottish clubs including those based in Scottish cities. Both Hearts and Hibs have invested in stadium development while Dundee, Aberdeen and Clyde all have stadium plans. A common denominator and challenge in all new builds is to optimise the mix between spectators, services and space while providing for event flexibility and reduced financial risk to owners.

36. Digital tech is one of the fastest growing areas in sports stadium management. Even a cursory glance at cities that value SMART stadiums suggests that the stadiums of the future will: (i) become technological fortresses; [30] (ii) have lower seating capacity but increased flexibility; [31] (iii) increasingly become multiple purpose structures; [32] (iv) deliver convenience all the way; (v) see security as remaining key but that AI tools will be part of the security mix; [33] (vi) strive for sustainability and no footprint; [34] (vii) be seen as providers of experience in multiple ways; (viii) be viewed increasingly as social meeting places; and (ix) become data templates. [35]

37. Again, our fan engagement research with Scottish fans suggests they want better connectivity within stadiums. They want reliable WIFI connections at half-time to know what is going on and be able to talk to other fans about other matches. But it is much more than this, it is about a connected life and connected experiences.

38. Whether it be on or off the pitch several opportunities exist in which there is mutual benefit for football, the universities and the city. How can Edinburgh's Football Industry continue to benefit from this expertise? How can we further utilise stadiums to advance digital and data capability of Edinburgh citizens? How can we use this expertise to enhance fan experiences and help clubs reduce the risk of fan drop out? How do we attempt to reduce the data gap between men and women's football? How do clubs maximise being part of the City of Edinburgh and how does the City of Edinburgh capitalise upon its football assets including its futuristic stadiums and stadiums of the future?

[30] Think of Augmented and Virtual Reality, think of drone technology, Artificial Intelligence, robots, think of sensor technology, 4D cameras. Holographic technology will play an important role as with this technology fans will be able to enjoy away games of the team in your own stadium. Holographic events will be no exception in the future. Conclusion, without technology, future stadiums will not win the war! It means a large part of investments will go to building a solid technological infrastructure.

[31] It's all about engagement. Future fans will come to stadiums if they get offered something extra. This may differ per event and hence to find the right mix, stadiums must become more flexible where capacity and services are concerned.

[32] Future stadiums will likely become small entertainment cities where people gather and meet and have a good time.

[33] If fans and consumers feel safe, they will stay longer at the venue and spend more money. Facial recognition, smart blockchain ticketing and crowd control systems are a few examples of how fans might feel safer in the future.

[34] Generations Z and Alpha do not require anything less. They are much more concerned with the future of the planet than older generations.

[35] One of the ways stadiums and club owners can earn back some of their investments will be data-gathering. Who is in the stands and what does that fan need? By doing this, the stadium can become a major content and data provider to many commercial parties. Data is a new gold for stadium owners.

## Football and Locality

39. Football has deep roots in communities and as suggested earlier we know that football is a game rooted in the traditions, symbolism and the social fabric of Edinburgh. Clubs in Edinburgh not only act as a central node in the everyday life of its citizens. They are also incubators of community outreach, social interventions, social capital and the enhancing of civic engagement. Football clubs help to secure a sense of place for its population, acting as institutions in communities, in an age of social change as communities transition socio-culturally across time.

40. Our recent study of one of the Edinburgh leading clubs showed that 77% of supporters believed that The City of Edinburgh was extremely important to their lives.[36] Approximately 70% of the supporters surveyed identify with the lifestyle and culture of the city. The data also illustrated that supporters are embedded emotionally in the city. 54% strongly agreed with the statement around their emotional attachment to Edinburgh. Football and football fans should have a voice and a place within any future sport and physical activity plan for the city of Edinburgh.

41. We also know that Edinburgh citizens are local season ticket holders embedded within local communities. 83.86% of Hearts season ticket sales in one season came from the city of Edinburgh itself, with the most popular districts being EH14 (SW Edinburgh, Balerno, 8.72% of sales), EH12 (West Edinburgh, Murrayfield / Corstorphine / East Craigs / South Gyle, 8.53% of sales), EH11 (SW Edinburgh, Dalry / Gorgie / Stenhouse / Broomhouse / Tynecastle, 6.07% of sales) and EH4 (NW Edinburgh, Cramond / Blackhall / Craigmyle, 5.79% of sales; also, the most popular district for Hibs sales).[37]

42. In a study of four clubs (Hibernian, Hearts, Aberdeen and Motherwell), the top 10 most popular postcodes accounted for 47.06% of season ticket sales, with 9 of these coming from Edinburgh and 1 from Kirkcaldy. This is the lowest figure across the four clubs, indicating a wide geographical spread of season ticket holders. Outside Edinburgh, the most popular areas for season ticket sales are KY (Kirkcaldy, 634 sales), FK (Falkirk, 312 sales), G (Glasgow, 235 sales) and ML (Motherwell, 141 sales). Matchday ticket purchasers are more likely to reside outside Edinburgh than season ticket purchasers, but both categories of purchasers are more likely to reside outside Edinburgh than their Hibernian counterparts, indicating that Hearts' following is slightly less concentrated.

43. Hibernian season ticket sales for 2019/20 saw approximately 12,300 ticket sales. 88.51% of these sales stem from the City of Edinburgh area postcodes, with the top sales areas clustered in North and East Edinburgh: EH4, EH6, and EH7 (the Easter Road postcode and Hibernian's home stadium). In general, matchday sales are more likely to come from areas outside Edinburgh, consistent with the travel commitments of a season ticket. Per capita, different areas emerge as the most significant buyers: particularly in NE Edinburgh, EH15, EH21, and EH7 all have more than 2% of their populations buying season tickets.

44. In addition, 83.86% of Hearts season ticket sales also came from the city of Edinburgh, with the most popular districts being EH14 (SW Edinburgh, Balerno, 8.72% of sales), EH12 (West Edinburgh, Murrayfield / Corstorphine / East Craigs / South Gyle, 8.53% of sales), EH11 (SW Edinburgh, Dalry / Gorgie / Stenhouse / Broomhouse / Tynecastle, 6.07% of sales) and EH4 (NW Edinburgh, Cramond / Blackhall / Craigmyle, 5.79% of sales; also, the most popular district for Hibs sales).

[36] University of Edinburgh (2022). Hibernian Fan Engagement Report: [https://www.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/aos-hibernian-fan-engagement-study-apr2022\\_copy.pdf](https://www.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/aos-hibernian-fan-engagement-study-apr2022_copy.pdf) [online] (Accessed 4 June 2024).

[37] University of Edinburgh (2021). Scottish Football Building Back Better: Heart of Midlothian Football Club: [https://www.pure.ed.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/248671215/Final\\_Hearts.pdf](https://www.pure.ed.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/248671215/Final_Hearts.pdf) [online] (Accessed 4 June 2024).



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46. In a study that looked at the distribution of season ticket holders of Aberdeen FC, Hearts of Midlothian, Hibernian FC and Motherwell FC, we find that 37% of season ticket holders across the four clubs reside in the top 20% least deprived postcode districts in Scotland, and a further 16% resided in the second most least deprived postcode districts.

47. This is just season ticket data and that alone is not the sole indicator of club activity. Football is rooted in locality, stadiums are focal points for activity rooted in locality and yet more work needs to be done by some clubs if they want to attract those on the margins into the stadium for some time if not longer periods of time.

## Football Sentiment

48. A traditional monetisation model for the football industry is often based on audiences, events, reach, and impressions, while a community-based monetisation model is driven more by, for example, storytelling, conversations, access, and direct-to-consumer commerce. Understanding Scottish football communities better has the potential of developing a

much more communities focused model that could unlock powerful new ways to produce, distribute, and measure football engagement and relationships based upon what fans and communities, including online communities want. Women's sports in the USA have been particularly successful a driving this community-based monetisation model.[38]

49. One of the key aspects of increasing fan engagement with women's football in the USA has been (i) Storytelling: fans of women's football in the USA have increasingly engaged with content both in- and out-of-season; and (ii) Purpose-led conversations: women's sports putting their values on display and engage/ buy based on how brands/ media/ teams/ athletes align with those values. Women athletes and fans want to engage with the social issues of the day. Societal topics drive conversation but also increase viewership.

50. Social media sentiment analysis is but one method of capturing fan news and stories but more than that it can help measure sentiment towards what the club and or the city is doing. We have not done such an analysis around conversations about the City of Edinburgh, but we have been able to provide some insight into football fan sentiment and football in the City of Edinburgh.

51. Social media sentiment tracking can help clubs gain key insights into the thoughts and feelings of fans. Sentiment analysis uses machine learning, statistics, and natural language processing (NLP) to find out how people think and feel on a macro scale. [39] Sentiment refers to the positivity or negativity or neutrality expressed in text. It provides an effective way to evaluate written or spoken language to determine if the expression is favourable, unfavourable, or neutral, and to what degree. Today's algorithm-based sentiment analysis tools can handle huge volumes of feedback consistently and accurately. Indeed, to get best value out of sentiment analysis you need to be analysing large quantities of textual data on a regular basis.[40]

[38] The Fan Project Report (2020). How women fans will lead the sports industry into the future. <https://www.sportsilab.com/free-reports/the-fan-project-how-womens-sports-will-lead-the-sports-industry-into-the-future-2021> [online] (Accessed 28 May 2024).

[39][40] Qualtrics (2024). Sentiment Analysis and How to Leverage It. <https://www.qualtrics.com/experience-management/research/sentiment-analysis/> [online] (Accessed 28 May 2024).

52. Since 2020 we have used this tool in at least six reports for different football clubs and organisations. [41] It is important for clubs to know who their key influencers are to work with them on a regular basis to sustain a meaningful relationship. Key influencers, including online communities, are people who can and do influence the narrative around the club. Social media tracking can help identify key influencers with a clubs' network, people that clubs should have a strong relationship with because they help to pass on the story or the narrative around what the club is or is not doing.

53. For established audiences, we can track a snapshot of the conversation. This allows us to measure how fans feel about their club and how these changes over time, both in response to specific events and results and longer-term macro trends. Network analysis of the conversation also allows us to measure the community figures that are most active in the conversation. Often, these are already known to clubs but quantifying the reach and connectedness of these figures gives the club more reliable information for channels to boost messaging, stories and campaign launches. We can track fans' conversations online to get a measure of how they feel about their club, the city, and the direction of travel.

54. Over a sixteen-week period at the end of the 2020-21 season we tracked the sentiment towards Scottish Women's Football. The scope of analysis was drawn from aspects of social media analysis of Scottish women's football involving the following Scottish Women's Premier League (SWPL) clubs: Glasgow Rangers, Glasgow City, Glasgow Celtic, Hibernian, Spartans, Forfar Farmington, Motherwell, and Heart of Midlothian. The four clubs that generated the highest levels of engagement over the period were Rangers, Celtic, Glasgow City, and Hibernian. The overall sentiment for the period being 10.84% negative; 47.3% neutral and 41.85% positive. In other words, the sentiment towards Scottish women's football was 89% neutral or positive.

55. We have also used this methodology to track the growth of women's football in Scotland over the period 2021-24. Over a parallel 12-week observation period in both the 2020-21 and 2023-24 seasons, the conversation around SWPL clubs demonstrated a 30% growth.

56. The conversation also changed in nature, moving from informational, low-emotive content to a more sentiment-driven conversation. Growth over this period was driven by clubs with the larger infrastructure, i.e. those with a parallel men's team. In general, the conversation has transitioned from being smaller and more evenly distributed across the league, to larger but dominated by a small number of clubs.

57. There is evidence that this is not simply driven by shared fans between the men's and women's teams, as the conversation is different in nature. In general, there is significantly less negativity in conversations around the women's game than what we see in the men's game.

58. It is important for women's (and men's) football clubs to build strong relationships with key influencers within their fan networks and beyond. Key influencers refer to those individuals who have a substantial following and/or act as critical connectors between users on social media. They represent individuals in each of the clubs' communities that are highly central and visible. They represent those with high levels of social capital in the network and are an essential component of the success and adoption of any marketing or other communication plan.

59. What is being suggested here is that for both the city and the Edinburgh Football Clubs there is an evidenced good news story around football and football in the City of Edinburgh. We have focused here upon women's football, but the same work could be done for men and women's football. What came out of one of the fan surveys of an Edinburgh football club was that the fans thought Edinburgh clubs did not optimise being part of the City of Edinburgh and that this was a good news story when being compared to being a football club in the city of Glasgow for example.

[41] Jarvie, G. Barret, J. Delgado, J. Widdop, P et al (2021). Micro-Briefing on Scottish Women's Football. University of Edinburgh: Edinburgh. [e recommendations in Scottish Government \(2019\) Review of the Scottish Sporting Landscape. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.](#) [online] (Accessed 28 May 2024).

## Football and Inequality

60. Football is entrenched in working class communities. The football clubs are mythised in these communities and over a century of interactions between people and the shared experiences, clubs have become social and cultural institutions embedded in city life. Some observers [42] have suggested that football has broken its connection to its utilitarian past and the growth of commercialisation and globalisation has seen the game take a collective turn away from its working-class upbringings. While football still has local reach cost barriers remain a factor that contributes to inequality of access to football and indeed sport in general.

61. The Hampden Nights[43] survey of fans attending women's international matches at Hampden suggested that 94% reported as being white British; 75% reported as having a college, university or post-graduate degree, the majority reported a household income of above 20k, 12% reported a household income of between 90 and 100k and 31% reported that they would be willing to make a greater financial contribution to making Scotland a better place. 79% reported that the Scottish National Women's team had an important part to play in the community.

62. In a study by University of Edinburgh there were clear disparities between those that could and couldn't attend football games across sections of Scotland. The study found that 37% of season ticket holders across the four clubs resided in the top 20% least deprived postcode districts in Scotland, and a further 16% in the second least deprived postcode districts. 1.3% of the most affluent 20% districts population were season ticket holders compared to 0.3% in the most deprived districts.

63. Cost of living is having an impact on fandom. In a recent study by Football Supporters Association (FSA) [44], 26% of respondents reported that they were attending fewer games. Of those who are attending less games, the main reasons cited were: work and family commitments (30.9%), high ticket prices (30.3%), inability to access tickets (22.8%), a change in financial circumstances (21.9%) and feeling disillusioned with football in general (17.9%). Two in five (40%) fans said the rising cost of living has impacted on how much they are able to spend on football, and fans are overall spending less.

64. There is also evident gender inequalities in football and the community it serves. In a study by Fair Game and University of Portsmouth[1] they found that only 11.1% of board members at Premier League clubs and 26% of spectators were women. In terms of stadium attendance, The University of Edinburgh research found that females only represented 17% of SPL match going audiences for one club in the City. SWPL attendances have still to be surveyed but the collective attendance for one season, 2022/23, broke the 100,000 mark for the first time. Greater visibility from more matches being played in the bigger stadiums has been called for by both national and club players.

65. England Lioness Eni Aluko has claimed that football "is not a safe place" for women online or in stadiums. A claim supported by Women at the Match survey by FSA[2], which reported that one in five women (20%) had experienced unwanted physical attention while attending men's football matches. In addition, in a Women in football report, 66% of respondents say that they have personally experienced some form of gender discrimination within the footballing workplace (Source: BBC 2020).

[42] Chadwick, S (2023) From utilitarianism and neoclassical sport management to a new geopolitical economy of sport. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 22(5), 685-704.

[43] Hampden Nights (2023). Scottish Women's National Team Fan Engagement Survey. [monwealth 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 4 June 2024).

[44] FSA (2023) National Supporters' Survey 2023. [monwealth 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 10 June 2024).

[45] Fair Game (2022) The Gender Divide That Fails Football's Bottom Line: The Commercial Case for Gender Equality. <https://www.fairgameuk.org/s/The-Gender-Divide-That-Fails-Footballs-Bottom-Line-Fair-Game-Report-March-2022.pdf> [online] (Accessed 10 June 2024).

[46] FSA (2022) Women at the Match Survey. <https://thefsa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/FSA-Womens-Game-Survey-2022.pdf> [online] (Accessed 10 June 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 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](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, G, 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, G, 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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