

Local, National and International Perspectives on the Role of Grassroots Sports Clubs in Their Local Communities



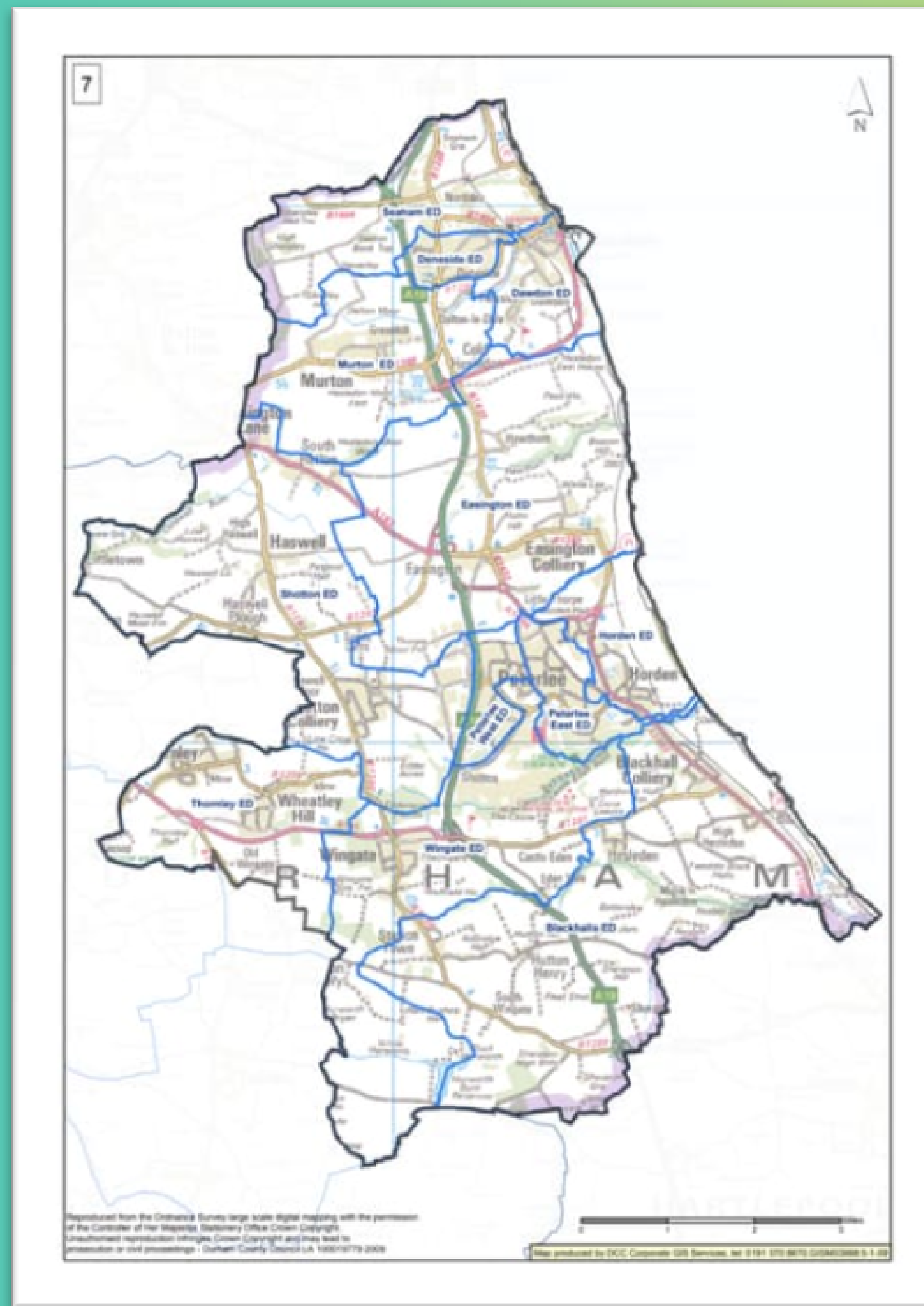
Scholar, Alexander Robinson, Durham Business School, Durham University. Research Supervisor
 Dr Stephen Crossley, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Durham University

Introduction

- The project was posed by Dr Stephen Crossley, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Durham University, and broadly centred around the idea that grassroots sports clubs in the UK have received relatively little attention in terms of the wider work that they are involved with and/or capable of.
- The research was conducted via a desk exercise literature review on the subject of grassroots sports in the UK.
- A database of the grassroots clubs in East Durham, with an accompanying interactive map of grassroots clubs in East Durham was produced.
- As a business studies student at Durham University, Dr Crossley supported my addition to the research of including what, if any, Social Return on Investment was being made through the provision grassroots sports clubs in the UK and in particular East Durham.

Methodology

- In seeking to create an interactive map of the grassroots clubs in East Durham, my methodology mainly relied upon a online searches.
- This way of searching was productive in presenting local grassroots clubs pages on social media platforms, such as Facebook. I mapped any of the clubs that presented in Durham, and was able to isolate those clubs that were in the East Durham area.
- The scope of study for this report is County Durham, focusing in particular on East Durham, as defined by the East Durham Area Action Partnership (AAP 2023). East Durham AAP stretches from Seaham in the north to Blackhall Colliery in the south.
- The population for East Durham between the ages of 0 to 24 is 26,078 (ONS 2020). 47.9% of the total population of East Durham live in areas in the top 10% most deprived nationally and 30.1% of 0 to 15 year olds live in areas in the top 10% most deprived nationally (IMD 2019; ONS 2017), furthermore, 21.7% of children under 16 are living in absolute poverty in families (HMRC 21/22).



Findings and Mapping

In total, the research found:

- 160 grassroots sports clubs in the Durham area:
- 35 cricket clubs
- 25 football clubs
- 10 boxing clubs
- 29 rugby union and league clubs
- 16 social clubs
- 17 women's rugby clubs
- 4 athletic clubs
- and 24 other types of grassroots clubs

What is Grassroots Sport?

International Sport and Cultural Association define grassroots sport as, 'a physical leisure activity, organised and non-organised, practised regularly at non-professional level, for health, educational and social purposes' (ISCA 2023). Law Insider defines grass root sports as, 'organised sport practiced at local level by amateur sport people and sport for all' (Lawinsider 2023). For the purpose of this research, both definitions will be considered in determining grass root sports clubs. Grassroots sports can provide an essential forum for advancing physical fitness, interpersonal communication, and personal growth. Grassroots sports are frequently planned and managed by volunteers, neighbourhood associations, or educational institutions at a local or national level; making them accessible and often affordable. They cover a wide range of pursuits, from leisure swimming and fitness programs to community basketball competitions and youth soccer leagues (SportsEngland 2023). Sports at the grassroots level also place a strong emphasis on diversity, welcoming players of all ages, genders, and physical abilities.

Literature Review

- In The research was conducted via desk research and a literature review in regard to theories, primary and secondary data on the subject of grassroots sports at a local and national perspective, as well as its provision within a community area, and the measurement of Social Return on Investment (SROI). The area researched in this report is East Durham, County Durham, North East England.all, over 110 sources on grassroots clubs and SROI were reviewed for this research project; of those 110 sources, 70% of sources were in relation to physical activity, grassroots sports, and grassroots clubs, with most emphasis being on physical activity.
- It was apparent from the literature review that there is a lack of information on grassroots sports clubs, and that often grassroots sport and Physical Activity are often linked together; even though they are quite distinct and can be quite different. The final 30% of sources in the literature review covered the social value of grassroots sports clubs and Social Return on Investment being made.

Social Return on Investment

Social return on investment (SROI) is more commonly being used across a wide range of policy areas to measure social value and to justify public investment. At a basic level, SROI is a framework for understanding and measuring the non-market economic, social and environmental value created by an activity, organisation or intervention. The SROI figures for the North East and for County Durham (which is the same as the Active Partnership area) are noted in figure 5. Of the 42 Active Partnership areas in the UK, with 1 having greatest SROI and 42 having the lowest SROI, County Durham Sport ranked 40th with a total return of £728,035,000. However, County Durham is one of the smallest Active Partnership areas, furthermore, in the Mental Wellbeing SROI bracket, with a total of £432,912,500, Active Durham Sport ranked in the top 50% of areas. The Sport England breakdown of social value is based on per £ spent on all physical activity/sport, it does not separate grassroots sports out. In that, it is hard to estimate how much SROI grassroots sports clubs have really had on an area such as East Durham.

