

How Much Can English Cities Afford Football?

A New Measure Based on Local Consumer Income Distribution

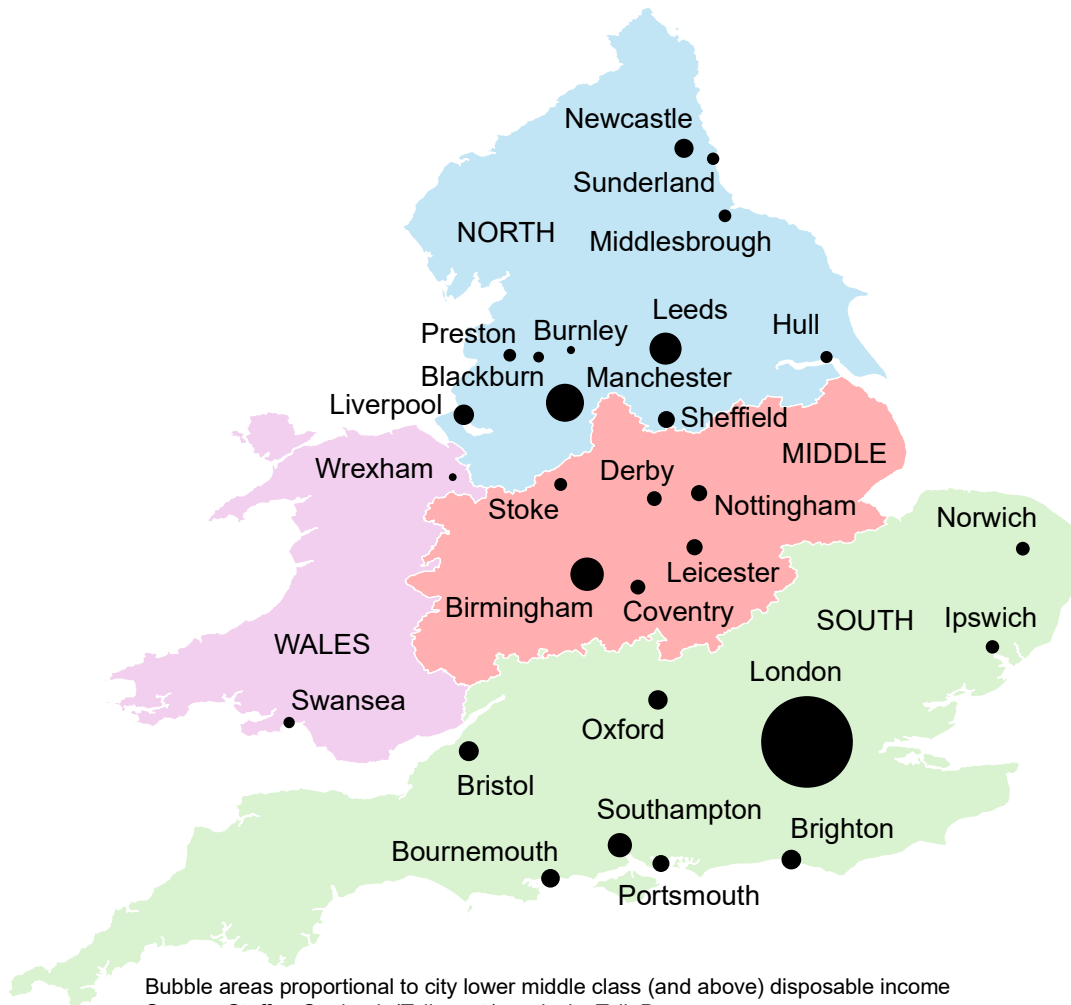
Dr. Staffan Canback, Tellusant

Boston, Massachusetts, May 2026

Football club payroll spending is well known. But how large is that spending relative to the middle-class consumer income base of the cities that host the clubs? I doubt anyone knows — until now.

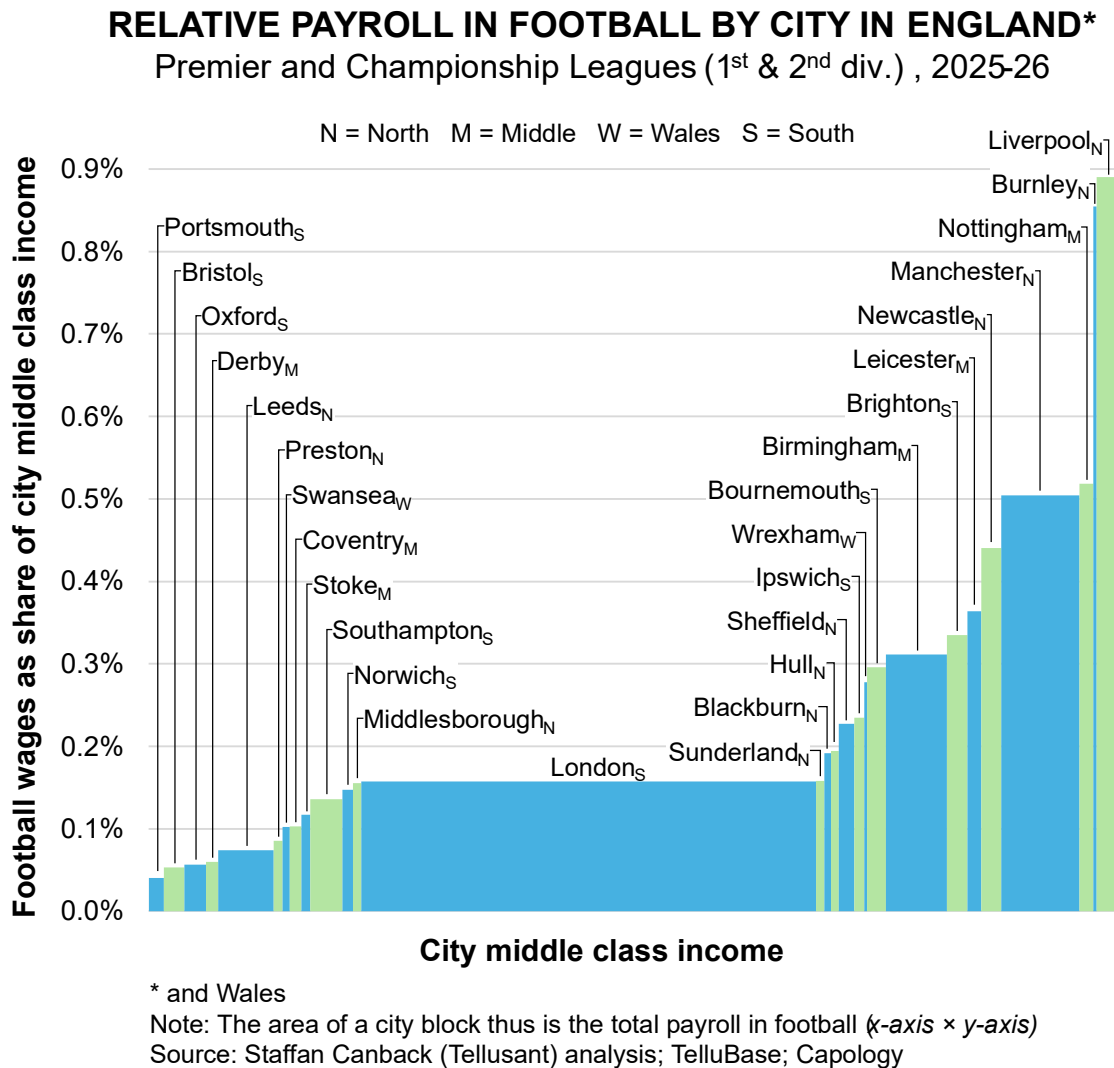
To start, the map shows the 28 cities hosting the 44 clubs in the 2025-26 season. Bubble areas are proportional to lower middle class (and above) disposable income in the city.

ENGLISH PREMIER AND CHAMPIONSHIP LEAGUES CITIES 2025-26 season



Payroll data for the 2025–26 season from [Capology](#) was then aggregated by club to their corresponding cities (using the UN urban definition) and compared with the disposable income of the lower middle class and above, using [income distribution from TelluBase](#).

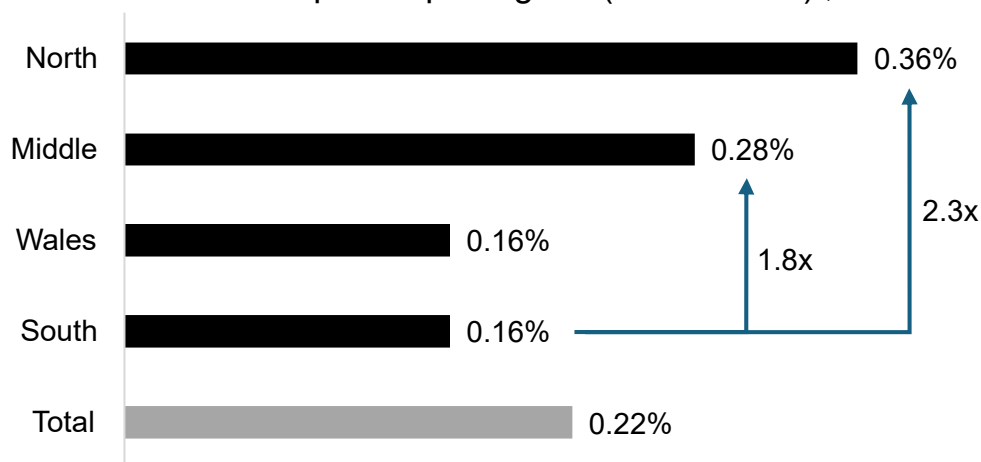
The result gives a fascinating perspective on English football economics. Relative football spending varies enormously between cities.



A striking pattern emerges. Northern cities spend substantially more on football than southern cities. Aggregated by region, northern England spends 2.3 times more relative to income, while middle England falls slightly below the north.

RELATIVE FOOTBALL PAYROLL BY REGION

Premier and Championship Leagues (1st & 2nd div.) , 2025-26



Source: Staffan Canback (Tellusant) analysis; TelluBase; Capology

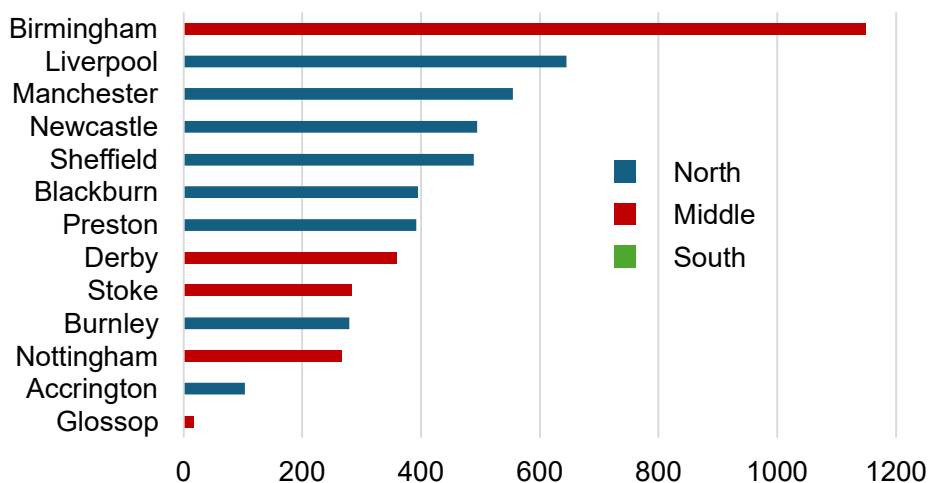
Why do these differences exist?

One crucial factor is historical path dependence: football began as a distinctly northern sport. The graph below shows first division participants in 1900, 12 years after the football league was founded. Note that there was *not a single southern team during the first 12 years*.

ENGLISH FOOTBALL ROOTS

Total points collected by 1900

1st division started in 1888



Source: DataRig on YouTube

Football was — and still is — deeply embedded in the social fabric of northern England, where populations have long shown a willingness to devote significant economic resources to sustaining their clubs. Liverpool is the clearest example.

English football is not simply a sports industry. In many northern cities, it remains a disproportionately large economic and cultural commitment relative to local consumer resources.

ABOUT

[Dr. Staffan Canback](#) is a global management consultant, entrepreneur and academic with over 40 years of experience, including partnerships at McKinsey and Monitor. He founded Canback Consulting (acquired by The Economist Group) and then co-founded [Tellusant](#) to build automated strategy solutions.

He holds advanced degrees from KTH Royal Institute of Technology (MSc), Harvard Business School (MBA), and Henley Business School (DBA), and is a Fulbright and a Wallenberg scholar. He won 1st prize for best European doctoral dissertation in management in 2003.

[TelluBase](#) is a macro-strategic simulation platform. It is powered by a dataset covering 220 countries / territories, 2600 cities, and 2500 subdivisions from 2000 till 2050. Its distributional economics data such as income brackets and socioeconomic classes is unique in the world.