

European Football for



Development Network

EFDN

# FOOTBALL FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

In conversation with Nicole Winkelhake,  
Coordinator of Climate, Environment &  
Resources at FC St. Pauli



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## 1.1. CHANGE THE GAME, NOT THE CLIMATE! A ST PAULI CLIMATE JUSTICE CAMPAIGN

**Tell us a bit about the project that St. Pauli is undertaking as part of the Football for Climate Justice project.**

The Football for Climate Justice [fan survey report](#), published in October 2023, found that 85% of surveyed St. Pauli fans think football clubs should be involved in taking climate action. Recognising that there is a strong mandate from fans, St. Pauli has decided to develop a climate justice campaign, ‘**change the game, not the climate!**’, embedded in the vision that ‘another football is possible’. Nicole Winkelhake of St. Pauli describes this as ‘football that is not only based on financial success but also sustainability’. Nicole sees the club as an ‘anchor’ for this type of thought and activity in Hamburg. The term ‘anchor’ comes from the concept of Community Wealth Building, where an anchor institution is a large organisation rooted in a place with the potential to engage with and influence the local economy, as well as support local communities.

**Where did the idea for this collaborative project come from?**

St. Pauli is well known for taking a stand against discrimination, racism, and fascism, as well as running large-scale social justice campaigns. Nicole describes the club’s recent anti-racism campaign as a blueprint for the upcoming climate justice campaign.

This campaign also has its roots in St. Pauli’s Sustainability Strategy, ‘Not Perfect but Better’, which the club’s Strategy, Transformation and Sustainability department is currently revising to take a more effective and integrated approach. The revised strategy sets out the following fields of action:

1. Fair working conditions for own employees and employees along the value chain;
2. Fair and sustainable business models
3. Protection of ecosystems, the climate and all life on earth;
4. Diversity and participation

**How does this project take a people and community centered approach?**

“A lot of people got wind that we were working on this project due to the Football for Climate Justice survey and at a conference held in Germany last November that brought together, fans, staff, volunteers and community members.” Nicole described how, at the conference, people were looking for a way to be involved, and from that point, a climate justice working group was established at the club. The working group has met five times since November 2023 and is exploring and discussing ideas for sustainable and inclusive fan mobility. At the next meeting, Nicole hopes to introduce the ‘change the game, not the climate!’ campaign as well as the KEBAP waste heat project, which is at an early stage.

**What’s the plan for the next six months?**

The immediate next step will be to publish the revised club strategy to align with the upcoming 2024–25 Bundesliga season and meet new internal and external standards, such as Deutsche Fußball Liga (DFL) reporting criteria. Then, the focus will be on ramping up communications, progressing the KEBAP district heating project, and keeping the door open to allow space for new grassroots climate justice projects to emerge from the recently established climate justice working group.

**What have been the key learnings so far?**

Nicole described how: ‘with the strategy, it’s really important to have buy-in from the highest management level, the executive committee, so that it comes from the bottom-up, but has the dedicated support of the top down.’

**Do you have advice for clubs starting out that are looking at climate justice and trying to understand how to integrate a climate justice approach into their current sustainability plans and strategies?**

“I think the key is really to allow people to participate on every level. That’s the thing that really helped to develop the fields of action in the first place with our strategy. We were able to do it because we had different perspectives from members, employees, fans, and experts, and that makes the picture broader and more inclusive.”

## 2. THE KEBAP DISTRICT HEATING PROJECT

The St. Pauli sustainability team are also collaborating with a non-profit organisation, KEBAP (KulturEnergieBunkerAltonaProjekt), whose work, amongst others, focuses on decentralised and community-led district heating models. KEBAP plans to build an energy centre and community space in an old WW2 bunker two kilometres from the Millerntor-Stadion. The project, which brings together FC St. Pauli and others, examines the potential of transportable heat containers which would re-use waste heat from high-energy users within the city of Hamburg. In the first instance, the aim is to provide the Millerntor-Stadion with this excess energy from large energy users in the city. The waste heat would be used to heat the pitch and power the activities of the football club. The Millerntor-Stadion is currently connected to the city's main district heating system but often reaches capacity in the winter months and has to rely on fossil fuels for backup. Nicole describes how mobile district heating containers, a concept which has been developed by KEBAP, could be a climate-smart solution to this problem.

### Beekeeping at Millerntor: Celebrating World Environment Day with Sustainable Honey Harvesting in St. Pauli



### Where did the idea for this collaborative project come from?

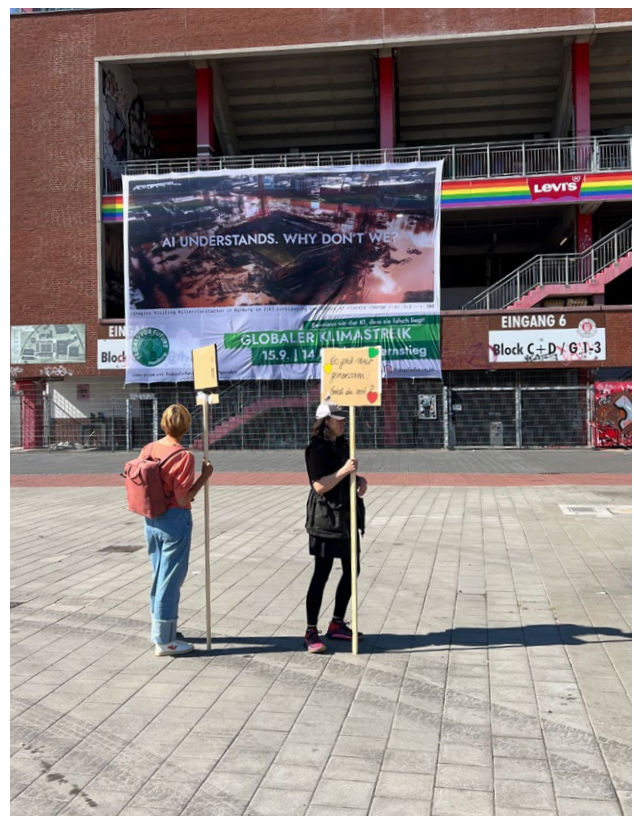
KEBAP approached St. Pauli directly. Nicole spoke about how publishing sustainability and climate justice reports, strategies, and research, helps to “open the door” with NGOs, organisations and policymakers and start a conversation.

“If you start publishing things about sustainability, then people easily become aware of what’s going on, and it’s easier to get in touch.”

### How is it going? Will the project take a people and community centered approach?

The project is still in the early stages. The core piece of work undertaken so far is a feasibility study which outlines the technical details of connecting waste heat suppliers to local organisations using mobile heat containers. Looking to the future, Nicole explains that once the concept has been tested with larger energy users such as the football club, she hopes there will be potential for those living close to the stadium to also benefit from and reuse excess heat.

### Climate Activists Rally at Millerntor Stadium





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How can football clubs support climate action that is good for the fans, their communities, and the planet?



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