



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI NAPOLI FEDERICO II

Dipartimento di Scienze Sociali

NEOLIBERAL FOOTBALL IN NEOLIBERAL (SOUTHERN) EUROPE

An indicator of social, economic and political
phenomena

Luca Bifulco

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II

Italy



Professional football as indicator

- A great economic industry
- It deals with political and legislative environment
- Identity, belonging, values

Theoretical frame: socio-historical perspective and conflict sociology

- Groups with different interests
- Unequal access to economic resources, power, status and opportunities
- Ideologies related to interests
- Conflict: resources and ideas that must inspire institutions and political decisions

The transformation of European football

since 90s

- Economic and globalization changes
- EU economic-political paradigm
- EU regulations
- Individualized and consumption society

European integration

- Neoliberal notions are dominant
- Compromise with neo-mercantilist and social-democratic projects

(Bastiaan Van Apeldoorn, 2001)

Neoliberal project:

Crisis = institutional problems, State intervention, too much welfare state,
limits to the market;

More market and less State;

Europe as an advanced free trade zone in a free trading world.

Neo-mercantilist project:

promotion and protection of “European champions” (firms).

Social-democratic project:

mixed economy and social protection.

Neoliberal ideology and discourse

some key concepts:

- Free and global market is a fact of nature
- Market is a natural law and a universal world vision
- Deregolamentation and privatization
- Competitiveness and Growth = Wealth
- Less State involvement
- Free and flexible labour market
- Welfare: Equal distribution of opportunities rather than equitable distribution of resources
- Safety: ability to adapt to change, rather than protection from risk
- Principles of legitimization: individual responsibility, rather than collective responsibility
- Globalization as a fact

European football as conflict arena

Different (transnational) actors - interest groups

- Governing bodies: FIFA, UEFA, Leagues, Football Associations
- ECA, Association of European Professional Football Leagues (EPFL) - *inequality: transnational clubs and local clubs*
- Fédération Internationale des Associations de Footballeurs Professionnels (FIFPro) - *inequality: top players and other players*
- European Football Agents Association (EFAA)
- Media companies
- Corporations

Other actors

EU, European Court of Justice, European Commission...

Bosman ruling (1995)

Power, authority conflict:

- UEFA/FIFA aims: competitive balance –national identity of the championships
- Bosman-players/top club: favouring market-based competitiveness and free market; free workers and non-discrimination of workers based on nationality

European Court of Justice outcome:

- Free movement and non-discrimination of European players/workers
- Free transfer at the end of contract
- Football, in its economic aspects, as any other business (some compromise)
- National identity not prevalent

*Articles 48, 85, 86 (Treaty of the European Community) :
Non-discrimination of workers and their free movement, free competition*

The new Champions League

Conflict:

- UEFA: competitive balance
- G14 (transnational clubs): to reward competitiveness - (richest) clubs making the biggest investments, bigger number of viewers

The new format (since 90s):

Champions league becomes a global brand

Collective TV rights and sponsorship

More teams (32)

Seeding, to safeguard the most important clubs and reduce their risk

National coefficient of merit

Clubs from countries with bigger number of viewers gains more

Club gains related to results and achievements

Commercialization of football

A global show with a dominant market logic





















Revenues:

- TV rights
- Sponsors
- Merchandising
- Ticket sales
- Players market

Italian football model:

- Competition for resources
- Limited competitive balance mechanisms
- Uneven distribution of resources among teams. Revenues deriving from the championship are managed according to a mixed model: a limited institutional redistribution mechanism and for the rest the market competition
- Players contracts negotiated according only to market logic

TV RIGHTS REVENUES

Millions of Euros	equal parts	viewers		sport results			merit	total
		fans	city population	history	last 5 years	last year		
 ATALANTA	18,5	2,5	0,3	3,9	4,3	1,2	1	31,7
 BOLOGNA	18,5	3,9	1,1	4,2	3,5	2,3	3,1	36,6
 CARPI	18,5	1	0,2	0,8	1,1	0,4	0	22
 CHIEVO	18,5	2	0,7	1,5	5,8	2,1	3,1	33,7
 EMPOLI	18,5	1,6	0,1	2	1,7	1,9	1	26,8
 FIORENTINA	18,5	7,9	1	6,2	8,1	3,3	6,2	51,2
 FROSINONE	18,5	1	0,1	1,2	0,6	0,6	0	22
 GENOA	18,5	3,4	1,6	3,5	6,9	1,3	1	36,2
 INTER	18,5	31,1	3,7	6,9	8,7	3,1	6,2	78,2
 JUVENTUS	18,5	49,7	2,5	7,7	11,6	3,8	9,3	103,1
 LAZIO	18,5	7,6	7,9	5,4	9,2	2,5	4,3	55,4
 MILAN	18,5	31,6	3,7	7,3	10,1	2,9	6,2	80,3
 NAPOLI	18,5	20	2,7	4,6	11	3,6	9,3	69,7
 PALERMO	18,5	5,3	1,9	2,3	4,3	0,8	1	34,1
 ROMA	18,5	16,9	7,9	6,5	10,1	3,5	9,3	72,7
 SAMPDORIA	18,5	3,8	1,6	5	5,8	1,5	1	37,2
 SASSUOLO	18,5	2,1	0,1	0,4	2,3	2,7	5	31,1
 TORINO	18,5	6	2,5	5,8	5,8	1,7	1	41,3
 UDINESE	18,5	2,6	0,3	2,7	7,5	0,9	1	33,5
 VERONA	18,5	2,1	0,7	3,1	2,9	0,2	0	27,5

Source: Calcio & Finanza. Simulation 2015/16 Lega Serie A

Competitive balance: “parachute” for relegated teams; 40% equal parts
 Competitiveness/market: 30% viewers + 30% results and achievements

60s-70s-80s: Inter, Juventus, Milan won 20 championships of 30 (66%);
 90s, 00s, 10s...until now: Inter, Juventus, Milan won 24 championships of 26 (92%).

Concluding remarks

- Competitive imbalance is not new
- Sporting dominance is a difficult question
- The ideas of the neoliberal paradigm (with some compromises) have influenced and shaped contemporary European football:
deregolamentation, priority to free market laws, competitiveness, free labour market, welfare as equal distribution of opportunities rather than equitable distribution of resources; individual responsibility rather than collective responsibility, safety as ability to adapt to change rather than protection from risk.
- Growing inequality of economic means among clubs and players
- Inequality (economic resources, power, prestige) is constantly reproduced
- Football as a realm in which these ideas can become common sense, taken for granted



Thank you...