

Chair of International Business
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The Innovative Matchday Experience

*as a strategic tool for Italian football clubs to differentiate, increasing
stadium attendance, fan engagement, loyalty and monetization*

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“Have faith...”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Contribution of the Project	4
2. Introduction	6
2.1. The Modern Business of Football.....	6
2.2. The Situation of Italian Football	10
3. The Matchday Experience	14
3.1. A Strategic Management tool for Italian clubs	14
3.2. Positive Externalities	20
3.2.1. Matchday Revenues, Attendance and Loyalty Diversification	20
3.2.2. Data Collection & Utilization.....	23
3.2.2.1. Direct and Indirect Commercial Opportunities	24
3.2.2.2. Improving CRM (FRM).....	24
3.2.3. Improving the Fan Experience	26
3.3. Comparison Italy v. England: the Report	29
3.4. Interesting Best Practices across Europe	32
3.4.1. Fan Village Liverpool FC & Manchester City FC	32
3.4.2. Matchday App Chelsea FC & OGC Nice.....	34
3.4.3. UEFA Champions League Final: my matchday experience as a volunteer	36
4. Matchday Experience Direct Contributions and Recommendations.....	40
4.1. In Serie C Olbia Calcio: boosting Attendance and Fan Engagement in minor leagues ...	40
4.2. In Serie B Frosinone Calcio: a special bond for the matchday experience	45
4.3. In Serie A AS Roma: design the “Stadio della Roma” for the optimal Fan Journey	49
5. Conclusions	59
Bibliography	60

1. Contribution of the Project

Since a lot of thesis and projects have been written in the football management field, especially talking about financial analyses of football clubs, this master thesis tries to do something different. Combining business strategy, consumer-centred marketing and innovation technology, and focusing on the “matchday experience” – the peak moment of the fan experience – this work wants to give its contribution to the field, providing a new solution for the improvement of Italian football – which is undergoing a difficult situation in these years –, representing one of the possible answers to reduce the gap with other football leagues in a short-term period.

Let's go briefly into it: chapter 2 introduces the reader to the complex context of modern football management, to understand the challenges and the new players who entered the game, focusing on Italian football's situation in the second part of it. Chapter 3 represents the core of the project, explaining the problem and the strategic answer that Italian football clubs can find in the “*innovative matchday experience*”, but also positive externalities generating from its implementation, such as matchday revenues, attendance and loyalty diversification, data collection and utilization, and a significant improvement of the fan experience. Moreover, this chapter includes a special report I prepared – comparing Italy and England about some matchday experience solutions – and some interesting best practices around Europe, including how UEFA deals with the matchday experience for the *UEFA Champions League* final, having had the privilege to volunteer for the 2017 and 2018 finals in Cardiff and Kiev. Chapter 4 wants to give some recommendations, and it is structured into three different levels for a complete overview of Italian football, from Serie C to Serie A, analysing the situation of three clubs – Olbia Calcio, Frosinone Calcio, and AS Roma – to see how the implementation of a matchday experience could differ among the three leagues, and it is enriched with precious contributions from managers of these clubs.

This thesis can be particularly attractive for those working in the management of a football club, who wants to know more about this trend, but also for managers interested in strategy, differentiation, consumer-centred marketing and innovation technologies.

Finally, I want to thank some people, for their time and dedication: my Professor and Thesis Supervisor, Alessandro Marino, for his assistance; IQUII, the company where I did my

internship and my tutor, Simone Cinelli, *Head of Marketing and Communication*; Stefano Sambati, *Social Media Manager* at Olbia Calcio, and Matteo Sechi, the club's *Communication and Press Office Manager*, for having me in Olbia; Salvatore Gualtieri and Andrea Fabbricini for their answers to my interviews, who are respectively *Marketing Director* at Frosinone Calcio and *Fan and Stadium Activation Manager* at AS Roma.

Please, feel free to contact me anytime for any comments, information or suggestions, at the following email address: domenico.santoro92@gmail.com.

Thank you for your time, I hope you will find this thesis enjoyable and interesting to read.

Domenico Santoro

2. Introduction

This chapter highlights the recent exponential growth of European football and its main trends, then to focus on Italian football and its difficult situation in these times, to understand why it suffered a major decline, if compared to other top European leagues.

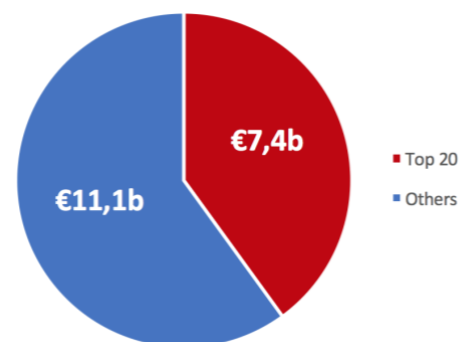
2.1. The Modern Business of Football

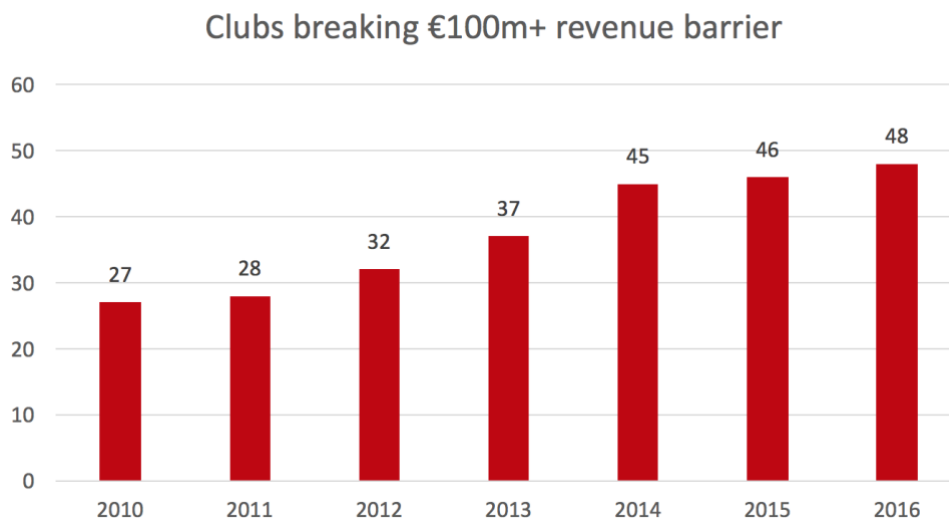
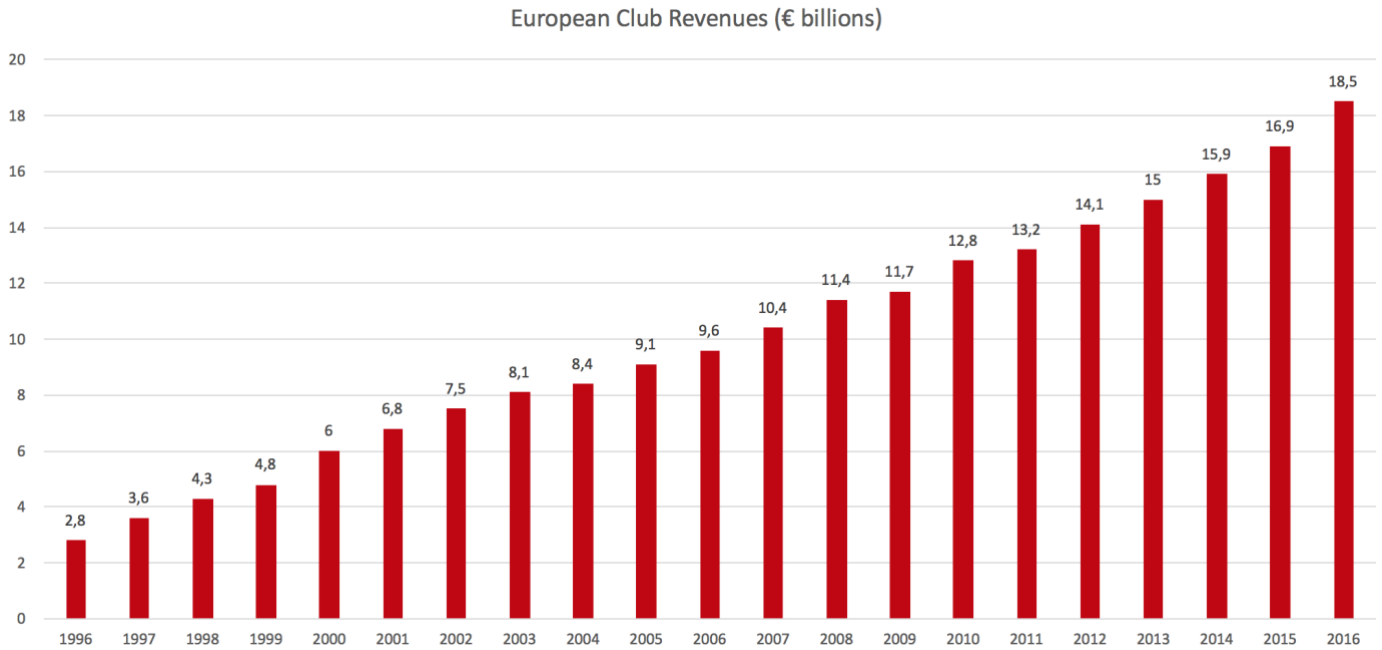
Let's start with an introduction on the business of modern football. Analysing the new international scenario and its trends is essential to fully understand how the “*most beautiful game in the world*” has become the real business we all know now.

In a world and global economy dominated by constant changes and uncertainty, the Sport Industry represents a positive exception. According to a study by *AT Kearney* (2014), the global sports system generates up to \$700 billion yearly – 1% of global GDP – with still huge growth forecasts for the future.

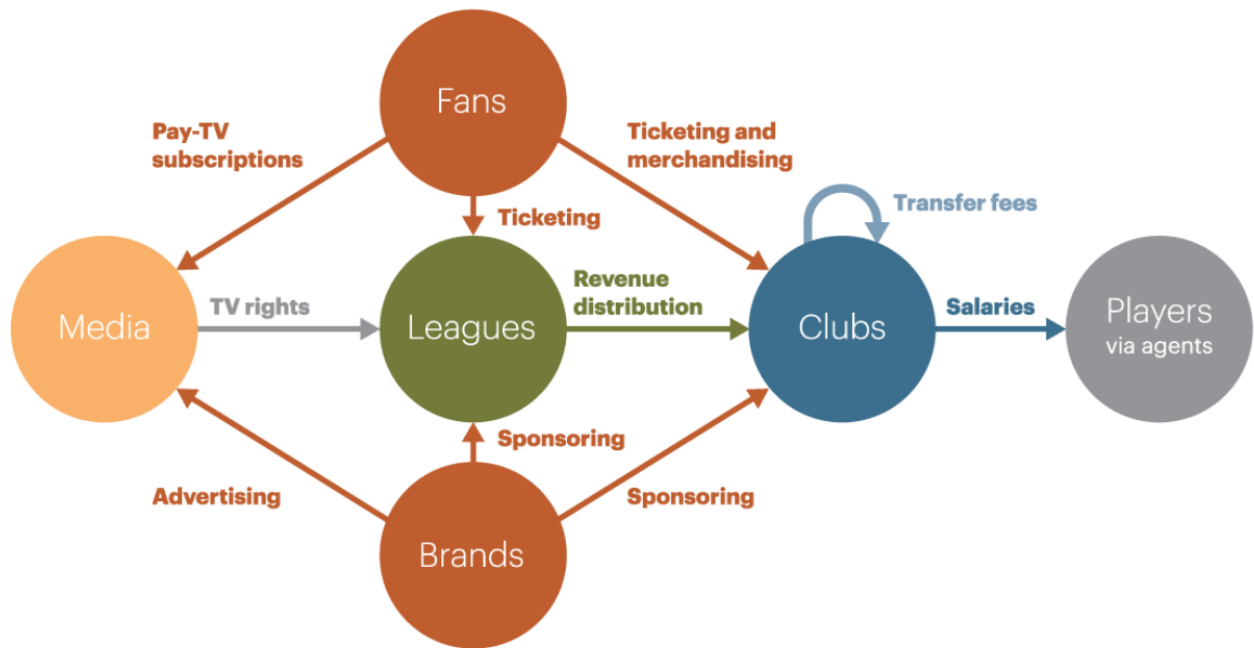
In the sport scenario, football is still the undisputed leader. It is deeply present in the everyday life of millions of fans, representing an important driver for decisions and habits, and it moves people and tourists from all over the world.

Especially in recent years, football has become much more than a simple sport, but a proper business, becoming the biggest entertainment industry in Europe, overcoming any other sport or other entertainment options such as music and cinema industries (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 2017). Some factors played an important role as *broadcasting* and *globalization*, turning football clubs into business firms with new standards to compete at the highest level. Indeed, European football clubs' revenues raised from €2.8 billion in 1996 to €18.5 billion in 2016, more than six and a half the number, and clubs breaking the €100 million revenue barrier registered a significant increase (+77%) in just 6 years (*UEFA*, 2018). And, it is interesting to notice that the top 20 European football clubs account for €7.4 billion, the 40% of the total (*Deloitte*, 2017): so, a huge power in the hands of few big players.





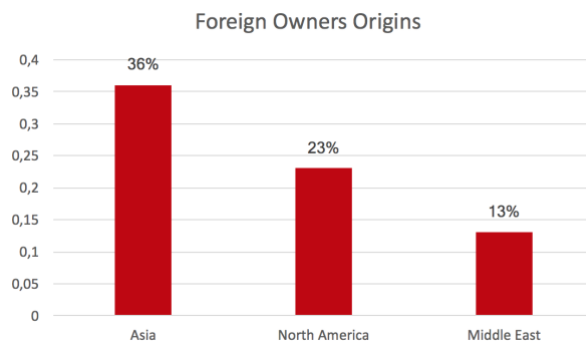
The Football Industry is a complex arena: in the framework below the reader can find the mechanisms generating revenues and flows of money in this business and its main stakeholders, such as fans, clubs, players, sponsors, leagues and media. The focus of this thesis is mainly on fans, clubs and sponsors, as we will define *matchday experience solutions* giving direct benefits to fans and clubs, with the concrete possibility of indirect commercial opportunities for sponsors. Of course, the centre of everything is the fan, who makes this entire business possible, contributing with the *passion* for the game. As it emerges, media play an important role in this framework, since broadcast revenue is – almost in every case – the largest revenue stream of a modern football club, as we will see later in detail.



Source: A.T. Kearney analysis

Along with the advent of broadcasting, *globalization* had a key role in the expansion of football as a global industry. Indeed, the entrance of new international players in the European scenario – with huge expenditure possibilities – increased and strengthened the competition. It is interesting to notice that the 18% of European football clubs are now foreign-owned (with a controlling party, over 50% of shares), with a significant number in England – as this percentage is 60% in the Premier League and 58% in the Championship.

Foreign-owned clubs in the European Football	
Total	18%
Premier League	60%
Championship	58%
Serie A	20%
La Liga	15%
Bundesliga	17%
Ligue 1	25%



In the other big European leagues the situation is quite different, since in Serie A we find 20% of foreign-owned clubs, then 15% in La Liga, 25% in Ligue 1, and 17% in Bundesliga (UEFA, 2018).

Another interesting data is the origin of foreign owners, to be mainly from Asia (especially China, with 11 investments in European football from 2014 to 2017, such as FC Internazionale Milano and AC Milan), North America (e.g. Manchester United FC, Liverpool FC, AS Roma) and Middle East (e.g. Manchester City FC, Paris Saint-Germain). “*A proper IPO on European football*” (Bellinazzo, 2015): for example, Paris Saint-Germain was bought by *Qatar Investment Authority*, the Qatar sovereign investment fund built in 2005 to allocate money and resources from the oil industry into new markets for diversification reasons. And it is not the only investment from Qatar: they aggressively entered the French broadcasting market by launching *beIN Sports*, and they put – for the first time ever – a sponsor logo on FC Barcelona’s shirt, with *Qatar Foundation* before, and then with *Qatar Airways*, the state-owned flag carrier of Qatar.

2.2. The Situation of Italian Football

Italy was the centre of global football back in the '80s, when Serie A – “*the most beautiful championship in the world*” – dominated the world's attention, thanks to its teams and stars. This privileged role continued in the '90s, strengthened by the advent of *pay TV*, boosting Italian football revenues. Everything changed at the beginning of the new millennium, when England, Spain and Germany began new policies for football development, based on *internationalization* and the *improvement of the infrastructures* (Bellinazzo, 2015).

In Italy, football was in the hands of the so-called “*seven sisters*” – Juventus FC, AC Milan, FC Internazionale Milano, AS Roma, SS Lazio, ACF Fiorentina and Parma Calcio – and their “*Patron*”, who were the actors of a *mismanagement* leading Italian football to its decline. Indeed, their strategy was focused on a short-term vision, characterized by no planning for the future and no internationality, spending as much as they can (and even more) on big players, *just to win the Serie A of the year and beat their national rivals*.

In this way, the *cost structure* of Italian football clubs became extremely high and not sustainable, almost reaching the 100% of the cost of labour / revenues ratio in the 2001/02 season. To bear this huge burden, Italian clubs didn't begin a new and sustainable strategy – as England, Germany and Spain did – relying on financial *escamotages*, not pursuing a long-term vision for the future of national football.

We can see the results nowadays.

Indeed, Italy lost its throne, as it is the 3rd league in the UEFA ranking¹ today, and the 4th for the average club turnover (as you can see in the image in the next page) after Premier League, La Liga and Bundesliga (FIGC, AREL, PwC, 2017). Moreover, Italian clubs are in loss, if we consider the aggregate data: - € 250 million for Serie A, - € 63 million for Serie B and - € 59 million for Serie C clubs.

We saw that the development of football in England, Germany and Spain at the beginning of the millennium was based on internationalization and infrastructures. Indeed, if we consider the revenue streams of a football club, which are mainly three – *broadcasting* (45% of the total),

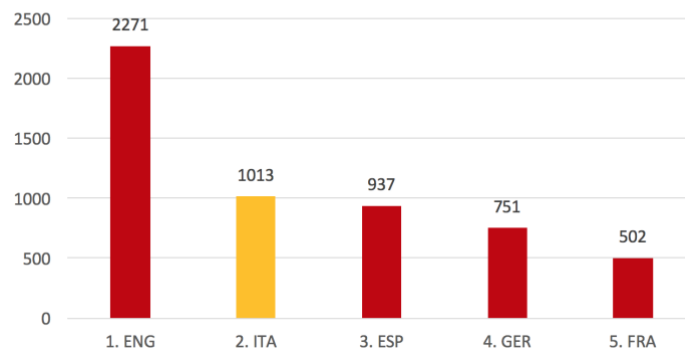
¹ UEFA, ranking for club competitions on June 10th, 2018:
<https://www.uefa.com/memberassociations/uefarankings/country/index.html>
Domenico Santoro

commercial (38%), and *matchday* (17%) (Deloitte, 2018) – Italy is in 2nd position for broadcasting revenues, but only in the 5th for the commercial and matchday ones (UEFA, 2018). This means that something went wrong here, and the reason why is clearly linked on the two areas mentioned above. Again, internationality and infrastructures.

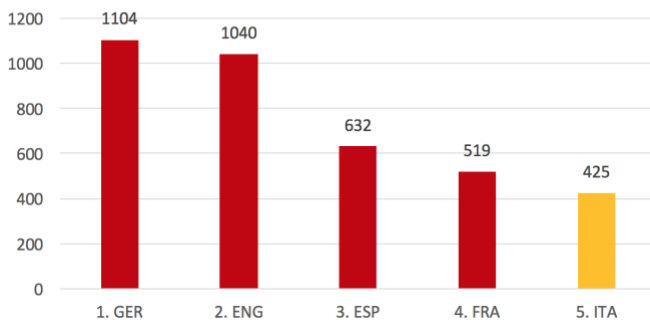
Football championships: average turnover per club			
			
€220m	€135m	€103m	€95m

Italian clubs: the average financial situation		
		
-€250m	-€63m	-€59m

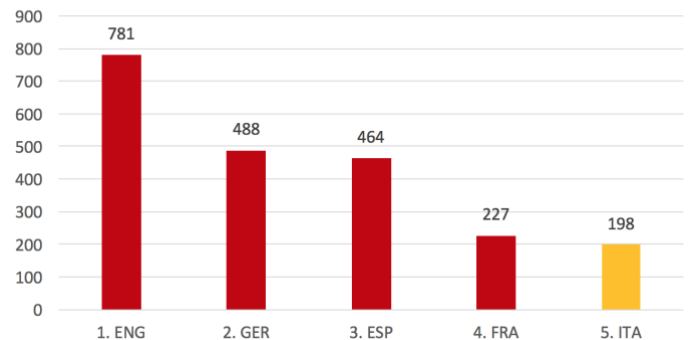
Top 5 | Broadcast (€m)



Top 5 | Commercial (€m)



Top 5 | Matchday (€m)



So, how to revitalize Italian football, for a long-term development strategy?

In my personal opinion, we must act on five different areas:






- Values: respect and fair play should be the bases of our football;
- Clubs: they must be managed as proper business firms, respecting rules with transparency and professionalism;

- Young players: betting more on them, creating the conditions for the development of a new generation of talents;

And, finally, the two mentioned above:

- Internationality: encouraging investments from abroad, as it happens in Premier League, without neglecting our traditions and values, for a “*Made in Italy*” product that is attractive on a global scale;
- Stadia: the situation of Italian stadia and the improvement of current infrastructures is a crucial point, the one we focus on this thesis.

Indeed, Italian football didn't invest in infrastructures: now we have this huge problem, with old (the average age of a Serie A stadium is almost 70 years old), decaying, inefficient and dangerous stadia. As we can see in the chart below, this is the poor situation of our stadia, if compared to other European championships.

Attendance for the 2015/16 season: FIGC Report data			
	Average Attendance	%Full	Unsold Tickets
	36'461	96%	643'720
	28'568	74%	3'912'556
	43'327	92%	1'136'535
	22'280	56%	6'584'699
	20'896	67%	3'918'617

What immediately emerges, is the brilliant situation in England and Germany, where stadia are full for the 96% and the 92%, respectively. If compared to Italy, where the percentage is 56, it is clear that Italy is in a poor position, for its old and inefficient stadia which are directly linked

to poorer matchday revenues, if compared to other leagues: so, we must do something for our football, to improve its competitiveness; we should plan a new generation of stadia, as it happened in Germany (thanks to the 2006 FIFA World Cup), where the average attendance per match is now 43'327, almost the double of our presence at the stadium, which has declined by 56% in 25 years, from 34'000 in 1989/90 to 22'280 nowadays (*Bellinazzo, 2015*).

3. The Matchday Experience

This is the *heart* of the project: introducing some strategic management concepts, the reader will understand how the “*Innovative Matchday Experience*” – which will be better defined later – could represent a *relatively* easy solution for Italian football right now, to reduce the gap with top European leagues in a short period, generating some positive externalities too, for clubs, sponsors and fans.

3.1. A Strategic Management tool for Italian clubs

We have seen in the previous chapter the situation of Italy, where the mismanagement of the last decades had led to the decline of Italian football. We have realised that the main issue is the lack of investments in stadia: indeed, this leads to poor results in terms of attendance and related-revenues, as we have seen that – among the top five European leagues – Serie A is only 4th for the average attendance (22’280), 5th for the stadium filling percentage (56%), and 1st for the number of unsold tickets (6’584’699); if we add the data relating to the main revenues streams, with Italy to be 5th both for matchday and commercial revenues, it is clear that we must do something for our football: we must invest in stadia, as we never did before. Indeed, there are two main investment’s categories to be considered:

- investment in infrastructures (**long-term** period): this is undoubtedly the direction to follow. Italian football needs new stadia, to improve the overall image and attractiveness of our tournaments, and to boost matchday and commercial revenues of our clubs: think about the case of FC Barcelona’s *Camp Nou* stadium tour, contributing to the tourism of the entire city, as 10% of Barcelona’s visitors come to the stadium, bringing 2.2 million people per year for a total of €45 million – which is more than the total revenue of half Serie A clubs together (*Calvo*, 2018). But, building a new stadium may require huge resources, a lot of time and permissions, so it is something that Italian clubs can put in their long-term strategy;
- investment in services (**short-term** period): to reduce the gap with the European *élite* in the short-period, Italian football clubs should invest in services offered at the venue on a matchday, as this is the focus of this thesis; moreover, doing so, clubs could start

imagining how to design their new stadia, including the matchday solutions proposed here.

So, this could be the *strategy* for Italian clubs: to focus on the level of services offered at the stadium, to increase **attendance** and **revenues** – reducing the gap in the short period – and to start planning their new stadia, to be designed with these services in mind.

Let's take a step back into strategic management theory. As defined by Michael E. Porter, strategy is “*the creation of a unique and valuable position, involving a different set of activities*”, and “*is about choosing and combining activities*” (Porter M.E., 1996). So, it means choosing which activities to do and which not to do, since competitive strategy is about being different and unique.

Porter said that, given C the cost of a product, P its price, and V the value perceived by customers, every firm can choose between two strategies:

- Low-cost Strategy: by lowering the price (P), working on lowering the cost structure;
- Differentiation Strategy: by increasing V , working on increasing the value perceived by customers.



Indeed, always according to Porter, “superior profitability goes to those firms that can create *superior value*, and the way to create superior value is to drive down the cost structure of the business and/or differentiate the product in some way, so that customers value it more and are

prepared to pay a premium price” (Marino, 2015). So, a company should deliver greater value to customers, or create comparable value at a lower cost.

Doing so, Italian football clubs can maximise the **consumer (fan) surplus**, that is the difference between the value perceived by fans (V) and the price of the ticket (P), and they can obtain a **competitive advantage** against their competitors.

But, which are the competitors of an Italian football club in this context?

We can define two major categories of them, reflecting two different aims of the football club:

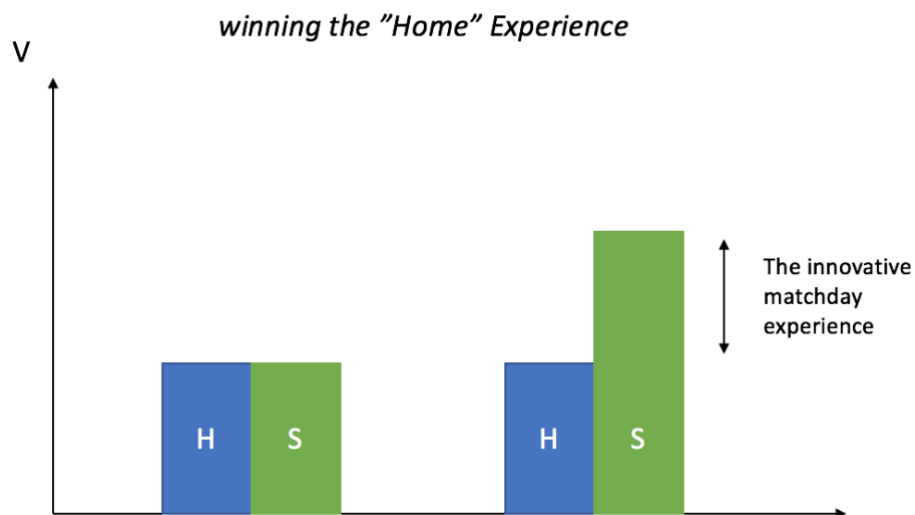
- Fan side: if the aim is to capture fans’ attention about the matchday, the correct question to ask is: “*which are the competitors of a football club, when a supporter thinks whether to go to the stadium or not?*” In this area, other football clubs don’t represent competitors, since – usually – fans choose a team once in their life, and don’t change this decision. So, the competitors in this particular context are mainly two:
 - the “home” experience:
“*Venues need to ensure they offer a more immersive experience than watching the game at home*” (Halicka, 2016). Indeed, “*why would someone shell out for a ticket and battle the elements and the traffic to come to our game, rather than enjoy the game from the comfort of their own home?*” (Rapid Retail, 2017). Nowadays, the “home” experience is more complete than ever, with various pay TV offers taking the fan to the centre of the action, with the additional benefit of the comfort of being at home;
 - other local entertainment options:
the matchday experience should be a more compelling and rewarding experience for the average fan and for the whole family who wants to spend a day out, if compared to other local entertainment options.
- Commercial side: here, instead, the aim is to capture the sponsors’ attention about the matchday, so the competitors are other football clubs. By designing innovative matchday experiences, clubs can obtain a competitive advantage towards other clubs

too, since it can boost matchday revenues and commercial revenues, thanks to the fact that the club can increase the number of activities on a matchday, giving sponsors new ways to broaden their brand and to get more data from fans, for an overall improvement of partnerships and sponsorships deals.

Italian Football Clubs: matchday competitors	
<u>Fan side</u>	<u>Commercial side</u>
<i>capturing fans' attention</i>	<i>capturing sponsors' attention</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Home Experience ➤ Other Entertainment Options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Other Football Clubs

So, how can a football club attract more people at the stadium – competing with the “home” experience and other local entertainment options – attracting sponsors’ money around the matchday?

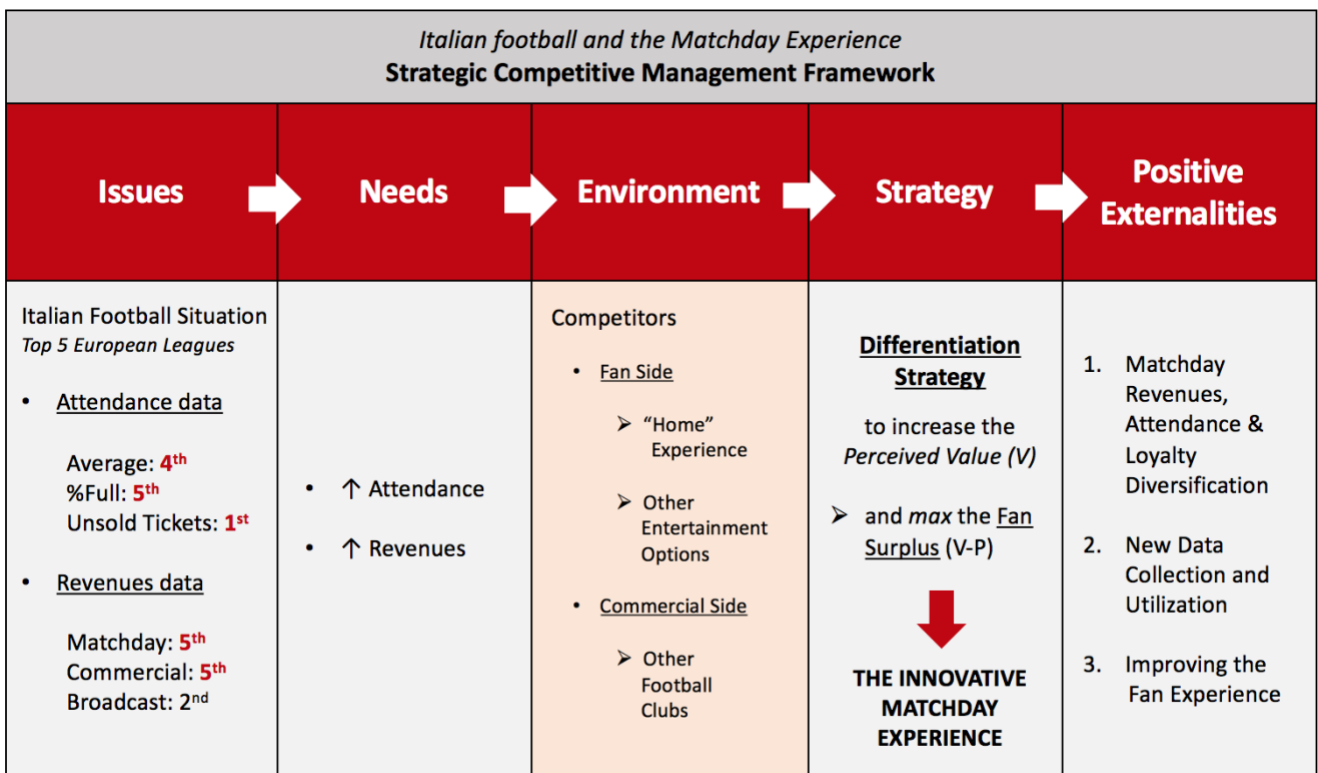
Since implementing a strategy means making trade-offs and choosing between alternatives – because without these trade-offs there would be no need for choice and thus no need for strategy (*Porter M.E.*, 1996) – Italian football clubs should not decrease the price (*P*) of their tickets – not to lose revenues, and so not to increase the existing gap in matchday revenues between Italy and the rest of Europe – but they should work on the value perceived by the fans (*V*), choosing a **Differentiation Strategy**.



For example, here you can see how the implementation of an innovative matchday experience could increase the perceived value (V) of the ticket for fans, in relation to the “home” experience: as Porter said, “a company can outperform rivals only if it can establish a *difference* that it can preserve”: so, Italian clubs must create and improve the *value* of the stadium experience.

Ok, but *how* can they do that?

By designing and implementing new matchday experience solutions, for example a fan village outside the stadium with entertaining activities for every fan for a complete pre and post match engagement, or a matchday-dedicated mobile app to boost the stadium experience, with features such as e-ticketing, e-access, food & beverage ordering, travel section, instant games, virtual/augmented reality and CRM. This means differentiating the stadium offer, in a value-creation logic, increasing the perceived value of the ticket for a more complete, engaging and easier experience. So, adding more to the simple football game. To understand how big is the room for improvement in Italy, just think that the average fan expenditure at the stadium for all the services offered (not including the ticket) is 3,50€: indeed, in England and Germany it is around 20€, thanks to the investments on infrastructures and services (Bellinazzo, 2015).



And many clubs are thinking about it nowadays. Of course, the main objective of a football club is to win on the field, earning money while giving fans the best emotions. Indeed, Juventus FC mission is “the club’s first aim is to give its fans the best sport satisfactions, and to create value for his shareholders and to maintain a trust relationship with his stakeholders” (*Juventus FC website*). Clubs should have the victory as their final aim – but focusing only on winning, and so on the sport result, can be not sustainable for a club that wants to perform as a business firm. Indeed, many clubs in Europe and in Italy, following the example from American sport clubs, are gradually changing their **strategic positioning** from “just winning”, to “create proper entertainment firms”. We can observe this change if we read the mission of SSC Napoli: “Napoli is pressing ahead with plans to evolve into a **diversified entertainment business**, offering its fans and partners more than just a football game by adding high quality shows and entertainment to its sporting events” (*SSC Napoli website*).

So, designing and implementing new matchday experiences, Italian football clubs can achieve two goals:

- reach the initial need to improve matchday attendance and its related-revenues;
- but it could bring Italian football clubs new benefits too, as the three positive externalities which will be explained in the next paragraph.

3.2. Positive Externalities

As we have just said, three positive externalities emerge from the implementation of an innovative matchday experience. In this paragraph, they will be explained in detail:

- attendance and loyalty diversification;
- data collection and utilization;
- fan experience improvement.

3.2.1. Matchday Revenues, Attendance and Loyalty Diversification

The first positive externality generating from the implementation of matchday experience solutions is matchday revenues, attendance and loyalty *diversification*. Let's divide it into two parts, for a better understanding of it.

- Revenues Balance for a Better Sustainability

Investing in the matchday experience is a great diversification measure because it can increase matchday revenues – and commercial ones too – trying not to excessively link the revenues of a club with the broadcast ones (as it is in Italy right now, with broadcast revenues to be the biggest piece of the cake by far): so, a more balanced revenue percentages from the three streams for a better balance and therefore a better long-term sustainability.

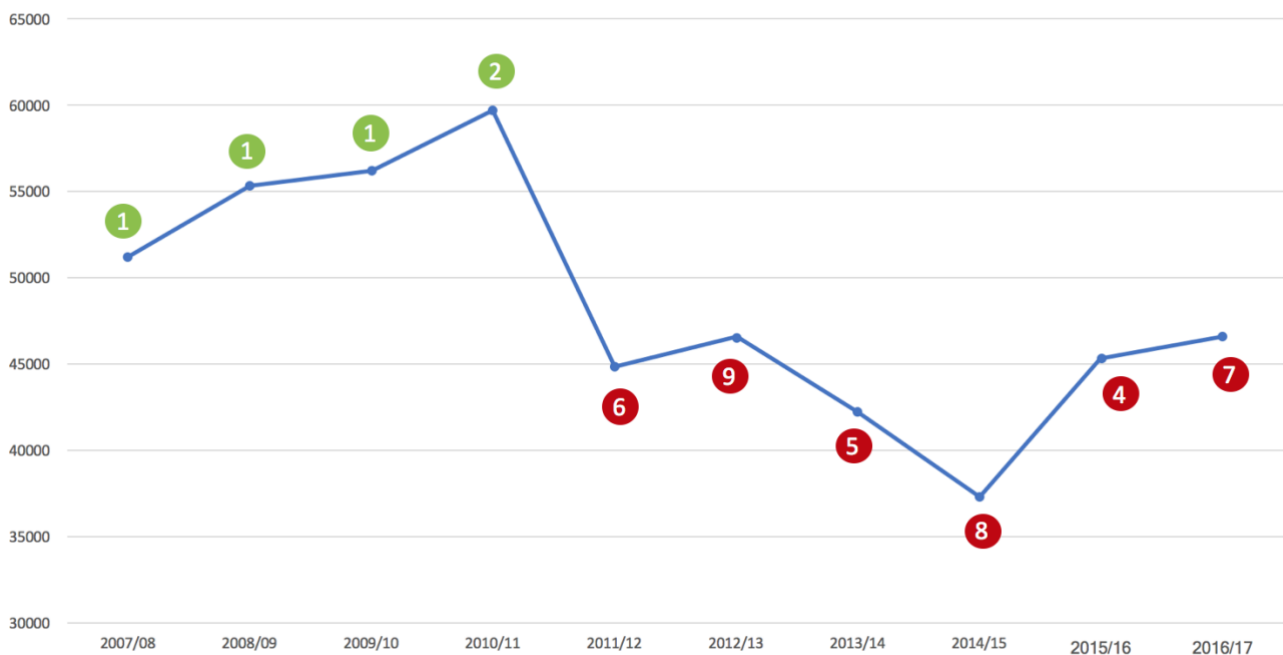
- Releasing Matchday Revenues, Attendance and Loyalty from Sport Result Uncertainty

We said previously that global football scenario has become more complex, since new players entered the arena with great economic power, and directors must manage a football club in an efficient way in order to compete, more than before. Even if football is a real business nowadays, it is mainly a sport. **This means that revenues use to come naturally from good performances, and so fans' loyalty.** Old football management remained anchored to the on-the-field success: a good season brought a good net income at the end of it, and a negative one a worse one.

Let's see an example from FC Internazionale: if we analyse the data over the last 10 seasons, we can clearly see how stadium attendance is strictly related to the on-the-field success.

Season	Average League Attendance	League Position
2007/08	51211	1
2008/09	55345	1
2009/10	56195	1
2010/11	59697	2
2011/12	44806	6
2012/13	46551	9
2013/14	42246	5
2014/15	37270	8
2015/16	45338	4
2016/17	46622	7

Average League Attendance (v. League Position)



Data from: <http://www.stadiapostcards.com>

Graphics: personal representation

So, it would be great if a club could have always a top stadium attendance, even if the team is not going well as expected (as it happens in Premier League, for example). This is relevant also because a modern football club must take in consideration the final

economic result more than before, and a proper football management can't rely anymore on random economic results based on the on-the-field success: new solutions must be found in order to stabilize the revenues. In this perspective, more and more clubs are implementing these fan-centred matchday solutions, to meet this need. So, we can say that the matchday experience is a strategic business tool for diversification, since it can increase and *stabilise* stadium attendance, so matchday revenues and fans' loyalty, releasing them from the randomness of the sport result.

Therefore, since clubs are global companies nowadays, they must have a more stable financial structure and revenue streams, if they want to keep competing at the highest levels. Implementing proper matchday solutions helps clubs to earn more from the fan, and therefore to have a stable revenue stream from the matchday, and a stable loyalty. In other words, clubs must not rely anymore only from the "on-the-field" success; with these solutions, they can diversify and create more stable conditions for a business to maintain and grow, which is essential nowadays.

3.2.2. Data Collection & Utilization

Thanks to matchday experience solutions – in particular, the fan village and the matchday-dedicated mobile app, working as new touchpoints – it will be possible to collect new data and utilize them to have great benefits. Indeed, fans are more than simple customers, and by building and nurturing the relationship with them, clubs have the chance to collect new and detailed data about their habits, preferences and behaviour at the stadium.

And, these new data can be the opportunity to revise many internal processes of a football club, to accelerate digital transformation. Digital transformation means much more than introducing new technologies; it means transforming the whole business by simplifying all the processes (*Startup Business*, 2016), eliminating manual errors and redundancy, and boosting the interaction between all the corporate functions in a new way. This naturally leads to a better efficiency and a significant cost and time reduction. Therefore, digital transformation is a crucial issue, and clubs should invest a lot in it: so. an opportunity to grow as a firm, which can bring a lot of benefits for the club.

During the week and in particular during the matchday, massive amounts of data are generated by fans, so collecting them efficiently and analysing them properly is a huge opportunity that clubs must take. Matchday experience solutions allow the club to gather new data, for example from the registration to participate to the fan village's activities, to the record of fan's habits (e.g. food & beverage preferences) through the mobile app.

So, it is essential that clubs re-acquire (*phase 1*) all the data-generating platforms which are external to the club (e.g. ticketing platforms, as it often happens in Italy to delegate third ticketing parties to manage this task), integrate (*phase 2*) all the existing and re-acquired data, and finally (*phase 3*) add the new matchday-collected data to build a *unique* platform for data management. Indeed, as stated in a study by *PwC, IFA and Exozet* (2014), the solution is a digitally *integrated* ecosystem approach.

So far, business functions of football clubs tend to use different technologies and gather data each one acting for itself alone: as a simple consequence, “*one and the same fan is engaging with one and the same club across multiple, mostly disconnected functions that are generally not coordinated with one another... making the transition to an integrated approach, clubs*

*could enable fans to truly experience the **entire** brand, rather than specific functions within the brand”.*

So, by building an integrated system, the club can reduce the distance for a closer relationship with its fans, make them feel the entire brand without confusion, and allowing the club to exploit the relationship with fans and sponsors, to boost monetization. The benefits of this approach can be summarized below.

3.2.2.1. Direct and Indirect Commercial Opportunities

By collecting detailed fans’ data and so knowing everything about them, the club can offer the best experience possible, fully tailored on their needs, boosting monetization and commercial opportunities. Indeed, if the club knows them exactly, it is easier to attract them with exclusive and customised messages finalised to monetization. This means, for example, sending push notifications with promotions on their favourite products – food & beverage or merchandising – at the right time of the day, even offering sometimes tailored gifts to enhance loyalty.

Partners and sponsors could be very interested in this data gathered: the club can sell this information to them, with this to *“help clubs to derive greater value from their contracts... as sponsors may soon be able to reach the exact audiences they want to address”* (PwC, IFA and Exozet, 2014).

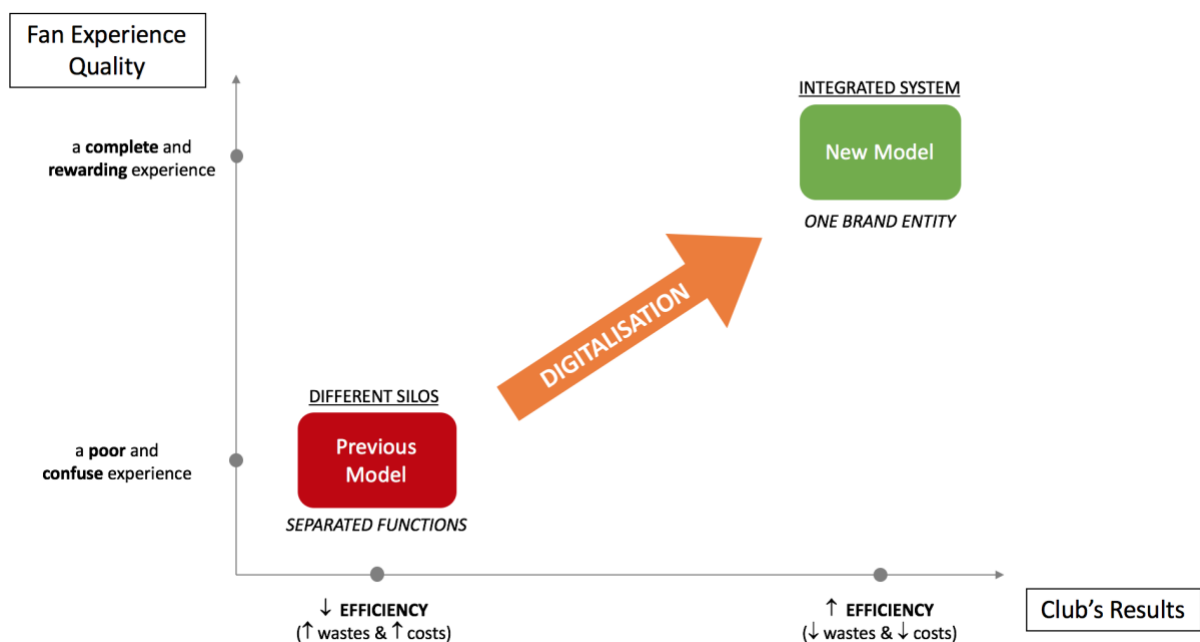
3.2.2.2. Improving CRM (FRM)

Matchday experience solutions are also tools to improve a lot the Consumer Relationship Management (CRM), or – in this case – Fans Relationship Management (FRM). Indeed, fan villages and matchday apps are other *touchpoints* for fans to interact with the club. For example, the fan village can have an info corner, and the mobile app can have a Customer (Fan) Care section to deal with special requests, giving fans all the information they need: all these features reduce the distance between the club and its fans, enhancing fan loyalty.

DATA COLLECTION AND UTILIZATION			
Phase 1: acquiring external data platforms		➤ building a unique and integrated ecosystem	
Phase 2: integrating old and re-acquired data			
Phase 3: adding the matchday-collected data			
1	Exploiting <u>direct</u> & <u>indirect</u> commercial opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more targeted and effective promotions • increased sponsor value 	Offering a personalised fan experience
2	Improving <u>Fan Relationship Management</u>	fans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less distance – closer relationship • no confusion – entire brand 	
			➤ MONETIZATION

In conclusion, we can see the chart above to summarise the importance of an efficient data collection and utilization. Building this integrated ecosystem, the club can accelerate its digital transformation process – which is essential nowadays – providing fans with the best and most customised experience possible, improving their relationship with the club, which can exploit this data by sending personalised promotions based on the information gathered, also selling this data to partners and sponsors: all this, with the final aim of monetization.

How Digital Transformation can help clubs and fans



3.2.3. Improving the Fan Experience

The implementation of an innovative matchday experience brings benefits not only for clubs, but also for fans – who remain undoubtedly at the centre of the whole business – and can enormously increase their loyalty towards the club.

The new fan, or the *Fan 4.0*, wants to do more than simply watching the game: he wants to participate and interact, feeling an active protagonist of the matchday, for a show that goes beyond the 90 minutes of the match. He wants an easier, more compelling and engaging day at the venue, and this is finally possible with the implementation of the innovative matchday experience.

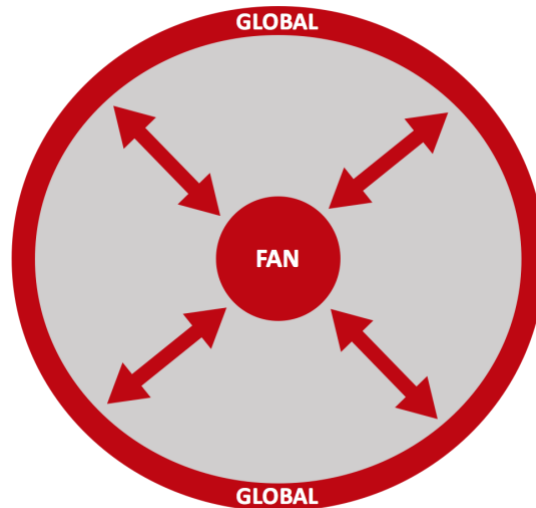
And clubs, designing it into their own stadium or including it in the new stadium project, can benefit from the so-called *Smart Arena*, which is more than a simple stadium, but a complete entertainment destination, a *connected* place which *connects* the fan with all the activities and infrastructures at the venue, on a matchday, to provide fans with the best experience possible – easier, customised and more compelling – with the final aim for the club to monetize from them.

In the past, the old sport marketing attention was on creating visibility, selling available spaces on the advertising boards, and signing partnership: all this, mainly on the local dimension (*IQUII Sport*, 2018, I).

Nowadays, football clubs became proper business firms, and marketing has increased its role. There are two main trends in the new sport marketing, one to wide its scope and one narrowing it:

- Global Dimension
Marketing departments have the responsibility to manage global *brands* all over the world, since globalization (and social networks) opened potentially infinite rooms for international commercial possibilities;
- The Fan at the centre

Clubs must generate exclusive and personalised contents to enter in touch with them (in most cases, switching from a standard *Marketing and Communication area* to a proper *Media Hub*), to have their attention, so their habits and preferences (data), to increase their loyalty and finally monetize.



Indeed, Marketing 4.0 saw the switch of the centre of the attention from the *product* to the *customer*, with the introduction of new technologies and new communication tools – *social networks* – to generate new customer behaviours and so new commercial opportunities.

And, since the focus is centred on the customer (*fan*) now, a new Sport Marketing Strategy 4.0 should be implemented².

The Sport Marketing Strategy 4.0 <i>converting passion in data, and data in money</i>		
Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
FAN	USER	MEMBER
<i>passion</i>	<i>data</i>	<i>money</i>

Phase 1 | Fan

Being a fan of a football club means *dedicating* the own passion to a football club. In the past, before the *Industry 4.0* and the introduction of modern technologies and social networks, clubs

² The *Fan – User – Member* scheme is a courtesy from IQUII Sport.
Domenico Santoro

struggled to overcome *Phase 1*, getting stuck in it. Indeed, clubs like Manchester United FC and Real Madrid CF have always had millions of fans all around the world, but they managed to *monetize* just the home fans, bringing them to the stadium. Thanks to the new innovations, the whole industry *opened up* (from a *close* system to an *open* one), with clubs to finally get something out of these big numbers of fans all around the world. Thanks to social media, clubs can always stay in touch with its global *fanbase*, increasing loyalty. But, in this phase, clubs don't have access to specific data about their fans, since this information belong to the social platforms.

Phase 2 | User

So, the importance of *Phase 2*. By registering, through digital or physical touchpoints such as the website, the mobile app, social networks, or even the fan village, clubs can acquire more specific data about their fans to implement engagement and loyalty strategies. Moreover, this allows the club to plan direct commercial promotions, or to sell these data to sponsors and partners, for indirect commercial opportunities.

Phase 3 | Member

When the fan decides to pay for membership schemes to access exclusive and personalised contents, the club can monetize directly.

And this scheme perfectly fits with the new matchday experience: just think about at the fan village and a matchday-dedicated mobile app, which can become new touchpoints where the fan can enter in contact with the club (and vice versa), for the conversion of the simple fan into user, and user into member, when he or she decides to subscribe and pay to enjoy exclusive contents.

3.3. Comparison Italy v. England: the Report

To deepen the analysis and to give more numbers on the Italian football's backwardness concerning the matchday experience, I prepared a report which summarises the presence of matchday experience solutions around Italy and England, after having analysed the situation of the first divisions of both countries – for a total of 86 clubs – for the 2017/2018 season.

The information found in the report is taken from the 86 official websites of the football clubs analysed: therefore, they have been chosen as reference point for this analysis, and, if an information was not available there, it cannot be included in the report. Obviously, for this reason, the report is subject to a little margin of error, even if I am confident that the information provided is 100% reliable.

Before going into the report's detail, let's define what is intended for matchday experience solution, and which are the ones I decided to analyse here.

Definition 1 | Matchday Experience Solution

It is something that *incentivizes* the fan to come to the stadium, and *improves* the overall matchday experience. The fundamental feature is that is something *matchday-exclusive*, which gives fans a more entertaining and easier experience at the stadium.

I defined as matchday experience solutions for this report the following two: Fan Zone (or Entertainment Area), and the Matchday-dedicated Mobile App.

Definition 1.2 | Fan Zone (or Entertainment Area)

An area with the presence of the following features:

- Entertaining activities (both for adults and kids, as live music, games, competitions, etc.)
- Food & Beverage corners
- Commercial activities (presence of sponsors and partners, also in the name of the area)
- Possibility to gather new and precious fans' data





This category includes the proper fan zones, and the similar ones, such as in-stadium entertainment areas.

Definition 1.3 | Matchday-dedicated Mobile App

Not a common app with news, stats and general information about the club, but a matchday-dedicated app, with *exclusive* contents and features *enabled only* for the matchday, or *useful only* for the matchday, for ticket-holders.

Even if the characteristics that could be mapped are several, I decided to focus my analysis on food & beverage in-app options, which give interesting results.

In the chart below, you can see the results of this report.

The Matchday Experience Report: Italy v England		
	Fan Village or Entertainment Area	Matchday-dedicated Mobile App – F&B Feature
	35,00%	0,00%
	0,00%	0,00%
	55,00%	15,00%
	83,33%	4,17%

As it emerges, Italy is still in a poor position if compared to England. We can find the 35% of Serie A clubs that are already implementing a solution like a fan village or an entertainment area (as defined above), but no Serie B club adopts it. In England, the situation is enormously different, since 55% of Premier League clubs have fan villages or similar outside their stadium, but what is more interesting to notice is that this percentage in the Championship is more than the 83%: this is a crucial point, as it highlights how English smaller clubs, in order to attract fans and families to the stadium, try to provide them entertainment areas for a more complete and rewarding day at the venue. Talking about food & beverage in-app purchasing options, **there is no Italian club using it, at the moment.** And, in England, even if with smaller

Domenico Santoro

percentages than the fan village, clubs are trying to include this feature in their stadium offer (15% for Premier League, and 4,33% for Championship).

I hope the reader can find these numbers interesting, and that they can stimulate some reflections, especially for the big room for improvement we have on the implementation of these solutions.

3.4. Interesting Best Practices across Europe

After having studied the situation in Europe about matchday experience solutions, some interest cases emerged, and they certainly deserve to be mentioned and examined in detail. Since we previously defined two categories of matchday experiences – the fan village and the matchday-dedicated mobile app – two interesting examples per category will be given here, analysing the situation of Liverpool FC and Manchester City FC for their fan villages, and Chelsea FC and OGC Nice for their special matchday-dedicated mobile apps.

3.4.1. Fan Village | Liverpool FC & Manchester City FC

Fan villages are becoming areas to make fans living the venue beyond the classic 90 minutes of the game: here, we will see how Liverpool FC and Manchester City FC went in this direction. In the complex context defined in the introduction of the thesis, is it necessary that an ambitious football club has a functional and capacious stadium for the club's and fans' needs. So, in the early 2000s, Liverpool FC was about to plan the move to another stadium, not satisfied with the 45000 capacity of Anfield and its limits, in terms of area and possibility to renovation.

But it is not possible to cancel over 120 years of history, so a new and innovative regeneration project was initially announced in 2012, with the permission given in 2014, for a 20-months work which saw the complete renovation of Anfield in the 2016/17 season. As Ian Ayre, former Liverpool FC CEO, said: *“Why would we ever move from here? ... our aim is to make Liverpool FC better, stronger, modern and forward-thinking, but at the same time respecting the history and ensuring that the values that this institution was built on remain ingrained in it”*. So, the project *“to transform the Anfield area and make it a better place to live, work and visit”* (Liverpool FC website).

Indeed, although the core of this work was the renovation of the *Main Stand*, with 8500 new seats (also with new hospitality offers and wheelchair viewing positions) added to make the Main Stand one of the largest single stands in the European football, the £260m project was more than a simple stadium enlargement. Thanks to the collaboration with Liverpool City Council, the *Anfield Regeneration Project* completely renovate the area outside the stadium, making it a better neighbourhood to live in: hundreds of new and renovated homes, new businesses, environmental improvements, community facilities and hundreds of jobs

opportunities: this is the legacy of this huge project, which is a great benefit for the local community.

And, of course, to benefit fans for a better matchday experience. Indeed, Liverpool FC opened two fan villages outside Anfield, the *Paisley Square* and the *Family Park*, at the two sides of the new Main Stand's road area. These fan villages have been designed with supporters in mind, as places for families and friends to meet before the game. They are invited to come to the stadium in advance, as the fan villages open four hours prior to kick-off, to soak up the atmosphere, while enjoying live entertainment (live music, freestyler shows, and a Liverpool FC TV studio), interactive activities (competitions and two five-a-side pitches) and a various food and beverage offering, and the possibility to enjoy a better shop experience in the new club's store situated next to Paisley Square.

In this way, Liverpool FC has taught everyone how to combine history with innovation, to offer the community a better place to live, and fans a greater matchday experience. A great example to follow.



Images: theanfieldwrap.com & mancify.com

To allow fans making the most of their matchday, Manchester City FC opened “*City Square*”, the fan village outside *Etihad Stadium* (*Manchester City FC* website). The peculiarity of this village is that it is not only open for the pre-match, but also after the match, for a unique and *longer* entertainment offer. The fan zone opens two and a half hours before kick-off, and it

includes live entertainment with live music performance from bands, DJs and comedians, activities such as competitions and interactive games with the possibility to win exclusive prizes, three large screens, a main stage with special guests, and two bars. And, at the end of the match, the fan zone reopens to offer the post-match analysis.

3.4.2. Matchday App | Chelsea FC & OGC Nice

Another great matchday experience solution is a dedicated matchday app, with special features enabled just for the matchday, to improve the fan experience. In Europe, very few clubs adopted such solutions, but this can be the innovative tool for the new matchday experience of the future, thanks to *smart stadia*. I decided to give here two examples, by Chelsea FC and OGC Nice.

Chelsea FC, in collaboration with *Levy Restaurants UK*, launched the “**CFC Express**” mobile app, the official catering app of the club (*CFC Express* website), developed by *Stadiaconnect*. It is designed to offering loyal fans the best possible service, offering them a great choice of food for every preference – as it provides the largest food & beverage option of the Premier League, with more than 200 options available – making fans save time ordering directly through the app. There are two collection options: prior to kick-off (from 60 to 9 hours before) and half-time, and fans can pay by card, taking advantage of the discount pricing. It also provides in-seat delivering for the front row fans with limited mobility. At the F&B corner, there is the express lane for app holders only. Moreover, the app will remind you when the order is ready for pick-up, through push notifications. Fans can receive offers and discounts, such as “*one free product for first time users, as well as other time-sensitive offers that encourage guests to order at certain points in the day, helping to minimise busy periods*” (*Service Works Group*, 2017). And, fans’ feedbacks are great: “*It’s great to be able to beat the queues by ordering in advance*”. Moreover, Chelsea FC have plans to improve the app to deliver a more personalised service thanks to fans’ data collection.

In European football right now, maybe the most complete app of this genre is the one of OGC Nice. Its stadium, the *Allianz Riviera*, was built in 2013 and is a “*multi-functional venue*”, suitable for sports and shows, which is completely sustainable, to reduce its impact on the environment, and a fully-connected stadium (*Allianz Riviera* website). Indeed, it is connected to the 4G technology, it has various Wi-Fi hotspots, and it offers fans outstanding services, included in the “*Allianz Riviera **Expérience Stade** Mobile App*”. It is designed in collaboration

with *VOGO Sport*, a French start-up, and it exploits geolocation and the stadium Wi-Fi (as Allianz Riviera has 467 Wi-Fi terminals, installed by *Cisco*, that can bear up to 10000 connections at a time at high speed), for a unique matchday experience, which cannot be found in another European club for its completeness (*IQUII Sport*, 2018, II). The app can be used *exclusively* while at the stadium, since it first requires the connection with the Allianz Riviera HD Wi-Fi, and has mainly three extra features (*Allianz Riviera* website):

- **Live&Replay:** through the app, the fan can access exclusive live replays thanks to multiple cameras connected, with the possibility to choose the angulation, zoom in and out, slow-motion, rewind and pause. This feature is relevant because it improves the fans' stay at the venue against the competition of the "*home*" experience, offering them all the benefits of technology while enjoying the power of "live".
- **Interactive Map:** thanks to geolocation, the app recognises the fans' position and shows them the nearest points of interest, such as stadium entrances, stands, entertainment options, bar and other services.
- **Come to Me:** thanks to this exclusive service, fans can order food & beverage or merchandise, purchasing online and cashless, and get the order directly to their seat. It represents the definitive solution to queues at food & beverage and merchandising corners, as fans can easily order whatever they want, paying directly through the app and waiting for the product to be delivered at the seat, with no extra fees.

Moreover, thanks to the app, the fan can purchase tickets for the next match or event at the stadium, can have real-time information on transports, live-match commentary and stats, and exclusive videos.



Images: ogcnice.com & cfcexpress.uk

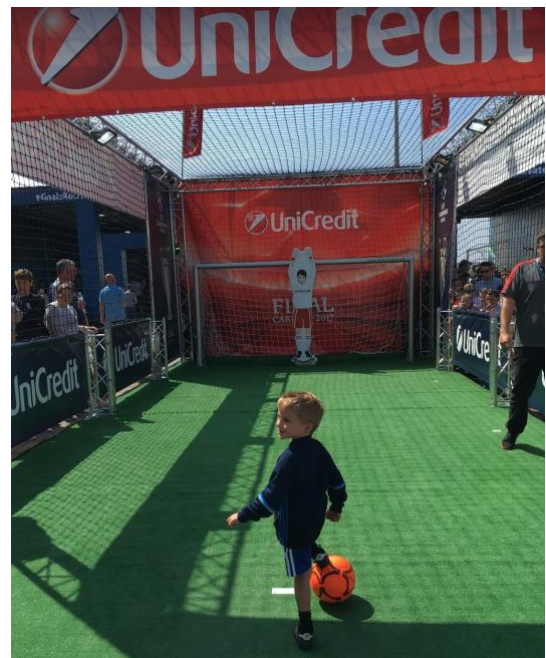
3.4.3. UEFA Champions League Final: my matchday experience as a volunteer

I had the privilege to volunteer for the UEFA Champions League final 2017 in Cardiff and 2018 in Kyiv, seeing directly how UEFA manages the matchday and all the activities related.

In Cardiff, I was selected to work in the “*Champions Festival*”: it is a huge fan village organised every year since the 2006 final in Paris, giving sponsors the possibility to increase their brand awareness, and local community and fans a matchday that goes far beyond the 90 minutes of the game, for 3 days of free entertainment and compelling activities. It included (*Football Association of Wales website*):

- Main Stage: for local and global artists’ performances and fan engagement activities;
- Champions Floating Pitch: a five-a-side football floating pitch, hosting the “*Ultimate Champions Match*” played by UEFA Champions League’s all time legends, and local community activities such as matches for young people, for people who have lack of mobility (i.e. *walking football*) or who are deaf, or for refugees;
- Champions Gallery: a proper museum, celebrating UEFA Champions League history;

- UEFA Champions League Trophy Experience: each fan had the possibility to shoot one photo with the famous trophy;
- UEFA partners' activations: every sponsor had the opportunity to feature in the village, as UEFA gave each of them a space to promote their brand, linking it to a UEFA Champions League's activity, giving fans the possibility to win exclusive prizes and tickets for the final. Here are some examples:
 - *Sony PlayStation*: a virtual reality (VR) arena was built, to let fans live the final as protagonists of it, for an immersive and rewarding experience;
 - *UniCredit*: an area with a robot playing as a goalkeeper to challenge to score the goal, suitable for younger fans.
 - *Adidas*: since it is the official technical supplier of the competition, it had a huge superstore inside the village;



The Innovative Matchday Experience



Image: UEFA Champions Festival Map in Cardiff, UEFA.com

And this is a winning concept that could be used in Italy too, for example for the League Cup final, to attract more people around this event, being a useful tool for sponsors, fan engagement

and fan monetization, trying to improve the image of the tournament, which certainly needs a renovation.

4. Matchday Experience Direct Contributions and Recommendations

This chapter represents the final part of this project, and wants to analyse the matchday experience situation in three different levels of Italian football: Serie C, Serie B and Serie A. Indeed, I had the opportunity to interview representatives from three clubs belonging to these leagues, respectively Olbia Calcio, Frosinone Calcio and AS Roma. After their direct contribution, I tried to give some recommendations to improve their matchday experience.

4.1. In Serie C | Olbia Calcio: boosting Attendance and Fan Engagement in minor leagues

I visited Olbia, in Sardinia (Italy), asking directly to club's representatives and observing how a matchday evolves inside and outside the stadium, for the Olbia v. Alessandria game, played on 24th March 2018.

Indeed, not only big clubs can work on the matchday experience: even smaller clubs can do something that matters, offering a pleasant, easy, and engaging experience at the venue, bringing benefits to both lower leagues' fans and clubs.

The main goal for the club is always the same: to maximise the matchday attendance. And, as stated by the FIGC Report (2017), stadia in Serie C are full *just* for the 28%: so, the implementation of matchday experience solutions can definitively help here.

Bringing as many people as possible and offering them the best solutions tailored to the club's possibilities and their needs, it means optimising the situation, enhancing fan loyalty and earning more matchday revenues, from ticketing, food & beverage, merchandising and other activities. The key is to provide an offer they are enthusiast to buy, to make them feel part of something, living the matchday as a protagonist, making them come back the next home games: so, as we said in the chapter about strategy, **to enrich the value of the ticket price**, by adding services and experiences.

Clubs that have the possibility, should build their new stadium with the fan in mind, optimising areas and flows to enrich the fans' journey at the venue and maximise their expenditure. But, if the club wants to renovate its current stadium, it can do something relevant too.

Direct Observation & Issues

Olbia Calcio 1905 is a football club playing in the 3rd Italian league, Serie C, in the “Bruno Nespoli” Stadium, which has a capacity of 3209.

During my stay in Olbia, I interviewed Matteo Sechi, *Communication and Press Office Manager*, and Stefano Sambati, *Social Media Manager* of the club. They kindly helped me, providing a lot of information. As explained by them, dealing with the matchday experience there are **3 major issues** for Olbia Calcio:

1. **Budget.** Of course, Serie C clubs do not have the same budget of big clubs, as they have small revenues, with the majority of them coming for young players' utilization on the pitch from the Italian football association. Commercial and matchday revenues are relatively small, as currently the ticket price range goes from 10 to 25€, and there are not great services offered at the venue.
2. **Stadium.** The “Bruno Nespoli” Stadium is an old one, and not optimised at the best. It should be redeveloped, as it requires a screen (useful both for commercial and fan engagement options), a new food & beverage corner, a new hospitality area and a small fan village.



Image: olbiacalcio.com

3. **Fans.** The average Olbia supporter is middle-aged or above, a person who just want to watch the match, and doesn't want to change his/her routine. Therefore, new matchday solutions are difficult to be implemented as they won't be valued by them.

The Serie C Matchday Experience Package

After having examined the issues, we discussed about possible matchday experience implementations. It is possible to design a "Matchday Experience Package" for Serie C clubs, a *standardisable* solution tailored to their needs and possibilities. It should include:

- a **small fan village**. To be built outside the stadium, with a few stands, its aim should be to create curiosity, to increase matchday attendance, making the fan stay more than the classic 90 minutes of the game. So, a place for the whole family, participating in the initiatives and buying directly from the club, with services like:
 - ✓ improvement of the food & beverage option: 3 or 4 stands should be dedicated to this, offering the fan an incentive to go to the stadium before the kick-off. The key is that the food & beverage option should be customised according to the **local culinary culture** of the region where the club plays in. In Italy, we have an outstanding food tradition and this could be a way to make more fans buying the ticket, also the away side, which can be interested in the particular offer of the home club. Therefore, food & beverage corners should be designed in collaboration with **local sponsors**, as this is another way to increase commercial revenues too.
 - ✓ a fan information point: fans need to be informed and guided throughout the matchday. They must feel welcomed, safe, and treated well. If they have any questions, staff members should be ready to answer to provide the best fan experience ever.
 - ✓ an engagement area: with compelling and involving activities both for kids and older fans, such as competitions, football skills activities, live music, and eSports tournaments.
 - ✓ official store: with home club official products, to boost matchday revenues.

- ✓ an away welcome area: what if you think about a place where home and away fans could stay together in a rugby style, exchanging opinions and spend some time together before and after the game? It could not just be a dream.
- a **matchday-dedicated mobile app**. Thanks to its engaging features, this app should involve fans in an exclusive way, thanks to the **beacons technology**, a geolocation service which enables the app functionality only inside the venue, sending the fan dedicated offers through push notification and making the fans competing in games and competitions, offering them the possibility to win exclusive prizes.

Home fans should register to enjoy this package, getting a special **Matchday Membership**. Doing so, they can enjoy all the fan village activities and stands, participate to all the app exclusive initiatives, and benefit from local sponsors' special discounts. On the other side, the club can have access to a new and huge amount of data, also live habits, for direct and indirect (sponsors) commercial opportunities, also thanks to the mobile app push notifications.

Thanks to this package, it is possible to work on the *three main key words* emerged during the meeting: young fan engagement, local environment development and respect & integration.

1. **Young Fan Engagement**. We saw that the age of the average fan is an issue, and additionally the matchday attendance is not big (for the game attended, there were just 1100 people, the 34% of the stadium capacity). So, Serie C clubs like Olbia should target young fans to begin a new era, involving them in activities to make their stay at the venue compelling and exclusive. Young fans can enjoy the fan village outside the stadium, and be involved in exclusive contents through the app. For example, they can play the "Matchday Quiz", where they can earn points to enter special rankings (one per matchday and one for the whole season) to win amazing and exclusive prizes and experiences, such as a half-time penalty. Moreover, they can shoot exclusive customised photos thanks to the official in-app stickers, sharing them on social networks to increase the club's brand awareness.
2. **Local Environment Development**. The fan village should have local food & beverage, to promote the culinary variety of the particular region where the club plays in, and

could be the opportunity for local companies to develop their brand in the community and beyond, as a place for visibility, to grow as a business.

3. **Respect and Integration.** The fan village could be a new place to gather home and away fans in a new way, for a new Italian football culture of respect and integration, starting from minor leagues. Therefore, along the local food & beverage stands, one stand could be dedicated to the away culinary culture too: this is also an interesting way to make the fan village always new, to attract home fans at every single match.

How to boost Attendance and Fan Engagement in minor leagues: the Olbia Case		
max • Attendance → • Fan Engagement		
%Full: • 28% in Serie C • 34% for the Olbia v Alessandria game		
<u>3 main Issues</u>	<u>3 main key words</u>	The Solution
	<i>where we have to focus on</i>	
• Small Budget	• Young Fans	• Fan Village <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities • F&B • Stores • Info Point • Away Welcome Area
• Inefficient Stadium	• Local Dimension	
• The Average Fan	• Respect & Integration	
		• Matchday App <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Games & Contests • Social Features • Local Offers

4.2. In Serie B | Frosinone Calcio: a special bond for the matchday experience

Frosinone Calcio, playing in the second Italian football league (Serie B) in the 2017/18 season, is a positive and unique case in Italian football right now. The club is having a rapid commercial growth, and it has a marketing structure not inferior to a Serie A club, since many activities have been carried out by Frosinone marketing department.

The club has gathered all the marketing-related activities under the name “*Frosinone Experience*” (Frosinone Calcio website, I), with the aim to create value for fans, sponsors, the local environment and the club, developing and spreading its brand. Talking about the local environment, the club gives financial resources to boost no-profit projects aiming to promote the social and cultural growth of the Province of Frosinone, encourages sports’ values and integrity at schools, organises and sponsors events to promote the local territory, gastronomy and culture.



Image: frosinonecalcio.com

And, of course, the realization of the new “Benito Stirpe” stadium, “*designed to leave something to the environment and its community*” (Frosinone Calcio website, II), which is one of the five club-owned stadia in Italy, and the first and only one in Serie B. The project has two phases: the first saw the inauguration of the stadium, while the second is in action now, with the aim to improve the area surrounding it. The club opted for a **crowdfunding** to build new infrastructures around the stadium (*Il Messaggero*, 2018), such as club’s marketing department offices, the store, the Frosinone Pub and finally the **Frosinone Village**, to improve the

matchday experience, which could be ready by the end of 2018. Indeed, the club started a crowdfunding with Tifosy³, the world's first sports investment platform founded by Fausto Zanetton and Luca Vialli (*Tifosy website*), helping clubs thanks to funding provided by their own supporters, for a total of €1.5 million raised. As explained by Nicola Verdun, *Head of Tifosy in Italy and Spain*, they are 5-year bonds, that can be underwritten from a minimum of 500€: they will offer a return of 8% per year, 5% cash and 3% as credits with the club (to buy tickets or merchandising). 371 subscribers participated in the initiative, for an average of 4000€ per fan. And, at the end of the 5 years, fans will have their original investment back. Maurizio Stirpe, *Frosinone's President*, said that they chose this type of financing because they deeply believe that doing so the link between fans and club can become stronger, as if the stadium was their home.

So, thanks to IQUII I had the privilege to interview Salvatore Gualtieri, Marketing Director of the club, about Frosinone's marketing strategies around the matchday, and especially about the new Frosinone Village.

Interview

Mr. Gualtieri, thanks for having accepted to answer my questions about the matchday experience.

1. How the fan experience at the stadium is important for Frosinone? Is Frosinone thinking of topics such as *Fan Engagement, Fan Loyalty, Fan and Data Monetization*?

The fan experience at the stadium is at the centre of Frosinone project. We have just built our new stadium, the "Benito Stirpe", a place where our fans feel at home and are proud of. The philosophy of our management is that the club belongs to the fans – as it should be – since the club represents the sense of belonging and the passion of our fans, as well as their identity in our land. Our idea of football goes beyond football itself, as it includes the promotion of the sound values of sport in younger generations, and the promotion and development of our land, with a strong commitment in it through supportive initiatives. And, obviously, we do this with

³ Tifosy website. <https://www.tifosy.com/en>

our Frosinone brand, developing it to build stronger relationships with our sponsors, with which we create a special and emotional link that is stronger and stronger. So, starting from this, it is understandable that topics such as fan engagement, loyalty and fan and data monetization are fundamental for us: we created – in the marketing department – a specific area with professionals dealing with these topics on a daily basis.

2. Was the new “Benito Stirpe” Stadium built and optimised with these logics in mind?

Of course it was built thinking about these logics, indeed we immediately created a new official merchandising line, which is high-quality and complete of everything, building the Frosinone Store at the stadium. It is the cornerstone of continuous fan engagement initiatives, and in the future it will be used even more for this reason. But it is the entire stadium area that will gather fans: outside the stadium we have already done some events, such as a fair where all our sponsors presented their products to the general public. Moreover, it will be inaugurated soon the Frosinone Village, which will change fans’ habits and it will be the most effective tool for fan engagement.

3. So, how the Frosinone Village will be structured like?

*There will be 12 boxes managed by our sponsors, an emotional area with videos, a kids’ area, a music area, a temporary area to present particular products or to launch new products for our sponsors, an eSports area, an area dedicated to the development of new ideas from young people, and a multifunctional area for events and to welcome away fans. Talking about food and beverage, the majority of boxes will be used for this purpose. The village will be built in collaboration with our sponsors, and it will be open for everyone, even without the matchday ticket, **also during the week for all the local community to enjoy.***

4. According to you, which will be its impact? Which strategic goals did you set?

*Certainly, parameters like stadium attendance, loyalty, and average residence time (i.e. time spent at the venue) will increase. But, the real aim is **the ambition to change the fans’ habits**, taking them at the stadium 3 hours before the kick-off with friends and all the family, for a true place and moment of social aggregation for all our fans of the province of Frosinone, to share*

the desire of being together, to spend some pleasant time, whatever you have the matchday ticket or not.

5. Which will be the next steps and the future strategies to improve the Village's offer?

We still have a lot of space outside the stadium, and – if the village will work as we believe – it could double its size. Moreover, other activities are planned like a sport track around the stadium, to take more and more people in the stadium area, and the Frosinone Pub will open, inside the stadium, as a daily meeting point for fans from all the Frosinone province, for Frosinone managers, and players.

Mr. Gualtieri, thanks for your precious contribution and time.

Recently, the club signed a partnership with IQUII, to become the club's official digital partner, for the development of the *SportXP platform*⁴, for a complete fan engagement project starting with the launch of the club's official mobile app. This includes photo and video gallery, updated news, fixtures, live commentary for every match, social contents published by the club, quizzes to climb the ranking, and the official Frosinone Calcio stickers for the main messaging apps. Therefore, talking about possible matchday recommendations for the club, the two parts could strengthen their partnership to take this platform a step further, implementing a whole section dedicated to the matchday, with features to boost fan engagement and the interaction of fans with the stadium and the village, as well as providing fans food & beverage options via app.

⁴ IQUII SportXP Platform. <https://sportxp.net/>

4.3. In Serie A | AS Roma: design the “Stadio della Roma” for the optimal Fan Journey

AS Roma is one of the biggest Italian football clubs, and it was acquired by American businessmen in 2011, with a mission in mind: to take and maintain the club at the top of international football.

The new management restructured the club as a proper business firm, making a lot of efforts to go in the direction of sustainability – collaborating with UEFA for the *Financial Fair Play*, while keeping high the competitiveness of the team – and in the direction of revenues’ diversification, focusing on marketing department development and innovative digital strategies, as the club is now the 16th most followed in Europe and the 4th in Italy, with a total fanbase of 13.4 million on social networks (*IQUII Sport*, 2018, III).

In this direction of sustainability and revenues’ diversification, AS Roma made a lot of efforts to provide fans with a better matchday experience over these years, even if “Stadio Olimpico” is not the perfect venue for football, as the distance between stands and the pitch is relevant. Indeed, they were the first Italian club to introduce a fan village outside the stadium, as in 2012 the “*Cuore Sole Village*” was born. The fan zone underwent several improvements, and a new and innovative concept of matchday entertainment was introduced in the late 2017, when “*La Magica Land*” opened.

Described as an “*innovative, interactive and multi-sensory village*” (*AS Roma*, 2017), it has a main stage, several attractions and a food & beverage area designed with the partner “*Birra Peroni*”: it was created to give fans a new and engaging stadium experience, making them stay more at the venue. Moreover, another advantage is data collection: indeed, to fully experience all the activities offered, fans should register at *lamagicaland.it*, based on IQUII’s *EventXP*⁵ technology for a better management and measurement of the event.

I met Andrea Fabbricini, *Fan & Stadium Activation Manager* at AS Roma, in his office at Trigoria (the club’s training centre) to ask him about “*La Magica Land*”, since he directly works on it, and how AS Roma deals with the matchday experience.

⁵ *IQUII Sport*, EventXP. <http://eventxp.it/>



Image: sportbusinessmanagement.it

Interview

1. How much and how the fan experience at the stadium is important for AS Roma?

It is certainly important, like it is for every other football club. AS Roma works on two levels at the same time: fan engagement during the week, and during the matchday.

*Talking about the first one, in the recent years the club had a huge growth under the digital profile, investing a lot in the **Media Center**, with the official TV and radio of the club. We interact with our fans with exclusive contents, 7/7, 24/7. But this is not enough, because – especially our local fanbase – is strictly affected by what happens on the matchday, and of course on the pitch. **So, a game to be played in parallel:** for the matchday part, now that we still don't have our own stadium, and with all the difficulties in Rome linked to logistics (how to arrive at the stadium, parking, public transports), our aim is to do the best we can to improve the matchday experience and increase its duration, beyond the 90 minutes of the game.*

2. So, AS Roma opened “La Magica Land”. Which are its strategic aims?

*We opened “La Magica Land” **challenging the old concept of fan village**: no inflatables or similar, – even if they are cheaper and easier to assemble and disassemble – but more important structures to align with the premium positioning we are trying to adopt at AS Roma. Our **target** changed too: before, the focus was mainly on children and their families, now we are trying to introduce activities to wider our target, offering interesting experiences to adult fans too – such as the virtual reality – for an attractive place for everyone.*

*Indeed, we try to have **cross contents** on our main stage at the village, working in synergy with our Media Center: we take to the village two Roma TV formats, such as “Siamo la Roma Junior”, engaging kids and their families talking about football with them, and “Slideshow”, taking our former legends at the village, stimulating the attention of our older fans: so, **two different formats to attract two different targets**.*

*Moreover, having switched to this new concept of fan village, was important for **commercial** reasons too, involving **a wider range of companies** in our activities. We managed to do it partially last year, and we hope to do better in the future. What it is essential, is that partners link their commercial purpose with engagement activities under the AS Roma brand in the village, to attract our fans: otherwise, it would have no sense.*

*Talking about **digital engagement**, it is not easy to implement such solutions as the stadium doesn't provide a Wi-Fi, and in the most important games connectivity becomes a problem. We started to implement cross engagement activities between what happens in the village and inside the stadium: we invite fans to post messages with the hashtag “La Magica Land” about their experience at the village, and the best messages are shown on led screens; we could do it since we acquired a new software to manage live the contents published on led screens.*

3. Which are the issues and challenges you face in your work?

We have three main challenges to deal with: the control over the stadium and its spaces, the logistics of a complicated city like Rome, and to have a sustainable cost structure.

*The stadium is owned by CONI, and it is shared with SS Lazio and other events. **We take control of it just 24 hours before the match:** so, we cannot work in a stable and permanent way on it. And, we don't have control over the services offered at the venue, since food & beverage, for example, is managed by CONI, who signs contracts with third parties as providers.*

*Talking about **logistics**, we are investing in it: we signed partnerships with Uber, Moovit, Waze, Car2Go and ZigZag for the sharing mobility, to give small but initial benefits to our users. We hope to improve these services next year, creating new spaces ad hoc for them, as we are currently working with CONI for this purpose.*

*And we have to do all this by keeping our **cost structure sustainable**: indeed, today we can't invest a lot, since our budget is consumed by the assembling and disassembling activities that we have to do every time.*

Talking about minor issues related to the village, at first Police was concerned about it – as they have a lot of worries to make everything working in a good way on a matchday in terms of crowd's safety and security – but, as soon as they understood the sense of it and its benefits, they accepted it in a good way, as a mean to have a more relaxed and enjoyable pre match around the stadium. Even ultras accept it: indeed, even if they are not interested in the village, they don't boycott it, as they understand that it is something useful and enjoyable for a different type of fan.

4. Is food & beverage an important element for your strategy?

*Food & beverage is a certainly a central element. We opened the village with a greater food offer, with pizza, hamburgers and hot-dogs: unfortunately, maybe because it was winter and maybe for the bad moment of the team, the results weren't good, so we decided to reduce the offer (with just hot-dogs) for the rest of the season, **to cut management and logistics costs**. Hot-dogs are simpler, because hamburgers and pizza need more structures, and for just 2 hours of event it could be not always affordable. But we will try next year.*

Talking about the beverage part, "Birra Peroni" is the main partner of the village. Peroni has a great experience in sports thanks to its partnership with Federazione Italiana Rugby, having built the "Terzo Tempo Village", a great example and case history of international level. This

village works 10 hours per matchday, and it remains in-place for a period of two months – the duration of the “Six Nations” tournament – becoming “an event in the event”, as many foreign fans come to Italy also thanks to it.

*So, given that they are now re-approaching football and AS Roma is a precursor in fan villages in Italy, we decided to partner with them to realise something similar. Of course, we have a temporal space which is much more limited: for example, what we can do next year for matches starting at 3pm, is to implement a **post match analysis** in the village, to become a place to see the highlights, and stay all together for 1 hours and a half after the match.*

5. How do you manage the data you obtain with the registration to the fan village?

Talking about data, it is certainly a delicate moment, due to the changes linked to GDPR. Some clubs had problems, and they needed to prepare special campaigns to invite registered fans to opt-in again, giving their explicit consensus. We don't have this problem here at AS Roma, since we don't have an advanced database yet, but we are just beginning to do it for CRM reasons, respecting GDPR. Currently, we use the data we get from the registration to the village to inform our fans on changes about it and its activities. In this moment, we don't apply any monetization logic with the data we gather.

6. Which are the future aims and developments of the village?

One aim for the future is certainly to grow in terms of spaces and engagement, to make this village always more a reference point for our fans. During the year, we moved it from outside the gates into them, for organizational reasons due to the “Internazionali BNL d'Italia”: even if doing so we are tied to gates' opening hours, we realized that being closer to the stadium and to the flows of fans is much better, so we'll continue in this way next year too.

Moreover, we want to increase the correlation between what happens in the village, and what happens in the stadium, working in an always more cross way with our Media Center and its contents. Another important aim is to have new partners at the village, with new engagement activities linked to the Roma brand, for an always new experience.

And, when we will have our new stadium, these aspects will be central and amplified a lot, to give fans the best matchday experience possible, with a permanent and grater village. Indeed,

with the new stadium we will be able to invest more on activities and related contents, since our budget will not be affected anymore by assembling and disassembling activities.

Thanks to Andrea Fabbicini for his precious contribution and his time.

“*La Magica Land*” is a certainly a great example of a matchday experience solution, creating a better atmosphere for fans, friends and families before the kick-off, entertaining them and making them spend more time, and so money, at the venue.

But, there is certainly a big room for improvement, as AS Roma could enormously benefit from the building of the new stadium – that should be inaugurated at the beginning of the 2021/22 season – to offer a more engaging and easier experience, thanks to the design with the fan in mind. So, let’s apply here some advanced matchday tools to a stadium that is not built yet: indeed, to design a stadium with these concepts in mind is the ideal situation for every club.

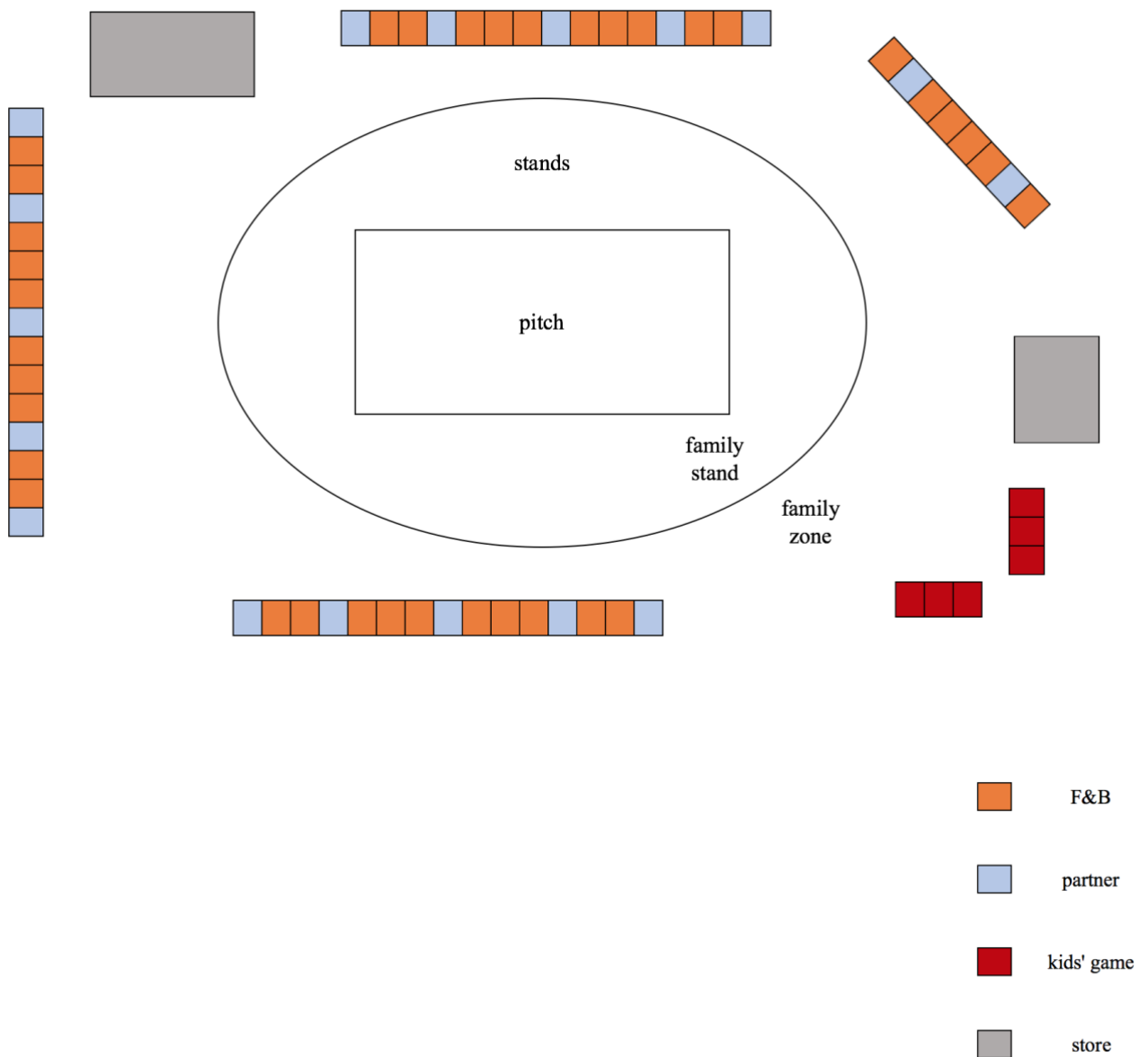
“Stadio della Roma” – services’ design proposal



Image: stadiodellaroma.it

The aim of AS Roma management should be to build an *optimised* stadium (studied with the optimal fan journey in mind, taking in consideration the fans' flow when designing the layout), which is more than a simple stadium, but a proper *entertainment* complex, and a must-see *touristic* destination too for everyone coming to Rome.

Therefore, my proposal is to include in its design a permanent fan village called "**Piazza 1927**": the innovative idea, is to build it not just outside the stadium, but *all around*, as an extension of it. Moreover, the village can be connected to a dedicated mobile app, called "**Unica Grande App**", since this app could gather *everything* that is needed for the matchday in *one single place*, and recalling AS Roma anthem "... *unico grande amore*".



This fan zone should become the new meeting point for all AS Roma fans, the place to spend a whole AS Roma-themed day. Its main features could be:

1. Entertainment

Since the new stadium should become a proper entertaining complex, a lot of activities should be designed to make AS Roma fan's experience the best possible one, including football-skills activities, a main stage with special guests and live music, a Roma TV studio for a pre and post match analysis, virtual reality's experiences, eSports tournaments, and a "Player Arrival" zone integrated in the village.

Moreover, it could be interesting to link each activity to one partner, as it normally happens in the UEFA Champions Festival for the UEFA Champions League final every year. Also *Roma Cares*, the AS Roma charity foundation, should have a space in it.

Fans can receive live news about the events and activities running up at the village, directly through the app.

2. Food & Beverage

The aim is to eliminate poor quality food & beverage kiosks in the stadium, replacing them with high quality ones, with partnerships with local brands to promote the typical food from Italy and Rome, with temporary stands, to have an always new experience.

With the app, fans could pre-order their favourite food and drinks directly via smartphone in an easy way, deciding when to pick up their order, avoiding queues thanks to a dedicated line, paying cashless. And, for disable fans, the order can be brought to the seat, in stadium.

3. Family Zone

A part of the village could be dedicated to young fans and their families, with specific games and activities, and direct access to the dedicated stand in the stadium.


4. Stores

Placing different stores, inside and outside the stadium, to make the most out of the fans' flow in terms of monetization.

5. Always open

The village should be always open to maximise revenues: for example, organising live screening of away matches inside the stadium, and other AS Roma-related events to exploit the village beyond home matches.

The connected app should have, in addition to the food & beverage feature, the following ones: *instant games* with the possibility to win exclusive prizes and experience, for a new level of fan engagement, e-access and e-ticketing, a travel-dedicated section, with all the information from public transport, and the possibility to book new services such as *Uber* or the car/moto sharing ones. Moreover, an in-app CRM (FRM) would be useful to deal with fans' questions about the matchday, using a chatbot technology.

 Stadio della Roma: services' design	
Piazza 1927	Unica Grande App
<p>1. Entertainment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Activities (linked to partners) ✓ Roma TV studio (pre and post) ✓ Player Arrival <p>2. Food & Beverage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Typical & high-quality (local partnerships) <p>3. Other Features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Family Zone ✓ Stores ✓ Always Open ✓ Always New 	<p>1. Features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ F&B order ✓ instant games ✓ e-access, e-ticketing ✓ in-app CRM ✓ travel section ✓ online store <p>2. Loyalty Scheme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ collect points for each activity, to win exclusive prizes <p>3. Data Collection & Proximity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Direct and Indirect customised offers, thanks to your data and position

Given these main features, the app should be built around two main pillars:

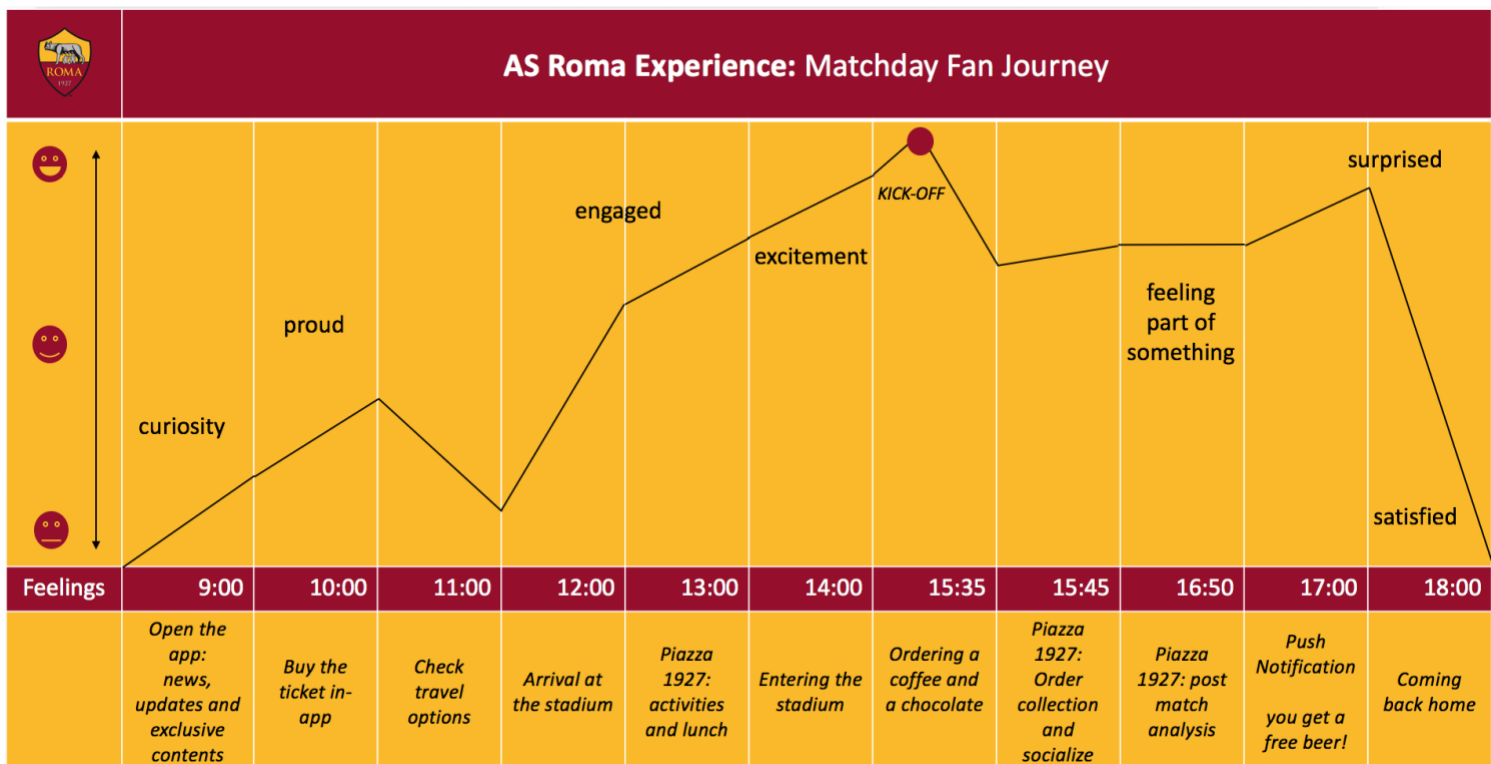
- Loyalty scheme:

The idea is that whatever you do with the app – from ordering a sandwich, to participate to a game or buying a scarf – you will be given a certain amount of loyalty points, to enter special rankings – for example, one per matchday and one for the whole season – to win prizes and experiences. This would enormously encourage the user to exploit the app, with all its features.

- Data Collection & Proximity:

Thanks to beacons mapping the whole stadium, it would be possible to send the user personalised contents and/or offers – both from the club and sponsors – recognizing its geographical position and remembering its data. For example, given your previous purchases, the app could know that you like a certain type of a beer, and when you come close to its stand, the app will send you a push notification to invite you to buy that beer, maybe with a promotion associated.

After having explained the main features of the village connected to the app, this could be a possible AS Roma fan journey at the venue, with the fans’ actions associated to their feelings, for a AS Roma experience lasting 8 hours.



5. Conclusions

I hope the reader has seen how big is the room for improvement for Italian clubs talking about the matchday experience, and how this can contribute as a short-term answer to reduce the gap with other European leagues.

The aim of this work is to highlight the importance of a complete matchday experience for clubs, to exploit potential new opportunities and revenues. But, being myself a true football fan, I strongly believe that this could boost the fan experience, helping supporters to make the most of their journey at the stadium. It is important that they live a great experience, first of all safe, but also easy and compelling, which goes beyond the sport result, that can be good or bad.

After 20 years of stadium experience, I dream to live a new exciting fan experience, and I'm sure that I will be able to do so in a few years, with the construction of the AS Roma new stadium. I dream to see a full stadium at every home match, passionate and loud supporters as they were some time ago, an easy-to-live stadium, an enjoyable food and beverage offering that should be in line with what our immense culinary culture offers. And, sometimes, the possibility to feel really part of it, for example winning amazing exclusive experiences. Maybe one day...

“There's no another place where a man could be happier than a stadium”

Albert Camus

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Chair of International Business
Master in Management
Track of International Management
Department of Business and Management

The Innovative Matchday Experience

*as a strategic tool for Italian football clubs to differentiate, increasing
stadium attendance, fan engagement, loyalty and monetization*

Thesis Recap

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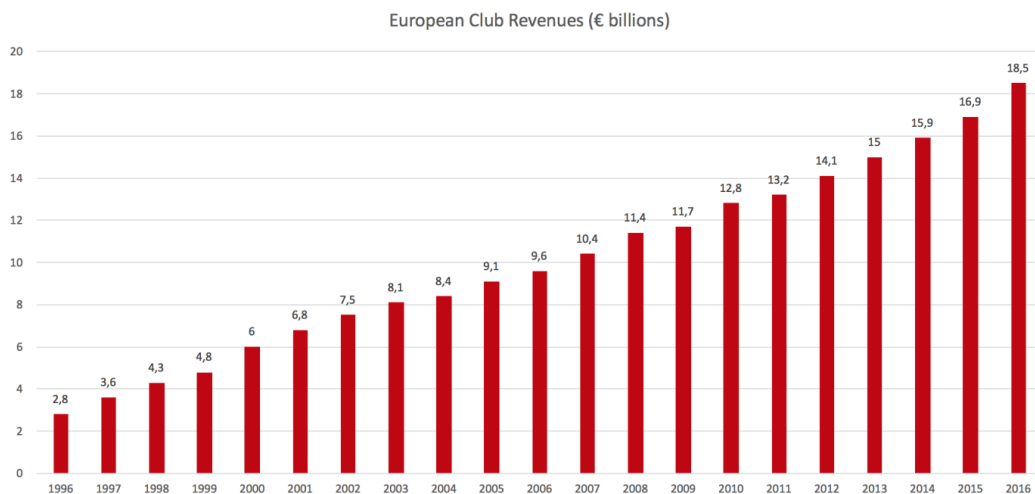
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This thesis deals with the football industry in a new way. Combining business strategy, consumer-centred marketing and innovation technology, it focuses on the “*matchday experience*” as a strategic tool to give a possible solution for the improvement of Italian football, since it is undergoing a difficult period now. I decided to write about this after some experiences I had in the field, such as a Summer School in Sport Marketing Management organised by AC Milan, two UEFA Champions League finals (2017 in *Cardiff, Wales* and 2018 in *Kyiv, Ukraine*) as a *Marketing Volunteer* for UEFA, and an internship at IQUII Sport, a digital sport marketing company based in Rome.

In the modern era, football represents an important part in the everyday life of million people, being the biggest entertainment industry in Europe (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, 2017), and becoming a proper business. Indeed, European football clubs’ revenues raised from €2.8 to €18.5 billion in 20 years, and clubs breaking the €100 million revenue barrier registered a significant increase (+77%) in just 6 years (*UEFA*, 2018). And, what is interesting to notice, is that a huge power is in the hands of few big players, since €7.4 billion (the 40% of the total) are generated by the top 20 European clubs (*Deloitte*, 2017).



Two factors played an important role in modern football: *globalization* and the advent of *broadcasting*.

The aggressive entrance of new international players in the European scenario (“*a proper IPO on European football*”, as stated by *Bellinazzo*, 2015), especially from Asia, North America and the Middle East with huge expenditure possibilities, increased and strengthened the competition.

Moreover, broadcasting and the advent of pay TV completely changed the game, representing now the biggest revenue stream of a modern football club (the 45% of the total, *Deloitte*, 2018), bringing a lot of money in European football.

Italy was at the centre of global football back in the '80s, when Serie A dominated the world's attention, thanks to its teams and stars. With the new millennium, Italy didn't follow an essential renovation process, which took countries like England, Germany and Spain to invest a lot in the internationalization of their clubs, and in infrastructures. Italian football clubs remained anchored to a "*short-term local winning mentality*", spending more than they could *just* to win the Serie A of the year and beating their national rivals, relying on financial *escamotages* to survive, not pursuing a long-term vision for the future of national football.

This *mismanagement* of Italian football led to its decline, and we can see the results nowadays.

Making a comparison with the others four biggest European championships – English *Premier League*, Spanish *La Liga*, German *Bundesliga* and French *Ligue 1* – the situation is certainly not good. Indeed, Italy, with its Serie A, is (*UEFA*, 2018 and *FIGC, AREL, PwC*, 2017):

- 4th for the average turnover per club (€95 million, against the €220 million of Premier League);
- 5th for commercial revenues;
- 5th for matchday revenues;
- 5th for the percentage of stadium filling (56%, against the 96% of Premier League);
- 5th for the average attendance (22'280, against the 36'461 of Premier League);
- 1st for unsold tickets (6'584'699, against the 643'720 of Premier League).

So, it is clear that we should do something for our football.

This thesis tries to give a possible solution to reduce the gap with other top European football leagues in the short period, focusing on increasing the stadium attendance and its related revenues.

Of course, a lot of investments on the infrastructures should be done, but this requires huge resources, time and permissions, so it is something that Italian clubs can put in their long-term strategy.

What it is possible to do in a shorter period, is to invest in the level of the services offered. As stated by Michael E. Porter, given C the cost of a product, P its price, and V the value perceived by customers, every firm can choose between two strategies (Marino, 2015):

- Low-cost Strategy: by lowering the price (P), working on lowering the cost structure;
- Differentiation Strategy: by increasing V , working on increasing the value perceived by customers.

So, a company (a football club in our case) should deliver greater value to customers, or create comparable value at a lower cost. Doing so, Italian football clubs can maximise the consumer (fan) surplus, that is the difference between the value perceived by fans (V) and the price of the ticket (P), and they can obtain a competitive advantage against their competitors.

But, which are the competitors of an Italian football club in this context?

We can define two major categories of them, reflecting two different aims of the football club:

- Fan side: if the aim is to capture fans' attention about the matchday, the correct question to ask is: "*which are the competitors of a football club, when a supporter thinks whether to go to the stadium or not?*" In this area, other football clubs don't represent competitors, since – usually – fans choose a team once in their life, and don't change this decision. So, the competitors in this particular context are mainly two:

➤ the "home" experience:

"Venues need to ensure they offer a more immersive experience than watching the game at home" (Halicka, 2016). Indeed, "why would someone shell out for a ticket and battle the elements and the traffic to come to our game, rather than enjoy the game from the comfort of their own home?" (Rapid Retail, 2017). Nowadays, the "home" experience is more complete

than ever, with various pay TV offers taking the fan to the centre of the action, with the additional benefit of the comfort of being at home;

➤ other local entertainment options:

the matchday experience should be a more compelling and rewarding experience for the average fan and for the whole family who wants to spend a day out, if compared to other local entertainment options.

- Commercial side: here, instead, the aim is to capture the sponsors' attention about the matchday, so the competitors are other football clubs. By designing innovative matchday experiences, clubs can obtain a competitive advantage towards other clubs too, since it can boost matchday and commercial revenues, thanks to the fact that the club can increase the number of activities on a matchday, giving sponsors new ways to broaden their brand and to get more data from fans, for an overall improvement of partnerships and sponsorships deals.

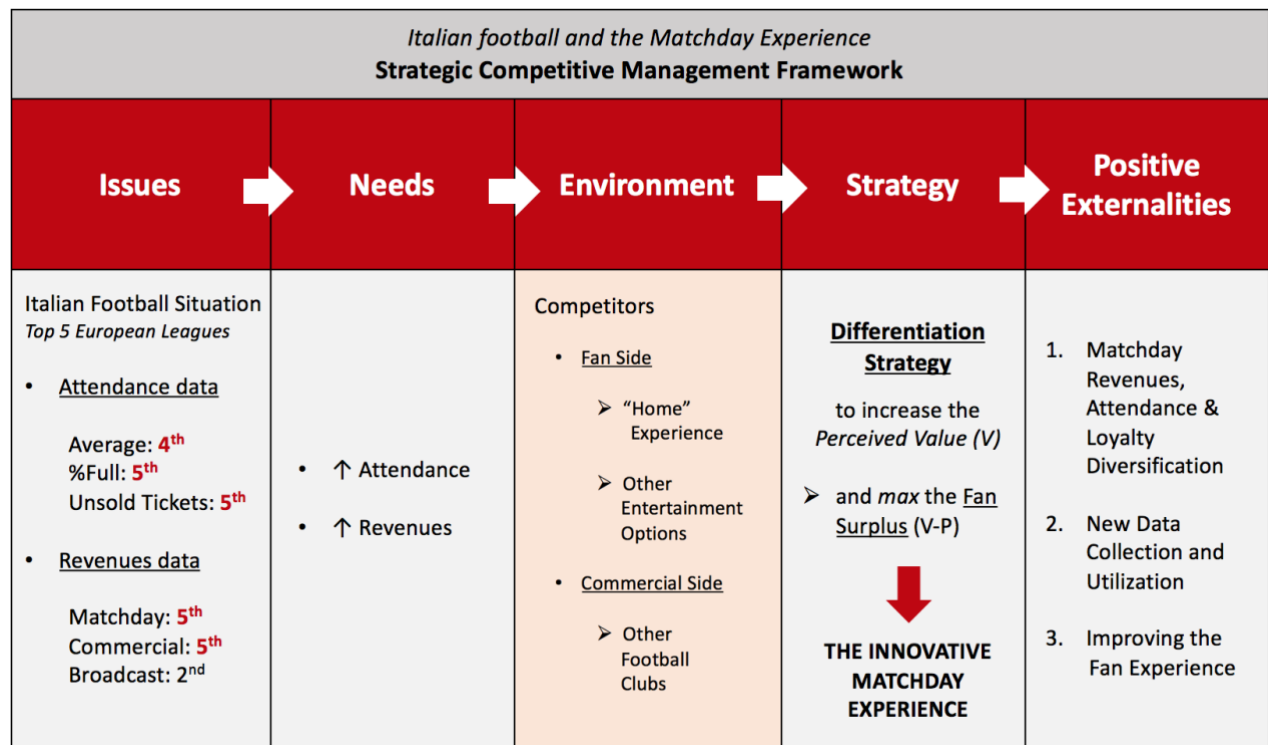
So, how can a football club attract more people at the stadium – competing with the “home” experience and other local entertainment options – attracting sponsors' money around the matchday?

Italian football clubs should not decrease the price (P) of their tickets – not to lose revenues, and so not to increase the existing gap in matchday revenues between Italy and the rest of Europe – but they should work on the value perceived by the fans (V), choosing a **Differentiation Strategy**.

And, Italian football clubs can do it designing and implementing *new matchday experience solutions*, around new services offered at the stadium for an improved fan experience, such as fan villages (entertainment areas for fan engagement) or matchday-dedicated mobile apps (special apps dedicated to the matchday), with the final aim of fan monetization. To understand how big is the room for improvement in Italy, just think that the average fan expenditure at the stadium for all the services offered (not including the ticket) is 3,50€: indeed, in England and Germany it is around 20€, thanks to the investments in infrastructures and services (Bellinazzo, 2015).

Some clubs in Serie A are thinking about these topics nowadays. Of course, the main objective of a football club is to win on the field, earning money while giving fans the best emotions. Clubs should have the victory as their final aim – but focusing only on winning, and so on the sport result, can be not sustainable for a club that wants to perform as a business firm. Indeed, many clubs in Europe and in Italy, following the example from American sport clubs, are gradually changing their **strategic positioning** from “just winning”, to “create proper entertainment firms”. We can observe this change if we read the mission of SSC Napoli: “Napoli is pressing ahead with plans to evolve into a *diversified entertainment business*, offering its fans and partners more than just a football game by adding high quality shows and entertainment to its sporting events” (SSC Napoli website).

So, designing new matchday experiences, Italian football clubs could improve their matchday attendance and its related-revenues.



Moreover, three positive externalities emerge:

- 1) attendance and loyalty diversification

investing in the matchday experience is a great *diversification measure* for two reasons:

✓ 1.1) revenues balance for a better sustainability

it could increase matchday and commercial revenues, trying not to excessively link the revenues of a club with the broadcast ones, for a more balanced revenue composition, and therefore a better long-term sustainability;

✓ 1.2) releasing matchday revenues, attendance and loyalty from sports results uncertainty

since football is mainly a sport, revenues and fans' loyalty use to come naturally from on-the-pitch good performances; but a modern football management can't rely anymore on the *randomness* of sports results: so, matchday experience solutions can increase and *stabilise* the stadium attendance, so its related revenues and fan loyalty.

• 2) data collection and utilization

Thanks to matchday experience solutions such as the fan village and the matchday-dedicated mobile app – working as new *touchpoints* – it will be possible to collect new data and utilize them to have great benefits. Indeed, fans are more than simple customers, and by building and nurturing the relationship with them, clubs have the chance to collect new and detailed data about their habits, preferences and behaviour at the stadium. And these new data can be the opportunity to revise many internal processes of a football club, to accelerate digital transformation. The solution is a 3-steps approach: at first, clubs should re-acquire all the data-generating platforms which are external to the club (e.g. ticketing platforms), then integrate all the existing and re-acquired data together, and finally add the newly acquired matchday-related data, to build a unique platform for data management. Having a *unique* and *integrated* data platform improves the club's *efficiency* (less wastes and costs) and the fan experience of the brand, eliminating the poor and confused previous one: indeed, before “*one and the same fan is engaging with one and the same club across multiple, mostly disconnected functions that are generally not coordinated with one another... making the transition to an integrated approach, clubs could enable fans to truly experience the*

entire brand, rather than specific functions within the brand” (PwC, IFA and Exozet, 2014). Moreover, this data will be useful for:

✓ 2.1) direct and indirect commercial opportunities

Knowing everything about its fanbase, it will be easier for the club to attract them with exclusive and customised messages finalized to monetization (for example, through the matchday-dedicated app). Moreover, partners and sponsors could be very interested in this data gathered, as the club can sell this information to them, with this to *“help clubs to derive greater value from their contracts... as sponsors may soon be able to reach the exact audiences they want to address” (PwC, IFA and Exozet, 2014).*

✓ 2.2) CRM (FRM) improvement





Matchday experience solutions are also tools to improve a lot the Consumer Relationship Management (CRM), or – in this case – Fans Relationship Management (FRM). Indeed, fan villages and matchday apps are other *touchpoints* for fans to interact with the club. For example, the fan village can have an info corner, and the mobile app can have a Customer (Fan) Care section to deal with special requests, giving fans all the information they need: all these features reduce the distance between the club and its fans, enhancing fan loyalty.

DATA COLLECTION AND UTILIZATION				
	<p><i>Phase 1: acquiring external data platforms</i></p> <p><i>Phase 2: integrating old and re-acquired data</i></p> <p><i>Phase 3: adding the matchday-collected data</i></p>			<p>➤ <i>building a unique and integrated ecosystem</i></p>
1	Exploiting <u>direct & indirect</u> commercial opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more targeted and effective promotions • increased sponsor value 	<p><i>Offering a personalised fan experience</i></p>	
2	Improving <u>Fan Relationship Management</u>	<p>fans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less distance – closer relationship • no confusion – entire brand 		
				<p>➤ MONETIZATION</p>

- 3) fan experience improvement

Of course, the implementation of matchday experience solutions boosts fan experience: indeed the new fan, the *Fan 4.0*, wants to do more than watching the 90 minutes of the game, but wants to interact and feel as a protagonist. This will be possible thanks to these services offered, that are important also for the club's monetization logics.

After having seen these positive externalities, I prepared a **special report**, comparing Italy and England about the implemented matchday experience solutions for the 2017/18 season, analysing the presence of fan villages and matchday-dedicated mobile apps with food & beverage ordering options. Results are not good for Italy, since we have no clubs implementing such apps, and the situation about fan villages is clearly improvable (35% in Serie A, 0% in Serie B – 55% in Premier League, 83% in Championship).

The Matchday Experience Report: Italy v England		
	Fan Village or Entertainment Area	Matchday-dedicated Mobile App – F&B Feature
	35,00%	0,00%
	0,00%	0,00%
	55,00%	15,00%
	83,33%	4,17%

After it, I decided to mention some matchday experience best practices found across Europe, such as the fan villages of Liverpool FC and Manchester City FC, and the matchday-dedicated apps of Chelsea FC and OGC Nice.

The final part of my thesis is the **empirical** one, and it has *three* direct contributions from professionals of the field. Indeed, it is structured in *three* parts, representing the *three* main levels of Italian football: Serie C, Serie B, and Serie A. Each level has some final matchday experience recommendations too.

Talking about Serie C, I visited Olbia, in Sardinia (Italy), asking directly to club’s representatives and observing how a matchday evolves inside and outside the stadium, for the Olbia v. Alessandria game, played on 24th March 2018.

We talked about how to boost attendance and fan engagement in minor leagues. Given the issues, such as a *small budget*, an *inefficient stadium* and the *average fan routine*, we analysed three main key words to work on, which are *young fan engagement* (as younger fans should be the new target of fan engagement plans of the clubs), *local environment development* (signing partnership with local companies and brands, to gain visibility at the village while engaging fans with activities under the Olbia brand), and *respect and integration* (for a new culture of hospitality for away fans). Implementing a small fan village outside the stadium, and designing a special app for fan engagement, it will be possible to reach important results with little efforts.

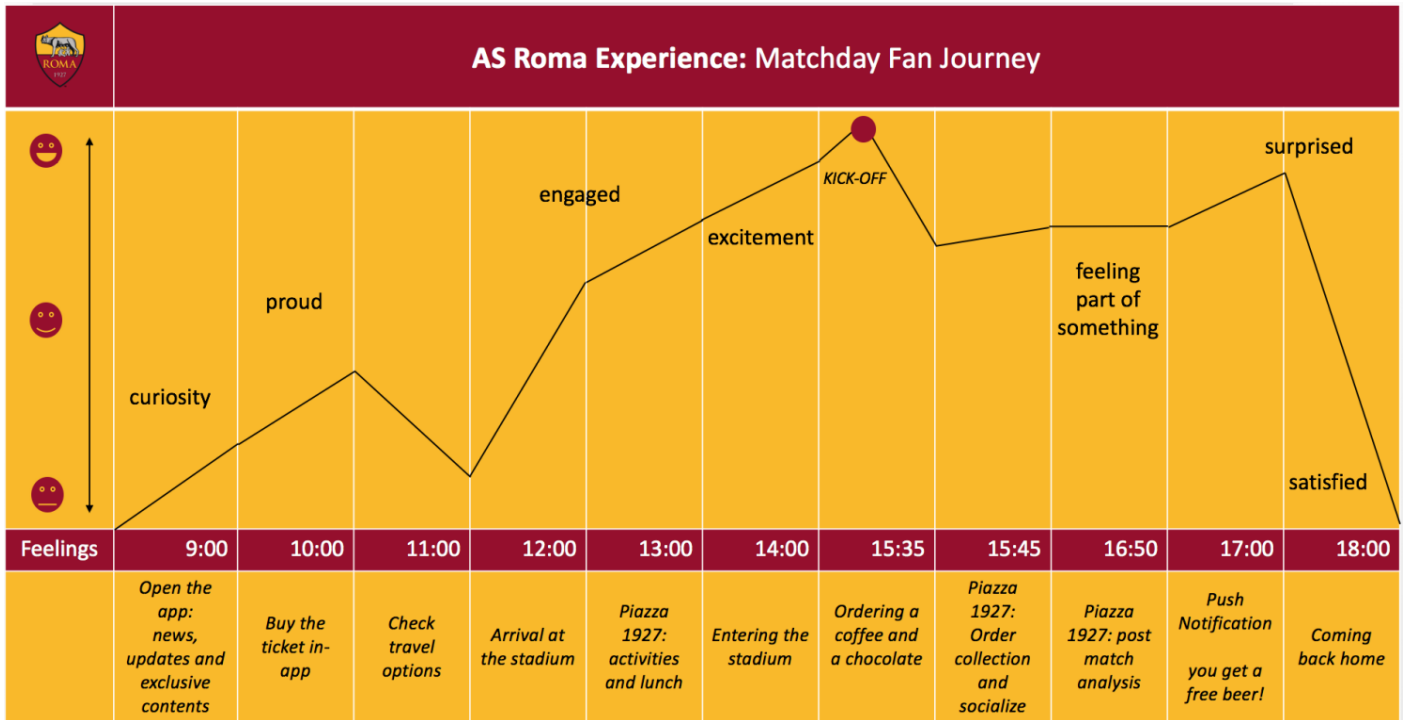
How to boost Attendance and Fan Engagement in minor leagues: the Olbia Case		
max • Attendance → • Fan Engagement		
%Full: • 28% in Serie C • 34% for the Olbia v Alessandria game		
3 main Issues	3 main key words	The Solution
	<i>where we have to focus on</i>	
• Small Budget	• Young Fans	• Fan Village <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities • F&B • Stores • Info Point • Away Welcome Area • Matchday App <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Games & Contests • Social Features • Local Offers
• Inefficient Stadium	• Local Dimension	
• The Average Fan	• Respect & Integration	

Then, I interviewed Salvatore Gualtieri, *Marketing Director* at Frosinone Calcio, a Serie B club for the 2017/18 season. Frosinone represents a unique case in Italian football right now, since it is having a rapid commercial growth, and it has a marketing structure not inferior to a Serie A club. Mr. Gualtieri told me about the “*Frosinone Village*” project, a fan village which is completely crowdfunded by fans, thanks to special 5-year mini bonds, unwritten from a minimum of €500, with a return of the 8% per year, 5% in cash and 3% as credits with the club, to buy tickets or merchandising (*Il Messaggero*, 2018). The village is included in the new stadium project, for a place “*for our community, to enjoy all the week long*”. Moreover, Frosinone signed a partnership with IQUII, the company where I did my internship, to become

the club's official digital partner for the development of the *SportXP platform*, for a complete fan engagement project starting with the launch of the club's official mobile app: I strongly believe that strengthening this partnership, giving fans new features dedicated to the matchday, would be a great deal for both companies.

Finally, I went to *Trigoria*, AS Roma training centre, to interview Andrea Fabbicini, *Fan & Stadium Activation Manager* of the club. AS Roma is making a lot of efforts to go in the direction of sustainability and revenues' diversification, while competing at the highest levels. I asked Mr. Fabbicini about their fan village, "*La Magica Land*". AS Roma is trying to change the common concept of a fan village, widening its target to offer a more diversified option for fans and partners. Despite many issues and challenges related to logistics and costs, AS Roma is doing what it can to improve the fan experience at the stadium, working in a cross way with its *Media Center*, constantly creating engaging contents to interact with its fans, also on the matchday: the aim for the future is to continue in this way, to enrich the village in terms of spaces, engaging activities and commercial deals. Taking a step further, the club's long-term aim is to build a new stadium, to include these logics into its construction, to have a proper entertainment destination for the best possible stadium experience.

Moreover, I prepared a special proposal for the new "*Stadio della Roma*" services' design, including a stadium-integrated fan village called "*Piazza 1927*", with entertainment activities and a local and high-quality food & beverage offering, which is connected to a matchday-dedicated mobile app, called "*Unica Grande App*", with features such as food & beverage ordering, instant games, e-access and e-ticketing, in-app CRM, a travel section and the online store; all this, with the app giving loyalty points for each activity completed, collecting fans' data and their preferences, to boost direct and indirect commercial opportunities, while engaging fans and increase their loyalty. The app's name recalls the AS Roma's anthem and the fact that it would be the *unique* and complete place to enjoy the matchday. The reader can find below the *AS Roma Matchday Fan Journey Map* that I prepared, which includes the new fan village and matchday-dedicated app that I proposed.



To conclude, I hope the reader could finally realize – thanks to this work – the backwardness of Italian football and its huge room for improvement, understanding that something must be done. The solution proposed here is something feasible in the short-term, helping clubs to grow under many aspects: from the main aim of matchday revenues and attendance increase, to diversification and data collection for digital transformation and for commercial opportunities. And, of course, for fans to enjoy a better experience. I really hope that this will – in some way- help Italian football to move forward.