

The Role of Lobbying in Italian Football: Analyzing the Impact of Public Affairs on Business Growth Strategies

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary context, Italian football represents an industrial sector of great economic and social importance, but at the same time characterised by profound contradictions in terms of institutional legitimacy and representativeness. The football system continues to be neither recognised nor behave as a strategic player in the country's political and institutional dynamics, limiting itself to a provincial, self-referential vision that is insufficient to excel on the international stage.

This discrepancy between the real value of football and its perception, not only externally but also internally, translates into a structural absence of tools, managerial and sectoral skills and long-term vision in the management of relations with political decision-makers. While in other European and international countries, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain and the United States, football and sport in general have been fully integrated into policy-making processes for years thanks to professional public affairs structures, in Italy we are still having to verify whether this function actually exists and, if so, to what extent it is structured, recognised and valued within the sector. In the absence of a dedicated professional culture and clear regulations on lobbying, institutional relations are episodic activities, often entrusted to top management or non-systemic external consultants, with little or no impact on strategy.

Analysing how public affairs can be a lever for business development in Italian football means addressing not only a functional gap but also a cultural and systemic issue that affects the ability of clubs, leagues and the Federation to grow in many ways and establish themselves as legitimate institutional interlocutors with skills,

vision and continuity. It is important to understand whether Italian football can overcome a self-referential and fragmented vision and take on a new organisational and institutional identity consistent with its economic and social weight.

Given the institutional marginality of Italian football and the absence of a structured representation strategy, this research aims to analyse in depth the potential of public affairs as a strategic lever for business development for the national football system. The objective is not only to verify whether and how this function is actually present within the sector, but also to understand how it is interpreted, used or neglected by the actors involved, and with what effects in terms of governance, legitimacy and influence.

The research aims to explore the degree of awareness within the sector of its own economic and social weight, highlighting the gap between the rhetoric of “strategic” football and the real absence not only of institutional but also of economic and extra-field planning. Particular attention is paid to the cultural dimensions that hinder the development of a professional public affairs function, such as the persistence of a personalistic conception of political relations, the confusion between lobbying and communication, the fragmentation between clubs, leagues and federations, and the absence of a unified vision of the sector.

A further objective of the research is to understand how advanced organisational models, already established in other international contexts, can be adapted to the Italian system, taking into account its specific regulatory, cultural and operational characteristics, to identify the main critical issues and outline possible developments that can be applied in a concrete manner. The ultimate goal is to analyse how it may be possible to build a new institutional identity, based on skills, structures and a long-

term vision, capable of restoring football to a leading role in national and European decision-making processes, consistent with its real economic and social impact, in order to conceive public affairs as a real factor for growth and economic stability in the sector, as well as a stable and integrated function in the governance of sports clubs, definitively overcoming the logic of episodic and unstructured intervention.

Underlying the entire research process is a guiding question that directs the theoretical investigation, international comparison and empirical analysis: to what extent can public affairs be a strategic lever for the growth of Italian football?

Through this question, the thesis does not seek to verify whether this function is present or not within clubs, but rather questions its quality and significance in the national context: what forms it takes, how it is perceived, what professional skills it mobilises, what continuity it can guarantee and, above all, what cultural and structural obstacles prevent its development. The question also aims to develop a comparative and transformative approach: public affairs in Italian football is compared with more advanced models to assess the conditions that make its integration into the strategic process of clubs possible and the specific characteristics of the Italian context that hinder its spread.

At the heart of this question is the idea, expressed by several interviewees, that Italian football suffers not only from a lack of resources or reforms, but also from a profound lack of political legitimacy. The research question, therefore, is not simply “what is missing”, but also addresses the issue of “what is needed” for football to grow and become a strategic player in the country's system, capable of influencing public agendas, accessing national and European decision-making spaces, and supporting its economic and social function in a structured, stable and recognised manner.

The thesis is structured in six chapters, which build a progressive path from the theoretical definition of the topic to empirical analysis and operational implications for managers and public decision-makers.

The first chapter aims to outline the theoretical framework through a comparison between two classic approaches to business strategy: the Resource-Based View (RBV) and the Institution-Based View (IBV). While the RBV values the internal resources of the company as the primary source of competitive advantage, the IBV broadens the horizon by including the decisive role of institutions, both formal and informal, in defining corporate strategies and trajectories. The chapter shows how IBV is particularly suited to interpreting the dynamics of the Italian football sector, where the lack of shared rules, professionalisation and institutional legitimacy constitutes a barrier to development. The choice of this theoretical framework guides the entire research, orienting both its analytical structure and its strategic implications.

The second chapter is entirely devoted to an in-depth analysis of lobbying as a tool for political and economic influence. After clarifying its definitions, objectives and main forms, the chapter highlights its effectiveness in terms of tax returns, corporate performance and resilience in times of crisis. Particular attention is then paid to the regulatory and cultural comparison between the United States, the European Union and Italy, highlighting how lobbying in Italy still lacks a clear regulatory framework and is often confused with communication, with negative repercussions in terms of legitimacy and transparency.

The third chapter offers a structural analysis of the Italian football system. After outlining the governance of the leagues and the Federation, the chapter examines

Italian football's position in Europe and beyond, highlighting its value alongside key weaknesses such as reliance on TV rights, fragmented leadership, poor infrastructure and limited international reach. The analysis is further developed through the application of Porter's "Five Forces" model, which is useful for mapping competitive pressures, and the VRIO framework, which is used to assess the potential competitive advantage of the key resources of the Italian football system. The chapter concludes with an in-depth analysis of the shortcomings in lobbying and institutional relations, which limit the system's ability to access resources, influence policy and attract investment, confirming the urgent need for strategic transformation.

The fourth chapter introduces the empirical part of the research and describes the procedure adopted in detail. After defining the objectives of the qualitative survey, the chapter illustrates the selection of the sample, composed of ten leading figures from the world of football. Once collected, the interviews were analysed through a thematic coding process using MaxQDA software, which helped identify the frequency and semantic relevance of key concepts. Word clouds were also generated to visualise the most frequently recurring terms across the interviews. The codes created were then transformed into individual cognitive maps for each interviewee and finally aggregated into a collective cognitive map, all using Graphviz software. This step made it possible to visualise in a systematic and interconnected way the analyses and perceptions of the actors involved regarding the role of public affairs, the professionalization of management, the relationship with institutions and the vision of football as a strategic sector. The methodology made it possible not only to identify the dominant themes but also to analyse the causal relationships between

concepts, offering a three-dimensional reading of the critical issues and opportunities present in the system.

The fifth chapter presents and discusses the results of the qualitative survey, offering a structured reading of the critical issues that emerged through interviews and cognitive mapping. Starting with word clouds that reveal a language characterized by absence, distance, and detachment in institutional terms, and ending with the collective cognitive map, the analysis describes a sector that recognizes its own relevance only at a rhetorical level but lacks the tools to act on it, with structural problems such as: lack of professionalization, fragmented representation, a self-referential vision, and a lack of planning and long-term vision. In fact, public affairs appears to be a missing strategic lever: present in the vocabulary but absent in the structure, as it is very often not considered by actors or seen as something useless. Juventus emerges as the only true case of ‘best practice’, integrating institutional relations into a stable and structured strategy, but this model remains isolated. The comparison with international cases such as the Bundesliga or the Premier League, cited by some actors and pursued in the thesis, confirms Italy's lag, not only in governance but also in the construction of a political identity for the sector. The conclusion is clear: without a cultural leap, Italian football risks consolidating its institutional isolation.

The sixth and final chapter brings together the main findings of the survey and summarises their implications for management, public decision-makers and theory. At the managerial level, the research shows the urgent need to move beyond a conception of football as mere entertainment and to fully recognise its industrial role. Finally, on a theoretical level, the research confirms the validity of the Institution-

Based View but stresses the need to integrate it with a reflection on the role of cognitive representations and organisational identity in the construction of institutional legitimacy. The thesis concludes by emphasising that the future of Italian football will not depend solely on sporting results, but on the system's ability to become an active part of the processes that matter: those that determine rules, resources and long-term visions.

CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical Framework

Introduction

To effectively analyze the relationship between Italian soccer and the institutional world, it is essential to build a solid theoretical foundation that allows us to understand the dynamics of interaction between companies and the public context. The first two chapters respond precisely to this objective: to outline the theoretical framework within which to interpret not only the phenomenon of lobbying, but more generally the relationship between the company, understood as an economic and strategic entity, and the institutional environment in which it operates.

This conceptual setting is based on a comparison between two central approaches to business strategy theory: the Resource-Based View (RBV) and the Institution-Based View (IBV). RBV, which has dominated strategic thinking since the 1980s, attributes a central role to internal resources, which are considered an essential lever for building competitive advantage. However, this approach is limited in that it tends to overlook the influence of the external environment, in particular the regulatory system and institutional constraints that affect organizations' strategic decisions.

To overcome this limitation, the Institution-Based View has emerged, as a framework that attributes a decisive role to institutions, both formal, such as laws and regulations, and informal, such as social norms, shared cultures, and customs, in defining the strategic choices and trajectories of companies. From this perspective, organizations do not operate in a neutral or constraint-free environment but are constantly

confronted with a complex set of opportunities and restrictions generated by the institutional environment itself. The IBV thus allows us to move beyond an internal and self-referential view of strategy, offering instead a more comprehensive and contextualized understanding of corporate decision-making.

This approach is particularly suitable for examining the relationship between the soccer system and public institutions, allowing us to understand the underlying reasons why, in Italy, this relationship is still weak, poorly formalized, and essentially lacking in any ongoing structure.

The second chapter is devoted to the topic of public affairs, understood not only in their technical sense as lobbying, but more generally as a set of practices and tools aimed at building, managing, and consolidating dialogue between private actors and public decision-makers over time. Public affairs, in regulated and high-impact sectors such as sport, play an essential strategic role, not an ancillary one. The heart of this chapter focuses on a comparison between three different models of lobbying regulation: the US, European, and Italian models. These are emblematic contexts, selected because they represent three profoundly different approaches to interest representation. The United States stands out for its advanced regulatory framework, which is rigorously transparent and equipped with effective sanctions. The European Union offers a system that is still voluntary but is gradually becoming more consolidated. Finally, Italy stands out as an anomaly: a country without a single regulatory framework, where lobbying is informal, fragmented, and difficult to trace. This comparison not only highlights the differences between systems, but also reinforces a fundamental thesis that runs throughout the work: the absence of a solid culture and professional practice of public affairs is a structural factor of

backwardness, which distances our country not only from the most advanced institutional standards, but also from the managerial and organizational models that are now well established in other European sectors.

The first chapter therefore aims to provide the theoretical basis on which the entire work is built. It shows how, to understand the possible trajectories of transformation in the relationship between football and institutions, it is essential to adopt a theoretical vision in which institutions are not a marginal element but a decisive factor in strategic choices. The modernization of the soccer system, its political legitimacy, and its alignment with more advanced models also, and perhaps above all, depend on the ability to develop a professional culture of public affairs. This theme will be explored in the following chapters through the analysis of concrete cases, best practices, and, above all, the structural deficiencies that still characterize the Italian context today.

1.1 Institution-Based View (IBV)

1.1.1 The Importance of the Resource-Based View (RBV) as a premise for the Institution-Based View (IBV)

Before introducing the Institution-Based View (IBV), it is essential to understand another theory that has significantly influenced business strategy since the 1980s: the Resource-Based View (RBV). The RBV, first proposed by Birger Wernerfelt in 1984 and later developed by Jay Barney in 1991, argues that a firm's sustainable competitive advantage stems from the internal resources it owns and controls. These

resources must be valuable, rare, difficult to imitate, and effectively organized to be fully exploited.¹

According to the RBV, organizations are seen as heterogeneous bundles of resources, and the variety and quality of these resources determine performance differences across firms. Managers should therefore focus on identifying, accumulating, and strategically managing internal resources to build and sustain a long-term competitive advantage.

However, despite the RBV having provided a solid theoretical foundation for understanding the internal sources of competitive advantage, it has been criticized by many scholars for its tendency to focus exclusively on internal firm dynamics, while neglecting the influence of the external environment. Specifically, this framework is often said to overlook the institutional and social context in which organizations operate, failing to adequately consider the normative, cultural, and regulatory pressures that may influence strategic decision-making.²

1.1.2 The emergence of the Institution-Based View (IBV) as a response to the limitations of the RBV

The Institution-Based View (IBV) was thus developed precisely to address the shortcomings and limitations of the RBV. This perspective emphasizes the importance of institutions in shaping firms' strategies and performance. According to the IBV, organizations must adapt to the formal and informal rules of the institutional

¹ Robertson Prime, R. P. R. (2025). *Understanding the Resource-Based View (RBV): 6 Best Components*, <https://bestdissertationwriter.com/resource-based-view-rbv/>

² Patnaik, S., Munjal, S., Varma, A., & Sinha, S. (2022). Extending the resource-based view through the lens of the institution-based view: A longitudinal case study of an Indian higher educational institution. *Journal of Business Research*, 147, 124–141

environment in which they operate in order to gain legitimacy and achieve long-term success.³

The IBV therefore expands the scope of the RBV by integrating the influence of external institutions into strategic decision-making and by recognizing that strategic choices are not determined solely by internal resources, but also by the norms, rules, and social expectations that define the environment in which the firm operates.

1.1.3 Definition and key concepts of IBV

Institutions are defined as laws, rules, regulations, and cultural norms that determine the 'rules of the game' about how firms can act in the market.⁴ The institution-based view represents a theoretical framework that examines how this system influences strategic decision-making processes and corporate performance. From this perspective, firms operate in a social framework of norms, values, and taken-for-granted assumptions about what constitutes appropriate or acceptable economic behaviour.⁵ Given the influence of institutional frameworks on firm behaviour, any strategic choice that firms make is inherently affected by the formal and informal constraints of a given institutional framework.⁶

When looking at business strategy from an institution-based perspective, the focus is on how institutions and organizations interact dynamically.⁷ Strategic decisions are

3 Sun, S. L., & Ding, Z. (2012). Institution-based view. In *Prepare for International Management of the Wiley Encyclopedia of Management* (Vol. 6, 3rd ed.). Wiley.

⁴ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63-81

⁵ Oliver, C. (1997). Sustainable competitive advantage: Combining institutional and resource-based views. *Strategic Management Journal*, 18(9), 697-713

⁶ Peng, M. W. (2002). Towards an institution-based view of business strategy. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 19(2-3), 251-267.

⁷ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63-81

seen as the result of this interaction. In any firm, the strategy–performance link is moderated by its internal resources and the external environment, in particular, the institutions within which it operates. The IBV point of view helps to show that the best strategy for a firm is determined by the interaction of the firm's resources with the institutions.

Peng introduced the term "institution-based view" to bring some conceptual order to the confusion engendered by the proliferation of "institutional" research in a host of disciplines. He chose this label because he wanted to avoid a conflict with fields such as sociology or economics, both of which have their variants of institutional theory. This new label has helped focus on strategy research, which naturally has brought forth further development and contributions.⁸ This theoretical framework highlights the importance of institutions in influencing how a company operates and achieves results. It recognises the influence of environments, like regulations and cultural factors, on strategic choices and outcomes. Researchers have utilized this viewpoint in domains such as social responsibility, supply chain management and the impact of institutional modifications on organisational assets. It presents valuable research opportunities in areas such as deglobalisation and sanctions, competitive dynamics, hybrid organisations, and corporate social responsibility.

Before this framework, scholars had traditionally focused solely on the task environment, neglecting the interaction between institutions, organisations, and strategic choices. This has led to the narrow assumption of a market-based institutional framework.⁹

⁸ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63–81.

⁹ Peng, M. W. (2002). Towards an institution-based view of business strategy. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 19(2-3), 251–267.

The more the world of institutions interacted with the world of industry, the more fundamental this framework became. This perspective is regarded as one of the three dominant approaches in strategic management, along with the industry-based and resource-based views.¹⁰ These three frameworks are linked to the growth of strategic management in three different periods. The first period of development of this discipline was in the 1980s when Porter introduced the industry-based view. The second period was in the 1990s when Barney advocated the resource-based view. The third one was in the last decade or so when the IBV emerged.¹¹

According to Peng, two sets of forces underpin the rise of the institution-based view in strategy: the external and internal ones. Externally, the rise of new institutionalism throughout the social sciences has energised scholarly attention in strategy to focus on how institutions matter. Internally, the frustration associated with the industry-based and resource-based views 'lack of adequate attention to contexts has called for new theoretical perspectives that can overcome these drawbacks. The result was the emergence of the institution-based view.¹²

The innovation of this framework is represented by the dynamic interaction between institutions, as independent variables, and firms, and by the strategic choices as the outcome of such an interaction, making this framework completer and more efficient compared to the previous ones.¹³ Overall, this framework complements the industry-based and resource-based views to collectively sustain a strategy tripod. Industry

¹⁰ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63–81.

¹¹ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63–81.

¹² Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63–81.

¹³ Peng, M. W. (2002). Towards an institution-based view of business strategy. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 19(2-3), 251–267.

position, resources and capability, and institutions all affect organisation strategy and performance. The institution-based view has added meaningfully new insights to the other two frameworks expressed above.¹⁴

As Peng said, the institution-based view adds by arguing that in addition to industry- and firm-level conditions, firms also need to consider the influences of formal and informal rules of the game, a concept that will be analysed in the next paragraph. For example, consider the Japanese pharmaceutical industry.¹⁵ The success of innovative Japanese automobile and electronics products around the world has led many to naively believe that all Japanese firms are “innovative.” The institution-based view refutes this thinking by pointing out that world-class innovative pharmaceutical firms are all Western. Why is there not a single Japanese pharmaceutical firm that is world-class? The reason is institutional. The healthcare system in Japan does not reward innovative new drugs. The Ministry of Health negotiates drug prices with firms. However, once fixed, prices are not allowed to rise during drugs’ prespecified shelf life. If prices remain the same but manufacturing costs decrease because of economies of scale, then the oldest drugs, not the newest, command the highest margins in Japan. Thus, given these rules of the game, Japanese pharmaceutical managers and firms, being rational, find little incentive to aggressively invest in R&D. In contrast, Western firms face an institutional environment that rewards “wonder drugs” with the highest margins, thus fueling their R&D-intensive strategy.¹⁶

¹⁴ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63–81.

¹⁵ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63–81.

¹⁶ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63–81.

In summary, the example of Japanese pharmaceutical firms suggests that institutions are not just “background” conditions and that not all major pharmaceutical firms should pursue an R&D-intensive strategy. Within the same industry, tremendous diversity exists due to institutional differences.¹⁷

The IBV view differs from both the industry-based and the resource-based approaches, as it considers the external institutional environment in which a firm operates as well as a firm's internal capabilities and market position. This perspective emphasises that strategic choices are not made in isolation but are significantly shaped by the established rules of the game set out by these institutions. These guidelines can impact how a company operates, either positively or negatively. The IBV offers insight into strategic management by incorporating external factors that were previously overlooked.¹⁸ It recognises that institutions have an impact on shaping the choices and results of companies in different industries and regions. The IBV goes beyond frameworks that were limited in scope by addressing their shortcomings and broadening the perspective to include the significant role that institutional contexts play in strategic management.¹⁹ In the next section, we will delve deeper into these organisations to understand their roles as players in the IBV framework. This examination will offer a thorough understanding of how these institutional entities engage with companies, impacting strategic results and shedding light on the intricate landscape that businesses navigate.

¹⁷ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63–81.

¹⁸ Peng, M. W. (2002). Towards an institution-based view of business strategy. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 19(2-3), 251–267

¹⁹ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63–81.

Comparison: Resource-Based View vs. Institutional-Based View²⁰

	<i>Resource-Based View</i>	<i>Institutional-Based View</i>
<i>Key Idea</i>	Firms strategically develop and integrate practices within systems	Firms choose practices in response to institutional pressures
<i>What Drives Choice of Practice?</i>	Strategy	Environment
<i>Manifestation</i>	Firms develop complex, unique practices and integrate them in firm culture and with other practices	Firms imitate the practices of other firms, especially practices that are normatively acceptable
<i>Coupling</i>	Tight	Loose
<i>Goals - Level 1</i>	Inimitability / Rarity / Integration	Legitimacy
<i>Goals - Level 2</i>	Synergy	Continued resources, relationships
<i>Goals - Level 3</i>	Sustained competitive advantage	Survival
<i>Risk</i>	High	Low
<i>Minimum Required Resources & Effort</i>	High	Low
<i>Potential Pitfalls</i>	Penalty for system failure	Penalty for nonconformity
<i>Potential Gains</i>	High - synergy	Low – avoid penalties
<i>Potential Imitability of Practice</i>	Low	High
<i>Assumptions</i>	Unique is good Complex is good People and firms can optimize Firms are idiosyncratic	Conformity is good Simple is good People and firms satisfy Firms are similar over time

1.2 The Role of institutions in shaping corporate strategy

Until recently, scholars have rarely analysed what can influence a firm's strategy outside the workplace. This has prevented a better understanding of the interaction between institutions, firms and strategic choices, as well as the influence and weight of institutions on the market. Today, academics are much more aware of the importance of the relationships between industries and institutions.²¹ This path took place not only from an economic and financial point of view but also involved scholars of society and culture. Within the institutional literature, economists have

²⁰ Gerhart, Barry & Trevor, Charlie & Graham, Mary. (1995). New Directions in Compensation Research: Synergies, Risk, and Survival. CAHRS Working Paper Series

²¹ Peng, M. W., Wang, D. Y. L., & Jiang, Y. (2008). An institution-based view of international business strategy: A focus on emerging economies. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 39(5), 920–936.

mostly focused on formal laws, rules, and regulations, while sociologists have paid more attention to informal cultures, norms, and values.²²

A fundamental aspect of comprehending this framework is to gain a clear understanding of the institutions involved. According to North, institutions are defined as “the humanly devised constraints that structure human interaction,” and they can be classified, as already seen, in formal and informal institutions. Similarly, Scott defines institutions as “cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behaviour.” While terms and labels differ on the surface, North’s scheme of broadly dividing institutions into formal and informal camps is complementary to Scott’s idea of three supportive pillars: regulative, normative, and cognitive. Institutions rule societal issues in the areas of politics (e.g., corruption, transparency), law (e.g., economic liberalisation, regulatory regime), and society (e.g., ethical norms, attitudes toward entrepreneurship).²³ Linked to these two definitions, there is then the concept of “institutional framework”, defined by Davis and North as “the set of fundamental political, social, and legal ground rules that establishes the basis for production, exchange, and distribution.”²⁴

Institutions are of critical importance in reducing uncertainty and providing meaning within a given context. They achieve this by establishing norms and defining what is considered legitimate behaviour. To illustrate the extremity to which the political

²² Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63–81.

²³ MBA Knowledge Base. (n.d.). Institution-based view of business strategy. *MBA Knowledge Base*. <https://www.mbaknol.com/strategic-management/institution-based-view-of-business-strategy/>

²⁴ Peng, M. W. (2002). Towards an institution-based view of business strategy. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 19(2-3)

system may pervade international strategic decisions, consider the case of Argentina's oil industry between the 1950s and the 1970s.²⁵

In this situation, changes in the ruling party led to an unpredictable level of government involvement within this industry. The pendulum-like political changes introduced political risk to foreign firms operating within this industry. Argentina's government in 1955 cancelled international contracts signed by a previous president, Peron, in 1952. The next president signed new contracts in 1958, which were nullified in 1963 by a different president. Foreign oil companies were invited to return in 1966, expelled in 1973, and again encouraged to enter after 1976. It is hardly surprising that foreign oil companies are sick and tired and would rather go to 'greener pastures' elsewhere. Not only are these decisions rational, but given an uncertain institutional framework, such decisions may explain why so many internationalization manoeuvres remain confined to regions that offer more consistent predictability.²⁶ This example demonstrates how institutions can play a significant role in reducing or, conversely, exacerbating uncertainty for companies. The instability of the Argentine oil industry provides an excellent case study demonstrating how an uncertain institutional environment can increase political and economic risk for companies. To reduce uncertainty and enable the making of long-term strategic decisions, a coherent and stable institutional framework must be in place.²⁷

Returning to the classification developed by North, we can define formal institutions as a set of laws, regulations, and rules which have a regulatory (coercive) function.

²⁵ Peng, M.W. & Khoury, Theodore. (2009). Unbundling the Institution-Based View of International Business Strategy. *The Oxford Handbook of International Business*. 256-268

²⁶ Peng, M.W. & Khoury, Theodore. (2009). Unbundling the Institution-Based View of International Business Strategy. *The Oxford Handbook of International Business*. 256-268

²⁷ Peng, M.W. & Khoury, Theodore. (2009). Unbundling the Institution-Based View of International Business Strategy. *The Oxford Handbook of International Business*. 256-268

For informal institutions, examples include norms, ethics, and culture, which serve a normative or cognitive function.²⁸ This last example plays a particular role within this subdivision; indeed, we can view culture as a part of informal institutions in the environment that “underpin formal institutions”.²⁹ It is helpful to mention Hofstede, Van Deusen, Mueller and Charles, who suggest that culture is “a substratum of institutional arrangements”.³⁰ Culture and institutions are deeply interconnected, with culture influencing the development and effectiveness of formal institutions, while institutions, in turn, shape cultural norms and values. This dynamic interaction causes both components to develop, producing economic and social outcomes in different areas and times in history. In essence, institutions are not just passive background circumstances.³¹

It is possible to assert that formal and informal institutions work together to regulate business behaviour, but, as North and Scott supported, where formal restrictions are ambiguous or ineffective, informal constraints will assume a more prominent role in reducing uncertainty, offering guidance, and conferring legitimacy and rewards to managers and firms. In this peculiar situation, there is a phenomenon that has become a common condition, that is the convergence toward informal institutions instead of deficient or absent formal institutions³². To better understand this concept, Peng reports in his paper an example as important as it is effective. In the wake of the

²⁸ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63–81.

²⁹ Peng, M. W., Wang, D. Y. L., & Jiang, Y. (2008). An institution-based view of international business strategy: A focus on emerging economies. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 39(5), 920–936.

³⁰ Hofstede, G., Van Deusen, C., Mueller, C., Charles, T., & Business Goals Network 2002. What goals do business leaders pursue? A study in fifteen countries. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 33(4): 785–803.

³¹ Peng, M., Wang, D. & Jiang, Y. An institution-based view of international business strategy: a focus on emerging economies. *J Int Bus Stud* 39, 920–936 (2008)

³² Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63–81

political collapse in the former Soviet Union, numerous Russian entrepreneurs attempted to launch and survive by relying on social ties and connections (known as blat) within their local networks.³³ Informal social ties facilitate economic exchanges, providing continuity for firms weathering formal institutional transitions. Further, research on informal activities such as corruption also shows the importance of informal institutions in the recognition and exploitation of opportunities. The common condition in these comparatively unique environments is the convergence toward informal institutions instead of deficient or absent formal institutions. Specifically, there is a predominant reliance on network-based strategies drawing on informal relationships. In other words, individuals and firms “often find ways of altering the terms of their formal and informal contracts to avoid the adverse effects of weak (formal) contracting institutions”.³⁴

Definitions of Institutions³⁵

<i>Author(s)</i>	Definition	Type of Institutions	Notes
<i>North (1990)</i>	“Humanly devised constraints that structure human interaction.”	Formal and informal	Institutions reduce uncertainty and structure social interaction.
<i>Scott (1995)</i>	“Cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behaviour.”	Regulative, normative, and cognitive	Links institutional functions to coercive, normative, and cognitive pillars.

³³ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63–81.

³⁴ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63-81

³⁵ Table prepared by the author based on the following bibliography: Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63-81

<i>Davis & North (1971)</i>	“The set of fundamental political, social, and legal ground rules that establishes the basis for production, exchange, and distribution.”	Institutional framework	Defines the context in which firms operate.
<i>Redding (2005)</i>	Informal institutions “underpin formal institutions.”	Informal	Culture supports and sustains formal institutions.
<i>Hofstede et al. (2007)</i>	Culture is “a substratum of institutional arrangements.”	Informal (culture)	Culture shapes and reinforces institutional structures.
<i>Peng (2009)</i>	In the absence of effective formal institutions, firms rely on informal networks to reduce uncertainty.	Informal	Firms turn to social ties and informal strategies in weak institutional contexts.
<i>Acemoglu & Johnson (2005)</i>	Actors “often find ways of altering the terms of their formal and informal contracts to avoid the adverse effects of weak [formal] contracting institutions.”	Formal and informal	Illustrates strategic adaptation in the face of institutional weakness.

1.3 The relationship between IBV, global markets and institutions

The phrase “the institutions matter” is not the fundamental proposition useful to analyze this framework deeply. To understand profoundly the IBV, you must ask yourself, “How the institutions matter”. Their importance is developed on the idea that different forms of institutions and rules of the game, whether formal or informal, define the dialogue with companies through laws, norms or interactions. The companies' relationship with the institutions and their strength defines the marketing, investment and other strategies that the different companies implement.³⁶

Institutions play a key role in another point analyzed by the IBV: how firms must behave when they open their market to a foreign state. The institution-based view says that institutional forces also influence differences in firm performance due to

³⁶ Peng, M. W., Wang, D. Y. L., & Jiang, Y. (2008). An institution-based view of international business strategy: A focus on emerging economies. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 39(5), 920-936.

their significant effects on exporters' strategies and performance beyond the impact of the firm's skills and industry factors.³⁷ IBV also argues that foreign entrants must develop a strong knowledge of the rules of the game, both formal and informal, in host countries.

It is not uncommon for foreign firms to face unequal treatment due to the established regulations of various countries, particularly in the way anti-dumping measures are applied. Anti-dumping rules are often used to prevent companies from selling products at a loss to eliminate local competition and then raise prices. When industry- and resource-based approaches fall short of addressing this challenge, local businesses may seek legal recourse by invoking anti-dumping measures. For foreign firms looking to enter new markets, it is crucial to consider how these regulations might serve as a barrier to entry. Additionally, from an institutional perspective, anti-dumping measures hold strategic importance, as they directly influence competitive dynamics and market accessibility.³⁸

IBV is also important for better understanding the growth of emerging economies by investigating the complicated and fast-changing relationships between organisations and institutions. The institution-based view helps internationalising emerging economies companies to improve their competitiveness and knowledge of the game rules of a foreign country.³⁹ The IBV emphasises that the impact of institutional factors varies between developed and emerging economies. In developed economies, corporate or firm-specific effects are more important in explaining variations in

³⁷ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63-81

³⁸ Francis, A. (2024). Institution-Based View of Business Strategy. *MBA Knowledge Base*. <https://www.mbaknol.com/strategic-management/institution-based-view-of-business-strategy/>

³⁹ Francis, A. (2024). Institution-Based View of Business Strategy. *MBA Knowledge Base*. <https://www.mbaknol.com/strategic-management/institution-based-view-of-business-strategy/>

performance, in line with the resource-based view. This is because market-supporting institutions are typically well-established and often not immediately apparent.⁴⁰ However, in emerging economies, where markets are less well-functioning, the lack of robust institutions becomes apparent. These changes are regarded as "institutional transitions" within economic theory.⁴¹

Two core propositions emerge from the institution-based view to reduce uncertainty in emerging markets. The initial proposition is that managers and companies engage in a rational process of seeking out and making strategic choices within the context of both formal and informal institutions.⁴² The second proposition refers to what has already been said above regarding informal institutions; while formal and informal institutions co-exist to regulate organizational behaviour, in case of ambiguity or failure of formal constraints, informal institutions will assume a more prominent role in reducing uncertainty by offering guidance and legitimacy. For example, the institution-based view posits that if a firm cannot establish itself as a cost or differentiation leader in the market, it may still succeed in overcoming competitors in non-market political arenas where informal relationships exert considerable influence. This distinction has led to the institution-based view becoming the dominant perspective in strategy research on emerging economies.⁴³ It provides

⁴⁰ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63-81

⁴¹ Peng, M. W., Wang, D. Y. L., & Jiang, Y. (2008). An institution-based view of international business strategy: A focus on emerging economies. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 39(5), 920–936.

⁴² Francis, A. (2024). Institution-Based View of Business Strategy. *MBA Knowledge Base*. <https://www.mbaknol.com/strategic-management/institution-based-view-of-business-strategy/>

⁴³ Peng, M. W., Wang, D. Y. L., & Jiang, Y. (2008). An institution-based view of international business strategy: A focus on emerging economies. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 39(5), 920–936.

valuable insights into the profound institutional differences that influence business strategies in these regions.⁴⁴

Institutions also play a central role in guiding corporate strategies, particularly regarding new aspects that are increasingly emerging in sustainability and corporate governance. Institutional analysis of corporate governance allows us to conceive of the latter not only as a set of formal rules, but also as a social construct that reflects prevailing informal practices, especially in institutional contexts characterized by regulatory weakness, ambiguity, or incompleteness.⁴⁵ These institutional characteristics determine how companies adapt to the new challenges posed by environmental and social sustainability and influence how companies respond to regulatory and market pressures for greater stakeholder engagement.

In fact the growing focus on sustainability does not depend solely on autonomous choices by companies but emerges above all in response to increasingly strong institutional pressures from actors such as financial institutions, regulators, and civil society, which demand greater transparency, ESG (environmental, social, governance) disclosure, and more sustainable management of environmental and social resources.⁴⁶ In particular, in contexts where regulatory systems are weak or ineffective in ensuring corporate environmental compliance, institutional investors play a key role through direct monitoring activities in the field. These activities mitigate the information asymmetry that typically limits corporate environmental

⁴⁴ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63-81

⁴⁵ Haxhi, I. (2023). An institutional perspective on corporate governance. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management*. Oxford University Press.

⁴⁶ Qi, S. (2022). How do institutional investors influence corporate governance under legal psychology. *Journal of Environmental and Public Health*, 2022, Article ID 5004309.

governance, encouraging companies to take greater social and environmental responsibility and improving their disclosure to the market and society.⁴⁷

Furthermore, the importance of sustainability in corporate strategies is significantly accentuated in emerging markets, where the institutional framework often lacks transparency and regulatory standards. In such contexts, companies must necessarily negotiate with local institutions and with the different expectations of stakeholders to ensure their survival and competitiveness, adopting business practices that reflect not only minimum legal compliance but also broader regulatory and social expectations.⁴⁸

In this sense, the role of institutional investors is even more crucial, as their direct engagement activities in the field push companies towards a significant increase in environmental and social capital investments and towards more accurate compliance with ESG standards. This effect is further amplified in companies with less environmental disclosure, where institutional investors can exert more pressure, prompting a proactive response towards more sustainable and responsible business practices.⁴⁹

The interaction between institutions and corporate governance therefore takes on a new and decisive central role, since universally valid governance models risk losing their effectiveness without a deep understanding of the specific institutional context. This implies that companies must adopt flexible governance strategies that are contextualized and consistent with their institutional context, aware that the most

⁴⁷ Qi, S. (2022). How do institutional investors influence corporate governance under legal psychology. *Journal of Environmental and Public Health*, 2022, Article ID 5004309.

⁴⁸ Arslan, M., & Alqatan, A. (2020). Role of institutions in shaping corporate governance system: Evidence from emerging economy. *Heliyon*, 6(3), e03520.

⁴⁹ Qi, S. (2022). How do institutional investors influence corporate governance under legal psychology. *Journal of Environmental and Public Health*, 2022

advanced governance systems may not be directly applicable or effective in less structured institutional environments.⁵⁰ Consequently, effective institutional adaptation of governance practices, capable of taking into account regulatory, cognitive, and regulatory dimensions, is an essential condition for companies to successfully address growing social and market demand for sustainability and more advanced, transparent, and responsible corporate governance.⁵¹

Ultimately, sustainability and corporate governance are not just isolated strategic choices, but adaptive responses to growing and complex institutional pressures that are profoundly redefining how companies interact with local and global socio-normative contexts. Therefore, adopting an institutional perspective becomes crucial to understanding how and why companies integrate environmental and social sustainability issues into their strategies and how these same companies can benefit, in terms of performance and reputation, from the correct interpretation and management of these institutional pressures.⁵²⁵³

1.4 Critiques of the IBV

While the Institution-Based View (IBV) has contributed significantly to understanding how institutions shape firm behaviour, it has faced several critiques regarding its limitations in strategic management. IBV was thought to bridge the limits of the other three frameworks. This point does not mean that IBV is perfect

⁵⁰ Haxhi, I. (2023). An institutional perspective on corporate governance. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management*. Oxford University Press.

⁵¹ Haxhi, I. (2023). An institutional perspective on corporate governance. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management*. Oxford University Press.

⁵² Haxhi, I. (2023). An institutional perspective on corporate governance. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management*. Oxford University Press.

⁵³ Qi, S. (2022). How do institutional investors influence corporate governance under legal psychology. *Journal of Environmental and Public Health*, 2022

and useful in all scenarios. The fact that it is a framework demonstrates that it is not a universally adaptable solution. Rather, it represents an abstract version of a more general theoretical concept. As a framework, most existing research about it is static, that is, scholars propose and test linear directions, such as close supplier relations and conglomerate diversification leading to better performance. The dynamic aspects of complex relationships have yet to be explored.

Critics point out that although IBVs emphasise the significance of institutions, they sometimes overlook the changing nature of settings and how firms play an active role in shaping these institutions. One critique is that IBVs may be overly rigid in their approach. They imply that companies are simply limited by their surroundings without acknowledging the ability of companies to shape and change these surroundings.⁵⁴ Some scholars argue that IBV does not sufficiently explain why firms in similar institutional environments often perform differently. This suggests that IBV might be overlooking critical intra-firm differences that the Resource-Based View (RBV) typically addresses.⁵⁵ At the same time, the focus on formal institutions in IBV sometimes leads to an underestimation of the role of informal institutions, such as social norms and cultural practices, which can be equally influential in shaping firm behaviour and strategy. Concerning institutions, critics argue that the IBV does not always provide clear guidance for companies operating in countries with different levels of institutional development. Indeed, the institutional framework's emphasis on context-specific strategies has led to critiques that IBV

⁵⁴ Peng, M. W. (2002). Towards an institution-based view of business strategy. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 19(2-3), 251-267

⁵⁵ Peng, M. W., Wang, D. Y., & Jiang, Y. (2008). An institution-based view of international business strategy: A focus on emerging economies. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 39(5), 920-936

might not be generalizable across different geographic regions or industries.⁵⁶ This context-dependency can limit its application in broader strategic management research.

Another criticism is that IBV is often reactive rather than proactive. Critics argue that IBV tends to describe how firms adapt to existing institutional frameworks but does not sufficiently explore how firms can proactively shape these institutions to their advantage. Moreover, the IBV may neglect micro-level analysis, particularly the strategies of individual firms. It provides a macro-level understanding but might not account for the nuanced decisions and actions of individual firms within institutional frameworks.⁵⁷

In addition to criticism, it is useful to analyze why several scholars consider IBV the most comprehensive theoretical framework for the analysis of firms' strategy, which can add significant insights to the industry-based and resource-based views by specifying in what contexts and under what circumstances certain capabilities in certain industries add value. Simply focusing on traditional industry-based and resource-based variables will not provide a complete picture, thus triggering the quest to probe deeper into institution-based insights. Of course, scholars interested in developed economies have long argued for more attention to institutions. McKinley, Mone, and Moon argued that whether a particular theory gains widespread acceptance depends on its continuity, novelty, and scope. They believe that the IBV excels in these three attributes. First, by extending new institutionalism into strategy

⁵⁶ Peng, M. W. (2002). Towards an institution-based view of business strategy. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 19(2-3), 251-267

⁵⁷ Patnaik, S., Munjal, S., Varma, A., & Sinha, S. (2022). Extending the resource-based view through the lens of the institution-based view: A longitudinal case study of an Indian higher educational institution. *Journal of Business Research*, 147, 124-141

research, the IBV exemplifies a great deal of continuity from the larger social sciences literature.⁵⁸

Second, by emphasizing the path-dependent nature of the evolution of institutions and its impact on strategy, the institution-based view brings significant novelty to strategy research.

Thirdly, the IBV also excels in its scope. The many possible institution-based factors that may influence firm strategy and performance allow for numerous ways of theorizing and testing, resulting in an expanding and cumulative body of knowledge. For example, the IBV can also benefit from cross-fertilization from an evolutionary perspective.⁵⁹

In the end, while the IBV adds to the strategy literature, it also contributes to the larger new institutionalism literature. Focusing on firm-level strategy, the IBV contributes to institutional economics by connecting its micro and macro branches. The institution-based view of strategy also adds to the sociologically oriented institutional theory by demonstrating the benefits of integrating with efficiency-oriented research.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63-81

⁵⁹ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63-81

⁶⁰ Peng, M. W., Sun, S. L., Pinkham, B., & Chen, H. (2009). The institution-based view as a third leg for a strategy tripod. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(3), 63-81

CHAPTER 2

The role of lobbying

2.1 Definition and key concept of lobbying

In an article published in Fortune magazine in 2006, Matt Miller writes, “A company's return on lobbying and campaign contributions, let's call it return on political investment, or ROPI, is astronomically higher than any real investment it can make.”^{61,62} Recent work in the field of organizational studies has championed an institution-based view of business strategy that focuses on the interplay between firms and institutional environments, which include the political institutions and political structures that shape the “rules of the game” of market competition and, thereby influence firm profitability.⁶³

In the world of business and politics, lobbying can be defined as the attempt to influence the decisions of government officials, particularly legislators or regulators, to create outcomes that benefit specific interests or organizations. Lobbying involves professionals employed by companies or organizations to communicate with policymakers. In general, the main objective of companies is to influence, through lobbying, the formulation of policies that have a direct impact on their activities.⁶⁴

Such activities may aim to reduce the regulatory burden, secure subsidies, or create favourable tax policies. In addition, lobbying can be used as a risk management

⁶¹ Scott, C. D. (2015). Lobbying: A critical dimension of business strategy. *International Journal of Law and Management*, 57(1), 17-27

⁶² Miller, B. M. (2006). *FORTUNE: Make 150,000% Today!* Fortune Magazine https://money.cnn.com/2006/01/27/news/economy/lobbyist_fortune/

⁶³ Gautam Ahuja, Sai Yayavaram, (2011) PERSPECTIVE—Explaining Influence Rents: The Case for an Institutions-Based View of Strategy. *Organization Science* 22(6):1631-1652.

⁶⁴ Scott, C. D. (2015). Lobbying: A critical dimension of business strategy. *International Journal of Law and Management*, 57(1), 17-27

strategy, influencing the regulatory environment in which the company operates.⁶⁵ Measured by observable spending, lobbying represents the single most important channel of corporate political influence⁶⁶. By meeting with the policymakers, hiring lawyers and policy experts, submitting briefs, conveying research results and technical information, engaging in media advertising and PR campaigns, and participating in protests, firms build and maintain influence over policies.⁶⁷ Many authorities long ago recognised the centrality of lobbying to any successful business strategy. This point was emphasised more than a quarter-century ago by Philip Kotler, the Dean of US academic marketing. Writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, Kotler explained that the business strategist “needs political skill and a political strategy” and must flex “sophisticated lobbying [...] skills”.⁶⁸ Reginald Jones, former CEO of General Electric, flatly stated that: “I can do more for General Electric by spending time in Washington and assisting in the development of responsible tax policy than I can by staying home and pricing refrigerators.”⁶⁹ Yet, as recently as 2007, fewer than half of global firms polled by McKinsey & Co. even engaged in lobbying. This is shocking, given the return on investment (ROI) numbers reported for those firms wise enough to invest in lobbying activities. For example, one study shows a return of between 1,100 and 3,600 per cent on lobbying expenditures. A second study shows an average ROI of a stunning 22,000 per cent.⁷⁰ This is one of the many empirical

⁶⁵ Gregor, M. (2011). *Corporate lobbying: A review of the recent literature*. IES Working Paper No. 32/2011. Institute of Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague

⁶⁶ Gregor, M. (2011). *Corporate lobbying: A review of the recent literature*. IES Working Paper No. 32/2011. Institute of Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague.

⁶⁷ Gregor, M. (2011). *Corporate lobbying: A review of the recent literature*. IES Working Paper No. 32/2011. Institute of Economic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague

⁶⁸ Kotler, P. (1986). Megamarketing. *Harvard Business Review*, 64, 117-124.

⁶⁹ Scott, C. D. (2015). Lobbying: A critical dimension of business strategy. *International Journal of Law and Management*, 57(1), 17-27.

⁷⁰ Scott, C. D. (2015). Lobbying: A critical dimension of business strategy. *International Journal of Law and Management*, 57(1), 17-27.

studies showing that lobbying is crucial, not only from a political point of view but also, above all, from an economic point of view.

Lobbying Statistics – United States (2025 Q1)

Lobbying Expenditures by Industry Sector⁷¹

Industry Sector	Total Spending (USD)
Pharmaceuticals/Health Products	\$118,549,436
Electronics Manufacturing	\$66,768,954
Insurance	\$49,832,389
Securities & Investment	\$41,863,589
Electric Utilities	\$38,119,658
Oil & Gas	\$37,921,910
Health Services/HMOs	\$36,642,025
Hospitals/Nursing Homes	\$36,534,117
Air Transport	\$36,189,147
Business Associations	\$35,365,239

Top Lobbying Spenders by Company⁷²

Organization	Lobbying Expenditure (USD)
U.S. Chamber of Commerce	\$19,730,000
Pharmaceutical Research & Manufacturers of America (PhRMA)	\$12,995,000
National Association of Realtors	\$11,282,603
General Motors	\$9,970,000
Blue Cross/Blue Shield	\$9,129,170
American Hospital Association	\$8,530,890
American Medical Association	\$8,185,000
Meta (Facebook)	\$7,990,000
Business Roundtable	\$6,860,000
AARP	\$6,630,000

2.2 International models of lobbying regulation: a comparison of systems

An analysis of international data on lobbying regulation reveals significant differences between countries, both in terms of transparency and formal requirements. According to OECD data, only 17 of the 32 member countries for

⁷¹ Foreign lobby watch. OpenSecrets. (2025). <https://www.opensecrets.org/federal-lobbying/industries>

⁷² Foreign lobby watch. OpenSecrets. (2025). <https://www.opensecrets.org/federal-lobbying/top-spenders>

which information is available (53%) have a public register of lobbying activities. However, only eight of these countries include detailed information such as the name of the lobbyist, the area of intervention, and the nature of the activities carried out, highlighting a profound heterogeneity in levels of institutional transparency.⁷³

In the United States, where lobbying is the most institutionalized, the regulatory framework is both advanced and highly formalized. It is grounded in instruments such as the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) and highly detailed monitoring systems, most notably that maintained by OpenSecrets, which allow for accurate tracking of interactions between interest groups and institutional representatives. This ensures a high level of transparency, aligned with a political culture in which lobbying is fully recognized as a legitimate and structured form of interest representation.⁷⁴

In Canada, the Federal Lobbyists Registry includes over 9,000 registrants as of 2024, most of whom are in-house lobbyists. While the system offers considerable visibility into the actors involved, it does not require disclosure of lobbying expenditures, limiting financial transparency.⁷⁵

At the European level, the European Union Transparency Register lists over 12.500 interest representatives engaged with EU institutions. However, registration is voluntary, and both the quality and the regular updating of disclosed data vary considerably. Still, it remains one of the most significant supranational efforts to regulate lobbying practices.⁷⁶

⁷³ OECD. "Lobbying." OECD, 2022, www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/lobbying.html.

⁷⁴ Foreign lobby watch. OpenSecrets, <https://www.opensecrets.org/fara>

⁷⁵ Canada, Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying. (2024). <https://lobbycanada.gc.ca/en/reports-and-publications/annual-report-2023-24/>

⁷⁶ "Registro per La Trasparenza." Commissione Europea, 2024, commission.europa.eu/about/service-standards-and-principles/transparency/transparency-register_it.

Among European States, only a few have implemented binding regulatory mechanisms. In Germany, a mandatory lobbyist register has been in effect since 2022.

⁷⁷ In Berlin alone, it is estimated that over 5,000 lobbyists are active, eight times the number of Bundestag members, with the financial sector alone employing more than 1,500 professionals and spending approximately €200 million annually.⁷⁸

In France, by contrast, the lobbying profession is not officially recognized by a specific code of ethics or a dedicated regulatory framework. Although it is possible to obtain a parliamentary access badge, there is no mandatory national register. Instead, lobbyists must submit declarations to the High Authority for Transparency in Public Life (HATVP), though the scope of this obligation is limited and rarely accompanied by effective enforcement.⁷⁹

In the United Kingdom, a public lobbying register was introduced in 2011, but it too is voluntary. The absence of strict obligations and penalties for omissions or inaccuracies has led several NGOs to criticize the system as ineffective and easily circumvented.⁸⁰

Finally, the Italian case is particularly emblematic and it will be analysed deeper in the next paragraphs. Despite a debate that has lasted for over fifty years and multiple legislative proposals presented to Parliament, Italy still lacks a formal law regulating lobbying activities. This regulatory vacuum has resulted in an ambiguous context in

⁷⁷ Der Spiegel. (2021). "Lobbyisten: Kabinett Beschließt Verhaltenskodex." www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/lobbyisten-kabinett-beschliesst-verhaltenskodex-a-24da84c9-ac47-46f5-92f2-6780806f5589.

⁷⁸ Ritzer, Uwe, and Markus Balser. (2016). "Lobbyisten Bekommen Keine Hausausweise Mehr - Na Und?" Süddeutsche.de, Süddeutsche Zeitung, www.sueddeutsche.de/wirtschaft/lobbyismus-lobbyisten-fliegen-aus-dem-bundestag-und-bleiben-gerauso-maechtig-1.2883584.

⁷⁹ Europa.eu. (2018). "New Lobbying Law in France". European Parliament. [www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)625104](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2018)625104).

⁸⁰ Spinwatch. (2025). "Spinwatch Statement on the Register of Lobbyists Bill." Spinwatch.org, spinwatch.org/index.php/issues/lobbying/item/5517-spinwatch-statement-on-lobbying-register.

which interest representation often relies on informal relationships, lacks systemic oversight, and remains outside an institutional and transparent framework.

Top 6 lobby spenders in Brussels (as of september 2023)⁸¹

Company	Lobbying Expenditure (€)
Meta	8,000,000
Apple	7,000,000
Bayer	6,000,000
Google	5,500,000
Shell	5,500,000
Microsoft	5,000,000

Foreign lobbying spending by Country in USA (2016–2024)⁸²

Country	Total Spending (USD)
China	\$456,923,221
Japan	\$410,750,957
Liberia	\$353,129,848
South Korea	\$321,986,020
Saudi Arabia	\$309,761,188
Marshall Islands	\$285,094,040
Qatar	\$256,328,933
United Arab Emirates	\$242,174,944
Bahamas	\$241,286,140
Bermuda	\$192,682,247

2.3 Outside and Inside lobbying

Theories on the classification of different types of lobbying are extensive, but one of the most important demarcations is the theory that distinguishes inside and outside lobbying, also known as direct and indirect lobbying.⁸³ Weiler said these two tactics are among the methods interest groups use to shape public policy. The choice between them comes down to the resources, goals, and relations to the political system of the group. Inside lobbying refers to the actual attempts of interest groups to affect policy within formal governmental channels. It usually involves face-to-face

⁸¹ Corporate Europe. (2023). “Lobbying Power of Amazon, Google and Co. Continues to Grow | Corporate Europe Observatory.” Corporateeurope.org
corporateeurope.org/en/2023/09/lobbying-power-amazon-google-and-co-continues-grow.

⁸² Foreign lobby watch. OpenSecrets. (2025). <https://www.opensecrets.org/fara>

⁸³ Weiler, F., & Brändli, M. (2015). Inside versus outside lobbying: How the institutional framework shapes the lobbying behaviour of interest groups. *European Journal of Political Research*, 54(4), 745–766.

meetings, the presentation of research findings, the supply of expert advice on areas of policy, and so forth. Inside lobbying is a form of lobbying that seeks to affect the legislation or rule-making process with direct communication and representation at decision-making points in government. It is a tactic often used by special interests like industry associations or professional bodies, who are acting for a subset of society. Primarily, these groups seek monetary or regulatory benefits for their members. In countries like Germany and Switzerland, this access is sometimes institutionalized through means such as social partnerships, where organizations are directly invited to enter policy dialogues.⁸⁴ For these groups, inside lobbying is an effective strategy since it can provide policymakers with in-depth technical information that makes it easier to work through challenging issues. This allows firms to shape policies that directly benefit them, skipping most of the public campaigns needed so far. The discreet and targeted nature of this lobbying makes it a powerful tool for influencing regulatory details and negotiating favourable terms.⁸⁵ On the other hand, outside lobbying focuses on getting the public involved and putting pressure on politicians. This strategy is used by groups that advocate for social issues, as they rarely have direct access to policymakers. These groups, also known as cause groups, rely more on outside lobbying tactics because they are less integrated into the political process than specific interest groups.⁸⁶ This is because specific interest

⁸⁴ Weiler, F., & Brändli, M. (2015). Inside versus outside lobbying: How the institutional framework shapes the lobbying behaviour of interest groups. *European Journal of Political Research*, 54(4), 745–766

⁸⁵ Maloney, W.A., Jordan, G. & McLaughlin, A.M. (1994). Interest groups and public policy: The insider/outsider model revisited. *Journal of Public Policy* 14(1): 17–38.

⁸⁶ Weiler, F., & Brändli, M. (2015). Inside versus outside lobbying: How the institutional framework shapes the lobbying behaviour of interest groups. *European Journal of Political Research*, 54(4), 745–766.

groups are well-informed about well-defined policy areas, a resource that is highly valued by policymakers.⁸⁷

Without direct links with policymakers, they must depend on democracy by mobilizing public sentiment, believing that public pressure can influence policy outcomes. This includes media campaigns, protests, petitions, and grassroots organizing to generate awareness and garner support.⁸⁸

Cause groups use outside lobbying also because they face difficulty in obtaining direct support from policymakers, as these organizations often work for broad societal benefits. This is a challenge for activist groups, as they must engage the public, raise awareness, and generate interest around their issues. This puts pressure on those in a position to enact policy at higher levels, even when they cannot directly interact with decision-makers. Another explanation for outside lobbying is that associations are less involved in politics than single-issue interest groups. Thus, while interest groups with technical expertise and established relationships with policymakers can identify specific pressure points to influence decisions, cause groups lack the same specialized knowledge or history. This means cause groups rely far more on external resources to sway decision-makers. Outside lobbying helps them put certain issues on the radar or make them politically costly for policymakers to ignore.

There are different pros and cons to both inside and outside lobbying tactics. Inside lobbying is, therefore, the most effective way of shaping decisions within

⁸⁷ Weiler, F., & Brändli, M. (2015). Inside versus outside lobbying: How the institutional framework shapes the lobbying behaviour of interest groups. *European Journal of Political Research*, 54(4), 745-766

⁸⁸ Weiler, F., & Brändli, M. (2015). Inside versus outside lobbying: How the institutional framework shapes the lobbying behaviour of interest groups. *European Journal of Political Research*, 54(4), 745-766.

organizations already participating in the policymaking process. Outside lobbying, on the other hand, is an important tool for those entities which do not have direct access to decision-makers and need to mobilize public opinion to exert pressure. Though the two strategies differ in methodology, most interest groups use a combination of both, depending on the issue and resources available.⁸⁹ Kriesi notes that attempts to influence policies are most efficient when multiple tactics are used.⁹⁰ For these reasons, most political interest groups use a mix of inside and outside strategies rather than specialising in the use of either of them.⁹¹

In conclusion, Inside and outside lobbying are two distinct strategies to influence public policy. Direct dialogue with policymakers through technical knowledge and resources, known as inside lobbying, is preferred by well-endowed special interest groups. In contrast, outside lobbying relies on public engagement and pressure, an approach favoured by cause groups, which often lack strong relationships with policymakers. A mix of both strategies is common, as they serve complementary purposes in shaping the political landscape.

2.4 United States, European Union and Italy lobbying legislation

When examining lobbying beyond theories and concepts, it becomes evident that the regulations and supervision of lobbying activities vary significantly depending on the country. The legal framework governing lobbying is influenced by the economic

⁸⁹ Weiler, F., & Brändli, M. (2015). Inside versus outside lobbying: How the institutional framework shapes the lobbying behaviour of interest groups. *European Journal of Political Research*, 54(4), 745-766

⁹⁰ Kriesi, H., Tresch, A. & Jochum, A. (2007). Going public in the European Union: Action repertoires of Western European collective political actors. *Comparative Political Studies* 40(1): 48–73.

⁹¹ Weiler, F., & Brändli, M. (2015). Inside versus outside lobbying: How the institutional framework shapes the lobbying behaviour of interest groups. *European Journal of Political Research*, 54(4), 745-766

circumstances of each country. In this analysis, we explore how lobbying is controlled in Italy, the European Union, and the United States. These three regions are chosen because they demonstrate different approaches to lobbying regulation; the United States is known for its well-implemented system; the European Union follows a developing but voluntary approach; and Italy represents a country where lobbying is less regulated and shows a higher degree of informality compared to the other regions discussed here. By comparing these countries, we can gain insights into how the political environments impact the conduct of lobbying activities.

In the United States of America, lobbying is a regulated practice mainly controlled by the “Lobbying Disclosure Act” of 1995.⁹² This regulation requires lobbyists to register with Congress, reveal their clientele, and regularly detail their lobbying endeavors. The reason for selecting U.S.A. for this evaluation is due to its legal structure and the significant impact of lobbying on policy formation. Lobbyists are obligated to submit reports every quarter. There are strict rules concerning the offering of gifts and travel perks to policymakers. In the United States, as well as in other countries, cooling-off periods for ex-officials are in place to prevent them from transitioning directly into lobbying after their tenure ends in office.⁹³ This strict regulatory framework positions the US as a model for examining the impact of influence on politics.

In the United States, lobbying regulation is centrally managed, whereas the European Union has opted for a voluntary approach. The EU Transparency Register,

⁹² Scott, C. D. (2015). Lobbying: A critical dimension of business strategy. *International Journal of Law and Management*, 57(1), 17–27

⁹³ Drutman, L. (2020). 6 The Business of America Is Lobbying. In B. Ginsberg & K. Hill (Ed.), *Congress: The First Branch--Companion Readings* (pp. 112-140). New Haven: Yale University Press.

established in 2011, aims to disclose information about lobbyists interacting with EU institutions. Membership is not mandatory.⁹⁴ The European Union was selected for this study due to its efforts to oversee lobbying practices across its member states. Although the transparency register has improved the visibility of lobbying activities to some extent, it is considered less robust than the system in the United States because registration is optional and there are no penalties for non-compliance. Nevertheless, the European Union is moving towards implementing regulations to address public demands for transparency and accountability in policymaking.⁹⁵

The situation in Italy provides an interesting contrast to explore when it comes to lobbying practices, especially when compared to the approaches of the U.S. and the EU. Italy stands out among its international counterparts for the absence of a comprehensive national legal framework on lobbying, a gap that has long fueled concerns about transparency and the risk of undue influence in the policy-making process. This case is particularly relevant as lobbying in Italy continues to operate in a largely informal manner, and attempts to introduce a binding transparency register have been limited and slow-moving. Critics frequently raise concerns about the lack of transparency in lobbying practices in Italy, with worries about links to organised crime and the challenges in identifying those who have an impact on shaping legislation.⁹⁶

In the United States, the European Union and Italy, lobbying regulations reveal stark contrasts determined by their respective political and cultural contexts. In the United

⁹⁴ Mahoney, C. (2007). Lobbying success in the United States and the European Union. *Journal of Public Policy* 27(1): 35–56.

⁹⁵ Bauer, E., Thiel, M., & Kotyla, S. (2021). Lobbying and foreign influence. *European Parliamentary Research Service*

⁹⁶ Mahoney, C. (2007). Lobbying success in the United States and the European Union. *Journal of Public Policy* 27(1): 35–56.

States, lobbying is strictly regulated, with rigorous legal requirements and significant penalties for violations, ensuring a high degree of transparency. The EU, while not as strict, nevertheless applies measures to improve transparency and regulate the influence of lobbyists within its multi-level institutional system. Italy, on the other hand, does not yet have a comprehensive regulatory framework for lobbying. This regulatory gap contributes to limiting transparency and weakens public control. These regulatory disparities stem from different institutional contexts: US lobbying rules are shaped by the power of financial and advocacy interests; the EU approach reflects its complex and pluralistic governance model, while Italy's more permissive context reflects the ongoing challenges of supervising lobbying activities within a weak and fragmented cultural and institutional system.

Comparative table: lobbying regulation in USA, EU and Italy

Aspect	United States	European Union	Italy
Legal framework	Lobbying Disclosure Act (1995)	EU Transparency Register (2011, voluntary)	No national law
Registration mandatory	Yes	No	No
Reporting requirements	Quarterly reports to Congress	None	None
Sanctions for non-compliance	Yes (financial and legal)	No	No
Gift/travel regulations	Strictly regulated	Not covered	Not regulated
Cooling-off periods	Yes	Some at institutional level	Not defined
Transparency level	High	Moderate	Low

2.5 The symbiotic relationship between lobbying, institutions, and corporations

As previously highlighted, lobbying plays a crucial role in connecting institutions and businesses, significantly influencing public policies enacted by institutions as well as the corporate strategies of the companies that engage in it. This occurs due to the essential role lobbying plays in shaping the interaction between businesses and political institutions. The relationship that lobbying can have, not only with

institutions but also with companies, has often been the subject of scholarly analysis. The methods and success of lobbying are determined by the institutional context. In political systems like Switzerland, where direct democracy is dominant, interest groups adapt their strategies between internal lobbying and external lobbying.⁹⁷ This interactive engagement with institutions influences how businesses push their agendas and the extent to which they can shape regulations and policies. For instance, in systems with transparent and open institutional frameworks, lobbyists often have more opportunities to defend their clients' interests through legitimate channels. From the perspective of the relationship between lobbying and businesses, companies view lobbying as a strategic and essential tool to ensure that the political environment remains favourable to their business interests. This influence occurs through transparent activities based on the expertise of professionals who perform this role, such as participating in public discourse, supporting or opposing regulatory changes, gathering documentation, and studying informative and strategic documents. This interaction between businesses and lobbying, through lobbyists, is closely linked to legal obligations, particularly in regions like the United States, where, as previously mentioned, the “Lobbying Disclosure Act” of 1995 imposes transparency and limits unethical influence.⁹⁸ Despite these legal constraints, companies continue to exert significant influence over policy by cultivating long-term relationships with public officials and stakeholders. These relationships enable companies to constantly shape

⁹⁷ Weiler, F., & Brändli, M. (2015). Inside versus outside lobbying: How the institutional framework shapes the lobbying behaviour of interest groups. *European Journal of Political Research*, 54(4), 745–766

⁹⁸ Weiler, F., & Brändli, M. (2015). Inside versus outside lobbying: How the institutional framework shapes the lobbying behaviour of interest groups. *European Journal of Political Research*, 54(4), 745–766

policy to align it with their business strategies and promote competitive advantages.⁹⁹¹⁰⁰

In conclusion, lobbying serves as a powerful tool for influencing policy and is significantly influenced by the institutional context in which it operates. The complex interaction between companies and institutions through lobbying creates a dynamic environment in which both parties aim to influence and accommodate each other's needs and objectives. This relationship highlights the influential role of lobbying as a strategic tool for companies to position themselves within the regulatory and political landscape.

2.6 Theoretical conclusion

In conclusion, the two previous chapters provided a theoretical framework for explaining the strategic dynamics that govern the relationship between businesses and institutions. After comparing the Resource-Based View with the Institution-Based View, it was possible to identify the limitations of an approach based purely on internal resources, emphasizing the fundamental role played by formal and informal institutions in defining organizational choices and development paths for companies. This theoretical model has made it possible to define public affairs as a central tool for acquiring legitimacy, representation, and political influence, which are fundamental for growth and development at the corporate level. It is not simply a set of lobbying techniques, but a strategic culture that allows for the professional

⁹⁹ Weiler, F., & Brändli, M. (2015). Inside versus outside lobbying: How the institutional framework shapes the lobbying behaviour of interest groups. *European Journal of Political Research*, 54(4), 745–766

¹⁰⁰ Getz, K. A. (2001). Public affairs and political strategy: Theoretical foundations. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 1(4) & 2(1), 305-329

structuring of dialogue with political decision-makers and public opinion. Public affairs therefore becomes an essential factor for any sector or company that wants to establish itself in a stable and active dialogue with institutions.

A comparison of three models of lobbying regulation in the United States, the European Union, and Italy has in turn consolidated the approach described above, revealing how the lack of an institutionalized regulatory and cultural framework constitutes a competitive and systemic weakness for our country. The analysis and data included have shown that, in contexts where lobbying is not only regulated but also widely accepted, representation activities are included in the corporate strategy in all respects, while in Italy, unregulated, opaque, and fragmented management of relations with institutions remains dominant.

These theoretical considerations form the fundamental concepts on which the subsequent empirical analysis is based. The following chapters will therefore analyze the particular characteristics of the Italian football sector, highlighting its economic and social potential as well as the structural obstacles that prevent its development. Starting from these premises, it will then be possible to investigate in depth the reasons why Italian football is unable to make the most of its strategic contribution to the national economy and determine the conditions for closing this gap through the implementation and dissemination of a professional culture, especially in the field of public affairs.

Chapter 3

Industry Analysis: The Italian Soccer Industry

3.1 Overview of the Italian soccer industry

With a global turnover of \$47 billion, it accounts for 28% of the turnover generated by sport worldwide, football is the most profitable sport. Europe is the richest stage internationally, but in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 seasons, European Top Division clubs recorded a total loss of €7 billion in revenue. However, according to the authors of the research, the numbers will rise again: by 2025, the average annual increase in the number of European spectators will be +8% (+37.7% if we consider the calculations by 2030).¹⁰¹

Football is undoubtedly the most popular and played sport in Italy: it is the favourite of 31% of Italians, compared to the European average of 27%. In Italy, football generated £78.8 billion in revenue, equivalent to 3% of Italian GDP. Despite this, it is an industry in distress: in the 2020-2021 season, approximately -92.4% fewer matches were played than in 2018-2019, resulting in a €7 billion revenue shortfall, including ticketing (€4.4 billion), sponsorship and commercial activities (€1.7 billion), TV rights and UEFA revenue (€0.9 billion).¹⁰²

Italian football is not only a major economic force, but also a pillar of national identity, who helped shape our society, generation after generation: in fact, officially established in 1929, Serie A has become one of the most prominent football leagues

¹⁰¹ Marazzi, T., Mancini, V., & Postiglione, A. (2022). Il business dello sport in Italia: Il mondiale in Qatar e le nuove frontiere tra eSports, crypto, NFT e metaverso. Rome Business School.

¹⁰² Marazzi, T., Mancini, V., & Postiglione, A. (2022). Il business dello sport in Italia: Il mondiale in Qatar e le nuove frontiere tra eSports, crypto, NFT e metaverso. Rome Business School.

in the world.¹⁰³ The Italian Football Federation (FIGC), founded in 1898, is Italy's governing body of football, organizing and overseeing all levels of football, from professional leagues like Serie A to amateur leagues and youth programs.¹⁰⁴ The FIGC is also responsible for the Italian national teams, including the four-time FIFA World Cup-winning men's team, playing a key role in developing the sport across the country and internationally.¹⁰⁵

Throughout its history, Serie A has been marked by the dominance of iconic clubs such as Juventus, AC Milan, and Inter Milan, whose achievements have elevated Italian football to the global stage. Over the years, Serie A has experienced periods of significant dominance, technological advancements, and increased international recognition. This growth of Serie A closely paralleled Italy's global football successes, particularly with the national team's World Cup victories in 1934, 1938, 1982, and 2006.¹⁰⁶ These triumphs not only showcased the strength of Italian football, but also underlined the talent nurtured by Serie A. Many of the players behind these victories had played in the Italian league, confirming its crucial role in developing top-level footballers. Each World Cup victory strengthened Italy's standing as a football superpower and further solidified Serie A's standing as one of the top football leagues in Europe and the world.

Over the past 15 years, Italian football has gone through a phase of transition marked by significant challenges. The rise of financially stronger foreign leagues, particularly the Premier League, has intensified international competition. At the same time, the

¹⁰³ *Lega Serie A-Storia*. (n.d.). Lega Serie A | Home. <https://www.legaseriea.it/it/lega-serie-a/storia>

¹⁰⁴ La storia della Federazione: approfondimenti. (n.d.). Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio. <https://www.figc.it/it/federazione/la-federazione/la-storia-della-federazione-approfondimenti/>

¹⁰⁵ FIGC & PWC. (2024). Report Calcio 2024. Centro studi FIGC. <https://www.pwc.com/it/it/publications/reportcalcio/2024/reportcalcio2024ITA.pdf>

¹⁰⁶ La storia della Federazione: approfondimenti. (n.d.). Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio. <https://www.figc.it/it/federazione/la-federazione/la-storia-della-federazione-approfondimenti/>

absence of meaningful reforms to nurture young talent has contributed to enduring structural weaknesses within the Italian football system. Nevertheless, Italian football remains one of the top five leagues in Europe.¹⁰⁷ It continues to attract players, sponsors, and a global fan base.

3.1.1 Historical background

The Italian Football Federation (FIF) was founded in Turin in 1898, organizing the first Italian championship in the same year, which Genoa won. In 1905, it obtained official recognition from FIFA and moved its headquarters from Turin to Milan, adopting its current name, FIGC. The Italian national team played its first official match in 1910, while the federation headquarters underwent several moves: it returned to Turin in 1911, then Bologna in 1926, and finally settled in Rome in 1929. Since the end of the Second World War, the FIGC has experienced several commissariats due to sporting crises or extra-football scandals.

The first significant crisis after the Second World War occurred in 1958 after the national team failed to qualify for the World Cup in Sweden, an event known as the "Belfast disaster", marking a deep crisis in Italian football. In the following years, the FIGC underwent other commissionerships following significant scandals, such as the "Totonero" of 1986 and the more notorious "Calciopoli" of 2006, which shook the Italian football system.¹⁰⁸

The last commissionerisation occurred in 2017 due to the failure to qualify for the World Cup in Russia in 2018. The inability to find a new president through elections

¹⁰⁷ FIGC & PWC. (2024). Report Calcio 2024. Centro studi FIGC. <https://www.pwc.com/it/it/publications/reportcalcio/2024/reportcalcio2024ITA.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ La storia della Federazione: approfondimenti. (n.d.). Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio. <https://www.figc.it/it/federazione/la-federazione/la-storia-della-federazione-approfondimenti/>

led to CONI's appointment of an extraordinary commissioner to ensure stability and internal reorganization of the FIGC. Analyzing eleven-a-side football and the professional leagues, one can see a gradual development from the second half of the 20th century directed more and more towards building a solid and wealthy industry.¹⁰⁹

Italian football was marked by fragmented management and limited regulation before establishing the Lega Nazionale Professionisti (LNP) in 1946. Initially, football in Italy was organized through regional leagues, but as the sport's popularity grew, a national competition was sought, leading to the creation of Serie A in 1929. This league, managed by the Direttorio Divisione Superiore under the fascist regime, was designed to unify clubs across Italy. However, governance remained underdeveloped, primarily focusing on political rather than professional matters, leading to instability and inconsistent regulations.¹¹⁰

In the aftermath of World War II, the need for a stable and centralized football governance structure became evident, leading to the establishment of the Lega Nazionale Professionisti (LNP) in 1946. This body brought Serie A and Serie B under unified administration, improving financial control and raising professional standards. Early reforms included limitations on squad sizes, fixed player salaries, and the use of foreign referees for high-stakes matches. As prominent clubs like Juventus, AC Milan, and Inter Milan gained influence, figures such as Umberto

¹⁰⁹ La storia della Federazione: approfondimenti. (n.d.). Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio. <https://www.figc.it/it/federazione/la-federazione/la-storia-della-federazione-approfondimenti/>

¹¹⁰ La storia della Federazione: approfondimenti. (n.d.). Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio. <https://www.figc.it/it/federazione/la-federazione/la-storia-della-federazione-approfondimenti/>

Agnelli and Angelo Moratti began pushing for greater independence from the FIGC, particularly in matters of player transfers and international recruitment.¹¹¹

The 1960s and 1970s accelerated Serie A's growth as a business with live television broadcasts and relaxed foreign player restrictions. Sponsorships surged in the 1980s, and selling television rights in the 1990s transformed Serie A into a global brand. By 2010, Serie A formed its distinct league, Lega Serie A, fully embracing its commercial potential through global events like the Supercoppa Italiana in China and Qatar, expanding international fan engagement and investment. Recent developments have further modernized Serie A. In 2021, the league established an International Broadcast Centre in Lissone, centralizing media production for global content distribution. Additionally, embracing eSports in 2021 has extended Serie A's reach to younger audiences, adapting to the evolving digital sports landscape and securing its relevance in global entertainment.¹¹²

The rise of new commercial strategies and technological innovations such as digital platforms, e-sports, international broadcasting and the opening of global markets is reshaping the football industry. If Serie A wants to reclaim its place as the world's leading league, it must embrace innovation, attract investment and implement meaningful structural reforms.

3.1.2 Organizational structure of Italian football

Football is undeniably the dominant sport in Italy, with an extraordinary cultural and social significance. Over 44 million Italians show interest in the game, 31 million are dedicated supporters of teams, and millions more engage with football through

¹¹¹ Lega Serie A-Storia. (n.d.). Lega Serie A | Home. <https://www.legaseriea.it/it/lega-serie-a/storia>

¹¹² Lega Serie A-Storia. (n.d.). Lega Serie A | Home. <https://www.legaseriea.it/it/lega-serie-a/storia>

various media. Matches attract 8 million spectators annually to stadiums, while another 25 million follow games via television or radio. Remarkably, all 25 of the most-watched television programs in Italy are football-related, highlighting its pervasive influence on the country's media landscape and cultural identity. The organizational structure of Italian football is a multifaceted system strategically designed to regulate, promote, and sustain the sport across all levels.¹¹³

At the core of the Italian football system stands the Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio (FIGC), based in Rome, which acts as the main governing body of the sport. The FIGC manages all levels of the game, from grassroots and amateur competitions to the top tiers of professional football, namely Serie A, Serie B and Serie C. It is responsible for enforcing financial fair play rules and overseeing the club licensing process, with the aim of ensuring a stable and ethically sound football environment.¹¹⁴

The major football organization in Italy is Lega Serie A, based in Milan. This organization focuses on the Serie A championship, the Coppa Italia and Supercoppa Italiana. Since becoming an independent entity in 2010, Lega Serie A has operated with considerable commercial autonomy. It serves as the economic engine of Italian football, managing broadcasting rights, sponsorship deals and other revenue generating activities. The league has also embraced innovation, exemplified by the creation of the International Broadcast Center in Lissone.¹¹⁵

This advanced facility centralizes media production and distribution, strengthening Serie A's global visibility and appeal. Although Lega Serie A enjoys operational independence, it remains subject to the regulatory oversight of the FIGC to ensure

¹¹³ Baroncelli, A., & Lago, U. (2006). Italian football. *Journal of Sports Economics*, 7(1), 13–28.

¹¹⁴ La Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio. (n.d.). Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio. <https://www.figc.it/it/federazione/la-federazione/la-federazione/>

¹¹⁵ Lega Serie A-Storia. (n.d.). Lega Serie A | Home. <https://www.legaseriea.it/it/lega-serie-a/storia>

adherence to financial and ethical standards.¹¹⁶ Below Serie A are the minor professional leagues, namely Serie B and Serie C, which serve as essential platforms for the development of clubs aspiring to reach the top league, while extensive amateur and youth systems form the basis for the development of soccer at the local level.

These interconnected levels seek to ensure that Italian soccer remains competitive and inclusive. In the following sections, the complex roles and functions of the FIGC, the professional leagues, and the amateur and youth systems will be examined in more detail, highlighting their contribution to the success and sustainability of Italian soccer.

3.1.2.1 Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio (FIGC)

The FIGC is the central institution governing Italian football, established in 1898 to oversee and promote the sport across the nation and recognized by FIFA in 1905 and as a founding member of UEFA in 1954, it operates as a private legal association under the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI).¹¹⁷

The FIGC is dedicated to ensuring that Italian football aligns with international standards while maintaining the sport's rich cultural significance within the country. At the helm of the FIGC is the President, Gabriele Gravina, who leads the organization with a vision to promote football's competitive and developmental aspects. The Federal Council supports the President by implementing policies, managing regulations, and coordinating the activities of Italian football's key sectors. This structure integrates representatives from the professional leagues, amateur

¹¹⁶ Lega Serie A-Statuto (n.d.). <https://img.legaseriea.it/vimages/64818bc7/LNPA%20Statuto-Regolamento%20aggiornato%20alle%20delibere%2016-24mag23.pdf>

¹¹⁷ La storia della Federazione: approfondimenti. (n.d.). Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio. <https://www.figc.it/it/federazione/la-federazione/la-storia-della-federazione-approfondimenti/>

divisions, and technical associations, reflecting the FIGC's wide-ranging responsibilities.¹¹⁸

The FIGC performs several key functions for the sustainability and success of Italian football. Its regulatory and promotional efforts aim to ensure a balance between professionalism and inclusivity, ensuring the growth of the sport at all levels. The federation applies the principles of financial fair play and licensing requirements, aligning Italian clubs with UEFA standards and safeguarding the ethical and financial stability of the game.¹¹⁹

The organizational structure of the FIGC is designed as follows: at its core is the Federal Assembly, the federation's highest legislative body, which approves statutes, elects the President, and sets the strategic direction for Italian football; then, the Federal Council, serving as the executive organ, implements these policies, oversees the FIGC's regulatory framework, and ensures compliance across all game levels; in the end, in a fundamental administrative role, the General Secretary manages the day-to-day operations of the FIGC,¹²⁰ this includes supervising financial activities, coordinating internal departments, and ensuring the execution of the President's directives. The Secretary's role is integral to maintaining the efficiency and transparency of the organization.

Specialized sectors within the FIGC, such as the Technical and the Youth and School sectors, operate with significant autonomy to fulfill their specific mandates. The Technical Sector oversees the education and certification of coaches, referees, and

¹¹⁸ La Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio. (n.d.). Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio. <https://www.figc.it/it/federazione/la-federazione/la-federazione/>

¹¹⁹ La Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio. (n.d.). Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio. <https://www.figc.it/it/federazione/la-federazione/la-federazione/>

¹²⁰ Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio. (2024). Statuto Federale.

other technical staff, while the Youth and School Sector focuses on nurturing young talent and promoting grassroots football. These sectors collaborate with professional leagues and amateur systems to create a unified footballing ecosystem. The FIGC also maintains strong partnerships with external bodies, including the Associazione Italiana Arbitri (AIA), Associazione Italiana Calciatori (AIC), and Associazione Italiana Allenatori Calcio (AIAC).¹²¹

These collaborations ensure that referees, players, and coaches are supported and regulated under a cohesive framework, aligning their activities with the FIGC's strategic goals. In sum, the FIGC's multi-faceted structure and functions enable it to fulfill its mission of promoting and sustaining Italian football. By balancing regulatory oversight, financial stability, and developmental initiatives, the federation ensures that football in Italy thrives as both a cultural phenomenon and a competitive sport.

3.1.2.2 Lega Serie A, Lega Serie B, and Lega Pro

The organization of Italy's professional football leagues represents a fundamental pillar of the national football system, covering the highest levels of competition and development. Operated under the supervision of the FIGC, Serie A, Serie B and Serie C function within distinct frameworks aimed at ensuring competitive integrity, financial stability and the international standing of Italian football. These leagues form a hierarchical structure that allows for movement between divisions, encouraging both competition and growth.

Lega Serie A

¹²¹ Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio. (2024). Statuto Federale.

Serie A, Italy's major professional league, is managed by the Lega Nazionale Professionisti Serie A (LNPA). Comprising 20 teams, the league follows a single round robin format with home and away matches, resulting in a total of 38 games per team throughout the season. At the end of the season, the team with the most points is crowned champion and awarded the Scudetto. The governance of Serie A is spearheaded by a President, currently Ezio Simonelli, elected on the 20th of December 2024, alongside an Executive Board that includes a Vice President, an independent council member, and various club representatives.¹²² The league emphasizes both sporting and financial management, overseeing broadcasting rights, sponsorships, and the distribution of revenues among member clubs. Serie A also plays a crucial role in international competitions, with the top four clubs qualifying for the UEFA Champions League. Meanwhile, the bottom three teams are relegated to Serie B, ensuring constant movement and competitiveness across divisions.¹²³

Lega Serie B

Serie B is managed by the Lega Nazionale Professionisti Serie B (LNPB), an autonomous association of 22 clubs. The league acts as a critical developmental platform, providing a pathway to Serie A for its top teams and serving as a safety net for those relegated from the top tier.

The governance structure includes a President, currently Paolo Bedin, a Vice President, and a council of elected representatives. Serie B is noted for its innovative marketing approach and commitment to nurturing young talent. A prime example is

¹²² Pinci, M., & Vanni, F. (2024, December 20). *Ezio Simonelli nuovo presidente della Lega Serie A. Decisivo il Lecce, è la vittoria di Inter e Juve.* *La Repubblica*.

https://www.repubblica.it/sport/calcio/serie-a/2024/12/20/news/lega_serie_a_simonelli_eletto_presidente_con_14_voti-423899291/

¹²³ Lega Serie A. (2023). Statuto-Regolamento della Lega.

the league's investment in branding and the integration of sponsorships into the league's identity. At the end of each season, the top two teams are automatically promoted to Serie A, while the third to eighth-placed teams enter a playoff to determine the final promotion spot. Conversely, the bottom three clubs face relegation to Serie C, while the fourth-last and fifth-last teams play in the playouts.¹²⁴

Lega Pro

Serie C, governed by the Lega Italiana Calcio Professionistico (Lega Pro), is Italian football's third and final professional division. With 60 clubs divided into three regional groups of 20 teams each, Serie C balances geographical representation with competitive rigor. The President, Matteo Marani, a Vice President, and an administrative council oversee the league. Serie C's operational focus is promoting local talent and maintaining club sustainability, often as a breeding ground for future Serie A and Serie B players. The league employs a promotion system where the winners of each group are directly promoted to Serie B, while additional promotion spots are determined through playoffs. Relegation to amateur football occurs for the lowest-ranked teams, reinforcing the principle of merit-based competition.¹²⁵

3.1.2.3 Amateur, Youth, and Women's Football in Italy

Beyond professional leagues, Italian football is supported by a wide network of amateur competitions, youth leagues, and an expanding women's football structure, all regulated under the FIGC's guidance. These categories ensure the sport's inclusivity and development, forming the foundation of Italy's football ecosystem.

Lega Nazionale Dilettanti (LND)

¹²⁴ Lega Serie B. (2024). Statuto della Lega.

¹²⁵ Lega Italiana Calcio Professionistico. (2023). Statuto della Lega.

The Lega Nazionale Dilettanti (LND) administers all amateur football in Italy, including national, regional, and provincial competitions. Its central responsibility is managing Serie D, the highest amateur division structured into nine groups. The first-place teams from each group may request admission to Serie C, provided they meet the FIGC's licensing criteria. The LND proposes replacements following specific ranking rules if a team declines or lacks eligibility.¹²⁶

Below Serie D, regional leagues like Eccellenza, Promozione, Prima Categoria, and Seconda Categoria are organized by regional committees. The Eccellenza winners advance to Serie D, while the lowest-ranked Serie D teams are relegated to Eccellenza. Provincial leagues, including divisions like Terza Categoria, cater to further grassroots participation.¹²⁷

Youth Football

Youth football is a priority for Italian football development. The Primavera 1 Championship, organized by Lega Serie A, represents the pinnacle of youth competition. The league includes 20 teams of youth squads from top professional clubs. It follows a league structure with regular-season matches, playoffs for the championship, and relegation of the lowest-placed teams to Primavera 2.¹²⁸ This competition serves as a talent pool for senior teams and aligns with the FIGC's broader developmental goals.

Women's Football

The Divisione Calcio Femminile, part of the FIGC, oversees women's football in Italy. This division organizes the Serie A Femminile, Serie B Femminile, and related

¹²⁶ Lega Nazionale Dilettanti. (2024b). Statuto della Lega.

¹²⁷ Lega Nazionale Dilettanti. (2024a). Regolamento della Lega.

¹²⁸ Lega Nazionale Professionisti Serie A. (2024). Regolamento del Campionato Primavera 1 2024/2025 - Trofeo Giacinto Facchetti.

tournaments such as the Coppa Italia Femminile and Supercoppa Italiana Femminile. Serie A Femminile achieved professional status in 2022, underscoring the growing commitment to the women's game. The Divisione manages these competitions with autonomy, setting participation rules and maintaining administrative and financial compliance with FIGC standards. Promotion and relegation systems apply between the Serie A and Serie B, mirroring the structure of the men's leagues.¹²⁹

3.1.3 Economic importance and key statistics

Today, sport in Italy has an impact on the national economy of around €24.5 billion (3% of GDP), a significant figure that guarantees around 420,000 jobs, but pales in comparison to countries such as France and the United Kingdom, where it accounts for almost 6% of GDP. Speaking specifically about soccer, the sector in Italy generates around €11 billion, thus appearing not simply as an entertainment industry but as a business with a significant social and economic impact. The return on each euro invested by the Italian government in football is remarkably high, reaching nearly 20 euros in value.¹³⁰

Thus, Italian football is a fundamental part of Italy's economy and society, generating direct and indirect impacts in fiscal, economic, and social ways that extend far beyond the football pitch. Football represents an essential driver of national GDP through its direct, indirect, and induced effects. This includes the support of approximately 130,000 full-time equivalent jobs across industries such as tourism, retail, media, and hospitality due to its interconnected role in sustaining various sectors of the Italian economy. Football's fiscal contributions are equally remarkable; in 2022, the industry

¹²⁹ Divisione Serie A Femminile Professionistica. (2023). Regolamento della Divisione Serie A Femminile Professionistica

¹³⁰ Marazzi, T., Mancini, V., & Postiglione, A. (2022). Il business dello sport in Italia: Il mondiale in Qatar e le nuove frontiere tra eSports, crypto, NFT e metaverso. Rome Business School.

achieved a record-breaking €189.6 million in social security contributions, an 86.2% increase from 2021, showcasing a strong rebound from pandemic-induced declines. Additionally, the government sees substantial returns on investment, with each euro yielding €19.7 in fiscal and social value, emphasizing the efficiency and value-generation capabilities of the sector. The financial structure of Italian football reveals significant strengths alongside critical vulnerabilities.¹³¹

The professional sector achieved an aggregate production value of €4.3 billion during the 2022-2023 season, reflecting a 23.9% increase from the previous year. A more specific analysis of the tax contribution from betting also confirms the prevalence of football compared to other sports: between 2006 and 2023 alone, the collection of bets on football competitions increased more than sevenfold, from 2.1 to 14.8 billion euros, with a tax revenue of 371.4 million euros, while the second sport, tennis, does not exceed 3.6 billion euros in collection and 93.3 million in revenue.¹³²

The men's football Serie A in 2023 generated revenue in Italy of almost €2.8 billion (only in 2012, it did not exceed €807.1 million), while the estimated worldwide revenue is €34.6 billion, mostly played in Asia and Europe.¹³³

However, the sector remains heavily reliant on television revenues, which constitute 40-50% of income for Serie A clubs. This dependency exposes the industry to market fluctuations and limits revenue diversification, especially compared to leagues such as the English Premier League and German Bundesliga, which have capitalized on global branding, commercial strategies, and infrastructure investments. In the

¹³¹ Bellinazzo, M. (2024). Calcio, la Serie A riparte da ricavi in aumento e perdite ridotte. Il Sole 24 ORE. <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/la-serie-riparte-ricavi-aumento-e-perdite-ridotte-AF0c73OD>

¹³² FIGC & PWC. (2024). Report Calcio 2024. Centro studi FIGC. <https://www.pwc.com/it/it/publications/reportcalcio/2024/reportcalcio2024ITA.pdf>

¹³³ FIGC & PWC. (2024). Report Calcio 2024. Centro studi FIGC. <https://www.pwc.com/it/it/publications/reportcalcio/2024/reportcalcio2024ITA.pdf>

Premier League, even the club earning the least from TV rights makes 40% more than the top-earning club in Serie A, highlighting the significant revenue gap between the two leagues.¹³⁴

Matchday revenues remain underdeveloped due to outdated stadiums, with minimal progress in modernization compared to Spain, where lobbying efforts have secured widespread infrastructure upgrades. Sponsorships and commercial activities also contribute significantly, but the overall market in Italy remains less lucrative than in other top European leagues, further underscoring the need for strategic reforms. Employment within the sector underscores football's socio-economic importance, with 7,832 professionals, 92.6% of all professional sports roles in Italy, directly engaged in the industry. This workforce is complemented by indirect and induced employment, driven by related industries such as event management, merchandising, and media production.¹³⁵

Employee spending in these industries further amplifies football's economic footprint, supporting regional development and driving consumption across Italy. Events such as Serie A matches and international tournaments act as economic catalysts, generating increased spending in local economies through tourism, transportation, and hospitality and bolstering tax revenues via value-added tax (VAT) and corporate taxes. Despite these contributions, Italian football faces structural challenges that hinder its long-term growth and sustainability.

¹³⁴ Diritti tv, il confronto Premier-Serie A: l'ultima inglese incassa il 40% in più della prima italiana. (n.d.). Calcio e Finanza. <https://www.calcioefinanza.it/2024/02/03/diritti-tv-premier-league-2022-2023-confronto-serie-a/>

¹³⁵ FIGC & PWC. (2024). Report Calcio 2024. Centro studi FIGC. <https://www.pwc.com/it/it/publications/reportcalcio/2024/reportcalcio2024ITA.pdf>

The cumulative financial losses of over €4 billion in the past decade and total debts nearing €4.8 billion reflect inefficiencies in governance and resource allocation. High wage-to-revenue ratios, often exceeding 60% in Serie A clubs, pose sustainability issues, particularly for mid-tier and smaller clubs. Compared to federations such as the Bundesliga, which maintains stricter financial controls, Italian football struggles to implement balanced and sustainable financial practices.¹³⁶

The lack of robust lobbying and institutional relations frameworks remains a key issue. Unlike leagues such as the English Premier League or the U.S. sports industry at large, where lobbying is regarded as a fundamental tool for corporate economic growth and stability, Italian football has failed to fully leverage its potential to influence policymaking (fig.3). This gap limits opportunities for tax incentives, public-private partnerships, and infrastructure funding, leaving the sector disadvantaged. For example, while Spain has effectively lobbied for investments in grassroots programs and stadium modernization, Italian football has failed to mobilize similar initiatives. Strategic lobbying could unlock significant opportunities, including reduced taxation on ticket sales, improved funding for youth development, and partnerships to enhance infrastructure, thereby increasing fiscal contributions and fostering long-term growth.

Football's broader social impact cannot be overlooked. It serves as a platform for inclusion, integration, and community development, engaging millions of fans and participants. Programs initiated by the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) aim to reduce barriers to participation and promote equality, reflecting football's

¹³⁶ FIGC & PWC. (2024). Report Calcio 2024. Centro studi FIGC. <https://www.pwc.com/it/it/publications/reportcalcio/2024/reportcalcio2024ITA.pdf>

commitment to social equity. These efforts and the sport's economic and fiscal contributions emphasize its role in shaping Italy's social fabric and cultural identity. In conclusion, Italian football is a pivotal economic and social driver, contributing billions to GDP, sustaining thousands of jobs, and generating significant fiscal revenues—however, systemic inefficiencies, financial vulnerabilities, and the underdevelopment of institutional lobbying limit its potential. To ensure sustainable growth and global competitiveness, Italian football must address these challenges through targeted reforms, enhanced lobbying efforts, and strategic infrastructure and youth development investments. By fully leveraging its economic, fiscal, and social potential, the sector can solidify its position as a pillar of Italy's economy and society while paving the way for a more sustainable and competitive future.

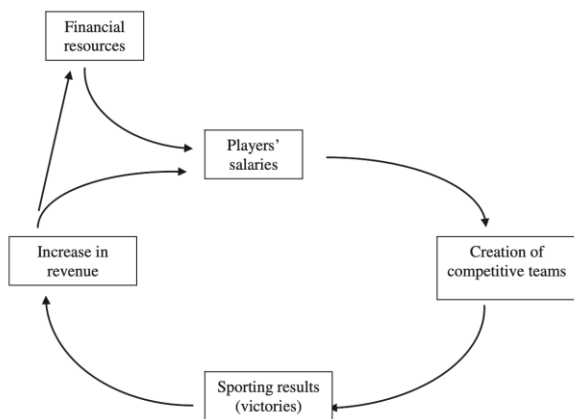


Figure 1: The Virtuous Circle Between Sporting Results and Economic Gain (Leading Clubs)
SOURCE: Lago, Baroncelli, and Szymanski (2004). Reprinted with permission of Egea.

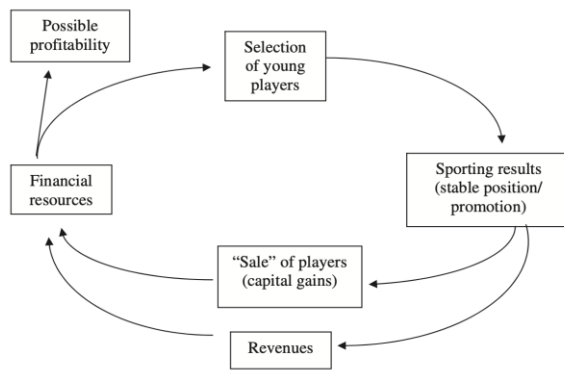
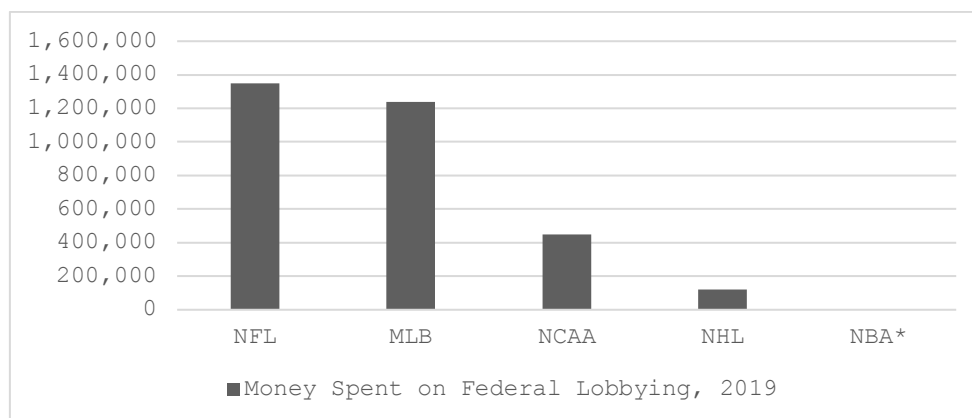


Figure 2: The Virtuous Circle Between Sporting and Economic Results (Small Clubs)
SOURCE: Lago, Baroncelli, and Szymanski (2004). Reprinted with permission of Egea.



**(NBA filed three reports of lobbying activity below the reporting threshold of \$5,000)*

Fig. Money Spent on Federal Lobbying in the US Sports industry, 2019¹³⁷

3.1.4 The limits of Italian football

Italian football, particularly Serie A, faces numerous challenges that hinder its ability to compete with other major European leagues like the Premier League, Bundesliga, and La Liga. Despite its cultural significance and economic contributions, systemic inefficiencies and outdated practices have left the Italian football system struggling to maintain financial sustainability and competitive relevance. One of the most significant issues is economic instability, with Serie A clubs heavily reliant on broadcasting revenues, which account for 40-50% of their total income. This dependency makes clubs vulnerable to fluctuations in media deals and limits revenue diversification. By contrast, the Premier League generates revenues three times higher than Serie A, thanks to global branding, sponsorships, and a diversified financial model.¹³⁸

Between 2018 and 2023, Italian professional football recorded a staggering cumulative loss of €4.9 billion, underscoring the unsustainable nature of its financial

¹³⁷ Baccellieri, E. (2020, February 14). NFL, MLB spend more than a million on government lobbying - Sports Illustrated. SI. <https://www.si.com/mlb/2020/02/14/nfl-nba-nhl-lobbying-us-government>

¹³⁸ Pirone, F. (2015, 8 giugno). L'industria del calcio in Italia. Fragilità e rischi del modello di crescita : Inchiesta. <https://www.inchiestaonline.it/economia/francesco-pirone-lindustria-del-calcio-in-italia-fragilita-e-rischi-del-modello-di-crescita/>

practices. Infrastructure remains a major concern, as Italian clubs invest far less in stadium modernisation than their European counterparts. Between 2011 and 2021, only 10.36 percent of total assets in Italy were allocated to infrastructure, compared to 38.6 percent in France and 29.6 percent in Germany. Most Italian stadiums are outdated, publicly owned and generate significantly less matchday revenue than the modern, privately owned facilities found in other major leagues.¹³⁹ The construction of modern stadiums is a key priority for increasing Serie A clubs' revenues, but progress is often hampered by complex regulations and local bureaucracy. To address this issue, the League has urged the government to establish a central authority to oversee and accelerate stadium-related projects. Infrastructure upgrades are crucial not only to increase matchday revenues, but also to support Italy's bid to host the 2032 European Championships, improve the fan experience, enhance the league's international image, and bring diversified revenue streams into club coffers, as new stadiums are increasingly becoming multifunctional hubs.¹⁴⁰

For instance, Juventus's ownership of the Allianz Stadium is a rare success, but other clubs lag due to regulatory barriers and financial constraints.¹⁴¹ Revenue diversification also remains limited. While leagues like the Bundesliga earn nearly 40% of their income from commercial activities such as sponsorships, merchandising, and partnerships, Serie A clubs lag far behind. Marketing strategies in Italian football remain weak, limited by the absence of long term planning, poor revenue diversification and inadequate infrastructure that restricts commercial

¹³⁹ FIGC & PWC. (2024). Report Calcio 2024. Centro studi FIGC. <https://www.pwc.com/it/it/publications/reportcalcio/2024/reportcalcio2024ITA.pdf>

¹⁴⁰ Austini, A. (2023, 27 gennaio). Riformare il calcio italiano è possibile? - Il Post. Il Post. <https://www.ilpost.it/2023/01/27/riforma-calcio-italiano-figc/>

¹⁴¹ Pirone, F. (2015, 8 giugno). L'industria del calcio in Italia. Fragilità e rischi del modello di crescita : Inchiesta. <https://www.inchiestaonline.it/economia/francesco-pirone-lindustria-del-calcio-in-italia-fragilita-e-rischi-del-modello-di-crescita/>

growth. These structural issues have hindered the global expansion of most clubs, with only a few, such as Milan and Juventus, managing to build a strong international brand despite the broader system's shortcomings.¹⁴²

A key structural issue lies in the fragmented governance of Italian football. Reform efforts, such as reducing the number of teams in Serie A or restructuring the leagues, have repeatedly stalled due to stakeholder disagreements. The four independent associations, Serie A, Serie B, Lega Pro (Serie C), and the amateur leagues, each have conflicting priorities, making it difficult to reach a consensus and to create unity among them. Proposed reforms, such as reducing the number of professional teams from 100 to 60, could improve resource allocation and financial stability, but such changes remain mired in political and institutional conflicts. Reducing the number of teams in Serie A from 20 to 18 or 16 could also improve the league's financial balance and competitive quality. A minor league would allow for better distribution of resources among clubs and create more open dates for European tournaments and national team activities. This change could strengthen Italian clubs in international competitions and help the national team recover after failing to qualify for the last two World Cups. However, critics argue that fewer matches could lead to a significant drop in TV revenue, which is the primary income source for many clubs.¹⁴³

Another critical area is the lack of effective lobbying and institutional relations, which other leagues have successfully utilized to secure favorable policies. For example, the Premier League and Bundesliga have leveraged lobbying to obtain government support for infrastructure projects, tax incentives, and youth

¹⁴² FIGC & PWC. (2024). Report Calcio 2024. Centro studi FIGC. <https://www.pwc.com/it/it/publications/reportcalcio/2024/reportcalcio2024ITA.pdf>

¹⁴³ Austini, A. (2023, 27 gennaio). Riformare il calcio italiano è possibile? - Il Post. <https://www.ilpost.it/2023/01/27/riforma-calcio-italiano-figc/>

development programs. In Italy, however, the absence of a coordinated lobbying strategy has prevented similar advancements, limiting the league's ability to modernize its infrastructure or secure better fiscal policies. Enhanced lobbying could unlock opportunities such as extended broadcasting contracts, tax breaks for stadium investments, and increased funding for grassroots programs, thereby improving financial sustainability and competitiveness.

From a fiscal perspective, Italian football does contribute significantly to the national economy, with €1.433 billion in fiscal and social security contributions in 2021 alone.¹⁴⁴ However, these contributions are undermined by inefficiencies and structural weaknesses that prevent the system from realizing its full potential.

The lack of modern financial practices and the fragmented governance structure exacerbate these issues. Italian football's failure to capitalize on its youth systems is another weakness. While grassroots football engages over a million players annually, only a tiny fraction progress to professional levels. This inefficiency hinders the development of homegrown talent and increases reliance on expensive international players. Leagues like the Bundesliga and La Liga have successfully integrated youth development into their financial and sporting models, providing a sustainable talent pipeline and reducing wage costs.¹⁴⁵

In conclusion, Italian football faces significant limitations, including economic instability, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of strategic governance. Compared to other European leagues, Serie A's reliance on broadcasting revenues, outdated stadiums, and fragmented leadership highlight the urgent need for reform. Enhanced

¹⁴⁴ FIGC & PWC. (2024). Report Calcio 2024. Centro studi FIGC. <https://www.pwc.com/it/it/publications/reportcalcio/2024/reportcalcio2024ITA.pdf>

¹⁴⁵ Austini, A. (2023, 27 gennaio). Riformare il calcio italiano è possibile? - Il Post. <https://www.ilpost.it/2023/01/27/riforma-calcio-italiano-figc/>

lobbying and institutional relations could address many issues by securing better policies, increasing investment, and driving modernization. By learning from the successes of leagues like the Premier League and Bundesliga, Italian football could regain its position as a global leader while ensuring long-term financial and competitive sustainability.

3.1.4 Financial Fair Play (FFP) and its impact on Serie A

Financial Fair Play (FFP), introduced by UEFA in 2011, is a regulatory framework to ensure financial stability among European football clubs. It operates primarily through two key mechanisms: the break-even rule, which requires clubs to balance their spending with revenues over a rolling three-year period, and the monitoring of overdue payables to prevent financial mismanagement.¹⁴⁶ Clubs that fail to comply may face sanctions, including fines, transfer restrictions, and exclusion from European competitions.¹⁴⁷

In Serie A, the introduction of FFP coincided with a period of financial instability characterized by high wage bills, unsustainable transfer spending, and significant debts. Clubs such as AC Milan and Inter struggled initially to meet the requirements. AC Milan, for instance, faced exclusion from European competitions in 2018 due to a failure to comply with the break-even rule. This prompted the club to undertake extensive financial restructuring, focusing on reducing costs, promoting youth

¹⁴⁶ Plumley, D., Ramchandani, G. M., & Wilson, R. (2019). The unintended consequence of Financial Fair Play: An examination of competitive balance across five European football leagues. *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, 9(2), 118-133

¹⁴⁷ Benoldi, A., & Sottoriva, C. (2011). La disciplina della redazione del bilancio di esercizio delle società di calcio. Confronto con l'esperienza internazionale ed impatto del c.d. «Financial Fair Play». *Rivista di Diritto ed Economia dello Sport*, 7(1), 1-148.

development, and increasing revenues.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, under stricter settlement agreements, Inter worked on streamlining operations and improving its financial position, aided by competitive success domestically and in European tournaments.¹⁴⁹ The present situation in Serie A reflects a mix of progress and ongoing challenges. Clubs like Napoli, Lazio, and Atalanta have adopted financially sustainable models, balancing competitiveness with compliance. These clubs demonstrate that adherence to FFP can coincide with sporting success. Juventus, however, continues to face challenges, with the need to reduce deficits and meet future FFP standards following sanctions and exclusion from European competitions in recent years. While FFP has pushed Serie A clubs toward financial discipline, it has also highlighted disparities within the league.¹⁵⁰

Wealthier clubs with higher revenues from sponsorships, broadcasting rights, and international competitions are better positioned to comply. Smaller clubs, in contrast, face constraints that limit their competitiveness. Despite these challenges, implementing FFP has spurred a cultural shift toward more responsible financial governance across Italian football, contributing to greater financial transparency and long-term planning.¹⁵¹ This dual impact of fostering financial health while

¹⁴⁸ La UEFA ha multato il Milan per le violazioni del Fair play finanziario e ha imposto alla società il pareggio di bilancio - Il Post. (2018, 14 dicembre). Il Post. <https://www.ilpost.it/2018/12/14/milan-uefa-sanzioni-ffp/>

¹⁴⁹ Repubblica.it. (2024, 29 febbraio). L'Inter e il Fair-play finanziario, conti in ordine nelle ultime due stagioni. Ricavi pubblicitari in crescita (aspettando due top sponsor). la Repubblica. https://www.repubblica.it/sport/calcio/serie-a/inter/2024/02/29/news/inter_bilancio_conti_sponsor_ricavi_fair_play_finanziario-422231791/

¹⁵⁰ La Redazione. (2024). Serie A e FFP: i prossimi paletti per Inter, Milan e Roma e la situazione Juventus. Calcio e Finanza. <https://www.calcioefinanza.it/2024/09/07/inter-milan-roma-juventus-situazione-ffp-uefa/>

¹⁵¹ Benoldi, A., & Sottoriva, C. (2011). La disciplina della redazione del bilancio di esercizio delle società di calcio. Confronto con l'esperienza internazionale ed impatto del c.d. «Financial Fair Play». *Rivista di Diritto ed Economia dello Sport*, 7(1), 1-148.

maintaining competitive inequalities underscores both the achievements and the limitations of FFP in reshaping the financial landscape of Serie A.¹⁵²

3.2 Porter's Five Forces analysis

Porter's Five Forces analysis is a strategic tool designed to assess an industry's competitive dynamics, competitive advantage, and profitability. It identifies five critical forces influencing an organization's ability to compete effectively and achieve long-term success. These forces include competitive rivalry, the bargaining power of suppliers and buyers, and the threat of new entrants and substitutes. By analyzing these factors, organizations can better understand the challenges and opportunities in their industry, adapt their strategies, and secure a competitive advantage.¹⁵³

When applied to Italian football, this framework comprehensively explains the pressures facing Serie A, Serie B, and Serie C. The analysis highlights the intricate interplay between financial instability, infrastructural challenges, global competition, and changing public behavior, collectively shaping Italian football's current and future landscape. By understanding these forces, we can identify strategic actions to improve the financial health, global competitiveness, and sustainability of sport in Italy.¹⁵⁴

3.2.1 Competitive Rivalry

¹⁵² Silvestri, S. (2022). *Il Fair Play Finanziario*. Università Politecnica delle Marche. <https://tesi.univpm.it/bitstream/20.500.12075/17107/1/IL%20FAIR%20PLAY%20FINANZIARIO.pdf>

¹⁵³ Porter, M. E. (2008). The five competitive forces that shape strategy. *Harvard Business Review*, 86(1), 78–93. <https://hbr.org/2008/01/the-five-competitive-forces-that-shape-strategy>

¹⁵⁴ Costa, M. F., Costa, C. E., Felisoni de Angelo, C., & Araújo de Moraes, W. F. (2018). Perceived competitive advantage of soccer clubs: A study based on the resource-based view. *RAUSP Management Journal*, 53(1), 23–34.

Italian football, particularly Serie A, is renowned for its fierce domestic rivalries between clubs such as Juventus, Milan, Inter, and Napoli. These rivalries are deeply rooted in history and regional identities, making them essential for fan engagement. However, the competitive intensity of Italian football extends beyond the national borders due to the global nature of the sport. Serie A clubs compete with leagues like the Premier League and La Liga, which have more profitable broadcasting deals. The Premier League has sold the television rights for four years, from 2025 to 2029, to Sky and TNT for a record sum: £6.7 billion, or €7.8 billion, double the amount earned by Serie A.¹⁵⁵ This discrepancy has the effect of limiting the ability of Italian clubs to compete for top international talent.

The financial imbalance between the top clubs and the rest further exacerbates the rivalry. Between 2018 and 2023, Italian professional football recorded cumulative losses of €4.9 billion, highlighting financial instability.¹⁵⁶ There is also a worrying trend in viewership. Compared to the previous season, there was a significant decline of 849,000 viewers, and compared to two seasons ago, the drop is as high as 1.389 million viewers.¹⁵⁷ This decline is a substantial concern for Italian football since Serie A clubs rely heavily on broadcasting revenues, which comprise 40-50% of their income, as highlighted in PwC's "ReportCalcio 2024".

Serie B and Serie C clubs face even more significant challenges due to their limited access to broadcasting and sponsorship revenues, creating a substantial financial

¹⁵⁵ La Repubblica. (2023). Premier League, diritti tv da record: il doppio della Serie A. la Repubblica. https://www.repubblica.it/sport/calcio/esteri/2023/12/05/news/premier_league_diritti_tv_accordo-421578398/

¹⁵⁶ FIGC & PWC. (2024). Report Calcio 2024. Centro studi FIGC. <https://www.pwc.com/it/it/publications/reportcalcio/2024/reportcalcio2024ITA.pdf>

¹⁵⁷ Pezzali, R. (2024, 9 ottobre). Calcio in TV, gli ascolti crollano. In dieci anni persi la metà degli spettatori. DDay.it. <https://www.dday.it/redazione/50722/calcio-in-tv-gli-ascolti-crollano-il-dieci-anni-persi-la-meta-degli-spettatori>

disparity with Serie A teams. While fans' passion is undoubtedly a driving force behind the competitiveness of football, the primary competition between clubs is financial, focusing on television rights and all factors that can contribute to stability or economic growth.

3.2.2 Bargaining Power of Suppliers

Players and agents have considerable influence in Serie A, mainly due to the liberalization that followed the Bosman ruling and subsequent regulations. While the average salary in Serie A remains high compared to other leagues, clubs find it challenging to compete financially with the Premier League and the Saudi Pro League. The Saudi Pro League, receiving substantial state investment, has attracted high-profile European players, further reducing Serie A's bargaining power. According to the "Report Calcio 2024", player wages consume over 60% of Serie A clubs' revenues, leaving minimal resources for other strategic investments. Italian clubs such as Juventus and AC Milan have historically leveraged their reputation to attract top talent. However, the gap is widening as clubs from other leagues outspend them. In addition, Italian clubs face limitations due to their infrastructure, which restricts their capacity to offer state-of-the-art training facilities. Milanello and MilanLab are exceptions, while most other clubs struggle with outdated facilities. With much smaller budgets, Serie B and Serie C clubs often lose their best talents to wealthier leagues, creating an unsustainable player development pipeline. The growing influence of agents has become a significant factor in the football market. Agents often considerably impact decisions regarding player transfers, favoring teams with more substantial financial resources and better relationships with specific

agents. In 2023, the total expenditure on agent fees by clubs reached an unprecedented \$888.1 million (approximately €815 million), a substantial increase from the \$623.2 million recorded the previous year, as reported in the FIFA Report on Football Agents in International Transfers. This figure represents a 42.5% increase from 2022 and exceeds the previous record of \$654.7 million set in 2019 by more than a third.¹⁵⁸

3.2.3 Bargaining Power of Buyers

Fans and sponsors are crucial to the financial health of Italian football. Serie A has a strong domestic fan base but struggles internationally as leagues like the Premier League and La Liga dominate global markets. The ReportCalcio 2024 highlights the International Broadcast Centre as a key part of Serie A's strategy to enhance global content distribution. However, its impact is comparatively limited when viewed against the broad reach of English football. Serie B and Serie C continue to place significant emphasis on community involvement. However, declining ticket sales and reduced sponsorship due to limited visibility have further compromised their financial stability. In contrast, English football has not experienced a similar decline. While the number of spectators in the Italian second division was just over 4 million last season, as reported by the Football Report 2024, the English Championship has consistently ranked second among all leagues in spectator attendance, with a steady growth that has recently accelerated. The English Championship attracted 12,720,000 spectators, approximately one and a half million more than Serie A. The presence of

¹⁵⁸ La Redazione. (2023). Commissioni record per gli agenti: nel 2023 incassati oltre 800 milioni a livello globale. Calcio e Finanza. https://www.calcioefinanza.it/2023/12/14/commissioni-agenti-2023-fifa-report-milioni/?refresh_ce

spectators is crucial for revenue generation, and their absence can lead to significant financial losses.¹⁵⁹ Italian football, which is experiencing a decline in popularity among young demographics, must take note of the positive developments in England to reverse its current trend.

Sponsors also play a key role, demanding high visibility and a strong return on investment (ROI). For instance, the failure to modernize stadiums, as noted in the "ReportCalcio 2024," limits sponsorship opportunities. Juventus' Allianz Stadium is one of Italy's few privately owned and modern stadiums, whereas most clubs rely on outdated, municipality-owned facilities, restricting matchday revenue and global appeal. This emphasizes the pivotal role that spectators and sponsors play in driving the success of the football sector.

3.2.4 Threat of New Entrants

Domestically, the threat of new entrants remains low due to the high capital requirements and strict financial regulations imposed by the FIGC. However, the emergence of financially robust leagues such as the Saudi Pro League and the Chinese Super League poses a significant international threat. These leagues offer higher wages and better financial stability, attracting top European talent. The RapportoCalcio 2024 emphasizes the importance of lobbying for improved fiscal policies and international collaborations to mitigate this threat and maintain the competitiveness of Italian football.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Rial, B. (2024, 11 giugno). Championship posts record attendance of 12.7 million. The Stadium Business. <https://www.thestadiumbusiness.com/2024/06/11/championship-posts-record-attendance-of-12-7-million/>

¹⁶⁰ FIGC & PWC. (2024). Report Calcio 2024. Centro studi FIGC. <https://www.pwc.com/it/it/publications/reportcalcio/2024/reportcalcio2024ITA.pdf>

3.2.5 Threat of Substitutes

The issue of substitutions in football is multifaceted, with implications that extend beyond the Italian context. Digital entertainment can engage a younger demographic, including eSports, streaming platforms, and short-lived leagues like the King's League. This generation is showing signs of losing interest in traditional football. Platforms like Twitch have created interactive experiences for fans that traditional leagues have struggled to replicate effectively.

In response to this challenge, Serie A has initiated a strategic investment in digital innovation. However, it lags behind other leagues, such as the Premier League, which have solid digital strategies and partnerships with global streaming services. The Report Calcio 2024 highlights the necessity for Italian football to embrace digital innovation to sustain public interest and compete with other forms of entertainment. The outdated infrastructure of stadiums further exacerbates the problem, as fans seek immersive and interactive viewing experiences that are difficult to offer under current conditions.¹⁶¹

Porter's Five Forces Analysis – Italian Football

Competitive Rivalry	Bargaining Power of Suppliers	Bargaining Power of Buyers	Threat of New Entrants	Threat of Substitutes
Historic rivalries among clubs (Juventus, Milan, Inter, Napoli)	Contractual power of players and agents (post-Bosman ruling)	Strong domestic fanbase, but weak international presence	High economic and regulatory barriers in Italy (FIGC)	Competition from digital entertainment (eSports, streaming, King's League)

¹⁶¹ FIGC & PWC. (2024). Report Calcio 2024. Centro studi FIGC. <https://www.pwc.com/it/it/publications/reportcalcio/2024/reportcalcio2024ITA.pdf>

Global competition with richer leagues (Premier League, La Liga)	High wages in Serie A compared to other leagues, but lower than Premier League and La Liga	Heavy dependence on TV revenues (40–50% of club income)	External threat from emerging leagues (Saudi Pro League, Chinese Super League)	Traditional football less appealing to younger generations
Financial inequality between top clubs and smaller teams	Growing influence of agents in transfer dealings	Serie B and C rely on community engagement, but suffer from low visibility		Dominance of interactive platforms like Twitch
		Lower stadium attendance in Italy compared to England (Serie B: 4 million vs Championship: 12.72 million)		

3.3 Competitive advantage and corporate and business strategy in Italian soccer

3.3.1 Competitive advantage in the Italian football industry

The football enterprise can be functionally defined as a system intended to produce goods and services for the community, in which the available resources must be combined efficiently to achieve the set objectives. The concept of competitive advantage in professional football clubs is the complex combination of strategic resource management, operational efficiency, and financial acumen. Football clubs today function as competitive teams on the pitch and complex organizations in a multi-billion-dollar industry, navigating between sport, business, and culture. Clubs must use their resources and capabilities effectively to gain a sustainable competitive advantage. Strategic frameworks such as the Resource-Based View (RBV) and the VRIO framework guide how clubs can use their tangible and intangible resources to

build a sustainable competitive advantage that leads to sporting success and financial growth.¹⁶²

A club's brand remains one of the most important sources of competitive advantage. This is particularly true for teams with a history of success. Clubs with strong brands often serve as industry benchmarks, demonstrating how historical success and effective marketing can extend their value proposition on a global scale. Iconic teams such as Manchester United, Real Madrid, and Juventus exemplify the power of an established brand. These clubs have built an international reputation through their history, consistent results, and global fan base. This brand equity attracts lucrative sponsorship deals and fosters fan loyalty, translating into higher revenues from ticket sales, merchandising, and broadcasting rights.¹⁶³

Another source is infrastructure, such as stadiums, all related to different societies. Modern stadiums, such as the Allianz Stadium in Turin and Tottenham Hotspur's state-of-the-art facility, serve as venues for matches and multifunctional facilities that generate substantial revenue streams. These stadiums host various events, including concerts and conferences, enabling clubs to diversify their revenue streams beyond match days. For instance, the Juventus Stadium complex features amenities such as car parks, retail outlets, the J Hotel, and the J Medical, a center that Juventus and private individuals utilize for medical examinations and check-ups. Furthermore, the stadium experience has evolved into a pivotal aspect for enhancing fan engagement, with offerings like hospitality suites and interactive fan zones creating an environment that fosters deeper bonds between clubs and their supporters.

¹⁶² Grass, D., Holst, M., & Jönsson, B. (2001). Competitive advantages in professional football clubs: A resource-based analysis. Lund University.

¹⁶³ Mori, F. (2015). Analisi delle performance delle società di calcio [Master's thesis, Università degli Studi di Pisa]. Università degli Studi di Pisa.

Human capital, particularly the competence of managers and coaches, is also a key component of competitive advantage. Successful clubs invest in leadership that aligns their sporting ambitions with sound financial strategies. For example, Borussia Dortmund and FC Porto have built reputations for their ability to identify and nurture young talent, generating both on-field success and significant transfer revenues. These clubs rely on well-structured scouting networks and youth academies, turning player development into a strategic asset. Conversely, wealthier clubs such as Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain demonstrate how financial resources can be used to acquire top talent and build world-class teams that can compete at the highest level.¹⁶⁴

The integration of technology and data analysis has profoundly impacted the football industry. Clubs like Brentford have adopted data-driven recruitment strategies, leveraging advanced analytics to identify undervalued players who align with their tactical systems. This approach has enabled smaller clubs to compete with more financially robust rivals, optimizing the efficiency of their investments.¹⁶⁵ Innovations like the MilanLab, a cutting-edge sports science center, demonstrate how technology can enhance player performance and longevity, providing a competitive advantage.

Organizational structure is the set of economic and social relationships a company has with other companies or customers. These relationships go beyond the financial aspect because they include elements such as trust and personal experience, which

¹⁶⁴ Sentinel Sports Group. (2025) Competitive Operational Advantage in Football. (n.d.). Sentinel Sports Group. <https://sentinelsportsgroup.co.uk/competitive-operational-advantage-in-football/>

¹⁶⁵ Stats Perform. (2025). Brentford Use Data Analytics in Hopes of Premier League Promotion. (n.d.). Stats Perform. <https://www.statsperform.com/resource/brentford-use-data-analytics-hopes-premier-league-promotion/>

are difficult to imitate and represent a crucial distinctive competence. In football, Liverpool is an excellent example of an organizational structure that is understood as a unique competence. The close link between the club and its fans has enabled it to achieve many successes.¹⁶⁶

It's crucial to remember that keeping a competitive advantage in football is difficult because clubs' financial differences remain the most critical deciding factors, giving the wealthiest teams an enormous advantage in acquiring great players. Regulatory regimes like Financial Fair Play seek to rectify these disparities by limiting club spending. However, there are examples of clubs that have succeeded in overcoming these challenges. Brighton & Hove Albion's rise through innovative recruitment, Borussia Dortmund's focus on youth development, and Manchester United's global marketing strategies underline aligning resources with long-term goals. These virtuous examples demonstrate that by integrating innovation, sound management, and strategic resource allocation, even football clubs with fewer financial resources can build the foundations for lasting success.¹⁶⁷

VRIO Framework – Italian Football Industry

Resource/Capability	Valuable	Rare	Inimitable	Organized	Competitive Advantage
Historic brand and global recognition (e.g., Juventus)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sustainable competitive advantage
Modern infrastructure (e.g., Allianz Stadium)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sustainable competitive advantage
Managerial competence and scouting (e.g., youth academies)	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Temporary or potentially sustainable advantage

¹⁶⁶ Mori, F. (2015). Analisi delle performance delle società di calcio [Master's thesis, Università degli Studi di Pisa]. Università degli Studi di Pisa.

¹⁶⁷ Sentinel Sports Group. (2025) Competitive Operational Advantage in Football. (n.d.). Sentinel Sports Group. <https://sentinelsportsgroup.co.uk/competitive-operational-advantage-in-football/>

Technology and data analysis (e.g., MilanLab, Brentford)	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	Temporary or potentially sustainable advantage
Organizational structure and stakeholder relations (e.g., fan loyalty)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sustainable competitive advantage
Financial capacity (e.g., large budgets)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Competitive parity or temporary advantage

3.3 2 Corporate strategies

Growth strategies in the football industry

Competitive advantage is the core of football clubs' success, combining strategic resources, operational capabilities, and innovation. However, transforming this strength into sustainable progress requires a growth strategy that enhances existing assets and amplifies potential in an increasingly globalized and competitive football landscape. Growth strategies are crucial in this context, providing clubs with tools and approaches to meet future challenges, expand their influence, and build a solid foundation for long-term competitiveness. The growth strategy of football organizations requires a comprehensive approach that combines innovation, marketing, financial sustainability, and community involvement. As the sector evolves, clubs must rethink traditional models, adopt advanced technologies, and strengthen relationships with fans and stakeholders to remain competitive in a dynamic global market.

Internationalization of the brand and global reach

International brand expansion increases visibility and is crucial for corporate growth for a football team. Teams should concentrate on establishing a significant presence in emerging markets where football is becoming increasingly popular, such as Asia,

North America, and the Middle East. This can be accomplished by encouraging collaborations with regional personalities and organizations. These kinds of projects help raise awareness.¹⁶⁸

Further recommended measures include participation in international tournaments, the organization of friendly matches, and the establishment of academies abroad. The Juventus Academy is a prime example of this strategy, with branches spanning from America to Australia, Africa to Asia, and Europe, where it has more than 80 J-academies. These strategies have proven effective in engaging new audiences on an international scale.

Successful localized marketing initiatives that adapt to local cultures may serve as an additional growth strategy. For example, collaborating with regional media, producing content in the local language, and setting up social media profiles in the local languages can help create a closer bond with fans. Another consideration is licensing contracts for merchandise distribution in these areas, which can boost sales and brand recognition internationally.

Sinergies for Developing young talent

Football clubs that can rely on less money must focus on developing young players, especially those from their local area. Establishing youth academies that combine football training with education ensures a steady flow of qualified players. These academies reduce the need to rely on expensive external transfers, increase the chances of developing future champions, and help maintain the club's unique identity.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Mori, F. (2015). *Analisi delle performance delle società di calcio* [Master's thesis, Università degli Studi di Pisa]. Università degli Studi di Pisa.

¹⁶⁹ Sentinel Sports Group. (2025) *Competitive Operational Advantage in Football*. (n.d.). Sentinel Sports Group. <https://sentinelsportsgroup.co.uk/competitive-operational-advantage-in-football/>

Creating clear paths for academy players to move up to the first team is essential. Working together with schools and universities can help with this. This can mean finding new talent early on and offering scholarships to help them grow. Investing in global scouting networks also helps clubs find new talent from different places worldwide, making them more competitive in the international market.¹⁷⁰

Infrastructure and facility development

Modern stadiums can enhance fans' experiences and help the club with its activities. Investing in the latest stadiums with digital ticketing, luxury suites, and eco-friendly facilities boosts match revenues. These stadiums should also be designed for concerts, conferences, and other events all year round, as well as team museums, shopping centers, and interactive activities.¹⁷¹

Modern training facilities with the latest technology are also essential to help players improve and recover. Clubs should also consider creating community spaces within their facilities, allowing them to build closer relationships with local fans and increase their social influence.¹⁷²

Institutional relations and lobbying

As discussed below, establishing institutional relations offices specializing in local, national, and European lobbying is imperative for navigating regulations and influencing policies. Effective lobbying can ensure favorable financial frameworks, such as tax incentives for infrastructure development, youth programs, and player

¹⁷⁰ Gasparini, S. (2024). Innovative financial strategies in football: A quantitative analysis of performance, investment and risk [Master's thesis, Università degli Studi di Padova].

¹⁷¹ World Football Summit. (2024). This is How Innovation is Becoming the Main Drive of Growth in Football. World Football Summit. <https://worldfootballsummit.com/this-is-how-innovation-is-becoming-the-main-drive-of-growth-in-football/>

¹⁷² Deloitte Sports Business Group. (2024). Annual review of football finance 2024. Deloitte. <https://www.deloitte.co.uk/arff>

protection. This must happen not only at the club level but also at the national leagues and federations level.

Italian clubs should engage with EU bodies to support football's growth policies. This should include seeking funding for stadium modernization and sustainability projects, which would ensure a competitive advantage for Serie A and Serie B teams.

Data and technology integration

The last two corporate strategies refer to those linked to the intangible resources. The effective use of data and technology is key to driving innovation in football, both on the pitch and in the company. AI-based analytics can personalize interactions with followers, providing relevant content and services that increase engagement. These techniques can also help improve player performance management, reduce injuries, and optimize training programs. From a corporate and financial perspective, Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems are integrated information systems that centralize and automate key functions such as finance, human resources, personnel management, and other business activities. In football, these tools enable more effective financial and operational complexity management, improving cost monitoring, regulatory compliance (e.g., sustainability and ESG), and data analysis. This supports data-driven decisions, optimizes operations, and facilitates revenue diversification, making clubs financially sustainable and competitive both on the field and as businesses.¹⁷³

The role of skilled management in football

¹⁷³ Deloitte UK. (2024). The Transformation Game: Why Football Clubs Are Turning to Enterprise Technology. Deloitte UK.
<https://www.deloitte.com/uk/en/services/financial-advisory/analysis/transformation-game-why-football-clubs-are-turning-to-enterprise-technology.html>

Effective management is vital in football to balance sporting success and business sustainability. Germany has a proven track record in professionalized management, with decentralized structures and a focus on financial stability, trained managers, youth development, and global branding, as evidenced by leading clubs such as Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund.

In contrast, Italy emphasizes the sporting aspect more, often overlooking organizational efficiency and corporate innovation. Decisions are usually centralized or entrusted to individuals with specific training, such as former players who assume management roles, potentially hindering progress. Despite strengths in coaching and refereeing, Italian football must adopt Germany's strategic approach, investing in professional management to achieve long-term success on and off the pitch.¹⁷⁴

3.3.3 Business strategies

Market diversification

Football organizations and clubs often face the issue of financial sustainability. This is especially important in Italy, where clubs have historically had problems with debt, particularly after the pandemic. Deloitte's analysis emphasizes the need to generate income in ways other than traditional sources, such as broadcasting and matchday takings. Clubs need to explore the opportunities offered by non-matchday events and expand their retail and digital revenue models, such as NFTs and blockchain-based collectibles.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Mori, F. (2015). Analisi delle performance delle società di calcio [Master's thesis, Università degli Studi di Pisa]. Università degli Studi di Pisa.

¹⁷⁵ Deloitte Sports Business Group. (2024). Annual review of football finance 2024. Deloitte. From <https://www.deloitte.co.uk/arff>

They also need to improve their money management and rule-following. This will help them be more financially stable in the long term. Italian clubs especially need to improve at this to compete with other leagues, like the Premier League, that have a lot of money.

Marketing and fan engagement

Modern marketing strategies can help build a loyal and engaged fan base. Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and X offer great ways to share interesting content, celebrate successes, and chat directly with fans. Images, videos, interactive activities, behind-the-scenes videos, and high-quality storytelling can connect fans emotionally. Clubs can also personalize fans' experiences by offering exclusive services, such as VIP packages for matches, access to changing rooms, and meetings with players.

Involving the local community is also crucial; collaborating with clubs and organizations in the area helps strengthen the bond between supporters and the team. The team must continue innovating to attract younger people and compete with digital alternatives like Esports and the King's League. This can entail utilizing gamified ticketing systems and AR/VR experiences.¹⁷⁶

3.4 Lobbying: untapped potential in the Italian football world

In Italy, especially in the football and sports sectors, lobbying and public affairs activities are practically nonexistent despite their strategic importance internationally. Football clubs, leagues, and federations frequently lack an effective strategy for influencing regulations and political decisions that would be

¹⁷⁶ Desygner. (2024). How to Market a Soccer Business. Desygner Blog. <https://desygner.com/blog/industry/how-to-market-soccer-business>

advantageous. In contrast, lobbying generates tangible economic performance and competitiveness benefits in the United States and the European Union.

3.4.1 The financial and strategic benefits of lobbying

Robust empirical evidence demonstrates that lobbying can yield significant financial advantages for firms, particularly in terms of reduced tax burdens. An analysis based on a panel of publicly traded U.S. companies between 1998 and 2005 reveals a systematic and statistically significant relationship between lobbying expenditures and effective tax rates. Specifically, a 1% increase in lobbying spending is associated with a reduction in the effective tax rate ranging from 0.5 to 1.6 percentage points in the following year. This effect remains consistent across different model specifications and controls, including firm size, leverage, capital intensity, return on assets, and industry fixed effects.¹⁷⁷

A similar relationship has been observed in the European context, where lobbying intensity is positively correlated with firm-level profitability. An increase in lobbying expenditure relative to total assets corresponds to measurable improvements in both return on assets and profit margins, with estimated gains of 0.052 and 0.059 respectively. These findings reinforce the notion that lobbying functions not only as a tool for influencing regulation, but also as a strategic investment that strengthens a firm's financial outcomes across diverse institutional settings.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Richter, B. K., Samphantharak, K., & Timmons, J. F. (2009). Lobbying and taxes. *American Journal of Political Science*, 53(4), 893–909

¹⁷⁸ Chalmers, A. W., & Macedo, F. S. (2020). *Does it pay to lobby? Examining the link between firm lobbying and firm profitability in the European Union*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28(12), 1993–2010.

Further evidence supports the strategic relevance of lobbying as a driver of firm performance. An empirical analysis on S&P1500 companies over the 2000–2020 period shows that firms engaging in lobbying, approximately 30% of the sample, spend an average of \$470,000 per year to influence the policy environment. This investment correlates with significantly better financial outcomes. A 1% increase in lobbying expenditures is associated with a 0.329 increase in the firm’s Tobin’s Q, which represents 15% of the average value observed across the full sample (2.07).¹⁷⁹ Although the relationship is strongest with Tobin’s Q, a positive association is also observed with return on assets (ROA) and return on equity (ROE), whose mean values are 0.029 and 0.89 respectively. These findings suggest that lobbying, when managed strategically, can enhance firm valuation and operational profitability beyond the sector level.¹⁸⁰

Furthermore, lobbying constitutes most of the corporate political spending in the United States: between 1998 and 2005, lobbying accounted for approximately 85% of all registered political expenditures by special interests. This dominance reflects the strategic importance attributed to lobbying as a tool for influencing fiscal outcomes and tailoring regulation.¹⁸¹

3.4.2 Cost reduction and stability during crises

Lobbying companies benefit from more favorable regulations and exemptions from stringent regulations. For example, reductions in environmental regulations for

¹⁷⁹ Girard, A., Gnabo, J.-Y., & van Rutten, R. L. (2024). Corporate lobbying and firm performance. Center for Research in Economics and Finance.

¹⁸⁰ Girard, A., Gnabo, J.-Y., & van Rutten, R. L. (2024). Corporate lobbying and firm performance. Center for Research in Economics and Finance.

¹⁸¹ Richter, B. K., Samphantharak, K., & Timmons, J. F. (2009). Lobbying and taxes. *American Journal of Political Science*, 53(4), 893–909

energy companies reduce regulatory and tax costs. For instance, during the “Tax Holiday” of 2004, certain companies achieved a return of 22,000% by lowering taxes on foreign activities.¹⁸²

Furthermore, these companies have demonstrated resilience in volatile market conditions, consistently delivering strong performance, even during periods of global economic downturn. Favorable regulations and exclusive contracts have allowed these companies to maintain superior economic stability, ensuring long-term sustainable growth. For instance, during the 2008 financial crisis, companies with lobbying departments demonstrated greater resilience than their counterparts. Thanks to established relationships with political institutions, these companies were able to secure access to government funds and regulatory protections, reducing the impact of economic turmoil and crises. This advantage is reflected in the performance of companies such as Lockheed Martin and Boeing, which won government contracts worth \$90 billion and \$81 billion, respectively. These examples demonstrate the potential for lobbying to create substantial economic benefits.¹⁸³

3.4.3 Lobbying vs. non-lobbying firms: a comparative analysis

Investment in lobbying by companies is a significant factor in their overall performance, as evidenced by several key data points. For example, the average Tobin's Q value for lobbying firms is higher (1.044 versus 1.010), suggesting that the market values these firms more highly due to their privileged access to government

¹⁸² Chen, H., Parsley, D., & Yang, Y. (2015). Corporate lobbying and firm performance. *Journal of Business Finance & Accounting*, 42(3–4), 444–481.

¹⁸³ Chen, H., Parsley, D., & Yang, Y. (2015). Corporate lobbying and firm performance. *Journal of Business Finance & Accounting*, 42(3–4), 444–481.

resources and regulations.¹⁸⁴ Lobbying firms also demonstrate higher performance in terms of return on assets. While the ROA for lobbying firms (0.068) is like that of non-lobbying firms (0.067), it positively correlates with incremental increases in lobbying expenditures, demonstrating a more efficient use of company resources.¹⁸⁵ As analyzed above, lobbying firms are more resilient during economic crises. This advantage stems from their access to political decisions that guarantee favorable regulations and protection from market fluctuations. In contrast, non-lobbying firms struggle to compete, especially in regulated industries. These firms lose access to government contracts and favorable regulations and are more vulnerable to economic downturns and regulatory changes, showing an increasing gap with lobbying firms.¹⁸⁶

3.5 Laws and lobbying on Italian football

As analyzed before, Italian football is a significant component of the national economy, with an estimated impact on GDP of almost €12 billion, with some teams having annual turnovers of more than 400 million euros. Despite this economic significance, lobbying and institutional relations in the sector are not as developed as in other leagues and federations.¹⁸⁷ However, over the years, and particularly in the last 40 years, there have been significant state interventions in certain areas. This period coincided with the transformation of football from a predominantly

¹⁸⁴ Girard, A., Gnabo, J.-Y., & van Ratten, R. L. (2024). Corporate lobbying and firm performance. Center for Research in Economics and Finance.

¹⁸⁵ Chen, H., Parsley, D., & Yang, Y. (2015). Corporate lobbying and firm performance. *Journal of Business Finance & Accounting*, 42(3–4), 444–481.

¹⁸⁶ Girard, A., Gnabo, J.-Y., & van Ratten, R. L. (2024). Corporate lobbying and firm performance. Center for Research in Economics and Finance.

¹⁸⁷ FIGC & PWC. (2024). Report Calcio 2024. Centro studi FIGC. <https://www.pwc.com/it/it/publications/reportcalcio/2024/reportcalcio2024ITA.pdf>

competition-based sport to a full-fledged industry, integrating economic, commercial, and cultural elements.

Legislative Decree 91/1981

This law marked a significant turning point in the professionalization of sports in Italy, establishing a relatively comprehensive legal framework for contractual relations between professional athletes and sports clubs. It regulated aspects such as salary structures, transfer agreements, and the conditions of employment of athletes. The law has been updated several times to address new challenges in the sports sector. However, the absence of a dedicated institutional relations office in many clubs has often led to a reactive rather than proactive approach to legislative changes, limiting the industry's ability to influence policy development effectively.¹⁸⁸

Legislative Decree 398/1991

Enacted to encourage the development of amateur sports organizations, this law introduced significant tax incentives and simplified tax obligations through a flat-rate taxation system for income from amateur sports activities. Although mainly intended for non-professional sports, professional football clubs have taken advantage of these concessions to set up numerous amateur sports associations, facilitating the organization of minor leagues and youth activities. The tax simplification has allowed these entities to focus their resources on the development of the sport, contributing to the spread and growth of amateur football in Italy and reducing the operational costs of training young talent.¹⁸⁹

"Salva Calcio" Decree (2003)

¹⁸⁸ Legge 23 Marzo 1981, n. 91. (1981). Norme in materia di rapporti tra società e sportivi professionisti. Pubblicato in Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 79 del 27 marzo 1981.

¹⁸⁹ Legge del 16 Dicembre 1991, n. 398. (1991). Disposizioni tributarie relative alle associazioni sportive dilettantistiche. Pubblicato in Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 295 del 17 dicembre 1991.

The "Salva Calcio" decree, officially designated Article 18-bis, was introduced to address the severe financial crisis that had affected Italian football in the early 2000s. At that time, several teams, including Inter, Milan, Roma, and Lazio, had accumulated debts of over 200 million euros, while Fiorentina had gone bankrupt.¹⁹⁰ The measure was part of a broader package of support measures for sports clubs, which included the amortization of players' transfer costs over ten years, an extension beyond the standard time frame. The decree also introduced additional accounting provisions, such as tax deductions for the depreciation of player transfers. However, this provision was subsequently removed by Mario Monti, the European Commissioner for Competition at the time, to prevent market distortions.¹⁹¹ The measure also introduced a tax shield with a rate of 2.5 percent for the return of capital from abroad and the sale of real estate owned by the Italian state to support the budget.¹⁹²

The "Salva Calcio" decree demonstrates how sports clubs have successfully lobbied for policies supporting the survival of prominent football institutions. However, it also raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of these solutions and the adequacy of sector controls.

Istituto per il Credito Sportivo (ICS)

The ICS was established to provide low-interest loans for the construction and renovation of sports facilities and has been instrumental in financing stadium and training center projects, playing a crucial role in the modernization of football

¹⁹⁰ Il Tempo. (2003). Cos'è il Decreto Salva Calcio. Il Tempo.

<https://www.iltempo.it/sport/2003/09/09/news/cos-e-il-decreto-salva-calcio-181170/>

¹⁹¹ La Redazione. (2004). Decreto salva-calcio: accordo sul fisco. Corriere della Sera.

https://www.corriere.it/Primo_Piano/Sport/2004/03_Marzo/09/salvacalcio.shtml

¹⁹² Decreto-Legge del 24 Dicembre 2002, n. 282. (2002). Disposizioni urgenti in materia di adempimenti comunitari e fiscali, di riscossione e di procedure di contabilità. Pubblicato in Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 301 del 24 dicembre 2002.

infrastructure in Italy.. Football clubs secured favorable loan conditions through strategic lobbying, ensuring affordability and extended repayment periods. This support has enabled clubs to enhance their infrastructure, enriching the fan experience and aligning with international standards. However, challenges still exist to overcome in order to extend these benefits to clubs in lower categories and smaller communities.¹⁹³

Legislative Decree 36/2021

This legislative reform introduced standardized contracts for athletes, revised tax policies, and strengthened supervision mechanisms for sports organizations. Football federations and clubs successfully lobbied for the reform to consider the economic realities of professional football, particularly salary caps and employment protections. While the reform sought to establish a fairer and more transparent system, smaller clubs, which expressed concerns about increased administrative and financial burdens, opposed it.¹⁹⁴

Tax Credit for Sports Sponsorship (2023)

This tax incentive was introduced as part of a broader effort to stimulate investment in sport during difficult economic times. It enabled companies to recover 50 percent of expenses related to sponsorship agreements with sports organizations made in the first quarter of 2023. Football clubs, heavily dependent on sponsorship revenues, effectively lobbied to implement this measure. The initiative has had a dual impact:

¹⁹³ Istituto per il Credito Sportivo. Chi Siamo - Credito Sportivo.

<https://www.creditosportivo.it/chi-siamo/>

¹⁹⁴ Decreto Legislativo 18 marzo 2021, n. 36. (2021). Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana.

It has strengthened clubs' financial positions and encouraged the formation of corporate partnerships, thus contributing to the sport's overall economic resilience.¹⁹⁵

“Salva Calcio” Decree (2022)

The "Salva Calcio" Decree of 2022, promoted by Forza Italia senator and SS Lazio President Claudio Lotito and introduced in the Budget Law 2023, provided specific measures to support sports clubs and associations. These measures were designed to provide financial relief to sports clubs facing challenges due to the impact of the pandemic. Notably, the decree introduced a payment deferral option for outstanding tax and contribution obligations, including VAT, withholding taxes, and social security and welfare contributions, suspended during the designated period.¹⁹⁶ Sports clubs were permitted to distribute these payments over 60 months to enhance financial flexibility, with the initial three installments due by 29 December 2022. However, a 3% surcharge was applied to the installment amount, representing a compromise between economic support for clubs and the state's fiscal needs. The decree also included an extension of payment deadlines, initially set for 31 July 2022 and later postponed to 31 December of the same year, offering further flexibility to demanding clubs. These measures were designed to ensure clubs' economic survival and preserve the entire football ecosystem, including youth sectors and minor leagues, which are often more vulnerable to financial crises. Despite the positive impact of these measures, their effectiveness is influenced by the ability of clubs to interact effectively with institutions. Sports clubs with well-developed institutional

¹⁹⁵ Dipartimento per lo Sport - Governo Italiano. (2023). Credito d'Imposta per Sponsorizzazioni Sportive. <https://www.sport.governo.it/it/contributi-e-patrocini/credito-dimposta-per-sponsorizzazioni-sportive/credito-dimposta-2023/normativa/>

¹⁹⁶ Mobili, M., & Trovati, G. (2022). *Salva-calcio, ecco il codice tributo per pagare*. Il Sole 24 Ore. <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/salva-calcio-ecco-codice-tributo-pagare-AEjWPcRC>

relationships have benefited most from the decree, influencing the allocation criteria and securing a privileged position. In contrast, many smaller clubs lacking these relationships encountered difficulties accessing subsidies, highlighting the strategic importance of public affairs and institutional relations to maximize the benefits of public policies.¹⁹⁷

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of the Italian football sector, highlighting not only its cultural, economic and social value at both national and international level, but also the fact that it remains an element of collective identity and a strong added value worth billions of euros in terms of employment and tax revenue. However, behind this strong impact lie several organisational, structural and managerial shortcomings that make the system's sustainability impossible in the medium to long term.

Although there are some excellent examples, the system is failing to modernise effectively, particularly in terms of infrastructure, institutional organisation and management training. In this regard, the Serie A League is the financial engine of the system, but it continues to be overly dependent on television revenues and has shown a lack of ability to diversify its sources of income.

The latest economic report on football has identified a sector that generates enormous value but is plagued by increasingly serious internal imbalances. Excessive costs, particularly wages, combined with overall losses of more than €4 billion over five

¹⁹⁷ Mobili, M., & Trovati, G. (2022). Manovra, arriva la norma salva-calcio: Scudo penale in discussione. Il Sole 24 Ore. <https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/manovra-arriva-norma-salva-calcio-scudo-penale-discussione-AEksssPC>

years and the inability to mobilise investment in state-of-the-art infrastructure, are a cause for serious concern. Other factors include the underdevelopment of youth systems, the poor international competitiveness of clubs and the weak global promotion of Italian football. Porter's five forces model identifies significant obstacles for Italian football on several fronts: competitive rivalry, bargaining power of suppliers, bargaining power of buyers, threat of substitution and threat of new entrants.

To be competitive, Serie A and the various national leagues will be forced to overcome fiscal instability, improve infrastructure and invest in digital innovation. Italian football has the potential to consolidate its presence in the global sports market by studying the successes of the Premier League and applying these models at national and local level.

Finally, as already pointed out, the absence of systematic lobbying has prevented Italian football from having an impact and obtaining favourable policy conditions, unlike other European leagues. Lobbying is not a short-term economic strategy, but a long-term approach aimed at supporting and ensuring the competitiveness and sustainability of a company and an industry. Studies show that investments in lobbying translate into significant benefits in terms of financial performance, access to resources and sustainable development. In the Italian context, particularly in the football sector, a lobbying approach would represent a turning point for both clubs and the federation. It would give them the strength to shape the regulatory framework, withstand economic crises, attract investment and drive development in a competitive market. Denying the potential of lobbying would mean acknowledging a competitive gap that is difficult to bridge in a complex and highly regulated market.

In conclusion, Italian football remains extremely rich in potential. If the system wants to turn this potential into reality, it will have to overcome deeply rooted opposition, create innovative management models and make bold plans for a sustainable future based on internationalisation and innovation. Only then will it be possible to restore Italy to its leading role on the world football stage.

CHAPTER 4

Interview development process and cognitive mapping

4.1 Research design

Cognitive mapping is a qualitative technique that allows the mental representations of individuals or groups to be represented graphically, highlighting key concepts and causal relationships between them. It allows us to understand how subjects perceive, structure, and give meaning to a complex problem, facilitating the analysis of strategic thinking and decision-making processes.¹⁹⁸

The technique differs from other forms of content analysis because it is not limited to the frequency of concepts, but aims to clarify the relationships between the concepts themselves, expressed graphically through directional arrows that indicate cause-effect relationships.¹⁹⁹

In the field of decision theory, cognitive maps visualize the belief system of decision makers, providing support for the analysis of strategic problems and helping to identify cognitive distances between different visions within the same organization.²⁰⁰ Their explanatory power is particularly useful in complex contexts, such as those involving innovation, digital transformation, or strategic marketing, as they offer a concise but meaningful representation of the thoughts underlying managerial choices.²⁰¹ In addition to its descriptive value, the map serves as a

¹⁹⁸ Chaney, D. (2010). Analyzing mental representations: The contribution of cognitive maps. *Recherche et Applications en Marketing (English Edition)*, 25(2), 93–112.

¹⁹⁹ Chaney, D. (2010). Analyzing mental representations: The contribution of cognitive maps. *Recherche et Applications en Marketing (English Edition)*, 25(2), 93–112.

²⁰⁰ Muzzi, C., & Ortolani, C. (2013). Le mappe cognitive come strumento di analisi delle “distanze cognitive” nel processo decisionale. LUISS Guido Carli.

²⁰¹ Bartoli, C., Bonetti, E., & Mattiacci, A. (2021). Marketing geographical indication products in the digital age: A holistic perspective. *British Food Journal*, 123(13), 4305–4325

predictive and strategic tool, as it helps decision makers reflect on their representations and reconfigure the relationships between key elements according to their objectives.²⁰²

Finally, one of the main strengths of cognitive mapping is its ability to make mental representations visible and communicable, acting as a bridge between individual reflection and organizational learning.²⁰³

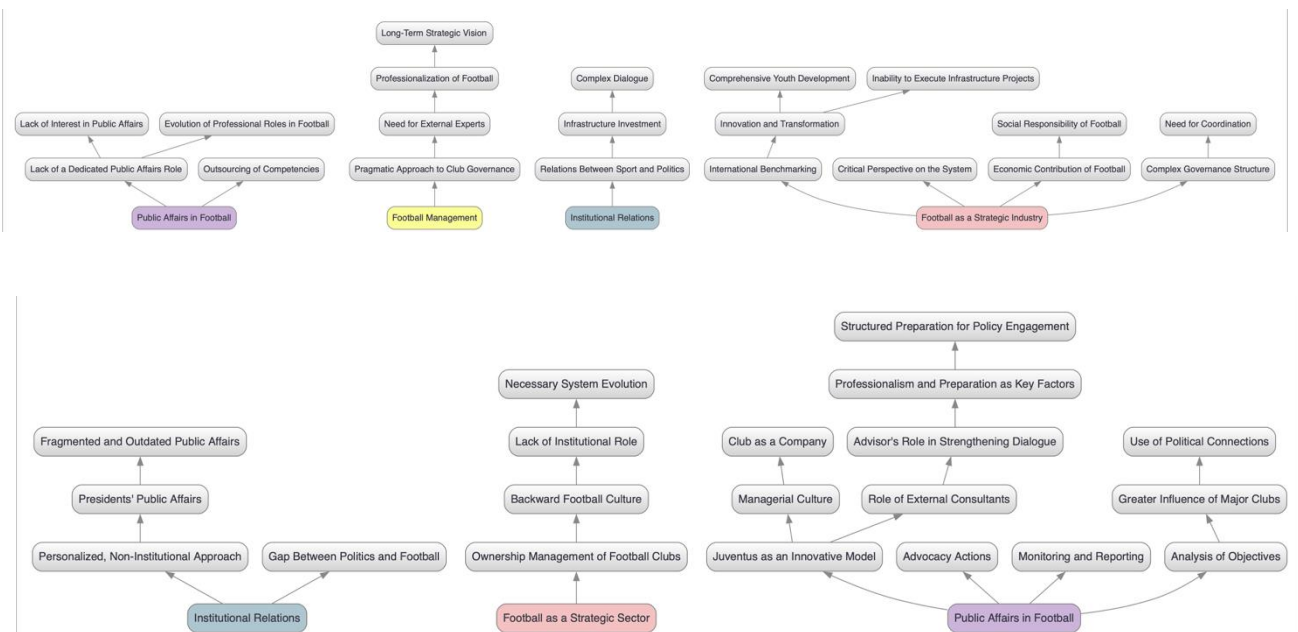


Fig. 1 and 2: Examples of the cognitive maps created

4.2 Selection of interviewees

In line with the aims of the research, this study employs a qualitative approach using cognitive mapping methodology. Cognitive maps represent “the activity of graphically representing an individual's thinking about a problem or issue”.²⁰⁴ This

²⁰² Marshall, R. (2013). Guest editorial: Cognitive mapping of strategy in marketing. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(9), 1541–1543

²⁰³ Chaney, D. (2010). Analyzing mental representations: The contribution of cognitive maps. *Recherche et Applications en Marketing (English Edition)*, 25(2), 93–112.

²⁰⁴ Eden, C. (2004), “Analyzing cognitive maps to help structure issues or problems”, *European Journal of Operational Research*, Vol. 159 No. 3, pp. 673-686.

technique originates from Kelly's theory of personal constructs,²⁰⁵ according to which each individual interprets reality through their own hierarchical system of theories, which allows them to give meaning to their existence and predict future events. Over time, cognitive mapping has also established itself as a useful tool in management, facilitating decision-making processes, helping to organize and understand behaviors and phenomena at both the individual and collective levels, and strengthening organizations' ability to explain and predict certain events.²⁰⁶²⁰⁷ In the field of decision science, one of the most widespread approaches to cognitive mapping is the causal relationship model known as the “cause map,” used to visualize the cognitive structure shared by a group of people.²⁰⁸ This type of map is configured as a directed graph, composed of concepts linked together by arrows indicating cause-effect relationships: for example, concept A influences concept B, which in turn determines concept C (3 nodes, 2 connections).²⁰⁹

Several studies emphasize the importance of the cognitive component in decision-making processes related to technological innovation.²¹⁰ Furthermore, this methodology has also been applied in the context of marketing to explore new dynamics related to digital transformation, such as the impact of digitalization on the

²⁰⁵ Kelly, G.A. (1955), *The Psychology of Personal Constructs. Volume 1: A Theory of Personality*, WW Norton and Company, New York.

²⁰⁶ Marshall, R. (2013), “Guest Editorial: cognitive mapping of strategy in marketing”, *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 66 No. 9, pp. 1541-1543.

²⁰⁷ Eden, C. (2004), “Analyzing cognitive maps to help structure issues or problems”, *European Journal of Operational Research*, Vol. 159 No. 3, pp. 673-686.

²⁰⁸ Eden, C., Ackermann, F. and Cropper, S. (1992), “The analysis of cause maps”, *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 29 No. 3, pp. 252-261.

²⁰⁹ Eden, C. (2004), “Analyzing cognitive maps to help structure issues or problems”, *European Journal of Operational Research*, Vol. 159 No. 3, pp. 673-686.

²¹⁰ Swan, J. (1997), “Using cognitive mapping in management research: decisions about technical innovation”, *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 8 No. 2 SPEC. ISS, pp. 183-198.

marketing of products with geographical indications,²¹¹ in the integrated management of marketing communication, and in digital interactions in the banking sector.²¹²

The first step involved the targeted selection of interviewees. These were identified based on their experience and on their roles in corporate, institutional, and political contexts relevant to the research topic. Almost twelve people, diverse and often representing competing or diverging interests (e.g., team managers, representatives of football institutions, political decision-makers), were selected. This choice aligns with the cognitive mapping approach, which typically focuses on individuals or small groups of experts.²¹³

For instance, Muzzi and Ortolani present a case study involving two key players within an organization: a senior scientist with a managerial role and a human resources manager. These individuals were selected because they represented two different "currents of thought" within the company, acting as spokespersons for opposing positions on the issue under study.²¹⁴

In my own project, for example, each interviewee was chosen for the contribution that they could bring from their role and point of view, trying to develop a strong and comprehensive vision of the research field. Potential participants were reached through LinkedIn, telephone contacts, and email, and ten of them agreed to take part in the interview. The total number of interviewees is in line with the methodological

²¹¹ Bartoli, C., Bonetti, E. and Mattiacci, A. (2021), "Marketing geographical indication products in the digital age: a holistic perspective", *British Food Journal*, Vol. 124 No. 9, pp. 2857-2876.

²¹² Brun, I., Durif, F. and Ricard, L. (2014), "E-relationship marketing: a cognitive mapping introspection in the banking sector", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 48 Nos 3/4, pp. 572-594.

²¹³ Bartoli, C., Bonetti, E., & Mattiacci, A. (2021). Marketing geographical indication products in the digital age: A holistic perspective. *British Food Journal*, 123(13), 4305–4325.

²¹⁴ Muzzi, C., & Ortolani, C. (2013). Le mappe cognitive come strumento di analisi delle "distanze cognitive" nel processo decisionale. *LUISS Guido Carli*.

guidelines for cognitive mapping, which is particularly suitable for use with small groups or individuals.²¹⁵

Summary of Interviews

Position	Organization	Type of Interview	Duration of Interview
Managing Director Revenue & Institutional Relations	Juventus Football Club	Videocall	30 minutes
General Director	Fiorentina ACF	Videocall	32 minutes
Chief Operating Officer (COO)	Torino Football Club	Videocall	17 minutes
Consultant in Institutional Relations and Communication	-	Written	-
President	Italian Football Federation (FIGC)	Written	-
EU and Governmental Affairs Manager	UEFA	Videocall	36 minutes
President	Lega Pro	In-person	33 minutes
President	Serie B National Professional League	Written	18 minutes
External Consultant in Institutional Relations and Communication	Juventus	Videocall	29 minutes
Minister for Sport and Youth	Italian Republic	Written	-

4.3 Question development

Once the interviewees were selected, sets of different questions were prepared for each interview, keeping the focus on the main topic present in all of them. Following the guidelines provided in the literature on interviews conducted using cognitive maps, I prepared an agenda consisting of approximately seven structured questions.²¹⁶ The questions were developed based on areas that require more in-depth

²¹⁵ Swan, J.A. and Newell, S. (1994), "Managers' beliefs about factors affecting the adoption of technological innovation: a study using cognitive maps", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 3-11.

²¹⁶ Eden, C., Ackermann, F. and Cropper, S. (1992), "The analysis of cause maps", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 29 No. 3, pp. 252-261.

analysis to fully understand the influence of public affairs in the world of Italian football, both from an institutional and a corporate perspective. This semi-structured approach ensured two things: first, a homogeneous coverage of the main research areas; second, the flexibility to explore peculiar aspects relevant to each individual interviewee.

The introductory questions were used to establish a main focus on which to base the discussion. The subsequent questions were specific to the interviewee's background. During the interview preparation phase, I tried to adopt a balanced approach, based on a flexible but focused interview outline, capable of adapting to each interviewee's profile, while ensuring that all relevant aspects were covered during the conversation. Each interview lasted approximately half an hour, depending on the number of questions asked and on the responses. The interviewees were encouraged to express their opinions, following their own line of reasoning and exploring topics in depth from their individual perspectives. This semi-structured, listening-oriented approach ensured that each interview produced a range of diverse and useful information. In line with the operational circumstances, most of the in-depth interviews were conducted via Teams or in person, while three were conducted via written responses. This online method is recognized as valid for conducting effective semi-structured interviews.²¹⁷

4.4 Coding of interviews

Following the conclusion of the interviews, I then proceeded to independently code the interviews using the “Documentary Coding Method,” a technique recognized in

²¹⁷ O'Connor, H. and Madge, C. (2017), “Online interviewing”, *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods*, SAGE Publications, 55 City Road, London, doi: 10.4135/9781473957992.

the literature for reconstructing informants' thoughts from their discourse and constructing the meaning of concepts and causal relationships.²¹⁸ I proceeded with the full transcription, translation and coding of the material, using the qualitative analysis software MaxQDA, enabling a systematic approach to text management, coding and content annotation.²¹⁹

A qualitative coding method was adopted, inspired by the main approaches described in the literature, with the aim of reconstructing the way in which respondents think and connect concepts. The process was geared towards bringing out the meanings and mental associations expressed in their stories, translating them into recurring themes and concepts.

During coding, these ideas were summarised using keywords, which allowed the content of the interviews to be organised. This was the first fundamental step in building a coherent interpretative framework, which then served as the basis for the conceptual maps and subsequent stages of the analysis.²²⁰

Through repeated readings of the transcripts, relevant concepts were identified: phrases or words containing an idea related to the research topic. Each concept was assigned a descriptive code, often corresponding to an important variable, such as a factor, objective or challenge.²²¹

At the same time, logical or causal links between one concept and another were also documented. In this way, a system of recurring and interconnected codes was

²¹⁸ Axelrod, R. (1976), *Structure of Decision: the Cognitive Maps of Political Elites*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

²¹⁹ Bartoli, C., Bonetti, E., & Mattiacci, A. (2021). Marketing geographical indication products in the digital age: A holistic perspective. *British Food Journal*, 123(13), 4305–4325

²²⁰ Bartoli, C., Bonetti, E., & Mattiacci, A. (2021). Marketing geographical indication products in the digital age: A holistic perspective. *British Food Journal*, 123(13), 4305–4325

²²¹ Muzzi, C., & Ortolani, C. (2013). Le mappe cognitive come strumento di analisi delle “distanze cognitive” nel processo decisionale. *LUISS Guido Carli*.

progressively developed, reflecting emerging themes and the relationships between them.

A key aspect of the coding process was the standardisation of vocabulary, as different respondents often used varied terminology to express similar concepts. To address this variability, I decided to standardise the coding through the creation of recurring codes, whereby synonyms and related expressions were unified under common conceptual key words. This process of code merging ensured that the same concepts could be recognised across different interviews, even when expressed in different words.²²²

Furthermore, four main thematic cornerstones were identified at an early stage, based on the recurrence, relevance and qualitative density of the references that emerged in the interviewed corpus: Public Affairs in football, Football Management, Institutional Relations and Football as a strategic sector. As it will be analysed later, these four areas were selected as the supporting structures of the subsequent visualisation, as they were transversally present in most of the interviews, albeit with different emphases depending on the profile of the interviewees. Not all the interviews touched on each branch, but each contributed to building at least one of these domains, with specific nuances related to the interviewee's experience. Thanks to the coding, hierarchical systems of concepts were created, shaping complete thematic trees for each interview. This structure formed the basis for the development of individual mind maps, each of which reflected the logical organisation and argumentative sequence with which the codes were linked together in the discourses.

²²² Muzzi, C., & Ortolani, C. (2013). Le mappe cognitive come strumento di analisi delle “distanze cognitive” nel processo decisionale. *LUISS Guido Carli*.

In the end, this coding work produced a set of recurring thematic codes, each linked to the corresponding textual extracts, and revealed a preliminary network of relationships between concepts, which served as the foundation for building the final cognitive map.

4.5 WordClouds development

Subsequently, thanks to the combined use of MaxQDA and its visualisation functionalities, a word cloud was generated for each interview. These visual representations were manually cleaned of non-indicative words (articles, conjunctions, pronouns and generic terms), in order to obtain a more faithful image of the key words and conceptual categories that were really relevant in the discourse of each interviewee. Through each WordCloud constructed for each individual interview, it was possible to understand what the most recurrent themes were during the various answers. . The lexical analysis displayed in the WordClouds provided complementary and consistent evidence with what would later emerge in the collective conceptual map. Although not directly representing thematic codes, the wordclouds constitute a powerful trace of the linguistic and conceptual recurrence that emerged during the interviews. In them, the centrality of the word 'football 'is obviously dominant, but what is striking is the semantic field articulated around it, much more articulated and oriented towards institutional, economic, political and managerial dimensions.

Emerging, mainly, are words such as:

- institutions, institutional, relations, governance, dialogue, representation, which underline the need for a stable and structured connection between football and the political-institutional sphere.
- system, sector, public, impact, strategic, value, growth, recognised, which restore the image of football no longer as a mere sport, but as a strategic industrial and social sector.
- policy, advocacy, affairs, interlocutor, credible, which trace the technical and value grammar of public affairs, an element that appears widespread in wordclouds, but is absent in practices.

It is interesting to observe how terms related to the professionalisation and managerialisation of the sector are well represented: words such as skills, leadership, management, governance, vision, president, club, team as a company clearly indicate that the actors interviewed perceive the urgency of adopting a corporate and professional culture in Italian football. This ties in perfectly with what emerged in the collective conceptual map, where the lack of professional figures, of public advisors, and of modern management models such as that of Juventus, is highlighted as one of the central criticalities.

At the same time, the wordclouds reveal the perception of a chronic delay of Italian football with respect to European benchmarks; this suggests that the interviewees are aware of the systemic distance with respect to the most advanced models, both in infrastructural and political and institutional terms.

Another relevant fact is the strong presence of words like dialogue, government, interlocution, decision, public, representation, which stand as indicators of a structural absence of formal communication between football and politics. Dialogue

branches indicated above, depending on the topics analysed during the individual interviews.

Once the construction phase of the 10 individual maps was completed, the individual maps were then integrated into a collective map, useful for providing an overall representation of the decision-making system on the issue in a graphical and hierarchical form.²²⁴²²⁵ The collective map takes the form of a “means/ends chart”²²⁶ and should be read from bottom to top: at the bottom are the starting points of the interviewees' thinking, while at the top are the final outcomes of their reasoning. As we will see later, preliminary analyses of the collective map were carried out using GraphViz Online software. The analyses focused on the relationship between arrows and nodes, centrality, antecedents and consequences, domain and cluster analysis. In particular, within the cognitive mapping methodology, the term 'cluster analysis' refers to the identification of subsets of concepts that are strongly interconnected within the map, creating an identifiable system or 'thematic island'²²⁷ on which the discourse of the group of interviewees focuses.²²⁸²²⁹ To isolate these subsystems, the “cluster analysis” tool available in Graphviz Online was used, setting a minimum threshold of four direct consequences.

²²⁴ Eden, C. (2004), “Analyzing cognitive maps to help structure issues or problems”, *European Journal of Operational Research*, Vol. 159 No. 3, pp. 673-686.

²²⁵ Marshall, R. (2013), “Guest Editorial: cognitive mapping of strategy in marketing”, *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 66 No. 9, pp. 1541-1543.

²²⁶ Eden, C. (2004), “Analyzing cognitive maps to help structure issues or problems”, *European Journal of Operational Research*, Vol. 159 No. 3, pp. 673-686.

²²⁷ Eden, C. (2004), “Analyzing cognitive maps to help structure issues or problems”, *European Journal of Operational Research*, Vol. 159 No. 3, pp. 673-686.

²²⁸ Cossette, P. (2002), “Analysing the thinking of F.W. Taylor using cognitive mapping”, *Management Decision*, Vol. 40 No. 2, pp. 168-182.

²²⁹ Brun, I., Durif, F. and Ricard, L. (2014), “E-relationship marketing: a cognitive mapping introspection in the banking sector”, *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 48 Nos 3/4, pp. 572-594.

4.7 Structure of the collective cognitive map

The collective cognitive map takes shape as a layered, interconnected, and dense structure. Its visual organization reveals four main branches, each functioning as a macro-thematic area from which subsequent nodes and connections emerge. The aim of this map was also to highlight the latent interdependencies between Public Affairs, Management, Institutional Relations and Strategy of the football system. These four clusters represent the key directions along which the interviewees' thinking developed and they serve as fundamental structures around which visions of football as a system, as an industrial sector, as a political space and as an object of public governance are aggregated. Therefore, external links were inserted between intermediate or terminal nodes, in such a way as to highlight the differentiation between the individual branches, but above all the interconnections and interdependencies between nodes directly not belonging to the same partition.

The result of the construction of the collective conceptual map represents much more than a simple visual organisation of qualitative contents. It constitutes, to all intents and purposes, a structured, multilevel and multidimensional synthesis of the discourse that emerged from the interviews, capable of accurately rendering not only the themes addressed, but also the systemic relations between them.

4.7.1 From codes to conceptual structure

From a methodological point of view, the map enables a fundamental step: transforming the dispersed and fragmented complexity of the individual narratives gathered in the interviews into a coherent and interdependent structure. The transition from linear coding (via MaxQDA) to reticular representation (via Graphviz) made it

possible to disentangle concepts from their individual discursive contexts, to recombine them according to a relational and rational logic.

The map includes 106 active nodes, each corresponding to a recurring concept or theme that emerged during the interviews, and a total of 122 connections between these concepts. Of the 122 links, 88 are internal to individual clusters and 34 are external. This indicates a conceptual network that is not closed but highly interconnected, where challenges and opportunities are reflected transversally across the various areas analyzed. This shows that over 20% of the connections do not follow a linear hierarchical path but instead cut across thematic areas, highlighting dense semantic interconnection and strong systemic cohesion.

To assess the robustness of the map, a preliminary test of the ratio of arrows to nodes (concepts) was conducted. The collective map has an average ratio of 1.15 (122/106). In this type of tool, links are selected intentionally and reflectively: each connection is motivated by a semantic affinity that emerged during the coding process, making the network not only cohesive but also methodologically sound.

4.7.2 Cross-cluster nodes and strategic interdependencies

The real added value of the map lies in the external connections, which break the verticality of the clusters and bring to light transversal conceptual nodes. These 34 transversal connections highlight the real interdependencies within the system: they make the map not just a representative tool but an analytical platform for identifying areas of strategic intervention.

The node, for example, of 'Lack of Professionalization' connects at the same time to Management (as an operational deficiency), Public Affairs (as an institutional

vacuum), Institutional Relations (as an absence of competent interlocutors), and the Strategic Sector (as a barrier to economic and infrastructural development). In this way, the graph shows not only where the problems lie, but also how they reinforce each other, in a context characterised by inertia, fragmentation and self-referentiality. From a cognitive perspective, the map maintains a remarkable balance between information density and readability. The presence of over one hundred nodes, relatively evenly distributed across the branches, allows for a comprehensive visualization of both the system's critical issues and its potential.

Finally, the map makes it possible to visualise the latent structure of the football-institution system in Italy, to identify its critical nodes and to imagine coherent lines of intervention. The presence of central nodes and intersections provides a useful basis for reasoning not only on critical issues, but also on strategic levers for change.

4.7.3 Vertical and horizontal reading of the map

The conceptual structure of the collective map presents a coherent framework, organized according to a vertical development logic that reflects the evolution of the ideas gathered during the interviews: from the base of generating concepts, through the construction of challenges and trajectories, up to the identification of more complex systemic dynamics. The tree-like structure, with multi-level depth and lateral connections, supports both vertical reading (thematic analysis) and horizontal reading (systemic analysis), offering a full 360° view. The entire architecture can be seen as an implicit narrative of the Italian football sector, starting from the mapping of its fundamental thematic cores and arriving at a representation of its institutional interactions, strategic shortcomings, and potential levers for reform.

At the base of the map, the four main clusters, Public Affairs in Football, Football Management, Institutional Relations, and Football as a Strategic Sector, serve as foundational themes. These are not merely thematic containers, but true cognitive frames. Each embodies a distinct conceptual horizon: the organization and industrial vision of football (Management and Strategic Sector), the quality and nature of its dialogue with institutions (Institutional Relations), and the awareness of the value of advocacy and representation functions (Public Affairs). Though positioned at the bottom of the map, these initial poles form the logical pillars upon which the entire discourse is built: they are the lenses through which stakeholders observe, understand, and evaluate the football–institution system.

In the middle section of the map are the articulation nodes, the concepts that translate general themes into specific problems, internal dynamics, and structural issues. This is where the map expands both in width and depth. Here we find, for instance, “Confusion Between Communication and Public Affairs,” “Lack of Skilled Professionals,” “Weak Governance Structure,” “Outdated Club Culture,” “Strategic Vision Gap,” “Fragmented Institutional Dialogue,” and “Infrastructure Delay.” These are the points where the four branches grow, but also converge and begin to communicate. It is no coincidence that most cross-cluster connections are activated in this area. Intermediate concepts represent zones of tension: points where multiple causes converge and multiple effects originate. This is where the map becomes denser, more interconnected, and more semantically charged. It is within these nodes that the main semantic overlaps between clusters occur, and where systemic contradictions become evident: the lack of professionalization is not only a

managerial issue but also an institutional one; role confusion is not only a communication problem but also a cultural and strategic one.

At the top of the map, where the terminal concepts are found, the system's most complex outcomes emerge: systemic consequences, opportunities for evolution, structural problems and levers for transformation. These are concepts that not only summarize the analyzed problems but also project the discourse into a forward-looking dimension. They are not just syntheses, but also horizons of possibility. Some represent desired goals (such as the adoption of international models, use of political connections, legislative coordination or public-private collaboration), others are the potential of the sector (such as fan experience as growth driver, stadium as economic engines or football a tool for social cohesion), while most represent the structural problems faced by football in Italy (such as Lack of Italian public affairs in Brussels, inadequate leadership, lack of external expertise, confusion between communication and public affairs, lack of public affairs awareness, economic disparity between leagues and infrastructure deficit) . In this final section, the map takes on a predictive, design-oriented function: it does not merely reflect what is, but also what could be, if the system were equipped with professional tools, strategic vision, and evolved institutional representation structures.

Thus, the vertical structure of the map is not just a graphic layout. At the bottom lie the thematic matrices, the major interpretive axes underpinning the interviewees' thinking; at the center, the conceptual nodes where opportunities, analysis of the situation and obstacles branch out and intersect; at the top, the models, implications, potential drivers of reform but also structural problems emerge. The entire

architecture reflects a progression from theme to problem, from problem to system, and finally from system to proposal.

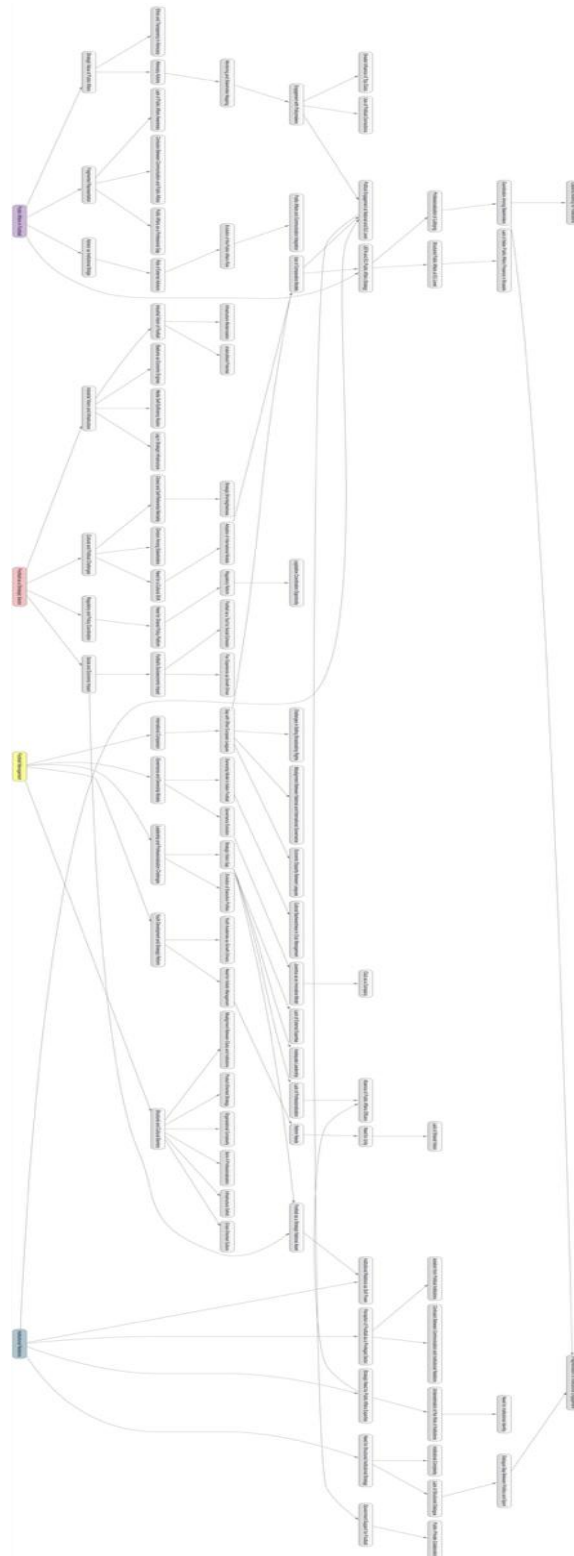


Fig. 5: Collective cognitive map

CHAPTER 5

Analysis and discussion of results

5.1 Results

The outcome of the analysis, visualized in the final collective conceptual map, confirms in a clear and structured manner what emerged from the first exploratory hypotheses formulated at the time of the survey design. Starting from the wordclouds generated for each interview, subsequently purified of accessory terms, it was possible to identify a recurring semantic constant: a lexicon strongly oriented towards lack, distance, systemic weakness and the absence of dialogue between the world of football and that of the institutions. What is striking is that Italian football's backwardness in public affairs is not just a matter of structural absence, but a deeply cultural, almost identity-related limitation. The interviews, particularly some of them, reveal a deep-rooted mentality that tends to conceive football as a closed, self-referential world, lacking a long-term managerial and institutional vision. This approach is directly reflected in the conceptual map, where issues related to fragmentation, the illusion of media self-sufficiency and the personalisation of institutional representation appear as systemic obstacles. The element of non-professionalisation constitutes the true transversal critical axis of the entire Italian football ecosystem.

Juventus is the explicit exception that proves the rule: it is the only club mentioned by multiple interviewees as an organised model capable of establishing serious and proactive institutional dialogue. This fact, repeated in several interviews, reinforces the conceptual evidence that emerges from the 'Juventus best practice' node in the map, from which concrete references to strategy, dialogue with institutions and

European positioning branch out. In contrast, other clubs, leagues and the Federation itself entrust institutional relations to external law firms or improvised figures, or only activate them in times of emergency, highlighting a reactive and non-strategic vision.

5.1.1 Juventus as a “best practice”

Within the Italian landscape, Juventus represents, almost unanimously and across all interviewees, an exceptional case. It is perceived not only as a winning club on the field, but as the only entity in the national soccer system to have consistently embarked on a path of organizational and institutional modernization.

During the interviews, Juventus was mentioned not so much for its sporting achievements as for its management structure and the business model it has adopted: an internal organization similar to that of a large company, with clear roles, professionals in various fields, vertical skills, and a long-term strategic vision that includes the institutional and relational dimensions. This is significant because it highlights how the club has moved beyond the traditional paradigm of the 'president-entrepreneur' to a logic in which football is treated as a real industry.

In the conceptual graph, this is clearly represented by the node “Juventus as an Innovative Model”, linked to concepts such as “Governance Evolution”, “Club as a Company”, “Strategic Vision”, but also “Institutional Dialogue” and “Public Affairs Integration”. It is precisely at this intersection between corporate management and institutional legitimacy that the originality of the Juventus model lies.

Juventus is, in fact, the only Italian club to have formalized the role of public affairs, establishing a partnership with an external consulting firm, developing an in-house office responsible for institutional relations, and initiating strategic and systematic

communication with institutions. These are not reactive or episodic initiatives, but a real investment in representation. It is no coincidence that, within the network of European clubs, Juventus is perceived as an authoritative interlocutor, often ahead of regulatory and political developments. This aspect is explicitly mentioned by several interviewees, who recognize that the Turin club “plays on another level” in this field compared to the rest of the national system.

What makes this model innovative is not only the existence of a structured organization, but the way in which it is connected to a long-term strategic vision. The integration of sports management, infrastructure assets (the club-owned stadium), international branding, institutional relations, and economic sustainability is something that no other club in Italy has been able to replicate so far. It is interesting to note that even those most critical of the overall governance of the system tend to recognize Juventus as an isolated best practice, albeit not always shared or fully understood by other players in the system, but one that has made professionalization, especially in the area of institutional relations, its strength. Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of the code, I would like to address the Juventus project briefly.

Juventus' presence in the collective conceptual map therefore takes on an emblematic value: it represents the possible end point of a process of systemic professionalization that the rest of Italian soccer has not even begun. From this perspective, the Juventus model is not only a virtuous exception, but a lens through which to view the systemic shortcomings of the overall system: where other clubs entrust institutional relations to external law firms or occasional managers with no training, Juventus invests in specialized professionals and in continuous dialogue with public institutions and supranational organizations.

This distance is cultural rather than operational. Other clubs seem unable to grasp the strategic value of institutional positioning, treating it as an ancillary or emergency function, activated only in times of crisis. On the contrary, the Juventus model demonstrates that structured work in public relations and communication with politicians can be an integral part of the sporting, economic, and reputational success of a football organization.

The analysis of the interviews and the conceptual map therefore shows that Juventus is currently the only Italian club that has understood the systemic value of public affairs and integrated this awareness into a coherent and modern management model. At the same time, however, this uniqueness reveals its limitation: being alone in a backward system makes it more difficult to consolidate a shared culture. The real leap forward for Italian soccer will only come when the Juventus model ceases to be an exception and begins to be replicated, adapted, and institutionalized at the system level.

5.1.2 The lack of professionalization as a systemic node

The “Lack of Professionalization” node is among the most interconnected in the collective map. It is positioned in the Football Management branch, but from there it radiates direct connections towards other areas:

- It is connected to the ‘Absence of Public Affairs Officers ’in the cluster of Institutional Relations
- It connects to the ‘Underestimation of the Role of Institutions ’in the Public Affairs cluster

- It affects the ‘Strategic Vision Gap ’found in the Football as a Strategic Sector branch

This clearly shows that the lack of professional and strategic skills is not an isolated deficiency, but a systemic condition that undermines multiple dimensions: governance, public communication, advocacy, and positioning of football in the political and industrial sphere of the country.

In this framework, public affairs emerges on the map not as a mere auxiliary function, but as a latent strategic lever: an element whose absence produces knock-on effects.

In European countries with more advanced football systems, public affairs has for years been integrated in the management of large clubs, in the federations, and in the reform processes of sports infrastructures. In the map, this is well represented by the node ‘UEFA and EU Public Affairs Strategy ’and its developments: ‘Professionalization of Lobbying’, ‘Coordination Among Stakeholders’, ‘Structured Public Affairs at EU Level’.

In Italy, on the contrary, the ‘Fragmented Representation ’branch and the ‘Lack of Public Affairs Awareness ’node testify to a cultural and functional backwardness, often linked to a self-referential vision of the sector, to a ‘Media Self-Sufficiency Illusion ’and to the ‘Absence of Public Affairs Officers’, elements that combine with a ‘Confusion Between Communication and Public Affairs ’that is well present in the conceptual structure.

5.1.3 Rhetoric vs. Practice: a structural gap

While interviewees widely recognize the strategic relevance of football as an industrial, political and social actor, this awareness is not yet reflected in concrete

organizational structures, professional roles or long-term institutional strategies. The word clouds reveal a mature vocabulary, focused on complex concepts such as governance, social impact, representation and sustainability. Many interviewees also express a clear awareness that football is an industrial sector that moves billions and generates value. However, in practice, this awareness has yet to be translated into structures, professional roles and strategies.

This is represented also by the theme of dialogue between the world of football and politics. While most of the interviewees analyzed the importance of the relationships with the political Institutions, the ‘Dialogue Gap Between Politics and Sport ’appears in several places as a direct consequence of the lack of institutionalization of the confrontation. The lack of a ‘Structured Dialogue ’and an ‘Institutional Identity ’ limits the ability of Italian football to present itself as a strategic sector and legitimate interlocutor of institutions.

On the contrary, the map shows that where such dialogue exists (as in the case of UEFA or other European leagues), it generates ‘Government Support for Football’, ‘Public-Private Collaboration ’and ‘Strategic National Framing ’of football as an economic, social and diplomatic resource. The interviewees explicitly mention the Bundesliga, the Premier League and other European leagues where public affairs have been institutionalized for over a decade, with a permanent presence in Brussels and ongoing dialogue with European institutions. This comparison is not only technical but also symbolic: Italian football is unable to position itself as a credible interlocutor because it cannot think of itself as a modern and strategic industry but continues to oscillate between nostalgia for patronage and an emergency-based view of the present. The most relevant fact, therefore, is that all the limitations highlighted,

from weak governance to infrastructural short-sightedness, from the crisis of representation to the fragmentation of the system, stem from the same root: the absence of a professional, structured and systemic approach.

A professionalization that public affairs, if strategically integrated, could help generate, structuring a shared vision, a common policy platform, and a new model of institutional governance of the football system.

5.1.4 Final remarks

This analysis provides a structural diagnosis: the absence of public affairs is not just an operational shortcoming, but a symptom of a system that has not yet developed its own institutional identity. The central issue is not just ‘lobbying ’or ‘getting results’, but becoming a legitimate political, industrial and social entity. This is not happening today. However, the collective map and the interviews clearly show that the path to achieving this has now been mapped out. It is up to the football system to decide whether to take it.

In short, the collective map not only confirms the critical framework hypothesized at the beginning, but broadens its scope, providing a relational, stratified and functional reading of why Italian football is in a condition of backwardness compared to European models, and how it could evolve when public affairs is adopted as a professional tool for institutional transformation. The wordclouds, as well as the conceptual maps and the collective map, fully confirm what has been repeatedly argued within the thesis: Italian football suffers from a profound lack of professionalization, both in its internal governance and in its ability to strategically interact with institutions. Public affairs, well represented in the technical and

conceptual lexicon, is perceived as a missing but necessary element, a tool capable of bridging the gap between football clubs and the political system. The survey shows that the actors in the system are aware of this gap: football is perceived as a strategic sector for the country, but the structures, roles and culture necessary to make it so do not exist. Dialogue with politics is insufficient, disorganized and often left to improvisation. The construction of an institutional identity of Italian football, through public affairs, professional representation and a shared model of advocacy, is indicated, both implicitly in words and explicitly in codes, as the key to starting a deep and systemic reform of the sector.

Thus, public affairs, as a technical and strategic lever, appears to be the great absentee: all the evidence gathered shows that its development could fill the gaps in representation, governance and institutional interlocution. The question posed at the beginning of the research is therefore confirmed: yes, Italian football needs to professionalize, equip itself with credible advocacy tools, and build a constant dialogue with the political decision-maker. And it must do so now, before the gap with European models becomes irreversible.

5.2 Comparison with the theoretical framework

The theoretical model outlined in the first chapters of the thesis is based on the adoption of the institutional-based view (IBV) framework, considered the most appropriate perspective for interpreting corporate strategies in complex institutional contexts. This approach broadens and goes beyond the resource-based view (RBV), emphasising that corporate strategies must necessarily take into account the set of formal and informal rules and institutions that shape the environment in which

companies operate. In other words, without careful consideration of the institutional context, it is not possible to develop truly effective strategies. Companies that are able to build legitimacy, comply with regulations, obtain political representation and actively influence institutions are stronger not only in terms of reputation, but also from an economic and competitive point of view.

The comparison between different national and international systems, analysed in Chapter 2, highlighted profound structural differences in the way lobbying is practised. In the United States, for example, lobbying is a well-regulated and widely recognised strategic tool. In Europe, on the other hand, a more fluid and voluntary approach prevails, as can be seen, for example, in the EU Transparency Register. In Italy, on the other hand, there is almost no regulation and no formal recognition of the profession. These differences are also clearly reflected in the football sector. In Italy, with the exception of Juventus, clubs do not have internal structures dedicated to public affairs and there is no widespread culture that recognises their strategic value. In contrast, environments such as the Premier League, the Bundesliga, La Liga and UEFA have permanent institutional departments, which also operate in Brussels and maintain a continuous dialogue with EU institutions on key issues such as taxation, stadium regulation, broadcasting rights and sports policy.

Even more developed is the US model, where lobbying in sport has become an integral part of the sector's governance. Since 1999, professional sports organisations in the US have invested over \$41.3 million in lobbying (fig. 1), with the NFL alone spending \$27.5 million, followed by the MLB and the NBA. These efforts focus on issues such as online gambling, player safety and antitrust exemptions (fig.2). Not only leagues, but also players' associations and individual clubs, such as D.C. United

and the Washington Commanders, pursue their own lobbying initiatives. In this context, public affairs are not an ancillary function, but a strategic pillar for market positioning and institutional engagement.²³⁰ Professional sports, business and politics are in constant dialogue, generating tangible effects in terms of tax policy, regulation and access to public resources.

The empirical investigation largely confirms the initial hypotheses, but also highlights dynamics that go beyond what theory predicts. Interviews and cognitive mapping have revealed a deeply stagnant system, in which the absence of a culture of institutional relations and a shared strategic vision is one of the main obstacles to the modernisation of Italian football. This is not just a regulatory vacuum, but above all a cultural and organisational vacuum. Unlike other contexts, Italian football is still perceived as an isolated and self-referential environment, where institutional relations are episodic, informal and often managed by the club presidents themselves rather than by professional internal or external structures.

This leads to a structural deficit in relations with institutions, identified as a critical issue in several clusters of the conceptual map. The only real exception is Juventus, which has developed a public relations function in line with the institutional context, built stable relationships with public decision-makers and integrated these activities into its broader corporate strategy. This case fully confirms the IBV's predictions that companies able to read and shape their regulatory environment gain a competitive advantage. However, the fact that this remains an isolated example in the Italian football landscape highlights how rare and fragile such practices still are. The collective

²³⁰ Sinn, D., Zielonka, A., Hoyt, C., & Brice-Saddler, M. (2017, December 19). Pro sports leagues, teams spend millions lobbying Washington. *CNS Maryland*. <https://cnsmaryland.org/2017/12/18/pro-sports-leagues-teams-spend-millions-lobbying-washington>

conceptual map therefore highlights a fundamental insight: the professionalisation of institutional relations is a key systemic lever capable of generating positive impacts on several dimensions simultaneously: governance, infrastructure, investment attraction, crisis management, dialogue with the EU, and taxation.

All these areas are currently hampered by the absence of a strong culture of institutional relations. This is where IBV demonstrates its analytical strength: it identifies institutional legitimacy as the main strategic asset in emerging or hybrid markets. However, the results of the empirical survey highlight the need for an extension of IBV.

Although this model is very useful for understanding the extent to which institutions influence corporate strategy, it is not entirely adequate for understanding the cultural dynamics that prevent the development of institutional legitimacy in some contexts. Italian football is a clear example of this inadequacy: the problem is not so much the absence of formal rules or regulatory structures, but rather the absence of a shared vision of football as a legitimate political and institutional actor.

The interviews and conceptual maps reveal a real identity vacuum that prevents the Italian football system from thinking of itself as an authoritative actor in public debate. It is difficult, if not impossible, to reduce legitimacy to what is established by rules: it must also mean the symbolic-cultural recognition of one's position in the public sphere and, above all, the recognition of institutions as part of a fundamental system linked to corporate strategies.

From this point of view, theory should more explicitly incorporate the cultural dimensions of legitimacy, taking into account the cognitive, symbolic and organisational processes through which a sector becomes aware of its political

potential and builds a representative structure capable of interacting with institutions. Only then will it be possible to fully understand the conditions that allow, or prevent, the emergence of authentic and sustainable institutional legitimacy.

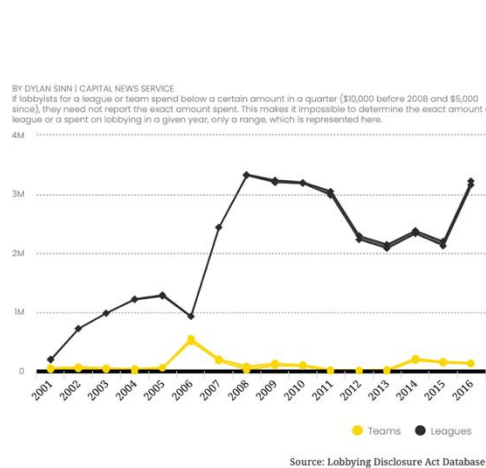


Fig. 2: Lobbying activity in NFL²³²

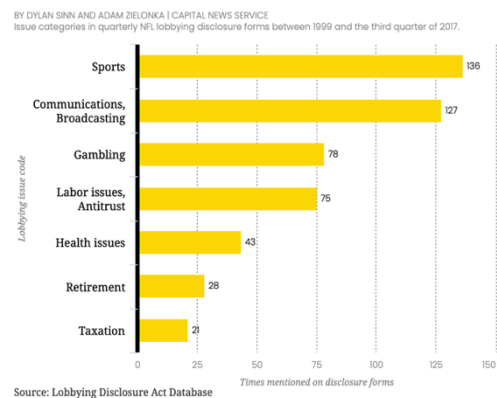


Fig. 1: Lobbying in the US sports industry²³¹

5.3 Contributions and emerging reflections

The empirical results are generally consistent with the theoretical interpretation of the theoretical premises set out by the Institutional-based View (IBV) and, in particular, with the strategic nature of institutions as constraints and enabling factors. In line with this logic, the results provide strong evidence that an organisation's ability to position itself effectively in the political-institutional context is crucial for influencing the rules of the game, gaining legitimacy and accessing key resources. The example of Juventus is a strong testimony to the fact that public affairs organisation in football must be part of a broader strategic governance approach. This

²³¹ Sinn, D., Zielonka, A., Hoyt, C., & Brice-Saddler, M. (2017, December 19). Pro sports leagues, teams spend millions lobbying Washington. *CNS Maryland*. <https://cnsmaryland.org/2017/12/18/pro-sports-leagues-teams-spend-millions-lobbying-washington>

²³² Sinn, D., Zielonka, A., Hoyt, C., & Brice-Saddler, M. (2017, December 19). Pro sports leagues, teams spend millions lobbying Washington. *CNS Maryland*. <https://cnsmaryland.org/2017/12/18/pro-sports-leagues-teams-spend-millions-lobbying-washington>

provides solid evidence to support one of the fundamental theses of IBV, namely that strategic organisations in their institutional context are more likely to anticipate and shape change, gain legitimacy and become active and influential participants. However, the data collected also provide original contributions to the theory. The first concerns the relational and systemic aspect of public affairs. The conceptual map highlights that the role of this activity is not limited to specific clubs and stakeholders, but depends on a coordinated system of representation. If there is no shared platform and reliable intermediary bodies, nor a shared culture of institutional relations, public affairs is transformed from a collective lever into an elite privilege. The IBV's focus on the company often overlooks this systemic aspect. However, evidence suggests that institutional relations are more effective when embedded in horizontal, multi-level and transnational advocacy networks, as is already the case in European football leagues and in the US system, where clubs, leagues, unions and regulatory authorities work closely with policy makers.

A second innovative insight that emerges from the survey concerns the link between strategic language and concrete action. The word clouds analysed reveal an evolved and articulated lexicon, a sign of a growing awareness, both theoretical and rhetorical, of the role of football as a sector with political and economic relevance. However, this maturation of discourse is not reflected in structured practices: there is a lack of corresponding organisational roles, dedicated functions and operational mechanisms capable of translating words into action.

This gap between what is said and what is actually done is very important. A culture and attitude that supports this discourse is needed: resources, skills and formal recognition. This is an element that has been little explored in IBV literature, but

which research suggests is central. Building institutional legitimacy does not just mean complying with existing rules or adapting to the context, but also implies the ability to make that strategic language operational and concrete, transforming it into structures and practices that enable it to have a real impact.

Finally, the results reveal a significant difference in organisational maturity between the different levels of the organisation. Some actors, such as the large Italian clubs, show levels, albeit minimal, of institutional awareness and sensitivity, while many of the smaller clubs, leagues and, until recently, the FIGC itself, are completely excluded from representative dynamics. This fragmentation only serves to widen the gap between the world of Italian football and the game as played in Europe. This picture suggests that effective institutional analysis cannot stop at the macro level, such as regulations or public policies, nor can it be limited to the micro level of individual companies. It is essential to include a “meso” reflection, which considers the shortcomings in coordination between organisations and the fragility of intermediate representation networks. These issues compromise the possibility of building a coherent and shared institutional strategy, making cultural change, which is fundamental for adapting to other countries, increasingly difficult.

CONCLUSION

This thesis project stems from a desire to explore the role that public affairs can play as a strategic lever for business growth in Italian football, analysing not only the potential benefits but also the current situation in the sector from this perspective. The relationship between sport and institutions is an area that remains surprisingly undervalued in Italy, despite the fact that football is an industrial sector of primary importance for the country in terms of GDP, employment, tax revenue and social relevance, and despite the fact that in other countries, from France to England, Germany to the United States, it has been an established reality for decades. The absence of a structured and professional model of dialogue with institutions, both at national and European level, represents not only an organisational shortcoming but, in particular, an obstacle to the political legitimacy and economic sustainability of the Italian football system. Starting from this assumption, the objective of the research is to verify how the adoption of a structured culture of institutional relations can represent an effective growth strategy for Italian clubs and, if present, whether it contributes to strengthening their influence, improving governance and obtaining institutional recognition consistent with their economic and social weight. To address this question, the thesis has constructed a theoretical framework based on the Institution-Based View (IBV), a paradigm that considers institutions, whether formal or informal, not as mere backdrops to corporate behaviour, but as key players in defining strategic trajectories. This framework has proved adequate for interpreting the relationship between the world of football and the world of politics, where the absence of clear rules, dedicated professionalism and a systemic vision produces a

form of “institutional isolation”, which translates into inefficiency, isolation and missed opportunities. To support the theoretical framework, a comparative analysis was developed between the US, European Union and Italian models, with the aim of highlighting the regulatory, cultural and strategic gaps that separate our country from international standards in lobbying and institutional relations. This has led to an understanding of how the cultural and regulatory integration of interest representation goes together with the cultural and regulatory integration of public affairs in the football sectors of different countries.

The objectives of the research were therefore oriented towards the construction of a systemic diagnosis, but also a transformative proposal: it is not enough to observe the cultural and structural lag of Italian football, it is necessary to provide the conceptual and operational tools to initiate a process of reform. The integration of public affairs as a stable, strategic and professional function within clubs and leagues can become the key to overcoming fragmentation, building political legitimacy, attracting investment, engaging in dialogue with the European Union and restoring Italian football to a position of leadership at both institutional and sporting level.

The final result, therefore, is not only intended to be a scientific contribution to the literature on institutional relations in the sports sector, but also an operational tool for policy-makers, football managers and professionals in the sector who wish to tackle the challenge of representation and growth in the contemporary context with seriousness and strategic vision.

In order to provide a coherent answer to the research question regarding the current situation of public affairs in Italian football and the extent to which it can represent a strategic lever for the growth of football clubs, the thesis, through interviews with

leading figures in the sector, empirically analysed the current situation, developing in particular comparisons with countries, federations and clubs that have been using this activity for years. The entire research design was constructed with the aim of linking theory, context and direct testimony, creating an interdependence between interpretative models, opinions and different visions of reality of the actors involved. In the first phase, a robust theoretical framework was developed through a comparative analysis of the Resource-Based View (RBV) and the Institution-Based View (IBV). While the former prioritises internal factors as a source of competitive advantage, the latter broadens the strategic horizon to include the decisive role of formal and informal institutions in defining corporate trajectories. The choice to adopt the IBV as an interpretative lens proved crucial, as it allows football to be analysed not as a closed system, but as an industrial sector operating in an ecosystem regulated by rules, social expectations and political-institutional dynamics. Subsequently, a systematic comparison was made between the models of public affairs regulation in the United States, the European Union and Italy, with the aim of outlining not only the regulatory differences, but above all the cultural and functional differences that characterise the degree of maturity of institutional relations in the different contexts. This comparative analysis highlighted how lobbying in Italy still lacks a defined legal framework, it is delegated to informal practices with serious repercussions in terms of transparency, effectiveness and legitimacy, and it is often confused with communication activities.

Through the subsequent empirical survey, it was understood how culture is a fundamental aspect of the framework. As analysed from a theoretical point of view in the first chapter, following the empirical survey, it was possible to analyse how a

combination of cultural aspects acts as a brake on the development of public affairs activities. From a general point of view, in fact, Italy has never developed and internalised institutional relations in a structured and profound way as a concrete benefit for companies and as a professional activity. This is demonstrated by the lack of regulation of interest representation and the preference, until a few years ago, for a “grey” form of lobbying, counting on relationships, personal interests and favours. From a sporting point of view, on the other hand, the world of Italian football has always been seen as a sector linked exclusively to entertainment, consisting largely of fans and matches, all within the space of “nineteen minutes”. There has never been any desire, either from outside or from inside, to abandon this “provincial” vision and move towards a corporate, international and sustainable concept of football.

After outlining the theoretical and contextual framework, the research focused on a structured analysis of the Italian football system. This phase involved mapping the internal organisation of the sector, its regulatory history, its economic performance and its governance structure. Using financial statements, official reports, legislative documents and sector studies, a snapshot of the Italian football landscape was reconstructed, highlighting the paradox of an industry with a high economic and social impact but lacking strategic vision, internal cohesion and adequate representation tools.

The empirical core of the thesis was then formed by a qualitative survey based on ten semi-structured interviews with key figures from the world of football and institutions. The interviewees were selected in a targeted manner, favouring profiles with direct responsibilities in the managerial, political, institutional and consultancy fields, so as to ensure a plurality of perspectives. The interviews were conducted

mainly via video call or in written form, using a flexible but consistent outline, with questions tailored to the role and area of reference (institutional, managerial or political), but defined according to a single format for all.

Subsequently, in order to better analyse the responses received and connect them to one another, a cognitive mapping system was used. Using MaxQDA software for thematic coding and Graphviz for visualising the relationships between concepts, it was possible to translate the discursive content of the interviews first into word clouds, which showed the most frequently used terms, then into individual cognitive maps for each interview, and finally into a collective cognitive map. This last step aimed to combine all the individual maps into a single network, capable of representing not only the most recurring themes, but also the causal links and strategic interdependencies between them.

The final result is a dense, hierarchical representation of the thinking of the actors interviewed, divided into four macro areas: public affairs, football management, institutional relations and the football system as a strategic sector.

Through this procedure, the research was able not only to gather information but also to provide a structured and visual interpretation of the problem studied, building a solid bridge between theory, data and practice. The methodology adopted thus made it possible to move from a descriptive analysis to a practical and strategic understanding, capable of identifying levers for transformation and formulating proposals based on shared evidence.

The results emerging from the qualitative survey and the construction of the collective cognitive map confirm the initial hypothesis of the research: although the world of Italian football recognises its strategic importance at a discursive level, it

still lacks the tools and organisational culture necessary to establish a stable, professional and continuous relationship with the institutions. Public affairs, although frequently mentioned, is constantly absent from Italian football governance, both at club and system level.

Italian football seems to act only in an emergency-based view of dialogue with politics, activated only in crisis situations, and a still paternalistic and personalistic conception of institutional relations, often delegated to club presidents or managed on an ad hoc basis by external consultants.

The lack of professionalisation emerges as the real critical point of the system. The cognitive map identifies it as a cross-cutting element that fuels other systemic weaknesses: from the confusion between communication and advocacy, to the fragmentation of stakeholders, to the lack of Italian football in Italian decision-making contexts and its total absence in European ones. The absence of internal structures within clubs dedicated to institutional relations, external consultants and a long-term vision, combined with the lack of a shared political platform at league or federation level, reduces the football system's ability to influence public policy, access funds or obtain favourable regulatory reforms consistent with its needs.

The only significant exception that emerged from the interviews is the Juventus model. The Club is cited by several interviewees as an example of an organisation with an advanced corporate culture, a long-term strategic vision and an internal structure dedicated to public affairs, capable of engaging in ongoing dialogue with Italian and European institutions. The Juventus case not only confirms the theoretical validity of the IBV, demonstrating that competitive advantage can derive from the ability to influence and read the institutional environment, but also represents a

structural limitation of the system: its uniqueness makes it difficult to establish a shared model.

Another important finding that emerged from the research concerns the discrepancy between the rhetorical recognition of football as a strategic sector and its actual ability to behave as such. The interviews show a widespread awareness of the economic, social and cultural impact of football, but this awareness does not translate into institutional planning or collective representation. In the absence of an autonomous and legitimate political identity, Italian football continues to present itself to the institutions as a collection of divided entities, incapable of sustaining a common, coordinated and credible narrative.

The results of the research therefore demonstrate what was stated at the outset and what has been seen so far. Public affairs is not a decorative function, but a strategic asset that is still unexplored and capable of having a cross-cutting impact on governance, access to resources, crisis management, internationalisation and the sustainability of the football industry model. When integrated into a conscious corporate strategy, it can help build the institutional identity that the system currently lacks, strengthening its position in the public debate and facilitating dialogue with political power centres at national and European level.

The implications that emerged from this research develop on two main levels: managerial and theoretical. In both cases, the results confirm that the absence of a structured culture of institutional relations in Italian football constitutes a profound obstacle to the development of the sector, compromising the possibility for clubs to take an active and recognised role in the decision-making processes that affect them and, therefore, crucially, to grow as businesses in all respects.

At the managerial level, as clearly emerged from the results of the empirical analysis, there is an urgent need for a paradigm shift. Clubs must begin to consider themselves as companies operating in a regulated, regulatable and competitive environment, with a very strong social and economic impact, and not just sports entities or entertainment brands. The qualitative survey revealed a system in which awareness of the importance of public affairs is widespread at the level of discourse but almost completely disregarded in practice. The interviews show that, with rare exceptions, clubs do not have dedicated internal figures, do not have medium- to long-term planning in their relations with institutions and tend to take action only in emergency situations, often relying on personal networks or favours.

This transformation requires the adoption of a long-term strategic vision and the integration of institutional relations within the organisational structure. Public affairs can no longer be managed on occasional and emergency basis or delegated exclusively to presidents. The occasional use of public affairs, even with external consultants, unconnected to a broader strategy, has proven ineffective, especially when these consultants, as emerged from the interviews, are not professionals in institutional relations but lawyers or trusted advisors to managers. On the contrary, support from structured and ongoing external consultancy, integrated with an internal office or a dedicated function, is good organisational practice and can contribute significantly to the development of a coherent and effective institutional strategy.

The lack of dedicated professional structures is not only a technical shortcoming but also an obstacle to building legitimacy, influencing public policy and seizing opportunities, funds and reforms. An effective public affairs function, as demonstrated by the Juventus case, requires stability, narrative consistency, regular

interaction with institutional levels and a proactive approach supported by data and planning. The function cannot be conceived as a response to a problem, but as a constituent element of the club's strategy. To be effective, the public affairs function must be fully integrated into the club's business vision. It cannot be an external delegation or a reactive initiative, but must dialogue with communication, financial planning, marketing and social responsibility. Only when considered part of the organisation's overall strategy can this function become a real multiplier of opportunities, a vehicle for institutional positioning and a catalyst for economic growth.

A further critical element that emerged from the interviews is the lack of coordination between the different levels of the system: clubs, leagues and the Federation often operate in a disorganised manner, without a shared platform or a unified vision. This entails a dual responsibility for managers: on the one hand, to initiate autonomous professionalisation processes; on the other, to actively contribute to the construction of a system culture, encouraging the emergence of common issues and supporting a collective agenda towards the institutions. In this sense, it is imperative for leagues and the FIGC to take a proactive role, promoting the creation of structured forums for discussion and providing guidelines for the development of shared representation strategies, developing a unity of purpose so as to have greater weight with policymakers.

Finally, on a theoretical level, the research confirms and, in some ways, reinforces the Institution-Based View. The IBV model has clearly demonstrated that the competitive advantage of companies depends not only on internal resources but also on their ability to read, interpret and influence the institutional context. However,

what emerges from the reality of Italian football is that institutional legitimacy is not built solely from the outside, but is generated internally from a recognition of identity and culture. A cultural leap is needed not only in institutions, but also within organisations themselves. Companies, of which football clubs are an integral part, must be aware of their role in society, their impact on the national economy and their responsibility towards the country as a whole.

It is no coincidence that the most successful team in Italy is also the one that is perceived across the board as the most stable and organised. Its strength does not come solely from the pitch, but from an advanced corporate vision that has been able to integrate public affairs into its growth strategy. Economic stability and the ability to position itself as a credible interlocutor with institutions are not side effects, but the direct result of a professional structure that methodically oversees the institutional dimension.

The professionalisation of public affairs, as outlined at the beginning of this research and confirmed by the results of the empirical survey, emerges as a concrete lever for business growth. Where this function has been strategically integrated, tangible benefits have been observed in terms of visibility, economic stability and institutional recognition.

In this context, Italian football is faced with a choice. It can either continue to move in a fragmented manner, relying on emergency measures and personal management, or it can build a new institutional identity based on professionalism, vision and representation. The risk, if this does not happen, is not only a loss of competitiveness, but a progressive downsizing of the entire system: from youth sectors to minor leagues, to the ability to attract investment and maintain an international role.

The challenge facing national football is no longer just about sporting results, but its ability to play an active role in the places where the rules, resources and prospects of the sector are defined. Only by including public affairs among the essential functions of the key players will it be possible to strengthen the Italian football system's ability to engage in stable dialogue with the institutions and contribute more effectively to the definition of the policies that govern its evolution.

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