

Italian Football in an Era of Globalisation: Neo-Patrimony, New Localism and Decline

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Abstract

Italy and Italian football have captured the imagination of writers and fans across the globe. The Italia '90 world cup reaffirmed Italy's standing as a world power in football. It also marked a turning point in global sport. At the end of the twentieth century, global sport underwent a period of profound transformation. In parallel to similar process taking place elsewhere in politics, economics and society, sport was entering a period of de-regulation and commodification, which impacted national leagues and local fans. Despite the intensification of transnational global networks resulting from de-regulation, individual nation states still hold significant power. Likewise, national leagues are still significant to football clubs despite the growth of global markets and transnational competitions. Yet these global processes of commodification and de-regulation have impacted fans in vastly different ways.

This thesis provides analysis of Italian football in relation to the impact of the changing global political economy. Through analysis of the Italian political economy, it will identify the complex personal networks operating across Italian business, politics and football. This has witnessed the emergence of a number of significant charismatic leaders who operate across these networks and utilise patronage to gain an advantage. These patrimonial networks were initially successful, as Italian football quickly adapted to the changing global economy. However, it has not capitalised on this early success. Italian clubs are struggling financially in relation to their European peers. This has been compounded by a series of crises have impacted Italian football.

The crises within Italian society and football have impacted the engagement of fans. Political engagement has fallen and this is replicated in the stadiums. The historical failure of the Italian state to impose itself has been further undermined by globalisation processes. Traditional regional identities have been reinforced as globalisation has further weakened the nation state. Changes to the patterns of consumption have combined with these traditional identities and has led to a greater particularisation in society. Individualism and regionalism have grown, and this has led to a decline in engagement with wider public life and social capital. One aspect of this decline has been demonstrated by several high profile violent incidents, and deaths at Italian matches. The impact of this decline will be addressed in relation to the formation of supporters' groups and the match-day experiences of fans. Ultimately this decline is financially affecting the clubs which further contributes to the overall crisis within Italian football.

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