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L'apporto della **Geografia**
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Roma, 7-10 Giugno 2017

a cura di
Franco Salvatori

A.Ge.I. - Roma

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GEOGRAPHY OF FOOTBALL FAN CLUBS IN ITALY

1. Introduction: social relevance of Italian football

Social relevance of soccer in Italy is very high for the long lasting traditions of football clubs, their international voice and an increasing financial power. Notwithstanding an ongoing decrease in passion, fans are organized in many clubs still playing important and complex social and economic roles (Pioletti, 2008).

Since the sixties, Italian teams and individual players have increased their notoriety due to the publishing of the first football sticker collection by Panini in 1961 (Panini Italia, n.d.). Moreover, on 10 January 1960, the state broadcasting service – RAI, *Radio Televisione Italiana* – aired the first telecast of *Tutto il calcio minuto per minuto* (literally, all football minute-by-minute). This was a running commentary of all Sunday football matches followed by millions of fans (Ferrari, 1990). At that time, the Italian national football team was not an international winner, but the National football league had a large popular audience and a very strong media support.

In 1970, the Italian national team won the 'game of the century' beating 4-3 West Germany during the FIFA World Cup semi-final in Mexico (Ghirelli, 1990). Since that year, football showed an increasing popularity until 1982, when Italy won the FIFA World Cup in Spain (Barrocu, 2007). Football became soon a flourishing industry, attracting financial investments, sponsors, and increasing attention by all media (Dal Lago, 1992). The role of telecasts has been determinant in increasing the revenues of professional players and people involved in the business. Becoming an industry – and a media industry – soccer built up a complex system of relations between football clubs and fans. The dimension of merchandising became larger due, also, to the overwhelming supply of radio and tv football shows all the day and all the year long (Abbiezzi, 2007). More recently, the Internet allowed fan clubs to have a direct control over communications and in managing their own image (Balestri, 2002).

The Italian soccer is capable of provoking violence and damages with hooliganism and trampling in overcrowded assemblies. On the opposite, it may settle differences between social classes and overturn national prejudices, having positive educational features (Scurati, 2009; Wilsey, 2006).

On the dark side, soccer has a bad reputation for irresponsible behavior performed by football clubs and fan clubs, in and off the game arena. Football clubs have increased their bad reputation for improper financial and unfair sport behaviors. Today, the Italian football clubs are facing the double risk of financial crack and social scorn. Organized supporters have a bad image due to violence, racial and territorial discrimination (Roversi, 1992, 2006; Russo, 2004). Many fan clubs lack of fair play before, during and after the matches, and criminal events have occurred even in recent times with the

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G.L. Corinto and A.M. Pioletti designed the research, collected the theory literature, provided methodology and data survey. They analyzed data and produced results, sharing interpretation and final comments and conclusions. C. Lazzarotto collaborated to data acquisition. G.L. Corinto wrote sections 1 and 3, A.M. Pioletti wrote sections 2, 4, and 5.



dead of supporters (Francesio, 2008).

We should note robust statements coming quite every day from the soccer authorities, sponsors and media against irresponsible and unfair behaviors (De Stefano, 2014).

In recent years the geographical distribution of football fan clubs in Italy has changed a lot. The last report on the 'Italian Football Fandom' shows that the current percentage of fans on total population has decreased, being today the 40%, namely 10% less than ten years ago (Diamanti, 2015).

The most popular football club in Italy is still *Juventus F.C.*, based in Turin. The two Milanese clubs, *A.C. Milan* and *F.C. Internazionale Milano*, have more fans in Northern Italy than in other regions. Following are *Roma* and *Napoli*, based in the namesake cities. They gather supporters mainly in Central and Southern Italy, respectively (tab. 1).

Official club name	North West	North East	Center	South and Islands	Italy
Juventus F.C.	32,5	25,0	28,4	29,5	30,2
A.C. Milan	20,6	19,7	9,5	15,6	16,5
F.C. Internazionale Milano	21,4	21,1	10,5	28,3	12,1
S.S.C. Napoli	2,4	2,6	2,1	28,3	12,1
A.S. Roma	1,6	3,9	21,1	1,2	5,5

Table 1. Main football clubs. Percent of fans per geographic area in 2013. Source: Diamanti, 2013.

Only 22% of total audience enjoy live games in stadiums, whilst people mainly watch football on free and pay TV, together summing up to 60% of the audience. Increasing but still marginal is the use of electronic devices connected to the Internet (Diamanti, 2015).

Besides the economic crisis, the overall fading of fandom may be linked to the lowering credibility of football as a fair sport, increasing perception of stadiums as risky and racist places and decreasing interest for the Italian football league in comparison to foreign ones. Today, for the Italian *tifosi* the most credible and trustable 'institution' is the present coach of the National Team (Diamanti, 2015). Notwithstanding the decline of the Italian *tifo*, football probably remains the 'ultimate' sense of social belonging, better than politics, regionalism, localism or parochialism (Diamanti, 2015).

The range of fans is continuously decreasing, being actually concentrated in supporting traditional bigger football clubs, *Juventus*, *Milan*, *Inter*, *Roma* and *Napoli*. A negative aspect is that fandom is changing into the world of 'counter-fans' and 'ultras', while the less warm fans are decreasing or stay home watching television football shows.

The case of *Juventus* and *Torino* is very illuminating per se, and paradigmatic for other similar situations (Signorelli, 1994). The *Juventus* club is owned by the Agnelli industrial family who founded and managed for years the FIAT automobile industry, which has recently evolved into the FCA multi brands Italo-American company. The counter team is the other football club *Torino*. The division between two fierce opposite fan groups is to be related more to geographical origin than social member-

ship of people. Fans of *Torino* were born in the city or at least in the Piedmont region, while fans of *Juve* are mainly southern Italian immigrants arrived in Turin to work in FIAT. Fans of *Torino* consider themselves as “native residents”, showing a leftist antagonism against the hyper-power of *Juventus* and its wealthy owners, reputed as provincial, parochial, and strategically allied with the immigrant workers.

In 1947 *Torino*'s players were the sole components of the Italian national football team, in a historical victory versus Hungary. The team was named *Il Grande Torino* (the great Turin) and players were named *Campionissimi* (super champions). This sport rivalry still continues, notwithstanding *Torino* is a ‘never-winner’ football club.

This kind of urban rivalry affects many other Italian fan clubs, especially when in a singular city there are two big football clubs in the same city, such as in Turin, Milan, Rome and Verona. A peculiar case regards the fierce relations between *Juventus* and *Fiorentina*, based in Florence. Since 1982, after a supposed referee conspiracy in favor of *Juventus*, which unexpectedly won the Italian national league, all the Florentine fan clubs declared a sort of permanent fan war. Today, the fan clubs of *Fiorentina* are strictly allied with those of *Torino*, the both being resolute counter fans of *Juventus*. In its turn, Florence as the regional capital city of Tuscany faces several counter fans from all other regional towns, quite all warm supporters of *Juventus*. Tuscan provincials stay close to the richest Italian football club due to the hate against the dominance of Florence in the whole region. Urban residents of Florence and Turin are fierce counter-fans of *Juventus*, for its long lasting sport supremacy and for being the scandalously ‘always-winning’ club of ‘hated’ provincials and immigrants from Southern Italy.

The aim of our work is to describe geography of football fan clubs in Italy and critically interpret the twinning and rivalry behavior among *tifosi* as diffused in the territory, investigating on motive of relations.

2. Background literature on fandom

In geography, the fan phenomenon has been analyzed in line with the construction of identity and space by Bale (1993; 1996). Social practices performed by fans are actual expression of the sense of belonging to a well defined social group (Hetherington, 1998). Fan groups do confront each other in stadiums, and continue to do it every day also during labor and leisure time, in public and private places. They separate or aggregate people around many figures, i.e. power and reputation of clubs, market of players, sport results, score of singular players and teams, game strategy to be adopted by the coach and the like.

Scholars of diverse disciplines (Durkheim, 1915; Mc Neill, 1995) posed sound hypotheses on the nexus between collective action and the community creation mediated by collective movements individuals do act when grouped. Religion was Durkheim's deal, but his interpretation of group consciousness gives sense to the symbolism of many other collective representations, including secular rites of fandom. The historian Mac Neill defined ‘muscular bonding’ (1997) the cohesion of a group which simultaneously moves, chants, dances, repeating the same gestures and words. In such a situation the group fosters euphoria and empowers shared sentiments while performing collective rites. The intensity of fandom signals the meaning and purpose people put in it, and fans seem like devotees and their practices are functionally similar to religious practices (Hills, 2002). Besides, the linkage between football and TV is the result of an emerging popular culture as an arena in which people make meaning of their daily lives (Hills, 2002).

Sociologist Maffesoli (1969) tied “being-together” and “collective consciousness” by the concept of *tribus* as the ‘highest social good’ for their members. Tribe is a median between individuals and the mass, capable to furnish a legitimate identity (Morris, 1982).

Football fanaticism provides a way to support diverse facets of individual identity. Individuals identify themselves with others within a group, which in its turn may differentiate, creating bounda-

ries by means of knowledge and creativity, based on past memory, present experience and future expectations. Giulianotti and Armstrong (1997) investigated on how football plays out fundamental social features, relating to class, gender, ethnicity, age, and even to moral and existential dilemmas. Like religion it involves a rituality around cultural artifacts and totems, which generate a symbolic communication (Finn, Giulianotti, 2013; Giulianotti, Robertson, 2004; Rowntree, Conkey, 1980). Fans draw identity from their social environment, selecting, discarding, choosing, expressing and adopting those items which are most appropriate for the time and place. Fans construct their identities and separations in continuously acting/reacting each other within a specific cultural context (Bernache-Assollant *et al.*, 2001). Stadiums are hierarchical places, with different social areas, usually well visible and highly symbolic, where the chanting of hymns and slogans, wearing of colors, or collective gestures, have certain meaning and show different preferences even in ordinary activities (Bernache-Assollant *et al.*, 2001).

An historical framework of the birth of Italian football fandom has been given by D'Auria (2009). The fan club *Fedelissimi Granata* was the first one to be founded in 1951, in Turin. Afterward, the phenomenon migrated to England, where fans have been called 'hooligans', with an increasing negative sense. The first group of so called *ultras* was the *Fossa dei Leoni* (The lions' den), active in Milan from 1968 until 2005. The first fan clubs using the term *ultras* in their own name were the ones of *Sampdoria* (based in Genoa) and *Torino* (in Turin). The two were respectively named *Ultras Tito Cucchiaroni* and *Ultras Granata* (D'Auria, 2009). Other *ultras* of major football clubs flourished during the sixties. Each of them had a symbolic name and a banner, gathering people during the choreographies and chanting in stadiums. Progressively, hymns, flags, confetti, drums, sport smokes, became the professional paraphernalia for all fans (D'Auria, 2009).

During the seventies, the Italian fandom became violent, showing also some features of an urban guerrilla, borrowing names, attitudes, formal behaviors from political extremists (Bruno, 2005). Nevertheless, the football clubs continued to legitimate fan clubs, winking at any kind of fanship as a commitment to their own colors and values. The *ultras* often had privileges, such as reserved stadium stands, popular prices and planned transfers in other cities (Bruno, 2005). After the eighties, all football club had actually at least one fan club.

3. Focus, research questions and method

Within the topic of football fandom, our focus is on the geography of Italian football fan clubs. What is the current map of football fandom? What is the map of friendship/hostility in terms of twinning and rivalry between fan clubs? Which are the actual motives and origins for alliances and rivalries? Are there any power hierarchies among football fan clubs?

We analyzed secondary and primary sources of information. We collected data from football clubs websites and fan clubs' Facebook pages (appendixes A and B). Afterward, we performed interviews to a dozen of key informants (appendix C), following the interviewing colloquial method suggested by Kvale (1996). We dedicated at least one hour to each interview, during the period from September 2014 to December 2015.

4. Results

In general, alliances are variable over time, besides some robust friendships between two or more football fan clubs. The map is complicated by a large series of relations involving Italian and foreign teams, playing in the first, second and third league.

The motive of friendship/hostility has usually to be related to a specific match, namely a contested final result or fair/unfair behavior of singular players or the whole team and club. Often a strong ri-

valry did originate from the blameful behavior of the referees, reputed 'mentally subdued' in favor of the winner club, usually the biggest ones in the national league.

Rivalry is considered a question of honor and when a fan club is eventually robbed of the iconic large stripe, it must break up. The territorial control of a selected area in the stadium (usually the low budget curved sector) is very strict. In this place, even the layout of a banner is bounded to the payment of a fee to the sector leader. Each fan club shows distinctive colors, usually related to the beloved football club. The power of fan clubs grew up in the last few decades and they can put pressure on players and football clubs.

In table 2 we show the number of twin/rival relations between fan clubs with respect to the present configuration of the first division, the Italian national league.

Club	Twinning	Rivalries
	No.	No.
Atalanta	3	12
Bologna	2	14
Carpi	1	4
Chievo Verona	-	1
Empoli	3	14
Fiorentina	4	12
Frosinone	1	12
Genoa	3	28
Hellas Verona	3	24
Inter	3	5
Juventus	2	6
Lazio	3	20
Milan	4	11
Napoli	4	24
Palermo	3	14
Roma	2	15
Sampdoria	6	18
Sassuolo	1	1
Torino	2	12
Udinese	1	9

Table 2. National football league 2015/16. Number of twinning and rivalries per club. Source: our processing from Tuttocurve, n.d.

Every club has a larger number of rivals than friends. *Juventus* looks having few rival clubs, although being the most hated club in Italy, due to the high amount of counter fans who are supporters of the biggest national clubs.

In the same line, the big clubs of the North have few rivals but also very few friends. In general, the southern fan clubs raise many rivalries, as a response to the historical racist division between Northern and Southern Italy. Provincial and minor football clubs have a very big density of relations because they maintain the past rivalries also when access to a major league.

Within the framework of conflicts, a North-South divide is quite evident. This division has sound historical bases even in many other well known socioeconomic features of the Italian society. Football gives a reliable picture of national and local situations. The traditionally wealthy northern regions, more industrialized and definitively no more rural, gather the most part of football clubs and fans, countering the political leadership of Rome by means of all economic activities, including football.

5. Discussion and concluding remarks

Our main goal was mapping the football fan clubs in Italy. This purpose has been easily satisfied surveying data on many dedicated websites. The reliability of this information has been proved as correct during the interviews we made. The other goal we wanted to reach was a deeper knowledge about the actual motive of friendship and rivalries between fan clubs. During the interviews we perceived some 'fanatical' behavior, especially when talking with fans with a deep culture of countering rival clubs. The interviewees participated freely and cordially in the interviews and we didn't perceive preclusions or misleading behaviors. The survey considered only the situation in Italy and any comparison with other countries will need specific surveys.

Actually, the Italian fandom has a dual soul. The first is linked to the traditional audience in the physical space of stadiums. The second one is more modern and regards the contemporary large use of the web and social media tools, capable of virally diffusing claims, slogans and emotions.

The diffusion of hot-fans and violent *ultras* is becoming overwhelming. Even though football is a still in-stadium show, the less warm fans are going to prefer TV airings. Our experience did confirm that any football match is a religious celebration and a social feast pertaining to popular culture for the many.

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Appendix A. Key Informants list. Interviews from Sept. 2014 to Dec. 2014.

No.	Role	Institution
1	Sport Journalist	Local Sport Newspaper
2	Sport Journalist	Local Sport Broadcast Service
3	Sport Journalist	Public Press Office
4	Fan	Fan Club
5	Fan	Fan Club
6	Manager	Social media business
7	Manager	Italian Football League
8	Actor	Italian Humorist Football TV Show
9	Ultras	Italian Third Division Fan
10	President	<i>Torino</i> F.C. Museum
11	Fan	Fan club
12	Journalist	National Broadcast Service

Appendix B. List of Official Football Club Sites and Fan Sites.

Football Club	Official Site	Fan Site
Atalanta	http://www.atalanta.it/	http://atalantini.gecosistemi.com/com/home.php
Bologna	http://www.bolognafc.it/	http://www.forumrossoblu.org/forum/
Carpi	http://www.carpifc.com/	http://www.iotifocarpi.it/viewforum.php?f=1
Chievo Verona	http://www.chieoverona.it/	http://www.chievocalcio.it/
Empoli	http://www.empolicalcio.net/	http://www.empolicalcio.net/
		http://www.rangers.it/
Fiorentina	http://it.violachannel.tv/index.php	http://www.fiorentinanews.com/
Frosinone	http://www.frosinonecalcio.com/	http://www.forum-frosinonecalcio.com/Social/
Genoa	http://genoafc.it/	http://www.pianetagenoa1893.net/
Hellas Verona	http://www.hellasverona.it/	http://www.hellaswall.com/
Inter	http://www.inter.it/	http://www.interfans.org/forum/
Juventus	http://www.juventus.com/it	http://www.giulemanidallajuve.com/
Lazio	http://www.sslazio.it/	http://www.lalaziosiamonoi.it/
		http://www.forumlazioultras.it/
Milan	http://www.acmilan.com/	http://acmilanforever.forumfree.it/
		http://www.milannews.it/
Napoli	http://www.sscnapoli.it/prehome/html/default.html	http://www.calcionapoliblog.it/index.asp
Palermo	http://palermocalcio.it/it/	http://www.palermomania.com/
Roma	http://www.asroma.it/it/	http://www.forza-roma.com/
Sampdoria	http://www.sampdoria.it/	http://sampdoria.forumfree.it/
Sassuolo	http://www.sassuocalcio.it/	http://www.tuttosassuocalcio.com/
Torino	http://www.torinofc.it/	http://www.toronews.net/
Udinese	http://www.udinese.it/portal/IT/handle/?page=homepage	http://www.udineseblog.it/

Appendix C. Official Facebook Pages of the Italian Soccer First Division Clubs, 2013.

	Facebook
Atalanta	https://www.facebook.com/atalantabc?fref=ts
Bologna	https://www.facebook.com/pages/Bologna-FC-1909/10184592211
Cagliari	https://www.facebook.com/CAGLIARICALCIOFFICIALPAGE
	https://www.facebook.com/cagliarieternoamore
Empoli	https://www.facebook.com/Guido-Rosselli-Fan-Club-el-Magic-de-Empoli-170280409732171/
Chievo	https://www.facebook.com/ACChievoVerona1929/
Fiorentina	https://www.facebook.com/AC-Fiorentina-267087803418888/?fref=ts
Genoa	https://www.facebook.com/genoaCFCofficial
Hellas Verona	https://www.facebook.com/hellasveronafc1903?fref=ts
Inter	https://www.facebook.com/InterOfficialPage
Juventus	https://www.facebook.com/pages/Juventus/528713460508794?brand_redir=1
Lazio	https://www.facebook.com/pages/SS-Lazio/26955219333
Livorno	https://www.facebook.com/pages/Associazione-Sportiva-Livorno-Calcio/154300681344039
Milan	https://www.facebook.com/ACMilan
Napoli	https://www.facebook.com/SSCNapoli
Parma	https://www.facebook.com/fcparma
Roma	https://www.facebook.com/officialasroma
Sampdoria	https://www.facebook.com/sampdoria/?fref=ts&rf=115306658483004
Sassuolo	https://www.facebook.com/officialsassuolocalcio
Torino	https://www.facebook.com/pages/Torino-FC/16002319067
Udinese	https://www.facebook.com/Udinese

Source: direct survey by the authors.