

# **The Creation of the FC Barcelona Early Competitive Advantage from a New Entrepreneurial History Approach, 1899-1922**

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this study is to show how an entrepreneurial project that identifies a future form of value may not be motivated by the search for personal financial gain. Based on the new entrepreneurial history framework established by Wadhwani and Lubinski (2017), the paper analyses the process by which FC Barcelona was created and consolidated, at a time when football was strictly amateur in nature. It was an entrepreneurial project deployed in a dynamic process based on trial and error characterized by three decisive entrepreneurial momentums: the creation of the club in 1899; its rebirth in 1908; and the construction of a large stadium in 1922. From uncertain beginnings, the club's eventual consolidation led to long-term socio-economic change and presents the main characteristics of a Schumpeterian creative response since it was key in the introduction of a sport that changed the way in which leisure was consumed in Spain.

**KEYWORDS:** Entrepreneurial History; Entrepreneurial Processes; Competitive Advantage; Sports Industry; Football; Soccer; FC Barcelona

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## **Introduction**

Swiss national Hans Gamper, a keen football player,<sup>1</sup> arrived in Barcelona in November 1898 with plans to learn Spanish and subsequently move to the Spanish colony of Fernando Poo, in present-day Equatorial Guinea, to explore the enclave’s potential as a supplier of colonial products. Not long after his arrival, he enrolled in the Solé gym. On one of his first visits, while resting after a pulley session, he asked his neighbor what the city’s best football club was and was shocked when the man seemed to have no idea what he was talking about. The few gym-goers with the vaguest notion of the sport explained that some of the British immigrants played the game, but that it had never caught on

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this work, the term ‘football’ is used to refer to the game of association football, also known as soccer.

outside of their inner circle. ‘Well, I love playing football,’ he replied. ‘Let’s form a club.’ On 29 November 1899, Football Club Barcelona was born.<sup>2</sup>

Futbol Club Barcelona (henceforth FC Barcelona or FCB) has been one of the key drivers behind the expansion of professional football in Spain, an industry that generated an economic impact of about sixteen billion euros in the 2016/17 season and includes clubs such as FCB itself and Real Madrid, which boast hundreds of millions of social media followers across the globe.<sup>3</sup> According to Deloitte (2021), Real Madrid, with 277.4 million followers, and FCB, with 273.9 million, were the two most followed clubs in 2021 on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and Tiktok. This paper explores the creation and early growth of FCB to show how creative processes whose goals are not based on personal financial gain can give rise to socioeconomic change creating long-term value.

Daniel Wadhwani and Christina Lubinski defined new entrepreneurial history (NEH) as the study of the creative processes that propel socioeconomic change by identifying future forms of value. Intrinsic to this premise is the recognition of plurality in entrepreneurial motives, which include the pursuit of civic, environmental, aesthetic, academic and industrial forms of value. Thus, entrepreneurial processes need not be limited to operating in competitive markets to derive financial gain, but may operate in other fields, such as academia, the state and the charitable world. Regardless, they stress that this is the most challenging aspect of their interpretive framework (Wadhwani and Lubinski, 2017).

Professional football has been highlighted as a field in which entrepreneurship can be dissociated from financial gain (Vamplew, 1982; Gillett and Tennent, 2018). The aim of this work is to demonstrate how the creation and early growth of FCB were marked by three entrepreneurial processes: the founding of the club in 1899, the development of an expansion strategy in the 1910s, and the construction of a large stadium owned by the club in 1922. Despite taking place outside competitive markets, these processes present most of the characteristics associated with a Schumpeterian creative response (Wadhwani

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<sup>2</sup> This anecdote appeared in the first issue of *Stadium*, a sports magazine published in Barcelona (*Stadium*, 1 May 1911).

<sup>3</sup> According to PricewaterhouseCoopers (2018), professional football generated a direct economic impact of three billion euros during the 2016/17 season in Spain; this figure rises to sixteen billion if one also includes indirect impacts (supply chain), induced impacts (household consumption) and ‘tractor’ effects (consumption associated with match days, pay-TV channels, media, betting and video games).

and Jones, 2014). The paper therefore studies the logic and rationality behind the establishment and consolidation of FCB.

The hypothesis explored is that the fundamentals of FC Barcelona's early competitive advantage were created through these entrepreneurial processes. FCB was one of the main actors in the rise and expansion of professional football in Spain, and since then has become one of its flagships in an industry which has created value over time in a variety of forms, not solely limited to the economic domain, not to mention the emotional aspect. The origins and evolution of professional football constitute a particularly interesting field of study to apply an interpretative framework such as NEH, at the core of which lies the plurality in entrepreneurial motives. The strategic decisions that, from an initially amateur structure, led to the structuring of an industry organized around professional football clubs, were not, in the case studied, motivated by the pursuit of personal financial return, and therefore, their analysis requires a methodological proposal that allows understanding more than mere economic profit maximization.

The paper commences by exploring the discussions surrounding the motives that drive entrepreneurial processes and the significance of social networks during their inception. The methods used to study value creation in the world of football are then introduced. The three entrepreneurial moments analyzed provide a narrative organized in three sections that starts with the club's creation by a group of Swiss, German and Catalan men, who were soon joined by a group of Englishmen, then continues with the club's growth in the 1910s, when football was starting to emerge as a mass spectacle in the city of Barcelona, before ending with the consolidation of football as a new form of entertainment just before the sport was professionalized. The penultimate section discusses the impact that the case under study has had on the debate about the nature of entrepreneurial activity and the rationality behind football clubs. The paper ends with some conclusions that point to the need for more research on the origins and evolution of professional football clubs.

### **The entrepreneurial process and professional football clubs**

Kirzner (1979) reduced the concept of entrepreneurial activity to the pursuit of market opportunities that make it possible to derive financial gain by exploiting intertemporal price differentials. In line with the neo-Austrian view, Shane and Venkataraman (2000) characterized entrepreneurship as the rational action of an

individual with the ability to perceive market opportunities and the skills to exploit them. Casson (2010), meanwhile, defined the entrepreneur as someone who is highly efficient at making judgmental decisions and who takes advantage of uncertain situations caused by an absence of complete information between agents in competitive markets. These conceptualizations are based on works by Knight (1921) and Schumpeter (1939).

According to Schumpeter (1947), the mechanisms of economic change in capitalist society pivot on entrepreneurial activity, which consists of carrying out something outside existing practices in the economy, industry or business.<sup>4</sup> But far from limiting socioeconomic change to the field of modern mechanized plants and economic organization, he considered that ‘all the features and achievements of modern civilization are, directly or indirectly, the products of the capitalist process’ (Schumpeter, 1943: 125). Among the areas that, as a general rule, need not be operated for economic benefit, he cited science, hospitals and modern education. They are always the product of capitalism, however, ‘because the capitalist process supplies the means and the will, but much more fundamentally because capitalist rationality supplied the habits of mind that evolved the methods used’ (Schumpeter, 1943: 125). Schumpeter also pointed out that capitalism is an evolutionary process and, as such, will atrophy the moment the profit rate enters a steady state. When this happens, human energy will turn away from business with the result that ‘other than economic pursuits would attract the brains and provide the adventure’ (Schumpeter, 1943: 131). It is therefore plausible that this entrepreneurial energy could overwhelm the business world long before the scope for financial gain is exhausted.

In a dialogue on the links between business theory and entrepreneurial studies, Nicolai Foss and Anna Grandori discussed the conditions under which an organization can be classed as entrepreneurial. While the former pointed out that the goal of entrepreneurship is to exercise ‘judgement by deploying heterogeneous resources under uncertainty to satisfy future consumer/customer/user preferences for a profit’, the latter put forward a less restrictive vision that included ‘project provision with resource investment’ in the unknown, thus indicating that profit is not a prerequisite for entrepreneurship (Foss and Grandori, 2020). The neo-Austrian vision would position the

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<sup>4</sup> Knight distinguishes between economic risk and uncertainty, with the latter referring to a situation where probabilities cannot be estimated but holds the potential to generate economic gains that perfect competition may not eliminate, resulting key the cognitive faculty of judgement (Langlois, 2023).

Schumpeterian entrepreneur as a discoverer of lucrative opportunities in competitive markets arising from the different degrees of uncertainty faced by economic agents (Shane, 2003; Foss and Foss, 2008). The opportunity, then, would come before entrepreneurship, which occurs when the opportunity is discovered, evaluated and exploited (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000; Foss and Klein, 2012).<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, perspectives arising from both the evolutionary theory of economic change and business history research all point to the entrepreneur as the creator of situations of imbalance that end up giving rise to the opportunity (Sarasvathy, 2002; Obstfeld, 2012; Mason and Harvey, 2013). The entrepreneurial process is, therefore, a social construct created and reformulated through an evolutionary process of trial and error by which entrepreneurs visualize and chase goals beyond the constrictions of their current context, as shown by Popp and Holt (2013). Entrepreneurship is thus regarded more as a process based on the ability to pool different resources for the same purpose (McMullen and Dimov, 2013), through social interactions and relationships (Obstfeld, 2017). All these views, however, make it explicit that the opportunity is inherently market oriented.

The postulates of NEH are particularly useful for highlighting the fact that value can be created without personal financial gain in mind. Its aim is to understand how the opportunities (and goals) that transform societies are imagined, pursued and constructed. Wadhwani and Lubinski (2017) rejected the assumption of actors' maximization of pure economic utility and advocated the use of historical analysis to study the nature of the creative processes that drive socioeconomic change by focusing on three specific processes: (1) envisioning and valuing opportunities, which refers to how entrepreneurs imagine futures in terms of new forms of value; (2) allocating and reconfiguring resources, which deals with how actors were historically able to convince others to dedicate resources to their ventures; and (3) legitimizing novelty, which relates to how entrepreneurs confront the challenge of legitimizing their endeavors. Thus, NEH extends the framework of action of entrepreneurial agency to areas that lie outside the competitive

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<sup>5</sup> However, while the unit of analysis according to Shane (2003) is the opportunity, Foss and Klein (2012) suggested that it is the entrepreneurial project.

market, such as the state, academia and civil society.<sup>6</sup> In this way, the actions of non-profit organizations can lead to the creation of new industries.

Social networks represent a strategic element in the processes by which new industries emerge, since they provide a source of information, resources and access to markets (Elfring and Hulsink, 2007; Obstfeld et al., 2020). Agarwal et al. (2017) pointed out that entrepreneurship focuses on the fulfilment of unmet personal needs without prior knowledge of the number of people who share these needs. These approaches focus on how entrepreneurs mobilize the actors and resources in their social networks to shape and pursue opportunities that arise from constraints in the environment in which they operate, thereby resulting in an accumulative process that leads to evolution of the entrepreneurial project.<sup>7</sup> While Wadhvani and Lubinski (2017) pointed out that the legitimacy of the project is essential to attract resources from social networks, Casson and Godley (2005) stressed the importance of individual reputation when weaving the social network that supports the entrepreneurial process.

This paper aims to show the impact of three entrepreneurial processes in the formation of FC Barcelona's first competitive advantage. From the club's inception in 1899, during a time when football was a purely amateur activity, to the construction of a substantial stadium on its own premises in 1922, just two years before professionalism was legalized,<sup>8</sup> the actions of the club's managers were never driven by the desire for personal financial gain. Wadhvani and Lubinski (2017) called for robust evidence to be presented on the plurality of entrepreneurial motives, which they considered the weakest postulate in their interpretive framework. According to them, entrepreneurial processes should undergo what they call a “resource test”, being the ability to rise resources from different domains, instead of the “market test” usually applied in entrepreneurial studies. This research shows three entrepreneurial processes that resulted in the creation of value in the long term, yet were not motivated by personal economic profit or, in the first two

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<sup>6</sup> Casson and Godley (2005) also recognized that profit is not the only motivation among entrepreneurs and noted that entrepreneurship can also take place within the not-for-profit sector, especially when entrepreneurs value status over wealth.

<sup>7</sup> The cumulative dimension of the entrepreneurial process has been highlighted in several approaches proposed by business historians, such as the ‘making present’ of Popp and Holt (2013), the sequential process of Wadhvani and Jones (2014) and the entrepreneurial multiplier effect of Galambos and Amatori (2016).

<sup>8</sup> Although professionalism was legalized in 1924, its regulations were not approved until 1926.

cases, neither by the desire to exploit a market opportunity. Far from conceptualizing entrepreneurial agency as the discovery and exploitation of opportunities for personal profit derived from situations of uncertainty (Shane, 2003; Foss and Foss, 2008), this work deems entrepreneurial processes as the creation of situations of imbalance (Sarasvathy, 2002) generated by evolutionary processes based on trial and error (Popp and Holt, 2013) that are characterized by the ability to mobilize different resources towards a shared purpose (Obstfeld, 2017).

A robust approach to the entrepreneurial processes in professional football clubs must address the nature of these organizations. A study by Rottenberg (1956) is usually acknowledged as the first economic analysis of professional team sports. Implicit in this study on the labor market of baseball players is the premise that professional teams act rationally as profit maximizers. Although this premise is commonly accepted in the case of privately owned American professional teams,<sup>9</sup> sportsman leagues with win-maximizing clubs subject to budget constraints seem to be the most common structure outside of North America (Szymanski and Zimbalist, 2005; Borrowman et al., 2020).<sup>10</sup> Sloane (1971) was the first to point out that the assumption of profit maximization was an inappropriate basis for analyzing the behavior of professional football clubs, and argued that profit-making clubs have represented the exception in professional English football, where clubs have sought to maximize their utility, which he defined as a function of playing success, attendance and profits. Subsequently, Sloane (2015) refined the function by pointing out that ‘the most common assumption is the maximization of playing success subject to a break-even constraint’.

Historical research on British professional football has stressed this approach (Cain and Haddock, 2005). While Hamil et al. (1999) considered that the limitation on dividend payments to five percent imposed by the Football Association until the 1980s drove conventional investors away from professional football,<sup>11</sup> Dixon et al. (2004) showed that the shareholders of top-flight English professional teams were driven more

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<sup>9</sup> This assumption was called into question by Quirk and El Hodiri (1974), who pointed out that wealthy franchise owners were motivated not only by profits but primarily by prestige and publicity.

<sup>10</sup> Garcia-del-Barrio and Szymanski (2009) empirically confirmed that the behaviour of football clubs in the English and Spanish leagues from 1994 to 2004 is best analysed by assuming a win-maximization rather than a profit-maximization strategy.

<sup>11</sup> Although the first professional football competition, the Football League, was established in England in 1888, club ownership continued to be considered a not-for-profit activity.



by emotional and social gratification than by financial gain. Likewise, Gillett and Tennent (2018) pointed out that the commercial logic of some stakeholders was balanced with other rationales that may have excluded a profit motive, especially before the establishment of holding companies in the 1990s. These conclusions echoes findings by Vamplew (1982) regarding Scottish professional football before WWI. Conversely, Porter (2018) argued that after the introduction of professionalism in Britain, the pursuit of individual economic profit became the driving force for the entrepreneurial efforts in the football industry.

According to Porter and Vamplew (2018), Stephen Hardy was the first to highlight the entrepreneur as the primary force shaping sports. However, Hardy's (1986) conceptualization of entrepreneurship in sports was closely tied to the assumption of financial risks for economic gain. In the same vein, Porter and Vamplew (2018) appear to lean towards Casson's (2010) definition of an entrepreneur, which focuses on the ability to exercise judgment in identifying and exploiting profit-making opportunities. Although Porter (2018) acknowledges the potential of the NEH to analyze the evolution of the sports industry, he does so primarily due to the importance that Wadhwani and Lubinski (2017) attribute to context, rather than its emphasis on the plurality of motives that drive the mobilization of different resources toward an envisaged goal, which may extend beyond personal profit. For its part, while Vamplew (2018) expands the spectrum of entrepreneurial motives to include the pursuit of a social return above operating surplus,<sup>12</sup> his proposal still focuses on studying the actions of certain individuals rather than the entrepreneurial processes that promoted socioeconomic change, as noted by Wadhwani and Lubinski (2017).

If the goal of professional football clubs is sporting victory, room would be created for entrepreneurship since clubs would seek to maximize their revenue, given that sporting victory is closely correlated with salary size (Szymanski and Smith, 1997). In this regard, the fact that ticket sales were the main source of income for clubs until the early 1990s (Dobson and Goddard, 1998) and attendance at stadiums was closely

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<sup>12</sup> Vamplew (2018) defines sports entrepreneurs as "those persons who act as change agents in the supply of sports products, who attempt to increase the output of the industry, improve the consumer experience, or raise interest in sports products by such means as developing new markets and creating new products," and categorizes them into four groups: 1) those seeking non-salary economic benefits directly from sports, 2) those seeking indirect economic returns, 3) those seeking psychic income and personal kudos (and such kudos may also come from winning trophies), and 4) those pursuing non-economic objectives.

associated with sporting success (Dobson and Goddard, 2012) created a circularity that could be broken through entrepreneurial projects.

The football industry can be defined as the individuals, organizations or businesses involved in producing, facilitating, promoting or organizing football-based activities, experiences or businesses. In fact, football became a commodity the moment consumers were willing to pay to play. Thus, the promotion of football in the early days also provided scope for entrepreneurship. Notable here are the amateur players who establish clubs to enjoy practicing sport, which is how FCB came to be created. However, when pioneering clubs such as FCB are established, they evolve in ways that cannot be envisaged at the time of their creation and are the result of uncertain, cumulative and collective entrepreneurial processes.

## Methods

This article uses a case study to show how the creation of an amateur football club ended up giving rise to a new industry that transformed the way people consume leisure in Spain. The case study is explored through a historical narrative based on exploitation of the information sources of the time. The use of both primary and secondary sources makes it possible to compensate for potential problems associated with selection and silence of the archives (Decker, 2013; Kipping et al., 2014). Sequential historical reasoning based on the exploitation of archival sources, supplemented with secondary sources, has been identified as particularly useful for examining the origins of new industries because of their potential to identify the actors and processes at the heart of their creation (Forbes and Kirsch, 2011).

Studying professional football in Spain before the Civil War (1936-39) is associated with a significant problem, the ‘silence of the archives’ due to their scarcity (Decker, 2013). Among the football teams that participated in the Spanish professional league from its inaugural year in 1929 to the outbreak of the Civil War, only FCB and Athletic Club from Bilbao, managed to preserve historical data during those years.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the first problem encountered is that the clubs’ records are not found in the archives, nor in the clubs’ own premises, implying a lack of interest in their own past.

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<sup>13</sup> I contacted all of the teams that played in the first division from 1929 to 1936 and, aside from the two clubs mentioned in the text, the clubs which did respond admitted to not having records before the War.

This is not the case for FC Barcelona, which has an excellent study and documentation center that permits fruitful archival research, as outlined in Tennent and Gillett (2023).

However, there are still major limitations. FC Barcelona's first logbook of minutes of the board (MB) is dated from 9 November 1911. Subsequent books 2 and 3 continue to cover the period up until 6 May 1919. However, books 4 and 5, which would cover the intervening years up until 19 October 1923 have disappeared. Regardless, qualitative information concerning the club's management and organization is of little use until the minutes in book 6. In relation to the Annual General Meeting of Members' (AGMM) logbook, records commenced on 27 June 1912 but yielded little information. Despite the aforementioned omissions, the main gap in potentially useful sources concerns financial information, as the first ledger was not started until 1925. Although income and expenditure accounts for the years 1915-18 and 1921 were found at the Archive of the Government's Subdelegation in Catalonia (AGSC), they were not maintained consistently. Therefore, in this work, primary sources on FCB include the minutes of board meetings and members' assemblies. To compensate for the scarcity and possible bias of primary sources, this article also relies on secondary sources obtained from reproductions in the press, both newspapers and sport magazines, as well as two extensive accounts of the club published to commemorate its silver and gold anniversaries (Carbó, 1924; Maluquer, 1949), adopting what Decker (2014) defines as a reconstruction approach. The main newspapers and sports magazines consulted were *Los Deportes* (LD), *La Vanguardia* (LV), *El Mundo Deportivo* (MD) and *Stadium*.

The unit of analysis considered are the entrepreneurial projects that led to the rise of FC Barcelona, from conception to consolidation. Thus, the analysis includes micro elements, such as individual actions; meso elements, such as the club's strategy, organization and financing; and macro elements, since the legitimization process took place at social level. In keeping with the principles of NEH, the article uses a reflexive case method to help shed light on how the opportunities were visualized and valued, how resources were mobilized to achieve the goals that had been set, and how the novelty was legitimized (Wadhwani and Lubinski, 2017). The aim is to understand the rationality and logic behind the decisions taken and how these evolved over time resulting in the formation of FC Barcelona's early competitive advantage.

The NEH provides a particularly useful interpretative framework for analyzing the emergence of new industries, as was the case with organized football, which ultimately became a mass spectacle. This work examines why and how an organization

dedicated to amateur football was established in a city where such activity was completely unknown, how resources were mobilized to develop it, and how efforts were made to popularize it. The initial actions led to an evolutionary process that envisioned new goals involving the mobilization of greater resources and the settling of new realities. Over time, a rationale emerged that sought to maximize the organization's income with a view to establishing a professional team that would achieve as many victories as possible. While in the long run, this resulted in a value creation process and the consolidation of a new industry, the logic of the actions undertaken aimed to mobilize resources for a shared purpose rather than for individual economic benefit. Therefore, the case study provides a clear example of the plurality in entrepreneurial motives, highlighting the potential of the NEH as a methodological approach for studying and understanding the emergence of new socio-economic realities.

Focusing on a single case makes it possible to gain a more in-depth understanding of the process (Gillett and Tennent, 2018) and to highlight the historical context and specificity (Popp and Holt, 2013). By analyzing the three main entrepreneurial moments identified in the club's early growth, the article offers an analytically structured chronological narrative (Eisenhardt, 1989; Rowlinson et al., 2014) to understand how FC Barcelona created its first competitive advantage, while laying the foundations for the emergence of a new industry. Eisenhardt (1989) pointed out that the case study method makes it possible to test theories in the field of management studies by providing evidence that reinforces their validation or refutes their generalization.

Historical studies have proved to be useful for developing and testing theories in organization and management studies (Kipping and Üsdiken, 2014), as well as in strategy, international business and entrepreneurship (Perchard et al., 2017). The research field that would allow the data to be used most appropriately and consistently to generate an informed historical narrative was entrepreneurial history, since the information collected were especially well suited to illustrate how value can be created without having personal financial gain in mind. This research addresses the challenge put forth in Wadwhani and Lubinski (2017) to provide examples of entrepreneurial processes occurring in domains beyond competitive markets, yet successfully passing what they refer to as the "resource test". The theoretical basis was therefore chosen after the documentation work had been done, thereby resulting in an inductive exploratory approach like the one applied by Gillett and Tennent (2018). Ultimately, this paper used an integrated historical approach to study how an organization learned, made strategic decisions and innovated over time.

### **From one individual's desire to collective action, 1899-1903**

The Catalan economy had experienced a period of euphoria in the 1860s and 1870s, stimulated by the boom in wine and spirits exports that capitalized on the phylloxera epidemic, which was devastating French production (Valls, 2003). The increase in domestic demand resulting from agricultural prosperity propelled already-established industrial sectors in Catalonia, such as cotton, wool, and machinery construction, as well as the diffusion of the Second Industrial Revolution. The illumination of Barcelona's Rambla in 1875 was followed by a series of initiatives in industries such as chemistry, pharmaceuticals, and automotive, attracting the attention of major international companies like Persons, Siemens, and Phillips, which opened factories in Catalonia (Catalan, 2023). Agricultural and industrial expansion stimulated the construction of new railway lines and the establishment of banks and credit societies (Pascual, 2015). This array of activities led to the arrival of skilled workers from countries like Great Britain, Germany, and Switzerland.

In those years, locals were starting to crave forms of entertainment beyond traditional shows such as theatre and bullfighting. Private gyms served as meeting places between natives and foreigners, and provided a route of entry for modern sports such as athletics and cycling (Pujades, 2011). Many sports clubs were established in Catalonia, which had twice as many as the rest of the country by the end of the century (Rivero and Sánchez, 2011). However, although Barcelona presented certain conditions to indicate that a sport such as football could be successfully introduced (McFarland, 2012), its presence at the end of the 1890s was minimal and it was barely practiced outside the narrow confines of the British community (Torrebadella, 2012).

The son of a stockbroker from Aarau, Switzerland, Hans Gamper was born in Winterthur on 22 November 1877, although his family settled in Zürich when he was two years of age (Gamper, 2008). After he lost his mother when he was just eight years old, he became a dedicated athlete and cyclist before falling in love with football, a sport he began playing at FC Excelsior. After leaving the club due to disagreements with the board, Gamper and some other disgruntled members organized a new club in 1896, FC

Zürich.<sup>14</sup> A year later, he decided to move to Lyon, France, to complete his apprenticeship in the business world. No sooner had he arrived than he signed up for the Union Athletique, where he played mainly rugby (Lanfranchi and Taylor, 2001). In 1898, he joined FC Lyon, although he moved to Barcelona in the autumn of that year as the final step before starting his professional career (*LD*, 22 November 1903).

When the Swiss arrived in Barcelona, Spain had just lost the Philippines (June) and Cuba (August), and was at the peak of a severe economic, political, and social crisis that began in the 1880s.<sup>15</sup> Economically, the crisis was explained by the ruin of the Castilian countryside, caused by the massive arrival of cereals from overseas, and troubles in the Catalan countryside, once the phylloxera crossed the Pyrenees (Pascual, 2023). Politically, the colonial collapse was associated with the inherent corruption of the clientelist system based on the hegemony of two parties – the conservative and the liberal – alternating in power since the Bourbon restoration of 1874.<sup>16</sup> Bipartisanship left the Catalan bourgeoisie disoriented, seeking refuge in their business organizations, while other political expressions emerged outside the system, articulating the discontent of small business owners and the Catalan middle classes against Bourbon centralism (Fontana, 2014). In this context, the loss of colonial markets was a severe blow to the Catalan industry, witnessing the installation of social instability in Barcelona. This was the backdrop against which the first political articulation of Catalan regionalism emerged, a movement that was taking shape when Gamper arrived in Barcelona (Termes, 2000).

Having just arrived in the city, Gamper became acquainted with some young Swiss people who gathered around the German-Swiss evangelical church (Rodés, 2001). As explained by Gamper himself, it did not take him long to persuade some of them to

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<sup>14</sup> Gamper also played for FC Basel occasionally. See Vonnard (2023) for the origins of football in Switzerland.

<sup>15</sup> The Treaty of Paris, signed on December 10th, ratified the cession of those territories, along with Puerto Rico and Guam, to the United States.

<sup>16</sup> In September 1868, Queen Isabella II was expelled from Spain during a revolution that aimed for democratization. In November 1870, the parliament proclaimed Amadeo of Savoy as king, who abdicated in February 1873, leading to a brief First Republic that ended in December 1874 with the return of the Bourbons. Under the new regime of Alfonso XII, conservatives and liberals alternated in power. When instability forced the government to resign, the king would call on the opposing party to form a new government while simultaneously dissolving the parliament to convene, under the control of the new government, of an election in which prevailing patronage ensured the organizer a comfortable victory (De Riquer, 1994).

play his beloved sport on a waste ground in the Barcelona district of Sant Gervasi, where most of them lived (Gamper, 1903). In October 1899, at the Solé gym, which he had started frequenting thanks to a contact provided by one of his church friends, he learned that a group of young people from another gym, the Tolosa, had started playing football at Bonanova Velodrome. Gamper approached them and asked them if he could play, but their answer caught him off guard: they were not interested in playing with foreigners. Outraged, he decided to start a club by himself. By then, he had decided to settle in Barcelona, having found work as an accountant for a tram company (Gamper, 1903).

He met the people needed to start the project through his two main social circles, the German-Swiss evangelical church and the Solé gym, where the weekly magazine *Los Deportes* was published (McFarland, 2013). That same magazine published a notice on 22 October 1899 calling for anyone interested in playing football to get in touch with him at the gym (*LD*, 22 October 1899). After a few preparatory meetings, three Swiss men (Hans Gamper, Walter Wild and Otto Kunzle), two Germans (Otto Meyer and Edward Schilling) and six Catalans (Lluís d'Ossó, Bartomeu Terrades, Enric Ducay, Pere Cabot, Carles Pujols and Josep Llobet) met on 29 November 1899 to formally constitute Football Club Barcelona.<sup>17</sup>

Wild and Gamper were appointed president and team captain, respectively, while locals Ossó and Terrades were appointed secretary and treasurer. The membership fee was set at two pesetas per month (equivalent to 8.77 euros in 2017).<sup>18</sup> FCB's objective was to recruit enough members to form two teams and to alternate with other teams made up of young people from the British community and the Tolosa gym, which would constitute Football Club Català a few days later (*LD*, 24 December 1899). As soon as the meeting ended, the founders expressed their intentions to journalists who reported on sporting matters in the local press (*LV*, 29 December 1924).

FC Barcelona played its first game nine days later against a team from the British community. The local press reported on the match, although only in a brief item on the inside pages. After the meeting, the most enthusiastic members of the British team decided to join FCB. Along with the Brits, some members of the Solé gym also joined

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<sup>17</sup> These were the most likely names involved, according to the following sources: *LD* (3 December 1899), *LV* (29 November 1924), and Carbó (1924a).

<sup>18</sup> 1899 pesetas have been deflated to 2017 pesetas using the GDP deflator in Prados (2017: Table 7), and then converted into euros. This same procedure was applied throughout the rest of the work.

up. Of the new members, the brothers William and John Parsons were named vice-president and second captain, respectively, while local man Adolf López became the first member of the board (*LD*, 17 December 1899).<sup>19</sup> The first step was to invite FC Català to play a match, which took place on the afternoon of 24 December (*LV*, 15 December 1899). Far from restricting activity to the club itself, the founders of FCB chose to encourage the creation of new teams, thus triggering a dual expansion process: that of the club and that of football as a whole.

The first season ended in April 1900 with five games having been played.<sup>20</sup> 15 out of the 28 players that took part in some of these five matches were also members of the German-Swiss evangelical church, highlighting the relevance of this social network during the club's initial stages. The main task for the new season was to find a playing ground (*LV*, 30 April 1900). This was a plot of land that cost a few hundred pesetas to fix up (*LD*, 11 November 1900). The rival team chosen to inaugurate the ground was Hispania Athletic Club, a team that had recently been formed by a group of Scottish workers from the Fabra & Coats spinning factory (*LD*, 18 November 1900). At that time, a total of seven teams were already playing football in the city, which had just established an organization to oversee the practice of football, the Association of Football Clubs, under the impetus of FCB's leaders (Torrebadella, 2012). The process of institutionalizing football was also beginning to gather pace (McFarland, 2013).<sup>21</sup>

FCB was forced to abandon its ground again in the summer of 1901. Bartomeu Terrades, the son of a wealthy family of textile industrialists and president of the club since March 1901, when Wild departed for England, found some land in the Sagrera district next to the tram line that linked the area to the city center, which greatly improved connectivity. The club spent a thousand pesetas on a new ground (about 4,500 euros in 2017), which was inaugurated on 23 November with a match against a team made up of sailors from British cruiser HMS *Calliope* (*LD*, 24 November 1901). The Witty brothers, sons of a shipowner and stepbrothers of the British vice-consul, facilitated contact both

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<sup>19</sup> During the period covered by this work, the board of directors, whose members were elected annually at the general assembly of members, consisted of a president, one or two vice-presidents, a secretary, a treasurer and, after 1911, an accountant. The others were board members.

<sup>20</sup> Three games against the British team, one against FC Català and one against a team made up of former Català members (Carbó, 1924a).

<sup>21</sup> Gamper and Eduard Aleson, the president of Hispania, drew up the first regulations for football in the city in 1902.



with Brits who travelled to the city and with ships arriving from the islands that moored in the port. The consulate was a source of players and experienced rivals alike. Another important source of members arose from the enthusiasm of Lluís d'Ossó, the club's secretary, who successfully advertised the team through his family's printing press (*LD*, 28 July 1901). Ossó's tasks also included writing news items for the local press, which still lacked experience in sporting matters, and, more importantly, an intensive recruitment campaign in his social circle. As a result, the members of FCB gradually evolved towards a local middle-class profile (Carbó, 1924a). Also in 1901, a Catalan nationalist candidacy achieved victory in the general elections for the Barcelona constituency, marking the first time that a list formulated against the two systemic parties prevailed in a major city (Termes, 2000).

The rising number of members made it necessary to organize a training school, which was launched in the spring of 1902. Its director was the German engineer Udo Steinberg, who worked for the same tram company as Gamper and whom the Swiss had recruited in November 1901 after learning that he had regularly played football for Britannia Berlin in Germany. By that time, FCB already had four teams, plus an under-14s team (*LD*, 7 June 1903). As indicated in Table 1, FCB's first team played thirteen games in 1901 and had 104 members. In 1903, it had 253 members and had played twenty-seven matches. The club was presided over by the Swiss Paul Haas, who was not one of the founders, from September 1902 to September 1903, when he was replaced by Artur Witty. Haas was the first president who had not played for the club previously. The social network that supported FCB was expanding rapidly. Resources were mobilized and expertise was mounting, and these two factors combined to allow this new form of entertainment to grow and assume legitimacy. Against this backdrop, the first interclub competitions were organized. One of these, the Barcelona Cup, established by Haas in 1902 involved the participation of eight teams, became the Catalan championship when it was taken over by the Association of Clubs in 1904.<sup>22</sup>

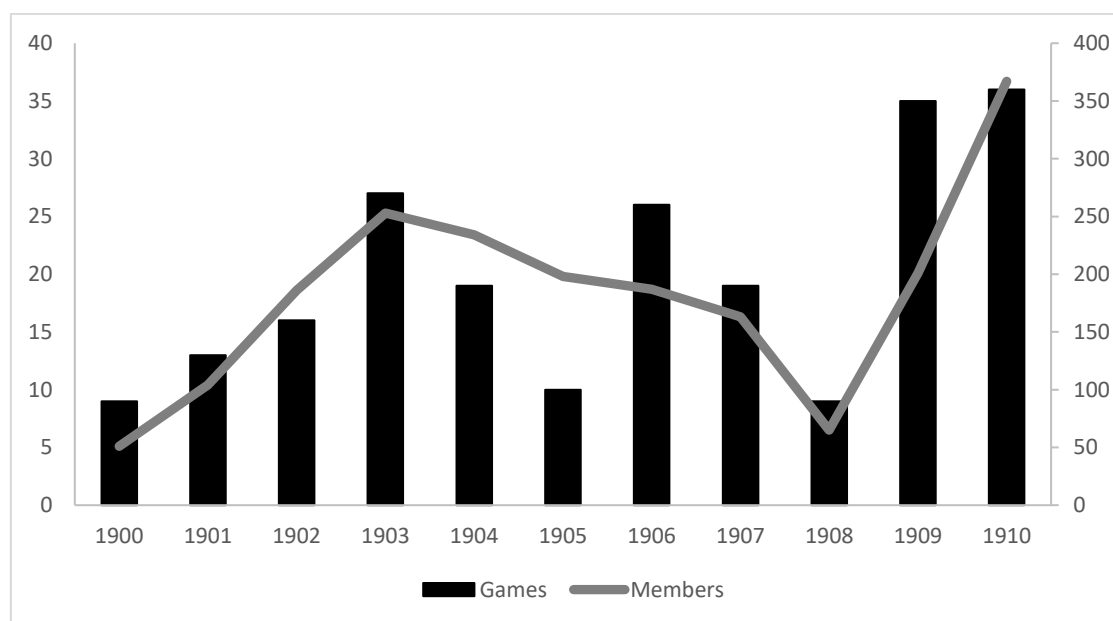
The creation of FC Barcelona was accompanied by a footballing boom in the Catalan capital. In Torreadella-Flix et al. (2017), a total of 105 organizations created for the purpose of playing football in Spain between 1900 and 1903 were identified, forty-eight of which were based in Barcelona, fifteen in Madrid and six in Bilbao. However,

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<sup>22</sup> The first competition was the Macaya cup, established by Alfons Macaya, president of the Hispania, which took place from 1901 to 1903.

sustaining this activity was no mean feat, given that the clubs' only source of income was their members' fees.<sup>23</sup> Apart from equipment and players' travel costs, the biggest expense was associated with securing a ground in good condition, since the industrial and commercial expansion taking place at the time was causing urban land prices to increase. This plunged football in Barcelona into crisis and meant that some clubs disappeared before the beginning of the 1903/04 season (*LD*, 25 December 1903).

Figure 1. FCB: Matches played by the first team and number of members\*, 1900-1910.



SOURCE: Data obtained from Carbó (1924a).

\*As of 31 December.

### From players to supporters, 1910s

Football in Barcelona was on an erratic path from which FCB could not break free; one of the first signs came when Gamper decided to withdraw from active life at the club in 1904 (*LD*, 3 January 1904). FCB was again forced to leave its ground before the 1904/05 season, in its fourth move in five years (*LD*, 24 September 1904). In November 1908, FCB had just thirty-eight members and had played nine games that year, which

<sup>23</sup> When club expenses could not be covered by membership fees, clubs usually asked their wealthiest members to put their hands in their pockets (Carbo, 1924a).

made it impossible to sustain operations. An extraordinary assembly was called to deal with the club's liquidation.

The meeting was held on 2 December 1908 at the Solé gym. Barely twenty members attended, most of whom formed part of the first team. Maluquer (1949: 99) reported that the situation was so tense that no one dared to speak up until Gamper, who had been distant from the club's inner circle since 1904, stood up and uttered the following words: '*Barcelona cannot and must not die. If no one is going to try, then I will assume the responsibility (...)*'. Gamper was elected president for the first time. It was evident to him that the club's viability depended on its financial resources, most of which came from its members.

His new vision focused on expanding the club's social base as far as possible. Up until then, the club's members had been individuals with a desire to play football. From then on, members would be sought among those who simply wanted to watch football. On this way, it was important to organize as many matches as possible against foreign rivals. Not only did such matches attract the biggest crowds, but they also gave the club firsthand knowledge of new tactics and systems. But more important was the need to create an emotional connection between these new members and the club. Gamper's strategy relied on linking the club to the liberal, reformist Catalan nationalist cultural and political movement that had been expanding rapidly since the turn of the century.

Since his arrival, Gamper had witnessed the emergence of this new movement, which, moreover, garnered the most sympathy among the middle classes that frequented the club's events. Following the electoral victory of 1901, Catalan nationalism had coalesced into an interclass political organization, the 'Lliga Regionalista (Regionalist League)', which won the municipal elections in 1905. The celebrations did not sit well with a deeply fundamentalist Spanish nationalism that was greatly exacerbated after the defeat of 1898. Particularly, the publication of a caricature in the satirical weekly *Cu-cut!*, mocking a defeated army in contrast to a victorious Catalan nationalism,<sup>24</sup> led to 300 soldiers not only storming the magazine's office but also that of *La Veu de Catalunya*, the newspaper of La Lliga. In response to the widespread public outrage, the Spanish

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<sup>24</sup> In the cartoon, a civilian and a military officer were seen observing a crowd of people entering a building. The military officer asked in Spanish, 'What is being celebrated here, with so many people?' The civilian responded in Catalan, 'The banquet of Victory,' to which the military officer then remarked, 'Of Victory? Oh well, they must be civilians.'

government enacted the Law of Jurisdictions, subjecting the expression of mockery of Spanish symbols to military tribunals. In Barcelona, however, Catalan deputies who opposed the law were honored in an event attended by around 200,000 people. A year later, the ‘Solidaritat Catalana (Catalan Solidarity)’ candidacy, comprising both left and right-wing Catalan nationalists, achieved resounding and successive victories in municipal, provincial, and national elections (Termes, 2000). It was in this context that Gamper decided to strengthen ties with cultural and political Catalan nationalism. The fact that, despite being married to a Swiss woman, he chose to educate his two children in Catalan (Gamper, 2008), shows that his strategy was not purely instrumental.

Gamper’s first move was to start 1909 with a match against Stade Helvétique of Marseille (*LD*, 31 December 1908), a team closely connected with the local reform church (Lanfranchi and Taylor, 2001). The effort involved in organizing this match was amply rewarded with both a huge fan turnout of almost five thousand people and the personalities who accompanied Gamper in the presidential box. At the match, Gamper was flanked by the main nationalist politicians (*LV*, 5 January 1909), who had also realized the potential of football as a channel for their political ideas.

FCB won the Catalan championship again in 1909 after a four-year wait. The German Otto Gmelin was appointed president after Gamper gave up the presidency to attend to his private affairs in October 1909. Meanwhile, the club had moved to a new ground in March 1909, where it would remain for more than ten years. The stadium was very well connected and had room for one and a half thousand people (*LD*, 30 March 1909), a capacity that quickly quadrupled (*LD*, 5 January 1910). This upward trajectory is reflected in the fact that FCB ended 1910 with 367 members and thirty-six matches played. The high number of members is evidence that many people were now joining the club as passive fans, rather than to play football. Not only was the club’s social impact beginning to cross over the boundaries of the entity, as revealed by the fact that a thousand people went to the station to welcome the team on its return from Madrid after being crowned champions of Spain for first time (*MD*, 8 July 1910),<sup>25</sup> but this process was

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<sup>25</sup> The first tournament to be designated as the ‘Spanish Championship’ was organized by Madrid FC in 1903, featuring the winners of the championships of Catalonia, Madrid, and the Basque Country. In subsequent editions, the number of teams expanded as the count of regional championships increased. In 1909, two rival organizations were formed, each aiming to govern football in Spain: the Spanish Federation of Football Clubs and the Spanish Union of Football Clubs. FC Barcelona won the title organized by the former. It wasn’t until 1913 that a reconstituted Spanish Football Federation brought together the collection

occurring in parallel with the institutionalization of football (McFarland, 2023), as borne out by the forty-four teams affiliated with the Catalan Football Federation, which was created from the former association in 1907 (*LD*, 30 November 1909).

The players' loss of power and the gradual, covert professionalization of football, known as *shamateurism*, were the big issues on the table in the 1910s.<sup>26</sup> The first team, whose re-establishment had been so hard fought and which had won the championships of Catalonia (1909, 1910 and 1911), Spain (1910) and the Pyrenees (1910 and 1911),<sup>27</sup> had fallen apart due to the tension created by the club's growth. Many players left the club in 1911, unhappy about the dominance of the passive members at the general assemblies. Until that moment, the team's management used to be in the hands of the captain, who was elected in the annual Assembly. With the increase in the number of affiliates, players lost their prominence in the Assembly, a situation that the Board of Directors took advantage of to gain control over decisions affecting the first team. This included the composition of the roster, the lineup of the starting team, and the arrangement of friendly matches.<sup>28</sup> However, FCB was not greatly affected by the conflict, as shown by the fact that, by 1913, it had more than a thousand members and had played up to twelve matches against international rivals. The increase in the club's size and in its volume of activity meant that an accounting department with salaried workers had to be created in 1913 (FCB, *MB*, 1913).

After a year, the city of Barcelona entered a climate of euphoria stemming from Spain's neutrality in the First World War, a circumstance that the Catalan industry knew how to capitalize on, achieving substantial profits (Catalan and Fernández-de-Sevilla, 2020). However, the end of the conflict also marked the end of industrialists' optimism, and they made workers bear the brunt of the sudden collapse in external demand. This initiated a cycle of intense social conflict that did not conclude until 1923 (Fontana, 2014).

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of clubs and joined FIFA. Since then, it has organized the Spanish Championship, in which the winners of regional championships continued to compete in a knockout format.

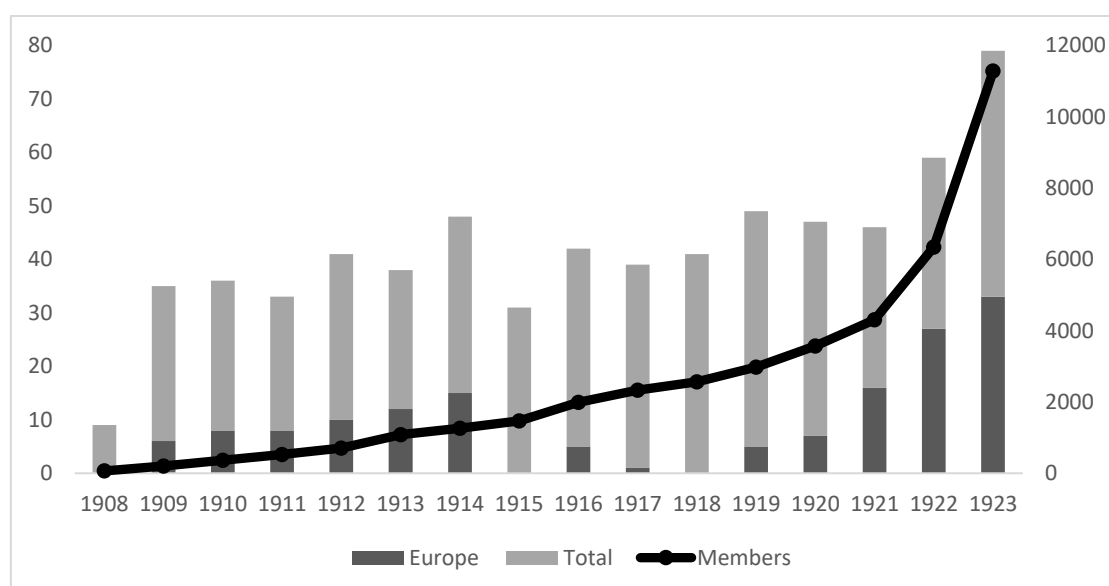
<sup>26</sup> The early signs of professionalization that emerged in the mid-1910s, such as membership fee exemptions and vouchers for the club's bar and restaurant for players (FCB, *MB*, 1915), evolved into a practice named "*shamateurism*", when footballers started receiving more expenses and higher value 'gifts' and the club began to covertly pay their first salaries (Pujades and Santacana, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> This was a cup played from 1910 to the start of the First World War between teams from the French and Spanish regions bordering the Pyrenees and was one of the first international football competitions.

<sup>28</sup> The players were also starting to call for a share of the income deriving from the expansion of football.

Notwithstanding, there was absolute harmony between the members and managers on a social level (FCB, *MAGM*, 29 June 1918). FCB had ended 1916 with almost two thousand members and forty-two matches played. In addition, it had won the Catalan championship again after a three-year drought. At the general assembly of members, Gaspar Rosés, MP for La Lliga in Barcelona City Council, was elected president (FCB, *MAGM*, 20 June 1916). Catalan nationalism was the substance that cemented the emotional ties between the club and its members. At a time of strong social tension, FCB was actively involved in a political campaign to recover political autonomy. Almost all Catalan councils signed the manifesto fostered by Catalan's representatives that demanded the right to self-government, which was also supported by a wide variety of civil associations. Among them, FC Barcelona stood as one of the most actives.<sup>29</sup>

Figure 2. FCB: Matches played by the first team and number of members\*, 1908-1922.



SOURCE: Data obtained from Carbó (1924a; 1924b).

\*As of 31 December.

<sup>29</sup> In 1914, La Lliga had achieved the creation of the 'Mancomunitat de Catalunya', an institution made up of the regional governments of Catalonia's four provinces with competences in public works, culture, and charity. In November 1918, Catalan parliamentarians presented a proposition to the head of government, García Prieto, to substantially increase Catalonia's self-government. However, it was withdrawn after the parliament refused to debate it. A new proposal was reintroduced in January 1919, this time after an intense yet unproductive campaign of popular mobilization, as the new proposition also failed to be discussed (Termes, 2000).

The club's position in terms of its sporting and social performance would be difficult to improve upon. Economically, however, the entity continued to run an operating deficit, a situation that had become chronic and was covered by loans from the wealthiest members, usually when they sat on the board of directors. As many as seven of the ten members of the board, which was led by Rafael Llopart (June 1915 – June 1916), had used their own money to pay for the club's ordinary activity (FCB, *MB*, 20 June 1916). The board presided over by Rosés (June 1916 – June 1917) had been forced to ask members for one-off voluntary fees to help settle the club's debts (FCB, *MB*, 5 July 1916). Later, Gamper's board (July 1917 – June 1919) had to persuade the majority of former members who had lent the club money to waive the debt (FCB, *MB*, 19, 21 and 26 September 1919).<sup>30</sup>

In the second half of the 1910s, FC Barcelona presented annual revenue equivalent to about 200,000 euros in 2017 (Table 1), most of which came from ticket sales (forty-one percent in 1915-18) and membership fees (forty-five percent). In the 1920/21 season, the club's income quadrupled with respect to 1917/18, although the inflows were probably not the same. In terms of expenses, the majority corresponded to those needed to support the activity of the football team, primarily travel, equipment and medical services, which accounted for forty-three percent of expenditure in 1915/18, together with expenses relating to ground rental and maintenance, which accounted for twelve percent. Supporting the club in administrative terms, essentially the social premises and office workers, accounted for sixteen percent of expenditure.

Table 1. Income and expenditure of FC Barcelona

|         | Income FC Barcelona |            |      |            |            |      |            |            |
|---------|---------------------|------------|------|------------|------------|------|------------|------------|
|         | Ticket sales        |            |      | Members    |            |      | Total      |            |
|         | Ptas                | 2017 euros | %    | Ptas       | 2017 euros | %    | Ptas       | 2017 euros |
| 1915    | 29,232.14           | 104,520.66 | 51.6 | 21,715.50  | 77,644.62  | 38.3 | 56,627.16  | 202,427.62 |
| 1916    | 27,448.70           | 89,036.01  | 40.3 | 23,044.60  | 74,750.33  | 33.9 | 68,036.62  | 220,692.03 |
| 1917    | 33,799.94           | 99,475.88  | 46.9 | 26,110.20  | 76,844.37  | 36.2 | 72,139.50  | 212,312.22 |
| 1918    | 19,352.50           | 46,507.88  | 27.1 | 48,873.35  | 117,452.60 | 68.4 | 71,493.85  | 171,814.26 |
| 1915/18 | 109,833.28          | 339,540.54 | 40.9 | 119,743.65 | 346,691.91 | 44.6 | 268,297.13 | 807,291.12 |
| 1921    | 230,568.45          | 534,026.88 | 65.9 | 106,618.50 | 246,942.48 | 30.5 | 349,823.15 | 810,236.47 |

<sup>30</sup> By that time, Gamper had achieved a wealthy status after opening a trading company of colonial products together with Enric Mir, a former teammate and son of one of the wealthiest families of Badalona, a neighbouring city of Barcelona.

| Expenditure FC Barcelona |               |               |      |                |               |      |            |               |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|------|----------------|---------------|------|------------|---------------|
|                          | Football team |               |      | Administration |               |      | Total      |               |
|                          | Ptas          | 2017<br>euros | %    | Ptas           | 2017<br>euros | %    | Ptas       | 2017<br>euros |
| 1915                     | 26,667.55     | 95,350.87     | 45.9 | 8,893.86       | 31,800.34     | 15.3 | 58,060.41  | 207,597.26    |
| 1916                     | 16,474.75     | 53,439.54     | 24.4 | 11,924.70      | 38,680.44     | 17.6 | 67,638.56  | 219,400.83    |
| 1917                     | 41,497.08     | 122,129.17    | 57.7 | 12,094.90      | 35,596.24     | 16.8 | 71,860.10  | 211,489.92    |
| 1918                     | 30,867.68     | 74,181.31     | 43.8 | 9,800.00       | 23,551.39     | 13.9 | 70,537.53  | 169,516.03    |
| 1915/18                  | 115,507.06    | 345,100.89    | 43.1 | 42,713.46      | 129,628.1     | 15.9 | 268,096.60 | 808,004.04    |
| 1921                     | ---           | ---           | ---  | ---            | ---           | ---  | 125,071.11 | 860,969.71    |

Source: FCB, *MAGM*.

\* End of season data (1 May or 1 June)

FCB was enjoying great social legitimacy and a degree of public sympathy and support that far outstripped the support of its actual members and that, furthermore, had spread throughout Catalonia, where groups of fans, known as *penyes*, were proselytizing the club in more and more cities and towns. Some members of the first team were already receiving a monthly allowance, more or less covertly. Josep Samitier, for example, signed for the club in 1919 when he was seventeen years old in exchange for a covert monthly salary of 150 pesetas (340 euros in 2017), a watch and suit (Pujades and Santacana, 2001). Therefore, building a championship-winning squad required higher spending. The time had come to maximize the potential revenue from the tens of thousands of fans who were already following FCB at that time.

### **The construction of its own large stadium, 1920-22**

Thousands of citizens headed to the train station to welcome the team after a victory over Athletic Club Bilbao at the final meeting of the 1920 Spanish championship (*Stadium*, 22 May 1920). With the First World War over, matches resumed against top-level European teams that year, beginning with visits from Slavia Prague (16, 19 and 21 March), Daring Brussels (23 and 24 May) and Red Star Paris (30 May and 3 June). During all these matches, it was patently clear that the club had outgrown its ground. The demand to attend FCB matches far outstripped the number of tickets available at the box office. The club had plenty of scope to increase revenue from ticket sales, but it needed new facilities.



Gaspar Rosés began his second stint as president after being elected in the general assembly of June 1920. In his farewell speech, Graells, the outgoing president, warned that Barça needed a stadium commensurate with its fan base. Rosés took up the strategic proposal to construct a large stadium that would also allow the club to increase its economic capacity. The first step was to raise the membership fee by fifty percent, from two to three pesetas a month (FCB, *MAGM*, 27 June 1920). This was an exceptional measure, since it had remained unchanged since the club's creation, so its purchasing power was more than halved.

However, the new ground project was developed during Gamper's fourth term, which began after he was elected at the assembly held in July 1921 (FCB, *MAGM*, 17 July 1921). A few months later, he convened an extraordinary assembly to ratify the construction project. About two thousand members unanimously approved the proposal, the main issue of which related to the financing of the operation. The formula chosen was the issuance of registered mortgage bonds up to one million pesetas (2,316,131.64 euros in 2017) with an interest rate of five percent, which would be absorbed by the members themselves. For those who did not underwrite any mortgage bonds, the fee was increased to four pesetas per month. Finally, the decision was taken to reward each member who underwrote at least five thousand pesetas (almost twelve thousand euros in 2017) with a seat for life in the stadium (Fernández-de-Sevilla, 2021).

The new stadium, which boasted thirty thousand seats, was inaugurated on 20 May 1922. The rise in the number of members reflected the strategic importance of the ground. The year 1922 opened with 4,302 members, while the club had 11,277 members by the end of 1923 (figure 2). The jump in gate receipts is considerable. While the income from membership fees multiplied by a factor of 4.5, the revenue from the sale of tickets to the general public also increased, in this case by a factor of 1.9. Likewise, there was also a not insignificant generation of income from the rental of the bar service in the game day and from the rental of the stadium to others. Although merchandising income, basically the sale of club badges and banners, continued to be modest, it could indicate that a matchday experience was starting to take place.

Table 2: FC Barcelona Income

| Membership fees | Ticket Office | Merchandise Sales | Grounds and bar<br>rental |
|-----------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
|-----------------|---------------|-------------------|---------------------------|

|      | Ptas       | 2017 euros   | Ptas       | 2017 euros | Ptas     | 2017 euros | Ptas      | 2017 euros |
|------|------------|--------------|------------|------------|----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| 1921 | 106,618.50 | 246,942.48   | 230,568.00 | 534,025.84 | ---      | ---        | 2,340.35  | 5,420.56   |
| 1924 | 484,990.00 | 1,096,584.65 | 428,366.70 | 968,566.77 | 3,456.00 | 7,814.17   | 22,950.00 | 51,891.00  |

Source: FCB, *MAGM*.

The move allowed FCB to secure a dominant position in Barcelona and, in turn, assume a major role in Spanish football. Up until then, the only club with a stadium that could accommodate more than ten thousand spectators had been Athletic Club Bilbao, which had built its own ground in 1913 and had room for some fifteen thousand people. Most top-flight clubs reacted to FCB's accomplishment by following suit; first came its city rival, RCD Español, which built its stadium a year later, although with a significantly lower capacity (twelve thousand). Atlético de Madrid also built a stadium, with room for twenty-five thousand people, in 1923. Its local rival, Real Madrid, followed in its footsteps a year later with a ground that could accommodate up to fourteen thousand fans (Pujades and Santacana, 2001). FCB had the most members out of any football club in Spain in the mid-1920s. The time had come to prepare the club's internal structures for the new stage. The era of professional football was under way.<sup>31</sup>

## Discussion

This article has explored the origins of professional football in Spain, studying the creation and evolution of FC Barcelona up to the anteroom of the legalization of professionalism. This case study reaffirms the view of football clubs as organizations with a rationality closer to the maximization of sporting competitiveness than maximization of profits for their owners (Sloane, 1971). Vamplew (1982) tested Sloane's thesis by studying the behavior of Scottish football clubs between 1890 and 1914 and concluded that they generally prioritized sporting victory over economic profit. However, he inferred that their development could not be explained as a result of entrepreneurship because it is linked to individual economic gain. In the years when the article was published, the agenda of entrepreneurial history was confined to the study of individuals

<sup>31</sup> The players' salary appeared for the first time in FCB's accounts in the 1926/27 season accounting for 220 thousand pesetas out of 880 thousand in total expenses (about 2 million euros in 2017).

whose business successes implied strong entrepreneurial ability, although the concept of entrepreneurship was not usually explicitly defined. This likely explains why in his later book on the emergence of mass spectator sport in Britain, a reference work for any research on the origins of gate-money sports (Vamplew, 1988), entrepreneurship played a marginal role.

Porter and Vamplew (2018) argue that a professional football match can be bought and sold just like any other commodity, and therefore, it seems unlikely that an entrepreneur in this industry would act differently from how their counterparts do in any other market-oriented industry. In their proposal for categorizing entrepreneurship in sports, Porter (2018) highlights the potential of the NEH to study the phenomenon, but primarily because of the emphasis this approach places on the importance of context. Although Porter (2018) characterizes the entrepreneur as an innovator, his view seems to be hindered by the close link between entrepreneur and businessman, leading him to consider professional football teams as a means to individual economic profit. However, while a profit-oriented football club seeks to maximize the distance between revenue and expenses, a club oriented toward sporting victory aims to maximize revenue to push the break-even constraint as far as possible, as revenue conditions the team's competitiveness. Therefore, if entrepreneurship is considered the ability to mobilize diverse resources for a common goal, a club focused on victory will be incentivized to undertake entrepreneurial processes, since success on the field is closely related to the ability to afford the high salaries demanded by scarce differential talent.

The research presented here shows how the New Entrepreneurial History allows capturing and understanding the presence of entrepreneurial processes in football clubs whose logic and rationality were not profit maximization, showing that none of the entrepreneurial processes analyzed that resulted in the formation of FC Barcelona's early competitive advantage were aimed at obtaining personal profit, although the organization's logic evolved over time. Table 3 summarizes the three entrepreneurial processes analyzed both in terms of the analytical framework proposed by Wadhwani and Lubinski (2017), as well as the rationality/logic of the decisions taken and the competitive advantages generated. As can be seen, the trigger for the establishment of FCB was the desire to play football in a city where the sport was practically unknown. Therefore, the trigger 'event' can be characterized as the fulfillment of a personal recreational need. FC Barcelona was created because Gamper wanted to play football and, a year after his arrival in Barcelona, he still could not do so, as there was not only a lack of supply, but

also a lack of demand. Hence, in FC Barcelona's origins we do not find the discovery of a market opportunity derived from a situation of uncertainty, but the need to satisfy an individual desire. For it to be viable, Gamper needed to convince a critical mass of people to join his project and he found these in the social networks he was part of. Overcoming these initial hurdles indicates that Gamper had both a good individual reputation as well as good organizational and leadership skills. In any case, he was able to transform an individual need into a collective project.

In its beginnings, the members of the club paid their fee to be able to practice football, that is to say, they bought a service, but none of the service providers obtained a monetary income, neither in the form of remuneration for work nor return of capital. In a few years the rationale of the organization evolved towards the search for sporting success. With the aim of achieving this goal, and owing to the fact that the club was constrained by the volume of income it obtained, the logic behind the company's actions sought to displace this restriction as much as possible. During the 1910s, the bulk of club members no longer paid to practice football, but did so to attend the game day. Increasing income meant, fundamentally, increasing the number of supporters of the club, whether they were members or not. Establishing an emotional bond with the club that went beyond sporting results could contribute to this purpose. The club's strategy was to become progressively involved in the cultural and political demands of Catalan nationalism. This strategy yielded great results. FC Barcelona was able to transcend the boundaries of the city to become a club with a huge fan base across the whole of Catalonia. Through this initiative, which placed FC Barcelona as the football club with the most followers in Spain, the club's leaders knew how to create a situation of imbalance that gave the organization a great competitive advantage.

The crucial aspect for capitalizing on the expansion of the social base, and that in turn it was only possible because the expansion itself, was the construction of a spacious stadium on its own property. By taking this initiative FC Barcelona became a first-mover giving it a significant competitive advantage over its main rivals. As can be seen in table 2, the new stadium made it possible to increase the club's income considerably, which was essential as professionalism was on the verge of becoming legalized. In this scenario, with football already established as a popular spectacle, the process that began consisted of identifying and exploiting a market opportunity in the form of unmet demand. Nonetheless, the company's rationality persisted in prioritizing the enhancement of the organization's competitive advantage rather than seeking personal

financial profits. In this case, therefore, a market opportunity was created in the 1910s and then evaluated and exploited in the early 1920s, but the obtaining of a personal financial profit was never among the motives.

The entrepreneurial processes observed, which account for both the establishment and initial expansion of the club, can be described as a creative response (Schumpeter, 1947), since their results could not be predicted *ex-ante*, they generated value in the long term and they transformed the way leisure was consumed in Spain, leading to socio-economic change. Wadhwani and Lubinski (2017) point out that the weakest part of their interpretive framework lies in justifying the plurality in entrepreneurial motives. The research presented has provided solid evidence that the entrepreneurial processes that led to the creation and first expansion of FC Barcelona did not aim to exploit a market opportunity and that the rationale of the organization's actions and the resources mobilized did not seek personal financial gain. Even so, these processes resulted in the generation of different forms of value in the long term. On an economic level, a club created in 1899 by just eleven people, for the purpose of facilitating the practice of amateur football had by the mid-1910s already generated income that was equivalent to 200 thousand euros in 2017 and in 1924 exceeded the equivalent of 2 million euros (the maximum was reached in 2019 with close to a billion euros). With regards to emotional value, FC Barcelona had surpassed one hundred members in 1901, one thousand in 1913 and 10,000 in 1923 (reaching 100,000 members in 1982). The members of the club are its owners under the principle of one member, one vote, and none of them seek to obtain a monetary return from this ownership. Its relevance lies in the realm of emotions and social bonding. Therefore, the club managers logic and behavior support the assumption of Wadhwani and Luibinski (2017) about the plurality of entrepreneurial motives.

Table 3. The birth and rise of FCB

| <b>Opportunity envisioned</b>                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Resources mobilized</b>                                                                                               | <b>Novelty legitimized</b>                                                                                                                                             | <b>Rationality behind decisions</b>                                                                                    | <b>Competitive advantage created/acquired</b>                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1899: Creation of an amateur football club</li> </ul>                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individuals from the founders' social circles</li> </ul>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amateur football</li> </ul>                                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To fulfil a personal desire (not the identification of unmet demand)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Willingness to accept foreign talent</li> <li>Club's affiliation with Barcelona city</li> </ul>                       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1910s: Large-scale recruitment of fan members (linking the club to Catalan nationalism)</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Club members, whose numbers increased from 65 in 1908 to 4,302 in 1921</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fan affiliation with a concrete club</li> <li>Competitive rationale among teams</li> </ul>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To increase income to guarantee sporting competitiveness</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Club's association with an entire region, resulting in the broadest fan base among football clubs in Spain</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1922: Transforming fan base into income by constructing its own large stadium (decision taken in assembly by 2,000 members)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mortgage bonds financed by 600 members</li> </ul>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Football as gate-money sport to be consumed during leisure time</li> <li>Football's professionalization (on the way)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maximizing income to overcome budget limitations</li> </ul>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic strength (11,277 members in 1923)</li> </ul>                                                                 |

Source: prepared by the author

## Conclusions

This research on the creation of FC Barcelona's first competitive advantage has shown how obtaining personal profit was not among the motivations of its owners and managers, although the latter were able to undertake uncertain, collective, and cumulative creative processes that resulted in long-term value creation both within the organization and across the industry as a whole. The mass sports entertainment industry, especially that developed around team sports, is an arena where the rationales driving the actions of its leaders can be diffuse and not readily apparent, as they are intertwined with a range of objectives ranging from the economic sustenance of the organization to the maximization of its sporting competitiveness. Their emergence not only constituted a process of creating material value but also gave rise to a process of emotional connection similar to those generated in nation-building processes. Other works should establish the relationship between the different forms of ownership in European football clubs and the adopted strategy (profit or victory-maximizers), as well as their evolution over time.

The new ground showed that football was becoming a mass spectacle and signaled the imminent arrival of professionalism. This meant that the project envisaged by Gamper in 1899 had become, through an evolutionary process of trial and error, a Schumpeterian creative response, since it was transforming the way in which leisure was consumed in the city of Barcelona and was giving rise to a new industry in Spain, that of professional football. FCB had acquired the ability to mobilize resources for a shared purpose, although the rationality did not lie in profit maximization. Future research should focus on identifying how FCB was able to sustain its competitive advantage over time.

The establishment and growth of FCB involved creating something new, outside existing practices, which led to long-term socioeconomic change by uncovering a new form of value, although the entrepreneurial process took place outside the realm of competitive markets and was based on a rationality unrelated to profit maximization. The capacity to mobilize resources to achieve a shared goal demonstrated by FCB's leaders resulted in cumulative entrepreneurial agency that would surpass what Wadhwani and Lubinski (2017) referred to as a 'resource test'. More research is needed to examine how the professional football industry was consolidated and expanded, in both Spain and the rest of Europe.

The rationality and justification behind the decisions changed over time. In the early years, the objective was to allow club members to play football regularly in their

free time, but a decade later the goal was sporting success, which required that income be maximized. The strategy involved broadening the club's social base, a central element of which was FC Barcelona's link with Catalan nationalism. In 1922, the club built its own large stadium to capitalize on the significant increase in its fan base. Thus, although the creation and consolidation of FCB were not underpinned by the pursuit of personal financial gain, the results achieved are characteristic of an entrepreneurial endeavor, thereby showing, as stated by Wadhwani and Lubinski (2017), that an entrepreneurial project can be motivated by reasons other than economic gain. Future studies could provide more examples of not-for-profit entrepreneurial processes involving the football industry.

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