

Research article

The construction of glory and immortality in leaders of sport organizations: The case of Real Madrid President, Florentino Pérez

La construcción de la gloria y la inmortalidad en los líderes de organizaciones deportivas: El caso del Presidente del Real Madrid, Florentino Pérez

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Abstract:

Introduction: While most soccer mandarins feel comfortable with developing a strong reputation, Florentino Pérez, following the steps of another mythical Real Madrid President, Santiago Bernabeu, seems to have that thirst for glory, a sort of immortality only reserved to a few selected players in the world of soccer. **Methodology:** This conceptual paper collects and reviews existing scholarship on the idea of glory and connects it to the world of corporate reputation and sports. Sixty-five academic references have been attributed, coming from books, journal articles, and newspapers. The authors also had in-depth interviews with employees at Real Madrid and one of Pérez's biographers. **Results:** The idea of glory and immortality in leaders of old has been replaced by other terms, like reputation, fame, and celebrity. Nonetheless, the world of sports – where epics and a sense of victory are explicit –

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offers these leaders the possibility of achieving a sense of glory. **Discussions:** The case of Florentino Pérez offers reason for reflection in this regard and is the proof that the sense of glory has not been lost, at least in the sports world. **Conclusions:** Sport leaders, such as Florentino Pérez, have built glory thanks to deeds, good press and architecture.

Keywords: Real Madrid; soccer; football; sports; public relations; strategic communication; legacy; glory.

Resumen

Introducción: Mientras que la mayoría de los mandatarios del fútbol se sienten cómodos construyendo una sólida reputación, Florentino Pérez, parece tener sed de gloria, una especie de inmortalidad sólo reservada a unos pocos elegidos en el mundo del fútbol. **Metodología:** Este artículo conceptual recoge y revisa la literatura existente sobre la idea de gloria y la conecta con el mundo de la reputación corporativa y el deporte. Se han atribuido sesenta y cinco referencias académicas, procedentes de libros, artículos de revistas y periódicos. Los autores también mantuvieron entrevistas en profundidad con empleados del Real Madrid y con uno de los biógrafos de Pérez. **Resultados:** La idea de gloria e inmortalidad en los líderes de antaño ha sido sustituida por otros términos como reputación, fama y celebridad. No obstante, el mundo del deporte ofrece a estos líderes la posibilidad de alcanzar un sentimiento de gloria. **Discusión:** El caso de Florentino Pérez ofrece motivos para la reflexión en este sentido y es la prueba de que el sentido de la gloria se ha mantenido. **Conclusiones:** Los líderes deportivos, como Florentino Pérez, han construido la gloria gracias a los hechos, la buena prensa y la construcción de edificios e instalaciones emblemáticas.

Palabras clave: Real Madrid; fútbol; deportes; relaciones públicas; comunicación estratégica; legado; gloria; reputación.

What are all the goods of this life for him who does not consent to contemplate them as such, fields, houses, flocks, treasures, because he considers their enjoyment small, their use very limited, possession uncertain, and that often even the most despicable men. Do they achieve immense riches?

(Cicero, *De Res Publica*, 55 BC)

1. Introduction

In this hypermodern (Lipovetsky, 2016), liquid era of management (Bauman *et al.*, 2015), in which power and reputation last less than ever (Naim, 2014), Real Madrid and its president, Florentino Pérez, constitute a rarity.

Real Madrid has more than 120 years of history (founded in 1902), and Pérez has forged an uncontested leadership and a strong reputation not only among Real Madrid fans. Pérez has been President of Real Madrid, twice, for more than 20 years: from 2000 to 2006 and from 2009 to the present. This record appears more exceptional considering that, unlike most top soccer clubs which tend to have billionaire owners, Real Madrid is not a for-profit corporation but rather a sports society. In other words, Real Madrid's president must be democratically elected by its members, is subject to their goodwill and makes no income in the position (Mandis, 2016). Under these conditions, Pérez has won six elections to the Real Madrid presidency and, after 2009, without having to compete with other candidates. His last mandate will end in 2025 (El Mundo, 2021).

Real Madrid was the soccer club leader in revenues for eleven straight years during Pérez's presidency (García, 2021). In 2023, it was considered the second most valuable football brand in the world (BrandFinance, 2023), and the second soccer club in revenues, with €713,8 million, behind only Manchester United (Bridge *et al.*, 2023). However, Real Madrid had been the leading club in revenues and the top football brand during the four preceding years under Pérez's leadership. Moreover, Real Madrid won six European Champions League, the most esteemed competition in the world of soccer. Pérez's record has matched that of Santiago Bernabeu, Real Madrid's most legendary president, although in a period where competitiveness, popularity, and ultimately impact of soccer was higher than in the 1950's, when Bernabeu won the first five of the European Cups. Santiago Segurola, one of the most prestigious soccer analysts at newspaper El País, suggested that Pérez always wanted to emulate Bernabeu by winning European tournaments: "He wants to recover that feeling of Real Madrid as an international power. Being a local power does not interest him... He also wants to be the new Santiago Bernabeu, [for people] to talk about him in the same terms" (Ball, 2015, p. 241). Segurola considers Pérez to behave like a Real Madrid apostle, "he feels a sort of semireligious obligation of making Real Madrid great again" (Ball, 2015, p. 242). Lo cita Ball en su libro

From several viewpoints, Pérez's presidency has been as successful as Bernabeu's. During Bernabeu's Presidency, Real Madrid won six European cups, built stadium Santiago Bernabeu in 1947, one of the first "megastadiums" (125,000 spectators), as well as the Sport City in 1963. Pérez also built the new Sport City of Valdebebas, the largest of the world in its kind when it was built, with 10 soccer fields, and remodeled the Santiago Bernabeu stadium. They were both focused on giving Real Madrid a global dimension. While Bernabeu successfully promoted the European Cup, Pérez did the same with the European Super League (Alvarez de Mon, 2023).

There are differences between the two presidents as well. Unlike Bernabeu, who was a footballer, Pérez is a global financial tycoon, a profile much more aligned with the needs of contemporary professional sports. According to Forbes (2023), Pérez was 1,513 in the ranking of the richest people on the planet. He owns one of the most important construction companies in the world. Although there is evidence that the personal involvement of a company's leader in a top sports club can positively impact company business if the person is doing well in the task s/he is charged with by the club (Nicolau, 2011), Pérez's love and passion for Real Madrid is out of question for the *aficionados*.

This paper argues if Florentino Pérez can be considered a contemporary version of the emperors, kings, and religious figures of the Roman Empire, Middle Ages and Renaissance. In order to reach this state of glory, Pérez has employed methods similar to the characters of antiquity, such as the provision of *panem et circenses* (soccer, spectacle, and entertainment), good deeds and achievements (in the past, wars; today, the obtention of Champions League), storytellers (good biographers in the past, good media and press coverage today), and lavish art and architecture (Pérez built a new sport city and completely remodeled the Real Madrid stadium into an avant-garde, futuristic, iconic building) in order to build a sense of glory and immortality that should transcend Pérez's anticipated retirement in 2025.

1.1 Theoretical framework

Cambridge Dictionary defines reputation as “the opinion that people in general have about someone or something, or how much respect or admiration someone or something receives, based on past behavior or character” (n.d.). Reputation in the field of public relations has been associated with identity, prestige, goodwill, esteem, and standing (Vercic *et al.*, 2016). This concept has much more prominence in reference to corporate rather than personal reputation. Most academic work focused on the importance of maintaining a good corporate reputation offers several tangible and intangible benefits for the organization (Doorley & Garcia, 2020). A solid reputation increases the willingness of stakeholders to invest in an organization (Aula & Mantere, 2020). Another factor is the temporary nature of reputation: it can change as deeds and environment change. It is fragile and impermanent.

This paper is about how Pérez’s efforts and outcomes as the president of Real Madrid transcend building a strong personal or corporate reputation. We are talking about something that has more to do with the idea of glory. Therefore, a definition of glory is required to show the differences and similarities with reputation. In today’s secularized Western world, the notion of glory is neglected “because of the notion’s apparent religious overtones” (Chappell, 2011, p. 106). The *Cambridge Dictionary*’s first concept is religious in nature, “praise and thanks, especially as given to God” (n.d.), while the second connects with the idea of reputation and deeds, “great admiration, honour, and praise that you earn by doing something successfully” (n.d.). Terms such as “fame, reputation and prestige are certainly within the conceptual aura of glory” (Balazs, 2014, p. 331).

Chapell (2011) notes “‘glory’ means the radiance or aura that typically arises from the achievement of something spectacularly excellent, within the framework of some worthwhile practice, together with the acclaim that that achievement merits from the audience that it deserves” (p. 132). Balazs (2014) argues that glory “is different from, although not entirely opposite to, fame; it is related to victory, to abundant, everlasting life, and to a certain type of passivity and dialogical contemplation” (p. 328). Hence, some people – especially in certain professions – pretend glory is something that athletes and celebrities typically aim at (Chapell, 2011). Glory happens when there is a good performance within a valuable form of activity, it irradiates something that a solid, powerful reputation doesn’t have: “there are actions, events, objects, people even, that have a kind of glow or aura about them” (p. 107). In a world where religion, metaphysics, and transcendence has evaporated, the quest of glory shows “a concern with *meaningful* and *immortal* life” (Birmingham, 2011, p. 3).

Balazs (2014) highlights the search for glory as a social motive and a human drive: “without the recognition of others, our glory or gloriousness is senseless” (p. 329). However, although it usually involves a selfish motive, glory may not only benefit “the agent [or] the spectator but the practice itself” (Chapell, 2012, p. 119). Bringing Hannah Arendt and Thomas Hobbes into the discussion, Balazs (2014) emphasizes the communal aspects of glory which, unlike fame, are usually an individual and private good (even if it has a communal aspect in the admiration of others). Glory is “not just the fruit of individual efforts”, but “a collective value to which the members of a community can relate themselves personally” (2014, pp. 333-334). That is the nature of soccer fandom, whereby the *aficionados* feel a part of and share the triumphs of their team. When Real Madrid wins the Champions League, every fan has a taste of glory:

“Glory in its fullness integrates victory over death, exuberant life, and richness, and it is a value that benefits others as well, yet it is not simply a collective good, a mere relation, a potentially perishable state of being famous for something. Glory tells us about eternity and elevates all who can have a share of it” (Balazs, 2014, p. 338).

Agamben (2011) describes the idea of glory as a sort of backbone of the Western vision of power that would go from the Roman Empire to the Christian tradition. Thanks to the existence of glory, power would become authority, “a form of mere being that knows no action” (Balazs, 2014, p. 334). The adoration of the empty throne in the case of Princes, Cardinals, Popes, or Monarchs would be an example of that. The metaphysical character of their power conferred by glory made possible to hold authority even in the absence of action.

Lida de Malkiel (1952) argued the most energetical and passionate praises of glory come from the most partisans of the Greek influence in the Roman genius such as Cicero who can make a distinction between the vulgar and the true glory,

Exposing to his son the Stoic division of goods, he places glory among physical goods or fortune, like the Stoics, but he separates on the one hand strength, beauty, health, nobility, wealth, clientele, and on the other a single category, *honos, gloria*, which, although goods of fortune, have inherent moral value (p. 29).

Indeed, we can find in Cicero’s life but also his works, particularly in the book *De Republica* (Cicero, 2022a), an ideal of glory based on the idea that what is important is not the form or structure of the government, but men’s virtue (Cicero, . Kagan (1994) notes how “glory was one of the pillars of the Republic” (p. 72). In Roma, life was a fight for power, wealth, and glory (Syme, 1939). Hölkeskamp (2019) makes a distinction between the different ways to compensate personal achievements in politics and war in Rome such as reputation and fame (*fama y existimatio*); glory (*gloria*), esteem and influence (*dignitas y auctoritas*); and honor and public distinction. Glory was a communal celebration. Legionaries and *populus* were *actors and spectators* at the same time. They participated of the glory,

In the ritual in a wide variety of roles: as “civic” spectators, being both the “decoration” and the recipients of that message of power and glory; as legionaries who were part, and in fact “co-actors”, of the procession; and as members of a civic body that had elected the victorious consul in an assembly and was going to elect future consuls as commanders and possible triumphatores (p. 93).

According to the ideals of *De Republica*, “men seek glory, not so much for its own sake, but rather as proof and public recognition of their goodness and virtue” (Sustersic, 2009, p. 4). In Cicero’s words, “virtue consists precisely in practice, its best use is the government of public affairs and its complete perfection in the realization, not with words, but with deeds, of all the great things that are proclaimed in the schools” (Cicero, 2022a, p. 1711). In the first book of *De Republica*, Scipion chants the idea of glory as proper of those who know the enjoyment of wealth is limited and that even despicable beings can get rich, instead he praises “those who consider ruling and the consulate itself hard duties that should be accepted and not honors and ambitions” (Cicero, 2022a, p. 1711). Cicero cites Scipion as the example of the military and consul for whom wealth is not sufficient and “the lasting honors and immortal crowns are the rewards which he has seen reserved in heaven for eminent citizens” (Cicero, 2022a, p. 1711). Cicero opposes the idea of fame to the true glory, reserved for those that put their time in the most elevated affairs such as the well being of the country. At the contrary, the fame is ephemeral, temporary, limited, “the greatest fame remains enclosed in the narrow limits of that world of yours that you have in view; It does not have the gift of immortality, it perishes

with men and becomes extinct in the oblivion of posterity” (Cicero, 2022a, p. 1814). In other words, according to Cicero, the eternal glory, by comparison to fame, manifests in the consummation of the political work and, at its perfection, takes a divine perspective.

Meaningful deeds for the community were a *sine qua non* for glory. In the Roman world this type of deeds was the provision *panem et circenses*, victories in battles and the conquest and good administration of territories. There were two main methods of leaving testimony of these good deeds, architecture, and storytelling. Hölkeskamp (2019) notes “stone monuments, not only honorific ones such as statues, arches and extravagant tombs, but also temples and public buildings built by consuls and commanders and financed by loot, played an especially decisive role in this culture” (p. 100). Eck (1999) argued the main objective of elites was to consolidate their own position and thereby escape from death and oblivion. That meant to avoid equality. For this reason, members of the Roman ruling class were enormously interested and concerned with the “creation of memory” (Hölkeskamp, 2019, p. 101).

“These houses, as well as the temples, basilicas, honorific statues in the Forum, Comitius and Capitol... turned the city into a vast “scenography” of imperial splendor, which could be considered a *tapestry* of memory” (Gowig, 2005, p. 132).

The tradition of using architecture to create and preserve political power, and memory, has been remarkable through history. Popes, kings, prelates, aristocrats, and others have linked patronage, power, and memory for centuries (García, 2020). While Florentino Pérez, because of the legal status of Real Madrid that forbids Presidents to finance the club, did not have to patronage the new buildings and facilities of the club, we can find a parallelism between historical characters such as Cardinal Richelieu, the Barberini family (Basilica of Saint Peter), and Cardinal Mazarino (Palais Mazarin, The Académie Royale de Peinture and the Collège des Quatre Nations) who patronage visual arts and monuments to gain popular support. There is a tradition that goes from the Roman Empire to the Baroque regarding the use of architecture to build memory and being remembered among main monarchs and popes. We can argue, for example, that, as Mazarin architectural style, “with its emphasis on the theatrical, the colorful and thing that was new and innovative in the visual arts” (García, 2020. P. 141), the renovation of Stadium Santiago Bernabeu, while there is an undeniable functional motivation, implemented under the mandate of Pérez, represents an iconic monument as well for Madrid at the same time than Pérez’s forward-looking ideals which guided him under his Presidency.

There is a second tradition, mainly in the Castilian Middle Age, of preserving and consolidating memory and glory. This is about written narratives. Kagan (2010) notes while portraits, sculpture, and architecture were able to help, they were condemned to destruction and suffer the passage of time. “Only history, written history, could last” (Kagan, 2010, p. 73). The glory was better achieved and maintained with the pen “than with the painter’s brush, the blacksmith’s hammer or the sculptor’s stone” (Enriquez del Castillo, 1994, p. 130).

Indeed, in the modern age, all official history had a storyteller side because of the concern with the future public: “it is conceived to offer the next generations a particular interpretation of the past” (Kagan, 2010, p. 24). The deeds of the entire Roman Empire, Caesar, or Alexander de Great would be seen as completely different if historians such as Tucidides, Quinto Curzio Rufo or Lucano had not told them (Prestage, 1928).

While Pérez has several biographies (Rosety, 2005; Loaiza, 2022; Alvarez de Mon, 2023) or some management books that highlight his figure (Mandis, 2016), the truth is none of these books have been bestsellers. The role of the chiefs of press or journalists have been much more

relevant to build Pérez's legendary reputation. For example, Antonio García Ferreras, a former press chief of Real Madrid and TV star, seems to be one of the most influential advisors of Pérez (Díaz, 2011; Mundo Deportivo, 2021). Kagan (2010) suggests "it is better to compare official historians with the examples of more determined press chiefs who surround the political leaders of today's democracies, and who are immersed in what is colloquially known as "manipulated" readings, selective but still thorough, of evidence related to a specific event or event" (2010, p. 27). The level of attention that Pérez pays to the press is well known in the journalistic world. In Seguro's words, "he has excessive power over the journalistic field, he uses it and has the arrogance of power, and he likes to handle even the smallest spaces and he does not miss anything. I know, for example, from my time at *El País*, that if he didn't like a caption, he would call you" (Ball, 2015, p. 242). Some journalists accuse Pérez of inspiring fear among the journalistic profession, "no one knows better than Florentino Pérez that there is a lot of fear, a lot of unemployment, a lot of communication companies that are closing and many families to care for" (Loaiza, 2022, pp. 154-155).

Pérez's emphasis on communication is well known. "From his arrival to the club, Real Madrid has followed 'the Bernabeu line' although articulated in the new society of information and global economy" (Pasamontes, 2002, p. 398). If "glory makes us pathologically dependent on the opinion of others" (Chapell, 2011, p. 119), that would explain Pérez's interest with controlling the media.

Deeds, architectural work, and influence on the media would be the three pillars that would support the construction of Pérez's glory as probably one of the best mandatories of a soccer institution in history. This paper argues that construction has been effective and is like what Popes, Princes, and Kings did in the past to achieve a sort of immortality status.

2. Methodology

This is a conceptual paper. It has an interdisciplinary approach as well that touches fields such as philosophy, history, politics, sports, and communication. It collects and reviews existing scholarship on the idea of glory (not a popular theme outside of the religious studies sphere) from the Roman times, Castilian middle age, Renaissance, and Baroque. Kagan (2010) acknowledges in those periods there is a strong concern among leaders to pursue and reach glory and immortality. It connects it to the world of corporate reputation and sports. Sixty academic references have been attributed, coming from books, journal articles, and newspapers that delve into the topic of glory and reputation.

The paper also includes in-depth interviews with two employees at Real Madrid and one of Pérez's biographers. The collected data has been collected in an scholarly commentary paper format since the methodology cannot be reproduced. Several of the quotes were originally in Spanish and were translated into English to make it accessible for the academic community. This paper reconceptualizes and connects concepts from different areas of knowledge, "themes from secondary qualitative analysis of existing qualitative data sets and reviews of published qualitative papers" (Protheroe *et al.*, 2008, p. 3).

3. Results

This section analyzes the three pillars of glory according to the thinking of Roman times, Castilian middle age, Renaissance, and Baroque. They are deeds (mainly war victories and spectacles for the people), architecture and monuments, and the written letter (biographies, chronicles, and news stories).

3.1 Deeds

Being able to provide a show, a spectacle, *panem et circenses*, is a source of power and reputation (Debord, 2020 [1967]). Artificial spectacles, sportainment, are the norm in the search for spectacularization and build a new reality (Webb & Richelieu, 2021). In a way, in the postmodern era is the opposite to, for example, the Roman times. Being able to be a good spectacle provider is already an achievement, a deed. No battles are required to win and celebrate. Providing spectacle to the masses is a victory. Quintus Cicero, brother, and adviser of Marco Tulio Cicero emphasized the importance of offering *panem et circenses* to the people to gain their respect, “finally, as regards the Roman masses, be sure to put on a good show. Dignified, yes, but full of the color and spectacle that appeals so much to crowds” (Cicero, 2012b, p. 79). The spectacle is a representation of reality that replaces genuine activity (Jeffries, 2021). This principle applies to any facet of life including sports and soccer (Stratton, 2020).

From the very beginning of his mandate, Pérez prioritized buying soccer players with a major media impact (Blanco Callejo & Forcadell, 2006). Real Madrid moved from a mostly sport to an entertainment institution. Then his marketing director, José Angel Sánchez argued bringing top and popular players such as Beckham (but also Zidane, Ronaldo Nazario, or Cristiano Ronaldo) was comparable to say, “Tom Cruise is in the lead” (Quelch *et al.*, 2007, p. 11). They were spectacular outside, because of their interesting and glamorous private lives, but also inside the soccer field (García, 2011).

If the glory of the *populus Romanus*, denoted by terms such as *imperium* (empire) and *maiestas* (majesty), was able to be measured in terms of victories and conquered nations (Hölkeskamp, 2019), Real Madrid also had its own conquests and victories during the mandate of Pérez. Under his two-mandate presidency, Real Madrid won six European Champions League, the most appreciated championship by Real Madrid fans and members (Mandis, 2016), consolidating its leadership with a total 14 cups. In total, with Pérez, Real Madrid won 32 titles. In addition to the six Champions League titles, Real Madrid won six FIFA Club World Cups, five European Supercups, six La Liga, three Copa del Rey, six Spanish Super Cups (Birlanga, 2023).

There is an epic aspect to winning a Champions League these days. There are several clubs competing, with budgets comparable or superior to Real Madrid’s, such as the English teams, thanks to large TV rights revenues, as well as the state clubs, such as Paris Saint Germain and Manchester City (Bridge *et al.*, 2023). These well-funded teams have been able to buy the main soccer stars in recent years, like Haaland, Neymar, Mbappé, or Messi – unlike Real Madrid, which had to survive the post-Ronaldo era with no true global stars. This trend may be reversing with the arrival of Bellingham in 2023 and Mbappé in 2024, although the French star has accepted pay cuts to play in Real Madrid (another sign of Real Madrid’s top reputation and/or glory).

Besides the equivalent of winning battles and wars on the sports battlefield, Real Madrid became a global organization under Pérez (Mandis, 2016; García, 2021). Real Madrid is, according to the analytic tool Blinkfire, the football club with the highest number of fans in the world, 500 million (Real Madrid, 2023a). Moreover, despite intense competition to secure the best soccer players in the world, during the early and middle Pérez era, Real Madrid had many of the best players in the world, like Zidane, Figo, Roberto Carlos, Beckham and Ronaldo Nazario (known as the ‘*galácticos*’), and others, like Cristiano Ronaldo, Bale and Benzema. Providing a good show and winning was always part of the Pérez ideal of sport management (Carlin, 2004). García (2023) always points out how Pérez has followed Machiavelli’s advice of providing Real Madrid *aficionados* with a good show, “a prince ought, above all things, always

to endeavor in every action to gain for himself the reputation of being a great and remarkable man" (Machiavelli, 1992, p. 104). The proposed European Super League, since cancelled, was aligned with these ideals of greatness and magnificence to offer the best spectacle that the prince can as a ruler (Machiavelli, 1992).

3.2 Architecture

3.2.1 The new Santiago Bernabeu stadium

Pérez is the President of ACS, one of the world's major construction companies. From Roman times to the Baroque, buildings were a main form of memory for the great protohumans of history. As previously stated, Pérez's financial success was in the old economy, leaving a tangible legacy of (mainly, but not only) public infrastructures and buildings. The new Santiago Bernabeu stadium will be completed at the very end of 2024, while his mandate lasts until 2025 and seems it will be his last one (García-Ochoa, 2024).

Pérez always had in mind a new stadium that reflected the *grandeur* of Real Madrid, and by extension, his greatness as well. Indeed, the Real Madrid website publicized the Bernabéu as "a world reference in sport and architecture" as well as, in the words of Pérez himself, "the best stadium in the world to be recognized again at the end of this century as the best club of the 21st century. A new stadium, heritage, and pride of our members and fans" (Real Madrid, 2023b).

Unlike most clubs that have moved stadiums to the outskirts of cities in the search for more space and more convenient infrastructures for hosting games, Pérez decided to maintain and invest in the Real Madrid stadium, maintaining its location in downtown Madrid. An organization that can take up so much space in the middle of the so-called "*milla de oro*" (golden mile) of Madrid – the city's most expensive area in terms of housing and commercial space – projects its greatness permanently. The renovation of the Bernabeu stadium cost Euros 1.17 million (de la Riva, 2023), an investment considerably higher than other iconic buildings, like Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, which cost Euros 132 million in 1985 (Lorenci, 2022), even considering the adjustment of the cost of living today. With "a skin of steel bands and variable lines that will be able to illuminate and project images" (Real Madrid, 2023b, Para. 2), the new Bernabeu stadium will be an iconic, avant-garde, and state-of-the-art building, and even more of a focus of attraction for tourists and visitors to the city of Madrid. The presence of the stadium will be enhanced by the fact that, according to members of the Real Madrid management interviewed for this article, it will host between 50-60 world class spectacles per year. That's also thanks to its retractable cover for the playing field. These spectacles are projected to contribute as much or even more than Real Madrid games as a source of revenue. Around Euros 400 million per year or almost the equivalent of 40 percent of the entire budget will come from pure entertainment unrelated to soccer. In other words, Bernabeu stadium will no longer be just a soccer stadium but rather now a proper center of a society of spectacle (Debord, 2020).

With new leisure, restaurant, and entertainment areas. Technology is one of the pillars of the project. There will be an indoor space for e-sports and a spectacular 360-degree video scoreboard will be installed within the stadium structure (Real Madrid, 2023b).

The main purpose of the new Real Madrid stadium will no longer be to host soccer matches but rather to cater to a massive audience, allowing it a massive social impact.

3.2.2 *Valdebebas sport city*

In his long interview with journalist Josep Pedrerol, after the fiasco of the Super League, Pérez bragged about the quality of the Real Madrid sport city built in 2005 under Pérez's first Presidency: "everybody comes to see it... nothing prettier... [it's] an attraction" (Rodríguez, 2021). This (almost) cheesy way of verbalizing his pride demonstrates what sport architecture means for Pérez. As a proof of its social importance, Real Madrid's website announces it as "the largest sports complex ever built by a football club" (Real Madrid, 2023c). It is ten times bigger than the former sport city and 40 times bigger than Bernabeu Stadium (Real Madrid, 2023c).

Without the aesthetical beauty of the new Bernabeu stadium, the Valdebebas sport city in the outskirts of Madrid also talks about the greatness and innovation of the club and its leader. Indeed, before Manchester City built its huge SportCity in 2014, one of its references was Valdebebas (Picón, 2023). They share characteristics, such as a building with dorms for junior players of the Real Madrid academy and the first team, office buildings and numerous soccer fields, including a second stadium called Alfredo di Stefano that seats 6,000 people (Picón, 2023, Para. 1). In the near future Valdebebas will be named Florentino Pérez (RTVE, 2023)

3.2.3 *Real Madrid museum*

Under the Pérez presidency, Real Madrid has optimized the spectacular dimensions of its assets, such as the stadium or the trophy room, to project Real Madrid's glory, and also as a revenue source. The creation of organized tours, where fans can witness the places where Real Madrid legends take place (such as the grass of the stadium, the benches, the bathrooms, and the wardrobe), offers the club an opportunity to share the most important places of Real Madrid's history with fans. Even during the construction period of the new Bernabeu, there was a tour, whereby aficionados were able to see the progression of construction. The tour makes the Real Madrid stadium, with almost 1.3 million visitors per year, the third most visited museum in Madrid, only after the globally recognizable Reina Sofía contemporary art museum, and the classic El Prado (Torres, 2023).

In sum, the Real Madrid stadium, sport city and museum are icons of pride not just for Real Madrid aficionados but for the entire Spanish society.

3.3 *Written letter*

As described in the theoretical framework, the printed word (in the form of historical accounts or biographies) was long considered to be the best way for architecture, art or other types of material expressions to communicate glory across centuries (Kagan, 2010). The case of Pérez deviates from that norm and reflects on social and technological changes. While there are several biographers of Pérez (Rosety, 2005; Alvarez de Mon, 2023), those books certainly have not been very influential in shaping his figure and have been far from bestsellers. Indeed, while they talk about Pérez's public deeds and sport management, they do not talk much about the person himself. Reading books about him, we still do not know what is inside Pérez. Rather, his glory has been forged in the media, much more in accordance with a liquid society in which much of the printed word is consumed ephemerally through screens and not hard copy books, unlike in the past.

In this regard, the power of Pérez in the Spanish journalistic profession has been almost absolute, and he was criticized for that. For example, when Josep Guardiola was coach of FC Barcelona, he accused journalists of being 'remote-controlled' by Pérez (using the term *Central Lechera* to refer to the similarities between white milk and the Real Madrid uniform colors) (Mundo Deportivo, 2011). Likewise, rumors have been constant that Pérez was appointing his allies and supporters in key Spanish media as well as firing his enemies. Pérez was accused of appointing *Marca's* Y director, pressuring *El País* to change the reporter Diego Torres, who covered Real Madrid, and having contributed to the appointment of the general managers of two main TV stations in Spain (public channel TVE and private channel La Sexta). He was also accused of having popular journalists who worked for him, such as Tomás Roncero and Josep Pedrerol (Loaiza, 2022). Factual or not, his control of the media in Spain was undisputable. The case of the leaked audiotapes, in which Pérez insulted some Real Madrid legends and labeled some journalists acritical supporters (for example, Pérez described the then-president of RTVE, Luis Fernández, as a "Real Madrid Taliban" (Mundo Deportivo, 2021). In the same audiotape, Pérez mentions how Fernández canceled a program that was very critical of his person, and how a former Real Madrid's Communication Manager would be the new director of the program (El País, 2004). García (2023) argues that the case of the leaked audiotapes, about which there was barely any media reaction, showed Pérez's control of the Spanish media. In his written history of Real Madrid (Ball, 2015), Segurola notes Florentino's concern about the written word: "the feeling in the newsrooms is that, with the anguish that the media is going through, we must make ourselves available to the clubs run by businessmen like Florentino" (p. 242).

While good press or media control is not going to provide that sense of immortality attributed to biographers or historians in ancient times, it does provide a sense of glory and meaning (Chapell, 2011). The victories, tournaments, trophy room (a constant reminder of Pérez's contributions), and the new stadium will proclaim Pérez's sense of glory, and that is a sign of our times.

4. Discussion

Due mainly to secularization, the idea of glory (and immortality) in leaders of old has been replaced by other terms, like reputation, fame and celebrity (Aula & Mantere, 2020). Nonetheless, the world of sports – where epics and a sense of victory are more explicit than in most areas of life – offers these leaders the possibility of achieving a sense of glory that is absent in most areas of life (García & Barberá, 2023; García, 2023). The case of Florentino Pérez offers reason for reflection in this regard and is the proof that the sense of glory has not been lost, at least in the sports world. Sport obtains victories that are celebrated by fans and masses, builds identity and memory through shared celebrations in which everyone has a part.

5. Conclusion

Leaders, such as Florentino Pérez, who have led these organizations, tend to come from other areas of life where they have been successful, but they miss a sense of recognition that lasts longer and persists even after life. They are the equivalents of emperors, kings, princes, popes, and others in the ancient world. The mechanisms to obtain that glory are the same: victories that are shared with people, an architectural legacy, and the written word. Glory makes life worthwhile (Chapell, 2011). That is the lesson of the concept of glory, which transcends the perennial concept of reputation and should be researched more applied to other current leaders and sports. The concept of reputation feels short when talking particularly about soccer since entrepreneurs and tycoons who manage large soccer organizations already have a strong

reputation. When they become managers of entities such as Real Madrid, these accomplished entrepreneurs are searching for something not dissimilar to immortality and glory, concepts that have been absent from the public arena in recent times due to their religious connotations.

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