

**INTEGRATING INTO FINNISH SOCIETY THROUGH  
PROFFESIONAL FOOTBALL: ISSUES AND POSITIVE EX-  
PERIENCES**

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The purpose of this study was to highlight how professional football players from abroad experience integration and migration into Finnish society. The study was carried out together with eight Veikkausliiga players, who talk about their experiences anonymously. The eight participants play in four different teams. This research aims to answer questions about the amount of work done by the clubs, the player's self-enhancement and the importance of communication.</p> <p>The material for the study was collected using an online survey, which was distributed to the participants. The survey contained 14 open questions from three different areas: Self-development, the work done by the club, and language and communication. A conventional approach to qualitative content analysis was applied as a methodological approach to the data.</p> <p>The research results brought out six different themes from the data. Professional teams are multicultural environments, and the English language has become the main way of communication in the four Veikkausliiga teams. Migration and integration into a new environment can be challenging, so support groups are valuable to the player. The participants named their teammates as the most important support network. Club's activities were most notable in terms of housing arrangements.</p> <p>Based on the research results, it can be argued that Finnish football clubs have succeeded in adapting to the needs of the global football world, and this may play an important role in terms of future growth in attracting players to Finland. However, the clubs still have a lot of space to invest in their own player acquisitions, so that the investment becomes successful for both parties.</p>	
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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena oli tuoda esille, miten ulkomailta tulevat ammattilaisjalkapalloilijat kokevat suomalaisen yhteiskuntaan integroitumisen. Tutkielma toteutettiin yhdessä kahdeksan Veikkausliiga jalkapalloilijan kanssa, jotka kertovat kokemuksistaan anonyymisti. Kahdeksan osallistujaa pelaa neljässä eri joukkueessa. Tutkimus tähtää vastaamaan erityisesti kysymyksiin seurojen tekemästä työn määrästä, pelaajan omasta kehityksestä ja kommunikaation tärkeydestä.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin verkkokyselyn avulla, joka jaettiin osallistujille. Kysely sisälsi 14 avointa kysymystä kolmesta eri osa-alueesta: itsensä kehittäminen, seuran tekemä työ sekä kieli ja kommunikaatio. Kerättyyn dataan sovellettiin konventionaalista lähestymistapaa kvalitatiiviseen sisällön analyysiin.</p> <p>Tutkimustulokset toivat esiin kuusi eri teemaa datasta. Ammattilaisjoukkueet ovat multikulttuurisia ympäristöjä ja englannin kieli on noussut pääasialliseksi kommunikointikeinoksi neljässä Veikkausliiga joukkueessa. Migraatio ja integraatio uuteen ympäristöön voi olla haastavaa, joten tukijoukot ovat arvokkaita pelaajalle. Tutkimukseen osallistujat nimesivät joukkuelaisensa tärkeimmäksi tukiverkoksi, eikä esimerkiksi perheen rooli tullut huomattavasti esiin. Seuran toiminta oli huomattavinta asumisjärjestelyiden osalta.</p> <p>Tutkimustulosten perusteella voidaan argumentoida, että Suomalaiset jalkapalloseurat ovat onnistuneet sopeutumaan globaalin jalkapallomaailman tarpeisiin, ja tällä saattaa olla tulevaisuuden kasvun kannalta tärkeä rooli pelaajien houkuttelemiseksi Suomeen. Seuroilla on kuitenkin vielä paljon tarvetta panostaa omiin pelaajahankintoihinsa, jotta sijoitus tulisi molempien osapuolten kannalta mahdollisimman onnistuneeksi.</p>	
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## APPENDICES

# 1 INTRODUCTION

Football is the most popular sport in the world, and its affluence is global. To most people, it is a way of enjoying their free time, expressing themselves or escaping the responsibilities of ordinary life. However, to some, it is a profession that includes enormous pressure and passion. In addition to the professionals, it is a way of life for some people, as there are so many opportunities and ways of enjoying and consuming football. The top of the top are experiencing the cruelty of the sport every day and getting to enjoy the financial benefits it can provide. Nowadays the slander that professional players get, has gone into the internet where anonymous people do not have any limits. On the other side, some are worshiped and idolized and get cheered on by fans. The situation can change after one bad touch in an important moment; therefore, the sport can be described as hectic sometimes. The world's most followed person on social media is a legend of the game, called Cristiano Ronaldo. Ronaldo's influence as an individual has grown to be massive, so one can only imagine the impact that football has on culture, economics, politics, and people all around the globe.

Football has been studied closely from multiple different points of views thus the understanding of the different sides of the game has increased and developed. Its influence has only grown, and its economy has inflated together with the world's economic situation. Thus, it should continue to be the focus of academic sports studies. The academic focus on football goes around the whole circle, from physiological aspects to the deep dives in marketing, management, and social studies. Football-related migration has become its own business, as the best teams try to recruit the best players from an early age. Therefore, professional football players migrate a lot and arguably quite often, depending on their status, achievements, quality, and motivation.

The purpose of this study is to reveal some of the issues that migrating professional football players have encountered during their stay in Finland. This thesis discusses the football organizations and what they should do to maximize the positive results of their investment, how foreign players in Finland perceive the role of Finnish and English language, and how their own actions affect the integration process. The niche for this study exists, as only very few studies have examined football in Finland at all (Itkonen & Nevala 2012). To be even more precise, studies covering football

related migration into Finland, are close to nonexistent. Therefore, it is necessary to update the situation from every aspect. However, this study only looks into the experiences of migrated players. Football related migration into Finland should be studied further because small adjustments could have significant influence on the growth of the league. Better players lead to team improvement, resulting in increased opportunities for international competitions and consequent financial benefits for the team. Finnish football could benefit a lot from more focused studies about player migration. There is concrete evidence about this in an English context (Maguire 1999; Richardson et al. 2012; Schinke et al. 2011).

The first section of the study introduces the reader to football and its economic climate, which is necessary to understand when looking into the reasons and issues of football-related migration. Then the study proceeds to cover the theoretical background. The theoretical background is utilized in analyzing the data and the process of deducing responses to research questions involves a thorough examination of data in conjunction with a review of existing scholarly works. The next section of the study covers methodology, which is necessary to understand when covering the analysis and answers. Finally, the last section of the study covers the analysis, and conclusions while discussing the field of research forward. Issues found within this study are criticized as well.

## **1.1 Football in Finland**

Uefa (2021) (The union of European Football Associations) states that Football arrived in Finland through English sailors in 1890. After which the first unofficial championship was held in 1905 and the Finnish Football Association is founded in 1907 (Uefa 2021). The Finnish Football association joins FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association) and UEFA during the 20<sup>th</sup> century but also has a small break from the sport. Nielsen (2004, 66) writes in their piece about football in Finland during the second world war that: “the Finnish Football Association wrote a letter dated 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1940 to the sister football associations in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, saying that no football could be played until possibly in the autumn. The reason was that some of our best players have been killed, some are wounded, and right now no one knows when we can start football training.” Uefa (2021) suggests that the Finnish football association started to improve footballing facilities in the 1970s and has continued to do so ever since. It should be noted that this is mandatory especially in Finland, where you can’t really play outside during the winter season.

Itkonen & Nevala (2012) write that Finland is one of few countries where football has not been used as a building tool for national identity. They also continue to argue that football is not the most important sport in Finland, even though it is most played one (Itkonen & Nevala 2012). However, the role of football has only grown in Finland, and this has caused the research field to become more active on the topic as well during 2000-2010. Arguably football has only continued its growth since 2010 and the Finnish national men's football team, colloquially referred to as "Huuhkajat," attained their inaugural qualification to a major international tournament, specifically the UEFA European Championship 2020. However, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the competition was subsequently rescheduled to the summer of 2021. In addition, Teemu Pukki introduced himself in the English Premier League and has since become a Norwich City Football Club legend (Norwich City F.C 2023). Finnish Youngsters have also gained some name for themselves in bigger leagues, and this can be argued to be a good sign of player development (Suomifutis.com 2022). Girl's and women's side of the game has also grown significantly, and this is partly due to the success of "Helmarit" the women's national team. One of the events that puts emphasis to growth of women's football in Finland was the Women's European Championship tournament in 2009 which was organized in Finland. (Itkonen & Nevala 2012.)

Itkonen & Nevala (2012, p. 1) suggest that: "Finland is not an internationally significant football country". This is based on the fact that Finland has never succeeded in international level, none of the Finnish clubs has never done too well on European club competitions nor is Finland known for producing top talents year after year. However, there are few players that are considered legends of the game in an international level. For example, the performances and individual achievements of Jari Litmanen and Sami Hyypiä are widely recognized in the biggest stage of the game (Itkonen & Nevala 2012). On April sixth, 2023, Finland is ranked as the 56<sup>th</sup> best country in men's football and the women's team is ranked as the 29<sup>th</sup> best team. Both men and women's teams are significantly lower in the rankings than other Nordic countries. (FIFA rankings 2023.)

This study focuses on migrants who have relocated into Finland to play professional football. The Highest division of Finland is Veikkausliiga and outside of Veikkausliiga, there are not too many professional players due to the financial state of Finnish football clubs. Veikkausliiga has its name from the main sponsor Veikkaus. Veikkaus is a government owned betting monopoly in Finland. Veikkausliiga ranks as the 37<sup>th</sup> best league in Europe, which drops it significantly below other northern countries' football leagues. Swedish Allsvenskan is ranked to be the 22<sup>nd</sup> best and Norwegian Elitserien is ranked as the 15<sup>th</sup> best football series in Europe. Veikkausliiga was founded in 1990 in its current form. Before its time the first division of Finland was called the Championship Series. (UEFA Country coefficients 2023.) The most

decorated Finnish football team is HJK (Helsingin Jalkapallo Klubi), who have won the championship 16 times during the lifetime of Veikkausliiga. The second most successful team in the history of Veikkausliiga is Valkeakosken Haka with five championships (Veikkausliiga statistics 2023). HJK also has a reputation of getting players good transfers away from Finland. Therefore, the logical step usually is getting a transfer to the capital of Finland after playing well elsewhere. This is not of course the only way as the football boom in Finland has been noticed in other countries as well.

The system and style of Veikkausliiga changed for the 2019 season (Veikkausliiga.com 2023). The series used to be played in a traditional way, where there is one league table, and everybody plays against each other a few times. This is still the series system in the most prominent leagues, like the English Premier League and the Spanish La Liga for example. For the 2019 season, the clubs decided to change the system together with the Finnish football association called Palloliitto, into a system where the league table is divided in half when the second half of the season begins. This generates a championship group and the lower group. The teams from each group only play against each other, which means that the last games of the season are not going to be the first versus the last. The Belgian Jupiler League and the Danish Superliga changed their series system into a similar kind of model a few years before Veikkausliiga, and it is safe to argue that Veikkausliiga looked at them and tried to achieve similar results in terms of general competition.

## **1.2 Economic aspects of football**

The vast expansion of TV coverage created an enormous rise in the value of broadcasting rights between 1996 and 2009 in the premier league (Richardson et al. 2012). During these 13 years, the broadcasting rights went from approximately 50 million euros to a bit above 950 million euros (Richardson et al. 2012). This figure has been passed a while ago as a 70 percent increase to the previously accounted sum has been reported in 2012 (Richardson et al. 2012). This has not only been the case in the Premier League, as the other top five leagues have got significant television rights contracts as well (Richardson et al. 2012). In 2022 the sum has risen to an astonishing 5.95 billion euros. Sanoma Media Finland has had the broadcasting rights of the Finnish league since 2015, and different media outlets have reported that the new contract that was made in 2022 is on at least until 2027. According to the reports (Ilta-Sanomat, Iltalehti, and Yle 2022) only two media companies were competing for the rights as MTV challenged Sanoma Media Finland. The lack of competition for broadcasting rights is concrete evidence of Veikkausliiga not having too much demand and



therefore it is understandable that there is not too much money to spread around. It can be perceived as a bit odd that the value of broadcasting rights is not publicly known in Finland.

The player budgets of the clubs indicate the amount of money that the clubs have to buy players and pay their salaries for the upcoming season. The single biggest transfer fees paid for one player go over 150 million euros which is 75 times the budget of the most decorated football team in Finland. Every team in Finland must announce its estimated budget before a season begins. However, most of these budgets are probably a bit more than announced, since they do not take changes happening in the middle of the season into account. Notably, ten teams increased their initial budget for the 2022 season. In addition to inflation, one enabling factor is the foundation of the Conference League. The CEO of HJK and the vice chairman of ECA (European Club Association) Aki Riihilahti announced that clubs that do not get any European games get at least 60 000 euros more than last year (Yle 2022). Conference League is the lowest division of European games, but it still has some big clubs competing for it. AS Roma winning it in 2022 is undeniable evidence of that. Clubs that do not get games in the glorious Champions League or Europa League, still get to experience international games, and gain a lot more money competing in the Conference League. The influence of the Conference League for smaller countries and leagues is significant and it enables the growth of multiple new footballing organizations.

HJK has the biggest transfer budget of all the Veikkausliiga teams, and it was estimated to be a bit over two million euros for the 2022 season (HJK). It rose by 300 000 euros from 2021 and this amount equals for almost the whole budget of VPS, who have the smallest budget in the first division of Finnish football (Suomifutis.com 2022). KUPS (Kuopion palloseura) has the second largest budget with 990 000 euros (Suomifutis.com 2022). Notably, the second largest budget differs from the biggest one with over one million euros. This statistic alone shows that the playing field in Finland is not level. Usually, one overpowered team can be disliked nationally, but this is not the case with HJK (Suomifutis.com 2022). Finnish football fans generally wish that it would succeed in European matches, as this would bring attention and money back to Finnish football. For example, AS Roma played twice against HJK in the autumn of 2022. “Finland has mainly been a transit country for many foreign players on their way to playing fields of a higher standard and higher pay. In the international division of labour, then, Finnish football functions as an educator of players” (Itkonen & Nevala, 2012, p. 580).

Darby et al. (2007, p. 143) writes in their article about football academies and the migration of African labor to Europe that: “The dramatic increase in the migration of African footballers to Europe in the last 10 years has given rise to a growing popular discourse that has invariably explained this process in terms of neocolonial

exploitation". Many other scholarly studies exist about the topic (Brackenridge et al. 2006, Armstrong 2004; Esson & Drywood 2018). There is an existing argument that the neocolonialist exploitation of bringing African players and young talent to play in Europe, significantly lowers the level of African football and therefore works as an obstacle to the development of the continent (Brackenridge et al. 2006; Darby et al. 2007; Esson & Drywood 2018). Therefore, it can be argued that football as a business has led to serious exploitation and to the development of a seriously problematic discourse (Darby et al. 2007). Esson & Drywood (2018) even describe human trafficking in football being modern slavery and that it is a poorly kept secret. Darby et al. (2007) note that cases of human trafficking in football do not only appear in Africa, but in other continents, like South America as well. Particularly concerning is the fact that most of the victims of such actions are minors. Footballing organizations try to save money in doing illegal business by trying to recruit talent from an early age. Fortunately, these issues have been getting much more attention in the last ten years, and FIFA has tried to come up with solutions to unethical business models. (Esson & Drywood 2018.) However, the solutions are problematic, and the governing organizations of football are known for their corruption and greed (Darby et al. 2007). Therefore, it can be argued that there is a lot of dirty money in football and that all parties do not benefit from it (Sahiba et al. 2019). The corruption rises from human's basic greed and football for some is all about making money. Especially in the US, economists argue that the meaning of professional sports is to create profit to the people that run it. (Leach & Symanski 2015.)

## 2 THE ROLE OF INTEGRATION AND ADAPTATION IN FOOTBALL

### 2.1 Integration

Blommaert & Verschueren (1998, p. 111) describe integration as a semantically vague term and how “integration or not being integrated defines the limits of the migrant debate”. An interesting approach to the to the concept of integration is that a beneficial migration would require a successful integration process, which means that if the migrant wants to fully enjoy the benefits of the new country, the government should see their integration process as successful (Blommaert & Verschueren 1998). This leads to the question of how can a government define a successful integration? Even though integration is being described as a condition of successful migration, it has no single accurate definition, and therefore the question is: “when is a migrant integrated?” (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998, p. 112). The word integration itself stands for bringing something inside, from the outside (Merriam-Webster 2023). Therefore, the condition of integration makes the migrant automatically someone from the outside, or someone who is seen as different and not belonging (Blommaert & Verschueren 1998). The words outsider or different have negative connotations and this way add negativity to the concept migrating (Kagan et al. 2017). “While outlining an integration policy is unmistakability and attempt to control the process, keeping the criteria undetermined guarantees that the majority cannot lose that control” (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998, p. 113). This observation highlights a common power dynamic in which those in the majority hold influence over the process of integration, which can potentially impede the autonomy, agency, and individualism of those who are perceived as outsiders or different. There is also a possibility that the pursuit of equality becomes a pursuit of similarity because integration, paradoxically,

emphasizes the inequalities (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998). Blommaert & Verschueren (1998, p. 113) also suggest that: “By proposing an integration policy, it is assumed that the target group is not yet integrated, ignoring that they have been part of the host society for a long time and that they have undergone various forms of adaptation”. Vitus & Jarlby (2022) discuss how integration policies try to develop the newcomers’ sense of civic responsibility and how opposing integration policies can damage the migration process severely. Different integration policies may arise as a result of various factors, such as a persistent trend towards policy restriction and heightened sanctions, or frequent alterations in policy and the proliferation of intricate legal frameworks (Vitus & Jarly 2022). It is no wonder that some human aspects are easily overlooked in this kind of climate. Integration policies are also described as inflexible by Vitus & Jarly (2022). Vitus & Jarly (2022) to argue that it has been observed that within the municipality, there exist divergent interpretations of the governing regulations among caseworkers. Such discrepancies pose significant obstacles to the creation and implementation of activities. Vitus & Jarly (2022) continue to write about the issues that different integration policies bring to the migrating person, and point out that from whatever perspective you look at integration, it is extremely problematic to measure and apply in practice. Therefore, it can be argued that there is no need to create strict integration rules into football.

Work-related mobility in the European Union has increased notably after employment restrictions were removed from multiple Eastern European countries. This has caused a high mobility rate of low-status employment because the employee is cheaper for the employer. The employee is also described to gain significant financial gain which is the main motive for many of the relocated workers (Lahti & Valo 2013). Kazlowska (2018) discusses how professional mobility still includes the same questions that regard other types of migration as well. People want to search for stability and security in the context of mobility. However, Kazlowska (2018) continues to write in their study that migrants are equipped with more mobile attitude compared to the government organizations. This basically means that in a mobile society, opportunities present themselves to people that are often aware of the necessary steps to take when relocating (Kazlowska 2018).

Fransisco et al. (2014) suggest that cohesion has been a utilized as a popular theoretical framework by football teams for some years. Cohesion as a construct means a dynamic process where a group needs to work towards a common objective (Fransisco et al. 2014). The two main points in utilizing this concretely are group integration and attraction to the group (Fransisco 2014). Group integration “refers to the degree to which the team acts as a whole” and attraction to the group “refers to how the group satisfies one’s personal needs and goals” (Fransisco et al., 2014, p. 261). When a new professional arrives to a group, they need to develop a perception of the team task

cohesion and social cohesion (Fransisco et al. 2014). Even though, the migration process of professional football players is quite similar in terms of issues to other migrating people, the integration into football team as a workplace differs from integrating into a new office job (Taylor 2006 & Fransisco et al. 2014). The environment in a professional football club is highly competitive as the players compete for a living. The career of a professional athlete also requires a lot of sacrifices and is extremely time-consuming (Richardson et al. 2012). It can be argued that these uncommon features of the workplace environment alter the integration and adaptation process.

Integration is an individual process and therefore, it is impossible to create a single guideline that suits everyone. However, a framework of what kind of integration and relocation activities are likely to help can be created. A previous experience of successful migration and integration can make the next experience easier (Richardson et al. 2012). If a tourist decides to visit Finland for a maximum of 90 days, they do not need a residence permit. However, a visa is required in most cases, excluding visa-free countries. After the 90 days, one needs a residence permit to live in Finland even if they were a tourist, family member, or a worker (Maahanmuuttovirasto 2023). Therefore, a professional athlete can come to Finland for a test period without having to do any paperwork. This is a feature that should be appreciated as it enables some professional players and clubs to feel out the atmosphere and if they are a right fit for each other.

“European nation-states increasingly expect from their incoming migrants that they integrate with the culture of the host country” (de Leeuw & van Wichelen, 2012, p. 1). Taylor (2006) adds to this by explaining that the migration of professional footballers brings up a lot of conversation and questions regarding politics, economics, national identity, citizenship, freedom of labor, and the exclusion or inclusion of immigrants as outsiders. Taylor (2006) argues that football migration should not be separated from normal trends and patterns of migration. The Finnish capital, Helsinki has created a website that offers migrants a lot of information and help with integrating into Finnish society. “All immigrants are entitled to receive basic information about Finland. Upon receiving a residence permit or registering your right to reside in the country, you are provided with written information concerning Finnish society and working life, your rights and obligations, and services that assist your integration” (infofinland.fi, 2023, p. 1). A migrant is entitled to receive an initial assessment, integration plan, and integration training when relocating to Finland. Also, the ministry of economic affairs and employment has created a welcome to Finland guide in 12 different languages (infofinland.fi 2023). Therefore, it can be argued that there is at least a large amount of information and services available to the migrating people. The state provides help and services to an immigrant without a job or a clear vision of their plans yet (Ministry of economic affairs and employment 2023). The migrating

professionals are expected to receive instructions and help from the facilities that they are integrating into in addition to the Finnish society. Working places can differ based on their field, economical side, and culture.

## 2.2 Adaptation

Adaptation refers to the ability of individuals or groups to adjust to a new environment or situation (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). Adaptation theories seek to explain how individuals or groups adjust to new situations, whether voluntarily or involuntarily (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). These theories attempt to describe the factors that influence the process of adaptation and the outcomes of that process. Adaptation theories have been applied to a wide range of contexts, including immigration, health, and organizational change (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). For example, in the context of immigration, adaptation theories have been used to explain how immigrants adjust to new cultures and societies, and how factors such as language, social support, and discrimination can impact the adaptation process.

One of the earliest adaptation theories is the ecological theory proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979 (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). This theory suggests that individuals are influenced by their immediate environment (microsystem), their family and social networks (mesosystem), their broader cultural and social context (macrosystem), and historical events and social change (chronosystem). According to this theory, individuals adapt to new environments by changing their behavior, beliefs, and attitudes in response to new environmental demands (Lazarus & Folkman 1984).

Another adaptation theory is the social cognitive theory, which emphasizes the role of cognitive processes in adaptation. This theory suggests that individuals learn by observing and imitating others, and that cognitive processes such as perception, memory, and reasoning play a key role in adaptation (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). Social cognitive theory also emphasizes the role of self-efficacy, or an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform a task or adapt to a new situation (Lazarus & Folkman 1984).

A more recent adaptation theory is the transactional model of stress and coping, proposed by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman in 1984 (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). This theory suggests that adaptation is a dynamic process that involves both the individual and their environment. According to this theory, individuals appraise their environment and the demands placed on them, and then use coping strategies to manage stress and adjust to the new situation (Lazarus & Folkman 1984).

Overall, adaptation theories provide a framework for understanding the complex process of adjusting to new situations. These theories highlight the importance of cognitive processes, social support, and environmental factors in shaping the adaptation process and outcomes (Lazarus & Folkman 1984).

Battochio et al. (2013) discuss different themes that can be utilized by the immigrants' teammates or coaches to help them integrate to new surroundings. These themes are a further adaptation of Fiske's (2004) pathways. The adapted themes are written with the idea of other people helping the migrant. The first theme is called fostered understanding. "Fostered understanding is a teammate or coach's attempt at contributing to the immigrated athlete's knowledge about the adaptation stressor and an exploration into effective response strategies" (Battochio et al., 2013, p. 105). Fostered understanding includes three sub-themes, language advice, language models, and integration advice.

Battochio et al. (2013) emphasize the role of the new language because it enables foreign players to communicate with people around them. If the player is not able to communicate with their new teammates or other people around the new club, arguably, the settling-in process becomes more difficult (Battochio et al. 2013). Therefore, it can be argued that not learning the new local language may have a negative impact on the player's performance on the pitch. Language advice from teammates or coaches becomes crucial, especially in the young players integration process. It must be mentioned that the migrating player can make up a lot by just showing the maximum amount of effort to integrate (Battochio et al. 2013). If the player shows that they really want to be in their new environment and succeed there, they will catch up on the important parts of the language and habits quickly enough. Battocchio et al. (2013) write about an example where a Japanese baseball player credits their teammate because they were actively trying to understand his bad English. These kinds of small acts of just listening to the migrant can be a start of a friendship and have a positive impact on their overall performance (Lahti & Valo 2013). Battocchio et al. (2013) also bring up the role of veterans as language conveyors, but this is only possible if the veteran is fluent in the new immigrants' language. "Coaches also gave advice to immigrated athletes so they would use the proper terms, sentences, and diction and avoid misunderstandings" (Battochio et al., 2013, p. 106). This suggests that the coach had focused more on professional lingo. Therefore, it can be argued that the coach was eager to convey their message to make the team perform better. It can also be stated that the coach's job becomes easier when everyone in the team understands the instructions at once in the main language.

Battochio et al. (2013) discuss how language models are pathways already discovered by teammates on how to learn a new language. Language models are therefore important because they create an example of language acquisition. It is also

emphasized how miscues and shattered sentences are an acceptable part of the learning process (Battochio et al. 2013). This, however, requires some persistence and bravery from the learner. The authors point out how there is always someone there who knows what it is like to learn a new language. Battocchio et al. (2013) and Lahti & Valo (2013) both make points in their studies that language adaptation can be bi-directional. This means that the locals are learning the newcomer's language as well. Both studies indicate that this was meaningful to the immigrant, and they appreciated the matter. Richardson et al. (2012) point out that an agent provided a young player who migrated from Portugal to England with lots of language advice. Therefore, it can be argued that language models can be provided by multiple different sources.

"Integration advice refers to suggestions offered about how to forge relationships with teammates, and more broadly, how to function in a new city" (Battochio et al., 2013, p. 106). Integration advice can come from anyone that knows something about the city where the player is moving, and they do not have to live in that specific place at the time. For example, as Battocchio et al. (2013) point out, it is common for the transferring player to ask about the new country and city from players that have played there at some point in their career.

The goal of integration advice is to help new players to open dialogue within their team since this can lead to friendships and the widening of the newcomer's social network. This also works as a buffer against loneliness and alienation (Battochio et al. 2013). In addition to teammates offering integration advice, coaches and managers can also be influential, even though this is less common according to Battocchio et al. (2013). The role of food can also be influential in immigrant players' integration. For example, integration advice can include information on how to navigate in the new city, where to access the tastes of migrated players' country of origin, and other restaurants that they might like (Battochio et al. 2013).

The second theme that Battocchio et al. (2013) suggest, is fostered control. "Fostered control is a teammate or coach's effort to build the immigrated professional athlete's confidence immediately post-relocation" (Battochio et al., 2013, p. 107). Fostered control can be practiced through language reinforcement and integration reinforcement. Language reinforcement refers to teammate's or coach's support that increases the willingness to speak in a new language (Battochio et al. 2013). If the newcomer is supported and encouraged in their language output, they arguably feel more comfortable expressing themselves. For example, this can happen through compliments and efforts to listen and teach rather than speaking over or correcting the migrated player all the time (Battochio et al. 2013). These positive ways of language reinforcement make the immigrant athlete believe that they are moving towards language acquisition and strengthen their overall confidence (Battochio et al 2013). Therefore, it can be



stated that the goal of language reinforcement is to reinforce the immigrated players' language efforts as they move toward proficiency (Battochio et al. 2013).

Integration reinforcement consists of words of encouragement that help the immigrated players immediate post-relocation process (Battochio et al. 2013). "A sense of control spurred by teammates or coaching staff encouragement is tantamount to relieving doubts about cultural integration attempts" (Battochio et al., 2013, p. 108). Battocchio et al. (2013) discuss team dynamics as a part of this by pointing out that meaningful conversations within the team create a sense of togetherness. It can be argued that if the chemistry and dynamics between the teammates are at a high level, they perform better while competing. Integrating to new environments outside of the sport has an impact on the overall integration process and migrating players can often struggle to feel comfortable in new surroundings (Battochio et al. 2013). Therefore, the impact of reassuring words can be calming (Battochio et al. 2013).

Fostered belonging is the third theme discussed in ways to help new players' integration process. Fostered belonging includes two sub-themes that are shared cultural background and cultural appreciation from a sports team. "Belonging is the sense of affiliation with the sport context among two or more team members (teammates, coaches) with at least one being a newcomer" (Battochio et al., 2013, p. 108).

One hypothesis of Schinke et al. (2011) is that migrated players often make friends easier with other migrated players than with native players. This is partly due to the fact that they are in a way in the same boat by possibly possessing the same issues and fears like the language barrier. Therefore, it can be argued that it is easier to relate to each other since they automatically have a grasping point. This matter is discussed further via the questionnaire and the results it presented. Shared cultural background is about making friends with other immigrated teammates where at least one is a newcomer (Battochio et al. 2013). Battocchio et al. (2013) suggest that friendships between migrated players are created through shared humor, values, experiences, and in some cases, shared domicile. These commonalities between the migrated players work as an easy opener in conversations. It is also argued that a new immigrated player can become friends with immigrated veterans through common experiences (Battochio et al. 2013). Belonging between migrated players is sometimes extended beyond socializing to shared accommodation which often leads to an even stronger bond between the participants. "Though a sense of belonging to the team and its members illustrates collegiality in the sport context, it seems to extend to a sharing of assimilation pathways among immigrant teammates" (Battochio et al., 2013, p. 109)"

Cultural appreciation from a sports team refers to the action that is taken by the team to integrate the freshly migrated player (Battochio et al. 2013). Schinke et al. (2011) argue that unfamiliarity with social norms and values can pose a threat to the newcomer and therefore the role of just acknowledging one's cultural background

becomes important. An important addition to this theme could be its widening to include the actions taken by the organization to help the newcomers' migration and integration process. As this section of the study has already pointed out, there are multiple factors to the migration and integration process of a foreign player. Therefore, it is important to remember the meaning of individuality and that different persons have different needs. Hence, the matter should be approached individually with a human touch. This emphasizes the role and responsibility that clubs have in bringing in foreign players. In addition, it must be added that the player also has a big responsibility because it is about their career and life, as relocating to a different country and culture is never a minor life event. To make this shared responsibility easier to comprehend and that way create an environment for the players to fulfill their potential, some guidelines should be added. These guidelines would make sure that nobody would be left alone and that a certain quality of life is guaranteed to the player who is relocating. Battochio et al. (2013) discuss that many teams have taken steps forward on an international scale to help their new players to settle down. However, this material only involves major North American sports competitions and therefore the statement above cannot necessarily be reflected to smaller teams with less money and international experience. Arguably these kinds of matters are well taken care of in organizations around the world that have the budget to pay tens or hundreds of millions for a player's services. This master's thesis tries to examine what much poorer and internationally inexperienced Finnish first-division clubs could do better to help their new signings integration process and therefore, the concept of cultural appreciation is regarded to be important.

One feature that an organization should take into consideration to ease the integration, is food (Battochio et al. (2013). Battocchio et al. (2013) findings projected that if the organization's training center offers Japanese baseball players Japanese food, it makes the player happier and therefore the cultural gap does not feel too big. This finding proceeds the author to ponder whether a wide variety of international foods boosts openness and creates positive affiliations to cultural diversity within the team (Battochio et al. 2013). Arguably, original food and different diets influence at least some players' integration process. Schinke et al. (2011) suggest that limited access to a familiar diet can even develop a feeling of loneliness in the first phases of the relocation. The budget of Finnish football clubs and the state of their facilities create doubt on whether it is being practiced in Finland. Most football organizations even in lower-level leagues have cooperation deals with a few restaurants where the players eat, rather than having the funds or facilities to have cooks in the training center. The fact that a Japanese player from HJK who has been voted the best player in Veikkausliiga has said in an interview that he eats in a local sushi bar every day creates some validation to this argument (Helsingin Sanomat 2015).

Another example of actions that an organization can make is recruitment strategy (Battochio et al. 2013). Battocchio et al. (2013) argue through various examples from the NHL (National Hockey League located in the North American continent) that teams have recruited highly recognized, immigrated veterans that have the same country of origin as a future star that is a foreign newcomer, and this has acted as a boost in the integration process for the newcomer. "Through these recruitment efforts, coaches fostered a sense of ease among their young, immigrated athletes that supported assimilation into the sport context and the prevailing culture" (Battochio et al., 2013, p. 109).

The last theme that Battocchio et al. (2013) discuss through is trust. This theme has been unraveled into two different sub-themes that are inclusive reputation of the team and inclusive reputation through teammates (Battochio et al. 2013). "Trust refers to the faith bestowed upon teammates and coaches to help overcome immediate post-relocation stress" (Battochio et al., 2013, p. 109-110). There are multiple ways one can feel or gain trust and many coaches and teammates also show trust differently, based on their working style. Therefore, it is important to add context to the kind of trust that a newcomer needs.

Organizations can be become known for creating a safe space and a better environment for immigrated athletes' and this is what inclusive reputation of the team refers to (Battochio et al. 2013). The culture within the club and money issues arguably plays a big part in this matter. Battocchio et al. (2013) explain that the teams try to alleviate the immediate post-relocation stress and the best way to do this is to prepare as well as you can for the arrival of the newcomer. One significant action taken by American Baseball clubs was to recruit multiple players from the same country. This phenomenon has created a reputation for some clubs to be more welcoming of some cultural groups (Battochio et al. 2013). This reputation is formed through conversations between the athletes and media presentations (Battochio et al. 2013). Newspapers and websites have their own agenda and in the era of clickbait and misinformation, the featured articles can create a negative or positive image of an organization. The image of the club can affect some players decision-making process as Richardson et al. (2012) point out. Battocchio et al. (2013) suggest that joining an organization that is known for working with migrated players integration and cultural adaptation processes is a more tempting destination for migrated players. This positive image gives the players assurance that the club is intently willing to work towards an easier adaptation period (Battochio et al. 2013). Some clubs can treat players in ways that leave a negative image of them. Richardson et al. (2012) discuss this through an example where a young player was invited to a test period multiple times, but the club still ended up stalling with the contract offer. The uncertainty was described as agonizing and therefore the club didn't leave a good and humane experience about itself for the player

(Richardson et al. 2012). Perhaps this matter could've been approached with a bit more humane touch. It is understandable that the club needs to be sure before investing money to the player, but honesty could've provided the player with more information and perhaps with even more motivation. The migration and integration processes of professional football players are highly complex and individualized experiences, and it is important to recognize that each player brings a unique set of skills, values, and perspectives to the process (Richardson et al. 2012). For instance, some players may feel more comfortable adapting to new environments and may be more willing to fight for their place on the team, while others may struggle with the adjustment and may not feel motivated to assert themselves even if they possess great talent (Richardson et al. 2012). Therefore, it is crucial for practitioners and stakeholders in the field to take a nuanced and individualized approach to supporting players in their integration process, taking into account their unique backgrounds, personalities, and needs. By doing so, we can help maximize the potential of each player and foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for all (Shinke et al. 2011, Richardson et al. 2012). However, the competition is fierce, and everyone should earn their place as there is always going to be someone who is willing to put all on the line of succeeding.

"Inclusive reputation through immigrated veterans refers to the reputation that the teams have earned as a result of established immigrated players and their efforts to accommodate newcomers" (Battochio et al., 2013, p. 110). On this sub-theme, Battocchio et al. (2013) emphasize the role of immigrated veterans and the fact that players are engaging more with each other than with other personnel at the organization. Clubs that have a culturally inclusive image, are also known to have inclusive players (Battochio et al. 2013). Inclusive teammates possess qualities that work as bridges between the newcomer and the rest of the team. Battocchio et al. (2013) suggest that the most important qualities to have, are possessing first-hand knowledge about post-relocation stress and having a valuable status for the team. It is also argued by Battocchio et al. (2013) that organizations should instruct their veterans to assist newcomers in addition to creating a positive reputation regarding the integration of newcomers. A personal level of engagement from other teammates and club staff is mentioned to be a decisive factor in some players' decision to migrate (Richardson et al. 2012).

Even though this theme is not discussed in Battocchio et al. (2013) article, it is part of Fiske's (2004) adaptation pathways and is an important addition to complete the typology of how to help the professional player to migrate. Self-enhancement must be embraced in this study because it plays a significant part in making the whole relocation process successful. "Re-location requires the garnering of new skills, be those skills a new language or new cultural practices, with both aspects facilitative of the athlete fitting in" (Schinke et al., 2011, p. 19). The previously discussed themes all include a factor of self-enhancement.

For a player who is adjusting to a new environment, understanding the cultural practices, community, and how it works makes the whole integration more easily approachable. The structures and processes of the new club and league are also important to understand, as the newcomer must adapt to those as well. The understanding of oneself is a breaking point in many migrated players' careers (Schinke et al. 2011). The newcomer needs to understand that the migration and integration processes take time as well as patience. Missteps and struggles are a normal part of the adjusting period and many young players that are relocating do not understand this when moving into a new country (Schinke et al. 2011). Schinke et al. (2011) suggest that that the immigrated athletes' cultural customs can be shared and practiced within the new organization in order to increase their understanding of others.

The feeling of belonging somewhere usually takes time and effort. Belonging can be enhanced especially by teammates or coaches, but the athlete is also responsible for that themselves. Schinke et al. (2011) suggest that the immigrated athlete must push to engage with others even if it brings discomfort or fear. A quote from Lahti & Valo (2013, p. 6) creates some validity to this argument: "When asked for advice on how to adapt to life in Finland, a Polish respondent says: Be active or else homesickness will hit you even harder ". When athletes experience loneliness immediately after relocating, it is often because they do not have any kind of social connections even though the facilities to make those are there in the form of training facilities and other establishments of the club (Schinke et al. 2011).

Schinke et al. (2011) suggest that newcomers should engage with the new community and its people even if the cultural assimilation feels insurmountable at times. That refers to the players' ability to control their actions at times when they are feeling down. Overall, the integration process is going to take time and it should be treated as a process. The athlete should understand that learning is not going to happen all at once (Schinke et al. 2011). Schinke et al. (2011) predict that there are going to be a lot of sport science people and psychological coaches working with immigrated professional athletes rather soon.

## **2.3 Challenges**

Adaptation can be a complex and multifaceted process that presents a range of challenges for individuals and communities alike (Norris et al. 2008). These challenges can be both external and internal, encompassing factors such as the availability of resources, social and cultural norms, and individual psychological factors (Norris et al. 2008). Research has identified a number of key challenges to successful adaptation,

including the need for effective communication, the ability to access and utilize resources, the need for social support, and the importance of maintaining a sense of personal agency and control (Norris et al. 2008).

The challenges of adaptation can be viewed through various adaptation theories. One such theory is the Ecological Systems Theory, which suggests that individuals' ability to adapt is influenced by a range of factors within their environment, such as the social and cultural contexts in which they live (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Another theory is the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which proposes that adaptation involves a process of continual interaction between the individual and their environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Both of these theories highlight the importance of considering not only individual factors but also the larger social and cultural contexts in which individuals are situated when attempting to understand the challenges of adaptation. For example, when considering the adaptation challenges faced by refugees, it is essential to consider not only individual factors such as trauma and language barriers but also the broader political and social contexts that shape their experiences of displacement and resettlement (Silove et al. 2017). Furthermore, other factors such as discrimination, marginalization, and stigmatization can also impact an individual's ability to adapt to a new environment (Ungar, 2012). Thus, it is crucial to understand and address these systemic issues in addition to individual factors when working to support individuals' adaptation.

Nowadays there are multiple professional athletes throughout various sports that have decided to relocate to a different country to practice their profession. Some athletes even make the transition in a very early stage by becoming international student-athletes that pursue an academic degree at the same time (Schinke et al. 2011). "The experiences of adaptation or acculturation to a new environment, lifestyle problems, and dislocation of these players illustrates the complexity of migration, and the psychological consequences that players may accrue in return for success in soccer" (Richardson et al., 2012, p. 1607). All these professional athletes have experienced unique migration and integration processes. Multiple emotional and physical factors can have an effect on the athlete's decision to migrate and how the process unfolds. Richardson et al. (2012) emphasize that the stage and nature of a player's career should be recognized, as it will undoubtedly influence the migrants' ability to integrate. Therefore, it is extremely difficult to know in beforehand if the athlete is able to fulfill their potential in the new environment. Individualism should therefore be emphasized and rather than suggesting a strict integration plan, a general framework with room for leniency could prove more useful. Immigrant professional athletes face several challenges in their transition and adjustment after the relocation process (Schinke et al. 2011). Schinke et al. (2011) point out that there is very little research made about

the challenges that professional athletes encounter after migrating. Therefore, it can be argued that there is a clear niche for this thesis as well.

Schinke et al. (2011) suggest multiple different issues that may occur in the athlete's adaptation process. All of these difficulties can have an effect on the newcomers' concentration, feeling of self-worth, and persona. Schinke et al.'s (2011) study covers different challenges that migrated athletes' face in their relocation. The issues Schinke et al. (2011) present are similar in many ways to the issues discussed by scholars who have studied integration and adaptation, such as: Lazarus & Folkman (1984), Silove et al. (2017), Norris et al. (2008) and Bronfenbrenner (1979). Each of the scholars mentioned have studied integration from a theoretical and practical perspective. Taylor (2006) suggested that football related migration shouldn't be treated differently and the fact that the issues are mostly universal, rather than experienced only by professional athletes creates validation around Taylors argument. The main issues suggested by Schinke et al. (2013) are listed below:

1. Language barriers: Athletes who move to a new country may struggle to communicate with others, which can make it difficult to establish relationships and build support networks. It also adds emphasis to the players' non-verbal skills. "We believe that language is the most critical aspect among the communication processes, not only for athletes who seek to learn an entirely new language, but also for those who use the same language, though with terms varying in meaning as a result of where they were born" (Schinke et al., 2011, p. 14)
2. Cultural differences: Athletes may experience difficulties adjusting to the new culture in their host country, which can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness (Schinket et al. 2011).
3. Homesickness: Being away from friends, family, and familiar surroundings can lead to feelings of homesickness and nostalgia (Schinke et al. 2011).
4. Adjusting to new surroundings: Athletes may need time to adjust to new living arrangements, weather, food, and other aspects of life in their host country (Schinke et al. 2011).
5. Adjusting to a different playing style: Immigrated athletes may need to adjust to different playing styles and rules in their new environment (Schinke et al. 2011).

6. Acclimating to new teammates and coaches: Joining a new team can be challenging, and athletes need to build relationships with new teammates and coaches (Schinke et al. 2011).
7. Social engagements: The challenges posed by unfamiliarity with social norms and ways of behaviour, for example, the sense of personal space. "People from different cultures socialize and party in very different ways" (Schinke et al., 2011, p. 14).

Richardson et al. (2012) point out that all of these difficulties can be perceived as worthwhile if the end result is going to be positive. In order to mitigate these challenges, many professional athletes rely on support networks during the post-relocation adaptation period. This support can come from various sources, including family members, friends, other athletes, agents, team or organization, mental health professionals, and other members of the local community (Battochio et al. 2013). Schinke et al. (2011) write that most migrated athletes have spoken about loneliness and that they express the need of family, friends, and their old community around them. Some athletes never overcome their loneliness, but often athletes that choose to migrate already know that they are going to experience such feelings and face some difficulties (Schinke et al. 2011). This acceptance or at least toleration of the process shows that the athlete has mental strength and faith in themselves.

Family members are often the primary source of support for professional athletes. They can provide emotional support, help with day-to-day needs, and offer a familiar connection to home (Schinke et al. 2011). Richardson et al. (2012) discuss that all the players that participated in their study reported that their family is the most important source of emotional and social support. Family members help especially with the important dealing of negative feelings (Schinke et al. 2011). Emotional and social support are critical in helping the player navigate through their own migration and integration process (Richardson et al. 2012). Having friends in their new environment can help professional athletes feel more connected and ease negative feelings like loneliness. Schinke et al. (2011) suggest that the development of information technology has made connecting with people from the athletes' country of origin a lot easier. Therefore, social media applications also play a part in professional athletes' migration process (Schinke et al. 2011). Players often migrate without their parents and family and therefore it is crucial to understand how migrated players cope and where do they get the support from (Richardson et al. 2012). In some cases, it is possible that ties to players country of origin might impede the player from developing a new skillset, values and norms that are required to succeed in the in the new environment. Though this notion can only happen when there is not too much contact with people from the new social



surroundings (Schinke et al. 2011). Schinke et al. (2011) emphasize the importance of the newcomers' own efforts on socializing and being aware of any possible issues.

Professional athletes may be able to connect with others who have faced similar challenges, such as language barriers and cultural differences (Battochio et al. 2013). Therefore, it can be argued that migrated footballers make friends easier with other migrants on their team. This claim was considered when planning the questions for the online questionnaire. Football being a transient sport, it is possible that deep meaningful friendships can be hard to make, as friendships require long-term nurturing to flourish (Richardson et al. 2012). Schinke et al. (2011) argue through examples that some people clearly benefit from acquainting themselves with other people from similar backgrounds. Help and social support from peers is being described as an essential component right after the relocation when the newcomer is still experiencing their initial reaction to everything new (Schinke et al. 2011). Richardson et al. (2012) discuss a player that felt they have no one they could trust inside the new club and in the end, this player relocated quickly back to their home country. The lack of support networks and the players' own efforts in migration were the decisive factors in their failure to integrate into the new surroundings (Richardson et al. 2012). It can be argued that if there would have been a framework from where to check the signs of players' well-being, the results could have been different. This considers a club from the Premier League, so financial deprivation is not an argument for missing the cues of a player being unsettled.

Teams and organizations may provide support in the form of language classes, cultural training, and by providing other resources to help athletes adjust to their new surroundings (Battochio et al. 2013). An individual has their own role in every group and when they become part of something new, they quickly need to find out their role and part in the new squad. In addition to the social role, a new athletic role also needs to be acquired (Schinke et al. 2011). Richardson et al. (2012) argue that even though the significance of the family should not be underestimated, it is possible that at some point the team coach can become a more meaningful character regarding the integration process. This is especially notable among young football migrants, as they often feel the need to have an older authority in their life (Richardson et al. 2012). A coaching style and philosophy also influence how the player experiences their new professional environment (Richardson et al. 2012). It is not entirely unusual that the club makes an acquisition to the team without consulting the coach and there is always a possibility that the player doesn't fit into the coach's style of play at all. Richardson et al. (2012) emphasize that if the tempo of the game is quicker than what the migrating player is used to, they might experience severe difficulties in adapting to the new league.

The role of the agent has received little attention in past literature (Richardson et al. 2012). It should be noted that most players have an agent and that a lot of trust is

placed in their guidance. The increasing presence of agents has only been emphasized during the inflation of the transfer market, and they usually receive enormous fees for conducting the transfers. For example, the English Premier League alone spent almost 300 million euros solely on agent fees during the 21/22 season. Agents work as facilitators and negotiators between the player and the interested club and in order to practice their profession, they must be registered with FIFA. Richardson et al. (2012) argue that much more attention should be placed on the agents' social and psychological capabilities rather than only focusing on the financials. Because players are often highly dependent on their agents, they have become a part of the players' support network (Richardson et al. 2012). It is common to see the player and agent spending a lot of time together, especially if the player is on verge of moving or they are considered to be a superstar. A famous agent called Mino Raiola was commonly known to be very good friends with his clients that possessed a high status. An ethical question must be raised as well, as there has been public discussion on if some agents want to move their clients around just to get paid more often. In these kinds of situations, it can be argued that the player is poorly advised and that their personal rights are violated.

Mental health professionals can help athletes manage the stress and anxiety that come with moving to a new country and adjusting to a new environment. The help of mental health professionals or psychological coaches is often utilized by football clubs that have the necessary resources to hire specific staff for these positions. In Finland, HJK, SJK (Seinäjoen jalkapalloklubi) and KUPS are the only teams with enough money to hire such professionals to help their players. Overall, support networks can play a crucial role in helping professional athletes overcome the challenges of post-relocation adaptation and thrive in their new environment. It's important for athletes to actively seek out and build these networks in order to gain the resources they need to succeed.

## 3 MOBILITY IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

### 3.1 Intercultural relationships

Lahti & Valo (2013) studied intercultural relationships of Polish migrant workers in Finland. “We investigate how temporary migrant workers, and their foreign colleagues perceive developing interpersonal relationships with each other through an analysis of in-depth interviews with employees of a Finnish recruitment agency and Polish metal workers it has recruited” (Lahti & Valo, 2013, p. 1). Both sides of the study describe their relationship with each other. The study also gives important insight into the development phase of intercultural relationships while analyzing the motives to engage or to stay distant from intercultural communication in the workplace.

Lahti & Valo (2013) discuss how some workplaces are seen as contemporary and therefore, they are characterized by short employment periods. The idea of not being in one place for a long time may influence how individuals approach the workplace environment and how important the forming of new relationships becomes (Lahti & Valo 2013). The short-term employment model can be identified in the world of football as well. Many players agree transfers to smaller clubs so that they can build positive momentum for their career. This can arguably be applied to Finnish football on a bigger scale because it is not highly regarded globally even though it has had a lot of growth in the last few years. This growth is mostly due to the successful transfers of players, like Alfredo Morelos, who moved played in Finland for a year (Transfermarkt 2023) and got a big move to Glasgow Rangers where he has done incredibly well.

An interpersonal relationship is a continuing behavioral process that lives and evolves through communication. Interpersonal relationships also involve repeated

interactions. (Lahti & Valo 2013). This suggestion highlights the fact that one of the most important aspects of integrating to a new socio-cultural environment is communication. "Workplace relationships are interpersonal relationships that individuals engage in when doing their job, such as peer co-worker, subordinate-supervisor or customer-client relationships" (Lahti & Valo, 2013, p. 2). The authors also suggest that these relationships are imposed, which means that one cannot choose their own boss or other people in the workplace. You can reflect these statements to the everyday life of a football club, especially from a players' perspective. One has to work with people they do not necessarily like, but they are willing to work together towards a common objective, which is winning as many matches as you can. On the other hand, a lot of great friendships are formed in a locker room. Therefore, it can be stated that workplace relationships often evolve beyond the bare minimum that is required to get through the task (Lahti & Valo 2013).

Lahti & Valo (2013) introduce a typology of workplace relationships that has been conducted by Kramm & Isabella in 1985. Even though the typology is quite old, it can be easily applied to any working environment due to its convertibility. The typology includes three different stages of a workplace relationship: Information collegial and special. "Information relationships entail sharing organization- and work-related information while providing little emotional support and are characterized by low levels of self-disclosure and trust" (Lahti & Valo, 2013, p. 2). A collegial relationship includes a more familiar approach between the participants as they discuss about more than just work-related issues. The people in a collegial relationship also receive support and validation of self-worth from each other (Kramm & Isabella 1985). The special relationship is a friendship where people trust each other and are therefore able to express themselves freely. A special relationship between two friends also includes an emotional connection (Kramm & Isabella 1985). This typology will be visited in the conclusion section of this study and is therefore an important source of understanding intercultural and interpersonal relationships.

Lahti & Valo (2013) discuss the importance of language tools in their findings. The lack of common ways to communicate created a phenomenon where people avoided intercultural communication and each other in order to avoid difficult and unnecessary interactions. "Not sharing a common language to exchange personal information in is identified as the greatest obstacle in developing intercultural relationships at work" (Lahti & Valo, 2013, p. 5). The Polish workers even said that the possible interactions with their Finnish colleagues are embarrassing and stressful (Lahti & Valo 2013). Based on this one could argue that the recruitment agency that has hired the Polish workers are not providing enough elements for them to even try to manage their time in Finland. This creates a negative image towards migration into Finland amongst the Polish workers. English-speaking participants reported that the topic of

the discussions doesn't vary too much (Lahti & Valo 2013). The authors suggest that people are not comfortable talking in their second language and this limits their efforts of communicating with foreign workers, even though they would have the possibility to do so (Lahti & Valo 2013). However, Lahti & Valo (2013) suggest that people are motivated to practice nonverbal communication and other symbolic ways to show liking, respect, and emotional support.

"Migrant workers may not feel inclined to develop closer ties with host culture members either, one reason for that being the formation of cultural cliques" (Lahti & Valo, 2013, p. 6). The formation of these subcultural groups within a workplace can have several impacts. It usually separates the people even further that are not able to communicate with each other in the first place. When applied to the context of team sports, these cliques can be the factoring cause of a toxic environment. Cliques in the dressing room can break the team apart and a group of individuals are arguably not going to perform as well as a united team. Prejudice against people from other cultures can work as creation of cliques as well (Lahti & Valo 2013). Lahti & Valo (2013) discuss that some of the Polish migrants complained about the fact that some Finns were extremely prejudiced against them.

Lahti & Valo (2013) emphasize that the development of interpersonal workplace relationships is an important factor in making someone else feel at home in different cultural surroundings. Language learning and improving trust between co-workers can be considered pivotal when integrating to another culture (Lahti & Valo 2013). Lahti & Valo (2013) also discuss about the controlling organization and based on their findings, the organization can help the migrants integrate more easily by providing them with cultural and linguistic knowledge, as well, as emotional support.

The goal of Ariss et al. (2012, p. 92) was to "question the central assumptions in the management and organizational literature regarding the topic of international mobility" and to create a theoretical and methodological framework for future studies of the subject. "In most advanced and high potential economies, there are reports of increasing need for skilled migrants" (Ariss et al., 2012, p. 93). This can be applied to sports as well because the level of Finnish football can arguably be improved a lot. Even though it is the most played team sport in Finland according to statistics (Tilastokeskus 2023). Ariss et al. (2012) also point out that there is a significant gap in knowledge about the effective management of international diversity at work. This argument suggests that there has not been too much academic information about intercultural competence and diversity in workplace in 2012.

Ariss et al. (2012) suggest three different types of terms to describe international mobility, which are corporate expatriation, self-initiated expatriation, and migration. People who are assigned to an international position and travel on work-related matters are described as corporate expatriates. The corporate expatriates share the

responsibility of their career with the organization and their career is considered to be an organizational process (Ariss et al. 2012). Self-initiated expatriates travel because they have chosen to do so. Therefore, their career becomes their own responsibility (Ariss et al. 2012). The authors suggest that the difference between a migrant and a self-initiated expatriate is not clear (Ariss et al. 2012). The distinction of the words seems to appear in the linguistic connotations when different ethnicities or racial lines are discussed and Ariss et al. (2012) also suggest that migrants do not have the same possibilities to advance in their career as they can be oppressed and discriminated. Unfortunately, according to studies, Finland is among the most racist countries in Europe (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018).

Richardson et al. (2012) have examined different psycho-social challenges that young players can face after relocating to a different country. The study also investigates how the unique culture of English professional football affects the player's ability to cope and adjust into being at the top of the football pyramid (Richardson et al. 2012). This notion is important to take into account since presumably Finnish culture and sub-cultures have an effect on the newcomers' migration and integration process. Richardson et al. (2012) mention that the person conducting the study was chosen to interview the target group since they had experienced a migratory transition from one culture to another. It may have no effect on the process at all, but it provides a shared experience and therefore the participants can feel more comfortable. Even though this thesis was made through a questionnaire rather than conducting interviews, the experience of migratory transition brings the researcher closer to the subject.

## **3.2 Transfers**

The Bosman case in 1990 changed the mobility possibilities of football players (Parrish & Mcardle 2010). A formerly unknown player from Belgium, Jean-Marc Bosman started a legal battle in order to transfer internationally as his club didn't fulfill the contract and he was left with little to no choice if he wanted to continue playing. This case gathered a global audience, and a lot of new legislations were made in order to make international transfers possible across multiple sports (Magee & Sudgen 2002). Even though the Bosman case started in 1990, the initial ruling from the EU court came in 1995. The decision from the court created the Bosman ruling, which means that players are able to move to a new club after their old contract has ended without the player's old club receiving a transfer fee (Parrish & Mcardle 2010). Nowadays players can even agree a pre-contract with another club when they enter the last six months

of their current contract. Due to the Bosman ruling, the transfer market has risen to be a global competition field.

Elite labor migration has become an established feature of the footballing world (Maguire et al. 1998). The market has experienced significant growth and inflation after Maguire and Steads' study in 1998. The players can move within nations and continents in addition to transitioning into a different city in a specific country (Richardson et al. 2012). Littlewood et al. (2011) mention that previous literature about football labor migration has identified that the primary destination of top players is Europe, with English Premier League, Italian Serie A, French Ligue 1, German Bundesliga, and the Spanish La Liga commonly known as the best five leagues in the world. European clubs have reshaped their recruitment strategies many times during the post-Bosman era (Richardson et al. 2012). The initial motive was to buy more experienced and accomplished players that are a "ready product" and can affect the game immediately, but lately, the market has become so inflated, that only a small number of clubs can afford to buy world-class players (Richardson et al. 2012). This has turned the attention to academies that in the best-case scenario can offer a top player to the club without a transfer fee. Richardson et al. (2012) argue that the increased movement of foreign players can be associated with the stifling of young player's progression in donor and host countries. This means that young players are experiencing difficulties to get chances in the first team as their places are being held by people that have migrated. The developed and rich countries football-wise tend to exploit the poorer countries that have invested into the production phase of talented players (Richardson et al. 2012). This can be a two-sided coin though, especially in the case of Veikkausliiga. If a talented player migrates immediately after reaching maturity, the level of quality decreases in the team and league. When the talented player leaves, it can bring a hefty transfer fee to the parent club and this money can help them build a competitive team for a few years. Therefore, it can be argued that the lack of money in Veikkausliiga is evident. However, young talented Finns have completed a lot more transfers in recent years compared to ten years ago, so in hindsight, Veikkausliiga has arguably grown in some sense.

"The possible (detrimental) social, physical, and psychological consequences associated with early migration have raised concerns for UEFA" (Richardson et al., 2012, p. 1607). UEFA implanted a rule about home-grown players in July 2004 (Richardson et al. 2012). The home-grown player rule is a result of a campaign called "level the playing field". The intention of the rule is to promote the development of home-grown talent in European clubs and what it means in action is that at least a certain percentage of players must be originated from the country of the club. Every country's football association imposed its own limits to the rule, and it resulted in clubs trying to recruit talent from an even younger age (Richardson et al. 2012). This can be seen as

unethical in multiple different ways. Firstly, there is absolutely no guarantee that a player reaches their respective potential even though they can be regarded as the most promising talent in football. Secondly, the question of when a player's services can be bought rises. A child should be guaranteed a healthy and safe environment to grow and therefore, all the governing football organizations have created rules that a player under a certain age limit cannot be bought. However, this has not stopped the richest clubs from grooming young talents from an early age. Thirdly, it can damage the host country in different ways by decreasing the level of quality that is garnered and therefore bringing a lot less money in. Therefore, UEFA introduced a rule that concerns buying players under the age of 18 (Richardson et al. 2012). Even though clubs cannot buy players under the age of 18, European Union has a legislation that allows freedom of movement for workers inside the EU, and therefore, a lot of young talented players just "switch" their football academies. This has also created a phenomenon called "club shopping". Clubs with the most money try to secure the signings of the most talented youngsters. It has even gotten to a point where a team called Manchester City had to be fined for signing minors in 2019 (Marca 2019). In 2022 a new investigation started about them pressuring underaged players to sign contracts (Der Spiegel 2022). Even though the grooming of young talents can be considered as unethical, and in some cases, illegal, the top clubs are attractive because of their history and legacy. Who would not want to play for Real Madrid or Barcelona?

The hypothesis being that all clubs that are bringing players in from around the world wish that the player is going to be a reinforcement to the team. The cost of signing a player varies depending on the circumstances. A player can sign into a new club as a free agent or from another organization. A player is called a free agent when they are currently not under contract with any club. If a player is bought from another club, the transfer usually includes a fee to the club where the player is leaving from. In addition to the transfer fee, the deal can often include a sell-on clause or other so-called add-ons. A sell-on-clause is usually a percentage of the player's transfer fee and it goes to the club where the player moved to the club that is now selling them forward. Add-ons are usually bonuses that are activated if the player or the club achieves a certain goal. For example, it can be agreed that if the transferred player plays in fifteen matches or scores 10 goals, the selling club would then receive the add-on, in addition to the original transfer fee. Nowadays the deals are as much accounting as reason since the rich clubs are always finding new loopholes in how to spend more money. One could draw a comparison to the class differences growing outside of sports as well.



### 3.3 Motives

Richardson et al. (2012) argue that even though economics is a crucial factor in picking up the destinations where players migrate, politics, history, geography, and culture play a part in the decision-making as well. Players' reputation tends to grow nationally and internationally based on their performances. As the reputation grows, the player may start to attract interest from different countries, and this is when the seed of migration is planted into the players' mind (Richardson et al. 2012). Maguire (1999) created a typology concerning football related migration that included three different kinds of categories a player can fit. Later on, Magee (2002) added three new categories to the typology to develop it a bit further. These categories will be discussed further in this chapter. Even though the context of the typology is from the late 90s it can still be adjusted to today's context, but it is recommended by Maguire (2004) himself that it should be developed further as economic and sociological circumstances in the world of football have developed drastically. Magee (2002) criticizes the typology by arguing that it suffers from a lack of grounded and interpretive substance. One important change in today's transfer market is that nowadays the players have the last say. Your club cannot make you move to a different country even if they agree to a deal with someone from a different country. This creates different factors for clubs to take into consideration while wanting to be the most attractive employer for the players. In the worst-case scenario, if a player has broken their relationship with the club and they do not agree to a transfer, the club can dismantle the contract. This can be argued to be quite rare though, as it is the slowest and financially poorest solution to these kinds of issues. Magee's (2002) improved typology suggests seven different motives for the relocation of the player: settler, mercenary, expelled, nomadic cosmopolitan, exile, ambitionist, and celebrity superstar. Richardson et al. (2012) highlight that in many scenarios, a player can fit into more than just one of these categories.

A player whose main source of motivation above anything else is money can be stated to be solely after economical rewards (Magee 2002). This is no wonder since a player can be set for life financially even after not achieving anything too special on the pitch. Magee (2002) also mentions how it has been a habit to pay for players' talent since the beginning of football and football for some, is only a job. The careers are usually fairly short, 10 to 15 years can be argued to be a good and lengthy career in professional football (Magee 2002). Of course, there are exceptions, like Cristiano Ronaldo, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, and Thiago Silva, who have played at the top for over 20 years. The players pay a price of physical injuries that may affect them for the rest of their lives. Based on these points it can be argued that it is humane to seek greater compensation for playing. Inflation has had a factor in the economics of the footballing

world as well and the prices of players and salaries have exhibited a notable increase in comparison to the values observed a decade ago.

Money is not the main reason to play for everyone though. The second classification of motives is called the settler. The settler stays in their new country for five years or longer (Magee 2002). Settlers also usually base their family in the new country they are living in and therefore become permanent immigrants through football. In the hectic transfer market, you can never know what happens but there are multiple examples where senior players are more willing to go to a direct rival if it means that they do not have to move, and their family can maintain their current lifestyle (see the latest case Jorginho to Arsenal from Chelsea in January 2023). Magee (2012) discusses bilingual children and how learning multiple languages is seen as an advantage.

The third classification is called the ambitionist. The ambitionist name is quite self-explanatory, but it is important to point out that the players' ambitions can differ quite a lot. Magee (2002) describes three different ambitionist where one has ambition to play in a certain location, one who just wants to become a footballer at any price necessary, and someone who has the ambition to improve their career by making a certain transfer. From an outside perspective, it is hard to recognize these subtle differences in ambitions, as it is impossible to know what people are thinking about without actually asking. Yet, one could argue that one's ambition has significant meaning to their career. Mental strength is an important aspect in any sport, but especially in football, as some players are able to cover their missing technical or physical skills by being clever and not giving up.

An exile is someone who leaves their country either voluntarily or through domestic pressure that can harm their career (Magee 2002). "Some people move in search of work or economic opportunities, to join family, or to study. Others move to escape conflict, persecution, terrorism, or human rights violations. Still others move in response to the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters, or other environmental factors" (United Nations, 2019, p. 1). There are professional football players who have escaped the current situation in their country, as Magee (2002) points out by quoting Slave Bilic and Sasa Ilic. These players have already retired from professional football a while ago, but they work as an example of how things can go. The war between Russia and Ukraine has already forced out a lot of exiles since it is impossible to play football in Ukraine right now and most of the foreign players want to leave Russia whenever they can. Sports washing and sports nationalism are whole other topics, but the political instabilities of the world are important to take into consideration because they have an effect on migration and especially migration within sports. Magee (2002) also discusses the former footballer of the year, George Weah, whose country of origin is Liberia. Conflicts in the African continent often get too little attention in Europe as it doesn't directly affect the people (Ohanwe 2009). Even

countries that have really developed their football academies and are doing well in the international stage of football such as Nigeria and Ghana have had multiple armed conflicts throughout the last 20 years (Ohanwe 2009).

A Nomadic cosmopolitan is a player who is after different experiences and wants to live in multiple different countries and cultures throughout their career. Often, their interests are focused on the major cities of the world (Magee 2002). Nomadic Cosmopolitan can therefore be argued to have extremely different decision-making processes from settlers while planning their career, transfers, and family. Magee (2002) discusses how the cultural experiences that different nations offer play a big part as well, as there more to countries than big cities.

The sixth class is titled the expelled by Magee (2002). "The expelled is a player who is, in effect, forced to migrate" (Magee 2002, p. 433). By this, the author of the article means that a player is having so many personal issues with someone or something, that they simply cannot continue their career in that country. A good example by Magee (2002) is Eric Cantona who was forced to leave France, as he had multiple incidents with the French footballing authorities. The expulsion worked in his favor, as Cantona became a Premier League icon at Manchester United. Sometimes the media chooses a scapegoat that they pick on and this can have extremely negative effects on a player's career. Then again, everybody loves a good comeback story and history has shown that football fans are quick to forgive when the game starts flowing.

The final addition to this category is a celebrity superstar. Magee (2002) has added this as a possible expansion beyond his already improved typology. Nowadays there is no question that this should not be a classification, as the status of some footballers has risen through the roof. Cristiano Ronaldo is the most followed person on all social media platforms and Lionel Messi is not far behind (alltopeverything.com 2022). This means that all movie stars and such, do not have the same kind of impact to the virtual world at least. It can be argued that David Beckham was the first celebrity superstar when he moved to Madrid with his popstar wife, Victoria Beckham (Magee 2002). Nowadays with the help of improved information technology, the profile of players is prone to rapid escalation, but may similarly experience a swift decline. However, this doesn't include everyone to the global celebrity superstar frame. According to Magee (2002) Celebrity superstars' off-field lifestyle plays an important part, but the player must also have success on the pitch for a sustained period. Therefore, it can be argued that the players can work towards increasing their status on multiple different fronts at the same time.

A possible critique of the typology must be added, as people evolve and even if one has chosen to be a settler for most of their career, they can suddenly realize that their time as a professional is running out and they want more experiences from the world. A player can also fit into a combination of categories (Magee 2002). "Clearly,

there is a relationship between the experience of migrant footballers and the broader dynamics of the political economy of world football” (Magee, 2002, p. 435). As the sports world has become more and more driven by economic factors, the role of money in any kind of deals made has increased significantly. Especially in the context of football markets, as it is the most followed sport on a global scale, and the governing organizations are known to be extremely corrupt. Adegard & Botelho (2011) criticize Magees’ (2002) typology for focusing on migration to and from Europe and that some of the categories lack differences and are too similar to each other, causing the categorization to be inaccurate as players may fall into multiple sections. Individuals are affected by multiple different factors and those factors construct a decision that makes the player migrate.

Adegard & Botelho (2011) study examines the labor migration in women’s football. As the topic is not nearly as much looked into as male sports labor migration, it brings important information about sports labor migration as a concept. International transfers in women’s football started to occur in the 1970s (Adegard & Botelho 2011). Adegard & Botelho (2011) study points out, that motives were not solely economic but included other aspects as well. The study suggests that the women’s football league in the US has been a multicultural environment since 2000 and that it is the biggest women’s football league (Adegard & Botelho 2011). As a business it has been taken care of similarly to the American baseball league and a positive image has been created around it competitively and culturally. This has caused the USA to be a dominant force in women’s football over the years. By utilizing the sports labor migration typology, Adegard & Botelho (2011) concluded that the main reason for professional female players to migrate was love for the game itself. It must be taken into consideration, that the money in women’s’ football is far from the monumental amounts that go around in the men’s side of the game.

Chiba (2004) seems to undermine the role cultural and geographical factors have in labor migration, only to emphasize the role of salary itself. Through this statement, it is argued that the flow of sports labor migration can be explained. By diminishing other factors and emphasizing the role of economics, the author gives a clear sign about the approach the study has. Based on this it could be argued that American-based sports are therefore even more money-driven than in Europe. Takahashi and Horne (2006) argue that sports labor migration studies are more focused on the cultural aspects rather than the economical. Even though they want to emphasize the role of economic factors, they mention the cultural, political, and geographical factors and their importance at least to some extent (Takahashi & Horne 2006). Takahashi and Horne (2006) write about how professional baseball players in Japan are not able to transfer to another team until they have been playing there for nine years, whereas in the US, players are able to transfer after six years. Compared to other sports globally

this is a peculiar system and doesn't able the agents, players, or clubs to benefit from the transfer fees as much as in football or ice hockey for example. Chiba's (2004) findings point out that 90 percent of foreign players in the MLB (Major league baseball, American baseball league) are from Latin America. The text also indicates that MLB is using Latin America as a farm system, this factor is favoring the addition of cultural and geographical point of views into the analysis as the results presented seem narrow and indicate that there would be something missing from them. Based on these studies it can be argued that it is much easier to be a nomadic cosmopolitan in the world of football. Different sports in America seem to have much tighter rules in transfers and relocation of the players.

## **4 RESEARCH METHODS**

### **4.1 Methodology of the study and research questions**

Sky Sports reported that in 2017, almost 70 percent of players were foreign in the English Premier League whereas in Finland, a bit less than nine percent of the players are foreign (Transfermarkt 2023). These leagues can be held as the opposite ends of the spectrum, money, quality, and popularity-wise. Therefore, it must be argued that the leagues are serving the players in different ways. Whereas many foreign football players can think about Veikkausliiga as a steppingstone, the English Premier League is perceived as the end goal and the dream. However, this does not make the integration process any less meaningful to players migrating into Finland, and therefore the study can be considered as a necessary dive into the modern migrating and integration experiences of professional athletes.

This study was conducted through an online questionnaire for players that are currently playing in the highest division of men's football in Finland (Veikkausliiga). The goal of the questionnaire was to discover what issues the players are facing when relocating into Finland. As the identification of potential issues can provide valuable insights into the analytical process, it is imperative that these matters are thoroughly examined and subsequently incorporated into the ensuing discussion, thus facilitating the development of plausible solutions. The questions were divided into three sections, where they matched the research questions. The three sections included communication, self-enhancement, and organizational actions. All the reading about the subject

inclines that communication is the most important tool when integrating into a new culture (Battochio et al. 2013; Richardson 2012 & Schinke et al. 2011). Due to this suggestion, the emphasis of intercultural communication skills from the player's and club's side is taken into consideration. There are currently 33 foreign football players under contract in Finland (Transfermarkt 2023) and I was able to persuade eight of them to answer the questionnaire. The players were encouraged to write from their own perspective, without trying to guide the answers into any direction. The eight players who answered are from four different clubs and they will be completely anonymous in the thesis. They have been marked as different letters in the study so that the reader can keep up with a specific participant if they wish to do so. In addition, the extracts from participants were numbered based on the frequency of their appearance in the study. This method of numbering allows for the identification of dominant themes and patterns within the data. Eight sets of answers were turned into five, to keep the length of the study more suitable. Three participants' answers were excluded from further analysis based on their answers. The short answers that didn't provide too much to analyze, were discarded from further study. However, they are taken into consideration while summarizing the topics. The anonymity makes sure that the players were able to answer honestly and not think about any consequences. The questions from the questionnaire were meant to elaborate the research questions a bit further and, in that way, provide more context around the discussed subjects. The research questions are:

RQ1: How can foreign football players enhance their own migration and integration processes?

RQ2: How do foreign football players perceive their club's effort while integrating into Finnish society?

RQ3: How do foreign football players experience the importance of language in the integration process?

This study utilizes qualitative research methods. The point of qualitative research is to provide knowledge that is based on human experience (Nowell et al. 2017). The study was conducted with an online questionnaire that involved fifteen questions. Online surveys offer several advantages over traditional paper-based surveys, including ease of distribution, lower costs, and the ability to reach a larger and more diverse sample population (Madathil 2014). They also allow for more efficient data collection and analysis and offer greater flexibility in terms of survey design and administration

(Madathil 2014). Jansen (2010) suggests that in an open survey, aspects of topic, relevant topics and objects, and categories are identified through the interpretation of raw data. "Open-ended questions are questions that do not provide participants with a predetermined set of answer choices, instead allowing the participants to provide responses in their own words" (Albudaiwi, 2023, p. 1). Open-ended questions also give the possibility of taking a comprehensive and holistic view of the matter. These kinds of questions provide the data with more variability by allowing the participant to approach the question from their perspective. Close-ended questions with only a yes or no answer could've forced the participant's answer into a certain direction and that may have altered the truthfulness (Albudaiwi 2023). With open-ended questions and a rather multifaceted subject, qualitative techniques were the only possibility. Albu-daiwi (2023, p. 1) discusses the meaning of open-ended questions to personal experiences: "Open-ended questions also help the participants to freely share their personal experiences, especially if the topic is sensitive or concerns personal matters". Migration can be a difficult topic and that is why it was important to ensure the safety and trust of the participants.

The questionnaire was conducted via webropol, which is a well-encrypted service that has a partnership with the University of Jyväskylä. To comply with GDPR regulations, an anonymous online questionnaire was used in this study. This approach ensured that the participants' personal data and identities were protected, as no identifying information was collected. Before starting the survey, participants were presented with a consent form that outlined the purpose of the study, the type of data that would be collected, and how the data would be used. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time without giving a reason. Additionally, the participants were assured that the data collected would only be used for research purposes and would be kept confidential. The questionnaire was accessed via a unique link that was only shared with the participants. The anonymity of the participants was maintained throughout the study, and no attempt was made to contact them after the study was completed. Overall, the use of an anonymous online questionnaire was an effective way to comply with GDPR regulations while collecting valuable data for this study. Participants answered the questionnaire in January 2023. Webropol has the ability to report the answers in a way they are easy to recognize and read. Therefore, there was no need to transcribe the answers into a different sheet. "To be accepted as trustworthy, qualitative researchers must demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 1). The trustworthiness increases as the questionnaire was not delivered anywhere else, except to the participants. Due to the number of



answers, it is extremely unlikely that the participants would've distributed the questionnaire further.

## 4.2 Data analysis

A conventional approach to qualitative content analysis is utilized as a research method. The qualitative content analysis with a conventional approach was chosen to be used in this study, due to the nature of the study. Qualitative content analysis enhanced with a conventional approach works in favor of the study by providing more insight into its research questions. The answers were read several times to identify common themes that may appear more than once. Battocchio et al. (2013) provided many possible interactions that can help the player to migrate, and these are discussed through in the conclusion. In addition, Kram and Isabella's (1985) typology of workplace relationships is applied to data. The motives for migrating cannot be discussed in the conclusion, as the questionnaire didn't cover that subject well enough.

The presented data was analyzed utilizing qualitative content analysis. Shannon et al. (2005) describes qualitative content analysis as a research method that analyses text-to-data with a focus on different linguistic characteristics. This way the attention of qualitative content analysis is drawn to the content or contextual meaning of the analyzed text (Shannon et al. 2005). Qualitative content analysis aims to provide understanding and knowledge about the studied subject (Shannon et al. 2005). Nowell et al. (2017) argue that content analysis is a method for analyzing, organizing describing, reporting, and identifying themes that are found in the data. It can be used in a wide range of epistemologies and research questions as well (Nowell et al. 2017). The main advantage of utilizing qualitative content analysis is its theoretical freedom. It provides the researcher with a highly flexible approach that is possible to modify for the needs of the study (Nowell et al. 2017). "The specific type of content analysis approach chosen by a researcher varies with the theoretical and substantive interests of the researcher and the problem being studied" (Shannon et al., 2005, p. 1277). Different approaches to qualitative content analysis require different analytical processes that do not differ too much. According to Shannon et al. (2005, p. 1285), there are seven steps to be followed while utilizing this study method: "formulating the research questions to be answered, selecting the sample to be analyzed, defining the categories to be applied, outlining the coding process and the coder training, implementing the coding process, determining trustworthiness, and analyzing the results of the coding process". By adhering to this structured approach, the research was able to generate

comprehensive and reliable findings that accurately represented the research questions.

A conventional approach to qualitative content analysis was applied in this study. The conventional approach can be utilized in studies that aim to describe a specific phenomenon, which in this case is the integration and migration experiences of professional footballers (Shannon et al. 2005). The biggest advantage of the conventional approach to qualitative content analysis is getting direct answers from the participants without applying preconceived theoretical perspectives or categories (Shannon et al. 2005). This approach suits the study best when there is not too much existing literature on the topic. It also allows the data to create categories rather than using preconceived categories (Shannon et al. 2005). Both claims above fit into this study with a minor exception. Even though data creates the themes and conclusions discussed later, it is necessary to compare the results to the existing literature. There is some previous literature, but it is all from different environments and larger contexts. More precisely, this study is focusing on the phenomenon of integration and migration of professional footballers in a smaller country and league, with less financial power. The meaning of environment and context comes to light while comparing the results of previous literature in the conclusion section. The conventional approach utilizes open-ended questions after which the answers are transcribed (Shannon et al. 2005). The first step of the analysis is to read the data repeatedly, in order to achieve immersion and full understanding of the data. The second step is to derive codes by highlighting words that can create the first key thoughts or concepts (Shannon et al. 2005). After which Shannon et al. (2005) write that the researcher writes notes of their first impression, thoughts, and initial analysis. As this part of the process continues, more codes can appear directly from the text and create a coding scheme (Shannon et al. 2005). The next step is: "Codes then are sorted into categories based on how different codes are related and linked" (Shannon et al., 2005, p. 1279). These commonalities found in the text created several recognizable themes in this study. The discovered themes provide important information about the approach of the participants and reflect on the research questions. The steps mentioned above were followed carefully while conducting this study.

Potential problems with the conventional approach can be its similarity with other study methods as it can be easily mixed with other theoretical approaches like the grounded theory method (Shannon et al. 2005). The issue of methodological similarity is overcome in this section as different phases of the study are discussed step by step. The conventional approach can be interpreted to be limited in the description of the lived experience and theory development, since: "both sampling and analysis procedures make the theoretical relationship between concepts difficult to infer from findings" (Shannon et al., 2005, p. 1281). The argument above is not entirely true in

this study, as the results can be compared to previous literature. It must be mentioned that the comparisons are not relatable in context and environment. However, this doesn't prevent the research from making comparisons, nor does it enable the argument that comparisons are pointless. The comparisons to a much larger environment in a different context create a reflection of the state of Finnish football in general. Shannon et al. (2005) mentions another possible issue by stating that if the researcher fails to identify the important codes, they have not developed a full understanding of the subject. The researcher can argue that they have identified the key codes in this study, as several themes were created from related similarities. The similarities ensure through examples that the data has been covered thoroughly. These possible issues lead to the conclusion that the results of qualitative content analysis that has been approached conventionally can only be utilized in model building or concept development (Shannon et al. 2005).

Other potential qualitative content analysis approaches could've been directed content analysis and summative content analysis. Also, the possibility of creating closed questions could've turned the data into numbers, and therefore the analysis would've been a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. The directed content analysis couldn't be applied to this study since it emphasizes previous literature and enhances existing studies further (Shannon et al. 2005). Almost no studies about the integration and migration of professional footballers in Finland exist in beforehand and therefore, it couldn't be applied as a qualitative content analysis approach in this study. A summative approach to qualitative content analysis would've been possible to apply to this study, but it would've changed the nature of the study to be more linguistic. The summative approach requires identifying and then quantifying the keywords from the text (Shannon et al. 2005). There is also a possibility that the quantifying of the words would've been too speculative due to the lack of more data. Further into the summative approach, the researcher would be focusing in counting the words or specific contents frequency (Shannon et al. 2005). Therefore, the interesting aspects of the study would've been turned into linguistics and partly into a quantitative study. The close-ended questions would have turmoiled the credibility of the data, as close ended-questions direct the participant into a certain direction and take away the freedom of interpretation (Nowell et al. 2017).

## 5 FINDINGS

The findings and analysis will be discussed in this chapter. To ensure clarity and organization, the research methodology employed in this MA thesis involved assigning a unique letter to each participant to distinguish their responses from one another. Additionally, each extract was assigned a corresponding number to facilitate easy reference throughout the analysis. This approach was deemed necessary to maintain rigor and transparency in the research process and to enable readers to easily track the findings presented. The use of this labeling system allowed for a structured presentation of the data, ensuring that each participant's responses were accurately represented and interpreted within the broader context of the study. The findings from each survey question will be described first, after which they will be compared and analyzed with the background theory in mind. This chapter has been separated into sub-chapters to ease navigation.

### 5.1 Intercultural self-enhancement

Self-enhancement was described as crucial by Schinke et al. (2011) and Lahti & Valo (2013). The endless number of challenges related to migration and integration described in this study can create a rollercoaster effect, where the athlete is not able to think about anything but the mountain of difficulties they are about to face. The relocation process requires a lot of courage and an open mind. If the athlete is not willing to embrace their new local culture to any degree, the integration is arguably going to be difficult (Richardson et al. 2012). Therefore, the mental capacity and willingness to enhance their own intercultural skills can be deemed to be crucial (Schinke et al. 2011). The relocating player should develop an awareness of their own cultural biases and

be able to reflect on their own cultural background and perception of the world (Schinke et al. 2011). Engaging in any activities is an important factor in self-enhancement as well. If the player doesn't place any effort into putting themselves out there, the integration becomes extremely difficult (Schinke et al. 2011). The ability to listen and practice empathy can be categorized as basic human skills, but these skills can always be developed further. Engaging in one's self-development can happen on multiple different levels, as the data below presents.

The question about players' own efforts to make the migration as easy as possible provided interesting and different approaches. Every participant approached the matter from a different perspective, for example, participant X thought about the cold weather. X addresses the needs that different weather conditions require. Based on this, it can be argued that X needed to adjust to the new climate. It should be mentioned that this is an issue that could be addressed from the clubs' side, as they often provide team clothes immediately to the new players. Participant Y approached the questions from an administrative point of view by writing about the documents required to stay in Finland. Y writes that they "made sure" to get the administrative documents handled, which can be interpreted to be a sign of being meticulous. This points to the conclusion that the most important thing in their relocation was making sure there isn't going to be any issues with bureaucracy. The emphasis on administrative matters can also be seen as a careful approach and this way the Y is making sure that they can focus on everything else by getting the paperwork perfectly done in the first hand. It must be mentioned that bureaucratic issues can also be solved by the clubs and agents. In fact, it is common practice at least in leagues that are more financially prominent (Battochio et al. 2013 & Richardson et al. 2012).

"(I bought) A lot of jackets because it's cold." X 1

"I made sure to get all the necessary documents for my residential application and I got the permit to migrate and work." Y 1

"I tried to communicate a lot, sometimes they joked in the team that I talk a lot." Z 1

The third quote above can be connected to a typical Finnish stereotype, where people are more introverted. Participant Z mentions that their teammates joked about the fact that they spoke a lot. In this case, it is impossible to know whether the participant perceived this as a good or a bad thing. Based on the interpretation this can be a crucial misunderstanding in the athletes' efforts to integrate into the group. The player is only trying to become part of the group by talking a lot, which shows good effort

and understanding of how integrating happens. After which, they are met with jokes and laughter. Z excludes himself from the team in his answer, by writing that “they joked in the team” about their behavior. Z’s behavior can therefore be argued to differ from the teams’ norms and everybody doesn’t react positively to changes and competition (Richardson et al. 2012). This creates a possibility that the event has had a negative impact on the player’s integration process. On the other hand, it is quite possible that the reaction has been received as positive by the player if they have been able to laugh together and form bridges through laughter (Battochio et al. 2013). The common idea of trying to build a good spirit within the team sides with the fact that this could’ve been perceived as a positive event. Social practices and norms have influence on the athletes’ integration into their new team (Battochio et al. 2013). Even though this answer can be connected to a Finnish stereotype, it cannot be reflected to every team in Finland. Each team has its own specific dynamics, and a lot of emphases can be put on how they approach the new player (Battochio et al. 2013). It should also be argued that competition within the team can affect the approach toward the new player. For example, if a popular and core member of the team suddenly finds their spot under more competition, their negative behavior can influence other team members’ approach. Z also writes that they “tried to communicate a lot”. The emphasis there can be put on the word tried, which suggests that they perceived many of their efforts to communicate to be unsuccessful.

“Respectfully with teammates and all other people around! Maybe some activity together, but the teammates you meet every day and step by step with small conversations you get to know better and better everyone!” K 1

The extract above provides the most insight and context around the answer to the question “what did you do to make sure your migration process is successful”. Participant K mentions that they approach everybody with respect. Arguably, this can be considered a good approach to meeting new people. K also writes that the relationships advance “step by step” and that can be considered as a sign of understanding that the integration process or forming relationships does not happen overnight. Schinke et al. (2011) discuss that by writing that recognizing integration as a process with multiple steps can help the process unfold more easily, as setbacks can be a part of it. In addition, they mention the meaning of being active with their teammates. Battocchio et al. (2013) and Richardson (2011) suggest multiple different ways how different activities between the teammates create togetherness and therefore help the new players’ integration. K writes about this in a way that suggests that too much extra activity outside of football is not needed, by adding the word maybe in front of the sentence: “Maybe some activity together”. Two of the extracts refer to teammates and

being active with them. This approach brings validity to the fact the participants are professional football players and are here to integrate through football, not without it. Football can therefore be argued to be a source of intercultural relationships in this context. The answers bring the affirmation of teammates into light as well. The teammates are therefore a crucial part of the players' integration.

There are two extracts that refer to the field of self-enhancement, even though they are from different categories of the questionnaire. These extracts are posted in this section of findings because they are related to the players' courage and way of taking things to their own hands, which can be important while moving into different country by yourself.

"The city in \*\*\*\*\* is pretty small, I discovered it by myself, but if I needed to ask about some cafe or anything, I could get easily advice!" K 2

"If they offer apartment it's already good, I believe that the grown men can figure out the rest on his own." K 3

The first quote gives the impression that K has been curious and that they have been eager to get to know the new city quickly, by stating that they discovered it themselves. K's answer also indicates courage and willingness to get familiar with new surroundings. The conclusion of K possessing courage and confidence comes from their way of writing that if they need something, they shall receive it. These features on an individual can help the integration process notably, as Schinke et al. (2011) and Richardson (2011) discuss how bravery can give the player better tools in integration on and off the pitch. The second extract is also from participant K. K's way of involving the word "if" at the beginning of the sentence creates a notion that they are satisfied with help to accommodation matters. K accounts for their own independence, as it can be argued that they categorize themselves as an adult who handles difficulties. This argument is based on the fact that K writes that "grown man can figure out the rest on his own". The usage of "I believe" and "can" in this sentence can be seen as indicators of the fact that K recognizes that not everybody possesses the same qualities in adaptation. Both extracts give the impression of actively engaging with the new community and surroundings. actively facing their new surroundings and being brave are enablers of a positive integration experience (Schinke et al. 2011). Engaging can include trying local foods or exploring the city and its cultural possibilities, in addition to many other possibilities.

The role of social media was briefly discussed in the review, and it came up in the data as well. It does not seem surprising that J mentions Instagram before any other social media platform, as it has risen to be the most prominent platform with

Twitter in the world of football (Football Benchmark 2023). The usage of the phrase “I tried” suggests that not all of their efforts to send direct messages to their new teammates were met. Participant J shows willingness to integrate, by stating that they have been active in getting to know people. The willingness to be active and the effort to integrate is arguably one of the most important factors in a successful integration process (Schinke et al. 2011). J also emphasizes to the fact that they have been active, and therefore this answer is discussed in the self-enhancement section.

“I tried to get to know some of my teammates beforehand through Instagram, and also after coming to Finland I have been active at getting to know new people here”. J 1

## 5.2 Teammates as a support network

Professional sporting organizations should have resources available to help their players who are adjusting to their new life. The migration process itself includes multiple steps like getting a work permit and an apartment in the new country. There are a lot more steps in migration and in addition to those, the player should integrate into the new culture and environment as well. To a certain degree, clubs should be responsible for the players that they to choose to invest in. The integration process is much more individual than the migration process, and it should be looked at from a human perspective. The clubs can provide the newcomer with language classes, counseling services, and relocation assistance for example, but these are not enough for some migrating professionals. Some players might benefit from cultural training, mentorship, showcasing existing support networks, or even social events with the local community (Schinke et al. 2011).

The most common theme found in questions that are related to helping the players’ integration process was the presence of teammates. This was expected as football teams spend a lot of time together and even a local player often doesn’t have a lot of spare time. Nowadays football is more project natured, and clubs try to start a project by creating a team that can grow and develop together, therefore it can be argued that player chemistries are an important factor when reaching for success. Five participants named teammates as the main source of help, whereas two participants named the club staff as the main source of help. These answers are, of course, heavily related to issues each individual player has experienced and how do they perceive the nature of their own issues. A variation was therefore expected in the answers. When asked about who was helping the participants to get familiar with their surroundings,



Participants Y, Z, and J referred to help as a team effort, by pointing out teammates in their answers. Z's answer frames help as something that teammates were happy to offer and at the same time puts themselves into a position where they are in need of help. It can be argued that Z recognizes their position as a newcomer and this way is also aware of the fact that help might speed up the integration process. J mentions that a couple of his teammates have been spending time with them outside of football. This can be interpreted to be a sign of forming meaningful relationships. It can also be argued that the teammates they are hanging out with, are familiar with the local environment, as they are showing J around the city.

“Yeah my teammates helped me to get to know the city”. Y 2

“All the guys were happy to help me!” Z 2

“A few teammates have been showing me around the town while hanging out”. J 2

The meaning of trust cannot be underestimated when discussing team sports. Trust was also discussed in the review where Lahti & Valo (2013) described it as being pivotal in helping the immigrant's integration process. Battochio et al. (2013) approached the concept of trust from a slightly different perspective and divided it into two sub-themes, inclusive reputation of the team and inclusive reputation through teammates. Inclusive reputation referred to a positive or negative reputation a team can have on recruiting foreign players and the possible immigrated veterans that are there to help the newcomers. Arguably the image of the club and possible migrated veterans who still play in the team can play a part in the decision-making process of a player that is about to relocate since these factors can be seen as positive parts of inclusive reputation (Battochio et al. 2013). The questionnaire inquired from the participants how long did it take for them to feel the trust of other players coaches and when did they felt that they could trust their teammates and other staff. A common theme was found from the answers as every participant except from one inclined that the trust was gained quickly. Z's approach to trust can be argued to be a sign of professionalism, as they refer to their own previous experience as a professional. The ability to recognize what is needed is gained through experience according to Z, who writes that they have been playing for a long time. Z separates the coach's needs from the team's needs and this can be interpreted to be a sign of leadership trait because the coach is not leading the play on the pitch. Arguably this skillset could be an important asset in the integration process into the team. Battochio et al. (2013) discuss about the

role of immigrated veterans as young, migrated players' helpers. Teaching Z's approach to young newcomers could be an addition Battochio et al.'s. (2013) research.

"I think very quickly, because I have been playing football for a long time and I already know what a trainer needs, and what the team needs." Z 3

J approached the concept of trust as something that exists on the pitch, by writing that trust was gained through practice. X writes that they felt the trust immediately after joining the new club. Their answer also includes a mention of everyone being "really nice". Therefore, it is possible to argue that X sees trust as something that is formed through good relationships. Everyone being nice can also be seen as an indicator that everyone around the club wanted X to feel welcome and comfortable right from the beginning. Y writes about the meaning of training and playing together as enablers of gaining trust quickly. An additional point in Y's writing is that not only playing and training together is enough to gain trust quickly, but ultimately success on the pitch speeds up the process of a team welding together. Y uses the word "quite", which leads to an interpretation that it could've been faster as well.

"After about two weeks of practices" J 3

"Right away. Everyone was really nice". X 3

"It took a week, it was quite fast. Training and playing well helped us to trust each other". Y 3

One answer about trust brought up a different perception of trust and its meaning. The answer indicates that they do not fully trust anyone, but that they were able to achieve some sense of it through time and their own behavior. The answer is not restricted to football but speaks about people in general. The use of exclamation points refers to K having strong feelings about trust. K is the only participant that writes about the process of gaining trust as a time-consuming activity. This is an interesting answer to the question as one could assume that professional team sports require at least some level of trust, from the clubs' governing part to the kitman that makes sure the players have the gear they need.

"I don't trust for 100% in people at all! some trust I got with time and with my behavior!" K 4

Friendships can prove to be an important support network when friends are the only people a newly migrated person is close to. Therefore, developing new friendships is a skill partly dependent on the athletes' social capabilities. Lahti & Valo (2013) go through a concept called "The special relationship", which is part of a typology by Kramm & Isabella (1985). The special relationship is a friendship where two people trust each other and experience a freedom of expression and emotional connection. Based on Richardson et al.'s (2012) argument that deep friendships require constant nurturing and due to the fact that football is a transient sport, it can be argued that a special relationship is hard to achieve in the world of football.

Battochio et al. (2013) discuss ways for newly migrated players to make friends through the theme of integration advice. Integration advice should help newcomers to open a dialogue with their new teammates and this is the first interaction that starts the forming of a relationship. Battocchio et al. (2013) argued that professional athletes may experience connecting with other players who have faced similar problems easier, than with others. However, the data of this study argues against this statement, since only J and K mention that it was easier to make friends with other migrated players. J uses the phrase "quite easy", which suggests that experience wasn't all smooth and easy, but ultimately successful. J also mentions that the shared experiences with other migrated players made it easier for them to form connections, which goes hand in hand with Battocchio et al. (2013) argument. K starts their answer with the phrase "of course" when referring to the fact that they experienced making friends easier with other migrated players. This refers to the idea that K thinks that it is obvious that migrated players make friends easier with someone who shares similar experiences. They then proceed to use the word "deeper", when describing the connection that they have with other migrated players. This can be interpreted as a way of saying that it would never be possible for them to achieve the same relationship status with someone who doesn't share their experience of migration. When describing their relationship with local players, K writes that they "were quite friendly etc!". The usage of the word "quite" and the abbreviation "etc" suggest that the writer, in fact, experienced much weaker connections with the local players.

"Quite easy, I think it was easier with other migrated players since they had been through the same experiences." J 4

"Of course with other migrated players its more easy to make contact and some deeper connection, but also the local players were quite friendly etc! It was not difficult for me." K 5

Other participants all made a clear distinction to the matter, by stating that they easily made friends with everybody. There was not a single issue mentioned in the whole study that could've been related to relationships or their forming. This indicates that a lot of the migrated players were active in their integration process. Participant Z also stated that they have good friends on the team, which works against Richardson et al. (2012) argument about the difficulty of forming deep friendships in football. Z's usage of the word "good" suggests that the friendships formed were special and meaningful. Z also uses the word "communicate", which suggests that not everybody in the club environment was having meaningful conversations with them. Communicating refers to conveying a message, which can be done in multiple different ways in addition to speaking. Y's answer about making friends is a general statement, which they continue to specify to their teammates. In any case, Y does not assert that establishing friendships was an effortless task, but rather notes that it was not a difficult one. This indicates that they confronted some difficulties and that they did not manage to form special relationships with a lot of teammates. This can be argued to be normal, as Richardson et al. (2012) point out. Participant X writes about "Finnish and foreign friends" and how it was easy for them to form friends with all everyone. However, the emphasis in the sentence is on the separation of nationalities. This highlights that there weren't issues with making friends with anybody.

"I communicated well with everyone, I also have good friends in the team." Z 4

"Yeah I can easily make friends so it wasn't hard to make friends with my teammates." Y 4

"I have Finnish friends and foreign friends. Both were easy to make." X 4

### **5.3 Integration and migration help received from the club**

The organization that acquires a player from a different country can and should do a lot of actions to make sure that they provide the player with the possibility to integrate (Richardson et al. 2012). There are no guidelines or a common framework on what the club should do to achieve this goal. The clubs' actions can therefore vary quite much, and the actions are often based on the clubs' specific culture and resources. Battochio et al. (2013) adaptation pathways include many examples of how the club can ease the integration process for the player. The recruitment strategy can have an effect on the players' integration in two ways. The club can recruit multiple players

from the same country, this way there are a lot fewer issues with language, and shared cultural background can make the forming of relationships easier as well (Battochio et al. 2013). The role of immigrated veterans as mentors is emphasized by Battocchio et al. (2013). The recruitment team should also take into consideration what the team needs and what the coach wants. This includes the players' position, age, teams' playstyle, and other factors that may have an impact on the overall team performance (Battochio et al. 2013). Three questions from this study were meant to find out, what kind of actions the clubs are actually doing and how they could improve. When asked about how the club made the participants feel welcome, a few different approaches appeared, but all of them were positive. Z perceived the communication with his coach to be the most welcoming act performed by the club, whereas Y looked at the matter in a broader sense by mentioning that his club helped them settle in outside of football. Z writes about questions that their coach asked. These questions can be held as a sign of caring about the player and making sure that they are doing well. Conversations about personal and important matters can ease the integration, and therefore it can be argued that the coach was willing to work towards a better integration experience with the player (Schinke et al. 2011). Y highlights the meaning of communication, feeling comfortable, accommodation, and goods from their continent of origin. By providing these supplements, the club has arguably worked towards the integration of the player. The fact that communication is the first thing that Y mentions, emphasizes its importance. It can also be argued that good communication can provide a feeling of comfort (Battochio et al. 2013).

“The coach always talked to me and asked how are you?, how is the family, always wondering how I feel.” Z 5

“Through good communication, helping me get an apartment, an African grocery store and feeling comfortable in the dressing room.” Y 5

K's approach was more related to their own perception of the actions around them. This is the opposite of two answers by X and J that didn't really share too much but just settled for expressing their satisfaction. A traditional part of Finnish culture was still squeezed in the form of a sauna. Sauna is a common way of recovery in football (Nike 2022). X mentions everybody being nice and arguably this can be seen as a bare minimum effort to welcome someone into a new environment. J writes that the club hasn't done anything specific to make them feel welcome and this seems like a matter of perception. The way J uses the word “but” and “friendly” creates a feeling that their welcoming into the club had been a bit underwhelming, but that it went along with no issues.

“I felt welcome in my mind! and (as long as) they don’t do any shit to me, then I felt already good!” K6

“Everyone was really nice and we go into sauna together”. X 5

“Not in any specific way but all have been friendly”. J 5

A common theme in the answers regarding the integration actions taken by the club was accommodation. More practical matters appeared in this section as the participants wrote about banking, bureaucracy, and family matters. Z writes that the club helped them in two vital matters. In addition to the apartment, the clubs help in bringing offspring into the world can be considered as humane and sensitive. Help in childbirth can be argued to be highly appreciated by Z as they chose to approach the matter from a non-footballing perspective. It can also be argued that the club possesses some emotional intelligence, as they made sure that Z’s family is well taken care of. Y writes that the club helped them find an apartment, rather than providing them with one. This differs from the other answers in this study and can therefore be seen as worse treatment of the player. It must be mentioned that this is a vague argument, as there are many unknown factors to this study.

“Apartment, helped my wife give birth to a child in a calm environment.” Z 6

“They help with finding apartment, getting your residency (licence) done and opening a Finnish bank account if you want one.” Y6

“Providing apartment and helping with bureaucratic things. J 6

Battochio et al. (2013) discuss the cultural appreciation of the club and emphasize that acknowledging the newly migrated players’ culture is extremely important. The core values and social norms of the new environment often differ from what the newcomer is used to in their home country (Battochio et al. 2013). As mentioned in the review, Battocchio et al. (2013) argue that the migrated players were happier, when food from their country of origin was available. Schinke et al. (2011) also suggest that if the migrated player has to completely change their diet, they are more likely to feel lonely right after the relocation. All the participants wrote that their culture was appreciated in their clubs. This theme involved some different ways of expressing appreciation, as Y wrote about their music, and X put emphasis on his cooking. K wrote about his culture being quite similar to Finnish culture where they’re from. Other

responses radiated positivity but did not elaborate on the matter further. Y uses the phrase “very” which leads to the conclusion that they are satisfied with how others have reacted to the displays of their culture. Y also writes that their teammates are dancing to their music in the dressing room, which refers to the teammates liking their music rather than the whole club. A similar notion can be withdrawn from X’s and Z’s answers. Z mentions that the team took them very well, which again refers to other players. X mentions that they cook for their teammates. This also refers to the fact that the teammates eat their food, not the organization. K’s reference to similar cultures can be taken as an indicator of the western lifestyle, as Finland is a western country. K also uses the phrase “not difficulty” rather than easy or another expression, which leads to a conclusion that no major incidents have happened, but something could’ve gone smoother. Based on these answers, it can be argued that the participants are part of their teams, as they do things together and enjoy, each other’s cultures.

“Yeah very (appreciated), my teammates dance to my \*\*\*\*\* music in the dressing room”. Y 7

“Yes, I make kebabs for my teammates”. X 6

“My culture is pretty similar, and I think people understand that in club! was not big difficulty”. K 6

“There were no problems, the team took me very well”. Z 6

#### **5.4 The importance of intercultural communication in foreign football players’ integration process**

Even though the new country’s language was described as crucial to learn by Battochio et al. (2013), Schinke et al. (2011), and Richardson (2012), the results show that it is not the experience these participants have had in Finland. Every participant highlighted the role of English rather than Finnish. The following quotes present that most of the participants did not even think about the Finnish language but rather automatically referred to English when thinking about communication issues. Only one participant referred to the complexity of the Finnish language:

“When I arrived at the club I understood a little English, the team helped very quickly started talking English, Finnish is very difficult”. Z 7

“In general all communication during trainings and with coaches was in English! I didn’t learn Finnish language”. K 7

“Yeah the club has helped me with language barrier. Almost everyone at the club speaks good English so it has been easy for me to integrate. The coach also go the extra mile to explain drills and tactical information in English”. Y 7

“Yes everyone speaks English” X 7

“I was not really sure how well Finnish people speak English so I was somewhat worried about the language barrier” J 7

There exists a distinct tendency for individuals to presume that English will be the primary language of communication, rather than Finnish, with one person even being worried about the English skills of their teammates. This notion could lead to the argument that Finnish football is becoming more intercultural and that the clubs have adapted to the requirements of a multicultural environment. The approach to a question about the club helping with language provided a general approach from the participants where it becomes clear that the English language can be described as a norm. The fact that only one participant referred to Finnish being hard, leads to an assumption that non-other participant had tried to learn it apart from dressing room jokes and slang. None of the participants seemed to think that the Finnish language is going to be a problem and the role of English as a lingua franca was emphasized in every answer. The same approach was adapted to the question about any communication difficulties, as only one of the participants is referring to the Finnish language when writing their answer:

“If you speak in English, I believe it’s already good, because 95% or even more players speak English! I don’t believe it’s a big obstacle if you don’t speak Finnish, but it could be of course even better if you could speak Finnish!” K 8

“No, I didn’t think (that language is going to be an issue), I’m quickly adapting”. Z 8

“Not really (having issues with language). Everyone at the club speaks good English, so it’s easy for me to communicate with them”. Y 8

“No (issues with language), everyone speaks English”. X 8



Other participants only brought up possible communication issues in the context of the English language. These quotes add to the argument that the environment around these clubs is multicultural, and people are, at least to some degree, aware of the importance of intercultural communication. Therefore, it can be argued that it is not necessary to learn Finnish to be able to play at a high level in Finland. In addition to English, football players tend to succeed if they are able to communicate with their presence and performance on the pitch (Richardson et al. 2012). At the end of the day, results are the only things that matter in professional sports and if the player performs well enough even without the necessary language devices, they can be considered successful. Football is the most played sport in the world, and it has the same rules and end goals everywhere you go. So, if someone has game knowledge and understands the movements of other players and the ball, it can be argued that they can succeed anywhere they go. One argument could also be that positive results on the pitch can reinforce the experience behind the scenes.

The official languages of FIFA are Spanish, German, Portuguese, French, Russian, and English (FIFA 2022). However, as English has developed to be the lingua Franca of the world, all the global football events are being held in English and the host country's main language. Due to the high education level in Finland, it can also be argued that generally speaking Finns are quite good at English, and therefore, Finnish as a small language doesn't have the space or need to step out into the world of football. As the results of the study show, participants of this study managed well in Finland without learning the Finnish language.

Encouragement can work as a positive reinforcement in the integration process. Battochio et al. (2013) discuss integration reinforcement and the role of words of encouragement in it. Integration reinforcement is one of the themes handled in the review. Words of encouragement can relieve doubts about everything and create a sense of togetherness in the team. It might feel simple but small bits of positive feedback enforce the players' self-esteem and therefore, boost their possibilities of succeeding. The data from the questionnaire suggest that every player experienced words of encouragement that were related to their performance on the football pitch. Three players refer to getting support from their teammates and coaches, which is expected in football-related encouragement. An interesting notion is that not a single participant mentions their family members in this section. It would have been expected as Schinke et al. (2011) emphasize the role of the family as a support network. The common approach to this question by the participants was from a professional football's perspective, and anything personal was left outside. K uses the phrase "in general" which refers to some bad experiences with teammates. After which they mention that the staff was supportive as well. This inclines that the club as a whole has put some effort into K's integration, as people who are not on the pitch side are giving positive

feedback. Z uses the word “only” in their sentence, which gives the impression of them receiving positive feedback orally throughout their integration period.

“Only words of support, they probably understood that after \*\*\*\*\* it takes time to be calm”. Z 9

“In general we had good teammates and the stu(a)ff also, didn’t saw anything what could stop the feel good”. K 9

“I got a lot of encouragement from the coaches and my teammates to keep doing the good stuff”. Y 9

J mentions other foreign teammates as the main source of encouragement. This can be interpreted to be a negative factor in the integration process because a supportive team works better together according to Schinke et al. (2011) and Battochio et al. (2013). The exclusion can also feel like cultural segregation. However, they use the word “mostly” in front of the sentence, which can be interpreted to mean that they have received others as well. On a more positive note, X wrote that their coach had come up with a nickname that has a positive connotation. Arguably, this can be interpreted as something to lift the spirit of the player (Battochio et al. 2013).

“Mostly from other foreign players of my club”. J 8

“Yes coach always told me I’m goal scoring machine”. X 9

## 5.5 Cultural experiences

Change of environment can be refreshing to some, but shocking to others. As mentioned, the migration and integration processes are individual, and it takes more time for some people. A lot of features influence these experiences with perception having a say as well. If the player perceives their experiences as positive, their integration and migration can happen faster and vice versa (Richardson et al. 2012). If the migrated athlete perceives many events around them as negative, it is possible that they do not achieve the feeling of comfort at any point (Battochio et al. 2013). When asked about negative experiences, K did not mention any but all the others had experienced some difficulties and bad events. K uses the phrase “in general” and “so” when discussing the negative events that they have experienced. These nod the reader

to think that they have had some bad experiences, but nothing so important that they would like to discuss the matter further. Z discussed earlier that the club had helped their wife with childbirth. Even though the participant had a positive experience with the club regarding their newborn, they proceed to write about negative experiences with the Finnish bureaucracy concerning the child. Their negative experience is related to governing organizations of Finland and football is understandably left in the background in their approach, as more important matters in life occur. Z's use of the word "very" emphasizes the urgency of the matter.

"We are waiting for the documents for the child for a very long time, we already have to leave as a (with the) lady and we can't! Very difficult with documents!" Z 10

"In general nothing so negative what I wish to tell! Basically I liked there!" K 10

The issue of racism is very much alive in Finland (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2018) and, unfortunately, J proceeds to explain some more negative experiences that are related to race. An important question of how to tackle racism should be raised whenever there is a possibility to do so. Even though there is no room for racism in football, or anywhere else in the world, almost weekly occurrences of racism appear in European football (Cable et al. 2022). Therefore, it can be argued that the campaigns and ads are not doing enough. Based on how J does not narrow the weird looks or racist slurs into any specific context, situation, or place, moves the reader away from football. Therefore, it can be interpreted that they have experienced these issues in everyday life.

"Some racist slurs and "weird" looks". J 9

X and Y perceived the weather to be a negative experience in Finland by referring to how cold it is. They discuss the issue in different sections. X has listed the cold weather as a negative experience, whereas Y has put it under a question about possible culture shocks. There are multiple stories throughout history where professional football players have not adapted to their new country due to colder and darker weather than what they are used to (Daily Star 2022 with the latest article of the example) Therefore, it can be argued that weather is an element that can influence professional football players integration into a new country. The Finnish weather tends to be from the other end of the spectrum, with extreme coldness and darkness that can last for eight months. Arguably, the weather can be perceived as a health risk, as the sun is an important source of vitamins and light gives people energy. Not one single theme

could be discovered from the negative answers, as everyone perceives their experiences in different ways and some issues are more important to others. In addition to the weather, the local food has not pleased X. X uses an exclamation point after the word cold, which refers to them experiencing the cold weather as a big turn-off.

“It’s so cold! Kebabs are not good here”. X 10

“Yeah the weather...” Y 10

The question about culture shocks brought up one common theme. As food and the weather were mentioned by some, three participants wrote about the nature of Finnish people. It is a widely known cultural stereotype that Finns can be silent and hard to approach like Y and J describe in their answers. Y writes that they had to be the one to make the initiative in different communication scenarios and puts the emphasis on starting conversations. The reader gets a feeling from Y’s answer that, they have approached Finns in many different situations and experienced it as arduous. Based on Y’s answer, it can be argued that they have experienced creating meaningful communication with Finns as difficult. This can lead to a longer integration period as (Battochio et al. 2013) write in their study. Kramm & Isabella’s (1985) description of a special relationship can only be achieved by a mutual level of interaction and therefore this answer can be an indicator of Richardson et al. (2012) results where they announced that creating meaningful relationships in a transitory sport is quite hard. J discusses the stereotype of quiet Finns as well in their answer and even provides the reader with a specific scenario. J utilizes the word “strangers” which owns strong connotations and, in this way, alienates themselves from other people that are at the bus stop. A stranger is defined as foreigner, a resident alien, or even as an intruder by Merriam-Webster (2023). Providing the reader with a specific scenario for small talk can be interpreted as an action that J is used to doing.

“Yeah the weather and Finnish people can be quiet and you have to make the first step to approach them, especially starting a conversation”. Y 10

“Yes, Finnish people are very introverted, people do not speak to strangers often not even small talk on the bus stops”. J 10

## 6 DISCUSSION

The conventionalist approach to qualitative content analysis revealed six common themes from the data. Teammates made the most appearances in the answers when reflecting on all the questions and the importance of teammates became evident. Therefore, it is safe to argue that in professional sports happening in a lower financial climate, teammates are the most important support network. The help of teammates can be considered to be crucial in the newly migrating players' integration process. This finding is in alignment with previous literature. Battocchio et al. (2013) suggest different adaptation pathways provided by the newly migrated player's teammates or club. Schinke et al. (2011) also discuss the importance of teammates as a support network. The first theme discussed, is integration advice and this study shows that it is a strong and helpful tool as all the participants expressed experiencing it from their teammates.

Previous literature created an argument that migrated players would make friends easier with other migrated players. However, this study suggests otherwise, as only two participants wrote that they have more in common with other migrated players. These participants then proceeded to discuss how they made friends with all of their teammates. All of the other answers dismissed the claim from the previous literature and emphasized the fact that nationalities or shared cultural backgrounds did not have an influence on their ability to make friends. In addition, every participant expressed how easy it was for them to make friends among their teammates. When reflecting the answers to Kramm and Isabellas's (1985) typology or workplace relationships, all except for one participant seemed to have created collegial

relationships. Collegial relationships provide people with some support, validation, and self-worth. One participant mentions how they were able to make good friends in the team and therefore, it can be argued that they had special relationships within the team. When people are in a special relationship, they can express themselves freely as well as share emotional support and trust (Kramm & Isabella 1985).

Battochio et al. (2013) discuss the meaning of trust within a sports team and according to the data, a theme of gaining mutual trust became alight. Trust as a concept can be approached from different points of views. The participants chose to associate trust with teammates and coaches in football, which can be argued to be logical. There was one exception who reflected the trust into their personal relationships. The data shows that seven participants out of eight described feeling trust and trusted “very quickly” and this can be interpreted to be a sign of professionalism. One participant notes that they have been playing for a long time and know what the team needs. Other answers included mentions of team training being the decisive builder of trust. Therefore, it can be argued that if newly migrated players feel a connection to their teammates on the pitch, it helps their off-pitch integration. Kramm & Isabella (1985) suggest that an information relationship only includes a low level of trust, whereas people who are in a special relationship trust each other completely. Based on this, it would be possible to argue that either the players are undermining the meaningful relationships in their working environment, or that football requires a certain level of trust. The latter would mean that the intercultural workplace relationships typology created by Kramm & Isabella (1985) cannot be applied to the modern-day football context and therefore it should be evolved in some direction. A team always has its own dynamics, where each individual plays their role as best as they can. Therefore, it is not only an intercultural working place, but a highly competitive environment where everyone wants to achieve the same goal. Based on this idea, the typology shouldn't be applied to a professional sports context. However, it can work as a starting point in developing a suitable typology for a competitive environment.

A common theme of clubs helping the players to get accommodation becomes clear when reading the data. However, it can be argued that this should be held as self-evident when a club brings a player to Finland or any other country. This kind of practical approach can be interpreted to imply two things. The first one being that the questions should have guided the participants to think of cultural aspects as well. Secondly, it can be interpreted to be a worrying sign about how little do clubs work on their players' integration, as housing is a crucial part of it (Richardson 2012). The starting point is obviously different when compared to financially richer leagues and clubs, but if the starting point is getting the players an apartment and hoping that they figure the rest out themselves, there are a lot of steps that can be taken in order to make the integration process easier and faster. A counterargument to this claim is found from

the data, as participants write how their clubs helped them open bank accounts, helped with welcoming a players' child into the world, and showed where an ethnic grocery store is located. It must be mentioned that in some answers it appears that coaches and teammates are perceived as the club. The questionnaire doesn't explain these concepts separately but utilizes the word teammate, coach, and club all in different contexts. The usage of these words, however, wasn't enough to separate their meaning. This leads to deserved criticism of the questionnaire.

Battochio et al. (2013) discuss cultural appreciation and limit its definition to action taken by the team to help the migrated player integrate. There are so many features that can be included in this definition, even in Battocchio et al. (2013) own writing, that it should be redefined. Lots of conversation has been flowing around for the past couple of years about the differences between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation, especially in the context of different art forms. However, in this context, an approach applied by the participants should be taken into consideration, rather than quoting past literature on the subject. All of the participants wrote that they feel that their culture is appreciated in their club. This was presented through different examples, like sharing their music and food with their teammates. Therefore, appreciating other cultures includes being tolerant and open toward migrated people. Battocchio et al. (2013) and Valo & Lahti (2013) discuss how learning about other cultures works in both ways. People from the host country can have positive experiences when learning new languages and other cultural matters. It can be argued that this should be self-evident as well, but people can be argued to be too focused on their own ideas and ways, even though new culture could broaden and enrich their minds. The importance of food was discussed through previous literature, and it made an appearance on data as well. Battocchio et al. (2013) suggest that a wide variety of foods can create positive affiliations to cultural diversity and a more open environment. Battocchio et al. (2013) also pointed out that access to food from the migrants' country of origin can ease the feeling of loneliness and enhance the integration process. Two of the participants brought up the importance of their local food in different sections of the questionnaire, which strengthens the claims from the source literature.

This study provided a non-expected side result when the data strengthened an existing stereotype about Finns' personality traits. Six of the eight participants mentioned experiencing a cultural shock about how silent Finnish people can be. Even though every participant said that they made friends easily, this suggests that it was from their initiation. Therefore, it can be argued that the participants were active in making their own integration process successful which was argued to be crucial by Schinke et al. (2011). Schinke et al. (2011) suggest that successful relocation requires the acquisition of new skills as well as being active.

A lot of emphases was put on the importance of learning the local language in the literature. This study argues against these claims with a reasonable explanation. Most of the literature related to the migration of professional athletes has been done in North America and England, where the financial climate of different sports differs quite a lot from Finnish first-division football. Therefore, the number of players, ethnicities, attention, and every possible aspect is larger compared to Finland. A second, and more important claim, is that English is spoken as a first language in North America and England. English is also considered as the lingua franca, which means that it is spoken almost everywhere. The role English language is undeniable in every section of the modern world, not just in sports. international business as well as tourism has adapted to its spreading during the global impact that England and America have had in the last three centuries (Richardson et al. 2012). Battochio et al. (2013) discuss how different language-related matters could improve the integration process. Language reinforcement and language models are two themes that Battochio et al. (2013) go through and are arguably found from the data. Language models can create an example of how to acquire a language since they are pathways that are already discovered by teammates. The importance of teammates has already been emphasized but it comes up again since the participants associated language with teammates and English rather than Finnish. Fostered control, which is divided into integration and language reinforcement can appear through words of encouragement (Battochio et al. 2013). Words of encouragement can build the players confidence and relieve any doubts the newly migrated player might experience. All the players expressed that they have felt encouraged, which leads to the conclusion that their integration process has been helped by their teammates and coaches. None of the participants mentioned receiving any support or encouragement from anyone else than their teammates or coaches.

A theme of English as the lingua franca was found in the data, as most of the participants side-lined Finnish completely. None of the participants was even worried about anything related to language, since the role of English became evident from the answers. Only one participant mentioned separately that the coach goes to extra lengths to explain the drills to them in English. Others just spoke about how everybody is speaking English so there were not any difficulties in that sector. This could lead to the conclusion that Veikkausliiga teams are capable of operating in English. This is an important finding as it can promote the reputation of Veikkausliiga amongst players that are looking to migrate or are possibly being recruited by some club in Veikkausliiga. Arguably, the quality and attention of the league grows, as foreign players are recruited to the teams and therefore, a possible reputation of a league without a language barrier can enhance the growth.



This study strove to answer three research questions:

RQ1: What are foreign football players in Finland doing to enhance their own migration and integration process?

RQ2: How do foreign football players in Finland perceive their clubs' effort while integrating into Finnish society?

RQ3: How do foreign football players in Finland experience the importance of language in the integration process?

According to the analysis, the answer to the first research question was that players are trying to grab their opportunities as well as they can by being active. Being active in their own integration appears in the form of approaching teammates and initiating conversations that can lead to the first steps of friendship, after which there is a possibility, the relationship evolves even further. An active approach becomes even more important, especially when the data provided insight into the fact that Finnish people can be a tad bit silent and slow at making contact. A sense of self-awareness can be argued to convey through the data as answers included citations to the responsibility the players feel about themselves. The responsibility of their own integration and success on and off the pitch is a crucial feature to understand, as the nature of the game is highly competitive. Everybody wants to play, and nobody wants to lose. The main finding from questions related to self-enhancement was that individuals' own approach to self-development is dependent on their background, situation, and experiences.

The answer to the second research question appeared in a few different ways and perhaps it tells something about the nature of football-related migration in Finland. The main finding was clubs helping players with accommodation and bureaucracy, but the actions of teammates and coaches can be at least partially included in this section. Battocchio et al. (2013) discussed about the reputation of clubs having an effect on players' decision to migrate. The fact that the players know in beforehand that their working environment is going to be in English, is arguably a positive factor in the decision-making process. The answers also provided intel about most of the people being nice, this can be stitched to the culture of the clubs as well because a competitive environment where players fight against each other for their playing time is not always a healthy one.

After the emphasis past literature put on acquiring the new environment's language, the results were not expected to argue against them. However, after comparing the environment of the past literature to the one of this study, it is evident that the

results are going to differ. The data presented that English has a major role in Finnish football and that football migrants do not even think about the Finnish language, as they know they will be fine with English. Therefore, the answer to the last research question is that foreign football players in Finland feel, that English is the main language and its position as lingua franca in the world of football is evident.

## 7 CONCLUSION

### 7.1 Practical implications of the findings

The first thing to mention is that there is a clear and enormous niche, for language, communication, and integration studies in Finnish sports. To be more precise, the niche is there for European sports and especially in northern countries. The effects that proper integration can have, can only benefit both parties. Therefore, it would be interesting to see some effort put into these kinds of subjects in the near future. The results of past literature are not comparable as the climate of the sports is completely different. Small leagues and clubs could gain some quick growth in developing their approach.

Battochio et al. (2013) suggests that the only generalizations that can be applied to a professional athletes' integration and migration processes is that there are not generalizations. This refers to the fact that every individual perceives their own reality in their own way. A tough approach can work for some, whereas it may have a devastating influence on others. The emphasis on individual perception and experiences is affected by multiple factors, like the players, age, family situation, and career stage. The stage of a migrated players' career is extremely influential in Finnish football, as it can be perceived as a pit stop for some, who are searching for a quick boost to their career.

## **7.2 Limitations of the study**

Eight participants out of 33 possible, takes the sample size to 24 percent. A narrow sample size may skew the answers but as stated before, the subject is multifaceted. This means that some critiques can be pointed to the results if they are being generalized. Another possible critique of the study method can be that the data is open to misinterpretations since the answers are gathered online and cannot be corrected at the time the survey is taking place (Jansen 2010). However, the questions should work as a fix to the possibility of misinterpretation since they were simple and open-ended.

Studying the careers of migrants is a multi-layered and multi-faceted phenomenon that involves the interplay of the individual and the organization (Ariss et al. 2012). Studies about international mobility should be able to take the whole package into consideration, rather than just looking at the matter from an individual or the organization's perspective (Ariss et al. 2012). Ariss et al. (2012) suggest a valid point by discussing the fact that international mobility research is almost solely imported from North America or Western Europe. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized on a global scale.

A major problem for this study is the possibility of interpretation of the answers. Even though there are not too many foreign football players in Finland, the sample size should be higher when conducting a survey through an online questionnaire. With only eight participants, interviews would have been better, as they would have provided some context around the answers. In addition, interviews would have made it possible for the researcher to adjust the questions and answers in the moment. This would have erased the possibility of interpretation from the answers. As the answers are interpreted by the researcher, there is a possibility that one point of view is not noticed when unwrapping the data into a text. Therefore, one can always argue that the results are not accurate at all.

One point of critique can be the quality of the questions as well. The questions should have been constructed after writing the review section. Now the questionnaire was made after a lot of reading and the reality around the literature was somewhat different in the end. Some questions could have been articulated better and a few more questions could have made the data richer.

## **7.3 Directions for future research**

Future studies regarding the integration and migration studies of professional athletes could benefit from a few different approaches. The first approach suggested

is a framework for a specific league. The recourses of clubs in a specific league are usually somewhat relatable with each other, except for a few super-rich teams. Therefore, a framework that forces the clubs to go through certain steps including some cultural education, language education, and education about new surroundings could arguably be useful. These features would lift some of the responsibility away from the players' shoulders, and they could focus more on the sporting side and bring their professionalism to the footballing side of things. Which could then lead to better performances on the pitch. A second possible approach could be investing in staff that could focus on players' mentality. This would provide an individual approach to integration, as sports psychologists could help the players in a way that they need is necessary. Not every migrant wants or needs help in integrating into a new society and this approach would also guarantee that the ones who need space are given it.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

#### **Theme: Language**

Did the football club help you with the language barrier? How?

Did you think in beforehand, that language is going to be an issue? Why/how?

Did you get encouragement? what kind and from who?

#### **Theme: integration help received**

Did somebody help you to get familiar with your new surroundings? Who?

How long did it take you to feel the trust of your teammates and coaches and vice versa?

Did you make new friends easily? With who?

Who has helped you the most with integrating into a new environment and culture?

#### **Theme: Actions taken by the club**

What actions did the football club make to make sure you feel welcome?

How did the football club help you with integration and migration? What did they do?

Do you feel that your culture is appreciated by the new club and teammaes?

#### **Theme: Cultural experiences**

When did you start to feel comfortable in a new club and country?

What kind of negative experiences have you experienced in Finland?

Did you experience any cultural shocks? What kind?

**Theme: Self-enhancement**

What did actions did you take to make sure your integration and migration processes are successful?