

# ADAPTING TO FINLAND THROUGH PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

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Perceptions of players and coaches

Master's Thesis  
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<b>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</b> <p>The present study explores how football migrants (foreign professional football / soccer players) perceive the adaptation process in Finland. Globalization and legislation have made it easier for football players to work abroad. The amount of football migrants in Finland is increasing each year. The internationalization of Finnish football requires study. Successful adaptation has a positive outcome on a migrant, which will increase the chances of personal, and thus in the case of football, team success.</p> <p>This thesis is a qualitative study of five football migrants, who are interviewed based on thematic, semi structured face-to-face conversations in Finland. The following research questions for this study are used to get insight in the adaptation process of football migrants: (1) how do football migrants feel about the possibilities in Finland to fulfil their dreams and ambitions?; (2) What are the impressions of their adaptation process in Finland?; (3) What are the football migrant's perceptions of their own intercultural communication skills?; And, (4) how internationally orientated are Finnish football organizations, according to football migrants?</p> <p>The key finding of this study is that football migrants have a hard time adapting to Finland through professional football: local football clubs are not ready to work with foreigners in order to achieve full potential. In addition, there are too many differences between the Finnish communication style and the one of the football migrant, which causes frictions on the football pitch. Although Finnish football has become more international during the last years, there is a lack of focus on intercultural communication competence.</p>	
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This Master's Thesis explores how football migrants perceive the adaptation process in Finland. A football migrant is someone who goes to a different country than its own, in order to work as a professional football player or coach (Besson, Poli, & Ravenel, 2013). A professional football migrant earns his living by being a fulltime football player or football coach.

In this study, their stories of arriving, living and working in Finland will be told, and have been recorded via in-depth interviews. The goal is to discover what working as a professional football migrant in Finland looks like in the context of intercultural communication. To be more precise: the study gives us insight in the adaptation process of football migrants in Finland and if they are able to do their job like they would like to, despite living in a different country and working in a new culture. What are their frustrations? How do they communicate with their Finnish colleagues? And above all: do they get any help from their employers, or are they left to their own fate?

Football has been the most popular sport in the world, since more than a hundred years. It is, however, not just 'sports'. It is a sub-culture, it is working life: "football is 'the serious life'" (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004, p. 546). A football club has to be seen as a company and a football player as an employee. Football migrants are like expatriates.

We are living in a globalized world. 'Globalization' can be defined as the "growth of international exchange and interdependence"

(Scholte, 2005, p. 16). It seems that globalization is something new, mainly because of the rise of the internet, through which people all over the world are easily connected with each other. But when we look back in history, we see that people have always been traveling and exploring the world: for work, to colonize or to flee from war (Wallerstein, 2000). However, in the case of sports we cannot name the same reasons for globalization.

The game of football has been introduced by the British, and has been spread all over the globe since late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although the objective of the game is in every country the same, namely: two team trying to kick the ball in the net of the opponent, local conditions have created a 'local' form of football. This phenomenon is called 'glocalization' (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004). Football in Finland is glocalized. For instance, the Finnish season starts in April and ends in October, due to cold and snowfall in the winter, while in the rest of Europe and many other countries in the world (except those countries with harsh winters), the football season starts in August and ends in May/June. Also, the league is much smaller than a regular league; the Finnish league has twelve teams, while in many other leagues eighteen or twenty teams play for the championship. The Finnish Football League Association says about these differences: "In a country that is almost three times bigger than England, but has a population of only five million, you really have to try to achieve anything. Never giving up, never losing your coolness. That is what the Veikkausliiga (Finnish Premier League, M.S.) is all about" ("Veikkausliiga: Briefly", 2013).

### **1.1. Motivation for the study**

This study has been conducted for several important reasons.

Firstly, football is one of the most studied topics in the academic world, yet there has been carried out minimal research on cultural adaptation in athletics and, in particular, Finnish football. Sports communication is a relatively new study field. Only in 1989 the first sports communication book written by a communication scholar was published. In the 1990's, more studies followed (Brown & O'Rourke, 2003).

Secondly, Finland has had a tradition of exporting players, rather than importing foreigners. Finland has a short history on attracting foreign football players. Only since recent years, there has been an increasing amount of football migrants coming to Finland. However, when looking at statistics, it appears that many football migrants, in general, do not stay longer in Finland than one or two years (Besson, Poli, & Ravenel, 2013). Due to the great movement of football players in the world, football teams import foreign employers more than ever (McGovern, 2002).

Thirdly, not every football club, nor football migrant, might be prepared for the change; it needs some education. Kim (2001) names several aspects of the adaptation process of a regular migrant. She says, for instance, that every migrant has to face the adaptation process, together with its difficulties. Change will cause psychological stress. The new living environment will change the way migrants will look at their personal cognitive, affective and behavioral habits. When a migrant is not competent in his communication skills, personal needs are difficult to

encounter and he will have a lower self-esteem, then when he does have these skills. Since football is a team sports, a hypothesis would be that Finnish football clubs are well prepared to adopt football migrants, in order to let them excel in the best way possible. Only that way, Finnish clubs benefit from foreign skills.

Effective communication is, hence, important. According to Daft (2000), among others, the biggest problematic factors in communication processes within intercultural sport settings are the language (with the amount of foreigners due to the Bosman case, language differences are problematic in sports teams. However, as stated by Kim (2001), language learning is a fundamental aspect of a successful adaptation process.), the limited communication time players and coaches have during games, the ability of perception (meaning that each player decodes a coach's message differently), a player's negative attitude and, finally, external factors such as noise in the stadium, the referee and opponents. These problems are less likely to occur when a football migrant, but also players and coaches of the local team, acquired (host) communication competence (Kim, 2001).

A football club is not a regular working place. Employees do not have a 9-to-5-working mentality, and there is no special academic qualification needed to get a place in the team. Football migrants have a very different status in society, than a random immigrant. As strikingly said by the Belgian Minister of State Mark Eyskens: "We do worship football players of African descent, even if they earn a lot of money, but anonymous

foreign poor creatures, who we do not know and we do not see on television, are unwanted and intruders” (Eyskens, 2013).

The motivation of the study has been explained in this chapter. Besides the lack of research, the growing amount of football migrants in Finland and the need for a migrant’s successful adaptation process, there is also a note of personal interest on the topic.

Since I was a seven-year-old boy, living in a time that football club AFC Ajax from Amsterdam, the Netherlands, conquered the world and won all the big trophies that were out there, I have followed the world of football closely. The Ajax team that won the Champions League, Europe’s biggest football trophy, in 1995 consisted of sixteen players, of which only three were foreigners: one Finn, and two Nigerians. In the same year the Bosman Ruling followed and Ajax started to be a team with mainly foreigners. That was, according to former Ajax CEO Arie van Eijden, the wrong path to follow: “If possible, Ajax should work with players who were grown up here. But sometimes it is necessary to sign a foreign player. But how ‘foreign’ is somebody from within the European Union, nowadays? (...) Communication is the most important aspect in football: players need to understand the Dutch language” (Meijer, 2004).

The life story of Cristian Chivu, a Romanian player who came in 1999 as a teenager to Amsterdam, intrigued me. In his book ‘Cristi’, Chivu talks about the moment he arrives in the Netherlands. He stays at a hotel room for a long time; he misses his family and does not understand a word of what people tell him. He gets injured, followed by

a suspension due to a red card. Only his will to survive made him finally a success in Amsterdam. It earned him a transfer to AS Roma in Italy (Boers, 2004).

Chivu's story, together with that of many other football players, made me interested in professional football players who are willing to leave their own country and go to another place, with another language and other habits. Is the will to survive the only way to succeed, or are there other factors that make an international team a winning team?

## **1.2. Introduction to football migration**

To understand today's globalized game of football; we first have to understand the so-called Bosman Ruling of 1995, after which football got its cosmopolitan style. Jean-Marc Bosman was a Belgian professional player for Belgian team RFC Liege, whose professional football contract with the club ended. Bosman wanted to move on with his career and leave RFC Liege, but the new team he wanted to join refused to pay a transfer fee for him, an amount of money RFC Liege demanded.

The European Court of Justice decided that the situation was in conflict with Article 39(1) of the European Treaty of Rome: free movement of workers. The court ruled that Bosman and all other professional players coming from the European Union were free to go at the end of their work contract. Also, clubs were allowed to play with a full team of foreign players, a rule that was in some countries forbidden (European Court, 1995). The Bosman Ruling meant that all clubs from the European Union were able to sign players with a foreign passport and

let them all play at the same time. However, to prevent talented players and star players to leave for free at the end of their contract, clubs signed them for high salaries and long-term contracts. A club that, despite the high costs, wants to sign a player has to pay a lot of money to the other team.. Players without a contract, the so called transfer-free players, could after the Bosman Ruling wait for a club to offer the highest salary (Dobson & Goddard, 2001). The arms race meant bankruptcy for many teams. The Bosman Ruling meant for Bosman himself the end of his career. "He gave his career to a court case to serve a cause, but he sees that the transfer fees are still there, quotas on home-grown players are making a comeback and the rich clubs are richer and the poor ones are poorer", said his lawyer, ten years after the ruling (Fordyce, 2005).

### **1.3. Finnish football**

In this study, the focus is on football migrants in the Finnish Veikkausliiga, which is the highest league division in Finland. It is named after its main sponsor, betting company Veikkaus. The league is in 2013 (season 2012/2013) the 33<sup>th</sup> best league in Europe and is as strong comparable to that of Iceland, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ireland ("UEFA Rankings," 2013). Teams which played the most seasons in the Finnish premier league are HJK from Helsinki (23 seasons), FC Inter (16) and TPS (21), both from Turku, MyPa from Kouvola (21), FF Jaro from Pietarsaari (19) and RoPS from Rovaniemi (17). The amounts of seasons show how young the professional Finnish league is: Veikkausliiga is founded in 1990. Before this time, the competition was called Mestaruussarja ("Championship Series"), which was founded in 1930 as

an amateur/semi-professional league. Between 1930 and 2013, HJK Helsinki has been crowned league champions 26 times and is therefore the absolute top team, followed by FC Haka and HPS (9 times champions) and TPS (8 times) ("Veikkausliiga historia," 2013). Newer, sensational teams are JJK from Jyväskylä and MIFK from the Åland island Mariehamn (Finnish: Maarianhamina). Both were smaller amateur teams, but both got promoted several years in a row. JJK even took the third place in the 2011-season, which earned the team a place in the Europa League, a knock-out competition that consists of teams from all over Europe. MIFK won this place after the 2012-season.

The budgets of the Veikkausliiga teams are relatively small, compared to that of bigger leagues in Europe. Budgets within Finland are important to show, since money is one of the most important factors in the signing process of football migrants. With this money, clubs can buy players and pay their salaries. The higher the budget, the more likely a club will buy better or more famous players, than other teams. Teams with a large budget are also more likely to have better job accommodations. In the following table team's overall budget and player's budget are shown.

<b>Budgets Veikkausliiga</b>		
<b>Season 2013</b>		
<b>Team name</b>	<b>Budget (in €)</b>	<b>Player budget (in €)</b>
HJK Helsinki	3.726.200	1.233.000
FC Inter Turku	870.000	620.000



TPS Turku	1.750.000	600.000
FC Lahti	962.500	450.000
FC Honka Espoo	900.000	350.000
FF Jaro Pietarsaari	1.171.000	422.000
MIFK Mariehamn	958.000	514.000
JJK Jyväskylä	1.300.000	600.000
KuPS Kuopio	1.100.000	550.000
MyPa Kouvola	1.300.000	380.000
RoPS Rovaniemi	950.000	350.000
VPS Vaasa	1.264.750	520.000

**Figure 1 Veikkausliiga's team budgets in Euro's ("HJK:lla suurin," 2013).**

According to research, footballers in the Finnish Veikkausliiga earn an average salary of €17.520 per year, based on the most recent numbers of 2011. This is lower compared to 2010, when the average salary was €22.580. For this research, 251 football players answered the questionnaire. The average age was 23 years old. 75 percent of them worked as a full-time professional football player. 20 percent earned more than €33.330 per year, 35 percent earned less than €9.600 per year ("Jalkapalloilijoiden", n.d., slide 2).

For more statistics on football migrants in Finnish football, please see chapter 2.1.



## **2. REVIEW**

In the past twenty years, many studies have been conducted in order to find out more about why migrants go abroad and what challenges they face in their new environment. There are also studies that look into the migration process and the migration reasons of football players. This review will focus on five major themes which arise in the reviewed literature. These themes are: cultural similarity, intercultural competence, pressure, identity and culture shock. The review consists of three additional themes, which focus on football migrants in particular. These topics are: football players in Finland, the purpose of football migration and the typology of football migrants. This review will, when possible, primarily focus on migration in relation to football players.

### **2.1. Football players in Finland**

Finland is a country with 5.2 million inhabitants of which 1.1 million are members of a sports club. According to statistics of the Finnish Sports Federation (Puistonen, 2012) there is one sports club for every 600 Finns. Less than three percent of the sports clubs have professional sports players employed, while the clubs have in total 1200 team coaches who earn at least half of their income from sports. Although there are teams who pay coaches and players some money, 97 percent of the sports clubs are not profit making.

Additional essential and interesting statistics come from the CIES Football Observatory. This think-tank has made several demographic studies regarding football. In 2013, Finland is one of the

European countries with the lowest amount of expatriates (or so-called football migrants), namely 23 percent (Besson, Poli, & Ravenel, 2013). This is a slight increase compared to the report of 2008, when it was 21 percent (Besson, Poli, & Ravenel, 2009). According to this report of 2008, Finland is one of the countries where we see a steady, slight increase of football migrants. Finnish teams attract relatively more players from Eastern Europe and Africa than other European countries. In 2008, football migrants were mainly Swedish, Nigerian and Zambian. Some Finnish teams did not have foreigners at all in their squad, a phenomenon that we do not see in other countries. For example, in Poland, Denmark, and Sweden the team with the lowest percentage of contracted football migrants still consists of 4% to 20% of foreigners. Top leagues in Europe, for instance the British, Spanish, and Italian, import more than 50 percent of their players from other countries.

In the same report of 2013 we also see some other remarkable measurements. For example, Finland has of all European countries the highest decrease of squad members per team - 22.4 members. Romania has 27.6 members, the highest average. Related to this finding, Finland also has the highest decrease of signings: -3.1% with an average of 7.3 new players per club per season, while 9 to 10 signings per season is average in Europe. However, this is in contrast to the number of national Finnish players in each team. Finland is third on the ranking of the highest percentage of club-trained players (33.8%). Club-trained players are players who have been playing for at least three years at the club during their youth, but who are now playing as professionals in the first adult

team. As a result, we see that the Finnish football league is among the youngest leagues in Europe. Players have an average age of 24.98 years, while the average European age stands at 26 years. The Cypriot league is the oldest in Europe: players have an average age of 28.29 years.

These statistics are in line with the fact that Finland is getting every year more, so-called, internationals, with an increase of 3.2% in the last year. Internationals are players who are born in Finland or have a Finnish passport and are playing for the Finnish national team, alongside their club team.

## **2.2. Purpose of football migration**

Although Finnish football does not know many foreigners, migration to Finland for sport purposes is not new. Olin & Penttilä (1994) did research on the motives of professional sports men for going to Finland. The reasons were, among others, to find a new job due to unemployment in their own country, trying to achieve a better status and better earnings and getting new life experience in a new country. Besides these, some players also said that the Finnish league could make them a better player. Economic factors, for instance better earnings, became even more important near the end of the 1980's, when practicing sports in Finland became more lucrative.

Jos Hooiveld is one example of a football player who came to Finland for the reason of being unemployed in his home country. The Dutchman says in an interview that nobody in the Netherlands was

interested in signing him, and that now, after winning the Finnish league title with his club Inter Turku and being awarded with the price of Best Player in Finland, he is now more famous in Scandinavia than in his home country (2010). On the other hand, since many Scandinavian football teams are semi-professional and are, therefore, not paying very high salaries, generations of Scandinavian players move south to Spain or Italy to get better earnings (Taylor, 2006).

Also in other countries people have done research on the reasons for people to go abroad and practice professional football. For example in Ireland, a country that has a football league comparable to the level of the Finnish league (Besson, Poli, & Ravenel, 2013). Many Irish players are moving to England to play professional football. One of the most important reasons to go abroad is the lack of fulltime playing time and a poor infrastructure (Bourke, 2003). Also the very high salaries are an advantage, since the average salary of a professional player is 400.000 dollar a year.

Yet, not every promising Irish player wants to play for a top league team from the very beginning. In lower league organizations people get more attention on a personal level, which leads to a better personal development. Money does not play a role in those cases, according to Bourke (2003). This is contrast with what Stead & Maguire (2000) have noticed with Scandinavian players who moved to England. For those players, the prospect of playing full-time professional football was the most important reason for moving abroad, but the second most important reason was the financial aspect. Many of them also wanted to

know more about other cultures and learn a new language. Also this is in contrast with the research on Irish players. They would rather play in Great-Britain than in Spain or Italy, due to cultural similarities, nearness to Ireland, and family ties (Bourke, 2003).

One other problem that Bourke (2003) discovered is the lack of regular education, since many chose a football career instead of education. Only a third of the studied group finished secondary school. Professional players in England have a lot of spare time, and with the lack of education they do not know what to do with their lives. The teams they play for do not look after them.

Low-cost employment is a reason why African footballers come to Europe. Young African talents first cost a little. After a few years clubs hope to sell them with big profit (Poli & Ravenel, 2005 cited in Poli, 2006).

According to Danish research among football playing ethnic minorities, these players feel excluded from the Danish society. When they would move to another, unfamiliar country, they have to start all over again with adapting and integration. Therefore, a Danish minority player would rather stay in Denmark (Agergaard & Sørensen, 2009).

### **2.3. Cultural similarity**

As stated by Taylor (2006) there is a tradition for football migrants to move to a country with cultural similarities. Since 1925 there have been hundreds of Argentinian and Brazilian football players who have moved to Italy. Italy has been the player's parent's country of origin, or

sometimes the players were born themselves in the country. Many players have a double passport because of Italian relatives. The majority of Brazilian players, who went to Italy, came from the club Palmeiras, a football team founded by Italians and formerly known as Palestra Italia Club of São Paulo, freely translated as the Italian Gymnastics Club of São Paulo. Comparable reasons were found for the Southern American migrants who went to Spain; also these players had Spanish relatives. Even in the year 2000, many of the Southern American players have moved to Spain, Italy or Portugal; there were only a few playing in the two other top leagues of Europe, England, and Germany. Also France has, due to its colonial history in Africa, many football migrants, who are in the French case of Algerian or Moroccan origin.

Even if the country is much different than a player's own, there still has to be an aspect of cultural similarity. According to Spanish player Isaac Cuenca, who moved in January 2013 from FC Barcelona in Spain to Ajax Amsterdam in the Netherlands, the presence of former FC Barcelona players Frank de Boer and Marc Overmars was very important to him, since they speak the Spanish language and know about his culture. Even the way Ajax plays the game of football, is in the opinion of Cuenca similar to that of Barcelona's (Verweij, 2013).

Not every migration is successful. One example is the Brazilian Emerson, who had problems settling himself in England. Especially his wife was extremely unhappy. She said in an interview that she could not stand the food, the weather and, because of that, she had



sleepless nights. Although life was financially worse in her own country, people were always in a better mood (The Mail on Sunday, 1996 as cited in Stead & Maguire, 2000).

Some adventurous players go abroad to play football on a very young age. As stated by Maguire (1999), some sports migrants do not think about the possible experience of culture shock, or think that they do not experience it at all, while already being abroad. This may end up bad, as already shown by tennis playing young women who get a burn-out after playing international professional tennis tournaments at a very young level. In contrast, Ruben (1983 cited in Kim, 2001) thinks that experiencing culture-shock might help a migrant adapt, since he or she is learning to be socially and professionally operative via the hard way, instead of trying to avoid such an experience.

The decision to play football in another country is, according to Stead & Maguire (2000) often influenced by family. The football club has to take into account that there are many connecting groups and organizations that have much influence on a player. To discover who is exactly in control and who has the power in football, one should do very difficult and costly research (Dunning, 1999). However, Clarke (1992) has made a schematic of the groups that have lots of influence during the life of a player. These are, besides family members and spouses, the home club or the feeder, and host club (recruiter), managers, coaches, agents, mass media, and the fans. Also sponsors are influential.

The nationality and culture play an important role for a football club for deciding what player it will attract. English teams, for instance, prefer Nordic players for several reasons. According to the managers of English teams and what the Nordic players have heard, players from Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden are reliable, hard-working, inexpensive and skillful compared to English players (Stead & Maguire, 2000). In addition, managers thought that Nordic players are not involved in scandals off the pitch, they do not drink (no beer-culture) and “you don’t get people moaning for days or who are gone to Rio” (p. 51), where ‘gone to Rio’ refers to Brazilian players who often want to go home due to homesickness.

#### **2.4. Types of football migration**

Some Finnish people think football migrants are very important for the future of Finnish football, because of their skills and mentality, and immigrants are therefore called ‘saviors’ (“Changing The Face”, 2009).

Magee & Sugden (2002) created a typology of football migration, based on the sport labor migration typology of Maguire (1999). Maguire (1999) identified five different types of professional sport migrants, who are going to another country to play, for instance, ice hockey, cricket or football. The first group of sport migrants is called *pioneers*. Pioneers are people who are one the first ones to bring a new sport to another country, or bring the game to a higher level. The migrants who are staying for many years are called *settlers*. Magee & Sugden (2002) think that a football player should stay four or five years in one country in order to call him or her a settler. The third type of sport migrant is a *mercenary*.

According to Maguire (1999), this is a type of player who only stays for a short period of time and has no connection to the new, local culture. Magee & Sugden (2002) believe that a mercenary is someone who is mainly motivated to practice professional sports for financial reasons: money is the key for attraction. On the other hand, there is a type of migrant named *nomadic cosmopolitans*. These players enjoy the experience of living in a different country, learning a new language and living in a big city. Examples of famous football players who belong to this typology are Ruud Gullit and Jürgen Klinsmann, who have been living and playing football in cities like Milan, London and Los Angeles (Magee & Sugden, 2002). According to Maguire (1999), nomadic cosmopolitans want to live like 'others'. The term 'others' belongs to the concept of having an 'in-group' and 'out-group' (see part 2.5: *identity*). The fifth group is called *returnees*: players who are going to their home country after traveling for many years. Magee & Sugden (1999) identified four more types of football migrants, namely *ambitionists*, *exiles* and *expelled*, plus *the celebrity superstar*. An ambitionist is someone who wants to be a professional football player at all costs, who wants to play in a specific high level league to become a better player and wants to play there because this league is famous in one's own country. The authors state that players from Scandinavia believe that the English league is the best competition to play, since English football has always been on television.



**Figure 2 Typology of football labor migration.**

**Sources: Maguire (1999) and Magee & Sugden (2002)**

players are the ones who move away involuntary to another country. One example of an expelled football migrant is Faas Wilkes, one of the most famous Dutch football players of the 1950's. In that time Dutch football was not yet of a professional level. Wilkes could earn money in Italy at Internazionale Milano and moved away from his own country. As a result of signing a professional football contract elsewhere, he was no longer welcome in the Netherlands and he was not allowed to play for the national team, as decided by the Dutch Football Association (Lanfranchi

& Taylor, 2001). Finally, a celebrity superstar is someone who is world famous because of his football skills, his looks and private life, and therefore wants to play for a team where he can stay famous or become even better known. Magee & Sugden (2002) name David Beckham as an example. Maguire (1999) stresses the fact that it depends on a player's stage of life to decide to what football migrant type he belongs.

## **2.5. Intercultural competence**

Stead & Maguire found that many of the football migrants they have interviewed emphasize the importance of psychological readiness. "Confidence was the key for some players" (2000, p.46). The main focus point, according to the football migrants interviewed by Stead and Maguire, is the right mental attitude. Also Kim (2001) says that a person's *functional fitness* and *psychological health* is important, explained as being mentally and behaviorally healthy. This healthiness develops at the same time with the communication competence of a person. In case a migrant has no consciousness of how life will be in an unfamiliar country or culture, intercultural problems may occur, as stated by Salo-Lee (2007). She says: "interaction (...) becomes a problem or threat if conflicts are not foreseen and there is no intercultural awareness, knowledge and skills to deal with intercultural challenges" (p. 47). Also Kim (2001) says that problems will occur when someone is not competent in his communication skills. He or she will be likely to fail in their needs and goals.

Himstreet (1995) says that effective communication is the core of any group. People within the group should be able to get along with

each other, trust each other and be able create good personal relationships. Only this will serve the greater goal of having success as a team. Without effective communication, a team will fail in its functioning. The biggest problems that cause ineffective communication are not only the language differences and prejudiced people, but also the lack of time sports people have on the pitch to communicate and external factors, such as the crowd and opponents (Daft, 2000).

According to Maguire (1999) sport migrants, who participate in international tournaments or play in international teams, deal with intercultural communication difficulties. "Major global sports festivals and tournaments involve a multilayered form of cultural communication involving interaction with fellow players, coaches, officials, the crowd, and media personnel." (p. 102). He names the Dutch, Swedes, Norwegians, and Germans as nationalities in football who communicate easier in intercultural situations than for example English players. One should have an adaptive personality, as stated by Kim (2001). Each migrant has a different personality, which "serves as a kind of blueprint for what follows in the new environment" (p. 82). One should have the traits openness and strength, of which positivity is one aspect in order to believe that everything will be all right. One who is missing these characteristics is most likely the one who gives up adjustment easily. After all, adaptation means that one is able to solve internal pressures in order to make a personal development (Kim, 2001).

People who have been living in different areas of the world for a longer period of time are called, as defined by Maguire (1999), nomadic

cosmopolitans. In addition to that, nomadic cosmopolitans can become cosmopolitan communicators (Pearce, 1989). In that case, a person knows how to communicate well in different intercultural circumstances. As stated by Pearce (1989), cosmopolitan communicators go along with each other as if they are natives to the local culture, because they are “similarly shaped by their own ‘local’ resources and practices” (p. 190). It takes for many foreigners a long time before signs of being a cosmopolitan communicator are visible (Kim, 2001).

The duration of a football migrant’s work contract should tell the club whether or not to invest in an intercultural training. According to Kim (2001), the host is not strict about the right cultural behavior of a short-term sojourner, but the one who will stay in a new place for a longer period of time will be possible more enthusiastic to learn about the country and culture. But in any case it is that a foreigner who is becoming more competent in an intercultural world will have a better confidence and will be likely to achieve personal goals.

Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC), also known as Intercultural Competence, is about being competent in an intercultural environment. Several scholars and researchers have discussed the definition of the term ICC. According to Chen & Starosta (2005), ICC is “the ability to effectively and appropriately execute communication behaviors to elicit a desired response in a specific environment” (p. 241), which can be translated as communicating in a way that another person response in an expected or wanted way. This idea, however, cannot be

applied in all intercultural competence trainings. It is impossible to use one, specific training for a large target group, since not everybody has the same communication method, cultural values, and/or expectations. Spitzberg (2000) recognizes this problem by saying that skills can be trained only in a specific circumstance.

Spitzberg also says that “no particular skill or ability is likely to ever be universally 'competent'” (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 6). Intercultural competence can be taught, but not always in the same way: one should look at the target group and the purpose of the training. The competence itself is about people's communication with others, who are standing differently in life, e.g. on cultural and language level. However, although the term communication refers to language, it has not always only to do with this area but rather is a part of a whole.

According to Kim (2001), it is necessary and a must for migrants to learn verbal and nonverbal communication patterns, such as codes and symbols. Language should be learned as first, because it helps one to get into the host society and to know how the locals think and why they act the way they do. When the migrant masters the language, he or she will get a good position in the society or in this case in the football team. Kim says that “[language] brings status and power for strangers, both psychologically and socially.” (p. 101). Young (1995) found that one needs to stay for a longer time in order to become adequate in having conversations with a second language.

According to Crystal (2003), a lingua franca (common language) is needed in an intercultural environment. This language can



be English or a pidgin, which is a language with elements of other language. Lingua franca is nowadays common since the start of international organizations such as the United Nations in the 1950's. An international language is, as stated by Crystal, especially valued in business communities, to which a football team belongs to as well. The danger of a lingua franca is that it might create "an elite monolingual linguistic class" (Crystal, 2003, p. 14), which could not be harmful to others in the same community.

When migrants will not learn the local language and cultural norms and traits, a migrant will be, as Kim (2001) says, "handicapped in their ability to meet their physical, material, psychological and social needs and goals." (p.73). When they do not participate in local communities – right away or not at all – it will take a long time before someone can be competent in the host communication (p.76-77).

With everything in life it is important to ask 'why' we do or must do things in a certain way. With producing or attending an intercultural training, it is even necessary to ask this question not only from oneself but also from the others. The aim of the training has to be clear and the wanted or expected outcome is essential when being involved in ICC. Therefore, participants should get a clear picture of why the training is of such great importance. In the globalizing world of today, everybody meets people from other countries. They do not only speak a different language, but often they also wear different clothes, have another skin color and most importantly, they have a contrasting communicating style. As stated by

Chen & Starosta (2005), companies might lose their (positive) image due to cultural conflicts and it will possibly harm their position in the international market.

## **2.6. Pressure**

A migrant might be well prepared for the changing living environment, yet, also the environment has to have traits such as openness and positivity in order to let the migrant function as desired. This is called host receptivity. Locals will help the stranger with the participating in local happenings and, thus, help him to develop communication competence. Host receptivity is sometimes also called as the communication climate of the environment (Kim, 2001). However, there might also be host conformity pressure. This pressure causes stress for the migrant: he has to act and live like locals, in a cultural as well communicative way. This pressure can be seen through, for instance, discrimination and prejudices (Kim, 2001).

After a longer time of staying, there are basically three ways a person can become part of the environment and society. This is, firstly, via acculturation, secondly via integration and finally assimilation. Acculturation is able to distinguish differences between its own and the new culture, and is also able to acquire some of the aspects of this culture. In the long run, this would result into assimilation, where a person will fully accept, and participate in, the host culture. Integration is a term used for the participation of a stranger in the host culture. However, this does not mean that the migrant has dropped his old cultural identity (Kim, 2001).

## **2.7. Identity**

The game of football is more than just forming a team and winning games. As Dunning (1999) states: “sport has come to be important at the individual, local, national and international levels (...), it plays an important part in the identity formation of individuals” (p. 5). Dunning explains that one’s identity is crucial in being successful in sports, to have good self-esteem and to be a good and valuable group member. Being a member of a group and having a feeling of being and belonging together is essential. Carrington (1986 cited in Agergaard & Sørensen, 2009) points out that success in sports is valuable for the feeling of belonging to society. Van Rheenen (2009) agrees with that, and mentions that football is an ethnic subculture that helps, for instance, ethnic minorities build a “unique cultural identity while becoming a part of an emerging multicultural nation” (p. 781). Hay & Guoth (2009) have found both results in Australia: ethnic groups use football either to create a cultural identity, while others use football to stream into the Australian society. One’s self-perception is in these cases related to a group’s relationship (Elias, 1978). According to Kim (2001), an individual develops a cultural identity by adopting cultural aspects of the other culture’s communication system. The cultural identity creates a ‘we-feeling’, a feeling of belonging to a certain group.

The perception of others should not be ignored in order to avoid generalizations and stereotyping. Generalizations assume that the members of a certain group share certain characteristics, values, and

personality traits and behave in a predictable way, which is in accordance with the group's expectations (Lehtonen, 2005). All this implies that there is a difference between the group of "us" and "them", often referred to as "out-group" and "in-group". Cultural stereotypes, such as comparisons between "us" and "the others", are connected with the concept of ethnocentricity. Ethnocentric stereotyping refers to the cross-cultural process, when an individual measures some other culture in relation to his or her own. A stereotype is a fixed, commonly held notion or image of a person or group based on a simplification of some observed or imagined mannerism of behavior or appearance of the group members. For example when one uses stereotypes of different nationalities or nations, one attributes distinctive characteristics to a country and its inhabitants.

According to Lehtonen (2005), stereotypical generalizations are often inaccurate, misleading, deceptive and irrational but we apply them nevertheless. Once adopted, stereotypes are harmful and it is very hard to change the image one has (Martin & Nakayama, 2010).

New information may change the belief one has about a group, but people tend to keep the information that supports the stereotype. However, stereotypes are inevitable and necessary, as they help us to anticipate and explain other people's behavior. People are often uncertain when experiencing something new. This view is supported by Lehtonen as he explains that when a person makes assumptions about a new person or a social event one is using the existing knowledge to

reduce uncertainty. The less one knows about the new people or their culture the more that person uses stereotypical generalizations. Many football clubs have a specific image or reputation. According to Dobson & Goddard (2001), football teams like the Scottish clubs Celtic and Rangers and the Spanish teams FC Barcelona and Real Madrid are proof that social and cultural identities have played a crucial part in shaping the support the clubs draw. Jeremy MacClancy wrote a book about stereotyping and identity in sports, and concludes that many people tend to manipulate identities through sports (1996).

## **2.8. Culture shock and uncertainty**

At the moment someone moves to another place, it is likely the person encounters a culture shock. There are many definitions for culture shock. The anthropologist Kalervo Oberg discussed in 1960 this term for the first time. He defined it as “anxiety that results from losing all of our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (Oberg, 1960, cited in Kim, 2001, p. 177). Since then, many researchers have redefined and expanded this definition. For example Bennett (1998) who claims that culture shock also comes up with people who experience the loss of a family member or encounter (new) intercultural situations. Bennett makes a difference between culture shock and transition shock. The definition of transition shock puts more focus on the adjustment, after losing familiarities in the environment.

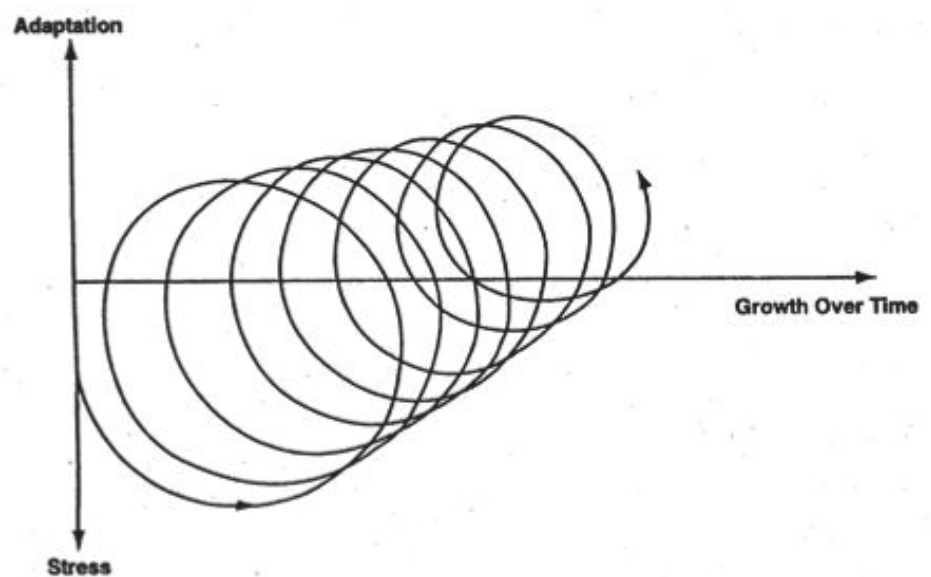
According to Ward et al. (2001), we should be careful with the word ‘shock’ in the term ‘culture shock’, since it sounds very negative.

Experiencing a new, unfamiliar place does not necessarily need to be something fearful. Instead, a shock might be something nice as well: a new viewpoint on life, a new experience. As also stated by Pedersen (1995), a culture shock is a personal experience, an experience different for each person. He defines it as “an internalized construct or perspective developed in reaction or response to the new or unfamiliar situation” (p. 1.), which is a quite neutral definition, based on the five culture shock experience stages of Peter Adler. Adler has developed these stages in a reaction on the definitions of Lysgaard, who developed in 1955 the U-curve hypothesis to define the adjustment period, and Oberg from 1958, who created seven stages of adjustment.

Adler (1975) made five neutral phases that people go through when living in another culture. The first stage is the honeymoon stage, where the person is excited about the new place, but is still thinking and living as if he or she is in the own country. The second stage is the phase where people throw away their old habits, but do not know what to do with the habits of the new culture. During the third phase, a person can have difficulties settling into the new environment, but has already learned many aspects of the new culture. However, one has emotionally a difficult time, which changes during the fourth stage, when a person develops a more balanced viewpoint on the old and new culture. Finally, one can reach the fifth stage, where the person is happy with its life in the new culture, but is also able to live in the former home culture. According to Pedersen (1995), it is not sure if this stage is really accessible or that it is only the most ideal stage to reach.

Some of the symptoms of culture shock are: excessive concern over health, feelings of helplessness and withdrawal, irritability, desire for home and old friends and physiological stress reactions (Bennett, 1998).

Kim (2001) talks more about acculturation, the active process of getting to know more about the new (host) culture. Kim sees adaptation as a process of personal growth. During this adaptation process, a person experiences lots of stress by falling back on old habits and rejecting the new culture. But by time, the person tries to adjust to the new culture again. Over a longer period of time, the stress becomes less, and the person has become more adapted to the new environment.



**Figure 3 The Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic model (Kim, 2001).**

Maguire (1999) described the experiences, problems and issues sports migrants face over time. In the short-term, we see that there are issues such as motivation and recruitment that play a role in whether or not a

player is happy in a different culture, but also if the player can get a work permit. This is normally not an issue for people from inside the European Union, but it may be for players from outside the European Union. After a longer period of time, adjustment, dislocation, and retention are important problems that are being faced, but also whether or not a person plays the amount of time he desired. At that point, also the staying abroad could be an issue, while being confronted with ethnic and national identity transformations.

Moving to another place causes frustrations. This has much to do with communication uncertainty: how to behave and communicate in a correct way? The Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) gives some indicators of when and how uncertainty increases and decreases. There are three stages of initial interactions, namely the entry phase, the personal phase and the exit phase. In the entry phase, people look for similarities in sex, age and physical appearance, and relate these to their own. The more people look the same, the lower their uncertainty about their behavior is. During the personal phase people share their personal 'data' by communicating, e.g. talking about their home town, while in the exit phase communicators are formal or informal with their greetings and possible future meeting plans, based on how well it went during the entry and personal phase of the conversation (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1997).

According to Infante et al (1997), there are three strategies to reduce uncertainty. First, there is the passive strategy. This strategy implies that by observing people, one can know how to behave in a certain way. The



second strategy, the active strategy, involves information discovery by asking around in the direct surroundings. There is no direct contact between the research object and the researcher. For instance, when one wants to know how to speak to a Finn, s/he will ask from friends and teachers who have had encounters with Finns before. The third strategy is the interactive strategy, where one seeks for direct contact. This way, one will reduce uncertainty by finding certain aspects of the new communication style all by him/her selves (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1997).



### **3. RESEARCH METHOD**

#### **3.1. Goal of the study and research questions**

As the literature review showed, football is one of the most important sports in the world and has, as a result, been glocalized (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2004). It is a sub-culture, a way of life, and has come to be important at the individual, local, national and international level. Finland is one of the countries in Europe with the least amount of football migrants playing in its highest football league. Only 23 per cent of all players in the Finnish Veikkausliiga have a foreign passport. However, there is over the years a steady increase of football migrants in Finland. Some teams do not have any foreigners in their squad, which means that the organisation is monocultural. In general, more than a third of the players in Finnish teams are club-trained youngsters.

Reasons for football migrants to move abroad are mainly unemployment, seeking new life experience and trying to get better earnings and a better status as a sports man. Playing in a lower league, like the Finnish, is accepted by many football players, since they get more personal attention from coaches, which leads to a better personal development. Family is a big influential factor by deciding the country to work in. Cultural similarities, however, are important for many football migrants. The lack of such may lead to home sickness and poor performances on the football field. Psychological readiness is for many football migrants essential before moving abroad. Having an adaptive personality is necessary for every migrant. Yet, culture shock will possibly

play a role in one's mental health, and thus being able to perform well in work.

There are several types of football migrants, for instance nomadic cosmopolitans, ambitionists, superstars, pioneers and settlers. It depends a lot on the migration reasons, the player's own identity, self-esteem and being a valuable group member, if he will be successful or not. Also the image Finnish colleagues have of the foreign player is critical. Stereotyping is a useful tool to reduce uncertainty, but stereotypical generalizations are often inaccurate, misleading, deceptive and irrational. Adopted stereotypes are harmful, and need, therefore, to be fixed by education. Intercultural communication competence can be trained. However, specific circumstances (target group, purpose of the training) are needed to have an effective training for participants. Language should be learned as first, to get into the host society and to bring status and power for strangers. In football the 'language of football' often works as a lingua franca.

The object of this study is to discover the experiences of a small sample of foreign and Finnish football professionals, arriving in Finland and adapting to the country and working place. The focus lies on adapting aspects such as cultural issues, communication, acculturation, integration and support.

Previous research mainly focused on the 'why-question' of football migration (Besson, Poli, & Ravenel, 2013; Bourke, 2003; Olin & Penttilä, 1994; Stead & Maguire, 2000; Taylor, 2006). However, specific

intercultural research on football migration in Finland is scarce. The reviewed literature is missing an answer on the 'how-question' of football migration, and in particular of football migration in Finland. The adaptation process of migrants is the most essential part of a person's staying abroad, since only with a successful process one can be functional fit and psychological healthy.

Although the review gives an understanding of adaptation processes of migrants in general, it does not give any proof of that the same reasons count football migrants, or in athletics in general. The football related literature only shows the reasons for football migration, and gives no insight in the adaptation process of footballers.

Therefore, this Master's Thesis takes an in-depth look into the adapting process of football migrants. Based on the topics and issues addressed above, I have formed the following research questions for this study:

*RQ1: How do football migrants feel about the possibilities in Finland to fulfil their dreams and ambitions?*

*RQ2: What are the impressions of their adaptation process in Finland?*

*RQ3: What are the football migrant's perceptions of their own intercultural communication skills?*

*RQ4: How internationally orientated are Finnish football organizations, according to football migrants?*

As a result of this study, Finnish football clubs may discover how to positively change the organization for the benefit of the football migrant, who they have contracted for, possibly, lots of money, and for the benefit of the whole team. Football is a team sport, and when one or more players cannot excel in their football skills due to, for instance, the lack of support and intercultural conflicts, nobody in the world of football will benefit from the positive sides of football migration.

### **3.2. Qualitative method of research**

A study on football migrants could easily be done by simply calling a football club and ask them what happens when a foreign football player arrives and how the further process looks like. However, it is much more relevant for the outcome to get insight in the perspective of the football migrant. Poli (2010) says that each football player has his own story: each football migrant has a different background and different career plan. By conducting in-depth interviews, I am able to talk with football migrants in a more relaxed environment to collect information.

It is possible that, for instance, an organization provides an excellent integration program, but that a player or coach is not enthusiastic about it. As stated before, based on the literature review it is known why football players, in general, migrate, but not how this process evolves. Only qualitative research can give a true insight in the adaptation process of football migrants in Finland. The interviews conducted in this

study are also useful as material for future studies (Kvale, 2008). The results are not meant to be generalized, but are intended to give the perceptions of players and coaches on the topic.

By conducting interviews, I am able to get deeper into the subject. By interviewing I get, as also stated by Lindlof & Taylor (2011), expert insight and gain information I would not normally get about certain events. According to Berger (2011) interviews are “one of the most fundamental research techniques”. He points out that the word *interview* comes from the French *entrevue*, which means “to see one another or meet”. Thus, it is all about a face-to-face meeting, in order to talk on a different level with the informant.

In addition, Kvale (2008) says about the qualitative interview that this research technique is very useful to find and understand the meaning of phenomena and facts. “The qualitative interview seeks qualitative knowledge as expressed in normal language, it does not aim at quantification. The interview aims at nuanced accounts of different aspects of the interviewee’s life world; it works with words and not with numbers” (p. 12). The in-depth interview technique is, therefore, most suitable for this study. In order to let the interviewed person relax and give personal information about his feelings and frustrations, it is recommended to create an “intimate familiarity” (Brenner, Brown, & Canter, 1985 p.148; as cited in Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). For this study, this has been arranged by conducting interviews in the dressing room, in the football stadium or in its restaurant.

An in-depth interview is a way to talk with the football migrant, apart from the football team, his coach and his manager. This way he is able to speak freely. In-depth interviews are normally unstructured with open questions. However, there is a different way of conducting in-depth interviews. That is via a semi structured format, or semi-standardized type of interview. The most important topics will be addressed through major questions, based on the themes of the research questions, but I get more freedom to ask more about a certain topic that came up during the conversation, and I can avoid questions on which the responder already answered while answering a different question (Gilbert, 1993; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

To make sure that the interviewed person feels comfortable with speaking openly about his viewpoints on his life and the organization where he works at that moment, I chose to make the names anonymous. According to Frey (2000), anonymity means that nobody is able to trace the interviewees. Since the Finnish football world is rather small, with keeping in mind that there are not many football migrants in Finland at the time of conducting the interviews, it is fairly hard to make sure nobody is able to guess who said what. Therefore I will not use nationalities to describe the research participants, neither the real names nor the teams they are playing for. Instead, I describe the status (level) of the team and the status of the player in the team, based on previous accomplishments.



### **3.3. Selection of interviewees**

In naturalistic inquiry, researchers choose interviewees who can give more insight in the topic the researcher is into. Therefore, these participants are not randomly chosen, but they are a “purposive sample, intentionally chosen the people, on the basis of theoretical and/or experientially informed judgments” (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000, p.274). The selection of interviewees is, therefore, guided.

The criteria for this study are that the football migrants have been working in a different country than its own, and worked in Finland for at least one season. One of the interviewees is a native Finn. This person is able to compare foreign football clubs with the Finnish ones and knows what could be better in Finnish football. He also works with football migrants in Finland and has been a football player himself for many years.

For the data collection I used network sampling (multiplicity sample or snowball technique) (Frey et al, 2000). I asked family and friends if they had any contacts in Finnish football. I got in touch with a Finnish football coach via a family member’s colleague, who worked as a player and coach in different countries, and is now coach in Finland. I did not only interview him, but he also asked foreign players from his team if they were willing to talk with me, which they were. Via a colleague of my own work I got the contact details of a foreign coach in Finland. He brought me in contact with a foreign player of his own team.

In total I was able to conduct five in-depth interviews, which were all done face-to-face in the players’ or coaches’ Finnish hometowns

or in the stadium of the concerned football club. The interview appointments were agreed by e-mail or telephone at any time suitable for the participant. I was able to conduct the interviews in May and June 2013. Some of the football players were in the beginning of their 20's, and some of the coaches were in their 60's.

The length of the interviews ranged from one hour to almost a whole afternoon. For one interview I was welcomed with a lunch in the stadium. After that, I interviewed the foreign coach and foreign player, and I visited the training ground and the gym, where players were preparing themselves for the next football match. During these extra visits, I talked even more with the research participants. That helped me in the understanding of the topics they have addressed during the interviews. These informal conversations were not recorded, what might be a reason they talked even more freely than during the interview.

### **3.4. Interviewees**

The world of football is a small world: everybody knows each other. This counts especially for Finnish football. Finland is a small country, there are only a few bigger cities where professional football is possible to flourish and therefore there are only twelve teams in the highest Finnish division. As showed in the literature review, there are not many foreigners in Finnish football. To secure the anonymity of the interviewees, I will give these persons a different name. I do also not reveal the teams they are playing or working for but, instead, I use a fake name. The coaches I interview will not have a team at all, due to the fact that there are not many coaches in the Finnish league.

Name	Origin	Age	Profession	Team	Experience	Time in Finland
<b>Peter</b>	Western European	20-30	Football player	Blue	< 5 years	1,5 years
<b>Alaba</b>	African	20-30	Football player	Red	< 10 years	12 years
<b>John</b>	Western European	20-30	Football player	Green	< 5 years	1 year
<b>Harry</b>	Western European	50-60	Football coach	-	< 30 years (as coach) < 15 years (as player)	< 10 years
<b>Jussi</b>	Finnish	50-60	Football coach	-	< 20 years (as coach) < 15 years (as player)	Spend < 2 years abroad

**Figure 4 Interviewees and their characteristics**

### **3.5. Data analyses**

The interview data will be transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis (Owen, 1984). This method helps to recognize patterns or themes within the data. Thematic analysis is different than other data analyses methods, since others are, for instance, more “theoretically bounded” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80), although every qualitative method seeks for patterns (McLeod, 2011). A theme is a common topic of that what a person is telling. Not only important are the spoken words, but also the emotion these words are told with. Context is important (McLeod, 2011). As stated by Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme consists

of key data regarding the research question. The researcher decides what a theme is and what is not, but normally themes are linked to objectives of the study. Owen (1984) made research on couples, and used the thematic analyze method. He created themes when these met three criteria. These criteria are: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Recurrence occurs when there are words said, more than once, with more or less the same meaning. Repetition happens when an interviewee names many times the exact same word, to describe, for instance, a feeling, happening or relationship. The last criterion is forcefulness, which discusses the emotion of words (volume, silences, etc.). The stressed word can now have much more meaning, then when it is just written down like any other word.

The findings in the following chapter arise from the thematic analysis (Owen, 1984). The interview questions (see *appendix 1*) were created based on the themes of the four research questions, namely work, adaptation, intercultural communication skills, and, finally, globalization. During the analysis, the interview answers were categorized based on these four themes, after which they were analyzed on a macro-level, based on Owen's three criteria: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. These criteria helped to distinguish what the important topics were for each interviewee. Since the interview was semi-structured and categorized based on the research question, the findings are presented in such way in the next chapter.

## 4. FINDINGS

The interview questions for the football migrants Peter, John, Harry, Alaba and Jussi were based on the four research questions of this study.

The research questions are:

RQ1: How do football migrants feel about the possibilities in Finland to fulfil their dreams and ambitions?

RQ2: What are the impressions of their adaptation process in Finland?

RQ3: What are the football migrant's perceptions of their own intercultural communication skills?

RQ4: How internationally orientated are Finnish football organizations, according to football migrants?

In the following chapter the main findings of the in-depth interviews will be divided into the following recognized themes, where each subchapter represents a research question: (chapter 4.1) motivation of migration, mentality and level of Finnish football, salary, ambition; (chapter 4.2) arrival, support, family, personal development; (chapter 4.3) language and group communication; (chapter 4.4) international Finnish society and international Finnish football. Each subchapter is followed by a conclusion, regarding the analysed topics.

## **4.1. Possibilities in Finland to fulfil dreams and ambitions**

When one visits a game of football in Finland, he or she will notice right away that football is not the number one sports in the country: that is ice hockey (Itkonen & Nevala, 2006). Still, football is played on a professional or semi-professional level, depending on the team and the region the team comes from. Bigger cities are more likely to have more successful teams, since the region gives more opportunities for sponsoring and creating a big fan base. Sponsoring means money, and with money it is possible to create good facilities and attract football players from outside the own region, to come and strengthen the team. When we take a look at the nationalities of the foreign football players and coaches who are working in the Finnish national football league, we can conclude that, in general, they come from countries where football has a higher status and where football is played on a higher level, than that in Finland. The question that arises is, therefore: how do football migrants feel about the possibilities in Finland to fulfil their dreams and ambitions? Why do migrants come to a country where football is not a number one sports and where, possibly, facilities are not that good as in their own or another (European) country?

### **4.1.1. Motivation going to Finland**

The main reason to move to another country to work as a professional football player depends on the type of football player.

Does he want to explorer the world, does he want to earn more money or has it to do with the (more important) role he will get in the new

team? It was for football migrants Peter and John a difficult decision to move.

I didn't play that much as I wanted. I had an option to play in a lower division in my home country, but my agent suddenly came with a team from Finland. I did not know anything about the country. Do they even play football over there? So I visited the football club for a week. I liked it. Great city, great club. So yes... I decided to do it. So that I could develop myself as a football player and as a person. (Peter)

Also for football migrant John the reason to go to Finland was the lack of playing opportunities at his club. He played most of his games in the youth team and was only sometimes allowed to join the first, adult team. But since he was already 22 years old, an age old for talents, he had to move on with his career. When his agent came with the Finnish option, he had to think for a moment. But in contrast to Peter, he knew something about Finland.

I knew a former player of my team, who then played in Finland, and asked about the team who was interested in me. I also talked with a Finnish team mate and with a Finnish manager who was working in my country. I just wanted to play football. My agent said: 'Maybe you take one step back now, but after two or three years you will make two steps forward'. So then I thought: okay, let's do it! (John)

The chance to get a better working position was also the reason for the football coaches to go abroad. The European coach Harry just came home after working in a southern European country. He could have stayed in his own country to work, but he got a phone call from the head of a Finnish football club, who wanted to talk with him.

It was a challenge for me. I liked the whole story, it sounded like an adventure. So I decided to do it for at least two years, and see how it would go. (Harry)

Also for the Finnish coach Jussi, who has worked in Asia and the United States, it was an adventure, a new cultural experience and a way to gain

international working experience. But he does not believe that every football player or coach has the same idea of working abroad to gain working experience. Jussi believes that many people just come to Finland, because they do not want to be unemployed.

You know... those player agents... they offer all the time players. And there are many opportunities to take contact with players, but it is, it is... if you need players, it is sometimes very difficult, because so many players on stage to come. And you need very exact knowledge of them. What kind of players and so on. And, okay, sometimes one coach calls another coach and so on, but normally those player agents, they make the contact. (Jussi)

Football migrant Alaba has a different story. The African player came as a student to Finland and also had to do practical work. He was supposed to stay for a year. In his free time he liked to play football and after a while he joined a local team; for fun.

...And then I made lots of goals during that period. It was in the second division. A lot of teams started calling me. I wasn't playing professionally; I didn't come to Finland with football shoes. When I got a contract to play football... that decided me to stay. (Alaba)

Alaba scored a lot of goals, but was not trained to be a football player.

Still, he was on a mission to become better.

They (*the people at the team who contracted him*) were very close to me, teaching me many things from the basics. I was training two or three times a week. The process was good, the transition was good. I wanted to train my skills to develop, to be a professional player. I missed some things. (Alaba)

#### **4.1.2. Mentality and level of Finnish football**

The Finnish top football league, the Veikkausliiga, is not one of the world's best leagues, although it is still to be found within the top 40 of Europe's best competitions. What is the football migrant's opinion about the level of Finnish football and what has to be changed in order to take the Veikkausliiga to a higher level? According to Peter and John people



underestimate the level of Finnish football. Both think that it is comparable with the second division in the Netherlands, or the third division in England. "I always watched (Western European) football on television, so I didn't know much about Finland. But now that I am here, I see plenty of good footballers on the pitch." (John)

Peter had to think for a long time, before he was able to say what he thought of the Finnish football level. According to him, the level is naturally lower than that of the leagues in which he was used to play or that he was used to watch on television. Still, he sees plenty of good football players around him. The biggest problem of the Finnish league is the lack of quality from abroad.

...Of course there are good Finnish players, but not really foreigners who can make a difference... you see, that guy over there (*points at a team mate*), he is quite all right, but... yeah, you know... I don't have the feeling that... well, maybe a bit, but it's not really visible. Let me say it like that. (Peter)

Coach Harry also sees that foreigners do not always make the difference in Finland. He says it has to do with money, because with money a club is able to pay a higher salary for players who otherwise do not want to play in the Finnish league. And in Finnish football, money is scarce.

Taking the best foreign player is the hardest thing to do; people are sometimes hard to judge. That is why I always let them come for a week, to see through the 'player' and look for the 'person'. What kind of guy is he? Is he always on time? Has he some kind of 'normal' attitude? That is the most important. Of course he has to be a good football player. But in the end the club decides. Too expensive? Well, not then. (Harry)

Also John is confused about the lack of quality in some teams. He says he cannot get a hold of the level of some clubs. When he arrived in

Finland, his team *Green* was qualified to play in the Europa League. The expectations were high. But the following season did not go as planned. “You just have to win your home games here in Finland. But still, sometimes the top teams win 6-0, so the week after you expect a similar result and then they lose 3-0.” (John)

Alaba thinks he knows the reason for the mixed results of some teams. The Finnish league is not that bad, but neither that good, and has ‘a lot of room for improvement’. But the main reason is the mentality of Finnish people. He says:

You see, if you go to Holland, there are so many good players. The challenge is there, that we don't have that here, in that way. (...). The bone spirit is different. Okay, I come from Africa; we believe that you have to work for your bread. That is different from here. (...). So when I have a bad day, giving up is not good. But it comes from here (*points to his heart*), it comes from something... (Alaba)

Also Peter, John and Harry think that the Finnish mentality is much different than what they were used to. As foreigners themselves and having the experience of working with top players, they know the difference between ‘top’ and ‘average’.

And that causes frustrations, but also respect, for players as well as coaches. It is something football migrants need to get used to; before they are able to play the game they were used to. Without this adjustment, performances stay behind. They all think that it would be nice to change the Finnish mindset, but yet, on the other hand foreigners should get used to the Finnish mentality. However, it is difficult for some of them.

Sometimes it is so frustrating that the Finns think: 'the coach will say what we have to do'. They just stand there and wait. In my country they just shout at you for doing nothing. You rarely see here that somebody is yelling at the other and calling him names. But yeah, I think the people are just like that. You cannot change that in a few seconds. (Peter)

John has a similar opinion and thinks that Finns do not want to win every game, which explains why teams win one week and lose a similar match the week after.

I am not a good loser. That is also something I learned on the youth academy. It's all about performance. But here it's sometimes like 'ah well, tomorrow there is again a new day'. You can see that in the games. Example: we are 2-1 behind, still ten minutes to go. I want to attack, go for the equalizer. And then they are like 'well, if we don't succeed...'. (John)

Coach Harry thinks Finns are very hard working, they have an 'incredible' work ethic, they are docile, and so they do everything you say, and have collectivity. Peter, Alaba, John and Jussi have recognized the same traits. But the problem, according to Harry, is that they are not that critical.

As a player you need sometimes to ask 'but why?! Then it goes deeper. Here they want to hear everything from you. Finns are a bit like Germans. 'Führer befehl, wir folgen'. Americans have the same attitude, very strong. Those Americans go the distance. (Harry)

Coach Jussi, who has been working with first (professional) teams as well as with youth teams, does not recognize a lack of mentality with Finnish players, but quite the contrary. Therefore he thinks there is no sense in attracting many foreign players to boost the level of Finnish football.

Finnish players, I think, their attitude is very healthy, so called, because they can understand what we are doing, those demands and so. If you want to be a good player, Finnish players understand those demands. (...) Of course, sometimes it is easy to see that there is maybe some kind of jealousy. 'Why we have *that* player?! We have better players here'. But that does not happen often in our club. (Jussi)

### 4.1.3. Salary

So far, the chance of more playing time and the level of Finnish fellow football players have been handled. But, as what can be read in the literature review, for many football migrants the salary is a reason to go abroad. However, in the same review we read that salaries in Finland are not that high. So can football migrants live of the money they earn in Finland? Both Peter and John are now earning around the same amount of monthly payment as what they earned at their previous club in a different country. This has to do with the status they had at their previous club. They were substitutes and had to work hard to earn a place in the first team, but now they are 'foreign' and, thus, have more status. More status means a better payment.

Alaba is in a different situation. He did not plan to become a professional football player. Therefore he cannot compare his salary with that at previous clubs. However, he knows that the salary is not that high, not even after playing more than ten years as a (semi) professional.

...That is not that kind of salary that after your career that you have quite a lot left, so I have a good salary and don't have to do any job, and in that way I send myself to school and I got enough money. So I don't have to get money of the social security system. But when I quit now I have enough savings for a year and I have to do another job, but now it is okay. (Alaba)

So is it fair to speak about 'salary' or is it pocket money'? Alaba thinks it is both: "I always say we just get... you know... salary! But then... if you think about Holland or England, they really get *money* to play football!" (Alaba)

Coach Harry thinks that his salary is quite high. He cannot imagine getting the same amount of payment in, for instance, the second division of a Western European football league. His salary depends on many factors, for instance the economical time he arrived to Finland, the owners of the club and the region the club is playing in.

I think I earn, for Finnish standards, quite a lot. But that I know not for sure. The salary that I was offered was at that moment was just higher than what I could earn at other clubs who were interested in me during that period.  
(Harry)

Although Harry admits he earns well, money was not the main reason for him to come to Finland. Harry is a man of feelings and likes to be in a place where he can work the way that he likes. Money is an additional factor.

At first I said: let's talk with the owners. I had a whole list with things that had to be just right. That is on one side the financial part, on the other side that I would be able to act. (...) My players were all fulltime professionals. I could work with them whenever I want, without being worried that they have to go to a different job in the evening. That was very important to me.  
(Harry)

In addition to the monthly payment, all football players and coaches have an agreement with their club to get an apartment and a car. The location of the apartment was sometimes self-chosen, but often players and coaches wished for a specific location, for instance in or nearby the city center. Some were afraid to become lonely in the Finnish forests; therefore an apartment nearby the center was desirable. Also a car is necessary to be mobile. Distances are great in Finland and often not to be compared with distances between places in the rest of Europe. Coach Jussi says that arranging an apartment is the minimum a Finnish club can do for a football migrant.

Yes, we arrange apartment, maybe a car, depends on the contract of the player, but minimum apartment of course. And of course everything what you need in football, we are professionals! We write it all down, the salary and any benefits and so on. (Jussi)

#### 4.1.4. Ambition

Despite the fact that the contract is well arranged, that the salary is good enough to live as a fulltime professional and that the players and coaches are playing or working the way they want, still nobody of the interviewees sees himself to stay in Finland for much longer than the contract says. All of them think that many things have to be changed in Finnish football in order to function more properly for, especially, foreigners. But all of them know that the lack of money in football is the biggest reason for not seeing improvements in the near future.

Ice hockey is the Finnish number one sports, so all of the sponsors put their money in ice hockey. According to John, the team's budget must be increased, the number of spectators has to get higher and the stadium has to be renovated. Those are, according to John, the only right steps to take. Although John has a two year contract, he would stay in Finland for a longer period of time in case he would earn a contract at a bigger club.

I'm open for staying in Finland when a bigger club calls me. When I left to Finland, I've said to my father: 'Dad, listen, I'm going to Finland, and the chance is there that I stay abroad for like twelve years, as long as I'm able to play football'. (John)

With the words 'staying abroad', John reveals that his plan is not staying in Finland for the rest of his career. He had that idea already when his

agent called about the possibility to play football in Finland, by agreeing with the idea of ‘taking one step back, then two steps forward’.

I know that I won't ever play for Barcelona or Manchester United, (...) but I see myself playing in the French or English second division. But for that, I first need a good season, and there are other factors... but no, I don't see myself here for another three, four, five years. But you never know, of course. (John)

Neither Peter thinks he will stay any longer in Finland than that his contract says. Also he says that playing in Finland could bring him “back up”. He already could have been transferred to another club somewhere in Europe, but he thought it was too early to say goodbye to his Finnish adventure. Therefore he is now waiting for another year until his contract ends, so that he is a free agent and can go to any other team in the world. He knows he is ‘in the picture’ by playing in Finland. Teams from Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands often scout in Finland for cheap labor. The main reason for his wish to earn a transfer to another country is the lack of a good Finnish football culture.

I now know what to look for when visiting a potential new employer. Not that I'll arrive in some desolate area. (...) You'll find the nicest stadiums in Helsinki and Turku, but at some places I think... wow... that should be done better. But playing in a big stadium with ten people watching the game is not an option either... (Peter)

African player Alaba hopes to see himself within three years somewhere in, for instance, China: earning good money and maybe, later, coming back to Finland to retire. But his football life is not about money. As an African he needs sunshine and happy faces. The dark, Finnish winter is hard to handle. The same counts for handling ‘the Finn’. His advice for fellow Africans is as follows:

Try not to lose your focus, remember why you come to Finland. Because it is a different culture, they have to take the good things and learn the good

things and facilities and things, but not losing the focus! (...) It is a comfort country. Everything is okay, and you can get easily carried away by the comfort. (...) When you see a guy who themselves in highly focused and it is football, then the culture can make him really down. (Alaba)

#### **4.1.5. Conclusion**

For the interviewees, the Finnish football league is one full of potential. Playing football in Finland gives football migrants lots of possibilities for personal development. Yet, a lot depends on the football migrant's motivation for moving to Finland. According Maguire (1999) and Magee & Sudgen (2002), there are different types of football migrants. They describe the following migrants: pioneer, settler, nomadic cosmopolitan, returnee, mercenary, exiled, expelled, ambitionist and celebrity. Based on their explanations, Peter and John would be ambitionists and mercenaries. Both play football in Finland in order to get noticed by bigger clubs in Finland or by teams in higher ranked European leagues. They also came to get more playing time than in their home country, a reason for football migration that also Bourke (2003) had noticed earlier. Both players are also mercenaries, since they only (plan to) stay for a short period of time. They do not attach to the new, local culture. However, Magee & Sudgen (2002) believe that a mercenary also stays abroad only for financial reasons. Since many of the interviewees say that the salary in Finland is not very high, the statement that they are in Finland for financial reasons could be discussed. Based on the statistics of Besson, Poli and Ravenel (2013), many football migrants do only stay for one or two years in Finland. Peter and John fit in this picture. Harry, who works and lives in Finland for already many years, could be described as an



ambitionist, who turned into a nomadic cosmopolitan and a settler. Harry came to Finland because he liked the adventure and possibilities he had with his team. Harry has also been working in big European cities before. Since Harry is in Finland for almost ten years, he is a settler as well. Also Alaba is a settler by coincidence, just like Harry. Alaba came to Finland with the idea of staying for only one year, but he found his luck as a football player and is in Finland for already ten years. Jussi could be named as a nomadic cosmopolitan, because he likes to work abroad in big countries and cities. Also is he a returnee, since he came back to Finland.

Olin & Penttilä (1994) did research on the motives of professional sports men for moving to Finland. Some results that were found, were unemployment in the own country, trying to achieve a better status as a sports man, financial reasons and getting new life experience by living in a different country. Also personal development as a sports man was named as a reason for moving to Finland. All of these motives are also found in the answers of the football migrant interviewees. However, in addition to the motive of achieve a better status as a sports man, it should be said that many of the interviewees said that they do, indeed, want to earn a better status and get a bigger name as a football player, but by doing so they needed to take a step backwards (moving to Finland) in order to make two steps forward. Thus, a football migrant invests in himself to become a better player in a later stage.

One reason for failing as a football migrant in Finland is the mentality of the Finnish players, almost every interviewee says. The

Finnish teammates are hard-working, but they play with a tunnel vision. They are not creative enough to find solutions. This causes communication problems with foreigners. The football migrants get frustrated by the passiveness of the Finns in their team. Finns do not have a winning mentality, yet they are hard-working. It is a similar result as what Stead & Maguire (2000) found. They discovered that Nordic players (including Finns) do what their coaches want to and are, therefore, named as disciplined and hard-working people. However, the researchers concluded also that Nordic players do not have a drinking culture. This is in contrast with what the interviewees say. According to them, Finns often have sauna-evenings where they drink a lot and are, all of a sudden, very open and social.

#### **4.2. Impressions of the adaptation process in Finland**

Many football migrants see the opportunity of playing football in Finland as an adventure. After searching the internet for information about the country and Finnish football, the day comes that the player packs his bags and moves to Finland for -that is the plan- a year or two. Although Finland is a European and Scandinavian country, it has many differences with other countries on the continent. Firstly, the Finnish language belongs to the Uralic language family, which is very different than the Germanic language, which is spoken in many other European and Scandinavian countries. Secondly, the climate is colder than in western, central and southern European countries and thirdly, Finland has one of the smallest population densities in Europe. All of these three factors are

likely to have a great effect on a person's personal state and one need to adapt to these differences, among others. How well does a football migrant adapt to Finland and Finnish football? To be able answering that question, we first need to ask: what are the impressions of a football migrant's adaptation process in Finland?

#### **4.2.1. Arrival**

When a person travels to a new place, the moment of arrival is something one will never forget. In a split second, one will notice many differences, for instance language, (non-verbal) communication style, climate, traffic signs and accommodations. "I remember the moment the plane doors went open. I saw the snow and it was minus twenty degrees. I had never felt anything like that before. But yeah... I got used to it." (Peter)

For Alaba the shock was not only the temperature and the amount of snow, but the lack of people. For him, nothing in Finland was similar to his home country.

I come from a city with like 20 million people and then I went to a small town where there are maybe 5000 people, so it was really hard. If anybody was going to the city from my town, I was like 'ah, can I come along, even if it's for two hours'. Just to be active, you know. (...) It is so cultural shock compared to my country. (Alaba)

John and Harry were not that impressed by the external factors, but rather looked at first at the working environment. John arrived in May and saw that there was still snow on the ground. He was surprised, but not shocked. He came open-minded and just wanted to play football. Summer followed soon and the fields were good enough to play at. Harry arrived in the middle of the winter and there was a lot of snow. But instead

of exploring Finland, he went to work. “We were training inside, I needed time to get the group together and I had to train with them. That was my job; I have spent a lot of time in that.” (Harry)

The first days were fine for everybody. Depending on the player’s or coach’s contract, an apartment and car were ready to use, but not more than that. Peter, Alaba, John and Harry had to find out everything themselves. At first, for most of the interviewees it was fine to take care for themselves. Finnish coach Jussi does not think anything is wrong with that, since ‘we are all professionals’. He says that Finns are willing to help, but someone has to come and ask for the help. This passive willingness to help foreigners is something that Peter, Alaba, John and Harry can appreciate, although all of them had to get used to it.

I have done everything myself. I got an apartment and I got a car from the club, and besides that I took a Canal+ TV-subscription... then somebody showed me the city. But yeah, that is typically Finnish... you have to find out things yourself. It is not so that they will take you by the hand. (Harry)

I have found out everything myself. I went on my own to the city center, and then I did try to call to some guys, but most of the times it was like ‘no, I am with my girlfriend’... (John)

Peter only got the question if he needed any help. He thought help was not necessary, since he learns things about the city faster on his own.

At the first day they told me how to get from here to my home. They told me that... but, eh... yes, they did ask me if I needed help. But I just wanted to see for myself. That way you learn faster what is around you. (Peter)

John didn’t expect any help. He says: “They didn’t promise me anything beforehand, and yes... well, I don’t think they can really promise you

something over here. They just said: hey, this is it. And well, I took it.”  
(John)

#### **4.2.2. Support**

It is possible that the football migrant has experienced a culture shock, or has faced other kinds of problems, for example with his accommodation. In many organizations there is a person, possibly working on the HR-department, who supports employees with certain aspects; however, not in Finnish football organizations. For John that is not a problem at all. He thinks he does not need any support from the club, since he is a Western European, coming from a big city. John thinks that the club should give support to, for example, Brazilians. Latino's are a certain kind of people, John says. Also Harry brought this up. He has been working abroad before and at his Southern European team were many Brazilians, who needed a special kind of treatment; for instance putting an arm around the shoulder when something goes wrong, instead of yelling at the player for what he did wrong. John thinks that the club is not responsible for his choice to move to Finland.

Look, some kind of support and guiding is necessary, but... I make this choice, and when I have to become independent of their support, then it will be never like... (...) If a club is 24/7 into a [foreign] player, then he won't be any happier. (John)

John's football club has a mental coach employed, who has to be visited once in a while. John is not really happy with that, since he is afraid that the mental coach will talk with his team's head coach. And John does not want that his boss knows everything about him.

There is this mental coach who helps the head coach how to communicate with us. And then if you have any problems, he will talk with you. But come on, he tells me the same things as my father, so yeah... (John)

Alaba thinks the same about the role of the mental coach, although Alaba has had many problems adapting to Finland. Still, he does not believe that the current role of the mental coach is correct. Alaba tells that the psychologist only talks with the best players of the team, in order to inform the coach in what mental condition his best attacker or defender is. Alaba respects the role of the mental coach, but he says:

He should help the less good players. Of course to help the good players to maintain their performance, but more the weaker ones. Because then the coach is focusing on the best one. But if you are starting, the coach is thinking about you. Okay, Mark is going to start. How is Mark going to play, and run, it's Mark, Mark... And when coach sees you, asks how is your girlfriend, how is your life... Maybe he doesn't like you. So the circle is that he should look after the weaker one. But I'm still confused, cause the coach does not see everything. (Alaba)

Alaba mentions that the mental coach and the head coach do not see everything of the problems that some players have. Alaba explains that when a Finnish football club signs a foreign player, who has problems adapting, the club will never see this player in his best possible form. So after a year the club may say: 'thank you, but you can go'. The mental coach, Alaba explains, should do everything for their players, even when a player does not seem to have any problems.

John thinks the same, and says that whenever he will be playing again in his own country, he wants to take care of the new foreign guy, because he now knows, from his own experiences, that it might be a lonely and confusing time for him, despite the fact that John has no big problems with this because of his own positive attitude.

Also Alaba says that a positive attitude is the best way to survive in a period without any support. His Finnish team mates are hard to reach. However, Alaba feels that his positive attitude has also a down side: people tend to think he is really happy, although he is not from the inside.

I played a kind of role, also, in a way that I showed my positive side. I think the team was not forthcoming in that way. They just accepted my skills, the fact that you are a good player, that the team needs you. But in the cultural way, in the way of more mentally getting you into the group, they were not that good in doing that. (Alaba)

Peter, John and Harry say the same about Finnish football players and football coaches: it is hard to make a connection with them and get any support from them. The initiative has to come from the football migrant.

For Jussi the football migrant has the responsibility for not getting depressed.

I think that some kind of... difficult to promise a player that we can arrange some company to you. (...) But if you think: whole culture, and Finnish culture and so on... it helps if player take some kind of information before moving here. (Jussi)

Peter's football club does not have a mental coach employed, but the head coach's assistant is the person to talk with in case of problems. Peter says that he does not talk with him; neither do his team mates, as far as he knows. However, Peter says that his football club should have a mental coach.

The assistant over here can help you with one and another. For example, he had put his wife in contact with my girlfriend, which was nice. But they should have a guy whose fulltime job is to help people from outside. (...) At my previous club there was this kind of person. (...) Here I hear from guys that the apartment is not all right, or something with the car... then they don't know it... In those cases a special person to help is important, I believe. (Peter)

Coach Harry says that also in his organization, there is no mental coach or a person to guide foreign or Finnish players. The players just come every day to the stadium to train and play the games, nothing more. Harry does his best to change that, but he cannot do it alone and he says there is not enough money to hire a person to do this job.

I see a player's behaviour. If I see things or things that strike me, then I try to do something with it. I also do tests with them. I try to find out what kind of player I got here. Extrovert, introvert, how does he decide what to do... what kind of type he is. But that's it. That is all the guidance and support there is. (Harry)

Alaba is at the moment not anymore the happy guy he was earlier. He is getting tired of the lack of openness and, thus, lack of support. It costs a lot of energy.

If you are not strong yourself... you know, I am getting older and getting tired of being the guy try to break the ice every time. But in the beginning I was quite active. And then the team respond. (Alaba)

At the moment he got injured and he could not go to work for a longer period of time, he did not hear anything from his team mates or coaches.

Alaba says that lack of support, while he had to sit at home, hurts a lot.

I was injured for over six months, and no player was asking me 'How are you doing?'. Then I called to the captain: 'I am one of the important players and nobody is asking'. And he said: 'Yeah, we don't have feelings... we have not, Finnish people... we are not friends'. And I said: 'But we don't need to be friends, just asking! We are work mates! (Alaba)

Jussi thinks that Finnish football clubs should make changes in their organization, but he is not sure what has to be changed exactly. He thinks that there should be more research on what football migrants need in Finland, and how to make and keep them happy.

Of course, I think that, for example, that information from organization, and maybe with some special person, we can manage better. Some kind of... but how much? How much he or she must do with player, those information things? And, walking there hand by hand or something..? But I think our



foreign players know much better what kind of information they go before and what they need when they come here. (Jussi)

#### **4.2.3. Family**

As seen in the literature review, family members may have a big influence on the decision making process of a football migrant. Some football migrants move together with wife and children to a certain country, but some stay in their home country because the footballer's wife does not want to move or the children have to go to school. In some cases, the footballer goes alone, with a possible breakup with the girlfriend or wife as a result. There are many reasons to name why one would not want to move to Finland: it might be too cold, the language might be too hard to learn and creating and maintaining social life is possibly hard. So how big is the influence of family on the football migrants who did move to Finland? Did they come alone, did they leave someone behind or did they meet someone in Finland?

For Alaba, family means everything. He came to Finland on his own, without the intention to stay. So he left behind his parents and other family members, with homesickness as a result. Alaba's first year was all right, since he expected to leave Finland after one year. When he stayed, he got salary and Alaba was excited: he was building himself a reputation, people started recognizing him on the streets and because of the success Alaba was a happy person. But then something went terribly wrong.

After one or two months, I went to the manager and I said: 'I want to go home!'. But he said: 'No, you have a contract, you have to stay'. And I said: 'No, I don't care, I have to go home!'. And he said: 'You cannot go home,

you have to wait until the end of the football season'. That was a really depressing time for me. (Alaba)

Alaba's family has the biggest influence on his life. He has been missing his family so bad, that he got not only depressed, but also physically ill and therefore he had to go to the hospital.

They took my blood and everything. And in the hospital they said: 'When did you go home for the last time? When did you speak your own language? Do you have a girlfriend?' They gave me one week holiday. (Alaba)

Alaba has learned a lot from that period, although he is still ill on a regular basis due to home sickness. Alaba realized that the Finnish winter was too harsh on him: too long, too cold and too dark. Coming from a sunny African country, Alaba has suffered during the Finnish winter, but cannot leave for the whole period due to his working contract.

He now has a Finnish wife, with who he got three children. They give him a lot of support, but Alaba explains that he still needs to go to Africa every holiday to gain new energy. He is missing his 'passion' in Finland, which he finds again in Africa. Finland is his constant; he calls the country his home, but mainly because his children and wife are here. Although Christmas is Alaba's most depressing period of the year, he stays in Finland during these days for his children.

Peter says he has had no home sickness so far. Only the first two weeks were a bit difficult, but he said he found his routine easily. Also the influence of his parents and girlfriend is of a minimal level. Peter's girlfriend joined him on his way to Finland and sits every day alone in their apartment. Peter stresses that it was her choice.

My girlfriend knows that everything is about me. It's all about football. I've said that to her from the first beginning. (...) However, she got some problems with finding work... those kinds of things... there are days that she has a difficult time. That's why she goes to our home country regularly. (Peter)

For John his family played a great role in his decision whether to go to Finland or not. He says that his agent is a good friend, so they talk a lot about business. Because of their friendship, John knows that his agent will do his best finding the most suitable working place for him. When his agent called John and said that he could go to Finland, John first talked about it with his parents.

I remember my birthday. We were celebrating it at our home and I brought up this opportunity. My father, my mother and my agent all said: 'Just do it, go to Finland and if it does not work out, then you just come back home. You have been abroad before and that worked out well.' That was when I decided to go to Finland. (John)

John says he does not really suffer from home sickness, although he does miss his friends. He uses Skype and Whatsapp to keep in touch with his friends and family.

Sometimes I see things, for instance pictures or so, and then I think: 'It would have been nice to be there now'. But they cannot take away what I have got here now. Maybe it would have been more difficult if I was sitting all alone at my Finnish apartment, but luckily I have found a girlfriend here. (John)

John got into a relationship with a Finnish girl, after going out to a club with his team mates. One of his friends asked if John was interested in the girl working behind the bar. John and the Finnish girl soon started to date and living together. With his girlfriend came also social life, something John had missed before.

Coach Harry is not married, but has a girlfriend who lives in their home country. She works and does not want to quit her job to move

abroad with her partner. The reason for this is, according to Harry, that working abroad is insecure. It is possible to get fired quite easily as a coach. Getting fired as a football player is less likely. Thus, the chance of being jobless after a few months is possible, which would mean that a man and his partner are both jobless. Also she would miss her country too much when she would stay in Finland for a longer period of time, Harry thinks. Harry and his girlfriend do not have children, and so they visit each other whenever possible.

Home sickness is something Harry is not familiar with. He has never had it before and neither does he have it in Finland. Harry thinks it has to do with his personality.

I think Finland is a pleasant country. (...) I am not that extrovert, but more extrovert than Finns. But... this suits me very well. Naturally, I did not know that in advance. For that matter, I feel at home here. (Harry)

Coach Jussi thinks family support is very important for some of the foreign players he has been working with. He remembers a match where the parents and grandparents of one of the foreign players came to visit a match. The family seemed to be very proud and the visit made the football migrant a happy person.

When Jussi got the opportunity to work abroad, he first asked his wife if it was all right if he would go there for some months. Then he needed the support of his colleagues.

I discussed it here with my head coach. 'Is it possible to leave?', because our league was going on. Head coach said: 'Of course, when you get that opportunity, use it'. My wife said: 'Of course you can go, use that opportunity. And, eh... it was very interesting. (Jussi)

#### 4.2.4. Personal development

Interacting with people from other cultures, working in an international working environment and living abroad are experiences which will change a person from who he or she was before. Harry, for instance, sees himself as a different person than before, by living and working abroad for a longer period of time. He is still learning and changing, he admits. He is happy the way he lives in Finland, but his way of working would not have been the same without having an earlier experience of working abroad. He explains:

I've made many mistakes before. I should have done things differently in southern Europe, maybe I still would have been there. I've made many enemies. I should have been supporting people more often, made them more responsible. My individual working method worked because we won a lot, but at the moment you lose you are on your own and you are out. In football it's more specific like this than on other terrains. It's all about winning or losing. (Harry)

Harry says he has become more 'Finnish' during the years. His driving style has become stricter; he stops when there is a stop sign. The only mistake he has made so far is that he has signed a contract for too many years. He was able to leave Finland last year to work in another country, but he felt that his Finnish life was too good to give it up for the unknown.

John's experiences abroad have made him a more adult person. Also living on his own and being without family and friends has made him stronger than ever before. The same counts for Peter, who was first living with his parents. John and Peter think that their social skills have become better. Both act more adult and are more open towards other people. They have to; otherwise they are afraid to be alone in a strange country. Jussi says working abroad makes a person older and

wiser and, thus, more experienced. His experience abroad helps him to understand football migrants who are in Finland. An open mind is, according to Jussi, the most important trait in order to communicate effectively with foreigners.

John thinks, like Harry, that he is not the same person anymore in terms of nationality, after living abroad for a longer period of time.

My neighbors in my home country are Portuguese. They told me they do not feel themselves anymore as real Portuguese people. Now, I do not say that my own nationality is gone, but sometimes I have got something like... that I don't remember words, or that I think in English, and that I have to remind myself that I should not forget my roots. (John)

For Alaba, Finland has changed his life and person completely. He says that the first period in Finland was a complete shock and he felt like a baby: he had to learn everything from scratch. Alaba knows that Finland has changed him as a person. He has learned a lot, but he is not sure whether Finland has made him a better person. Finland is a difficult country to live in for Africans, Alaba explains.

If you choose to have a life here, you have to make contacts, look for Finnish people, but if you come for football then just face it. Don't let the way of life put you down, because it is going to put you down. Not that they are bad people, but Finnish people are used to it. (Alaba)

#### **4.2.5. Conclusion**

Many of the football migrants were open-minded at their time of arrival in Finland. Yet, all of the interviewees were amazed by the Finnish long, dark and cold winter. The winter was a reason for Harry to put all of his effort into work, to be distracted. Alaba was the only one who said he experienced a culture-shock. He was in shock about the temperature, the

snow, and language and communication style of Finns. According to Ruben (1983, cited in Kim, 2001) experiencing culture-shock might help a migrant to adapt, rather than trying to avoid experiencing such. However, Alaba says that even after living in Finland for almost ten years, he still has homesickness on a very regular basis and he says he is still not used to many of the Finnish habits and traits. Kim's Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic Model (2001) could be applied to Alaba's life. He is experiencing from time to time lots of stress and home sickness, but despite all that he says that Finland is his constant, his home. It is the only place where he can feel himself at home. As also said by Kim (2001), stress becomes less over a longer period of time so that the person starts to be more adapted to the new environment.

None of the football migrants got any guidance from the football club during their first periods in Finland. They had to find out everything themselves. But according to Jussi, support is difficult to give, since Finnish football organizations do not know what football migrants exactly need. Jussi has found himself while working abroad, however. As stated by every interviewee, one has to be open-minded and prepared for moving to Finland; otherwise it is difficult to adjust to the new environment. This idea gets support from, for instance, Stead & Maguire (2000), Kim (2001) and Salo-Lee (2007), who all say that there will occur conflicts at the moment a migrant has no psychological readiness and no adaptive personality. However, none of the Finnish football clubs that the interviewees are working for offered cultural trainings or any other kind of information about working and living in Finland.

In order to work successfully in Finland, one needs a different attitude than what he was used to have, Harry, Alaba and Jussi say. Experiences from previous working experiences and experiences from living abroad might help with changing the mindset. A mental coach is not helpful for football migrants, since some of the interviewees see him as an extension of the head coach. Sharing personal feelings does not feel right.

According to Taylor (2006) there is a tradition in football migration, where football players tend to move to a country with cultural similarities. However, the interviewees can name many differences between Finland and other (European) countries. They all had to get used to Finland and the Finnish teammates. Looking for similarities makes also part of the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Infante, et al, 1997), where one first need to feel safe, and only after that, when the uncertainty about the new environment is reduced, one will open himself.

For all of the football migrants play family a big role in their decision making. This has earlier also been concluded by Stead & Maguire (2000) and Clarke (1992). Clarke made a schematic of groups that have influence on a football player's life, of which a player agent also makes part of. For John, his family and agent are playing the biggest role in decision making. Although family is important to all of the interviewees, yet, the player is the most important person in the family. In case a football player has to choose between his career and his girlfriend or wife, he will most likely choose his own career.



### **4.3. Football migrant's perceptions of their own intercultural communication skills**

Intercultural communication is a way of communicating through different cultures. There are many communication processes going on at the moment a person communicates with a person from a different social or ethnic group, for instance. During the interviews, three aspects of intercultural communication came across: language, group communication and problems in verbal and non-verbal communication. For instance, is it necessary to learn Finnish in order to work properly in Finland? Is playing football the same with Finnish teammates as it is with players from a player's own country? And what are the biggest communication challenges a football migrant is facing?

#### **4.3.1. Language**

According to the interviewed football migrants, it is not necessary to learn the Finnish language in order to succeed in Finnish football. Football has an own kind of language, namely the 'language of football'. It means that, according to the football players and coaches, players can 'speak' with their feet. The rules of football are the same all over the world, and many (successful) tactics are adopted in many football countries. So players know where and when to run and pass the ball to a fellow teammate. In addition, Finnish people are, in general, quite skilled in their English language skills. English is a universal language, adopted by the world football association FIFA as the official language in football. Therefore, it is, officially, not needed for football migrants to learn Finnish. Partly because of this, Finnish football clubs do not send their foreign players

and coaches to language trainings or give them any other kind of language or cultural training.

I brought up a language course myself, but then I had to do that in the evenings and then I was too tired, so I did not have any energy for that. But no, the club did not advise me to learn Finnish. (John)

Also Peter wanted to learn Finnish and asked his head coach for advice. Peter arrived in Finland in September, but the Finnish language course would only start in January. Peter did not want to participate anymore because of that long period without courses, and since his teammates did speak English well enough to communicate with, Peter did not learn Finnish. Peter says that Finns speak very good English, except elderly people.

Coach Harry did learn Finnish for many years. He says it is important to learn the language of the country where one wants to work. It makes working life easier, since only then you can really understand what people want and mean. John has the same opinion. He says that Finns appreciate it when a foreigner learns some Finnish, but it is in the end not necessary to learn it. Harry says that learning the local language is a must in order to create a good working atmosphere.

But also Harry had to learn Finnish just by himself. He went to a Finnish language course twice a week, and learned better Finnish grammar than most Finns are able to use. However, many of the Finns he is working with are talking dialect, so there are moments he cannot participate in conversations. The football club's president was actually surprised that Harry wanted to learn Finnish.

The president said: 'Why do you do that? There is English, right?' (...) I now understand everything what they say in the dressing room, so now the

Finnish players won't say anything out loud anymore, you understand? It is an advantage. (...) I have done it for four years, I followed ten courses. I am better in grammar than most Finns are! (Harry)

Alaba learned Finnish in his first year in Finland, when he was working. He says that children are very open towards foreigners and are willing to help you, when you do not understand everything correctly. Children do not switch to English in case of miscommunication.

The Finnish language was a shock for me, but... I was quite... maybe due to my positivity and the fact that I was working with the children... so the children don't have so much big words and they don't speak English, so everything they speak Finnish. So every time I go to work I also started to think in Finnish, because they don't have that much big words. But if you talk with adults. They are like: 'Ah, look at this guy, let me speak English... his Finnish, they don't understand...' But kids just speak! (Alaba)

Although Alaba speaks Finnish very well these days, he says he still needs to talk his own language. "I like to speak my mother language, because it really gives me... it takes a bit of my depression away, when I know that they understand me." (Alaba)

Coach Jussi always advises Finnish youth players to learn English, or the language of the country where they will work in the future. Jussi says that you cannot advise a player to only work hard, but one has to think about his attitude.

When you go abroad, there is something, there is much more than football. And if you can react to those things... for example culture, language, different places, history and so on, it is much more easy to handle football also. If you think all the time 'football', maybe sometimes too hard, if you have different things with you... okay, football is important, but much more easier to handle that. (Jussi)

But Jussi says that Finnish football clubs do not recommend football migrants to learn the Finnish language, since it is not necessary to know the language. Jussi says that the working language at his team is Finnish

and that the foreigners always can ask a summary of the conversations in English from the coaches and teammates. Jussi says that everyone at his team is very open-minded about having foreigners in the team, and therefore everyone is willing to help and translate discussions and team tactics. He says that the foreigner has to be active himself. He gives an example of a Hungarian player who joined their team and who started to study at the local university. The Hungarian took Finnish courses and learned the language. However, Jussi also remembers a time when a player from South Korea joined their team. The Koreans did not speak Finnish or English. A Korean student from the local university was willing to work freely as an interpreter. Possibly because of the language problems, the Korean player did not stay long in Finland. When Jussi worked abroad, he was working alongside an interpreter, also during the games when he needed to coach his players.

#### **4.3.2. Group communication**

Group communication consists of interpersonal communication between a certain amount of people. Football teams mostly consist of 18 till 23 players, an amount that would be considered as group communication in small groups. Cohesion and respect are important indicators in a team for success. However, language and cultural problems could cause disintegration of a group. Without any group spirit and without any openness towards other kinds of people, a football team is doomed to fail; after all, football is a team sports.

According to Alaba, John, Peter and Harry, Finnish football players are very aloof on the working place. None of the Finnish teammates are trying to integrate newcomers; for instance, some of them did not even introduce themselves when a football migrant came to work for the first time. Peter, for instance, remembers that his first day at the football club was full of awkward moments. He found it hard to get into the Finnish group, but was lucky that there were more foreigners in the team.

Group forming is very common in Finnish football teams, according to all of the interviewees. John says that especially in his first year, there were many small groups within the team. Now there is just a gap between the older and younger generation football players, which causes regularly communication problems. Peter sees many smaller groups within his football team. He says that the foreigners form a group and the Finns form a group, but in the end, when things have to get done, they will all work together. Alaba says that the team was not 'forthcoming' in integrating him into the team. But, according to Alaba, in Finland they try to get team spirit with different things.

In Sweden or Holland, they are really looking after each other. In the way on and off the field, they are emotionally connecting, but here the work rate *is* the team spirit. (...) It is just like: you play a part, play as good as you can. But in other places, like Spain, England, Sweden, it is more. They say, they are active, they joking, they do everything. But here it is different. But you don't say to them [Finns] that they do not have team spirit, because... that is their culture, that is their way. (Alaba)

The reason for group forming comes from the differences in culture, Harry thinks. He believes that French football players, for instance, are more phlegmatic, while the Finns are hardworking, and do everything the

trainers ask. That causes tension, which is not fair, according to Harry. Also Peter thinks that his Finnish team mates often think that he and other foreigners do not give everything during the games. Peter sees that the Finns are annoyed by the phlegmatic of foreigners. Harry thinks Finns are not open enough to see cultural differences and are not able to accept differences in work ethic.

Finns expect from the French guy exactly the same attitude as what they have. But you see, this French guy has the football qualities, but it is difficult to get him into the collectivity... in the group happenings. That is inapprehensible for the Finns. That is normal for them, always! That is a culture clash. Foreigners are often more individual, more than Finns. (Harry)

Harry wants to stress that 'the foreigner' not exists, because everybody is different, but he recognizes many times the same features of this group forming process of Finnish and foreign football players.

Also Alaba has had problems getting into the group, which mostly consisted of Finnish players. He says that they only accepted him because of his football skills, not of the person he was. Harry has seen the same happening in his team.

Football is a difficult world. If you have a guy who is difficult, but he is scoring every game, then the Finns will accept him more easily. You will get a better position. When you do not do that, you will have a very difficult time. (Harry)

However, John thinks that this phenomena is not typically Finnish, because he has seen the same things happening in other countries. John says that it depends on the group's majority's nationality and cultural similarities. Nevertheless, John says that Finns are more introvert than any other nationalities he has met before. Alaba thinks the same. Despite that, Alaba says that Finns are very honest people, and therefore you can

rely on them in the team and while playing football. Still, Alaba has problems understanding the typical Finn.

You can trust Finns, to some extent. If they are drunk, they tell you 'I am drunk', haha! The only benefits you get from that is that they really like you. If you are not their type, they say straight: 'O, you are not my friend'. It is on two levels, two different things. So if you don't come, it is hard. So when I go to night club, small place, so everybody knows each other. You go to night club, drunk, and on Monday morning they look at you... you know, they don't say any hello. Do I have shit on my body?! We just had fun last Saturday! So in that way... I don't know, but something is missing! (Alaba)

Alaba, as well as John, Peter and Harry, believe that Finns are much different at work, than in their free time. They all enjoy the so-called sauna-evenings, where everybody gets drunk and when all of the Finns are very talkative. However, as said by Alaba, the Finns react the day after as introvert as before, although they were very extrovert during the sauna-evening. Indeed, Jussi thinks that those sauna evenings are helpful for bonding the group.

According to Harry, John and Peter, Finns tend to stick together and form a general opinion about a certain topic; in contrast to foreigners, who have often their own opinion. Peter and John were used to the fact that the older and more experienced football players told them what to do in problem situations. In Finland the foreigners are seen as the more experienced players, since they often played in higher status football leagues. Therefore, the hierarchy is not correct, John thinks. Harry says that Finns always do what he wants them to do, but they often do not think about why they are doing it. Harry thinks that this causes often conflicts, because Finns are easily offended.

The working language at most of the Finnish football clubs is Finnish, due to the fact that the majority of the team members are Finns.

However, in the teams of Harry and Peter the working language is English. This means that the game talks and discussions are in English, but at any other moment is also Finnish allowed. Peter thinks that it is fair that his club demands English as the working language, despite that some of the Finnish players are not that good in English. Peter wants that his Finnish teammates always speak English in the dressing room and in the restaurant, because he feels himself an outsider otherwise. For John, however, it does not matter much that in his team the working language is Finnish. He says that he is brave enough to always ask for a translation. Alaba, however, thinks that it is a problem when a football team consists of foreigners, while the team talks are in Finnish. It will make the football migrant feel excluded, as Alaba experienced himself.

I think... eh... if you talk about... really, you know, getting deep, a good connection, there is nothing so much you can do with that, with this environment. As I said, the biggest thing is that, when we talk tactics or something like that, team mates are trying to say what coach is saying. If coach has something special, you say in English for him. (...) But if you are not mentally feeling good, you cannot last long in whatever you are doing. So I think that side is very important. (Alaba)

Coach Jussi says that miscommunications are no common problems in his teams. He thinks problems between foreigners and Finns occur at the level of status. When a foreigner is a better football player than the Finn, or the foreigner has accomplished many successes in his career, difficulties may come up.

We had a couple of seasons ago one very famous player from Montenegro. Best goal scorer in his best times. He was some kind of star. But no problem, because he was not too big star anymore. (...) If we got one foreign player who is a big star, maybe then there is too big difference, you know, and for example in the Premier League in England, maybe some Balotelli is a too big star in his mind. The club is big also, but maybe then they have some problems. (Jussi)



Harry, Peter and John have seen lots of differences between the Finnish approach to Finland and their own. All of them have had problems with their football mentality. John says that communication problems are related to the football academics. He thinks that the Finnish football players learn 'the real deal' only at a later stage of their football education.

Those guys here, when they join the first team, then they start to learn things. Tactical stuff and so. And now, well, I can say some football related words in Finnish, but it goes faster when I do it in English. But then they do not always understand me, or I say it too hasty, but... there are quite often situations that you think: God dammit. (John)

Peter tells a similar story, about miscommunications on the pitch which have not always to do with linguistic problems, but more with tactical and football related problems. Peter calls it 'very frustrating' and says that the Finns are not enough professionals, compared to football players from his own country.

The difference [in professionalism] is really big. I think that they [Finns] want to, but that they have clearly no idea about how it actually... how everything can look like. That is what I think... but then again: their mentality is very good. (Peter)

Harry remembers his first period as a coach in Finland like if it was yesterday.

We were training... they were totally not used to that I was asking them something. Then you say something, and there they go, then they do it. But then I asked: 'Why do we do this?' 'What do you want?' I asked. (...) And then they do not know it, they just do something. There is not that much, for that matter. (Harry)

Alaba is the only one of the interviewees who has an idea of how all of the miscommunications occur and why it is difficult create a true group spirit. He says that there is no emphasis on teambuilding and that there should be a plan in order to integrate the persons who are left behind. At

this point, there is nobody, besides the coaches and fellow players, who can help a lonely football migrant. Alaba knows that his Finnish football team is a, relatively, small organization, but still there should be “some clear objectives, then you cannot hide”, he says. Therefore, Alaba has made an own document with strategies and ideas on how to go along with each other. He sees it as his duty to contribute and help in the objectives and process.

It is a small document, how to integrate people. For instance, the team I played for earlier had a policy for foreign players. It is obvious that, okay, we just want to be a Finnish team. So these are things that I wish we could developing things, step by step. I am not close to the management, maybe they are doing something, but these haven't been done before, so I am making this guide book and a little bit of structure. (Alaba)

#### **4.3.3. Conclusion**

English is adopted in football as a lingua franca. Football is the same anywhere in the world, so the game can be practically played by anyone who knows how to play football, without having to speak a word. The ‘language of football’ is therefore also a sort of lingua franca.

None of the Finnish football clubs offered language trainings to their foreign football players. Some people, like John, Peter and Harry, brought up the idea of learning Finnish themselves. However, due to different kinds of circumstances, not everybody was able to participate in the courses. The president of Harry's football club even said to him that he was crazy for wanting to learn Finnish, since ‘everybody’ speaks English as well. Alaba learned Finnish by working in a day care. He says

that children are the perfect language learning partners, since they will never reply in English to comfort the other.

That learning the language and learning more about the Finnish culture is necessary, is admitted by everybody. Jussi says, for instance, that a player cannot concentrate only on football; he needs something more, which will make him a stronger person. However, Jussi thinks the football migrant himself has to come and ask for help and support. According to Kim (2001), it depends on the time period a migrant will be in a different country, on how needed it is for the migrant to learn about the culture and country of residence. The football migrants in Finland do not get any information or language training. However, Kim says that it is necessary and a must for migrants to learn communication patterns, with language as a primary learning goal. Crystal (2003) says that a migrant needs at least a lingua franca (common language) in order to succeed.

The football migrants do not feel themselves welcome in their Finnish football clubs. Finns are very aloof. They are hard to reach and getting into touch with them on a social level is, at first, almost impossible. Some football migrants miss their own culture or the one in countries such as Sweden, where people seem to be more open towards foreigners. There are also many miscommunications between foreigners and Finns, since they do not seem to understand each other's passion in football. Some are named to be phlegmatic, others are called undereducated. As stated by Kim (2001), a migrant who does learn anything about the new environment will be "handicapped in their ability

to meet their physical, material, psychological and social needs and goals” (p.73).

The more foreigners there are in a team, the less these problems will occur. The only time Finns are extrovert and social with foreigners are during the so-called sauna evenings. Finns tend to stick together and do not easily let foreigners in their group. They do so by speaking Finnish and no English at all, and by going out with each other without informing foreigners. Foreign football players are seen by Finns as better players than the local players. When a football migrant does not show his better skills, he will have a problem within the team. According to Alaba, there has to developed a guideline on how to integrate a football migrant in the team, because now foreigners feel themselves excluded and might not reach their potential.

#### **4.4. Internationally orientated Finland**

In the Finnish football league we do not find many foreigners working as a football player or football coach. There are reasons for this: the level of the league is not high enough for (European) football migrants, the salary is not high enough and the quality of the facilities is too low. But are there more reasons to name? For instance, do Finns welcome football migrants at all in their league and society? Are there opportunities for football migrants to participate in the Finnish society, or do they have to – and want to – seek for people from their own nationality?

#### 4.4.1. International Finnish society

Although football migrants might live in a 'football bubble', meaning that they are mainly training and playing during working hours and at home watching television and sleeping, eventually they will get into situations where they have to communicate with Finnish people: on the street while letting the dog out or when they go out on a Saturday night. Are Finnish people open to them? According to Alaba, Finland is not as open as Sweden, where he has also been for a longer period of time. "You know, they [Swedes] are used to more foreigners, they accept foreigners. In Finland, when you have a Finnish family, Finnish friends, at some time, it takes long time before they ask: what are you really doing here?" (Alaba)

Alaba believes it has to do with self-esteem. He explains that he thinks the Winter War has had lots of impact on the grandparents and parents of today.

I don't know about this generation, maybe it changed a bit, but maybe 50 years or so... but self-esteem in a way. It is a great country, maybe everything is okay, life is well, but Sweden is richer country than them, lots of Swedish things, Swedish are more open to foreigners. (Alaba)

Alaba explains that Finland is his home, which has become so because of his Finnish wife and their children, and also because Finland has been his first country to live after moving away from Africa. Alaba says he has a strong connection to Finland, but on the other hand he says he feels himself more accepted in Sweden. He gives an example by telling a story about the summer in Sweden, where strangers are laying side by side on the beach and playing football with each other, while nobody knows each

other. He says that in Finland such a situation will never happen spontaneously.

Harry says that Finland has two faces: the *international* one and the *local* one. Harry thinks that there is a big group of Finns that knows Finland cannot live without international contacts, and therefore the younger generation can speak English very well. But there is also a large group who is not connected with foreigners at all.

I think that Finns can also be very racist, if you look at certain things. Sometimes... in their thinking. But that is... if you look outside the city, then you think that those places are twenty or thirty years behind. That idea still counts. And then there are the True Finns, who know how to connect with those people, so yes, that is also a face of Finland. (Harry)

John says it is hard to integrate in Finnish society, since one gets only fully accepted by talking fluently Finnish. However, Alaba says that even though he lives in Finland for already eleven years and that he speaks more or less fluently Finnish, Finns still see him as a foreigner.

John has found himself a Finnish girlfriend and has heard that many other foreigners are in a relationship with a Finn. That makes him thinking that Finns are not afraid to be in touch with foreigners.

Harry does not see a problem with the aloofness that many Finnish footballers seem to have towards foreigners. Harry thinks the foreigner has to adjust, not the other way around. "You know, socially... and that is what I have learned in other countries... But I am a guest here in Finland. I am mainly a guest. I am a stranger here in Finland: a foreigner." (Harry)

Despite the fact that Harry thinks foreigners are guests in Finland, there still need something to be arranged in order to keep the

foreigner happy; especially in football, where the mental health is closely connected to performance on the football pitch.

Feeling yourself at home is the key to success, everybody agrees. Alaba says Finland is his 'base' for himself and his children. John and Peter say that Finland is in certain ways 'laidback' and is therefore an easy place to feel you at home. Harry thinks his character fits between that of the Finns and also says that Finland is his second home, even with the absence of his wife, who lives in their home country for work related purposes. Jussi says that Finnish football clubs need to think about this before signing a football migrant.

Yes, I think that if you make a two years contract, it was very useful to eh, settle down and feel home. That you can and you have to feel that you are at home. You need to... you have... you need friends, some kind of social net. Because... if you don't have anybody and only football: impossible!  
(Jussi)

A 'social net', as how Jussi calls it, might be working for a football migrant, but not for their partners. Many girlfriends and wives only want to stay in Finland with their footballing boyfriend or husband when she can get a job. Finding work in Finland is hard for many foreigners, as Harry and Peter have discovered. Harry's wife is working and does not want to give up her career in her home country. She visits Harry regularly in Finland. Peter's girlfriend came to Finland to stay with him, but is struggling with finding a working place. It is difficult for her to stay at home all day, every day, while her boyfriend is working and earning money for them. The cold, dark and long winters are not helping in these kinds of situations.

That football migrants may feel themselves quite often lonely in Finland, does not mean that they are looking for other people with the

same nationality or people who speak the same language. Peter says that he does not even know if there are people from his country in Finland. His girlfriend has met some, but she did not get along very well with them.

My own language only connects in the world of football. Then it is easier to talk about the sports, than with Finns. But outside of football... then I do not have the need to see people who speak the same language. I might as well go along with French or Finnish people, then. (Peter)

Harry and John give a similar reaction, by saying that they are not eager to get in touch with people who speak the same language.

It is unconsciously that I do not search for people from my country. When I meet them, it is fine, we talk, we laugh... But they are often drunk, so they do not remember me the next time they see me. But that is fine. I rather go out with people from my football team, than with people who by chance speak my language. (Peter)

Despite the fact that nobody of the interviewees is interested in finding people from their home country in Finland, it is for almost everybody still very important to read the news from their home country. Nobody is receiving an actual newspaper, but they all read and watch the news on the Internet. For Alaba it is a way to fight against home sickness, and besides that, he thinks it is a way for his children to learn his mother tongue and learn about the country of their father. Harry and John want to know what is going on in their country. They follow the everyday news stories, but also football related news websites.

I read every day the website of the newspaper. I want to know what is happening in the country. And well, I do want to watch the news broadcastings, but I cannot watch them, I don't know why... When I want to watch it, it will say this kind of message 'This broadcasting cannot be streamed in Finland'. But I'm always up to date regarding the news! (John)

Peter is the only one who does not follow the news anymore. "I have to say that before I always read the newspaper and watched the news. But



here [in Finland] not anymore. I am not proud of it, but that is the way it is.” (Peter)

As a result, Peter does neither follow the Finnish news. He says he is not interested in it, most likely due to the feeling of staying only for two years in Finland. In contrast, John says he follows the Finnish news, since he wants to be able to talk about daily life with his Finnish team mates. Harry watches the news every day, to get an image of the country.

I watch always the news in the evening. That is... I think that I know quite a lot of Finland. Over the years I have formed an image, also regarding politics and so. I try to see what kind of country it is, what kinds of politics they do. (Harry)

#### **4.4.2. International Finnish football**

The reason why many football leagues try to increase the amount of foreigners is that national players can learn and develop themselves. It makes the league also more attractive to watch, since different kinds of football styles (cultures) make the league less homogeneous. This was for Jussi the reason why he was asked to work abroad. Jussi was for some weeks in the United States, but stayed for more than half a football season in China. The American club wanted to have a European coach to train their American football players, but first they gave Jussi a course on how to educate Americans. ”It was a regional camp. I got there some lectures and training sessions, some kind of model training sessions, how I can lead training sessions as a European coach. It was very nice.” (Jussi)

Jussi tells that both the Americans as Chinese were very happy on having a European coach to lead them.

They were very keen about Europe and the European way of coaching. Because you know, they, they have some kind of, eh, thingy that we play in Europe good football. And we've got something here in Europe to show them in States. (...) [About Chinese club:] And it was very funny, they decided that: now we need European coach. And I was that. Haha, it was very interesting. (Jussi)

Jussi experienced how interesting a multicultural team can be. He tells that there were four Brazilians and one South-Korean player and a fitness coach from Brazil, who arrived one week before Jussi. In addition, the technical director of the football team was from Europe, while the head coach had been working in Japan for many years.

According to John, Finnish football needs more football migrants in order to grow. However, he realises that there are not enough revenues to be able to pay a high transfer fee and high salary for the foreign football player.

Well, I don't say it is a bad thing, but if you get two or three big foreign names... or just foreigners... but well, they won't play for a small amount of money, they will choose another country. So yes, the budget has to become bigger, the number of spectators and the stadium has to be renovated. That is the only way to make steps. (John)

Harry thinks that attracting more foreigners to Finland is a way to increase the popularity of the Finnish football league, but, however, those football migrants have to bring something extra, Harry thinks.

Look, if you look at quality, then I think that is a good thing for the football... But then you should take the better ones, and that is a problem. I mean, a foreigner should bring more than the Finnish guy, otherwise you shouldn't do it. (...) But... ehm... there are a lot of average foreigners here, of which you think: 'Why did they take them?!' (Harry)

Jussi has the same opinion about attracting more foreigners to Finland. He remembers the 1980's, when there came some British football migrants to Finland 'to show the Finns how the game should be played'. The Brits played during the summer period in Finland, after which they went back to Great Britain. Since then, Finnish teams play a similar kind of football as the traditional British way, the so-called kick-and-rush football. Jussi says that British players have always come over to Finland to, for example, start their career. Even now in the 2010's. Harry has also seen the British influence in Finland, but he thinks that the style of play is changing into a more 'European way', a result of having a more multicultural Finnish football league, with players and coaches from all over the world. However, Jussi says that Finnish teams should not just take foreigners, only because they are 'foreign'.

I think it is no use to take a foreign player if he is not better than local level players, it is no use. Because we try to develop our own young players and if we need some foreign players here, they have to be much more better one way or another. (Jussi)

Also Alaba and Peter have this opinion. Alaba is not sure if all of the foreigners in the Finnish league are of top quality and Peter says you have to really search for the good foreign players, otherwise they will not light up from the Finnish players. Peter says this is not a good situation.

The situation of foreigners, who are, in some cases, earning more money than local Finnish players, while they are not necessarily better players than the Finns, causes tensions in the dressing room. Harry says that Finns have difficulties listening to foreigners. A foreigner has to proof himself that he is a really good player. Peter has noticed this in the sense that the coach is sometimes harsher to him then towards the

Finns, but he has no problems with that and he thinks that it has to do with that the coach can talk better about football with him as being another foreigner.

According to Jussi, Finns know that they should work hard to be better than the foreigners, so that they have no reason to complain about, for instance, the lack of playing time due to the presence of a football migrant. Harry says that there is nothing wrong with the mentality of the Finnish players, but football migrants could teach them to be more open minded towards 'others' and let the Finns be more creative in their thinking and playing. Peter thinks that foreigners can help changing Finns into more social human beings. "No... no... that [being open-minded] is pretty hard. You cannot generalize, but there is a large group that has difficulties with it, with accepting things from foreign players." (Harry)

Harry, Peter and Alaba all say that the Finns should get a different training method during their youth years, which is at this moment too much focused on the work ethic, and not that much on the tactical part.

However, Finnish football is transforming already from a more kick-and-rush style of game to a more tactical and technical European style of playing. The possibility to play in the Champions League of Europa League (the two annual continental club football competitions in Europe) give Finnish clubs more status, revenues and, in addition, the opportunity to get in touch with different kinds of cultures.

Alaba has seen his Finnish club changing from a locally focused club into a more international organization, due to the playing

time in the Europa League. Still, he is not sure if there is a real progress in the organization, in a way that the club has become more professional and that players have become of a higher level.

In that way it is really difficult to say... of course there has been progress. We have been top once, periods... there is always talk going on players, lot of changes going on in the office... but there have to be strong objectives, and it has to be clear what are the objectives, in that way... (Alaba)

Harry thinks his Finnish club has a relatively high status in Europe, since the club is playing regularly in one of the continental European leagues. He says that it makes it easier to attract foreign players, since playing in the Champions League or Europa League gives players a podium to show themselves to the world, in order to earn a transfer to a bigger European club. Since the tactics that Finnish teams have adopted are more European, players from Finland are easier to adjust in other countries. Also, Finnish players are cheap, according to Harry and Jussi, and, thus, there are always many scouts present during Finnish matches. Also John thinks Finnish football gives a foreign player the opportunity to present himself on some sort of podium.

Well... [long break] I think that you can become a big name quite fast. When you have become one of the better players of your team, you are automatically one of the better players in the whole league. So at that point I would say that there is a lot to get from Finland as a foreign player. But if you come here for the supporters, for spontaneous football, then you should go to another country. (John)

[Globalization] is a good thing. We have.. growth.. bigger club. (...) We have gained very quickly, lot of things in short time. But that is good. Football is international; it is very good that we have an international team. (Jussi)

#### 4.4.3. Conclusion

In this subchapter, the interviewees have been talking lots about Finns and Finland. The statements made about Finnish people are not to be generalized. 'Finns' are the Finnish people the interviewees have met.

According to the interviewees, Finnish teammates do not accept foreigners that easily. It will take a while before they will have a deeper conversation with a foreigner. This has possibly to do with stereotyping. According to Martin & Nakayama (2010), it is hard to change stereotypes. Also Lehtonen (2005) says that stereotypical generalizations are not always correct, yet they are still applied. The generalizations are used at the moment one does not know enough about the new culture and environment.

There are many different 'Finns', according to the interviewees. There is a general feeling of two kinds of Finns: the one who is interested in other cultures and the one who conservative and has anxious for foreigners. Some are missing spontaneous social life actions, which are not often possible since Finns tend to plan their life very carefully.

Integrating into Finnish society has been seen to be a tough process. As said by Alaba, according to unwritten Finnish social laws, one needs to speak Finnish fluently and look like a Finn. Alaba, for instance, speaks Finnish fluently, but due to his African looks people still see him as a foreigner, despite his deep knowledge of Finland and the Finnish language. However, Harry, Jussi and Peter, think also that foreigners need to do effort to adjust and one should not expect that every

Finn will come to socialize, a statement also made by Kim (2001), who says: "We, as strangers, need to respect the basic integrity of the local culture – just as we would expect strangers coming to our own community to do the same" (p. 224). Having a Finnish girlfriend or wife might help merging into Finnish society. Finnish football clubs should do research on a football migrant's personality, before signing the player. In this way, a club can find out if the football migrant fit between the Finns.

All of the interviewees, except for Peter, say that they still follow the news from their home country. It is for them important, for not missing home that badly, but also for feeling mentally healthy in the rather unknown environment. Peter is the only one who is not following the news at all, neither his native nor Finnish news. Having internet access gives people the opportunity to keep reading, listening and watching the media they were used to. Besides Peter, everyone else is using also Finnish media to be up to date. One reason for this is to have content for conversations with Finnish colleagues. As found out by, among others, Kim (2001) and Jialy (2006), the use of ethnic media helps a person to acculturate, although the usage should be in combination with having social contacts in the country the sojourner lives in at that moment. In addition, Kim (2001) states that following the news from one's home country has only a function in the beginning; it will not be helpful in adapting to the new country in the long run.

Jussi experienced abroad some of the benefits of working in a multicultural team. He also got trainings on how to coach people from another culture.

Many of the football migrants think Finnish football need more foreigners to let the level of the league grow. In order to make the Finnish football league a successful, multicultural league, it should innovate, attract qualitative foreigners, build better facilities and have an overall better football organisation. The biggest concern is money. Every interviewee says that Finnish football cannot get better without money. Although football migrants find their way to Finland since the 1980's, only the style of football seems to have changed, instead of the overall football accommodation.

Finnish football is attractive for football migrants, because of the possibility to play in one of the continental European leagues, such as the Champions League and Europa League. In this way, a football migrant hopes to play himself in the picture of scouts. It becomes easier for a Finnish club when it plays every year 'European football', so that foreign players know that they can develop themselves at this club. The games of Finnish matches are very often visited by European scouts, since Finns are cheap to buy. Since the level of the league is relatively low, a good player will stand out right away. According to Finns, the presence of football migrants in their country stimulates them to work harder in order to become better than the foreigner. However, Harry says that he has seen during the years that Finns have difficulties with the presence of foreigner, especially with accepting help and advice from them. To conclude, every interviewee says globalization is good for Finnish football, but to get benefits of internationalizing, there is need for change.



## **5. DISCUSSION**

This research is made with the intention to explore the field of football migration in Finland, and in particular the adaptation process of football migrants. The in-depth interviews give insight in their professional football life and their possibilities to live and work successfully in Finland. The result brings a football migrant's adaptation process to light. The study shows that football migrants experience lots of difficulties on different levels. I will discuss the results in the following chapter.

### **5.1. Discussion**

The present study shows that football migrants have a hard time with adapting to Finland through professional football. The main reason for this, is that the Finnish football clubs are not ready to work with foreigners in order to achieve full potential of players, and neither that of the team. The football organization does not take care of the football migrant as such. It does not offer any support in the form of, for instance, language training, cultural training or tutoring. The only support a club offers is a mental coach; however, this is not something desired by the football migrant, as stated by the interviewees.

This finding is something to worry about. Previous research among football migrants showed that many of them preferred playing for a lower league football club, since there is more personal guidance: trainers have more time (and are more willing) to work with a football

migrant on a personal level. According to the interviewees in the present study, the personal guidance is lacking in Finland.

According to interviewee Jussi, foreign players who have been visited by family and friends are happier than the ones who don't. He also says that a player needs a 'social net': only living for football is not desirable. This has also been concluded in the theoretical review. As stated by Kim (2001), it is necessary and even a must for a migrant to learn communications patterns. Chen & Starosta (2005) even claim that companies lose their image through cultural conflicts. The statements of these scholars, together with that of the football migrants, proof that a Finnish football club should pay personal attention to the early adaptation phase of a football migrant.

Kim (2001) says, in addition, that a migrant will be "handicapped in their physical, material, psychological, and social needs and goals" (p.73), without any communication competence. Also Maguire (1999) found that football migrants face problems of adjustment, dislocation, and retention, and experiencing an ethnic and national identity transformation. These factors have also been named by some of the interviewees. Yet, the football migrants were not prepared for these chances. The experiences have a heavy impact on a migrant's state, and thus, on his performances on the football pitch. As a result, the team performance is lacking.

Maguire (1999) found also that especially young athletes are experience intercultural problems while being abroad. Two of the interviewees in the present study were younger than 25 years old; they

have been living at home with their parents before coming to Finland. Yet, they did not get any special attention of their football club.

Football migrants have a negative image of the average Finn, based on their experiences with their teammates and Finnish society. However, this could be due to the fact that the football migrants have to survive on their own. They do not feel themselves very welcome, and therefore they might be biased when analysing their adaptive and communication processes. Interviewee Harry thought there are two sorts of Finns: the one who doesn't like foreigners, and the one who does. Although stereotyping might help migrants to explain other people's behaviour (Lehtonen, 2005), they are hard to change (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). Therefore, it would be recommended for the football club to talk with their contract football migrants, in order to tackle cultural conflicts.

Earlier studies show that football migrants in Finland tend not to stay any longer than one or two years. The present study also shows this, although two of the interviewees are already much longer in Finland than two years. The reason for leaving Finland after two years is the lack of possibilities to fully fulfil a player's ambition, miscommunications with Finnish colleagues and the aloofness of Finnish society. Kim (2001) says that hosts may not expect culturally appropriate behaviour from migrants who only stay for a short term. This might explain why the Finnish teammates do not bother making intensive contact with their foreign

teammates, by expecting the foreigner to leave rather soon. Another reason could be the host conformity pressure of the Finns, and the lack of host receptivity. Also in this case, the lack of the understanding of each other's culture is the main reason for the occurred problems.

As a result, it is recommended to prepare future incoming football migrants for their stay in Finland, and organise the team for the incoming foreign influences. Kim (2001) says: "No immigrant or sojourner can completely escape adaptation as long as he or she remains in, and is functionally dependent on, the mainstream culture" (p. 25.).

The biggest problems occur with prejudices. For instance, Jussi said that the club does not do any cultural research when they contract a Western European player, while they do try to find out what cultural differences there are between Finns and Korean people. Indeed, a German or Dutch football migrant might be more similar as a Finnish individual than a Korean migrant. Still, generalization does not help for small (project) groups.

The differences between one's own culture and the Finnish culture are bigger, than a person might find during the first weeks in Finland. The Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 1997) shows that uncertainty only reduces after a longer period of time in the host environment. During the entry phase, only the visible differences are noticed. Ward et al. (2001) say that a culture shock is not, per definition, something bad. This might be also the reason why, for

instance, Peter did not experience any culture shock during his entry phase, since he was happy in Finland and did not experience any 'shock'.

Everyone emphasized the importance of having an adaptive personality. As said by Alaba, the Finnish society will bring one down and makes one depressed as he or she is not prepared for this. However, John, for instance, said he faces difficulties during his stay in Finland, but his open mind and positive attitude helps him through it. These two different kinds of persons are important to point out, since it shows that when one develops an intercultural communication competence training for football migrants in Finland, (s)he should take into account that there are many sorts of football migrant, see also figure 2 of chapter 1.

Yet, as a result of this study and as also stated by interviewees Alaba and Jussi, Finnish football clubs need more information on the wishes and needs of football migrants, in order to make the organization more suitable for foreigners. The present study gives already many of the wishes.

Finnish football clubs would like to develop the quality of Finnish football, by attracting foreign employees. The idea is that Finnish football players and coaches will learn from foreign influences, which will help developing the local level of football. However, Finnish football clubs have a collection approach and treat football migrants the same as any Finnish player.

One recommendation for this is changing the organization from Finnish speaking to English speaking. At this moment, football

migrants need to ask for translation constantly. Maude (2011) found that minorities in an organization will fail in their development when not having the required language skills. These skills are for football migrants essential to create social life outside the working environment, but, even more important, to succeed in communicating effectively during tactical football discussion in the dressing room and on the football pitch. Communication problems can cause group forming, as also observed by interviewees Peter and Harry, which is a factor for increasing discrimination (Maude, 2011). A mental coach is not the solution. One possible reason for this is that a football migrant might not be able to share his inner feelings in a different language than his native one, but this statement needs further research.

Although many Finns speak English, which is also been spoken by the football migrant, it can be argued whether English as a lingua franca is the key for success. Although lots of football jargon are of English words, in Finland almost all of the key words are translated into Finnish. As a result, the football migrant needs to learn Finnish in order to understand what is happening during the game. And, thus, participating in a Finnish language course is desirable, although Finnish football clubs do not advice to do this. Thus, adaptation is almost impossible for football migrants, also according to Kim's cross-cultural communication theory (2001), which states that successful integration into society is accomplished by, among others, learning the local language.

Although Finland is a European country, the interviewees said Finns are much different than other people from Scandinavian countries. All of them are having a hard time communicating with Finns. Finns do not tend to make contact with strangers actively. The only moment football migrants feel themselves socially accepted are during the sauna-evenings, as a result of alcoholic beverages. Finns are said to be very aloof. According to Finnish players (based on the interviews and "Changing The Face", 2009), the presence of football migrants in their country stimulates them to work harder, only in order to become a better player than the foreigner. This could be explained in two ways: it is either to learn from 'the foreign expert' in order to become a great football player, or it is for showing the Finnish coaches and managers that Finland does not need football migrants. The second explanation is likely, since Peter, Harry and also Alaba have noticed that Finns have difficulties with the presence of foreigners in Finnish football, especially with accepting help and advice from them. However, these explanations could be made by the lack of host communication competence.

All of the interviewees think that living and working abroad will change a person's identity. But we have to keep in mind that a football player is a celebrity of a certain kind: he works in the public domain, his work is being broadcasted on radio, television and online and his performances are being analyzed by fans, colleagues, coaches and journalists. A football player's status can change every week, depending on a range of circumstances. Thus, a changing identity is natural.

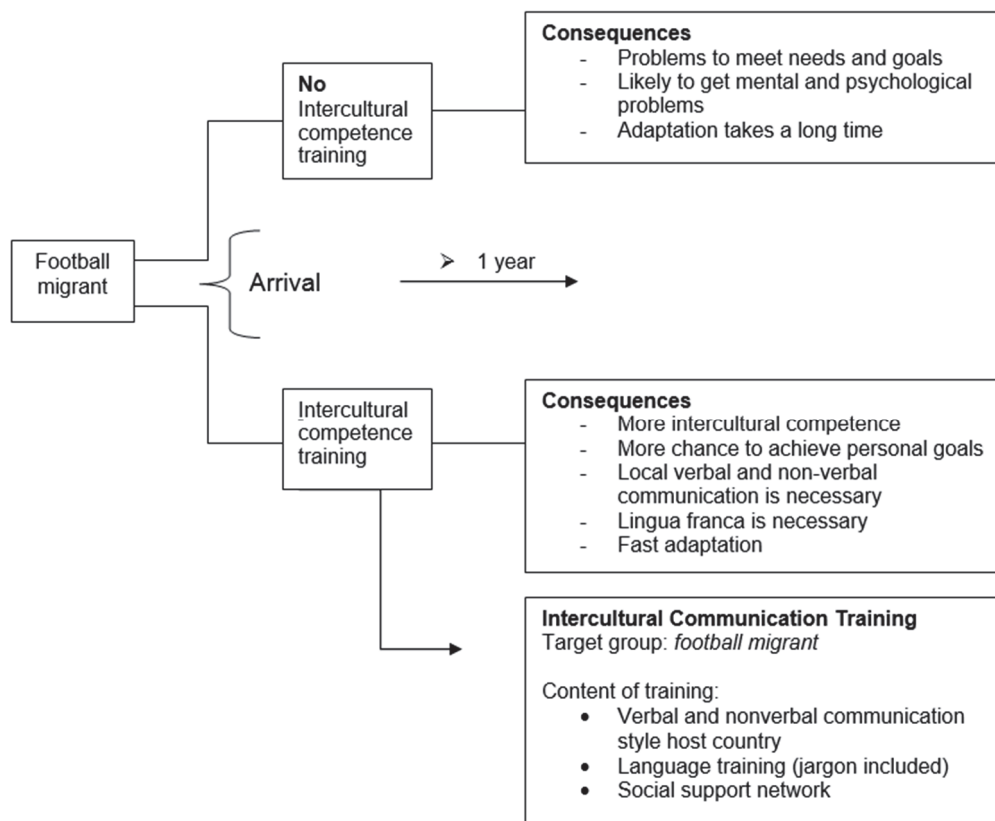
### **5.1.1. Conclusion**

Based on the conclusions of the findings, the following model can serve to explain the win or fail possibility of a football migrant. It is, therefore, named the Win-or-Lose Model for football migrants (figure 5).

The transfer of a football migrant costs often a lot of money for the organization. The consequences of a football player who cannot perform at his best are large. Not only money will be spilled, but also the football team will not perform as hoped (failed in effective communication) and the football migrant himself will have problems to meet his needs and goals, is likely to get mental and psychological problems and his adaptation process will take a long time.

All of the occurred problems are less likely to face after participating in a suitable intercultural competence training, where one will learn about, inter alia, the differences between Finns and the migrant. The adaptation process will be smoother, with positive consequences for the football migrant, his team and environment (including football supporters). According to Kim (2001), a migrant who will only stay for a short period is less motivated to participate in such a training. However, football contracts are often signed for at least one or two year.





**Figure 5 Win-or-Lose Model for football migrants, based on, i.a., Kim (2001), Crystal (2003) and the present study.**

The findings of the present study are also to be found in other studies on migrant workers in Finnish organizations. This suggests that the findings do not only apply to Finnish football, but also to other career fields in Finland. For instance, Polish workers in Finland (Lahti & Valo, 2013) have experienced the same kind of aloofness of Finnish colleagues as what the football migrants in the present study have experienced. According to other research, many European migrant workers in Finland experience discrimination and language problems, even when a migrant has learned Finnish. Also the closed nature of the Finns and the job market has been named as problematic (Carmel, Cerami, & Papadopoulos, 2011, Olakivi, 2013).

A different situation do European exchange (Erasmus) students experience in Finland. Everything is arranged well for them, including housing, tutors, cultural events and Finnish language courses, even though they are temporary migrants. However, the student exchange program has impact on one's identity (Dervin, 2011).

## **5.2. Study evaluation**

The aim of this study was to explore the field of football migration in Finland in relation to intercultural communication and give insight in the adaptation process of professional football players. For this research, three professional football players and two professional football coaches (former football players themselves) have been interviewed. This amount of study objects (5) might be small, but gives an in-depth understanding of the adaptation process with lots of variation in findings.

The five interviewees are not representative for the average football migrant in Finland; yet, five is, relatively, not a too small portion, compared to the total amount of football migrants in Finland at the moment of interviewing. However, as also mentioned by Patton (2002), Kvale (2008), and Barnes et al. (2014), small samples are very useful for gaining in-depth understanding of the participants and the research topic. To get this in-depth insight, the use of face-to-face interviews was very useful. The interviewees were calm during the, sometimes, long talks, but sometimes also emotional due to the content of the conversation. The emotional state of a study object might have influenced the outcome of the conversation. Two of the interviewees were for just (over) a year in

Finland, the other three could talk based on, for instance, ten years of experience.

The interview questions were divided into themes, in order to get to the main topic of this study. Some themes were for some of the interviewees rather hard to answer, mostly due to the fact that they never thought about their life in Finland on a deeper level. Two of the interviewees, for instance, were able to analyze their personal culture shock experience. The others spoke, regarding this topic, at first with their heart. The trick was to give the interviewee time to think about the answer.

When a research participant gave a somehow sensitive answer to a certain question, the interviewees often asked about the researcher's point of view, being a foreigner himself. Confirmation or disagreement was avoided by, for instance, asking a different question. This observer-expectancy effect, or unintentional expectancy effect, causes that the responses are influenced by, for example, the body language of the researcher (Goldstein, 2011). The researcher could use an interview technique such as nodding the head, to show that the interviewee can go on with talking, which could have an effect on how the interviewees will response.

The expectance was to get more insight in the organizational structure of Finnish football clubs. However, all of the interviewees concluded that the organizations are rather small, which causes, as a result, problems for football migrants. Yet, without this knowledge, the

loneliness football migrants are experiencing would not have been understandable.

The study has been completed in a consistent and stable manner. The more reliable the measurement is, the more dependable it is, because it leads to similar outcomes when it refers to different contexts (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000). However, reliable research has sometimes errors. For instance, the present study gives some insight in the problems that occur between football migrants and locals, although the story is only told by one side and would therefore need a counter-argument. Research remains to be done with focus on group communication.

The participant's anonymity was constantly an important issue. Since the world of Finnish football is rather small, one could easily find out who participated in this study. Especially when it concerns nationalities, races and religions, one should be careful what to say about other people. However, by protecting one's anonymity, the quality of this research is likely to be higher than without anonymity. Adaptation to another country brings up sensitive issues. Protecting people's right of privacy is a moral principle of ethical guidelines (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000).

This qualitative study did not try to generalize the findings for all football migrants in Finland. The main goal was to explore this rather unknown field of expatriation in football related to intercultural communication. The intention was to hear the voice of football migrants in Finland and to attach meanings to the findings. The results contribute to the field of intercultural communication by showing how football

migrants are different from other expatriates and immigrants, and what problems they face when arriving, living and working in Finland. These problems are described in the conclusion.



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## APPENDICES

### Interview questions for football migrants - players

#### Theme: Background

Name, age, nationality?

What is your educational background?

How long have you been playing professional football?

How long have you been playing football in Finland?

#### Theme: Career in Finland

Why did you come to Finland to play (professional) football?

Could you react on the following characteristics of your transfer to Finland? Salary,

Level of the football league, Finnish culture / language

(Un)employment / competition in own country, Relational influence (family/partner, agent, club's pressure)

Can you describe the process of your transfer and the final stage of signing the contract?

*What was the role of the club in this process?*

In what way did you learn about your new football club and country?

What were your own expectations of living and working in Finland?

*Did you meet your own expectations?*

What were the Finnish club's expectations of you?

*Were these expectations realistic in your opinion?*

What are your former experiences of working in a different country than your home country?

How would you describe the club's guiding in your first weeks and now? *(Cultural or language training, team mate tutor, housing, working permit, etc?)*

Did you get any help to integrate in Finnish football and society? *Via the club or city integration policy?*

How would you describe your first weeks of living in Finland?

What do you do in your free time?

What is your emotional status when you are (alone?) at home? (*home sick, adventurous, as being on a holiday, etc.*)

What would be a critical cultural incident for you that happened in Finland?

What does or what would the club do in case of problems between Finns and foreigners in the team? *What are the rules?*

How international orientated is your Finnish club?

Is knowing the Finnish language necessary to work like you would work in your own country?

Which language is used and which language would you prefer to use?

How international orientated is the Finnish society in your opinion? Do you feel yourself welcome?

What are the improvements you would like to see to be able do your work better than now?

What is your opinion about the club's influence on your physical and mental status?

What are your perceptions of the Finnish colleagues' communication style, including coaches, trainers and managers? *What are the differences with your earlier experiences? Is there equality in the team?*

What do you think your Finnish team colleagues think of other cultures, nationalities and languages in their team?

What did you do when there were communication problems?

To whom do you go in times of problems? *Does the club have a counselor?*

How often do you use media of your own country or language?

*Why do you think native media services are important / not important to keep using?*

Have you met any international people or people from your own nationality via the club, team mates or any other channels?

When you get in the future more than one job offers, would you choose a club in a different way than the way you did when coming to Finland? (*international environment important?*)

What would you have done differently when you look back at your whole period in Finland?

What would you advise players from your own country when moving to Finland to play football?

What have you learned about your own culture and about you as a person?

Is there any different way of looking at football migrants / foreign football players, before and after your own international transfer?

**Theme: Future**

Where do you see yourself professionally in three years?

How do you feel about a future of living in Finland for the rest of your professional football career?

What would you do if your partner could get a great job in a different country than Finland?

**Interview questions for football migrants - coach**

**Theme: Background**

Name, age, nationality?

What is your educational background?

How long have you been playing professional football?

How long have you been playing football in Finland?

How long have you been a coach in Finland?

**Theme: Career in Finland**

Why did you come to Finland to play (professional) football?

Can you describe the process of your transfer and the final stage of signing the contract?

*What was the role of the club in this process?*

In what way did you learn about your new football club and country?

What were your own expectations of living and working in Finland?

*Did you meet your own expectations?*

What were the Finnish club's expectations of you?

*Were these expectations realistic in your opinion?*

What are your former experiences at working in a different country than your home country?

How would you describe the club's guiding in your first weeks and now? (*Cultural or language training, team mate tutor, housing, working permit, etc?*)

Did you get any help to integrate in Finnish football and society? Via the club or city integration policy?

How would you describe your first weeks of living in Finland?

What do you do in your free time?

What is your emotional status when you are (alone?) at home? (*home sick, adventurous, as being on a holiday, etc.*)

What would be a critical cultural incident for you that happened in Finland?

What does or what would the club do in case of problems between Finns and foreigners in the team? *What are the rules?*

How international orientated is your Finnish club?

How does your own experience of working and living as a football migrant in Finland help to do your work as a football coach/trainer in Finland?

What is your own view on the globalization in football? *What is good and what is wrong about it, what can be arranged better?*

Is knowing the Finnish language necessary to work like you would work in your own country?

Which language is used and which language would you prefer to use?

How international orientated is the Finnish society in your opinion? *Do you feel yourself welcome?*

What are the improvements you would like to see to be able do your work better than now?

What is your opinion about the club's influence on your physical and mental status?

What are your perceptions of the Finnish colleagues' communication style, including coaches, trainers and managers? What are the differences with your earlier experiences?

What do you think your Finnish team colleagues think of other cultures, nationalities and languages in their team?

What did you do when there were communication problems?



To whom do you go in times of problems? *Does the club have a counselor?*

How often do you use media of your own country or language?

*Why do you think native media services are important / not important to keep using?*

Have you met any international people or people from your own nationality via the club, team mates or any other channels?

What would you have done differently when you look back at your whole period in Finland?

What would you advice players from your own country when moving to Finland for playing football?

What have you learned about your own culture and about you as a person?

Is there any different way of looking at football migrants / foreign football players, before and after your own international transfer?

**Theme: Future**

Where do you see yourself professionally in three years?

What would you do if your partner could get a great job in a different country than Finland?

Do you have any intentions of leaving Finland and move back to your own country or work in another country?