Exploring the struggle of a professional football league and its clubs in wider sport entertainment field

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Abstract: This thesis report aims to explicate how a professional football league, Finnish Veikkausliiga, and its clubs struggle for their position in wider context of sport entertainment field. The main emphasis is to provide an account on the intrinsic challenges and how the meaningful stakeholders engage in shaping the field dynamics. The chosen research approach to meet the aims is grounded theory, resulting in conceptual model explaining the struggle of the professional football league.

Following the principles of grounded theory methodology, this thesis was conducted by using qualitative data collection methods and relevant analysis methods, including open, axial, and theoretical coding processes. The results of eight in-depth interviews and the grounded theory model were complemented with appropriate secondary data sources received from the stakeholders involved and available content on the internet.

The results suggest that a professional football league and its clubs operate in a complex and challenging environment, while struggling with the intrinsic causality dilemma to achieve international success and obtain financial resources. A fundamental element of the causality dilemma is the adhesive and transmitting role of public audience, impacting the field dynamics and being impacted by the field dynamics. Regarding the struggle of turning the causality dilemma into a virtuous cycle, or trying to avoid the vicious circle, a well-aligned and mutually benefiting strategies across stakeholder groups are required to facilitate gradual progress.

This thesis advances sport management research with a novel and pervasive approach to understand professional sports leagues and the stakeholders, while offering valuable insights to practitioners within professional football and sports in general.

Keywords: grounded theory, professional football, professional sports, chicken or the egg causality dilemma, field theory, organizational study
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1 INTRODUCTION

The uncrowned position of sport as one of the most significant passions of modern popular cultures is something that hardly anyone can argue against (Boyle and Haynes, 2009). The overwhelming passion for sports has resulted to the widespread commercialization of sports, where especially the ball game leagues such as European football (hereinafter referred to as football), basketball, American football, baseball, rugby, and ice-hockey have become multi-billion businesses (Söderman and Dolles, 2015). While the most lucrative ball games on individual league level are the professional leagues in North-America (American football, basketball, and baseball), on global scale football has taken the dominant position in professional sports (Pedersen and Thibault, 2014).

Albeit professional football leagues often enjoy their almost monopolistic position, they are claimed to be competing against other sport leagues in wider fields of sport and within the larger and highly competitive arena of recreation and entertainment industry (Mason, 1999). Furthermore, professional football leagues operating in geographically restricted domestic markets are not only competing against other leagues in their region, but also the globally recognized top leagues that are available to everyone, everywhere, and at any time (Mason, 1999; Söderman and Dolles, 2015).

Whereas football occupies the dominant position in most of the European countries (Deloitte, 2016), ice-hockey has traditionally held the most prestigious sport’s status in the sport entertainment field of Finland (Breivik, 2010; Taloustutkimus, 2017) despite of the wide-spread popularity of football as hobby (Suomen Palloliitto, 2016). From those reasons, the area of interest of this thesis is the struggle of the top Finnish football league and its clubs (hereinafter referred as Veikkausliiga) within their wider context at sports entertainment field, and the relationships among the meaningful stakeholders of Veikkausliiga determining the position in wider sport entertainment context. The aim is to uncover the practicalities and realities, both internal and external, that result to the struggle and are a result of the struggle.

1.1 Research problem

Each professional sports league, including Veikkausliiga, struggles continuously to improve its position in both geographically restricted domestic field and in the larger
fields of recreation and entertainment industry. The struggle of a sports league is portrayed by the competition of sports leagues over the attention of the public, fight for the commercial revenues of sponsorships and the partnerships with businesses, as well as the race for higher media rights remuneration received from media companies and broadcasters (Mason, 1999). The prominent media and cultural researchers have stated that pop music, sports and any other activities are kept up by media industry and that the relevance of media is not restricted to the financial resources and transmission, but includes also the proactive transition of those two (Boyle and Haynes, 2009).

The targeted institution of this thesis, Veikkausliiga, is managed by Jalkapalloliiga Registered Association (Jalkapalloliiga Ry). To simplify the expressions used, hereinafter, in cases where Jalkapalloliiga Ry is involved as governing body or collective social actor, we use the more well-known brand name of Veikkausliiga Ry. Veikkausliiga Ry and Palloliitto (Finnish Football Association, hereinafter referred as FFA) together have tried to leverage the current position of football as the most popular sport in Finland in terms of registered players in their challenging campaign to become the number one sports league in Finland in terms of followers and attractiveness (Suomen Palloliitto, 2016; Veikkausliiga Ry, 2009).

A promising sign for Finnish football has been discovered by Taloustutkimus Oy (2014), declaring that football has for the first time become the most appreciated sport in Finland. Despite the recent positive sign posts in hobbyist numbers and appreciation, the popularity of football in absolute figures of how many people are following football is lagging the traditionally popular sports of ice-hockey, ski-jumping, and athletics. Football is currently the 6th most popular that Finnish consumers are following actively (Taloustutkimus Oy, 2014). The latest survey results (published in March 2017) reveal that the relative appreciation of football has declined during the couple of past years while the attractiveness has remained the same (Taloustutkimus Oy, 2017)

1.2 The research gap

While multiple researchers have examined professional sports by using strategic management principles (Grundy, 2004; Rossi et al. 2013), marketing theories (Mason, 1999; Södermand and Dolles, 2015), and econometrics (Forrest et al. 2004; Buraimo, 2008; Garcia-del-Barrio and Pujol, 2016), only few have tried to address the social complexities related to the position of particular sports in its wider context of recreation
The formerly referenced authors have demonstrated how sport management researchers are able utilise social theories, such as the Bourdieu’s theory of field, in order to explore variety of sport management phenomena. Basically, the theory of fields is about the settings and space where agents interact with each other per their roles, positions, and capitals possessed (Grenfell, 2012). Typically, the power-relationships and positions are studied at individual level, but Fligstein and McAdam (2011;2012) extends the field-theoretical perspective regarding power-relations to upper level, legitimizing usage of collective actors as units of analysis. Sports management and football specialized researchers (i.e. Dolles and Söderman, 2005; Skogvang, 2009; Giulianotti and Robertson, 2012) have studied the complexity and the omnipresence of football, and its complex relationship with the society to some extent after the first seminal study by Slack and Kikulis (1989). For example, the relationship between professional sport league and media broadcasting has been studied extensively (e.g. Buraimo, 2008; Garcia-del-Barrio and Pujol, 2016) but with relatively narrow or non-existent scope regarding the complex web of relationships embedded in contemporary professional sports field.

Despite of the recent developments in sports management research and sociology of sports, in overall the highly recommended cross-fertilization of the two theoretical foundations has remained relatively thin (Kitchin and Howe, 2013; Kay and Laberge, 2002a;2002b). To capture the subtleties of such phenomena in complex and socially constructed interplays between multiple actors and field levels, a Bourdieusian approach with relational analysis is suggested by Kitchin and Howe (2013). They argue for the use of Bourdieu’s theory of practice approach for researching professional sports leagues in terms how the field, capital, and habitus are socially constructed and interrelated among the stakeholders. Another similar approach for studying organizational fields is provided by DiMaggio and Powell (1983, p. 148), who are arguing that: “organizational fields only exist to the extent that they are institutionally defined”.

The former concept by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) is designed more for studying isomorphism and institutionalism, while Bourdieusian studies should be better suit for identifying the powerful agents/institutions, power-relationships, and tools which actors use for exercising power (Grenfell, 1983; Kitchin and Howe, 2013). Another suitable field-theoretic approach is proposed by Fligstein and McAdam (2012), King et al. (2009, 2010), and King and Walker (2014), of which the latter is arguing for the value of field-theoretic approaches for strategy studies. King and Walker (2014) advocate for the field-
theoretic approach to strategy research, as they claim that it is useful for addressing the notions of organizational status and power in much more holistic way than traditional strategy theories can explore. Despite some synthesized theories and concepts exist in sports management and sociology of sports, there is still a clear need for the wider social dimension to be considered in sports management research.

1.3 Statement of purpose and the aim of thesis

The intention of this thesis is to fill the research gap by exploring the field of professional sports from field-theoretical perspectives in terms how a professional sport league, Veikkausliiga and its clubs, struggle for its position in broader context. With this struggle, this thesis intends to uncover those strategic elements emphasized in field-theoretic approach (King and Walker, 2014). The theoretical stance is adopted by synthesizing field-theoretical concepts by Bourdieu (1977, 1992), King et al. (2009, 2010), King and Walker (2014), and Fligstein and McAdam (2012), although the methodological approach will follow grounded theory principles (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006).

This thesis tries to advance the research discipline of sports management and socially constructed studies of sports both theoretically and methodologically, as there are few to non-existent research on professional football leagues by using field-theoretic perspective with collective actor level as the unit of analysis. The practical aim of this thesis is to provide managerial implications for professional team sports management and other stakeholders within the domestic sports field and across international boundaries. Also, it aims to support Veikkausliiga and Finnish football in their challenging campaign to become the most popular sports league in Finland.

Therefore, the area of interest in thesis is the struggle of a professional sport league within the larger professional sports field and in the field of recreation and entertainment business (Bourdieu, 1977; Fligstein and McAdam, 2012; King et al. 2009; 2010; King and Walker, 2014). The peculiar starting point for this study is amplified by the fact that football has more registered amateur players and is more appreciated than for example ice-hockey, volleyball, and basketball have (Suomen Palloliitto, 2016), but this has not shown directly in the follower figures (subscriptions) or in the match day attendances of Veikkausliiga (Veikkausliiga Ry, 2009; Taloustutkimus, 2014; 2017). The concept of professional sports field and the struggle of its agents has not been covered much in
academia, except by few graduate students partly addressing similar types of struggles of lower level professional sport leagues (Karlsson and Skännestig, 2011; Mönkkönen, 2011).

Hereby, the aim of this thesis is to explore how professional sport leagues struggle for their position in the field of professional sports domestically and internationally, fields of cultural production and entertainment industry. More exactly, this thesis explores the struggle of Veikkausliiga and its clubs by applying grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) research strategy and reflecting the results with the field-theoretic principles by Bourdieu (1992), Fligstein and McAdam (2012), and King et al. (2009; 2010). Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.24) propose that: “grounded theory is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon”. Furthermore, the aim is not to present absolute truth claims about the reality, but to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon itself and the relationships and interactions that ultimately form the dynamic constructions of the real world of actors involved (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

The noble intention of this thesis is to provide an improved understanding of professional football, while advancing the sport management and sociology of sport research, especially in their intersection. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to answer to the broader research question of “How does Veikkausliiga and its clubs struggle for their position in broader field of professional sports and entertainment field”. The final output of the grounded theory approach is model depicting the struggle of football league. More specifically, the model aims summarize the relevant categories that will eventually steer the football league towards a vicious or virtuous circle. The reason for football league’s vulnerability for a vicious or a virtuous circle is the chicken or the egg-type of causality dilemma deeply rooted in professional football business. More specifically, the aim of the thesis will be reached by answering the below research questions:

**RQ1:** What are the fundamental challenges pertaining to the struggle of Veikkausliiga and its clubs?

**RQ2:** Who are the meaningful stakeholders for Veikkausliiga Ry and its clubs and how do they engage in shaping the field dynamics?

**RQ3:** What are the outcomes from the realized practices to respond to the struggle of Veikkausliiga?

**RQ4:** How are these practices and outcomes impacted over time?
1.4 Delimitations

As this research is conducted with a relatively pragmatic approach, the empirical part of this thesis was restricted to those interviewees who were available for the interview from Veikkausliiga representatives and other relevant stakeholders discovered during the research. Additionally, an extensive longitudinal, critical, and ethnographic approach was out of scope due to limited resources (time, money, access to organisations). Nevertheless, this thesis could produce some valid and reliable findings by applying rigid, high-quality grounded theory approach when exploring the struggle of Veikkausliiga within its wider context. The results and conclusions of this study are relevant to the multiple stakeholders involved in the empirical part, as most if not every meaningful stakeholder, are able reflect their own agenda and strategies with the presented grounded theory. The policy implications are especially relevant to the professional sport league institutions and their media partners.

Although qualitative research is not looking to generalize its findings, the inductive grounded theory analysis of this thesis aimed at analytical generalization of the results from the relational field-theoretical perspective (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Charmaz, 2007). Therefore, the findings and conclusions are interesting from international perspective as well, although with limited generalizability. Regardless, the delimitation of this thesis is the generalizability of managerial implications presented, as often each professional league operates in its own unique circumstances and thus the generalization is difficult if not impossible (Kitchin and Howe, 2013). Finally, it is important to note that in this type of thesis, the theoretical end-product is “a partial view of the social phenomenon shaped by the researcher’s point of view” (Grenfell, 2012, p. 241).

1.5 Structure of thesis

This thesis will follow the grounded theory research approach suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The first chapter will start by addressing relevant and purposeful literature, enabling the commencement of empirical work by guiding the early data collection. Another role of the literature review is to provide relevant framework to reflect on with the results and grounded theory model.

After the theoretical foundations are presented in literature review, the methodology section is followed, which explains the research methodology decisions and approach to the research. The chosen research strategies with data collection methods are discussed
in detail as per grounded theory principles (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Next, the results are reported systemically explicating the emergent categories and main themes, originating from rigorous coding processes. The results section will end by presenting the grounded theory model explaining the causality dilemma faced by professional football leagues. Finally, the last chapter includes the reflections of results with the existing literature, conclusions, implications, and avenues for future research based on the implications and conclusions.

1.6 Key definitions and concepts used in this thesis

Grounded Theory – A holistic qualitative research approach that features systematic usage of tools and processes in the analytic work that ultimately aims to generate relevant theory of the studied phenomenon or case. Requires both rigor and creativity from the author. (Strauss and Corbin, 1990)

Chicken or the egg- causality dilemma – A term used to explain a situation where it is difficult to state “which of the two things happened first” (Merriam-Webster, 2017)

Jalkapalloliiga Ry (Veikkausliiga) – The governing body of Finnish top division football. Registered association comprising of four permanent staff and 12 board members in addition to the chairman. (Veikkausliiga, 2017)

Professional sports league – A joint venture of sport clubs participating in the competition that is part of the powerful leisure and entertainment market (Mason, 1999), and where each player of the teams is getting paid by playing the chosen sport (Wikipedia, 2017).

Field-theoretic perspective – “Domain of interaction that is structured around shared but often contested ‘understandings about the purposes of the field, relationships to others in the field (including who has power and why), and the rules governing legitimate action in the field’” (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p. 9)

Practice Theory by Bourdieu – A set of tools that a researcher can utilize in providing social explanations of phenomena. Salient to the theory is the relationship of the key concepts of field, capital, and habitus. (Kitchin and Howe, 2013)

Strategic action fields – A pertinent concept of the settings where strategizing of both individual and collective actors take place within a mezzo-level social order (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012)

Virtuous circle – “A recurring cycle of events, the result of each one being to increase the beneficial effect of the next.” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017a)

Vicious circle – “A sequence of reciprocal cause and effect in which two or more elements intensify and aggravate each other, leading inexorably to a worsening of the situation.” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017b)
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This opening presents a coherent and an encompassing literature review that will serve as justifiable theoretical framework on which the empirical part can build on and reflect against with (Caulley, 1992). As this thesis explores how a professional sports league, Veikkausliiga, struggle in its field, the literature review starts by outlining the basics of commercialized sports and by describing how professional sport leagues (emphasis on football) have developed over time. It will elaborate the formerly highlighted symbiotic relationship of professional sports and media, while not forgetting the importance of technological disruptions. Secondly, it will scrutinize the current sport management research and sociology of sport research, which helps to highlight the potential gaps in the research and to show how this study will position itself within existing literature. Hereby, the literature review critically examines the world of professional sports, football, and the contemporary sports research while raising important questions and recognizing avenues for further research.

2.1 Professional sport leagues

In short, professionalization in sports refers to the transition from voluntary-based arrangements of sports to the business-driven mind-set shared by the individuals, organizations, institutions and systems within the sports field (Dowling et al. 2013). Furthermore, Dowling et al. (2013) argues for three mutually non-exclusive categories regarding professionalization, which are organizational professionalization, systemic professionalization, and occupational professionalization. The organizational professionalization refers to the governance and management of those organizations in sports to be based on professional staff instead of voluntary workers (Dowling et al. 2013). For example, most professional football clubs are limited trading companies instead of non-profit registered associations. The systemic category refers to the broader level of commercialization of any specific sport, which was demonstrated empirically by O’Brien and Slack (2003). Finally, the occupational professionalism is defined as the specialized knowledge related to sports that differentiates the individual professional from professionals of other industries (Dowling et al. 2013).

Although rapid commercialization of team sports has drastically changed the game, the remuneration of athletes is not a very new concept. One of the first institutions to receive significant financial remuneration from sports was the major-league baseball
charging $500 from the media rights in 1910. Indeed, it was the United States leading the manifestation of commercialized team sports during the early half of 20th century with its popular leagues in baseball, American football, and basketball (Dawson and Downward, 2002), ultimately resulting in organizational, systemic, and occupational professionalization (Dowling et al. 2013). In Europe, the first one to become fully professionalized was United Kingdom’s football league. From these two nations, the professionalization began to expand to other areas of the world with a variety of popular sports followed in the United States and in United Kingdom. (Dawson and Downward, 2002)

2.1.1 Professional football

Despite football has been globally popular sport for a century, the growth into the multi billion global business has started less than 30 years ago. This commercialization has attracted more and more researchers to explore the interplay between sport and business. Researchers have concluded the high uncertainty of the game and the ethnic, gender, social, and economic equality as the main reasons for growing into a world sport. For example, in football the pyramid shaped organizations have a significant impact to the popularity and affection as people are involved to football during their childhood, adulthood, and even after the retirement. (Söderman and Dolles, 2015).

Another explanation for the popularity of team sports, and especially for football, is the large number of league games with highly uncertain outcome (Mason, 1999). Moreover, the major boost for the wider professionalization of football was the regulatory change in transfer regulations set by FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) and UEFA (Union of European Football Associations). Before 1995, those footballers whose contracts were expired had to stay in the current club unless the new club agreed to pay the transfer fee. After the “Bosman” ruling in 1995, players have could move freely within the EU after the contract is expired. The entire case occurred when Jean-Marc Bosman (professional player 1990s) appealed for the contravention of Article 48 of the Rome treaty and took his case to court. (Dolles and Söderman, 2005)

Although football is played nearly everywhere in the world, and in most of the countries at full professional level (organizational, systemic, occupational professionalization by Dowling et al. 2013), the financial and sporting dispersion across the globe is large. While some leagues such as English Premier League (hereafter EPL), Spanish La Liga
(hereafter La Liga), and German Bundesliga (hereafter Bundesliga) consists of teams resembling transnational mega corporations with annual turnovers of €100-550 million (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2012; Deloitte, 2016), some European football leagues consists of clubs that are running on almost semi-professional budgets (annual budgets of €0.3-1.0 million). One of the main reason for this dispersion is the remarkable differences in media broadcasting rights revenue received by the football clubs in different league systems (Evens and Lefever, 2011). For instance, professional football leagues at the lower end (leagues such as Veikkausliiga) receives hardly any compensation from broadcasting, while the twenty clubs at EPL will split the massive €2,590 million pot as per the final position from previous season (Deloitte, 2016; Veikkausliiga Ry, 2009).

### 2.1.2 Value captures in football

To understand how and why football has become such a commercialized sport, it is important to explain how value is created in the network of a football club and football league systems. The theory for value captures in football is developed by using marketing and strategic management theories as fundaments. (Söderman and Dolles, 2015) The main idea of this value-capture framework (Figure 1, p. 11) is to define the multidimensional product in football and to describe how the different features interrelate with the variety of customers (Södermand and Dolles, 2015). Traditionally, football clubs have generated revenue from match day takings (tickets), sponsorships and other revenue sources (merchandising), and from media rights (Grundy, 2004). Resulting from the rapid commercialization since 1990s, most top level football clubs rely more heavily on revenues from media rights, which ultimately contributes to the increased sponsorship money as well (Söderman and Dolles, 2015; García-del-Barrio and Pujol, 2016).

To understand the complexity of football as a product, Söderman and Dolles (2015, p. 372) proposed a framework (Figure 1, p. 11) representing the network of value captures in professional team sports. This network of value captures is the basis for any commercial activity and strategy work for the different stakeholders in the world of professional football. A quick calculation of the amount of possible interactional spheres among the different actors in football value capture network is eight times six, thus 48 possible relationships could be explored. According to Söderman and Dolles (2015), the value-capture framework can be applied to other sports as well, as the nature of
professional football resembles other professional team sports in general terms. In this thesis, however, we will not delve deep with all different relationships in value capture network. Therefore, we choose those value captures between football products and customers that allow to understand especially the phenomena and strategies on a league level (Figure 1).

The previous research on football has concluded that media and broadcasting contributes significantly to the development and financial wealth of top level football leagues (Grundy, 2004; Garcia-del-Barrio and Pujol, 2016). Nonetheless, it seems that in less popular professional football leagues the same is not true or has not yet actualized. Also, Söderman and Dolles (2015) themselves call for deeper operationalization of their value-capture network, with detailed account of value captures at specific levels (Söderman and Dolles, 2015). Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to explore the struggle of Veikkausliiga in the larger professional sports entertainment field, field of cultural production, and field of power. Moreover, the focus of this thesis will be on those value captures between the clubs and/or sporting competition and their media partner (Figure 1).
To understand how such a complex value capture network framework works and to test it in empirical settings, a cross-fertilization of sports management research and sociology of sports is required (Kitchin and Howe, 2013). Thus, the above framework alone is not sufficient to capture the complexities embedded in the world of professional football. Therefore, it will be synthesized together with socially broader context of different field-theoretical conceptualizations that will form the theoretical framework of this thesis. As the literature review suggested in this chapter, the role of media is imperative to comprehend when studying the field of football. Because of it, the next subchapter will address the symbiotic relationship between professional sports league and media, before examining field-theoretic conceptualizations.

2.1.3 Professional sports league product and media

Many researchers argue for the potential media value of a professional sports league is highly dependent on the popularity, which again is a result of past and current sport performance (Garcia-del-Barrio and Pujol, 2016; Grundy, 2004). In many cases, there is one dominant sports league in terms of followers (e.g. EPL in Great Britain, LaLiga in Spain), which often transforms into the most lucrative sports league as well. Therefore, the popularity of different sports can vary significantly within a country. For instance, Ice-hockey has been the dominant sport regarding followers for over a decade (Sponsor Insight, 2015). Thus, the actual competitive field of sports leagues is not within the specific sport, but in much broader professional sport entertainment market (Mason, 1999), which is today extended often across the domestic border lines (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2012). Alternatively, Wright (2009) claims that this larger field can also be defined as a large scale cultural production, which per Pierre Bourdieu (1977; 1988) is prioritized by economic capital and steered by the demand of the public that are not part of cultural product production. Consequently, if a field would be characterized as a restricted cultural production, which was the case before professionalization, the field would prioritize symbolic capital over the economic (Wright, 2009).

Consequently, Söderman and Dolles (2015) propose that information technology and media have impacted the evolution of sport and business relationship. It has been said that this impact is a result from the financial resources gained, and from the proliferation of technology, allowing most of the people in developed countries to consume sport everywhere and at any time (Söderman and Dolles, 2015). Despite the recent positive conclusions drawn of the partnership between football and media broadcasting by the
contemporary research, there have been multiple contradicting speculations of the impact of live broadcasting (e.g. Buraimo, 2008). Nevertheless, the hard facts argue for a different outcome: “By half-time of the second Premier League game that is televised domestically in 2016/17, more broadcast revenue will have been generated than by all the First Division matches combined 25 years ago.” (Deloitte, 2016, p. 3). For instance, the English Premier League’s (EPL) domestic media rights contract value today are worth £10.2 million per single match, explaining why broadcasters and professional football have been considered to form a symbiotic relationship especially in financial terms (Deloitte, 2016). Thus, it can be stated that football has become a sport with high significance both socially and economically, and therefore an important part of modern society. However, not every professional sports league can generate significant revenues from media rights, which is also the case of Finnish Veikkausliiga. Nevertheless, simultaneously with the increased co-operation with media companies (broadcasters), the rapid commercialization has spread across the globe turning dozens of professional sport leagues into multi-million businesses (Söderman and Dolles, 2015).

Despite of the contradicting findings discovered by econometric demand studies conducted in English Premier League (Baimbridge et al. 1996; Buraimo, 2008), the stadium attendance figures at the top European level have been growing steadily and are expected to remain stable in the future (Deloitte, 2016). Those findings about the impact of broadcasting to attendance level studies suggested that broadcasting all matches live would have detrimental impact (Baimbridge et al. 1996, Buraimo, 2008). Nonetheless, it is important to note that they have been done before the internet fully revolutionized media broadcasting. Nevertheless, whether those conclusions on match day attendance were reliable or not, these top leagues have achieved the position where all matches are shown live, match day attendances are higher than ever, and the financial remuneration from broadcasting is at record level (Deloitte, 2016; Evens and Lefever, 2011).

Regarding the negotiation approach to broadcasting rights, there are two models how the relationship between football and media have formed an agreement; 1. clubs individually negotiating the rights and 2. Collective media rights by the league (Garcia-del-Barrio and Pujol, 2016). Looking at most of the European football leagues, including Finland, the latter one (collective media rights selling) is dominating except in leagues at the Mediterranean area. To understand the different approaches to these negotiations, it is necessary to comprehend the relationship of the sports, media, and advertising. It is suggested that although professional sports benefit greatly from media and advertising
collaboration, it simultaneously lessens the power that sports hold. In other words, the sport is easily being dominated by the media and sponsoring companies. (Lefever, 2012)

The interrelatedness among these collective actors around professional sports is portrayed in Lefever’s (2012) framework of sports/media complex in digitalized markets, where basically almost every professional sports league today operates at (Figure 2).

In very few occasions across the globe, an individual mode of professional sport is financially independent from commercial organizations, state aids, or media companies, although technically it would be possible, if match day revenues and merchandising could cover all costs. Following from previous, the commercial organizations and media companies are invited to exert stronger power in sports (Boyle and Haynes, 2009). The pressure from sponsors, advertisers, and media companies may result in changes to some fundamental characteristics of games, including rules of the game, starting time of events, and other major elements around it (Figure 2). (Lefever, 2012)

Consequently, among the main reasons why media companies engage in sports and provide economic capital and exposure for them, is the value behind an interesting sport product (Figure 2). Moreover, the exact value of interesting sport product lies in its ability to increase credibility of media channel (television, radio, or internet), to attract large audiences, and more importantly to attract consumers’ attention for
advertisements (Boyle and Haynes, 2009). For instance, Lefever (2012) suggests that football in Europe, traditionally, has attracted young men with relatively good purchasing power. Indeed, the exclusivity of certain sports products can provide for the media broadcasters is something very valuable what sports can offer. (Lefever, 2012)

Furthermore, commercial organizations as forms of sponsoring companies and advertisers play a vital role in this triangle, although in varying degree depending on the characteristics of a sports product. The main motivations for companies to engage in sponsorships include brand awareness and brand equity building. These motivations are satisfied with not only coverage of the attendance at the event arenas, but also through the live coverage and other forms of media coverage in newspapers, online platforms, and high-lights in news (Boyle and Haynes, 2009). Abruptly, the increase in media coverage has an immediate effect on other commercial partnerships between sports and any commercial organization. (Lefever, 2012)

Resulting from the different perspectives of these entities in the triangle, especially sports itself needs to sort out how to balance between the diverging interests of some stakeholders of the sports, media, commercial organizations triangle (Lefever, 2012). For example, if a football league would sell exclusive media rights to a pay per view media operator, the trade-off compared to free-to-air television would be the lower number of spectators seeing the content, which again lessens the attractiveness of sponsorship deals. The digitalization during 21th century has changed the media, sports, and sponsorship triangle to even more complex compared how it used to be (Figure 2, p. 14).

Simultaneously, the media landscape has seen a distinct convergence, as for instance in Finland it is often the same corporations who are airing live broadcasts, press newspapers, provide online content and live streaming services, and are active in radio media. Also, the digitalization has transformed consumers from passive receivers of content to active “prosumers” (Boyle and Haynes, 2009; Lefever, 2012). Because of the liberalisation emancipated by the digitalization, consumers can redistribute pay-per-view content to their peers, causing problems for media companies and sports itself (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2012). According to Lefever (2012), not only has convergence happened within media, but also within the triangle (Figure 2, p. 14) itself as some media companies have acquired stakes of global football giants lately.
As a final remark, the digitalization has also offered sports itself to leverage new technologies in their operations. These new opportunities include getting closer with the consumer, disintermediation, and merchandising (Lefever, 2012). I.e. a professional football club can 1) closely monitor its potential target audience by leveraging social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Instagram), 2) provide content to their supporters by themselves through own website (broadcast own trainings, matches), and 3) sell tickets directly without intermediaries.

2.2 Field-theoretical approach in relevant context

Before moving on to the field-theoretical domain, a short introduction to sociology of sports and socially constructed stand for sport research is justifiable. The preface for this chapter is looking to outline how professional sports management and sociology have collaborated and what is the current state of the liaison. Additionally, it aims to bridge the topic of professional sports with sociological studies to rationalize the use of field-theoretical research for this thesis.

According to a sociological definition, “Sport is a social system the core of which is playful non-utilitarian action in competition with others. It ranges from the informal game occurrences of children to the rigidity of contests of adults. It approaches characteristics of a social institution, open to strong overlaps with other institutions such as education, economy, art.” (Lüschen, 1988, p. 269) The definition provided by Günther Lüschen (1988) is a good fit with contemporary football, and it gives a justification to the application of widely recognized conceptual frameworks and theories of sociology to sports (Football) as a social system (Lüschen, 1988). The early history of sociological study of sports was embodied with the researches on bureaucratization, gender, leadership, professionalization, government-dependency, and organisational change (Slack and Kikulus, 1989).

Moreover, there was a long-standing separation between the research silos of sports management and sociology of sports, while both trying to gain a stronger foothold as being relatively new science disciplines (Slack and Kikulus, 1989; Love and Andrew, 2011). Consequently, it was not until few years after the millennium when first researchers took the new approach of combining both disciplines of sports management and sociological aspects of sport. The harmony was found mainly due to two important acknowledgements: 1. The raised concerns of leaving out the important social,
psychological and international foundations in sports management and 2. the sociology of sports discipline feared to have too little impact on sports in practice. (Love and Andrew, 2011)

A seminal study that has relevance for this thesis was written by O’Brien and Slack (2003), regarding the change towards professionalism in rugby field. The study by O’Brien and Slack discussed the change of the institutional actors during a radical shift from amateurism towards professionalism across the rugby communities around the world. Their work included concepts from Bourdieu (legitimate forms of capital) and other well-known theorists regarding organizational and institutional theory (O’Brien and Slack, 2003).

Regardless of the initial struggle in collaborative approach between sport sociologists and sport management scientists, a particularly interesting analogy between sociology and sport management is presented by Kitchin and Howe (2013). The analogy is based on Bourdieu’s theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977 cited in Kitchin and Howe, 2013). In addition to Kitchin and Howe (2013), also Fligstein and McAdam (2012) have made a field-theoretical example of professional football league, by discussing the power-relations of lower order field actors to the other collective actors in the strategic action fields.

2.2.1 Bourdieu’s practice theory

The theory of practice consists of the three key concepts, and concentrates to the relationships between those. Bourdieu (Grenfell, 2012) defines the three main concepts of practice theory as field-, capital-, and habitus theory (Figure 3, p. 18). The pivotal concept of field was by Bourdieu seen as the society having numerous amount of semi-autonomous fields. Moreover, these fields are separated into fields of cultural production, religion, economics, having their norms, regulations and boundaries. (Benson, 1999) Basically, a field is defined as: “structured and objective network of social relations where agents are engaged in a contest for resources and position” (Kitchin and Howe, 2013, p.124).
2.2.1.1 *Field-theory*

Another interpretation of Bourdieu is provided by Grenfell (2012, p. 53), that describes each field as competitive game, thus a “field of struggles” is something that may exist on different layers. Therefore, a field, such as field of cultural production, may have multiple subfields underneath it, such as in the case of art with subfields of sports, poetry, literature, and drawing (Grenfell, 2012; Benson, 1999).

![Figure 3](image)

**Figure 3** Bourdieu’s practice theory main concepts applied to a professional sports league context (Kitchin and Howe, 2013).

Based on previous model (Figure 3), Bourdieu proposes for binary opposition of the class division in society, where economic power (capital) is on one end and cultural power (capital) is on the other end. Moreover, Bourdieu adds that each field is “structured around the opposition of between “heteronomous” pole representing economic and political capital and the “autonomous” pole representing the specific capital unique to that field (cultural)” (Benson, 1999, p. 464). Returning to the concept of field, it is important to note that each field (i.e. cultural production, religion or economical) is part of the instructional field of power, which is defined as the “all-encompassing” dominating centre governing the social classes (Benson, 1999, p. 465). In terms of unit of analysis of an agent or an organization, Bourdieu’s field theory offers a tool for analyzing the organization in microcosm field, while not forgetting that the microcosm is also situated in larger macrocosm field (Benson, 2006). Additionally, Bourdieu’s concepts provide a
way for focusing on the mezzo-level of the field, that both theoretically and empirically bridges the traditional macro (societal) and micro (organizational) approaches (Benson, 1999).

2.2.1.2 Capital-theory

Moreover, Kay and Laberge (2002a; 2002b) add to the Bourdieu’s concept that the fields of struggles are centring around the types of symbolic capital. Consequently, this capital addresses the tools that are used by agents to compete for the resources and field positions against other players in the field (Kitchin and Howe, 2013). These capitals can take either economic, cultural, or social format (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Moreover, the habitus explains the continuously changing dispositions, appreciations, and perceptions that formulate the meaning of each agent within the field specific circumstances” (Kitchin and Howe, 2013, p. 124).

Of the different formats of capital, the economic and cultural capitals constitute the entire social world by being situated at the opposite ends in field of power (Benson, 2006). According to Bourdieu, economic capital is straightforwardly money or type of assets that transferable into money, while cultural capital is formed by the skills, techniques, and abilities in any given field. The relationship of economic capital and cultural capital is not trivial, because economic capital is the more powerful one, but cultural capital will always be needed to legitimize the fortune. (Benson, 2006)

The less focused Bourdieusian concepts of social and symbolic capitals are widely used in journalistic field studies (English, 2016; Benson, 2006). The social capital refers to the networks and relationships people have in their field. Thus, the social capital has ability to contribute not only to the economic capital, but also to the cultural capital one has. Symbolic capital might be the most abstract form of capital in Bourdieu’s concepts, as it emerges from the acknowledgement, appreciation, status, and recognition. (English, 2016)

2.2.1.3 Habitus-theory

An important concept of doxa is introduced in Bourdieu’s work since the ethnographic studies in Kabylia, Algeria. Bourdieu argues for the concept of doxa as the stronghold of any field out there, determining “the stability of the objective social structures through
the way these are reproduced and reproduce themselves in the agent’s perceptions and practices (habitus”). (Grenfell, 2012, p. 116) Hereby, the doxa adopts the form of symbolic power, that is transmitted by the three accumulated capital types (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) the certain field agent possesses.

Consequently, in case where the doxa is identified as arbitrary but still accepted in practice by the agents, the situation is called as orthodoxy. On the contrary, the heterodoxy draws on the recognition of rival beliefs and thoughts, and to the presumption of move from practical action (doxa) to discursive trades and the birth of a field of alternative stance. (Grenfell, 2012) As all the agents of the certain field act accordingly to the doxa, they tacitly identify the specific values of stakes in the specific game setting and agree on the arbitrary rules of the game. Thereafter, accordingly to Bourdieu (cited in Grenfell, 2012) the concept of illusio is “knowledge born from within the field”, also a format of interest that can also be interpreted as an investment in the game. (Grenfell, 2012; Bourdieu, 1977)

### 2.2.2 Alternative field-theoretic approaches

While Bourdieu has been widely acknowledged and referenced field researcher, a similar yet much needed second perspective to field studies is developed by Fligstein and McAdam (2012). King (2015) argues that the book by Fligstein and McAdam (A Theory of Fields) is technically a synthesis of different theoretical foundations within the spheres of institutional contestations and the power-relationships of markets and fields at multiple level. In similar manner as Bourdieu with his practice theory, also Fligstein and McAdam (2012) rely on the constructionist stance, by grounding their ideas on strategically oriented interplay between the agents within field and across the multiple level fields. Both Bourdieu and Fligstein and McAdam argue for bottom-up approach, although Brayden King sees the latter as having more micro-constructionist stance (King, 2015)

Similarly, as in Bourdieu’s concepts, A Theory of Fields by Fligstein and McAdam (2012) argues for field a struggle where incumbents (those holding the power) trying to hold on of their position, while the challengers (those being dominated) fight for a better position (King, 2015). More specifically, they describe fields as following: “strategic action fields are the fundamental units of collective action in society.” (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p. 9) Furthermore, these fields are at mezzo level (similarly as in Bourdieu’s theory)
where both individual and collective agents are connected to each other and generally accepted rules are administrating the actions within the field. Interestingly, also Fligstein and McAdam used professional sports league in short analogue, just as did Kitchin and Howe (2013) in their article. These mezzo-level fields are situated and embedded in larger pool of fields, which Fligstein and Adam refer to as a Russian doll, consisting of multiple layers which are interlinked across macro and micro levels. A mezzo level/strategic action field is usually not fixed by clear boundaries, rather it is dependable on the certain capital and the stakes are pursued by the participants. (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012)

To comprehend how a field is constructed, Fligstein and McAdam (2012) follow the logic presented by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992). The four imperative categories for understanding the interaction within a field are: 1. Shared acumen of the game including the stakes at the game, 2. generally acknowledged roles and power-relations of the actors, 3. mutually agreed tacit rules for legitimate tactics in the context of the field, and 4. “common knowledge” of the basic logics and strategic actions from each actor’ perspective. (Fligeist and McAdam, 2012) Understanding those four categories within a strategic action field must be complemented by broader level analysis, by introducing the concepts of distant, proximate, dependent and independent fields. Proximate fields are the similar type of other strategic fields with frequent compendious confluences with the focal field, while distant fields are having low to non-existent capacity in a focal field. A dependent and an independent field are distinguished by correlation of the fields. Finally, the fields may be distinguished also based on whether a field is manned by state actors or non-state actors. (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012)

It is relatively easy to see the influence of Bourdieu’s work on previous, albeit from my opinion the definition by Fligstein and Adam seems to have some redundancy in part of the definitions, i.e. in interaction categories within a strategic action field. Moreover, King (2015) proposes there are some deficiencies in the theory of fields presented by Fligstein and McAdam. For example, the ignorance of the impact by non-deliberately influencing actors is something that may lead to harmful simplification regarding the power-relations. Another similar and to the previous affiliated problem can occur due to the over-reliance in vertical division of incumbents and challengers, ignoring the potential horizontal multi-dimensionality (King, 2015). Therefore, King and his colleagues have placed much more emphasis to the horizontal dimensions that occur within a field and across the multiple levels.
Brayden King has also contributed to the research domains of organizational and institutional theories, by especially contributing to the research of social movements. According to King and Walker (2014, p. 134), the extant studies in social movements and organizations have “focused on the strategies and tactics that actors take to get resources, maintain their positions, accrue power and influence, and, in certain instances, disrupt and challenge the positions of other actors.” Furthermore, King and Walker (2014) argue for an alternative definition of strategy depicted by the actions that accumulate resources, holds on the status, and create power. This kind of strategy can also be defined as the subsidiary strategy with strong political infusion. Following the previous strategy definition, the organizations can be defined as social actors whose main purpose is to control the appearance and opinions of the audience about the organization. To succeed in this, the organizations must be able to exert power and impact to the rules and cultural norms, thus resonate with the social movements. (King and Walter, 2014)

Consequently, this alternative definition of strategy is inspired by the three-dimensional Max Weberian resource-based economic position features: class, status, and party. In this three-dimensional concept, class is almost exclusively referring to classical financial metrics dominated performance, while status is concerned with respect and dignity, and party is depicting the causation among the organization, stakeholders and policymakers. (King and Walker, 2014) Moreover, King and Walker points out that the mixed research field of organizational studies and social movements acknowledges all the three strategy dimensions, although the higher importance is being placed on to the status dimension. A key component for this emphasizing is the incumbent versus insurgent juxtaposition in both social movement organizations and organizations, and the utilization of symbolic resources. (King and Walker, 2014)

For these reasons, King and Walker (2014) claim that the strategy research discipline has been inadequate to comprehend holistically such strategies where influencing the public perceptions and impact on the social movements are at the core to the strategy. Hence, the limitations of strategy research are based on the performance centricity (Financial), short term perspective with insufficient emphasis on the game of long term navigation, and the underestimation of relative position of organization with other actors. Hereby, King and Walker commits their work as being heavily influenced by Fligstein and McAdam (2012) and thus advancing the field-theoretic approach started by Bourdieu in 1970s.
An important position that King et al. (2010) takes regarding any institutional or organizational field-study, is the conclusion of the role of organization as a unique actor influencing their environments while being granted a legal and a practical status on accountability and responsibility terms. With their collective actor advocating study, King et al. (2010) argue for both narrowing and broadening the organizational theory research, as they hope for more organizational actor focused research and that organization is studied within broader societal field rather within its own sphere. Not only King et al. (2010) argued for collective actors, but also Fligstein and McAdam (2012) were stating that the main contribution of their reconceptualization on Bourdieu was the more systematic focus on collective actors.

Furthermore, the concept of internal governance unit (IGU) is an important part of collective actor concept, as it denotes an internal governing body looking secure the existence and level of performance. For example, in football these governing units may be FIFA (Global level), UEFA (Europe level), and domestic football associations such as Veikkausliiga. The central mission of IGU is to advance the objectives and interests of a certain strategic action field (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). Fligstein and McAdam (2012) concluded their main criticism on Bourdieu’s work that it was heavily focused on individual actor level. The literature review here verifies this, as those demonstrations on collective actors on fields were all written by other researchers than Bourdieu himself.

2.3 Theoretical framework for analyzing the professional team sports field

This thesis will aim to synthesize theories and concepts from sports management (Evens and Lefever, 2011; Södermand and Dolles, 2015), from the intersection of sociology sports and sports management (Slack and Kikulus, 1989; Kitchin and Howe, 2013; Love and Andrew, 2011) with those of field-theoretical approaches in sociology, organizational, and institutional studies (Bourdieu, 1992; King et al. 2009; 2010; King and Walker, 2014; Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). These theoretical and conceptual foundations will be used as the basis of the empirical research in this thesis. Hence, the theoretical framework for studying sports management is constructed with an encompassing combination of the relevant field-theoretical foundations by Bourdieu (1992), King and Walker (2014), King et al. (2009; 2010), and Fligstein and McAdam (2012).
The main objective of this theoretical framework synthesis is to support the empirical research conducted for this thesis. Although the analogy by Kitchin and Howe (2013) provides a legitimate starting point for this study, alone it lacks in-depth theory regarding the subtle peculiarities of football. Hence, especially the interview-guide structure is based on the concepts by Söderman and Dolles (2015) and on the theories by field-theoretical researchers including Bourdieu, King et al. (2009, 2010), and Fligstein and McAdam (2012).

Consequently, field-theoretical concepts remain as the primary layout for the analytical work of this thesis. Bourdieu’s theories will be complemented by those field-theoretical doctrines from King and Walker (2014), King et al. (2009, 2010), and Fligstein and McAdam (2012). First, Bourdieu’s main concepts are discussed by using the football analogy. Additionally, these discussions are enriched by views of other prominent field-theoretical researchers. Thus, the synthesis is a combination of Bourdieu’s practice theory, other field-theoretical studies (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012; King et al. 2009, 2010; King and Walker (2014), and Söderman and Dolles’s (2013) value capture, which will serve the empirical part of this thesis.

Albeit Bourdieu’s theories and concepts have been applied by many researchers in variety of industries (i.e. media, sports, Skille, 2007; Skogwang, 2009; English, 2016), the empirical studies remain relatively scarce especially in sports field (Love and Andrew, 2012). The analogy suggested by Kitchin and Howe (2013) explains how a professional sports league can be studied within the framework practice theory by Bourdieu. Moreover, the field setting of a professional sports league consists of the social sphere where the relationship-managing regularities are compounded by the key stakeholders within the certain field of professional sports league (Kitchin and Howe, 2015). According to Kitchin and Howe (2013) and to Bourdieu’s field concept, the relationships in this field network will determine the structure of the professional team sports field, ultimately leading to the crafting of dispositions with unconsciously agreed valuations by all stakeholders and actors. The field concept is useful for this thesis, as it allows to analyse the current position of Veikkausliiga in its own field and in the larger field of professional sports entertainment sector.

In terms of different field levels, the article by Kitchin and Howe (2013) argues for the potential of Bourdieu’s practice theory to provide a link between macro and micro level analyses, through the application of mezzo-level concept regarding organizational
habitus. In the context of this thesis, professional team sports leagues, such mezzo-level concept allows to conduct an analysis of the competition among organisations, including depiction of how power is comprehended at macro level to execute micro level strategies in specific field (Kitchin and Howe, 2013). In terms of professional football league, the macro level could be defined as the overall sport entertainment field competing for the attention of large public. The mezzo-level field could be the competitive field between different professional sports products offered in Finland, while micro-level would refer to the specific power-relations within the field of a certain sport.

By leveraging the ability of this theory to reveal the complex power-relations across the fields, it should be possible to explore why certain strategies are introduced to compete for the specific stakes at fields. By taking part in to the professional team sports field, the agents are embracing policies and strategies, which contributes to the level of practical sense and to the creation of specific field dispositions. Thus, the habitus is created by the agent. (Kitchin and Howe, 2013) The identification of different practices, field dispositions, and habitus enables this thesis to define and locate the current state of meaningful actors taking part in the fields. A particularly important concept guiding the relationships of the field in practical terms, is the current doxa representing the “rules of the game”. (Grenfell, 2012; Fligstein and McAdam, 2012; King and Walker, 2014). For instance, in such field as professional team sports, the most powerful capital type mediated by the doxa could well be the economic capital if inferring from the findings of contemporary sport research (e.g. Giulianotti and Robertson, 2012; Grundy, 2004; Smith et al. 2016).

A closely related concept to doxa is the illusio, that describes the fundamental reasons of the importance of taking part of the field and pursuing for the stakes involved (Cooper and Johnston, 2012). Additionally, the capital can take other forms than economic and the levels of capital each agent/organisation holds can vary significantly (Kitchin and Howe, 2013). For example, a single club selling the broadcasting rights of their games to media partner usually lacks the force in the game, but when all clubs are in cartel agreement in media rights sales, they become much more powerful (Grundy, 2004). Subsequently, taking part in the league gives each stakeholder the opportunity to gain wealth (capital), which ultimately determines the power and stance (position) within the hierarchical model of the field (Kitchin and Howe, 2013). Thereafter, the ownership of certain tools and capital will ultimately determine the position and status of individual agent in the field. The agents are not cemented to their positions, rather they are in
continuous movement within the field, and the movement is defined by the agent’s power in the game field, their present habitus, and their strategic orientation. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992)

The introduction chapter of this thesis explained some peculiar facts about the current state of Finnish professional football regarding its higher appreciation that has not transformed into increased number of gate revenues or media subscribers. Potentially, analyzing the empirical data by using the theories and concepts of different forms of capital allows describing how such appreciations, positions and habitus impact to the capitals possessed by the actors in the field. As per the relational approach suggested by Kitchin and Howe (2013), the increase in attendance levels of a football league would have consequences for the entire field and habitus of the organizational and individual agents (Kitchin and Howe, 2013). Kay and Laberge (2002a) describes that the structure of a certain field is a snapshot of the present power relationships among the stakeholders, agents, and institutions participating in the struggle. Thus, the struggle is always impacted by the previous struggle and has high tendency to change again over time (Kay and Laberge, 2002a). Following this logic, it is essential for this thesis to map out not only the current struggles in fields, but also main points from the historical struggles occurred during the near 30-year existence of Veikkausliiga.

To explore a field thoroughly, Bourdieu (1988) argues for a thorough examination of four close-knit notions. These notions are well-articulated by Kay and Laberge (2002a, p. 26) in the following format: “A. the social history of the constitution of the field in question, B. the relationship of the field to other fields, C. the specific stakes and struggles that fuel the field’s dynamic and D. the power relations that transform the structure of the field, eventually transforming the practice itself”. A very similar approach is also proposed by Michael Grenfell (2012) that relies on same principles as Kay and Laberge (2002a). The empirical part of this thesis is looking to explain those four aspects in the chosen field of professional team sports, by following the methods discussed in the next chapter. An important remark for this point is that, regarding the field actors, this thesis will focus more on collective actors rather than the individual actors. This decision is inspired by the systematic approach on collective actors in field-theoretical studies advocated by both Fligstein and McAdam (2012) and King et al. (2014).

As described earlier in this subchapter, the thesis will follow field-theoretical concepts in the discussion chapter. The seminal field-theoretical perspective by Bourdieu will be
complemented with relevant expansions in field-theoretical domain when later reflecting the grounded theory model with existing literature. Especially, the collective actor perspective advocated by Fligstein and McAdam (2012) will be imperative in reinforcing the theoretical framework for this study. This perspective allows not only the more pertinent accounting of how collective actors operate, collaborate, and compete within and across the fields, but also the profound examination of inter-field relationships across multiple levels (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). Indeed, the empirical work done by Bourdieu focused on how individuals operate in social settings instead of organizations, institutions and other collective actors. Following from this, the collective action is in fact the main divergence between Bourdieu and Fligstein and McAdam (2012), King et al. (2009; 2010), and King and Walker (2014).

Further, with this more collective approach a researcher may utilize the collective dynamics, formed by contests and collaboration, to explore the fields. Exactly here is where Bourdieu’s sociological theories form a liaison with social movement, organization, and institutional theories (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). Additionally, another departure from Bourdieu’s scope is explicated by the increased attention to development and change of fields over the time. Bourdieu did acknowledge the continuous transformation of field structures, however with less focus on how it happens in practice. It is here, where theories of social movement, organization, and intuitionalism complement Bourdieu’s theory. (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012)

### 2.4 Summary of the literature review

This literature review intended to explore, discuss, and synthesize relevant works from the fields of sport management, football, sociology of sports, field-theory, organizational theory, and institutional theory. First table (Table 1, p. 28) encapsulates those concepts and theories from the world of professional sports, professional football, and media-sponsorship-sports triangle while the second (Table 2, p. 28) summarizes the main features of the most prominent field-theoretical researches.

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<td>Theoretic field</td>
<td>Sport and Business Research, Sport Management, Football</td>
<td>Sport, The Media and Popular Culture, Sports Management Research, Sport and Media</td>
<td>The Sports Product, Sports Management Research, Professionalization of sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main concepts</td>
<td>Professionalization, Football stakeholder</td>
<td>Media Partnerships, Sponsorships,</td>
<td>Professional League Product, Media &amp; Sponsorships,</td>
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with relevance for the thesis | theory, Media, Broadcasting, Sponsorship, Value-Capture Framework | Entertainment business, Professionalization of sports, Broadcasting, Sport/Media complex | Entertainment business, Conceptualization of Professionalization

Primary contribution for the empirical results reflections and discussions | “Principles of professional team sports, including Value-Capture Framework in Football” | “The symbiotic relationship of professional sports and media, including the sporting triangle of television, sport, and commercial sponsorship” | “Theoretical foundations for understanding the professional sports league product and situating it in larger entertainment product field.”

| Theoretic field | A Theory of Practice, Reflexive Sociology, Sociology | Field Theory, Social Movements, Organizational Theory, Strategy Research | A Theory of Fields, Organizational Research, Institutional Theory, Sociology | Social Theory in Sports, Practice-Theory |
| Main concepts with relevance for the thesis | Field, Capital, Habitus, Doxa, Illusio, Modus Operandi, Opus Operatum, Micro Mezzo, Macro | Organizational Actor, Strategic Research Dimensions, Power and Politics, Organizational Identity | Strategic Action Fields, Incumbents, Challengers, Internal Governance Units (IGU), Social Skill, Broader Field Environment, Exogenous Shocks, Mobilization | Social Capital, Organizational Field, Organizational Habitus, Football Analogy for studying fields |
| Primary contribution to the resonance section of the grounded theory model and empirical results | “Different field levels and the types of capitals at stake, that construct the dynamics of field struggle. The changing dispositions, appreciations, and perceptions of field agents and their capitals possessed. Relationship of cultural and economic capital” | “Accrualment and mobilization of resources, status maintenance, and achievement of larger power and influence. Bridging field-theoretic perspective and the above-mentioned three key dimensions of strategy.” | “The Macroevironment: Fields embedded in network of fields. Dependence, interdependence, and unconnected fields, including the coalitions and hierarchies. IGU’s role as liaison and lobbyist with state actors and fields” | “Sport management research in its wider social dimension. Relational approach of Bourdieu’s practice theory. Bourdieu for studying institutional phenomena.” |

Table 1 Summary of professional sports management, football, and media

Table 2 Summary of the relevant field-theoretical research
3 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the plan and the steps taken will be explained to give an answer how the research questions were answered. In more exact terms, this chapter elaborates the chosen contextual framework of the study, research approach and design, and the research methodology. It aims to present explicitly how this thesis has been conducted and furthermore argue, why certain decisions were taken. First, the contextual framework for studying professional sports in the specific environment of Finland will be discussed. Then, the selected research approach and strategy are contemplated. Next, the specific methods used for data collection and empirical data-analysis are discussed. Finally, decisions made regarding research methodology will be contemplated in terms of potential criticism and the quality of research.

3.1 Scene for the empirical research

As the literature review of this thesis proposed, the boundaries of strategic action fields are often difficult to determine definitively (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). Regardless, the aim of this subchapter is to present the most relevant field contexts in question of this thesis. The widespread academic attention to professional sports and football was depicted in the literature review, which also allowed to identify the research gaps in empirical studies exploring the field of sports or its proximate strategic action fields (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012).

Although describing the environment and the specific context are not always discussed under the main chapter of methodology, it is necessary to include descriptive subchapters about the environment and the context where Veikkausliiga operate. These contexts include a short account of Finnish sports and the media field in the upcoming subchapters. Therefore, the purpose of those upcoming subchapters is to describe the surroundings, contexts, environments and the brief history of the case which will be studied. This will include the brief introduction of the field environment of Veikkausliiga, and the main stakeholders who are participating in the field struggle(s).

First, however, a brief description of the conceptual framework is needed, including the definition of unit of analysis. These descriptions and conceptualizations are based on work by Kitchin and Howe (2013), Kay and Laberge (2002a; 2002b), and Söderman and Dolles (2015). Hereby, the main intention of this subchapter is to draw the line on who and what will be studied, where and when, and under what conditions. To clarify and
define the boundaries for this thesis, the aim was to make the best out of the recommendations of Fligstein and McAdam (2012) about conducting a field-theoretically approached empirical study of a specific phenomenon.

First pressing issue is to define the borders of fields. The stance taken in this thesis follows ontologically the relativist approach by approving collective actors’ roles in multiple strategic action fields. For instance, a media partner in case is distinctively involved in multiple strategic action field levels (Figure 4). Moreover, to prevent the scope from being inflated too complex and broad, it is justifiable to include only those players in field that are interested in different outcomes at stake in the fields. This thesis agrees with the definition of Fligstein and McAdam’s (2012, p.217): “Who gets what and why are the core questions at the heart of the analysis of any field”. Consequently, these questions are salient in describing the hierarchical and coalitional settlements in fields (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012).

![Figure 4 A demonstration of possible field levels of professional football (adapted from Bourdieu, 1977; Fligstein and McAdam, 2012)]

Furthermore, while this master thesis addresses socialization of the individual in the empirical setting, in principle it will approach these phenomena with scaled up unit of analysis with focus on organizational actors (collective action). With this stance, it is necessary to advocate the notions of collective mind and remembrance. A pressing concern in this study is to ensure the captivation of dynamics between different field
levels, without the possibility to expand the study for longer period over time. (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012). The issue of limited longitudinal scope was solved by analyzing historical aspects using secondary data and by including historical aspects as one theme during the primary data collection. Next, the specific environment regarding professional sports and media in Finland are discussed to set the scene for the upcoming empirical results.

3.1.1 Professional team sports field in Finland

Gunner Breivik (2010) has discussed the different sport cultures and philosophies of Nordic countries in a recent article. Football was mentioned in detail with each of the Scandinavian countries, but in Finland chapter football was completely excluded. What makes the previous incident interesting, is the numerical fact that football should have a significant role in Finnish sports culture, with the clearly dominant position in terms of registered amateur players and hobbyists in Finland (Suomen Palloliitto, 2016). Suomen Palloliitto (2016) announced recently, that the player number grew 8.1% to 130,956 registered footballers. Interestingly, in terms of registered players, the most popular sport in Finland was not mentioned by Breivik (2010). The only ball game he mentioned was ice-hockey.

Consequently, when searching for information or studies about professional sports in Finland, the result was thin on empirical level and limited to only few dissertations and theses (i.e. Mönkkönen, 2011; Marjamaa, 2007; Roitto, 2013). Clearly, professional sports have not occupied such a large role in Finnish society as it has done in many other countries. Although professional sports, and football as a subcategory to it, have not been studied at large as phenomena in Finland, there are few Finnish books describing the historical and societal features of the game. For example, Itkonen and Nevala (2007) have written a book (Kuningaspelin Kentät) about football, which is comprised of 20 articles (both Finnish and international) that discuss football as phenomenon. Both Itkonen and Nevala are working at Finnish universities in Jyväskylä and Eastern-Finland, which are known as the centre of sports research in Finland.

Moreover, as Breivik (2010) mentioned, Finland has typically admired and cultivated individual sports, such as running, javelin, and cross country skiing, where Finns have achieved Olympic and world championship level success. Regardless, ice-hockey has proved that it is possible to break the dominance of individual sports, by occupying the
number one position of being the most interesting sport to follow (Sponsor Insight, 2015). Similarly, the number one position of football as the most popular sport as hobby and the position of most admired sport explain that the 21th century Finnish citizens have taken ball games in their hearts (Taloustutkimus, 2015).

Although positive signs have been discovered, the fact that only ice-hockey is within top 5 regarding the interest level, tells that there should still be room for improvement for ball games such as football, basketball, and volleyball. Despite the long-term success of individual sports in popularity of followers, the interest has not shown in live attendance figures. According to Sponsor Insight (2015), ice-hockey league (Liiga) and Veikkausliiga have been the most popular sport events in terms of match day/live attendance although many individual sports are regarded as more interesting to watch. If people are not following a sport live at the venue, they are most probably interested to follow it with the help of media. Therefore, next section will add media into the equation.

3.1.2 Media and sports in Finland

The sports media has extremely long traditions in Finland with Urheilulehti (Since 1898) ranked as one of the oldest sport magazines of the world after the La Gazzetta dello Sport (Urheilulehti, 2005). In addition to Urheilulehti, there are several other larger media corporations serving consumers and companies within the fields of sport and football. The well-known sport media corporations in Finland are Alma Media, Sanoma Oyj, Yleisradio (state-owned), and MTV. Additionally, there are smaller regional media companies, such as Kaleva-Group and Keskisuomalainen Oyj. Although smaller regional media companies are important as local news mediators, they are usually left out when speaking of main stream sports broadcasting to a larger audience. Nevertheless, looking at the large media companies in Finland and the amount of sport content they show, sport is an integral part of their business.

In addition to the previously mentioned larger media corporations, also Viasat (and Viaplay) markets live sports to Finnish consumers both through linear television and through online subscriptions. The most recent entrants to Finnish media field is Discovery Networks Finland, operating through multiple linear television and online channels, with well-known brands of Eurosport, Discovery Channel, TV5, Kutonen, and Frii (Discovery Networks Finland, 2017) and Elisa Fanseat (online sports stream
channels by Elisa mobile operator). Fanseat has focused on pure live streaming of different sports, including football, basketball, and ice-hockey.

In most of the popular ball games played in Finland, the media rights holders have changed quite frequently. For example, during the past 25 years, the Finnish ice-hockey league has been broadcasted by Sanoma Media, Yleisradio, Canal+, C More, and UrhoTv which went to bankruptcy in 2013 (Yleisradio, 2016). These same media companies have also shown Finnish Veikkausliiga football during the 25-year period (Figure 5). Currently, Sanoma Media is the main owner of media rights at both in ice-hockey and Finnish football.

Figure 5  The significant sport broadcasters in Finland during past 25 years

Currently, Ice-hockey is shown at Nelonen Ruutu+ and Nelonen Pro (subscription based online stream and pay-tv), while Veikkausliiga is shown at ISTV Extra (Sanoma Oyj tabloid web-tv) and at Nelonen Ruutu+ (Sanoma Oyj entertainment channel). The short historical perspective of partnerships between media companies and professional sports in Finland adduces adversarial thoughts about the symbiotic relationship conceptualizations discussed in literature review. Also, theories about the impact of broadcasting to live attendance are somewhat difficult to address in the contextual framework of what Finland offers compared to the bigger football nations.
3.1.3 Veikkausliiga

The governing organization of highest tier football in Finland, Jalkapalloliiga Ry, was founded in 1989 to take care of highest level football competition in Finland. The first season under the new organization was played in 1990. The role of Veikkausliiga Ry is to create better circumstances for top tier football, develop the clubs participating in Veikkausliiga including better rights for players, and to advance the values of football. The most successful club of its history is HJK Helsinki, with 11 titles and record of being the only club staying at top division during the existence of the league. Currently, there are twelve teams at Veikkausliiga, and each team plays 33 games during the season between April and October. The winner of the league is awarded with place in UEFA Champions League qualifications and second and third positioned clubs will qualify for UEFA Europa League. The last positioned club will be relegated, and the second last club will qualify against the second positioned team of Ykkönen (Second tier of football). (Veikkausliiga, 2017)

Veikkausliiga Ry is governed by its board, chairman, and full-time management team. The board is formed by the executives (chairman or CEO) of each participating league club. Additionally, each year an executive committee is assigned to support and work for specific areas agreed together with the board. The work distribution between Veikkausliiga and Palloliitto (Finnish Football Association, hereinafter referred as FFA) is following: Veikkausliiga is responsible for designing the rules of the competition at top division and for forming bigger commercial partnerships, while FFA is responsible for developing the club licensing system, quality system, and providing a growth package for the main football leagues in Finland. (Veikkausliiga, 2017; Palloliitto, 2016b)

With the support of FFA, Veikkausliiga have fought for better position in Finnish sports landscape. In 2009 published strategy document included a vision of becoming the most popular ball game in Finland and the mission of growing the new generation to be the main audience of Veikkausliiga. Veikkausliiga had a good period in 2002-2007 when the spectator figures where growing steadily, but after the economic crisis spectator figures fell and have not recovered fully. The spectator base has remained loyal, but attracting new audience has turned out to be challenging. (Veikkausliiga Ry, 2009)

Consequently, the strategy of 2009 consists of five key objectives. First and most important area is to develop and advance the popularity of Veikkausliiga among the consumers. This is the main metric for delivering the mission of Veikkausliiga strategy
2009 and it includes action plans in areas of marketing communications, internet, customer relationship management, media partnership, live broadcast, and other consumer products. Second area of Veikkausliiga strategy is to advance the financial circumstances and commercial partnerships of its member football clubs. The third emphasized element of 2009 strategy is to improve the level of commercial and media partnerships between Veikkausliiga Ry and main stakeholders. As a fourth focus area, Veikkausliiga aimed to develop and advance the business processes and operating conditions of the clubs. Finally, Veikkausliiga 2009 strategy aims at improving the position and power of Veikkausliiga in larger context. (Veikkausliiga Ry, 2009)

The main reasons for selecting Veikkausliiga as the main interest of this field-theoretical grounded theory inquiry, was the fact that Veikkausliiga and its clubs have not been able to capitalize the popularity of football as a hobby, and the appreciation among team sports given by the public audience. The fluid format and constantly changing environment provides also an interesting starting point for this study, when power-relationships, field positions, and different forms of capitals are great interest to myself. Furthermore, the strong background in football as an amateur footballer and as a football fan, gave the opportunity to leverage the possessed knowledge throughout the research process. Therefore, there was urgent need to work with rigour and consistence to escape the strong personal bias, which could have distorted the analytical work.

3.2 Research methodology

The research methods one adopts should always depend on what is it exactly, that the study is looking to find out (Silverman, 2011). Moreover, as Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue, the research methods are a result of the chosen research paradigm based on the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of the world. While quantitative research methods are often preferred for testing hypotheses and creating generalizations (Silverman, 2011), qualitative inquiries seeks to elucidate how systems function or how things work, and how does the context play role in it (Patton, 2015).

As this thesis intended to find out how a professional football league struggle for its position in its wider context of professional sports and entertainment fields, by using field-theoretical apprehensions, this master’s thesis followed constructivism research paradigm and qualitative research methods were applied (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The qualitative research methods were utilized in accordance with grounded theory and
exploratory case study research approaches (Yin, 2009; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2006). Thus, the analytical reasoning was based on inductive and abductive logic. (Bryant and Charmaz, 2006) Initially, it was not crystal clear what research strategy to adopt, except that due to the type of research questions and phenomenon studied, it was clear that it had to be done with the qualitative research methods.

3.2.1 Research paradigm for exploring the multiple reality constructions of meaningful individuals at the fields

By choosing to explore the focal phenomenon with constructivism paradigm, the ontological, epistemological, and methodological presumptions of this thesis followed the pattern described next. Following from constructivism, this thesis aimed to study the phenomenon with relativistic ontological stance (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012; Guba and Lincoln, 1994), by acknowledging that there are multiple realities constructed by the individuals around the focal phenomenon. As this thesis examined the positions and power-relations of collective actors based on the recorded and transcribed interview data, relativistic ontology was a prerequisite. Therefore, the acknowledgement of multiple realities was a must, as the empirical data collected for the analysis relied on the dialectical interactions between the interviewer and interviewees elaborating the social and experimental constructions of the reality (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Furthermore, the epistemology of constructivism advocate for the transactional and subjectivist point of view of how things happen in practice, hence the discoveries of the research are based on researcher-object investigations (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). By adopting constructivism’s epistemological stance of transactional and subjectivist position, the personal knowhow could be used for creating relevant framework for this study. Moreover, the creation of appropriate interview guides and analysis of the collected data was more fruitful, as picking up the subtleties of the emergent codes was possible with the help of personal knowhow.

The constructivism’s methodological assumptions claim that individual and social constructions can only be disclosed through the interactive process between the respondents and researcher. Those assumptions are based on the hermeneutical and dialectical stances that are intrinsic to constructivism paradigm. (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) These research traditions and methodological stances were selected and acknowledged, as they are appropriate for discovering power-based relationships within
a system, and are optimal for understanding the practical consequences of a phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Coming back to the research question of this thesis, the target of this thesis is to explain how a professional football league, Veikkausliiga and its clubs, struggle in its wider sport entertainment context. Hereby, the chosen relativistic and transactional-subjectivist ontological and epistemological stances were legitimate for studying the phenomena with a combination of case study and grounded theory research approach.

### 3.2.2 Case study research strategy with grounded theory approach

As one of the trailblazing advocates of case study research strategy, Robert Yin (2009) proposed for criteria to be used in designing case study research. First and most important question is the access to potential data needed. According to case study blueprint, the next pivotal task is to determine who-, what-, where-, how-, and why type of questions related to the phenomena studied. This step also includes the definition of the boundaries in a case study. Perhaps, the trickiest task in a case study design step is to define the unit of analysis. In this thesis, the unit of analysis is induced from the research questions and from the title of this work, hence this case study explores field of professional sport leagues and world of professional football. On the other hand, the boundaries of such unit of analysis are not entirely clear, and in this thesis, there will be less concrete units of analysis in addition. Finally, there should be a preliminary plan for data analysis, including the linkage between the data and propositions, as well as the interpretive scheme for the findings. (Yin, 2009)

The chosen approach of grounded theory does not differ significantly from explorative case study, and intrinsically both have similarities in their designs. The research process of grounded theory (also referred as grounded theory methods MTD) was developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1960s. Grounded theory as a concept includes both the method itself and the resulting theory from the use of the method. (Bryant and Charmaz, 2006) Despite the resembling features with case study approaches, grounded theory method distinguishes itself from other research approaches by using theoretical sampling, by continuously comparing the collected data to theoretical rubrics, and by “developing theory via theoretical saturation of categories” (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007, p. 13). Moreover, grounded theory is suggested as an optimal qualitative research method for addressing complex phenomena with multiple variables (Patton, 2015).
Since the early drafts of grounded theory, the main elements and ideology remain the same. Also, grounded theory place high emphasis on defining the boundaries with the help of research questions. A major prerequisite for grounded theory is the assumption of insufficiently studied problem area with unformed conceptualization. Therefore, the first research questions in grounded theory are often broader and open, which will later be narrowed down and broken into smaller pieces when progress is made in the empirical part. (Strauss and Corbin, 1990)

Nevertheless, the specific phenomenon should be identified naturally in the research question, because too vague research question confuses the reader. In the case of the research question in this thesis, it directly explains that the interest here is to understand the competition and struggle between different professional sports from the perspective of professional football league. Although the main research question used “How does professional football league struggle for its position in the broader field of professional sports and entertainment field?” is in many terms way too vague, for this grounded theory thesis it serves the purpose by guiding the work from the start. (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). On the other hand, the grounded theory as research approach includes a selection of methods “to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 24). More specifically, grounded theory aims at constitution of theoretical composition of captured reality investigated empirically.

Thus, this thesis followed a combination of exploratory case study (Yin, 2009) and grounded theory research strategies (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). A well-defined process description of grounded theory is outlined by Charmaz (2006, p. 11), that portrays the workflow and interdependent relationships of grounded theory steps (Figure 6, p. 40). The workflow by Charmaz (2006) shares similar characteristics as the initial fundamental tenets by Glaser and Strauss (1967), which are A. constant comparative methods, B. theoretical coding, C. theoretical sampling, D. theoretical saturation, and E. theoretical sensitivity (O’Reilly et al. 2012).

Although grounded theory as method is holistic and the five tenets are present at all stages during the research, the constant comparative method initiates only after first stage of data collection. It will include the process of identifying of variety of things that are related to the focal phenomenon/event/case (O’Reilly et al. 2012). Retaining theoretical sensitivity is a key objective for grounded theory researcher, which is all about
preparing the investigator for analytic work with the empirical data. Basically, this means that researcher must make sure he/she can give justified meanings to material collected and see difference of relevant and irrelevant theories from the emergent data. (O’Reilly et al. 2012)

In practice, this includes putting conceptual labels on discovered data on basis of the existing understanding of the event or phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). While the first open coding is all about breaking the data into pieces, the subsequent stages of axial and selective coding/theoretical are steps when pieces are again put to together to develop new theoretical patterns of phenomenon (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Theoretical sampling is an approach where the researcher decides where to go next, after the initial considerations where to start the data-collection. Theoretical sampling is guided by the emergent concepts of the specific case studied (Figure 6, p. 40). Theoretical sampling is closely linked with the next tenet, theoretical saturation, which indicates the researcher of the stage where there is no point going further, as the collected data do not unfold new information. (Strauss and Corbin, 1990)
Figure 6  Grounded theory process figure for exploring professional football league (adapted from Charmaz, 2006)

The above workflow (Figure 6) for grounded theory studies is adapted from Charmaz (2006), depicting those stages completed during the research process. The very first step of this thesis process was to read and investigate how professional football had been studied with different research disciplines. Soon after discovering the research gap, there was an urgent need to secure the access to the relevant data. A meeting with the representative of Veikkausliiga was held, to discuss about Veikkausliiga’s situation and the personal ambitions of the author. The discussions were around few issues which seemed interesting from the perspective of Veikkausliiga Ry and its clubs, yet not exactly suitable for master thesis research questions.

After the first meeting, the objective of the thesis was not exactly clear, but within few days some relevant material was discovered, which became vital part of this thesis’ literature review. Next, a preliminary plan was outlined for how to get started with the
actual grounded theory approach regarding the data-collection and analytic work (Figure 6, p. 40). All the way from the beginning of the data collection to end, the approach followed those steps suggested by grounded-theorists (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) in relatively meticulous way.

In actual terms, the first data-collection steps were taken together with Veikkausliiga’s operative top management, and Sanoma Media’s Head of Digital Consumer Products early January 2017. In this meeting, the theoretical foundations of the thesis were discussed and the access to data was agreed. The reason why these individuals and institutions are selected for the main source of empirical data is because they should represent the dominant agents in the field and thus should also exert the largest power within the field (Grenfell, 2012). Consequently, the literature review and methodology section were deepened, while the first semi-structured interviews were agreed to take place early February 2017. After this, the grounded theory approach’s methodological steps were followed during coding and data-analysis process (Figure 6, p.40). Throughout the data-collection and analysis phases, which took place concurrently, the theoretical framework and methodological chapters was revised, including the updates on literature review.

3.2.3 Qualitative data collection methods in grounded theory

The purpose of qualitative research is to form the linkage between events and meanings, while the social reality is constructed and experienced by organizational members (Dundon and Ryan, 2010). Van Maanen et al. (1982) argues that, the varieties of qualitative data collection methods include techniques of observing (participant), analyzing the content of documented data and text, interviewing small samples with suitable approach, and recording, videoing, and transcribing the phenomena. Silverman (1993; 2011) agrees to the previous list of qualitative research techniques, while adding that these techniques are not restricted to qualitative approach solely, but that they can used when deemed suitable for ontological and epistemological assumptions.

As per the claims made by many grounded theory books and articles, the approach itself is not restricted to any specific data collection methods, although majority of the grounded theory studies tend to rely on interviews and secondary data (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007; Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Regardless of the previous, grounded theory’s approach to data collection has distinctive features, which includes the
simultaneous coding and analysis of data while the data collection continues (Corbin and Strauss, 1990).

Hence, the data collection of this thesis followed the grounded theory approach (Figure 6, p. 40) suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Charmaz (2006). The empirical data was collected by interviewing Veikkausliiga, Sanoma Oyj, and other relevant stakeholders in the field of professional team sports. The sampling strategy in interviews followed principles of snow-ball sampling and theoretical sampling (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007) methods, while the interview approach was semi-structured interviews by following interview guides built around emergent themes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990; Patton 2015). In addition to semi-structured interviews, the empirical data was complemented with notes and secondary data available at public. This data included the public strategy descriptions of Veikkausliiga and Palloliitto, online news, interviews, and any other useful online material found during the iterative theory induction process in this thesis. As not every interesting informant had the time to participate in interview, some of them kindly replied to the key questions sent by email. This was the case with Head of Yle Urheilu, who replied later in spring (April 2017) when the analysis was already conducted and grounded theory finalized.

The first interviews were arranged with the key actors at Veikkausliiga and Sanoma Oyj. Before the first round of interviews, the interview guide was tested with a person having similar kind of knowledge of football as most of the interviewees at initial stages. The pilot interviewee was suitable for this purpose as he had no prior knowledge of any field-theoretical concepts but had sufficient football background. After the pilot interview, some content of the interview guide was modified to reduce any ambiguity of the definitions and concepts of themes covered.

Although snowball sampling method was applied in data collection to some extent, the value capture model (Figure 1, p. 11) by Söderman and Dolles (2015) was used as the backbone for the first interview guides and to determine where to start data-collection. The early targets were decided to be the governing body of Veikkausliiga and its official media partner. As the principles of grounded theory data collection procedures suggest, the interview guide was modified to each interview session. The reformulations were based on emergent themes, concepts, and phenomena from the previous interview sessions after the initial open coding sessions. (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Charmaz, 2006)
Finally, it is important to note that the interviews were conducted in Finnish as it was the mother tongue for both informants and interviewer (Table 3, p. 44). Thus, the interview guide and data-analysis process were operated mostly in Finnish before translating the results and conclusions to English for this thesis report. The respondents were informed about the objectives of this thesis before-hand and the main themes of the interview were also included in the appointment confirmation emails. Anonymity was not explicitly required by any informant, perhaps because of the small size of these organizations studied, making it relatively transparent in that sense. Consequently, the informants were explicitly informed that the interviews (Table 3, p. 44) will be recorded and transcribed for the thorough analysis, ensuring the consent of taking part to the research. (Silverman, 2011) After each the interview data was processed for results and grounded theory model, the must informative quotes were distributed once more to the respondents, to verify the permission to use direct citations in results section. Most of the informants agreed, when only one respondent did not wish to disclose certain citations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant #</th>
<th>Informants role and represented organization</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Number of words – transcriptions in Finnish</th>
<th>Conceptual labels (Codes) discovered in coding session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CEO &amp; Marketing Director of Veikkausliiga Ry</td>
<td>8th February 2017</td>
<td>81 minutes</td>
<td>8,715</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Head of Digital Consumer Products – Iltasanomat (Sanoma Media)</td>
<td>14th February 2017</td>
<td>61 minutes</td>
<td>5,951</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>General Secretary - Finnish Football Association (FFA)</td>
<td>28th February 2017</td>
<td>70 minutes</td>
<td>6,431</td>
<td>41</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Head of Sports News – Iltasanomat/Sanoma Oyj</td>
<td>9th March 2017</td>
<td>36 minutes</td>
<td>3,217</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Relationship Manager – Veikkaus Oy</td>
<td>16th March 2017</td>
<td>71 minutes</td>
<td>6,674</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Emergency &amp; Surveillance Director – Helsinki Police Department</td>
<td>24th March 2017</td>
<td>24 minutes</td>
<td>2,816</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Club Owner – Veikkausliiga club</td>
<td>27th March 2017</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>5,023</td>
<td>34</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Executive Director - Players Association (JPY)</td>
<td>29th March 2017</td>
<td>41 minutes</td>
<td>4,156</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Head of Yle Urheilu – Yleisradio</td>
<td>5th April 2017</td>
<td>Email answers</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>SUMMARY</strong></td>
<td>8 interviews (average length 54min, average word count 5,373 words)</td>
<td>Feb 2017 – March 2017</td>
<td>429 minutes</td>
<td>42,983 words</td>
<td>282 conceptual labels placed on interview data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3  Summary of the interviews conducted with the meaningful individuals at the field

### 3.2.4 Empirical data analysis

Typically, when researcher engages in interviewing small sample of respondents, he or she is willing to address the phenomenon or object in detail. Consequently, the interview approach may take to forms: either the positivism approach to interview data or the interactionism approach. The former approach assumes that the data collected from respondents represent hard information of the real world while the latter interprets the interview data as social constructions of the reality. As this thesis followed the constructivism paradigm, the interview approach leaned towards interactionism and ethnomethodology. This decision was based on those ontological (relativist) and epistemological (transactional-subjectivist) stances this thesis occupies. Although the thesis aimed to theorize from the collected qualitative data, it is not justifiable to treat the collected data as per the positivism paradigm. This is because the semi-structured interview questions concerned opinions about the positions, relationships, and other personal view-centric open-ended questions. (Silverman, 1993;2011)

In more exact terms, the empirical data analysis in this thesis was based on the premises of theoretical sensitivity (Strauss and Corbin, 1990), which has an imperative role in the overall grounded theory approach. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), theoretical sensitivity is the characteristics, experience, and know-how of the researcher regarding the studied object or phenomenon. In practical terms, it includes the ability to give sense to terminology, meanings to the collected data, and the ability to filter the relevant concepts and information. This theoretical sensitivity was sourced from the personal and professional experience of the researcher, and complemented with the comprehensive
literature review of relevant theory to the object. (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) So in case of this thesis, a sufficient level of personal experience of the studied field of football was needed. Additionally, a literature review on sports management and football management was a prerequisite. By securing the sufficient level of theoretical sensitivity, the researcher may proceed to the coding processes with confidence, and this process of theoretical sensitization will continue throughout the analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

As mentioned in earlier chapters, this thesis's analytic approach followed inductive reasoning. Inductive reasoning is described as the process of moving from the specific setting to a more generic level. Consequently, the inductive nature of grounded theory method includes elements from the abductive reasoning. The most distinctive feature adapted from abductive logic is the approach to aim for the best possible generalization when developing theoretical explanations. (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007)

The analysis of interview data was depicted by the coding procedures (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The objectives of coding are to move from the raw data to the actual research concerns (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003), by distilling and sorting the labeled data segments (Charmaz, 2006). Basically, coding is about focusing on the practice in the field, when assigning codes to data. Ultimately, this coding will result in theoretical abstraction of the phenomenon or case according the empirical model. More specifically, the coding in this thesis followed the principles of open, axial, and theoretical coding (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) as per the emergent themes, concepts, and properties from the data (Gioia et al. 2012).

To maintain the focus during multiple interviews with varying background and perspective, the interview guides were designed around the central theme of Veikkausliiga's struggle for its position in wider context. The collected data was complemented with relevant secondary data from newspapers, websites, and such, to perform data triangulation to the interview data collected. Each interview was transcribed and coded within 48 hours from recording, although this early coding (open) was revisited constantly during subsequent coding phases (axial, theoretical). The analytical work in this thesis followed the flexibility principles of grounded theory method (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Additionally, the source of evidence was collected from the available secondary source documentation, which allowed data triangulation on methods basis (Yin, 2009). During the coding processes, a memo and notes will be
written throughout process to document the analytical processes, as suggested by Corbin and Strauss (1990).

The analysis started rigorously right after the transcribing of an individual interview was done, and the first stage involved a careful consideration of emerging concepts (incidents, cases, events, phenomena, etc.). At first, NVIVO (software for qualitative research) was used for analyzing and sorting out the transcription data, however it became clear that Microsoft Excel as a spreadsheet software is faster to use in this research. After placing the conceptual labels on data in Excel, these concepts were refined and filtered to the categories sharing the same properties listed in each conceptual label. This two-stage early analytical process was conducted separately for each interview as soon as possible from the recording and preferably finalized before the next interview. The next stage entailed constant comparison of emergent first order categories between the cases (informants). This allowed to spread the material figuratively to a large table before assembling it again per the paradigm model principles (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). By using paradigm model, it was logical to set “Veikkausliiga struggling for legitimacy, credibility, and development” as the central phenomenon. At the later stages of data collection, the paradigm model was already drafted and any new emerging category was tested again the model, resulting to changes or modifications to the model. Although one interesting stakeholder, Yle Urheilu, replied very late to the inquiry, some content (citations) from these responses were utilized, however, the data did not have an impact to the grounded theory model prepared at that stage.

3.3 Research quality

This section aims to discuss how the decisions regarding methodological selections impact to the research quality and how the empirical work conducted contributes to the trustworthiness of the results.

3.3.1 Potential criticism of the research approach

The assessment of research quality differs from each other on basis of the selected research approach (Silverman, 2011). For example, in grounded theory the aim is “to specify the conditions that give rise to specific sets of action/interaction pertaining to a phenomenon and the resulting consequences (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.251). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), the assessment on quality will be done at three different levels: 1. Judgements of the validity, reliability, and credibility of the empirical
data, 2. Suitability of the research approach (process), and 3. Empirical grounding of the discoveries from empirical data. The first and third level will be assessed in “Discussions” chapter 6, while the second point of the applicability of research process is covered already in this subchapter.

The assessment of selections on research approach are thus discussed here, with potential counterarguments for selected positions for the research approach. First important aspect to consider is the experimental decision to use collective actors as units of analysis per field-theoretic principles (King et al. 2009; 2010). The potential criticism towards this decision may be aimed at the fact that data is collected from the individuals who might not always represent the “opinion” of the collective actor he or she represents. Another potential criticism may be directed to the pragmatic decision to rule out the longitudinal scope for exploring the field dynamics, due to the time restrictions for completing the master’s thesis.

Consequently, by taking constructivism stance regarding paradigm, the relativist ontology and transactional-subjectivist epistemology of the reality can be criticised when the empirical data consists mostly of interview-data. Therefore, the quality assessment is done on basis of trustworthiness and authenticity. (Guba and Lincoln, 1985) To ensure trustworthiness and authenticity, the author aimed for full transparency regarding the research approach and for rigour in grounded theory processes. Transparency was achieved by continuous memo-writing, research diary, and self-assessment. Regardless, there was a risk of getting falsified (biased) responses from the informants and the risk of misinterpretation of the data due to the researcher bias. The personal motivations and orientation towards football were acknowledged well before starting the empirical part of this thesis. Furthermore, the relatively low number of interviews did put a pressure in reaching theoretical saturation suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Also, the data triangulation (Guba and Lincoln, 1985) remained relatively thin because of the lacking opportunity for participant observation, however this could have been reduced by applying respondent validation at the end of the research (Silverman, 2011).

3.3.2 Criteria for measuring quality of grounded theory thesis

Qualitative research often addresses the quality and trustworthiness qualitative research by looking at the preunderstanding, credibility, conformability, integrity, transferability, dependability, understanding and utilization (Storbacka et al. 2011). More specifically, when evaluating grounded theory researches such as this thesis, Charmaz (2006) argues
for four categories for the assessment: credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. Credibility is achieved by sufficient familiarizing when setting the topic, sufficient data collection, logical connections between data and arguments of the analysis, and sufficient evidence to convince the reader to agree with the propositions made (Charmaz, 2006). The intimacy with the topic was achieved by lengthy and profound reading of existing literature before identifying the research problem. The reading began already in November 2016, whereas the research problem was only formulated in mid-January 2017.

To secure conformability of the results, each interview was transcribed within 24 hours of recording and the early open coding was conducted immediately to avoid potential bias and preconception from other data sources. A pertinent risk with every qualitative inquiry is the dependability of the results (Storbacka et al. 2011). A way to reduce risk of incorrect interpretations of interview data was applied before the final report writing. The list of used quotations was sent to the respondents to validate the message of the text passages. Throughout the data collection and coding processes, a research diary was written to note feelings about conceptual developments. Another risk of qualitative research lies in the integrity of respondent answers.

Regarding resonance (Charmaz, 2006) and sufficiency of data, collected data was rich and plentiful for coding purposes, however, a longitudinal data collection would have allowed more credible support for the claims. Nevertheless, for master thesis, eight in-depth interviews (58 min on average) are sufficient for studying a single case and its surrounding stakeholders. By asking similar questions about the important concepts from different stakeholders, the data triangulation helped to strengthen the transferability of the data. Also, the data was rich in that sense that it allowed theoretical saturation as the final interviews provided hardly any new insights regarding the main phenomenon. The rich data allow to build a strong argument for results and grounded theory model, although subsequent quantitative analysis could provide even stronger support for the arguments and claims.

A central part of originality (Charmaz, 2006) was one of the main concerns of this study, as the topic was close to the researcher and some of the concepts and categories may seem trivial from the perspective well-acquainted person. About the triviality of some of the findings within practitioners, the value will be in the drawn overall connections between those trivial findings and the relationships in broader context. Hopefully, the grounded theory presented in chapter 4 will give fresh insights for the people operating
within and with the focal phenomenon. Most probably, it will at least help them to clarify their thoughts regarding their own strategies and actions. Regardless, as the following results (Chapter 4) section explicates, especially some of the categories and concepts offer fresh insight compared to existing literature, thus advocate the usefulness of analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, the model describing the causality dilemma depicts the phenomenon in conceptually novel way. Finally, the results and grounded theory model here able to extend the current theories and concepts regarding professional sports and professional football.

### 3.4 Summary of the methodology section

The aim of the methodology section was to discuss the plan methodologically, how the research questions of this thesis are aimed to be answered. It started by describing the specific contexts and environments where empirical work was planned to be conducted. Consequently, it contemplated and argued for and against the research approaches and strategies to reach the objectives of this thesis. Furthermore, the practical decisions regarding used data-collection and data-analysis methods were elaborated. Finally, the potential criticism regarding trustworthiness and bias were discussed. Below is a summary of the methodology chapter (Table 4, p. 50).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Section</strong></th>
<th><strong>Selected position</strong></th>
<th><strong>Arguments for chosen approach</strong></th>
<th><strong>Arguments against chosen approach</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contextual framework for the empirical study</strong></td>
<td>Collective actors as the main units of analysis instead of individuals. Acknowledgement of multiple strategic action fields (overlapping). Inclusion of only those players that have interest in different outcomes at stake in the fields.</td>
<td>Collective actors as units of analysis are justified as relationships of institutions are focal. Convergence of different institutions within the field argues for acknowledgement of multiple overlapping fields to examine.</td>
<td>Many field-theoretic and institutional scholars do not acknowledge collective actors as unit of analysis. Reliable data from interview informants to answer: “who gets what and why?” type of core questions. Difficulty to capture dynamics without longitudinal empirical work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environment of Finnish sports and media fields</strong></td>
<td>Restricting the focus in sports to the team sports (ball games). Focus on domestic sport field instead European or Global level.</td>
<td>Team sports share same characteristics in terms professional sports. Author had access only to Finnish football community.</td>
<td>Athletics and winter-sports (individual) enjoy widespread recognition especially outside of metropolitan area, thus have a great impact on Football as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research paradigm</strong></td>
<td>Constructivism (Guba and Lincoln, 1994)</td>
<td>Allows to study phenomena by interpreting the dialectical interactions of respondents. Impossible to observe</td>
<td>Reliability and trustworthiness of the answers conclusions about power-relations and positions across the fields?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
or research by solely quantitatively methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontology and Epistemology</th>
<th>Relativistic ontology (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012) and transactional-subjectivist epistemology (Guba and Lincoln, 1994)</th>
<th>Potential to leverage own expertise and know-how in creating the framework for empirical work. Own expertise helps to avoid misinterpretations.</th>
<th>Biased author because of the strong background in Football and challengeable motives for studying power-relations and positions objectively.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research approaches</td>
<td>Case study (Exploratory) (Yin, 2009), with grounded theory approach on empirical work (Corbin and Strauss, 1990)</td>
<td>Case-study and grounded theory are suitable for studying phenomena that has unclear boundaries with context. Grounded theory optimal for studying multiple variables.</td>
<td>Grounded theory is recommended to include closer to 50 interviews to reach theoretical saturation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical Reasoning</td>
<td>Inductive and abductive logic (Bryant and Charmaz, 2006)</td>
<td>Inductive reasoning is suitable when researcher cannot be sure what he/she will discover. The research questions lead to abduction of “best possible generalization”</td>
<td>Ambitious target to ground theory with relatively scarce time and money resources for data collection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection methods</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders for Veikkausliiga. Field notes. Document analysis (strategy documents, annual reviews). (Yin, 2009; Corbin and Strauss, 1990)</td>
<td>If following snowball and theoretical sampling principles, the semi-structured interviews should disclose relevant insight. Rigid transcribing and coding procedures.</td>
<td>Unreliable data without participant observation in their day-to-day work with longitudinal scope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data-analysis</td>
<td>Open, axial, and theoretical coding (Corbin and Strauss, 1990)</td>
<td>Theoretical sensitivity raises the trustworthiness of analysis.</td>
<td>Potential bias of the researcher when interpreting the data.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4  Summary of the methodology chapter
4 RESULTS

This chapter presents the results from the collected and analysed qualitative data, by following the structure that elaborates the main emergent themes and their respective categories. This will be done by writing up the analytical memos and the notes of the analytical processes completed when developing the final conceptual model. The analytical processes will be enriched with the ample usage of direct citations from the interview data (Appendix 9). The sequence of main categories and concepts will follow the grounded theory model later presented in this thesis. This model will be presented in the third subchapter, which will include the grounding of the model to the empirical data. The second subchapter consists of presenting the emergent categories and concepts. First subchapter will start by explaining the analytic processes involved when making sense of the interview data.

4.1 Analytical processes when coding the transcribed interview data

The early coding followed open coding principles by reading the transcriptions with chunk by chunk principle (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Sentence by sentence approach was considered first but was then later discarded after perceived unsuitable, however, at time to time, the meaningful conceptual labels were placed one single sentences as well. The subsequent stage included axial coding of those codes identified in first open coding sessions. At this stage, the open codes were compared against each other to create concepts with similar properties, that could later be reassembled by using the paradigm model (Table 5, p.52) approach suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The final coding steps included more abstract level theorization out of the categories pertaining to the paradigm model.

4.1.1 Paradigm model around the central phenomenon of professional football league struggle for legitimacy, credibility, and progress

In the analytical work of this thesis, the rigorous use of constant comparative method and paradigm model were essential to make sense of the large amount of data collected. Ultimately, the 282 open codes were filtered to 102 concepts that formed the paradigm model in axial coding stage. By drawing the first paradigm model, it was possible to work out what was going on at the field, and to further develop the categories for the final theoretical model. As Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggests, the paradigm model should be
built around the central phenomenon. In the case of this thesis, the central phenomenon had to be closely related to the beginning research question of the grounded theory. Thus, the central phenomenon was named as “Veikkausliiga struggling for legitimacy, credibility, and progress”. The main reason for slightly modifying the wording from initial research question was that the data indicated towards a struggle for legitimacy, credibility, and accreditation (Table 5). Naturally, any given professional ball game league will be measured against other leagues within the sport. Thereafter, the struggle for progress is also an important element within the central phenomenon explored in the thesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Relationships of the categories to the central phenomenon of “Veikkausliiga struggling for legitimacy, credibility, and progress”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Context</strong> (locations, events, incidents surrounding and related to the phenomenon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Causal conditions</strong> (happenings, events, incidents resulting to the phenomenon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Intervening conditions</strong> (the structural conditions bearing the actions/interactions that are pertaining to the phenomenon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Actions/Interaction</strong> (Strategies and actions taken to respond to the phenomenon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Consequences</strong> (the main outcomes or results from actions/interactions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td><strong>Central category:</strong> Chicken or the egg- causality dilemma in professional football</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5  Paradigm model built around “Veikkausliiga struggling for legitimacy, credibility, and progress.

4.1.2 Central category – Chicken or the egg- causality dilemma in professional football

After the paradigm model was refined with the data of the last three interviews, the theoretical coding of second order categories began. The initial results indicated that there were clearly over 20 categories which pertained to 6 main themes. Resulting from another round of analytic work with the paradigm model, the number of categories was condensed to 17 categories (Table 5). The initial results of the categories were already
telling a good story about the phenomenon, but somehow the red line was missing, which would eventually connect the consequences and other central elements of the paradigm model. During the final stages of theoretical coding, a central core category was identified, to which all themes, categories, and concepts were related directly or indirectly.

The core category crystallized by looking at back to the open codes and transcriptions. This central category was repeatedly referred by the central informants around the central phenomenon. The central category was named in the following way: “Chicken or the egg- causality dilemma in professional football” (Table 5, p. 52). The reason why the central category was named as the following, is a result from the 1) repeated message that financial resources would allow to the progress of football league and its clubs in many aspects, but that 2) fundamental requirement for increased financial resources are dependent from the combination of quality of game, conditions, credibility, and accreditation. Additionally, this central category (or central concept) was mentioned by one of the respondents:

“I have been involved since the beginning, so I can name the financial side, the size of markets, as a clear issue. And in a way, the lack of success, I mean the lack of success at national team level and at the club level [...] Part of the problem lies there, that we have relatively scarce resources...the salary budget is quite restricted and therefore the level of game is not high enough [...] that one would have to invest extremely heavily compared to the existing level so that it would be possible to succeed. There is that kind of Chicken and the egg- dilemma with the lack of success.” [own translation] (Club owner, 2016)

The above citation was not the only responded using the exact metaphor of Chicken and the egg- causality dilemma and the emerging data within the categories and main themes seemed to be related to the above causality dilemma. Next chapters will discuss the main themes and their respective categories will be explained.

4.2 Main themes and their categories

This section of the results will act as the backbone of the analysis and the empirical model. It will serve as logical narration that will ultimately develop into a theoretical model called Chicken or the Egg causality dilemma of professional football (Table 5, p.52). The analytical processes are opened to the reader and the reader will get an overview of focal phenomenon and the surrounding elements. The first subchapter starts by presenting the operational environment surrounding a professional sports league (historical and current). The second subchapter will outline the fundamental challenges a league struggles to overcome. Next, the subchapter three will illustrate the specific
actions and interactions related to the central phenomenon. Finally, the realized practices and dynamics altering forces will be revealed, including the vicious circle and virtuous circle scenarios related to the development of professional football leagues.

All the main categories are related to the central phenomenon: “a professional sport league’s struggle for legitimacy, credibility, and progress in wider sport entertainment field”. The relationship with the central phenomenon was verified by using paradigm model in axial coding stage (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). When second order categories started to emerge from the data, constant comparison principle was embraced to move back and forth with the open coding and axial coding stage. The sequence of below sub-categories aims to provide logical structure as per the paradigm model: causal conditions, central phenomenon, context, intervening conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences. (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) However, not every event, case, concept, or incident pertained to only one category, but could have been placed under multiple dimensions of the central phenomena. For the sake of analysis, these concepts were assigned under one specific core category although there was overlapping between some of the concepts in different dimensions of the paradigm model.

The explanations of below categories are enriched with direct citations from collected qualitative data. The interview transcriptions are in Finnish as it was the preferred language of the respondents. Therefore, also the early analytic work was done in Finnish to capture the subtleties of the interview data. Direct citations are translated by the author. Therefore, each direct citation will be therefore marked with [*] to indicate the self-translation by the author. Finally, before writing the draft, every translation citation was approved by the informant to pay respect to the research ethics.

4.2.1 Intrinsinc challenges restraining the progress of professional football league

A professional football league and its clubs face a variety of challenges, when trying develop both with the level of game and resources available. These challenges are not usually black and white, instead, they are often multidimensional by nature. These intrinsic challenges consist of those very fundamental challenges that are hindering the progress and success of football league and its participating clubs. The challenges that will be elaborated in subsequent subchapter include both elements and aspects that are easily measured as hard facts, and those more abstract measures, such as incoherence of the identity across stakeholder groups. Regardless of type of challenge, the sub-
categories below appeared as the most important aspects to focus on within the league and its clubs.

4.2.1.1 Lack of success at the international level – clubs and national team

The knowledgeable agents involved in Veikkausliiga proposed that the lack of international success results in lower appreciation among the wider audience. As did the club-owner state in the direct citation on page 53, when describing the chicken and the egg situation, many other meaningful stakeholders agreed with the statement, that the international success is imperative in many ways.

More specifically, the lack of international success was considered as one of the primary causes that inhibits the development of Veikkausliiga and its clubs. Another dimensionality that was added to the equation was the success of the Finnish national team in addition to the club level success. On both measures, on club level and national team level, Finnish football is lagging in country ranking positions of 36 in country club ranking and 99 in national team ranking (UEFA, 2017; FIFA, 2017. For example, the manager of large sports newsroom stated that:

“World is globalized right now and as we already discussed about the international games, the day when “Huuhkajat” [Finnish national team] gets to a final tournament, then large masses [public audience] would realize that we are just as good as everyone else.” [*] (Manager of Sports newsroom at Iltasanomat, 2017)

Naturally, such approval from public audience is important as the audience is the ultimate measure for success and guides the world of sports. This was heavily emphasized by the participants of this research. Interestingly, the poor results achieved by the national team of Finland seem to have a direct impact of level appreciation of football. For long time (1993-2015), the ranking was fluctuating between 40-60 (with few exceptions only) resulting in position of most appreciated sport in Finland in 2014 (Taloustutkimus, 2014). Now, when the poor results dropped the ranking to 94-99 during past three years, the latest result in Taloustutkimus survey revealed that football is currently at the fifth position, placed behind ice hockey, biathlon, track and field, and formula 1. Consequently, this has been showing in the media time received in main stream media’s such as Yleisradio. The head of Yle Urheilu replied to the questions regarding guiding principles regarding the content shown at state-owned media in following way:
Within the same breath, the same person from Yleisradio added that they aim at promoting sports culture and to seize the new trends. Yleisradio’s one of the most popular weekly/daily broadcast is the Urheiluruutu, which shows a summary of sports headlines and reaches almost 20% of Finnish population on weekly basis (Finnpanel Oy, 2017).

The statements made by informants regarding the importance of international success are also verified as true when looking at the spectator figures of most watched sports events in 2016. Those sports where Finnish athletes excel on international measures, such as ice hockey, cross country skiing, biathlon, and motor sport, occupy top spots on regular basis (Finnpanel Oy, 2017).

On the other hand, some football broadcasts in the mainstream media, such as Yleisradio, seem to reach large audiences, as can be seen when Finnish national team played against Iceland in World Cup Qualifiers, making the event the most watched live broadcast in October 2016 (Finnpanel Oy, 2017). The national team of Finland got over twice as big audience on mainstream media compared to the most watched domestic Veikkausliiga broadcast (Finnpanel Oy, 2017).

4.2.1.2 Lack of or poor implementation of joint strategies among the football family

During the eight interviews held with the key actors representing the most meaningful organizations related to Veikkausliiga football, it became apparent that the overall success is also highly dependable on the co-operation models among the football family. In case of Veikkausliiga, the lack of or the inefficiency of the joint strategies had hindered the development during the past two decades, although the current situation was perceived as seen light at the end of the tunnel:

“Now it feels that…on strategic level, we are going to the same direction. The strategies support each other and therefore decision making is easier.” [*]

(General Secretary of FFA, 2017)

In addition to the hindrance caused by these overall strategies among governing organizations, poor commitment and implementation were put blame on when speaking of joint efforts across Veikkausliiga clubs. It was stated that the implementation of
strategic initiatives was not at a required level and that it resulted in insufficient adoption across the club sphere.

“So that it would go further forward also in the club organizations on operative level, so that when they do things, that they would also understand why certain things are done, and why this kind of decisions have been taken. This is something, that has never gotten properly to club level and to the daily work of operative management of clubs, that they would have been knowledgeable about this and what is the aim.” [*] (CEO of Veikkausliiga Ry, 2017)

Following from the insufficient adoption level of joint efforts, the effectiveness was perceived low, which ultimately results to the hindrance in progress of the entire league and its clubs. Veikkausliiga Ry representatives, club owner at Veikkausliiga, and General Secretary of FFA all agreed that the main issues in insufficient adoption and poor implementation of long-term development strategies are usually resulting more from the insufficient resources time and money wise, rather than from the poor football management skills. Regardless the consensus, the same club owner also admitted that there is also a gap in know-how about marketing and club management:

“One problem is that, which is caused by the financial realities, that it is difficult to attract top-quality professionals to manage the clubs. The knowhow is kind of outdated. Also, the marketing knowledge. And that as well, when selling the partnership, that today the rules of the game are changed, that rarely the visibility or logo are...that value is seen as marginal and then we must think about alternatives. [...] And there the know-how...it should be at a better level than the current. And then again, it is difficult to attract top level professionals, unless you are able pay respective salaries.”[*] (Club owner, 2017)

The poor club management skills have caused some troubles to the bigger picture, of which the unrealistic financial management has been the most visible one, as several clubs have fallen over due the financial mismanagement. Especially the Veikkausliiga Ry management team, main sponsor Veikkaus Oy, and the General Secretary of FFA stressed the importance of long-term perspective in planning the financial side.

4.2.1.3 Loose and ineffective co-operation models media partner

There was a one repetitive theme stressed by every stakeholder group involved in the empirical research. The most significant issue on partner level was stated to be the incoherent and short-sighted media partnership. The importance of good media partner was acknowledged, while admitting that the historically speaking this was something where Veikkausliiga and its clubs have failed at:
“Also, regarding the media contract and its utilization, it is also...if we look at the history, regarding the domestic football in Finland and the main league, it has been very unstable, bouncing from one media channel to another one. It has been quite fragmented and therefore it has been difficult to build on something.” [*] (CEO of Veikkausliiga, 2017)

The importance of media partner was emphasized by all informants, and not least by the media representatives (Head of Digital Consumer Products at Iltasanomat), who together with Veikkausliiga Ry representatives voiced up their ambitions to grow Veikkausliiga similarly as did the Swedish Allsvenskan (main league in Sweden) earlier on:

“There are many reasons for that [why Veikkausliiga is seen part of Iltasanomat consumer product portfolio], but one is that in Sweden the power of...and exactly the role of media was significant, when growing the football phenomenon. In a way, that has been used as benchmark, what happened in Sweden some time ago. That the same could happen in Finland” [*] (Head of Digital Consumer Products at Iltasanomat, 2017)

The direct implications from the loose and ineffective media partnerships were said to be the low or non-existing revenue streams, short contract periods, and insufficient value creation for both parties.

4.2.1.4 Poor ability to develop long-term and large-scale commercial partnerships with businesses

The short-sightedness seems intrinsic to Veikkausliiga football in many different terms, as not only the short-term perspective in strategy was mentioned, but also the contractual periods of commercial partnerships. Many respondents admitted that most of the commercial partnerships with Veikkausliiga and its clubs are relatively small and agreed for only short period. On the other hand, the main commercial partnership with Veikkaus Oy was a good example of partnership they wish to have more:

“Of course there are plentiful of partners...Veikkaus is extremely important. Right now, Veikkaus is the main sponsor, but Veikkaus do not have too strong role in my opinion currently.” [*] (General Secretary of FFA, 2017)

This perception by the Veikkausliiga and other relevant stakeholders was confirmed by the Veikkaus representative as well:

“Veikkausliiga has been our partner for longer time, because we have a clear need for this kind of partnership. It the partnership is utilized vastly within our organization. And when such sponsoring is done, then the ideal situation is that you are able utilize it in many ways and reclaim everything out of it.
When we can add value together to the supporters [of Veikkausliiga], then our sponsoring partnership is successful.” [*] (Relationship Manager at Veikkaus Oy)

Although the partnership with Veikkaus has been a long lasting one and lucrative in terms of monetary remuneration, the answer by the Relationship Manager of Veikkaus Oy might explain why most of the partnerships are so short in terms of contract length:

”It is reasonable, that the partnerships are updated on regular basis. We have two years as the period. So, that will be done during summer and autumn internally within clubs, league, and us [Veikkaus Oy], that to what direction we should develop it.” [*] (Relationship Manager at Veikkaus Oy, 2017)

The short contract length was mentioned as a fundamental issue by the representatives of Veikkausliiga Ry, Club owner, and General Secretary of FFA. All these entities linked long term commercial partnership with the ability to create and implement long term strategies, ultimately resulting in reduced operational uncertainties among Veikkausliiga and clubs.

4.2.2 Characteristics of a football league as a sports entertainment product

This subchapter presents the ideas, perceptions, and concepts depicting the characteristics of football league and its clubs as a sports entertainment product. First, the identity (internal) and accreditation (external) of Veikkausliiga as the central concepts will be explicated. Then, the unique features of Veikkausliiga will be reported as per the interview data.

4.2.2.1 Incoherent identity and low accreditation of Veikkausliiga within the football family and across stakeholder groups

The identity and accreditation are something intrinsically attached to the phenomenon of professional football league and its development. Looking at the interview data, those are distinctive areas where Veikkausliiga and its clubs are struggling and have been struggling at. The identity within the football society was mentioned as one of pressing issues to be solved, because the people involved with football are the most potential and targeted group to consume Veikkausliiga league product. Veikkaus Ry’s CEO used a metaphor to describe the identity problem of Veikkausliiga football and Finnish football in general:
“We are still at that general sport box. Football does not have such a holistic significance, that this people...maybe we have that kind of meaning that we are sort of the Donald Duck. So, the sorrowful character of sports. Always failing, always losing...the story line here is that, why there is never big succeeding? [...] The success in sport [football], only certain group of people are affected, but to larger audience it has no significant meaning yet” [*] (CEO of Veikkausliiga Ry), 2017).

The CEO of Veikkausliiga adds to the previous, that it might be down to that story above, why the large number of hobbyists, people involved in football, are living in their own eco-systems without the interest to follow and support Veikkausliiga football.

The lack of accreditation and credibility is something where Veikkausliiga is seen lagging drastically to ice hockey and traditional individual sports were Finnish athletes have enjoyed international level success. This will subsequently lead to legitimacy issues at the eyes of major partners; media partner and commercial partners. The situation in Finland is clearly admitted by the interview respondents from commercial partner and media side, declaring that ice hockey dominates both in terms of partnership revenue and media rights value:

“I also feel that the national team and Veikkausliiga itself, are still at a relatively low level [...] Ice hockey is the best benchmark. That it is...as consumer product, if speaking of exactly those fans and followers. Not necessarily including the hobbyists. So, in this case, ice hockey has longer traditions, and of course the broadcasting product, from Ruutu+ perspective it [ice hockey] has had more resources during past years. Quality of the broadcast. Quality has been higher and much more material available. So, compared to ice hockey, with football we are still at relatively low level.” [*] (Head of Digital Consumer Products at Iltasanomat, 2017)

The reason the why the accreditation and credibility are keys to success, is that with the higher quality media product the identity will be built strongly to the Finnish sports culture.

4.2.2.2 Uniqueness of features of a football league and its clubs as sports entertainment product for their partners

Emerging concepts and categories clearly indicate that there are certain features and qualities that make Veikkausliiga to stand out as sports entertainment product for its partners. These features include the wide spread coverage of Veikkausliiga club across Finland and the additional business opportunities related to professional football, such as sports betting. The sports betting has long traditions with football in Finland.
Veikkaus Oy (national betting monopoly) has been the main partner of main league for decades due to the mutual benefits:

“Veikkausliiga has been our partner for longer time, because we have a clear need for this kind of partnership. It the partnership is utilized vastly within our organization. And when such sponsoring is done, then the ideal situation is that you are able utilize it in many ways and reclaim everything out of it. [...] When we can add value together to the supporters [of Veikkausliiga], then our sponsoring partnership is successful.” [*] (Relationship Manager at Veikkaus Oy, 2017)

Although Veikkausliiga football might not be the biggest sponsoring partner for Veikkaus Oy, it is a very important partner as being a league for betting in the middle of summer, when most of the larger football leagues and ice hockey are on summer break. Another feature of Veikkausliiga and professional football in general was identified in its huge potential to grow and the global trend of increasing popularity of football:

“Many studies have shown that the markets for sports entertainment is growing, and especially a good business case where we benchmark is UEFA Champions league. So, in a way, the terrific popularity in Europe, which then secures the profitability. And based on that, regarding domestic leagues and investing on them is potential path.” [*] (Head of Digital Consumer Products at Iltasanomat, 2017)

The same was agreed by other respondents, such as Veikkausliiga Ry and FFA, Veikkaus Oy, and Iltasanomat representatives, while they also added that the younger generation in Finland seems to be more receptive for Finnish football, which will be discussed in next subchapter.

4.2.2.3 Low level of attractiveness to the public audience

The low level of attractiveness is something that was regarded as crucial, as the ability to attract spectators and followers was described as indispensable tool in commercializing the football. Basically, all informants named fans/audience among the most important stakeholders in their operations.

“Audience and supporters, that is the biggest. From those masses these commercial partners will get interested sooner or later.” [*] (General Secretary of FFA, 2017)

With no exceptions, all respondents interviewed felt that there is unredeemed potential regarding the attractiveness of Finnish football to larger audience. While acknowledging that Finnish football, at club and national team level, has not been successful, they also
thought the low accreditation, credibility, and legitimacy with what Veikkausliiga struggle, are a bit harsh:

“There are small opportunities out there, as I have followed football for so long and seen the apathy. Clubs are coming and going and so on. So, this is...extremely, I don't know how to put it, this nation has been dabbling on its own here for decades, so maybe now during the past 10 years, the eyes of large audience have started to open, that people have realized that even Veikkausliiga can be great.” [*] (Manager of Sports Newsroom at Iltasanomat, 2017)

The previous statement clearly illustrates the lack of attractiveness, accreditation, and credibility what has been part of the struggle of Veikkausliiga. The problems of low attractiveness are still present. This can be seen in the very fresh results of Taloustutkimus survey (30.3.2017) which indicates that football had dropped in results regarding the accreditation and attractiveness. The important of these results is based on the statement of Head of Yle Urheilu regarding how they decide on the media coverage for different sports shown in Yleisradio channels “We use our user data (www, tv, radio, and social media) material and the material from one external company, that completes annual survey of how interesting different sports are and how the trends are developing”. (Pokkinen, 3.4.2017)

4.2.3  Operational environment of the professional football league

In the very beginning of the data collection and the analytic work, it became clear how much the operational environment impacts the struggle of Veikkausliiga in its wider context of sports entertainment business. The impacts were caused by several different things and concepts, which belonged to three different categories. The three most impactful categories were cultural heritage, competitiveness of international football, and the specific characteristic, economic and geographic that surrounds Veikkausliiga.

4.2.3.1  Cultural heritage of the society in terms of sports – hunger for success

Looking at the cultural aspects of Finnish society regarding sports, one can rely on historical data, which suggests that certain sports, such as track and field, cross country skiing, and ice hockey have been institutionalized across Finnish sport audience (Breivik, 2010). This was well understood among the respondents, and that part of problem with Veikkausliiga and Finnish football is that there has never been such podium level success. Additionally, some of the respondents contemplated that Finnish cultural heritage in
terms of sports follows the success achieved, implying the glory hunter nature of Finnish audience:

“And that...such a sports nation as Finland is really critical. So, the success [international] has a significant role in that if you are displayed or not. A good example is i.e. Kaisa Mäkäräinen. Biathlon was never a very visible sport in Finland. As soon as we have this kind of world class start who can perform outstandingly, then all the sudden she becomes our [Finland’s] most interesting athlete.” [*] (Club owner, 2017)

Resulting from this paradigm, most of the respondents agreed that by succeeding, football could have a chance to convert the potential of large hobbyist base into follower and attendance figures. Also, the optimism was closely linked to thoughts in previous subchapter regarding the younger generations’ inclination to accept the fact that Finnish football is not competing for podium positions.

4.2.3.2 The competitive level of international football

There was a clear consensus among all respondents, who were actively involved with Veikkausliiga, that the competition at international level football is extremely high. The high level of competition is materialized through the abundance of financial resources available, which was mentioned as the main obstacle to overcome to reach international level success:

“The biggest thing to think about, is purely there whether our top clubs [Veikkausliiga] are at a level that they can compete and win games in the middle of summer [...] The first round is not too... but the second round [qualification] brings clubs that invariably bigger clubs. In terms of financial resources. [...] 5-10% is the growth we are targeting. That is the pace we should be able to... so even if we achieve that, financial resources of our clubs are still very moderate. What is it then that speaks for that we are at competitive level compared to others? Because I know that others are progressing quickly.” [*] (General Secretary of FFA, 2017)

The above quotation is referring to the qualification stage of UEFA club competitions (Champions League and Europa League) where top finished Veikkausliiga clubs are measuring their level against other European leagues’ clubs. The statements regarding the competitive level and financial resources hold true, as the FIFPro Global Employment Report (2016) lists Finland among the second-tier clubs, regarding the wage level, club conditions, and length of contract. When looking at the average wages for players, Veikkausliiga can barely fit in to the better half on global scale, which indicates that there are tens of countries were players are paid more by the clubs.
Another implication that was linked with the high level on international football, was the problem of lower valuation of players who plays in Finnish clubs. Deloitte (2016) concluded that only some of the absolute top level clubs in Europe do have to sell players to generate revenue, and that for many smaller leagues, trading players is an important source of revenue. A concern regarding low valuation of players sold by Finnish clubs was raised by the club owner:

“And perhaps the third import source of revenue, that could a source of revenue, is player trade. And regarding that, in overall, the current level of Finnish football is at a level, that trading with Finnish clubs is not seen interesting by the top-level European clubs”. [3] (Club owner, 2017)

Therefore, the implications from high competitive level of international football are two-fold, as it makes the succeeding difficult due to the high-level of financial resources required and that it makes it difficult for Veikkausliiga clubs to earn money by selling the players.

4.2.3.3 Unfavourable economic and geographical realities within the country

There are certain external aspects that restrain and problematize the progress of Veikkausliiga, which are related to the economic structure and geographical realities of Finland. Of these, the relatively small economic size of Finland has large impact to Veikkausliiga through the line of businesses that could potentially partner up with Veikkausliiga and its clubs. Naturally, the small economy is largely down to the small number of citizens living in Finland, which is shown in the sizes of municipalities where Veikkausliiga clubs operate (Table 6, p. 65).

| Club and municipality | Number of inhabitants of county/city (2016) | 2014 Gross Domestic Product of the province (million €)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IFK Mariehamn</td>
<td>29,214</td>
<td>1,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HJK Helsinki</td>
<td>635,181</td>
<td>78,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJK Soniakoki</td>
<td>62,052</td>
<td>5,908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VPS Vaasa</td>
<td>67,620</td>
<td>6,855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilves Tampere</td>
<td>228,274</td>
<td>17,337</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RoPS Rovaniemi</td>
<td>62,231</td>
<td>6,078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KuPS Kuopio</td>
<td>117,740</td>
<td>7,719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FC Lahti</td>
<td>119,452</td>
<td>6,225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS Kemi</td>
<td>21,603</td>
<td>6,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIFK Helsinki</td>
<td>635,181</td>
<td>78,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FC Inter</td>
<td>187,604</td>
<td>16,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PK-35 Vantaa</td>
<td>219,341</td>
<td>78,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sum</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,363,890</strong></td>
<td><strong>309,028</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 There was no 2015/2016 statistics available for GDP in different provinces and counties in Finland.
Entire Finland is split to 19 provinces and 311 counties (Table 6). The reason why the gross domestic product was taken on province level was that it can be assumed that Veikkausliiga and its clubs attracts commercial partners from larger geographical and economic zone than within the city or county. On the other hand, it was reasonable to present the inhabitants on county and city level as the provinces are so large geographically, that it is not realistic to attract match day spectators within 300-500km radius. Although most of the informants identified the economic realities regarding small economic sizes of Veikkausliiga municipalities, especially the club owner emphasized the varying realities where Veikkausliiga clubs operate:

“I have been involved since the beginning, so I can name the financial side, the size of markets, as a clear issue. [...] The metropolitan area is somewhat different to smaller regions [in terms of challenges faced by clubs]. The smaller the economic region is, the more difficult it gets. So basically, you need...the problems appear when you look for commercial partners, because you need commercial partners that must be able to operate at least domestically. And you need multiple partners, as one partner is not sufficient for running a Veikkausliiga club. In that way, kind of, one needs those economic fundaments, to build this kind...let’s say annual budget.” [*] (Club owner, 2017)

While there is an evident struggle to find enough commercial partners, mainly due to the small size economic regions, there were some features of Veikkausliiga which was considered as a clear advantage to offer for commercial partners. Veikkausliiga was regarded as especially suitable sponsoring partner to companies targeting wide spread coverage and influential communication channel for all over Finland:

“This is also an important thing...that with the help of sponsorship partners, we are able to reach people across Finland. Let’s say, that every time we assess a partnership, we evaluate the content of the partnership, what kind of content it will offer to support our business. As support to our...communicational partnership and that is where Veikkausliiga is one of the most meaningful leagues...the clubs, Veikkausliiga clubs are...or are at least among the biggest clubs in terms of influence in Finland.” [*] (Relationship Manager at Veikkaus Oy, 2017)

This was verified with opinion by the club owner at Veikkausliiga, stating that as Veikkausliiga clubs as sponsoring product is suitable for companies operating at least on national level, the smaller municipality clubs must work hard to find these types of companies.
**4.2.4 Strategies and action plans of the football league and surrounding stakeholders in response to the central phenomenon**

The content of interview data and document analysis provided a plethora of different actions and strategies Veikkausliiga, its clubs, and the surrounding stakeholders apply to respond to the central phenomenon of Veikkausliiga struggling for its position. For the sake of clarity, these strategies and actions were pragmatically divided between those where (1) Veikkausliiga and its clubs were heavily involved or took the initiative, and to those (2) purely driven by the self-interests of surrounding stakeholders to Veikkausliiga Ry and its clubs.

**4.2.4.1 Close collaboration with powerful and meaningful stakeholders**

The unified message throughout the data collection voiced up a message that for Veikkausliiga and its clubs, there is no room for being stubborn or condescending. The results show that as Veikkausliiga and its clubs are reliant on the financially larger institutions and organizations, the best possible result will be achieved through strategic level collaboration. In practice, this means that Veikkausliiga and its clubs approach meaningful stakeholders with open and accommodating attitude to find solutions that are beneficial for the customers that will in turn contribute to their success:

“There is also the partner side, commercial partners. So, they are important as well, at club level, as well as at the internal governing unit level, as they operate in a role of financiers. Without these, this thing here [football] would not work. It is...football is very much driven by the resources of commercial partnerships. Exactly, as those media rights remunerations, match day revenues, merchandising are not very big, therefore the revenue from commercial partnerships has high percentage, and in that case these are heavily emphasized.” [*] (CEO of Veikkausliiga Ry, 2017)

For example, Veikkausliiga and its clubs are in urgent need for financial resources coming from indirect channels, such as FFA, UEFA, and FIFA. Additionally, Veikkausliiga football is reliant of resources of commercial partners, media partner, city governments, and ministry of education and culture (Figure 7, p. 67).
4.2.4.2 Stakeholder groups’ objectives and operational measures disregarding Veikkausliiga and its clubs’ interests

The cluster of stakeholders involved in Veikkausliiga and its clubs includes several organizations and companies that have such self-interests requiring actions that might be harmful for Veikkausliiga and its clubs. The most influential of these seems to be the prioritizing of sports news content by media companies and national tv-channel (Yleisradio). The clear message from these media companies is that they will give media exposure on basis of audience figures (attractiveness), Finnish sports culture, and the statistics of their own material:

“The number one priority is the audience. It is them for whom we do this, so basically I would not want to say any other stakeholders [that are important for sports newsroom], because without them, there is no Veikkausliiga articles, videos, or anything. It is where we look at and what we cannot forget.” [*] (Manager of Sports Newsroom at Iltasanomat, 2017)

Followingly, the lack of attractiveness due to low international success of Finnish football will result in reduced media exposure in mainstream media that will ultimately result in
reduced interest to football in general. Another small, yet important, detail that was mentioned by the Head of Yle Urheilu (3.4.2017) is the aim of Yleisradio to: “promote Finnish sports culture”, which seems to imply that Yleisradio, the state-owned mainstream media, aims to cultivate the traditions of Finnish sports culture. Some other notable stakeholders, which may have divergent interests with Veikkausliiga and that may act upon it, are police authorities and city governments. The city governments are usually the owners of match stadiums and therefore they may influence negatively to Veikkausliiga clubs by restricting access or setting high rent for the use of venue. Although Police Department was also perceived as valuable stakeholder in mitigating negative side effects, the specific actions it may take can be extreme, as they act solely on behalf of public safety and security:

“From the perspective of police authorities it is a bit pity, that we do have to get involved, whether we like football or not. And the means...I dare to say that we got our ways. But the ways might not be nice, and first of all, they are not good for the organizer [club], for Finnish football. When we start loading double amount of security officers or restricting spectators from the stands and such, they all fight against the event and entire football.” [*] (Emergency & Surveillance Director of Police Department, 2017)

A final institution, that is not directly involved with Veikkausliiga, but has a strong impact to the overall position of the footballers as professional workers, is the Finnish legislation. JPY, Football Players Association in Finland, has been fighting for better entitlements of professional footballers for couple of decades. Naturally, the improved legal position of footballers has brought additional costs to clubs, but in long term it has facilitated the professionalization of Veikkausliiga and its clubs:

“JPY soon understood that it had to grow member number, so that it could exert greater power and say, and a possibility to really advance the rights of players. The most important concern became to help the players in contract and salary issues. The trust and faith for JPY grew as result from previous. Significant advancements were also the pension and accident legislative security, as well as the definition of players as normal employees, been granted with the right for annual leave as well.” [*] (Executive Director of JPY, 2017)

4.2.5 Actualized practices pertaining to the central phenomenon of professional football league’s struggle for legitimacy, credibility, and progress

When all those crucial concepts, events, and incidents are placed around the central phenomenon, the outcomes regarding the rules and practices actualized at the field is divided into three subcategories which aim to explicate the reality within and around the phenomenon. First, the Finnish football world seems to have adopted near to full level
commercialization. Second, the visibility and appeal of professional football combined with its economic resources allures the political activity around Veikkausliiga and Finnish football. Finally, the resulting dynamics are explained with the help of graphical illustration (Figure 8, p. 71).

4.2.5.1 Prevalence of business rules in professional football

It seems that there is not much room for benevolence in operational environment of Finnish football, as not only media, but also commercial partners are seen to operate today with pragmatic approach regarding their sponsoring activities. Unless Veikkausliiga and its clubs are able add more value than the alternative options, whether a media company or potential commercial partner, the alternative option will be chosen. The modern football with commercial mind set was the dominating way of thinking:

“In the first place we are inclined more on the commercial side as the media rights holder and beneficiary. This way we will then, again, lift the financial aspects to the centre, what we do. [...] It is...football is very much driven by the resources of commercial partnerships. Exactly, as those media rights remunerations, match day revenues, merchandising are not very big, therefore the revenue from commercial partnerships has high percentage, and in that case these are heavily emphasized.” [*] (CEO of Veikkausliiga Ry, 2017)

The reason to this seems to be resulting directly from the increasing demands of commercial partners regarding the gained benefits from the co-operation, which again appears to be linked directly with the level of success and public attractiveness:

“I have been involved since the beginning, so I can name the financial side, the size of markets, as a clear issue. And in a way, the lack of success, I mean the lack of success at national team level and at the club level [...] Part of the problem lies there, that we have relatively scarce resources...the salary budget is quite restricted and therefore the level of game is not high enough. [*] (Club owner, 2017)

Although the respondents admit that there might be so called sports patrons involved in Finnish football, they added that these are only few cases and that the level of such political or benevolent business-rules neglecting investments in football are low in comparison to some international examples, which will be elaborated more in detail next.

4.2.5.2 Politics and personal interests in professional sports and football in Finland

Continuing from the personal or political interest of powerful people and institutions to get involved with Finnish football, the reasons for this are uplifting influence to status and the potential to have an impact in sport they feel passionate about. When moving
from the club level to the national and international governmental bodies, there is even stronger inclination towards politics and divergent aims. The interviews held suggests that there might be internal battles within and between the governing bodies around Veikkausliiga and its stakeholders. Unfortunately, the details regarding this cannot be disclosed here as due the request by certain respondents.

Additional ways where political and personal interests shaping Finnish football and Veikkausliiga, are the interests of Ministry of Education and Culture and Municipalities with their city governments:

“That money [generated by Veikkaus Oy, a state-owned gambling monopoly] goes from Veikkaus to political ministry of education and culture, where it then partially ends up to regional government authority, where again might end up to the city government or municipality. So, in this case the chain is easily broken, that the end user might not know where the money is originally from.” [*]

(Relationship manager of Veikkaus Oy)

Of course, there are guiding principles which are used by the Ministry of Education and Culture, such as that the money is split between: “Sports organizations and clubs, Construction of sports venues, Exercise and sports in municipalities, Physical education, Promotion of sporty life style, Promoting top-level sports, Scientific research in sports, and Other operations in sports.” (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017a)

4.2.5.3 Dynamics of the relationships among and between the stakeholders and the football league

There is a complex web of different type of stakeholders involved to Veikkausliiga and its clubs. Resulting from the diversity of these stakeholders and the level of convergence or divergence of their interests, the relationships among and between the stakeholders are either interdependent or the dependence is distinct to one direction only (Figure 8, p. 71). Following from these interdependencies and dependencies with Veikkausliiga, certain stakeholder groups stand out as organizations and institutions with whom Veikkausliiga appears to have open and balanced strategic level partnership. From these, Veikkaus Oy partnership is most long-standing one, while Sanoma (ISTV Extra/Iltasanomat) collaboration is relatively new:

“And before we were at the mercy of media companies in that sense, that we got some visibility slots, both from the printed media and from the broadcast, wherever they wished to fit us in. Today, we are in control of our own media. And this is here to stay as Timo Marjamaa said, every match is televised and there is material out there”. [*] (Marketing Director of Veikkausliiga Ry, 2017)
Naturally, the relationship with Finnish Football Association has also been long-standing, but it seems that only quite recently the quality of co-operation has got on to a higher level and a strategic level alignment has been achieved. The other football related stakeholders, such as JPY (Players Association) and UEFA/FIFA, have also objectives and aims that are aligned, but they seem to be related more distantly with Veikkausliiga. Then, there are different groups that are extremely significant and influential to the struggle of Veikkausliiga, but are somewhat difficult to align with Veikkausliiga on strategic level. The main stream media and commercial partners play leading roles in growing the attractiveness of Veikkausliiga and the financial resources available, while Ministry of Culture and Education and municipalities are often in charge how the stadium and grassroots conditions evolve. Subsequently, the police department and regulatory authorities are involved in mitigating negative side effects of supporter culture and match fixing. Finally, the public audience as the key stakeholder is not in a partnership with Veikkausliiga or the clubs, but acts as the adhesive element in the entire ecosystem.

4.2.6 Conclusive impacts altering the dynamics in the operational environment of a professional football league

The aim of this final subchapter of results reporting is to explain the two type of conclusive scenarios impacting that can alter the current dynamics of Veikkausliiga.
First, the more negatively resulting outcome will be presented and finally the more positive, yet feasible, scenario is described.

### 4.2.6.1 Failure on or off the pitch resulting in legitimacy and financial detriments (vicious circle)

The insights of meaningful individuals at the ecosystem of Veikkausliiga suggest that the failure to keep up with the international competitive level of football can put a stop to the overall development of Veikkausliiga. The reason why this is such an important aspect in the struggle is already highlighted in earlier categories, but is also verified by the statement regarding UEFA Club country ranking target by Finnish Football Association:

“So, are you able to get people on board, that, let’s work hard and jump from 36 position to 33 [UEFA Club country ranking coefficient]. Well, that does not sound very “sexy” either, when thinking from external stakeholder perspective. But it is realism, that do we have chance for that, realistically speaking. Because, can we detect something, see something already within two or three years, that the size of our clubs would grow significantly, regarding the turnovers.” [*] (General Secretary of FFA, 2017)

Such a failure, as the above passage suggests, would put a severe legitimacy, credibility, and accreditation issue for future operations of Veikkausliiga, including commercial partnerships, media rights remuneration, and player trade. Consequently, this kind of financial instability would cannibalize the most important block of modern commercialized football, decreasing the ability to develop the league and clubs systematically.

### 4.2.6.2 Unified success through collaboration (virtuous circle)

On contrary to the above scenario and issues resulting from shrivelling level of Finnish Veikkausliiga football, the widespread strategic alignment of objectives and close co-operation with most of the stakeholders may and should be the most feasible pathway for catching up with European football. Through these varying sizes of value-creating and player-developing co-operation models, the desired virtuous cycle can become reality with Veikkausliiga and Finnish football in general. Because of the complexity of relationships and stakeholders involved, reaching the virtuous cycle is possible only by strenuously pursuing better aligned and longer term co-operation models with the stakeholders involved:

“We should, somehow, attract that kind of, not patrons, but partnerships, that would see this with a bit longer perspective... this path to success. Then, we should aim to
create a convincing path to success, which will result to level of game, where both national team and league clubs succeed. I believe, that these things will not happen in few years.” [*] (Club owner, 2017)" “But again, same way as Veikkausliiga sees, that it may improve its position and become number one [league in Finland], in similar way this a business case for us. So, we have a chance to get new fans to purchase the product. And through that it will grow.” [*] (Head of Digital Consumer Products at Iltasanomat, 2017)

The final subchapter of results section will summarize the categories and concepts emerged when creating the grounded theory model of Veikkausliiga’s and its clubs’ struggle for legitimacy, credibility, and progress.

4.3 Summarizing results for the grounded theory model of the causality dilemma faced by Veikkausliiga and its clubs

The result of thorough and rigorous data analysis suggested that all categories are related, directly or indirectly, to a causality dilemma (chicken or the egg) regarding the financial resources and international level success of Finnish football (Figure 9, p. 74). The first part of the figure shows the categories pertaining to the central phenomenon. These categories are a complex set of intrinsic challenges, internal and external factors, interrelationships, and the taken actions/interactions within and across the different stakeholder groups. Resulting from these categories and their interrelationships, the struggle of professional football league is impacted conclusively resulting in either virtuous circle (green color) or in vicious circle (red color) (Figure 9, p. 74). If the conclusive impact is steered by the lack of international success and poor performance regarding the co-operation models with the stakeholder groups, the football league will most probably end up in vicious circle (Figure 9, p. 74).
The current state of Veikkausliiga, for instance, seems to be a result of multiple years in vicious circle regarding international level success and financial well-being. On the other hand, if a football league can execute effective and unified strategy with its stakeholder, the mutual gains for the stakeholder groups can facilitate the way towards virtuous circle (Figure 9). In this scenario, each small or big payoff for the stakeholders will accelerate the future success of a league both in sportive success level and with the financial gains. However, the boundaries of vicious and virtuous success circles are not always clear cut. Often, there might be elements or parts of the league and its clubs, that are in virtuous circle although the overall picture suggests different. This result was confirmed by multiple respondents of this study:
“Some are already there higher at the trajectory. We have good examples, clubs that do long-term planning and long-term investments...those that are able to focus on persistent development.” [*] (CEO of Veikkausliiga Ry, 2017)

Also, there was no full consensus regarding which should come first, the egg or the chicken or in this case: the international success of the financial resources. Basically, the majority acknowledged that the competitive level of Finnish football must and can only grow with the better player development. The elements of better player development consist of training facilities and coaching staff. Most of the respondents were in opinion that to reach better player development, there is a need for more financial resources to hire better and more full-time professionals. Additionally, there were opinions that it is possible to get more out of the current resources, thus there is no urgent need for increased financial resources for player development. Finally, there were perspectives that saw commercial partnerships as potential orientation for breaking out from the vicious cycle and stepping closer to virtuous circle (Figure 9, p. 74).
5 **DISCUSSIONS**

One of the aims of this thesis was to uncover the practicalities and realities, both internal and external, that result to the struggle and are a result of the struggle of Veikkausliiga for better position within its wider context. This chapter will discuss the results and model generated by following the grounded theory research approach. Therefore, the final chapter of this master thesis will start by synthesizing the results and the final grounded theory model with existing literature. This section includes the careful analysis of the results and grounded theory model in relation to the theoretical framework presented in the literature review. Next, the main theoretical and managerial implications are discussed to summarize the contributions of this thesis. Finally, the conclusions are drawn and limitations of this thesis are pondered to pave the way for further research.

5.1 **Synthesizing findings with existing literature**

This opening subchapter will introduce the main ideas derived from the results of previous chapter in relation with the existing literature (1) about professional football league’s struggle. Additionally, the idea of the second part of this subchapter is to contemplate the resonance of field-theoretic approach to the results and grounded theory model of this thesis.

5.1.1 **Reflections with professional football management literature**

Somewhat unsurprisingly, there were aspects, concepts, and theories in literature review which were very apparent in the results and grounded theory model. On the other hand, there were a few emergent notions that might be a great interest to the football society. Some of the unsurprising aspects were the nature of football as global sport for masses and its prevalence in wide-spread geographical area. Just as it was said in the literature review by Söderman and Dolles (2015), part of the widespread success of football is explained by its equality to have everyone on board, regardless of the economic, social, gender, or racial status. The same attributes were confirmed by many of the respondents (i.e. CEO of Veikkausliiga, 2017; General Secretary of FFA, 2017) stating that football as sport enjoys widespread advocacy as a hobby.

Regarding the same topic, a surprising gap or missing resemblance was identified regarding the link between football as a childhood hobby and the lifetime attraction to
football. Södermand and Dolles (2015) concluded that one reason for football’s popularity is the life-long affection initiated by the early childhood hobby. A contradicting phenomenon seemed to be pertaining to the struggle of Finnish Veikkausliiga, where one fundamental issue was the isolated hobbyists who are not interested or do not care about Veikkausliiga although they are still playing the sport. The grounded theory model created from the emergent categories suggested that the reason for this might be a result of multitude of things, such as poor international success and the Finnish sport culture in general, which is depicted by the hunger for podium-level success.

Perhaps, resulting from the previous contradicting findings, the value-capture model by Söderman and Dolles (2015) is only applicable to some extent. Most of the concepts hold true, such as the complex nature of professional football product to its customers and stakeholders, but for example the media rights and merchandising are revenue wise very insignificant at smaller leagues like Veikkausliiga. Not surprisingly, the ambition of small leagues is to grow the number of subscribers and value of media rights. Exactly as Söderman and Dolles stated (2015), this will be a very positive effect on the value of commercial partnerships as well. Additionally, some elements were completely missing from the value capture model that were repeatedly emphasized by the respondents in the empirical data. These elements were the (1) governing bodies of football, such as UEFA, FIFA, Finnish FA and (2) political bodies such as Ministry of Culture and Education and authorities. Although these organizations are not customers buying the football product, they are distinctively involved in the operations of professional football and can impact directly and indirectly to the success of Veikkausliiga.

Regardless of the currently low monetary value of media partnership Veikkausliiga enjoys, the imperative role of media was acknowledged at the lower-tier football league in similar way as in larger and more lucrative professional leagues. The consensus between the literature and results was also found regarding the opinions of about some of the determinants of media rights value, such as the past and current level competitive performance (Garcia-del-Barrio and Pujol, 2016). However, there were divergent opinions about the perceptions of in which way the popularity is measured. While literature (Grundy, 2004; Garcia-del-Barrio and Pujol, 2016) proposed that often one sports dominates regarding the attractiveness and with the financial metrics, some of the respondents (CEO of Veikkausliiga, 2017; Marketing Director of Veikkausliiga, 2017)
were firmly believing that the number one position of Finnish ice hockey league does not hinder Veikkausliiga from growing.

Although some of the football management researchers have been concerned about the potential risk of omnipresence pay-tv coverage resulting in loss of match day attendance, the results show different (Garcia-del-Barrio and Pujol, 2016). The perceptions were also strengthened by a survey data provided by ISTV Extra and Veikkausliiga Ry, which suggested that the current ISTV pay-tv coverage for every match increases attractiveness to Veikkausliiga (59% of the respondents) and that 21% of the respondents have started to visit games more frequently because of ISTV/Ruutu+ live broadcasts (IS Extra, 2017). These results are confirming the positive approaches suggested by the literature (Deloitte, 2016; Söderman and Dolles, 2015; Evens and Lefever, 2011) and the empirical results. The empirical results do agree with some of the impacts caused by the digitalization of media field (Lefever, 2012), such as that it offers disintermediation possibilities for Veikkausliiga and its clubs. Interviews held revealed that this has allowed Veikkausliiga to gain more control over the content they can produce and target to the potential clientele (Marketing Director of Veikkausliiga Ry, 2017).

Another figure that was used in the literature review was the sport, media, commercial organizations triangle by Lefever (2012). The conclusions by Lefever (2012) and Boyle and Haynes (2009) were convergent with the results of this thesis regardless of the size of the media partnership or commercial partnership. The results in this thesis confirmed that professional football is highly depended on the financial resources of commercial partners and media partner, and that these two close partners can exert power even in the form of influencing to the scheduling of the league. An Iltaisanomat TV Extra (ISTV Extra) survey (2017) suggests that most actively following supporters are young male (94% of the respondents, n=1728) who are employed in relatively well-paying occupations. Previous results confirm Lefever’s (2012) argument why sport is valued as advertising platform.

5.1.2 Resonance of the grounded theory model with field-theoretical approaches

The original aim of this thesis was to explore professional football in Finland by being inspired with the field-theoretical approach by Bourdieu (1978). As the chosen research approach was chosen as grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990), the main purpose of the field-theoretical approach was to (1) help design the research structure and early
data collection by guiding the first interview guides and to provide a framework for final reflections. Therefore, the aim here is to discuss the field-theoretical approach with the help of analogical perspective derived from the results of this grounded theory research.

Although the analytic processes of this thesis could not follow directly the field-theoretical approaches, already the sports definition of Lüschen (1988) was very convergent with the results of the thesis. The grounded theory model of this thesis suggests that professional football league, “approaches characteristics of a social institution, open to strong overlaps with other institutions such as education, economy, and art. (Lüschen, 1998, p. 269)” The results indicated that even if talking only about professional level sports, the social institution will overlap strongly with these institutions and in Veikkausliiga’s cases these are for example Ministry of Education and Culture and commercial trade. Already these cursory findings stand for the decision to explore professional football with a wider scope.

Following the proposed professional sports analogues of Bourdieusian doctrine in the literature review, the discussion here includes the principles discussed in the methodological chapters of Bourdieusian inspired field-theory researchers (Kay and Laberge, 2002a; Grenfell, 2012). First step of the analysis was to identify the social history of Veikkausliiga (field in question). Although the interview guide could not be constructed per these themes, the sport cultural history of Finland became one major concept that impacted the overall grounded theory model. Additionally, the historical perspective on Finnish football provided insightful concepts, cases, and events that helped to categorize the data to understand under what causal conditions and in which type of broader environment Veikkausliiga operated.

Bourdieusian doctrine suggested that the next step was the analysis of the position of the field in relation to other fields. The second main objective of the analysis was to map out of the stakes in the fields, structures of relationships, and the field struggles that constitute the field dynamics (Grenfell, 2012). As the concepts of Bourdieu and other field-theoretical approaches are somewhat abstract, the reflections here are results from far going interpretation. Regarding the fields of professional football, the early depiction of micro, mezzo, and macro fields of professional football in Figure 4 (Adapted from Fligstein and McAdam, 2012, p. 30), did correspond with the actual results. Also, the variation of the same concept, strategic action fields, by Fligstein and McAdam (2012) did correspond with the findings. Regarding Veikkausliiga, the struggle’s multilevel nature was explicitly addressed by the respondents. There are multiple micro-level
interactions and relationship between collective actors and individuals, such as the
relationships between the governing body of Veikkausliiga and the respective clubs in
Veikkausliiga.

Additionally, the interesting and peculiar relationships, such as, between Veikkausliiga
Ry and Finnish FA or UEFA/FIFA with Finnish FA are a great example of those collective
actors that operate at the mezzo-level. Subsequently, even wider context could be
described as mezzo/macro level, where professional sports is already put to the same
basket as other culture forms, such as music and art. There, a clear evidence of this type
of field can be elucidated in the form of relationships among Veikkaus Oy, Ministry of
Culture and Education, and the sponsoring partnership targets (sports, cultural events,
art). Finally, the pure macro-level field would then materialize when Veikkausliiga is
being put on global framework as one professional league among tens of other, which all
are available to consumers because of digitalization and internet.

Regarding the intrinsic concept of Bourdieu (Benson, 1999), each of these fields are then
either heteronomous (structured around economic capital) or autonomous (structured
around cultural capital). The results indicate that the commercialization of Veikkausliiga
started almost a quarter ago have resulted in heteronomous field structures across the
different levels, as throughout the discussions with respondents, the economic capital at
the centre of discussions. Interpreting Veikkausliiga and its clubs with field-theoretical
perspective and using capital theory, Veikkausliiga and its players are still fighting to
reach same level cultural capital as their European counterparts, so that the clubs,
players, and other key stakeholders could transform their cultural capital into significant
amount of economic capital.

Interestingly, the less frequently applied capital concepts of social and symbolic capitals
(Benson, 2006; English, 2016) were very visible in the grounded theory model and
empirical results. The social capital can be seen a closely related concept to the
commercial partnerships between the clubs and companies. It seems that, the social
capital a club can offer to the companies, can help them to attract more lucrative
partnerships with companies. The symbolic capital, on the other hand, is remarkably
reminiscent with the central phenomenon’s key concept. Because supporters and a large
audience act as the transmitting stakeholder regarding the different capitals related to
professional football, the symbolic capital can be seen something earned from the public
audience. According to the grounded theory model, the symbolic capital gained from a
large audience can eventually be transformed directly to economic capital although the
fundamental problem lies there that symbolic capital can only be achieved by succeeding on international level.

Subsequently, the objective of field-theoretical approach was argued to be the understanding of the pivotal power-relations, habitus, and those systems of dispositions within the fields governed by the type of capital the agents/institutions possess (Grenfell, 2012). Bourdieu and most of the field-theoretical researchers consider habitus as something pertaining to individuals. Although the Kabylia- example about habitus, doxa, and illusio (Grenfell, 2012) is difficult to reflect with the football league’s struggle depicting grounded theory model presented earlier, they are useful concepts for reflections. For example, doxa, is something that takes a different form regarding the field level.

Within the Finnish football field (football family), there is rather orthodoxic situation regarding the habitus of Veikkausliiga, but as soon as the level is elevated to the higher floors of mezzo and macro, there is more heterodoxic perspective on how things should work in practice within professional sports. Especially the symbolic value is interpreted in more heterodoxic way when moving to broader fields. Nevertheless, within professional sports and entertainment business, in overall, the fields are orthodoxic as per the results, meaning that the stakeholders involved act by the rules and by the format of interest, illusio.

To complement the central concepts by Bourdieu, it is meaningful to reflect the results of this thesis also with the similar field-theoretical contributions provided by Fligstein and McAdam (2012), King (2015), King and Walker (2014), and Kitchin and Howe (2013). Especially the idea of unclear boundaries between different level strategic action fields was something evident in the results, as for example Veikkausliiga does operate only domestically in many aspects, but is also a popular betting object abroad. Moreover, King and Walker (2014) acknowledged the impact by non-deliberately acting collective actors, which was evident in the grounded theory model when for example Police authorities are by no means willing to hinder development of Veikkausliiga, but are forced to do so if negative side effects are getting uncontrollable.

Additionally, the concept of social movements and collective actors’ capability to resonate those is something that resemble to findings of empirical work. This is closely related to the concept of symbolic capital by Bourdieu (English, 2016), where individual or organization could be seen struggling for acknowledgement, appreciation, status, and
recognition. The struggle for such symbolic capital forms was one of the most distinct findings emerging from the qualitative data analysed. Although practice theory by Bourdieu (Grenfell, 2012; Bourdieu, 1977) was not originally designed for collective actor level (Fligstein and McAdam, 2012), most of its key concepts of it has a great resonance with the results discovered in this grounded theory research. The same was realized by Kitchin and Howe (2013), who were referenced in literature review to connect the logic of field-theoretical perspective with sport management research. However, they suggested to adopt more longitudinal, critical, and ethnographic approach. Regardless of the methods they suggested, the grounded theory approach here helped to develop the understanding of organizational habitus and to advance the relational use of Bourdieu’s key concepts in sports management research.

5.2 Conclusions

The aim of this thesis was twofold. The top priority was to investigate how exactly does a professional football league, Veikkausliiga and its clubs, struggle for their position in broader field of professional sports and entertainment field? In more exactly, this thesis aimed to answer the following research questions: RQ1: What are the fundamental challenges pertaining to the struggle of Veikkausliiga and its clubs? RQ2: Who are the meaningful stakeholders for Veikkausliiga Ry and its clubs and how do they engage in shaping the field dynamics? RQ3: What are the outcomes from the realized practices to respond to the struggle of Veikkausliiga? RQ4: How are these practices and outcomes impacted over time?

Regarding the first research question, the fundamental challenges of professional football league and its clubs are multidimensional by the nature (Table 7, p. 83). Some of the challenges are a result of both internal and external factors, such as the lack of success at the international level, where the challenge is amplified the ever-increasing competition in global football. The reason why lack of international level success is such a big issue is that it seems that only international level success can give credibility, accreditation, and legitimacy for professional football in Finland (Table 7, p. 83). Those elements are required from not only public audience, but also key stakeholders, such as media, commercial partners, and authorities. The suggested rationale is verified by the attractiveness and spectator figures of Veikkausliiga in comparison to ice hockey, where Finland has been successful at international level.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Summarized answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What are the fundamental challenges pertaining to the struggle of Veikkausliiga and its clubs?</td>
<td>International level success – clubs and national team. 2. Implementation of joint strategies among the football family 3. Cooperation models with media partner(s). 4. Ability to develop long-term and large-scale commercial partnerships with businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Who are the meaningful stakeholders for Veikkausliiga Ry and its clubs and how do they engage in shaping the field dynamics?</td>
<td>Public audience (fans, subscribers, citizens), Journalistic media, Media Partner, Commercial partners, Finnish Football Association, UEFA &amp; FIFA (International Governing Bodies), Political Organs (Ministry of Education and Culture, Municipalities), Footballers and Players Association. These abovementioned stakeholders are shaping the field dynamics by giving accreditation and legitimization to Veikkausliiga and its clubs, by making decisions that are impacting to overall financial position of Veikkausliiga and its clubs, and by collaborating with Veikkausliiga and its clubs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>What are the outcomes from the realized practices to respond to the struggle of Veikkausliiga?</td>
<td>Because of the commercialization, the traditional business rules are deeply rooted in professional football today. Subsequently, resulting from the impactful status of professional sports and the money involved, there are a variety of different personal interests and politicking pertaining to Veikkausliiga.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>How are these practices and outcomes impacted over time?</td>
<td>The practices and outcomes are impacted over time by the shifts in accreditation, credibility, and legitimacy of Veikkausliiga, which are heavily impacted by the international level success achieved (or the lack of it). The international level success is driven by financial resources and effective collaborations with the key stakeholders.</td>
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Table 7 Summary of the answers to research questions

Another intrinsic challenge seems to be the lack of or the poor implementation of joint strategies among the football family (Table 7). This challenge is depicted by the historical disputes between the powerful organizations involved in professional football. Another dimension of this challenge is the unsuccessful implementation of unified strategies within the participating club organizations. Without consistent and effective joint efforts for building the credibility of Veikkausliiga, there is a high risk of getting stuck to the vicious circle. Perhaps, the most important and most powerful collaboration a football league can have is the one with its media partner. Not only does the empirical data speak for this, but also the literature review (Lefever, 2012; Boyle and Haynes, 2009). It seems that a strategic partnership is one of the most promising tool to gain credibility, accreditation, and legitimacy from other stakeholders. Therefore, it can be speculated
that perhaps the inconsistency with media partners have kept Veikkausliiga in the vicious circle. Another fundamental issue has been the poor ability to create long-standing mutual value-creating partnerships with commercial partners. The direct consequence of this is the financial instability and short-sighted strategy making (e.g. budgeting).

Results for research question two reveal no major surprises, as the stakeholders involved in Veikkausliiga follow closely those suggested by Söderman and Dolles (2015) in existing literature (Table 7, p. 83). However, perhaps due to the environment and special characteristics of Veikkausliiga, some of the stakeholders were not given as strong emphasis as did the empirical model suggest. For instance, the role of governing bodies in football seemed to be very powerful in the Veikkausliiga case. As the results concluded already, money is the guiding force in modern football. Therefore, it is logical to assume that the powerful position in relation to Veikkausliiga is a direct result of the monetary subsidies flowing from governing bodies all the way to Veikkausliiga clubs. Subsequently, the elevated role allows these collective actors to steer the operations of Veikkausliiga in greater extent, than perhaps in countries were the leagues are financially more independent.

Perhaps, the most interesting and novel conclusions regarding how the meaningful stakeholders engage in shaping the field dynamics are those of the role played by the mainstream media (sports news, printed media, www-news) and political organs. Yleisradio, the state-owned media company, is the biggest and most influential media house in Finland (Finnpanel, 2017). The results show that getting exposure and visibility from such media channels is vital for sports. Although no quantitative analysis was conducted to analyse the effect of mainstream media, the literature review (Lefever, 2012; Boyle and Haynes, 2009) supports this conclusion. Additionally, when looking at the selection of sports available in free-to-air television or the news headlines, one can see which sports are getting media exposure. As Yleurheilu’s chief (2017) declares that attractiveness is the main determinant regarding the content shown at state-owned media, it amplifies the vicious circle effect within less-attractive sports, such as football. As literature review suggested (Boyle and Haynes, 2009), it is no secret that media has the power to increase the attractiveness of a sport, thus the credibility and legitimacy among other stakeholders.

The same effect is seen with political organs, although the effect seems to be less powerful. The funds channelled to grass-roots level at any sport, should eventually contribute to the success at professional level. The more direct impact caused by political
organs is the funds directed to improve conditions within a sport. These political organs are both municipality and city governments, as well as the ministry of education and sports. Naturally, most of these funds are directed to grass-roots level so that as many as possible citizens can benefit, but in certain cases the beneficiary is also the professional sports. Good examples of these are the aids directed to the construction of new multipurpose hall in Tampere and reconstruction of Hietalahti Stadium in Vaasa. The multipurpose hall in Tampere will receive multi-million aid from ministry and city government and Hietalahti Stadion in Vaasa received already 750,000 € from ministry of Education and Sports (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017b).

Regarding the third research question, the conclusions suggest that the realized practices of the struggle force Veikkausliiga and its clubs to compromise their intentions with a variety of stakeholders. However, it is important to note that there is a blurred line between compromising one’s interest and working in strategic alliance. For example, the potentially agreed compromises with Finnish FA and media partner will most probably contribute to the success of Veikkausliiga in longer perspective. For example, agreeing with Finnish FA’s homegrown rules (to comply with restrictions regarding Finland-grown players used in every match), Veikkausliiga can be expected to enjoy better self-grown players in future, resulting in increased valuation of player trade. Additionally, by creating attractive pay-tv package for consumers by working for the mutual interest with Iltasanomat, Veikkausliiga can expect higher future revenues from the co-operation. Historically and currently however, the praxis has been that commercial partnerships are relatively small and short in time, although the partnerships with Finnish FA, Iltasanomat (IS Extra), and Veikkaus Oy are on more strategic level than some decades ago. The main reason for the behaviour of the commercial partners and media stakeholders is the prevalent business atmosphere, where economic capital is guiding force for the practices and praxis at the field.

Finally, as suggested in the previous paragraphs, a way to escape the vicious circle of professional football lies in effective and firm collaborations within internal and external stakeholders. Success at international level requires substantial financial resources, which are scarce, and it seems that only gradual progress financially is plausible for a professional football league. The same goes with international level success, although if there would be a sudden international success, the financial effects would not actualize immediately, but over time. For instance, some decades ago, ice hockey a saw gradual
improvement in international level success and managed to seize the most popular sport’s title from cross country skiing and track and field.

The example of ice hockey shows that there is room for ball games in the hearts of Finnish citizens. Therefore, entering to virtuous circle is and should be the main goal of any professional league, such as Veikkausliiga, as only then the multidimensional benefits can realize. Nevertheless, being absorbed by the virtuous or the vicious circle is not a straightforward process. In fact, it is a result from the combination of all the categories presented earlier. All these categories are acting on behalf of themselves and interacting with others to seek overall gains for themselves. The public audience will act as adhesive power that connects all stakeholders together. The peculiarity lies exactly here, because although everything is dependent on the public audience, the public audience can and will be influenced by the interactions and actions of all stakeholders involved. Therefore, the difficult task of practitioners within professional sports remains there, and the quest to solve the causality dilemma continues in the future as well.

5.3 Implications from the results and the grounded theory model

This subchapter will present the implications in both theoretical and managerial terms. The main theoretical contributions are the grounded theory model explaining the chicken or the egg-type of causality dilemma related in professional football and its intrinsic vicious and virtuous circle scenarios resulting from the overall grounded theory models. The managerial implications will support the decision making and strategy processes of the practitioners involved in professional sports or more specifically, in professional football. The managerial implications yield benefits for both internal stakeholders of Veikkausliiga and the surrounding external stakeholders.

5.3.1 Theoretical contributions

The main theoretical contribution of this grounded theory thesis is related to the in-depth account of what Kitchin and Howe (2013, p. 132) were after: “Empirical data are required to enhance our understanding of how dominant stakeholders in sport are able reproduce certain values while maintaining the perceived status quo over the beneficiaries of public investment in sport”. The theoretical contribution is twofold: (1) the results and the grounded theory approach advance the sport management research by providing empirically grounded model of the distinguished stakeholders, their actions and interactions, and the related praxes within and across different field levels. Secondly
the results and grounded theory model further develop the area of football management literature, by providing empirically grounded model that can be, with certain adaptations, reproduced in different settings.

In overall, the ambitious objective to provide a wider perspective of the struggle of professional sports league has resulted in broadened acumen in professional sport leagues management, that the existing literature, which often focused on only one specific aspect related to professional sport leagues, such as marketing, media contract, player trade, strategic management, or institutionalization. Therefore, the theoretical framework is the principal theoretical contribution of this thesis, which aims to provide conceptual hypothesis applicable for any relevant time, place, and people with ascendant fit (Glaser, 2002).

Hence, I end the theoretical contributions by proposing the following theoretical model (Figure 10, p. 89) that is extended from the earlier proposed grounded theory model (Figure 9, p. 74) and explains the dynamics of the causality dilemma faced by middle- and small-sized professional football leagues. This extension of the grounded theory model aims to clearly indicate the theoretical contributions of the grounded theory model, thus the theoretical framework to end with. Therefore, the five categories pertaining to the struggle of professional football league and its clubs will be reviewed in accordance to their dimensions to apply the model for any small- and medium-sized professional football league and the respective clubs (Table 8, p. 88). These five categories will be reviewed in terms of their dimensions and the interlinks between them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grounded theory model's categories pertaining to the central phenomenon</th>
<th>Intrinsic challenges restraining the progress of professional football league.</th>
<th>Operational environment of the professional football league.</th>
<th>Strategies and action plans of the football league and surrounding stakeholders in response to the central phenomenon.</th>
<th>Characteristics of a football league as sports entertainment product.</th>
<th>Actualized practices pertaining to the central phenomenon of professional football league's struggle for legitimacy, credibility, and progress.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dimension s of categories for the theoretical framework</td>
<td>1. <em>Internal vs external</em></td>
<td>1. <em>Field-level (micro, mezzo, macro)</em></td>
<td>1. <em>Possibility to influence (external, internal, or joint actions)</em></td>
<td>1. <em>Identity and accreditati on</em></td>
<td>1. <em>Type of capitals as driving force</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. <em>Product or action-based</em></td>
<td>2. <em>Demographics (population,</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. <em>Features within the different field-levels</em></td>
<td>2. <em>Type of relationships within</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8 Dimensions and interlinks of the categories within the grounded theory model

The dimensions of intrinsic challenges are twofold: the (1) internal challenges vs the (2) external challenges and the type of challenge, whether the challenge is product centric (the quality of football) or action based (strategies). For instance, the external challenge to keep up with the highly competitive nature of international football is something abstract that applies to every context (Table 8). Additionally, the ability to create long-term and large-scale collaborations with media partners and other commercial partners is something that seems to apply regardless the operational environment (large or big leagues). Furthermore, the external challenge of highly competitive nature of international football can be extended to the “operational environment category”, within the macro level dimension of operational environment (or strategic action fields). Other operational dimensions are dealing with the type of demographics in the country of the league and the sport culture prevailing in that specific country (Table 8).

Consequently, the strategies, actions, and interactions have three dimensions, which are based on who is involved in the action or strategy. Regarding the characteristics of a professional football league and its clubs, the identity and accreditation is an important dimension, because both identity and accreditation are firmly grounded on the other dimension of features of a professional football league. Finally, the actualized practices pertaining to central phenomenon are twofold in their dimensions: 1. the type of capital will elaborate the driving force within field, whether a pursuit for social well-being or for maximizing profits and 2. type of relationships between the collective actors in multiple field-levels (Table 8).

The following model (Figure 10, p. 89) is useful in explaining the causality dilemma for smaller football leagues and their clubs. Regardless, the conclusive impacts to the causality dilemma are put in between brackets, as the conjecture is that the degree how much they have an impact may vary significantly between the professional football leagues. The conclusive impacts and the concepts of vicious and virtuous circles are evident and confirmed elsewhere also in operational environments of larger professional football leagues (Deloitte, 2016).
Figure 10 Theoretical model explicating the causality dilemma pertaining to professional football leagues and their clubs
The conclusive impacts steering the professional football league are resulting from the core categories and their respective dimensions explained above (Table 8, p. 88). As the model (Figure 10, p. 89) explicates, the first four core categories interact with each other and with the central phenomenon, which ultimately results to the actualized practices at different fields pertaining to the central phenomenon. Consequently, after the conclusive impact to the causality dilemma, the achieved success and financial resources will again have an impact to the core categories, thus the process is iterative over time.

Explanations of the dimensions (Table 8, p. 88) in previous page build up the theoretical model (Figure 10, p. 89), which supports the main category explicating the extant causality dilemma pertaining to professional football leagues of any type. As the theoretical model explains, a professional football league typically falls into vicious circle or achieves the virtuous circle state. By looking up to the main categories and their dimensions, further research can advance similar organizational studies within sports and similar institutions by refining the above theoretical model in focused qualitative and quantitative measures.

5.3.2 Managerial contributions

The managerial contributions of this thesis will remain moderate for the internal stakeholders of Veikkausliiga and its clubs, but in overall, the contributions for professional football and professional sports practitioners and surrounding stakeholders are notable. Although those stakeholders interviewed for this thesis might not learn a great deal of new, they will get an overall clarification of their everyday struggle provided by an external researcher. Additionally, as the central category of this grounded theory model suggests for a causality dilemma regarding international level success and financial resources, they will get a remission from the results of this thesis. Third, it will give epitomes of the business problems faced by the internal and external stakeholders of professional football leagues that can be reflected on in future strategy making and operational processes. Additionally, the results and the model should have international significance, as professional football is a globalized phenomenon. However, the managers must take the local environment into consideration to adapt the model in new context.

Furthermore, other professional sports are able apply the theoretical framework developed in their quests to improve their positions in wider sport entertainment fields. These sports institutions can use the suggested framework for analyzing their position to
develop more effective strategies to overcome the struggles evident in their everyday work. In conclusion, this thesis’s results and theoretical model can help several types of collective actors to better understand their operations in increasingly complex global world we live in.

5.4 Limitations

As was explained in the introduction and in the methodology section, this research followed the principles of grounded theory and case study research design. The limitations of this master thesis are twofold. First, there are limitations pertaining to the study design and research approach. The inquiry aim of taken constructivist stance includes understanding and reconstruction of the studied phenomena, by interpreting individual reconstructions of reality. Furthermore, chosen paradigm relied strongly on the reconstruction of multiple voices, including the researcher’s own voice and other participants’ voices. (Guba and Lincoln, 1994)

Therefore, one clear limitation of this study is the reliance on inquirer’s and participants’ interpretations of the socially constructed phenomena. However, the author intended to mitigate the limitation by applying data triangulation whenever it was possible during the analytic and writing processes. Additionally, the author aimed for rigour when collecting and coding data, to escape the personal bias, resulting from lifetime hobby and interest towards football. Regardless of these efforts, it must be admitted that personal preconceives have potentially impacted the data collection and interpretation of data. Also, the results are limited in that sense, that the research approach relies on the assumption that meaningful individuals representing organizations are knowledgeable actors and being honest with their answers.

Regarding the potential mitigation of the previous, one part of the limitation is the lack of respondent triangulation from each stakeholder group. For example, including several interviews from each stakeholder group would have increased the credibility and confirmability of the results. Unfortunately, such a method for addressing this limitation would have required extending the data collection stage from 60 days to closer a year. The respondents of this thesis are distributed all over Finland and have often irregular schedules due to the nature of the football business. Therefore, the limited time and financial resources resulted in limited sample which decreases credibility and confirmability of the study.
Second, the case study structure and data collection from only one phenomenon limits the generalizability of the results and grounded theory model presented. Furthermore, the constructivist grounded theories, such as this thesis, are: “contextually situated in time, place, culture, and situation [...] seeing facts and values as linked.” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131). Therefore, the impact of the results is limited to the similar contexts in terms of characteristics and environments as was the case in this empirical research on Veikkausliiga’s and its clubs’ struggle for their position in wider sport entertainment field. Consequently, the aim of this thesis was to produce an analytical generalization grounded in empirical data.

Finally, as was already suggested by the literature review (Kitchin and Howe, 2013), a longitudinal and ethnographic approach would have been preferential approach for studying professional sports league wider scope. Unfortunately, just as was the case with respondent triangulation, the limitation is result from restrained resources. However, the longitudinal scope issue was mitigated by including historical perspective to the interview guides, thus to the analysis of the struggle. Subsequently, it would have been interesting and fruitful for gaining access to the meeting rooms of the studied organizations however this was not possible due to the confidentiality issues. For instance, one respondent for this thesis told an interesting story about behind the scenes events, which was omitted because of the will of respondent. On a general level, however, this story could be used for the grounded-theory model by taking the essentials out of it. Basically, the story was about internal politicking within one of the respondent groups of this thesis, which gives an account of how such disputes may hinder the development as the key actors are not able to reach full consensus.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

As this thesis explored professional football with a rather novel approach and with a holistic way, the avenues for further research are many. Naturally, the most interesting suggestions for further research would be to investigate how those domestic football leagues have reached their position, which are in the virtuous circle, such as English premier league (Deloitte, 2016). On the contrary, a multiple case study with purposeful sampling would also make sense for those smaller leagues in the shadows of other sports and globally followed domestic leagues of English premier league, Spanish LaLiga, and German Bundesliga.
Subsequently, the themes, categories, and grounded theory presented in this thesis could be tested quantitatively with a larger global sample of professional ball game leagues. For instance, it would extremely valuable to investigate the correlation of years partnered with the same media (broadcasting) partner and trend regarding subscribers or attractiveness of the sport. On the other hand, a great research area could be to investigate qualitatively how the much needed long-term and mutual gains-producing commercial partnerships are evolved.

Finally, one of great personal interest to the author would be to explore the correlation between the attractiveness of a sport (domestic level) and the international success achieved in this sport. This was one of the key concepts in the grounded theory model presented, thus a quantitative analysis with a large global sample would provide answers whether it is a global phenomenon or just intrinsic for Finnish people.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1  INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR VEIKKAUSLIIGA MANAGEMENT

Interview guide – Veikkausliiga Ry – “Exploring the struggle of professional football league and its clubs in wider sport entertainment field”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant and date</th>
<th>Veikkausliiga Ry, CEO and Marketing director 8.2.2017 at 15.00 at Sonera Stadium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timekeeper and interviewer</td>
<td>Aimo Rantanen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Welcoming and introductions:
- Wish participants welcomed for research and thank them for participating.
- Confirm the available time.
- Tell the purpose of the interview. Explain why they are invited for interview.
- (A short small talk if needed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Sub theme</th>
<th>Example questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal background</td>
<td>1) Current role</td>
<td>1) Tell more about your role at Veikkausliiga?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Short description of career</td>
<td>2) How did you end up here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy(Veikkausliiga)</td>
<td>3) Old Strategy 2009,</td>
<td>3) Thoughts about the old strategy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) New Strategy 2017</td>
<td>4) How successful?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) Strategy dimensions</td>
<td>5) Expectations/Differences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veikkausliiga and its history: Position in Finnish sports field</td>
<td>6) SWOT of Veikkausliiga</td>
<td>6) The future of Veikkausliiga?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7) Position in Finland</td>
<td>7) SWOT elements?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8) Position in larger entertainment field</td>
<td>8) In comparison to other leagues?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9) Veikkausliiga's development</td>
<td>9) Progress?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10) Significance of Veikkausliiga</td>
<td>10) Level of professionalism?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaningful stakeholders. Roles and behavior of these.</td>
<td>11) The most meaningful stakeholders within the field.</td>
<td>11) Who are the meaningful stakeholders?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12) Broader environment – other industries</td>
<td>12) Which other ones are close to and pertain to Veikkausliiga?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13) Roles and habitus</td>
<td>13) How do you describe their role and participation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14) Background for current situation</td>
<td>14) Why are the roles in this way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitals in sports business – economic, cultural, social</td>
<td>15) Opinion about the stakes and capitals that are guiding forces at the field</td>
<td>15) Describe the stakes involved within stakeholders? Who competes for what?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- **Specific stakes in professional sports**

  16) In Finland
  17) In Global, broader context

  16) *How do you assess the stakes in Finland?*
  17) *How about in broader international context?*

**Wrap up**

  18) *Something I forgot*
  19) *Who next*

  18) *Have I forgotten something? Something you want to add?*
  19) *Who should I consult next?*

**Closing**

- Thank the participant for their time.
- Ask the participants if they wish to see the transcriptions and validate what they’ve said.
## APPENDIX 2  INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SANOMA REPRESENTATIVE

Interview guide – Media partner - “Exploring the struggle of professional football league and its clubs in wider sport entertainment field”

### Informant and date

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant and date</th>
<th>Head of Digital Consumer Products, Iltasanomat (Sanoma Media) 14.2.2017 14.00 at Sanomatalo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Timekeeper and interviewer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timekeeper and interviewer</th>
<th>Aimo Rantanen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Welcoming and introductions:
- Wish participants welcomed for research and thank them for participating.
- Confirm the available time.
- Tell the purpose of the interview. Explain why they are invited for interview.
- (A short small talk if needed)

### Main theme | Sub theme | Example questions
--- | --- | ---
Personal background | 1. Current role | 1) Tell more about your role?
Strategic approach of Digital Consumer Products at Iltasanomat | 2. Iltasanomat and ISTV Extra strategy with sports | 2) How do you describe the approach of Sanoma to digitalization?
Strategic approach of Veikkausliiga | 3. Strategy from media partner's perspective | 3) How do you think Veikkausliiga succeeded in their strategy (old)?
Professional sports, media, and meaningful stakeholders involved | 8. From media partner’s perspective relating to football 9. In broader perspective 10. Relationships and roles 11. Background for current situation | 8) Who are the meaningful stakeholder from your perspective? 9) What are the other industries who are indirectly involved?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakes involved and capitals possessed</th>
<th>12. Professional sports and stakeholders involved</th>
<th>12) What are the stakes of the game? Capitals pursued? Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actualized practices regarding relationships and power</td>
<td>13. Finland</td>
<td>13) How this works in practice in Finland?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Broader sport entertainment field</td>
<td>14) How about in larger context?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. Recent years shifts</td>
<td>15) How have the situation evolved recently?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrap up</td>
<td>16. Something I forgot</td>
<td>16) Have I forgotten something?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17. Who next</td>
<td>Something you want to add?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17) Who should I consult next?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Closing**

- Thank the participant for their time.
- Ask the participants if they wish to see the transcriptions and validate what they've said.
APPENDIX 3  INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FINNISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

Interview guide - Finnish FA - “Exploring the struggle of professional football league and its clubs in wider sport entertainment field”

Informant and date | General Secretary, Finnish FA, 28.2.2017 13.00 at Sonera Stadium.
Timekeeper and interviewer | Aimo Rantanen

Welcoming and introductions:
- Wish participants welcomed for research and thank them for participating.
- Confirm the available time.
- Tell the purpose of the interview. Explain why they are invited for interview.
- (A short small talk if needed)

Main theme | Sub theme | Example questions
--- | --- | ---
**Background** | 1. Current role | 1) *Tell me more about your current role and background?*
**Finnish FA Strategy 2016-2020** | 2. “We are football country” | 2) *In what exact terms?*
| 3. Focus areas of strategy 2020 – five key elements and resulting targets | 3) *Concrete actions?*  
| | Most important actions and projects?  
| | Biggest caveats along the way?*
**Veikkausliiga old and new strategy** | 4. Veikkausliiga’s old strategy | 4) *How did you think about it?*
| 5. Co-operation of FFA and Veikkausliiga | 5) *Describe your co-operation model?*
| 6. Co-operation regarding new strategy Veikkausliiga | 6) *How were you involved in strategizing work of Veikkausliiga?*
| 7. Veikkausliiga’s New strategy | 7) *What you think about the new strategy of Veikkausliiga?*
| 8. Multidimensional nature of football product | 8) *What are the dimensions of football as commercial product?*
**Current state of Veikkausliiga and its history: Position in Finland and its progress** | 9. Professional football’s position | 9) *How do you see the current position of Veikkausliiga in Finland?*
| 10. Broader context | 10) *How about in the larger entertainment field and arena of global football?*
| 11. Position as entertainment product | 11) How about as a one among many leisure activities? |
| 12. Short history of Veikkausliiga | 12) How do you think Veikkausliiga have developed over time? |
| 13. Slogan of “Finland into a football society” | 13) What do you think about that slogan repeated by the fans and media? |

### Professional sports and meaningful stakeholders: relationships

| 14. Meaningful stakeholders for Veikkausliiga | 14) Who are the meaningful stakeholders? |
| 15. Power-relationships and roles | 15) How do you describe the relationships between Veikkausliiga and among stakeholders? |
| 16. Background for current situation | 16) Why are the relationships that kind? |

### Why stakeholders are involved – capitals pursued

| 17. Professional sports - motives | 17) Why are these stakeholders involved in professional football? |
| 18. Media use the word “ilmioittaminen” – “growing a phenomenon” | 18) What you think media means with “growing a phenomenon”? |
| 19. “Business case” | 19) What do you think media means by this? |

### Realized practices over time

| 20. Finland | 20) How are these practices in Finland? |
| 21. Broader context | 21) And how about in larger context, global? |
| 22. Past few years | 22) How has it evolved recently? |

### Wrap up

| 23. Something I forgot | 23) Have I forgotten something? Something you want to add? |
| 24. Who next | 24) Who should I consult next? |

### Closing

- Thank the participant for their time.
- Ask the participants if they wish to see the transcriptions and validate what they’ve said.
APPENDIX 4 INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR ILTASANOMAT SPORTS NEWSROOM

Interview guide – media partner’s news press – “Exploring the struggle of professional football league and its clubs in wider sport entertainment field”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant and date</th>
<th>Manager of Sports newsroom at Iltasanomat, Iltasanomat, 9.3.2017 13.00 at Sanomatalo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timekeeper and interviewer</td>
<td>Aimo Rantanen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Welcoming and introductions:
- Wish participants welcomed for research and thank them for participating.
- Confirm the available time.
- Tell the purpose of the interview. Explain why they are invited for interview.
- (A short small talk if needed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Sub theme</th>
<th>Example questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1. Current role</td>
<td>1) Tell me a bit about your role at Iltasanomat?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports newsroom and Sanoma Conglomerate operations</td>
<td>2. Sanoma operations, including Iltasanomat</td>
<td>2) What kind of co-operation models exist between the departments?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Stakeholders involved

| 10. From sports newsroom perspective, the meaningful stakeholders |
| 11. Relationships with Veikkausliiga and among the stakeholders |
| 12. Dependencies and interdependencies |

- **10)** Who are those meaningful stakeholders?
- **11)** What kind of relationships do you have as a sports newsroom to these stakeholders?
- **12)** What kind of dependencies or interdependencies there exist?

### Actualized practices among the stakeholders

| 13. Power-relationships and roles |
| 14. Recent shifts |

- **13)** How do these relationships appear to your perspective?
- **14)** Has there been any changes recently?

### Wrap up

| 15. Something I forgot |
| 16. Who next |

- **15)** Have I forgotten something?
  - Something you want to add?
- **16)** Who should I consult next?

### Closing

- Thank the participant for their time.
- Ask the participants if they wish to see the transcriptions and validate what they've said.
APPENDIX 5  INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR VEIKKAUS OY

Interview guide – Veikkaus Oy - “Exploring the struggle of professional football league and its clubs in wider sport entertainment field”

Informant and date: Relationship Manager, Veikkaus Oy, 15.3.2017 09.00 at Veikkaus HQ Espoo

Timekeeper and interviewer: Aimo Rantanen

Welcoming and introductions:
- Wish participants welcomed for research and thank them for participating.
- Confirm the available time.
- Tell the purpose of the interview. Explain why they are invited for interview.
- (A short small talk if needed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Sub theme</th>
<th>Example questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1. Current role</td>
<td>1) Tell me a bit about your role at Veikkaus Oy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veikkaus Oy operations, co-operations, and Veikkausliiga collaboratio n</td>
<td>2. Purpose of Veikkaus Oy</td>
<td>2) How does Veikkaus Oy operate and how are the profits shared for Finnish society?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Objectives of Veikkaus sponsorships</td>
<td>3) Tell me a bit about the objectives of the sponsorship co-operations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Type of sponsorships</td>
<td>4) What type of sponsorships you have and how many?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Veikkausliiga as partner</td>
<td>5) Tell me a bit more about the sponsorship you have with Veikkausliiga?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veikkausliiga as partner</td>
<td>6. Veikkausliiga compared to other sports</td>
<td>6) What kind of partner is Veikkausliiga for sponsorships?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Background for the co-operation</td>
<td>7) Why exactly football has remained as one of the main partners so long? And such a strong brand co-operation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Future</td>
<td>8) How do you see the future of this co-operation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veikkausliiga’s situation</td>
<td>9. Position of Veikkausliiga</td>
<td>9) What kind of position Veikkausliiga holds in Finland? How about in broader environment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Operational environment of Veikkausliiga</td>
<td>10) What do you think about the operational environment where Veikkausliiga operates?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Derby games and supporter culture</td>
<td>11) What do you think about the derby games and supporter culture there?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>The challenges Veikkausliiga have</td>
<td>12) What are the main challenges of Veikkausliiga in your opinion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Role of Veikkaus in Veikkausliiga’s future development</td>
<td>13) What are the main implications of Veikkaus co-operation to the development? What is the role of Veikkaus in the future?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholders involved with Veikkausliiga</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Stakeholders</td>
<td>14) What are the meaningful stakeholders in regards Veikkausliiga co-operation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. Relationships</td>
<td>15) What kind of relationships Veikkaus have with them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. Dependencies/Interdependencies</td>
<td>16) What kind dependencies or interdependencies there are?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrap up</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>17. Something I forgot</td>
<td>17) Have I forgotten something? Something you want to add?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18. Who next</td>
<td>18) Who should I consult next?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Closing**
- Thank the participant for their time.
- Ask the participants if they wish to see the transcriptions and validate what they’ve said.
## APPENDIX 6  INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LOCAL POLICE DEPARTMENT

Interview guide – Police department of Helsinki - “Exploring the struggle of professional football league and its clubs in wider sport entertainment field”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant and date</th>
<th>Chief Lieutenant, Emergency and surveillance department director, Helsinki Police Department, 24.3.2017 10.00 Pasilan Poliisitalo 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timekeeper and interviewer</td>
<td>Aimo Rantanen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Welcoming and introductions:
- Wish participants welcomed for research and thank them for participating.
- Confirm the available time.
- Tell the purpose of the interview. Explain why they are invited for interview.
- (A short small talk if needed)

### Main theme | Sub theme | Example questions
--- | --- | ---
**Introduction** | 1. Current role | 1) Tell me about your current role at Police department of Helsinki? How related to Veikkausliiga?

**Veikkausliiga, supporter culture, and its side effects** | 2. Football, supporter culture, side effects | 2) What do you think about the supporter culture and its side effects?
3. Veikkausliiga management | 3) How have Veikkausliiga and its clubs reacted to the phenomenon?
4. Prevention in general | 4) In what way Police and Veikkausliiga takes preventive measures on this, in general?
5. Match day | 5) And how about regarding individual matches?

**Operational environment of Veikkausliiga** | 6. Stakeholders regarding side effects | 6) Are there some other parties involved in addition to the supporter groups?

**Future** | 7. Future of side effects | 7) How do predict this will develop?
8. Escalation of the problem | 8) What if the problem keeps escalating?
9. Radical actions | 9) What are the extreme measures Police may use?

10. Optimal resolution | 10) What would be the optimal solution to the problem?
### Wrap up

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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</thead>
</table>
| 11. | Something I forgot  
| 12. | Who next  
| 11) | Have I forgotten something?  
|     | Something you want to add?  
| 12) | Who should I consult next?  

### Closing

- Thank the participant for their time.
- Ask the participants if they wish to see the transcriptions and validate what they've said.
**APPENDIX 7  INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR VEIKKAUSLIIGA CLUB – OWNER OF A CLUB**

Interview guide – Club owner - “Exploring the struggle of professional football league and its clubs in wider sport entertainment field”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant and date</th>
<th>Club owner, Former chairman of Veikkausliiga Ry 27.3.2017 15.00 Keskuskatu Helsinki</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timekeeper and interviewer</td>
<td>Aimo Rantanen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Welcoming and introductions:**
- Wish participants welcomed for research and thank them for participating.
- Confirm the available time.
- Tell the purpose of the interview. Explain why they are invited for interview.
- (A short small talk if needed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Sub theme</th>
<th>Example questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1. Current role</td>
<td>1) Could you elaborate your current role in Finnish football? Previous roles?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational environment for Veikkausliiga clubs</td>
<td>2. Finnish sports field 3. Global football</td>
<td>2) What kind of operational environment surrounds Veikkausliiga clubs? 3) What are the differences to the international setting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veikkausliiga and its clubs as products &amp; stakeholders involved</td>
<td>8. Veikkausliiga as product (and its clubs) 9. Stakeholders 10. Objectives of stakeholders</td>
<td>8) What kind of product is Veikkausliiga and its clubs to the stakeholders and customers? 9) What are the most important stakeholders? 10) How are the objectives of different stakeholders intertwined with each other?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veikkausliiga and its clubs strategy work</td>
<td>11. Strategies and actions</td>
<td>11) In your opinion, what are the strategies and actions that are most helpful in advancing the position of Veikkausliiga?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Actualized practices among stakeholders

<p>| | |</p>
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</thead>
</table>
| 13. Practices in operational environment | 13) *How do the relationships develop in practice? How is power exerted?*
| 14. Changes in dynamics | 14) *In what way, the dynamics could change over time? Any change at the moment?* |

### Closing
- Thank the participant for their time.
- Ask the participants if they wish to see the transcriptions and validate what they've said.
APPENDIX 8  INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PLAYERS ASSOCIATION

Interview guide – Players’ association - “Exploring the struggle of professional football league and its clubs in wider sport entertainment field”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant and date</th>
<th>Jalkapallon pelaajayhdistys, 29.3.2017 15.00 Scandic Paasi (Helsinki)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timekeeper and interviewer</td>
<td>Aimo Rantanen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Welcoming and introductions:**
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- Tell the purpose of the interview. Explain why they are invited for interview.
- (A short small talk if needed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Sub theme</th>
<th>Example questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1. Current role</td>
<td>1) Could tell your own story in Finnish football?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational environment of a professional footballer in Finland</td>
<td>2. Finnish sports field</td>
<td>2) What kind operational environment surrounds Finnish professional footballer?</td>
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<td>3. International football</td>
<td>3) And how about the same in international context?</td>
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<td>4. Background leading to current state</td>
<td>4) What are reasons to the current state and position of Finnish footballer?</td>
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<td>Improving the position of a player</td>
<td>5. Challenges with the position of footballer (history)</td>
<td>5) What have been the fundamental challenges that JPY have aimed to overcome?</td>
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<td>6. Current</td>
<td>6) What the most pressing issues right now?</td>
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<td>7. Measures and actions taken by players’ association</td>
<td>7) How JPY (Players’ association) aims to influence to the improved position of Finnish footballer?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Players’ association and its stakeholders</td>
<td>8. Stakeholders</td>
<td>8) What are most meaningful stakeholders from your perspective?</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>stakeholders</strong></td>
<td>9. Players role in productizing Veikkausliiga</td>
<td>9) <em>In what way, the players contribute to the appreciation of Veikkausliiga?</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Practice</strong></td>
<td>10. Practices within the operational environment</td>
<td><strong>10) How does Players’ association practically speaking have an impact to Finnish football society?</strong></td>
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<td>11. Role of players’ association</td>
<td><strong>11) How influential it can be?</strong></td>
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<td>12. Changes in dynamics</td>
<td><strong>12) How could these current practices and dynamics evolve over time? How about at the moment?</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wrap up</strong></td>
<td>13. Something I forgot</td>
<td><strong>13) Have I forgotten something? Something you want to add?</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>14. Who next</td>
<td><strong>14) Who should I consult next?</strong></td>
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**Closing**
- Thank the participant for their time.
- Ask the participants if they wish to see the transcriptions and validate what they’ve said.
## APPENDIX 9  SUMMARY OF THE DIRECT CITATIONS REIFYING THE CATEGORIES AND MAIN THEMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main theme</th>
<th>Name of the category</th>
<th>Direct citations</th>
<th>Informant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic challenges restraining the progress of professional football league</td>
<td>Lack of success at the international level – clubs and national team</td>
<td>“The challenge here is... [sigh] our competitive level compared to European standards, to global standards. For sure there is room for improvement. In this country, everything will be measured how do you succeed internationally”</td>
<td>CEO of Veikkausliiga Ry</td>
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<td>Lack of or poor implementation of joint strategies among the football family</td>
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<td>“I that old guy, that I have followed ice hockey since the beginning of 1970s. I have seen the success story of this sport [ice hockey], so it is possible to get into the hearts of citizens, or at least occupy space in there. And of course, it is possible for football as well, but it will not happen in a short period [...] Seriously speaking, we [football in Finland] should start working in more professional way among football and be able to grow better players, so that we would get higher quality and better games to Veikkausliiga, although that is not the real fundamental problem, but the issue of lacking success internationally. World is globalized right now and as we already discussed about the international games, the day when “Huuhkajat” [Finnish national team] gets to a final tournament, then large masses [public audience] would realize that we are just as good as everyone else.”</td>
<td>Manager of Sports newsroom at Iltasanomat</td>
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<td>“The success in sport [football], only certain group of people are affected, but to larger audience it has no significant meaning yet” [success of Finnish football].</td>
<td>CEO of Veikkausliiga Ry</td>
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<td>“Making the strategy is extremely important for both [Finnish FA and Veikkausliiga]. And that there would be something we can reflect on all the time in our operations. And now that we both [Finnish FA and Veikkausliiga] have could do it [strategy], and we have been in dialogue during the process. Now they are verified, these objectives, and these measures are aligned. Now it feels that...on strategic level, we are going to the same direction. The strategies support each other and therefore decision making is easier. [...] Much easier to find consensus. Finally feels like we are there.”</td>
<td>General Secretary of Finnish Football Association</td>
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<td>Characteristics of a football league as sports entertainment product</td>
<td>Incoherent identity and low accreditation within the football family and across stakeholder groups</td>
<td>“Then, although we have a large number of hobbyist players [sigh]...how this entire football society is...a bit fragmented. Often junior players, other agents operate in their own ecosystems. They go to their own training, own games, tournaments, live in their own world, so that how could such national unification be reached.”</td>
<td>CEO of Veikkausliiga Ry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intrinsic challenges restraining the progress of professional football league</td>
<td>Loose and ineffective co-operation models with the key stakeholders</td>
<td>“Also, regarding the media contract and its utilization, it is also...if we look at the history, regarding the domestic football in Finland and the main league, it has been very unstable, bouncing from one media channel to another one. It has been quite fragmented and therefore it has been difficult to build on something.”</td>
<td>CEO of Veikkausliiga Ry</td>
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<td>Poor ability to develop long-term and large-scale commercial partnerships with businesses</td>
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<td>“There are many reasons for that [why Veikkausliiga is seen part of Iltasanomat consumer product portfolio], but one is that in Sweden the power of...and exactly the role of media was significant, when growing the football phenomenon. In a way, that has been used as benchmark, what happened in Sweden ten years ago. That the same could happen in Finland, as everyone knows how the current state of Finnish football has been relatively...after all, comparatively...Finland is hockey nation, so the starting point has been low, thus there is room for improvement.”</td>
<td>Head of Digital Consumer Products at Iltasanomat (ISTV Extra)</td>
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<td>“It [Media contract] is currently at some level. Clubs are getting at least some profits. But it is the main thing, that affects everything, the image...which comes first, chicken or the egg, that is another story.”</td>
<td>General Secretary of Finnish Football Association</td>
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<td>“Veikkausliiga will reduce the number of commercial partners for 2010 season, when there will be maximum of six partners in addition to the main commercial partner [Veikkaus Oy]. [...] The partnership deals are often too heavy in relation to their value. The short contract length creates continuous uncertainty.”</td>
<td>Veikkausliiga Strategy document 2009</td>
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<td>“Veikkausliiga has been our partner for longer time, because we have a clear need for this kind of partnership. It the partnership is utilized vastly within our organization. And when such sponsoring is done, then the ideal situation is that you are able utilize it in many ways and reclaim everything out of it. [...] When we can add</td>
<td>Relationship Manager at Veikkaus Oy</td>
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<td>Low level of attractiveness to the public audience</td>
<td>&quot;What I personally have felt, is that the supporter culture is still at its early stages, when comparing to some fanatic football cultures. And...I also feel that the national team and Veikkausliiga itself, are still at a relatively low level [...] Ice hockey is the best benchmark. That it is...as consumer product, if speaking of exactly those fans and followers. Not necessarily including the hobbyists. So, in this case, ice hockey has longer traditions, and of course the broadcasting product, from Ruutu+ perspective it [ice hockey] has had more resources during past years. Quality of the broadcast. Quality has been higher and much more material available. So, compared to ice hockey, with football we are still at relatively low level.&quot; Head of Digital Consumer Products at Iltasanomat (ISTV Extra)</td>
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<td>Operational environment of the professional football league</td>
<td>&quot;If we think about our top-level sports, what have been the most important to us Finns? Well, it has been track and field, because no matter how cliché, we were run to the world map. Then, when track and field lost its appeal, it has been cross country skiing. Well, now we just saw regarding the finished world championship competition [in Lahti 2017], at our own newsroom I can see how much it [Cross country skiing] appealed to our people. So, there is no signs at the horizon that these things would change in short period.” “And that...such a sports nation as Finland is really critical. So, the success [international] has a significant role in that if you are displayed or not. A good example is i.e. Kaisa Mäkäräinen. Biathlon was never a very visible sport in Finland. As soon as we have this kind of world class start who can perform outstandingly, then all the sudden she becomes our [Finland’s] most interesting athlete.” “The challenge here is... [sigh] our competitive level compared to European standards, to global standards. For sure there is room for improvement. In this country, everything will be measured how do you succeed internationally” Manager of Sports newsroom at Iltasanomat Club owner at Veikkausliiga CEO of Veikkausliiga Ry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operational environment of the professional football league</td>
<td>The competitive level of international football</td>
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<td>“The biggest thing to think about, is purely there whether our top clubs [Veikkausliiga] are at a level that they can compete and win games in the middle of summer […] The first round is not too... but the second round [qualification] brings clubs that invariably bigger clubs. In terms of financial resources. [...] 5-10% is the growth we are targeting. That is the pace we should be able to... so even if we achieve that, financial resources of our clubs are still very moderate. What is it then that speaks for that we are at competitive level compared to others? Because I know that others are progressing quickly.”</td>
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<th>Unfavourable Economic and geographical realities within the country</th>
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<td>“I have been involved since the beginning, so I can name the financial side, the size of markets, as a clear issue. [...] The metropolitan area is somewhat different to smaller regions [in terms of challenges faced by clubs]. The smaller the economic region is, the more difficult it gets. So basically, you need...the problems appear when you look for commercial partners, because you need commercial partners that must be able to operate at least domestically. And you need multiple partners, as one partner is not sufficient for running a Veikkausliiga club. In that way, kind of, one needs those economic fundamentals, to build this kind...let’s say annual budget.”</td>
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<th>Close collaboration with powerful and meaningful stakeholders</th>
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<td>“That we would not do the same thing twice, that Football association would do something and that we would get involved but from our different angle. There must be a symmetry, that we are doing a close co-</td>
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| Strategies and action plans of the football league and surrounding stakeholders in response to the central phenomenon | operation where Football association is responsible for player development and organizing competitions in general. And of course, our role [Veikkausliiga Ry and clubs] is to support these bigger lines, but in the first place we are inclined more on the commercial side as the media rights holder and beneficiary. This way we will then, again, lift the financial aspects to the center, what we do.”

“There is also the partner side, commercial partners. So, they are important as well, at club level, as well as at the internal governing unit level, as they operate in a role of financiers. Without these, this thing here [football] would not work. It is...football is very much driven by the resources of commercial partnerships. Exactly, as those media rights remunerations, match day revenues, merchandising are not very big, therefore the revenue from commercial partnerships has high percentage, and in that case these are heavily emphasized.”

“Veikkausliiga will reduce the number of commercial partners for 2010 season, when there will be maximum of six partners in addition to the main commercial partner [Veikkaus Oy]. […] The partnership deals are often too heavy in relation to their value. The short contract length creates continuous uncertainty.”

“The number one priority is the audience. It is them for whom we do this, so basically I would not want to say any other stakeholders [that are important for sports newsroom], because without them, there is no Veikkausliiga articles, videos, or anything. It is where we look at and what we cannot forget.”

“JPY soon understood that it had to grow member number, so that it could exert greater power and say, and a possibility to really advance the rights of players. The most important concern became to help the players in contract and salary issues. The trust and faith for JPY grew as result from previous. Significant advancements were also the pension and accident legislative security, as well as the definition of players as normal employees, been granted with the right for annual leave as well.” | CEO of Veikkausliiga Ry

Veikkausliiga Strategy 2009 (documented) | Manager of Sports Newsroom at Iltasanomat

Executive Manager of Football Players’ Association, JPY |
<p>| <strong>Actualized practices pertaining to the central phenomenon of professional football league’s struggle for legitimacy,</strong> | “The role of public sector services will be fulfilled best, when we are able to offer Finnish people free-to-watch unified moments and unique experiences. [...] Additionally, we want to promote Finnish sports culture and encourage Finnish people to participate in sports. The former lifts the attractiveness to the central criterion (although measuring attractiveness is an ambiguous aspect). Sports culture promoting requires the thorough consideration of diversity (including equality), new phenomena creation and the seizing new trends.” | Head of Yle Urheilu |
| | “We use our user data (www, tv, radio, and social media) material and the material from one external company, that completes annual survey of how interesting different sports are and how the trends are developing. In addition, we use hobbyist statistics and audience figures in somewhat unscientific manner as part of the process in measuring overall attractiveness.” | Head of Yle Urheilu |
| | “In the first place we are inclined more on the commercial side as the media rights holder and beneficiary. This way we will then, again, lift the financial aspects to the centre, what we do. [...] It is...football is very much driven by the resources of commercial partnerships. Exactly, as those media rights remunerations, match day revenues, merchandising are not very big, therefore the revenue from commercial partnerships has high percentage, and in that case these are heavily emphasized.” | CEO of Veikkausliiga Ry |
| | “I have been involved since the beginning, so I can name the financial side, the size of markets, as a clear issue. And in a way, the lack of success, I mean the lack of success at national team level and at the club level [...] Part of the problem lies there, that we have relatively scarce resources...the salary budget is quite restricted and therefore the level of game is not high enough. [*] (Club owner, 2017)” | Club owner at Veikkausliiga |</p>
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<th>Credibility, and progress</th>
<th>“Ministry of Education and Culture gives aids from state funds for physical education and sports to: Sports organizations and clubs, Construction of sports venues, Exercise and sports in municipalities, Physical education, to promote sport life style, to promote top-level sports, Scientific research in sports, and Other operations in sports. In year 2017 government’s budget has reserved 149,6 million € for physical activities and top-level sports from profits of Veikkaus Oy. In addition, some of budgeted funds will be used for [...] Active school operations expansion, Olympic Stadium’s reconstructions, and to fund governmental physical education centers.”</th>
<th>Ministry of Education and Sports</th>
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<td>Politics and personal interests in professional sports and football in Finland</td>
<td>[...] And then again...in a way, ice hockey does get more coverage in main stream media [compared to football].”</td>
<td>Relationship manager of Veikkaus Oy</td>
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<td>Actualized practices pertaining to the central phenomenon of professional football league’s struggle for legitimacy, credibility, and progress</td>
<td>“There is also the partner side, commercial partners. So, they are important as well, at club level, as well as at the internal governing unit level, as they operate in a role of financiers. Without these, this thing here [football] would not work. It is...football is very much driven by the resources of commercial partnerships. Exactly, as those media rights remunerations, match day revenues, merchandising are not very big, therefore the revenue from commercial partnerships has high percentage, and in that case these are heavily emphasized.”</td>
<td>CEO of Veikkausliiga Ry</td>
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<td>Dynamics of the relationships among and between the stakeholders and the football league</td>
<td>“And before we were at the mercy of media companies in that sense, that we got some visibility slots, both from the printed media and from the broadcast, wherever they wished to fit us in. Today, we are in control of our own media. And this is here to stay as Timo Marjamaa said, every match is televised and there is material out there [...] so in media field there is a threat regarding these tv rights remunerations, and the sizes of these. Especially when media field gets fragmented and the supply will increase, that we will be stomped if we are not alert. Then, we might be just one small among many others...so in that sense we must make sure...that although it opens new opportunities, it brings threats as well.”</td>
<td>Marketing director of Veikkausliiga Ry</td>
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<td>Conclusive impacts altering the dynamics in the operational environment of a professional football league</td>
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<td>Failure on or off the pitch resulting in legitimacy and financial detriments</td>
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<td>&quot;The basic needs must be satisfied before we can move forward in pyramid. In the end, the financial independence and financial sustainability are something that are, if think about Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, at the bottom when thinking professional football and sports.”</td>
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| "So, are you able to get people on board, that, let’s work hard and jump from 36 position to 33 [UEFA Club country ranking coefficient]. Well, that does not sound very “sexy” either, when thinking from external stakeholder perspective. But it is realism, that do we have chance for that, realistically speaking. Because, can we detect something, see something already within two or three years, that the size of our clubs would grow significantly, regarding the turnovers.” |

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<th>Unified success through collaboration</th>
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<td>&quot;We should, somehow, attract that kind of, not patrons, but partnerships, that would see this with a bit longer perspective... this path to success. Then, we should aim to create a convincing path to success, which will result to level of game, where both national team and league clubs succeed. I believe, that these things will not happen in few years. [...] and through this, we will these visibility benefits and other added value to businesses, as the visibility solely does not suffice, but that there would path to success for both commercial partners and Finnish football. And I believe, that it would be one way [...] another way is, where we have developed, and where we have already seen progress, is the more scientific player developments. I.e. Sami Hyypiä academy is already doing this ground research with younger generations, that which kind of attributes and what are needed, and how we are progressing in comparison to European level footballers.”</td>
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| "But again, same way as Veikkausliiga sees, that it may improve its position and become number one [league in Finland], in similar way this a business case for us. So, we have a chance to get new fans to purchase the product. And through that it will grow [Digital Consumer Products].” |

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<th>CEO of Veikkausliiga Ry</th>
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<tr>
<td>General Secretary of Finnish Football Association</td>
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<td>Club owner at Veikkausliiga</td>
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<td>Head of Digital Consumer Products at Iltasanomat (ISTV Extra)</td>
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