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Organizing player development in a professional Scandinavian youth football academy

A case study of AIK football club

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the organization of player development in the youth football academy of AIK in Stockholm, Sweden. More specifically, the aim of the study was to focus on (a) the organization of the athlete development model and (b) the values, norms and ideas that underpin how the club attempt to facilitate learning and development.

AIK was chosen because the club has a long history of facilitating top-level football players and advocate an alternative approach to the more normative talent identification and development-based systems increasingly more common in football. The official policy of the club is to facilitate long-term development and participation, while at the same time develop top-level football players. The club encompasses many of the features of the Scandinavian sports culture, while at the same time being part of the increased competition and professionalization of international football.

The Environment Success Factors model (Henriksen, 2010) was used as a conceptual lens to focus the data collection and analysis. The data collection was based on document analysis, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The informants were coaches, leaders, value workers and researchers currently working in the club. The data analysis was done through a combination of theoretical and inductive coding.

The main findings showed that AIK is concerned about children's health and well-being, alongside their football development. This was expressed through (a) the recent changes in the academy structures (e.g. late entry into the academy, facilitating possibilities for diverse sport experiences during childhood and multiple pathways),e and (b) the explicit focus on values and life-skills (through e.g. communication with parents, coaches and the wider public, the appointment of a "value worker" within the organization and through promoting the development of life-skills in the everyday practice activities. Moreover, their specific approach to skill acquisition is based on a game-centered, non-linear pedagogical approach.
The findings and their application are discussed in relation to relevant literature in athlete development research.

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1 Introduction

Football is the most popular team sport in the world, with approximately 265 million active players. Of all those who play football, only 0.04% are part of a professional league. This percentage suggests that it is difficult to reach expert level in football (Haugaasen & Jordet, 2012). Together with the commercialization of the football industry, the competition between players, coaches and football clubs in producing top-level players has increased rapidly. This has led football clubs to organize talent development within their own football academies.

The increase in professionalization also influences youth sport in the Scandinavian region (Persson, 2011). For football clubs in Scandinavia, athlete development is an essential factor of success, and there is increased pressure to identify and develop young players. Environments that successfully develop elite players can enjoy both increased profits and recognition (Henriksen, 2011). However, the effectiveness and scientific foundation that underpin how sports organizations identify and develop youth athletes have been questioned. For example, the increased professionalization has led many talent development programs in youth football to base their enterprise on early talent identification. Despite the considerable data that show the ineffectiveness of early talent identification, sports organizations continue to invest resources and time into talent identification initiatives (Collins & MacNamara, 2018). For example, over 90% of those recruited to a premier league football club are likely to never play first-team football for that club (ibid.).

Traditional approaches to learning and skill acquisition have been based on a linear understanding of skill development. Studies of athlete development have traditionally focused on individual factors related to physiological or psychological skills. Such approaches have led to a strong focus on early sport specialization and structured practice. Less attention has been paid to the particularities of different methodologies of practice (Vaeyens et al., 2009) and limited consideration has been given to the broader context that influences development (Araújo et al., 2010).

More recent research has, however, demonstrated that skill acquisition and learning can emerge in nonlinear ways (Araújo & Davids, 2011; Chow et al., 2016). This finding has led researchers to call for more studies on talent development that avoid an emphasis on single components in isolation from the greater whole (Bjørndal, 2017). Several studies undertaken in the Scandinavian region (Norway, Sweden, and

Denmark) have explored different talent development environments from such a holistic perspective (Aalberg & Sæther, 2016; Henriksen, Stambulova, & Roessler, 2011; Larsen et al., 2013).

In Scandinavia, sport clubs have had a different approach to athlete development compared to the more structured elite-sport systems described in the international literature. The Scandinavian sports model is characterized by volunteer-based multi-sports clubs, egalitarian values, and democratization, and it encompasses both elite sport and sport for all perspectives within the same organizational structures (Ibsen & Seippel, 2010). Youth sport policy in Scandinavia focuses on values that emphasize joy and play (Andersen, Bjørndal, & Ronglan, 2015). For example, in Norway, elite-oriented competition and development are prohibited before the age of 13. Similar regulations are in place in Denmark and Sweden. Furthermore, no national system of talent identification across sports exists. Talent development is the responsibility of the individual sports associations (Andersen & Ronglan, 2012). However, the increased commercialization of Scandinavian sports has led to an increased pressure on the legitimacy of the Scandinavian sports model and more attempts to structure and professionalize talent development now exists (Ronglan, 2015). Surprisingly, few attempts have been made to develop in-depth knowledge on alternative approaches to organizing talent development in the Scandinavian region, making us run the risk of throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

The aim of this case study is, therefore, to investigate the athlete-development model of a Scandinavian football club with a strong history of developing professional players and to explore the factors that seem to facilitate or inhibit success in that particular environment. Henriksen, Stambulova, and Roessler (2011) have suggested that research in talent development should have an exploratory rather than a confirmatory design, be situated in real-world contexts, and aim at holistic explanations. The study has tried to encompass this.

Allmänna Idrottsklubben (AIK) was strategically identified as a critical case because of its explicit talent development policy and system, their history of producing elite players, and their dual goal of promoting elite-sport development and lifelong sport participation. Therefore, the club encompass many of the features of Scandinavian sports culture which I aimed to capture, while at the same time being part of the increased competition and professionalization of international football. A three-fold research question was formulated: (a) What characterizes the athlete-development

model in AIK youth football?; (b) Which values, theories and practical experiences form the basis of the athlete-development model?; And (c) How does the club transfer its intentions into practice?

To answer the research questions, the study was designed as a case study and applies the Environment Success Factors model (Henriksen, 2010) as a conceptual lens in the attempt to capture how the club organize and facilitate player development. The second and third chapters presents the literature review and the theoretical framework. They review research on talent development and investigate different models that have been used to enhance player development in different contexts. The methodology chapter presents the context, the reasons for selecting this particular club, the process of data collection, and how data was analyzed. The results and discussion chapters consider the player development model in the club and which potential success factors make AIK a productive environment for player development.

2 Models of talent development in sports

Bailey and Collins (2013) have argued that most systems of talent identification and development share a set of common characteristics, and they have coined this the standard model of talent development. The standard model of talent development has had a significant influence on both policy and practice in elite-sport systems. In this model, sports development is viewed as linear and predictable. The underlying assumption is that successful progression from one level to the next is an indication of future performance.

The standard model of talent development focuses on progressing those who are identified as talented through the system. This process neglects a broader group of youth athletes, even if the athletes meet the standards of the system at a later point. Often, once a player has been deselected, it is difficult for them to return to the system. Selection-based models are therefore always at risk of selection bias and creating self-reinforcing effects (Hancock, Adler & Côté, 2013). One central assumption in the model is how early performance predicts later success. The apparent success of the model may be an illusion because there is no way of being sure who might have succeeded through different systems (Bailey & Collins, 2013). Athletes who are deselected might have acquired the necessary abilities for elite sport through different circumstances. These deselected individuals are, however, rarely the focus of studies (Bjørndal, Andersen, & Ronglan, 2017).

Short-term talent identification strategies run the risk of losing potentially talented athletes whose performance at a certain point in time does not match age-group expectations. Moreover, while early recruitment could be a competitive advantage, reliable talent identification programs should provide effective financial investment by focusing resources on fewer athletes. Unfortunately, however, models of talent identification are associated with low predictive value, and their validity has been questioned (Vaeyens et al., 2008). Many researchers have challenged the scientific foundation of talent and identification programs that resemble the standard model of talent development (Abbott et al., 2002; Bailey & Collins, 2013; Vaeyens et al., 2008).

To name a few examples, the Sports Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success, discussed in Brouwers et al. (2015) and the Long-Term Athlete Development model (Balyi & Hamilton, 2004) present two real-world examples that resemble the Standard Model of Talent Development. These models have strongly

influenced elite-sports policy and coach education across several countries (Collins & MacNamara, 2018).

The Long-Term Athlete Development model attempts to balance the training load and competition in an athlete's development. The model speculates that there are windows of opportunity that exist and should be used to maximize training gains in youth sport. However, the model has been criticized for the lack of evidence on which it is based and how it might overemphasize the volume of training (Lang & Light, 2010). Collins & MacNamara (2018) noted that some sports and organizations have become so invested in talent identification and development concepts such as the Long-Term Athlete Development model that it is hard to go another way. The assumption that all children and youth have to develop through the same stage-based model, comprised of the same set of activities and tasks, at the same time in their development, is in stark contrast to the uniqueness of individual pathways that characterizes successful athlete development (Phillips et al., 2010). Ford et al. (2009) have argued that the Long-Term Athlete Development model would become more suitable for understanding development if it were more holistically oriented.

In comparison, the Sports Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success have identified nine policy areas that are the possible drivers for an effective elite sport system. Areas such as financial resources, athletic and post-career support, facilities, and coach development are examples of significant policy factors (De Bosscher et al., 2009). However, the different contexts of the specific sports environments was left unnoticed in the original studies that comprise the model (Brouwers et al., 2015). Even if the model can be applied as a framework to examine policies in a specific sport, Brouwers et al. (2015) have argued that the model does not take context into account the context-specific drivers of athlete development. For example, the model is incongruent with the success of sports such as Norwegian handball, whereas athlete development is less structured and do not rest on talent identification (Bjørndal, Ronglan & Andersen, 2017).

One of the main assumptions of the Standard Model of Talent Development is that the amount of early specialized training is necessary for future adult success (Bailey & Collins, 2013). This notion is based on the theory of deliberate practice (Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Römer, 1993) which states that the performance level reached by an individual is directly related to the amount of deliberate practice he or her has completed. Deliberate practice is defined as structured, goal-oriented and specific

training (ibid). Despite the theory's significant influence on talent and performance development across a wide variety of domains, it has received criticism for the sole emphasis it places on the effects of practice compared to other factors contributing to development. In sports, the strong emphasis on deliberate practice has resulted in an increased pressure on early sport specialisation (Côté, 1999). However, early sport specialisation has been associated with injuries, burnout and drop-out from sport (Baker, Cobley, Fraser-Thomas, 2009).

Instead, one could argue that the developmental process from youth to elite football player is complex, and dependent on both interacting personal and circumstantial factors (Haugaasen & Jordet, 2012). Factors such as age, activity characteristics, genetic predisposition, environmental context, and sociocultural context are considered to influence development (Haugaasen, 2015). In football a player may not need extraordinary capacities related to technical, psychological and physical demands (Stolen et al., 2005). The unique combination of skills can make a player compensate for weaknesses in one area by increased strength in another (Meylan et al., 2010).

Somewhat contrary to an early specialization pathway is the idea of deliberate play which focus on early sampling and diversification (Cote, 1999). Deliberate play activity typically occurs during sampling years (ages 6-13), before specialization (approximately. ages 13-16), and investment years (approximately. ages of 17+ years, and encapsulates physical activities which are intrinsically motivating, are designed to maximize enjoyment, and provide immediate gratification (Berry, Abernethy, & Cote, 2008).

The assumption is that an early diversification pathway enable the psycho-social development of children in sports and that skills may transfer from one domain to another. Several researchers have argued that skills such as general perceptual and tactical skills can be improved through different activities (Memmert & Roth, 2007; Williams, & Ford, 2008). Social interaction and creativity are inherent in deliberate play, and it is characterized by more child-led activities with less involvement from a coach (Collins & MacNamara, 2018). Deliberate play focus on playful activities that are undertaken by the premise of the children themselves (Cote, 1999). Studies have shown that deliberate play, early sampling and diversification can lead to fewer injuries, less burnout, and increased long-term engagement in sport (Cote et al., 2007).

In their review of football expertise, Haugaasen & Jordet (2012) found that elite football players did not start football earlier that their sub-elite or amateur counterparts, which suggest that the starting age is not as important as other aspects of football experience. However, Haugaasen & Jordet (2012) also show that participation in other sports does not seem to be very important, as professionals players has shown to only participate to a small degree in other sports. However, there may be some advantages to diverse practice such as injury prevention, general physical, the abovementioned psycho-social development and increased motivation. Team sports that share similar rules, movements, perceptual cues and strategies appear to have higher potential of transfer compared to other sport, and different skills seem to be affected in different ways by various types of practice (Haugaasen & Jordet, 2012).

Moreover, Storm et al. (2012) has shown that specialization pathways are more unique to the individual and more culturally situated then what has been acknowledged in the research literature. In their study of 17 Danish elite athletes, Storm et al. (2012) found that the athletes had progressed through nonlinear and unique trajectories. Furthermore, the authors show how early diversification vs. early specialization are inadequate as categories to explain the content and variety of the activities they are comprised of.

Trying to illustrate that successful pathways in sport are idiosyncratic, Giblin et al. (2014) have introduced the concept of deliberate preparation as an alternative approach. Deliberate preparation conceptually lies between deliberate play and deliberate practice and suggests that structured physical skills development during childhood can provide an environment that enhances the development of behavioral, psychological and movement skills (Collins & MacNamara, 2018). MacNamara, Collins, and Giblin (2015) have suggested that development in youth sport should focus on these skills rather than practicing for future performance or "just letting them play."

The abovementioned research demonstrates how ideas from contemporary models of athlete development that resemble the Standard Model of Talent Development are able to encompass the complexity of the performance context. Common for most research and literature on athlete and talent development, is that it has traditionally centered on the individual athlete and how to aid development in making the individual more skillful, each in turn. Such an approach has often led to practices that fail to transfer to the performance context (Renshaw & Chow, 2019). Instead, nonlinear approaches to athlete development emphasis the inherent complexity

of learning in sport and address the importance of understanding the interplay between contextual, individual and task constraints (Chow et al., 2016).

3 Theoretical framework

Several researchers and practitioners have pointed to the fact that sports development does not occur in isolation from the environment where it is embedded (Araújo et al., 2010; Larsen et al., 2013; Martindale, Collins, & Abraham, 2007). Therefore, recent studies have focused on how contextual conditions influence individual development. Henriksen and Stambulova (2017) have suggested that athletic talent is a set of competencies and skills developed from innate potential, from long-term interaction with an environment, and from the ability to exploit the strengths and compensate for weaknesses in that environment. Martindale et al. (2007) have emphasized the lack of attention given to what characterizes effective environments for talent development. This lack of attention is surprising, as talent development environments are, essentially, where individual development occurs. Moreover,

some environments are much more successful than others in the development of elite athletes. These distinctions have led researchers to investigate the characteristics of environments that have a history of producing elite athletes. Henriksen, Stambulova, and Roessler (2011) have emphasized that development is not only influenced by the immediate microenvironment, but also by the interrelated systems of microenvironments (e.g., school and club), by settings in which the individual athlete is not actively involved (e.g., sports associations), and by broader cultural patterns. However, few attempts to investigate environmental constraints and interactions have been made (Araújo et al., 2010; Davids et al., 2013).

Henriksen (2010) has proposed the "holistic ecological approach" in an effort to examine the role of the overall environment and its effects on athletic development (Larsen et al., 2013). Henriksen (2011) has argued that successful talent development environments are those who show a consistent ability to develop elite athletes from a pool of young athletes. His methodological approach to researching environments contains two conceptual frameworks: the Athlete Talent Development Environment model and the Environment Success Factors model. The Athlete Talent Development Environment model provides a framework to describe the environment by focusing on the roles and functions of different components and relations at the different levels of the context (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017). Nevertheless, the Athlete Talent Development Environment model does not provide a comprehensive understanding of how and why some environments consistently facilitate the development of elite

athletes. To complement the Athlete Talent Development Environment model, the Environment Success Factors model (fig. 1) provides a framework to investigate and explain different structural factors that facilitate positive talent development. As the unit of analysis in my study was the organizing of athlete development (and not the individual athlete), I chose to not include the Athlete Talent Development Environment model in the conceptual framework for this thesis. Instead, I will focus solely on the Environment Success Factors model.
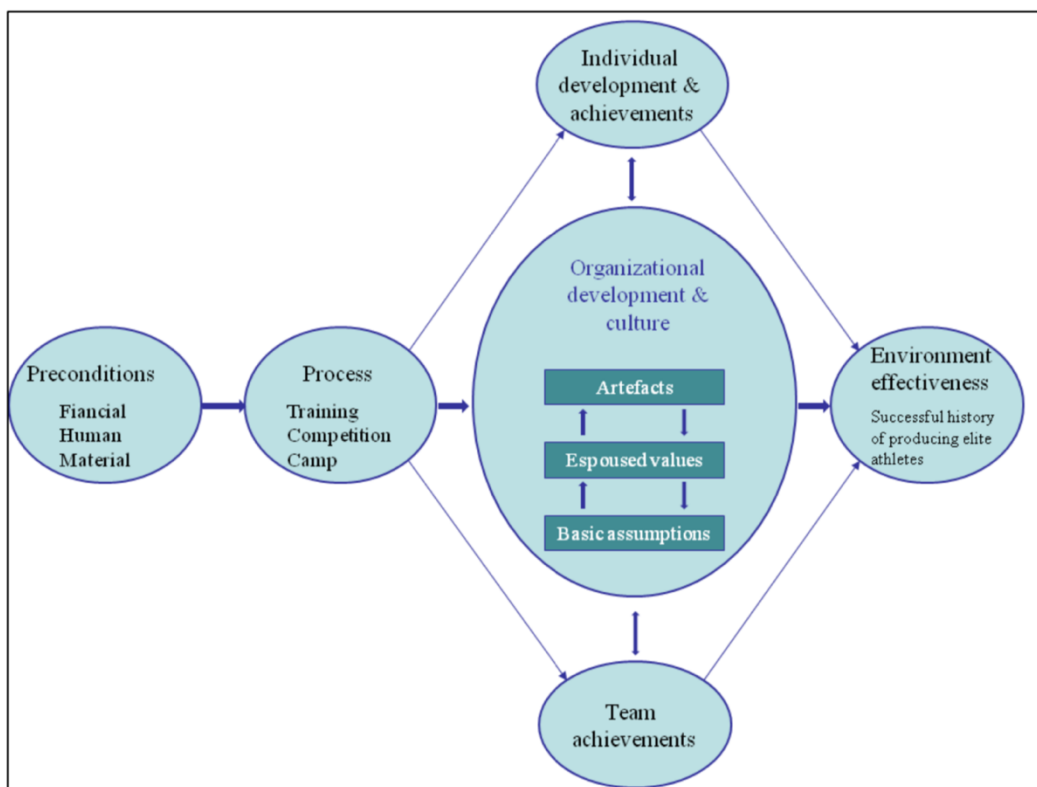
Figure 1: The Environment Success Factors model (Henriksen, 2010, p. 42)

The model centers on the environment's prerequisites for player development and it describes how the daily routines in the environment lead to the development of three areas: (1) individual skills, (2) organizational culture, and (3) team performance. These three areas are closely linked and influence how effective a club is likely to be in facilitating development to the elite level. The model was constructed in order to compare and describe similarities and differences between unique talent development environments (Henriksen, 2011). Preconditions, process, individual development and achievements, team achievements, organizational development and culture, and

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environment effectiveness are the first-level dimensions of the model (Henriksen, 2010). Each dimension is discussed further in the following account.

Environment effectiveness is the history of the environment's ability to produce elite athletes (Henriksen, 2010). Preconditions refer to the available resources in the environment. They include financial, human, and material resources, where material resources are elements such as training facilities, equipment, and the state of the facilities available. Process describes the daily routines within the environment. Daily routines are unique to each situation, but one can presume that all talent development environments involve practice, competition, social happenings, and other activities (Henriksen, 2010). Individual development and achievements refer to athletic and psychosocial skills, and how these, together, lead to sporting achievement. Team achievements relate to a team's athletic success.

A central element of the Environment Success Factors model is the organizational culture and development of an environment. Here, Henriksen (2010) build upon Schein's (1990) conceptualization of organizational culture. Schein (2010) has defined the culture of a group as a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solves its problems of external adaption and internal integration. This pattern works in a way that is considered valid and, therefore, is taught to new members as the correct way to think, perceive, and feel.

According to Schein (1990), all groups must survive and grow by adapting to the demands of a dynamic environment. Organizational culture is therefore characterized by its stability over time, socialization of new members, and integration of basic assumptions (Schein, 2010).

Schein (2010) has asserted that culture is an abstraction, but that the forces that are created in organizational situations deriving from the abstraction are powerful. Cultural forces are viewed as powerful because they operate outside the awareness of those involved in an organizational. Understanding cultural forces in an organization can help to understand the participants of the environment better. The culture of an organization emerges as solutions, actions, and values that are created to solve challenges in the environment. Interaction between members of the environment continually shapes and refines the culture while, at the same time, the culture stabilizes these interactions. The organizational culture influences which behaviors, values, and approaches are preferred in a particular environment. How an organization goes forward to solve challenges depends on which values shape the organization and which

behaviors exist that are taken for granted. Schein (1990) has pointed out that a culture—in this research, a football club—consists of three components and levels: artefacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions with various degrees of visibility.

Artefacts are visible manifestations such as stories told in the environment, as well as clothing, buildings, and organization charts. Espoused values are social principles, norms, and standards that the organization shows to the outside world. Basic assumptions are underlying reasons for action (Schein, 1990). These assumptions comprise the core of the culture and are often taken for granted within the environment (Larsen et al., 2013).

The Environment Success Factors model is chosen as a conceptual lens to answer the research questions because it provides a framework to investigate the different factors that influence player development and affords a means of studying the different levels of an organization's culture. In this manner, the model is used both as a theoretical framework and as a methodological tool that aids both collection and analysis of data.

4 Methodology

This research is a case study of the talent development model of AIK football club. Case studies are well-suited to investigate and provide an understanding of a phenomenon in depth, within its real-world context (Yin, 2018). In case studies, it is essential to consider how contextual conditions situate our understanding of a phenomenon. This case study focuses on a specific environment where athletic development takes place. The analytical unit of the study is the organizing of athlete development in academy football within the context of a Scandinavian semi-professional football club. The specific contextual and cultural conditions change the norms of the player development process within a specific national sports culture (Araújo et al., 2010). Andersen (2013) has proposed that a study of this nature aims to inform theory rather than make generalizations applicable across broader populations.

Case study research often makes use of multiple research methods and data collection procedures to create a more detailed picture of the phenomenon or process under investigation. Yin (2018) has suggested that a case study relies on multiple sources of evidence where data need to converge in a triangulating fashion. One of the strengths of a case study is the reliance on several sources used in data collection. Multiple sources of information create validity in interpretation and explanation (Andersen, 2013). By using triangulation, a more nuanced picture can be described and a more in-depth description of an environment can be developed. Patton (2002) has argued that multiple data sources enhance findings and analysis.

In this chapter, the context and reasons for selecting AIK as the case study are presented and then the process of data collection and data analysis are outlined.

4.1 Context and case selection

This study investigated the youth academy of a football club within a Scandinavian context. In sport, the Scandinavian countries share a legacy relating to idealism and voluntarism (Gammelsæter, Storm, & Söderman, 2011). Football, like most other sports in the region, has generally been aligned with political values such as democracy, social fostering, gender equality, and the integration of young people from the working class or immigrant groups. Many of the characteristics of Scandinavian sport can be linked to distinctive cultural and political features such as the organization of sports. Scandinavia

is a homogenous region sharing linguistic, cultural, historical, and political traditions that, in turn, structure sports and football. Organizations in Scandinavian countries have similarities in terms of structure, organizational culture, goals, and missions (Andersson & Carlsson, 2009).

From its inception at the end of the 19th century, football in Scandinavia was organized by non-profit clubs, many of which organized elite, youth, and grass-roots football alongside other sports. The tension between commercialized elite football and voluntary grass-roots football is ever present, and there is a general perception that the countries cannot produce international elite players without organizations that can show the sustained ability to develop elite football players (Gammelsæter et al., 2011).

In Scandinavian countries, sport is organized through autonomous voluntary associations which are influenced by democratic and egalitarian values. Countries in this region are known for sports movements where activities take place in clubs and associations gathered within unified confederations (Bergsgard & Norberg, 2010). To a large extent, competency in organizing and developing talented athletes lies within local clubs and their leaders (Norberg & Sjöblom, 2011). However, the degree of formalized talent identification and development varies depending on the particular sports organization. The popularity and resources of the sport shape the process of player development (Andersen, Bjørndnal, & Ronglan, 2015).

Football clubs within the Scandinavian region put effort into developing players for their first team, which, potentially, can have a significant positive impact on a club's economy. Home-grown players who make the transition from the youth system to the first team become vital. In the Scandinavian sports model, elite athletes must start with a particular sports association and a local club. All children, skilled and less-skilled, are organized within the same sports model (Ronglan, 2014). The Scandinavian models of sports participation are distinguished by exposing children to multiple sports during childhood (Green et al., 2013). Organized sports for children happen within the local community, mainly within multi-sports clubs (Andersen, Bjørndal, & Ronglan, 2015).

In comparison with other countries, Scandinavian countries support amateurism longer than most countries (Andersson & Carlsson, 2009). In 1967, the amateur rules of Swedish football were dismantled. The rule changes initiated the professionalization of football in Sweden. Consequently, clubs took on the shape of professionally managed business companies, and a market for buying and selling players was established (Billing, Franzen, & Peterson, 2004). According to Ronglan (2014), the increased

professionalization run in line with general international tendencies may threaten the organizational legitimacy of the voluntary-based sports movement that youth sports is comprised of.

In Sweden almost half of all people between the ages of seven and 70 (3.4 million) are members of a sports club. Of the over nine million inhabitants in Sweden, 2.4 million regularly compete, and the country has over 7,000 elite athletes (The Swedish Sports Confederation, 2013).

The Swedish multi-sports club, AIK, offers 12 different sports (AIK, 2019). The football club is located in Stockholm, the largest city in Sweden. The city of Stockholm organizes approximately 60,000 players. In the 2019 season, there are three Stockholm football teams in Allsvenskan, the highest division in the Swedish soccer league. These team are AIK, Djurgården, and Hammarby. Among these, AIK is historically the most successful in terms of league championships and cup trophies. The club has played 90 seasons in Allsvenskan, which makes it the Swedish team with the most seasons in the highest division.

Fotbollskanalen (2016) investigated to what extent youth players were given a chance in the first teams in Allsvenskan. The investigation showed that, of the clubs who had played at least three of the last five seasons in Allsvenskan, AIK was the club that gave playing time to the highest number of players under the age of 20. In 2017, AIK sold a player born and raised in the local community, for a record transfer fee for Allsvenskan of 7.75 million euros.

The same year as the record transfer the club released a public statement concerning a structural change in the academy. The club stated that they would delay selection within the academy until the age of 13. There would be no selection process for the age group of 8–12 years. Instead, practice groups would be formed with increased AIK investment in resources to support coaches working within that age group (AIK, 2017). In March 2019, two AIK academy graduates played for the national team against Norway, which illustrates the club's sustained ability to develop elite players.

AIK was therefore selected as a suitable case study due to the club's advocacy for an alternative approach to the more normative talent identification and development-based systems increasingly more common in football. The club's policy states that the club environment should contribute to multiple objectives, such as the education of elite football players, the development of good public citizens, and the augmentation of

public health. Moreover, they have an explicit pedagogical approach to skill acquisition in children and youth that differs from traditional training practices more common in Scandinavian team sports. After the structural changes in 2017, the club appointed a research and development team to develop the organization further. To my knowledge, this group is unique within Scandinavian football and provides a possibility for investigating how such an organizational unit within the football club works to influence player development. Their activities provoke interest and awareness of the particularities and organization of practice and led to this research. Thus, the case is both deviant and critical because it holds the potential to provide empirical and theoretical insights into an apparently successful but different club-based approach to organize and facilitate talent development within the Scandinavian football context.

4.2 Data collection

The study was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (Appendix A). The leader of AIK football club's youth department gave, on behalf of the club, consent for me to undertake this research. The club's research coordinator helped set up the interviews and provided access to documents and practices. All informants signed a written consent form that provided them with information about confidentiality, the study's objectives, their rights as participants, and what participation in the study would involve (Appendix B).

The participants in data collection were coaches, leaders, value workers, and researchers within the club. Several of the involved participants had multiple roles. The role of a value worker within the club is to have the overall responsibility of implementing the clubs stated values both on and off the football field. Confidentiality was ensured through the use of pseudonyms, and data that identified participants were not reported. It is, however, possible that the roles of participants and background information could compromise full anonymity if readers were part of the same sports setting. All participants were given the opportunity to read transcripts and to accept or correct the data collected.

As Miles and Huberman (1994) have highlighted, the nature of this type of study relies on the social interaction between the participants and others in the environment being investigated. My awareness of the role of the researcher was essential in all

interactions. An important focus for me was to create a reliable and professional connection with participants. This connection was established in the environment through openness about the aims of the study and what my presence in the environment would involve. The club was open and welcoming throughout the research process.

Data collection was undertaken through gathering document analysis, individual interviews, group interviews, and participant observation. I conducted a qualitative document analysis of the club's strategic plan, educational material, and website before visiting the club. The document analysis provided me with an understanding of how the club conducts player development.

The interviews were semi-structured and conversation-based. Two interviews were individual, and two were group interviews. I developed the interview guide based on Henriksen's (2010) *Environment Success Factors model* and Bjørndal, Ronglan, & Andersen (2017) interviews with key organizational actors in his studies of talent development in Norwegian handball. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and were conducted in the head office, at the training ground, and in available settings around the club's facilities. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. In the first part of the interview, participants answered questions about their roles and how they experienced everyday life in the club. In the second part, participants described their views on different aspects of talent development. Finally, the participants answered questions that asked them to reflect on the club's values, environment, challenges, and possibilities. Based on Thagaard's (2016) recommendations, I used main questions to introduce themes before using follow-up questions to gain more detailed information. Both individual and group interviews were conducted to gather a more nuanced understanding of opinions and experiences, as recommended by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015). Facilitating group interviews in the environment encouraged open conversation and enhanced my understanding of arguments and reasons for actions in the club. King, Horrocks, and Brooks (2019) have argued that group interviews can help to highlight language, attitudes, and priorities.

Observational data were collected to enrich the data collection and create a more vivid picture of behaviors, norms, and organizational culture within the club. I used participant observation to become more actively involved in the activities of the club, as suggested by Yin (2018), and developed an observational guide, which focused on the same topics and areas of interest as the interview guide.

The focus of the observation was not on the behavior of players but on the actions of the coaches. There were several coaches involved at each training session. A central point of interest for me as a researcher became the interaction between coaches and coaching behavior related to the particular session or practice design. Lofland et al. (2006) have argued that in using observation as a method one must prioritize what information to focus on.

To collect a broader and more well-informed data set, I observed ten practices, three games, and three meetings with club coaches and leaders. The method facilitated not only watching but also listening. I chose to observe several teams and coaches to gain a more nuanced idea of what influenced the environment. Listening to how coaches interact in the field, helped, as noted by Thagaard (2016), to create a deeper understanding of meaning in the gathered data.

By attending the meetings between coaches and club leaders, I gained a deeper understanding of the ideas behind their actions and behaviors. Throughout the time spent with the club, field notes were used to highlight critical observations, as suggested by Thagaard (2016). During and after each observation, I wrote down the main points. These notes contributed to both the collection and the analysis of data. By speaking to, observing, and listening to individuals with different roles in the club I could compare and investigate how different factors in the Environment Success Factors model (Henriksen, 2010) influenced daily processes in the environment.

4.3 Data analysis

The process of analysis required the coding and categorization of the data based on the dimensions of the Environment Success Factors model (preconditions, process, individual development and achievements, team achievements, environment effectiveness, and organizational development and culture). The coding and categorization were carried out through the use of the software Xmind version Zen, which helped to organize the different types of gathered data transparently.

In this research, two complementary data analyses were applied: theoretical coding and inductive thematic coding line-by-line. The former was developed using the Environment Success Factors model (Henriksen, 2010); the latter, using the guidelines for qualitative analysis provided by Corbin and Strauss (2008). The theoretical

framework of the study shaped, the basis of the analysis, as indicated by Yin (2018). My choice of theoretical framework guided the analysis by pointing to which contextual conditions and explanations should be examined.

Both the inductive and deductive approaches in the analysis illustrated new patterns and relationships that created deeper understanding of the environment (Thagaard, 2016). This study followed the argument of Corbin and Strauss (2008) that theory can be developed by a reflection on the meaning of the data set by coding data systematically and classifying them into different levels. In the analysis of documents, interviews, and observations, I used the first and second level dimensions of the Environment Success Factors model as pre-existing categories. Third dimensions within the factors of preconditions, process, basic assumptions, and cultural artefacts were constructed from the empirical data, analyzed by thematic coding line-by-line (Appendix C).

Data related to the preconditions of the club included the financial, human, and material resources available. The process and daily activities in the club were analyzed by looking at what characterized training, competition, and other activities. The documentation of individual development and achievement enabled me to explore how the club aimed to develop individual players and what types of players they wanted to develop. To explore team achievements and environment effectiveness, I analyzed the club's history of producing senior elite players.

Related to artefacts, I reviewed the context and history and the structural changes in the club, and I examined my observations of facilities and materials. Espoused values were considered by looking into the club's stated values, vision, and how the club worked to implement these in the environment. I considered basic assumptions by analyzing data gathered from participants concerning talent as a concept, how they experienced the environment, and how they looked at development and identification in youth sport.

I used the inductive coding to gain more in-depth and empirically grounded interpretations of the organizational culture and how the participants' own experiences expressed beliefs, values, and norms prevalent in this specific club culture.

5 Results

In the following sections, I present the organizing of youth football in the AIK football club (fig. 2). The chapter is divided into four related parts: (a) the preconditions for athlete player development; (b) the process of athlete development; (c) the individual development and achievements in AIK; and (d) the organizational culture of AIK. The organizational culture was significant for a comprehension of the expressed views of the study participants and is, therefore, the focal point of this chapter.
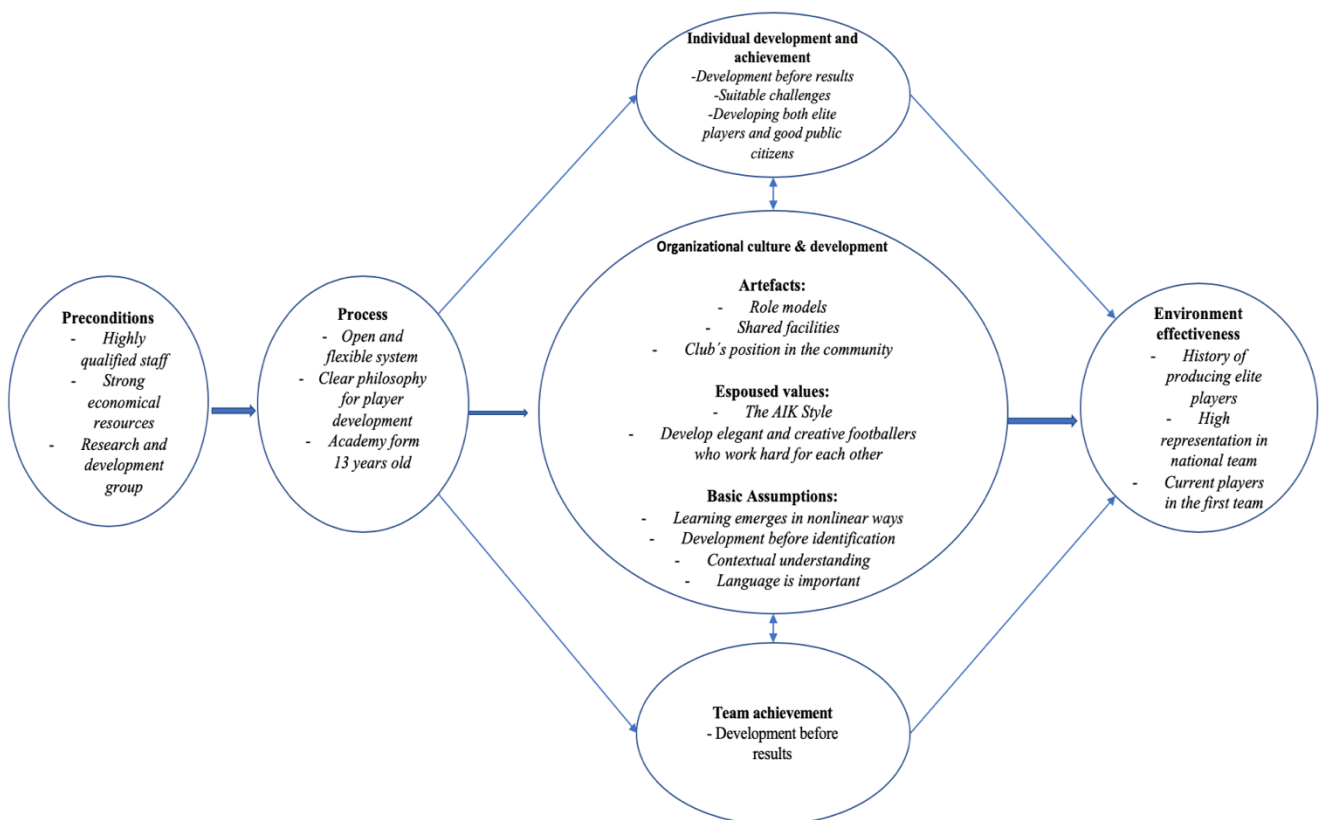
Figure 2: The Environment Success Factors model adapted to the empirical findings.

5.1 Environment success and team achievements in AIK football academy

The history of AIK youth football dates back to 1914 when AIK announced a plan to set up a junior team. In the beginning, the club only had teams for players of junior age. However, in the spring of 1934, a boys' team was created. In 1982 AIK had 16 youth teams, which is a considerable contrast to the number of teams today. During the 1980s

the number of teams almost tripled, and the club won two Swedish championships for boys in the late 80s. Players coming through the academy into the first team went from a few individuals in the 1970s to two or three every year in the later stages of the 1980s.

In 1998 a five-year project was started to maximize the number of youth players who would develop into first-team players. During the late 1990s, the club sold Magnus Hedman to Coventry, and Patrick Fredholm to Udinese. Such sales alone could fund the youth sides' activities for several years. The club has demonstrated a continuous ability to develop elite players who create significant revenue for the club. In 2018 AIK Youth Academy received the highest mark possible along with seven other academies in the certification of youth academies carried out by Swedish Elite Football. Among these eight clubs, AIK was placed fourth.

Today the youth academy has an explicit focus on player development before team results, and in that manner downplays the importance of successful winning records in their youth teams.

5.2 Preconditions for player development in AIK football academy

The club is managed economically through an annual budget provided by the director and management group. The budget aims to contribute to the realization of the club's aim of being the leading youth club in the Nordic region. To conduct its business, AIK youth football is dependent on non-profit coaches, leaders, and parents. Staff costs, as well as pitch rent, equipment, education, and travel expenses, are the club's most substantial expenses. Economically the club has higher than average financial preconditions compared to other clubs in Swedish elite football. In terms of human resources, the club's boys' academy has highly certified coaches and physiotherapists available.

There are several coaches involved in every practice session in the boys' academy. In the youth academy (under (U)13–U17), one coach per group must have undergone the Swedish Football Association's UEFA B certification, while the responsible coach for the academy teams from U16–U19 is required to hold a UEFA A certification.

In addition to the curriculum taught through the football association, the club conducts their own education, which aims to provide an understanding of the club's

values and how to conduct activities in line with those values. For a chosen group of coaches within the club, there is a mentor group that aims to develop coaches' competence in leadership and pedagogy. The club also has a research and development group that consists of coaches and leaders, which aims to help optimize the development of players, leadership, and the organization. An example of how the group work to develop the organization is how they

have utilized the athlete talent development model (Henriksen, 2010) to illustrate a more "zoomed" out view of their environment and how different institutions influence the player development environment as a whole (Appendix F). Two of the coaches involved in this group are undertaking PhDs on player development in football. The research and development group, along with the value worker are responsible for the implementation of the club's cultural and social values on and off the field. The player development model and how its theoretical foundation transfer to practice is also significantly influenced by the group.

One coach shares his view on how the group work:

> I think one of the most interesting aspects of what we are doing is the research
> and development group which I am part of. From that group, there is a lot of
> good discussions, ideas, and debates. It is beginning to help form and shape the
> club. From a cultural and pedagogical perspective, it is shaping how we work
> on the pitch with the players for the future. (Mike)

The group contributes to sporting development in collaboration with clubs, Swedish football, and Swedish sport in general. It aims to achieve this by generating knowledge and contributing to productive collaboration, discussions, and decisions.

> I think some clubs have sort of an implicit understanding of these things that
> the group is trying to do. But I do not think that clubs have deliberately put a
> group or department together that actually investigate these things. If you look
> at some methodology departments in the south of Europe they perhaps would
> be looking into these views. But they tend to be more into the ABCs of
> coaching. I would say this is unique and zoomed out. I think that gives AIK the
> potential to be world-leading in some respects. (Victor)

The group works with transdisciplinary research approaches to athlete development. It works daily within the environment in practice to inform coaches, players and parents, on which types of language and behaviors the club wants to develop. Those responsible for the club values share how the individuals from the research and development group have made changes in term of incidents related to negative occurrences in the club.

> Since we brought in Victor, Mike, and Ole into the environment to talk with
> and remind coaches, players, and parents about the club's values, the number of
> incidents reported to me have been dramatically reduced. It makes the
> environment more proactive. (Eric)

The research and development group aim to close gaps between theory and practice by actively working with all parties involved in the club.

To summarize, the preconditions for player development are highly qualified staff members, strong economic resources compared to the economical average of football academies in Sweden, and a research and development group working to develop the organization.

5.3 The process of player development in AIK football academy

The strategy for athlete development at AIK focuses on two critical areas: children's well-being and increasing the number of players who can reach the level of junior age teams and the senior team of AIK. To reach these goals and create a healthy learning environment the club uses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Swedish Sports Confederation's publications on child and youth sport as guiding documents. Moreover, they focus on and believe that football interactions are influenced by the social environment, the circumstances, and the historical and cultural context.

Children can enter the club from the age of five. There are around 1,500 players within the club. The club is in the process of a structural change where the age of players who enter the academy is moved from eight to 13 for boys, and from 11 to 13 for girls. This change means that no selection of players takes place before the age of 13. The club's youth football wing wants to encourage players to participate in different

sports. They believe that this freedom of choice is likely to benefit the development of players.

> What we are doing is that we are facilitating an environment built on being flexible towards individuals. We think that if the system is very open up to the age of 12 some things will emerge. When they are maturing and going into their teens, they start to understand that they are individuals in an environment where they make their own decisions. What we think is that if by then we have, let us say, 100 12-year-old players who are presented with the question: Do you want to specialize in football or not? Then we will have a sort of specialization path and recreational path. (Victor)

Entry to the academy involves a more specialized path with more intense investment in football compared to the other pathways in the club. Victor explained how the system works:

> Some players will be chosen for the academy from the ones that want to specialize. We will also have parallel teams, which means that the ones who want to specialize will still have the opportunity to do that even if they do not get selected for the academy. We are also working with schools so they will have the same opportunities. To have that system open, so that players can go from specialization to recreational or the opposite way from 13 and up to 16 or 17.

During the season, a dialogue on cooperation was established between the academy director and the coordinator for youth teams. The club stated that their player development is based on close communication between the different parts of the club. Youth team players who are not a part of the academy can practice with the academy for periods.

For players who are selected and allowed to enter the academy, this means a more professional pathway from the age of 13. Compared to the parallel teams and the other possible paths, the academy offers a more professionalized daily routine. The academy has higher qualified coaches, uses more video analysis, and players are monitored on their health and well-being.

Practices within the academy last between 60 and 90 minutes, and practices from the youngest to the oldest age groups shared similar characteristics. There was a focus on questions related to how players can retain the ball or win it back. Feedback was directed to the intention of choices, body position, and where to position themselves on the field. Practice design was related to what the club views as critical factors for developing players. Such factors are about closeness to the football, body position, and how to create advantages on the field through exploiting space and movement. Players were given questions related to how they control the ball, space, and the opposition. Game-like and ball-possession exercises that involved several parts of football, portrayed the practice design. There was little use of isolated practice related to the development of a single component of the game, such as passing drills without opposition. Through observation in the academy, I witnessed no use of isolated drills. The only team observed in the club that used such activities was the senior first team who used isolated passing exercises in their warm-up. One coach shared his view on what sort of practices they aim to create:

> I think we try to create an environment where kids can make decisions themselves as much as possible. What is also essential in a good environment is that criticism is accepted in the right way. We tend to overload on positive feedback, which ends up being hollow noise. (Mike)

During practices, coaches used questions about how the players could position their bodies when receiving the ball, how they could exploit space, or how they should pressure to win the ball back. In one session a player wondered why he did not get a free-kick to which the coach answered: "Could you have solved that situation differently so that you do not provide the other player with the opportunity to tackle you?" (Sebastian).

Practices often changed the constraints to adjust how the players practice. Changing constraints were achieved through the use of multiple goals, different solutions to get points, and adjusting the size of the playing field to focus on different parts of the game. Intentions were often more praised than the results of the action. The purpose behind the pass was expressed as being more important than if the pass hits the target.

How players exploit space and time had a considerable focus. In one practice session in the U14 team, one coach provided feedback to a player who was in possession of the football in an activity where the goal is to keep the ball in your team: "You are now the one who controls the play, you have to dictate the tempo. Should you speed it up or slow it down to better control the game right now?" (Victor)

In practices, there was a focus on what players can do to solve challenges together to gain the outcome they want. Feedback was used to inform players about how they can make better solutions in a way that supports how the club wants their teams to play.

To summarize, the process of player development is characterized by an open and flexible system, a clear philosophy for player development, and selection with a more professionalized pathway from the age of 13.

5.4 Individual development and achievement in AIK football academy

The aim at AIK is to develop football interactions, which is explained by coaches as skills, such as passing, dribbling, and finishing. The club seeks to develop these skills without separating perception and technical execution in the exercises they apply in training. The interlinked relationship between perception and action form the basis of all practice activities and is viewed as the fundamental element of training. The aim is to develop players through principles from nonlinear pedagogy.

> What we say is that we are promoters. We want to promote the principles of
> nonlinear pedagogy in our environment. Using the example of a tag game with
> a ball, which creates an external focus of attention; kids have to use the left
> foot, right foot, inside, and outside without anyone telling them. (Mike)

The club wishes to develop players who are elegant and imaginative, but who also works hard both on and off the ball. The club highlights the importance of how the practice design should provide athletes with information that translates to situations resembling the game itself.

> I think we are starting to understand that to optimize development you have to
> educate young players' attention to information. Learning is about information

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and the movement you do relating to that. Information creates new information and then you have to do movements that create new possibilities. I think the way to go is to take on that view because we have so many generic linear models to develop unique people. I think it is about educating attention and intentions in forms that are similar to aspects of the game. (Mike)

When playing in competitions, the club stated that games are to be viewed as learning opportunities where leaders and players should focus on development before results. The club supports this statement by doing its best to ensure that all players within the club play as much as possible. In the academy, players and leaders should, nevertheless, focus on winning their matches as it is seen as a development goal in itself. However, this does not imply that AIK teams are likely be matched over time to win their league by always playing their "best team." At the end of the season, teams can, however, play to reach playoffs and to secure league games on the highest level possible for the next season.

Teams within the AIK academy participate in what the club refers to as elite preparation tournaments, the focus in these tournaments is to win the games. In such competitions, AIK teams play with the best possible team, which means playing time can vary for each player. Players within the academy are part of a system that means they might be deselected from the system after a season ends. When deselection occurs, it has to be in consultation between the team coach and the academy leader. Before deselection, a conversation must take place between the coach, player, and parents. If a player does not stay, he is given the opportunity to play for AIK youth teams outside the academy or a suitable cooperating club.

All players in the academy are offered individual training during the season to achieve their personal goals based on an individual development interview with the team's academy coach. Such practice is conducted in connection with regular practice or during other offered times. To stimulate the players that seem to have come furthest in their development, the club holds age-rotational practices to provide suitable challenges. The aim is to encourage the most prominent players in the age group. Players could be permanently moved to older groups if it considered that this is likely to be developmental for the individual player. For players involved in the district or national team activities, there is a heightened effort through individual player development.

The club conducts practices in school hours with players tied to the schools who are collaborating with the club. Coaches from the academy hold these practices. The aim is to provide all players in the academy with football practices during school hours. The club wants to use this collaboration to strengthen relations with the schools and the community while at the same time enhancing the club's position in terms of football education.

To summarize, the club aim to promote individual development by creating suitable challenges for each individual player, focus on development before results, and work towards a dual goal of developing both elite players and good public citizens.

5.5 The organizational culture of AIK football academy

Organizational culture is central to the Environment Success Factors model and outlines three levels of a club's culture. The artefacts of the academy, the espoused values, and the basic assumptions create an organizational culture that influences the effectiveness of the club in their work to develop elite players, good public citizens, and increased public health.

5.5.1 Artefacts in AIK football academy

Råsunda IP and Skytteholm IP are the home of AIK Youth Football. The arenas are located in Solna, in the same area as the first team stadium that the club shares with the national team. Solna is a part of what is referred to as Stockholm County. Northwest from the city center, Solna has approximately 78,000 residents.

Råsunda IP and Skytteholm IP are in considerable contrast to the modern 50,000 seat stadium of the first team. An old brick building located next to a worn-down artificial grass football field is the home of the academy. When entering the building, the first things a visitor is likely to see are large pictures of academy graduates making their first team debut.

Downstairs in the basement of the building, there are multiple dressing rooms, equipment rooms, and meeting rooms. The facilities are not new or fancy. They are, however, buzzing with academy players of different ages who share the building.

They talk about the blue line in Stockholm [a reference to the city's metro line].
This side of the city is ours and AIK is the biggest club in Sweden with most
fans and members. (Lars)

With over 22,000 paying members, AIK is one of the largest sports clubs in Sweden.
The process of hiring new coaches illustrates the club's position. One leader in the club
shared the first question he asks someone who applies for a coaching position at the
club:

When a coach contacts AIK and want to come here I always answer back:
Why? Why do you want to coach here? Because it is a big club, probably one
of the biggest in Scandinavia. For many people, it is cool to wear the AIK
badge. And there is also an idea about AIK that is shown through the media.
These ideas are things more connected to the senior team and supporter groups
that are not very much aligned with our values, code of conduct, or pedagogy.
So that is to make sure people do not come here with the wrong ideas. (Victor)

The values of AIK Youth Football are in stark contrast to ideas and behaviors from
some parts of the club's supporter groups. One coach shares his view on the
environment that surrounds the club.

I mean, working in this club, it is a great club, but it is an environment where it
is tough to change things. If me, Ole, Victor, and Mike were sent to another
club, we could have made many changes in a shorter period of time. (Eric)

In addressing both challenges and opportunities that occur in the club, AIK strives to
understand their own environment.

We do not manage from where we want to be. We manage from where we are.
(Victor)

Walking around in Solna you clearly understand that this is AIK's area. Sports shops
are filled with the club's colors, and AIK flags hang from apartment windows. For the
academy, one football field is next to the dressing rooms, but the other practice fields
are a two-minute walk away. Here players and coaches cross the main road together and

pass a fast-food restaurant to get to the practice field. Players and coaches are easily identified as part of AIK. Everyone in the club, from the five-year-old's to the first team, wears the same material and equipment. The black, white, and yellow colors of the club are seen all over Skytteholm IP and Råsunda IP. The club aims to understand its own culture and history in order to be more effective in their work with the development of both elite players and good public citizens.

To summarize, the main artefacts are how strong the club's position in the community is, how players every day see pictures of role models, and how players of different ages share the same facilities.

5.5.2 The espoused values of coaches and leaders in AIK football academy

The AIK style encapsulates the club's stated values and should be the foundation for all activities in the club. The core values are related to respect and humility towards all people, to actively distance themselves from violence, bullying, racism, drugs, alcohol, and doping. It is about doing your best and supporting other teammates and other teams in the club. The AIK style has evolved and changed throughout the club's history. One coach shared how it has changed in recent years.

> If you go back to 2002, they just had a piece of paper. A situation happened in a young boys' team. Then they understood that they needed to work with this differently. (Eric)

Since 2012 the club has had a full-time employee who oversees the implementation of these values. One coach shared how he works to implement the club's values in practice:

> A favorite day is like my Tuesday when I come to Råsunda IP at around nine, and then the practice starts at ten. I go down and change with the guys in the locker room. Talking with players and discussing things. It could be about school, or it can be private. It can be you are there as a secure grown up that is there for them and who is not their coach—just being around them, feeling the culture, walking through the locker rooms. Laughing and being a positive force. Then I follow them to the pitch and help the coaches with language. Both with

football things and with behavior. After practice, I am available to talk about whatever is on their minds. (Eric)

The club consistently works on how they can implement the values both on and off the football field.

The AIK style is a very strong form of the club's identity. However, as we discussed today, we are working on how do we do it in practice.[...] You turn up early for training because that shows respect. Also, you respect the pass you give to your teammate. The values are all interlinked, but we are looking and trying to promote reasons for how we work with it out on the pitch. (Mike)

Through the values, the club has the vision to be a progressive and development oriented club whose organizational idea is to contribute to the education of elite football players, good public citizens, and increased public health in a safe environment. The club's espoused values are also about flexibility towards children and adolescents' nonlinear biology, psychology, and social development. The club's organizational idea is that the AIK style is the base for everything. The academy manager shared how the AIK style dates back to the early parts of the club's history:

It is more than a hundred years, and it is the same thing with the football philosophy of creating elegant and creative players who work hard for each other. What we are doing is synthesizing to bring these together. So the AIK style is now coming back into football because it originally was about football. That means that the values are related directly to football. You can coach from them, analyze a pass from it and so on. The kind of play we want to develop is about a creative and novel way to solve problems together with others. We are trying to go back to the roots and bring it to life on the pitch. (Victor)

The club's espoused values, the AIK style, is the basis and philosophy for how the club wants to operate in every way to reach their goals.

To summarize, the espoused values are the clubs stated values and which type of football players they aim to develop. These values are expressed through how the club work to implement the values inn all activities both on and off the field.

5.5.3 Basic assumptions in AIK football academy

The structural changes made in the academy illustrate a new direction for the club. They show which meanings and underlying reasons influence action and choices. When a new coach comes to the club, he or she does not receive a handbook for how player development should be carried out. The coach, through interaction with other coaches, is offered the opportunity to learn and question practice design and understand what type of behaviors are viewed as acceptable in the environment. All practices within the youth academy have multiple coaches who hold the practice together.

> We have people who are always interacting with coaches, both those with contracts and volunteers. Everyone takes part in discussions about pedagogy, learning, and the environment. It is a constant dialogue. (Victor)

One coach expressed his view on how everyone shares the same philosophy but that coaches also have freedom inside the frame of how the club wants to develop players:

> We have a philosophy in AIK and an idea of how we want to play. Every coach tries to achieve their goals with that philosophy. Because of that, we all have a reference for how it should be done. (Lars)

The philosophy is also relevant to behavior off the pitch. In the academy, there is a focus on the language and words that are used in the environment. The club avoids terms like talent. One coach commented:

> The concepts and the idea of talent bring with them much baggage. Particularly in child youth sport and in football. I think that many people mix talent on occasion and talent development. What is interesting about AIK's decision to restructure is that it means we are spending less time on talent identification and more time on development. That is where I think the resources and time should be put. I also think it is a word that brings with it a lot of expectation. When using the term, you are defining young children: he is a talent, or she is a talent. That is putting a label on them quite early. I think that is something we should avoid. I believe that talent is an ongoing relationship between the individual, the environment, and the affordances provided.[...] We are removing a lot of

these words. Because language is critical. If you want to change the culture you have to change the language. (Mike)

There is an assumption that language influences the development of players. The club view talent as an interaction between the individual players, the task, and the environment around them. Two coaches shared their view on talent as a term:

Within the framework of nonlinear pedagogy, a skill, or more generally, talent is not a trait possessed by individuals alone, but a property of the athlete environment subject to changing constraints. (Ole)

Talent is important if you have the right mindset. If you do not it will be just as hard for the talented athlete as any other. (Lars)

The coaches highlighted that the kind of pedagogy and motivational climate they aim to create intends to enhance athlete development. Which language is accepted or not is likely to shape and influence how the club develops children and adolescents. One coach shared an experience of how the older players reacted when they started to discuss what kind of words to use and why it matters:

In one of the first practices, one of the players had a couple of bad passes, and he started cursing. One of the other players came to him and told him that we were not supposed to talk like that. Then he was like: Oh, sorry! Also, he went to the kids standing on the sidelines and said sorry to them as well. That was brilliant. They want to work at this. Because they understand that if we work in a group where everybody feels secure, it will improve performance on the pitch. (Erik)

In AIK youth football there is an explicit focus on understanding the club history and context in terms of how the club wishes to conduct their business and to be a club that is an essential contributor in the community.

There is an AIK magazine from the 50s or 60s where they write about how our duty is not just developing footballers but people in our society and being a club for everyone. (Mike)

The club is looking at its roots and history to understand better how they can develop the environment for athlete development further. The goal of creating both elite players and good public citizens illustrates the history of the club. The club's name AIK (Allmänna Idrottsklubben), translates into the club for everyone. The club aims to conduct a business that lives up to that name. As the club is currently going through changes, there are present and future challenges within the environment. Two coaches shared their perspectives on how the club's choice to move away from earlier specialization to a more open system influences and challenges how parents and players view the environment:

> We can see now with the decision from us that some private organizations are capitalizing on the decision by having private programs which are very much about improving performance and very much about early specialization. There is still this expectation from parents that their child needs this. (Victor)

> The main challenges are these culturally resilient beliefs that are ingrained in our society. (Mike)

One coach believed that there are both significant challenges, and big opportunities related to these questions:

> Trying to help people understand that a suitable environment for learning and development is centered around collaborating. Whether that is players and players, parent and coach, or club and association. If parents understand that football is a social activity that requires a player to play with others, what will happen to private practice with individual coaches? If we can get across that the players are going to develop excellent technique by playing in the streets or on different surfaces with each other that is a powerful message. We want to be an environment and club that is a safe space in the community for children and adolescents to develop. (Ole)

The changes made in AIK represent a new path for a club that already has a history of producing elite players. The club recognizes that there are significant challenges and

opportunities both with those involved in the club and all those outside the club who influence the underlying assumptions of the environment.

To summarize, the basic assumptions relates to the club's view of how learning emerges in nonlinear ways, that development is more important than identification, that having a contextual understanding is essential, and that conscious use of language is important to create the culture they aim to do.

6 Discussion

The study sought to investigate the organizing of player development in AIK youth football. In this chapter, the study findings and their application are discussed in relation to relevant theoretical and empirical research.

The study show that the structural changes to the academy represented a new direction for player development in AIK. The age for players to enter the academy was raised, new leaders and coaches changed the organizational structure of the teams, and a research and development group was created. The cultural position of AIK in their local environment has increased the attention from media and other sport clubs. The club has made an explicit statement about how they want to develop players based on a nonlinear pedagogical approach.

The first main finding relates to how AIK concern for children's health and wellbeing is expressed through (a) the recent changes in the academy structure (e.g. late entry, possibilities for diverse sport experiences during childhood and parallel pathways), and (b) the explicit focus on values and life-skills (through e.g. communication with parents, coaches and the wider public, the appointment of a "value worker" within the organization, and through promoting the development of life-skills in the everyday practice activities.

For example, the changes to the academy structure have made the club's explicit values explicitly in line with the ethos of the Swedish sports movement and the Swedish Sports Confederation (RF). The club follow the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child and the Swedish Sports Confederation's guidelines for children and youth. Children's rights in sport emphasize a sport-for-all perspective whereas the child's psychosocial development, health, well-being and enjoyment should be the focal point of sports participation (Skille, 2011). All of the Scandinavian countries have adopted a sport-for-all perspective as the main focus of their sport policy (Skille, 2011). This policy has shown to be both successful, resilient and competitive, as the Scandinavian countries have high participation in organized sport *and* international success compared to most other countries (Seippel et al. 2010). The Swedish Sports Confederation (2013) idea of Swedish sports is that sport should promote democracy, voluntary involvement, and good health, among other factors. The confederation has categorized child sport to be up to the age of 12 years, and youth sport from age 12 to 20 years. The entry age to the academy at 13 years are now aligned with the recommendations of the Swedish

Sports Confederation. However, even though the club has raised the selection age and entry to the academy, it does not mean that challenges related to the structure and nature of a football academy evaporate. In the Scandinavian sports model, the general attitude is against early selection and player development in the form of disciplined and specialized training (Andersen et al., 2015).

The attempt to encompass other objectives than elite development are becoming more and more rare in professional football. For example, Norberg & Sjöblom (2012) showed how a Swedish football club presented a planned elite effort based on structured talented identification from the age of nine. The kids who were "identified" would be provided with extra practices by professional coaches, receive media practice, mental counseling, and specialized nutrition. The president of the Swedish Sports Federation commented that the initiative was not in line with the values that should characterize youth sports. The criticism reflects how the professionalization of youth sport is a controversial theme. While such initiatives are far from unique, there is a general idea that they are not representative of the ethos of the Swedish sports movement (Andersen et al., 2015).

While it is clear that children's health and wellbeing are an expressed concern, the second main finding relates to how the club attempts to facilitate and develop. My findings show that the values and basic assumptions embedded in the organizational culture clearly influence the organizational structure of academy football in AIK. The coaches and academy officials conscious use of language illustrate how the club downplay athletic talent and place a stronger focus on development. In the youth academy, the word talent is rarely used. There is a focus on creating a practice environment where children and adolescents are encouraged to play and experience. Moreover, players in AIK are expected to help each other both on and off the field, facilitated by how coaches emphasis the development of psychosocial skills and good conduct (e.g. by carrying their own equipment).

By raising the age of entry for the academy to age 13 years the club promote early diversification pathways. This is very different to most football academies where increased professionalization has resulted in earlier selection and specialisation. It also challenges the historical, social and cultural beliefs prevalent in Swedish football culture. Thus, the coaches this study emphasized how it is challenging to do things differently when it is different to the culturally resilient beliefs about player development in football. Parents and players who feel the need for earlier specialization

and professionalization can move to a different club or pay for commercial player development programs. Challenging the view of early specialization in football is difficult when the sport has increasingly become more competitive since the professionalization and commercialization of football in Sweden from 1967 (Andersson & Carlsson, 2009). To prevent this, the club tries to be transparent and collaborate with all the involved stakeholders in order to facilitate a shared understanding of how the principles that underpin organization and practice.

For all players not selected to the academy, the club offer all players, the opportunity to continue to play football on teams organized within the club but outside of the academy. The club organize their pathways in a way that provides players with the opportunity to participate in several sports. However, players selected to the academy have to specialize around the age of 13. However, the club strives to be flexible and allow players to take part in other sports also after entry to the academy. The early diversification pathway facilitated by AIK is similar to the recommendations by Cote et al. (2009), who suggest that around the age of 13 children should have the opportunity to specialize or continue in sport at a recreational level. For example, Lerner et al. (2001) showed how the age 13 to 15 years is an essential period for the development of psychological processes. Early sampling has been shown not to hinder elite-sport participation in sports where peak performance is reached after maturation, for example, in team sports such as ice hockey, basketball and baseball (Baker, Côte, & Abernethy, 2003; Soberlak & Cote, 2003). Côte et al. (2009) have suggested that children are likely to learn emotional, cognitive, and motor skills through more diverse sport experiences, skills that can prove valuable to their later investment in sport. Therefore, missing practices in the AIK academy because of attending other sports will not have negative implications for the player, such as reduced playing time in games. In their study of Norwegian youth football players, Sæther and Aspvik (2016) have found that players who played more games reported lower levels of stress related to performance compared to players with less playing time, showing how playing time is important for their psychosocial development.

Even if AIK facilitates the possibilities for multi-sports participation through a more open system compared to more clubs who focus more on early specialization, the teams still participate in competitions where playing time is reduced. Furthermore, when players are used to having the same amount of playing time, this could potentially lead to players not developing the skills necessary to cope and grow in the face of

adversity because of lacking experience in dealing with such situations (Collins, & MacNamara, 2012). Examples of such adversity include coping with being benched, put off the team, or deselected from a player development camp. From their studies focusing on the psychological skills that facilitate successful talent development, Collins, Macnamara and McCarthy (2016) have found that it is essential that the athlete is provided social support, which ensures that adversities are interpreted and managed as positive growth experiences. Through this approach, youth athletes can develop the necessary psycho-behavioral coping skills. From the age of 13 years, the academy players in AIK are a part of a selection process throughout adolescence where the players experience an increased pressure to develop and perform because this enables entry to the next level.

In AIK, coaches and staff believe that an effective environment for player development should facilitate that individuals learn and grow from criticism. Carpentier and Mageau (2013) have studied change-oriented feedback, which is feedback that indicates that behavior needs to be modified, in a group of 340 athletes and 58 coaches. The results have demonstrated that such feedback could motivate athletes and guide them towards performance improvement. However, it can also lead to anxiety and decreased self-esteem. Carpentier and Mageau (2013) have suggested that change-oriented feedback should be characterized by autonomy support, clear and attainable objectives, and given in a considerate tone of voice.
During practice in the Academy, the coaches focus on how they use feedback and how players interact with each other.

The use of feedback can help players adopt a growth mindset, which is beneficial for player development. A growth mindset is fostered through a type of feedback that focus on factors that the student or athlete are in control over such as their work effort or stamina (Kamins & Dweck, 1999; Mueller & Dweck, 1998). The feedback that contributes to a growth mindset is characterized by having direction, and by encouraging the intention behind an action. In AIK, the focus is on feedback that supports individual decision-making, and there is a consensus among coaches and staff that solutions and creative behavior on the field are related to how players interpret information. For example, the use of feedback builds upon how players can exploit space, move on the field, dictate the tempo of the play, and position themselves in a way that provides better opportunities for effective individual decision making, these examples illustrate the pedagogical approach of the club. Furthermore, the coaches are

concerned about not giving too much information and feedback. In their study of how talent development environments can be designed to maximize the benefits of challenges in the environment, Collins, Macnamara and McCarthy (2016) have argued that while showing support, coaches also need the ability to take a step back and let players solve the problems themselves. The input from the coaches is not directed to telling players what to do and how to solve a technical task. Rather, coaches ask questions and give instructions on how the club wants to play and by holding players accountable to the club's values. While this study does not investigate the motivational climate, it is reasonable to believe that the coaching behavior and use of feedback in AIK may contribute to autonomy-supportive coaching behaviors. Autonomy-supportive coaching behavior has been demonstrated to be beneficial for psychosocial development and continued participation in sports (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2009; Adie, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2012; Rocchi, Pelletier, & Couture, 2013).

The third main finding relate to how the specific theoretical understanding of skill acquisition and pedagogical approach underpin all practice activities. Here, the player development model as a whole and the micro-structure of practice is facilitated through principles from nonlinear pedagogy (Vaughan et al., 2017). In AIK, principles from the nonlinear pedagogy-based approach are used to guide how the coaches utilize instructions and feedback, evaluate development and performance, and structure practices. The basis for practice design is based on the club values and the type of players they wish to develop (creative, imaginative players who work hard). This basis influences analysis of performance, the instructions given during practice and guides coaching behavior. Players are developed through game-centered training that does not separate the perception and action in skill execution. Here, perception and action in refers to the ability of the performer to use the information available in the practice environment to support their decision-making and movement (Le Runigo, Benguigui, & Bardy, 2005). In comparison to a nonlinear approach, traditional training methodology usually divides sport-specific training into either technical or tactical training where skills are practiced in isolation from the game contexts where they occur (Davids et al., 2012).

Several studies have compared skills acquisition and teaching of skills in linear and nonlinear pedagogy and have argued that the common misconception is that there exist an ideal movement solution for a given task (Lee et al., 2014; Moy, Renshaw, & Davids, 2014). Studies have focused on how coaches can manipulate specific

constraints in order to influence the development of specific technical and tactical skills (Práxedes et al., 2018; Vilar et al., 2014). A similar approach to practice design is often used at AIK. The assumption is that small-sided and modified games with numerical superiority or inferiority in the attack makes it more likely to enable players' to transfer their skills to the specific performance context.

Several empirical studies has supported a nonlinear pedagogy based on game-centered training. For example, Práxedes et al. (2018) have evaluated a teaching program based on nonlinear pedagogy that included 19 male players belonging to two U12 teams from the same Spanish club. The groups were formed by the club, and were not modified for the research. Both teams were of similar sports levels and played in the same local league, so they faced the same level of opposition. The teaching program was based on modified games characterized by a numerical superiority in attack. The results showed significant differences in the experimental group, whereas decision-making and the execution of passes after the intervention period of 14 training sessions was enhanced. Práxedes et al. (2018) have argued that the findings demonstrate the superior effectiveness of this type of program compared to isolated skill-based training.

More support was provided by Vilar et al. (2014) who examined the effects of varying the constraints related to the number of players involved in small-sided team games in football (5 vs. 5, 5 vs. 4, 5 vs. 3). In Vilar et al.'s study, the researchers demonstrated that manipulating the number of players influenced the patterns of interaction between the competing players and which actions the players chose to engage in. Vilar et al. (2014) have argued that successful performance in football are influenced by the athlete's ability to identify opportunities for actions from their spatial-temporal relationships with both teammates, opponents, and constraints, such as the location of goals, equipment, and sidelines.

Practice design at AIK aims to maintain a strong coupling between perception, decision-making and execution so that players can learn to exploit the given affordances in a specific task or game situation. One activity that illustrates this is how one team in the academy practiced developing the player's acceleration where the team used tag-games, which demands that the players continuously seek information to solve the challenge of the exercises. Critics of a nonlinear pedagogy have pointed out that the technical terminology and academic language present in the literature makes the principles from a constraints-led approach unavailable for a wider public. Renshaw and Chow (2019) have argued that this may result in a limited understanding of the critical

concepts and, hence, limited implementation. In their systematic review of studies that has applied a constraints-led approach in interceptive sports, Clark, McEwan and Christie (2018) noted that the evidence of such an approach is still not clear. In their assessment of the methodological quality of the original studies, the authors have revealed what they refer to as poor quality scores for the majority of the 18 original studies included in their review. However, 77.7% of the studies did find that game-centered training had a more significant benefit to technical skills development when compared to traditional training regimes (Clark, McEwan and Christie (2018).

In a commentary to Clark, McEwan and Christie (2018), Newcombe et al. (2019) have challenged their conclusion, and argue that it only provides an analysis of the quality of findings from experimental studies of skills learning that may contain reductionistic methods less suited to investigating different approaches in skill acquisition. Thus, there is a need for more research that examines the effectiveness of a constraints-led approach in real-world sports contexts.

A strong emphasis was placed by AIK on the importance that the ideas and concepts from their game-based approach were implemented in a manner that made the coaches effectively utilize the fundamental principles. The emphasis was on making the theoretical assumptions understandable and clear at all organizational levels. A wide array of organizational research has shown that there is a need for coherence between stakeholder in order for successful implementation to occur (Pankhurst & Collins, 2013). Coaches in the academy, together with the research and development group have weekly meetings in which there is a focus to discuss and share thoughts about how they aim to develop players.

In AIK, the research and development group have organizational responsibility for the general practice design of training sessions. This universal training methodology across the different teams and age-levels can make it easier for the other coaches in the academy to implement the principles from a constraints-led approach. However, it may also narrow the autonomy of the individual coach in a fashion that inhibits the coach's creativity and autonomy. The club has a clear philosophy for values, player development, and practice design that coaches are meant to follow. McLean and Mallett (2012) have provided an examination of what motivates sports coaches. Interviewing 13 coaches in different sports and levels of competition the study found that coaches' motivations were dependent on their connection with the sport, coach and athlete development, external influences, and internal influences. Related to external motives,

the high performances coaches in the study expressed a feeling of pressure to achieve success according to predefined performance in the environment, such as institutional goals. While AIK aim to focus on development there is still an omnipresent pressure on the coaches to develop players that can meet the standard of performance that is required in the first team. Thus, how well one can survive in a coaching position in AIK without presenting adequate results are left for future studies.

Because of the strong policy and implementation, a challenge in AIK is to provide coaches with the fulfillment of autonomy. For example, McLean and Mallett (2012) have pointed to the importance of also fulfilling coaches' psychological needs in sustaining their motivation and learning. If AIK does not provide coaches with enough autonomy and creative freedom concerning practice design, use of feedback, and choices related to player development this may inhibit the fulfillment of autonomy and be detrimental to coaches' motivation. How and when this becomes an issue is left for future research to determine.

Jones and Wallace (2005) have suggested that coaches realize their ambitions only through the success of the athletes for whom they are responsible. As coaches can never gain absolute control of how their players develop, the policy objectives in AIK might provide coaches with an unrealistic, and to a degree, unattainable goal for player development. In the case of the academy, there may be a challenge for coaches to develop players who collaborate instead of competing because the nature of academy football is to get selected to the next level, sometimes at expense of their teammates.

Denison and Avner (2011) have discussed ethical practice for positive coaching in athlete development. They argue that effective coaching needs to think critically about problem-setting and problem-solving in sport. The culture at AIK works to enable regular discussion and mutual assistance both on and off the field to further enhance the development of coaches and players. As AIK have chosen a clear policy of how they aim to develop players, it seems important that the norms and taken-for-granted ways to act are continuously scrutinized in order to further promote organizational development. For AIK, their vision is to become the leading club in the Nordic region, making continuous improvement inevitable.

7 Concluding thoughts

The organizational structure of the AIK youth football academy has recently gone through structural changes that have had a major impact on how they organize player development, their pedagogical approach and training content. The main findings of this study show how the club (a) attempt to align all activities related to practice and competition with the explicit values of the club; (b) apply a clear pedagogical approach based on a game-centered skill acquisition model; and (c) utilize the principles of nonlinear pedagogy in practice. The organizing of player development in AIK is an attempt to avoid the "one-size-fits-all" approach that traditional models of athlete development, skill acquisition and coaching are based on (Chow et al., 2016).

The player development model in AIK challenges common norms, ideas and beliefs about athlete development in football, present in and around Stockholm, Scandinavia and the international world of football. Reflecting on and questioning the common norms, ideas and beliefs of athlete development in football are necessary for the long-term development of players. Hence, AIK presents a different approach to organizing children's and youth football within a talent development system based on a dual approach, where continued sports participation and elite sport development are facilitated within the same broad-based organizational model (Collins et al., 2012).

Future studies of player development in football should attempt to address some of the limitations of this study. For example, to interview academy players would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how well-intended development initiatives create intended and unintended consequences (Denison & Avner, 2011), and would provide information about how the diverse needs, interests and objectives inherent in team sport can be balanced within a player development model (Ronglan, 2016). Talking to players currently in the academy or academy graduates could provide more depth and nuances to our interpretations. The present study was also conducted in a club which is still going through structural changes. By undertaking a follow-up study would provide additional information about the consequences and implementation of change to the youth academy, as would a longer period of participant observation. How the research and development group at AIK aim to enhance organizational change and facilitate athlete development could be an interesting case study in itself, as this group represents a unique initiative in how to work with research in football development within a Scandinavian sports context.

Future research may also aim at comparing different club-based systems of athlete development in football. In order to develop a better theoretical understanding of athlete development, one needs to go beyond the mere descriptive nature of the Environment Success Factors model. However, studies should always provide rich descriptions of the context-specific conditions that facilitate and constrain successful player development and long-term sport participation in football.

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Appendix A: Ethical approval from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services

NSD

Christian Thue Bjørndal
Postboks 4014 Ullevål stadion
0806 OSLO

Vår dato: 26.06.2018   Vår ref: 60909 / 3 / AMS   Deres dato: Deres ref:

Vurdering fra NSD Personvernombudet for forskning § 31

Personvernombudet for forskning viser til meldeskjema mottatt 25.05.2018 for prosjektet:

60909	Casestudie av ungdomsfotballen i AIK
Behandlingsansvarlig	Norges idrettshøgskole, ved institusjonens øverste leder
Daglig ansvarlig	Christian Thue Bjørndal
Student	Martin Skogheim

Vurdering

Etter gjennomgang av opplysningene i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon finner vi at prosjektet er meldepliktig og at personopplysningene som blir samlet inn i dette prosjektet er regulert av personopplysningsloven § 31. På den neste siden er vår vurdering av prosjektopplegget slik det er meldt til oss. Du kan nå gå i gang med å behandle personopplysninger.

Vilkår for vår anbefaling

Vår anbefaling forutsetter at du gjennomfører prosjektet i tråd med:
· opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet og øvrig dokumentasjon
· vår prosjektvurdering, se side 2
· eventuell korrespondanse med oss

Vi forutsetter at du ikke innhenter sensitive personopplysninger.

Meld fra hvis du gjør vesentlige endringer i prosjektet

Dersom prosjektet endrer seg, kan det være nødvendig å sende inn endringsmelding. På våre nettsider finner du svar på hvilke endringer du må melde, samt endringsskjema.

Opplysninger om prosjektet blir lagt ut på våre nettsider og i Meldingsarkivet

Vi har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet på nettsidene våre. Alle våre institusjoner har også tilgang til egne prosjekter i Meldingsarkivet.

Vi tar kontakt om status for behandling av personopplysninger ved prosjektslutt

Ved prosjektslutt 20.05.2019 vil vi ta kontakt for å avklare status for behandlingen av

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS   Harald Hårfagres gate 29   Tel: +47-55 58 21 17   nsd@nsd.no   Org.nr. 985 321 884
NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data   NO-5007 Bergen, NORWAY   Faks: +47-55 58 96 50   www.nsd.no

personopplysninger.

Se våre nettsider eller ta kontakt dersom du har spørsmål. Vi ønsker lykke til med prosjektet!

Marianne Høgetveit Myhren

Anne-Mette Somby

Kontaktperson: Anne-Mette Somby tlf: 55 58 24 10 / anne-mette.somby@nsd.no

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering
Kopi: Martin Skogheim, skogheim91@live.no

Personvernombudet for forskning

Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

Utvalget informeres skriftlig om prosjektet og samtykker til deltakelse. Informasjonsskrivet er godt utformet.

Personvernombudet legger til grunn at forsker etterfølger Norges idrettshøgskole sine interne rutiner for datasikkerhet. Dersom personopplysninger skal lagres på mobile enheter, bør opplysningene krypteres tilstrekkelig.

Forventet prosjektslutt er 20.05.2019. Ifølge prosjektmeldingen skal innsamlede opplysninger da anonymiseres. Anonymisering innebærer å bearbeide datamaterialet slik at ingen enkeltpersoner kan gjenkjennes. Det gjøres ved å:
- slette direkte personopplysninger (som navn/koblingsnøkkel)
- slette/omskrive indirekte personopplysninger (identifiserende sammenstilling av bakgrunnsopplysninger som f.eks. bosted/arbeidssted, alder og kjønn)
- slette digitale lydopptak

Appendix B: Written consent

As a master's student at the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences, Martin Skogheim wishes to conduct a case study of the youth football programme in AIK football. More specifically, the purposes of the study is to investigate (a) what characterizes the athlete development model in AIK youth football; (b) which values, theories and practical experiences form the basis of the athlete development model; and (c) how do the club transfer their intentions into practice? AIK is specifically chosen as an interesting case because of its explicit values, holistically perspectives of talent development processes, and its use of nonlinear pedagogy and a constraints-led approach to skill acquisition.

The data collection will be conducted during Autumn 2018, ideally between September-November, and the thesis will be submitted in May 2019. The data collection will focus on textual analysis of policy and strategy documents, semi-structured interviews of coaches and other club officials involved with player development and participant observation of practice sessions and matches. The conceptual framework for the thesis is based on the Environment Success Factors model (Henriksen, 2010).

What does participation in the study involve?

By participating in the project, coaches will be observed during training and matches. For those who are interviewed, questions will address the organization of youth football in AIK and how they attempt to facilitate skill acquisition and learning. Data will be recorded through notes and audio recordings.

Information and confidentiality

All personal information will be treated confidentially. The student and the supervisor will be the only ones with access to personal information. Participants will not be recognized in the

publication of the study. The project is scheduled to end June 2019 and collected information will be anonymized and audio recordings deleted after publication. The study has been reported to the Norwegian Center for Research Data AS (NSD) and is approved.

<u>Voluntary participation</u>

It is totally optional to participate in the study. All participants can at any given time withdraw from the study without giving any reason. If one chooses to withdraw all information will be anonymized.
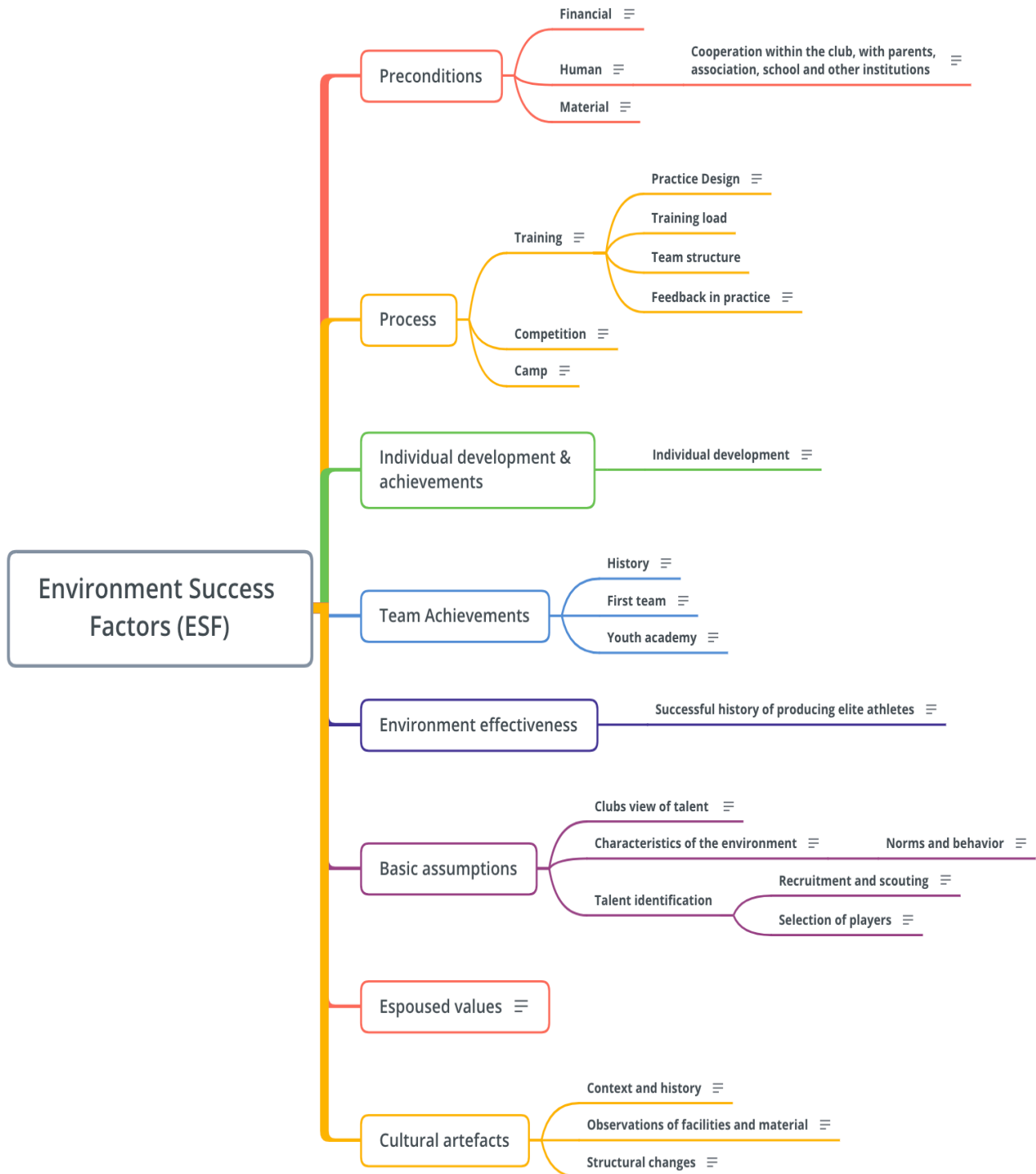
If you wish to attend or have any questions about the study, please contact student Martin Skogheim, phone: *+47 984 81 221* or supervisor Christian Thue Bjørndal, phone: *+47 408 98 766*.

Consent:

I have received information about the <u>study</u> and I am willing to participate

....
(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix C: Data analysis scheme

Appendix D: Interview guide

Theme	Main question	Follow-up questions
Background	Tell me about your role at the club	- How long have you been at the club? - How do you experience being a part of this club?
Talent concept	What do you experience as the core in developing young people?	- What is talent? - How important is talent? - What do you mean characterizes those who become elite athletes?
Talent development	How do you work to facilitate the development of young athletes? Can you tell me about the clubs approach to talent development and pedagogy?	- Planning - Instructions/Feedback - Evaluation - How does this approach fit in with your own approach to talent development? - What forms the basis of the clubs approach to skill acquisition?
Talent identification	What are you looking for in a potential elite athlete? What skills, player types and personal traits are the club looking for through the selection process?	 - Have these criteria changed during your time at the club?
Values	Can you tell me about the clubs work with values?	- What values do you believe to be

		important when working with young athletes?
	How do you work to implement the clubs values in your role at the club?	- In practices - In games - Outside of sport activities
	How does the club work with the guidelines for youth football provided by the association (SvFF)? (Spela, lek och lar) Can you provide some examples about how the club works with values in practice?	(Football for everyone, children's rights, focus on joy, effort and learning, sustainable athletes, Fair Play)
Development environment	What do you mean is important factors for creating a good environment for development? How do you work to contribute to a good environment for development? What do you mean are essential factors for creating a good relation between coaches and athletes?	- In practices - In games - Outside of sport activities

The clubs environment	What characterizes the culture of this environment?	- When a new coach arrive at the club, what would he or she experience as different to other clubs?
	Does the club have any specific vision or goals for the future?	- How does the club work to achieve these goals?
	In terms of the youth development at the club, what can be said about the role of:	- Coach
		- Other athletes in the club
		- Friends in and outside of sports
		- Family
		- School
	In the expanded environment around the athlete, how do you believe these institutions influence the development of the athlete:	- The football association
		- Other clubs
		- School
		- Family
		- Supporter culture
		- Coordination between institutions, such as: Club-school-national youth teams
	How does the club work to create positive cooperation?	
	How do you experience that the club´s environment affects athletes and coaches to develop and progress?	

Challenges	What challenges do you think the club will face in the future?	
	How do you think the environment can improve?	
	How do you think youth development in football will change in the future?	
In conclusion	Do you have anything to add?	

Appendix E: Observation guide

Theme	Observe	Observation notes
Organization of football practice	- Who leads the practice? - Number of coaches? - Number of athletes? - Age of athletes? - Length of practice? - How does the coaching staff distribute different tasks? - What happens in breaks? **Activities:** - How is the different parts of the practice organized? - What kind of practice designs are being used? - Number of repetitions? - What is being developed?	
Coaching and pedagogy	- What are the athletes supposed to learn? What characterizes the instructions and feedback: - Individual - Group - Positive - Negative - Use of questions - Types of questions being asked - Degree of codetermination - Is there a focus on result? - Is the clubs values implemented in the practice? - What values is focused on? - What norms appear during the practice?	

Appendix F: Club document explaining the player development environment