Talent Development in Female Football

What characterizes a successful environment?

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Abstract
Research on talent development has developed to highlight the central role of the environment and have found that good and supportive environments can ease prospective elite athletes’ transition from junior to senior elite level in sport. The aim of this study was to examine a successful athletic talent development environment in female football through a holistic ecological approach, in order to provide a holistic description of the environment. Furthermore, the aim was to explain how factors are influencing the environmental success in developing prospective elite athletes into senior elite athletes. The study was designed as a case-study and data collection included a total of eight interviews from multiple perspectives (prospective elite athletes, head coach, elite athletes and sport manager) and analysis of documents. The environment was characterized by good communication and cooperation, centered around the relationships between prospects, coaches and school. Moreover, the environment included a strong organizational culture characterized by good attitude and motivation, a whole person approach and coordinated and integrated efforts. The results showed many similarities with research conducted in other successful athletic talent development environments.

Key words: Talent development environment, female football, prospective elite athletes, transition, holistic ecological approach, case study, environmental success, support, cooperation, organizational culture.
Acknowledgements

I would like to begin with expressing my sincere gratitude to the football club and all the participants from the environment who contributed to my study. You were all open and generous with your thoughts and provided me with valuable information. I hope that this master thesis will be a contribution back, with a content that will make you see the strength in your environment as well as sides to further develop.

Big thanks to my supervisor Joakim Lindgren, who guided me through the process of writing this thesis. Your support has been incredibly important and I appreciate all the help I have received from you.

Finally, to Umeå University – five years have come to an end. These years have included hard work and countless hours of reading and writing, but with me I have knowledge, experience and memories that will last for a life time. Thanks!

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Introduction

The following chapter will outline the background of the selected research area, followed by the aim of this study and designed research questions.

A broader context to understand the development of athletic talent

In sport research, talent development is often discussed with the aim of producing athletes that can achieve a consistent world-class level of performance (Li, Wang & Pyun, 2014). The Swedish sport federations states that there is something congenital that can be defined as “talent”, but that it takes more than just talent to succeed in sport. Talent is something that needs to be developed through long-term training that requires great ambition and desire from athletes (Fahlström, 2011) and fundamental in athletes’ striving for success is the quality of the environment where the development occurs (Ivarsson, Stenling, Fallby, Johnson, Borg & Johansson, 2014), seeing that is what underpins the nurturing of the athletic talent (Henriksen, 2010).

Previous research in this area has mainly been focusing on identifying athletic talent, but has now shift to focusing more on how to best develop it (Ivarsson et al., 2014). The main focus is especially on the environment in which the athlete develops (Henriksen, 2010; Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler, 2011) since the development process of athletes is affected by the interaction between the individual athlete and their environment (Carlsson, 1991). Traditionally, researchers have paid attention to the micro-environment (i.e. coaches, parents and peers) but factors such as national culture and sport systems (macro-environment) have also been found to affect the development of athletes, meaning that research has advocated a holistic approach to study talent development (i.e. to see the whole picture) (Henriksen, 2010). Other factors shown to be important in developing athletes includes for instance; long-term development focus, good communication, understanding of the athlete, challenging and supportive network system (Ivarsson et al., 2014) as well as strong organizational culture with an open sharing of knowledge and high degree of cohesion (Henriksen, Stambulova & Roessler, 2010a).

Within talent development environments it is common that talented athletes experience high demands from coaches and parents (Ivarsson et al., 2014) together with the great amount of pressure that comes from stress trying to balance demands in both sport and school (Larsen, Alfermann & Christensen, 2012). Some of these demands have negative impact on athlete’s mental well-being (Ivarsson et al., 2014) and during the transition from junior to senior elite level, these demands are often perceived as too tough, resulting in dropouts and athletes not reaching their full potential (Henriksen, 2010; Larsen et al., 2012). Another risk during this transition is that athletes develop a one-sided athletic identity, which will endanger not only their sport career but also their adaption to life after sport, as they will experienced a higher degree of emotional adjustment difficulties (Lavallee, Gordon & Grove, 1997; Lavallee & Robinson, 2007). High demands can be an obstacle for the transition, but sport organizations can reduce these barriers by providing good talent development environments (Henriksen, 2010). Larsen, Alfermann, Henriksen and Christensen (2013) explains that the responsibility of giving athletes adequate resources to cope with difficult transitions in their careers lies in the talent development environment and not on the individual athlete or club. By applying a holistic approach to talent development, it is easier to understand the challenges that comes with it, such as problems regarding recruitment, retention and transitions (Henriksen, 2010). The approach also acknowledges that some environments nurture athletic development more successfully than others, by helping talented young athletes successfully transition from junior level to senior elite level. Research in Scandinavia indicates that these successful talent development environments share a number of features which define their success, but that these types of environments are unique.
Henriksen (2010) used a holistic ecological approach and two working models to study three successful athletic talent development environments (ATDE’s) in individual sport in Scandinavia. From the results, the author could identify common characteristics in the environments, which he summarized as eight success features contributing to talent development. The author highlighted the value of studying further environments from this perspective, as this may reveal that successful environments to a degree have similarities in the role of components, structure, organizational culture etc. Additionally, Henriksen (2010) suggested the direction for further research:

One future research direction is to investigate successful ATDE’s in a variety of sports. There are clear gaps especially as regards the classic team sports, such as soccer, handball, and ice-hockey, and it is very likely that successful team environments will vary in nature from those in individual sports (p. 172).

With the same perspective and working models, Larsen et al. (2013) expanded the research area to examine a successful talent development environment in Danish male football. Many similarities with Henriksen’s (2010) results could be identified, but also differences. Larsen et al. (2013) study contributed to the research field by examining a team sport, but there is however still a lack of research on successful environments in female team sport. Gledhill and Harwood (2014) believe that research lacks an understanding of female football players’ developmental experiences and suggest that these experiences need to be examined from their perspectives. Since only a minority of talented young female football players can develop into elite players, the authors believe that by examining their experiences from their perspective it can help football organizations to further improve the quality of female sport. Due to that previous research with a holistic ecological approach and the two working models as a framework have not solely focused on talented female athletes, it can be assumed that successful ATDE’s in female team sport may look different and consists of other features explaining its success, than what have been found among talented male athletes and athletes in individual sport. The purpose of this study is therefore to provide knowledge that can help to fill the gap in this area and hopefully strengthen and extend the understanding of successful environments in a different sport context, from unique and common features and the contextual influence on these features. In order to do that, focus will be to gather talented young female athletes’ (prospective elite athletes) and other significant individuals’ perceptions from a successful talent development environment in female football.

**Aim of study**

By applying a holistic ecological approach, the aim of the present study is to provide a description of a successful athletic talent development environment in female football and examine how factors in the micro- and macro-level influence the development of future elite athletes. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, following research questions have been designed:

- How do relationships and processes between prospective elite athletes, coaches, elite athletes and other significant individuals appear in female football?
- How are environmental factors in female football (e.g. individuals, educational systems and organizational culture) contributing and cooperating to talent development?
- In what way are Henriksen’s (2010) eight success features represented in the environment?
Theoretical approach and framework

The following chapter will provide a presentation of the development of a broader perspective, chosen background theories, and finally the two working models used as a framework to describe a successful athletic talent development environment and explain its success.

The development of a broader perspective

The term Talent Development Environment (TDE) was introduced by Martindale, Collins and Daubney (2005) through analysis of existing literature on talent development, including both theoretical and empirical work. Due to the review, the authors could identify five reoccurring themes, reflecting aspects of effective TDEs: (1) long-term aims and methods, (2) wide ranging coherent support and messages, (3) emphasis on appropriate development rather than early selection, (4) individualized and ongoing development and (5) an integrated, holistic, and systematic development. From this review, the need and direction for further research was highlighted and subsequent research has then developed models for examining talent development environments.

Talent Development Environment (TDE) refers to all aspects of the coaching situation, i.e. focus is exclusively on sport domain and coaching (Martindale et al., 2005). Henriksen (2010) did however develop an ecological approach to study talent development, by including young athlete's social relations both inside and outside sport. By incorporating both micro and macro-levels and sporting and non-sporting domains, he widened the perspective by focusing on a broader development context and environment, and through that he introduced the holistic ecological approach to the study of athletic talent, which also will be used in the present study. Henriksen (2010) labelled the environment as an “athletic talent development environment” (ATDE) and defined it as:

...a dynamic system comprising (a) an athlete’s immediate surroundings at the microlevel where athletic and personal development take place, (b) the interrelations between these surroundings, (c) at the macrolevel, the larger context in which these surroundings are embedded, and (d) the organizational culture of the sports club or team, which is an integrative factor of the ATDE’s effectiveness in helping young talented athletes to develop into senior elite athletes (p. 161).

Background theories

To be able to compare existing environments, Henriksen (2010) created two working models of a successful ATDE, which will be described later in this chapter. The basis of the models can be found in existing theories of individual development in the context of, and dependent on the environment. These theories will serve as background for the present study.

Ecological model of human development

Inspired by Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) ecological model of human development, Henriksen (2010) took the assertion that talent development must be understood in the light of the particular environment in which it takes place. Bronfenbrenner (1994) describes the environment as a series of nested structures, consisting of micro-, meso-, and exosystems within a macrosystem and last but not least, the chronosystem which extends the environment to a third dimension. The micro-system refers to the context where people spend a good deal of time and consists of relationships and the meso-system involves interrelations between microsystem. A context where individuals are not actually situated but are influencing their development, forms the exo-system and the macro-system involves a larger cultural pattern of the society. Lastly, the chronosystem encompasses change or consistency over time, with focus on both the characteristics of the individual as well as the environment where the individual lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Fundamental in this theory is that the development is affected by the complex interrelationship between process, person, context and time (PPCT model). The
process refers to interactions between the individual and objects, symbols and people on all different levels in the context over an extended period of time. The process can be called proximal processes. The person refers to the way this person invites or discourages reactions from the social context, and the context refers to the different levels of the environment that already has been explained (Krebs, 2009). The context includes both objective properties (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, Karnik, 2009) but also the way it is perceived by the person. Time includes both micro-, meso- and macro-time, where the first refers to what happens during an activity, the second to the extent to which activities and interactions happens with consistency in the environment, and the last to the importance of historic events or periods. Henriksen (2010) explains that the theory states that there is reciprocity in the relationship between the individual and the environment, where the individual also affects the environment and not only vice versa. This leads to the perception of the environment-individual as a system. This model helps to understand that the ATDE is not an independent organism that affects athletes, but that the athletes in turn, affects the ATDE, because of the social relations and interplay that exist in it.

Systems theory
In addition to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development, Henriksen (2010) used the systems theory framework to assist in viewing ATDE's as systems containing certain functions and components, with a structure and development. ATDE’s is therefore seen organized wholes that are self-regulating regarding maintaining stability and a fit with the context. The basic tenets Henriksen (2010) used from the system theory includes the understanding of a complex system where the whole is different from its parts, thus that investigating the sum rather than its pieces is essential to get the right presentation of phenomena. Furthermore, interactions between parts of the system are presented in patterns, where rules and codes of conduct organizes the interactions between members of a social system. Another basic tenet Henriksen (2010) present refers to the cyclical nature of development and how behavior is influenced by the past, present and future. Systems adapt, either by slow ongoing accommodation or an abrupt discontinuous change, to maintain a fit to the context which are in change. Finally, systems are viewed as open and permeable, and if there is a change somewhere in the system it will most likely create a change somewhere else. Therefore, it is not likely to describe a human system without reference to the environment.

Cross-cultural and cultural psychology
Organizational culture was also incorporated into the working models from cross-cultural and cultural psychology. Culture is described as a multi-level phenomenon with an impact on human experience and behavior. It defines central values, directs behaviors and guides socialization of new members and is relevant in small groups and not only in a broader societal level (Henriksen, 2010). Culture can be seen as material (cultural artefacts such as stadiums, buildings or clothes) and non-material (values, beliefs, lifestyles and patterns of interactions and so on, that are shared by a group of people). Organizational culture focuses on patterns of behavior that belong to the culture and not to the individual. A group is described as an open system that is constantly adapting to the society in change.

Sociocultural theory
To further understand talent development, parts from Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory will be in included in this study, in addition to the theories that form the basis of the working models created by Henriksen (2010). By including parts from this perspective Tappan (1998) explains that social participation is seen as the starting point for learning and development. This perspective is based from a constructivist view, where it is assumed that knowledge is created through common interaction and not just individual acts. The social environment and culture is the most crucial in how individual’s learning and development occurs. Relationships are a central element in this perspective and it presumes that learning is created through participation and interaction with others. This perspective also emphasizes how the social world
with more competent adults and peers is guiding individuals and their development. Adding this perspective to the present study will acknowledge that prospective elite athletes’ development is created through practical activities where people collaborate together within a cultural community, i.e. the ATDE.

**Two working models as framework**

As already explained, Henriksen (2010) created two working models of a successful ATDE. He suggested that: “a successful ATDE is an environment that holds a successful track record of producing elite senior athletes from among its juniors (p. 162). The author further translated the previously explained background theories into manageable approach and matching scientific methodology appropriate for the study of environments in sport. The working models were created in order to compare environments and to deal with a large amount of data.

**The Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE) working model**

The first working model developed by Henriksen (2010) is the athletic talent development environment (ATDE) working model (see figure 1). This is a descriptive working model used as a framework for describing a particular athletic environment. The model helps to clarify roles and functions of different components as well as relationships within the environment. An ATDE as a system serves mainly to help prospective elite athletes to successfully transfer from junior level to senior elite level in sport, and therefore they are in the center of the model. The model is structured in a micro- and macro-level, divided into a sporting context and non-sporting context (athletic and non-athletic) and embraced with a timeline (past, present and future). Closest to the prospective elite athletes (micro-level) is the club environment, which consists of managers, coaches, experts, current elite athletes, younger athletes and club mates. Other components include school, family, peers and related teams and clubs, and some of these components may transcend between the athletic and non-athletic domain. The entire micro-level is characterized by real communication and interaction. Social settings that affect athletes but do not contain them, refers to the macro-level. This level includes reference groups, sport federations, educational systems and media, as well as national culture, general sporting culture, the culture of the specific sport and youth culture. The timeline illustrates that the environment is dynamic and changeable and that prospective elite athletes and their context is influencing each other in an equal manner (Henriksen, 2010).

![Figure 1: The Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE) working model (Henriksen, 2010).](image-url)
The Environment Success Factors (EFS) working model

The ATDE working model exists as a guide to describe a specific talent development environment, but is however not answering the question why a specific environment is successful. Therefore, Henriksen (2010) also created an explanatory model as a supplement to the ATDE working model, named the environment success factors (EFS) working model (see figure 2). The EFS working model allows to explain why a specific environment is successful, by structuring factors in the environment.

Preconditions provided by the environment are the starting point in the model and exemplifies how the daily routines (process) have three outcomes: athletes’ individual development and achievements, team achievements (in team sports), and organizational development and culture. These outcomes are related to each other and have an impact on the environment's success. Preconditions explain human (coaching and material resources), material (training and accommodation facilities) and financial factors, which are necessary for the talent development environment, but however, is not a guarantee for success. Process refers to everyday activities in the environment, such as training, camps, competitions and social events. These activities can be diverse and specific to the environment. Prospective elite athletes’ achievement of psychosocial competencies and athletic skills and how they in combination lead to success in sport, is linked to individual development and achievements. The teams’ athletic success is linked to team achievements and both of these (individual and team achievements) are a product of the process, especially countless hours of training, but also due to organizational development and culture.

Central to the EFS working model is organizational culture, consisting of three levels. Cultural artefacts are the first level and include stories and myths, customs and traditions, and physical cultural manifestations such as clothing, building and organizational charts. These artefacts are hard to interpret but easier to observe. Espoused values are a second level and include social principles, norms, goals and standards. The organization shows these to the world as they exist in the minds of the members and serve as noticeable incentives for actions. The last level, basic assumptions, consists of beliefs taken for granted and assumptions and are underlying reasons for actions. These are derived by the researcher because they exist at a level below the members' consciousness. The integration of key basic assumptions into a cultural paradigm, guiding socialization of new members, providing stability and adapting the organization to a constantly changing environment, is characteristics of an organizational culture (Henriksen, 2010).

![Figure 2: The Environment Success Factors (EFS) working model (Henriksen, 2010).](image-url)
These two working models that have been presented complement each other in the way that (1) the ATDE working model provides a framework to describe a talent development environment and (2) the EFS working model helps with summarizing how factors are influencing the environment’s effectiveness. The EFS working model predicts that the success of an athletic environment is a result of the interplay between preconditions, process, individual and team achievements, where the organizational culture integrate these different components.
Methodology

The following chapter outlines a description of the research design and approach, including a presentation of the environment and participants, data collection and data analysis. Finally, a discussion about the research quality and ethical considerations will be presented at the end of this chapter.

Research design

A qualitative research strategy was chosen for the present study with the aim to go deep and get detailed information about a specific phenomenon, i.e. a successful ATDE (Hassmén & Hassmén, 2008). This strategy allows an understanding of how individuals imagine the world and what meaning they give the phenomena in the world. Focus is placed on the individual, unique, distinctive and on differences, as well as to find coherence and structures.

Qualitative case study design

The two working models created by Henriksen (2010) form the basis of the empirical data collection in the study and preconceptions about how the ATDE is constituted exist in these models. However, there will be openness for new knowledge, facts and perspectives and the idea that the two working models might need to be edited and enhanced to describe a successful ATDE in female football and what is characterized with its success. Thus, to focus on the specific phenomenon and to gain insight and an understanding, to go deeper rather than wider, and to discover rather than to prove (Hassmén & Hassmén, 2008), a qualitative case study was employed to the present study. This design place attention to sort out complexities, by examining how relationships and social processes works in detail in a social context, together with an understanding that facets in the environment are connected to each other. Using a case study design allows a holistic perspective instead of looking at individual factors separately (Denscombe, 2016) and is additionally embedded in real-life situations (Maaloe, 2004). It also allows combination of research methods to capture the whole environment (Denscombe, 2016). The present study therefore adopts an abductive and explorative integrated approach to research. An abductive approach is described as a cross between induction and deduction, which adds new and personal steps and has a constant movement between empiricism and theory. It is a systematic combination where theoretical framework, empirical studies and analysis are simultaneously developed (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2008). The explorative integrated approach is defined by Maaloe (2004) as: “a cyclic approach of a continuous dialogue between pre-chosen theories, generated data, our interpretation, feedback from our informants, which hopefully will lead us to a more inclusive theory building or even understanding” (p. 8).
Environment and participants

Choosing the environment (i.e. club) for the study was made using a criteria related selection. This type of selection requires a description of criteria with prepared essential attributes before including the unit of the study (Merriam, 1994). The selected criteria to find a suitable environment for the present study are explained in table 1.

Table 1: Criteria for environment/club.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for environment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful record of producing elite athletes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in team sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consists with a female elite team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consists with a female junior team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a collaboration with a national approved sport program</td>
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</table>

From criteria, a football club was selected as the environment for this study. This may be interpreted as a convenient choice, as the club is located in the nearby environment for the case study. It should also be acknowledged that the selection of environment is partly a time-serving case, as the club was open for the study. However, the club meets the selected criteria, due to the large number of athletes in the elite team that comes from the junior elite team. This is consistent with the suggestion Henriksen (2010) had on the criteria for a successful ATDE and is an indicator that the environment is successful in developing prospective elite athletes into senior elite athletes. This is the definition of a successful ATDE the present study assume. As the study aim to extend the research field by examining a female team sport, it is worth mentioning that the club only consists of female football players, divided in a junior elite team and a senior elite team. The club also has a contract and cooperation with the national approved sport program (NIU) located in the city.

Looking at previous results for the club, the elite team had a successful period in 2000-2010, when they won the series seven times and received two victories and three second places in the UEFA Women’s Cup. The junior team playing in the F19 north series finished in second place in 2014 and won the series in 2015. The F17 team won the swedish division 3 and finished in 3rd place in Gothia Cup in 2014 and finished in second place in the swedish division 2 in 2015 (The club, 2016a). When the club in 2015 merged the two junior teams into one junior elite team, playing in two different series, they finished in first place in the F19 north series and in second place in the swedish division 2 series. Worth mentioning is that all except five players in the junior elite team are studying at NIU, thus that most of them are playing with the school team that have received good results in the swedish national tournament for schools.

Selecting individuals to participate in the study was made using a targeted selection (Merriam, 1994), which means that individuals that were considered to provide the most knowledge about the ATDE was chosen. This type of selection is based on the assumption to detect, understand and gain insight. It facilitates to better solve problems, such as to discover what is happening, the results of what is happening and to also understand the relationships connecting these events. The selected criteria to find the best individuals for this study are explained in table 2.
Table 2: Criteria for participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prospective elite athletes:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Members of the football club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying at a secondary level at a national approved sport program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals from different cohorts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals from at-home city and moved-in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals who has represented a junior national team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elite athletes:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of the football club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Players in the elite team for minimum of two years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent position in the elite team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Junior elite coach:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible for the prospective elite athletes’ training at night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed higher coaching education program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School coach:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible for the prospective elite athletes’ training during school hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed higher coaching education program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sport manager:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Been a part of the club for minimum of two years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible for the existing team in the club</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The target group of the study was prospective elite athletes playing in the junior elite team. The age of the target participants varies between 16-19 years old and therefore, they are in the investment phase of development (Côté, 1999). They are all students at NIU, one prospective elite athlete moved from another city to be a part of the environment and one has been representing the junior national team several times.

Apart from the target group of prospective elite athletes, participants included; two elite athletes, one junior elite coach/school coach and one sport manager. Since one person fulfilled the criteria for both junior elite coach and school coach, this could be combined in one interview. This person will hereinafter be referred as “the head coach”.

**Research methods and instruments**

Data was collected from individual interviews and analysis of documents, meaning a methodical triangulation was made (Merriam, 1994). It is common to use different methods to collect information for a case study, and this enables to exploit all the advantages of the different methods and still be in control of their disadvantages.

**Interviews**

Using interview as a method allows an understanding of the world from the subjects’ point of view and from their experiences meaning can be developed. A qualitative interview is a professional conversation between the interviewer and interviewees, where knowledge is created commonly in the relationship (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Hassmén and Hassmén (2008) present different types of interviews and argue that semi-structured interviews are preferred when the study has its starting point in a model of reality. Since this study is using the ATDE and EFS working models as a theoretical framework, semi-structured interviews were employed.

In order to have adequate questions for the interviews, an interview guide created by Henriksen (2010) was used in the present study, i.e. a list with relatively specific themes to include in the interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2015). However, some adjustments from the original interview guide was made and varied in some questions to allow different perspectives (e.g. from the view of
prospective elite athletes, elite athletes, the head coach and the sport manager). Themes to include, emerged from the two working models and formed the basis of the interview guides, which created structure and focus to the interviews. Fixed answers were avoided to generate flexibility to the interviews (Hjerm, Lindgren & Nilsson, 2014) and allow space for the interviewee’s perspectives. To further enhance flexibility, to focus on the participants’ perspectives and to decrease the risk of asking unclear and leading questions, the interview guides consisted of clear and open-ended questions.

The interview guides started with an introductory part, with questions about the participant’s background and immediate impressions of the environment. This followed by a descriptive part with questions about the roles and functions and specific components of the environment and about the relationships between these components in the micro- and macro-level. Questions about the factors contributing to the environment’s success, as well as questions about preconditions, process, individual- and team development and achievements, and organizational culture continued the interviews in the explanatory part. In the final part of the interviews, questions about future challenges were included. One example of an interview guide is attached in appendix 1. Note that all attached appendixes will be in Swedish.

**Document analysis**

The second technique used in this study was document analysis. Documents are a complete and rich source of information and can be defined as public documents, personal sources, physical remains and artifacts, and is information that exists about the subject before the research has started (Merriam, 1994). Documents can also be defined as written text (e.g. books, articles and reports), digital communication (e.g. webpages, messages, blogs and social media) and visual sources (pictures, videos and artefacts) (Denscombe, 2016). Sources for this study included; the webpage of the club, NIU and the football federation, received documents from the environment and social media. Since the aim of the present study was to provide a description of a successful talent development environment, based on the descriptions and perceptions from individuals that exist in it, the documents used in this study were all formed by the environment. Merriam (1994) explains that documents have an independent existence of the research and therefore has a connection to the reality. In the present study documents were important artefacts in the culture that helped to understand how the environment understands itself and to understand important features in the environment by comparing documents with data from interviews.

**Procedure**

After selecting the environment, a letter of introduction (see appendix 2) was sent by e-mail to the club, to obtain consent for their participation in the study. After receiving a confirmation, a sample of individuals was chosen to participate. This was made in collaboration with the sport manager, junior elite coach/school coach and elite coach during a meeting, to ensure finding suitable participants based on the criteria. During the meeting, it was agreed that the findings would be presented to the club after the investigation was finished. Anonymity to the club was also offered during the meeting, but not accepted. Even though the club did not want to remain anonymous, the club name remained anonymized because the participating head coach and sport manager easily can be identified otherwise.

When the individuals were selected, the head coach gave the target group (i.e. the prospective elite athletes) information about the study, to gain a preliminary acceptance. A letter of information was then sent to all participants, with information about the study, overarching topics for the interviews and ethical guidelines. Small changes in the description of overarching topics were made because the aim was to capture different perspectives. One example of a letter of information is attached to appendix 3.
Procedure for interviews
The interviews lasted between 21 and 72 minutes and were recorded with an audio recorder, to facilitate for the author to concentrate on the topic and focus on the dynamic of the interview. By recording the interviews in permanent form it also simplified further analysis and transcription (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). All interviews were conducted in different settings, but all in familiar environments for the participant, such as school, club house and places in the training facility. The interview with the sport manager was however conducted in a quiet room in one of the city’s hotels and this was decided by the sport manager.

Procedure for document analysis
In order to gather background information about the football club and start the evaluation on the basis of criteria, the webpage of the club was used. This webpage is public and mainly provided information about the club’s history, present and statistics. The webpage of NIU and the football association gave further insight about their activities and organisational goals. Information about the club’s sporting and organizational developmental plan, junior elite team objectives and guidelines as well as the club’s vision and mission statements, were provided by the environment. Social media (i.e. Instagram) was also used to gain further insight in the environment and provided information about social activities and projects that have taken place in the club.

Table 3 summarizes the data collection strategies.

Data analysis
Processing data for a qualitative analysis is always done using a certain method and require a structure (Hassmén & Hassmén, 2008). The theoretical framework and the scientific approach to the study determines the choice of method and the ways to structure the processing and the analysis. Since the present study uses an abductive and explorative integrated approach, data analysis was based on this.

Transcribing interviews
In terms of preparing qualitative data for analysis, transcribing is often the first step when interviews have been the source for data collection. The process of transcribing includes transforming speaking words into written text (Hassmén & Hassmén, 2008). While all interviews in this study were recorded with an audio recorder, transcription could be performed after each completed interview. All transcribed material remains private and will not be shared with anyone else, due to the ethical consideration which will be discussed later in this chapter. The interviews were all performed in Swedish and the selected quotes featured in the empirical findings have been translated into English.

Categorizing data
There are different tools and approaches to make the interview analysis more accessible, procedures including coding, categorizing, condensation and interpretation of meaning (Kvale & Brinkman, 2014). In the present study, analysis of documents was made using the same approach as for the interview analysis. The first step involved deductive categorizing of data. Themes emerged from the working models used as a framework, i.e. coaches, elite athletes and family in the micro-environment and the football federation and educational system in the micro-environment. Throughout the analysis, new themes appeared and were included together with the content of the themes, representing an inductive categorizing of data. The second step in the analysis process included meaning condensation, a tool to summarize sentences more briefly, in order to essentially pick up the meaning and describe longer sentences by pressing them together in a few words (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Each theme contained summarized sentences and provided an overview of a large amount of transcripts and a summary of each category could be written. From the results, empirical versions of the working models were
created; the ATDE working model to describe the environment and the EFS working model to explain the environmental success.

**Table 3: Summary of data collection in the environment.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Transcripts</th>
<th>Archival data used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prospect 1</td>
<td>54 minutes</td>
<td>18 pages</td>
<td>School and club webpage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospect 2</td>
<td>53 minutes</td>
<td>16 pages</td>
<td>The Football Federation webpage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospect 3</td>
<td>38 minutes</td>
<td>12 pages</td>
<td>Club sporting and organizational development plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospect 4</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>15 pages</td>
<td>Club vision and mission statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite athlete 1</td>
<td>31 minutes</td>
<td>9 pages</td>
<td>Junior elite team objectives and guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite athlete 2</td>
<td>21 minutes</td>
<td>8 pages</td>
<td>The junior elite team and elite team instagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head coach</td>
<td>65 minutes</td>
<td>19 pages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8 interviews</strong></td>
<td><strong>379 minutes</strong></td>
<td><strong>113 pages</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Assessing the research quality**

To establish trustworthiness of the study, there were several steps taken into consideration. To ensure that the perspectives and experiences of the participants were correctly corresponded, the findings were provided to the environment before being published (Bryman & Bell, 2015), and throughout the data analysis there was a dialogue with the head coach and sport manager, to establish and ensure that the findings were correctly understood. Seeing that the analysis of basic assumptions related to the organizational culture of the club involved interpretation from the researcher, the check with the environment mainly concerned this. Some adjustments were made but the overall findings were perceived correctly. Using interviews, document analysis and also gather data from several information sources (e.g. prospective elite athletes, elite athletes etc.) also made is possible to check out the consistency of the results (Merriam, 1994) and strengthen the credibility of the study.

A detailed report of the underlying assumptions and theories, criteria for participants, the social context where the information was derived and the methodological process has been granted in order for future researcher to repeat the work. The reason it not to require the same results in future research, but rather to make sure that the findings are consistent and depending (Merriam, 1994). To further explain, the present study does not aim for a statistical generalization but instead for an analytical generalization, meaning that findings from this study may be used as a guide to what might occur in other talent development environments (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014).

Throughout the entire study, the author has acted in good faith to ensure that the findings are the results of the experiences and thoughts of the participants and not the preferences of the author. Guaranteeing objectivity is however impossible, but a constant attempt have been made to not let personal values affect the results, in order to achieve confirmability of the findings (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Due to the fact that the author have experiences of participating in a talent development environment as a football player, reading previous research of the field made the author aware of her preconceived notions, which facilitated not to be seduced by them. Furthermore, theoretical implications were not used to confirm or control the content of the results, but instead to guide the data collection and support the overall reconstruction of the results. As already stated, all collected data from documents was written by individuals in the environment, to establish authenticity.
**Ethical considerations**

To protect the individuals who participated in this study, a series of recommendations and guidelines were followed (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). In order to fulfill the information requirement, the club and all the respondents received an information letter with information about the purpose of the study. The club and all respondents accepted this and gave their informed consent of participation, which correspond to the consent requirement. Furthermore, respondents were promised confidentiality to feel more comfortable with answering questions during the interviews. To prevent identification of the respondents, fictitious names were used in the findings. Furthermore, no contact information or answers have been extradited to a third party, which meets the confidentiality requirement. All transcript material will therefore be kept private by the author. Lastly, the utilization requirement is met when all use of the material has been exclusively for this study. The respondents were also informed in the information letter that their answers were only to be used for research and not for commercial use.
Literature background

In this chapter, previous research on talent development will be presented, with a focus on environmental factors. The first part will outline a summary of major features identified to explain environmental success in developing talented athletes. The second part will present a more detailed presentation of key factors considered to be important to support athletes in their transition from junior level to senior elite level in sport and how they are interacting in the environment. These factors will be divided into a micro- and macro-level. Henriksen (2010) terms talented athletes who are in the transition from junior to senior elite level as “prospective elite athletes”. However, previous research use other terms to these athletes. To facilitate further reading, these athletes will hereinafter be referred to as “prospects”. Additionally, the athletic talent development environment where prospects are situated in will be referred as the "environment".

Major features explaining environmental success

In a Swedish context, Carlsson (1991) executed a retrospective study of talent development in seven different sports. The author compared a group of national team athletes with a group of athletes whom were successful up to about 15 years of age but did not reach further than that. This study showed that the athletes who managed to reach national team level explained that their success was due to factors such as a good club environment, friends within sport, no pressure to succeed, support from parents and good experiences with coaches.

From the earlier work made by Martindale et al. (2005), that identified five factors as key features on effective talent development, Martindale, Collins and Abraham (2007) gathered experiences from 16 coaches in the UK, that all have had records of success in the development of prospects into elite level. The aim was to provide more substantial evidence for best practice and the study revealed a number of factors as key features consistent with the previous work. The results included for example the need of long term aims throughout the development system, with clear expectations and understanding of the dynamics of talent development. Coaches in this study highlight the importance of developing prospects psychosocial skills, the need for individualized development and a systematic process of goal-setting, developing, and reviewing. Furthermore, informal interaction between prospects and coaches, creating a balance in their lives and systematic use of role models, is considered important for talent development.

Whereas Martindale et al. (2005: 2007) focused on all aspects of the coaching situation (i.e. the micro-environment), Henriksen (2010) on the other hand took the starting point in studying environments, using a holistic ecological approach and focusing on a broader context. Henriksen (2010) made a multiple case study of successful environments in individual sport in Scandinavia, using interviews, observations and data analysis for the data collection. The target group of all three studies was prospects, but elite athletes, coaches, managers, experts, parents and others, were also included as participants. From this multiple case study design, the author could identify eight features explaining successful environments. A list of the eight features was developed, together with opposite poles to clarify the meaning of each feature (see table 4).

Table 4: Features of successful athletic talent development environments (Henriksen, 2010)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Features of successful ATDE’s</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
<th>Opposite Poles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training groups with supportive relationships</td>
<td>Opportunities for inclusion in a training community; supportive relationships and friendships within the group, despite performance level; good communication.</td>
<td>Individualized training programmes at an early stage; training alone; low cohesion in the group; inter-group rivalry; performance as a criterion for inclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proximal role models</strong></td>
<td>Community of practice includes prospective and current elite athletes; opportunities to train with the elite athletes; elite athletes who are willing to pass on their knowledge.</td>
<td>Airtight boundaries between athletes at different levels. Elite level athletes keep their secrets and regard prospects as future rivals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support of sporting goals by the wider environment</strong></td>
<td>Opportunities to focus on the sport; school, family, friends and others acknowledge and accept the athletes’ dedication to sport.</td>
<td>Non-sport environment shows lack of understanding of elite sport and the demands involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support for the development of psychosocial skills</strong></td>
<td>Opportunities to develop skills and competences that are of benefit outside the sporting domain (such as autonomy, responsibility and commitment); considering athletes as “whole human beings”.</td>
<td>Focus solely on sport and winning at any cost; excessive control from coaches; focus not on personal improvement but on relative performance level, which devalues learning and development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training that allows for diversification</strong></td>
<td>Opportunities to sample different sports during early phases; integration of different sports in the daily routines; appreciation of versatile sport profiles and basic sport skills.</td>
<td>Promoting early specialization; focus solely on developing sport specific skills; considering athletes’ interest in trying different sports to be rivalry and a potential threat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus on long-term development</strong></td>
<td>Focus on long-term development of the athletes rather than early success; age-appropriate amount and content of training.</td>
<td>Focus on short-term success; kids are seen as miniature elite athletes; no time to heal when injured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strong and coherent organizational culture</strong></td>
<td>Organizational culture characterized by coherence between artefacts, espoused values and basic assumptions; culture provides stability to the group and supports a learning environment.</td>
<td>Fragmented culture in which espoused values do not correspond to actions; uncertainty and confusion among coaches, athletes and others; lack of common vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Integration of efforts</strong></td>
<td>Coordination and communication between sport, school, family and other components; athletes experience concordance and synergy in daily life.</td>
<td>Lack of communication; conflicting interests; athletes experience many and contradicting pulls in daily life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally Larsen et al. (2013) developed the research area by examining talent development among under-17 soccer players in a successful Danish soccer club. The study was designed as a qualitative case study and data was collected from multiple perspectives, such as prospects and elite athletes in the club, school, peers and coaches. Similar features as the ones developed by Henriksen (2010) could be identified, such as; a focus on a long-term education and
development rather than early results, a strong and coherent organizational culture, a strong family feeling in the club and an environment characterized with openness, cooperation and knowledge exchange. There was however some differences that could be recognized. The environment did not have any proximal role models for prospects and did not give prospects the opportunity to train with elite athletes. There was also a lack of explanation and communication to support in prospects’ transition to senior elite level and cultural differences between the junior team and the senior team.

**Key factors in the micro-environment**

**Coaches**

Larsen et al. (2013) found in his study, that club coaches have constant contact with prospects and shared information regarding football and were available for informal talks. Coaches in this environment were working with prospects in a familiar atmosphere and in a holistic approach, where they shared knowledge about recruitment and tryouts of new players, injuries, development plans, poor or good performances and lack of development. There was a communication between coaches, talent managers and sport managers regarding talent development, performance and results, as well as an understanding that prospects may miss out on practice if they have a lot of studies to do.

From the multiple case study that previously was explained, Henriksen, Stambulova and Roessler (2010b) found that coaches in a successful track and field club have different competencies that allows them to overcome practical problems regarding schedules, exchange views, inspire and support each other. Results from a kayaking environment (Henriksen et al., 2011) showed that school coaches work more as mentors and sparring partner than traditional coaches. In this environment there are also a constant cooperation and communication between club-, national team- and school coaches, regarding prospect’s training.

Ivarsson et al. (2014) examined the predictive ability of perceived environment on the well-being of prospects in Swedish football. The participating prospects responded to questionnaires three times during a year and from the results, the prospects were divided into one high quality, one moderate quality and one poor quality class. The high quality environments were characterized with coaches that were communicating a vision for prospects’ sport development. They were supportive regarding long-term performance goals, which were gradually followed up and evaluated. In addition, they were explaining the purpose of exercises and link the exercises to set goals, engaged in prospect’s life outside sport and were present for them. In the environments with lower quality, there were a lack of communication and support from coaches, which was found to have negative impact on prospects’ development, which makes it important for coaches to show an autonomy support over a longer time to increase their well-being (Ivarsson et al., 2014).

From the study made by Martindale et al. (2007), coaches further expressed how they can help to create a balance in prospect’s lives, which make prospects sustain in a successful progression. This could, for example be made by helping them with the ability to relieve stress that comes from life and sport, encourage outside activities and also by helping them to develop effective mental and physical recovery plans. This was believed to assist prospects to prevent burnouts, make them see themselves from a rounded perspective and prepare them for the outside world.

Henriksen, Larsen and Christensen (2014) further developed the research field using a holistic ecological approach, but with a case study in a struggling environment in golf. Multiple perspectives such as administrators, coaches and prospects were included and data was collected from interviews, observations and analysis of documents. The authors could identify features opposite to the ones found in successful environments. As for the role of coaches, prospects in the environment were only relying on the coaches as technically and theoretically providers, and if non-sporting problems occured they were not likely to talk to them about it.
There were neither any communication nor integration between coaches, teachers and school coaches, which sometimes lead to confusion for prospects by conflicting advice and demands.

With a quantitative study design, Mills, Butt, Maynard and Harwood (2014) examined prospects’ perception of the quality of their environments. The prospects participated in football academies and described that their environments were of good quality, where factors such as a long-term focus, a big support network and effective communication were central qualities. Coaches in these environments were described to present for players at all times, have good communication with support staff about prospects needs and have good dialogue with players’ schools regarding sport related activities.

Using semi-structured interviews, Wolfender and Holt (2005) examined prospects’, parents’ and coaches’ perceptions of talent development in elite junior tennis. The study revealed support from adults in several ways and as for the relationship between prospects and coaches in the environment; it was characterized as playful but serious. Prospects and coaches could laugh together during practice, but there were also boundaries and seriousness.

**Role models**

The importance of elite athletes in environments has proven to be valuable because they can help prospects in their transition from junior to senior elite level, by preventing a “cultural chock” (Henriksen, 2010). Henriksen et al. (2011, 2010b) found that elite athletes are the main driver as role models for prospects’ development and a central quality of the environment. They are giving the prospects a chance to pick up on the training culture and technique. In a sailing milieu, Henriksen et al. (2010a) found that elite athletes pass through knowledge about sporting skills and everyday life experiences in an organized training between the two groups. Elite athletes are also important in pointing out the routes to elite performance. In a struggling environment, Henriksen et al. (2014) found that the relation and interaction between elite athletes and prospects was absent.

The development coaches from Martindale et al. (2007) study explained that there are different ways to incorporate role models in prospect’s development. Examples provided was; to mix age groups in the school or club environment, expose prospects to elite athletes or coaches, use video, read biographies or have meetings that include mixed-age and performance-groups. Martindale et al. (2005) however argues, from their review on literature regarding talent development, that there can be different role models apart from elite athletes, in different levels of the development apart. Individuals such as coaches, teachers, schools and peers can all have a large impact on a prospect’s beliefs and attitudes. Additionally, Gledhill and Harwood (2014) interviewed female football players in different sporting levels (youth international level, international colleges representative team and Women’s Premier League) and found that their fathers (with current or previous role in professional football) and brothers can act as a role models and providers of football related information.

Research also reveals that environments are using prospects as role models, to help with coaching younger athletes, to make them realize the knowledge and the value they share (Henriksen et al., 2010a), to earn money to finance their sport, to their personal growth (Henriksen et al., 2010b), and also to prepare them for a coaching career if they fail to reach international elite level (Henriksen et al., 2010a).

**Relations with other teams and clubs**

From the multiple case study, relations with other teams and clubs are also visible in the environments. The results showed that there is integration between teams and clubs, where practice and knowledge can be shared across borders (Henriksen, 2010). For example, prospects in the kayaking environment were welcomed to train with other clubs in the country when they were on holiday (Henriksen et al., 2011), some were visiting neighboring clubs for a week’s
training with friends (Henriksen et al., 2010b) and others were invited to train together with elite athletes from another nation (Henriksen et al., 2010a).

**School**
Several studies found that school is a central part of prospects lives (Henriksen et al., 2011; 2010b; Larsen et al., 2013) and that there is important with cooperation between school and sport to facilitate their development. Larsen et al. (2013) found that there is a shared perception by the club and school, that sport and school are equally important. Coaches provide help by contacting school regarding practical issues, such as when prospects travel within sport and miss out on participation in school. Teachers meet these difficulties by adjusting their homework and every day routines as well as by arranging extra classes. Henriksen et al. (2010b) also found that teachers are supporting prospects, by making them involved through post and phone when they cannot participate in school. In two other environments (Henriksen et al., 2010a; 2011), it appears that school provided prospects opportunities to train during school hours.

Henriksen et al. (2014) study on a struggling environment showed a lack of communication between school and sport, with teachers that do not understand prospects’ involvement in sport and coaches that are not inserted with the amount of homework they have. Gledhill and Harwood (2014) addresses that lack of interaction between such factors in the environment can result in a bad relationship between prospects and teachers, because of the educational underperformances. Li et al. (2014) also found evidence from a review study on environmental factors that are essential for effective talent development, and that there was an increased dropout rate in sport were prospects got lower academic results and feel stressed because of conflicting demands in the environment. Furthermore, from a negative case study including interviews with former female football players that did not make it to the Women’s Premier League in the UK, Gledhill & Harwood (2015) found that there was a lack of understanding and communication between school and sport, which became a barrier for their development. From this there was suggested that it is important with teacher with an understanding in dual careers, because teachers who only focus on prospect’s “student-identity” will cause role ambiguity within them.

**Family**
Mills, Butt, Maynard and Harwood (2012) examined the factors perceived to influence prospect’s development in their transition to professional level in football, by interviewing coaches responsible for the development. Environmental factors were discussed as important for prospect’s development, including the role of significant others. Parents was seen to have a central role, with supportive behaviors such as putting trust in coaches methods, not get to involved in prospects development and provide emotional and tangible support.

Côté (1999) states that prospects are situated in the investment phase of development and found in his study about the influences of the family in the development of sport that this phase consists of a range of roles from parents that facilitates prospects participation in sport. From interviews with prospects, siblings, mothers and father, he found that the support from parents does not directly involve giving sport-specific instructions or coaching, but rather to show an interest and companionship. This is also confirmed by finding from Wolfender and Holts (2005) study, where parents instead of giving tennis-specific advice were more involved with general advice. Côté (1999) further states that the investment phase contains high level of emotional support provided by parents in time of stress. Other studies (Henriksen et al., 2010a; 2010b; Gledhill & Harwood, 2014; Wolfender & Holt, 2005) confirm that emotional support from parents is important for prospects when they need comfort and security. In the study conducted by Wolfender and Holt (2005) the emotional support was mostly provided when prospects have had a tough match or during a losing streak. In the later part of their development, Li et al. (2014) and Mills et al. (2012) also found the importance of parents was to not focus too much on
winning or sets unrealistic expectations on their children, since that can hamper their development. Parental behaviors such as over-inflating prospects’ egos, living through them (i.e. imaginary participation in their lives) and being overprotective, will also have a negative effect on their development (Mills et al., 2012).

Research have found that successful environments are characterized with prospects that have parents who have been active in the same sport or in other sports, which contributes to an increased involvement in the sport and nurture of an elite mentality (Henriksen et al., 2011; 2010b). It has also been found that financial and practical support from parents is of great value for their development (Larsen et al., 2013; Henriksen et al., 2010a; 2010b; Li et al., 2014; Gledhill & Harwood, 2014; Wolfender & Holt, 2005) to make them participate in competitions (Henriksen et al., 2011) and when they are in need of sport related equipment (Henriksen et al, 2010b; Gledhill & Harwood, 2014; Wolfender & Holt, 2005). Henriksen et al. (2010a) found in their study, that the environment supports prospects from other cities with surrogate families, since there is not enough provision if they are living in student dormitories.

**Friends**

Looking at the significance of friends, research shows that friends and peers play a crucial role in supporting prospects’ long-term participation and involvement in sport. Through sport, prospects also get the opportunity to receive friends, which increases social satisfaction and commitment to the sport (Li et al., 2014). However, research shows that prospects experience the importance and role of friends in and outside sports in different ways. Some experience friends within sport as an important factor to better say no to parties and activities with friends outside sport and also for keeping a high motivation within sport (Henriksen et al., 2010a), while others experience that their participation in sport makes it difficult to take part in these social settings (Henriksen et al., 2011). Having friends within sport has found to be easier than maintaining friendship outside sport, which makes it more common to have friends within sport (Henriksen et al., 2010b). Gledhill & Hardwood (2014) explain that emotional support from friends within sport during difficult time such as when injuries happen or prospects being left out from the team are perceived as important.

Friends outside sports are seen as important for prospects’ social identity (Larsen et al., 2013), to unwind mentally from sport (Henriksen et al., 2011) and from the social support they get to maintain participation in sport (Gledhill & Harwood, 2014; Mills et al., 2012). Research does however show that friends outside sport can be demanding for prospects, when they cannot attend activities with them (Larsen et al., 2013). Gledhill & Harwood (2015) states that this can result in a role conflict between the role as a player and the role as an adolescent. It has also been found that friends outside sport can lead prospects from the correct path or direction in sport, which will have a negative effect on their development (Mills et al., 2012).

**Key factors in the macro-environment**

**Educational system**

As already stated in the micro-environment, research shows that it is important that prospects get support from school in their commitment for dual careers. In the successful track and field club, educational institutions at all levels are available (Henriksen et al., 2010a) and for those who cannot sustain a living through sport, a state education grant for a basic living is provided (Henriksen et al., 2010b). Li et al. (2014) states that educational systems differ between contexts and that research have found that schools play an important role in establishing a suitable setting to introduce sport for prospects, by a wide range of sport programs where they can develop their skills. Geographic locations of schools can also influence talent development, for example with the accessibility to facilities and equipment.
**Sport Federation**
Henriksen et al.s. (2010b) study revealed that the sport federations in the environment work as a support for prospects, when issues regarding school occur. The federation addresses these problems to the specific sport federation, which then takes contact with the school to solve the problems. The federation also deals with sponsorships, strengthens relationship with the overall sport community, help prospects with preparing further education, organizing training and selection for talent groups and national teams, and provide financial support for prospects to attend competitions and also to sell equipment for a good price. They are also organizing important relationships with media. Henriksen et al.s. (2011) research on kayaking, found that the sport federation was visible in the environment by organizing shorter and more frequent camps, which prospects experience as social events and a treat to them.

Research in the track and field club (a rural club) (Henriksen et al., 2010a), did however revealed that the sport federation is not considered as an important partner in the environment. They support with supervising and hosting competitions as well as funding high schools and organizing national teams, but the club experienced a lack of attention in comparison with the attention clubs in bigger cities acquired.

**Community**
The sailing environment is symbolized with cooperation between different actors, such as club, school, sport centers and local companies (Henriksen et al., 2010a). They are working together with local companies, which involve financial and tangible support, but also support in helping with housing and flexible jobs for prospects. In cases where the financial resources in the club are limited, it was found to be important with volunteer contributions from companies (Henriksen et al., 2010a). Clubs with limited financial resources can however be successful, for example when benefiting from having world-class environments for the sport (i.e. facilities provided by nature), though the financial means is seen as important in the long run for developing prospects (Henriksen et al., 2011).

**Media**
The relationship with mass media should be a resource and not a barrier and Henriksen et al. (2010b) found that the successful track and field environment are helping prospects to create stories of interest to the media as well as assisting them when it comes to interviews. They are also getting them used to media attention.

**Culture**
The national sport culture is considered an influential and important part in successful environments (Henriksen et al., 2010a; 2010b; 2011). A recurrent attribute research has identified importance’s in successful environments; the sport organization culture need to be strong, dynamic and coherent (Mills et al., 2014; Martindale et al., 2007; Larsen et al., 2013).

Martindale et al. (2007) found that the messages from every source of influence in the environment should be clear. This can be done by different kind of methods (e.g. formal education days, informal contact, websites, booklets, involvement of parents and a sharing of information and ideas throughout the organization. Martindale et al. (2005) explains the importance of a good culture, to be able to develop appropriate attitudes and behaviors in prospects, as well as being able to build an environment that is self-reinforcing. If the culture is not strong and coherent, Henriksen et al. (2011) explain that it could lead to uncertainty and confusion among prospects, coaches and others, which will affect prospects’ development in a negative way.

In the track and field club, Henriksen et al. (2010a) found that the environment is symbolized with an organizational culture where interactions have a family nature. Coaches have good conversations about prospects and a high level of feedback and discussions and there is also a
Henriksen et al. (2010a) established a strong link between junior coaches and senior team operations. Henriksen et al. (2010b) further identified that focusing on performance process rather than results during trainings and an open sharing of knowledge and co-operation will improve the development of everyone in sport organizations. A culture characterized of openness, patience, discipline, ambition, determination and independence was further analyzed as common in a successful environment (Henriksen et al., 2011).

As already stated, there is significant through research that it is important for organizations to have a long-term development focus (Larsen et al., 2013; Henriksen, 2010; Martindale et al., 2007; Ivarsson et al., 2015; Li et al., 2015). For a successful long-term development, research find a need for systematic planning and implementation in a number of areas (Martindale et al., 2005; Li et al., 2014), and Henriksen et al. (2011) state that these strategies need to be implemented by policy makers at institutional levels. Li et al. (2015) explains that focusing on a long-term development will give prospects key attributes to realize their potential. Furthermore, successful environments do not focus only on results (Henriksen et al., 2010b) nor on prospects with the biggest talent (Larsen et al., 2013). Instead those environments are focusing on the potential of every prospect and their ability to work hard. Findings by Mills et al. (2014) also showed that in a successful environment, there is a coherent philosophy where core values, expectations and behavioral standards are clearly defined. The environment is promoting whole-person-development and creates a sense of ownership and relatedness by empowering staff, players and parents. Larsen et al. (2014) states that strong and coherent organizational culture that is promoting the development of whole persons, also support the development of a holistic package of psychosocial skills. Prospects will be able to use these skills both in sport and in other life spheres. Jones & Lavallee (2009) used focus groups to explore; how life skills are defined; which of these skills British adolescent athletes need and; which are considered as most important. Athletes and coaches were included in the study and the results confirmed the importance of life skills that can be used in both sport and other life spheres. The athletes that participated in the study stated that social skills are the most important because when they stop with their sport they need to be able to make friends outside sport, and they further explained that social skills will be of benefit in future jobs.

In lack of financial resources in sport clubs, a strong organizational culture can be a winning concept, by working together as a team, helping and pushing each other. This also includes working together within the whole nation of sport (Henriksen et al., 2010b). Henriksen et al. (2011) also states that having favourable conditions and recourses will not lead to a developmental success for prospects, if the communication and coordination between coaches and teachers, school coaches and club coaches and so on, is not integrated. Larsen et al. (2013) continue on this track and explains that fancy and expensive stuff is not necessary for athletes in their sport development, but instead there need to be a culture through the organization that hard work is the only thing that needs to be successful.
Empirical findings

The following section will present the club as a case, with a starting point in the ATDE and EFS working models. The models summarize the results of the data analysis and from this basis; a holistic description of the environment will be made, in order to explain its success in developing prospects.

A description of the club as an ATDE

By starting from information and perceptions from participating prospects, the head coach, elite athletes and the sport manager, together with information provided from document analysis, major components and relations in the environment will be described below. This will be structured into a micro-environment (athletic and non-athletic domain) and a macro-environment.

Micro-environment (athletic domain)

At the center of the model is the target group of prospects playing in the team. The immediate experiences prospects have of the environment are positive and they explain that it is a successful environment when it comes to developing athletes, due to the fact that the club annually recruits prospects to the elite team. The key to environmental success is mainly described by prospects due to the fact that they are a group of athletes wanting the same thing and a group with a good cohesion. The good relationship between NIU and the club together with the group of coaches are also described as key factors influencing the success. One prospect defined the key to the environmental success like this:

I think it is because we know each other so well. Surely, new players are coming and some are leaving, but we do quite a lot outside football. Both that we are eating together, and now we happen to have school together, and we practice together and are going away some weekends, so we practically become a family, so I think that what it is mostly (Prospect 1).

The relationship between prospects and the group of coaches is strong in the environment. The head coach for the team is also one of two coaches for prospects studying at NIU, something that facilitates for prospects to get a moderate training intensity throughout the weeks. This makes it easier for the head coach to keep track of the developing need of prospects and adapt practices based on that. The head coach also works as a coordinator between the club and NIU and is the head of the junior elite operation. He is responsible for the structure of the operation and explains that his primary task is to make sure that the big picture is correct and suitable for the prospects and that the whole team of coaches and players are focusing on development rather than results. Prospects explain that the head coach is involved in their life outside sport and supports them in the relationship with NIU, for example by helping them to take time off from school when they have away games, training camps etc. He is also described by prospects as playful and with a focus on the development of the whole team during practices with the club, rather than focusing on the individual development.

The four remaining coaches around the prospects, where two of them are new this year, have different competencies and responsibilities. One coach has the primary responsibility for physical training and the remaining coaches are focusing more on developing prospect’s individual skills during football training. In total, three of the coaches have a football education relevant to train a first league team in Sweden and the sport manager highlights the club’s ambition is to always have educated coaches.

Overall, prospects describe that the group of coaches are pushing them in a good way, ensures that all players are doing their best, helping them with developing football skills and are available for conversations about sport and life outside sport. However, when the head coach is
absent, the training quality is described as lower and the climate not as tough, something the prospects experience should change. One prospect commented on this:

Some coaches are a little like “it will work out, it will be good”, while others are much tougher. It can be a little so-so sometimes, because the level of the practice gets uneven depending on the coaches that are present and how to behave (Prospect 1).

The relationship between prospects and elite athletes are clearly visible in their daily sporting life. The team is normally sharing the pitch with the elite team during afternoon trainings. There is cooperation between the teams, where prospects at times participate in trainings with the elite team. The coach of the elite team together with the sport manager of the club are usually the ones choosing the players to participate in elite teams trainings, and some players train with the elite team more frequently than others.

The overall relationship between the team and elite team is described as good because they often share the pitch, train together at times and see each other most days, but the relationship between the players in the teams are described to be very different. Prospects relationship to older elite athletes is declared as absent in comparison the relationship they have with younger elite athletes. The reason for this is explained by the fact that the younger elite athletes recently have been a part of the junior elite team. Prospects and younger elite athletes have developed friendships and are also spending time together outside sport. Both prospects and the head coach describe that the relationship has been improved over time and that prospects are now welcomed better in the elite team contrary to the past. However, there are still negative experiences regarding elite athletes which were commented like this:

When I was younger it was like, or like "what the hell, or what are you doing here?”. It was not that they welcomed you as much, but now it is much better. Some are saying hi, but it is like, they do not care about us a lot really (Prospect 4).

There are also experiences from prospects that when participating in trainings with the elite team, they do not feel like a part of the group and more like cones. The sport manager did however explain that in more tactical practices, the purpose for prospects is not always to perform but rather get an insight in how the elite athletes are performing things and the way it sounds during their trainings. The two elite athletes participating in this study confirmed that the relationship is mainly because prospects are training at the same time or with them, but that there is no further relationship than that. One elite athlete commented: "I think that everyone would feel better if we knew each other a little bit better, but right now we don’t, more than those who have come up several times and trained" (Elite athlete 2). This is though something that they wish to improve, to benefit both teams. Elite athletes do however feel joy watching prospects train with them, because of their motivation to improve and develop, and because they are talented and ambitious. One elite athlete also commented on the difficulties that might exist for prospects that participate in their trainings:

We often talk about the fact that we need to feel what to do, that we should practice game sense and I think that is the most difficult for them because they are used to people telling them what to do... They often want me to tell them exactly what to do and that becomes a form of security for them... I can tell that it hard for them and also for me because I need to guide them, and sometimes I notice that I do it too much (Elite athlete 1).

Prospects are important for elite athletes because they remind them that they have come a long way in sport and prospects give elite athletes an opportunity to become better instructors when helping them during trainings. One elite athlete explained that she is trying to remember how she felt when she was new and had players to look up to and then tries to act toward prospects as she would like to be treated herself.

There are no younger teams in the club, but some prospects are participating as coaches for kids during the clubs summer academy. The club also organizes a winter academy with two trainings
per week. The sport manager did comment about the club not having any younger teams in the club and the philosophy behind it:

We stopped with our youth activities two years ago... where we had grassroots sport and elite sport. But if you want a good harmony with other clubs in the city, I see a danger with us taking the best players too early. Partly because we know from both research and experience that there is a bit of a lottery who becomes good in young ages, and the risk is also impending that if we are taking players in an early age, we are going to break teams because they won’t have enough players, and that they feel that they are loosing their best players and feel that it is not worth playing anymore and that their careers are over. Then we contribute to the contrary to realize football dreams, we contribute even more to damage them. I believe that around secondary school age, it is an okay time to select for our team and the junior elite business. Much sooner than that is too early (Sport manager).

Both the club and some prospects have relations to other teams and clubs. There are prospects participating in district- and national team training and games. The club has contact with other clubs regarding player recruitment and also to help prospects that will not get a spot in the elite team to find other teams to play with. The club’s sporting and organizational development plan explains that prospects who are too old for the team, but not ready for the elite team are passed on to other clubs, but with the hope that they will develop and once again be considered for the elite team.

Linked to prospects studying at NIU is a big support team consisting of a student counselor, curator, school nurse, accommodation coordinator and also an orthopedic and physiotherapist connected through a health company. From this company, prospects get help regarding injuries and they have the equipment needed to help them with that. The head coach explains this relationship as important, due to the fact that the club needs to have prospects on the pitch in order to develop them, and that it is the responsibility of an elite club to provide support to make sure they are. All prospects are however not familiar with the support system with experts provided in the environment. Missing in the environment is a physiotherapist for the team that can participate in all afternoon trainings and help when injuries happen. One prospect explained that coaches and other prospects are the ones helping with wrapping if injuries happen and stated that it is not a suitable situation for the team.

**Micro-environment (non-athletic domain)**

A central part of prospect’s lives is school. Apart from providing an education, half of the football trainings are organized in school during mornings. The head coach commented the importance of school and explained that this cooperation is a precondition for the club to operate the business in the way they want to.

All prospects described the relationship between NIU and the football club as important and positive. The relationship facilitates for prospects to combine school and sport. Teachers at NIU have an understanding that prospects are dedicated to sport and support them by adjusting school work. The football club also has an understanding that school is important and prospects are allowed to skip trainings to study, if they are behind or stressed with school. One prospect started secondary level school in a regular class but changed to NIU after a year. She explained the differences:

It means a lot this with NIU. Last year I did not study at NIU because I chose not to apply because I thought it would be too much. But I changed my mind, talked to them and started there. It has become much easier because the first year was though with sport and school because it became too much and if you were going away with football you had to hand in an application and a lot of stuff like that and teachers did not have the same understanding. It is easier now because our teachers at NIU understand (Prospect 3).
The sport manager described that the relationship between NIU and the football club also provides an insight in prospects performance in school and enables them to take them off football trainings if they not manage to pass courses in school. He explains that school comes first and football second and commented on the way the football club wants to act:

And without taking too big words, I think it becomes a holistic approach to watch education, that we are trying to see the whole person and life puzzle to make it possible for players to feel good and develop at all levels. Both as a human, as a football player and in school (Sport manager).

Prospects mostly have friends within sport and especially within the team. Everyone being good friends within the team is appreciated because it contributes to the joy of sport and prospects spend a lot of time together even outside sport. Everyone’s determination to reach elite level helps prospects to not stay up late at night and party, and there is also an agreement in the team and in the football club that this is not acceptable. One prospects explained how friends within the team contributes to her:

I would say that is one of the most important things, because if you end up in a training environment where you not feel comfortable at all, I think it will affect the football a lot and as I mentioned earlier, I think that’s why it has gone so well for the team and for many individually. That we enjoy being together and that you really feel that it’s fun to go to training, not just for football but to meet everyone (Prospect 1).

Having friends outside sport is not as common, but appreciated in the sense that prospects can unwind mentally from football and relax. One prospect however described that friends outside sport often value different things and that it can be hard to find common interests and maintain these relationship in the longer run.

All prospects come from families with some background in sport and some parents are active as coaches today and providers of sport knowledge. Parents are described as involved and interested in prospects commitment to sport. Three of the prospects also stated that their parents are the main source in helping them to reach elite level in sport. The fourth prospect that moved here from another city explains that the players that she is accommodated with are central in her development, due to the fact that they are helping with everything around sport, such as food, sleep and school.

The main support provided by families is financial, emotional and practical support. Parents are helping prospects paying player fees, the costs for training camps and support them with help in different work that needs to be done on the behalf of the club. The last-mentioned support makes it easier for prospects to focus on sport and school instead of working. The head coach commented on the support from parents and their involvement in prospects daily sporting life:

I want them to become senior players. It should not be that parents are that involved in that. It sometimes happens that parents call, but I rather see that prospects bring up problems themselves. It is not to mess with them, but for their development. It would be difficult if we bring a player to the elite team, because it becomes a huge difference and it becomes a chock which is not good. They should be as prepared as possible at all levels (Head coach).

Parents are also visible in the environment by helping the club with recruiting sponsors, fixing apartments for prospects and working during elite team games, something that is highly appreciated by the club. There is also a contact between the club and parents if something happens with or around the player, and it is usually centered to problems such as injuries.

For prospects moving to this environment from another city, support and supervision in their daily lives are provided by the school and the accommodation coordinator. The accommodation coordinator visit prospects apartments at times, to make sure everything is okay and to help with things regarding apartments or student dormitories. The head coach described the
accommodation coordinator as a “parent on site” and the participating prospect in this study experience that she has been available every time they have been in need of help.

**Macro-environment**

To be able to organize the entire operation, the club is dependent on financial means provided from the *local business community*. Relationships with sponsors are important and it requires hard work from the club to maintain and develop these. The relationships with sponsors are described as “give-and-take relationships”, where the football club receives money but also gives back in different ways. Prospects and elite athletes are contributing to give back, by performing work on the behalf of the companies. In addition, the club is annually organizing a dinner for the most contributing companies.

There are also existing relationships with *the local sport community*, where the club collaborates with other football clubs in the city. There is for example an agreement for cooperation with another club, to provide players in the elite team playing time if they do not receive enough time in the club. This relationship is important to maintain since prospects that eventually gets too old to play in the team need new clubs to play with, if they do not take a spot in the club’s elite team. Players from the team together with the elite team are also mentors for youth sport clubs in the city and offer to conduct a minimum of two activities with each club.

Acting as a cohesive force in the macro-environment is *the school management* and its relationship with the club. NIU provides prospects with highly educated teachers and instructors, with a goal to provide the best solution for combining elite sport and studies. The aim is also to provide football training with a clear elite character with objective that students eventually will reach elite level. As already explained, prospects value this relationship high in their daily sporting life because it helps them focus on both school and sport in pleasant way. One prospect explained that the only time there is a problem with this combination is when prospects do not take their own responsibility in planning homework or studying for a test. Having the head coach as a coordinator between school and coach also facilitates the combination for prospects and makes it possible for them to participate in most activities. Something to mention is that the club also has collaboration with the university, which allow them to be close to research regarding exercise, nutrition, rehabilitation and mental training and support dual careers.

*The football federation* is not visible in prospects daily routines more than through the player’s education plan provided from them to the club. The sport manager explained that this is a relative new education plan about training, including directives that place focus on both the whole and individual in the context of development. There is an ongoing work from the club to implement the education plan in the junior elite team operation.

*The interest organization* “Elitfotboll Dam” is linked to the football club, where the club receives financial means through a certification. By annually reporting the work performed by the club, they receive funds depending on met objectives set by Elitfotboll Dam. These objectives include, among other things; coach education level, training schedules and coaches in different positions.

As for the *municipality*, they distribute time for trainings at the arena, what happens at the arena, advertising boards etc. This relationship is described as an existing dialogue and a good cooperation. It also emerged that the home municipality of the prospects moving to this environment, provide them with financial support for accommodation.

*The relationship with media* is visible in the way that media contact the club after games, but mostly the club is trying to provide information to media through social media and the website of the club. The sport manager commented that media is good in the way that they recognize female sport generally and that local media partially gives attention to the junior elite team. In terms of supporting and preparing prospects to handle media, this is mainly distributed in
school, where they have a course that includes talking about what to say and not to say in situations with media.

Participants of the study were being asked about their thoughts about different cultures and how cultures influence their daily sporting life. Two words explaining the Swedish national culture from prospects was reserved and spoiled, but no further explanation about this was presented. The sport manager did however discuss the Swedish national culture in terms of body ideal, diets and training and the way social media brings out the picture of how females should look like. This is something he states are not always compatible with elite sport. This is considered a barrier for prospects and the club has also noticed eating disorders in the environment.

Being asked about the youth culture, prospects mostly mentioned partying, but that this is something that does not really affect them since they are surrounded by likeminded people. One prospect commented about whether dominant values among youths are affecting her athletic development:

Not so much actually, because I feel that now when I am in a class where everyone do elite sport, we all have the same beliefs, so it becomes a bit different. But otherwise I can absolutely feel it, but not now, not so much. It is mostly if you look at parties and alcohol and stuff like that, but it is not that much time over for that and we have a policy anyway so I have not really felt that (Prospect 2).

The head coach explained that since prospects are with likeminded people, the youth culture becomes about elite sport and he believes they feel good being in that “bubble”. Being a part of NIU and training football does not make partying a way of living for prospects. Talking about the football culture, it is described as football before everything else, and again, partying is described as something that is not involved in that culture.

**The environment in a time-frame**

Reported from the sport manager, head coach and elite athletes, is the fact that the club in the last couple of years has been in a transformation process. From having an established elite team with recruited star players in the top of the series, the club no longer has that possibility. The change has over the last years been to find ways to develop own players. The head coach commented:

Recruit star players are in itself fun in terms of results... but I am the kind of leader who believes that most people can reach far if you have the will, if you find the right way to go, then you can reach incredibly far (Head coach).

One elite athlete explained that it is a good tradition in the club but in the same time the club is starting something completely new. The sport manager reported the same thing and explained that the club in the past was organized in another way, with one person controlling and doing most of the work. Today there are more people involved, a lot of people have been replaced the last year, and the sport manager explains that today’s slogan reads “from here and onwards”. The club is now instead working more together in a united force. The club’s sporting and organizational development plan further proves this change with this explanation:

In the light of this, a work begun in the club with a focus on long-term contracts with partners, but also to sport wise work more long-term and refrain a strategy that involves recruiting your way to success. In the beginning of 2010 the direction of the club changed and we decided to invest in our own talents, educate players with an aim on long-term relationships and to give them a really good football education.
The empirical ATDE working model of the club

An empirical version of the ATDE working model was adapted to the club (see figure 3), to summarize the description of the environment and highlight the most important components and relations, as well as structure.

Figure 3: The Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE) empirical model of the club

Factors influencing the environmental success of the club

From the above presentation describing the environment, the following part will present major factors contributing to the environmental success of the club. This will include factors related to precondition, process and organizational culture and how these are effecting individual and team development and achievements together with the club’s effectiveness.

Preconditions

Prospects highlighted the group of coaches and the team with likeminded prospects as central resources in the talent development process. Coaching resources are overall good and the team has a number of different coaches with high level education, which has already been explained earlier in this study. Facilities in the club environment are good, with an outdoor pitch located next to the club house for afternoon practices. The school is providing an outdoor pitch located in the school area, which enables combining football trainings with other lectures in school. Prospects also get access to gym facilities and an indoor running track in the school area. The support team with experts connected through school is an important resource for prospects studying at NIU. One prospect that has been injured for a long time commented on this:

Well, that is what has been really good. I have had an injury now for seven months and thanks to the club I have got fast help, first to the physiotherapist and then to the orthopedic.
And thanks to the club and NIU you get fast help, faster than otherwise, so that is really good (Prospect 3).

The club has limited financial preconditions, something that prospects notice by the amount of work they have to do on behalf of the club. None of the participating prospects are experiencing this as something negative for their development, but rather something they are doing for a good cause. One prospect commented on the way the club is handling the financial situation towards prospects:

They are very open and honest about it and it feels good that they are not sneaking with it. But you notice it because we have had to work a lot to make everything possible, both for the club and for ourselves (Prospect 3).

The sport manager explains that the limited financial resources do not affect prospects in their daily sporting life as much as others in the football club. It affects staff in the office more with hard work throughout the season and elite athletes by not getting the right opportunities to spend more time on their development. One elite athlete explained that when she set aside time for individual workout session it comes with the expense of her living poorly that month, because she have to take time off her work. The limited financial resources does however affect prospects when they need to pay for training camps and this makes them depended on the parents for financial support. The head coach is also concerned that player fees and other fees pose a risk to exclude people from the sport. Another barrier is that prospects need to travel more by bus this season, instead of flying, which is commented to worsen their preparation for away games.

Among missing resources in the development process, as already explained, there is a lack of a physiotherapist that can participate in all football practices, which can affect prospects negatively when injuries happen. A problem regarding experts is also for prospects not studying at NIU and therefor do not have the same access to the support team provided by the school. The club is however working hard to find support for them and today they are mostly provided help from the elite team’s support team. Prospects that have not yet entered secondary level school also do not have access to a gym, which makes it hard to do specific exercises.

All participants explained that there is no full size indoor pitch to practice football. They all agreed that this is important to get the right proportions and be able to train properly and develop both individual skills and team skills even in the winter time. The sport manager explained that the indoor pitch also causes injuries for many football clubs in the city, due to the bad surface of the pitch. The head coach also stated that lack of a nutritionist in the environment together with a goalkeeper coach. A few weeks after the interviews it did however emerged that the club had recruited a goalkeeper coach for the team.

**Process**

Entry to the junior elite team is mainly through NIU. The school, the district football association and the cooperative clubs are responsible for the admission to NIU. Acceptance is based on grades and a procedure where prospects attend two football trainings and evaluates by a team of coaches. There is also a conversation with each player to judge whether they are mature enough to be in such an environment for three years. The sport manager explain that they are trying to see further than where the prospect are today but that it is sometimes difficult to make a subjective evaluation.

As for prospects daily routine around trainings, they normally train 8 times a week, divided into 4 trainings in school during mornings and 4 trainings with the club in the afternoon. Training weeks are divided in three colors; green, yellow and red, and each color tell what level of intensity the training will be. School trainings are mainly focusing on developing individual skills and afternoon trainings are focusing more on the collective and position training. This is organized well due to the fact that the prospects have the same coach in school and the club.
There are also existing individual development plans for prospects. These are designed by the prospects together with coaches, consisted with things to improve, how to improve it and when. The head coach conducts performance appraisals with prospects before and after the football season to talk about the individual development plans. The head coach stated that prospects are at different levels in sport, where some are new in the environment and just started NIU. For these prospects he highlighted the importance of a long-term focus, where they in the beginning should focus more on making friends, get to know the city and so on, to later focus more on the game.

Two trainings per week only include physical training. In school prospects are provided with theoretical information as well as practical work regarding physical training and in the football club focus is more on basic strength to prevent injuries. Prospects perform physical tests in terms of running and jumping five times per year, to continuously ensure prospects are in phase with their physical training.

Approximately prospects have two days off from training every week, to get good recovery. Afternoon trainings are consciously disposed directly after school, to give prospects time to study or spend time with friends during nights. The head coach highlighted the importance of giving the prospects time for social life, to be able to keep a balance in their life. As explained earlier, prospects spend a good deal of their life outside sport together, activities that do not cover football. Some activities are mandatory with the whole team, including coaches, but most activities are organized by prospects where everyone who wants to come is welcomed. The group of coaches is also meeting together once a week, together with the elite team coaches. The head coach explained the content of the meetings:

Individual level. Team level. Highly focused on development. It is easy to end up in results, but my role is now to. I have been coaching the team but I won’t do that now, so it it easier for me to now see the progress rather than the results, because otherwise it is easy to focus on the results, but I am trying to keep us on the right track. And we have our policy now about how to work so that have to work out as well (Head coach).

Prospects play one game per week, either in the F19 series or the division 2 series, but on occasion they participate in both series the same week. This year is the first time the team is going away on a training camp abroad together. For the third year in a row the team is also going to Gothenburg during the summer to participate in Gothia cup. Going away on a tournament is appreciated by prospects since it provides a chance to further strengthen the cohesion in the team. The head coach stated that the most important thing is to develop prospects in to elite athletes, but prospects highlighted good results when commenting on goals. One prospect commented whether the team has a set goal for the upcoming season:

No, I don’t think so. It not like "you are going win the national championship gold this year". It is not like that, but that is what everyone wants. Everyone knows what we want and no one believes that we are going to participate only to participate (Prospect 4).

After losing the national series final last year, one prospect also commented on the goals for now:

We actually said right after the final signal that we need revenge on this. There was really nothing that needed to be said, it was obvious to all of us not to repeat this (Prospect 1).

**Organizational development and culture**

*Artifacts* represent the visible tokens of the culture. Visible in the club house located next to the outdoor football pitch are trophies, medals and team photos collected throughout the years. On the wall of the football arena is also a large poster of an elite team player. In the elite teams locker room is a sign posted, with key words about how they want to act as a team and key words that shows what happens if they do not complete this. Another artifact is the training clothes players’ uses and because the football club has a main sponsor, all players wear this brand.
during training and games. Going on away games, prospects have agreed to wear standardized clothes to show they are a team and to look professional.

The most salient value in the club, words expressed by mentioned, was that everyone is giving their all and doing their best. Other key values expressed by participants in the environment include a hundred percent focus during football training, working together as a group, working in the same direction, an open climate, letting everyone participate and giving everyone the same chance. This fits well into the club’s core values and vision that are presented in the club’s sporting and organizational development plan that states:

To create and maintain a strong set of values it is required that our values are communicated through action. The club will continue to convey a clear and recognizable identity through the values: togetherness - joy - commitment. A partner must with security know who they are collaborating with.

Prospects also stated the importance of everyone knowing that you are representing the club even if you are not wearing club clothing, thus that everyone need to behave even outside the athletic domain. An example of this is the rules about alcohol. The sport manager discussed this and explained that if players do not have the right behavior even outside the athletic domain it will cause a ripple effect for the individual as well as the football club. It is a big responsibility to bear for prospects but a requirement the football club need to have because of the dependency of sponsorships and money.

The analysis revealed that the club’s cultural paradigm is characterized by seven interrelated basic assumptions. The first assumption relates to the athletes and states that the most important factor to reach elite level is the attitude and motivation within the athlete herself. It involves the desire to be the best, wanting to spend the time required to develop and find it enjoyable to practice football.

This connects to the second assumption about athletes and states that in order to develop you need to be surrounded by likeminded people. Prospects expect each other to always show focus, discipline and a drive to develop during training, which goes in line with having the right attitude and motivation. Coaches also expect this and reinforce this by pushing and helping them to develop during training. Being surrounded by likeminded people can also explain the fact that prospects have the right motivation and enjoy being together with the group even outside sport.

The third assumption also relates to the athletes, but also states the club’s approach: an athlete is more than just an athlete. This is evident in the way people in the environment are supporting and helping athletes with combining school and sport and deliberately having early trainings to give athletes time for other activities. The head coach explained this whole person approach, by using a stool with three legs as a metaphor. One leg represents the social life with friends and family, the second represents school and the third represents the sport. If one leg breaks, it will affect the other two, he clarified. This supports the sport manager’s statement about a holistic approach, meaning that they want to develop prospects at all levels and not only in sport. Furthermore, the sporting and organizational development plan explains: “In addition to the football-related development, we consider it important to help players prepare for a life after the football career”. This is visible in the way the club collaborates with NIU and also the university for those who invest in a higher education.

The fourth assumption states that the development is more important than results. As the head coach stated, one of his responsibilities is to make sure the group of coaches and players are focusing on development rather than results. The whole person approach and a focus on development were also clearly formulated by the sport manager:

Success might be the development. Maybe the path is the goal a little bit. There might be someone who manages great in school or take huge steps as a human, and that is also a success. So we should not measure everything in football success either, but have we
managed to get a person to raise a little bit on some level I think we should be very happy (Sport manager).

The fifth assumption relates to the organization and the states that the organization and cooperation between school and club is a precondition for prospects' development and the sixth to the goals of the system: an elite sport environment must provide the right resources for prospects. This is visible in the organization between NIU and the club, which provides prospects with good facilities, a big support system, the head coach who support and help prospects in both areas and likeminded people that are helping and supporting each other to develop. It also makes it possible to adjust the content and intensity of training and keep a thread.

The seventh and final assumption relates to the overall development of the football club and include that we need to do it together despite limited financial resources. This is visible by the way the organization has change from a one person approach to managing the work, to many people working together. The people working in the club house, the club management, coaches, parents, prospects, elite athletes etc., are all contributing to build and develop the football club as a united front. As one elite athlete stated:

- The challenge is to take what it is right now. Because we do not have the financial resources, the challenge is to still take steps sport wise and result wise without it. That is the challenge.
- We demand a lot from each other even though we do not have the conditions for it (Elite athlete 1).

**Individual development and achievements**

An analysis of data revealed that prospects develop a number of characteristics that are important for them both in sport and in life outside sport. The major categories of individual development include responsibility, planning and commitment, team work and social skills. As the sport manager reflected about how prospects develop responsibility and planning:

- But these players I think, in many ways learn by nature to take control over their own lives, and planning of their daily life. And they learn that whether they want it or not, cause that is an experience they simply create. Getting their lives together with food, practice and stuff, it almost does not work without planning (Sport manager).

Prospects learn that they need to make sure they plan their lives to get enough training, food and sleep, as well as making time for school and other activities outside sport. They also learn responsibility by knowing how to behave well even outside sport, to represent the football club in a good way. They develop an understanding for the commitment they need to do, by working hard, as this will contribute to their athletic development. Prospects reported that being in an environment like this also develop their team work skills. Many qualities were explained as useful in school and something prospects believe will be important in future work. Examples provided were that they learn to take place in a group, have the courage to make a statement in a group and also learn to take orders. One prospect explained the feeling of a greater self-confidence by being provided the opportunity to be a part of this environment. The sport manager also commented that one of the most important things prospects learn for future work is that it is possible to work in a group with different personalities and opinions, thanks to common goals and visions. And as stated earlier in this paper, the club wants to nurture not only good football players but also good individuals. By getting the chance of playing football in this environment, prospects are feeling a greater self-confidence.

**Team development and achievements**

Prospects develop characteristics such as kicks and technique, making the execution on the pitch move faster. This contributes to the team development in both attack and defense play. In attack the team can make faster counterattacks and in defense each players becomes better in the one on one game, which contributes to the whole team trusting each other and can stay well
organized as a team. The individual development of each prospect is also inspiration for everyone in the team to develop, which leads to further team development. The group of prospects being very close and spending a good amount of time together further contributes to team cohesion and the ability to cooperate.

Within the team, prospects and coaches are working together with the team’s development. With the help of video analysis, the team is divided into groups with the aim of analyzing parts in attack and defense from the last game, to further report to the whole group with good examples and examples to develop. The purpose is to practice and develop these parts in upcoming games and also continue practicing the good examples that was brought up.

The environmental success

As for the organizational development and the environmental success, the football club’s elite team today consists of 14 players that have made the transition from the club’s junior elite team. There are also players that have been too old for the junior elite team, but have not taken a place in the elite team, that has transferred to other clubs and played on senior elite level. This is an acknowledgement that the environment is successfully developing prospects to senior elite level. The junior elite team also has in total 8 prospects that have been to national junior team camps and all prospects have represented a district team. Worth mentioning is also that the school team have consisted mainly of prospects from the football club, and in the last three years the school team have progressed from being in the quarterfinals the first year, semifinals the second year to winning the national final this year.

The sport manager commented how the organization with school and club receive more recognition and attention:

In the beginning it was mostly Umeå and possibly students from Västerbotten that applied, but over the years I think players have noticed that with the club, they have the possibility to get up and go through the entire system into an elite team environment. This means that we have applicants from Norway, Finland and Norrbotten, and even to some extent the south of Sweden (Sport manager).

The empirical EFS working model of the club

An empirical version of the EFS working model was also adapted to the club (see figure 4), to summarize the most important factors influencing the success of the club as an ATDE.

Figure 4: The Environment Success Factor (EFS) empirical model of the club
Analysis

The following chapter will illustrate the relationship between empirical findings, previous research and the theories and perspectives used in this study. The first part will be based on Henriksens (2010) eight features describing environmental success, followed by the second part that will revisit the background theories in the light of this study.

The eight features explaining environmental success

The present study used the same approach and framework as Henriksen (2010) and Larsen et al. (2013) did when examining ATDE’s, but differs in that this case study is made in an ATDE in team sport consisted of only female athletes. As previous research in Scandinavia demonstrate, each environment are unique (Henriksen, 2010) but findings in this study also confirms that there are a number of similar features defining the environmental success in developing prospects into elite athletes, although it is in a different context.

The first feature Henriksen (2010) presented includes training groups with supportive relationships. These results are consistent with findings in this study, where the group of prospects is spending most of their time together, whether it is in the school environment, sport environment or outside sport. Prospects described that most of their friends are within sport and that this is something that contributes to joy and also their dedication to sport, since they all want the same thing and are aiming for the elite. These evidence also matches what Li et al. (2014) found in their literature review on talent development, which indicates that friends are important for supporting prospects in their long-term participation and involvement in sport and that friends within sport increases social satisfaction and commitment. The relationship between prospects and coaches in the club are also characterized with a supportive approach, where the head coach works as an important coordinator between the club and school to facilitate a focus on individual development of prospects.

There are also proximal role models in the present environment, as shown in the environments examined by Henriksen (2010). Prospects are regularly training together with the elite team and are also sharing the pitch most of their trainings. This is suggested to help prospects in their transition to senior elite level and prevent a cultural shock (Henriksen, 2010). It was however not as clear in this environment that elite athletes share knowledge regarding sport or life experiences, nor knowledge about reaching elite level. They do however get the chance to pick up on training culture and technique (Henriksen et al., 2011; 2010b). Worth mentioning is however that findings from the present study differ from the results by Larsen et al. (2013) in team male sport, where proximal role models do not exist in the environment. In their environment under study, there is an organizational barrier between the youth and professional department, something that Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourne and Richardson (2010) found as a recurring problem within many European professional football clubs. Since Larsen et al. (2013) and Relvas et al. (2010) research applies to male football and the present study focuses on female football, the differences could be due to the financial situation that the club is in. As the sport manager said, they do not have the financial possibility to recruit star players and therefore need to develop their own players. Male team sport does however receive more financial means, which might be the explanation why they have less focus on the connection between youth and professional departments in comparison to female team sport.

The third feature saying that the wider environment is supporting sporting goals (Henriksen, 2010) is also clearly visible in this environment. The overall environment is supporting prospects in their focus and dedication to sport. All prospects described that their families are involved and interested in their commitment to sport and are visible with emotional, financial and practical support. The support from families was also evident in the environments examined by Henriksen (2010) and Larsen et al. (2013) and as Côté (1999) stated, this support
from families facilitates prospects’ participation in sport. The last mentioned author states that the support from families in the investment phase of athletes’ development does not directly involve giving sport-specific instructions or coaching. This is something Wolfender and Holts (2005) also identified. Two prospects in this study did however describe that their fathers are involved in giving sport related advice, which instead complies with findings by Gledhill and Harwood (2014) saying that the fathers of female football players can act as role models and providers of football related information.

There is, as in the studies by Henriksen (2010), more focus on the athletic domain in this environment, as manifested in the empirical version of the ATDE model, which inspires a high degree of athletic identity in athletes. Prospects are situated in a school environment surrounded mainly by other athletes, they mostly have friends within sport and especially within the team and they have parents, coaches and teachers that support their sport careers. This is something that prospects explain as a resource in their development in sport. Having a predominantly athletic identity can however endanger prospects adaption to life after sport, when they develop a self-concept that does not extent further than the athlete role (Lavallee et al., 1997). The environment does however support prospects to also focus on school, making sure they are passing courses and deliberately have early trainings to provide time for activities outside sport, which allows prospects to also develop other identities. But again, prospects are focusing on the relationships with friends in the team and they are mainly surrounded by other athletes in school, which could be said to create problems if prospects are forced to quit sport due to an injury or other circumstances. Larsen et al. (2013) explained that friends outside sport are important for their social identity, but it seems that prospects in this environment are deliberately choosing to spend time with friends within sport even though they have the opportunity to do otherwise during night time. The question that then can be raised here, is if these prospects are enough prepared to live a “normal life” without taking part in sport activities and if they have enough relationships outside the sport domain? Lavallee & Robinson (2007) found evidence that athletes feel lost and helpless when they retire and that they do not know who they are outside sport, which points to the importance of helping athletes with pre-retirement planning even in early ages.

As for the environments examined by Henriksen (2010), the present study also showed a support for the development of psychosocial skills, which can be of benefit outside sport. The analysis of data revealed that prospects in the club develop psychosocial skills such as responsibility, planning, commitment, team work skills and self-confidence. The environment states that they are supporting a whole person approach, meaning that they see athletes as whole human beings and not just as athletes. Larsen et al. (2014) described that a club with a strong and coherent organizational culture focusing on the development of whole persons, also support the development of a holistic package of psychosocial skills that prospects will be able to use in both sport and life outside sport. This will ease prospects’ transition to senior elite level (Larsen et al., 2012) as well as the transition out of sport (Danish, Petitpas & Hale, 1993). Apart from transitioning from junior to senior elite level, prospects also make transitions in different domains of their lives that may affect the development in their sport careers (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavallee, 2004). As for the prospects in the present study, this will for example include a transition from secondary school to a higher education and a transition from adolescent into young adulthood. These transitions may also be important for the environment to be aware of and from that provide support to facilitate the transitions. Danish et al. (1993) explain that there exist enhancements interventions that prepare athletes for future events. This include for example to help athletes understand the nature of future event and develop confidence that athletes can cope with these, which will lead to an increased self-efficiency and lower level of stress. Another example is helping transfer skills from one domain to another. Prospects in this environment are already aware of important skills that will be important in non-sport domains, however, Danish et al. (1993) states that athletes that are tied up in their sport identity view themselves as successful athletes and not successful people, which can block
athletes from investing time and energy in pursuits outside sport. This seems to be the case in the present environment, and it is suggested from Danish et al. (1993) therefore to use help from a counseling psychologist that can promote the notion of having alternative activities, as this will prevent burnout and improve the quality and concentration in sport.

An organizational culture that is strong and coherent is another identified feature by Henriksen (2010), which was found in the environment examined by Larsen et al. (2013) and visible in the present environment as well. This can be linked to the efforts made in the environment, for prospects to focus on both school and sport. It is also shown in the way the group of coaches are working together with the elite team coaches in regularly meetings, where the goal is to make sure that everyone is following the policy and focus on development rather than on results. Mills et al. (2014) found that such clear and effective lines of communication is important characteristics of sport organizations and Henriksen et al. (2011) further explains that a strong and coherent culture will reduce the risk of uncertainty and confusion among individuals in the environment, which in the opposite case would have negative affect on prospects’ development.

This is consistent with another feature identified by Henriksen (2010) stating that there is a focus on long-term development rather than early success. As explained above, efforts are made to maintain this. The head coach also explained that prospects that are new to the environment contrary to the older prospects, might have another focus, for example to get used to the environment before focusing too much on football. Li et al. (2015) explains that a long-term development focus will give prospects key attributes to realize their potential. Additionally, Mills et al. (2014) found that core values, expectations and behavioral standards are clearly defined in a successful environment. Many of the documents provided from the environment obviously state that they focus on a long-term development and that individuals in the environment must represent the club with appropriate behaviors even outside the sport-domain, which also was explained from several different perspectives during the interviews.

Similarly to Henriksen (2010) another feature revealed in this study is an integration of efforts, meaning that the club are collaborating with NIU with coordination and communication regarding prospects activities in both school and sport. Both parties are unanimous that dual careers are important, as evidenced by teachers adjusting home-work so that prospects can participate in sport activities and coaches making sure prospects can take time off from sport if they are behind in school. The integration between the club and the NIU reduces the risk of dropouts caused by conflicting demands in school and sport (Li et al., 2014) and also the risk of prospects feeling role ambiguity, as they can be seen as both a student and an athlete (Gledhill & Harwood, 2015). Important to mention is that the club is collaborating with the university to further facilitate dual careers and provide opportunities to educational institutions at all levels, something that Henriksen et al. (2010a) also found in the track and field club. However, as already been discussed, the environment are still weighted to the sport domain and prospects clearly have a strong athletic identity, which can cause problems in different transitions in life. It is beneficial to create opportunities for dual careers, but the club also needs to be aware about difficulties that might occur in these kinds of transitions.

One of the eight features identified by Henriksen (2010) could however not be found in this environment based on the information from the participants; Training that allows for diversification. In this environment, prospects focus exclusively on football, with training eight times a week and games at least once a week. As stated in previous research, the investment phase of development that these prospects are situated in, is a period where athletes are devoted to specialized training (Côté, Lidor & Hackfort, 2009) as they have the capacity to understand the costs and benefits with focusing on one sport. They are also able to make an independent choice to concentrate on a particular sport. Whether the prospects would want to participate in other sports, the amount of training, together with school and other activities, makes it possible to assert that there is limited time in the environment to allow diversified training. In earlier phases of athlete’s development, Côté et al. (2009) states that early diversification and
participation in deliberate play activities has been found to contribute to longer sports careers, positive youth development and also a solid basis of intrinsic motivation. Henriksen (2010) found further evidence that these activities support development even in the investment phase. According to this, it might be suggested that the environment, apart from providing football training and physical training also should engage prospects in other activities.

**The theoretical basis in the light of the present study**

The present study used a holistic ecological approach to the study of athletic talent, a perspective focusing on a broader development context and environment. Two working models developed from a theoretical basis were used as a framework and the following section will discuss these theories and how they are emphasized in the club as a successful talent development environment.

**The ecological model of human development**

It emerged from this study, that a prerequisite for being able to operate and provide the resources necessary to implement good development conditions for prospects was the cooperation between school and club. The present study therefore confirms Bronfenbrenner's (1994) assertion that individual's development is influenced by the environment in which it takes place and that the development are influenced by different levels of the environment. This together with prospects that have high motivation and ambition to develop and embrace what the environment is providing contributes to their development. As Krebs (2009) explain, the environmental context influence proximal processes and development outcomes, and the construction of the club as an ATDE can be said to provide a stability and consistency for prospects during the years they are able to play in the junior elite team. Furthermore, prospects can only be a part of the junior elite team for a limited amount of time before they are too old. This refers that the talent development process is situated in a time-frame (Tudge et al., 2009), where the meso-time in this case are in focus, as for the years prospects are studying at NIU and have the age to play in the junior elite team’s series.

**The systems theory**

Examining the club as a successful ATDE confirms that the environment as an organized whole is too complex to be disassembled into parts. As in Henriksen’s (2010) studies, several basic tenets from systems theory were found in this study. When prospects for example were to describe the importance of school, coaches and elite athletes, the focus was placed on the relationships existing between the components and not on the individual component. When the head coach explained the important of school, he emphasized the cooperation between school, club and resources existing due to this relationship. The environmental success was characterized by integration and coordination between the different components in the environment, meaning that examining one particular component would not have given the results justice.

The findings about how the club has shift focus the last couple of years confirm the environment as open and permeable to information from the outside world. Because of changes in the financial resources, the club decided to focus on the development of own players instead of recruiting star players. Collaboration with NIU was created to allow this and to maintain stability and a fit with the context in which the club was situated.

**Cross-cultural and cultural psychology**

In the ATDE model, the Swedish national culture, youth culture and football culture was integrated from a cross-cultural perspective and participants were asked about how the cultures are influencing the talent development process. Prospects did not really state that the different cultures are influencing their development, hence they are situated in an environment where for example partying is not a part of their life style. However, the sport manager talked about body
ideal, diets and training and his experience of prospects with eating disorders. This is relevant to cross-cultural psychology stating that the culture has an impact on human behavior (Henriksen, 2010). The EFS model included the cultural psychology in terms of artefacts, values and basic assumptions and findings can tell that the way prospects and other individuals in the environment should act and think, have become a matter of course rather than something they are questioning. Prospects are guided by values, beliefs, lifestyles and patterns of behavior, to represent the club in the best way and to facilitate their own development.

**Sociocultural theory**

One part from Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory includes that the social environment and culture is the most crucial in how individuals learning and development occurs (Tappan, 1998). Holton and Clarke (2006) further explains that this theory include “the zone of proximal development” which is described as:

> the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (p. 128).

This zone represents the potential the individual has to develop when assisted by others, a “scaffolding process” which enables the individual to solve a problem or carry out a task with an adult or expert “controlling” it. From the elite athlete’s commentary about the difficulties that might exist for prospects when they are participating in their training, this type of learning was illustrated. Prospects are participating in training with elite athletes, those who can be seen as more competent adults or peers. As it was explained, elite athletes are working on the ability to feel what to do (game sense) without anyone telling them what to do, but that this sometimes is difficult for prospects. Elite athletes therefore assist with guidance and help in prospects’ construction of knowledge. Tappan (1998) also explains that this type of learning develops a set of higher mental processes and this could be said to prepare prospects to be a part of the elite team in the future. This type or process is also visible in the way the junior team are using video analysis after games. Prospects are not working individually, but in groups and their task is to choose situations that are good and situations to develop. In collaboration and with assistance from coaches they are trying to learn what to do better in the future.
Concluding discussion

The final chapter of this study will summarize and link the findings according to the designed research questions and discuss the implication of the results to a scientific and theoretical context. Finally, a discussion including methodological reflections and propositions for further research will end this chapter.

As stated in the introductory part of the present study, it is common that athletes in the transition from junior to senior elite level experience high demands in the environment, which can result in dropouts or athletes not reaching their full potential. It is however found that supportive environments can help athletes in this transition (Henriksen, 2010). With a starting point in a holistic ecological approach, the purpose of the present study was to examine relationships and processes between prospects, coaches, elite athletes and other significant individuals in the environment and provide a holistic description of a successful ATDE in female football. From this basis, the aim was to further explain how factors in the micro- and macro-level are influencing the environment’s success in developing prospects into senior elite athletes and in what way Henriksen’s (2010) eight features is present in the environment. As already been explained, findings from this study share many similarities with previous research and seven of eight factors could be identified.

Through interviews with four prospects, two elite athletes, the head coach and the sport manager, a description of the environment was obtained which gave insight into the relationships and processes that appear in the environment. An empirical version of the ATDE working model was adapted to the club and presented in the findings, to summarize the description of the environment. At the center of the model is the relationship between prospects, coaches and school. The operation is built on the cooperation between the club and school, where the head coach is fundamental in keeping focus on development rather than on results. The group of prospect is characterized by good cohesion and spends time together in school, sport and outside sport. Prospects spend a lot of time close to the elite team, either by participation in training or sharing the pitch. The structure of the environment is skewed to the athletic domain. School is more connected to the athletic domain and provides training during mornings and a support system with experts. In the non-athletic domain, families are visible with various kinds of support to prospects and they also contribute with help to the club. The school management acts as a cohesive force in the macro-level, by managing the operation and providing prospects with good support in the school environment, which makes it possible for prospects to combine sport and studies in a good way. The school management also cooperates with the local business community to ensure that the club receives enough financial support to develop and maintain the organization. It further exists relationships with the local sport community to ensure that prospects have a future in other clubs if they are not ready for the elite team. The time frame in the model depicts a change in the environment, from a focus on recruiting star players towards a focus on development of own players.

To further summarize how different factors are contributing and cooperation to talent development and are influencing the success of the club as an ATDE, the empirical version of the EFS working model was created. The findings revealed that the club benefits from current cooperation with school, where prospects are provided with a good group of coaches, likeminded prospects, facilities in the school as well as in club area and experts in case of problems and injuries. The limited financial resources are compensated with the overall organized environment around the prospects. The process routine in the environment is organized with training in school during mornings and training in the club during the afternoons, which allows a good distribution of content and contributes to individual as well as team development. The daily routines are influenced by the organizational culture, where the central element is the cooperation and coordination in the overall environment, a focus on development rather than on results and a group of prospects with good attitude and motivation to improve. Furthermore, the culture is characterized with a holistic approach, which permeates
in the daily processes and facilitates for prospects to focus on dual careers and social activities. The culture also influences prospects as they learn to take responsibility, be committed, develop team work skills etc. These described elements unite to provide the groundwork for the environment’s success, which is mainly measured in terms of producing elite athletes, team results and recognition.

Overall, the findings show that the environment in several ways support prospects to develop resources to effectively deal with high demands in their transition to senior elite level. There is however important to discuss on the basis of the present findings, that the environment are responding incredibly well to what research state as good talent development. The sport manager used the words “holistic approach” when he described how the club wants to work and the analysis of documents revealed several aspects that can be found in major features describing good environments. Is it that the club and the overall environment are as up to date and aware of what research states as “best practice” and therefore work the way they do? It can be questioned that prior to the study define the environment as successful, due to the fact that participants might want provide information that live up to these expectations. The club did not either want to remain anonymous, which also can be questioned and create uncertainty to the findings, if they chose to provide “the best” answers to attract for example stakeholders/sponsors and players. However, as the sporting and organizational development plan states, the collaboration with the university gives the club access to research in different aspects of sport, and this may explain that the club is aware of important features in the development of athletes.

Before the present study was conducted, the club was considered to be a successful ATDE, due to the previous track record of producing elite senior athletes from their junior elite team. An important statement to make is that even though the results confirm that the club give prospects adequate resources and support in the environment, explained to ease the transition to senior elite level and the fact that many players in the elite team today were former players in the junior elite team, it cannot be said that the environment are successful at the time until it is proven that the todays prospect have made it to the elite team.

**Implications**

This study has contributed to existing literature on talent development environments, by examining a successful ATDE in female football, which previously have not been investigated with a holistic ecological approach. The findings add to current knowledge about the importance of supportive environments in order to successfully develop talented athletes. The results also strengthens the importance of earlier identified key features by Henriksen (2010) that characterizes successful environments and even though the present study was conducted in a context consistent of only female athletes, the study confirms the overall picture provided by previous studies (e.g. Henriksen, 2010; Larsen et al., 2013; Li et al., 2014; Martindale et al., 2005; 2007; Gledhill & Harwood, 2014; Ivarsson et al., 2014). Therefore, it is alleged that the results from this study may support other talent development environments in female football to optimize their operations. Furthermore, in the empirical EFS model created in this study, team development and achievements was included, in compare to the studies made by Henriksen et al. (2010a, 2010b, 2011) on individual sports and supports that good environments are influencing individual as well as team development and achievements.

Looking at practical implications, using a holistic ecological approach in the present study, confirms that when studying talent development, a broader context needs to take into consideration as for the transitions prospects make in different life spheres. This is important to be aware of for all individuals involved in the process of developing prospects. This approach can also guide struggling environments to develop and be more successful in this area. Even though the club is up to date and aware of important aspects regarding talent development, this study may inspire them so further improve what is already good, but also to look at the pieces which could be enhanced.
It is also possible to look outside the athletic context. Could it be that other business and organizations have something to learn from successful ATDE’s? If you for example look at schools in general, it can be conceivable that this is place to also adopt a holistic approach. Schools have a strong focus on results and controll, something that stresses kids and youths and instead causes poor performances rather than good ones. One idea might be to instead focus on a more long-term development rather than on results and try to see each student from a holistic perspective? This may in the long run be more efficient and instead contribute to better results.

By analyzing the results of this study, it is possible to say that the club are not only developing prospects into elite athletes, but they also developing individuals in all aspects. This can be said to further help to develop a good society. The club is providing a safe social community where prospects learn to respect and socialize with other people. From coaches and older elite athletes they receive positive adult role models and the solidarity in the club prevent people's isolation. By getting involved in sponsoring missions, prospects also contribute with work to the society.

Methodological reflections

As suggested by Henriksen (2010), a case study design with different qualitative methods was employed to this study. This facilitated to examine the ATDE as a life-real phenomenon, to gain insight, go deep and look into the relationships and social processes existing in the environment (Hassmén & Hassmén, 2008). However, Henriksen (2010) further explained that participant observation provided a good basis for grasping the cultural characteristics of the three environments under his study and especially important in the interpretation of basic assumptions. As already stated earlier in this study, artefacts are also hard to interpret but easier to observe. Despite this, participant observation was deselected in this study, due to the limited time. The author has therefore relied on the participants’ statements and descriptions and from that explained artefacts and derived basic assumptions. It is suggested for future research to also include observations to facilitate the interpretations of basic assumptions and aso to better observe artefacts that exists in the environment. In addition, to gain an even better understanding of the relationships and processes in the environment, more interviews could have been included. For example with individuals from the macro-environment, such as the principal for NIU, that could have provided with information from “the other side” of the important collaboration between the club and the school. It would also have been interesting to include elite athletes that recently have been a part of the junior elite team, to get their perspectives on the relationship between prospects and elite athletes and also an insight to how they experienced the transition to the elite team.

As stated in the introductory letter, the first thought was to include a coordinator from NIU, a representative from the municipality and also parents to the participating prospects. However, some changes were made quite early in study: (1) whereas the head coach, apart from also being coach in school, also had the responsibility as a coordinator between the club and school, (2) it was decided to include the sport manager instead of the representative from the municipality, since it would give a further insight in the micro-level, and it also appeared that the sport manager could share adequate information about the macro-level, and (3) group interview with parents was excluded due to the limited time and the resources that would have been necessary to coordinate it and since some of the parents did not live in the city. Regarding parents not being interviewed, the results do however give the impression that the other participants provided helpful information to understand the way parents are visible in the environment with different kind of support to both prospects and the club. In the present study, the author chose to start from an existing interview guide created by Henriksen (2010), and only make a few adjustments. No pilot interview was made in advance and during the interviews with prospects, difficulties concerning the questions about different cultures emerged. For further studies, it would therefore be of benefit to make some clarifications around these questions to give the participants a better understanding of the meaning. Worth discussing can also be the fact that the quotes were translated from Swedish to English. It was considered appropriate to achieve a
preferable flow in the presentation of empirical findings, but to ensure the correct meaning in the quotes, it could have been beneficial to verify each quote with the participants first.

Overall, the holistic ecological approach together with the two working models, have been helpful in describing the environment and explain its success. The sport manager’s statement about the way cultures can affect prospects’ development in terms of pressure from social media regarding the way females should look like, body ideal, diets and so on, do raise further questions. Henriksen (2010) presented only one statement about the expectations placed on youths in Sweden, where a coach commented that girls in particular, are expected to do well in both school and sport, to help around in the house, and to look pretty and dress right. The prospects in the present study did not raise these kinds of problems as a barrier for their development, but these two statements can however be important to reflect upon. Considering that the author for the present study is not as experienced, it may have been possible to obtain more detailed information about this area with the right supplementary questions. It can also be suggested to further develop the interview guides and include more gender specific questions to examine whether ATDE’s should include support regarding these kinds of demands on female athletes, since previous research on talent development environments do not raise these kind of questions about gender specific problems.

**Further research**

Because prospects in this environment are strongly weighted to the athletic domain, with friend relationships mainly through the team and the school environment (other athletes), future research could examine how players from these kinds of environments, who had to quit because of injury or other circumstances, are experiencing the transition to a normal life. The environment is developing prospects psychosocial skills, which can be used outside sport, but is the lack of relationships from the non-athletic domain a barrier for their transition out of sport? It was discussed to include elite athletes that recently were a part of the junior elite team, to examine their experience of the transition to the elite team, but this is however something that future research can focus on. This could be further evidence to state how successful environments really are. Surely, successful environments are developing prospects into elite athletes, but there is a key part of examining how these players explaining the different parts of this transition. It could be that they after a few months or a year, stop playing due to difficulties and bad experience?

It can also be suggested to investigate successful ATDEs in female team sport, that do not have a cooperation with a national approved sport program, to identify how these environments are supporting and preparing prospects in their transition from junior to senior elite level. Since the club is highly dependent on this cooperation, it stimulates further research in tracking what other ways there are to promote good talent development.
References


Appendix 1. Interview guide

Intervjuguide: Juniorspelare

Introduktion

✓ Berätta om dig själv och om din fotbollsbakgrund?
✓ Hur kommer det sig att du spelar i detta lag?
✓ Hur upplever du att det är att tillhöra detta lag och denna miljö?
✓ Vilka faktorer tycker du är viktigt för att du ska nå så långt som möjligt inom fotbollen?
✓ Upplever du att den miljön du befinner dig i är en framgångsrik talangutvecklingsmiljö?
  o Varför är den framgångsrik?
  o Vad är nyckeln till detta?

Beskrivande del

Mikro-miljö

✓ Vilka personer i din närhet hjälper dig att nå elitnivå?
✓ Vilka hindrar dig att nå elitnivå?
✓ Hur upplever du din/dina träningar?
  o Roller och uppgifter?
  o Värderingar?
✓ Vilka upplevelser har du av de äldre elitspelarna i klubben?
  o Har du någon relation med dessa spelare? Om ja, beskriv denna relation!
  o Vad karaktäriserar denna kontakt?
✓ I ditt vardagliga idrottsliv, vilken roll har:
  o Yngre aktiva i klubben?
  o Stödpersoner/expert såsom sjukgymnast, psykolog etc.?
  o Familj?
  o Vänner, inom och utom fotbollen?
  o Skola?

Makro-miljö

✓ Har du personer inom eller utom idrotten som du ser upp till?
✓ Hur skulle du beskriva ungdomskulturen?
  o Vad upplever du är de dominanta värderingarna bland ungdomar generellt?
  o Hur upplever du att ungdomskulturen påverkar ditt dagliga idrottsutövande?
✓ Hur skulle du beskriva fotbollskulturen?
  o Vad upplever du är de dominanta värderingarna bland ungdomar generellt?
  o Hur upplever du att fotbollskulturen påverkar ditt dagliga idrottsutövande?
✓ Hur skulle du beskriva den nationella kulturen?
  o Kan du förklara med några ord vad det innebär att vara svensk?
  o Hur upplever du att den nationella kulturen påverkar ditt dagliga idrottsutövande?
✓ Hur upplever du att klubben/laget samverkar med den omgivande miljön?
  o Beskriv relationen som klubben/laget har med:
    ▪ Skolan?
    ▪ Dina föräldrar?
    ▪ Andra klubbar?
    ▪ Förbund och landslag?
    ▪ Media?
Förklarande del

Förutsättningar

✓ Hur upplever du de resurser som finns inom klubben/laget?
  o Tillgång till experter?
  o Tränare?
  o Anläggningar?
  o Finansiella resurser?
  o Annat?
✓ Hur upplever du att dessa resurser räcker till för den dagliga verksamheten och din utveckling?

Process

✓ Beskriv hur den dagliga verksamheten i miljön?
  o Hur ofta träner ni? Hur är träningen organiserad?
  o Hur ofta har ni matcher?
  o Träningsläger?
  o Sociala aktiviteter utanför idrotten? Beskriv!
  o Annat?

Organisationskultur

✓ Vad karakterisera kulturen (lagets värderingar) i miljön?
✓ Kan du komma på något tillfälle eller någon berättelse där dessa värderingar varit extra synlig?
✓ Finns det speciella symboler (såsom logos, klädstil) som är betydelsefulla i er miljö? Beskriv!
  o Vilken betydelse har dessa för dig?
✓ Finns det några speciella traditioner i er miljö? Beskriv!
✓ Berätta om det finns några speciella mål för din nuvarande säsong?
  o Vem formulerar målen?
  o Vilket inflytande hade du vid uppsättningen av mål?
✓ Har klubben någon utformad vision?
  o Beskriv detta!
  o Berätta på vilket sätt du upplever att detta mål finns närvarande i den dagliga verksamheten?
✓ Om en ny spelare skulle bli inbjuden att träna med ert lag i en vecka, vad tror du hon skulle tycka är den största skillnaden jämför med annan miljö?

Individuell utveckling

✓ Berätta för mig vad du lärt dig i denna miljö?
  o Vilka attityder och värderingar uppskattas/värderas i miljön?
  o När upplever du att din tränare är tillfreds med dina ansträngningar under träning? Under match?
  o Vilka värderingar tar du med dig från denna miljö?
  o Upplever du att du kan ta med dig någonting från idrotten till ditt vardagsliv?

Slutdel

Tidsramar

✓ Vad upplever du skulle kunna förändras i denna miljö för att göra den mer framgångsrik?
✓ Vilka traditioner tycker du är bra att fortsätta med?
✓ Finns det någonting du skulle vilja tillägga, fråga eller reflektera kring innan vi avslutar denna intervju?
Appendix 2. Introductory letter

Introduktionsbrev

Umeå, 2 mars 2016

Hej!


- 4 spelare från juniorellitlaget som går NIU (Individuella intervjuer)
- 2 spelare från a-laget och spelar minst 2 säsonger (Individuella intervjuer)
- 1 tränare från juniorellitlaget (Individuell intervju)
- 1 tränare från NIU (Individuell intervju)
- 1 koordinator från NIU (Individuell intervju)
- 1 representant från kommunen (Individuell intervju)
- 4 föräldrar till spelare i juniorellitlaget (Gruppintervju)

Varje intervju beräknas ta ungefär 60min och vid intervjuerna tar jag hänsyn till Vetenskapsrådets forskningsetiska principer, vilket innebär att det är helt frivilligt och deltagare kan, om de så skulle vilja, välja att avbryta sitt deltagande när som helst under intervjuens gång. Intervjuerna kommer att spelas in med ljudupptagning och transkriberas till text. Detta material skall endast nyttjas av mig i forskningssyfte och är det som utgör underlag för min analys. Jag kommer i studien att av identifera de som intervjuas för studien. Det innebär att namn på personer, platser och lag kommer att bytas ut till fiktiva namn.

Jag hoppas att ni som förening är intresserad av detta och vill ställa upp i min studie. Ni kommer självklart att få ta del av den färdiga rapporten och en presentation av resultaten erbjuds vid intresse.

Jag kommer nästkommande vecka att intresseka er per telefon, för att se hur ni ställer er till medverkan och hur vi tillsammans kan hitta rätt individer för denna studie. Kontakta mig gärna så snart som möjligt om ni har några frågor och funderingar, eller om medverkan i denna studie inte är intressant.

Med vänliga hälsningar

Moa Westermark
*Masterprogrammet i Ledarskap och Organisation, Umeå Universitet*

Joakim Lindgren (handledare)
*Docent, Pedagogiska institutionen, Umeå universitet*
Appendix 3. Information letter

Informationsbrev

Studie om talangutvecklingsmiljö

Umeå, 21 mars 2016

Hej!


Varje intervju beräknas ta ungefär 60min och vid intervjuerna tar jag hänsyn till Vetenskapsrådet forskningsetiska principer, vilket innebär att deltagandet är helt frivilligt och du kan, om du så skulle vilja, välja att avbryta ditt deltagande när som helst under intervjuens gång. Intervjuerna kommer att spelas in med ljudupptagning och transkriberas till text. Detta material skall endast nyttjas av mig i forskningssyfte och är det som utgör underlag för min analys. Jag kommer i studien att aidentifera alla som intervjuerar för studien. Det innebär att namn på personer kommer att bytas ut till fiktiva namn.

Nedan följer en lista på de områden som kommer att beröras under intervjuerna:

1. **Introduktionsdel:** Frågor om din fotbollsbakgrund och dina direkta upplevelser av den miljö du befinner dig i.

2. **Beskrivande del:** Frågor om roller, funktioner och särskilda delar av miljön och om relationen mellan dessa komponenter på mikro- och makronivå.
   a. Du kan fundera kring dina upplevelser av tränare, a-lagsspelare, stödpersoner/expert, familj, vänner inom och utom idrott, skola, andra klubbar, förbund/landslag, media och olika typer av kulturer (den svenska nationella kulturen, ungdomskultur, idrottskultur och fotbollskultur).

3. **Förklarande del:** Frågor om de faktorer som bidrar till miljöns framgång, vilka innefattar frågor om förutsättningar, process, individuell utveckling och organisationskultur.

4. **Avslutande del:** Frågor om tidigare traditioner och framtida utmaningar för miljön.

Har du frågor eller funderingar kan du kontakta mig via nedstående kontaktuppgifter.

Tack på förhand!

Med vänliga hälsningar

**Moa Westermark**
Masterprogrammet i Ledarskap och Organisation, Umeå Universitet

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