



## **Integrating Foreign Football Players Into a New Culture**

Fabio Da Rosa

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

Degree Programme in Sports Coaching and Management

Bachelor's Thesis

2025

<b>Author(s)</b> Fabio Da Rosa
<b>Degree</b> Bachelor of Sports Studies
<b>Report/Thesis Title</b> Integrating Foreign Football Players Into a New Culture
<b>Number of pages and appendix pages</b> 33 + 6
<p>Abstract</p> <p>The globalization of professional football has increased the presence of foreign players in clubs across the world, creating multicultural teams that face unique challenges. This thesis focused on the integration process of foreign football players into new cultural environments, exploring the impact of acculturation, integration, communication, and the support systems for player performance and well-being. The objective was to understand the difficulties faced by players and clubs during this transition and to develop a practical action model that could be implemented in professional football clubs. The study was limited to professional club environments and did not include national teams or amateur levels.</p> <p>The theoretical framework was based on concepts such as cultural integration, cross-cultural competence, and cultural adaptation in sports. Previous studies, player autobiographies, and support system models were analyzed to provide the context. The Double Diamond Design Process Model was used as the main tool to guide the study. Data was collected between 2024 and 2025 through qualitative methods, including 31 interviews with foreign players, coaches, agents, club managers, and family members. Data was analyzed to identify challenges and the best practices.</p> <p>The findings highlighted common issues such as language barriers, climate and cultural shock, emotional stress, and lack of initial support. The presence of support systems such as a person for immediate contact, language classes, family assistance, and cultural orientation was found to play a major role in a player's adaptation. Based on these results, a practical action model was created to improve the integration process of foreign players. The model will be tested in a professional football club setting to evaluate its effectiveness. The thesis concludes that structured support and preparation lead to better player adaptation, improved team dynamics, and overall club success.</p>
<b>Key words</b> Foreign players, new culture, multicultural teams, acculturation, socialization, cultural shock, support systems, cultural integration, cross-cultural competence, cultural adaptation in sports

## Table of contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Theoretical Framework	3
2.1. Cultural Integration	3
2.2. Cross-Cultural Competence	4
2.3. Cultural Adaptation in Football	5
3. Development Phases	8
3.1. Methods	8
3.2. Data Management and Ethical Considerations	9
3.3. Phase 1: Data Collection and Analysis	10
3.4. Phase 2: Results	13
3.5. The Action Model Chart	19
3.6. Testing the Action Model	20
4. Discussion	21
5. Conclusion	23
5.1. Significance, Scope and Limitations of the Study	23
5.2. Contribution to Knowledge	24
5.3. A Personal Journey or Reflection	24
References	27
Appendix 1. Interview Questionnaire	30
Appendix 2. Checklist	31
Appendix 3. Integration Experiences Script	32
Appendix 4. Research Announcement	34
Appendix 5. Informed Consent	35
Appendix 6. Summarized Data Collected From Literature Review and Interviews	36
Appendix 7. Findings Categorized Into Groups of Solutions	38

# 1 Introduction

In the current football environment, players from all over the world come together, bringing their individual skills, experiences, and backgrounds to the field. Apart from the challenges of the competition games, the pressure for performance, the struggle to stay healthy and fit throughout the season and the sacrifices made to chase the dream of becoming a professional football player, there is another challenge that has been discussed in recent years but not often prioritized by the clubs who sign them: how to successfully integrate those players into a whole new culture?

Imagine leaving everything familiar behind – your home, your language, your family, your friends, your favorite foods – to pursue your passion for football in a foreign land. The success of these players isn't just achieved by their performance in matches. It's also about how well they adapt to their new environment. It's about feeling at home in a place that might be thousands of miles away from where they grew up.

As a strength and conditioning coach working in professional football, the topic has always been alive in my own journey due to my background of transfers to clubs and countries where sometimes the language, the culture and the traditions were completely unfamiliar to me, and most of the times I found myself on my own in a place where I had no friends or family members to support the challenges of acculturation.

When I was given the chance to develop this thesis for my degree course, I spent a couple of days writing some ideas down in a blank piece of paper as a starting point, and at the end I came up with the following questions that helped me to organize the ideas and get everything started:

- *What are the main challenges faced by foreign football players when they move to another country and need to adapt to a new culture?*
- *What are the main challenges faced by football clubs when trying to create resources to integrate those players into the dynamics of the team and into the culture of the country?*
- *How cultural differences impact the performance of the team on the field?*
- *What support systems and integration programs are currently in place in professional football clubs worldwide to assist foreign players and their families?*
- *What strategies can football clubs implement to support the integration of foreign players into the team and the country?*

In the following pages of this thesis, I will explore the journey of foreign football players when joining clubs outside of their home country and the factors that affect their adaptation and influence their integration into a new cultural environment. I will also explore previous academic research

related to the topic, current support systems in place, and the role played by clubs, their management and their staff, as well as the personal experiences of the players and their families.

By understanding the challenges and opportunities in this process, the main objective is to add a direct contribution to existing support systems in professional football clubs, by delivering a practical action model drawn from the findings of this work. This model can be implemented, tested and improved in any football club that signs foreign players. The aim is to simplify the process of integration, improve player well-being, strengthen team dynamics and boost performance, creating a more inclusive and supportive environment in football around the world.

In addition, this thesis also aims to contribute to existing knowledge on cultural adaptation in professional sports by raising common factors that influence successful integration from theories and concepts related to the topic.

By supporting football clubs to improve their integration processes for foreign players, this thesis can also contribute to the development of the organization, helping them to enhance team dynamics which can lead to more fan engagement, increasing revenue, providing financial stability, and success in the achievement of their future plans.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Cultural Integration

Integrating foreign football players into a new culture is a process that has been discussed more and more every year in sports' research and literature. Previous studies show that supporting the inclusion and adaptation of the players into a foreign culture play a crucial role in their performance on the field and success in their life (Maderer, Holtbrügge & Schuster 2014, 221). Another range of academic studies, theories and concepts relevant to the topics of acculturation and socialization provide the foundation for this thesis when highlighting the challenges that footballers face when adjusting to unfamiliar environments.

The Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede 1980) explains how people from different cultures tend to think and behave in certain ways based on their cultural values. For instance, the dimension of *collectivism vs individualism* explains how some cultures value group effort, like in Indonesia, Brazil and most of the African nations, as they grow up learning to prioritize strong values related to family bonding and respect for authorities, while in cultures like in the United States or the Netherlands, people are taught to be independent, make their own decisions and focus on personal success as early as possible in life. In the case of a player joining a team coming from a culture that focuses more on teamwork where everyone plays and live their lives outside of the training and games more independently, this can cause confusion, frustration and the feeling that their teammates are selfish or that there's not enough cohesion and communication within the team. The dimension of *power distance* in the Hofstede's theory (Hofstede 1980), which looks on how people think about hierarchy and authority, also explains how players from a high power distance nations are used to respect coaches and staff as the absolute leaders and not question or challenge them, and they expect to have clear rules, high level of discipline and stricter routines, while players from a low power distance nations might expect to have flexibility and treat the coaches more like a collaborator, so they're comfortable on speaking up to them and even giving the coaches some feedback. In all cases, the players might feel lost, frustrated, anxious or resistant to changes, depending on the style and approach of the coaches.

The concept of acculturation in sports is described as a personal and social journey that coaches and athletes experience then they move into a new cultural environment, where the process involves more than just learning a new language or adapting to the tactical playing style of the team. It involves, in its most desired form, maintaining their own cultural identity while also changing or adjusting their mindset, behaviors, communication, values and expectations to the norms and practices of the new culture (Bespomoshchnov, Mallett, Saarinen, Vähälummukka, & Arvaja 2024).

## 2.2. Cross-Cultural Competence

*Cultural competence* refers to the ability to understand, respect, and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. The term cultural competence, also known as *intercultural competence*, has been defined from diverse perspectives and fields of work, and referenced in various sources as “a combination of skills, attitudes, and knowledge that enables individuals to navigate cultural differences and build meaningful relationships” (Unesco 2013), “the ability to participate ethically and effectively in personal and professional intercultural settings” (University of Sydney s.a.), “a set of values, behaviors, attitudes, and practices within a system, organization, program or among individuals and which enables them to work effectively cross-culturally” (Denboba 1993), “the ability to work and communicate effectively and appropriately with people from culturally different backgrounds (Alizadeh & Meena 2015, 120).

*Cross-cultural competence* refers to the attributes that allow people to adapt and work well in environments where the culture is different from their own. They are the competences that help people succeed no matter which cultures they are interacting with (Abbe, Gulick & Herman 2007, 2). Those competences are categorized here in 3 main attributes:

**Knowledge:** “The ability to understand other culture’s beliefs, values and behaviors” (Abbe et al. 2007,14).

**Skills:** “To initiate conversations, interact and maintain relationships with other cultures” (Abbe et al. 2007,18).

**Motivation:** “To engage in intercultural interactions” (Abbe et al. 2007,16), “to find immediate answers and solutions and to resist any new information that conflicts with those answers” (Abbe et al. 2007,17), “to use language to build relationships” (Abbe et al. 2007,23), “to observe and adjust his/her behavior in a socially appropriate way depending on situational cues” (Abbe et al. 2007,8).

Cross-cultural competence affects three main parts of life: *personal well-being, work, and relationships with others*. In the personal part, it means that a person is able to handle the emotional and physical challenges of living in a new culture. This includes staying healthy, feeling comfortable with everyday life, and managing changes that come with living somewhere unfamiliar. At work, cross-cultural competence helps a person perform their job well, get used to the work environment, and complete their tasks successfully. Lastly, cross-cultural competence allows people to connect with people from different backgrounds and maintain their relationships. In this last case, it’s not just about learning a new language, but understanding how to communicate respectfully and build good relationships with people from another culture Abbe et al. (2007).

In the context of this thesis, cross-cultural competence is a combination of skills and personal attributes that allow foreign players to adapt to new cultures in a way that supports their health and well-being, help them succeed at unfamiliar workplaces, and allow them to get along with people from all over the world.

### **2.3. Cultural Adaptation in Football**

Moving abroad to join a new team can often be a more complicated experience than just switching teams. It involves a change in lifestyle, different rules, laws, traditions, new language – in some countries even more than one (Juuti 2012, 23–24; Lally, Smith & Parry 2021, 6) –, exotic foods, and differences on how people act, behave and communicate (Novia & Anshari 2020, 258). This process of “fitting in” called *integration*, is not just about learning how to position in the field when attacking and defending, or how to act or react in transition moments, or when to use individual skills to take a player on in a 1v1 situation. It’s also about finding comfort, safety and understanding in the new environment.

In Indonesia, players like Fabiano Beltrame and Esteban Vizcarra moved from their countries to play without knowing much about the language or the culture. Beltrame from Brazil, referred directly to the managers of the club Persela Lamongan by a friend who used to play for the club, and Vizcarra from Argentina, scouted by a local agent to play for the club Jakarta Pelita Jaya, had to rely on friends, teammates and agents to help them get started and figure things out in the new environment. Vizcarra went through stages of adaptation varying from excitement at the very beginning with the warmth of the people in the new city and the fans of the club, to frustration when trying to understand the muslim language when they went to pray, scary moments like when he experienced an earthquake, and finally adapting well when studying the language and diving into the cultural traditions, such as the respect of the children for their parents by kissing their hands. Beltrame also had moments of joy with the happiness and hospitality of the Indonesian people and fans of the club, but as well as Vizcarra, went through moments of frustration when trying to find ingredients to make his food at home in the Brazilian way, and finally adapted fully when he studied the language to be able to communicate with locals, coaches and teammates, and go to know in depth the cultural traditions (Novia et al. 2020, 258–262).

Biographies of former professional football players and support systems currently in place working exclusively to support the integration and adaptation of foreign players into the culture of the country and the structure of the team, also support the foundation of this thesis, so the challenges that international footballers face in adjusting to unfamiliar environments can be understood.

In England, players like Didier Drogba, Luis Suarez and Fernando Torres, spoke in their autobiographies about the acculturation process and the challenges they faced. All three players reported in their books that the language barrier was one of the most difficult issues they faced when adapting to the new country because it was right at the beginning and through most of their time with their clubs. Drogba, when transferred to Chelsea (London) from Marseille, stated in his book that “My initial problem was that I didn’t speak English, my command of the language extended to the pointless sentences that all French kids learn at school”, and explained that because of his struggle to communicate he found it very hard to find a place to live as he couldn’t visit houses for inspection and deal with the real estate agents himself. Torres, when transferred to Liverpool from Madrid, reported that “One of the biggest problems I faced when I first moved to Liverpool was the language barrier. My English was limited.”, and affirmed that this was something that prevented him from giving as much as he would like to give in terms of expressing himself both on and off the pitch, impacting in performance, career and livelihood. Suarez, in his turn, also had an impact in the adaptation process when transferred to Liverpool from Amsterdam. He mentioned that “To start with at Liverpool, I had to rely on gestures to communicate”, and that had an impact in his career on and off the pitch (Lally et al. 2021, 6).

Torres and Suarez had an extra layer of difficulty in their communication with the staff in the club, for instance, to explain to the medical staff about an injury and how it happened. This was due to the fact that in Liverpool the locals use a particular dialect to communicate known as Scouse, or Liverpool English (Lally et al. 2021, 6).

In Finland, where the language issue also seems to be a huge barrier to be overcome by foreign players, there are other factors that make it even more difficult for international players to adapt to the environment. Roads, training grounds and facilities covered in snow, very short days with shortage of sunlight and extreme low temperatures, were such a cultural shock for players transferring to Finland from their original tropical countries. Those factors tested the players' resilience and led some to suffer from emotional strains and homesickness (Thiaw 2024, 26, 29–30).

Between the players and their new clubs there is often a person that plays a major role in the connection between the player and the club: *the agents*. Many players, especially those coming from or into countries with very different languages, cultures and traditions, rely on agents not just as their business representatives, but as their main person of contact to help them get used to the new lifestyle. They contact their agents to connect them with people in the new country who speak their language to act as translators in the first few weeks, to help with daily tasks, meetings and appointments. However, the influence of the agents can vary according to how much they're willing to get involved in the process after the deal is signed (Kelly & Chatziefstathiou 2017, 4-13).

From a practical point of view regarding the support systems, it was found that some professional football clubs in countries where football is the most popular and profitable sport, have developed different strategies to help foreign players settle in. These clubs have dedicated staff, departments and collaboration with local businesses offering integral support for international players on matters that don't involve their duties in the sport during their time in the club, such as language courses, housing assistance, family assistance, or cultural orientation, as well as assistance in travelling, commuting, documentation and legal matters (The Player Care Group s.a.).

### 3 Development Phases

#### 3.1. Methods

The study was done in four phases, beginning with a comprehensive review of the literature, which served as a foundation for understanding the concepts related to cultural integration in sports. This initial phase helped to define the scope of the thesis.

Following the literature review, the interview phase started. The recruitment of the participants for the interviews was made via phone calls, text messages and private messages to their social media profiles. The criteria for participation of the players and the coaches included the registration of their profiles in Transfermarkt where their transfer deals could be verified. The total participants in the interviews for this thesis was 31. The total countries involved in this thesis through the experience of the participants was 36. The table below (Table 1) provides details of the demographics of participation in the interviews for this thesis work. The interviews were conducted between late 2024 and early 2025, some done in person and others done by phone or video calls (Transfermarkt s.a.).

Table 1. Demographics of participation in the interviews.

Players interviewed	Staff interviewed	Family members interviewed	Coaches interviewed	Club managers interviewed	Agents interviewed
14	2	4	7	2	2
Nationalities of the players		Nationalities of the family members	Nationalities of the coaches		Nationalities of the agents
Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Colombia, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, The Netherlands, Serbia, Sweden		Portugal, Brazil, Colombia	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Finland, Portugal, Scotland, Spain		Turkey, Italy
Countries where the players lived			Countries where the coaches worked		
Argentina, Austria, Australia, Brazil, Colombia, China, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hong Kong, Ireland, India, Iran, Indonesia, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Japan, The Netherlands, Mexico, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, Thailand, USA, UAE, Vietnam			Brazil, China, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hong Kong, South Korea, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Scotland, Turkey, UAE		

Once the interviews were completed, the data collected both from the literature review and the interviews was analysed and the findings were integrated, focusing on categorizing them in common themes that served to define the support systems that football clubs might create to support the integration of their foreign players and their families.

Based on the categorized findings, a practical action model was designed, showing the workflow of the process of the integration. The entire study was conducted in approximately one year.

To support the development phases of this thesis, the Double Diamond Design Process Model (British Design Council 2005) was chosen as the main tool for management of the information. This process model is a simple but powerful tool created to help understand, explain and solve a problem, serving as a guide to organize information for the person or organization who uses it to be able to know where to start, organize the ideas, make the best decisions and explain or create a solution in a clear and structured way. It consists of four stages, each representing different ways of thinking – either *diverging* (expanding the view) or *converging* (narrowing the view) – grouped in two main phases that look like two connected diamonds (Figure 1).

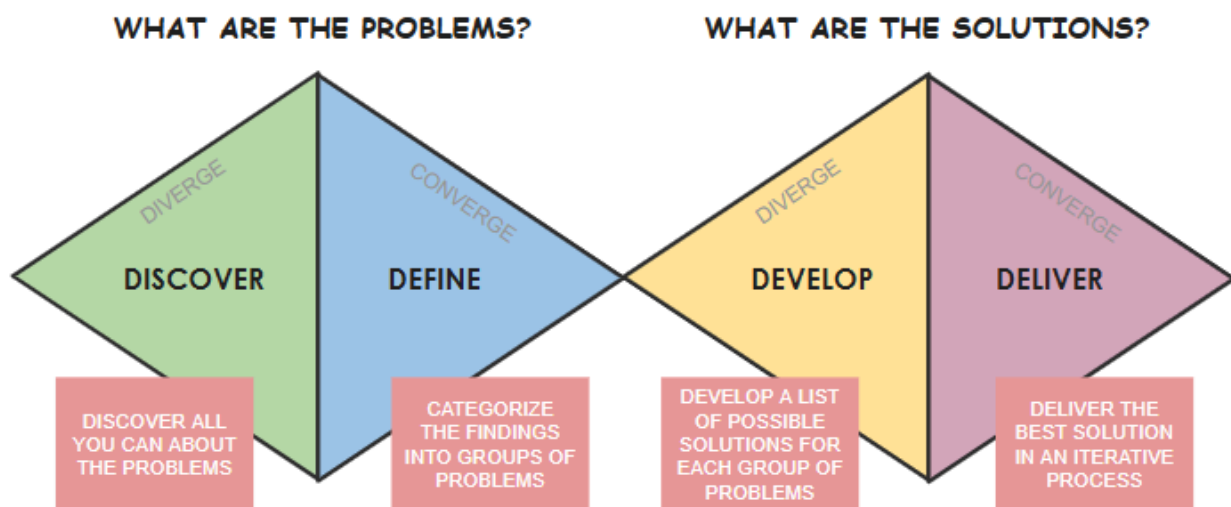


Figure 1. Adapted from the Double Diamond Design Model (British Design Council 2005).

### 3.2. Data Management and Ethical Considerations

The data collected in the interviews was stored securely with limited access to the people responsible for this thesis. Anonymity was ensured by removing names and personal details from

the participants. Data was stored for a specific period before being securely deleted and destroyed. Results were shared protecting the identities of the participants.

Participation in the interviews was completely voluntary and the participants were also free not to answer a certain question they did not feel comfortable with and to stop participating at any time if they were not comfortable with any questions or subjects addressed.

Informed consent for the interviews asking the participants to give their permission to be part of the study was sent and returned with their approval. The privacy of all participants was respected by not sharing their names or any personal details that could identify them and all data collected and recorded was stored securely.

### **3.3. Phase 1: Data Collection and Analysis**

The *discover* and *define* stages of the Double Diamond Design Process Model were applied in this phase to identify as many problems as possible when exploring information from the literature, interviews with players, their family members, agents, coaches, club managers and support staff. A summary of the findings identified in this phase were gathered together (see Appendix 6) and the following paragraphs bring the details of the information collected.

**Language barriers:** One of the biggest challenges brought up from the review of literature that foreign players face when they move to a new country is the language. Players who are not able to speak or understand the local language or to communicate with their teammates, staff, fans and local community using English language can right away feel frustrated, isolated and unconfident to manage tasks related to the sport in trainings and games and to handle daily life tasks.

The interviews conducted for this thesis confirmed that players adapt quicker and more smoothly when they can speak English, or when they have a chance to have a few classes of the local language in advance before travelling or if the club provides those classes as soon as they arrive.

**Climate differences:** The weather conditions and climate differences can have a significant impact on the player's adaptation and integration. This topic was clear in the examples from the literature which showed that players coming from warmer countries found it very difficult to adapt to the cold temperatures when moved to countries like Finland, where the climate can be a shock for them, affecting their mood, energy levels, emotional well-being and physical comfort due to the extreme cold temperatures and long and dark days in winter when the daylight can last only a few hours. The extreme and sudden change in climate also affected their performance, as their bodies needed time to adapt to training and playing in freezing temperatures.

But the opposite situation can also be challenging. Players who moved from countries with colder temperatures all year long also struggled when they moved to tropical countries with hot and humid climates. In countries like Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and the majority of the countries in South America where the temperatures can stay above 30°C and the humidity is high all year long, some of the players interviewed found themselves exhausted after training under those conditions at their usual level of intensity. Some players experienced fatigue, dehydration and difficulties breathing in extreme heat, especially if they were training in the hottest times of the day. In some of those countries there was also the fact that heavy rain and unpredicted tropical storms affected their routine of training, match schedules and recovery time. Interviewed players mentioned that it took them weeks, sometimes months in some cases, for their bodies to adapt to the heat, and that affected directly their performance, creating doubts in the coaches and club manager's minds about their real skills and qualities related to the game.

**Cultural shock:** Another common issue is cultural differences. Players moving to a new country often find themselves in an unfamiliar social and cultural environment that can lead to misunderstandings, social isolation, difficulties in adapting to new traditions and social norms, worries about their families' well-being and education of their children. Two of the players interviewed found themselves in countries with strict religious, dietary, and social rules, like Iran and Saudi Arabia, and adapting their way of living was difficult and overwhelming at the beginning, especially because one of them moved with his wife and 2 young children.

**Mental and emotional well-being:** Another critical aspect brought up in the interviews with players and coaches is mental and emotional well-being. Some players stated that they experienced stress, anxiety, depression, the feelings of loneliness and homesickness when moved to a new country, away from their families, friends and loved ones. These issues combined with the pressure to perform at a high level significantly impacted their confidence and overall performance.

**Difficulties dealing with daily tasks:** Almost all the players interviewed mentioned that at some point in their career they had difficulties in some countries to find suitable accommodation, setting up utilities or simply a phone number, opening bank accounts, obtaining visas, work permits, managing finances and taxes and understanding how basic services work in a new country, such as documentation, transportation, grocery shopping, commuting, attending to appointments, when they had to do all that and figure out things by themselves, and that the experiences were usually time-consuming, challenging, frustrating and overwhelming, distracting them from focusing on their duties and performance, especially when they were totally unfamiliar with the local language, laws, norms and customs.

***Having somebody to rely on when needed:*** One of the most important points mentioned by the players in the interviews that can help them feel welcomed, supported and adapt quicker when arriving in a foreign country was the importance of having a person, or a department, easily accessible for their needs in the first weeks after their arrival. Data from the interviews showed that players often arrive tired and confused from the trip and the time zone difference, and all the new information they have to process as quickly as possible, especially if they don't speak the language, can cause stress and overwhelm.

Players shared that the first weeks are the most important part for a successful adaptation and integration, and having someone or a department physically present or easy to reach makes them feel much more comfortable. In some clubs, players had great experiences when a staff member picked them up at the airport and helped them get settled in their homes and assigned a senior teammate to show them around the city and be with them in the first days.

Some players suggested that the clubs should always assign a reliable person to take care of foreign players in the first weeks, someone who not only knows the city and understands how to deal with paperwork, but someone who understands the emotional feelings of moving alone to a foreign country,

***External problems and worries about their families:*** Players who moved with their families faced even more challenges, as they needed to guarantee that their partners and children also adapted well to the new environment. Social integration and family support are essential for a player's well-being. When players feel lonely or disconnected from their teammates and community, their motivation and mental health can suffer. Those with families often worried about their children's education, their family members' ability to integrate, the availability of support options, and ended up losing focus on their duties and responsibilities in trainings and games.

***Adjusting to the new tactical system and the relationship with the new coaches:*** Team dynamics and tactical adaptation can also be challenging for foreign players. Each football club has its own playing style, expectations, and team culture. Some interviews revealed that adjusting to a new tactical system, understanding the coach's philosophy, and building relationships with teammates took some time and effort. Players who did not integrate well with the coaches and the team dynamics, felt sad and frustrated, affecting their performance and career projects.

***Poor preparation of the players prior to arrival:*** The interviews with coaches and club managers highlighted that many foreign players arrived in their club without any kind of preparation. They were unaware of basic rules, norms and traditions of the country, and in some cases, they hadn't even been told about the club's history, culture, facilities and their expectations for their arrival. In some cases, the club staff mentioned that some players arrived without knowing

how the weather conditions would be, so the players struggled with the clothes and gears they brought from the very first day, how the public transportation system worked, or what kind of documents they needed to register with the local authorities.

Staff members also shared that when the players arrive with some kind of information and preparation, especially about the language and culture of the country, they tend to adapt and feel comfortable and confident in their new environment a lot easier and quicker.

***Lack of support from agents:*** Club managers and some of the coaches interviewed brought up the problem of poor involvement of the player's agents after the deal was done. They mentioned that some agents are very active and attempt to details related to comfort and well-being during the process of negotiation, but the support and attention to the player's needs after the contract was signed tended to drop considerably.

***Close-mindedness to accept new experiences and socialize with people of different backgrounds:*** Openness to new experiences was also an important topic mentioned by coaches for the player's adaptation. Players who isolated themselves or got together only with people from their own country or spoken language often struggled to feel comfortable in their new environment, and sometimes caused dissatisfaction in their teammates, coaches and staff.

***Balance of their own identity with the new culture:*** Coaches mentioned in the interviews about their experiences with players who expected everything to be the same as in their home country and were resistant to new ways of living. They also mentioned that maintaining their religion, customs, and cultural traditions seemed to be very important and valuable for them to keep bond with their own identity, but when some players were overly strict about them, sometimes created barriers for integration, especially with the community. In the words of one of the interviewed coaches:

*“Foreigners should be open to try different foods, adjust to different daily routines, and respect the social norms of their new environment. Living in a foreign country exactly as they would do on their own, can make adaptation more difficult and prevent them from experiencing the beauty, the diversity and the opportunities of the new culture”.*

### **3.4. Phase 2: Results**

The *develop and deliver* stages of the Double Diamond Design Process Model were applied in this phase with the objectives of developing a list of suggestions for possible solutions for each category. The findings were categorized into groups (see Appendix 7), as highlighted and explained in the following paragraphs.

## **Support Systems**

The main support systems identified in this thesis that can facilitate the integration of foreign players are:

### ***Language Classes***

Using a common language for communication during trainings and meetings also helps improve team cohesion. English language plays a crucial role in professional football, as it is widely used as a common language in international teams, regardless of the country. Many clubs operate in multicultural environments where players from different nationalities must work together, making effective communication essential for tactical understanding and team cohesion. Proficiency in English allows players to communicate easily with teammates, coaches, staff members, and the press and media, and assist them in their daily lives by understanding club policies and handling personal matters. Encouraging foreign players to learn English or providing them English language classes, besides the local language, can shorten their integration process and professional success.

About the aspects of language and communication, even if the club provides language lessons after their arrival, the players who make an effort to learn some basic words and phrases before moving will have a much easier time connecting with teammates, coaches, and staff. Simple greetings, expressions, and football-related terms can help build relationships and show respect for the local culture. Players who try to participate in conversations and practice the new language, even if they make mistakes, are more likely to be accepted and supported by those around them.

### ***Player's Integration Guide***

Every professional football club can develop a *Player's Integration Guide* to share with the newly signed foreign players and their agents before their arrival. This guide has essential details that will help the players get familiar with the new environment, such as information about the country's culture, local customs and traditions and expected social behaviors. It also explains the club policies, code of conduct, expectations and behaviors on and off the field, and contact information of the main staff members in the club, like the coaches, medical staff and other staff members. The more a player knows in advance, the smoother their adaptation can be.

Since language is often a major barrier, basic language expressions could be included in the guide for the player and his family to familiarise with before their arrival. When the player is already in the country, a few weeks of basic instruction in the local language can help the player communicate and feel more comfortable in their new environment.

### ***Institutional Video***

In addition to the written and printed guide, clubs can create and publish in the webpage an engaging *Institutional Video* showing the country's main cities and popular tourist spots, typical foods, lifestyle, weather, and other cultural information, as well as the club's history, core values, playing style, how the league works, what a typical week looks like during the season, club's achievements, reputation and some of the most important important players who made or are making history at the club, giving to the new players a better idea of what to expect. In the video, the club could also include a few words from former players who have gone through the same integration process to help the new players prepare and feel more welcomed prior to their arrival.

### ***Psychological Assistance Program***

Psychological assistance can also be available for players and family members. Access to counseling and psychological support can help them deal with stress and emotional challenges during their transition.

Creating a welcoming and inclusive club culture is crucial for integration and team performance and helps players deal with stress, anxiety and other psychological factors that might affect their performance and well-being. For instance, organizing team-building activities allows players to connect with their teammates and develop a sense of belonging. When players build strong relationships off the field, it translates into better teamwork and their performance on the field.

### ***Integration Programs and Assistance for Family Members***

Clubs may promote cross-cultural events to help players and their family members understand and respect each other's traditions. Recognizing cultural diversity is an important factor in the integration of foreign players, their families and the community. Clubs can promote events for players to introduce and present each other's cultural traditions and create an environment where everyone feels respected and valued.

Clubs may also promote events for the families of the players to interact with locals. Making friends outside their usual circle and showing interest in learning about different cultures contribute to a quicker integration into the society.

If the player has children, the club may provide assistance in finding schools and connecting them with the community, ensuring a smooth transition for the whole family, once the education and integration of their children will be also taken care of.

## ***Training for Coaches and Staff Members***

Football is a sport that connects players from different countries and backgrounds, but each club has its own culture, playing style and tactical approach. Ensuring that the coaches and staff have experience or at least are trained in working with diverse teams strengthens the adaptation process and makes it more effective. Coaches play a fundamental role in making foreign players feel welcomed, valued, and integrated into the team. It is crucial that they have skills to communicate clearly with players from various backgrounds, avoiding situations that could arise from differences in language and culture. A coaching staff that treats all players equally, regardless of their nationality, promotes an environment of fairness and inclusion, where every athlete feels respected and motivated to perform at their best. Coaches with international experience bring extra advantages when working with multicultural teams. Having coached in different countries gives them experience on working with different playing styles, training methodologies, as well as cultural experiences, making them more adaptable and open-minded in their approach.

Everyone processes and learns new information in different ways. Developing communication strategies using visual, auditory and kinesthetic styles in a common language during training, ensures that all players understand tactical instructions more easily and clearly.

## **The Onboarding Manager**

Before a player even arrives in the country, clubs can assign a dedicated person who will assist in the whole transition process (before, during and after their time in the country). This person will mostly cover non-sporting and non-medical matters related to the players and their families around the team. In the countries mentioned before, where football is the most popular sport, this person is often called Player Liaison Officer or Player Care Officer. Our main person of contact to provide full assistance to the foreign players and their families when moving to a new country will be called in this thesis as ***Onboarding Manager***.

The aim of this position is to reduce the chances of players having issues off the field, so they can focus on their duties and responsibilities for their performance on the field.

The profile of the onboarding manager is a person who's friendly, discreet and pro-active on anticipating events and planning everything in advance.

### ***Onboarding Meeting with Players and Agents (Pre-Arrival Meeting)***

Once the contract deal is done, the onboarding manager can contact the player and the agent to set an onboarding meeting, or pre-arrival meeting, and discuss the points mentioned below.

While clubs are working on improving their support systems for the integration of foreign players, the role of the agents in preparing and supporting the players to arrive in their new environment also remains a key part of the whole process. When agents stay close, involved and supportive, they can make a big positive difference in the process of integration of the players, especially in the first weeks. The role of the agents is to act as a bridge between the player and the club, helping with the communication, and sharing the responsibility of their integration with the club. Agents should work to give players all the necessary information in advance, such as what to pack, how daily life works like in the new country, what support they'll receive and who to talk to when they need help, and how to prepare mentally and emotionally for the move.

One of the most important steps players can take before arriving in a foreign country is to do their own research about the culture, norms, and daily life of their new home, regardless of receiving or not a guide from the club with all that information. And this task is directly connected to their agents, who play a vital role in helping the players to find this information and prepare to arrive in the new country and new environment.

Understanding the country's traditions and norms of the society can help players avoid cultural challenges and adapt smoothly to their new environment. Learning about practical aspects such as weather, transportation, food, and lifestyle can also reduce the initial stress and anxiety about the new life that is about to come. Players should familiarize themselves with their new club's culture, history, playing style, and expectations after their arrival to be able to integrate quicker into the team.

While football clubs play a crucial role in integrating foreign players, the players themselves also have a significant responsibility in their own adaptation process. Moving to a new country is more than just a professional transition in their careers, it is a personal journey that requires preparation, commitment and effort. A player's ability to adapt quickly and effectively depends also on their openness to accept new experiences, study and get to know about their new environment, and actively participate in the integration process.

Players who prepare before arriving, make an effort to communicate, interact with others, and are open to new experiences tend to have a more positive transition. Their ability to integrate well increases not only their well-being but also their performance on the field. By accepting change and making the effort to adapt, foreign players can take the best out of their experience in a new country and contribute to their team's success.

The onboarding manager can also develop a pre-arrival check-list to be used in the onboarding meeting every time the club signs a new player. This document might contain a workflow of the

whole process with specific tasks to be completed prior to arrival of the new player, as well as tasks to be completed as a follow up.

### ***Daily Tasks Support***

The onboarding manager is the main person of contact for both local and foreign players. The person who will assist the players on finding accommodation, setting up a phone number, grocery shopping, dealing with bank accounts, visas, work permits, taxes and other bureaucratic matters, and understanding how basic services such as transport, hospital appointments, emergency services, calendar of trainings and travels for matches, as well as marketing and promotional events work in the country and in the club.

To help with daily life, the onboarding manager can also assign a senior teammate who will assist the new player in settling in. Having a trusted person to rely on can make a significant difference in the integration process.

Once the player arrives and the club arranges airport pickup and transportation to their accommodation, the onboarding manager can then conduct a club orientation experience, where the player is introduced to their new coaches, teammates, and staff. A guided tour of the club's facilities including training grounds, locker rooms, gyms, and medical facilities, as well as the main shops, tourist points and landmarks of the city, will ensure that the player gets familiar with their new environment.

### ***Feedback Form***

The feedback form is a strategic tool used to understand how foreign players felt about their experience in the new club, especially how well they were supported during their time in the new country. The form is given to the players when their contracts are ending or when the contract is broken due to a transfer deal, and the objective is to hear from the players what went well, what was difficult, and what the club can do better to help foreign players in the future.

The form is the responsibility of the onboarding manager, or the department responsible for helping the foreign players to settle in the country. It can be filled online by sending a link directly to the players or in a short face-to-face meeting where the onboarding manager can also gather some extra information by asking informal questions to the player while the form is being filed out.

The questions cover subjects such as daily tasks support, language, culture, physical and mental well-being, support for the family, and how well they felt during their time in the team.

The information provided will help the club understand how the integration process is being done, what areas are working well and what can be done to improve the process and enhance the performance of the team by making all players feel welcomed and supported. It can be shared with all the staff involved, so everyone can learn from the answers.

### 3.5. The Action Model Chart

The following chart (Figure 2) represents the action model designed from the results of this work to be implemented, tested, improved and adapted to the reality of football clubs worldwide for the integration of their foreign players into the culture.

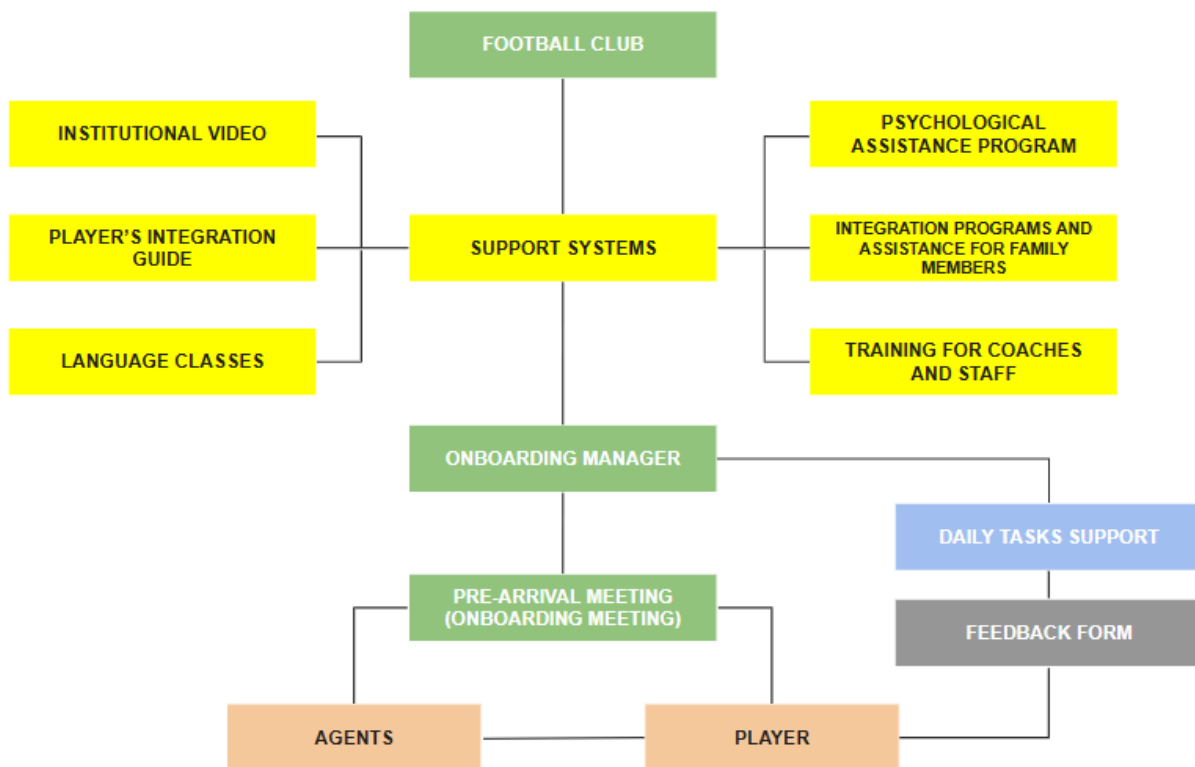


Figure 2. Action model for the integration of foreign football players and their families into a new culture.

The Action Model Chart is the final product of this thesis and it demonstrates how football clubs, after making available the support systems and assigning a dedicated person or department to be in constant contact with the players and their families, can facilitate the process of integration of foreign players into the country's culture and the club's dynamics.

### **3.6. Testing the Action Model**

The next important step to validate the action model is to test this model in a real football environment to see how it works in practice, which parts are working effectively and which ones need improvement.

To begin the process, the model will be tested by myself in the football club where I currently work. This is a great opportunity for me to apply the insights of my studies in a professional environment and ensure that the work done for this thesis is able to help foreign players to integrate into any other culture and perform at their best, as well as to help professional football club worldwide to facilitate the integration process for their foreign players and benefit from that.

This final process will focus first on the next signed players from abroad in the upcoming season. In the meantime, I will take responsibility for presenting the project to the board members and to the coaches, and get their approval to create the essential material, delegate the tasks to the staff, instruct the agents to cooperate with the new process and collect regular feedbacks from the players about their experiences right after spending a few days training with the team and living in the country.

We already have one person who works as a volunteer for the club and is responsible for most of the tasks and responsibilities of the Onboarding Manager mentioned in the previous pages. Watching this person volunteering in supporting the players and the coaches, taking care of them and their families, struggling sometimes in facilitating the integration of the club's foreign players but in the majority of the cases, succeeding in making the players feel welcomed in the club and in the country, served as a big inspiration for me to develop this thesis.

## 4 Discussion

The findings of this thesis highlight that the integration process requires structured support from football clubs, football associations, player's agents, teammates, and local communities, as well as openness from football players themselves and their families to adapt to the new environment without giving up on their own values. A player's ability to perform well is directly connected to their level of comfort and confidence in their new environment. When a club fails to provide that support, players can struggle with cultural differences, communication barriers, and the feeling of emotional struggle, which can negatively impact their performance, their career development and the team's targets for the season.

In some cases, the lack of proper support can also lead to serious physical and mental health consequences. Players who struggle with stress and emotional breakdowns may experience loss of weight, loss of muscle mass and fatigue, affecting their physical condition and making them more vulnerable to injuries. Stress and anxiety can also result in sleep disorders, negatively affecting their recovery process and athletic performance. Without proper mental health support, players can develop feelings of isolation, depression, and burnout, which not only affect their game but can also shorten their professional careers.

Additionally, a lack of medical attention, nutritional guidance, and rehabilitation support for injured players can lead to longer recovery and rehabilitation times. If the players don't receive the right care, they may never return to their peak performance, and the club can lose valuable assets. This can also create tensions inside the squad, as players who feel unsupported may drop in motivation or even consider leaving the team before their contracts end.

On the other hand, when clubs create and invest in well-structured integration programs, the positive outcomes can be significant. A well-adapted player feels more confident, motivated, and committed to their team, which often leads to stronger performances, better statistics, and personal achievements such as winning championships and increasing the club's revenue for future seasons, breaking records and winning personal awards.

By achieving personal success, well-integrated players can increase their market value, attracting interest from other clubs in higher leagues. This not only benefits the player but also generates revenue for the club through transfer fees and sponsorship deals. A club that is known for effectively integrating foreign talents becomes a more attractive destination for elite players, agents, and investors. When a club successfully supports and integrates its players, the media exposure increases, leading to more fan engagement, increase in ticket sales, and commercial opportunities.

In addition, foreign players who feel welcome in their new environment are more likely to engage in community activities, promotional events, and media appearances, strengthening the club's reputation locally and internationally. Their success stories contribute to the club's image, making it more interesting to sponsors and business partners.

## 5 Conclusion

### 5.1. Significance, Scope and Limitations of the Study

This work focused primarily on the experiences of foreign football players and their family members, football coaches, football agents, club managers and club support staff in professional environments. It did not focus on the integration experiences of foreign players in national teams or amateur leagues.

By narrowing the focus to professional club environments, this thesis can provide deeper insights and practical recommendations relevant to football clubs and player development programs in any level of performance of the sport.

This thesis has considerable importance for the following key stakeholders in the football industry:

**Football Clubs:** By understanding the challenges faced by foreign players when moving to a new country, football clubs can develop more effective integration and support programs to facilitate their acculturation, helping the team to be more inclusive, improving team cohesion, player performance, and the club's overall success on the field.

**Football Coaches,** who play a crucial role in the development and well-being of their players. By understanding how foreign players adjust to new cultures, coaches can offer better guidance and support on and off the training environment, facilitating the adaptation process of their players, strengthening the connection between them, improving communication, and promoting a more positive team environment.

**Youth Academies and Development Programs** that train young players for professional football, both locally and internationally, can use the insights of this thesis work to better prepare their players for cultural challenges, increasing the chances of success for those young athletes in their future careers.

**Football associations** that aim to promote diversity and equal opportunities in the sport can use the findings of this work to provide valuable data for initiatives that support foreign players and ensure that everyone, regardless of their cultural background, have equal opportunities in football.

**Broader impact,** where the insights of this thesis extend beyond the football industry and are relevant not only to football but to other contexts of the society. The insights can also contribute to understanding how immigrants integrate into new communities and how businesses can better support international employees.

## **5.2. Contribution to Knowledge**

This thesis is aimed to add valuable insights into how foreign players adjust to new teams and cultures. It identifies the main challenges players face and strategies that clubs and coaches can use to help them settle in. By highlighting the successes and the gaps in current integration methods, this work offers practical recommendations for improvement.

The findings of this thesis provide to football clubs and players basic guidance on how to create a smoother transition experience, improve player well-being, and enhance team performance. The knowledge gained from this thesis can be used by clubs, coaches, and sports organizations to build more welcoming environments.

## **5.3. A Personal Journey or Reflection**

Conducting this thesis work has been a personal journey that has broadened my understanding of the challenges foreign football players face. Moving to a new country is not just about adapting to a different style of play but also about finding a sense of belonging. Through this thesis, I came to deeper understand the complexity and importance of cultural adaptation.

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned is that small gestures can make a big difference. A simple welcome from teammates, furniture items specially arranged in an apartment to make it feel like home, or a coach making an effort to understand different cultural backgrounds and communicate with everyone equally can have a huge impact on a player's confidence and overall well-being. They perform at their best when players feel supported, valued, and included. This thesis has reinforced my belief that successful teams are built on more than just talent.

Working on this thesis has not only been an educational project but also a retroactive journey for me. It took me back in time to when I first left my home country, Brazil, to live abroad in 1998. That moment marked the beginning of a long road filled with challenges, learning experiences, and self-discovery. At that time, the only language I could speak was Portuguese, and I found myself unable to communicate in any other language, including English. This language barrier was one of the toughest struggles I faced in my early years abroad, similar to the experiences of foreign players arriving in new countries.

Over the years, I have lived in countries where the culture was completely different from my own, and adapting to environments where customs, traditions, and social norms were unfamiliar to me was a humbling experience. I also lived in places where the language was extremely difficult to learn, like Finland and China, where not everyone speaks English or adopts it as a common language. This made daily interactions and integration more challenging, similar to what foreign football players experience when they move to a new country where communication barriers exist.

However, I found my way of learning a universal language, English, and it became the key to my growth as a man and as a professional coach. I was fortunate to receive support from many professionals in the football industry who recognized my talent, skills, and promising future as a coach in their point of view, and their belief in me and their willingness to help me to overcome my difficulties played a vital role in my life and in my career. This is a strong reminder of how crucial it is for football clubs to provide support systems for their foreign players, just as I received support in my own journey.

Through my personal experiences, I also learned that integration is a two-way road. I realized that instead of expecting people to accept me, my culture, my religion, and my personality, I had to make an effort to understand and integrate into the culture of the places I moved to. This mindset shift was crucial in my ability to adapt to different environments. It taught me that respect, openness, and the willingness to learn are essential qualities for anyone trying to integrate into a new society.

As I researched and gathered the information for this thesis, all these experiences came together in a way that made perfect sense. It was as if I was travelling back and living the struggles, the lessons, and the achievements of my journey, now looking at them through the lens of my academic work. The process of writing this thesis became more than just an academic task, it turned into a journey of self-understanding.

This project took me back to almost 30 years of memories, challenges, and achievements, making me reflect on all that I have learned and overcome. I could see the connections between my personal experiences and the struggles of foreign football players adapting to new environments, and how those connections could contribute to this field of knowledge.

Now, as I complete this thesis, I realize how rewarding it is to bring together my personal experiences with my academic work and I see this as more than just a study. It is a contribution to the football industry, offering insights that can help players, clubs, and coaches improve the integration process. I feel a sense of fulfillment knowing that my experiences, combined with the findings of this thesis, can be a valuable resource for those with similar challenges.

Additionally, working on this thesis has provided me with new opportunities to learn even more about the sport that I love and that made me the person I am today. The research process contributed to both my personal growth and professional development, increasing my passion for football and reinforcing my commitment to helping players and teams succeed.

This journey has confirmed that integration is a key part of success in football, just as it is in life. Through this thesis, I hope to contribute to making the game more inclusive, supportive, and

understanding for players who take the brave step of leaving their home countries to pursue their dreams.

## References

- Alizadeh, S. & Meena, C. 2015. "Cultural Competence Dimensions and Outcomes: A Systematic Review of the Literature." *Health & Social Care in the Community*, vol. 24, no. 6, Oct. 2015, pp. e117–30, doi:10.1111/hsc.12293.
- Antonios K. Travlos, Panagiotis Dimitropoulos, Stylianos Panagiotopoulos, 2017. "Foreign player migration and athletic success in Greek football", *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 7 Issue: 3, pp.258-275.
- Benson, A. J., Evans, M. B., & Eys, M. A. 2016. Organizational socialization in team sport environments. *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports*, 26(4), 463-473. doi:10.1111/sms.12460
- Bespomoshchnov, V. A., Mallett, C. J., Saarinen, M., Vähälummukka, M., & Arvaja, M. 2024. Coaching Across Borders: Lessons From Finnish High-Performance Ice Hockey Coaches. *International Sport Coaching Journal*. 12. 1-12. 10.1123/iscj.2023-0098.
- British Design Council. (2005). *Design methods for developing services*. Retrieved from <https://www.designcouncil.org.uk>
- Denboba, D., US Department of Health and Human services, Health Services and Resources Administration (1993). MCHB/DSCSHCN Guidance for competitive applications, material and child health improvement projects for children with special health care needs.
- Hofstede, Geert. 2001. *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions and Organizations Across Nations*. 10.1016/S0005-7967(02)00184-5.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Sage Publications.
- Juuti, J. 2012. Foreign footballers' integration challenges in Finland. Bachelor's thesis. HAMK University of Applied Sciences, International Business. URL: [https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/53296/Juuti\\_Jaakko.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/53296/Juuti_Jaakko.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y). Accessed: 17 May 2024.
- Jalkapallon PelaajaYhdistys 2024. Welcome to Finland. URL: <https://jpy.fi/en/welcome-to-finland>. Accessed: 22 May 2024.

Jarjabka, Akos & Fűrész, Diána & Havran, Zsolt. (2024). The impact of cultural distance on the migration of professional athletes as high-skilled employees. *Journal of Industrial and Business Economics*. 51. 10.1007/s40812-023-00288-8.

Kelly, S. and Chatziefstathiou, D. (2017) 'Trust me I am a Football Agent'. The discursive practices of the players' agents in (un)professional football. *Sport in Society*, 21 (5). pp. 800-814. ISSN 1743-0437.

Lally, Aaron & Smith, Matthew & Parry, Keith. (2021). Exploring migration experiences of foreign footballers to England through the use of autobiographies. *Soccer & Society*. 23. 1-16. 10.1080/14660970.2021.1930535.

Lepore, D. How to integrate players in a new environment. Player development project blog. URL: <https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/how-to-integrate-players-in-a-new-environment/>. Accessed: 29 March 2024.

Maderer, Daniel & Holtbrügge, Dirk & Schuster, Tassilo. (2014). Professional football squads as multicultural teams: Cultural diversity, intercultural experience, and team performance. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*. 14. 215-238. 10.1177/1470595813510710.

Novia, Reyna & Anshari, Faridhian. (2020). A Study of Cultural Adaptation Process in Indonesia by PERSIB Football Club Foreign Players. 10.2991/assehr.k.200818.060.

Obilișteanu, Georgeta & Niculescu, Brandusa-Oana. (2018). Intercultural Competence in Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages. *International conference KNOWLEDGE-BASED ORGANIZATION*. 24. 345-350. 10.1515/kbo-2018-0113.

Player Care Consulting. The Player Care Group. URL: <https://www.playercaregroup.co.uk/player-care-consulting>. Accessed: 20 November 2024.

PlayerCarePro - By The Player Care Group. The Player Care Group. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t0wde9R-k6w>. Accessed: 20 November 2024.

Player care: The unseen part of performance. Training Ground Guru. URL: <https://archive.trainingground.guru/articles/player-care-the-unseen-part-of-performance>. Accessed: 20 November 2024.

Romeijn, N. & van Sterkenburg, J. 2024. Playing with Cultures. Adapting To a New Country. *Football Players Worldwide*. URL: <https://fifpro.org/media/n3odzjwi/fifpro-playing-with-cultures.pdf>. Accessed: 6 April 2024.

Thiaw, M. 2024. The adaptation process of KuPS foreign football players. Bachelor's thesis. Savonia University of Applied Sciences, Social Sciences, Business and Administration. URL: [https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/851843/Thiaw\\_Issa.pdf?sequence=2](https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/851843/Thiaw_Issa.pdf?sequence=2). Accessed: 17 May 2024.

UNESCO, Intercultural Competences. Conceptual and Operational Framework, Paris, printed in the workshops of UNESCO, 2013, p.16.

University of Sydney. (s.a.). *What is cultural competence?* National Centre for Cultural Competence. URL: <https://www.sydney.edu.au/nccc/about-us/what-is-cultural-competence.html>. Accessed: 25 May 2025.

Żemojtel-Piotrowska, Magdalena & Piotrowski, Jarosław. (2023). Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory. 10.1007/978-3-031-08956-5\_1124-1.

What is Player Care? The Player Care Group. Online video. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yliwSdfHmzY>. Accessed: 20 November 2024.

## **The Use of AI**

The AI played an important role in correcting mistakes of sentences in certain parts of the thesis as per the example below where I used the ChatGPT 3.5 language model:

*“Correct spelling mistakes, language and concordance in the following sentence: When a club fails to provide support, players may struggle with cultural differences, communication barriers, and feeling emotionally affected, which can negatively impact their performance, the achievement targets for the season and a long-term career development.”*

## **Appendix 1. Interview Questionnaire**

### Interview questionnaire for foreign football players and agents

#### **General Information**

1. What is your nationality?
2. What is your first language?
3. How old are you?
4. How many countries have you played in other than your own country?
5. What's your level of English?
6. What is the highest level you have played at in club football?
  - Regional or State leagues
  - National leagues (which division?)
  - Continental leagues (UEFA Champions League, CONMEBOL Libertadores, AFC Champions League, CAF Champions League, OFC Men's Champions League)
  - FIFA Club World Cup
7. What is the highest level you have played at in national team squads?
  - National Cups, Leagues, Championships
  - FIFA World Cup Qualifiers
  - FIFA World Cup

## Appendix 2. Checklist

Please check below the benefits and support people/systems that you and your family have/had available for you while playing abroad:

- Player Care department
- Onboarding Manager
- Integration guide/booklet
- Language classes
- School for my children
- Sports and activities for my family
- Translator
- Personal assistant
- Access to private health system (apart from the insurance)
- Mental health support
- Team building activities in the club
- Cultural exchange activities
  
- Housing
- Meals prepared/provided by the club
- Groceries delivered to my house
- Own driver
- Own car
- Gym (club's own or sponsorship deal with a chain)
- Personal trainer
- Nutritionist
  
- Others:

---

---

### **Appendix 3. Integration Experiences Script**

In this form I'll mention more topics and you tell me if you have experienced them in your career. If you have, we'll talk more about them.

#### **Culture**

The culture of the country is/was very similar to mine

It was a different culture, but easy to adapt to

#### **Food/cuisine**

The country's cuisine (food) is/was very similar to my own country

The country's cuisine (food) is/was different from my own country, but easy to adapt to

I have/had my meals prepared by the club according to my taste and own diet every day

I have/had my family with me and my meals were prepared mostly at home

I have/had my own staff to prepare my meals

#### **Safety**

The country is/was safe, same as in my country

The country is/was safer than my country

The country is/was not very safe, but the club supported me and my family to commute

#### **Club, coaches, staff and teammates**

The club has/had a culture of signing and integrating foreign players

The club is/was open to diversity, accepting different backgrounds and cultures

The team culture is/was very inclusive, everyone feel/felt welcomed and valued

The country has/had a culture of playing, developing, watching and supporting football

#### **Coaches' knowledge and international experience**

The coaches are/were friendly, accessible and supportive

The staff are/were very friendly, accessible and supportive

The team have/had activities to build team spirit and team cohesion

The coaches have/had previous experience working with foreign players

The coaches cared about integrating the foreign players into the team and the country

The coaches used a common language where the majority of the players could communicate

The coaches made the effort to communicate with me/teammates in a different language while we were learning the common language spoken within the team

The coaches have/had good communication skills, speaking, demonstrating and getting players to perform the drills and understand the ideas before demanding performance

The coaches have coached abroad and had good knowledge and experience in high-performance football

**Check below the main challenges you faced while playing in the countries you listed above:**

- I didn't have a person to support me on a daily-basis. I had to ask and figure things out myself.
- Nobody went to pick me up in the airport when I arrived
- The club didn't support me to bring my family
- I had to share a house with other players (**tell me more about it**)
- When me or a teammate got sick, we had to look for assistance in the public health system
- When me or a teammate got injured, we had problems to get proper medical assistance
- When me or a teammate got injured, we had problems with the insurance

**Additional Comments**

Do you recall any additional good experiences that were not mentioned in the questions above?

Do you recall any additional bad experiences that were not mentioned in the questions above?

Would you have any other suggestions for improving support for foreign players?

Would you have any other suggestions for enhancing team integration and dynamics?

Any additional (free) comments?

*Thank you for participating in this survey. Your answers are very important and will help improve the integration experiences of foreign football players.*

## Appendix 4. Research Announcement

The research announcement will be distributed to the participants of the thesis as a printed or electronic document along with the thesis cover and the consent form (Appendix 5).

Integrating Foreign Football Players Into a New Culture

**Student's Name:** Fabio Da Rosa (fabio.da.rosa@myy.haaga-helia.fi)

Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences

Degree Programme in Sports Coaching and Management

Bachelor's Thesis - 2025

**Supervising Teacher:** Mika Saarinen (mika.saarinen@haaga-helia.fi)

**Objective of Data Collection:** to understand the challenges foreign football players face when integrating into a new culture and club environment.

**Method and Phases of Data Collection:** Literature review, online and face-to-face interviews, case studies and data analysis.

**Preparation Prior to Participation:**

- Reflecting on their personal experiences when playing football in a foreign country
- Reflecting on topics such as club support, coaching staff assistance, team dynamics, language barriers, housing, family adaptation, and mental well-being
- Thinking about challenges faced when moving to a new country

**Benefits of Participation:**

- Sharing personal experiences
- Adding a contribution to positive change in football
- Raising awareness about player's needs
- Helping the next generation of foreign players

**Dissemination of Results:** the thesis report will be published in the Theseus online library.

**Handling, Storage and Potential Disposal of Data:** primarily utilizing the storage services provided by Haaga-Helia.

## Appendix 5. Informed Consent

I hereby give my consent to participate in the thesis **Integrating Foreign Football Players Into a New Culture** according to the research announcement provided as an attachment.

The content of the aforementioned research announcement has been explained to me, and I understand the nature of the study, what participation entails for me, how the data I provide will be used, and how it will be stored. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers to all my inquiries.

I understand that participation is voluntary. I am aware that I can withdraw this consent at any time without giving a reason, and for instance, I can discontinue the interview if I so desire.

Consent can be withdrawn by sending an e-mail to the Student or the Supervising Teacher. Please note that once the research results have been analyzed, the contribution of a single participant cannot be retrospectively removed.

For additional information about the research, the thesis author **Fabio Da Rosa** can be contacted.

With my signature, I confirm that I give my consent to participate in the research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of the Consent Giver

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## Appendix 6. Summarized Data Collected From Literature Review and Interviews

Subject	Findings	Source of Information	Effects on Integration and Adaptation
Language barriers	Players not able to speak English	Literature	Frustration, isolation, changes in self-confidence, drop in performance
Language barriers	Players struggle with particular dialects of the community	Literature	
Language barriers	Players struggle to learn the country's language	Literature, interviews with players	
Language barriers	Lack of support from the club to provide language classes	Interviews with players and agents	
Language barriers	Lack of support from the agents to make English classes available	Interviews with players	
Climate and weather	Difficulties to adapt to extreme low temperatures	Literature	Emotional well-being, physical comfort, mood changes, drop in energy levels, effects in sleep time and quality, drop in performance
Climate and weather	Difficulties to adapt to tropical temperatures	Interviews with players	Fatigue, unusual dehydration, difficulties breathing, effects in their routine of training, match schedules and recovery time, drop in performance
Cultural shock	Cultural shock when in unfamiliar social and cultural environment	Literature, Interviews with players	Misunderstandings, social isolation, difficulties in adapting to new traditions and social norms, worries about their families' well-being and education of their children
Mental and emotional support	Difficulties dealing with loneliness, homesickness, stress, anxiety, depression	Interviews with players and agents	Changes in self-confidence, drop in performance
Difficulties dealing with daily tasks	Difficulties dealing with accommodation, home utilities, sim cards, bank accounts, legal documentation, transportation, grocery	Literature, Interviews with players and agents	Stress, frustration, time-consumption, overwhelm

	shopping, commuting, attending to appointments.		
Having somebody to rely on when needed	The importance of having a person, or a department, easily accessible for their needs in the first weeks after their arrival.	Interviews with players	Stress, overwhelm, worries about their families' well-being and education of their children
External problems and worries about their families	Worries about the adaptation and integration of their families, their well-being and the education of their children	Interviews with players and agents	Loss of focus in their duties and responsibilities in trainings and games
Adjusting to the new tactical system and the relationship with the new coaches	Adjusting to a new tactical system, understanding the coach's philosophy, and building relationships with teammates took some time and effort	Interviews with players	Sadness, frustration, drop in performance, career goals affected
Poor preparation before arrival	Players arrived in the new club/country unaware of basic rules, norms and traditions of the country, and with no knowledge of the club's history, culture, facilities and expectations for their arrival.	Interviews with coaches, club managers and staff members	Difficulties in adaptation and relationships with teammates and staff, loss of confidence, confusion, stress.
Support from agents	Poor involvement of agents after the deal was done.	Literature, interviews with coaches and club managers	Misunderstandings, poor communication, isolation, disorientation, frustration
Close-mindedness to socialize	Close-mindedness to accept new experiences, learn a new language other than their mother language and socialize with people of different backgrounds	Interviews with coaches, club managers and staff members	Isolation, struggle to feel comfortable, dissatisfaction on teammates
Own identity and the new culture	Players expected everything to be the same as in their home country and were resistant to try new ways of living	Interviews with coaches, club managers and staff members	Frustration, isolation, dissatisfaction on teammates, coaches, club staff and the community

## Appendix 7. Findings Categorized Into Groups of Solutions

Category	Sub-category	Findings	Effects on Integration and Adaptation
Support Systems	Language Classes	Players not able to speak English	Frustration, isolation, changes in self-confidence, drop in performance
		Players struggle with particular dialects of the community	
		Players struggle to learn the country's language	
		Lack of support from the club to provide language classes	
		Lack of support from the agents to make English classes available	
	Institutional Video	Players arrived in the new club/country unaware of basic rules, norms and traditions of the country, and with no knowledge of the club's history, culture, facilities and expectations for their arrival.	Difficulties in adaptation and relationships with teammates and staff, loss of confidence, confusion, stress.
	Player's Integration Guide	Cultural shock when in unfamiliar social and cultural environment	Misunderstandings, social isolation, difficulties in adapting to new traditions and social norms, worries about their families' well-being and education of their children
	Psychological Assistance Program	Difficulties to adapt to extreme low temperatures	Emotional well-being, physical comfort, mood changes, drop in energy levels, effects in sleep time and quality, drop in performance
		Difficulties to adapt to tropical temperatures	Fatigue, unusual dehydration, difficulties breathing, effects in their routine of training, match schedules and recovery time, drop in performance
		Difficulties dealing with loneliness, homesickness, stress, anxiety, depression	Changes in self-confidence, drop in performance
Integration Programs and Assistance for	Worries about the adaptation and integration of their families, their well-being and the education of their children	Loss of focus in their duties and responsibilities in trainings and games	

	Family Members		
	Training for Coaches and Staff Members	Adjusting to a new tactical system, understanding the coach's philosophy, and building relationships with teammates took some time and effort	Sadness, frustration, drop in performance, career goals affected
Onboarding Manager	Daily Tasks Support	Difficulties dealing with accommodation, home utilities, sim cards, bank accounts, legal documentation, transportation, grocery shopping, commuting, attending to appointments.	Stress, frustration, time-consumption, overwhelm
		The importance of having a person, or a department, easily accessible for their needs in the first weeks after their arrival.	Stress, overwhelm, worries about their families' well-being and education of their children
	Onboarding Meeting with Players and Agents	Poor involvement of agents after the deal was done.	Misunderstandings, poor communication, isolation, disorientation, frustration
		Close-mindedness to accept new experiences, learn a new language other than their mother language and socialize with people of different backgrounds	Isolation, struggle to feel comfortable, dissatisfaction on teammates
		Players expected everything to be the same as in their home country and were resistant to try new ways of living	Frustration, isolation, dissatisfaction on teammates, coaches, club staff and the community