

Football agents as occupational loners

How established practitioners act to win market power

Abstract

The research purpose of this study is to investigate how football agents act to gain market power, despite an apparent decreasing need for intermediaries lowering transaction costs within the football industry. Prior theory has emphasised market conditions to explain the growth of the profession, thereby overlooking the agents as active partakers in market developments. To address the identified research gap and understand the behaviour of agents, a qualitative study was conducted where agents, clubs, players and additional relevant actors in Sweden were interviewed. An interdisciplinary research approach was applied at the intersection of embeddedness and professionalisation theory. The current study finds that agents work on individual basis to create embedded ties with players as well as clubs in order to form networks and gain personal trust. Additionally, instead of using professionalisation processes, practitioners exploit networks and relations characterised by personal trust, in order to legitimise the need for matchmakers in the labour market and to gain market influence.

Keywords

Embeddedness, professionalisation processes, intermediary, football agent, information asymmetry

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Glossary

FIFA

FIFA stands for “*Fédération Internationale de Football Association*” and is the global governing body for association football. FIFA regulates world football by providing laws and rules for competitions and transfers among several concerns. FIFA consists of 211 member associations and operates with the purpose of continuously improving football. (FIFA, 2017)

Information asymmetry

Information asymmetry concerns transactional decision-making where one actor has either more or superior information than the other actor involved. This implies knowledge imbalances, which often puts one actor in a more advantageous position in transactions (Granados et al., 2010).

Intermediary

The traditional role of intermediaries, also named middlemen and agents in literature, is buying and reselling of goods (Yanelle, 1989). Transactions of goods can either occur directly between sellers and buyers or indirectly using an intermediary. In the latter case, the intermediary buys the good from sellers and then sells it to buyers (Rubinstein and Wolinsky, 1987). An intermediary can also function as a matchmaker, by helping sellers and buyers to meet and then transact (Spulber, 1996).

SvFF

SvFF (*Svenska Fotbollsförbundet*) is the Swedish governing body of football and is a member of both FIFA and UEFA (*Union of European Football Associations*). SvFF organises and administer football leagues in Sweden as well as the national teams. (SvFF, 2017)

1. Introduction

The following chapter discusses the relevance of the current study and outlines the context characterising the football agent occupation. First, a brief description of the empirical case, including a general outlook of developments in the football agent environment is provided (1.1). Thereafter, research contribution and the research question are presented (1.2). Finally, the study's delimitations are explained (1.3).

1.1. Background and problem discussion

Football agents have undergone considerable growth in recent years both in terms of active practitioners and in monetary numbers. They act on the labour market where they help football players find appropriate clubs, thereby acting as matchmakers on the football labour market. According to literature, intermediaries normally contribute to a more perfect market by reducing transaction costs (Spulber, 1996). However, in the case of football agents, the need for matchmaking between players and clubs has decreased in significance. The football player market stands out from almost all other labour markets in that performances by individuals in the workforce are transparent. Comprehensive and well-sorted data in form of videos and statistics on player performances are today available for all clubs through programs such as Wyscout and Instat. This development makes it easier for clubs to both locate and evaluate players in-house and consequently, the need for labour market middlemen reducing transaction costs should therefore decrease. Despite this, the agent business is flourishing.

Theoretical explanations for the agents' growth are dominated by environmental factors such as jurisdictional changes, financial growth and globalisation (Frick, 2009; Andreff and Staudohar, 2000; Frick, 2007). Without opposing those existing explanations as relevant factors, this study argues that they are not alone sufficient to explain the prevalent situation. Existing literature has overlooked the agents themselves as active partakers in shaping the market and thereby failed to provide a holistic picture.

In order to explain agent behaviour and the impact it has on the football labour market, embeddedness theory is employed. As the agent profession is heavily grounded on relations and quality of their network, the concept of embeddedness

within social theory is feasible to apply in order to understand the interrelation between an actor's' position on the market and its behaviour. From the perspective of embeddedness theory it is not possible to understand one actor without considering others and the interrelations between them. Thus, by taking into account the most relevant actors and their social connections to each other, a holistic understanding of football agent behaviour will appear.

Specific market aspects that have been given significant attention in this paper, due to its atypical character, are professionalisation processes of the agent occupation. The pre-study revealed that normal developments according to professionalisation theory have not occurred in the case of the football agents, yet the agent occupation has experienced growth and success. Applying an embeddedness perspective to professionalisation theory will help understand how football agents have used alternative methods to establish themselves and gain power on their market. The following section will introduce the research contribution and research question.

1.2. Research contribution and research question

Employing an interdisciplinary research, this study aims to broaden the understanding for how labour market intermediaries can gain market power and experience growth, without methods and processes previously covered in professionalisation theory. As little theoretical attention has been given to the professional development of the agent occupation, the thesis highlights two other occupations where professionalisation literature does exist. Consequently, the professional evolution of executive search firms and management consultants will be presented as benchmarks for the development of football agents.

By adding concepts from embeddedness theory to the specific professional group, the study attempts to decrease knowledge gaps within professionalisation theory. Hence, the study can also be seen as a springboard for future research where embeddedness and professionalisation theory are combined to enhance the understanding of developments for other occupations. In order to explore the observed phenomenon, the following research question will function as guidance throughout the research process:

“How do football agents act to increase their power as intermediaries in the football labour market?”

1.3. Market delimitations

The study makes a geographical delimitation by focusing on football agents as intermediaries on the Swedish market. The delimitation is motivated firstly by the directive nature of FIFA's (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) most recent regulations on working with intermediaries (FIFA, 2015). The protocol states that the regulations should serve as minimum requirements that each association must implement at national level, where the latter have authority to make further additions. As a consequence, market conditions for intermediaries may vary between nations. The geographical delimitation is further motivated by the authors of this study being based in Sweden and due to access constraints in other markets. Consequently, the Swedish market provides more openness in regard to relevant actors being more approachable. As three of the largest football clubs as well as the most prominent football agencies were based in Stockholm, actors in the sample were primarily located in the Stockholm area.

Notably, as the football market today is characterised by globalisation and transnational mobility, this limitation does not imply that only recruitment of Swedish players between Swedish clubs are considered. Players willingness to play for international teams, as well as clubs willingness to find talents abroad are present factors that can not be excluded from the overall understanding of the market.

2. Empirical background

This chapter will outline the empirical background for the research question. Attempting to provide a comprehensive understanding for the research topic, previous literature describing critical events in the development of a football industry characterised by transactions (2.1) will firstly be presented. Thereafter, a section about the intermediary role of football agents and their relation to other actors in the football industry will follow (2.2). Against this context, market characteristics regarding player performance transparency and the conditions on the Swedish market (2.3) will be clarified.

2.1. Market development

As of today, professional football is highly characterised by market transactions. Football leagues that follow international regulations from FIFA, or in Europe, UEFA (Union of European Football Associations), manage these transactions through a transfer market where the typical scenario is that the buying club pays a monetary transfer fee to the selling club in order to acquire the registration for the player and his services as a football player (Simmons, 1997). A player can only be registered for one club at a time, however, under special conditions, a player can be on loan to a club that he is not registered for (FIFA, 2003).

Nations operate transfer markets to manage the mobility of players between football clubs. However, this has not always been the case. Before 1973, football players were bounded to specific clubs until the age of 35 through a mutual agreement. As a consequence, player careers were often spent in one specific club. In 1973 after a mutual agreement between the league, federation and player union in France, limited time contracts were introduced (Gouguet and Primault, 2006), meaning that a player could negotiate a contract over a regulated period. Furthermore, this also meant that a contract could be terminated before its expiration if another club wanted to buy a player from the player's current club. The buying club would then compensate the selling club financially in exchange for the player under contract. This drastically changed the conditions regarding players' attachments to specific clubs as well as the competitive and cooperative environment between professional football clubs.

Prior to football season 1995-1996, national football leagues managed their transfer market based on two basic principles. Firstly, although a player wanted to change club after his contract had expired, a transfer fee was required. Secondly, leagues used strict regulations concerning the amount of foreign-born players that could participate in a team during a specific match (Simmons, 1997). The second principle restricted player mobility and meant that the football player labour market had few similarities with the general labour market (Frick, 2007). However, Jean-Marc Bosman, a Belgian footballer, challenged these principles in 1995 and his case appeared before the European Court of Justice. The court ruled that the two principles, transfer fee for buying out-of-contract players and restrictions regarding amount of foreign players in teams, were incompatible (Frick, 2009).

The Bosman ruling resulted in several implications for the transfer market, both regarding transfer fees and the structure of player contracts. The size of transfer fees has been shown to correlate with a player's contract length, meaning that long contract duration implies high transfer fees (Feess et al., 2004). Feess et al. (2004) also find an increase in the average contract length (from 2,5 years to more than 3 years in Bundesliga, the German top division) after the Bosman case. The Bosman ruling has created free movement for players without contract, which gives incentives for clubs to sell players before the player contract expires, in order to gain a profit on the transfer.

Moreover, as the restraints on mobility were removed after the Bosman ruling, economic theory proposes that football player migration has increased as a consequence. Milanovic (2005) found that increasing mobility, in the form of free circulation of high skilled labour, results in a larger concentration of talented football players in the wealthy leagues in Europe. As an example of the increasing mobility, the percentage of German players in the top division in Germany decreased from approximately 70 percent in 1995 to less than 50 percent during a five-year period (Frick, 2007).

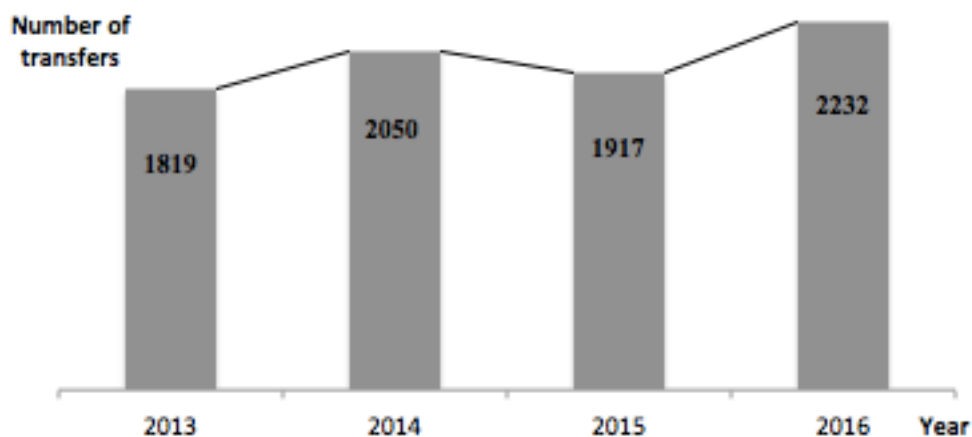
The importance of the transfer market for professional football is further motivated by its intercorrelation with sports performance. Studies have found that performances - in the form of championship ranking - and the monetary amount clubs spend on player

salaries are highly correlated (Kuypers and Szymanski, 1999). Therefore, given the comprehensive interest for the sport, the increase in transfer fees and salary levels as well as the escalation of financial resources now available to professional football clubs are often seen as logical. Moreover, this development has partly been fuelled by valuable television rights that have increased revenues dramatically for European football clubs (Andreff and Staudohar, 2000).

2.2. The intermediary role of football agents

In a labour market characterised by market transactions and increasing financial resources, football agents as intermediaries have become influential actors in facilitating exchanges. Agents represent both players and clubs and their role includes many functions today. They negotiate contracts and transfer fees, provide scouting services and manage players' image rights among many functions (Poli, 2016). However, as agents power have increased, medial attention as well as recent literature have turned attention and questioned ethical aspects of their work. As an indicator of the growth of the agent occupation, Figure 1 highlights the trend of an increasing amount of agents representing players in transfers. The following section will clarify the football agent role and present factors that previous literature considers have contributed to the powerful position agents hold today, starting with describing football agents' work experience.

Figure 1. *Number of transfers where football agents represents the player*



(Figure modified from FIFA, 2016:2)

2.2.1. Work experience

To advance in the career as a football agent, creating and consolidating transnational networks is crucial (Poli, 2009). As a consequence, the start-up phase of the agent profession is uncertain and requires both time and financial resources. About 37 percent of agents have work experience within the football industry before entering the agent business. Out of the industry professions, football player, football scout and football manager are the three most common earlier professions. Literature explains this as previous football experience can provide agents with beneficial networks as well as a better understanding for the transfer market. For agents with non-football work experience (63 percent), backgrounds within finance and law are most common which can be an advantage when handling aspects such as contract negotiations, legal guidance, taxes and budgeting. (Poli and Rossi, 2012)

2.2.2. The football agent's role

FIFA define football agents as intermediaries accordingly, *“a natural or legal person who, for a fee or free of charge, represents players and/or clubs in negotiations with a view to concluding an employment contract or represents clubs in negotiations with a view to concluding a transfer agreement”* (FIFA, 2015). The agent role can be divided into two main categories. Firstly, acting for players by negotiating wage and other employment terms when signing contracts and in renegotiations during the contract period. Traditionally, this has been the role characterising the football agent profession (Poli, 2009). Secondly, agents today to a larger extent also act as intermediaries for clubs in transfer negotiations, making them gatekeepers between professional clubs and their access to football players (House of Commons, 2011).

The two agent roles are sometimes interlinked. Within the boundaries of FIFA's new regulations of working with intermediaries (FIFA, 2015), agents are allowed to work simultaneously for both players and clubs. Literature has described how this opens up for conflict of interests in the agent role. As an example, the agent can be financially compensated by buying clubs in assisting them with the acquisition of a player. Concurrently, the player might also compensate the agent for negotiation of employment terms. Holt et al. (2006) explains how conflict of interest applies when payments from clubs to agents are not disclosed to players. This system incentivise agents' to place players in clubs where agents can maximise payments from clubs

(agent fees) and wage commissions from players. Moreover, this may be at the expense of the player, as the club recommended by the agent may not be the one offering best wage or other employment terms.

The role of agents today is manifold, partly due to agents diverse work experience mentioned above. Literature has therefore also made efforts to describe the agent role by dividing it into several services. Poli and Rossi (2012) investigate the football agent profession in the five largest football markets in Europe. They firstly divide agents services, toward players, into seven key services (see table 1) and present the percentage of agents that perform each task.

Table 1. *Agents' services toward players*

Percent of agents offering a specific service (per service provided)

Services provided	%
Negotiating players' contracts	98%
Negotiating players' marketing and endorsement contracts	65%
Legal counselling and dispute resolution	51%
Career and post career planning	48%
Personal care	46%
Financial planning	38%
Marketing planning	31%

(Table derived from Poli and Rossi, 2012: 56)

As table 1 shows, negotiating a player's contract is a service provided by almost all agents. This concerns employment terms such as wage and contract duration. The agent sometimes also negotiates a signing-on fee attributed to the player when signing the contract (Poli, 2009). Negotiation of marketing and endorsement conditions for players have increased in importance and is today a valuable income source for clubs. Image rights can be defined as “*the commercial appropriation of someone's personality, including indices of their image, voice, name and signature*” (Haynes, 2007). As discussed above, a certain proportion of agents have work experience within law and about 50 percent of agents also perform legal counselling. Some players prefer to hire lawyers as agents, since their competence and legal expertise are considered superior than “*simple intermediaries*” (Poli and Rossi, 2012).

Table 2. Agents' services toward clubs

Percent of agents offering a specific service (per service provided)

Services provided	%
Transferring players	71%
Scouting professional players	65%
Scouting youth players	50%
Organising events	23%

(Table derived from Poli and Rossi, 2012: 59)

Furthermore, a majority of agents offer services toward clubs. The most common services are presented in table 2 above (Poli and Rossi, 2012). As seen in table 2, supporting clubs in transferring players is the most frequent service offered by agents toward clubs. This function includes giving an interested club access to players that the agent represents as well as negotiating transfer fees. About 65 percent of agents are also involved in scouting professional players and 50 percent in scouting youth players. As agents identify young talented players, they contact clubs, which they collaborate with and offer trials for the players (Poli, 2009).

2.3. Market characteristics

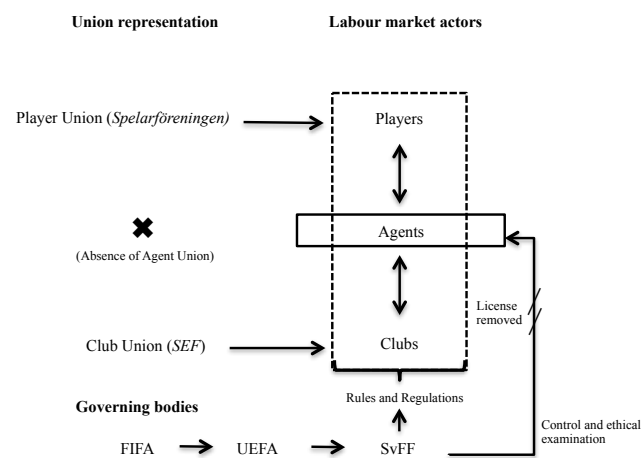
The football market as a labour market is unique due to its transparency regarding player performances. Available statistics on player performances (e.g. running distance, successful passes) through digital platforms makes player qualities transparent and available to employers but also to agents that perform scouting activities. In recent years, the use of digital platforms for scouting football players has increased rapidly and therefore changed talent recruitment processes in professional football. Radicchi and Mozzachiodi (2016) argue that these platforms serve two general purposes, firstly they support traditional scouting activity “on-field” and secondly, in identification of unknown football talents.

2.3.1. The Swedish football market

Active member organisations in the Swedish football market are the Club Union (*SEF*) and the Player Union (*Spelarförbundet*). However, the Swedish football agents currently have no member organisation. Furthermore, Swedish football agents

primarily work individually and only a few small agencies exist. The Swedish Football Association, SvFF, has the mission to administrate organised football in Sweden (SvFF, 2017). SvFF is connected to the international umbrella organisations FIFA and UEFA. Previously, to work as a football agent a license issued by FIFA was required. To be granted the certification, a test had to be successfully completed and certain standards needed to be met. In year 2015, FIFA decided to remove the licensing system and each national federation was authorised to decide whether to have a certification system in their country or not (FIFA, 2015). In Sweden, SvFF has chosen not to introduce any form of agent certification, as a consequence of the absence of certifications, no numbers are available regarding the amount of active football agents in Sweden. However, the conducted pre-study strongly indicated a rapid increase of active practitioners in recent years.

Figure 2. Agents' position in the Swedish football market



3. Theoretical framework

This chapter serves to introduce the theoretical framework employed by the current study. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach, concepts within embeddedness theory and professionalisation theory are applied and interwoven in order to understand the observed phenomenon. First, an introduction discussing the relevance of embeddedness theory for understanding agent behaviour is provided (3.1). The concept of embeddedness is then outlined (3.1.1), followed by a section elaborating about effects of embeddedness (3.1.2). A section regarding optimal network structure and the paradoxes of embeddedness (3.1.3) finalises the theoretical field of embeddedness. The chapter thereafter introduces professionalisation theory (3.2) followed by two illustrative examples of how professionalisation processes take place for executive search firms (3.2.1) and management consultants (3.2.2) respectively. The examples are provided in order to facilitate understanding of how intermediaries, such as football agents, can use professionalisation as a tool to gain influence and contrastingly, the incentives and strategies related to avoidance of traditional professionalisation processes.

3.1. Applicability of embeddedness

As the empirical background outlined it is primarily market mechanisms, such as globalisation and regulations, that previous literature have ascribed to the development of the football agent profession, rather than actions made by agents themselves. In a broader context, to neglect the contribution of actors in the shaping of markets is also discussed by Kjellberg and Helgesson (2007). They mention how previous concepts and theories may have contributed to de-emphasise the role of agents proactively trying to shape markets, instead of markets shaping themselves. Examples of such concepts are the invisible hand by Adam Smith (1981 [1776]) and ideas presented by Mandeville (Nash and Sutcliffe, 1970 [1705]).

This paper, in contrast to previous empirical literature, investigates football agents position from the perspective as them being actors shaping the market in negotiations with other actors. Hence, their role as partakers in the development of their current market position is observed. As explained in the empirical background, the embedded

network of football agents and their actions is heavily grounded on relations and quality of their network. Embeddedness, a concept within social theory, is feasible to apply in order to understand the interrelation between an actor's position on the market and its behaviour. Thus, in attempting to develop the argument that football agents utilise embedded networks in order to gain more power, the framework of embeddedness and especially the role and effect of ties (Granovetter, 1973; Uzzi, 1997) are employed. To conclude, socially embedded relationships should be considered in order to understand the behaviour of agents, players, clubs and other actors in the market.

In order to evaluate potential for empirical contribution and theory development, a literature review over embeddedness theory was performed together with an assessment of its previous application within empirical research. The screening process showed absence of embeddedness theory in empirical papers discussing football agent behaviour and strategies to gain market power. However, Rossi and Brocard (2016) discuss sport agents and the central role of social embeddedness for operating transfer markets. Furthermore, the concept of embeddedness have been utilised when discussing other actors within the agent network such as football managers and scouts. Kelly (2017) employs embeddedness theory to explain the role of football managers and how mobility is socially embedded in the football industry with the use of personal contacts. Additionally, Darr and Mears (2017) elaborate on how football scouts exploit social ties to facilitate transactions in professional football.

3.1.1. Concept of embeddedness

In general terms, embeddedness is an area within sociology and economics and concerns how social structure influences economic life (Uzzi, 1997). It diverges from neoclassical theory where an ideal atomistic market is characterised by self-interest, profit maximisation and arm's length ties between exchange partners (McNeil, 1978). In contrast to neoclassical theory that provides an undersocialised account of economic action, embeddedness theorists argue that transactions and actions are not atomised or always rational, rather they are embedded in networks characterised by interpersonal relations (e.g. Granovetter, 1985). Similar behaviour can be identified

for football agents in how they place players in clubs embedded in their network, rather than in clubs optimal from a neoclassical market perspective. Moreover, embeddedness diverges from the oversocialised conception in that actors do not slavishly adhere to social norms and “*scripts*” characterising their social category (Wrong, 1961), rather they perform purposive actions embedded in ongoing structures of social relations (Granovetter, 1985).

As exchange between actors in embedded networks is reciprocated, other factors than purely economic ones become important. Literature describes how the economic exchange becomes embedded in a multiplex relationship where investments, altruistic attachments and friendship are influential factors (Uzzi, 1997). This intermix of economic and non-economic activity, is further emphasised by Granovetter (2005), stating that non-economic social activity both affect costs and available techniques related to economic activity.

Both Uzzi (1996) and Powell (1990) recognises simultaneous presence of various types of exchanges. Specifically, they argue that both embedded and arm’s length ties coexist. Uzzi (1996) present quotations from respondents regarding the difference between the two types of ties, where embedded ties are labelled as “*special*” or “*close*” relationships and arm’s length ties as “*you discuss only money*”, reflecting the impersonal aspect, in line with neoclassical theory. Hence, this perspective of coexistence of embedded and arm’s length ties stands in contrast to the logic of ideal markets with “anonymous buyers and sellers supplied with perfect information” and absence of social contact between exchange parties (Hirschman, 1982). Following the argument of coexistence between embedded and arm’s length ties, Uzzi (1997) further explains that to what extent embeddedness facilitate economic action correlates with ties’ quality and structures within the network. In this argument, quality of ties refers to “*an actor’s ability to access the opportunities of a contact or network*” whereas network structure refer to an actor’s combination of arm’s length ties and embedded ties within a network (Uzzi, 1997).

The concept of embeddedness is multifaceted, consisting of multiple specifications. Zukin and DiMaggio (1990) categorised embeddedness using four classifications: structural, cognitive, cultural and political. The latter three classifications characterise

perspectives on embeddedness of social constructionists. However, structural embeddedness primarily reflects the reasoning of Uzzi (1997) about how quality and network structures within exchanges affect economic activity. Uzzi (1996) further explains structural embeddedness by stating that “*the unit of analysis is the nature of the social relationship between and among exchange partners*” and that the domain emphasises how outcomes that social networks generate “*may equal or surpass market alternatives*”. Moreover, sometimes interlinked to structural embeddedness in discussions of optimal network configurations, is a micro-level dimension of the concept called relational embeddedness (Rowley et al., 2000). Relational embeddedness concerns the strength of ties, strong or weak, and how certain ties can be exploited for gaining fine-grained information (Gulati, 1998). Strong ties are connected with outcomes such as trust and fine-grained information in exchanges (Uzzi, 1997) whereas weak ties may generate novel information (Granovetter, 1973). Granovetter (1973) explain “strength of ties” as a combination of time commitment, emotional intensity, intimacy and the reciprocal services involved within the tie.

Considering the classifications of embeddedness mentioned above, the current study limits the interpretation and analysis of collected data to the concept of structural and relational embeddedness. In attempting to understand how football agents’ behaviour may affect power structures within the football industry, it is feasible to also review the opportunities, benefits and potential liabilities that embeddedness may generate. Consequently, the following sections will provide a discussion of potential effects of embeddedness, optimal network structures as well as clarifying the paradoxes of embeddedness.

3.1.2. Outcomes of embeddedness

Uzzi (1997) argues that embeddedness is a logic of exchange, consisting of both arm’s length and embedded ties with various qualities. He finds that embeddedness fosters economies of time, integrative agreements, complex adaptation and pareto improvements related to allocative efficiency. Uzzi (1996) further suggests that there are three key factors of embedded relationships, which regulate the dynamics between exchange partners and facilitate economic exchange. He labels these as trust, fine-grained information transfer and joint problem-solving arrangements.

In line with Uzzi (1996), Granovetter (2005) discusses how social networks influence economic outcomes and also recognises trust as an effect of embeddedness.

Regarding trust, Granovetter explains it with confidence in others doing the right thing, even though incentives toward the contrary arise within a network. Granovetter moreover recognises that social networks affect flow and information quality since actors are more likely to believe people they have a relation to, in the interpretation of subtle information.

Examining the effect of trust further, Granovetter (1985) argues for that actors preferably seek to make transactions and trust information from someone that has been dealt with from before, partly since actors with whom one has an ongoing relation with have economical incentives to be trustworthy. Additionally, he explains that actors prefer transacting with people that have a known reputation since few people are content on relying fully on institutional arrangements or generalised morality to avoid trouble. Consequently Granovetter (1985) describes, in contrast to undersocialised conceptions, that social relations produce trust and discourages malfeasance in economic life rather than institutional arrangements. Uzzi (1997) found trust as an explicit feature of embedded ties and that trust had an heuristic character, in that people assume the best in interpretation of others intentions and actions. The heuristic aspect of trust is further argued to make decision making faster and to conserve cognitive resources (Uzzi, 1997).

Concerning the effect of fine-grained information from embedded ties, Uzzi argues that such information is “*more tacit and proprietary than the information exchanged at arm’s length*”. Therefore, firms can enhance transactional efficacy and become better at reacting to environmental changes. As for the effect of joint-problem solving arrangements within embedded ties, Uzzi explains that these enable faster and more precise feedback than market mechanisms. He further adds to this argument, stating that such arrangements enable firms to “accelerate learning and problem correction”. (Uzzi, 1996)

3.1.3. Optimal network structure and the contradiction of embeddedness

Uzzi (1997) explains the paradoxes of embeddedness, discussing how processes for market adaption generated by embeddedness paradoxically can lead to the contrary. He presents three conditions that may cause this effect; (1) an unexpected market exit from an important actor within the network, as it increases vulnerability for networked organisations. (2) Market rationalisation from institutional forces, which may rupture social ties and therefore make networked organisations more fragile than market-oriented firms. (3) Overembedded networks, if embedded ties connect all the firms within a network, intake of novel information may be reduced, as links to outside actors pursuing innovative ideas are scarce (Burt, 2004).

In line with condition (3) Burt (2004) as well as Uzzi (1997) argue that network structures comprised of an integration between embedded and arm's length ties drastically lower the risk of failure, in contrary to when networks exclusively are comprised of one or the other (embedded or arm's length ties). The proposition further relates to the argument of Granovetter (1973) concerning the strength of weak ties, meaning that weak ties contribute by generating new knowledge, which can help to foster innovation.

3.2. Introduction to professionalisation

Professionalism is a widely used term in academic work as well as in everyday language. When considering terminology in the current study, professionalisation refers to collective organisation of a practice, with a distinct way of carrying out work. A professionalised practise is one where the occupation itself, rather than other actors in an open market, controls its work, its definition, organisation, execution and legitimise evaluation (Freidson, 1987). Hence, professions are viewed as occupations with a high degree of control over whom can hold a certain title and how to acquire and maintain such a title. Furthermore, control over work and who exercises that control are key concerns for professionalised practises (Muzio et al., 2011a).

Closure, the ability to distinguish members from non-members within a practice, has historically been, and still is, a cornerstone of professionalisation processes (Muzio et al., 2011b). Traditional political economy approaches to professionalisation entail processes of jurisdictional closure, where a state hand out exclusive rights to perform

a service. Commonly used examples of professions that have been established in this manner are doctors and lawyers. The underlying logic behind this form of legitimisation is to safeguard services that are considered best provided outside the laws of market competition, by an exclusive group of registered practitioners that should be regulated (Abbot, 1998). In symbiosis with a movement away from concerns for welfare towards neo-liberal ideals of market power and competitiveness, states has turned away from legally inscribed monopolies (Beaverstock et al., 2010).

However, another form of closure has spread where practitioners themselves organise to replicate the model earlier used by states. A knowledge base is created and the practitioner has to somehow prove his or her expertise within that base, in order to exploit the legitimisation advantages of membership and using the title “*professional*” (Hodgson, 2007). Practitioners thereby replicate political economical professionalisation methods traditionally used by states, in order to gain legitimacy and control over who can call him or herself a professional. Political economy professionalisation serves as a barrier to entry for new practitioners and established actors withholding the title “*professional*”, benefit from the occupational closure. (Beaverstock et al., 2010)

In order to illustrate how processes of professionalisation are carried out in practice, two examples are presented in the following sections. Firstly, executive search firms serve as a benchmark for how other intermediaries have professionalised in order to experience growth and gain influence. Thereafter, as management consultants illustrate an occupational group that has avoided traditional professionalisation processes, their incentives and strategies are relevant to understand in order to facilitate analysis of football agents, whom also have escaped from traditional occupational developments.

3.2.1. Example 1) Executive search firms

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, management literature has emphasised the increasingly fierce competition for talent, stating that there is “*a war for talent*” going on (Lewis and Heckman, 2006). Academic literature within the field reflects an empirical development of increased competition among companies for the

best and most talented individuals. On that note, managerial knowledge is one form of talent that has been described as vital for competitiveness. McKinsey & Company produced a report in which they argued that future success of firms would depend on their ability to attract talented executives, with abilities to inspire organisations to be innovative and ultimately profitable in a knowledge-based economy (Axelrod et al., 2001). A cornerstone in talent management discourses is the importance of flexible, talented labour as a central factor of production that maintains the competitiveness of firms in the digital age of contemporary globalisation (Muzio et al., 2011a).

In symbiosis with a growing competition for talent and increased labour mobility, executive search firms, sometimes referred to as headhunters, have emerged across geographically spread labour markets (Faulconbridge et al., 2009). Changing market conditions dominates explanations for the growth of executive search firms, and the growth has often been viewed upon as a natural consequence of market evolution. However, it has been suggested that executive search firms' role as intermediaries is not just the one of passive bystanders without influence, instead they have an active role in shaping contemporary elite labour recruitment practises. Accordingly, Beaverstock et al. (2010) argue that labour market intermediaries and their strategies for defining and managing contemporary elite labour recruitment practices is too often ignored.

Political economical professionalisation has been the approach for executive search firms, starting with the formation of the professional association AESC in 1959. Established search firms have since then developed and calibrated a common understanding of what knowledge, ethics and competence a professional practitioner should possess. In order to become a member of AESC the practitioner "*must commit and adhere to the AESC's industry and government recognised Code of Professional Practice and Standards of Excellence, client organisations worldwide can be assured that AESC members are able to serve as trusted advisors for their most important engagements*" (AESC, 2017). Furthermore, it has been suggested that professionalisation processes have played a vital role in the notable growth of executive search firms. Headhunters used to have a poor reputation, however, through collective efforts to form standards and guidelines for the profession, they have been

able to win the confidence from clients and conquer new markets by referring to their professional credentials (Muzio et al., 2011b).

The developments for executive search firms are similar to professionalisation processes of most other trades. Moreover, executive search firms serve as an example of an intermediary occupational group that has been able to escape a previously poor reputation. Therefore, due to similarities with football agents' currently poor reputation, developments within the executive search firm occupation are relevant to consider in order to facilitate understanding of agent behaviour and its effect on market power.

3.2.2. Example 2) Management consultants

Management consultants as an occupation have experienced growth in amount of practitioners as well as in terms of influence on business decision-making. However, in conformity with some other knowledge-based occupations, conventional models of professionalisation have not taken place (Fincham, 2006). Academics have emphasised that although consultants in many countries have formed associations and established qualifications, it has not resulted in control of the regulation of practice in their markets (Kubr, 2002). Furthermore, no legal restrictions on who are allowed to practise as a consultant exist and practitioner associations have consistently low membership percentages. Consequently, this has resulted in low entry barriers on the market, permitting any individual or firm to label their service "*consulting*" (Muzio et al., 2011a).

Explanations for the lack of professional closure are in the literature dominated by observations of consulting knowledge being too "*fuzzy*" and "*perishable*" for a traditional professionalisation process. The most successful professionalisation examples, such as within the fields of medicine and law, rely on distinct form of knowledge which is possible to codify although difficult for clients to evaluate. Contrastingly, it is argued that consultants' expertise does not amount to a genuine occupational language or body of theory (Fincham, 2006).

Theory has further highlighted that consultants themselves do not view becoming

professionalised as an optimal strategy. This attitude is partly due to the character of the occupational knowledge base in combination with the specific industry structure and that they therefore have chosen to act in different directions (Fincham, 2006). Given the form of knowledge from which management consultants capitalise, Alvesson and Johansson (2002) suggest that although professionalism represents a powerful resource to achieve legitimacy and trust, consultants may not benefit from a clearly defined and codified body of knowledge from which clients can assess the quality of their work. Congruently, consultants trade on ideas that do not resemble science or validated practice, the premium is rather on persuasiveness and crass commercialism. Considering the environment, a clearly defined knowledge base might therefore be a hindrance. Also, claims of impartiality and detachment from industry actors might limit consultants' flexibility and room to respond to changing demands of clients (Alvesson and Johansson, 2002: 242).

However, it has been argued that models that solely focus on consultants' incentives and actions are not sufficient to understand the complexity of how a profession forms. Such standpoint is motivated by the fact that attempts of organisational legitimisation and occupational closure have been made, although not successful, in the case of management consultants. Jarausch et al. (1990) propose that professionalisation should be understood as an ongoing process of negotiations between aspirant groups and other actors. Professional formation is then the result of intricate and fluid negotiations between different actors with their own tactics and sectional objectives.

In a model presented by Jarausch et al. (1990), the occupational group, the state and two additional actors are involved in the professional formation, namely training institutions and users. First, training institutions provide the base of knowledge and technical competence used by consultants to solve problems on behalf of their clients. Moreover, universities and allied institutions also "*provide the official credentials (an approved degree) that support professional closure regimes*" (Muzio et al., 2011a: 811). Second, clients (*users*) have indirectly shaped the development of consultants through how they value professional credentials (Alvesson and Johansson, 2002). Disorganised, fragmented and poorly educated clients are considered the ideal conditions for professional services to gain autonomy and authority (Muzio et al., 2011a). Furthermore, clients may become less in need of consulting

professionalisation standards, as more systematic procurement systems develop (Werr and Perner, 2007). Hence, if it becomes easier for clients to evaluate the quality of consulting advice, the need for third party standards weakens.

Management consultants separate from most other trades in that normal professionalisation processes have not occurred. Hence, for that reason, a common denominator with football agents exists. Consequently, it is feasible to consider management consultants' incentives for avoiding traditional political economical professionalisation strategies, in interpretation of findings related to agent behaviour and strategies identified in the current study.

3.3. Research gap

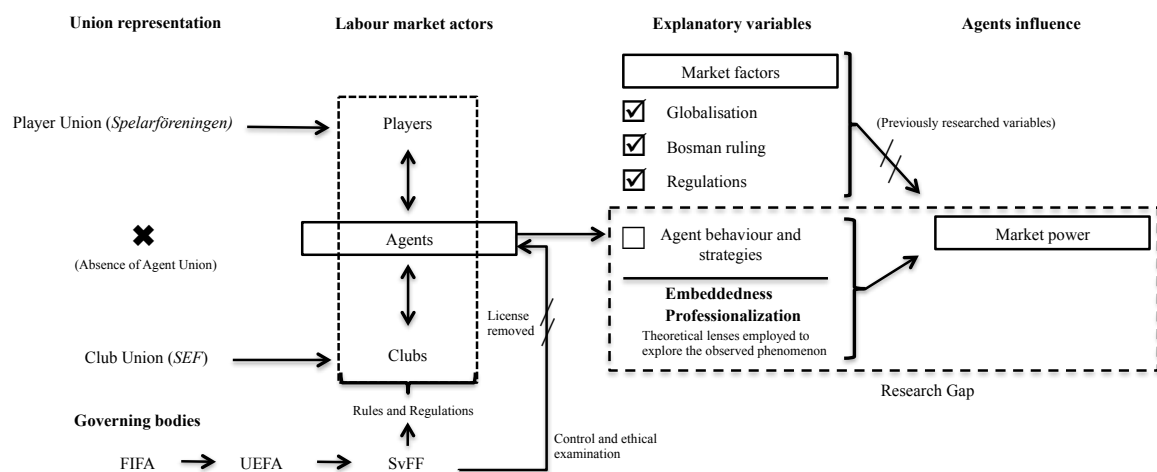
Football agents have been able to gain a strong position in their market in parallel to a decreasing demand for the traditional intermediary role to reduce transaction and search costs. Despite of clubs' increased capabilities to locate and evaluate the quality of players through website platforms, the role of the agent as a gatekeeper for clubs wanting to attract players has grown. What is also remarkable to the agent business is that traditional professionalisation processes have not taken place, yet the profession has experienced rapid growth. In existing literature on football agents, the growth has been explained with external macro economical factors. The importance of such factors are not questioned in this thesis, however, they are not sufficient to account for the remarkable developments in the business. This study attempts to enhance the understanding of how the profession has grown by looking at the football agents' own behaviour and strategies.

After identifying this missing approach in the study of empirical developments, a theoretical understanding of the relation between agent tactics and market power was developed. Based on a growing understanding of appropriate theoretical fields for studying the phenomenon, a theoretical lens evolved that was considered best in relation to the empirical dilemma. Concepts from embeddedness theory have been used to comprehend the dynamics of the social interrelations between intermediaries, clients and clubs. In addition, the most applicable notions from professionalisation theory have been exploited to gain an understanding for the occupational

developments in the empirical context. Concepts from both fields have been interwoven to constitute a venture point for answering the research gap. The interdisciplinary approach serves to generate new insights as to how football agents actively influence their position in the labour market, which will be accomplished by exploring the following research question:

“How do football agents act to increase their power as intermediaries in the football players labour market?”

Figure 3. Overview of Research gap



4. Method

As previously explained, the empirical field of football agents is relatively immature. Specifically, the phenomenon of how football agents behaviour affect power and market structures in the football industry lies within a novel state of theory, as no prior research have tried to investigate the topic. Attempting to examine a new area of study within the empirical field of football agents, this study employs an exploratory research approach. This chapter serves to outline the research process, motivating methodological choices regarding methodological fit (3.1), research approach (3.2), research design (3.3) data collection (3.4), data analysis (3.5), and data quality (3.6).

4.1. Methodological fit

Since little is known about the phenomenon the study investigates, the research method should allow data collection that shapes and enhances the researcher's understanding for the specific subject (Barley and Stephen, 1990). As methodological fit was considered, exploratory qualitative research offered a feasible strategy since the observed phenomenon was relatively unexplored (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). Consequently, to offer new empirical insight into how football agent behaviour affect power balance and market efficiency, a qualitative approach was employed, using open-ended research questions and in-depth interviews for data collection. Aside from aiming to present empirical insights about how football agents' behaviour affects markets, the approach was also considered feasible in order to produce suggestive theoretical insights about how intermediaries can gain power using certain behaviour, and thereby inspire and inform future research.

4.2. Research approach

Qualitative research is particularly useful for studies of social relations (Flick, 2014). As the dynamics of the football industry increasingly rest on transactions within embedded networks, the observed phenomenon is affected by rapid social change. Flick (2014) suggests that traditional methodologies of deductive nature, that use and test theoretical models against empirical findings, often fail to explain phenomenon

within this social context, which further motivates employing a qualitative method for the current study.

As both previous empirical and theoretical contributions were scarce, abductive logic was considered most appropriate in aiming to produce new knowledge in the exploratory context of the current study. Abduction is viewed as a learning process, attempting to arrive at the best possible explanation. In order to arrive at the best possible understanding, one should alternate between theory and empirical data (Martela, 2015).

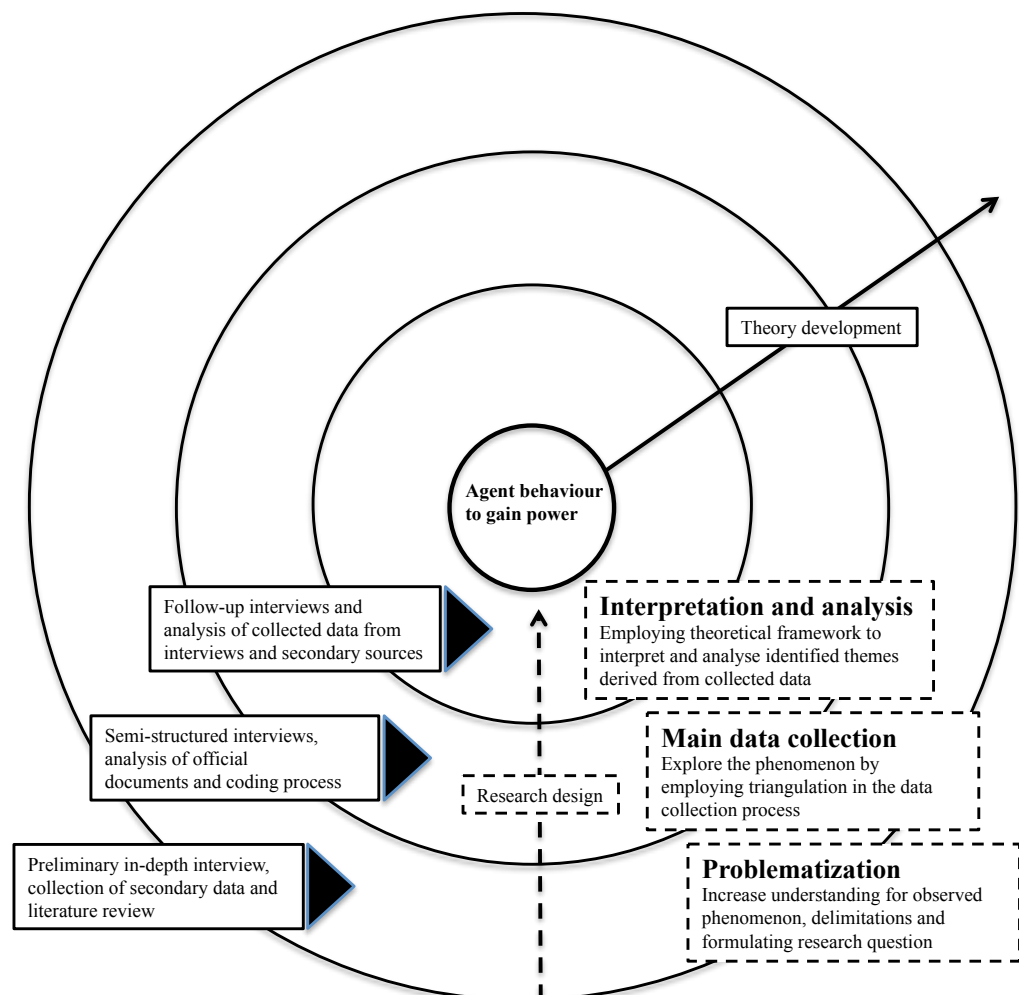
Alternative approaches would have been applying either deductive or inductive logic. Deductive logic implies deducing a hypothesis based on theory, which later is subject to empirical scrutiny. In contrary, inductive logic draw conclusions from empirical observations, which then form theory (Bryman, 2012). However, deriving hypotheses using deductive logic was considered inadequate as this study incorporate theory from adjacent research fields, due to absence of theory explaining our specific subject. Additionally, as the empirical study observed a market with unique conditions, it served to inspire future research rather than being able of making generalised conclusions shaping theory. Hence, inductive logic was not considered suitable. Instead, by applying an abductive approach, the current study refined its empirical and theoretical understanding during the data collection, which also guided us in additional collection of data.

4.3. Research design

To explore the observed phenomenon, the study employed triangulation, using several sources of data and methods, which allowed observation from various reference points as recommended by Bryman and Bell (2011). Initially, empirical literature was reviewed, attempting to explain the context affecting the observed phenomenon in the empirical background. Official documents were reviewed during the entire process whereas the preliminary interview with the market expert and the in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted sequentially. The preliminary interview with the expert helped to identify suitable aspects to investigate further in the interviews and additional collection of secondary data. Consequently, the interviews and collection

of secondary data were performed in order to grasp the phenomenon in detail, select the most relevant aspects to examine further and lastly, to validate empirical findings.

Figure 4. Visual representation of Research design



4.4. Data collection

Initially, an exploratory pre-study was performed in order to gain a broader understanding for the market and to identify potential contributions to the empirical field. Thereafter, according to the explorative purpose of the study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted which also constitute the main source of empirical data. Follow-up interviews were also conducted in order to validate empirical findings. Additionally, collection of secondary data through official and

legislative documents was made to enrich the overall study by providing background information, inform about the researched field and for guiding interview content. The following section elaborates further on the data collection process.

4.4.1. Exploratory pre-study

Primarily, an extensive exploratory review process of official documents and previous research on the football agent occupation, agent license and transfer market was performed. The review used academic tools such as Scopus and JSTOR and searched methodically in line with recommendations presented by Bryman (2012). Official documents were retrieved from FIFA, SvFF and SEF. Moreover, current newspaper articles and a recent television documentary (Kalla Fakta, 2017) were reviewed, allowing further identification of current trends, issues and market developments related to football agents. The pre-study helped to identify agent behaviour and its effect on market and professionalisation processes as a potential phenomenon to examine further. Consequently, to explore the feasibility of our subject and its potential applicability on the Swedish market, an in-depth interview with the agent Patrick Mörk was performed. His input helped to identify relevant aspects of the phenomenon as well as to gain access to additional interview targets.

4.4.2. Semi-structured interviews

As mentioned above, the exploratory pre-study identified agent behaviour and its effect on power structures as a suitable phenomenon to investigate further. The main study investigated the topic further by performing 18 semi-structured interviews in total, whereof two were follow-up interviews in order to validate findings. An interview guide (see Appendix 2-4) was used for each interview with questions designed to explore pre-defined themes identified by the pre-study. However, to allow an adaptable interview process, questions had an open-ended character (Kvale, 2008). Furthermore, this format also enabled follow-up questions, useful to guide the respondent toward more specific discussions of relevant themes (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). Semi-structured interviews were considered a useful interview approach as interviewees are allowed to be flexible in answers and since questions outside the interview guide could be asked to pick up on relevant aspects mentioned by interviewees (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were

feasible for the explorative purpose of our study by facilitating understanding of how interviewees interpret aspects related to the observed phenomenon.

Concerning interview style, “responsive interviewing” was employed which is an interview model presented by Rubin and Rubin (2011). The model emphasises the importance of relationship-building during the interview, with the aim to generate depth of understanding for the research topic. Aiming to create a comfortable atmosphere, warm-up questions were used, tailored based on background information of the interviewee (retrieved from sources such as company websites and press-releases). Moreover, background information also guided interview content to some extent, as specific questions could be designed to enhance information gathering of the observed phenomenon. The study consequently used self-reflection between the interviews in line with the responsive interviewing model by Rubin and Rubin (2011) by making adjustments to the interview guide, aiming to improve interview content as new findings were generated.

As described above, the main study collected data from 18 interviews. Out of these, six were conducted with football agents, four with club representatives, four with professional football players, and two with representatives from SvFF and the Player Union respectively. The interviews were performed between September 6th and December 4th. The interviews were held either face-to-face or via phone and had a duration between 18 and 83 minutes. Regarding duration, the majority of interviews were scheduled for 40-60 minutes with the purpose of giving respondents sufficient time to formulate personal perceptions, even though the participants had various roles and functions in relation to the observed phenomenon (Ahrne and Svensson, 2011). Also, in attempting to increase comfort for the interviewees and to enhance communication and record possibilities, interviews were conducted at each respondent’s desired location (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

All interviewees were asked about the possibility to conduct the interview face-to-face. However, due to logistics and time constraints, some interviewees preferred being interviewed via phone. Rubin and Rubin (2011) recognise the constraints of using telephone interviews, as it may limit the time to develop trustful relationships. To counteract this, each respondent were contacted prior to the interview (through

phone or mail), receiving information about research purpose and subject. All interviews (except two due to constrained documentation possibilities) were recorded with consent from each respondent and shortly thereafter transcribed, in order to facilitate early identification of themes in the coding process. The two interviews that could not be recorded were instead documented by actively taking notes during the interview process.

Table 3. Overview of respondents

<i>Name</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Employer</i>
Patrick Mörk	Agent	Global Soccer Management
Gustaf Grauers	Agent	Taldea Advisory Group
Carl Fhager	Agent	Global Soccer Management
Dalil Benyahia	Agent	Own agency
Mikael Kallbäck	Agent	Neverland Management
John Thornberg	Agent	Sportic
Albin Ekdal	Player	Hamburger SV
Henok Goitom	Player	AIK
Elliot Käck	Player	Djurgårdens IF
Philip Andersson	Player	Akropolis IF
Bosse Andersson	Sport Director	Djurgårdens IF
Jesper Jansson	Sport Director	Hammarby IF
Thomas Lagerlöf	Trainer / Sport Director	IK Sirius
Tobias Ackerman	Club Scout	AIK
Tobias Tibell	Lawyer	SvFF
Magnus Erlingmark	Secretary General	Player Union

4.4.3. Interview sample

The exploratory pre-study helped to identify stakeholders included in the football agent network. Hence, it also informed about potential units to include in the sampling process. Using purposive sampling (Bryman, 2012), the study first sampled based on type of actor within the football agent network. Thereafter, participants were sampled based on their responsibilities, work-experience, position and perceived ability to inform about the research questions. Aiming for a diversified sample, particular efforts were made to include actors with various roles in the agent network. Consequently, semi-structured interviews were performed with five different stakeholder groups, agents, professional players, club representatives, SvFF and the Player Union. Applying snowball sampling, the study identified relevant participants based on recommendations from other interviewees (Bryman, 2012). The amount of interviews within each stakeholder group was a result of which group that were perceived to have greatest potential to answer the research question, explaining the stronger representation of football agents. The pre-study recognised various views among agents about agent license and best practice in player-agent relationships. Therefore, in attempting to capture a representative picture of agent behaviour, special efforts were made to include agents with different work-experience, reputation and network size in the sample. Players were sampled to include young and old players as well as players with different levels of accomplishments, attempting to grasp player-agent interactions of various types. Additionally, club representatives from the three largest clubs in Stockholm (AIK, Djurgårdens IF and Hammarby IF) as well as a smaller club (IK Sirius FK) were included in the sample to ensure diversity. Due to limited access possibilities, all participants in the sample were based in Sweden. A comprehensive list of the interviews can be found in Appendix 1.

4.4.4. Secondary sources

Aside from semi-structured interviews, data from secondary sources was collected in order to increase understanding of the observed phenomenon. Primarily, official and legislative documents from FIFA were retrieved during the exploratory pre-study. These documents described the role and restrictions of both football agents and clubs and guided the formulation of the research question. Thereafter, as the study was delimited toward the Swedish market, SvFF helped with provision of information about agent fees and documents covering current regulations of Swedish football

agents as well as a proposal of new regulations. Additionally, information from current newspaper articles and a television documentary (Kalla Fakta, 2017), describing developments on the Swedish football agent market, helped to guide interview content and the analysis of empirical findings.

4.5. Data Analysis

The logic used for data analysis reflected the current study's abductive approach and was inspired by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Following procedures recommended by Corbin and Strauss (1990), collected data from interview transcripts and secondary sources were subject to analysis throughout the research process, starting by grouping data into concepts. Identified concepts were thereafter compared and grouped into several categories, containing concepts with perceived interrelations.

As patterns sequentially emerged, the study contrasted these with regard to the pre-defined research question, which allowed selection of three core categories. These core categories were thereafter prioritised in the data collection process and consequently, guided formulation of interview content and selection of data to collect from secondary sources. Lastly, data included in the various core categories were compared and analysed in regard to the theoretical framework, aiming to control for theory development. (Strauss, 1987)

4.6. Quality of study

Considerations regarding the quality of research have further steered the research process. Traditionally, applying the concepts of validity and reliability have been the norm in assessing the quality of research. However, inspired by the reasoning of Bryman and Bell (2011), suggesting that qualitative research instead should be evaluated based on trustworthiness, this section outlines methodological choices to ensure credibility (3.6.1) and transferability (3.6.2). Additionally, assessing the quality of the study using the criterion trustworthiness was considered more feasible in regard to the explorative purpose of the study.

4.6.1. Credibility

Credibility refers to internal validity and as described by Merriam (1988), the concept of credibility concerns to what extent findings are congruent with reality. Moreover, to establish trustworthiness in a study, ensuring credibility is essential (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Following recommendations by Shenton (2004) to enhance credibility, the current study applied triangulation, using different methods for data collection as well as triangulating through data sources by involving a wide range of informants in the sampling process. Attempts to strengthen credibility further were made by sampling interviewees with much experience, in order to generate insights about the development of agent behaviour over a broader time horizon.

4.6.2. Transferability

Transferability is synonymous to external validity and Merriam (1988) explains external validity as to what extent a study's findings may be generalised to other situations. To ensure transferability, Guba and Lincoln (1994) further suggest that the investigators should provide sufficient contextual information of the context where the study was undertaken, in order to enable the reader to perform such a transfer.

The current study's delimitations and the limited sample size may affect generalisation to a wider population. Attempting to counteract this, the study included stakeholders in the sample that were considered similar to the types of stakeholders active in markets other than the Swedish. To ensure transferability further, the study aimed at providing sufficient contextual information in the empirical background and thereby, explaining the context affecting football agent behaviour.

5. Empirical findings

Findings are structured typologically around three focal themes, which will be presented in the following sections. The converging topics that were identified all support the overall aim of the study, to explain how football agents act to gain market power. The empirical background illustrated that working as a football agent has become a lucrative occupation, with an increasing number of practitioners. Respondents included in the sample support and confirm the attractiveness of the occupation and further agree that the active number of agents in Sweden has visibly increased in recent years. This has taken place in parallel to the rise of technological player evaluation programs that logically should work against intermediary power. This chapter outlines the empirical findings starting with agents' embedded networks (4.1). Thereafter, a section covering occupational strategies (4.2) follows and finally, how agents contribute to creation of information asymmetry is presented (4.3). The findings inform, among other things, how agents actively create different kind of relationships and exploit them to gain market power.

5.1. Agents' embedded networks

The data collection process early identified that building relationships appeared as the most important tool used by agents to become successful. This insight was consolidated as the interviews continued. It became evident that agents are dependent on having positive relationships with players as well as clubs. The following sections will clarify how agents actively attempt to form ties with players and clubs in order to create *personal trust* and *networks*. Thereafter, how personal trust and large networks function as competitive advantages is presented and finally, how these advantages can be exploited to strengthen their position is outlined.

5.1.1. Forming ties with players

Without clients it is impossible to conduct business, therefore it is only natural that agents work intense to recruit players. This section presents the empirical findings on how football agents operate to attract and retain clients. Conducted interviews with agents, as well as with players and clubs, are used in order to enhance the understanding of what methods agents use to attain players in an increasingly

competitive occupational landscape. Interviews inform that strong personal ties between agents and clients are not uncommon, instead all agents explained that they have relationships of more personal character with several of their clients. Michael Kallbäck, active agent since 2014 and former Sport Director for two smaller clubs in Sweden, emphasised that he considers some of the clients he represents to also be his personal friends:

"I have a personal relationship with many of my players. I've had players spending the night in my house; I've spent my vacation with players visiting them in their home. Then there are players that you only have a professional relationship with, although I believe it's good to build a personal relationship."

Interviews further reveal that agents often work closely with clients for extensive time periods and that communication between agents and players is not limited to when contract negotiations take part. Instead, agents discuss career aspects continuously with players and also assist with other matters. Accordingly, some agents presented their work description as not restricted to finding the best club or contract agreement for the player. Instead, they expressed their availability as counsellors and in supporting with concerns unrelated to football, as an example, finding accommodation in new cities was mentioned by three of the respondents as an additional service offered to clients.

Each responding agent acknowledged strong ties with clients as a key success factor and five out of six agents said that they actively try to create relationships characterised by trust. The advantage of strong relationships is particularly useful in the process of recruiting players to the agency, however, it was explained to be even more important in the activity of retaining clients. As a consequence of the increasing amount of agents, the competition for players has increased and agents found it more difficult to retain clients today compared to only a few years ago. Although no compilation or official register presenting the total amount of active agents in Sweden, respondents confirm a development where the amount of players that are represented by an agent has increased substantially during recent years. In fierce competition for the most promising players, forming strong relationships is used as an active strategy to retain clients. Consequently, written contracts, that assure

collaboration between agent and player for a specified period of time, are often used. However, agents also emphasized the weakness such contracts contained. Accordingly, the most commonly expressed concerns with written agreements was primarily that there are ways for players to bypass such agreements and also, the problem of working with certain clients that would rather collaborate with another agent. Hence, a preferred method to assure long-term collaboration was to build mutual trust. Dalil Benyahia is a former player who decided to become an agent two years ago, he elaborates on this theme by stating:

"The relationship with the player is the most important thing, he's the one that feeds you. If you're able to create a good relationship with him it can be worth a lot in the future, otherwise the risk is that he goes to a more established agent."

5.1.2. Creating personal trust with players

Interviews with players revealed two criteria of severe importance in the selection of agent. Firstly, all respondents mentioned the factor of trusting the agent, underlining the reciprocal attribute of this factor. From the perspective of the players, collaboration with agents implies sharing information and control concerning their careers, which can evoke feelings of exposure and insecurity. In regard to this, players emphasised the importance of trusting the agent. To assure trustworthiness in the selection of agent, players communicate with teammates and ask them about recommendations. Congruently, all four respondents informed that they consulted with other players before they decided to employ their current agent. Albin Ekdal, a player currently playing for the German top division team Hamburger SV, is from Stockholm and has represented several teams outside Sweden since 2008. In the interview he emphasised the importance of an agent's reputation:

"Good references matter. (...) Players talk a lot with each other, it is important to have a good reputation."

Apart from an agent's reputation, the impression from personal interactions was considered a factor for trust. Albin Ekdal further elaborates on why he has retained the same agent throughout his career:

“Everything has worked fine, the personal chemistry is good. You build trust between one another, I believe that’s important in this business.”

Agents are aware of the severe importance of reputation and capacity of building trust. Notably, agents should not only be reduced to only passive actors in the formation of selection criterions of players in the choice of agents, instead findings indicate that agents are active actors in the shaping of such criterions. Interviews with players and agents helped to identify a pattern of agents emphasising the vitality of creating personal trust with clients. In addition, putting their own ethically unimpeachable behaviour in relation to other “*non serious*” actors were common rhetoric to use. Furthermore, reports about malfeasance in the business and widely spread suspiciousness towards the profession were often contrasted with their own morally legitimate behaviour and good reputation. John Thornberg has worked as an agent since 2011 and he did not consider the negative attitude towards the profession as disadvantageous for his business:

“You can also see it as an advantage. It does not affect my business negatively, as long as you behave it is pretty positive if the business has a bad reputation.”

Established agents argued that size and the amount of experience in the business were indicators of trustworthiness. They explained this by reasoning that inadequate behaviour from their side would damage their reputation among players and clubs and as a consequence, they would not have wanted to conduct business with that agent. Since players and clubs desired the agents’ services, they used that as an argument against people questioning ethical aspects of their work. Smaller agents expressed frustration over such rhetoric. Dalil Benyahia is a small agent trying to compete with the established actors. Concurrent with the current study, a widespread Swedish news program, *Kalla Fakta*, broadcasted coverage on doubtful behaviour within the agent profession, Dalil used the interviews in that show to exemplify rhetoric used by more established agents:

“As you know agents have a bad reputation and larger agents like to describe new agents as irresponsible, it is a way for them to avoid competition. There will be a news story on Kalla Fakta soon, you will see, certain people like to paint up new

agents as being hustlers, criminals and all sort of things. If a young talent decides between an established agent and the guy that was on Kalla Fakta, who will he pick?”

There have been reports about ethically questionable behaviour and malfeasance by agents in Sweden. However, to investigate the spread and dimension of that problem within the agent occupation is not the objective of the current study. Instead, this thesis reveals that agents accentuate and exploit the bad reputation of their trade to their own personal advantage and that larger agents argue for size as a sign of reliability. However, findings indicate that concerns regarding players' loyalty is not a problem reduced to smaller agents. Considering the global character of the players market, large Swedish practitioners have to relate to international competitors. Patrik Mörk was one of the pioneering agents in Sweden and is considered one of the most successful actors on the market, with many high profile players as clients. He accentuated the importance of mutual trust for retaining players:

“It comes down to finding someone you can trust. Everyone wants to be famous and players are flattered when it comes an agent that offers fame and glory. We see a trend towards Swedish players changing agents more often.”

5.1.3. Accentuating the network

The final quote in 5.1.2 relates to the second expressed parameter in the players' selection of agents, namely, the agent's network. Prior success is the main benchmark players use to evaluate the size of the agent's network. Furthermore, collaboration with successful players as well as previously conducted business with large clubs are indicators of a strong network, which is highly valued among players when choosing which agent to collaborate with. Interviews with players indicate that the agent's network is even more important than the feature of personal trust. Elliot Käck from Djurgårdens IF answered what he considers the most important criterion for deciding which agent to collaborate with:

“I wish I could say the best human being, but you start with which players they have and above all which clubs they have players in. (...) You always take the one highest in the “food-chain”, then you know he is good.”

Henok Goitom, currently representing AIK and previously a professional for various teams in Spain, further accentuated the importance for agents to have a comprehensive network. When Goitom was asked whether the players and clubs an agent has collaborated with influences the probability of him hiring that agent, he responded:

“Yes. It is much better than approaching a new agent. I prefer an agent that has been in contact with many clubs, because if you’re not Lionel Messi and the best player in the world, it will decide a lot what contacts the agent has.”

Interviews with agents clearly manifest that they are aware of the importance of their network. In addition, agents are not only responding to the increasing demand from players of a large agent network, they also contribute to the demand. Specifically, established agents frequently use their established networks of clubs as a selling point in communication with players. Agent Patrick Mörk explained that he emphasises his network as a strategy for attracting and retaining players:

“I was first, which enabled me to acquire a cluster of players and a network of clubs. That is an advantage for several reasons. One (reason) is that I can more easily attract new players because I can show that I’m working with big players and clubs.”

Established agents in the sample often returned to their positive relation with different clubs, both within and outside the Swedish market. Interviewed players confirmed that agents accentuate their network in communication with them. Hence, established practitioners use rhetoric to consolidate the importance of having contacts and a broad network and thereby reinforce their network as a competitive advantage towards smaller actors.

5.1.4. Forming ties with clubs

As accounted for in the section above, having a strong network of clubs is considered to be an important competitive advantage. Consequently, agents therefore spend particular effort to form relationships with club representatives. Indications that building strong ties with clubs is an integrated part of the agent profession presented itself in the pre-study and were confirmed in the main study. Although all agents emphasised that the players are their clients, the daily work consists more of interactions with club representatives than communicating with the players they represent. Relations with clubs are of similar nature as communication with players according to the agents, as some were described as entirely professional and others as more personal. Carl Fhager, football agent and one of six members of Global Soccer Management, one of the largest football agencies in Sweden, made the comparison with player relationships:

“It’s pretty similar to the relationships with players. Sometimes it’s personal and some of the people in the clubs are my friends as well.”

Respondents in both groups, club representatives and agents, confirm that personal relationships between the parties are not unusual. Evidently, it is logical that strong ties and friendships are formed between people working in the same field when they are involved in plenitudes of interactions with each other. However, it would be misleading to reduce such relationships to only emerge as a natural consequence of working in the field of football. All interviewed agents also expressed that forming strong ties with clubs is an integrated part of their strategies. Gustaf Grauers has worked as an agent since 2014, and also has experience from working as Sport Director for Hammarby IF 2010-2013. Grauers explained that one of his strategies is to gain personal trust through interactions with clubs:

“I listen to the clubs, I listen to their needs so that they will see me as an asset. I speak well about players that are good even though they are not my clients, in order to gain trustworthiness.”

Hence, findings suggest that agents work hard to create personal trust with club representatives and not solely with players. The reasoning for allocating much time on

forming positive relations with clubs is that constructive interactions with players and clubs are not considered mutually exclusive. Michael Kallbäck, agent since 2014 and earlier Sport Director for two smaller clubs in Sweden, emphasised that in order to have well-functioning relationships with players, you need to have good relationships with clubs as well:

“It’s very important to have trust with the players because it’s first and foremost them you work for. At the same time, in order to be able to work for a player you must have good relationships with the clubs (...) For example I have never done a deal with IF Elfsborg, that’s because I don’t have the same relationship with Andreasson (Sport Director of IF Elfsborg) as I’ve got with for example Bosse Andersson. I’ve not been to Borås (the location of IF Elfsborg) and tried to form a relationship with Elfsborg.”

The underlying logic in the quote above indicates that the possibility for a player to sign for a club increases with the strength of the agent-club relationship. Interestingly, this was the general understanding of clubs as well as agents. However, this does not imply that clubs sign low-quality players because they like their agents, contrastingly, respondents agree that clubs make a comprehensive work in the recruitment process to determine which players are most suitable to acquire. However, consensus prevailed among respondents that strong ties to a certain club facilitate for agents to get a club to consider and evaluate a player that the agent represents. Moreover, the general opinion among respondents is that if a club decides between two players of similar quality, strong ties with one of the agents might impact the decision.

Taking into account the transparent nature of player performances, logically players should end up at a club level concurrent with their quality. Evidently, the best players often play for the best clubs. However, interviews with club representatives revealed that it is not only player quality that determines which player to sign. When asked the question which criteria are important when deciding what player to recruit, Bosse Andersson, Sport Director of Djurgårdens IF, replied:

There are a lot of things to consider when signing a player: How does it work with the agent? How does it work with the player?

Considering the purpose of this study, the notion “how does it work with the agent” is an interesting factor to take into consideration for understanding the recruitment process. Consequently, it indicates that which agent represents a player impact a player's possibilities of signing for a certain club. Andersson was not alone in mentioning that, from a club perspective, it matters which agent that represents a player, in fact three out of four club representatives explicitly said that some players are being excluded from evaluation because of the agent representing them. Thomas Lagerlöf, Coach and Sport director at IK Sirius further accentuated what unique position football agents have:

“We drop players on the basis of what agents they have. Who can one trust?”

Remarkably, findings indicate that talented job candidates are being excluded because of what agent they have. This stands in contrast to most other occupations, as it is very unusual that employers value other factors besides ability to perform the work. Obviously, a candidate's personality, ambition level or fit with the company culture could be of interest, however evaluation based on the person handling the contract negotiations on behalf of the candidate makes this situation unique. A bad reputation of an agent might be enough for clubs to avoid him even if the club have no own experiences from dealing with that person. Jesper Jansson, Sport Director at Hammarby IF Fotboll, explained how he uses his network in the business to educate himself about both agents and players:

“I consult everyone about players to recruit and the further you get in the process, the more you filtrate. Some agents you reject and then you accept that you might miss a good player.”

5.1.5. Experience as an indicator of trust

One benchmark for assessing agents according to the clubs was the size of the agent, implying the amount and dignity of completed transfers made by the agent. The reasoning behind the importance of this factor was in line with rhetoric used by agents, that if an established practitioner had misbehaved it would have reached the clubs. Hence, a “big” established agent is viewed as more trustworthy in comparison

to a smaller actor. Three out of four clubs acknowledged that what agent a player has influences the probability of that player being recruited to their club. Tobias Ackerman from AIK was the only club representative expressing a different opinion:

“Which players are best is what determines who we buy. We work with all agents, so the best player is what matters.”

Furthermore, Ackerman explained why he believes AIK is able to have this approach. According to Ackerman, AIK do not normally come in contact with “*bad*” agents since AIK is one of the largest clubs in Sweden and only big established agents will represent the players with a plausible chance of signing for them. Thus, he uses the criterion mentioned above, size, as a way of evaluating how good an agent is, the reasoning being that big agents are more trustable than smaller ones. This is illustrated in the quote below where Ackerman explained why AIK do not have to work with bad agents:

“The players that signs for the biggest clubs - Malmö FF or AIK – often have a big and serious agent. If the players are on their way to a big club like AIK they probably want a big agent that has done big deals in the past and they gravitate towards established agents.”

The established agents gain from a common understanding that experienced agents are more reliable than newer ones with less experience. Consequently, club representatives stated that agents often argue that their experience in the business should be considered as an indicator of trustworthiness. Conducted interviews with agents offer further support for expansive usage of such rhetoric. The experienced agents in the study emphasised that they would not have been able to stay in the business for so long if they did not act fair, as players and especially clubs would not want to conduct business with them if that was the case. Congruently with how clubs explained agent rhetoric, agents also acknowledged their experience in the business as a favourable argument for gaining trust from clubs.

5.1.6. Concluding remarks

Answers from agents and players combined reveal that agents are aware of the criteria they are being evaluated on; personal trust and network. In addition, activities by the agents to attract clients should not be reduced to passive responses to what players appreciate from an agent. Rather, the study indicates that established agents play an active role in the formation process of such criteria. Firstly, agents emphasise the importance of personal trust by contrasting it to the reputation of the profession, thereby also contributing to the poor reputation. Secondly, established agents consolidate the value of a comprehensive network in order to expand the competitive advantage towards smaller practitioners in attracting players. Furthermore, empirical findings indicate that established agents use their amount of time in the business and established networks as arguments for trustworthiness in the communication with club representatives. Thus, the agents actively contribute to an understanding within the business that larger agents normally are more reliable. In this context the saying “success feed success” is particularly true.

5.2. Occupational strategies

No specified requirements are needed to become a football agent. From the perspective of professionalisation theory, combined with embeddedness concepts, this section explores the strategies of established practitioners.

5.2.1. Individual practitioners

Working as a football agent is to a large degree an occupation consisting of individual actors. There are some agents collaborating and working together in agencies but those collaborations are small and the largest agency in Sweden consists of only six members. Even within those few corporations, the work is mainly carried out individually. Carl Fhager, member of the agency Global Soccer Management explains:

“In the Swedish market the collaboration consists of some minor corporations with separate individuals that collaborate in a group. It differentiates the business from other trades where big companies collaborate.”

Apart from those minor corporations, the profession is characterised by a low degree of collaboration between practitioners, for example no active union exists. In 2011 an attempt was made to create a union but it did not succeed. John Thornberg was one of the agents attending the only meeting held when the intended union was initiated. He elaborates on the topic:

“If you look at the largest agents in Sweden they are also big rivals. It’s maybe four agents who consider themselves to be the biggest one, it’s very difficult to get them to collaborate. It would never be that they pulled in the same direction anyway. It’s a long step, I think the competition is too tough among agents.”

Patrick Mörk was one of the initiators of the intended union and he stated that he also has tried to form networks with other agents. However, individual competition for the same target clients has been an obstacle:

“Yes I try but it’s difficult because...well it is a trade with very sharp elbows, you are competitors rather than colleagues.”

All respondents agreed that there is a low degree of collaboration among practising agents. Fierce competition was repeatedly mentioned as the main reason for lack of organised cooperation.

5.2.2. Absence of professionalisation

The football transfer market is characterised by a low degree of regulations. No successful attempts to control what is required in order to be allowed to call oneself a football agent have been made by external actors. As accounted for in the empirical background, FIFA tried to introduce an agent license but were not able to uphold it. Instead, the different national football associations have the choice whether they want to implement a licensing system within their country. In Sweden, no agent license exists of yet and anyone can call him or herself a football agent. Tobias Tibell, legal counsel at the Swedish Football Association, revealed that after repeated reports in media about ethically questionable behaviour of some agents, discussions now are being held with concerned actors about different forms of regulations:

“Some of the established agents we’ve been in contact with have been positive to implementing stricter regulations and a license of some sort.”

Established practitioners being positive towards stricter regulations as to who is allowed to call her or himself an agent is in line with professionalisation theory. However, conducted interviews with agents indicate conflicted attitudes towards stricter regulations. Most of the respondents were positive to some form of enhanced regulations, however, many of them also added that too strict regulations are neither possible nor desirable. Several of the respondents returned to the reputation being so important that in the longer perspective it is not beneficial to play tricks on players or clubs. Agent John Thornberg elaborates on how agents reacted when FIFA removed the agent license:

“I thought it was wrong. I would have preferred the opposite; a tougher legal framework. Some agents were happy, others were not, one can conclude things from that.”

The current study does not question that some agents are genuinely concerned about malfeasance within the trade. However, it is also important to separate rhetoric from action. With the absence of other actors’ active involvement in deciding what is expected from an agent, the practitioners themselves possess the opportunity to gain control over occupational closure. Yet, the study revealed that as a group, apart from that one meeting where a trade union was discussed, football agents have not initiated any attempts of political economical professionalisation.

5.2.3. Barriers to entry

Anyone is allowed to call her- or himself a football agent in Sweden and it is a flourishing business that attracts interest from many new aspiring practitioners. However, all agent respondents agree that it is more difficult to become a successful agent starting today compared to five or ten years ago. The more experienced agents in the sample even stated that they would never attempt to become an agent with the competitive landscape of today. Carl Fhager has been in the business since 2008 and explains:

“It’s impossible to start from zero today, you can’t go from scratch and become an established actor. It’s a moment 22, the players ask what players you have and what clubs you know, therefore it’s very difficult to start from scratch.”

In 5.1 it was accounted for how players and clubs both highly value the network of an agent, something established agents like to consolidate. Both established and new agents in the study attest to the selection criterion entailing high barriers to entry for aspiring practitioners. Michael Kallbäck argued that even though he is struggling, the network from his time as a sport director is what has enabled his recent venture into the trade:

“It’s tough but that I’ve worked as a sport director earlier has helped. Had I come from scratch without contacts it would have been virtually impossible.”

Interviews with players offer further support for the extraordinary importance of a network. On this theme, the football player Albin Ekdal states:

“Yes, an agent that has awesome players of course finds it easier to get new players. I guess everyone rather have an agent that has worked with big clubs than one that doesn’t have the same contacts or track record.”

Players and to some extent clubs, value the network of the agent to an high level compared to clients of other trades, implying that networks constitute a barrier to entry in the agent business. In addition, the study suggests that building personal trust, the second important selection criterion for players and clubs, is difficult to accomplish in a trade believed to attract irresponsible practitioners. Dalil Benyahia, agent since 2015 explains:

“I have to work very hard to win the trust from players. If I don’t know them from before they are very suspicious of me to start with.”

In this context it was suggested by respondents that a license would make it easier for new entrants to gain trust. Tobias Tibell, at the Swedish Football Association, stated this in regard to the effects of a certification:

“If a smaller actor could apply for registration, undergo education and get a certificate he would be stamped as a serious actor. It would open up business opportunities for the smaller actor.”

John Thornberg qualified for the old agent license when he started as an agent, seven years ago, and elaborates about the advantages:

“I had the license and it helped. It was still tough because I didn’t have a network but the license made it slightly easier to acquire one.”

5.2.4. Concluding remarks

The agent trade is characterised by fierce individual competition and low degree of collaboration among practitioners. External actors have not chosen or been able to regulate and professionalise the trade. Attempts of agent certifications that have been made, or are being discussed, are greeted with conflicted attitude among the interviewed agents. Moreover, agents, despite the opportunity of controlling occupational closure, have done no political economical attempts of professionalisation. However, barrier to entry in the trade are considered very high and two obstacles for aspiring agents were repeatedly mentioned. Firstly, a strong network is highly valued among players and clubs, making it difficult for new agents to compete with established actors. Secondly, personal trust from clients and clubs is difficult to gain in a trade occupying a reputation of poor ethical standards. Regarding trust, it was suggested by respondents that increased professionalisation in the form of a certificate would reduce the importance of that factor as a barrier to entry.

5.3. Creators of information asymmetry

As FIFA’s regulations (2015) allow football agents to simultaneously represent both players and clubs, their position naturally gives them a choice of which information gained from players to share with clubs, and vice versa. Based on data collected from interviews and secondary sources, the findings presented in this section indicate that agents’ behaviour contribute to information asymmetry within the football industry.

5.3.1. Non-transparent agent fees

Even if an agent solely represents the player, the club normally pays the agent fee. Findings suggest that agents also encourage this payment system, as it gives them the possibility to decide which information to share with players. Hence, drawing on results from player interviews, players often are unaware of the amount charged by agents to clubs. Also, players appear to be aware of the fact that some information purposively is withheld in favour of the agent, as indicated by the following answer by Henok Goitom on the question if he believes there is any information his agent does not share with him. Goitom currently plays football in the Swedish club AIK and has previously represented teams in Serie A and La Liga (the top divisions in Italy and Spain respectively). His answer was:

“Yes, otherwise I would be naive (...) If there are two clubs where the player is compensated similarly, of course the agent choose the club that he gets the most money from.”

This confirms the notion that when the agent fee is not disclosed to players, it incentivises agents to place players in clubs that pays the highest agent fee instead of the club which may be optimal from the players perspective. Goitom further explained that sometimes the agent asks if you as a player are satisfied with a certain salary level, without informing the player that a substantially higher amount might have been possible. Due to information asymmetry regarding the share agents' charge of the total possible salary for players, Goitom noted that you must accept reality and ask if the proposed salary is reasonable. This indicates a certain acceptance from players for this kind of agent behaviour.

An alternative payment method, that would reduce information asymmetry, would have been if agents charged players solely, instead of clubs. However, Elliot Käck (player in Djurgårdens IF), gives an example of how agents often explain the current payment method toward players:

“It is only in Asia where you charge players and not clubs. But the agents tell you that you can ask the players they represent and that have never taken money from the player salaries.”

Club representatives also confirm this rhetoric of agents toward players and that clubs need to adapt in order to stay competitive. Hence, it appears as an acceptance from clubs exists, similarly to players, for the current payment method of not disclosing the agent-fee. Jesper Jansson (Sport Director for Hammarby IF) elaborates on the topic and states:

“The agent often says that the club pays the agent fee, so that players don’t have to worry about that. Therefore I believe that a good strategy for a club is to be the one who pays agents the most money, then you get the best players.”

Notably, the agent fee appears to be substantially higher in the football industry compared to intermediary fees in other industries. In the study’s interview with football agent Patrick Mörk, he explains that the fee previously was about 10 percent in the Swedish market and that it nowadays lies around 5-6 percent. In the interview with agent John Thornberg, he mentioned that FIFA has tried to limit the fee to 3 percent. However FIFA’s attempt to regulate the agent fee size met difficulties due to national legislation. On that note, Tobias Tibell at Svff explains that current national regulations do not contain any limitations of the size that agents are allowed to charge. Logically, as several clubs confirm, as a larger share of the money connected to transactions goes to agents their market power increase. Also, agents appear to have power to influence the size of the agent fee. When asking an agent, wishing to stay anonymous, about why he believed the agent fee in percent is higher in comparison to what intermediary actors charge in other industries, he replied:

“It can be due to the non-transparency. No transparency makes it more of a negotiation (...) The player has no idea what the club negotiate, and then the agent may be able to charge a higher agent fee.”

However, it seems as some agents might have identified the non-transparency regarding the agent fee and try to be transparent about it in order to gain a comparative advantage by increasing trust in the player agent relationship. Agent Mikael Källbäck emphasised the importance of sharing information with players in order to build trust and resonated as follows regarding information asymmetry related to agent commission:

“It feels wrong to charge a club and not tell it to the player (...) I want to show the player the size of the agent fee for him to evaluate whether the amount is fair.”

5.3.2. Agents exaggerating player commitment

The findings moreover indicate that agents purposively use rhetoric to signal that they are “active” in tasks related to player commitment. Albin Ekdal (player in Hamburger SV) explained that agents often attract players by promising “hard work”. Ekdal further explained that when choosing between agents, their ability to market a player toward clubs is an essential criterion. Perhaps contradictory, and in line with the argument of a more transparent labour market, one agent who wished to stay anonymous stated:

“80 percent of the times it’s the club that contacts me. That’s something you might not tell the players.”

The statement above indicates that clubs often are aware of player qualities (e.g. through statistical programs such as WyScout and InStat) and that agents’ role of proactively market players toward clubs is reduced. The player Elliot Käck described that he wished agents were more honest instead of just notifying him that many clubs have shown interest. Furthermore, he explained that sometimes agents refuse discussions with interested clubs without communicating it to players.

5.3.3. Information asymmetry as a tool to involve additional agents

Moreover, the findings suggest that agents increase information asymmetry by sometimes not disclosing to players and national governing bodies which actors that partake in certain transactions. During the interview with Tobias Tibell at Svff, he explained that current legislation requires clubs to retroactively inform which agent that was involved in a deal and what the agent fee amounted to. However, findings indicate that there are often several agents involved in transactions, often undisclosed to both players and clubs. The sport director of Hammarby IF, Jesper Jansson, explained:

“When selling players to foreign countries, at least two or three intermediaries are involved. This might be because the buying club has a relation with another agent which they believe would facilitate the transaction, it can also be due to certain kickbacks.”

Continuing on this theme, when asking Jansson about if there exists secrecy about which agent that represents which player, he informs:

“It may be a consequence of the function of agents network. That the agent uses a front-man so that even the player don’t know which agent they have.”

As for players, understanding of this non-transparency appears to exist. Henok Goitom believes that players need agents in order to negotiate satisfying contractual terms and express acceptance for involvement of several agents in transactions. When asking Goitom about the behaviour of agents that involve additional agents in a transfer, he elaborates:

“What can a player do if there is three or six agents involved? If you as a player don’t know about it, maybe it’s just for the best.”

It appears to be various explanations of why this behaviour exists. However, as Jansson explained it might be a method for agents to increase the total commission due to kickbacks and as some agents might have better relations with the buying club. The higher total commission could then be divided between the agents involved in the transaction. Agent John Thornberg discusses how this affect agents that earn money by having a longer time horizon for monetary returns:

“When it’s time for the transfer, you get paid for all the time you invested (e.g. career plan, administrative support, continuous dialogue) (...) Therefore it’s problematic when agents “hijack” transfers of players, perhaps it happens because of a higher agent fee.”

5.3.4. Concluding remarks

Findings suggest that agent commission is normally paid to agents by clubs, rather than from players to agents. Also, interviews indicate that agents often employ rhetoric toward players presenting this payment structure as the norm, which appears to have resulted in an acceptance from players for this compensation procedure. Clubs have reacted to this by allowing higher spending on agent commission, as a way to create a comparative advantage on the transfer market. Moreover, the transfer fee in percent appears to be substantially higher than recommendations from FIFA. Agents express that the non-transparency in transfer processes might enable more room for negotiation regarding the size of agent commission, which is also allowed according to current legislation as explained by SvFF. Results further indicate that agents sometimes exaggerate their activity regarding marketing of players toward potential buying clubs. This might be a consequence of clubs nowadays having digital scouting programs, reducing the function of agents needing to “sell in” player qualities. Lastly, clubs, players and to some extent agents, confirm agents behaviour of involving additional agents in the performance of transfers. Uncertainty exists concerning what agents gain on involving additional agents, however, reasons such as enabling kickbacks, increasing agent commission and facilitating transactions were acknowledged as potential factors during interviews.

6. Analysis

With the study's empirical insights as foundation, this section employs the earlier developed theoretical framework when providing tentative answers to how football agents' behaviour has contributed to create a powerful market position. The following analysis is structured according to the three focal themes identified in the empirical section, starting with exploring how agents form ties to players and clubs in order to develop personal trust and large networks (5.1). A discussion on how established actors actively emphasise the importance of personal trust and network to create barrier to entry follows (5.2). Thereafter, an in-depth analysis follows, exploring how some agents use personal trust to proactively create information asymmetry and how this makes introduction of an agent license and regulations less attractive (5.3). The previously presented arguments are then condensed to form a tentative framework of how agents act in contrast to other occupations covered in professionalisation theory (5.4). Lastly, a concluding discussion of what possible implications this imply for decision-makers, clubs and players within the football industry is provided (5.5).

6.1. Creation of networks and personal trust

Certain theorists within the concept of embeddedness argue for coexistence of embedded and arm's length ties (Uzzi, 1996; Powell, 1990). Football agents of this study possess a combination of such ties with players and club representatives. Some contacts are described as distanced and strictly professional, whilst other ties with clients as well as clubs, are described as closer. In concurrence with the reasoning of Granovetter (1985), interviews with club representatives indicate that they prefer to make transactions with someone they have dealt with before. Agents are aware of the importance of their network and it is also an essential part of their business strategy to build substantial networks.

Moreover, empirical findings indicate that for football agents, the network is of even greater importance than for other trades. Player respondents revealed that the network of the agent is the main selection criterion for which agent to hire, as consensus prevailed that the size and quality of the network of the agent strongly correlate with how lucrative club and contract the client ends up with. This is partly true since clubs

prefer to work with agents they have conducted business with before and because they regard the network as an indicator of trustworthiness. Agents are aware of the importance of their network, both for legitimacy towards clubs and even more so for attracting and retaining clients. Consequently, substantial effort is made to form ties with clubs.

Furthermore, Uzzi (1997) explains that ties of high quality imply possibilities to exploit opportunities within the network. Such high quality ties are of specific importance in a trade maculated with ethically poor reputation, due to the risk of being excluded from business opportunities because of suspiciousness from clients or customers. Thus, as the empirical findings outlined, agents work actively to form high quality relationships, characterised by mutual trust, with both players and clubs. Apart from the network, personal trust is the most important selection criterion for the clients and agents are aware of the vitality of this factor.

In an environment where the quality of the practitioner's network and the degree of personal trust is what the practitioner is being judged on, forming social ties is the most important tool used in order to increase those factors. When asked what constitutes a successful agent, each of the responding agents mentioned social ability, illustrating the importance of forming strong relationships. This ability is used both to construct networks and for creating personal trust. These two interrelated factors are the most important ones for success.

6.2. Personal trust and network as barriers to entry

Executive search firms used a political economical professionalisation approach to break loose from their misrepresented poor image and marginal status. Increased legitimacy was gained from such processes and enabled expansion of the trade (Muzio et al., 2011b). This follows an established pattern of how professions normally develop. The occupation of football agents are characterised by a similar poor reputation as executive search firms used to have, however, this occupational group has chosen to shun away from processes of professionalisation.

The first suggested explanation provided in this study is that established practitioners actually benefit from the poor reputation of football agents as a group. The trade is characterised by individual practitioners in fierce competition for clients, where the ability to create personal trust is essential to win clients. Established agents that have been able to build a positive reputation and gained personal trust have a big competitive advantage. Introduction of a mandatory certification, required to be able to work as an agent, would imply a shift towards organisational trust and away from personal trust. Thus, the competitive advantage that established agents have towards aspiring agents would decrease in significance.

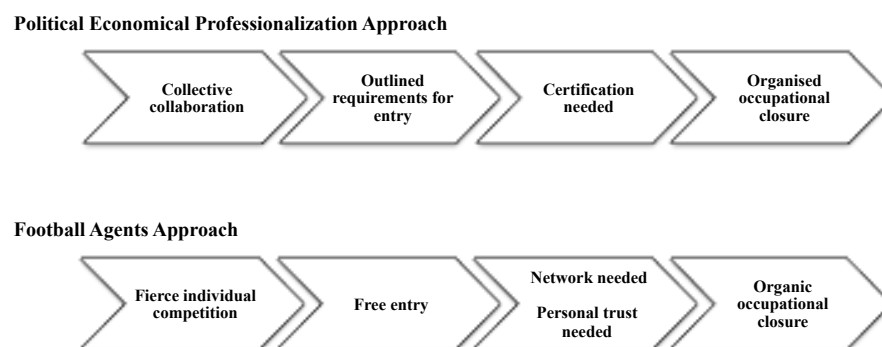
There are also interesting similarities between management consultants and football agents. Despite occupational growth, conventional professionalisation processes have not occurred and no legal restrictions as to who is allowed to call him or herself neither consultant nor agent exist. In addition, practitioner associations are weak and non-existing respectively. Management consulting literature has suggested that consultants may not benefit from replicating political economy professionalisation models, as accounted for in the literature review. One explanation is that training institutions provide an approved degree, supporting professional closure (Muzio et al., 2011a). However, no such institutions exist in the case of the football agents. Furthermore, it has been suggested that if it becomes easier for clients to evaluate the quality of consulting advice, the need for third party standards weakens (Werr and Pemer, 2007). Procurement of technical programs to evaluate the performances of players should work against the need of matchmakers, yet the agent business is flourishing.

The second offered explanation for the hesitant attitudes to professionalisation standards offered in this thesis, relates to the highly valued factor of a network in the business. In line with Alvensson and Johansson (2002), clients have indirectly shaped the development of consultants through how they value the agents. Because of the players' strong belief in the agents network being decisive for their careers, agents with established networks possess a huge competitive advantage to new practitioners. Since players choose agents that have large networks of clubs, it is very difficult for a new actor to compete. Thus, the barrier to entry is already so high that

professionalisation processes, which theoretically should increase barriers to entry, are not needed from the perspective of the established agents.

However, labour market intermediaries should not be reduced to passive bystanders without influence (Beaverstock et al., 2010). Apart from not indulging in political economical professionalisation methods, established football agents also shape the recruitment practices by consolidating network and personal trust as the main factors they are valued on. In rhetoric towards clubs as well as clients agents emphasise the importance of an agent possessing these two things. Thereby they contribute to the construction of the selection criteria they are selected on and thus increase the barriers to entry. Hence, professionalisation initiatives to control occupational closure are from their perspective not needed to the same degree as for other trades.

Figure 5. Occupational tactics for closure



6.3. Information asymmetry

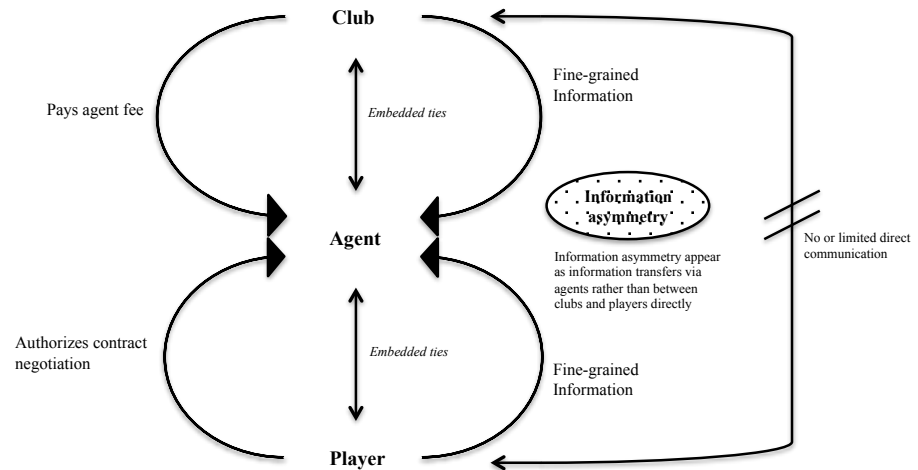
As explained in the previous section, football agents have successfully identified personal trust as a factor to increase influence. By forming high-quality ties with players, networks and relationships characterised by mutual trust have created entry barriers of sufficient nature to de-emphasise the importance of an agent license. On that note, Granovetter (2005) explains how trust, within the concept of embeddedness, comprises the assumption of others doing the right thing although incentives toward the contrary exist. As the empirical section identified, the agents' strong ties with both clubs and players have facilitated agents in the creation of information asymmetry.

Accordingly, agents informing players to concentrate on performance aspects rather than economical issues, have led to an acceptance for the current payment system, where clubs pay agents instead of players. As agents can negotiate the agent fee without disclosing the size of it to players, it makes it possible for agents to capture a larger share of what otherwise would have been allocated to the player.

Additionally, as agents have been able to form player-agent relationships characterised by mutual trust, agents have authorisation to neglect clubs interested in the player and also to recommend the player to clubs of his liking. Thus, as agents in relation to players, have more and superior information, they are able to exploit information asymmetry to their advantage. Congruent with above arguments and agents increasing power, is the reasoning of interviewees that one of the most vital aspects for clubs is paying high agents fees in order to compete in the signing of players.

Contrastingly to undersocialised conceptions, Granovetter (1985) argues that social relations create trust rather than institutional arrangements. As SvFF followed FIFA's decision to abolish the licensing system for agents, the importance of trust in relationships with football agents have increased, as the empirical section outlined. The removal of the licensing system implied less regulations and ethical examination of agents and concurrently, less transparency for the agent occupation. Reconnecting how agents actively creates information asymmetry to their own advantage and how the empirical findings outlined agents indifferent attitude toward re-introducing a license, one could argue that some agents understand that a licence would be in their disfavour as its existence reduces information asymmetry for the agent occupation. To conclude, this might be an additional explanation to why agents, in contrast to traditional professionalisation processes, have not been active in trying to introduce certification once again.

Figure 6. Information flow in the football labour market



6.4. Tentative framework

Agents' main strategy to gain power is to create strong qualitative ties with players and clubs. Social skills are therefore considered crucial among agents because it is needed to create such ties. Interactions with clients and clubs serve two main purposes. Firstly, to gain trust from players as well as clubs, since personal trust is highly valued in an agent by those instrumental groups. Secondly, to build a network of clubs and clients, because that is the most important selection criterion when players decide on what agent to hire.

Practitioners that have been able to build qualitative ties with big clubs and players enhance that advantage by emphasising the importance of personal trust and big networks. In rhetoric with players and clubs, established agents stress the importance of those two factors in order to appear as a competent agent. Thereby established practitioners actively contribute to the general understanding in the business that players need "big" agents to improve their careers.

Three reasons for why agents have not been collaborating or indulged in political economical professionalisation processes, yet still been able to rapidly increase their power as an occupational group, are suggested. They all relate to the power of

personal trust and network. Firstly, agents' social ability to create personal trust from players and clubs enable them to gain power without organisational trust for the trade. In fact, increased organisational trust in form of certification standards would decrease the value of the personal trust that established actors possess. Therefore established agents can benefit from a poor reputation of the trade by contrasting it to their own image. Reinventing an agent license would in this empirical context reduce the barriers to entry, because new actors would have the chance to flee away from the bad reputation of the trade by referring to the license.

Secondly, by emphasising the need for a player to have an agent with a large network in order to end up in the big clubs, established agents attract the most talented players. The prevalent understanding among players is that big agents are needed to attract attention from big clubs, which implies power for the agents. In addition, it function as a big barrier to entry because players are needed to build a network, and a network is what is needed to attract players. Traditional occupational closure processes are therefore not necessarily needed.

Thirdly, personal trust, in combination with non-transparent contract negotiations, open up for the opportunity to create information asymmetry. Different forms of information asymmetry exists, the most notable one is that agents have created an acceptance from players of a payment system where the clubs, rather than the clients, pay the agent fee. Often the players are unaware of how much the agent is paid and it conduces to the high fees agents are able to charge. Organised professionalisation of the trade would imply increased transparency, ethical examination and a maximum allowed percentage on the fees. Even though some agents might work with total transparency towards players and clubs, the occupational group would lose negotiation power and reduction of agent fees is a plausible result.

6.5. Implication for other market actors

In Uzzi's (1997) reasoning about the paradoxes of embeddedness he elaborates on the risks of having an overembedded network, solely characterised by embedded ties, as it may affect an actor's ability to react to market developments. Agents purposely attempt to form embedded ties with clubs in order to expand their network, as this is

an important selling point for attracting players, as outlined in the empirical findings. Notably, the relation is reciprocal as clubs view agents as gatekeepers in providing access to attractive players. Hence, there might be that clubs become disadvantageously convenient in relying on recruiting players, and receiving tips about potential prospects solely from agents that they have an embedded tie to. Consequently, considering the argument of Granovetter (1973) about the strength of weak ties in generating new information, it is possible to assume that clubs therefore risk to miss out on talented players outside of their network.

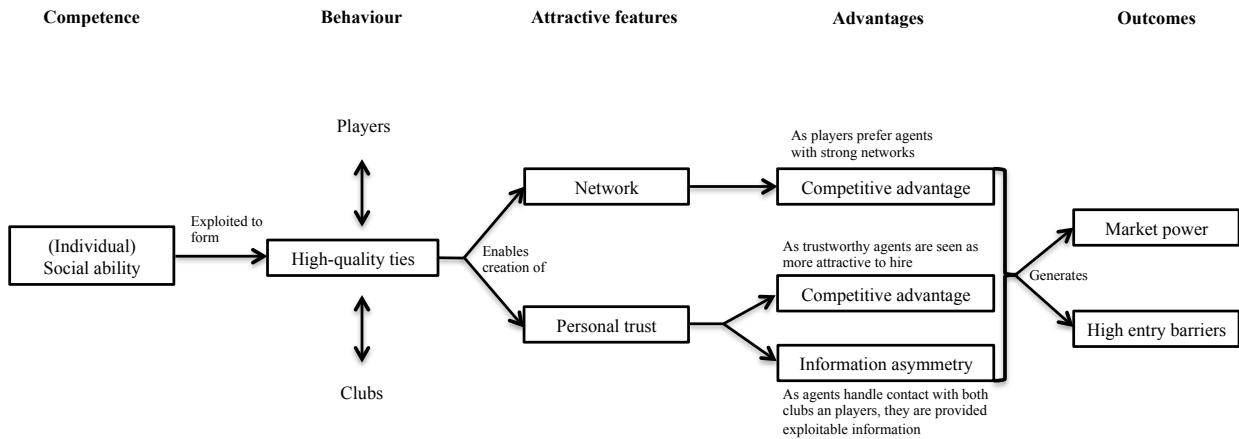
Additionally, the empirical findings indicated that clubs prefer to make transactions and receive tips from agents whom they trust and have an on-going personal relation to. As a consequence, clubs have incentives to keep agents within their network satisfied through offering high agent fees. In combination with a lack of transparency regarding size of the agent fee for other than clubs, this system may be disadvantageous for players as a larger share of the total transfer goes into the pockets of agents.

Furthermore, several interviewees informed that they believe agents contribute to a higher mobility of players between clubs, as agents receive commission on all transfers. Congruent with the heuristic character of trust, that people assume the best in interpretation of others' intentions, which generates faster decision-making (Uzzi, 1997), agents have power to affect players' willingness to change clubs due to the personal trust characterising the player-agent relationship. Hence, a more intense mobility of players gains agents, possibly at the expense of players and clubs. Specifically, the player's new club might not be optimal in order for them to advance their career and for clubs mobility affects their squad continuity and increases their costs spent on agent fees.

Figure 7 illustrates the connection between the various themes presented in the analysis. Hence, it highlights how agents use their social ability to form strong ties with players and clubs in order to build a network and personal trust with players, which are seen as attractive features when clients select between agents. Trustful relationships with clients and broad networks lead to competitive advantages, which result in market outcomes such as creation of entry barriers for new agents wanting to

enter the market and higher market power for already established agents.

Figure 7. Synthesis over analysis



7. Conclusion

In order to accentuate the main components of our research, a condensed summary of the study is here presented.

This study has the ambition to add to the understanding of the remarkable growth of the football agent trade, by focusing on how practitioners themselves act to strengthen their position. This perspective is missing in existing literature. By combining the perspectives of embeddedness and professionalisation theory, new insights on how the agents have been able to improve their power in their labour market is gained. The absence of collective initiatives by the agents distinguishes it from other professional groups, no union exists and the occupation is characterised by fierce individual competition for clients. No professionalisation attempts have been made by practitioners to control occupational closure and improve the poor reputation of the trade. Our research suggests reasons for why and explains how the agents successfully have been able to gain influence through alternative strategies.

To form strong ties with players and clubs, the intermediaries use social skills and interviews with agents illustrate that social ability is considered the most important competence. Ties to clubs are needed to construct a network because the prime selection criterion for clients is the size and quality of the agent's network. Established agents use rhetoric to further consolidate the essentiality for players to have agents with big networks in order to have successful careers. In this manner, the need for players to have an agent is fuelled and the occupational group legitimise their own existence in the market. In addition, prevailing consensus regarding the importance of big networks, amplified by established agents, serves as a barrier to entry. Aspiring agents find it almost unfeasible to form networks of clubs because players are needed to form those networks, and to win clients you need a strong network – a catch-22 arises. Thus, the highly regarded networks contribute to high barriers to entry and serves as a form of occupational closure controlled by established actors.

Furthermore, conducted interviews with players and clubs reveal personal trust as their second evaluation criterion for agents. Consequently, agents work hard to form

strong qualitative ties characterised by mutual trust. Established agents try to contrast the poor reputation of the trade to a personal image of trustworthiness and fairness, often by comparing them to smaller ‘non serious’ practitioners. In this manner established agents construct a need for large reliable actors and their position is justified. Thus, established practitioners exploit the poor reputation of the trade, as they use it to legitimise the need for big serious actors and thereby also creates a barrier to entry for new agents. Professionalisation of the trade would imply a shift away from personal trust, towards organisational trust, which could imply reduced barriers to entry and decreased power for agents. Therefore, how agents profit from personal trust further explains why other strategies than a political economical professionalisation approach are used.

In addition, agents exploit trust to create information asymmetries. In line with the concepts of embeddedness theory, a strong tie comprises the assumption of others doing the right thing although incentives toward the contrary exist. Qualitative ties with players and clubs facilitate for agents to control information in their intermediary position and in communication with the separated groups, they can share only what is beneficial for the agent. Our research indicates that agents do this in various ways, although the spread of such methods cannot be measured from this study. A prominent feature in this context is the prevailing acceptance for the current payment system, where the clubs are the ones paying the agents even though the players are considered the clients. As agents can negotiate the agent fee without disclosing the size of it to players, it makes it possible for agents to capture a larger share of what otherwise would have been allocated to the player. Creation of different forms of information asymmetry constitutes our third empirical finding of how agents gain power. In addition, it further explains why agents have not come together to professionalise their trade, since such processes normally lead to regulations, transparency and examination of ethical behaviour.

Our findings together explain why football agents have not initiated political economical professionalisation processes. The study suggests that established actors legitimise their existence in the market easier without the organisational trust and transparency that professionalisation standards imply. Furthermore, our research indicate that barriers to entry in this case actually decrease with certification, since

players and clubs currently select agents based on personal trust and their network. By consolidating the importance of those two factors, football agents have been able to gain power despite of, or rather because of, the absence of traditional professionalisation processes, as accounted for in our three main findings. This should be viewed as one added variable to explain the flourishing agent business.

8. Contributions and future research

Firstly, the empirical character of this thesis calls for clarification of the theoretical contributions of our research (8.1). Secondly, some of the limitations of the study will be acknowledged (8.2). Then the study ends with suggesting some of the possibilities for future research this study opens up for.

8.1. Theoretical contribution

Our interdisciplinary research presents new explanations for how an intermediary occupational group can accomplish growth and gain power, without methods and processes covered in professionalisation theory. Exemplified with the empirical case of football agents, we suggest that collective efforts are not always needed, or even preferred, for increasing the market power of an intermediary profession. Furthermore, by studying occupational developments through the perspective of embeddedness theory, we illustrate how concepts from that field explain established practitioners alternative strategies to increase barriers to entry. Occupational processes covered in professionalisation theory are not holistic enough to cover specific conditions of all trades and do therefore not adequately answer how certain professions grow. Thus, our study opens up for future research where embeddedness and professionalisation theory are combined in order to enhance the understanding of developments in other intermediary businesses.

8.2. Limitations

Employing an explorative approach, this study examined football agent behaviour and identified new contributing factors to why agents have gained such a powerful position. Further, the study provided suggestions to why the agent licence has not been reintroduced. However, additional research is required to verify generalisability and robustness of the findings. Firstly, the empirical insights reflect subjective perspectives of a limited amount of respondents within each stakeholder group. Logically, their experiences and expressed opinions should therefore not be seen as universal or fully capable of capturing how agent behaviour has contributed to them gaining a powerful market position. Furthermore, the generalisability of our research is limited since the football agent profession has several unique features and to

transfer the findings to other empirical contexts is not unproblematic. Additional research observing the phenomenon within other markets than football agent activity is necessary. Additionally, in order to verify theory developments, observing intermediary behaviour in other industries over a more extended time horizon is needed. To conclude, this thesis emphasises relevant aspects of agent behaviour and should be regarded as a point of departure for coming interdisciplinary studies, at the intersection of embeddedness and professionalisation theory.

8.3. Future research

This study has put forward facets of agent behaviour that might engender curiosity into various research directions. Although, attempting to understand how agent behaviour contributes to increasing their market power, expanding the sample to include additional stakeholder groups can be helpful to produce a more nuanced understanding of this effect. Incorporating international governing bodies such as FIFA and UEFA as well as agent unions (currently not present on the Swedish market) can therefore be advantageous for future studies of this specific effect. However, perhaps of more severe nature, are studies examining possible adjustments to current legislation in order to counteract malfeasance and the non-transparency characterising the agent occupation as of today. On that note, research exploring how a future licensing system might be designed, as well as studies examining potential improvements to regulate payment of agent commissions, are interesting themes.

Moreover, as this thesis has provided tentative answers to which intermediary strategies that appear effective in gaining power for football agents, future studies exploring the feasibility of unidentified strategies for other types of intermediaries would be valuable in striving for further theory development. Finally, additional interdisciplinary studies applying embeddedness and professionalisation theory is of value to enrich understanding of synergies between the two theoretical fields in the study of intermediaries.

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10. Appendices

Appendix 1: Overview of interviews

Nr.	Name	Role	Employer	Located	Interview format	Interview date
1.	Patrick Mörk	Agent	Global Soccer Management	Stockholm	Phone	06.09.2017
2.	Gustaf Grauers	Agent	Taldea Advisory Group	Stockholm	Face-to-Face	12.09.2017 (also follow-up interview)
3.	Bosse Andersson	Sport Director	Djurgårdens IF	Stockholm	Phone	26.09.2017
4.	Thomas Lagerlöf	Trainer / Sport Director	IK Sirius	Stockholm	Face-to-Face	27.09.2017
5.	Tobias Tibell	Lawyer	SvFF	Stockholm	Face-to-Face	04.10.2017
6.	Magnus Erlingmark	Secretary General	Player Union	Gothenburg	Phone	11.10.2017
7.	Carl Fhager	Agent	Global Soccer Management	Stockholm	Phone	19.10.2017
8.	Mikael Kallbäck	Agent	Neverland Management	Stockholm	Phone	09.11.2017
9.	Jesper Jansson	Sport Director	Hammarby IF	Stockholm	Face-to-Face	10.11.2017
10.	Henok Goitom	Player	AIK	Stockholm	Face-to-Face	24.11.2017
11.	Philip Andersson	Player	Akropolis IF	Stockholm	Face-to-Face	30.11.2017
12.	Dalil Benyahia	Agent	Own agency	Stockholm	Face-to-Face	13.09.2017 (also follow-up interview)
13.	Elliot Käck	Player	Djurgårdens IF	Stockholm	Face-to-Face	14.11.2017
14.	Tobias Ackerman	Club Scout	AIK	Stockholm	Phone	07.11.2017
15.	John Thornberg	Agent	Sportic	Stockholm	Phone	04.12.2017
16.	Albin Ekdal	Player	Hamburger SV	Hamburg	Phone	29.10.2017

Appendix 2: Interview guide agents

Area of focus	Example questions
Briefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Brief description of research topic▪ Short explanation of interview design, for example structure, confidentiality, suggested duration, note taking, recording approval
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Could you please explain your background?▪ Could you briefly explain your current role?▪ What are the main working tasks for a football agent?
Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ How would you describe your relations with players?▪ How would you describe your relations with clubs?▪ Do you spend more time communicating with players or with club representatives?
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Do you collaborate with other agents in any way?▪ Does established agents operate together to push for any common issues?▪ What is your opinion about the licensing system for agents that were removed?
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ How do you work to collect information about players and clubs?▪ Is there any information you do not share, either with players or clubs?▪ How do you charge for your services?
Finalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ What constitutes a good football agent?▪ Is there anything you would like to add?

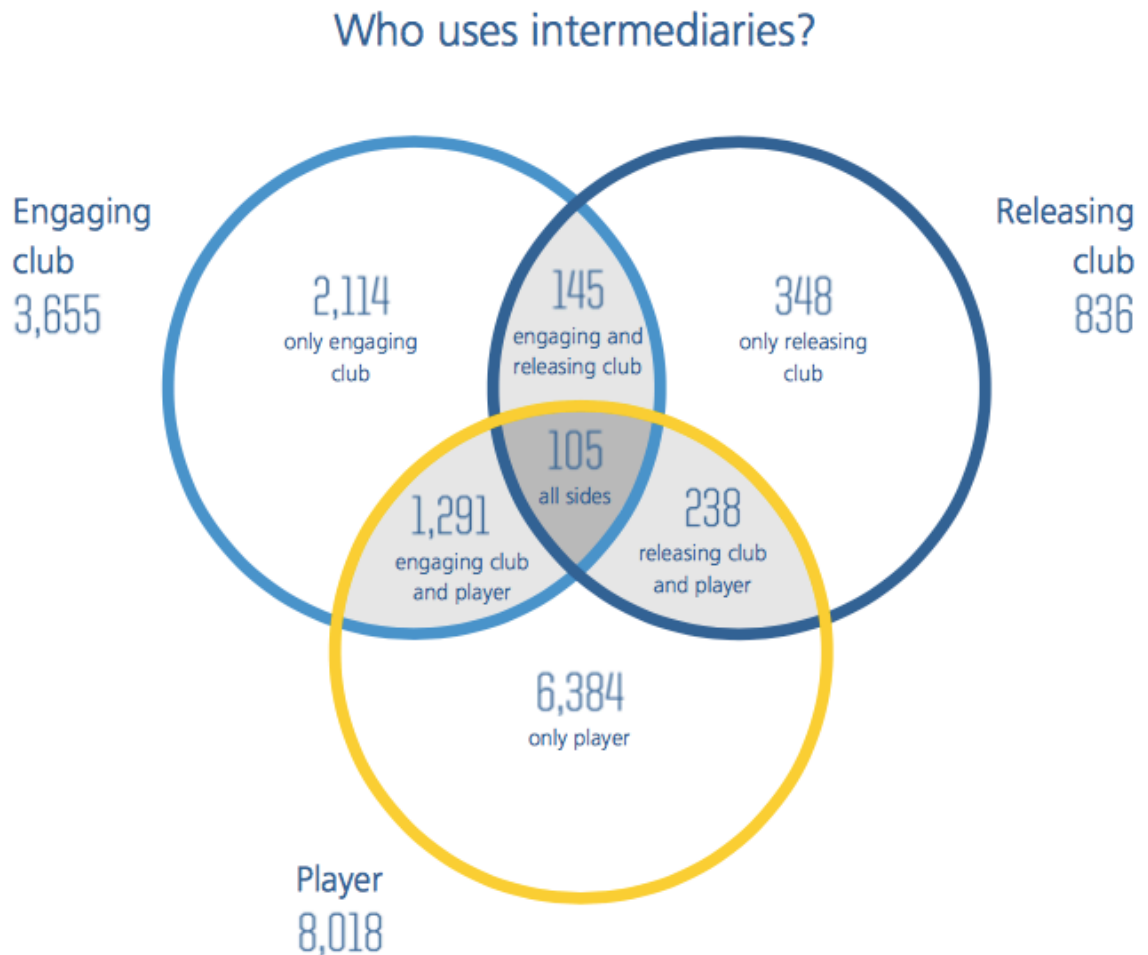
Appendix 3: Interview guide players

Area of focus	Example questions
Briefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Brief description of research topic▪ Short explanation of interview design, for example structure, confidentiality, suggested duration, note taking, recording approval
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Could you please explain your background?▪ Could you briefly explain your current situation?
Selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ What have been your main selection criteria when choosing what agent to hire?▪ How do agents pitch themselves to players?▪ Does what agent you have affect what club you end up playing for?
Relation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ How would you describe your relation with your agent?▪ How much does your agent communicate with you?▪ Can you describe those communications?
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Is there any information that your agent does not share with clubs?▪ Is there any information that your agent does not share with you?▪ How does your agent charge for his services?
Finalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ What constitutes a good football agent?▪ Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix 4: Interview guide clubs

Area of focus	Example questions
Briefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Brief description of research topic▪ Short explanation of interview design, for example structure, confidentiality, suggested duration, note taking, recording approval
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Could you please explain your background?▪ Could you briefly explain your current job?
Selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ How do you and your club work to locate and evaluate players?▪ What part do agents play in the recruitment process?▪ Does what agent a player has affect the chances of him signing for your club?
Relation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ How would you describe your relation with football agents?▪ How much do you and your club communicate with agents?▪ Are there any agents you collaborate more with than others?
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Is there any information that you give agents that they do not share with their clients?▪ Is there any information the agents do not share with you?▪ How does the agents charge for his services?
Finalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ What constitutes a good football agent?▪ Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix 5: Users of football agents



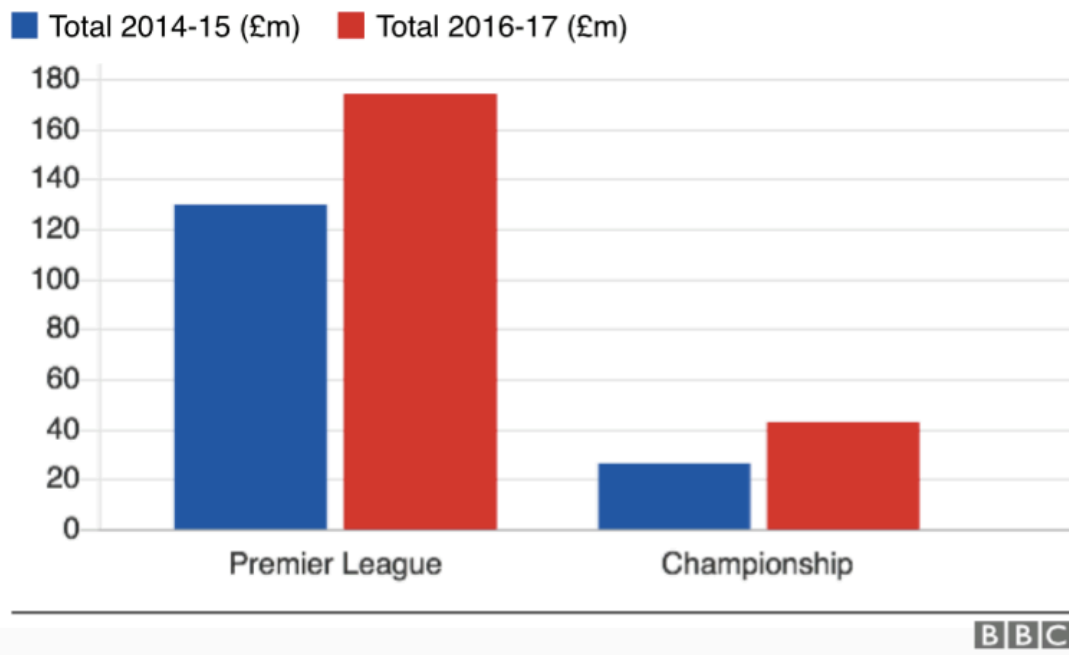
(Retrieved from FIFA TMS,

https://www.fifatms.com/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2016/11/Intermediaries-2016.pdf)

Appendix 6: Overview of agent fees in English football

Total amount paid to agents and intermediaries

By Premier League and Championship clubs



(Retrieved from BBC, <http://www.bbc.com/sport/football/39526917>)

Appendix 7: Overview of active agents in the Swedish top division

Agenterna i Allsvenskan

De största aktörerna

Nordic Sky

Per Jonsson, Anders Karlsson ("Astrio"), Svante Larsson, Mikael Dorsin, Anders Carlsson ("VSK", vd), Jonas Brorson och Robert Bärkroth (scouter), 38 klienter i 10 klubbar

Global Soccer Management (GSM)

Patrick Mörk, Nima Modyr, Blash Hosseini, Tonny Westring (scout), Carl Fhager (jurist), 34 klienter i 14 klubbar

MD Management

Martin Dahlin, 12 klienter i 6 klubbar

Taldea Advisory Group

Gustaf Grauers, 9 klienter i 4 klubbar

Total Football

Magnús Agnar Magnússon, 8 klienter i 6 klubbar

VMC Group AB, Göteborg

Vision Management & Consulting Group, Arash Bayat, Mentor Zhubi, 8 klienter i 5 klubbar

Neverland Management

Michael Kallbäck, 8 klienter i 5 klubbar

Stefan Pettersson

8 klienter i 5 klubbar

Jonas Svensson

8 klienter i 5 klubbar

John Thornberg

7 klienter i 5 klubbar

Martin Klette

7 klienter i 5 klubbar

Övriga

6 klienter HC Management (Hasan Cetinkaya)

5 klienter OML Sport&Marketing

4 klienter Brightbird Management, Essel Sports Management (Søren Lerby), Innocent Okeke, Miro Jaganjac, Sportbusiness Nordic

3 klienter AMA Sports Agency, HK Football Management, Keypass AS, Respect Sports Agency (Fredrik Risp), Roger Ljung, Wasserman Media Group

2 klienter Elite Consulting, goOn AS, Jim Solbakken, Nordic Sports Group, Talenti Sport Agency, Vlado Lemic

1 klient Advokatbyrån Vaziri, Agentbyrån Pro XI, André Schei Lindbæk, Benchmark Sports and Entertainment Pty Ltd, Big Point, Carlos Delgado, Carlizon Sport Agency, Claes Elefalk, Darren Young Sports Management, DF-Sportmanagement, Eden Sports Group, Eijkelkamp Pro Soccer, Fabio Alho, Global Football Consulting, Global Premier Management, Golden Star, Hardy M, HMFootball84, H.O.L.M., JL Sportmanagement, JPA Soccer, Lamine Touré, LionShare, Luzzsports, MAOS, Max Goldberg, MB Sports, Meissa N'Diaye, Michael Makaab Jr, Mike Kjølø, Niklas Strand, Nordic Scouting, Olafur Gardarsson, Oliver Cabrera, Onfield Management, OrsaSport, people in sport, sports-deal, PESM, Phil Radley, Prestige Sports, Soleon Sports Management, Sports Advisers Group, Sports Entertainment Group, Sports Plus Football Management, Terje Ström, Thomas Andersson, TopSpot, Transfair

(Retrieved from Dagensindustri.se, attachment in Sport & Affärer, Nr 1, 2017)