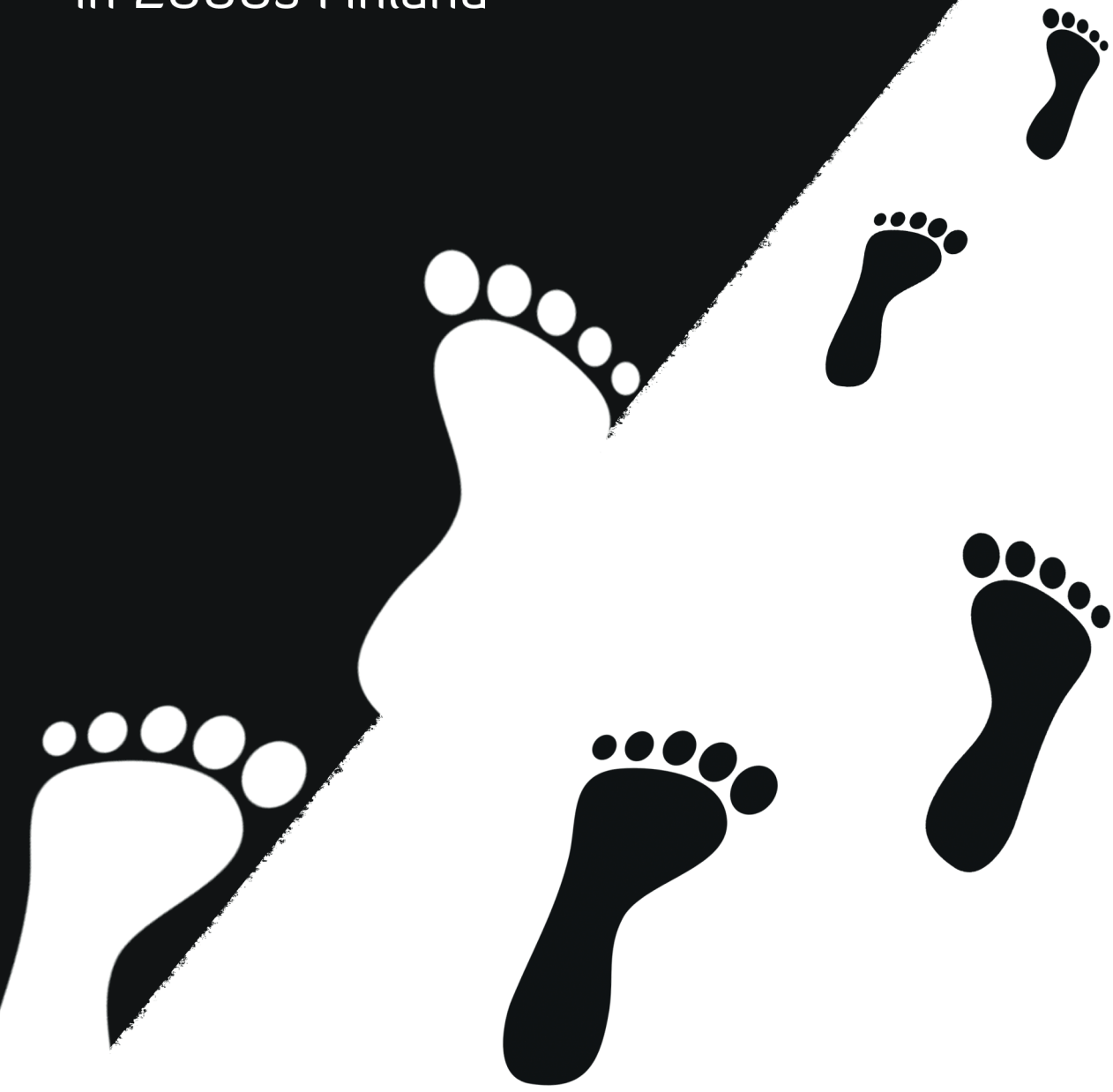
# Exceptional Life Courses

## Elite Athletes and Successful Artists in 2000s Finland



Mikko Salasuo & Mikko Piispa & Helena Huhta

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# Contents

# Preface

This publication is the completion of a substantial research project. In the three books in Finnish of the project, launched in 2012, the life courses of Finnish elite athletes and successful young artists have been comprehensively discussed. The aim has been to understand those complex life course mechanisms and processes that have led 78 athletes and 29 young artists to success. Besides the successful athletes, the researchers looked into the dropout of 18 particularly promising athletes. In addition, 20 multicultural athletes were studied to highlight the challenges arising from a multicultural background. This publication is based on the two peer-reviewed books published during this project.

Most surveyed athletes and artists had been born and raised in Finland, hence the study's perspective is predominantly domestic. Many of them had continued their careers abroad after having reached the top, yet the essential events of their life courses are located in Finland. The vast international research knowledge used along with the research data itself has, to a great extent, complemented the domestic perspective. In addition, the researchers have thoroughly reviewed international research literature on elite athlete development, leading to a unique dual view in the study, a combination of domestic and international. On the contrary, as to the artists, the researchers have mainly drawn upon domestic research knowledge. This is firstly due to a large amount of domestic research on artists and, secondly, to the fact that artists' life courses are mainly connected to domestic labour markets.

In this study, the life courses of athletes and artists are reviewed in parallel. Consequently, the reader enjoys a broad insight into the growth and development of Finnish elite athletes in the late 20th and early 21st century Finland. The same applies to young successful artists whose life phases are studied from childhood until present. This study is unique in the international context as the researchers were able to reach an exceptionally large number of the best Finnish athletes and artists of different fields. The name of the publication refers to the unusual life course choices and phases of the athletes and artists but, at the same time, the study dismantles the genius and hero myths typical to these fields of life. After all, the athletes and artists have grown up in the very same society with the rest of us, and there is nothing supernatural or mystical behind their success, quite the contrary.

The researchers Mikko Salasuo, Mikko Piispa and Helena Huhta would like to warmly thank Finland's Ministry of Education and Culture and its Division of Sport for the funding of the project, and the Finnish Youth Research Network for the inspiring work environment. Their thanks are extended to Minna Kalajoki who had the tremendous task of translating the publication into English.

# Introduction

Finland is a sparsely populated and little known country in the northeast corner of Europe. Frequent names on the lists of internationally best known Finns include Jean Sibelius, Jari Litmanen, Tove Jansson and Kimi Räikkönen – artists and athletes. Arts and sport have played an important role in building up the international image of Finland. At the same time, they have been the essential building blocks in the construction of national identity.

During the past 30 years, globalisation, information technology, the global economic system, collapse of the welfare state and the end of the Cold War, among others, have shaped the world in many ways. The role of the nation state has changed and the great national narratives do not, to the extent they did in the past, determine the self-perception of individuals anymore. Arts and sport still play an important role in the Finnish society which is very different from that of, for example, the 1930's or 1970's Finland. Many traditional concepts have been challenged and new generations interpret the world from their own perspectives. At the crossroads of past and present, we are negotiating the meanings to be given to what has been lived, experienced and seen. The resulting interpretations are a combination of the past, present and future.

An individual's life is realized in a certain historical time, place and setting. Different social networks have a significant impact on the life course of an individual. Family, relatives, friends and peers constitute 'webs of significance' (cf. Geertz 1973) by which every individual builds up a relationship to the surrounding society and its structures (Elder et al. 2004; Elder & Shanahan 2006). Every human being is an individual and a unique agent with different ambitions, aspirations and goals. An individual's internal and external transitions in life, as well as the major social, cultural and societal changes, occur in a certain, partly non-predetermined order. All of them have an impact on the direction, choices, possibilities and realization of an individual's life course. Every individual's life is unique and the life lived, the accrued capitals, experiences, values, attitudes and ambitions have an impact on both the past and the future. Thus, an individual's life course is, by nature, a cumulative process. (Giele & Elder 1998, 8–11; Elder & Giele 2009, 9–15.)

The life course paradigm (Giele & Elder 1998; Mortimer & Shanahan 2004; Elder & Giele 2009) and its interpretation framework presented above have proven to be a functional way to analyse, even model, the life of individuals; the factors that influence it, its progress and fundamental transitions, individual factors and the cumulative features of the life course (e.g. Alwin & McCammon 2004; Alwin 2004; Elder et al. 2004). In this study, the life course analysis is used to review the lives and careers of 78 Finnish elite athletes. In addition, we observed 18 young athletes who had finished their promising careers just before reaching the top (list of the athletes in appendix 1). Altogether 96

athletes representing 45 different sports were interviewed for the purposes of this study in 2012. The average age of the athletes in the research data is 25 years and 6 months.

Along with the athletes, 29 successful young artists (list of the artists in appendix 2) were interviewed. They represented various fields of art and their average age is approximately 33 years and 6 months. In arts, as in science, success is typically achieved some 10–20 years later than in sports, thus, the artists interviewed for the purposes of this study can be considered to have succeeded at a very young age (see Ericsson 1996a, 9; Simonton 1996). The entire research data includes 125 interviews, conducted by the methods of narrative life story interview (e.g. Atkinson 2002). This study offers, by analysing these life story interviews, a written perspective into the life courses of Finnish elite athletes and successful artists, all the way from their childhood homes to the top of their careers.

The key research problem of this study is derived from the interpretation framework of the life course analysis (Giele & Elder 1998; Mortimer & Shanahan 2004; Elder & Giele 2009). First of all, we try to retrace the life courses of those elite athletes and top artists who have succeeded in the late 1990's and early 2000's – precisely how and why these athletes and artists have made it to the top in their respective fields, in this particular historical time? A multidisciplinary approach is characteristic to Finnish youth research (see Hoikkala & Suurpää 2005). The interviewees represented young people of approximately the same age – generations – who share similar experiences in the society (see Karisto 2005; Häkkinen 2014).

The life courses of successful athletes and artists are often considered 'exceptional' (Bain 2005; Piispa & Huhta 2013). Life stories of exceptional individuals generally attract and interest people. This can be seen in the vast numbers of newspaper and magazine articles, books and movies on successful people. A large number of different beliefs and myths are related to, for example, elite sports. People are particularly interested in the elite athletes and in their exceptional, even supernatural skills (Lenk 1976). Cultural journalism, for its part, has in recent decades changed to the direction of personification of art (e.g. Jaakkola 2013; Holmberg 2014). Griselda Pollock (1980) writes in her classic article *Artist mythologies and media* that the life of great artists is often interpreted on the basis of their works and these works of art are seen as undisputable evidence of their mythical skills and personality.

A very different picture is drawn when studying the lives of elite athletes and successful artists, the different phases and contexts of life, and factors influencing them. This perspective pulls the superhuman or the genius down from his or her stand. This is the key idea of this publication. Examining the life courses of successful individuals in two very different walks of life opens up a very comprehensive and interesting research perspective. What are the factors behind the success of those age groups that have spent at least part of their childhood and adolescence in the final and culmination phases of the Finnish welfare state in the 1970's and 1980's (Roos 1999) but built their careers in the new, post-depression and technology-driven information society of the 1990's, in the "Nokia Wunderland" (Hoikkala & Paju 2008, 287; see also Castells 1996)?

Placing the life course in a particular time and place is the key starting point of this study. In Finland, the leap from rural and agricultural society to a post-industrial, tech-

nology and information-driven society took place in the span of a few decades (Relander 1998, 44). The urban generation born and grown up during this relatively short period of time (Häkkinen 2013, 53) has lived in a very different Finland from that of the previous generations (1971–2000). Agrarian society and its lifestyle is, above all, a story from the past to these young people. Their context of life has been very different; in this case, a thoroughly changing Finland, a country in a turning point (Hoikkala & Paju 2008; Salasuo & Hoikkala 2013; Salasuo & Suurpää 2014).

In addition to physical and technological changes in the living environment, the mental connection to the agrarian lifestyle and its intergenerational continuum have been replaced by values, attitudes and choices which are learned, read and reflected (Häkkinen 2013). The concept of changing Finland in this study is not only the background assumption impacting everyday living conditions but also the mindset of change: it's the land of individualisation, education, multiple choices, excellence and, consequently, increasing competition and pressure for success. Great national narratives have been replaced by small-scale stories, and the foreseeability of life courses of the modern generations clearly differs from that of the children of 'old Finland', and their childhood, adolescence and adulthood (e.g. Ahonen 1998). Social historian Antti Häkkinen (op. cit., 53) has studied Finnish family generations from the 18th century to the present time and concludes on the new urban generation as follows:"the consistent chain of ten generations breaks here."

This study approaches the lives of elite athletes and top artists from the perspective of social science traditions. Elite athletes and artists are seen as agents whose actions are strongly influenced by the society framework, i.e. time, place and structures. The study aims for theoretical pragmatism where theories are sufficiently modest, in order not to hide the nature of reality. Precise research questions which establish a perspective into the analytical chapters of this book, and the dynamic research approach share the same aim (Kivinen & Piiroinen 2007). The pragmatic approach doesn't only apply to the way of writing of this report but it also served as a guideline in collecting and analysing the research data. Life course analysis and athlete's career research offer ways to understand, interpret and analyse the data. They also structure the analytical chapters of this study.

The fact that the researchers come from social sciences – sociology, social history and youth research – i.e. outside the traditional sport and arts research can be regarded as a strength: a certain outside view and a 'fresh look' enable interpretations that are not much influenced by previous research in the field. This can be seen not only in the analysis but also in the collection of research data: the questions are different from those that would have been asked if the researchers had been equipped with more thorough prior knowledge – this can be seen in the interview questions as well (see appendix 3).

As for the elite athletes, the research data permits a multi-step analysis, taking into account factors relating to the growing up, development and everyday life of the athletes. Along with the general life course analysis several other analyses are made, based on more sophisticated segmentations. As the analysis progresses, the athletes are divided into three groups based on their main sports (see also Piispa 2013c): athletes representing team sports (50), traditional individual sports (35) and lifestyle sports (11). The life stories of those athletes who have "dropped out" offer a view into the choices and phases of life

that have led to finishing a young and promising career in sport. Gender approach provides information as to how men (61) and women (35) differ in their ways to reach the elite level in sport. Last but not least, we have 20 multicultural athletes in our research data. Prior to this project, there has been no research in Finland on multicultural elite athletes. (see Huhta 2013.)

Elite athleticism, talent, success and the factors explaining them have been studied at an intensifying pace at the international level in recent decades. The groundwork of this development may have been the study *Developing Talent in Young People* by Benjamin Bloom (1985a) and his research group in 1985. Also the psychologist Anders Ericsson can be seen as a pioneer in this research angle as he has published, both on his own and with his colleagues, several studies on top performance in sports, arts and science in the early 1990's (Ericsson & Smith 1991; Ericsson et al. 1993; Ericsson 1996a). These studies provide a solid research paradigm to elite sports research focusing on the socialization of athletes, career and its progress, fundamental normative transitions and their timings, as well as other factors influencing the development of an athlete.

Career research on Finnish elite athletes, based on the recent international research trends (e.g. Stambulova & Alfermann 2009; Wylleman & Reints 2010; Stambulova & Ryba 2014), has not been done before in Finland. Some reports relating to the topic (e.g. Finni et al. 2012; Kärmeniemi et al. 2012; Kärmeniemi et al. 2013; Lämsä et al. 2014; Mononen et al. 2014) can be found but they do not transmit a profile of today's elite athletes, their lives or the milestones of their careers. The searches made in the article and literature data bases indicate that the amount of academic research in elite sports decreased significantly in the early 1990's. A few accounts and reports have been published but they are usually very narrowly defined to deal with very special themes (Haarma et al. 2010, 5). The 2010 report made by the Research Institute for Olympic Sports (op. cit., 4) supports the conclusion made on the basis of data base searches:"Still, research knowledge is typically not produced from the point of view of elite sports, and the distance between research units and the units focusing on the development of sport is often big and the interaction between the researchers and the development experts may be limited." These shortcomings partly explain why the development work in the Finnish sports movement is often based on 'gut feeling' and experience whereas research knowledge is not widely utilised (e.g. Paavolainen 2011; Paavolainen et al. 2013, 35). This distance between knowledge and actors has, in Finnish elite sports, been named as the 'thin stream of knowledge' (Paavolainen et al. 2013, 8).

Previous international research was thoroughly analysed for the purposes of this study. Career research of athletes provided an outstanding tool to support the life course analysis and is the main 'reflection surface' of this study. In their 2014 review article Natalia Stambulova and Tatiana Ryba call this research approach the career research of athletes. According to them, there are three distinct waves in the career research. The first wave puts the focus on the athlete's career and on its normative transitions, on the general level. In the second wave, national factors gained more emphasis, and in the third wave the emphasis is put on the cultural and local practices of the elite athlete's career. (Stambulova & Ryba 2014.) Stambulova and Ryba (op. cit.) encourage the career

researchers of elite athletes to put more focus on cultural and local factors because by taking these special features into account the practical value of data will considerably increase. In this study, previous international career research is used as key background material and as an active discussion partner. The collected interview data and the analysis thereof is reflected and reviewed in the light of international career research, throughout the entire publication. This creates a framework that provides evidence-based knowledge on the life courses of the interviewed Finnish elite athletes and also on its relationship to the results of recent international career research.

The perspective of this study is holistic and national. A holistic approach is a fresh approach in elite sports research, a paradigm shift which is believed to reach the complex phenomenon better than before (Stambulova & Ryba 2014). This means that the research object is the athlete's entire life and career course as he or she has thought about it, told about it and described it in the interview (see also Wylleman et al. 2004; Wylleman & Lavallee 2004; Reints 2011). The new approach emphasizes the importance of social and societal knowledge as well as psychology (e.g. Stambulova & Ryba 2014). The life course approach, in particular, has established its position as part of the career research in elite sports (i.a. Jones et al. 2002; Conzelmann & Nagel 2003; Wylleman & Reints 2010; Debois et al. 2012). The holistic approach implies that elite athleticism can be studied only by studying those individuals' lives that really have reached the top. Jean Côté with his working group (2005, 15–16) notes that it is impossible to anticipate who will reach mastery and who will not. Therefore, the only way to study actual elite athletes is to study those that have reached the top. Consequently, retrospective interviews are and will be one of the key methods to gain knowledge on what it requires to reach the top and stay there. With reference to Patricia Miller and Gretchen Kerr (2002), we could add that it is important to study athletes in a broader context, as individuals and persons, not only as athletes.

One of the strengths of the holistic and culturally sensitive research approach is the placing of the athlete's career and the fundamental normative transitions related to it as part of the national culture and the sport system. The approach provides the tools to optimise that very same sport system in which an athlete's career, maturation and development take place. (Côté et al. 2007; Wylleman & Reints 2010.) The life course and the athletic maturation of the interviewed athletes have mainly taken place in Finland and in the Finnish sport system. Hence they have gone through, in one way or another, the practices (e.g. Hakkarainen et al. 2009) and the resulting normative transitions defined by the Finnish elite sport system, and its federations and clubs. Normative transitions (i.a. Wylleman et al. 2004; Côté et al. 2007; Wylleman & Reints 2010) include initiation into instructed sport activities, its development into systematic practice and goal-oriented competitive sport and, finally, reaching the elite level. The timing of these transitions varies between different national sport systems and different sports. Normative transitions in an elite athlete's life (e.g. Côté et al. 2007) are of significant importance and ordinary life course transitions (Elder & Giele 2009) often appear subject to them.

As to the artists, the research paradigm is to some extent similar to Elina Jokinen's (2010, 54–57) approach: she examines authors 'in the sociological context whilst empha-

sizing the individual's perspective, typical to humanistic artist research' (op. cit., 56–57). To Jokinen, the sociological context means that 'it is meaningful to study art as part of the different webs of interaction and not as a phenomenon which is independent of the surrounding society it'. It is relevant to add that this study heavily draws upon qualitative data and therefore differs from the so called 'artist's status' studies that are typically built on register-based data (Rensujeff 2014). Those studies and their results are naturally used as some of the knowledge bases and comparison points of this study because they provide a lot of information on the Finnish community of artists[1]. Also, the paradigm of this study shall not be confused with the so called artistic research (Hannula et al. 2003) originating mainly from humanistic fields and aesthetics.

This study is not restricted to a single social scientific theory on the art world and its composition. It can be categorized into the tradition of social scientific art research (Karttunen & Rautiainen 2014) but the most important tool for its construction and its empirical analysis comes from outside the art research; the life course analysis (Giele & Elder 1998; Kok 2007; Elder & Giele 2009). Various analytical frameworks in the field of sociology of arts would be on offer, including Howard S. Becker's (2008 [1982]) theory on arts worlds, Pierre Bourdieu's (1983; 1993; 1996) theory on the fields of art and Niklas Luhmann's (2000) systems theory. All these theories as well as many other theories on the social formation of the arts world (Danto 1964; Dickie 1974; van Maanen 2009) have their own qualities and strengths (see also Piispa 2015b) but, in this study, individual theories mainly serve as assisting tools and means for conceptualization (i.a. Kivinen & Piiroinen 2007). The study approach is empirical.

Also, Erkki Sevänen's (1998) historical-sociological model drawing upon Luhmann's systems theory offers a concrete interface: it stresses the historical development of the art system and its connection to time and place, and interprets art as one of the part systems in society. As Sevänen's (op. cit.) writing indicates, the systems theory approach puts forward, among others, the role of public authorities in the development of art and its resources. Such perspective tallies well with the life course analysis which emphasizes historicity and accumulation.[2]

Artists were not only recruited as comparison material for athletes although the possibility to compare the two groups had naturally crossed the researchers' minds and some comparison obviously is made on the pages of this book. The artists' interviews were put together as a data set of its own. One of the selection criteria was the receiving of a national or an international award or recognition. In addition, we tried to reach those artists whose works have been widely on display in recent years. Another central criterion was to reach young artists in many different fields of art.

1 According to Kaija Rensujeff (2014, 16):"There might not be another country in the world beside Finland where the working conditions, income formation and support policy of artists has been so regularly and systematically studied."

2 When not a single sociological art theory is referred to, we usually mean the same social context of the world of art (in Finland) when talking about the art world, the field of art and the art system. When we mean a certain theory, it becomes clear in the context and in the references (e.g. the field of art; Bourdieu 1993).

In the beginning of the study, the research object was not strictly defined as artists. Instead, we referred more broadly to, for instance, young people that have been successful in cultural fields. In the daily discussions and meetings of the research group we discussed whether definitions such as 'experts in cultural fields' or 'the core group of the creative economy' were too ambiguous (see Florida 2002; Metsä-Tokila 2013). We also considered the usefulness of concepts such as 'the key group in cultural production' (cf. Karttunen 2002) or 'the makers in the core fields of the cultural industry' (cf. Kainulainen 2004, 176). These may be precise by definition but, on the other hand, unnecessarily complicated.

As a result of the discussions, all the interviewed persons were defined as *artists*. This was despite that fact that, for example in the field of design, the interviewed persons typically had managerial instead of designer roles, actors see themselves often as employees rather than independent artists and authors sometimes emphasize being most of all 'ordinary workers' and not artists (see Houni 2000, 131–133). In any case, even those interviewees who didn't identify themselves primarily as artists ended up in the research data as a result of their artistic skills and achievements. Secondly, all interviewees had either graduated from an art school and/or they had been awarded a prize in their own artistic field. In addition, all were active in the art forms listed by the Arts council of Finland (see Karttunen 2004, 25; Rensujeff 2005; Mertanen 2012). And as Kaija Rensujeff (2014, 21) writes:"[…] the status granted by an institution doesn't depend on that individual's experience. It's rather the fact that there are different perceptions as to what an 'artist' entails, as a concept and as an occupation."

A lot of Finnish artist research has been done and the results have become a part of the Finnish cultural policy (of the welfare state). As to biographical research on the artists, Pia Houni (2000) has studied actor identity and Pirre Pauliina Maijala (2003) top musicians, among others. Vappu Lepistö's (1991) and Terhi Aaltonen's (2010) interview data on visual artists can also be classified as biographical material although these researchers do not locate themselves in the research traditions of biographical research or life course analysis (cf. Haavikko & Sala 1987; Jännes 1998; Jokinen 2010). Relevant observations from previous studies, pertinent to this study, include the review model for vocational development (Tuhkanen 1988, 23) and the talent model (Gagné 2004; see also Uusikylä 2012, 83–84) which could easily be placed in the broader framework of the life course analysis.

This is not a guide book on how to become an elite athlete or a successful artist, in detail or in general. Instead, this book examines how a group of young Finnish people have become elite athletes and successful artists, and been socialized into athleticism and artisthood, respectively. At the same time, we analyse what it means to be an athlete or an artist in the 21st century Finland. It is about in what kind of Finland and in what kind of societal circumstances the life courses of the elite athletes and the successful artists have been accomplished. By answering these questions we can sketch a growth story and an ethos which may otherwise be biased by long-established, persistent assumptions. The new data helps us to draw a picture of the elite athletes and the top artists of the 21st century. In order to support and enhance their careers we need to rely on present day realities instead of long gone myths.

## INTERVIEW DATA

Research data has been collected by the method of narrative life story interviews (Hoikkala 1999; Atkinson 2002). The life story interview traditionally begins with an open question to which the interviewee is expected to answer in his or her own words. As the research setting focused on how the respondents had reached the top and become top performers in their own fields, the typical opening question was:"please tell your life story as an athlete/artist". In this way, the interviewee could tell his or her life story to the extent and precision he or she found comfortable. After the first answer, as uninterrupted as possible, the interviewer asked questions on those topics that required precision or which had not been answered at the outset.

In the more detailed questions, the discussion went back to childhood and the central themes in the life story were discussed in more detail. In addition, questions were asked on those topics that were not brought up when telling the life story. By asking these more detailed questions, features of a traditional semi-structured interview were brought in. The interviewers aimed at repeating the same questions with each interviewee, to ensure comparability of data in fundamental themes (see appendices 3 and 4).

The interviewed athletes were very young, from the perspective of the life story research. They were, on average, nearly ten years younger than the interviewed artists so they lived their lives more in the present and hadn't really stopped to structure it to a coherent story (e.g. Reese et al. 2010). Some of the athletes asked the interviewer to proceed directly to the more specific questions because they felt they could not get their life story going, for some reason or another. The life lived and experienced didn't yet take shape as a clear and structured story. Being an athlete is still an ongoing phase in their lives and many had just recently reached the top level in sports. Reflecting one's own life as an elite athlete was still something new. Still, being an athlete is a strong identity (e.g. Heikkala & Vuolle 1990); as a result, many elite athletes had thought about their lives as athletes and how they became top performers in sport. This became evident in the more specific questions after the more general opening question. Still, the athletes' interviews stayed, for the most part, strictly in the themes of sport.

The artists, in turn, often need to think about their lives and the different stages of life, as they are, in one way or another, also the 'raw material' of their work. They are used to talk about themselves. In the artists' interviews we could see that they had structured their life courses precisely through their work as artists. The important turning points in life, certain points of time and events, for example, were often reflected from that particular perspective of being an artist. The interviewed artists primarily took the role of a reminiscer but when addressing abstract and general themes related to arts, instead of their own lives, they changed their role to an informant, for that moment. The main way of telling the story was, however, the self-biographic discourse. (See Merrill & West 2009.) The artists' more advanced age and accrued experiences were seen in the structure of the individual interviews in the research data: the younger interviewees were more inclined to use the present tense whereas the older ones preferred the past tense. Most elite athletes reported on their lives in the present tense.

The method of collecting and interpreting the research data is, in addition to the life story interview method, also close to the methods of oral history research. These two traditions are similar in many ways and the researchers' different academic backgrounds[3] lead to somewhat different ways of reading the data. We write about life story interviews but our ways to analyse and use the research data, and the thematic realization of the interviews would also fit into the oral history memory research approach. (Roberts 2002, 95–97; Portelli 2006.) The interview data collected by the methods of life story interviews includes information on the athletes' lives which is remembered, experienced and defined as meaningful. Maike Reimer and Britta Matthes (2007) have reviewed self-biographic memories from the perspective of the life course research and write: "They are not aimed at representing reality as accurately as possible, but at making sense of the past in the light of the present and at creating biographical meaning and identity". Remembering is always related to the ongoing situation in life. In this study, the interviews of the athletes and the artists are interpreted and analysed as insights into their individual lives and careers, produced by their life situations at the time of the interview. (I.a. Cohler & Hostetler 2004.) The interview answers describe the cultural webs of significance that the athletes know and that are of particular importance to them and in which their worlds of significance have been constructed (Geertz 1973; Giddens 1979; Giele & Elder 1998, 9).

An individual's memory is not a tape recorder which would record the course of events as they have actually taken place. This is why oral accounts never produce completely objective information but are always imperfect to some extent. This imprecision and subjectivity applies to each individual's way of seeing, understanding and structuring one's own past. (Portelli 2006.) The strength of this research data is that we can receive information as to the meaning of the events experienced by the athlete or the artist. As an example, the comprehensive childhood accounts of the data open up a unique insight into one of the key themes in the career research of athletes, the socialization into sports and the respective family practices (e.g. Carlson 1988; Burnett 2005; Wylleman et al. 2006; Appleton et al. 2011; Kraaykamp et al. 2012; Schubring & Thiel 2014). By analysing these childhood memories, we can produce fresh insights into the origins of becoming an artist or an athlete and expose some of the previously unknown socialization processes and related practices, in the Finnish context (see also Portelli 2006).

Different ways of collecting data have been used in international research on the maturation, development, socialization and career of elite athletes. The interview method has been criticized for producing imprecise information on details and only a little quantifiable information (Côté et al. 2005). These deficiencies of the interview method become evident when trying to use the athlete's memory as a source of factual and quantifiable information, such as the amount of hours of practice. (Côté et al. 2005; Reimer & Matthes 2007.) Despite methodological challenges, interview data has successfully been used in studies on the careers of elite athletes (Côté et al. 2005). The well-known name

3 Mikko Piispa and Helena Huhta are sociologists and Mikko Salasuo is an economic and social historian.

in the career research of elite athletes, Jean Côté and his research team (op. cit.) regard the interview method as the best one to study elite athletes. This research method allows us to get a hold of the life courses of those athletes that have overcome all the obstacles and actually reached the top.

## Athletes

For the purposes of this study, 96 athletes were interviewed. In the analysis, 78 of them have been classified as elite athletes and 18 as dropout athletes. The latter were promising athletes in their respective sports and age groups but, for one reason or another, finished their careers in sport. There are 61 men and 35 women in the research data and 49 men and 29 women in the group of the elite athletes. The research data includes more men than women, mainly due to the fact that the project focuses on elite sports and success. In the Finnish elite sports, especially on the international elite level, there are relatively more men than women (Lämsä 2014) and this is also reflected in the research data. In a wider context, this has to do with masculinity of elite sports and greater visibility of male athletes (e.g. Kay 2003).

According to the basic idea of the research project, we aimed at interviewing young elite athletes. Their life course is located in the changing Finnish society of the late 1990's and early 21st century. It has clearly influenced their growth and development towards an elite athlete. In the research data, the average age of the athletes was 25 years and 6 months. The youngest interviewed athlete was 15 and the oldest was 42. Some of the athletes were older, simply because in some sports the elite level is reached much later than usually in elite sports (see also Ericsson 1996b, 9). The clear majority of the interviewed athletes were younger than 30 years of age.

The athletes in the study represent 45 different sports[4]. There may not be many countries in the world where such a heterogeneous and large group of athletes could be interviewed for the purposes of one study. Among the interviewees, there are medalists and gold medalists of the Olympics, World Championships and European Championships, top professional athletes in different sports, Nordic champions, Finnish champions and several athletes representing the national teams in different sports. Listing all the achievements of the interviewed athletes would be too time-consuming and would not serve the purpose of this study.

The starting point was to cover the spectrum of the Finnish elite sports as comprehensively as possible. The aim was to recruit athletes who had reached the elite level

4 45 is a figure that requires further clarification. Many athletes were active in several sports at the elite level. Thus the most important classification criterion in our categorization was the sport where the athlete had been most successful at the time of the interview. In addition, track and field has been defined as a single sport as, for example, dividing different running distances into different sport categories would have required additional definitions. The wide range of different sports in track and field has, however, been taken into account in appendix 1 where the interviewed athletes with their (main) sports are listed.

in their respective sports or, alternatively, were very close to it. Our expectations were exceeded as we could reach, with a very few exceptions, young athletes who had reached the national or international elite level in their sports. The best athletes in team sports were more difficult to define so we consulted the national sport federations in this issue. The federations interpreted our request in somewhat different ways but we were able to reach key players of the national teams, professionals playing abroad, best players in the national leagues and the most promising young athletes in their respective sports. In lifestyle sports, the biggest challenge was to find those sports which are played in Finland at all. One of the criteria was that the sport must be organised in some way, either in a sport federation or under an umbrella organisation. Due to different recruitment channels, the final research data is a very heterogeneous sample of the Finnish elite athletes which corresponds the broad spectrum of athletes on the elite level of Finnish sports.

Soccer was chosen as a single sport in which interviewees were recruited equally among the elite athletes, the dropouts and the multicultural athletes. Consequently, soccer is overrepresented in the research data (25 interviewees). Basketball is also somewhat overrepresented which was mainly due to the possibility to reach a large number of multicultural athletes in it. The amount of soccer and basketball players naturally leads to an overrepresentation of ball game team sports; exactly half of the athletes in the study represent these sports. We try to take this into consideration as the analysis progresses and we shall emphasize that this in no way is a judgement of different sports or their order of importance.

The research data was also categorized on the basis of different sport types. This is justified as the differences are clear and the categorization facilitated the structuring of the analysis. The athletes were defined as team sport athletes (50), traditional individual sport athletes (35) and lifestyle sport athletes (11). Of the athletes defined as elite athletes, 38 represented team sports, 31 traditional individual sports and 9 lifestyle sports.

Team sport athletes include team ball game players (48) and skaters of synchronized skating (2). We are aware that there is a strong team sport aspect in some lifestyle sports – breakdance is a typical example of this. Yet in this study, they are not classified as team sports because their characteristics differ so much from 'traditional' team sports. Traditionality here refers to established sport institutions and competition systems. Definition problems arise also with some ball games, whether they are individual or team sports. In badminton, for instance, the players also play doubles. Therefore, the categorization in this study is also empirical, i.e. based on the athletes' own experiences.

Synchronized skating is clearly a team sport but it also differs greatly from other team sports of this study. Firstly, other sports are ball games – also ice hockey is categorized as a ball game despite the shape of the puck. As we will see throughout the analysis of this study, team ball game players constitute a kind of 'tribe' that moves flexibly between different team sports. Against this background, skaters in synchronized skating clearly represent a different type of team sports in the larger context of team sports. Synchronized skating, together with figure skating and artistic gymnastics, are also typically regarded as early specialization sports (e.g. Baker 2003) or as 'aesthetic sports'. There are relatively few representatives of early specialization sports (5, out of which 1 is a dropout) in

the research data of this study and therefore they are not classified as a separate group. Instead, they are analysed along with the athletes of team sports or individual sports, whatever suits their sport better. Special features of the athletes in early specialization sports are discussed in the excursion in chapter 5. These sports are also separately taken into account whenever needed.

Despite certain demarcation problems it's easy and almost intuitive to distinguish between traditional individual sports and team sports. However, their difference from lifestyle sports requires further definition. The distinction between traditionality and alternativity provides a useful differentiation tool: traditional sports include established Olympic sports or other sports with well-established competition traditions. The traditionality of these sports stems from their long history (Kanerva & Tikander 2012) and from their logic which is subordinate to competition culture and institutions of sport (Heinilä 1998, 147–165). Once again, the empirical approach, i.e. the personal experiences of the interviewed athletes, serves as an important guideline in the analysis. These experiences have been decisive in some nebulous cases.

Many of the traditional individual sports can also be defined as 'CGS sports' (Moesch et al. 2011) where results are measured in centimetres, grammes and seconds. Karin Moesch et al. (op. cit.) conclude that physical skills and capabilities are fundamental in these sports whereas technical and tactical factors are secondary. Running sports are a classic example.

Furthermore, many traditional individual sports can be categorized as HIS, high intensity sports. According to Wylleman and Reints (2010) high intensity sports require long-term and intensive training. Their competition performance is short but very demanding, both mentally and physically[5]. Wylleman's and Reint's (op. cit.) research data consists of judokas – martial arts which cannot indisputably be categorized as CGS sports typically are HIS sports. In the strict sense, approximately half of the traditional individual sports athletes in this study represented high intensity sports. In general, CGS (Moesch et al. 2011) and HIS (Wylleman & Reints 2010) definitions easily cover all traditional individual sports.

Lifestyle sports need more definition. They have also been defined as alternative sports, extreme sports and youth culture sports (Wheaton 2004; Tomlinson et al. 2005). The use of several terms indicate that definition and categorization of lifestyle sports is not easy. Robert Rinehart's (2000) definition provides a good basis: lifestyle sports are sports that either ideologically or in practice offer alternatives to mainstream sports and the values they represent. Rinehart (op. cit.) refers to 'alternative sports' and, in a certain way, alternativity is at the heart of these sports. Most of all, they provide an alternative to competition – in most of these sports one can be a recognized a legend without ever taking part in a competition. Sense of community, new experiences and simply 'doing it' are more important values than competition and the pursuit of victory.

5 "HIS are characterized by (very) high impact intensity and continuous power output with no recess during a period of 1–8 min, and require intensive training programs combining high volumes of training with sessions of high-intensity and the development of technical skills."

In this study, the concept of lifestyle sports is used instead of other options. This term is also widely used in research. In the introduction of *Understanding lifestyle sports*, edited by Belinda Wheaton (2004, 4), the editor points out that the athletes themselves use this term. This was evident also in the interviews conducted for this study, so the choice was clear. The definition 'lifestyle sport' also indicates that there's more to it than 'just sport'; it's a lifestyle. The defining elements are not only related to sports but also to social life, experiences, style and travel. Wheaton (op. cit.) defines these sports as having more to do with 'doing it' and 'participation' instead of success. Or, following Henning Eichberg (2004), lifestyle sports are the 'third' or the 'joker' in sport. They reject the hegemonic ideology of competition and performance in sport and bring drama, play and the spirit of *Gemeinschaft* onto the sport courts (Tönnies 1988 [1887]; see also Willing et al. 2016). Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning (1986) have defined sport in a classical way as a 'quest for excitement'. A group-based quest for excitement strongly defines the culture of lifestyle sports. Lifestyle sports are, by definition, much more spontaneous than traditional sports and therefore have the potential to get young people moving in novel ways (see Tomlinson et al. 2005).

As to the dropout athletes, nine sports were represented and soccer was overrepresented. This was the researchers' deliberate choice. In order to understand the mechanisms of finishing one's career in sports, the research data has to have an adequate degree of coherence, in order to be able to identify the explaining factors in the life course, and to compare them to those athletes who have reached the top. Soccer players form a micro data which facilitates comparison. That explains why there is an equal number of them among the dropouts, the multicultural athletes and there's an equal number of male and female soccer players in the research data. As to the dropouts group in general, the numbers of men and women and multicultural athletes are fairly equal. 12 of them represent team sports, 4 traditional individual sports and 2 lifestyle sports.

Reaching multicultural athletes was an important dimension in the recruitment of athletes (see Huhta 2013). There are 20 of them in the research data. Multicultural athletes mean immigrant athletes, second generation immigrant athletes, athletes whose other parent are a native Finn, and adopted athletes whose parents are native Finns. (Op. cit.) Until now, elite athleticism of this group has never been studied in Finland (see, however, Huhta 2013) even though the ethnic homogeneity of Finnish elite sports has declined quickly in recent decades. In the early 2000s, multiculturalism in the Finnish elite sports has become very common and in many sports – in soccer, for instance – multicultural athletes are well represented. Multicultural athletes are part of the entire research data but they are also discussed in a separate chapter. This group includes both elite athletes (14) and dropouts (6).

## Artists

Our aim was to reach 30 artists for interviews. We contacted 39 individuals, three of them were not available and seven didn't respond. The final research data consists of 29 artist

interviews. At the time of the interview, the youngest artist was 19 and the oldest 42. The average age was approximately 33.5 years and the median age 34 years. The artists' careers typically start much slower than those of the athletes. As Mikko Piispa (2013d, 152) wrote in his article in the first publication of this research project: "Being an artist doesn't follow your body clock because cultivating mind, thoughts and ideas takes time". The birth years of the interviewed artists were very equally distributed on the years between 1969 and 1983, with the exception of two young top artists in classical music born in 1989 and 1993.

When collecting the data, the research data and the success level of the interviewees were indirectly defined by the 'gatekeepers' of art and culture because art awards and recognitions were one of the selection criteria, among others. According to Sari Karttunen (2002, 44), this approach is an attractive, 'objective' definition tool for social scientists coming from outside the field of art research. On the other hand, it seems more neutral than it actually is.

In this study, artisthood is not only defined by register classifications or gatekeepers but also on the basis of the research data. Firstly, already when conducting the interviews, the 'artistic nature' of the research object was underlined and this conclusion became only stronger and more saturated as the analysis progressed. In addition, to support the interpretation of the research data, two social scientific approaches can be used. In Howard S. Becker's (2008 [1982] theory on the art world a work of art is the sum of uncountable social links yet each work has its unique 'originator'. With this interpretation, the interviewees represent these originators who can also be seen as artists to distinguish them from, for instance, critics and dealers of the art world. Secondly, in Pierre Bourdieu's (1996, 141–173) theory of fields, the key feature defining the art world is charismatic economy, meaning that the most important capitals in the field are symbolic, not economic. According to this theory (op. cit.), recognition achieved by hard work is seen more valuable than material success. The artists interviewed for this study almost unanimously shared these values so they can be seen as representatives of artistically oriented fields.

When defining the interviewees as artists we unavoidably and indirectly speak out as to what is art and what is not[6] – whether we want it or not. In this respect it's important to emphasize that in this study and in its origins, art is understood without any judging in any way. In this way we want to be open for, for instance, the interpretation of Dewey which emphasizes art as an experience (Dewey 1958 [1934]; van Maanen 2009). We try not to define what good art is or intentionally distinguish between 'high brow' and 'low brow' art or culture (see e.g. Shusterman 1997, 93–132). The heterogeneity of the artists interviewed to this study is one manifestation of this.

The range of the artists is very broad: there are 11 representatives of visual arts in the data. This broad group includes painters, graphic artists and sculptors. Four interviewees

6 Sari Karttunen (1988, 15) pointed out aptly already nearly 30 years ago that "it might be more appropriate to define art as something made by an Artist than to define an artist as someone who makes Art".

are comic artists. Six of the interviewees work full-time with music; three of them with classical music, two with pop music and one with game music. There are two of each of actors, authors, directors and fashion designers. Definition of the main field of art was arbitrary and to some extent irrelevant with many interviewees as many of them work in different fields at the same time. These classifications were necessary, however, in order to have representation from several fields of art even though some fields were left out altogether.

Despite their young age many of the artists in the research data are well merited and well-established in the world of arts. According to Vappu Lepistö's definition (1991, 27) they belong to the principal area of arts as they are "in different ways merited and oriented, and not only nationally but also internationally". They belong to the group that Derek Layder (1984) calls 'the elite' when referring to actors. The interviewed artists also fulfil the definition of successful artists by Helena Erkkilä and Marja Vesanen (1989, 41–45) because they are not only uncompromising in making their art but they also make a living from it.

## EXPLORING THE PHASES AND THE CHOICES OF THE LIFE COURSE

Life course research is a multidisciplinary approach that has gained in popularity in the late 1990's and early 2000s (e.g. Elder et al. 2004; Elder & Giele 2009). At present, its possibilities are used in both qualitative and quantitative research. In this study, the research data is analysed by qualitative methods derived from the tradition of the life course research. The research method is called the life course analysis (see Häkkinen et al. 2013; Piispa & Salasuo 2014; Salasuo & Piispa & Huhta 2015). In its analysis framework the vertical life history of the interviewees and the horizontal turning points – whether they relate to the interviewees own life or to the surrounding society – intersect (e.g. McLeod & Almazan 2004). The analysis framework is a tool through which the life story interviews of the athletes and the artists are interpreted, viewed and analysed. This framework has, during the course of development of the life course research method (Giele & Elder 1998; Mortimer & Shanahan 2004; Elder & Giele 2009), been recapped to five principles or axioms to trace and reconstruct the psychological, social, cultural and structural factors in an individual's life. The life story interviews were placed on the 'operating table' of the researchers and analysed with the help of the five principles of the analysis framework.

The first principle of the life course analysis is the *cumulative* nature of human life (i.a. Elder & Giele 2009) meaning that everything that has taken place also has an impact on the present and on the future. This principle is obvious in the lives of both athletes and artists and is an actual prerequisite for reaching the top. Different choices and turning points in life have opened up certain opportunities and futures while excluding others. The present has an impact on the past as a way to assess and structure one's own life course and to give meanings to earlier events (Cohler & Hostetler 2004).

The second principle in the life course analysis is the *meaning of social networks*. Family,

relatives, friends and acquaintances build up different networks in everyone's life. These networks allow us, in an intergenerational way, to meet the past with its values and attitudes, and to construct with peers a fresh relationship to the past, present and future (see Mannheim 1952 [1928]). The family is the most important arena of interaction between different generations. The capitals (Coleman 1988) and the habitus (Bourdieu 1986; Wheeler 2012) passed on intergenerationally and their impacts on being an artist or an athlete are particularly interesting from the point of view of this study. In addition, siblings, acquaintances, friends and other agents are the social factors that strongly define the life course of an elite athlete or a successful artist. At the crossroads of the biological generation of the family and the social generation of the peers, individuals socialize themselves into sport and culture in different ways, they embrace capitals and create perceptions of self and of their place in the surrounding world and construct a relationship to the society and its structures (see Berger & Luckmann 1994 [1966], 147–166). An individual is an active agent in his or her social networks. This interaction creates meanings and every individual contributes to the network and the network has an impact on every individual (see Giele & Elder 1998; Elder & Giele 2009; Häkkinen 2012; Häkkinen et al. 2013; Piispa & Salasuo 2014; Salasuo & Piispa & Huhta 2015).

According to the third principle of the life course analysis, each *individual is born to a certain historical time and place.* In this case, the time is the end of the 20th century and the beginning of a new one. The place is Finland, struggling to preserve its welfare state model when entering into the information age and the post-industrial economic system. In this rapidly changing Finland sport enthusiasts yearn for the past, for the glory days of elite sports and the feeling of pride they gave to the national identity (see Kokkonen 2008, 317–320). In the Finnish cultural policy, instead, the so called third phase dominates (Alasuutari 1996; Jokinen 2010). We can call it the age of competitive economy or, should a more precise definition be needed and taking into account the broader development in the society, the age of diversity of art or the age of market individualism (cf. Paakkunainen 2007, 51).

According to the fourth principle (i.a. Elder & Giele 2009) people actively strive to steer their lives, within the existing possibilities. This axiom, called the principle of *agency* in the field of the life course research, suggests that people intentionally plan and execute actions and practices in their lives. In this way, the socially constructed webs of significance and acquired capitals and competences, and the awareness of opportunities shape the individual's goals and targets, aspirations, desires and interests. The motive and goal of these short-term or longer term plans may well be the aspiration of the 'good life' (Häkkinen 2016) defined on the basis of one's own webs of significance and in certain historical time and location.

If the principle of agency appears powerful and special, the same applies to the fifth and last principle of the life course analysis: *transitions*. The life course consists of phases in life and transitions between them. The individual's position changes along with the transitions which has an impact on the individual but also on other people. In recent decades there has been discussion on the decreasing significance of transitions and on how they've become more asynchronized and diversified. In addition, many believe that

individual choices have gained in significance whereas the foreseeability and linearity of different choices have diminished. (Field 2010.)

On the contrary, this development cannot be seen in elite sports. In elite sports, an athlete reaches the top at approximately age 20 and the career will be finished at approximately age 30 (i.a. Ericsson 1996b, 9). As a result, normative transitions strongly define the life course of an athlete (Wylleman & Reints 2010). These steps to the top are defined by the national or sport-specific sport system and they need to be taken in a predefined order, one step in every few years. Development to an elite athlete takes place in a very short time frame hence there is no time for hesitation. The transitions have to follow one another in the order defined by the national or sport-specific 'timetable'. If not, the athlete will be late and the next step disappears – and the athlete's manuscript is cut short.

Transitions materialize only if the child, the teenager and later the young adult wants to proceed towards elite athleticism. Thus, the agency and the transitions are intertwined in an athlete's life. On one hand, an aspiring athlete striving to the top goes through normative transitions and, on the other hand, to realize these transitions the athlete's agency has to be very engaged and determined. In this way, the life courses of elite athletes differ from those of the successful artists (Piispa & Salasuo 2014). Time is short and reaching the goals of an athlete agent requires stability and certainty as well as exceptional symmetry and linearity in life. The transitions defined by the sport institution have to be passed, otherwise the elite level will not be achieved.

The analytical approach in this study is very much based on the research data. The life course analysis provided a framework in which the interviews were analysed by using the method of *grounded theory* (i.a. Glaser & Strauss 1967). In practice, this meant a coding-centred analysis where grounded theory was used as a methodological and assisting tool. This guaranteed a coherent logic in the analysis which enabled the systematic joint use of the research data and allowed the researchers to compare their observations. (see Salasuo & Piispa 2012, 39–41). The ATLAS.ti programme¸ an analytical tool for qualitative data, was used for the management of the interview data. With ATLAS.ti (from now on Atlas), Mikko Piispa conducted a 'raw coding' of data as he went through all interviews by using the same codes. In this way, uniform codes were given to passages where, for example, parents, training and motivational factors, among others, were mentioned. In addition, Mikko Piispa wrote a short summary of approximately 1000 characters on each interview. This raw coding and the summaries provided a solid basis for the interim report of this study (Piispa 2013c) and Helena Huhta used them and refined the coding further in her analysis of multicultural athletes (Huhta 2013). The raw coding and the summaries also provided a strong basis and an essential tool to the study at hand. It needs to be emphasized that without this meticulous raw coding, further management of the very extensive interview data would have been much more challenging.

As the analysis progressed Mikko Salasuo and Mikko Piispa continued their independent coding of the data with the help of the Atlas – yet not forgetting an on-going dialogue on the relevance of their observations and codings (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Now, the research data was typified in a more detailed manner. The research data was

also analysed, with the help of the Atlas, in the light of the life course axioms described earlier. By virtue of this selective coding the researchers could locate individual themes – such as family capitals and transitions – in the research data. Sometimes certain existing theoretical divisions – such as the physical activity relationship (Koski 2004) and the idea of intergenerational transmission derived from them – served as a basis for coding.

With the help of the Atlas codes, Mikko Salasuo built an in-depth Excel observation matrix on the athlete part of the data. This matrix included information on each athlete's main sport, age, age of entry into sports, number of practised sports, whether the athlete had reached the top or had discontinued his or her career, what the parents' background in sports was and so on. Every athlete was described with the help of 32 variables. It was easy to analyse the different elements of the entire data by using the filters in the matrix, for example, to study the number of practised sports of the dropout athletes. It also provided an easy method to quantify the data – one could, for instance, easily check how many elite athletes had siblings who were also active in sports.

Still, even the best of programmes do not conduct the analysis for the researchers. One important result of the Atlas coding is a very thorough and detailed analysis of the data it offers – in addition to coding the data it also provides a framework for a thorough reading of the data. Atlas and Excel are, however, mainly tools with which to manage the extensive research data better. They provide a tool to return to the research data and to its thematization also at the end of the research project when more than three years had passed from the first interviews. This is important as it is unavoidable that within this timeframe the researcher's memories on the interviews begin to be selective. With Atlas, the researcher can return to the research data in a thematic manner and, in this way, avoid returning to those interviews that he remembers best – maybe because he did them by himself. At the same time, individual interviews remain alive in the researchers' minds and their large text volumes never become an unmanageable 'bulk'.

Despite the IT tools it is sometimes useful to review the data on paper. Atlas printouts of interview extracts and themes helped us especially in those phases of re-reading when we were looking for, for example, descriptive quotes or recurring themes. Reviewing the data in a more physical form, i.e. on paper, may sometimes be more suitable especially when taking into account the restrictions of human thinking. Sometimes it was also necessary to return to the original interview recordings to better recall the moods, intonations and tones of the interviews. The aim as regards the presentation of analysis results is to generate culturally thick and theoretically conscious description on the experiences and interpretations of being an artist or an athlete (Geertz 1973).

The study has been conducted using good scientific practices and evaluated ethical aspects throughout the process. We have familiarised ourselves with Finnish guidelines and pledges to uphold these guidelines (www.tenk.fi). Ethical questions were considered extremely important in this study especially because many informants are well-known athletes and artists. All the interviewees gave their permission to publish their names in the publications of the project (see appendices 1 and 2). However, the quotes used are anonymous and, when necessary, anonymised. In cases where the interviewee could be identified from a quote used, the interviewee has been asked for permission. (For more

details on the research ethics, see Piispa & Salasuo 2014, 22, 182–185; Salasuo, Piispa & Huhta 2015, 38–39.)

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Analytical chapters follow the introductory chapter. They have been divided into four main parts. These chapters have originally been written in Finnish and published in the peer reviewed publications *Taiteilijan elämänkulku* (*The Life Course of an Artist)* (Piispa & Salasuo 2014) and *Huippu-urheilijan elämänkulku* (*The Life Course of an Elite Athlete)* (Salasuo, Piispa & Huhta 2015). They have been explicitly translated for this publication and their contents have been edited only to the extent necessary, for example, by revising the internal text references and the numbering of tables.

In the first part, we discuss the importance of social networks to the growing up of the athletes and the artists. In both groups, the significance of the family rises above everything else. The capitals acquired in childhood, from home, school and peers are the beginning of that cumulative process which leads to an individual's development to a successful athlete or artist. 'The family table' is the metaphor to that place where adults – steered by their parenting principles – pass on their values and routines to their children.

In the second part, the research data is reflected against the backdrop of that cultural and social landscape where the athletes and the artists have grown up. The idea of young people as generations whose living conditions are connected to a certain time and place plays a central role here. These circumstances have had a varying impact on the conditions of growing up and to become an athlete or an artist. Thus both athletes and artists are the 'children of their time' even though they've grown up in different ways, steered by very different orientations.

In the third part we focus on the transitions in the lives of the athletes and the artists, and on the meanings of their own agency. Again, we see that these aspects have very different meanings in the life courses of the artists and the athletes. As to the athletes, agency and transitions are intertwined and the construction of the institutional structures of sport has a significant meaning. The artists' growth is more uncontrolled and easygoing although the role of, for instance, education is important and the 'hard facts' of professional life have to be faced sooner or later.

In the fourth part we look into the micro data sets within the elite athlete interviews: the dropouts and the multicultural athletes. We notice that the decision to finish one's career in sports must be understood as part of the entire life course. It is not only a question whether things are done 'right' or 'wrong' in sports – although this also matters. In any case, being an elite athlete is a very delicate equation and its symmetry is constantly under threat. The analysis of the interviews of the multicultural athletes brings up certain challenges and opportunities of that particular group, including racism.

The summary chapter comes last. It draws together the different notions of this study and compares the observations that resulted from the analysis. Lastly, we discuss what we have learned during the research process and provide direction for future research endeavours.

# I Family and social networks

# 1 Sport and exercise in the athletes' childhood

In the research literature on family life (i.a. Cheal 2002, 12; Morgan 2011a, 9–11; Morgan 2011b), the concept of family practice refers to those repeating and distinctive daily routines, patterns, habits and activities that define a certain group of people as a family and distinguish it from other families. Family practices (Morgan 2011b) include physical activities as well as values, attitudes, knowledge and thoughts about life (see Häkkinen et al. 2013; Jokinen 2014). It's an on-going process, shaped by the actions of family members, and where the children socialize themselves and build their identities. In the family practices, knowledge, skills and traditions are passed on, from one generation to another. These are negotiated between the different generations which generates continuity, interruptions and reshaping (Bengtson et al. 2002, 134–154; Bertaux & Thompson 2007, 1). In the Finnish social science research, the term *family capital* (i.a. Häkkinen et al. 2013; Piispa & Salasuo 2014) has been used for the same mechanism. In the context of international family research, this term is often connected to quantitative research with variables such as economic status, education level and other quantifiable variables (e.g. Marjoribanks 1998). In this publication, both family practices and family capital are used meaning not only the micro level, qualitative practices of socialization but also the linked life courses of a family generation (see Moen & Hernandez 2009).

Family[7] is still important, if not the most important institution, where children learn thinking patterns, values, attitudes and practices. Some academics suggest that the significance of intangible capital passed on from parents to children has diminished in recent decades as daycare, school, youth work, after school activities and other educational institutions and agents have a stronger presence in the everyday life of children and youth. Still, the importance of the family in the growing up and development of children and youth is still indisputable. Language, names, nationality, interests, social roles, housing practices and, for example, religion are transmitted from parents to their children. Also values, the model of good life, aspirations, fears, ideologies, behavioural models and many other capitals necessary in life are learned as part of the family practices. (Bertaux & Thompson 2007.) The construction, development and shaping of the child's habitus – i.e. the child's appearance, thinking patterns and behavioural models learned in childhood as well as other capitals of an individual – is also part of this intergenerational interaction which is strongly related to the family's way of life and lifestyle (Bourdieu 1990, 53; Swartz 2002).

7 Instead of the traditional nuclear family, family is here seen as the social network based on kinship or on living together, including at least two consecutive biological generations (cf. Bertaux & Thompson 2007, 2).

Juha Heikkala and Pauli Vuolle (1990, 91) note that the essential question in the life career research on athletes is how the socialization into the institutions and practices of sport takes place. They view socialization primarily as a linguistic process, a 'language game' in which individuals adopt a certain view of the world (op. cit., 92). In the philosophically-oriented research they do not delve empirically and in a more detailed way into those everyday practices where socialization into sport takes place. However, Heikkala and Vuolle (op. cit.) are right in saying that, in order to become an athlete, an individual has to socialize himself into the institutions of sport such as the traditions of training and competition. In this socialization process, the individual's family plays an essential role (e.g. Côté 1999; Wylleman et al. 2000; Wylleman & Lavallee 2004; Horn & Horn 2007; see also Birchwood et al. 2008; Partridge et al. 2008).

Sociologist David Swartz (2002) summarises the intergenerational transmission of the athletic habitus by stating that children of sporty families are more likely to become athletes than children of musicians. In other words, in those families where sport is strongly present, the children absorb, from the environment they are growing up in, various sport-related elements to their habitus (see Wheeler 2012). These elements are shaped as the child grows up and the sport and exercise-related capitals are present, in the individual's habitus, in his or her past, present and future. (E.g. Bloom 1985b; Csíkszentmihályi et al. 1993; Gould 2002; Swartz 2002.)

In previous studies, family members have been regarded as, for example, *significant others* (Côté et al. 2003; Côté & Fraser-Thomas 2007; Fraser-Thomas et al. 2008) from the perspective of an athlete's growth process. The concept refers to George Herbert Mead's socialization theory that Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1994 [1966], 147–206) discuss in their book *The Social Construction of Reality*. An individual is born in a certain reality, place and historical time into which he is socialized, with the support of other individuals who are close and important to him. Parents, siblings, friends and acquaintances are significant others whose definitions of situations become reality to that individual. This is the way in which values, habits and patterns, i.e. the social nature of reality, are transmitted. (Berger & Luckmann 1994 [1966], 148–150.) In the context of sport and exercise, significant others pass on to the children their own beliefs as to whether sport and exercise are a meaningful part of human life, or whether sport is important (see MacDonald et al. 2011).

Sport-related capitals are not only important in the athletes' lives in their childhood. They often remain important well into their careers in sport and the time after that (i.a. Wylleman & Lavallee 2004). The results of a study made in the Netherlands (Kraaykamp et al. 2012), on the basis of an extensive quantitative data, suggest that the intergenerationally transmitted physical activity relationship is strong and often lasts a lifetime. Also a large number of Finnish surveys support the idea that the family's sport and exercise-related practices have an impact on their children's behaviour. Children who have played sports together with their parents are known to be more physically active at a later age. This is also related to the social inequality of sport and exercise: the parents' average income level is reflected in the quality and quantity of their children's activities. In Finland, for instance, the children of middle class families are typically more physically active than the children

of lower income level families. (E.g. Huurre et al. 2003; Myllyniemi & Berg 2013, 75; Kay 2000; Collins & Buller 2003; Dubrow & Adams 2012.)

In the following subchapters we examine the development and transmission of the physical activity relationship in childhood of the interviewed athletes. Firstly, we delve into the significance of the family in general and then in more detail with those 51 athletes that had acquired a strong, intergenerational physical activity relationship from their parents. We examine both the active and the silent practices with which this relationship has been passed on. After that we focus on the practical support parents provide to the childhood activities of their future athletes. Families with a strong physical activity relationship remain in the centre of the analysis but we also cover those families where this relationship is not so strong. After that we analyse the meaning of siblings to the development of the physical activity relationship. Lastly, we take a look at those athletes who have not obtained any strong sport and exercise capitals from their family members but have acquired and developed those with the support of 'significant others'.

## FAMILY TABLE AND SPORT RELATIONSHIP

In this chapter we analyse the significance of family members to the sport and exercise in childhood and to the socialization into sports of all 96 interviewed athletes – including the 18 dropouts. The focus lies on the first ten years of age[8]. During this time, most interviewees had adopted a sporty lifestyle as something taken almost for granted. Parents, and for many athletes also older siblings, had played an important transmitting role. As Sharon Wheeler (2012) notes, children adopt, by way of their families, entire micro level sport cultures or systems which seem to be able to construct routines and practices of significance giving, important for their future sports careers.

Dropout athletes are analysed along with the elite athletes because they had also been socialized strongly into sports in the first place. They then finished goal-oriented practice of sports before reaching the top. As to the meaning of the family and the early childhood years, their stories share many similarities with the stories of the elite athletes. Also Michael Wall and Jean Côté (2007) who have studied successful and dropout ice hockey players have come to the same conclusion. They conclude that both groups had entered into sports in a 'versatile and playful way' and no important differences were seen before the early teen years. Divergences to this conclusion are separately brought up in the text (see also chapter 5). The family backgrounds of multicultural athletes were somewhat different but their life stories also had many similarities with the life stories of native Finnish athletes. This conclusion is more thoroughly analysed in chapter 9.

8 I.a. Jean Côté (1999) distinguishes three essential learning phases in the childhood and youth of elite athletes: *sampling years*, *specialising years* and *investment years*. During these phases, the role of parents changes from carer to an instructor, supporter and, finally, an encourager. In this chapter on early years, the role of parents is emphasized. In the subsequent life phases, the role of parents diminishes and changes its nature.

In the analysis, the idea of the family dinner table as a metaphoric scene of the socialization process is used (Häkkinen et al. 2013). At the family table, parental values, attitudes, knowledge, habits and practices are transmitted to children. However, children do not embrace them as given but personalise them with the help of, for example, their peers and the reality surrounding them. In other words, they negotiate on their values and habits at the table and, at the same time, construct their own identity and their individual view of the world. (Häkkinen et al. 2013). The same applies to, for instance, artist families where cultural capitals are present and negotiated in the everyday life and with the help of them, the children develop their perception of the social reality as part of the family interaction (see chapter 2). The significance of one of the fundamental axioms in the life course analysis, the intergenerational transmission of capitals (see Coleman 1988), is clearly visible in the lives of many athletes. The family table is a very functional metaphor describing the process in which parents and children construct both their personal and their shared worlds of meanings.

According to Pasi Koski (2004, 191) the physical activity relationship is a system of meanings embraced by an individual through which he or she is attached to and gives meanings to the social world (Unruh 1979) of sport and exercise. Koski (2004, 191) divides this relationship into four ideal types: strangers, tourists, regulars and insiders. *A stranger* is not familiar with the social world of sport and exercise. Strangers may have a suspicious attitude to the whole field of sports but, on occasion, they might be involved in some activities of this field in the role of a spectator, for example. *Tourists* are interested in the social world of sport and exercise but the deeper meanings in it remain superficial to them. Tourists may be engaged in recreational sports but the social content of, for example, occasional morning runs, is not something they are particularly interested in. *Regulars* have a more permanent adherence to the social world of sport and exercise. Their physical activity relationship is an essential part of their lives, they are committed to sport and interested in its deeper meanings. The cultural meanings of sport deepen with time and intensity. Regulars may be actively engaged in a single sport but often without competitive ambitions. They follow sports in the media and participate in sport events. *Insiders* are, by definition, the insiders of sport and exercise. Elite athletes are the core of this group as their social environments and identities are mainly constructed inside the social world of sports. Insiders include those individuals who are deeply involved in the social world of sport and exercise, and that world has an important impact on their views of the world. Sport and exercise are very important to insiders. To some of them, they are the most important context and spectrum through which meanings to the surrounding reality are given. (Op. cit.)

In this study, the physical activity relationship defined by Pasi Koski (2004) is complemented by the concept of *intergenerational sport relationship*. The concept applies to those athletes who have at least one parent whose physical activity relationship has been or still is that of Koski's insider (2004, 191). In these families, either one of the parents or both of them have been elite or competitive athletes themselves, they may have participated, in different roles, in the civic action in the field of sport and exercise, and elite sports have been or still are part of their social environment and identity. The intergenerational sport

relationship is the interviewed athletes' experience on how actively the physical activity relationship of one or both parents has been present in the daily familiar interaction. The intergenerational sport relationship refers to the negotiating process between parents and children, at the family table, and not as in Koski's (2004) concept to the relationship between an individual and the social world of sport and exercise.

Based on the interviews, the intergenerational sport relationship appears to be divided into two distinctive transmission and negotiating modes. The *active transmission* of the sport relationship implies a strong presence of sport in the daily family life, the parents' continuous interest towards sport and the careful maintenance of their own physical activity relationship. Children are often actively introduced and guided into the world of sport and exercise. The *passive transmission* of the sport relationship refers to one of the parents or both of them having an insider relationship to the social world of sport and exercise but this has not been actively transmitted to children. It is more about transmitting the identity of an athlete and the valuations and examples related to it. These are transmitted in more passive ways, via 'silent' discussions. Different ways of passing on the intergenerational sport relationship are not mutually exclusive. Particularly in those families where this relationship has been actively transmitted, many mechanisms of passive transmission have also been in action. On the other hand, in those families where passive transmission has been dominant, parents have not actively guided their children into sport or taken any active role, such as that of a coach, in their children's activities. Hence the intergenerational sport relationships constitute a layer where, if parents so wish, active transmission modes can be added 'on top of' the passive modes of transmission.

The information on the sport participation of the parents and siblings of the elite athletes, provided by the research data, is indirect because the athletes' family members were not interviewed for the purposes of this study. However, from the analytical perspective, it's not important whether the athlete remembers the previous sport success, the correct league level or the exact number of medals of his or her parents exactly right. The individual experience of the interviewed athlete on the meaning of sport and exercise in his or her family is much more important and, in particular, the impact of this on his or her own life course. The same applies to those elite athletes who told that their families only had a minor impact on their sport relationship. Also in their lives, the athlete's life course is constructed through experiences and meanings given to them, not through the 'actual' historical events. (See Portelli 2006.) Therefore, the previous sport participations of the parents, of which the interviewee was not aware of or forgot to tell, are not relevant to the experienced and meaningful life course (Yow 2005, 17–22).

In the research data of this study, the sport relationship had been transmitted in an intergenerational way from the parents to the interviewees in 51 cases. In 33 cases of these, it had been primarily transmitted through the active participation of the parents themselves. These parents were typically former competitive or elite athletes who later actively participated in the sport activities of their children by, for example, coaching them. In 18 homes, the parents' sport relationship had been transmitted in more passive ways. Also these parents were former competitive or elite athletes but their strong sport

relationship was mainly transmitted by way of example, attitudes and values rather than by active participation and direct guidance. In families of active transmission, the sport relationship had also been transmitted by a number of passive ways.

55 interviewees had siblings who had been or still are active competitive or elite athletes at least on the junior level. 45 athletes concluded that their sibling had had a significant impact on their own careers in sports. This impact was less important among ten athletes. Parents' strong sport relationship and siblings' athleticism clearly correlate: in as many as 35 athletes' families at least one of the parents and at least one of the siblings had a strong sport relationship. Correspondingly, in 20 families the athleticism of siblings compensated for the weaker sport relationship of the parents. Sixteen of these athletes reported that the impact of their sibling had been particularly important. That sibling was often older than the interviewee.

The parents didn't have a strong sport relationship in 45 homes. According to Koski's (2004) definition, these parents were not insiders in sport. However, they were often interested in sports in other ways, in recreational sport or in spectator sport. Most parents of the interviewed athletes had at least Koski's (op. cit.) regular physical activity relationship. Also those parents who were closer to tourists or strangers were, almost without exception, very supportive to their children's sport careers in many ways. As said, in 20 families of these, at least one other child was active in competitive sports, and in many cases the siblings were important examples and socializers into sport. The remaining 25 athletes grew into the social world of sport and built their athletic identities mainly outside their families and, on average, somewhat later than others.

Table 1. The athletes' intergenerational sport relationship (ISR) by the sport participation of their siblings.

| | ISR | No ISR | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sibling participates in sport | 35 | 20 | **55** |
| Sibling does not participate in sport | 16 | 25 | **41** |
| Total | 51 | 45 | **96** |

Table 1 clarifies the figures presented above and the importance of different family members. We can see that in approximately three families out of four there have been other athletes as well. As noted earlier, also in the families of those 25 athletes who were the only athletes in their families, the parents generally had a very positive and supportive attitude to sport and exercise even though their own physical activity relationship was, at best, regular. This can be seen in the interviews as financial and psychological support and in transporting children to training. (See Côté 1999; Rønbeck & Vikander 2010a & b.)

To most interviewees, the family had been the most important factor of socialization into sport and exercise (Bertaux & Thompson 2007, 1; Kay 2009; Rønbeck & Vikander 2010a; Wheeler 2012). Family practices, passed on by parents and siblings,

have been the starting point of that cumulative process – when expectations, appreciations and behavioural models have been integrated in the habitus – that has finally led to goal-oriented sports. To a significant part of the interviewees, sports and elite sports have seemed as possible, even as a desirable model of good life, often already from early childhood onwards. (See also Koski 2004; Birchwood et al. 2008; Howe 1990; 1996; Baker et al. 2003; Spaaij & Anderson 2010.)

## INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF THE SPORT RELATIONSHIP

51 of the interviewed athletes had inherited their sport relationship from their parents in an intergenerational way. In most cases (33), the parents played an active role whereas in some cases (18) this transmission was more passive. In this subchapter, these two ways of transmitting the sport relationship are discussed in parallel but as the analysis progresses, they are also analysed separately and their special features exposed.

The following quote is a typical illustration of a strong sport relationship family. It links together the sport participation of the parents, the transmission of the sport relationship to children and the parents' encouraging and permissive attitude towards the spontaneous sport activities of their children. A brother with whom the athlete has played sports is mentioned and the importance of nearby sports facilities is emphasized as well. All the members of this family are clearly insiders in the world of sport and exercise and their sport relationship is transmitted in both active and passive ways. Being physically active is passed on as something taken almost for granted:

> We've always lived in a row house, there was a shopping centre nearby and some sport fields. It was a peaceful neighbourhood with a lot of families. It was perfect in many ways, the first apartment was good for us until it got a bit too small. I only remember that it was a good neighbourhood, we were always out playing. My parents were so relaxed about it, they let us play around and when it was time to go home they picked us up from somewhere.
>
> My parents were into ball games. My dad was coaching and my mum playing. My mum was even in the first ever national team of that sport. They took me to play when I was five or six, to the local junior team. And that's how it began, I made a lot of new friends. I immediately liked it, I played and then at some point I started to play ice hockey too. We were really sporty, we were always out playing, at least in summer every day. After school we did our homework and then we went out playing with friends, or just the two of us [with my brother], and spent maybe five or six hours a day out playing.

Many athletes remember how, in their childhood, their parents' sport activities were their early touches to the social world of sport and exercise. The contents of these memories range from sporadic, flash-like moments to sequences of shared experiences that lasted for years. These memories are positive and experiential in nature. Sport and exercise are natural, shared activities of the family; they are established family practice and family capital. One of the world champions in team sports remembers his parents' sport activities as follows:

> INTERVIEWER: By the way, did your parents have any background in sports?
> ATHLETE: Well, my dad played ice hockey and my mum played [another sport].
> I: Did he play on the national level? I mean, has your dad played in the league or something?
> A: Yes, he played somewhere, I mean back then he played in [the name of the team], I don't even remember anymore. But he played for a long time.
> I: Did he play when you were little, do you remember him going to training or matches or somewhere?
> A: Yes, sure, and I remember that we went with him, if my mum had something and we couldn't stay with her, then my brother and I went with him. I remember those sweets we always got, and we had a really good time watching his training.

The tone of voice heard in this interview recording reveals even clearer than this written extract that following the parents' sport activities has been a meaningful and important element in the respondent's childhood. The memories associated to the typically bleak and bare environment of an ice hockey hall are, in this case, very positive and nostalgic. Later in the interview, the athlete tells that the smell of ice hockey gear still remind him of that happy moment when his father came home from his training in the evening. In this way, the memory is strongly anchored to the everyday family practices not only as a physical event but also as a psychological and emotional experience. Later in life, his own training in that very same ice hockey hall, with so many positive memories attached to it felt as a very natural, familiar and comfortable thing to do. Also his mother's sport was closely connected to the athlete's childhood. This sport became a way of life and an important recreational sport to the athlete himself and to his sister. The sport relationship of both parents was passed on to their children mainly in a silent way, by way of example and by the sporty atmosphere at the family table, not by actively guiding the children into sport. (See also Sloane 1985; Stevenson 1990.)

Different sports as part of family life provide a basis for one's own career and identity in sports (e.g. Swartz 2002; Jacobs 2007). These kinds of stories are common throughout the research data. The next quote illustrates well a phase of life course of a female ball game player where sport is an essential part of everyday family practices. The statement "I was always there watching" is a powerful, experiential memory referring to repetition, frequency and normality – i.e. exactly those factors and mechanisms which transmit the immaterial and material capital in the family practices (Bertaux & Thompson 2007, 1).

> My mum played Finnish baseball and rinkball and they [parents] also played together, tennis and something else. And I was always there watching.

The psychologist Michael Howe (1996) has written about the birth of talent and its understanding. He reminds us that an individual's life is a continuum where repeating everyday events accumulate to habits and routines which strongly influence further stages in life (see also Giele & Elder 1998). According to Howe (1996), the mapping of habits and routines from the childhood onwards is important if we wish to understand the contents and origins of talent. As the quotes above demonstrate, physically active parents activate their children to participate in sports. At the same time, sport provides a schedule to everyday life, as to what to watch on TV (see Such 2013), for

instance, and as an essential part of family practices in many other ways as well.

Many athletes reached the top in that sport that their parents had played either competitively or recreationally. In the following extract an elite ball game player explains how this ball game played a very important role in his family already before he was born:

> I had two big brothers, both of them played. [With the other one] I played nearly every day, first we played, and then we fought a little and played again. My family's attitude was positive as my dad was my coach all my youth. [...] My dad has played too, ever since he was little. Although he needed to persuade his parents a bit more as they wanted him to become a musician.

The extract's last sentence draws attention, that the athlete's father was not encouraged in sport at his childhood home. Later in the interview it becomes evident that he even had to play behind his parents' back. This was clearly not repeated in the family of the respondent as his father was also his coach. One repeating element in the interviews was that one of the parents or both of them were active as coaches or in other roles in the sports club. Many parents had been active as team leaders or caretakers and some of them were professionals in the field of sport and exercise. These connections are naturally present in the everyday life of the family and further strengthen the child's adherence to the social world of sports, and emphasize the parent's role as an active transmitter of the sport relationship. In the following quote we can read how the parents transmit their own expertise and knowledge in sport directly to their children. An international-level elite athlete in ice sports remembers his childhood when he, guided by his father, became familiar with the sports culture and the athletes of a particular sport, although he later reached the elite level in a different sport:

> My dad has always been sporty, he played table tennis and coached that, too. I remember when I was little and my dad coached. I was not even in school at that time, his team members were a bit older, end of primary or beginning of secondary, and I used to hang around with them.

The intergenerational transmission of sport and exercise in family practices extends to relatives as well. Many interviewed athletes described the sport activities of their uncles and aunts and the importance of their example. In addition to the immediate family, close relatives form that network through which different capitals are transmitted from one generation to another (Bedford 2001, 318–319). The meaning of relatives or extended family in recalling sport and exercise activities in one's childhood and adolescence is strengthened by the fact that a solid network of relatives is psychologically a very strong institution of socialization (Neven 2002). In an athletically oriented network of relatives a career in elite sports is appreciated, the meanings of the social world in sports are deeply understood and a career in sports is supported. In this way, a certain growth environment and social family networks generate, from early on, that social and psychological capital which is needed in elite sports (e.g. Baker & Horton 2004; Xu et al. 2006; Wang 2010; Kraaykamp et al. 2012). Within the analysis framework of this study we could conclude that the sport relationship of the extended family is usually transmitted via

silent mechanisms as appreciation of sport and the family culture. An elite ball game player recalls the meaning of his family and the extended family to his childhood sport and exercise activities and their active role, how he "[...] was made to play sports":

> As to my background, my parents have been active in sports. Especially my dad's brothers and my dad too, and I was made to play the ball and ice hockey and try various other sports when I was little. Maybe it's also in our genes.

In this quote, the athlete refers to the athleticism of his family being possibly transmitted "in our genes". We can discuss whether it has been transmitted in the genes or, rather, in the habits and practices which are transmitted intergenerationally in an extended family. According to a common belief in the early 20th century, elite athletes and other talented individuals were thought to have received a certain programmation in their genes that explained their success (cf. Howe 1996, 260; see also Bale 2002; Väliverronen 2007, 13–17). Finns generally believed that being athletic was typical to our ethnic origin. This discourse on 'athletic genes' has, to some extent, sustained on its own but it's not to be interpreted literally in the athletes' interviews. It is to be interpreted as a reference to a solid sport relationship extending over several generations in the family (Koski 2004, 191). Being physically active is rather a way of life and an intergenerational tradition, instead of a genetic feature[9]. This kind of intergenerational transmission – in this example a very active one – is evident also in the following quote where a soccer player describes her father's enthusiasm in introducing his new family member to the world of sports as soon as possible:

> Sport has always been an important part of my life. My dad has told me that a day after I was born, he signed me in to a track and field club. My dad and grandad have been top track and field athletes so it was just natural that my brother and I were taken there, too. Before I even remember anything on my childhood there are all those pictures where we are doing long jump in a sandbox or something. So sport has always been a big part of my life.

In the research data, there are some recollections on how competitiveness has been present in the family practices from very early on. This was seen both as a resource and a burden. To some people, the impacts of early competitiveness may be positive and supportive in the context of elite sports but, on the other hand, research generally suggests that too much competition can be detrimental to the development of a child's self-image and personality, and even result in aggressiveness, stress and a number of other behavioural disorders (e.g. Scanlan et al. 2005; Coakley 2006; Wall & Côté 2007; Branta 2010; Choi

9 In some interviews, by genetic heritage the athletes meant inherited, physical features, for example, the "fast cells" or tallness favourable in some sports. The research data of this study can naturally not prove the impact of genetic factors although they certainly have one. Two interesting features are worth bringing up: first of all, late bloomers in sport often emphasized the impact of genetic heritage (see chapter 5) and also some multicultural athletes thought that they had profited from their genetic heritage in their respective sports (see chapter 9).

et al. 2014). These effects may rather be an obstacle to a potential career in sports than a factor advancing it as competitive pressure coming too early from outside combined with hard training very often result in dropping out (e.g. Wall & Côté 2007; Choi et al. 2014; see also chapter 8). Signs of parental pressure were hardly seen in the research data of this study except with a few dropout athletes. However, many athletes reported on a sense and an ethos of competition at home, strongly promoted by parents. An elite level ball game player describes the competitive atmosphere of her childhood as follows:

> I remember how I hated those long summer breaks from school with nothing to do. I just wanted to play, no matter what. I often asked my parents to play ball with me, or card games, and I always wanted to have a competition. Whatever we played, whether it was a board game, or a ball game, there was always some competition involved. The result was all important. I'm happy that now… or at least I think so, that I can lose. That if we're playing some games in the midsummer party just for fun, I don't mind loosing. But it took a while, to learn how to lose. And it was tough.

In the quotation above, competitiveness has had some positive implications but the negative consequences of too much competition are clearly visible. The feeling of loosing has not been easy, quite the opposite: "it was tough." The compulsion to win, learned in childhood, is not restricted to the athlete's sport activities only but extends to other fields of everyday life as well. This quotation refers to board games whereas other athletes in their interviews mentioned, among others, the P.E. lessons at school which were often considered "boring" because the other children "couldn't do anything". Such even manic competitiveness had followed many athletes well into adulthood and often they couldn't determine where it had originally developed – a logic conclusion could be that most likely not only in the family but also in the social world of sport where competition is an essential part of the sports culture. However, differences between athletes exist, and to most athletes, sport and exercise in childhood was mainly defined as a playful activity. Competitiveness entered the picture only later, when own sport had been discovered. (See also Moesch et al. 2011.) In this respect, sport is not different from other fields of life where children and youth build their individual identities through trial and error.

All in all, the research data illustrates how all-encompassingly the sport activities and other sport-related interests of the athletes' parents have socialized them into a certain lifestyle and influenced the meanings they give to different things. Children build their identities in the social interaction of the family, they learn and begin to give meanings and adopt models for a good life (see also Jokinen 2013). The description of a national team ball game player brings the metaphor of the family table, as the central arena for intergenerational interaction, literally into life:

> I: Were your parents sporty?
> A: Well, my dad was, mum maybe not so much but my dad has played soccer all his life. [And] my both brothers and then my sister, too, so we were talking about sports a lot.
> I: At home?
> A: At home we always talked about sport at the dinner table and so on.

## SPORT AND EXERCISE IN THE FAMILY'S PARENTING PRACTICES

In this subchapter, we expand the analysis to those athletes who had not inherited an intergenerational sport relationship. In those families where this relationship was strong, sport and exercise were an integral element of the children's upbringing but also in other families, they were generally considered good and important. Consequently, sport and exercise were an important part of parenting practices in most families. This was reflected in concrete actions as well as in psychological and material support to children's activities (see also Koski 2004).

In most families of the interviewed athletes, the parents actively played sports with their children and created the everyday conditions for building the sport relationship. They have provided opportunities to try different sports, encouraged their children in sport and allowed them to play sports and games in familiar surroundings. In addition, they have taken their children to sport events and in many ways contributed to their children's socialization into a physically active lifestyle. In the life courses of the interviewed athletes, these 'sporty' parenting practices have been strongly present (see also Woolger & Power 1993; Kay 2009). A multiple world champion in an individual sport recalls the following:

> Especially my dad has always been crazy about cross-country skiing. Then my sisters started competing in skiing and of course I was taken along. We were often out hiking and sport has always been a natural part of our everyday family life ever since I was little. We were definitely not taken to school by car, or anywhere really… we've always been physically active and it's been a lot of fun, always. Somehow I've grown into it and it's been perfectly normal that every day we did something sporty.

This quotation clearly illustrates how the family has been physically active in many ways and how the children have been encouraged – sport has been "a natural part of our everyday life". This athlete had tried many sports, including cross-country skiing and artistic gymnastics like her sisters, before discovering her main sport. She emphasizes two dimensions of sport: the family enjoyed it and it was part of their everyday life. At a very early age, the signs of the foundation of the so called vocational ethos (Piispa & Salasuo 2014, 78–87) could be seen (see also the summary chapter).

In most families of the interviewed athletes, the parents supported their children's activities financially. It's not only about club membership fees, about buying equipment or transporting to the training. Instead, it's more about a lifestyle where material and immaterial capital is invested in the children's activities and enabling them is considered important (e.g. Kay 2000). The following quote of a winter sports athlete illustrates how sport has strongly defined the social order of the family. Parents' support to sport can be seen in prioritizing sport and never questioning it.

> My dad is a PE teacher in upper secondary school and very active in sport, even more when he was younger. He wasn't successful in any important competitions but he's still doing a lot, including spectator sports, and that has clearly influenced me. My mum is also interested in sport but never had any career in it. Maybe she's not so talented but she's interested, always tries her best and always

> gives me her full support. [And] if I ever wanted to go abroad to train they never told me to focus on school instead or that we didn't have money, they've always given me all the support I needed in sport. It's been very important in all this.

Parental support and encouragement in sport has often meant that the parents have taken their children to instructed sport activities. From the parental point of view, it seems not to be about 'raising an athlete' but rather about good parenting practices and parental awareness. Parents believe that sport and exercise, or playing in general, provide a good platform for growth for children. Another aspect is, whether they feel that they are deliberately raising athletes of their young children. Jaana Poikolainen (2002) writes about the awareness of child rearing as an intergenerational practice. Parents use the parenting models of their own childhood as a basis and reshape them usually on the basis of discussions with other people (op. cit., 115–116). The awareness of child rearing manifests itself as particular child rearing actions and activities. Parents try to offer their children opportunities that, on the basis of their actual knowledge and understanding, are relevant and important for their children's growth and development (see op. cit., 11–12). The interviews of this study demonstrate that many parents value the social worlds of sport and exercise as essential elements in the goals and methods of good upbringing. In many families this means that children are introduced early to instructed activities in sport clubs. Yet at this stage this is not seen as the starting point of the 'athlete's path' but merely a valued leisure activity.

Table 2. Age of entry into instructed sport activities of the interviewed athletes

| Age | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nr | 1 | 6 | 13 | 28 | 19 | 14 | 3 | 12 |

As we can see in table 2, 48 athletes – every second in the research data – started instructed activities at ages 3–6 for the first time. Parents of 34 of them had a strong sport relationship and ten other athletes reported that the role of other family members, i.e. parents or siblings, was important in entry into instructed activities. Only four athletes said that their main impulse to start instructed activities came from outside the family, from friends or from the proximity of sport facilities. In other words, the importance of family is evident also in the entry into instructed activities and these activities in early childhood appear as part of the family practices.

Another half (48) of the interviewed athletes started instructed activities at ages 7–15. Only 17 of them had parents with a strong sport relationship. The difference is significant taking into account that 9 out of these 17 had started at age 7. In other words, the stronger the parents' sport relationship, the earlier they have taken their children to instructed activities. In reverse, we could conclude that instructed activities have not been an element of parenting practices in the families of weaker sport relationship the

same way they have in families where this relationship is stronger. Entry into instructed activities is analysed more carefully in chapter 5, as part of the athlete's transitions.

To sum up, sport and exercise activities have been considered very important and worth supporting in the families of the interviewed athletes. The next quote illustrates this: the family's father has been actively involved, brother has provided an example and mother has contributed by being the household caretaker:

> A: We're an ordinary middle-class family, mum, dad and my brother who's ten years older than me. A sporty family, sort of.
> I: What do you mean by sporty?
> A: My brother tried all the sports before me, this is how it started, I guess. I wanted to do everything what he did.
> I: Did you do it together, as a family?
> A: My dad was really involved, he even coached me, until I was 20 or something… He's still coaching. [...] Dad was really involved and my mum was more in the background [...] she took care of the dirty business; laundry, cooking and so on. It's at least as important as what my dad did, he was always with me, travelled for competitions and everything.

This quotation is an important example of the nature of family practices. Mothers often do the laundry and cooking in families where children play sports. Parents and siblings provide support, stimulus, example and encouragement – both practical and mental. This creates a sport relationship that gives the child a feeling of continuity, stability and familiarity. At the same time, practical investments in sport communicate to the child that sport is part of the normal, good life. (See also Morgan 2011a, 5–7.)

The strong sport relationship of parents or the support and encouragement they offer do not guarantee the way to the top. However, to many athletes interviewed for the purposes of this study, it has been an important socialization channel and a safe haven to construct a sporty self-image. The study by Jessica Fraser-Thomas et al. (2008) suggests that if parents focus too much on sport it may become a decisive reason to stop it. The relationship between parents and children is a complex psycho-social entity where putting sport before the child's other needs may result in bad results. Elite athletes are not made at family tables or in backyard games but by means of these, and in a balanced environment, a child can develop such physical, mental and social capitals that are favourable from the perspective of elite sports. Childhood is only the beginning of that cumulative process which contributes to some of the athletes reaching the top.

## SIBLINGS AS SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

55 athletes in the research data had at least one athlete sibling. 45 of them reported that their sporty sibling(s) had had a significant impact on their childhood sport activities, on their development to an athlete and on their career in sport. 37 of these reported that it was their older sibling who was particularly important to their sport relationship, three of them said it was their twin sibling and five of them said it was their younger sibling.

In addition, ten athletes reported that their physically active siblings had had some impact on their sport activities – three of them said that the older sibling was particularly important whereas seven mentioned the younger sibling. The remaining 41 athletes were either only children or their siblings were not, according to the athlete, important from the perspective of sport and exercise.

On the whole, approximately every second interviewed athlete reported that at least one of their siblings has been important from the perspective of their sport activities and sport career. It is important to note that more often that important sibling was the older one. In some families, the athlete was one of many sporty children who formed, through joint play and competition, a solid 'sport gang' – of these groups of several siblings only that sibling who was the most important, according to the athlete, has been included in the calculations above.

Those athletes who mentioned the importance of their siblings, often reported in a colourful way on the sporty games, competitions and pick-up or backyard games between siblings. The meaning of siblings was important in all sports. The following quotes broadly illustrate the various meanings that sporty siblings may have. Two men and two women representing four different sports, two of them ball games and two of them individual sports, report on the importance of their siblings:

(1)
I've got two older brothers and a lot of other boys around me too… so very often we played ice hockey or soccer. Our school was half of kilometre away from us and in the evenings we got together to play on ice or on the soccer pitch, or anything really. Or then we just went cycling. We were just hanging around, often without any particular plans, the sporty environment just provided us all we needed. Everybody liked to do something sporty, that's how we got into it.

(2)
I: So you have always competed against one another or actually played sports together, so did you ever have any mutual competition between you two?
A: Oh yes! This has also pushed us forward that we've always competed against each other, who's in better shape and so on. Also in negative ways, we've been watching what the other one eats, if one of us had an extra potato on the plate, the other one couldn't take more and so on, all the time.

(3)
I: So you started when you were around five?
A: Yes, around five. My brothers took me along to play and that was it.

(4)
I: So do you have any siblings, at least one brother?
A: My sister is five years older than me and my brother only a year younger. So we've been hanging around a lot together, as he's only a year younger.
I: And he played a lot of sports too?
A: Oh yes.
I: Has there been a lot of competition between you two?
A: We've fought a lot. It was good, I always had somebody to play with. If I started tossing a ball at home, my brother was always there to play with me.

Along with parents, siblings are important negotiating partners at the family table (Häkkinen et al. 2013). Their views, values and attitudes contribute to the family practices and they offer different examples, knowledge and practices from their parents, especially to their younger brothers and sisters. Siblings are, together with parents, the most important persons in childhood and their contribution is important in the construction of the social reality of childhood. Positive attitudes towards sport and exercise are passed on by parents but they are negotiated and realized together with siblings. Last but not least, siblings are natural partners for sport and play.

The relevance of siblings in the lives of elite athletes has repeatedly been recognised in international studies (e.g. Seltzer 1989; Gould et al. 2002; Sulloway & Zweigenhaft 2010). They suggest that those siblings that have been physically active and engaged in competitive or elite sports have had a special importance in the growth process of an elite athlete. Norwegian researchers Nils Rønbeck and Nils Vikander (2011a) write in their study of cross-country skiers that 2 out of 3 Norwegian and American competitive skiers have siblings who do either cross-country skiing or another sport.

Daniel Gould and his colleagues (2002) list some of the essential qualities of an elite athlete which are developed in the sibling interaction from the early childhood onwards. For these qualities to develop, they need to be nurtured in the trusting and caring environment between siblings – as a natural part of the family's everyday activities. Direct feedback and criticism on performance is a natural part of the siblings' play, games, competition and sport. Learning to cope with these, often considered negative, elements is seen as an important capital that later supports an individual's personal growth towards elite athleticism. Siblings offer a lot; not only techniques and ways of athletic performance are learned from them but the interaction between siblings also transmits, through everyday learning (see Nyyssölä 2002, 17–18), many types of physical and mental capitals needed to construct a sport relationship – and a sporty or even athletic habitus (Wheeler 2012) – as well as resources and means to understand the social worlds of sport (e.g. Breivik & Gilberg 1999; Gould et al. 2002).

Playing and games between siblings are typically deliberate play (Côté 1999; Côté et al. 2007). It is motivating and enjoyable. Most of all, it has been observed to influence in many ways on the psychological skills later in life, on the 'intelligence in playing games' and the 'understanding of playing games' (e.g. Berry & Abernethy 2003). All types of backyard and street games, ice hockey without skates, spontaneous skiing or running competitions between children imitate the real sports. By playing them, children develop their motoric skills, physical condition, understanding of rules and cognitive skills, among others. Deliberate play simulates sports. The precondition for deliberate play is the children's own desire, enjoyment, interest and flexibility – parents can generally provide the framework for it, by helping to put together a basketball hoop or letting their children put a small soccer goal in the garden. Deliberate play has to be distinguished from deliberate practice, as both a mental and a physical process, action and learning. Secondly, the competition between siblings should not get too serious (see also Fraser-Thomas et al. 2008). In the following quote is an elite athlete remembers deliberate play in her childhood as follows:

> When I was young my dad made a one kilometre cross-country skiing track on our field where my big sister and I could ski. We played different games, the other one started 10 seconds ahead and the other one tried to catch her on that one kilometre track, and then we changed. That was quite tough, really, but because it was just a game between us we didn't really think about it; that we were actually skiing quite hard.

Gender and age differences naturally define the everyday exercise practices, deliberate play and games. Same sex siblings with a small age gap are likely to play more together (see Seltzer 1989). Gender differences are seen in, for example, female athletes of which only a few had discovered sports 'on their own', without the example of parents or siblings. This observation may be a reflection of sport being, to a certain degree, a masculine field (e.g. Tiihonen 2002) which may be difficult to approach for girls, without the sport capital or sport habitus obtained from parents or siblings at the family table (see also Berg 2005; Berg 2010).

Many of the respondents considered playing, exercising and sports with siblings as self-evident and, therefore, it was not usually spontaneously brought up in the interviews, without a separate question. When asked, the athletes did describe their siblings as being especially important and meaningful in many ways, as significant others for their sporty lifestyles and habitus (see also Van Yperen 2009). The following is a very typical extract of an elite athlete interview. The importance of siblings in one's life course is emphasized only when specifically asked:

> I: What about your brothers or sisters, do they play any sports?
> A: Well, yes, in fact I've got three brothers and they're all very sporty. The one who's three years older than me still skateboards and plays floorball. Quite sporty. And whenever we can, we play "sneaker ice hockey", just for fun, my brothers and I. It's good fun and I think that I've got a lot from my older brothers. I've always just followed them and maybe that's why I got so interested in sports myself.

In this young athlete's life, playful games with his brothers still continue in the form of 'sneaker ice hockey' – a typical pick-up game in Finland when ice hockey is played without skates. The interviewee has grown up in a family with three sporty brothers. As long as he could remember, the family's everyday life was characterized by various sporty practices and activities. Siblings have played an important role in raising him and socializing him into a lifestyle where sport and exercise are natural ways of having fun and playing games. In the following extract, also cousins are involved in playful, sporty activities.

> A: We always did something sporty. Backyard games or whatever.
> I: Do you have siblings?
> A: Yes, an older brother.
> I: What's the age gap between you two?
> A: Two years.
> I: Well then you got somebody to play with.

A: Yes, and then my cousins lived next door. Even though we lived in the countryside.
I: So you played with them too?
A: Yes.

Sten Eriksson researched Swedish elite athletes in team sports (2001) and concluded that the younger or the youngest sibling was often the one who reached the top (see Rønbeck & Vikander 2010a). Also Frank Sulloway and Richard Zweigenhaft (2010) shared the same conclusion when studying the siblings' birth order and its impact on baseball success. The importance of birth order to success is repeated also in other international studies (e.g. Côté 1999; Breivik & Gilberg 1999; Davis & Mayer 2008). This is explained by personality traits, the impact of family dynamics on sociability and willingness to take risks which are related to the competition for parental attention (Sulloway & Zweigenhaft 2010). Younger siblings compare themselves to the older ones and set similar targets to themselves and try, for example, to beat big brothers and sisters in sporty games. According to Sulloway (1996), younger siblings want to receive recognition on their actions from the significant others and therefore try to identify themselves to the older siblings' roles, activities and actions (see also Davis & Mayer 2008).

As stated earlier, the importance and example of older siblings was emphasized many times also in the research data of this study. There were no significant differences between different sports and all athletes, whether in team sports, individual sports or lifestyle sports, reported on the importance of their siblings. The importance of siblings seems to be related to sportiness in general, not to a specific sport or sport culture. The following quote, where the athlete "simply followed" his older brother and his friends, illustrates this clearly. Without example, he wouldn't necessarily have gone that long distance.

The court was there, maybe four kilometres from us. I ended up there because of my big brother. He started on his own, with a couple of friends, went there before me, and then I simply followed. I was maybe ten when I went with him. Often children go with parents but, in my case, I went with my brother.

A similar story was heard in many other interviews in different forms. The interviewees 'just needed to follow' their older siblings who offered not only a role model but also a fascinating view into the world of older kids. If the younger sibling was taken along, he or she got a new set of friends and always somebody to play with and to win. As the sibling is always an important contender it's also natural that the younger sibling played that little bit harder already at the tender age.

A: I've always been very competitive, ever since I was little. I don't believe I'd been happy with just doing it for fun [laughs]. I wanted to do competitions and win, or I got bored. Especially as a child I was very bad at loosing, I think I even hit my sister with a ski pole every once in a while [laughs]. Even though she was bigger… of course she wanted to win but it wasn't easy.
I: Well, competition between sisters may get quite…
A: Well yes, of course. She's less than two years [older than me] so sometimes we were competing

> in the same league. At some point I started to be better than she which was very tough for her, of course [laughs]. I think it's good to be the little sister, you always need to try that little bit harder.

This quotation crystallizes the idea of why younger siblings are more often those who actually become elite athletes: the younger one always needs to "try that little bit harder". As the older sister did better for years, the younger one always had a target, somebody to overtake.

## SELF-ACCOMPLISHED SPORT RELATIONSHIP

In the entire research data, 25 athletes did not inherit a strong sport relationship from their parents in an inter-generational way, or had a sporty sibling as a contender. Hence they were the only athletes in their families. The physical activity relationships of their parents and siblings were defined as regular, tourist or – with a few of them – even stranger. The life courses of these 25 athletes differ from those who had family members with a stronger physical activity relationship. Childhood memories related to sport and exercise are not similarly connected to the sportiness of the family but rather to their own personal initiative. The following quote illustrates this situation:

> We never played any sports together, well we went ice fishing and berry-picking and maybe cross-country skiing on a frozen lake but it was more like hiking and just doing something together. When I got into sports it was really my own thing, at least I don't remember that I had been somehow nurtured or encouraged or driven to that direction. It was more about my friends; they were a bit older and into track and field. We didn't really talk about it at home and I'd say it was more like an announcement; that the neighbourhood kids go the nearby sports court, I'll go with them, ok? That's how I remember it that I simply said that this is what I want to do.

The athlete behind this quote comes from a small municipality. Her socialization into sports has taken place outside the family setting. The meaning of friends is important along with her own initiative and determination. The importance of a nearby sports court in also underlined in the extract although she later discovered her main sport outside the track and field. Her family table was not void of exercise altogether as, for example, hiking and occasional skiing trips were common. However, sport as such stepped in at the family table only through the child's sport activities.

The team sports athlete of the following quote had a similar situation. The family table was void of sports and the sport he heard of in school was something totally new to him. As he was looking for new friends and activities after moving to a new place, the sport relationship started to develop partly accidentally, partly through peer-to-peer example.

> When I was seven we moved [to that part of town] and I changed school in year 2. And then I heard about [that sport] in the after-school club where all the other kids in my class played it, and I wanted to be part of that, too [...]. I just heard them asking each other, I still remember that situation, if they were going to that [sport] club? And I was like, what club? Then I asked my mum to find out, and then my granny took me there.

In the following quote, a world-class elite athlete in a combat sport tells about his childhood. He was "never pushed to anything", including sports. However, his family supported his activities, he was always given everything "I wanted and needed". His own desire and "what I liked" was important.

> I: What's your family background?
> A: My parents were not into sports. I was never pushed to do anything. I've always done what I wanted and gone wherever I wanted to. [...] They never took me to any sports. It's my own desire that's been important. My parents were just ordinary workers. I could go wherever I wanted to and try different sports, and maybe that's been important, that I've tried different sports. Then it's easier to change as I did when I changed to my main sport at seventeen.
> I: Did your parents always support you if you needed some sport equipment or something?
> A: Yes. I always got what I wanted and needed. But I was never really encouraged, never told to try some sport. No pushing, sport has always been something coming from myself. And we never played any sport together with my parents.

His childhood has been, as in many small places in Finland, characterized by physical activities and trials of different sports. The positive attitude of the local community to sport and exercise has been important as well. In the beginning of the interview, the athlete mentioned the local former Olympic medalist whose tradition he feels he is carrying on. In addition, he feels that his sport is nationally important, for historical reasons. The athlete's values and attitudes are strongly connected to national, regional and local traditions and they are very far away from the logic of global sport entertainment[10]. (See also Salasuo & Ojajärvi 2013.) An urban counterpart to this athlete is a lifestyle sport veteran who has won several medals in world-class tournaments. In the urban environment, many sports were on offer and the athlete tried several sports before embarking on his main sport.

> I've always been physically active, always done a lot of different sports. Not too seriously, though… At four I started skiing and tried tennis, too. Then in primary I started playing basketball and took up tennis again. At some point I dropped basketball and played tennis somehow semi-seriously. Maybe until I was 15. Then I dropped tennis at around 18 and started this sport where I succeeded then.

In this quote, the athlete reports on having tried many different sports but not necessarily due to family encouragement. The physical activity relationship of his family corresponds to Koski's (2004) defined tourist's relationship. This elite athlete clearly is a child of the Finnish welfare generation and the sport and exercise culture it represents (Zacheus 2008,

10 Already in the first half of the 20th century, playing and competition between boys was appreciated by adults. It was regarded as good physical preparation for agricultural work. In addition, the national sport heroes of that time contributed to a national ethos favourable to sports. Right after independence, sport and exercise of young men were regarded as important from the perspective of national defence (Salasuo & Ojajärvi 2013). The traces of this mentality are still seen in present-day Finland.

160–161). The growing number of sport facilities in Finnish cities offered the middle class good opportunities to actively try and play different sports.

The age of discovering the main sport is the common nominator of these two athletes coming from very different backgrounds. Both of them discovered their main sport in their late teens. The sport relationship of both of them progressed slowly from early childhood on. However, socialization into sport was spontaneous and both of them dived into the world of meanings of elite sports in their late teens. In these two cases the difference between urban and rural backgrounds can be seen in the choice of sports: the first athlete emphasizes the meaning of local and national whereas the second is attached to a new, global youth culture sport. In Finland, a sparsely populated country with long distances, the growth stories of urban and rural athletes are, unavoidably, very different.

Throughout the research data, many athletes emphasized the meaning of a good quality and nearby sport facilities to their childhood sport and play activities (see also Suomi et al. 2012). To those interviewees whose other family members were not physically active, the role of these facilities was crucial. An athlete with a rural background explains how free-to-use sport facilities, i.e. a sport court and a skiing track, provided a natural basis for childhood sport activities:

> The place where we lived played a major role. Before I had even started any sport, the facilities were always there, the sports court and the skiing tracks in winter. We often went skiing just for fun, with the other kids around, our neighbours. We went straight from us onto the frozen lake and up the hills. Sometimes I went to school on skis.

The quotes above are from athletes who have discovered sport and exercise at a very young age not because they had inherited an inter-generational sport activity relationship from their parents but because they had own initiative and determination. Thanks to the environment they grew up in and the friends they grew up with, sport gradually became their main leisure pursuit. Still, there are some ten athletes in the research data whose childhood sport descriptions and memories remain very thin or random. They might have played some sporty games as children but, for some reason or another, these were not mentioned in the interviews and therefore did not become part of the interviewees' sport and exercise-related life stories (see also Roos 1987, 35).

The things that are not told and the reasons for that are often important, too (Roos 1987, 20). In some cases, it may well be that other major changes in childhood overpowered sporty activities and games. Moving from one place to another, from abroad to Finland or parents' divorce are big and consequential changes in childhood which were identified in the interviews and which determine the life course more than sport and exercise. In some cases, due to parents and siblings not being physically active, own plays and games have not resulted in shared memories even though the athlete would have had them. In the spirit of oral history research (Portelli 2006), we could conclude that sport did not become experimentally important due to lack of significant others in these situations or due to scarcity or occasionality of events.

In addition, there are a few athletes in the research data who didn't report on any sport and exercise experiences in their childhood simply because they didn't have them – they started to play sports in their teen years. This will be expanded on in the chapter 5.

# 2 Social capital and the social networks of artists

Throughout his or her life, a human being is part of numerous social networks. Immediate and extended family are important in childhood, the importance of peers increases with age and in adulthood the number of social networks mushrooms to several dimensions. Social capital is generated and developed in human relationships (Coleman 1988) and its key feature is trust (Ilmonen 2000). Social capital is present in peoples' lives in different ways, from birth to death. It's a personal resource that greatly influences the individual's life course.

This chapter takes us to the analysis of the research data: we delve into the social relationships and networks in the lives of the interviewed young artists, especially from the perspective of growing up to an artist. First of all, we examine the importance of family and the capitals obtained at home. Secondly, we explore the other important relationships for the socialization process in childhood and adolescence, and other essential networks in the professional life later. As for social capital, we focus on information sharing in the social relationships and social networks (Coleman 1988; Pulkkinen 2003). Information sharing is understood as a socialization and negotiation process through which artists obtain resources for the creation and building up of their own artistic capital.

The mainstream idea in the analysis is the one of a cumulative life course, i.e. that accrued and accumulated life experiences always have an impact on the following turns in the life course. This idea characterizes also this study, hence, the importance of social relationships and networks is not exhausted in the analysis of this chapter but rather provides a basis for the analytical themes in the chapters 4, 6 & 7.

## TRANSMISSION OF FAMILY CAPITALS

We often talk about artistic families. Family is the institution where members of a biological generation meet and share their worlds of experiences, and where various capitals are transmitted from one generation to another. The family dinner table is a suitable metaphor for a place of social interaction where parents, children and grandparents share their values, attitudes, knowledge and ideas of life (Häkkinen et al. 2013). At the family table, the family members negotiate, build identities and views of the world, and socialize themselves into various capitals and resources. The idea of this age-old mechanism is to guarantee the preservation of those skills, knowledge and traditions in the immediate and extended family. The passing on of these different capitals, practices, values and attitudes as such, from one generation to another, is not automatic. Along with continuity,

disconnections and modifications occur which have an impact on the intergenerational patrimony of the subsequent generations. (Op. cit.) The intergenerational interaction has a significant impact on the psychological and cognitive development of the children, on their personality, beliefs and sociability (Riley 1998).

The artist interviews open the door to those intergenerational capitals that the artists themselves consider relevant for their lives and careers. Capitals are transferred from parents to children, both consciously and unconsciously. In this way, the parents' comprehensive awareness of child-rearing (Hirsjärvi 1980, 18-19; Hirsjärvi & Huttunen 1991, 42–43) can be seen to be passed on to the child, and to constitute an awareness of opportunities later in life. Parents' attitudes to professional life and future opportunities seem to be transferred to children, too (Uhlenberg & Mueller 2004). Along with the child-rearing awareness we could also refer to parents' child-rearing orientation or parenting context. Here they refer to the family's art orientation, that artistic capital which is present at the family table through the parents. Assumingly, a child is socialized into the parents' art orientation in the same way as into other orientations in life.

Several studies (e.g. Tuhkanen 1988, 72–81; Vihma-Purovaara 2000, 151–152; Maijala 2003, 77–82; Hirvonen 2003, 135; Myllyniemi 2009) indicate that artistic way of life and interest in arts are socially inherited. An artist's parents often work in an artistic or cultural field which results in the child's socialization into a certain way of life, through the example and the capitals he or she has obtained. Sari Karttunen (1988, 40) writes in her study *Taide pitkä, leipä kapea* (art long, bread short) on visual artists' life stories in Finland that occupational inheritance is fairly common: "many artists' parents can be classified as *cultural curators,* i.e. specialists who produce, interpret and distribute cultural products. These include artists, art brokers and teachers". Many artists' parents are also academics or artisans (op. cit.).

Such intergenerational socialization stories (e.g. Bloom 1985b; Ericsson 1996b; Côte 1999; Uusikylä 2012), and in a broader sense the inheritance of cultural and social capitals (e.g. Willis 1977; Bourdieu 1986; Lareau 2011; Myllyniemi 2012), have been identified in other studies as well, covering other fields of life such as sports. This is typically seen in educational choices, for example (e.g. Vanttaja 2002; Antikainen at al. 2013, 124–138; Kataja et al. 2014). Correspondingly, the low socio-economic status is noted to be inherited in many ways (Kortteinen & Elovainio 2012; Kataja et al. 2014). The inheritance of artisthood, or being an artist, has in previous studies been explained by the intergenerational transmission of the middle class values which emphasize personal development and creativity (e.g. Lepistö 1991, 33; Tolonen 2005; Levanto 2005, 99–100).

Hence the family table is the metaphoric scene where parents' and children's intertwining life courses provide a basis for future turns in life, or for what can happen in life at all. These are the first steps in the socialization story of life (e.g. Pulkkinen 2003). At the same time, it's important to bear in mind that societal changes constantly reshape the way in which children later exploit their intergenerational immaterial capitals (Elder & Pellerin 1998). For example, being born into an artistic family is not a deterministic way to artisthood. As the following analysis indicates, family background is only one factor out of many in the artists' life courses and other backgrounds may result in successful artisthood as well.

Pasi Koski (2004) uses the concept of physical activity relationship in analyzing individuals' relationship to the social world of sports (see also Unruh 1979). In his analysis on Finnish physical activity generations and their differences Tuomas Zacheus (2008) has operationalized this physical activity relationship. Along the lines of Koski, he divides the physical activity relationship into 1) personal physical activity, 2) voluntary work in sports clubs, 3) spectator sports and 4) expenditure in sport and exercise. As for art and culture, and along the lines of Koski (2004) and Zacheus (2008), we could talk about a 'culture relationship' and extend its scope to families and their capitals, in particular. In other words, the culture relationship of a family could be defined as follows: 1) how much the family itself has been involved in making art or culture, 2) to what extent the family members have participated in cultural activities outside home, 3) how much culture and arts have been followed (e.g., by reading the respective news) and 4) how much the family has invested in culture, by buying art or participating in cultural activities, for example.

The concept of the culture relationship helps to categorize the artists' family backgrounds. In the interview data, families with both strong and weak culture relationship were represented. Most families were located between the two extremes although it was evident that the culture relationship of the interviewees' families was fairly strong, on average. The interviews in the research data can be categorized, on the basis of reported and experienced family backgrounds, into three groups: art and culture homes (5 respondents), culturally inclined homes (20) and non-cultural homes (4).

## ART AND CULTURE HOMES

In *art and culture homes*, at least one of the parents was a professional artist or a dedicated amateur artist. There were artists among the relatives, too. The strong impact of the family on the socialization into arts can clearly be seen in the following interview extract:

> Well yes my dad is [a professional artist] and we [the children] grew up somehow well […] surrounded by culture. Well, let's put it this way that we could use our weekly allowances in anything we wanted. But then we got extra money for cultural activities such as, for instance, movies of course, to young people. Of course sometimes we said that we were going to see a movie [with a laugh] but used the money to something else. But in any case, whatever the cultural activity, there was always money for it. So we were clearly encouraged. My mum is [a professional artist] and we really watched a lot the old classics in our video library. We didn't actually even have any new stuff, old French classics and other old movies, too. So I basically grew up surrounded by those old cinema classics. Mum and dad liked them, thought they were important and that's why we watched them, too. […] And maybe all this somehow gave us a clear guidance or something, so everything was always very clear to me, and very natural.

At the family table of this home of art and culture, artistic orientation and artistic capital have been highly valued. The quotation reveals how art – and culture – is in many ways present in the everyday life, in the household objects, in leisure activities and in the

everyday conversations of the family. The childhood socialization took place in an environment of rich artistic influences and art was part of the family's everyday life (see also Ruohola 2012, 17). The children of art and culture homes have, through their families, a long and deep relationship to culture and arts. For them, art is an important mental and psychological dimension. It's a knowledge reserve that changes, at the family table, into a shared interpretation schema with which to understand the world. We could also conclude that the paradigm of art serves as the prism for this interpretation schema. With age, as the art-related knowledge reserve expands, the artists can draw upon the interpretation schema and modify it according to their needs. (See Habermas 1984.)

> And then well, we always talked about everything. We always talked a lot with our parents, about anything really. About literature, theatre, movies, everything. When I was a child it was really important to my mum that we sat down together at the family table, for dinner or some other meal, at least once a day.

This quotation demonstrates how, at the family table – and not only in a metaphoric way – art has been talked about. It is worth noting, however, that the family has not only talked about arts but about "everything" and that these shared moments have been highly valued.

> I grew up in […] what we called an artists' village… They are those wooden terraced houses with an atelier in each one of them. Those houses are different in size… I lived there until I went to school… and it was somehow so natural that everyone was an artist and that it's an occupation as anything else.

The children of art and culture homes understood at an early age – through example of their parents and also through professional example of their parents' colleagues and other relatives – how is it to be an artist. This is clearly visible in the quotation above. In the artist's childhood, there was not only an example but also an awareness and broader knowledge of what the artist's profession is and that it's a job like anything else; acceptable and normal.

Despite strong capitals, the way to an artist is not self-evident and without effort even to young artists coming of strong art and culture homes. The family ambiance may, in some cases, get 'over the top' and thus push the child away from arts. Sometimes parents' careers may cast a shadow to one's own career – this phenomenon may be more common and better known in sports where parental pressure is a potential factor behind the discontinuation of the careers of young athletes (e.g. Frazer-Thomas et al. 2008). The materialization of intergenerationally inherited capitals into artisthood requires the contribution and optimal balancing of other axioms of the life course. The next quote demonstrates how important the life's turning points, transitions, timings, social capital and conscious self-reflection are, for the shaping of one's life course (see also Giele & Elder 1998):

> Well yes I studied, at the Open University […] and then I had some odd jobs here and there and then I somehow drifted to film-making. Well actually I worked in one production and it just went on. [...] One day at shooting somebody said that they would need some assistants in another shooting the next day. Then I got to know this production manager who arranged me an assistant job in a short production which was shot within a week. And it was there where I somehow just fucking realized that this is where I really feel at home.

This quotation illustrates the lifelong impact of a strong art and culture home which becomes apparent in the last sentence of the quote. Return to arts from other walks of life is somehow a natural process because the interviewee knows the norms and codes of the art world and, with the help of the personal interpretation scheme, feels at home.

## CULTURALLY INCLINED HOMES

In *culturally inclined homes*, art and culture were consumed to at least some extent. Some of the parents were amateur artists and some interviewees' relatives were professional artists. The children grew up in a culturally inclined ambience but, in most cases, without direct example or guidance. In these families, parents usually had a positive attitude towards children's art and culture activities. The most obvious difference to art and culture homes was that these homes didn't have, in the same way, direct references to the world of arts even though art and culture were generally highly appreciated.

Whereas art and culture homes were rich in artistic stimulus, the culturally inclined homes had some artistic 'drops' here and there. But when reflecting their own lives, the artists themselves saw them as early signs of the direction of their life courses (see also Linko 1998). The following quote illustrates this in a beautiful way: the childhood musical influences are still "felt in my body" and, at the same time, the father's example encouraged the musician to start playing the same instrument. Also reading as an educational activity is mentioned:

> We didn't go to the theatre or concerts, we didn't do anything you could call highbrow culture. Instead, we always listened to music, this is what I remember from my childhood. I think music is somehow maybe even a stronger path than visual arts. I mean really, it's something that I really felt in my body and everywhere. Listening to music clearly comes from my dad's side. He also played guitar and of course it has been to me, I mean it was so much easier for me to start playing guitar myself. I don't know if there's any strong connection but there must be something in there. So that's how it went. And then of course we always read a lot. But not really any classics, if you want to make that separation, but we always read something that we were interested in.

In the quotation above, the interviewee wants to make a separation from the highbrow culture and the family didn't have any strong artistic background or traces. These were located in other interviews, though. The following respondent goes further back in time and in generations and, in this quote, art can be seen as a strong mental trace:

> In my childhood I heard about these people in my family who had always somehow combined the academic and agricultural worlds so they ended up as farmers but studied theology and then there were quite a few missionaries and artists, too. Somehow that sweet mishmash that there was, somehow I must have embraced it.

The essential part in this passage is that the interviewee felt to have absorbed this ”sweet mishmash” already as a child. The interview goes on and the artist tells about the childhood home in the countryside and the relationship to arts that the adults who lived there had and concludes that “the place where you live has an interesting impact”:

> But I think that those things that I did, those were the kind of things that many adults were maybe dreaming of but they just couldn't do them so then the [adults] were happy to see when a child started to do those things. It's really interesting how our living environment has an impact on us, where we live and in what kind of an environment. Maybe there was some kind of magic in those things I did, something that the adults usually couldn't do because they were so involved in the daily chores.

Culture was often present in these homes, in the form of music and cinema, for instance. Many interviewees reported that even though their parents were not, due to work or other activities, actually artistically oriented they were interested in art and made sure that children learned to appreciate culture. This could be described by the concept of *cultural goodwill* (Bourdieu 1984). In the following quote ‘being culturally oriented’ simply boils down to being interested in arts:

> Well, I couldn't say that we were an artistic family or somehow culturally oriented but then, on the other hand, our family, my mum and dad, they were always somehow interested in arts. So we did have some degree of cultural orientation, in my family.

Contrary to art and culture homes where children were often consciously guided towards certain art activities, the encouragement in culturally inclined homes was more subtle. In many homes, it was about encouragement to ‘smart activities’ such as reading or simply supporting children in the activities they chose. Small details may have been important, such as mother bringing comics home every week. The influence of the family is not restricted to transferring social and cultural influences and capitals to children. The support and encouragement – or the lack of them – by parents is important whatever the children's choices may be (see also Linko 1998; Uusikylä 2012; cf. Erkkilä & Vesanen 1989, 84–89). In this way, even in ‘less culturally oriented’ homes support to children's own choices may provide a solid growth environment that supports independence. Also the possibility of unrestricted free play during childhood strengthens artistic tendencies (see also Houni 2000, 146; Maijala 2003, 86).

In four families, parents had clearly tried to guide their children to a certain field of art (mostly classical music). In these cases, parents own aspirations may overrun children's aspirations (cf. Frazer-Thomas et al. 2008). Some interviewees felt that such guidance was oppressive. In some cases, where the artistic activity had been changed to another,

a 'more lowbrow' activity, parents had questioned and objected the change.

Those homes where children were encouraged and supported in their own choices or at least they were allowed to try different art activities which, in some homes, could have been forbidden as 'useless', had a more neutral relationship to the child's (artistic) activities. Most respondents reported on encouraging experiences. The following quote where a 'favourable ambiance' is emphasized, is typical:

> I've always been in many kinds of art schools, classes with special emphasis on drawing, after school activities around visual arts, and I've always been into doing something with my hands, I've enjoyed it and I've been encouraged to do it. At home the atmosphere has always been very open-minded and then at school, in primary, I did a creative class as an after school activity and my teacher was good [...] all these have been good stimuli that I've been in that ambience where it has been desirable to do something with hands.

The culturally inclined homes shared a certain middle class ethos. This became very apparent in relation to education orientations. Many respondents reported that they had been encouraged at home to get a good education in any field; artistic fields were acceptable, too. The family tables in these homes have offered the children a spectrum of possibilities and the children have become artists through other socialization processes and often also by chance. These homes also reflect the 'good old Finland'; the society where children's social rise was an opportunity taken for granted – often a wish or almost an expectation (Pöntinen 1983). The following quote illustrates this ethos, emphasizing 'the children doing well' and their 'smart' activities.

> We didn't have any particular academic background or any obligations in that sense but we had a very good home to grow up in. And maybe we had that, I don't know, it was somehow not outspoken but my parents had that maybe more unconscious approach, I mean they must have invested a lot in us children. It was important to them that the children do well and do well at school and have some activities. Well they did invest in us although both of them worked and my dad quite a lot actually but particularly my mum, I think my mum's life was more that 8 to 4 or 9 to 5 work and then she was always there for us. I wouldn't say that she lived through her children but she was very much there for us, very involved, we read bedtime stories and so on. Our dad took us to the library so there was a clear orientation, I mean we were kind of shown that here are the books and that it's somehow smart to read them.

In the culturally inclined homes, the width of the horizon of opportunities was emphasized. Even as adults, many artists still had a positive attitude towards life, characterized by an opportunity to choose between different options, rationality and, on the other hand, future optimism. Well educated and well raised children were important to their parents and many of them would have had other options as well, along with the career in arts. Many of them had, in fact, thought about other education options in their youth and often chance played an important role in embarking on arts. The backgrounds of children of art and culture homes were very identical with the background observations made in previous artist studies (e.g. Tuhkanen 1988, 72–81; Maijala 2003, 77–82; Hirvonen

2003, 135) whereas the stories of children of culturally inclined homes were closer to a typical middle class child-rearing orientation emphasizing personal growth and believing that good education guarantees a good future (e.g. Tolonen 2005; Lareau 2011).

## NON-CULTURAL HOMES

Children of *non-cultural homes* typically described their backgrounds with the following words:"I didn't get anything particular from home that would have led me to arts". Parents had non-artistic occupations and were not particularly interested in culture. However, it is possible that to these artists coming from 'not-so-culturally-inclined-homes' own home seems non-cultural because the typical benchmark in the world of arts is other artists typically coming from stronger art and culture homes. In any case, in our research approach based on oral history, the personal account of the interviewee is decisive. The personal account also reveals the life courses which result from the resources of the artist's background.

> I: What about your parents, were they artists?
> A: No they weren't, well my mum was always interested in my art activities but they are, they really are from another world of work. And now they're retired. And yes well, at least with my dad, discussions on the philosophy of arts are always cut quite short [with a laugh].

In many cases, the capitals inherited in non-cultural homes would rather have pointed to different white-collar fields instead of artistic fields. This was also seen at the family table where discussion themes were not particularly 'cultural' or discussions on art "were cut short" as the artist stated above. Parents might have been active readers or music lovers and some of the interviewees reported on having been influenced by that. Making art by themselves was not common in these homes. This doesn't mean that the children's art activities would have been somehow rejected at home but the children were also not particularly guided towards them, nor was any example given. The activities supported at home were more often sport and exercise, for example. Some of the artists even reported on some degree of objection to children's artistic tendencies in these homes.

As the children of non-cultural homes didn't receive a clear artistic orientation at home, other childhood experiences were emphasized. Some of the artists mentioned different youth culture trends and friends. Maaria Linko (1998, 322) points out that indirect artistic influences might be as important as the direct ones: "a family which is not particularly interested in visual arts might have a rich story-telling tradition from which a sensitive and receptive child draws inspiration for drawing, for instance". The artists of non-cultural homes clearly had more difficulties to locate where the spark for art had originated from: when nothing referred to artistic fields, chance must have had strong impact, too. The next quotation is quite revealing as the interviewee is still not aware where that interest came from:

> A: But at the same time I have drawn a lot, ever since I was some six or five, I really drew a lot.
> I: Okay. Do you remember if your parents were somehow involved in arts, or were they into culture or how did it come about…
> A: Well, my parents had typical lower middle-class occupations. So they don't have any cultural background. And they didn't, I mean I didn't really get anything from them. So I've been also wondering where it all came from… well they really appreciated sports and especially those traditional sports like running and cross-country skiing and those types of sport. They've always encouraged me to play sports but I could always choose the sport myself. But really they didn't have any thoughts on culture, we hardly talked about it. And then, well I actually asked them this spring that where did they get the idea from, to take me to the Children's Art School and they were like, well, they hadn't suggested anything but I was the one who had the idea. I wanted to go there.

Regardless of the origins of the artistic passion, all the children of non-cultural homes reported on how they had taken distance and separated themselves from the family values and habits. Some of them didn't find this painful at all because their parents had given their acceptance to a career in arts, even with the financial uncertainty related to it. Others had experienced indifference or even objection from their parents. This had typically caused problems at first but had then, at least in some cases, turned to a resource. To these artists, art and developing in it was perceived as embarking on one's own personal path and even as rebellion.

## FAMILY'S ECONOMIC STATUS

The socio-economic standing of the family was very seldom brought up in the artists' interviews. Clearly, the interviewees didn't see it as a very important factor in their lives and for their own careers in arts. The most typical impression on the interviewees' family backgrounds was that the family had enough money for living and most artists had received financial support to their art activities. Many activities, such as drawing, do not require substantial financial investments in the first place. Those who needed money for more expensive activities, such as playing a classical instrument, had got it too, at least until they could finance their activities themselves.

The financial position of the families seems to have been fairly stable and even if there were occasional money problems they were not reflected in children's lives in any particular way. This was seen despite the fact that the early 1990's depression hit most respondents in the middle of their childhood and adolescence. Also, it's worth noting that none of the interviewees reported on coming from either very poor or very wealthy backgrounds. The family backgrounds were not analysed by any quantitative methods but the interviews led to a conclusion that the artists, defined by their family economic status, came from very middle class backgrounds. This is in line with a previous study on artists' social inheritance (Karttunen 1988; Houni 2000; Maijala 2003; see also Vanttaja 2002; Lareau 2011) and, at the same time, confirms the hypothesis of the welfare generation (Hoikkala & Paju 2008).

Thus social capital (Coleman 1988) and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) were seen more important than financial capital. The inheritance of the former was earlier

analysed with the help of the family types: social capital is a reserve of mental skills and knowledge which is passed on from parents to children. The latter refers to the culture the children are socialized into and to what kind of culture they learn is natural, good and respected. In this way, the children of art and culture homes, for example, embrace certain cultural practices, skills and operating models in their habitus (Bourdieu 1993) and, at the same time, a particular cultural taste and interpretation framework. They learn the (high) cultural codes and learn how to put what they learn and experience into perspective against that background. Home is an important place for the development of cultural capital and education is important to its refinement. In a way, the cultural capital is materialized through the degree obtained in (cultural) education (Bourdieu 1986). Already when applying to and getting in in higher education in cultural and artistic fields, the cultural capitals obtained earlier matter. Education can be seen as 'a series of consecutive choices' (Antikainen et al. 2013, 98) and the social capitals inherited at home offer resources and strategies also to parents in influencing their children's educational choices (Coleman 1990). It's probable that the cultural background of the family, or the 'right family name', help in advancing one's artistic career – in particular because the measurement of artistic quality is always somewhat arbitrary.

Bourdieu's (1993; 1996) notion of cultural capital includes the concept of distinction. It refers to the cultural capital serving as a tool of distinction in relation to those with less cultural capitals. This may strengthen the position of the cultural elite but, at the same time, take them further away from 'common people'. Bourdieu's (op. cit.) concept is based on an analysis of the French society and is not directly applicable to a more monocultural and egalitarian Finland (e.g. Kahma 2011). Still, Bourdieu's (1993; 1996) notion of cultural capital helps us to understand why, for example, 'being culturally inclined' is learned and often inherited in the society, via family backgrounds.

## SIBLINGS

The family backgrounds of the interviewed artists have been discussed above. In the previous subchapter, we focused on parents in particular, what they had transmitted to their children. Siblings are part of the family, too, and because the role of siblings is to some extent special and varying, it is worth a separate analysis. In the interviews, the relationship to siblings was typically approached by the question about whether they had ended up in artistic fields as well. In many interviews, relationship to siblings was not discussed any further than that, especially if they were not involved in arts and culture. However, whenever there were similarities in career choices or whenever the interviewees felt that telling about their relationship to siblings was important, the theme was elaborated on. Some interviewees had siblings who had also ended up in artistic fields and some of them had even worked together with their siblings in professional contexts.

Three interviewees are the only children of their families and in one interview, siblings were not mentioned at all. Thus 25 interviewees are known to have siblings or half-siblings. 17 interviewees told that their siblings had not ended up in artistic fields. Many of them

were information technology experts, engineers and professionals in other academic fields. In fact, many interviewees felt that being an artist was the role that was left for them in the family. For example, one artist told that "my brother is the engineer in the family and I take care of the non-serious business". Still, a few interviewees had worked together with their siblings by, for example, combining their respective artistic and commercial skills. It's notable, that to most interviewees the role of siblings was minor in their childhood activities. Brothers and sisters have done their own things and the artistically oriented child his or her own things. Of course siblings have often been important in different ways, by offering a more 'down to earth' perspective and a discussion partner during the art-filled career. Hence siblings are a contact point to the world outside arts and offer a valuable human relationship which is not based on work as the following quote illustrates:

> I hang around a lot with my siblings and they are all doing really well and… And then they are somehow very far away from anything that's related to arts [...] they're not interested in what I do, they're interested in me as a person. What I mean is that they, kind of, just don't talk about my work. Well I couldn't, I mean I would find it embarrassing that I should somehow be… [...] So they kind of understand it in a right way, they take it as a personal matter and, if it was something else, it would disturb our time together and interaction so that they would feel that they should somehow have an opinion on it or something. So they kind of don't even acknowledge my art.

Five interviewees' siblings had, in one way or another, ended up or were close to end up in artistic fields. Only two interviewees had siblings who could have been considered of having had some impact on the artistic career of the interviewees, either by giving an example or by doing things together. Three interviewed artists had been role models to their younger siblings. Three interviewees didn't even mention the professional fields of their siblings although one of them told that the siblings drew together a lot when they were younger. In general, siblings were not discussed more than this.

Thus, approximately six artists had siblings who were important to their artistic careers. In these families, solid intergenerational capital had been passed on from parents to all children, and being an artist has, in a way, provided a model of a good life. Approximately the same amount of interviewees reported that their siblings had an important role in their lives but not directly from the perspective of artisthood. With most interviewees, siblings were not very much talked about. This doesn't mean that siblings wouldn't have had any influence in the artists' lives but that they only had an indirect impact on their artistic careers. This is a significant difference compared to athletes (see chapter 1).

## EXTENDED FAMILY

When we categorized families by their cultural backgrounds above we already referred to the importance of relatives. Many interviewees had professional or amateur artists in their extended families. Some interviewees told that actually the example of their relatives made it clear, what it is like to be an artist. In a way, they have been pioneers

in their families, by shaping their family attitudes more positive to arts. Consequently, the younger generations have had it easier to aim for artistic fields. Approximately every second interviewee named their aunts, uncles or grandparents as important influencers.

> Well that [aunt] was very important in all my doings, she was the one who took me to the seashore to watch the stones, how they, I mean like "look at these stones, if you put them this way, what do you see in there". So that happened already when I was very little. And we collected dry twigs, did potato printing and everything, the list goes on. What you do as a child really has an influence although I never went to an art school or anything. But I always had the opportunity to do all these crafts.

This quotation indicates how moments spent with aunt had inspired imagination. The artists' relatives had taken the children to flea markets or amusement parks, or drawn a lot with them. The most important meaning of the relatives was often the fact that time spent with them had been creative and free. To some interviewees, the relatives have simply functioned as a source of encouragement and support in their artistic activities.

> My cousin was an important friend to stimulate my imagination. She's three years older and with her, somehow I remember how I adored her as a child and how we played all these creative things together, as most children do. I remember how all those things were just so exciting; we did our own magazine and all that creative stuff. At that age, three years is a big difference and I really admired her and looked up to her. Well yes, we did everything we could imagine of and many creative things really, those magazines and then we made our own clothes. We were speculating which one of us dares to go to a public place in them, I mean those clothes were made out of old fabrics and sheets, and the one who had the courage to go public was the winner. Well I don't think I ever went [laughs] but something like that we did and it surely was good fun.

Six interviewees told that their cousins had been very important to their artistic endeavours. Three artists' cousins had been their artistic role models and also some sort of 'mates in art' with whom they drew or played music. As illustrated in the quote above, especially older cousins were "looked up to", with admiring eyes. One of the artists felt that he was the role model for his cousin and, at the same time, an artistic pioneer for the whole family.

## GROUPS OF FRIENDS AND SOCIABILITY IN CHILDHOOD

The childhood growth environment has a significant impact on what kind of social and cultural networks are on offer. In smaller places children have to discover their things on their own and form smaller groups around these activities whereas in bigger towns there are more children of the same age, more groups of young people, youth cultures to join and to draw upon. The growth environment determines the degree of sociability which is considered normal. Groups of friends play an important role in the formation and development of social capital of children and youth (Coleman 1988; Korkiamäki 2013; Salasuo & Suurpää 2014).

We could group respondents according to their self-defined degree of sociability. 22 of them told they were mainly extrovert in their childhood and adolescence and that they had an active social life. Seven respondents said they were rather introvert and preferred to stay alone. Most extroverts defined their childhood friends as 'normal'. Normality was also defined by spending time with children who were not at all into arts. For the extroverts, childhood and teen years mostly meant just doing things together outdoors and being generally active, as anybody in their childhood and adolescence. Many interviewees felt that their circles of friends were completely 'normal' but some of them started to develop an artist's role in them:

> In upper secondary school, when we needed to start thinking of what to study, what to work with, then I somehow embraced that identity that was offered to me, that this guy is an [artist] well my friends told me that it was some kind of a joke but then again, in my group of friends, we gave these identities to each other. Maybe they saw something in me, maybe it had to do with my habit of being sometimes somehow absent, even autistic, deep in my own thoughts and then of course I did my own things.

As the quote above indicates, some future artists didn't always want to be surrounded by friends but stayed alone, with their own things or thoughts. Socializing with friends did not always tally with artistic activities and time dedicated to one thing was always away from something else: "it was somehow in opposition to my social life, that drawing thing". Some of them found another person as a solution, a friend or a cousin for example, with whom they could really get absorbed in arts. Some of them preferred a larger group, around making music, for instance. It is notable that none of the interviewees felt they had grown up in any very artistic groups of friends, at least not before upper secondary school. In addition, nearly all interviewees who had 'artistic friends' when they were young told that these friends didn't always end up in artistic fields although some of them continued as amateur artists.

Seven interviewees were more noticeably introvert which was strongly related to their artistic activities. Some activities developed to a more goal-oriented and therefore also more time-consuming direction already at an early age. For most of these artists, it was more about just staying alone while creating their own worlds by drawing, for instance. A few of them told they had a single 'best friend' with whom to pursue artistic activities. In the following quote, this friend is defined as a "soulmate with a similar personality". The artist shared everything with her friend that even led to bullying:

> Well I don't know, I didn't really find my place especially in secondary school. My friend and I, we were kind of soulmates and… I met her in seventh grade and… She was also into drawing and somehow…. a very similar person to myself. She was as tall as I was, we looked alike and we even dressed in a similar way and I felt we were really like a single person and… well with her we were together all the time, throughout the secondary and upper secondary. Well, not really of course and we did have some other friends, too. I don't know what was the group we kind of represented, well, we were like… well, we were not nerds because we were not that smart [laughs], but we were a group of our own, we had our own things. But we were not cool either we were somehow nothing

> special. Well there was also some bullying in the air… just a little bit, I was not that badly bullied but I've always been a target somehow. Maybe it was about [...] my crazy ideas of what to draw or just something else…

The division to 'extroverts' and 'introverts' is naturally not static. The location of all interviewees between these two extremes had varied throughout their childhood and adolescence. A few artists told they had been very sociable children but then became more introvert teenagers. Another typical development path is that the future artist is somehow 'different' or an outsider as a child or as a teenager but then, as he or she grows older, finds a matching peer group in which the artistic identity can be shaped in a more pronounced way. These descriptions may be reflections of the old myth of genius (e.g. Lepistö 1991; Koskinen 2006), i.e. that an artist always represents difference in his community. It is, however, impossible to estimate to what extent the artists channel – most likely unconsciously – in their interviews their perceptions influenced by the genius myth and to what extent their experiences 'hold true'. In any case, we can conclude that this observation supports the idea that all myths always arise from reality, at least to some extent, although they also live on their own.

It's also important to note that there were no major gender differences as to the degree of sociability in the interviewees' childhood and adolescence. There are different cultural expectations, norms and stereotypes as to the sociability of boys and girls. Consequently, genders can perceive sociability in very different ways. This analysis has been made purely on the basis of the respondents' individual accounts and experiences.

## MENTORS AND ROLE MODELS

Some artists reported on their childhood idols and role models. Sometimes they came from the immediate surroundings of the future artist; an artist parent or an artist cousin. The more remote childhood idols were often very classic: Beethoven, Madonna, Salvador Dali and Aki Kaurismäki. As the art activities deepened, the role models became more specific. It's worth noting that most artists didn't want to name their adulthood role models anymore. All in all, there was not much talk about role models and idols. Maybe it's about artistic creation arising from originality, or simply the fact that professional artists don't want to identify themselves with other artists.

> And then I had my neighbour, well, he was just a person who was generally interested in many things and with him we developed different projects with the help of some whisky, when I was still studying. He was about 50 then so he must be about 60 now. He's an architect, I just met him in our hallway, then he invited me and we just started talking about things. He was my mentor, in some way. Well yes, as he lived next door it was really easy to pop in and talk about art.

As the quotation above illustrates, personal 'mentors' – or, traditionally speaking, masters of their apprentices (e.g. Sosniak 1985; Maijala 2003, 99–102; Merta 2006; see also Virtanen

2001, 351–372) – may be even more important than role models. They are older artists, often close to the artist's own field of arts, who take the younger artist as their protégé(e) and offer guidance and knowledge to an often insecure, young artist. In some cases, the mentors had been relatives, and in some cases they had been discovered by chance: they had been instructors in after school activities, 'guys from next door' or teachers in school. To some interviewed artists mentors were particularly important as they might have been the only people in their childhood circles who understood anything on artistic work. Hence they knew how to guide and help. Mentors and role models were important at that stage when own interest had already risen but it was not very clear yet. Also Katarina Eskola (1998, 66) made similar observations in her research data based on life stories: "the stories seemed to be full of descriptions of how important good instructors, leaders and mentors are, in the emergence and development of creativity". These observations are not to be ignored when thinking about the actual conditions to creativity and how to support creativity with the means of cultural policy (see also Cronberg 2011; Uusikylä 2012).

## ART EDUCATION AND TEACHERS IN THE COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

Experiences of educational and training institutions were also analysed. In the artist interviews, there was very little talk about basic education. Art and drawing were the favourite subjects of many interviewees and some of them mentioned an inspiring teacher in either primary or secondary school. Many future artists had been in Steiner School with its inbuilt creative focus. A few interviewees told they were in a special class with emphasis on music in the comprehensive school which they felt had been a good opportunity. Not all of them shared these good experiences of the art education in the comprehensive school, however. Some remembered the horrors of being forced to play fipple flute, or the monotony of art education. Some of them also felt that art and drawing in the comprehensive school was simply too easy.

Many interviewees were involved in different art and culture activities already as children. Often they had also inherited artistic capitals at home. Thus the fact that there was not much talk about art education in the basic education is not surprising. The importance of art subjects in the comprehensive school may relate to the fact that "to most children, school is the *only* environment where they can encounter art" (Bergala 2013, 31). As Sami Myllyniemi (2009, 44) states "the importance of school for participation in art is central as it can – contrary to the art and culture education services aimed at children – reach the entire target group". The fact that art education in comprehensive school was hardly mentioned in the interviews of this study doesn't correlate to the potential importance of art education in comprehensive school as such. We also need to bear in mind that most interviewees went to school between the end of 1970's and the end of 1990's after which art education has changed. We should rather think about the great potential of the comprehensive school art education if we wish that artistic skills and creativity really are 'every man's rights'. At the same time, the relative importance of the social capital inherited at home, to being an artist, would diminish.

## SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS DURING EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL CAREER

As noted earlier, family is the main social arena in childhood, having an impact on the foundations of each individual's life course. Social capital, defined by Coleman (1988) as a general mental resource for all human action, is inherited in the family. The role of professional networks and groups of friends strengthens with age: they generate additional social capital as defined by Bourdieu (1986): relationships and networks as well as skills to navigate in them. As Riikka Korkiamäki (2013, 36) writes about social capital as defined by Bourdieu: "Social capital is defined as those actual or potential resources that depend on individual's belonging to a group". In this case, the group can be defined as the (Finnish) field of arts where social capital has indisputable importance.

Social capital in the field of arts means that an individual knows people with whom to collaborate and who can offer peer support and friendship (see also Becker 2008 [1982]; Herranen et al. 2013, 141–144). Secondly, social capital is simply making one's name known and gaining recognition to one's personal skills. This makes things progress naturally and with ease. Social capital helps an individual to operate in the field of art even when action in that field is characterized by competition. One dimension of social capital is its connection to habitus and, in that way, to unconscious behavioural models and ways of acting.

In the subchapter above we concluded that to some interviewees, the instructors, mentors or 'masters' met in adolescence became important influencers in their lives. To some of them, they were the first persons to have a direct professional influence in them, extending to their careers later on. A mentor typically had the role of a teacher, an informal supporter or an encourager. Mentors knew how to guide the future artist into making art, when nobody else could. At the same time they helped, either consciously or without even noticing it, the future artist to network in the world of arts. Mentors were particularly important to those future artists who were not from strong art and culture homes.

> More networking took place in the Academy. [...] I think the most important thing in studying is that you meet those people who do it professionally and you can network with them. If you don't find anybody at least you can talk about art, on an equal footing. [...] I mean that at least you'll develop a personal relationship to a teacher, to an artist who's really in that network, in that field, that's why studying is so important. It takes you forward, the fact that you can talk to that person. It's a bit like an idea of having a master.

As seen in the quote above, schools are important places for social networking. According to the interviewed artists, teachers may at best become personal 'masters' of the aspiring artists, with reference to the classic idea of a master-apprentice relationship. Many interviewees concluded that the most important thing of education is to have those contacts to like-minded people, to teachers and other students. Most art school graduates mentioned at least one teacher whose impact had been important, in the context of

art. Some of them even became friends with their teachers. The role of teachers is not limited to teaching as they often also function as gatekeepers in the field of art. Many interviewees said that in art schools it's important that the teachers 'remember your name' as they often work as curators of art exhibitions and in the selection boards of art grants. Other students offered peer support and a benchmark to one's own art making and often also an opportunity to artistic and intellectual collaboration (see Riley 1998).

Many interviewees emphasized the time straight after graduation being particularly important. For example, succeeding in final project exhibition led to invitations to other exhibitions, first small grants and, through that, to the beginning of the professional career in arts. Time after graduation is, without doubt, an important transition phase and a turning point in an artist's life course. John Clausen (1998) explains how the life course is full of transitions and how the most important ones are those turning points that have a significant impact on the future. Often, a major turning point is not recognised when it actually takes place but, instead, only much later when its importance as a future direction provider and a road map becomes part of a longer autobiography. As for the artists interviewed for the purposes of this study, the critical years straight after school can be regarded as very important for the success of their future careers. Successful and positive events in that phase have taken their life courses to the right direction.

Even though the artists recognised the importance of social capital obtained in school, many interviewees emphasized that in the final year the competition with other students should not accelerate into a fight 'for a place in the sun'. The emphasis should rather be in making sure that one's own work is good and that it will be recognised on its own merits.

> Of course higher education in arts means a super tough competition with a lot of mental pressure, I mean, it was a really tough school and that's why I thought that I might not have managed it when I was younger. [...] When you have your own friends then it gets a bit difficult. And then especially during that last year when I did my final project I felt how the tension affected our whole year group, I mean everyone got a bit aggressive which was not always nice. We had some gallerists coming over to see the projects and, well, I can't say it didn't affect our relationships to one another. And then of course after that, after graduation, the first couple of years are kind of critical if you think of everything you have to do and then you already kind of see to which directions different people go, and then of course everything you have to do and experience, not always only nice things… But now I see it differently maybe I just hang around more with those friends and colleagues who are somehow on the same level… I mean then you can share that good and encourage and help others. But, yes, there's always been competition and it has had its negative impacts, too.

The functioning of the art field sparked a lot of discussion in the interviews. The quotation above brilliantly summarises a few things. Indeed, many interviewees had an ambivalent relationship to competition and this quote also illustrates how "kind of critical" the first years after graduation are (see also Lepistö 1991, 29–30; Vihma-Purovaara 2000, 185–190; Maijala 2003, 105–109). Some of the interviewed artists admitted that they had competitive mentalities but also said that competition should never have an intrinsic value as such: you can only succeed by focusing on your own work and not because you

want to 'win'[11]. Of course the role of chance in the lives of successful artists cannot be neglected and in these happy circumstances, the artists don't have to think about competitive settings (see also Røyseng et al. 2007). On the other hand, one feature of the 'charismatic economy' (Bourdieu 1993; Karttunen 2002, 56–59; Røyseng et al. 2007) of art making is the idea of disapproving competition altogether.

To all interviewees, fellow artists are primarily cooperation partners, peers and some of them also friends. This is natural also from the success perspective: sociability and solidarity of some degree are considered virtues compared to isolating oneself from others. At the same time, this answers the requirements of diversity of art and increased cooperation (Tolvanen & Pesonen 2010; Rantala & Korhonen 2012; Herranen et al. 2013, 147; Ansio & Houni 2013a, 66–71; see also Becker 2008 [1982]).[12] The pure human aspect is important, too. Artists understand each other and thus offer easy-going friendships and social networks to each other. Without doubt, artists in Finland form their own community and network where other artists are either personally known or at least easy to reach through other friends and acquaintances (see Granovetter 1973). At the same time, social capital in the world of art has its trust-based dimension: it 'lubricates' social interaction[13] at the levels of both work and personal life (see Ilmonen 2000). When needed, artists may give peer support to each other:

> Yesterday I spoke to a colleague because I know that she understands, I told her that you know, I haven't touched the paintbrush for a week now, why did I promise that I could teach. I was just coming from that teaching session and then ran some errands that needed to be taken care of. She understood it very well and told me that she'd been travelling and that she hadn't had any time for painting either, and this week would be the same, and then we were both there, just furious. Only another artist can understand you and how your happiness comes from being able to do that work and how annoying it is that there are so many other things that, yes, have a connection to your work but actually keep you away from it.

Already on the basis of their respective fields of art, the interviewees could be divided into those who principally work alone and into those who mainly work with other artists. The first group includes, for example, visual artists and authors and the second, among others, those who work with cinema and music. This division is not absolute, of course: all artists have solitary and social phases in their work. A certain degree of perfectionism and its impact on their work was felt with some of the interviewed artists: working with

11 This is another point of comparison to the athletes. It is probable that the artists talked more about the competitive aspect of their work because they knew that also athletes were interviewed for the purposes of the same study.

12 As we can see, the research data demonstrates not only the competition in the art field (Bourdieu) but also the cooperation focus in the art world (Becker). A more detailed analysis will be made in another context (Piispa 2015b).

13 This might be another reason for the continuums created by "artistic families": in addition to the inherited social capital the artist can profit from the "family name" which guarantees that the artist knows the rules of the field and can accomplish his role and deserve the trust offered to him. The reverse is the more closed off nature of the field of art (Bourdieu 1993; 1996).

others is fun and sometimes also necessary but then you inevitably have to compromise. Often artists didn't have as high demands as when working on their own when working with other people, or they simply approached working with others in a more playful way.

Some interviewees emphasized the importance of non-artist friends. They offer a window to another world and to another sociability where work is not constantly in mind. This also applies to non-artistic activities. You can meet people who are not artists and you can socialize with them without the burden of any titles and status. The following description illustrates this very well by describing another activity:

> A: And then in yoga, it's so crazy that you are on a level playing field with all those people in the dressing room, you meet them and you know them, one of them is a doctor, another one is a lawyer and the third one is a management consultant and so on… so it's really different when people come from so many walks of life and backgrounds…
> I: So you can talk about something else…
> A: Yes and it's really good fun, I mean often we don't talk about work at all but about something else, we know so much about each other but, on the other hand, wouldn't probably recognise each other in everyday clothes, only in our yoga outfits. So it's been really good to have all those people I can now call friends and spend some time with them, maybe even outside the yoga studio.

The position of spouse or partner was interesting. Ten of the interviewees reported on having a partner who also works in the field of art and a few artists had amateur artist spouses. This is only natural and many emphasized its importance in life coordination, both from mental and time management perspective. Five respondents' spouses or partners had nothing to do with arts. In these cases, despite occasional challenges, the differences between the spouses' professional lives keep the couple sane: it's "very healthy" as one of the interviewees put it.

## EXCURSION: GENDER IN THE INTERVIEWS

It is notable that very few artists emphasized the meaning of gender, in any way, in their life and work. One could have expected that, at least with women, gender would have been brought up in some way, with reference to gender inequalities on the labour market, for instance. However, this was not the case which can result from female domination in many of the artistic fields which – on the other hand – may be one of the reasons for the low income levels in these fields (see also Karttunen 2004, 18–19). All the same, the (financial) uncertainty of an artist's life was not approached from the gender perspective but from being an artist as such. None of artists felt that gender was the reason for low income levels but being an artist was mentioned by many respondents as being one of the reasons for that.

In a broader sense, we could conclude that artisthood was, without exception, the dominant position in the interviews (see the overlapping positions of the life course; e.g. Gecas 2004) rather than, for example, gender, nationality or parenthood. The dominance of the artisthood position was seen, for example, in artists placing themselves in

the historic continuum of their own field, of visual artists, for example, not of male or female visual artists in particular. Only three female artists briefly referred to their roles as female artists in particular. The first one felt it was important that after "the established male-dominant history [my colleague] and I have done so much compared to others in this field, and this is rare because we are women". The second one had discovered her own strength in being different from the traditional female image. The third one mentioned some other female artist as pioneers to break the traditional male rule.

Many artists already had children and parenthood was typically discussed as motherhood or fatherhood. However, these were not given any particular meanings which would have been important from the perspective of the theme of the interview. This is an interesting difference compared to athletes (see Salasuo, Piispa & Huhta 2015): motherhood is a real risk to an athlete's career whereas for female artists – at least on the basis of these interviews – motherhood was considered as a minor risk. The artists did report on phases of life when newborn children had taken time and energy away from making art but this was related to both genders, including fathers. A flexible spouse understanding 'the artist's moods' was a key factor in reconciliating family and work which many artists underlined. It may be that the even gender distribution in the field of arts is reflected in the personal values of artists and, for instance child-rearing, is seen as a responsibility of both parents.

The 'absence' of gender or its minor role in the interviews arouses some questions. Firstly, it may refer to a high degree of gender equality among artists – and of equality of success or of 'misery' – or at least gender equality is a reference value and a natural starting point in the field of arts. This would strengthen the assumption that feminisation and a higher degree of education and professionalism among artists, that have gone hand in hand with the welfare state cultural policy, have taken away the masculine and mythical perceptions of artists. In particular, the role of women as equal and hard-working artists is a powerful tool in breaking up the genius myth.

Secondly, the invisibility of gender in the artist interviews may be a result of the interview approach. The personal lives of the artists were approached from the perspective of artisthood and not from other positions, as already mentioned. This may have resulted in 'forgetting' the importance of gender. Gender naturally and certainly has an impact on the interviewees' life courses as *individuals* but maybe not so much as *artists*.

# II Society and culture, time and place

# 3 Children of the rapidly transforming Finland and its sport and exercise culture

In the introduction we discussed the societal and cultural developments which are important from the perspective of this study. We concluded that understanding this framework requires evidence-based knowledge or, as Grant Jarvie (2006, 61) writes: "no informed debate on sport, culture and society can take place without reference to the historical dimensions or processes involved in the making of sport". Historical factors have to be taken into account as changes in sport are part of a broader development in society. From the perspective of this study, understanding the present state and the recent history (e.g. Mäkinen 2010; Kokkonen 2013; Rantala 2014; Kokkonen 2015) of the Finnish sport and exercise culture has to be complemented by understanding the ongoing, deeper change in society: for the purposes of this study, this means that Finland where the interviewees were born and where they have grown up (see also Heinilä 1998). As stated earlier, the life course analysis has been chosen as the key research method of this study. One of its key principles is that every person's life course is connected to a certain time and place (Elder & Giele 2009; Häkkinen 2012).

The perspective of this chapter brings together the most significant changes in sport and in society in the past 40 years, from the point of view of the research questions of this study. The focal points of the analysis are athletes as generations and their growth environments. The growth environment is a very important factor as Finland – contrary to popular beliefs – is not a uniform, homogenic community: cultural changes that have an impact on young people's lives and change their everyday practices occur at different times in different places (Helanko 1953, 67–76; Lähteenmaa 2006; Tolonen 2010). This means that, for example, rural athletes have been socialized into a different sport culture and ethos (e.g. Hämäläinen 2008; Heikkinen et al. 2012) compared to their urban peers. It is also evident that the oldest athletes in the research data have had a very different growth environment compared to the youngest ones (about physical exercise; Vasara 1992a,b,c; Koski 2004, 198–204; Zacheus 2008; Kokkonen 2013; about youth Aapola & Kaarninen 2003; Vehkalahti & Suurpää 2014). In elite sports in particular, the meaning of time and place is paramount.

In this chapter, we analyse the childhood and adolescence sport participation of the Finnish athletes of different ages and of different growth environments. The analysis is a follow-up of chapter 1 where the importance of family capitals and socialization into sport were discussed. The societal and cultural landscape where the athletes grow up is also reflected in the analysis. We also take into account those athletes who have finished

their careers. As in the chapter on the importance of the family, there is no need to distinguish between dropouts and elite athletes here.

## GROWTH ENVIRONMENTS OF ATHLETES, IN TIME AND PLACE

The quantification of certain elements of the research data of this study provides an interesting view to the changes of sport and exercise culture and the generations of sport and exercise, even though the research data of this study is not quantitative in nature. This is reflected in the following table 3 where the interviewees are crosstabled according to their birth decade, growth environment and their sport type. In the 1970's, more than half of Finns lived in urban environments but rural environments and individual sports still produced a large number of elite athletes. After that, the situation changed and towards the 1990's most elite athletes had grown up in urban environments: in the entire research data, 67 athletes came from urban environments and 29 from rural environments. However, we cannot make any direct quantitative conclusions or generalisations on the basis of the research data of this study. For example, urban environments and team sports are emphasized in the two youngest age groups, due to a large number of soccer players in the data (see also Heinilä & Vuolle 1970, 6; Kortelainen 2007). On the other hand, if we were to "standardise" the number of soccer players and drop it to the level of, for example, basketball players, "urbanisation" of elite athletes would still be a clear trend. This trend could be seen even without the soccer players altogether. This table illustrates a clear tendency: from rural to urban environments. Another trend to be seen in the table is the growing interest in team sports and lifestyle sports even though they haven't yet completely replaced the traditional individual sports. It's also worth noting that nowadays the athletes of traditional individual sports most often come from urban environments, too.

Table 3. Athletes of different sports according to their birth year and childhood growth environment

| | | Individual sports | Team sports | Lifestyle sports | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1969–1979 | Urban | 1 | 4 | 1 | **6** |
| | Rural | 6 | 1 | - | **7** |
| 1980–1984 | Urban | 4 | 6 | 2 | **12** |
| | Rural | 4 | 4 | 1 | **9** |
| 1985–1989 | Urban | 4 | 16 | 3 | **23** |
| | Rural | 6 | 4 | - | **10** |
| 1990–1997 | Urban | 7 | 15 | 4 | **26** |
| | Rural | 2 | - | 1 | **3** |

Next, we discuss the importance of the athletes' growth environments in relation to time and place. The physical activity generations, as defined by Tuomas Zacheus (2008), are a useful tool for time analysis. Zacheus distinguishes between those born in the 1970's "the generation of the rise of technicalised exercise" and those born between 1980 and 1988, "the generation of personalised exercise". These definitions illustrate the change of the physical activity culture, or the sports and exercise culture. From the generational point of view, this is the transition from natural outdoor sports and play towards a more differentiated and instructed and, on the other hand, also more urban sport and exercise. The turning point of the transition can be located in the mid 1980's. Compared to Zacheus's (op. cit.) classification, the research data of this study is analysed in a more detailed way: those born in 1969–1979 (13 interviewees), in 1980–1984 (21), in 1985–1989 (33) and those born in the 1990's (29). The cohorts cover different lengths of birth years which can be justified by the turning point of the mid 1980's. In the mid 1980's, the persistent features of old Finland slowly started to fade away from the life stories and remained in minority (also Herva & Vuolle 1991). As Outi Aarresola (2014, 97) writes, "the divergence of the Finnish sport movement coincided with the rise of the generation Y" – generation Y referring to those born in the 1980's, the generation of individual choice (e.g. Hoikkala & Paju 2008; Siltala 2013). Kimmo Jokinen (1989, 135–144) has referred to the same phenomenon as the 'fragmentation' of the fields. In other words, the thorough societal change in the childhood and adolescence of those born in the 1980's coincided with the change in sport participation and was reflected in it. This could be seen in table 3, as the difference between the number of urban and rural athletes, and these changes are also clearly seen in the further analysis.

The division between urban and rural environments is not unproblematic, however, as the difference between a small town and the capital is often bigger than that between a small town and countryside. In addition, some interviewees had moved from one type of area to another, the urban environment of the 1970's is not similar to that of the 21st century and so on. For these reasons, the division has not been made on the basis of quantitative differences or registry definitions but on the basis of the research data itself; how the respondents themselves defined their childhood growth environment. For example, some of the athletes who 'officially' grew up in cities emphasized of having lived in the outskirts of the city and therefore, in 'rural' or 'village-like' environments. Consequently, the urban environment may mean more 'urban-like' as defined by the interviewed athletes themselves and it can be anything between the capital and a small town. Also, rural is more accurately 'rural-like' if the childhood residence had officially been within city limits. Thus the research data was allowed, on the basis of the *grounded theory* method (Glaser & Strauss 1967), 'speak with its own voice' and therefore the division was, after all, very straightforward – however, not forgetting that, in some cases, it can be very approximate.

In analysing the changes in sport participation, the respondents' first sport story serves as a useful tool. The life story interview method (see introduction) was used for collecting the data for the purposes of this study. Thus, every interview started with an open question, "please tell me your sport-related life story". Most respondents started this by characterizing, in their own words, their first experiences in sport and exercise or just

those experiences that first came to their minds. The remaining respondents also reported, in the beginning of the interviews, on their sport experiences. To some interviewees the first experiences included pick-up games or backyard games, or general physical activity whereas others reported on their first instructed sport activities.

In this analysis, we distinguish whether the interviewees emphasize the importance of *deliberate play* or *deliberate practice* (e.g. Côté et al. 2007) in their stories and, whenever possible, which one they think came first. It is notable that these two forms of physical activity are not mutually exclusive but rather explain what was the interviewee's first memory and experience of his or her childhood physical activities (Abrams 2010, 78–105). Also in cases where deliberate practice was named as the first memory, socialization into sport and exercise had often taken place in the family (see chapter 1). Whilst the analysis on family capitals illustrated how and through which ways the young athletes had been socialized into sport this chapter delves into the practical framework of that socialization.

So it is about the experience the athlete puts first in the framework of elite athleticism. The emphasis of these telling sentences (Hyvärinen 2010, 93–96) may expose the chronological course of events but they also reveal what was the most important thing from the point of view of the athlete, something that has led him or her from one developmental stage to another. For example, stories such as "I always ran everywhere. I went to track and field school." or "I started kids' league at six. We also played backyard footy." have a clear difference. They lead the reader, in this case the researcher, to draw conclusions on the cultural differences behind the stories (op. cit., 94). In a previous study based on interview data (e.g. Salasuo & Ojajärvi 2013), the way different generations emphasized certain types of sport and exercise as part of their autobiographic reflections corresponded fairly accurately to the broader changes in the sport and exercise culture (op. cit.).

From the point of view of remembering, we could conclude that those interviewees who mostly emphasized deliberate practice seem to have experienced it as a turning point. To them, it was the starting point of a sporty lifestyle. On the other hand, those athletes that mostly remembered deliberate play and games experienced it as a natural part of their childhood. To them, the deliberate practice started later was not seen as an important transition because those sport fields and facilities were already so familiar. (See also Salmi-Nikander 2006.)

## Grandchildren of old Finland

The sport and exercise childhood of those born in 1970's was already clearly different from that of their parents who often had 'one foot on the skiing track, the other one on the running track'. Still, even their conditions and framework to do sport were so different from those of today's young people that it, in some cases, arouses some nostalgic feelings. Many of those born in 1969–1979 reported on their habits and on the old times, on how typical it was, just to go out and play with friends. However, it was not only about playing games and maybe skiing or running as for instance team games were popular, too (e.g. Vasara 1992b, 413–419; Zacheus 2008; Salasuo & Ojajärvi 2013,

149–152). The physically active lifestyle was, at least to the athletes interviewed for this study, something taken for granted even though the age of 'compulsory physical activity' was already gone (Salasuo & Ojajärvi 2013).

In the opening stories of those born in 1969–1979, the respondents often reported on frequent own-initiative physical activity and outdoor play. Eight athletes out of 13 reported mostly on various backyard games and also on playing sports outside sports clubs, with parents, siblings or friends (see also chapter 1). The remaining five reported on having started sport by deliberate practice and some of them even emphasized of not having been physically active or even interested in sport before that.

The following quote is a typical example of playing sports on own initiative. An athlete in traditional individual sport starts the interview by reporting on various sporty plays, games and activities. She also participated in competitions but was not involved in deliberate practice. Long cycling distances to the games further accentuate her overall physically active lifestyle.

> From very early on, I was out there, playing with the neighbourhood kids. We were out playing in summer and in winter. I remember how I participated in competitions, interscholastic competitions and all that. I was somehow very involved all the time. And if I didn't have a ride to where I wanted to go, then I just cycled that 6–8 kilometres even when I was still in primary school, just to get there to play with friends.

It is revealing that many of the older athletes discovered or chose their own sport very late. This correlates with an all-round sporty background, acquired in childhood plays and games, and also with the fact that these athletes didn't have to choose between competing and stopping sport altogether in their youth, as often is the case nowadays. In fact, nearly all those born in 1969–1979 had a very physically active, and in many ways so, childhood and adolescence. Many have also had at least one secondary sport as long as possible, often even well into their 20's. Today such multiple sport participation might be considered impossible. Many of these athletes started deliberate practice relatively late and also specialized late in their respective main sports.

Those born in 1969–1979 are the only age cohort in the research data with more rural than urban born respondents. Traditional individual sports were popular among those born in rural areas whereas city children favoured team sports. This could be seen in the interviews: rural children spent their childhood 'running around', just playing out there and being physically active in their free time. Many reported on having walked, cycled or skied even several kilometres to school and an interest in more traditional sports had been a very natural part of lifestyle. Urban children, in turn, played different outdoor and backyard games. They also had an increasing number of sports and sport clubs to choose from, without any strong need to specialize at a young age. It's worth noting that for both urban and rural athletes sport and exercise were mostly seen as social action. Again, it has to do with the idea that at that time, 'all children were physically active' – even though it wouldn't have been the whole truth with that generation (Salasuo & Ojajärvi 2013, 148–160; 2014).

## Children of the turning point of the sport and exercise culture

The onset of the transitional phase can already be seen in the childhood sport and exercise activities of those born in 1980–1984. Some of them described their childhood activities in a somewhat nostalgic way "how we played all those different games back then, like all the children". Still, more children than before participated in deliberate practice and sport began to be partly separate element of everyday life, something to go to. Deliberate play had become deliberate practice to more children than ever. There is a substantial difference between living environments, though, as those born in rural areas mainly reported on outdoor games and free play whereas urban children typically entered into sport through deliberate practice in sport clubs.

Those born in the early 1980's have grown up in an important turning point in society, extending to all fields of life. They are among the last age cohorts to have memories of Finland before the early 1990's depression, the time before the information technology revolution and the rise of Nokia (Castells & Himanen 2001). The old Finland still prevailed in rural areas until it inevitably started to disappear as a consequence of the turmoils of the early 1990's. We could even suggest that those born in early 1980's have been socialized into two different social realities: on one hand, into the culmination of the Finnish welfare state (Roos 1999) and, on the other hand, into the onset of its decomposition.

As regards the first sport experience the interviewees were split in two groups: ten of them reported mostly on deliberate play, eleven on deliberate practice. The former were mainly raised in rural environments, the latter in urban ones. The following quote clearly illustrates this dichotomy. A ball game player reports first on her own-initiative sports but also on how her parents took her to deliberate practice, to instructed sport activities:

> I guess I was quite an active child and my mum keeps telling me that she never knew in which tree I was climbing or doing something else in our garden, running around or something. But practicing... I don't know, maybe they took me to different places, to some instructed track and field activities or somewhere else.

The importance of sport and exercise facilities was brought up, too. Those who grew up in the 1980's and 1990's could enjoy the results of a wide-spread planning and building of sport facilities not only in cities but also in smaller municipalities (see Salmikangas 2004; Kokkonen 2013; Kokkonen 2015, 175–178). An athlete born in the early 1980's recalls their meaning as follows:

> We had so many options to choose from. There were tennis courts and ice-skating rinks, skiing tracks, Finnish baseball and the list goes on. You could find facilities for any sport. And in our municipality you could do almost anything for free, and everything was just so accessible, you just went there. I should really thank our municipality, for having all these sport facilities as a child.

Those born in the early 1980's shared a lot with the urban born 1970's children. Both groups participated actively in instructed activities in team sports, in particular. In the interviews, sport was characterized in many ways as less enforced and more playful than what the younger age groups have described. Many athletes had had time to play and test different sports before embarking on their own favourite sport. Chance played an important role to many athletes in choosing their main sport and for good reason one could suggest that these all-round athletes could have made it to the top in other sports as well.

It is also interesting to see that there are no significant differences in the experiences, sport activity backgrounds and opportunities between urban and rural athletes. On the basis of the athlete interviews we can conclude that those who grew up in the last years of the heyday of the uniform culture and the culmination of the Finnish welfare state had fairly equal opportunities to participate in sports regardless of their place of residence (e.g. Zacheus 2008, 81–84). The situation started to change from the 1990's depression, after which those born in the 1980's started to specialise in their main sport. With many athletes, this took place fairly late and, again, the benefits of all-round physical activity in childhood and of late specialization are emphasized.

## Children of the diverging and urbanising sport and exercise culture

As could be seen in table 3, those born in late 1980's differ only little from those born in early 1980's as regards their living environment or their range of sports: most of them are urban born which is, on the other hand, greatly influenced by the overrepresentation of soccer players among those born in 1985–1989. For those born in the 1980's, the dividing lines in sport are the qualitative aspects of sport and exercise and, in particular, the increasing participation in deliberate practice, in organised and instructed sport activities.

If those born in the early 1980's were the children of the turning point of the sport and exercise culture, those born in 1985–1989 had already experienced this change and the divergence brought by it in a much more concrete way in their childhood and adolescence. In the interviews of those born in the late 1980's, we could hear only a few echoes of the old sport and exercise culture, and only with rural athletes. Thus, the juncture or the turning point between athlete generations can be placed, on the basis of the birth year, to the mid 1980's. In post-depression Finland, where most of those born in the late 1980's entered into sport, sport participation became much more instructed and club-based (see also Kokkonen 2013, 172, 177–178; Salasuo & Ojajärvi 2013, 164–173). It may not be exaggerated to say that, at the same time, sport activities changed to the direction of mainly instructed training (cf. deliberate play vs. deliberate practice; Côté et al. 2007).

This change can clearly be seen in the first sport experiences as reported by the respondents: eight of them emphasized playing sports and games on their own whereas as many as 25 reported on having participated in instructed activities. At this point, the way to report on one's athletic autobiography makes a clear u-turn in the research

data. The following description by a soccer player is, in all its simplicity, a very typical beginning of the stories of those born in the late 1980's. He tells about the club and the sport played in it, and about the continuum which is still going on:

> Well, when I was four my mum took me to play soccer in the kids' league [in club x], and then the playing just went on.

As many as 18 representatives of this age group started their athletic autobiography with a similar, or nearly identical, story. This reveals how sport participation can easily become a 'pipeline', a system of refining and producing athletes. In the sociology of sports, concepts such as the commodification of an athlete and the athlete as a product of a global system are part of the debate around this phenomenon (Ingham 1975; Heinilä 1998, 133–140; Chung 2003). The quotation above is very typical especially to urban athletes and, more often than before, also to rural athletes – even though in discussions with some of the rural athletes we could still hear echoes of the old ethos emphasizing more 'natural physical activities'. Among these athletes, old and new were sometimes mixed in interesting ways: there might have been a sports hall even in the smallest of municipalities but children came to instructed activities on foot, by bike or by skis, even from a distance of several kilometres. On the contrary, those urban children who emphasized deliberate play sometimes referred to urban play locations: "well I've been quite active ever since I was a kid, running around the shopping malls etc…" The activities of the end 1980's born 'booster seat generation' (Kyttä 2003) were, however, often observed by parents or trainers, and children were usually taken to training by car, even in the countryside (Salasuo & Ojajärvi 2013)[14].

Those born in the late 1980's also offer an interesting view to the rise of lifestyle sports. They secured their place in the spectrum of sports towards the end of 1990's (see Kokkonen 2013, 158–159). This coincides with the increasing media exposure and the influx of international youth culture trends to Finland[15]. Many lifestyle sports arrived to southern cities (i.a. Jokinen 1989) already in the 1980's but from the perspective of elite sports, they were still far away from the mainstream. They became mainstream only after the early 1990's depression, through young people, and slowly reached all parts of Finland. The ever increasing media exposure played its role, too. "I saw that [lifestyle sport] on TV and it looked cool", one of the lifestyle sport athletes born in the late 1980's told.

With the rise of lifestyle sports, sport and exercise began to expand to totally new directions and cultural fields which had not traditionally been defined as sport (cf. "street sports", Hoikkala 1989, 107; see also Rinehart 2000; Piispa 2015a). Henning Eichberg (2004, 13) writes about three models of sport, the last of which is characterized by carni-

14 One young athlete born in the 1990' told that his club policy was and still is that the athletes come to practice by bike or by other means of their own. Car could be used only if the distance was more than 10 km. The interviewer got interested in this practice and promised to recommend it in the publication – here it is now.

15 Thus is not surprising that also the lifestyle sports athletes born before 1985 discovered their sport only in the 1990's or later.

val and play. Instrumental rationality is not among the principles of such sports and the sense of community in them. Instead, human interaction, emphasis on being different, identity and non-identity are emphasized. Eichberg (op. cit.) writes about street parties, dancing and playing, and about a culture where the sense of belonging is a consequence of human encounters and the aim is not to unify or to streamline the group as in elite sports. This could well apply to lifestyle sports, too.

Whilst free play and outdoor games have become less frequent in childhood, some people gather similar experiences later in life when establishing their own social reference group or community. Lifestyle sports offer positive experiences and a sense of community that many look after, and that cannot be reached in competitive sports. As the research data indicates, this 'experience pathway' may well produce world-class athletes in previously unknown sports. For example, the Finnish aviation magazine Ilmailu (Ilmailu/Tuominen 2007) suggested that the wingsuit flyer Jari Kuosma must be, "without doubt", the best known Finnish aviator in the world.

## Children of new Finland

Those born in 1990's have clearly grown up in new Finland. This can be seen in the emphasis on deliberate and diverged practice of sport. The difference to those born in the early 1980's and to the children of the 1970's is significant. Sport and exercise have been practised almost exclusively in the context of deliberate practice, not in that of free play and outdoor games. In the interviews, courts, tracks and sport halls were listed as places to play sports. Most 1990's born athletes have grown up in cities with a large number of facilities for organised sport activities (e.g. Kokkonen 2015, 175–178). As the amount of deliberate play has decreased, children and young people need to go to specific places to practise sport, in other words it doesn't come naturally anymore (Zacheus 2008, 199–202; see also Kinnunen 2001). This development is seen in traditional individual sports, too. Also individual sport athletes have grown up in urban environments and with modern training facilities: rural landscapes have changed to all-weather running tracks.

As for the first sport experience, the change in sport culture is evident: only 6 athletes mentioned non-organised sport, whereas 23 mentioned instructed activities. Four out of these six had entered into sports with their parents, one with his friends in backyard games and only one reported on having never been involved in sport clubs. It is notable that only two athletes reported on natural, own-initiative physical activity which was taken for granted only ten years earlier. The following quote tells about entering into sport in a club, about early target setting and competitions which were emphasized among most younger athletes in the research data:

> My mum took me to [a particular sport] training when I was seven and that was it. I trained for a couple of years and then I was told that I could go to the older kids' group to learn more. That was the start and when I was young maybe the first big achievement was the Inter-Scholastic Finnish Championship, I must have been 8 or 9.

Those born in the 1990's talked about concepts such as development squad, sport school, special sport emphasis in schools and junior level competitions. The reality of sport and exercise was very different from that of the childhood and adolescence of the oldest athletes in the research data. Sport and exercise had become instructed and target-oriented activities, serving competitive goals. The difference to earlier generations is significant and not only in the light of the research data of this study: in the Heinilä and Vuolle study (1970, 14–15), for instance, most elite athletes born in the 1950's began their competitive activities only after 10 years of age. The change correlates with a broader development in which, along with rising commercialism and intensifying global competition, elite sports have changed substantially during the last decades – "the game is getting tougher in elite sports", as Jouko Kokkonen (2013, 106) described the change in competitive and elite sports from the 1970's onwards (see also Amis & Slack 2003; Phoenix et al. 2007).[16]

In most cases, socialization into sport still takes place through family or friends. However, it doesn't mean going cross-country skiing with family or playing backyard ice-hockey without skates with friends but going to sport clubs with parents or friends. This seems to hold true also among lifestyle sport athletes: most of them had entered into sport in instructed sports either in their own sport or in something more traditional such as team ball games, and their own initiative had been emphasized only later when they joined different subcultures and communities. In the following quote, a lifestyle sport athlete tells about deliberate sport practice in primary years:

> Yes, back then, maybe during the last years of primary, in the sixth grade. I did track and field, went to training. Well we did running and long jump in the school sport facilities and so on… and then I danced, I had disco dance once a week.

## CHANGES IN THE GROWTH ENVIRONMENTS OF SPORT

As could be seen in chapter 1, the impact of the family is significant in the socialization into an active lifestyle and in the development of an athletic habitus. This process seems to be the 'universal of growing up as an athlete' in which essential habits and meanings are transmitted. This chapter has so far indicated, however, that even if family members passed on the essential habits, the framework of action has changed: the interest towards sport may come from the family but the initiation or actual entry into sport often takes place within deliberate practice or in instructed activities. Also, the content and goals of sport and exercise in childhood and adolescence have been redefined. The older athlete generations have inherited a more informal physical activity culture from their families

16 We may very well ask if this "tough game" is even good for the growth of elite athletes? Some may say that children of freer sports culture, the likes of Jari Litmanen or Teemu Selänne, simply don't emerge anymore. Still, these athletes did very well also in this "game getting tougher" continuing their careers well into the 21st century. Thus, is educating athletes to the tough game the correct approach, after all?

whereas with younger generations, the family transports the young athlete to and from organised sports. Exercising together with friends or family and 'natural, everyday physical activity' (Zacheus 2008) has been replaced by participation and inclusion in sports club activities (see also Koski 2009; Salasuo & Ojajärvi 2013).

The divergence of sport and exercise is, however, not the only factor behind the shift of the sport initiation to 'club level'. Other factors include the construction of sport facilities, changes in parenting practices and changes in the practices of sport associations and club. All this is complemented by urbanisation and the rural lifestyles being replaced by urban ones (e.g. Kokkonen 2015, 175–247). More people simply live in urban areas. For them, participation in instructed activities in purpose-built environments is only natural. In urban environments, children's free play and backyard games are being replaced by instructed activities but the changes in the average living environments have an impact on the practices of sport, too. Once again, we can conclude that sport and exercise do not take place in a societal vacuum (see also Tamburrini 2000; Jarvie 2006).

Two elements have to be emphasized here. First of all, the analysis above and its categorizations – age groups, living environment and the nature of sport and exercise – entail certain generalizations. For example, dividing athletes into different age groups or using more sophisticated characterizations of the living environments or the nature of sports would have been an option. In this way, certain nuances could have been analysed, such as the connection of certain sports to certain living environments but at the same time, the bigger picture of the analysis could have become blurred. The broad research data extensively covers the spectrum of different sports but for individual sports, the sample sizes would have been limited. For example, comparing two wrestlers and three volleyball players wouldn't make much sense hence the method of this study is well justified. The athletes' biographies were in the core of the analysis and the result of the study is clear: there have been important changes in the contents of childhood and adolescence sport and exercise within just a few generations and these changes are mutually connected to broader changes in the society such as urbanisation. A more detailed, case-by-case analysis could have led to a jungle where these mutual relationships between different phenomena would have been more difficult to detect. Secondly, it's worth noting that the authors don't want to value the underlying change through their analysis in any way. This would be tempting, in particular because the authors themselves, born in the early 1970's and early 1980's, are the same age as the older generations in the research data. Attaching value to the change wouldn't offer more than useless nostalgia as the societal changes have already taken place and they have become irreversible facts. Now that we know that today's and future's sport and exercise are more likely to take place in cities and in urban sport facilities we should look for solutions to, for example, decreasing physical activity levels among children and youth, in urban environments (e.g. Husu et al. 2011). In addition, climate change may have even more irreversible impacts than urbanisation at least in some sports such as skiing; as a consequence, the raising of future cross-country skiers may even become impossible (Yle, Finnish Broadcasting Company/Kluukeri 9.12.2014). Thus, there is no point in longing for the past. Instead, we have to look for new activities and maybe even

new sports which are intrinsically urban (see also Jokinen 1989; Harinen & Rannikko 2013; Kokkonen 2013, 221–252).

The change in society can also be seen in the stories of rural athletes. One athlete, raised in a rural environment and born in the end of 1980's, remembers the local multi-purpose hall as follows: "It was like I nearly lived there, in that environment, and it was all so… well, good fun. We could do whatever we wanted to. "The enthusiasm with which the athlete told about the past is not very well transmitted through the text extract. The interviewer had written the following complementary note in his research diary: "The athlete's eyes were lit and a broad smile came to her face when she was telling about the time spent in that multi-purpose hall, of how it was her second home when she was young." Hence the experience was very nostalgic. However, the nostalgia didn't result from backyard games or from other elements of a traditional rural childhood but from the time spent in the sports hall. The origins of good sport moments or the key elements of growing up are not tied to a certain growth environment, or to any time or location.

Thus, there is no categorical imperative that a certain environment would be clearly better for sport and exercise than any other. In this context, lifestyle sports offer a solid new field and perspective in which sport and exercise concretely correspond to modern living environments and mindsets. As Kauko Kämäräinen wrote in 1979 (see Kokkonen 2008, 116), "Sport and exercise may, as a whole, be one of those fields in the society that especially have to adapt to societal changes". If this is not understood in sport and exercise policy and in sport movement, the physical activity levels of children and youth might decrease even further (see also Puronaho 2014). The traditional inertial force (Lähde 2013, 27) may hold up the sport institutions (Piispa 2015a) longing for the past success but it shouldn't slow down those children and young people who still want to play sports and have fun in the growth environments they feel at home with.

## EXCURSION: THE LACK OF SOCIETAL DISCOURSE IN THE INTERVIEWS

It is worth noting that the athlete interviewees didn't explicitly reflect almost any factors connected to societal and cultural time and location. The athletes were talking from their own point of view; about their lives and their careers as athletes. The talk was mainly built on the athlete's perspective and only very few 'grace notes' were heard in the interviews, to reflect the meanings of the changing time and place. This happened mostly with older interviewees and with multicultural athletes although, with the latter, this was due to the 'additional' theme in their interviews, i.e. the features and challenges of multiculturalism. In addition, in the interviews of multicultural athletes it is important to note that these themes, such as racism experiences, were usually brought up by the interviewer. When comparing the athlete interviews to those of the artists, in the same study context, the athletes' interviews were relatively 'void' of societal and generational experiences.

It's well-founded to reflect the reasons for this observation. Firstly, it's evident that the theme of the interview, i.e. *an athletic* life course guided and restricted the discussion to some extent. It doesn't entirely explain the phenomenon, however, especially taking

into account the significant difference to artists' interviews. One explanation could be that, compared to a career in arts, a career in sports takes place here and now and the athlete doesn't really have time to think about the past or the future of his career. An artist's career, on the other hand, requires a certain degree of maturity and it generally materialises considerably later than that of an athlete (see chapter 6; see also Ericsson 1996b, 9). For that reason, the interviewed artists were, on average, nearly ten years older than the athletes which could clearly be seen in the interview talk. As Katarina Eskola (1998, 149) points out, young people don't talk less about their lives just because their lives are somehow 'void of experiences' but simply because they have less life behind them, compared to older people. This could also be seen in the average length of the athletes' interviews which was shorter than that of the artists. In addition, the interviews of older athletes were, on average, longer than those of the younger athletes.

Another reason for little reflection of societal issues in the interviews of the athletes may be that a career is sports materialises, in certain way, in isolation. Certainly, this doesn't mean that the life courses of athletes or the world of sports in general were somehow separate from the society as a whole. Instead, an aspiring athlete must focus strictly on sport and just turn down many dimensions of the normal life course. As a result, the immediate everyday experiences of an athlete often consist of a much regulated and carefully timed sport-based rhythm with training and competitions and little time for 'normal' experiences. One way this was reflected in the interviews was that the athletes talked very little about following sports in the media or their own idols – these were usually mentioned only when specifically asked.

The life course of an athlete is indeed very 'exceptional'. Artists are not the best reference group, though, as they often draw inspiration for their work from the cultural reality surrounding them and usually reflect it very strongly. The athletes' setting is often the opposite. This could be analysed with the help of the character types as defined by David Riesman (2001): athletes are *inner-directed* whereas artists are *other-directed*. An athlete is strongly focused on goals and he has learned the values behind them from his parents and other authorities through the socialization process. He has embraced the competitive culture of sport and its norms. This can be concretely seen in the impact of the Olympics on the practice and competition rhythm in many sports. An athlete practises on his own but his targets are set by the norm system of sports whereas an artist constantly observes the signals coming from his social environment. The norm system of arts is not defined by authorities but by the peer networks of individual artists. As a result, the targets and values in art are in constant change and each artist can also influence them.

The societal terms of the life courses of athletes are, in any case, the same as with anybody else. If the athletes themselves do not reflect on them, the researchers may do so. As for the athletes, the researchers also focused on the sport system which has a very strong hold of the athletes. Consequently, in chapter 5, we focus strongly on the institutional terms and conditions of sport which are very tight compared to almost any other field of life. The 'window' of elite athleticism is very narrow and, for example, tightly tied to the athlete's age and therefore doesn't really allow any 'drifting around' (see also Heinilä & Vuolle 1970). Again, the difference to artists is significant. Another important

conclusion is the sport sociological observation (see Hughes & Coakley 1991; Heinilä 1998, 133–134; Dunning 2005) made above, i.e. that the athlete's career materialises in a very tight and predefined institutional framework. By this we mean that an athlete must embrace a culture – almost an obsession – of competition and, in practice, participate without questions in the predefined competitive structures given from above. There is no room for revolution in the field of sports (c.f. Bourdieu 1993; 1996) – except in the form of establishing totally new, often subcultural fields of action (such as lifestyle sports; see also Wheaton 2004; Rannikko et al. 2013).

# 4 Artists and the societal and cultural landscape

One of the main principles of the life course analysis is the impact of social conditions, contexts and changes on the life courses of individuals (e.g. Giele & Elder 1998; Kok 2007; Häkkinen 2012). The place where an individual is born and raised has an impact – and not only whether he's born in Finland but also whether he was born in Helsinki, and in which district of the city, or somewhere else. Secondly, the timing of the major changes in the society and their coincidence with the major events in the life course impact individual's life. In our age of sudden changes, it makes a big difference whether the individual was born in the 1950's or 1970's Finland.

Most interviewed artists are children of the big societal change (see Roos 1987). For the baby boomer generation the 1970's was the decade of the most positive turning points in their lives: landing in a relationship and having children, for example (Purhonen et al. 2008b, 45–47). The turbulent 1960's and the heyday of the youth revolution had been left behind although political radicalism and, on the other hand, opposing it continued well into 1970's. Also the vast majority of those who were not personally touched by the political movement of the 1960's experienced the changing living conditions (Purhonen 2008, 197–226). The most important features included the increasing standards of living resulting from phenomenal economic growth.

Urbanisation continued strongly in the early 1970's. Already in the late 1960's more than half of the population lived in urban areas but, in the 1970's, many still had a rural mindset and a rural way of life (Kortteinen 1982; Häkkinen & Salasuo 2013). Urban life started to develop in the form of regular paid jobs and in suburban residential areas (Kortteinen 1982, 143–146). In many families, the change in life was radical as, compared to the agrarian society, the spouses were not anymore work partners and the traditional, gender-based division of labour fell apart (op. cit., 146). Naturally, this had an influence in child-rearing, education and the whole educational system. The comprehensive school system and 9 years of compulsory education were introduced in the 1970's. Going to school and education were taken for granted, as common goods, or resources. (Antikainen et al. 2013, 100–104.)

Urbanisation led to changing culture in cities and to respective new lifestyles. New middle class was characterized by the husband's good position as a salaried employee and the wife's 'double burden' at work and at home. At the same time, a new working class was born and it started to diverge from the successful middle classes by way of housing, socioeconomic orientation and status (Kortteinen 1982, 161–163). In the 1970's at the latest, a new social development phase followed: the ideas and attitudes of younger generations became educated, learned and thoroughly thought (Häkkinen

2013, 53; see also Van den Berg 2007, 68). Values were not transferred or inherited from parents and relatives anymore, through a very slow change, as they were in the agrarian times, because now there were so many new options and so much information on offer. New, small stories started to flourish along with the old national narratives, challenging and weakening the past, and at the same time creating new ways to adhere to the past, present and future.

What was the connection between the life courses of the interviewed artists and the changes in the society? All the artists, with one exception, were born before the 1990's depression. All of them were born and raised in the shelter of a well-established welfare state. The material conditions of their childhood were much better than those of their parents. They were born and raised in the 'society of plenty' (Hoikkala & Paju 2008, 280) with access to many resources and opportunities in the field of arts.

## URBAN AND RURAL GROWTH ENVIRONMENTS FOR ARTISTHOOD

The interviewees grew up in many different localities in Finland and some of them had spent considerable parts of their childhood abroad. Seven interviewees were defined as 'born and raised in Helsinki' as they had lived all their childhood and teen years in the capital. Their childhood was characterized by a large number of options for education and after school activities and their ability to use them. Many options to consume art were available, too. Parents could easily take the children to, for example, museums. According to the 'culture relationship' (cf. Koski 2004; Zacheus 2008) as defined in chapter 2 we could conclude that the thick realization of the culture relationship was in its own class in Helsinki compared to other parts of Finland. Most of the Helsinki-raised artists went to Kallio or Torkkelinmäki upper secondary schools with special emphasis on arts. In the following quote the importance of the special school becomes evident, not only as a place to study art but also as a social environment:

> A: And then I went to that art, whatever it was, don't really remember the name of the subject anymore. It was something like a theatre group where they do all these things. And I immediately loved it. I liked everything in that school, not only the art subjects.
> I: Yes, well, you said that your friends were really important that they really got you into that upper secondary school and helped you to integrate into it?
> A: Yes and in those years what is often more important is the social environment, not the school itself. Although I was always quite good at school, even in upper secondary, I never really invested that much or really studied a lot. But what was most important was that group of people and those new friends I made, and all those good parties and all that good life in general, you know what you appreciate when you're sixteen.

In the quotation above, the interviewed artist emphasizes the meaning of friends, even from the perspective of school work. Friendship relations are strongly connected to different youth cultural trends and involvement in them. Today, the growth environment strongly defines – and defined even more in the 1980's and 1990's – what kind of youth

(sub)cultures are even theoretically possible to an individual in a certain experiential context. The last few decades can be characterized by the changing nature of the field of youth cultures. Youth cultures used to be large, often dogmatic and even somewhat serious movements (e.g. Heiskanen & Mitchell 1985) before the fragmentation of the field of youth cultures (e.g. Salasuo et al. 2012). This change is related to the increasing speed of communication and information. The younger generations have not only lived in the juncture of the information society but also experienced the change in youth cultures. For those born and raised in cities, the youth cultural trends of the 1980's and 1990's were strong, new experiences. For a few artists, those trends and the social circles offered by them became very important to their subsequent career in arts (see Thornton 1996). In the following quote, the artist names hip hop, graffiti and snowboarding and the new circles of friends they offered, where the future artist was "very much in":

> Well, yes, I guess I was still a child but then at some point I got really involved in the hip hop culture, and all those urban culture things, that must have been when I was in secondary school. And then I hanged around the graffiti gangs and maybe through that I developed, well, an interest in urban culture and through that, to music and I was somehow very much in in that whole thing. And then that developed into having all these different phases in my life. After graffiti and all that I got into snowboarding which was somewhat related to that same culture.

Other urban children (7) were from Espoo (3), Tampere (2) and Oulu (2). They don't share that many common features in their experiences compared to those raised in Helsinki or, on the other hand, in rural areas. However, as those raised in Helsinki, they have taken advantage of the large number of educational and cultural opportunities their cities had to offer:

> Well sometimes we went to the theatre and to some art exhibitions but it was fairly occasional, and then to classical music concerts, too. And also through school, we had all those opportunities. I remember I loved our library and our local cultural centre. We went there quite often, or maybe not that often, some three times a year maybe, to some concerts. And the library was there, I really enjoyed going there, in that world, looking for books and really get absorbed in them.

Helsinki was very attractive especially to those raised in Espoo. All of them went to school in Helsinki and moving there was a somehow a natural passage to where the action takes place. In the following quote one can clearly see that Helsinki and HKTL, its upper secondary school with special emphasis on visual arts were natural moves but the foundation obtained in Espoo was good – that "optimistic spirit" provided a good basis, and other "successful people" were mentioned, too:

> Well, I'd say that the Greater Helsinki Region, well it's difficult to say and compare to what it would have been like had I lived somewhere else, in another town or in the countryside, but well, it's difficult to imagine that… but I think that when it comes to stimuli and opportunities, if I had lived somewhere else I wouldn't probably have gone to Helsinki and to HKTL and well... But on

> the other hand, well I do think that where I lived had some impact, too, we've always lived there […] well, there were very different people there but somehow the spirit was always optimistic, at least that's how I felt it, and then I know many people who study and work and are successful so…

Small town artists (6) had less cultural opportunities in their childhood but there were some, at least if they looked for them. Some respondents were heavy users of libraries, for instance. Other opportunities existed too: ”I remember that I took all possible courses in comics and in graffiti, whatever they had on offer”.

Friends became very important to some of the interviewed artists raised in small towns. Groups of friends were active in discovering and doing different things, within the limits they had. In the following extract, the respondent finds reasons for his interest in horror movies – that he later drew upon in his artistic work – in his group of friends and its shared interests:

> Well, I don't know, in my teen years I somehow got really into [horror movies]. At that time, there were not many horror movies available for rental. Movies were also heavily cut then, it was really difficult to find uncut versions. But I had my channels, I knew where to order VHSs. And we watched them with friends, it was exciting because it was somehow forbidden. Of course, the VHS quality was very poor, those films that we watched in somebody's home. I collected incredible amounts of them. So that's where it all comes from. I don't know why we were so thrilled about them but I really felt that it was something that we were really into, all of us. But the others didn't choose any career in arts then.

Those raised in small rural municipalities (6) emphasized the impact of the growth environment. All of them talked about the impact of their growth environment, in both positive and negative sense. Nearly all of them had memories of both the happy 'countryside childhood' but also of some frustrating elements. As for (art) activities, everything needed to be looked for or even invented on their own as there were very little stimuli available, maybe ”just a library bus”. Countryside living was different also because the respondents felt that they were somehow cut off from the big wide world. In the following quote, the respondent explains how, especially before mobile phones and internet, people lived in a ”sort of bubble” where information was often replaced by ”weird rumours”:

> Well, I'd say it's great to live in small places although at that time it felt really depressing and it was somehow embarrassing to admit that I lived there. And you really live in a sort of bubble, especially before the internet and mobile phones… Now it's difficult to even imagine that you wouldn't have internet or mobile phone but back then, really, if you wanted to talk to somebody you made a phone call or you went to see your friends… And somehow stories evolved to totally new versions of what had actually happened, and some weird rumours were going around, all the time. Maybe this example sheds some light on this; well at school during break times we had this issue, and there were really two schools of thought in this; the other one said that Chewbacca in Star Wars was played by Billy Idol and the other one insisted that it was Chris Holmes from W.A.S.P, and these two groups really fought over this during breaks and nobody ever came up with the idea of just reading the list of actors at the end of the movie… of course it was none of them… [laughs]

Nearby cities were seen as almost magical places, exciting to visit and where everybody wanted to go to study. Social skills were of particular importance to those born and raised in the countryside: all of them made friends and got into circles of friends to make art with even with a risk of being seen as a rural weirdo. Many of them also had a very strong introvert dimension in making their art. Up until 1990's, youth (sub)cultures arrived late and somehow watered down in the countryside, and they had some interesting forms of appearance. These were meaningful to most interviewees even "in all their comicality", as could sometimes be added afterwards.

For those who moved around a lot (3), there was no particular growth environment characterizing their childhood. Regular moves and changing environments affected all of them. Two Finnish-born artists moved a lot with their families, both in Finland and abroad. Constant moving and influences from around the world became important. This story of an immigrant artist obviously differs from the life courses of all the others:

> We were placed in Jyväskylä in the autumn of 1990 which I still remember well. There had been nearly no foreigners there before us, I mean that our group was really the first one. And those were really, well, interesting times. And the feeling was mutual. When we came to Finland, we knew nothing about it and Finns didn't know anything about us. I remember when people asked me if they can touch my hair because it was so dark.

The passage above also tells how much Finland has changed in the last 20 years. In Jyväskylä, this artist and his family were among the first foreigners in town and foreign presence in Jyväskylä was something new to both groups. Later, he moved to bigger cities and finally to Helsinki. It is notable that even though the interviewees had grown up in different environments in Finland and also elsewhere, at some point their paths have – especially due to concentration of art education and art circles – crossed in Helsinki or ended up there. In the entire research data, there are only four artists who had never been in any art school in Helsinki. They were happy with other educational options: two in Tampere, one in Lahti and one in Kankaanpää. This is clearly a sign of the Helsinki-centricness (see also Karttunen 1988, 42–47; Rensujeff 2005, 6; Herranen et al. 2013, 46; Ansio & Houni 2013a, 59–61; Rensujeff 2014, 36–40) of the art world but is naturally also connected to the ongoing urbanisation and to the change in urban economic structures (e.g. Kainulainen 2004; von Bruun & Kivelä 2009). The next quote is another good example of this:

> When I went to [Helsinki] to do the entrance exam and other stuff, I thought that everybody is there. Well, in a certain sense. It's sad but if you think of fine arts education and fine arts in general, well, everything's there. And it's really difficult to have that education somewhere else.

Certainly, Helsinki has a special status as a hub or as the final point but, at least so far, artists have been educated in other places, too. One of the themes of the cultural policy debate in recent years has been the cutting of places in art education which would hit hard at least some smaller localities (OKM 2011; OKM 2012; Herranen et al. 2013).

In addition, this could lead to an increasing Helsinki-centricness and to homogenisation of arts[17].

Experiences abroad had been eye-opening to anybody, not only to those who had moved a lot. To five interviewees, the upper secondary school exchange student year abroad had been important. It opened up new perspectives to own doing and to life in general – "seeing differently" Skeggs 1999) – and in general, to what art and different fields of art could be.

> In the 1990's, the education system [in the other country] and the Fine Arts Academy was so hierarchical and classical [...] When I came back and was asked about it at school, about how it was, well I remember how I said to one of my professors that now I know what I want to do.

The exchange year had had its challenges but, on the other hand, overcoming and winning them were exactly the important things. Four interviewees had studied in art schools abroad. The experiences were often two-sided as well. In the quote above, the interviewee had first been disappointed with the hierarchy and conservativeness of the school but had at last understood what art is and what to aim for in life.

## THE TURNING POINT OF THE 1990'S AND THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

The transition from an agrarian society to a post-industrial society occurred very fast in Finland (Kortteinen 1982; Relander 1998, 44; Häkkinen 2013). The country was uprooted from an agrarian way of life in the late 1970's and already at the end of 1980's and in the beginning of 1990's, the country had become a model of a modern information society (Castells 1996). In the 1970's and 1980's, Finns were still adapting to an urban way of life and to the rhythm of industrial work. The 1990's depression swept away many established structures and, at the same time, many people's jobs.

The lifestyle and ethos of the 'old Finland' stayed alive mainly via older generations (cf. Hoikkala et al. 2009) whose mental heritage has been complemented by the ethos of excellence, characterized by competition and pressure for success (e.g. Simola 2001; Hoikkala & Paju 2008). Foreseeable rural life has changed to a new mentality that socializes people into uncertainty on the labour market, into the building of their own, do-it-youself life story and into the structures of changing sociability, individuality and the debate on the diminishing sense of community (Putnam 1995; Julkunen 2008, 14).

In recent decades, the importance of biological generation, i.e. the family, as the source of opportunities and choices, seems to have risen, regardless of whether the family

17 We should also reflect how urbanisation and Helsinki-centricness, for their part, contribute to the change in the "great story" of the Finnish arts. It's clear that artists raised in urban environments draw upon different aesthetics compared to, for example, the national romantic artists admiring and drawing upon agrarian and forest Finland.

has these 'resources' or not (Wierenga 1999; Bengtson et al. 2002, 155–168; Jallinoja 2006; Häkkinen & Salasuo 2013). One of the reasons has been the adoption of the purchaser-provider-model in the organization of after school activities for children and youth. For example, many non-governmental organizations have changed their way of working and are now based on a purchaser-provider-model instead of a trust relationship which has affected the trust and social capital in the society (see Putnam 2001). In the past 20 years, this purchaser-provider thinking has led to a dramatic rise in the costs of sport and art after school activities for children and youth, and to an alienation of the third sector from the civil society (Saukkonen 2013, 8–10).

With rising costs, the possibilities to try different leisure activities are narrowed down and become more dependent on parents' socioeconomic position, and on their parenting competencies and practices (see Wierenga 1999; Häkkinen et al. 2012). Parents' different capitals and own activity in organizing their children's after school activities very much defines what activities children may choose and what kind of capitals they may gather (Myllyniemi 2009; 2012). The importance of the family as a central action unit seems to have risen as the social capital offered by the support networks of the society has diminished, and supporting the activities of children has been left to their parents' shoulders (Häkkinen & Salasuo 2013). This development is important to understand as after school activities are an important pathway to the recruitment into culture, arts and sport.

In this context it's not surprising that an artist's typical family background is middle class, culturally-inclined and encourages to both formal and informal education. Such background seems to be able to provide good resources and a broad horizon of opportunities well into adolescence when understanding major societal changes, such as information technology development, becomes easier. Socialization continues throughout life, also after that sensitive age (e.g. Giddens 1979). The family backgrounds of the interviewed artists', their growth stories and other life stories are interrelated in the shared middle class experience of a safe and protected childhood and adolescence and, following that, a (relatively) happy adulthood built on those elements. Of course, modern adulthood is also characterized by opportunities, options and making choices (Mikkola 2002, 116), as well as the ethos of self-realization, related to the middle class habitus of the 21st century (Hoikkala 1998, 162; see also Linko 1998, 312–313; Julkunen 2008, 126–128; Tuohinen 2010). Seen through the glasses of the mass generation interpretation, artists clearly share middle class, modern and individual, romantic values (see also Sulkunen 2009, 159–178).

Art is often present in the middle class set of values, in one way or another[18]. The socio-cultural heritage is in many ways reflected in the adulthood and professional career. The children of art and culture homes sail smoothly in the world of arts whereas those with less artistic capitals obtained in their upbringing use different strategies:

18 Pertti Alasuutari (1996) also suggests that the needs and wishes of the educated middle class have, above all, been taken into account in the planning of public art services.

> I haven't had that role model as to how to be an artist. In fact I'm happy that this is the way it is, I mean it's also…as I've seen in that theatre where there are a lot of children of artistic families, second generation actors, somehow working with them has sometimes made me think about their background, how different it is from mine. They take it for granted that they are artists and that's where they belong to and they can somehow enjoy that freedom, too. [...] What I've got from home is a certain middle class lifestyle [...] but then that's somehow that multitension, or, in a more sophisticated way, the source I draw upon, or where my art comes from, it's a big part of it. Somehow that tension between the middle class lifestyle and the freedom of an artist. I believe I wouldn't have this problem if I had a model of another kind of lifestyle. But then I would have the problems they have, constant comparison to parents and fighting their way out of their shadows, very different stuff. I mean that due to my background, I also have a lot of freedom and all that space to realize myself.

The quote above reveals how family background also defines one's own artistic process, not only the social and mental orientation in the world of arts. Having a middle class lifestyle and identity is something to draw upon, to one's own art works. In the interviews, being middle class was noticed in the reflections of professional career in a sense that being an artist was not necessarily taken as a realistic career option even though art had always been a central part of life. As an example, the following quote shows that passion for writing did not yet mean an author's career but the interviewee had more practical goals, in the first place:

> But it was actually good, in that sense I didn't really think about a career in writing, I had no aspirations for it, the writing itself was more important. In some way the writing as an activity was stronger than the idea of being an author. As for my part, I was also thinking that it's not a decent job, being a writer, I should rather be a vet, or a lawyer or a teacher. So these were my dream careers.

A certain *zeitgeist* is seen in the research data, also elsewhere than at the transitions of the ethos of the culturally-inclined middle class. For example, the changes in information technology and media have clearly provided some artistic stimuli. These are strongly related to time as the generations before them didn't even have the opportunity to draw upon these new 'things' (see also Mikkola 2002). In the following quote, movies and computer games are mentioned, the latter having offered "adventures" and "inspiration":

> Movies have interested me the most in this world, they clearly are a source of inspiration on their own. And another source of inspiration are games. I've had so much fun with X-Box and Play Station with all the adventures they offer, those worlds where you really immerse yourself in, they really give you so much inspiration, that experience.

The multiplied offer in the fields of youth cultures, art and entertainment and its reflection in younger generations and artists is related to urbanisation and the so called post-modernisation of culture. End of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st are important junctures where people have just recently detached themselves from their rural roots (Häkkinen 2013, 53). The mindset of the Finns has followed these changes,

protesting only silently. The great narratives of history have not just abruptly broken off, as explained with the concept of the linguistic turn. Instead, they have become multi-perspective (cf. Ahonen 1998; Van de Berg 2007, 75). Marko van den Berg (2007, 149) writes about today's young people's ways to use history as an existential process, in their search for new mental focal points. This process of looking for small-scale narratives can be regarded as that silent protest with the help of which people detach themselves from the old narratives, and the new era with its new narratives – expressly in plural – begins to take shape.

It is also understandable that the performance-oriented middle class in times of constant change is exposed to the pathologies of their time. The best known of these may be the ethos of excellence (Simola 2001) and the battle to succeed. Seventeen artists reported on having at some point of their career – at this point it's worth noting that all of them were in relatively early phases in their careers – experienced a burnout or at least work-related stress. Pia Houni and Heli Ansio (2013b, 132–133) have had similar results in their study; more than half of the interviewed artists had experienced some work-related stress, and approximately one fifth of them a lot or very much.

> I had this point in my life, I had just completed my second degree, my child was still quite young, I had a lot of important projects in the pipeline and then I taught a lot, too. I had just been accepted to do a PhD and I was teaching. I had just opened my exhibition and then, on the following week, I thought I'd be teaching all week and then suddenly I just stopped, needed to take a deep breath. I was walking in that corridor, then I felt like, well I didn't collapse but I just felt that I cannot stand anymore. I just felt so dizzy […] I was so exhausted. So I've been down there. Nothing was ever found. I fell asleep in the ambulance. I was taken to the ambulance, with that trolley on wheels, then I was taken to the hospital. As soon as I lied down, I fell asleep. So I've been in that point… where everything just feels so important, all those opportunities that you just don't say no.

Stress experiences are of course part of modern working life (e.g. Sennett 2002; Julkunen 2008) but artists associate stress and exhaustion with their work, in particular. In the artists' interviews, there was a certain mechanism to be seen: when everything seems so important you cannot say no to anything. As if the performance-oriented generation was afraid that if you don't catch the train, it's gone and there is no new one. This was clearly seen in the quotation above.

## GENERATIONAL REFLECTIONS IN "NEW FINLAND"

> And well part of the reason was of course that there was the economic depression when I started my studies. It was so evident in the construction industry, and I couldn't do my training as part of the studies so the whole thing felt very theoretical. It really was difficult to find a traineeship, and real architects were out of work, too. And then I started to do illustrations, to a magazine.

In this quote, we can see how the early 1990's depression contributed to the artist's career change. This was one of the few occasions in the entire research data when the depression

was brought up – and in a fairly neutral tone. Maybe the depression was not seen that important because the artists could cope with it (cf. Wass & Torsti 2011; see also Puuronen 2013). In the society as a whole, some people had also seen positive consequences of the depression, as pluralism in the value debate increased and consumerism was calmed down to some extent (e.g. Mikkola 2002, 36–39). In many fields, the Finnish art world suffered from the depression as public funding was diminished although Pertti Alasuutari (1996), among others, has noted that budget cuts in arts were still relatively small. The artists in this research data were not directly affected by the depression as they were still largely outside the labour market during the difficult years. On the other hand, the 'age of healthy realism' (Mikkola 2002, 36) after the depression could have been beneficial to artists as it encouraged them to look for and to develop new ways of making a living, and maybe even offer something to draw upon in the evolution of one's own artistic work.

The 'depression generation' (e.g. Virtanen 2005; Wass & Torsti 2011) is a frequently used concept in many contexts, where the depression itself has been seen as the key experience of that generation. This can lead to the following hypothesis: the key experience of those who coped with the depression with no major consequences is, from Mannheim's perspective (see Mannheim 1952 [1928]), the post-depression rise whereas, of those who suffered from the depression, it is the depression itself. The first group includes, among others, the 'successful people' of this study. They can be called the 'welfare generation' (Hoikkala & Paju 2008). The latter includes those who, for example, trained themselves to industrial work before the depression just to notice that there were no such jobs left after it. Thus they can be called the 'depression generation' (Wass & Torsti 2005; Puuronen 2013). Thus, it is justifiable to suggest that there are, within the same age group, at least two strongly divergent generation experiences. Maybe these two fractions of the same age group also share something: they could be described as the 'junction generation of the information age'. They still remember the time before mobile phones, computers and the internet but they have been forced to use new technologies. Some of them have learned easily, some of them haven't. The following quotation is about childhood before the digital age, where the artist also sees a seed of creativity (see also Uusikylä 2012):

> I think as a child of the seventies that my childhood was somehow different as we didn't have any computer games or anything. What I mean is that everything we did was made and developed by us. We did a lot ourselves, we developed different plays and games on our own and built a lot with our hands. That was creative, in that way.

In another interview, an artist reports on how he doesn't understand anything on his brother's "computer man" job, and doesn't even feel the need to:

> My brother works with computers and information technology. [...] he's some kind of a computer man [laughs], something to do with information technology, well, I don't really understand but what I do understand is that I'm very happy when he explains me things and then I ask 'well is this a good thing?'. 'Well, yes' he says and then I'm really happy. And the same goes the other way around.

The quotations above suggest that the artists in the research data located themselves somewhat outside the digital world. Other interviews shared these same features. Thus, the immaterial dimensions of making art were more pronounced although some artists (such as authors) naturally work with computers. In the world of arts, new equipment does not have an intrinsic value in itself although new technology is very welcome in some fields as it cuts costs[19] and provides new opportunities to create and display art (e.g. Dworsky & Köhler 2011).

In the 21st century, the rise of the information age, ruptures in youth cultures and the unavoidable digitalisation of art are naturally reflected in arts in many, also invisible ways. For example, new digital tools were first adopted in some youth cultures and the innovations they generated was inevitably reflected in arts and, consequently, in the way world view of an entire generation. Good examples include graffiti, skating and snowboarding, the importance of which was also emphasized in some interviews.

> Well I´m somehow, how should I put it, well maybe I have some social criticism, of course. The idea is that somehow I would like to change the world to a better place. It´s not ready yet and the fact that I do have these possibilities through my work, to make things visible or better or whatever. Well I don´t know, maybe it´s a question of one´s life control, like in this way I feel more of being in control of my own life and…. that I don´t just sit and wait.

The generation that many of the artists represent is the generation of the children of the political generation of the 1960's and 1970's. Taking into account that art (Karttunen 1988) as well as political views (Virtanen 2001) often run in the family, and that artists often represent a certain avant-garde in the society (e.g. Purhonen et al. 2008a, 295–297; Grindon 2011), one could expect a certain (left-wing) political inclination to be read in the stories of the interviewed artists. This was indeed the case although the political views were not very strong. Being straightforwardly political in art was not very typical but many reported on expressing their political views by other means. This may reflect the decreasing degree of politicality in art[20] (Hacklin 2010) and, on the other hand, the rise of aestheticism and escapism in art. In the following extract, the artist emphasizes how works of art can be seen as "places to escape to" or "fantasy worlds":

19 Alain Bergala (2013, 148–149) gives a hilarious example on this. In one project, young students had to use expensive and unforgiving 8 mm film instead of modern technologies: "You should have seen that seriousness and dignity when they turned on the camera; that distress and hope about everything that could happen […]."

20 Esko Ranta (2013, 145–146) writes about the KOM theatre and its visits to Lapland decades ago: "Back then, it was enough to answer the questions who we are and where do we belong to, as for the willingness to collaborate. Now, the most important question to everybody seems to be who I am". Ranta's notion is very topical and he adds, with a hopeful tone: "It's a pendulum on the move. I'm waiting for the change of direction." If Tommi Hoikkala (2000, 386) is right in saying that "utopias are becoming more personalized [...] in a way that there's no energy left for collective utopias", Ranta may have to wait for a long time.

> I want to offer places to escape, something that are like the best classic fairytales, they're sweet but there's always a danger lurking behind a tree. And of course the good guys win, 6-0. [...] When I read the papers and I've also done some human rights projects, I watch the news, I know about all inequalities in the world, so I don't want to further provoke people with my art, to awaken them further. I understand those artists. It's good that they're there but it's my statement that I'm not that kind of an artist. Being so apolitical is somehow very political. I want to show people utopias and fantasy worlds, that's my statement.

When the world is too big, too complex and, as many of us think, in a bad shape, influencing it becomes a second job and art is the place to escape, a territory of its own. It's a place to build utopias and forget dystopias, maybe even reality. As Aki Kaurismäki said, when he was asked about the 'tenderness' of his recent movie *Le Havre,* compared to the 'darkness' of his previous movies: "When all the hope is gone there's no reason to pessimism anymore" (Turun Sanomat Newspaper 5.4.2012).

# III Agency and transitions

# 5 Transitions and turning points, agency and choices

In the life course analysis, it is essential to locate the important events and transitions, from the perspective of the life of an individual (see Elder & Giele 2009). Growing up to be an athlete and the career in sports take place within a short period of time, typically within 30 years, which means that transitions occur frequently and often in predefined stages of life (e.g. Bloom 1985b; Monsaas 1985; Wolstencroft 2002; Wylleman et al. 2004; Balyi et al. 2005; Côté et al. 2007; Wylleman & Reints 2010). The so called normative transitions define the career and the life course of an elite athlete (Wylleman et al. 2004; Wylleman & Reints 2010). They are stages of the sport career which are located in the life course mainly as defined by the national sport system and by sport federations, clubs, teams and coaches. (Abbott & Collins 2002; Balyi et al. 2005; Kirk et al. 2007; MacPhail et al. 2010.) With age and skills development, also the non-sports related transitions become more dependent on the normative transitions of being an athlete. This conclusion could be made on the basis of the interviews: the athletes very much emphasized their athleticism, or being an athlete. A career in sports had, in nearly every athlete's life story, become a certain prism to look through into other fields of life; something that has an impact on everything (cf. Vuolle 1978). Sport and elite athleticism were the dominant elements in their manuscripts of life (Gould et al. 2002). The socializing impact of sport as an institution, together with sport-oriented parents, siblings and friends, seem to cover the entire agency of an athlete and thus define his or her self-perception (e.g. Stevenson 1990). From the sociocognitive perspective, we can talk about 'self-competence' which is developed in social interaction. In the life courses of the interviewed athletes, this means embracing the agency of an athlete.

Accumulation is an important aspect in the agency, identity and choices of an elite athlete. A cumulative athlete agency is seen, with the advancement of age and skills, as a stronger will and desire to move from one normative transition to another (e.g. Sosniak 1985). The relationship between transitions and agency lead to an intertwined, virtuous circle: each transition strengthens the experience of the agency which, in turn, motivates the athlete to pursue the next transition (see Stevenson 1990).

As athleticism becomes more serious and the athlete agency strengthens, with increasing age and development, there is less and less space for other experiments and trials of young age. In this sense, the life course of an elite athlete is – as the name of this publication suggests – exceptional: as agency is led by an atypical rationality, only a few features of a typical childhood and adolescence fit in (see Schulze 1992; Piispa 2013b). In this rationality, there are features of both rigorous purposive rationality (Weber 1978 [1921]) but also of experience rationality as defined by Gerhard Schulze (1992). However,

purposive rationality primarily targets only the internal goals of sport – whereas an elite athlete puts aside the protected and 'ordinary' life (cf. Kok 2007). The number of young people's options typically increase when they approach adulthood (Salasuo 2006; Hoikkala & Paju 2008) but for athletes, they become fewer.

To be able to reach the elite level, the life course of an athlete has to follow the *principle of symmetric accumulation* (see also Gould & Dieffenbach 2002). With accumulation, the athlete's skills and knowledge develop and certain choices exclude others. An athlete must aim for symmetry: life must be in full balance, and being an athlete strongly defines the entire life. The most important choice of an elite athlete is a certain non-choice: to opt not to opt for anything else. As a consequence of this non-choice the athlete engages himself, transition after transition, stronger to his career in sports, prioritizes his development as an athlete and thus enables the status quo of symmetry and the continuation of accumulation. Each step towards the top takes the athlete closer to the ideal of 'good life' (see also Allardt 1975; Vilkko 1997; Häkkinen 2016) in sports and further deepens his desire to reach it. These dimensions of symmetry and accumulation are evident in the following analysis of this chapter.

In this chapter, we discuss the different transitions of the life courses of those athletes who have reached the top (78) and the choices behind them. Two elements of the life course analysis – agency and transitions – will be analysed combined (see Elder & Giele 2009). Combining these two axioms of the life course is particularly justified with elite athletes as it underlines their complementary nature. Intertwining of agency and transitions is, at the same time, the precondition and the burden of being an athlete: transitions and phases of normal life are 'haunting' beside the career in sports, and the aspiring athlete is in a constant cross-draught where life balance and symmetry are hard to achieve and maintain. The consequences and challenges of this dyssynchronicity will be analysed in the end of this chapter. Dropout athletes (18) will be analysed separately in chapter 8 as their careers are defined by one transition above all: discontinuation of the sports career.

## NORMATIVE TRANSITIONS IN THE ATHLETE'S CAREER

Nearly each interviewed elite athlete had gone through, in one way or another, the typical transitions of a career in sports. They can be seen either as transitions from one career stage to another and the changing positions of being an athlete or as physical, psychological and social processes taking place between the transitions (e.g. Côté et al. 2007; Wylleman & Reints 2010). In sports, the importance of normative transitions varies according to individual sports and nations (e.g. Stambulova & Alfermann 2009). For example, in early specialization sports, intensive and systematic training usually starts before the age of ten and the normative transitions take place in a very short, typically a ten-year period. Lifestyle sports are in the other extreme, as the athletes typically discover their sport later in life. In these cases, normative transitions are usually not the most suitable interpretation framework at all. It is worth noting that the importance of normative transitions can also vary from one national system to another: in Norway, for

example, children's early competition in sports is restricted by regulations (e.g. Skirstad et al. 2012).

In this chapter, we use the typification of transitions, constructed on the basis of a large number of research results in elite sports (Côté 1999; Wylleman & Reints 2010; Erpić et al. 2004; Wall & Côté 2007; Reints & Wylleman 2008; Moesch et al. 2011). The frequently used DMSP-model[21] by Jean Côté et al. (2007) (see figure 1) has been composed on the basis of empirical research and it illustrates the different normative transitions in sport in a clear way. The DMSP-model serves also as the basis of the analysis of this study, and the research results are illustrated by applying and complementing it. At the end of this chapter, we present an illustration drawn on the basis of the analysis where empirical observations are presented with the help of the DMSP-model (Côté et al. 2007, 197). This enables the comparison of the career transitions of the elite athletes of this research data to the optimal timing of these transitions and to the optimal training between them, as seen in the light of present knowledge.

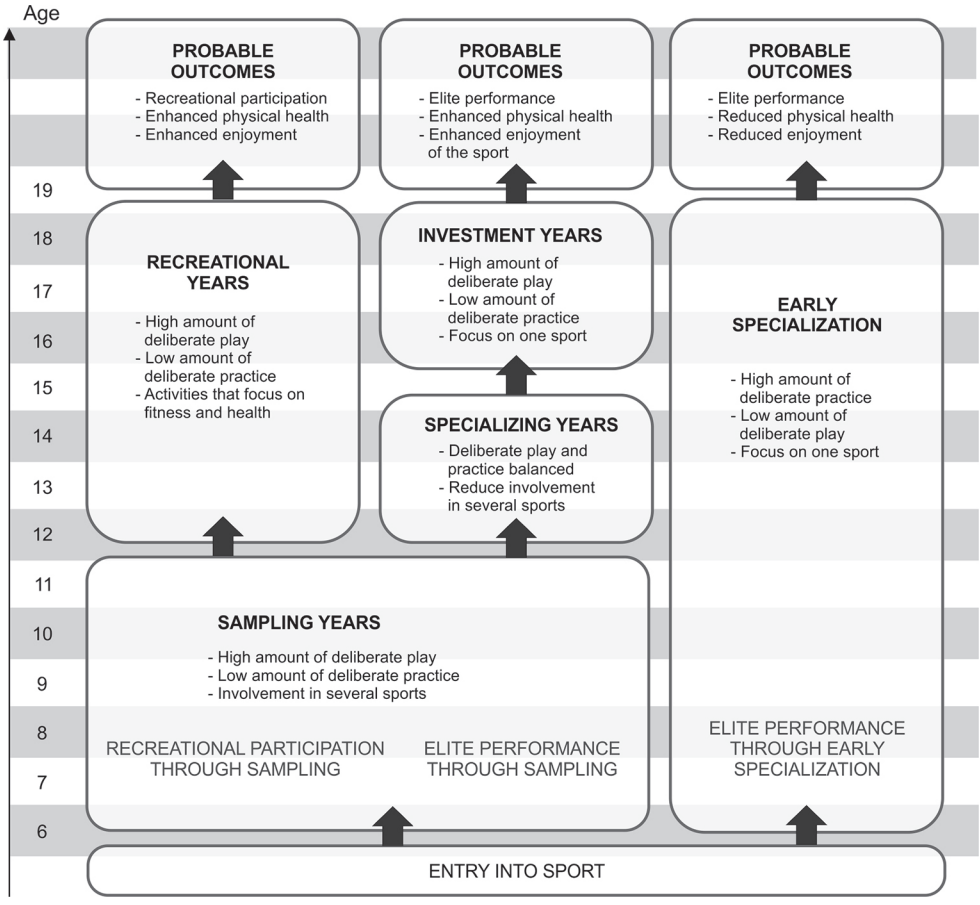


Figure 1. The Developmental Model of Sport Participation, Jean Côté et al. 2007.

21 Developmental Model of Sport Participation.

We need to bear in mind, though, that there are several exceptions in the research data: dyssynchronicity, variation and exceptions to the norm. These features are, within possibilities, taken into account as the analysis proceeds although it is carried out on the basis of the type transitions. In addition, the career in sports should not be seen as a separate entity from the other elements of the life course, instead, these two must be analysed side by side.

Figure 1 illustrates the different transitions and phases in the life course of an elite athlete, based on previous research (Côté 1999; Côté et al. 2007; see also Wylleman & Reints 2010). The first transition is entry into sport, or initiation, usually occurring at age 6–7, but according to several studies (e.g. Wylleman et al. 2004; Bruner et al. 2008), it can also occur as late as at age 12. In practice, initiation means the start of instructed sport activities, or deliberate practice. Initiation leads to a phase which is called the sampling phase[22]. It lasts, on average, until ages 11–13. The following transition leads to what Côté et al. (2007) call specializing years[23], usually starting at around age 11–13. Specializing years at age 13–15 is followed by investment years after the age of 15. Practice becomes more intensive and competitive. However, there may be even significant variation according to particular sport. Transition to next phase, elite performance (or mastery), occurs at approximately age 18–19. The last transition in the career of an elite athlete is the retirement phase, discontinuation (see Wylleman et al. 2004). Its timing depends on particular sport but it usually takes place at approximately 28–30 years of age. Discontinuation doesn't necessarily mean discontinuation of the career in elite sports but at least starting the preparations for it (Wylleman & Reints 2010).

As we have seen, different transitions structure and set the rhythm to the life course of an elite athlete. It is clear that in reality they are not as definitive as in the typification (e.g. Wylleman & Reints 2010; Côté et al. 2007). For example, the athletes interviewed to this study demonstrated great variation as for their transition to mastery, from age sixteen to more than thirty years of age. However, type transitions could be located in nearly every story of the interviewed athletes hence they can be seen as good indicators of the average or the 'middle of the pack' (see also Abbott et al. 2007, 18).

The transitions of an elite athlete's life course have been subject to systematic research only in recent decades (Huhta & Nipuli 2011, 49–66). Ideological models describing the transitions in sport and exercise have been constructed on the basis of these results (e.g. Abbott & Collins 2002; Balyi et al. 2005; Kirk et al. 2007; MacPhail et al. 2010). Helena Huhta (Huhta & Nipuli 2011, 49) suggests in her review article that the most relevant, international ideological models offer practical insights into and applications of different ways to organise sport and exercise for children and youth. They mix research, value choices

22 It's worth noting that e.g. Wylleman et al. (2004) talk about the sampling phase by using the term initiation. Different models share many similarities but differences exist, too, which will be seen later. Thus, misunderstandings are possible. In this study, we aim to bring the categorizations and classifications of previous studies to the Finnish context, by using the vocabulary of previous studies but not committing ourselves to it. Instead, our aim is an interpretation which takes into account the special national features (Stambulova & Ryba 2014).

23 Wylleman et al. (2004) call this development phase, approximately at age 13–19.

and experiential knowledge. The ideology of these models means that they include value choices and an open or hidden agenda, i.e. a subjectively defined target. In many models, this aspiration is related to recognizing and selecting top talents whereas in other models the most important value choice is to provide access to sport and exercise to as many children and young people as possible (*sport for all*; see Huhta & Nipuli 2011, 49–66).

Certainly, no single theoretical model reaches the diversity of sport and athletes. The advantage of evidence-based models is the explicit analysis framework they offer. It can be used in the development work of elite sports which can improve athletes' possibilities to reach the top. At the same time, we can prevent dropping out, burnout and mistakes (e.g. Vaeyens et al. 2008). Roel Vaeyens et al. (2008) underline that agents in elite sports should actively try to understand all those different factors that interact when a talented young person develops to an elite athlete. Research and practice in sport should constantly interact. At the same time, we should understand that there will inevitably be something else in young person's life than just sport. This diversity of life is not always well taken into account in the so called path models, thus, we must be able to interpret and apply these models, and understand their function in a wider context. When not properly used, even feasible models can harm children and youth as individuals, and elite sports and society as a whole.

In Finland, the debate around the need of a national model began in the beginning of the century, and some drafts have been sketched (Lämsä 2012; KIHU 2014; Mononen et al. 2014). However, this is only the beginning. So far, the recommendations by Nuori Suomi (2004; 2005; 2008) have been closest to any ideological models. According to Huhta (Huhta & Nipuli 2011, 70), they differ from international models in being general and very inclusive, covering the entire field of sports. Yet, they don't seem to take evidence-based knowledge into account.

Due to lack of evidence-based models, paths or transitions, the development and career transitions of the athletes interviewed for the purposes of this study have taken place nearly exclusively as defined by the practices of that particular sport, club or team (see also Hakkarainen et al. 2009). They can be referred to as experience models or opinion models as there is very little, if any, research knowledge behind them and their value choices have been mostly implicit. On the basis of the research data, the different stages of the progress and career development of athletes have been the result of practical work of different sports and sport clubs, experiential learning and the beliefs of individual, strong personalities.

## INITIATION TO DELIBERATE PRACTICE AND THE SAMPLING PHASE

According to typical transitions (Côté 1999; Erpić et al. 2004; Wall & Côté 2007; Côté et al. 2007; Reints & Wylleman 2008; Wylleman & Reints 2010; Moesch et al. 2011), childhood's deliberate play and playful games are followed by an initiation to the institution of sport at around 6–7 years of age. The following sampling phase continues up until age 11–13. In optimal situation, initiation should not diminish the amount of deliberate play but rather increase it. Repeating experiences of physical activity in differ-

ent environments in the sampling phase strengthen those capitals in children that will make the overcoming of the physical and cognitive challenges easier in the following career phases. (See Baker & Côté 2006; Côté et al. 2007.)

One of the determinants of the initiation experience is the sport relationship embraced at the family table (see chapter 1). Especially to those born and raised in families of strong physical activity relationship the first transition may be self-evident but, at the same time, it is also very important. It connects the children to a similar life course to that of their parents, or at least one of them. Initiation, where the children are introduced into the social world of sport and exercise, valued by their parents, is an important transition of the whole family. Also many other interviewed athletes and their parents have experienced this transition as an important one. Strong intergenerational physical activity relationship or the example of peers and siblings make the initiation into deliberate practice a natural and also an anticipated transition.

Especially with older interviewees, childhood had been a period of own-initiative sport and physical activity (see chapter 3). Those with rural backgrounds reported on abundant and varied everyday physical activity whereas those raised in urban areas reported on continuous backyard games and so on (see also Salasuo & Ojajärvi 2013). In such environments, deliberate practice has been a natural continuum to the childhood plays and games. The childhood of many elite athletes seemed to be filled with sport and exercise either at home, in school, at leisure or in deliberate practice.

With the initiation the child has, for the first time in his or her life, a position in a team, in a training group or similar, i.e. he or she becomes part of the organized sport system. Symbolic signs of the transition include the transfer of parental responsibility to the coach during the training, predefined timings and locations for training and a uniform training outfit of the team, among others. The transition has a clear dimension of place as the immediate influence of home and other familiar surroundings change to, for example, a sports field where time is spent without parents. This time is experienced as social and attractive. In the interviews, the first training sessions were remembered as important experiences, positive rituals and as a transition to the 'real' world of sports. In the next quotation, an elite athlete in traditional individual sport recalls how playing with his father changed to training with a coach. Informal activities changed to instructed activities in a sports club.

> When I was younger, not even in school yet, I went to those father-son sport activities with my dad. Well, it was so close to us and through that, there was this instructor who knew my future coach. And those other guys were just, by chance, establishing this sports club and my instructor heard about it, that there was this new club and so on… well, he told about it to my dad and then my dad took me here to practice. I must have been seven or something. And that was it, I've been training every day after school [my own sport] here.

The importance of the family for the entry into sports was clear but also the role of peers was brought up in the interviews. In the following quote of a ball game player, the impact of "friends of the same age" was considered important in the entry into deliberate practice:

> Well, we used to play outside every day and once I even went to play in a team with those guys a couple of years older than I was. I was quite a shy boy when I was little and I just stood there, beside the court, ready in my shoes and everything but I just wasn't brave enough to go there and train. Well, I waited for another year and went there with my friends of the same age then.

Athletes wanted to deepen their physical activity relationship by entering into instructed training as it was seen as the fascinating world of real sports, in child's eyes. As the ball game player of the quote above, many interviewed athletes followed older children's – often siblings' – practice. Sometimes they were taken along to try some instructed plays and games. For this reason, childhood's deliberate play and the sampling phase following the initiation were often actually quite similar among the interviewed athletes; it was rather a natural continuum instead of a significant change. Initiation into deliberate practice on the nearby sports field was a smooth transition in many ways, also physically.

To many athletes, their future main sport was already familiar from backyard games and activities. Thus initiating deliberate practice was rather the deepening of an already existing physical activity relationship (Koski 2004). On the other hand, those who discovered their own sport later in life, typically entered into deliberate practice via another sport and started their own sport only later – this was typical with athletes of lifestyle sports, in particular. Hence we may conclude that, in the sampling phase, the interviewed athletes were socialized also into *the institution of sport* not only into their own particular sport (see also Heikkala & Vuolle 1990).

According to the interviews, in most athletes' youth the sport and exercise activities for children and youth were very accessible at the age of the sampling phase, and the costs were considerably lower than nowadays. None of the athletes said they would have prevented them from participating in sport activities (see also Puronaho 2014), however, some of the multicultural athletes (see chapter 9) stated that the costs affected their choice of sport and narrowed down the available options. In a typical situation described in the interviews, children were practically 'taken in' from the wings of the sports field, without asking for any payment commitments. Hence, just a few years ago, the sports institution's doors were much more widely open than nowadays.

## Different types of initiation

The age of entry into deliberate practice in team sports was 6 years and 10 months on average, the median age 6 years and range from 5 to 13 years. In traditional individual sports, the age of entry into deliberate practice was 7 years and 4 months on average and the median 7 years. The age of entry varied from 5 to 12 years of age. In lifestyle sports, adherence to deliberate practice or instructed activities occurred at the age of 6 years and 10 months on average, the median was 6 years and range from 4 to 10 years.

Thus we can conclude that there are no significant differences in the initiation age between different sports. The big picture is very uniform and as for those Finnish athletes interviewed for the purposes of this study, the age of adherence to the institution

of sport generally occurs at the starting age for first year of school. Consequently, two very important transitions in the life courses of the interviewed athletes have overlapped in childhood. Within a short period of time, the children have become members of two important national institutions which are important to their life courses.

According to research of success in elite sports (e.g. Stafford 2005; Côté et al. 2007; Bruner et al. 2008; Wylleman & Reints 2010), the optimal initiation age into deliberate practice should, in most sports, be between 6–10 years of age, up until age 12. Research doesn't suggest any specific 'recommended age' to initiation and different studies offer different, often cautious interpretations. It seems that academics are reluctant to offer any strong recommendations which could later prove harmful. In addition, special features of different sports have an impact on the reasonableness of the initiation age.

Lack of precise definition may be a good thing as it takes into account the children's different rhythm of psychological growth. It seems that what happens in the sampling phase following the initiation is more important than the age of initiation. The adherence to the sport institution of the athletes interviewed to this study occurred at the age of 6–7 on average, being at the low end of the suggested optimal initiation age of many studies (Wylleman et al. 2004; Bruner et al. 2008; Wylleman & Reints 2010). This earliness or anticipation is reflected in the entire career in sports, up until the mastery years. If too big a role is given to deliberate practice in early years, due to early initiation, we can talk about 'expediting athleticism'.

We will return to the idea of expediting athleticism as the analysis progresses as recent studies suggest that hurrying clearly narrows down the possibilities of reaching the top (e.g. Güllich 2014b). Lowering the age of initiation into deliberate practice which has taken place in recent decades in Finland does not, in the light of recent international research (Güllich et al. 2000; Güllich & Emrich 2006), seem a positive development contributing to later success in elite sports. At the same time, there is no consensus as for the optimal timing of initiation, from the point of view of elite level athletic success later in life (e.g. Vaeyens et al. 2009; Gulbin et al. 2013). Post-initiation training intensity, multiple sport participation, timing of transitions and the amount of deliberate play are more important factors (Baker et al. 2003; Côté et al. 2009).

In addition to the age of initiation, the sport of initiation is an important factor, too. Every second athlete in the research data started deliberate practice in that sport in which they later became elite athletes. As for individual disciplines, the dividing line seems to be between team sports and traditional individual sports (see table 4).

Table 4. Initiation into deliberate practice; athletes of team sports, traditional individual sports and lifestyle sports, and of men and women

| | Initiation in team sports | Initiation in individual sports | ...of which initiation in one's main sport |
|---|---|---|---|
| Team sports men | 25 | - | 17 |
| Team sports women | 11 | 2 | 7 |
| Traditional individual sports men | 8 | 10 | 4 |
| Traditional individual sports women | 1 | 12 | 7 |
| Lifestyle sports men | 5 | 1 | - |
| Lifestyle sports women | - | 3 | 2 |
| **Total** | **52** | **26** | **39** |

In the research data, there are 25 male elite athletes who have reached the top in ball games. All of them had started deliberate practice in team sports and 17 of them had started it in the same sport in which they later reached the elite level. As for female athletes in team sports (13) initiation had mainly taken place in team sports and with seven of them, in that sport in which they later reached the top. As for initiation, skaters in synchronized skating are an exception: they had entered into figure skating whereas all ball game players had started with a ball game[24]. Especially those male athletes who had immediately discovered their main sport mostly talked about this sport in the interviews even though they would have had another sport later on, beside the main sport. Multiple sport participation was more common with female athletes in team sports.

In the traditional individual sports, the initiation of 31 elite athletes occurred fairly equally in track and field sports, cross-country skiing, alpine skiing and with some boys also in team sports. Of the male athletes, ten of them entered into deliberate practice in individual sports and eight in team sports. On the contrary, only one female elite athlete in traditional individual sports entered into the sport institution via team sports. Eleven of the athletes in traditional individual sports entered into deliberate practice in that sport that later became their main sport. It's worth noting that two of these athletes represented the so-called early specialization sports where early specialization is required for later success. In traditional individual sports, multiple sport participation was common with both men and women in the sampling phase, and only one third of them entered into deliberate practice in that sport in which they later reached the top. Thus the path through the sampling phase was more exploratory than that of the team sport athletes.

Five out of six men who later reached the top in lifestyle sports adhered first to team sports whereas none of the three women did that. Only two lifestyle sport athletes, both of them women, started in that sport in which they later reached the top. Lifestyle sport

24 We will return to synchronized skating later in the excursion on early specialization sports.

athletes entered into deliberate practice approximately at the same time as the others but they typically discovered their own sport later than them. Hence their sampling phase was characterized by playful and multiple sport participation and their initiation into sport was not in any way determinative for their future.

## Team sports athletes in the sampling phase[25]

As regards childhood's deliberate play, initiation, post-initiation activities and the main sport in mastery, there are many similarities among, in particular, male athletes in team sports. They have typically taken a very normative route, with transitions occurring at approximately the same age, close to the average age of the research data. To most of them, initiation into deliberate practice was a transition taken for granted, following the example of parents and siblings. Initiation into deliberate practice was often reported as a transition which didn't require much personal reflection.

In the following quote, a ball game player tells about his initiation as a very easy-going experience. Adherence to the sport had already taken place before joining the team. The last sentence of the extract and its "why not" summarises his relationship to initiation into deliberate practice in ball games. Soccer is also the sport in which he later reached the top.

> I guess there was an ad somewhere that a soccer team will be set up near where I lived. At first, there were no kids of my age, they were a bit older but I went there to try. That was my first activity as a child, and that's how it started. At first, I just wanted to try, as I've always liked sport and exercise, soccer too. So I thought that why not, and joined this team to play soccer.

In the following extract a ball game player tells how, right after initiation, he started dreaming about a career in elite sports. His initiation into sport materialized in that sport in which he later reached the top. He tried other sports, too, but the number one sport was clear and his relationship to it was passionate. Entry into deliberate practice appeared as part of that path that, in the child's eyes, ends up in "buying a Ferrari".

> I started in boys' development squad and my dad started to train us. When I was very little, I said to my parents… and this of course sounds like something coming out of a 6–7 years old mouth…. But I had promised that when I start to play professionally, I'll buy them a Ferrari. That was maybe the only car I knew… Even though I said it as a child, well, I did have this target from very early on, that this is how I could make a living and this is what I'll do in my life.

Athletes typically moved from childhood backyard games through initiation into some team sport which often was the subsequent main sport, as in the following quote. This

25 In analysing the transitions and life phases of team sport athletes, the focus is on team sport ball games. This applies to both the sampling and the development phase.

ball game player describes the early stages of his relationship to team sports and the deepening of that relationship to soccer in the sampling phase. Events outside the soccer practice are important, too. Life is filled with soccer, he not only plays it but is also an active soccer fan. Elsewhere in the interview, he reports on having tried other sports, too. And sometimes his mother had hard times with her son's activities.

> I guess I started [playing soccer] in our backyard when I learned how to walk and understood what a ball is. I was out playing all the time and didn't have time to PlayStations or television. I was out playing all the time. My dad bought me two goals and there was this little soccer pitch to play on. Sometimes we played inside too, mum was not always so happy about it because we broke some lamps and flower pots. And I remember when I got my first soccer jersey, I slept in it, I played in it and, if somebody hadn't said no, I would have taken a shower in it. It was Maradona's shirt and it's something that I'll always remember, I even framed it to the wall.

Nearly all interviewed team sport athletes had played several team sports in the sampling phase, i.e. not only that sport that later became their main sport. According to the interviews, these other sports were played both just for fun but also in clubs. However, it was not about deliberately playing 'supportive secondary sports' but about genuinely enjoying and wanting to sample different sports. The main sport was selected through trial and error, often on the basis of what the athlete feels he or she can do best. Sometimes the main sport becomes evident already 'at a very young age', despite the trials. Early selection of sport is apparent in the following interview extract of a ball game player.

> My parents started to take me by car to the neighbouring municipality, I must have been ten or something. I was so sure about [my sport] already at that age although I played other sports too, soccer and others. But of course when I grew up and started to do well, it motivated me further to that direction.

Due to strong connection between team sports it appears that, particularly in the sampling phase, young athletes start to develop a very specific relationship to sport, through deliberate play. Sharon Wheeler (2012) views that children of sporty families develop a network of behavioural models and values, a certain habitus. Team sport players in ball games seem to develop a typical habitus of a team sport ball game player in which the worlds of at least soccer, basketball, volleyball, bandy, ice hockey and floorball intersect. The habitus of a team sport ball game player ties the boys, in particular, very tightly to the social webs of significance of team sports (cf. Ford et al. 2012). Those who play team sports establish their own, specific group at age 7–12 where they smoothly move between different sports, be it in the shape of deliberate play or deliberate practice. In the research data, this is particularly pronounced with men but the same phenomenon is also visible among female team sport ball game players.

Multiple sport participation during the sampling phase was more emphasized among female team sports players compared to men. Men embraced a strong ball game athlete habitus already at a young age whereas women had sampled different sports more than men. Still, nearly all women had ball games in their main focus. In the following quote a ball game player reports on how she entered into sport in that ball game in which she

later reached the top. Still, she sampled many different sports in both team and individual sports. As girls' teams were not always available, she also played in boys' teams. This athlete had not been taken to sport but she had discovered her sport on her own. Again, we see that a girl's path to an athlete is not as straightforward as that of a boy. Yet multiple sport participation provides a good 'athletic basis' and in the end, the main sport is selected on the basis of which sport the athlete feels she is good at.

> I was six when I started to play [my own sport]. I just saw an ad in a newspaper and wanted to go. That's how it started, I guess. It was good fun. And we played against boys as there were not enough girls' teams. We were always beaten by 11–0 but I still wanted to continue. And I've also played ice hockey, I started when I was maybe nine. I played it some five years, always with boys. One of the girls in our class played too, and her brother played so that's how I started playing ice hockey. I've done some track & field, too, running different distances, some long jump and so on, I've always been very sporty. I just wanted to try all possible sports. At some point, I chose [my own sport] just because I felt that I was quite good at it.

The gender-based differences in the sport institution are reflected in the quotation above. The girls' place in the field of sports is not as straightforward as that of boys and, consequently, girls seem to have more room for trials and sampling. In and after their initiation, they are not as easily 'siloed'[26] (e.g. Koski 2009; OPM 2010a) to one specific sport as boys. (See also Kay 2003.) Female athletes also reflect their own initiation more than men, i.e. the meaning of different sport trials and their relationship to the main sport.

The initiation of the ball game player of the following quote took place in the 1980's and 1990's when women were a clear minority in sport clubs and in elite sports in particular (Kay 2003, 95–97). A girl's active participation in sport typically aimed at boys (e.g. Drummond 2002; 2011) has, as an individual experience, been special and delightful (see also Sturm et al. 2011). The athlete tells about her initiation and the years following it. Her sport was not very common in her youth, at least not among girls. Hence she got a 'strong head start' when she also did track and field in summer.

> Well I was about eight when I started [that ball game], nine when I started track and field and I played those two side by side until I was 14. Track and field in summer and that ball game in winter. I had a real head start to others who just took vacation in summer while I had my practice. At that time, that [ball game] was not so popular yet so there was no training in summer.

The soccer player of the following quote develops her strong relationship to soccer very early which is comparable to the experiences of the male team sports players cited above.

26 In the 1990's, sports movement began to adopt business-like operational models. Historical roots and ideological traditions were replaced by new public management models, customer-centric thinking, service marketing and financial targets. This has led to the so-called 'siloing process'. Sports clubs specialised in a single discipline and began to compete for the customers – clubs and federations became single discipline silos. Thus sampling different sports has become very expensive and more difficult.

Her relationship to soccer includes deliberate play, backyard games and more intensive training. Interestingly, soccer had been discovered through her father and brother – i.e. passed on by the male family members – who were familiar with the team sports institution.

> I was three or four when my big brother started to play soccer and I've been around ever since I was very young, always there on the pitch playing with my dad. Then I said that I'll start playing too when I'm old enough. [...] When I was five or six my grandma took me to kids' soccer school, we were crawling on the floor so it didn't have a lot to do with soccer, it was more like just doing something a bit sporty. When they set up a team of my age group I immediately joined, I was six or seven. After that I've always played in my own age group, and sometimes I've helped the boys and the older team.

Those who play team sports often stated they were 'team sport personalities'. In the following quote, a ball game player tells how she started doing track and field which was too individual-oriented to her personality. She changed to a team sports ball game in which she later reached the elite level:

> I did track and field because that was something that all of us did, it was somehow natural. I went to track and field school, did my things and tried to get along but then I realized quite quickly that team sports were my thing. In [track and field] I enjoyed relay and other stuff that could be done with others. But I lost my interest when things got too individual-oriented. […] I then landed in [my own sport] by participating an activity that was organized near us. That was the first time when I really tried it. I started to play a little with my brother's team, they were three years older than I was, and there was this other girl too.

Socialization into the social world of sport through team sports seems to create a psychologically strong tie that creates a solid 'sport capital' (e.g. Wheeler & Green 2014). Playing different team sports side by side, either in the sense of deliberate play or deliberate practice, is seen useful also from the point of view of biomechanics and anatomic learning. Richard Schmidt and Craig Wrisberg (2000) have classified inter-sport transferable skills. They suggest (op. cit.) that 'observation' related to decision-making, moving on the field and 'instinctive' situational awareness develop and broaden when an athlete plays similar sports, or sports where certain moves or situations are similar to those of the main sport. Examples include anticipating opponent's moves in team sports or tossing the ball in serving at tennis or Finnish baseball (see Baker & Côté 2006). On the basis of the research data, the added value of playing other sports was considered useful and the skills learned in own sport were easily applied in other team sports as well.

## Traditional individual sports athletes in the sampling phase

The most common initiation sports of the elite athletes in traditional individual sports include track and field, cross-country and alpine skiing and team sports. This means the interviewed athletes typically had a wide range of different sport and exercise activities in the sampling phase. The sampling phase was literally sampling and trial to those athletes

who later chose a traditional individual sport. This cumulative process was typically more nonlinear and multidimensional than the nearly deterministic descriptions of male team sport athletes. Others had found their own sport already before school age, others at the end of the sampling phase and some only after that. This indicates that many technical and other skills needed in individual sports can be learned also later as long as the athlete has a background of multiple sport participation and the motoric and physical skills developed in it.

The importance of multiple sport training seems to apply to all those who later selected a traditional individual sport. In addition to deliberate practice, especially the older athletes in the research data continued different own-initiative plays and games during the sampling phase. The individual sport athlete cited below has sampled and tried many different sports yet the main sport selected later had been discovered in the form of play already before the school age. Initiation into deliberate practice occurred at around the school starting age. Competitiveness and possibility to compete from early on were decisive factors when the athlete later selected the main sport. The sport of initiation "was always there" throughout the years but it didn't prevent different trials.

> A: I've been around that sports hall basically ever since I was born and I've always loved it, and at school age we started to prepare for competitions and so on. But I had all those other sports to do, too, and maybe when I was 13–14 I realized that I just didn't have time anymore so I selected [my sport]. I had ballet too, until the end. I was so competitive, really a competitive character and [my sport] felt so good that I was always looking forward to those competitions [laughs]. That's why I chose it.
> I: What were the other sports, ballet and...?
> A: Ballet, yes,… and then I went to triathlon training and sometimes I even tried soccer but that was not my thing at all. And I've done diving and artistic gymnastics and really everything [laughs] but [my own sport] has always been there.

The athlete in traditional individual sports of the next quote had a completely different initiation from the athlete above. She also reported on childhood plays and games and tried different sports when she was seven and finally discovered her own sport only at age 15.

> A: The food was served in that way and we spent four hours a day outdoors, no matter what the weather was like. So that's how I learned this healthy…
> I: Sporty?
> A: Yes, a sporty lifestyle. My brothers had a big role, they are 8 and 10 years older than I am and sometimes we played soccer, I was alone against them. And their friends, too [with a laugh].
> I: So you were the goalkeeper?
> A: Yes, and this is where the resilience comes from. And many other crazy things… We were skiing, I was maybe 2 or 3 and my brother put me in a big black garbage bag and pushed me down the hill. I didn't mind little knocks and bruises. And I really loved PE in school.

Another athlete in traditional individual sports shares similar memories. Different team sports with brothers and friends have played an important role in the deliberate plays and games of her childhood:

> We had tough games in our garden every summer and we invited the neighbour's son, too, to play with us. Somebody always started crying when his team didn't win. And we played Finnish baseball, too, and many other games, ice hockey and others.

To many athletes of traditional individual sports, the role of friends has been significant to sport choices. It's also worth noting that the individual sports have not – at least not to the athletes interviewed for the purposes of this study – appeared as a lonely activity. Recurring themes in the interviews include the importance of different sport facilities and their proximity, and free access to them. Interviews include many descriptions on playing and competing just for fun on sport fields and other facilities. For example, a possibility to try different track and field sports in 'real' setting with siblings and friends was an important source of motivation to many athletes.

Some athletes reported on having speculated the suitability of one's level of fitness and personality to various sports. In the following extract the athlete reports on team sports being left out on the basis of such reflections which did not, however, prevent the athlete from sampling individual sports:

> A: Yes, well I was in junior soccer league. I was not good at it but there I was.
> I: Do you remember how old you were?
> A: I must have been nine or ten. Motorically I was maybe ok but playing in a team was just not my thing. My dad is a former track and field athlete so I gave it a try, too, but somehow I was so much more into winter sports.

Adherence to the sport institution of some athletes of the traditional individual sports seems to be a playful process where there was no need to hurry or to be too serious. An athlete of traditional individual sport tells about some 'unpersistent' trials as follows:

> A lot of different sports from early on. Soccer, volleyball, handball, whatever ball. All these traditional ball games. I tried everything but nothing very seriously or persistently. At eleven I started [my own sport] and here I am, still. Haven't had any real break since then.

## LIfestyle sports athletes in the sampling phase

Similarly to traditional individual sports, lifestyle sports athletes typically had a sampling phase which was, by definition, sampling and trying different sports. Only 2 out of 9 had entered into deliberate practice in their future main sport. Naturally, also the lifestyle sport athletes have profited from their experience in deliberate practice of more traditional sports. The initiation often occurred into team sports; many male athletes played floorball, for instance. The sampling phase was often characterized by different trials and free play and games outside the deliberate practice. No clear path or early socialization into a certain sport or sports could be identified. Deliberate practice and own-initiative deliberate play in childhood and adolescence provided a basis for subsequent physical activities, and the most important turning points in their athleticism often took place later, in their teen years.

All lifestyle sports athletes had adhered to deliberate practice in their childhood but their main sport was often found later. When discovered, that lifestyle sport usually had a significant impact on the athletes, something very different and social, something related to innovation, discovery and searching, as the following lifestyle sport athlete describes his initiation into his own sport:

> At first we didn't even know how to do it. We were just messing around and at first we thought we had discovered all these new tricks as there was no internet at that time. Later we found out that everything had been more or less invented already, when we started to find out more about it in the internet.

The traditional development models of elite sports portray the career progress in lifestyle sports only in a limited, even erroneous way. Even in the mastery phase, there are many of those elements present that, in elite sport models, are defined as typical elements of the sampling phase in childhood. These include emphasis on the element of playfulness in training, and the limited amount of systematic practice (cf. Côté et al. 2007). Instead, having fun and enjoyment in training are underlined (e.g. Wheaton 2004). Even in mastery, these sports could be described as 'tribes' or 'subcultures' (e.g. Hänninen 2012).

The elite athletes in lifestyle sports seem to have consciously taken distance to the traditional sport institutions, after teen years at the latest (e.g. Rannikko et al. 2013; Piispa 2015a). With top lifestyle sports athletes we can even talk about a kind of inverse transition; the initiation might have occurred into the world of team sports or traditional individual sports but the athlete may have returned to deliberate play and playful games after that. The athlete had rejected the rationality of elite athleticism and started to build an identity of his own, characterized by combined individualism and a sense of community. We will return to this pattern later.

## Excursion: early specialization sports

Five athletes in the research data have competed on adult level in the so-called early specialization sports or in 'aesthetic skill sports' (e.g. Baker 2003). The sports include synchronized skating (2), figure skating (2) and artistic gymnastics (1). One of them is a dropout and four of them are classified as elite athletes in this study. Typical features of early specialization sports include early start of deliberate practice – often already before the school age – and goal-oriented and systematic training already at a young age. This often leads to one-sidedness in training which can have physical and psychological consequences (Fraser-Thomas et al. 2008; see also Skirstad et al. 2012). For example, in the DMSP-model (see figure 1) Jean Côté et al. point out that early specialization may lead to less enjoyment of sports at the top level, and even to deterioration of the physical condition (Fraser-Thomas et al. 2005; Curran et al. 2011; Enoksen 2011). One-sided training also exposes the athlete to sport injuries (e.g. Malina 2010; Huxley 2014). Harri Hakkarainen, specialist in sport medicine and coach, has made the following summary

in a magazine interview (Tiede [Science]/Mutanen 7.8.2008): "From the health point of view, it's not a very good idea to start intensive training at a young age but, on the other hand, if you want to succeed at the international level in these sports, you just have to".

In these sports, the initiation age was fairly low among all the interviewed athletes: median was five years, variation from four to seven. This result seems to correspond to the initiation age recommendations of the Finnish skill sports federations (Valto & Kokkonen 2009; Kalaja 2009). Initiation occurred into skating with skaters and into gymnastics with the gymnast. However, initiation didn't always 'orthodoxically' lead to early specialization as some of them had other sports – such as aerobics and mogul skiing – on the side for a fairly long time which was considered useful. Despite this, training had been very specialized from early on, especially in skating sports. Desire to develop and enjoyment in sports were mentioned as the motivational factors in childhood and adolescence, along with having fun and spending time with friends. Strong desire to reach the top and a high degree of competitiveness were evident with two interviewees, from an early age on.

From the perspective of normative transitions and phases, many athletes showed a number of development phase features already in the sampling phase at age 6–12. On average, we can conclude that the development phase had started before the age of ten. Similarly, mastery was reached fairly early, in the form of invitations to national teams or the first championship level competition, at age 14–19, when many other athletes are just shifting to the development phase. The activation of the sport agency and realizing that one could reach the top in his or her sport seem to be located at this age, too. In other words, success goals have started to crystallize in that phase. All the interviewed athletes achieved their first successes at the adult level by the age of 20. With a few athletes, early intensive training had disturbed their school work but most athletes were able to combine elite-level sport and school work at least reasonably.

As stated earlier, one of the figure skaters was classified as a dropout athlete. Also the other interviewed skaters had discontinued their careers in the mastery phase, i.e. 'retired' at less than 25 years of age, shortly after the interviews were done. This supports the observations of an earlier study (e.g. Côté et al. 2007): in skill sports mastery is reached relatively early and, for example, the consequences of one-sided training are seen as a relatively low age or retiring, too. The fact that mastery in skill sports is typically a short phase which also ends at a relatively young age can also have positive consequences, for example, studying after the sports career becomes easier.

Despite the relatively small number of the interviewed skill sport athletes in this study, the results are similar to those of the previous studies. Early initiation seems to be imperative in figure skating, in particular. The same seems to apply to early specialization: it results in one-sided training but, on the other hand, is necessary to reach the top. Instead, artistic gymnastics seem to be less restricted (see also Kalaja 2009) in the comparison although only one athlete in the research data represents this sport. In general, in early specialization sports athletes are likely to meet more unavoidable challenges than in other sports. However, it doesn't mean that these challenges were completely different from those of other athletes.

## Deliberate play in the sampling phase

Deliberate practice in the sampling phase is just the beginning in the development of an elite athlete towards mastery. According to international studies, all-round, deliberate play should play a dominant role, measured by the number of hours spent, in children's training up until age 11–12. (E.g. Côté et al. 2007; Ford et al. 2012.) The life story interview is a very rough tool to estimate details such as the number of training hours. However, we can draw some general conclusions on the basis of the research data. The most striking issue, already discussed in chapter 3, is the generation specificity of deliberate play. Athletes born in 1970's and 1980's reported clearly more often on free play and backyard games outside deliberate practice or instructed training. (See also Côté et al. 2009.) One of the explanatory factors is that the increase in the number of team sport clubs took place in the 1980's and the offer on instructed activities to children and youth was fairly limited before that (e.g. Zacheus 2010). Hence own initiative was needed in at least part of the sport trials. It was also about a young urban culture in which children of 1960's to 1980's had learned from their parents that garden or backyard is the natural arena for play, sports and games (Salasuo & Ojajärvi 2013).

Spontaneous play and games are much less present in the interviews of younger generation athletes, indicating the impact of a strengthening 'siloing process' (e.g. Koski 2009; OPM 2010a). In the following extract, a young athlete in individual sport reports on different sports where spontaneous trials or own-initiative practice may not even be possible, in many cases. It is notable that the athlete has tried "everything" but everything in an instructed, not in a spontaneous way.

> I didn't do competition but I did some gymnastics at around seven and then all these children's gymnastics. I also tried water polo but that was clearly not my thing and I also tried soccer, for a week or so. I've tried so much of everything but these things were just not for me.

Along with the generational impact, the amount of deliberate play and games decrease with age, already during the sampling phase. In many interviews, descriptions on deliberate play become fewer as the athlete approaches the age of 12. Instructed activities become the dominant arena in the athlete's life. This is particularly emphasized in the interviews of those athletes born in the end of 1980's and in the 1990's.

The interest – evident in several international studies (e.g. Carlson 1988; Côté et al. 2007; Côté et al. 2009; Ford et al. 2012) – towards the relationship between deliberate practice, multiple sport participation and deliberate play and games is related to a number of indicators. The most obvious of them is the total amount of hours spent in sport and exercise. In many sports, it is the highest among those children that are active in all forms of sport and exercise outside deliberate practice during the sampling phase. According to the consensus in many sports, the amount and importance of deliberate practice should optimally be less than that of deliberate play as late as at age 7–12. (E.g. Carlson 1988; Baker 2003; Côté et al. 2007; Ford et al. 2012.)

There are studies on single sports and on the optimal relationship between deliberate

practice and deliberate play during the sampling phase. One study analysed the role of them from the age of seven onwards, of soccer players who were the best of their cohort at age 16 (Ford et al. 2012). The researchers sketch a hypothesis according to which those who have made it to mastery in soccer have, at age 7–12, focused on soccer-*like* plays and games, in addition to deliberate practice (e.g. Ford et al. 2009; 2012). The researchers write (Ford et al. 2009; 2012) about 'early commitment' to soccer, instead of early specialization. In this article published in 2012 Ford et al. (2012) compared Brazil, UK, Portugal, Mexico, Ghana, France and Sweden.

From the perspective of Finnish soccer, the observation by Ford et al. (2012) that the number of hours spent in deliberate play along with deliberate practice was much lower in the UK, in France and in Sweden than in other countries when measured by the number of hours, is of particular interest. In Sweden, the amount of deliberate play does not exceed the amount of deliberate practice in any phase. This observation, obviously due to societal development, living conditions and climate factors, leads the researchers to suggest certain country and culture-specific actions to increase the number of hours spent in deliberate play and games (Ford et al. 2012; see also De Knop et al. 1999). Thus according to their hypothesis (op. cit.) the best result from the perspective of the development of a soccer player will be reached when soccer is played in both deliberate practice and in deliberate play, i.e. that free play is, for the most part or even exclusively, related to soccer. However, this hypothesis of 'early commitment' has certain methodological shortcomings, as the researchers themselves point out. The research data does not entail soccer players who have reached the top but only those players who represented the 'elite' at age 16. (Ford et al. 2009.) In the light of other studies (e.g. Leite et al. 2009; Güllich 2014a & b) we can conclude that these hypotheses only report on how these 16 year old players reached the elite in *their* age class.

Deliberate play and games develop different qualities from deliberate practice. Côté et al. (2003) write about, in particular, how flexible strategies and creativity needed in team sports develop in deliberate play. At the same time, players can test their physical abilities and limits in different circumstances without considerable costs. In addition, motoric skills, physical condition, understanding of rules and cognitive skills develop differently as part of deliberate play compared to deliberate practice. Too much instruction and guidance in the sampling phase may rather hamper the learning of motoric skills (Wulf & Shea 2002). When deliberate play is based on the children's and youth's own desire, enjoyment, interest and flexibility it strengthens the positive experiences of sport and exercise (e.g. Côté 1999; Côté et al. 2007; Côté et al. 2009). Deliberate play with socially significant others, siblings and friends, supports the athlete's perception of his own athleticism, deepens the athletic habitus and is important from the point of view of the athlete's identity work (see van Yperen 2009). An elite athlete in traditional individual sport portrays the ideal growth environment of an elite athlete as follows:

> We were a big group of boys and girls, we were maybe 15, and as far as I can remember we were always outside. Sometimes we played some sort of sport, bandy on the parking lot, and then all these backyard games, hide and seek, you name it. I remember them being really exciting. I was

> one of the youngest in the gang and we got to play with those bigger boys and girls. We lived in a great place too, we could play by the lake all year around. And then there was this sport field on the other side of the block.

Deliberate practice during the sampling phase doesn't exclude the deliberate play of childhood. In the following quote, rich in nuances, a ball game player tells about his deliberate play before and after the initiation. Playfulness and spontaneous play continue even after entering into deliberate practice. This quote is an ideal type recollection of the importance of deliberate play.

> When I was five or six I got this little goal in my room [...] Every night I had my own games there, I played with my imaginary friends with the door shut and came out sweating every night. I must have been an easy child; as long as I had a ball, I was happy. Of course I didn't think about it in that way as a child but later, when I've been thinking about those days, it's been quite fantastic, really. And those games in my own room are one of the few things I remember of my childhood at all. When friends came over, we had competitions and everything, we developed them on our own. Usual tricks were not enough anymore, we needed to put the ball through two walls, through the ceiling and one wall, whatever, all those crazy things.

In the light of present-day research it appears that in nearly all sports, too hard, too frequent, one-sided and goal-oriented deliberate practice in the sampling phase results in negative consequences from the perspective of reaching mastery (e.g. Wiersma 2000; Baker 2003; Scanlan et al. 2005; Wall & Côté 2007; Baker et al. 2009; Branta 2010; Choi et al. 2014). We come back to this issue in the chapter on dropout athletes. It's noteworthy that athletes who have reached the top have, with a few exceptions, practiced in their sampling phase in such clubs and teams which have allowed multiple sport participation and a more liberal rhythm of practice. In other words, they have not specialized in their main sport too early.

## Perspective: are costs, structures and competition between sports hindering success?

In recent years there has been debate on the rising costs of children's activities and the impact of the family's socioeconomic status on children's opportunities to participate in different activities (Kantomaa et al. 2014). The issue has been debated mainly from the perspectives of equality and national health (e.g. Keskisuomalainen 8.4.2014; Yle, Finnish Broadcasting Company/Ranta 7.5.2014a; Yle, Finnish Broadcasting Company/ Ranta 7.5.2014b). Rising costs mean a serious problem to Finnish elite sports as well. Firstly, it hampers the important sampling phase which is essential to subsequent success as the costs of multiple sport participation have risen considerably. Secondly, some potential elite athletes cannot, due to rising costs, even embark on 'the athlete's path' and, consequently, initiation will never take place (e.g. Hakamäki et al. 2014). Thirdly, rising costs may force a young athlete to give up his or her activity particularly in very

expensive sports – this situation has become widely recognised in ice hockey, for example (i.a. Yle, Finnish Broadcasting Company/Ranta 18.11.2014).

Rising costs of children's activities have been criticized but means adopted to remedy the situation have not been unproblematic either. Katja Rajala (2014, 41) has written about the financial aid awarded to sport clubs to support families with limited economic resources as follows:

"The action plans of those sport clubs who have applied for financial aid to enhance possibilities of children with limited economic resources to participate in sport activities have been mainly reliant on external funding. There have been very few new ideas as to how to financially support sport and exercise of children and young people. Most projects give direct assistance to children with low economic resources to participate in sport clubs' activities. In some cases, one child can receive support only once. Such model is in nobody's interests in the longer term. Economic equality in sport club activities would require more thorough development of sports club activities and the definition of common rules and practices between sport clubs and their cooperation networks."

In the 2010 statement of the Ministry of Education and Culture, a large number of athletes in recreational sports was named as the first priority (OPM 2010a). According to the statement, a broad 'talent reserve' provides a solid basis for elite sports: "As for sport activities of children and youth, the idea is simple: as many children and youth should do as much sport and exercise as possible, as often as possible and in many different ways. This is the way to spot talent and develop it." (OPM 2010a, 10.) On the basis of international research results (e.g. Green 2005; De Bosscher et al. 2008, 86–89; Bailey et al. 2010, 14; De Bosscher et al. 2011) it is clear that financial factors are an obstacle to multiple sport participation and the consequences of rising activity costs reduce the opportunities of Finnish athletes to succeed in elite sports.

The structural changes in the Finnish sport system have also had an impact, in many ways, on the initiation of athletes and the consequent sampling phase. Pasi Koski (2009, 41–46) has noted that sport clubs have changed from multi sport clubs to single sport clubs in recent decades. At the same time, the importance of single sports and single sport cultures has become stronger in the sport club activities. This development has reduced the possibilities to try different sports or participate in multiple sports. One important reason for the increase of single sport participation is the competition between sports and sport clubs for junior athletes as 'paying customers'. This seems to be resulting in more losers than winners.

The setting can be illustrated with the help of the *prisoner's dilemma*, the idea of which is as follows:

Two members of a criminal gang, A and B, are arrested and imprisoned in solitary confinements. They have agreed not to admit the crime if caught but in prison they cannot communicate with one another. The clever interrogator suggests to both prisoners, in separate interrogations, that the suspect can either plead guilty and, at the same time, betray his accomplice or he can remain silent. If the interrogated prisoner commits but the other one doesn't, the other one will serve three years in prison and the interrogated prisoner will be released. If both commit and betray each other, they both serve two years in prison. If both of them remain silent, both of them serve one year. For the best

mutual reward, both would be best off to remain silent. Pursuing only their individual reward, they may either serve longer in prison or be released altogether. Individual and mutual rewards meet if the prisoners hold on to their original agreement. However, these interests conflict if one or both of them betray each other.

How is this allegory related to the Finnish sport system then? Research suggests that it's in the interests of both sports in general and elite sports in particular that children and young people do as many sports as broadly as possible. However, it may be in the interest of a single sport or an individual sports club that children and youth commit themselves as early as possible to one particular sport: in this way, the sport or the sports club secures its own customer base and 'seizes' the potential elite athlete. This situation is something similar to the prisoner's dilemma – the following imaginary and simplified example illustrates this:

An agreement is reached within the sport system that states that young athletes are encouraged to participate in deliberate practice in at least two sports in the development phase, at age 12–15. A twelve-year-old athlete plays both ice hockey and soccer. Both sports consider whether the athlete should be made to choose between the two sports. If the two sports follow the ideal as agreed within the sport system, the athlete continues for another three years playing the two sports and selects the main sport then. Multiple sport participation supports the growth and development of the athlete regardless of the sport which is later selected as the main sport. In addition, multiple sport participation reduces the probability of dropping out of sport altogether at 15. If only one of the two sports asks the athlete to specialize by offering improved success outlook, the athlete selects that sport and dedicates the following three years to it. However, finishing the other sport increases the probability of dropping out of sport altogether at 15. Another option is that both ice hockey and soccer force the athlete to make the selection. As the athlete doesn't want to stop any of the two the situation becomes both physically and mentally stressful and, again, the probability of dropping out of sport altogether increases. In both sports, there's an incentive to break the agreement and seize the athlete to that particular sport. Also, both sports share the risk of losing the athlete if the other sport breaks the agreement and seizes the athlete. The following table illustrates this foursquare dilemma further (see table 5).

The table illustrates how, if the two sports only pursued individual reward, they should try to make the athlete to select that particular sport. In this way, the athlete would dedicate all the time to it and would probably continue with it, also after the age of 15. From the perspective of mutual reward, however, the two sports would be better off not to push the athlete to choose. In this scenario, the athlete would probably continue multiple sport participation with all its advantages. The worst case scenario is also obvious: if the athlete felt pushed from both sides, it is not only the two sports that lose but most probably also the athlete himself or herself.

Table 5. Prisoner's dilemma as an illustrative application in Finnish junior sports.

| | **Ice hockey makes to choose** | **Ice hockey doesn't make to choose** |
|---|---|---|
| **Soccer makes to choose** | The athlete tries to play both sports resulting in very little free time. The joy of playing sports decreases and the risk of a burnout increases. After a while, the athlete either chooses one of the sports or stops sports altogether. | The athlete chooses soccer, but the training becomes one-sided. The joy of playing sports decreases and the athlete's development is not supported by multiple sport participation. The risk of dropping out increases. |
| **Soccer doesn't make to choose** | The athlete chooses ice hockey, but the training becomes one-sided. The joy of playing sports decreases and the athlete's development is not supported by multiple sport participation. The risk of dropping out increases. | The athlete plays both sports in a flexible way. Multiple sport participation supports the athlete's development and increases the joy of sports. At 15, the athlete probably chooses one of the sports and continues to practice it in a goal-oriented way. |

## TRANSITION TO THE DEVELOPMENT PHASE AND THE DEVELOPMENT PHASE

That point of time when the relationship to the sport institution deepens and training becomes more serious can be located in every interviewee's career. The sampling phase comes to an end and the interviewees start to talk about more serious training and sport in general, competitions and success. Also, the first references to one's own talents, strengths and weaknesses become visible in the development phase.

The sport agency of a young athlete typically strengthens as he or she moves on to the development phase. Contrary to initiation, where parents' parenting practices usually have an impact, now it's the young athlete's turn to choose what he wants to do and on which conditions – he may even choose to discontinue his career. If the athlete experiences success in this phase, symmetry and linearity start to define his career in a more pronounced way. On his path towards mastery, the athlete tries to select the most favourable route towards the next normative transition, without any unfavourable turns (see also Wylleman & Reints 2010) such as injuries or other personal disappointments.

The transition to the development phase was most often located at around age 11–13 in the interviews of this study. The median was 12 years. The youngest athletes in this second normative transition were only 7–9 years old whereas the three oldest ones were 15–17 years old. On average, the timing of this second transition in the Finnish elite athlete's career corresponds to the respective timing of other elite athletes, according to international studies (Côté et al. 2007; Wylleman & Reints 2010; see also Côté 1999; Wylleman & Lavallee 2004; Erpić et al. 2004; Wall & Côté 2007; Reints & Wylleman

2008; Moesch et al. 2011). During the development phase, training becomes more intensive and competitive. At this transition, the division of hours between deliberate play and deliberate practice should balance out. In addition, the amount of practiced sports should narrow down to a few sports only (e.g. Côté et al. 2007).

At the transition and in the development phase following it, four important changes relevant to the athlete's life course can be brought up. First of all, the athlete discovers his or her main sport. Secondly, children enter their preteen years which is an important change from the psychological point of view. Transition decisions from one phase to another should be made consciously and independently. Thirdly, the roles of significant others; parents, siblings and peers start to have new emphases in the athlete's life. During the development phase, friends become psychologically the most important group in defining the athlete's athleticism and, at the same time, the role of the coach is emphasized, especially in traditional individual sports. Parents still have their important roles in the support network. (See Wylleman & Reints 2010.) In this research data, the role of siblings as significant others can be seen with many athletes. Fourthly, the young athlete moves on to secondary school which is an important transition in the life course; the transition from childhood to preadolescence (e.g. Pekkarinen et al. 2012). Again, transitions in sport coincide with other normative and institutional transitions outside the world of sports.

Free play, sporty games and trials of different sports become fewer in the development phase. The margins of athleticism narrow down towards deliberate practice although many athletes in the research data still participated in multiple sports. Further investments in one's own sport were made by spontaneous practice at leisure. In the athletes' accounts, signs of a strengthening athlete rationality became visible at around age 11–13 (Schulze 1992; Piispa 2013b). This can be seen as more pronounced target setting, determination in the main sport and willingness to compete and compare one's 'real' skills to other athletes. This transition often requires changing the sports club, longer transportation to training and abandoning the childhood friends. The institutional support systems in sport become visible for the first time when some of the athletes apply to secondary schools with special emphasis on sport.

## Intergenerationality in the development phase

At the transition to the development phase, the capitals obtained at the family table were still seen in the agency of many athletes. Athletes of families with active transmission of the physical activity relationship don't really see this phase as a decision as to whether or not invest more in sport. They have been socialized very strongly into sport and athleticism (Stevenson 1990), already in the beginning of the development phase, and they have already embraced the habitus of an athlete (see Wheeler 2012). Thus, the elements determining their transition are, rather, the early-embraced athlete rationality and the embedded accumulation in the sport agency (Heikkala & Vuolle 1990, 91–92). A more relevant question would be what is the next sport to be tried or what is the sport to invest more in than about choosing between sport and not doing sport. The interviews

of these athletes gave an image of 'sport being everywhere and everything in life'. This is how, first an elite athlete in lifestyle sports and then a team sports player report on their sport activities in the preadolescence phase:

> 1) I got bored with cross-country skiing and track and field and started to play team sports. Soccer and Finnish baseball, then ice hockey in a bigger club. I did a bit of everything and was always on the move.
>
> 2) I must have done something every day when I was little and played both sports. I spent all my time at the sports hall, just went there after school to play or something. Didn't always remember my homework though… but I was sporty at least.

In the following extract an athlete in a traditional individual sport tells about the role of the family that has taken her well into the development phase and even further. The whole family's enthusiasm about her sport contributed to a successful specialization. Siblings and parents who originally were sport insiders in another sport adhered to the new sport as a family. The sport capital's role at the family table grew further and remained strong over the years:

> It was somehow so natural that my mum and dad were always there to support me. They didn't know that much about my sport, as they had never done it themselves. [...] I didn't really do track and field anymore after I turned 14, I did only my own sport in summer. And all my family started to do the same sport, my brother and my sister and it really became a family sport. Whatever we did in that sport, the whole family was involved. We were there together.

In families with strong physical activity relationship, the dominant role of sports is also reflected in non-sport choices. Sport is not prioritized above all other fields of life but it is placed side by side with schoolwork, for instance. In the following quote of a team sport ball game player sport activities replace musical pursuits in the development phase and sport plays an important role in the school selection which is not without compromises:

> I stopped playing violin in primary school. Well I didn't really stop but I wasn't just interested in it anymore and every Monday I suffered from headaches or something [laughs] when I was supposed to go to my violin class. It was just because I was more interested in other things, it felt so much nicer to go to sport practice than to violin lessons. And then I went to this secondary school with special emphasis on sport. [...] I needed to travel some 10 kilometres to get there. So it was a big change. It was not that bad but it was quite a long way, at that age anyway.

In this quote the athlete tells how the distance to school became longer due to the special emphasis school. The school itself and all the work related to it have always been priorities that, even in families of active sport relationship, precede sport. A typical memory of the development phase is the athlete's mother or father saying "you do your sport but school comes first!" (See also Brettschneider 1999.) In the research data, the Finnish comprehensive school system is seen as the only institution (e.g. Paju 2011, 18–26)

that is placed above sport or at least beside it in the lives of every interviewed athlete.

Athletes who didn't inherit a strong sport relationship at home oriented differently in their development phase. In these situations, the role of own agency is emphasized. In transitions it can be seen as conscious choices where parents have rather stayed on the background. Usually parents were not passive either but their role was mainly that of a driver, spectator, supporter and enabler. The attitude towards the sport activities of the child was positive at the family table but the young athlete took the main responsibility of his or her choices in sport. In the following quote of an elite ball game player the importance of own agency is emphasized when the athlete describes his deliberations at the transition to the development phase:

> I was quite young when I realized that I have to spend a lot of time on the pitch if I want to move forward. And every time when I wrote something at school or something similar, it was always about soccer. Of how I was going to be a soccer player in the future. I must have been 12 or 13 when I started thinking that now I need to play hard.

In addition to own agency, some athletes stressed the importance of peer relations and sport facilities in the development phase. Some of them also started sport so late that the development phase remained very short, a kind of 'honeymoon' with sport.

## The development phase in team sports

Transition to the development phase implied an important change in the careers and life courses of the team sport athletes in the research data. At the age of 12 or soon afterwards the athletes moved on to a very different world, to a competitive club and team. The number of training hours increased, other sports were left out either on own initiative or imposed by the main sport and fierce competition between peers started at full speed. The time window to young athletes' national teams is only a few years long and, in order to succeed, one has to invest much more in the main sport compared to the sampling phase. The interviewed athletes were asked when their own sport became really competitive and serious. Of the team sport athletes, 38 reported on competitiveness and seriousness having increased considerably at age 14.5 on average. There was not very much variation as, with the exception of four athletes, all responses were in the age frame 13–16.

Individual sport and gender were noticed to have some influence when the research data was analysed from the perspective of intensifying competition. The development phase window was opened first in basketball, at age 14 on average. In soccer and ice hockey it was at 15 and in floor ball and volleyball at 16 on average. The number of interviewed athletes in other sports is so limited that a similar age comparison is not meaningful.

The development phase in women's team sports differs from that of men. Talented girls typically play in the older age groups of their own club already at a very young age. According to the experiences of 13 female team sport athletes in the research data, the

intensification of training and competition takes place at age 13–18 on average whereas the median was 14. The small gender difference is not exceptional as for instance in the Jean Côté's (1999) study in the end of the 20th century, the intensification of training occurred at age 14 on average with women and at age 15 on average with men. A typical development phase description is the following account of an athlete, of how the women's age groups were mixed at age 14:

> In secondary, in grade 9, I trained with [adult] women two times a week and then I had my own training a couple of times a week. I trained some four times a week on average, I had 4 to 5 events a week and at some point we just had an incredible amount of games.

In team sports, the transition to the development phase often occurs hand in hand with the change of team and club. This can be regarded as an important turn from the perspective of the athlete's athleticism and there's often a psychological dimension involved in it. An aspiring athlete selects a better team over his old team mates as it supports the development of his athleticism. This is the first time that the athlete's rationality is put to a test. A ball game player recalls his move to a competitive elite squad at age 12:

> I: Do you still remember how often you trained, in grade 8 or 9?
> A: I changed my team then. I had more training of course. Five times a week.
> I: That's quite a lot.
> A: It was quite a lot, yes. Somehow it worked, though, from school to sport to home. Maybe it was quite smart, at least I didn't spend my afternoons just hanging out somewhere.
> I: Do you think it was a good thing?
> A: Yes, I think sport helps a lot. You can avoid many problems. You don't have to invest too much but a little, of course. You use your time more wisely in that way.

The athlete's rationality is clearly seen in the quotation above. Life becomes simpler and there's symmetry in it which also favours athleticism: everything considered irrelevant and not worth doing is abandoned (Gould & Dieffenbach 2002). In the following quote, a ball game player recalls how she played in several teams with older team mates until, at the age of 12, she moved on to the competitive elite squad – again, to the older age group:

> I've always played with older girls. So it was only natural to go to that squad. And then I moved on [to another squad]. The distance was always bigger [laughs]. And then I followed my coach to this team.

The interviewed athlete was talented for her age and used to play with older girls from early on. Moves from one team to another seem natural in the interviews. In addition, this athlete went to a secondary school with special emphasis on sport so her athleticism strongly defined her choices not only in her sport but also in other fields of life.

In team sports, transition to the development phase seems to advance the intensification of training and the experience of competitiveness more pronouncedly than in traditional individual sports and in lifestyle sports. Also the development phase itself seems to 'intensify', in particular as regards the national team and elite squad requirements,

and this development is often faster than the recommended optimal as defined in earlier international studies (Güllich 2014b; see also Côté 1999; Côté et al. 2007; Wylleman & Reints 2010). The development phase career development of the interviewed team sport athletes can be characterized by an intensifying requirement towards symmetry. In the beginning of the development phase other sports are typically abandoned and the development continues in only one sport. This is how a soccer player who was made to select his main sport at age 11 sees it:

> First I started soccer and then I went to ice hockey. I would have been selected to the elite squad in ice hockey. But I had some hard time with my coach who didn't accept soccer. And then my dad said that it was up to me. That he's not going to say what I should play. Well I liked soccer and didn't want to stop it. And I think the junior ice hockey team was training too much. I should have been there training all the time, and things like that.

## The development phase in traditional individual sports

The athletes of traditional individual sports interviewed for the purposes of this study moved from the sampling phase to the development phase at age 12, on average. The youngest were seven but they represented early specialization sports. The change in traditional individual sports is not as abrupt and agency-narrowing as in many team sports. The following quote of an athlete in traditional individual sports is an extreme example of the number of sports in the development phase which often favours the career in elite sports (e.g. Côté et al. 2007; Wylleman & Reints 2010):

> Well my main sport, ever since I was 12… throughout my childhood I did so many things, first cross-county skiing and then that [main sport]. But then I played volleyball for seven years and floor ball for 5 years and ice hockey for 3 years and soccer for 2 years and competed in track and field and in cross country running and […]. All my friends were there. Well, I had some other friends, too, in primary the children who lived next to us. And then later I had my team mates in all those different sports. And of course we played all possible sports also in our free time.

The transition to the development phase has, in the life of this athlete, meant a total immersion into the world of sport and exercise. She comes from a small municipality where sport and exercise have played an important role in the leisure activities of children and youth. The athlete continued playing other sports even though the main sport took up more and more time. Other sports were an important resource for this athlete as the total number of practice hours in sport has been considerable and the essential qualities needed in the main sport have been strengthened as well (Côté et al. 2007).

In the following quote, an athlete in traditional individual sport recalls how she gradually had to narrow down the range of sports, due to overlaps and lack of time:

> I: When did you give up those other sports?
> A: Well I gave up Finnish baseball when I was maybe 13 and javelin throw just a couple of years ago.
> I: So you didn't have time right?
> A: No I didn't, and the important events and competitions in javelin coincided with my [own sport] so I couldn't really focus on the two.

In the development phase the family table is not necessarily the most important location anymore, for sharing the sport relationship, as the shared table with other athletes and team mates starts to gain in importance (see also Wylleman & Reints 2010). Other young athletes who share the social world of athleticism together with the athlete become important significant others beside his parents. In the development phase, the life course of an athlete begins to narrow down to an 'exceptional' life course, thus, discovering like-minded peers becomes important. In team sports, finding such peers is naturally easier than in traditional individual sports as there's always a whole team of them, in training and in games. A world-class elite athlete in a traditional individual sport describes the social drawbacks of this 'unconventionality' as follows:

> I was a bit, well not lonely but I wanted to do things on my own. I also enjoyed having other people around me but usually they didn't stay for a very long time so I had a lot of time to be on my own then.

In traditional individual sports the transition to the development phase gives the athlete some leeway but the importance of discipline is emphasized in the absence of social team control. There are eight traditional individual sport athletes in the research data who started in their main sport at age 12 or later. From the point of view of their athleticism, the deepening of the individual physical activity relationship and the strengthening of the sport agency were essential at the transition to the development phase. This is how world-class athlete describes his sport selection process in the development phase:

> I just went to play some sports with my friends so that was the selection, I selected those sports with good instructors and trainers when I was 13 or something. Then I just gave up some of the sports which were not so interesting but I still did a lot of things around sport and exercise. And something else, too, we did carting and RC car racing all around Finland. At some point, I only had volleyball and [my own sport] left, by chance and through my own choices. Then I needed to choose between these two at around 16 or 17, then I made my choice. Actually our volleyball team fell apart then.

The description of this quote reaches beyond the next transition, too, and illustrates well the narrowing of margins of an athlete. First the athlete samples new sports with his friends after which 'less interesting' sports are given up. In the end, only the main sport remains.

## Lifestyle sports athletes in the development phase age

Also elite athletes in lifestyle sports have gone through a certain development phase. However, this transition is not similar to that of the athletes in team sports and in traditional individual sports. Transition has taken place as part of deliberate practice but it has not been experienced from a career point of view. Age-related development from childhood to preadolescence and the new sport opportunities related to it are more pronounced at the transition. Thus, instead of referring to the development phase of lifestyle sport athletes, the term 'development phase age' is more suitable.

The desire to exercise and develop oneself in a number of ways is more pronounced than the drive to succeed in the interviews of many lifestyle sport athletes. This may be considered as the desire to physical development aiming to a better physical self-apprehension. Tapio Koski (2000, 89–92) refers to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the French philosopher, when he writes about physical 'self-competence', about how an individual aims at recognizing and embracing the competence of his or her own body. The body, as an objective tool, enables a physical performance which is realized and developed when the person exercises and trains. In the accounts of lifestyle sports athletes, aspiration to stretch out to one's personal limits is emphasized, from the body control point of view. The context of practice and competition is social, as the sense of community is the binding element among enthusiasts of lifestyle sports. Physical self-apprehension and realization of one's own physical competencies and qualities are possible only in relation to significant others who share the intention to seek and understand one's self-competence via the same physical activity.

In such culture, development arises from one's own desires instead of the institutionally defined nature of a certain age phase (e.g. Rannikko et al. 2013). Instead of talking about practising, lifestyle sport athletes frequently refer to simply 'doing'. There's also variation whether they see themselves as athletes or not. They may have been athletes in other sports but not in the lifestyle sport. The personal relationship to the sport is important, too. The interviewed lifestyle sport athlete describes the difference between an ordinary athleticism and his own experience as follows:

> I: Did you already have talent in sport? Did you ever think of the talent or was it just having fun?
> A: I didn't usually take sport so seriously, well maybe floorball a bit more seriously as I also competed in it, in some smaller settings. My [own sport] has been more about just doing something nice and having fun.

The interviewee avoids the question on talent by describing his relationship to floorball. The lifestyle sport is not seen as traditional sport even though he progressed to the national elite level in it, already at a young age. Also the following extract reveals how distinct the lifestyle sports are in many ways, from the institutional systems of sport. The athlete didn't even know that a sport like that existed. A single event (see also Alfermann & Stambulova 2007), in this case spotting an ad and connecting it to a memory of something that his father used to do, aroused interest. This phase of life, when deliberate practice

in traditional sports is typical, is here characterized by the athlete's own enthusiasm in lifestyle sports, and by doing and learning on one's own.

> My dad really didn't do it [anymore] as there were too many of us children. Towards the end of the primary, in year 5 or 6, I saw this ad that [a particular sport equipment] is on sale. Then I realized that we had those at home and that my dad had been playing with them sometimes. And then I thought that what is it really, I didn't know anything about it. Well, I ran straight home and decided to try… it was so cool and I was just so excited about it. The following day I went out to try again and I've played every day ever since, I think.

Only very few lifestyle sport athletes reported on intensive training. One exception is presented in the following extract. The 'brutality' of this experience is partly due to tight timetables and accommodating training to other life course elements.

> Well, in secondary school it started to get quite tough as I had more training. I needed to travel some 20 kilometres in a bus to get there. I went there straight from school and just waited there until the training started. Then I had my training, took the bus home, and arrived there at around 9 or 10, just in time for homework.

With many lifestyle sports athletes the sense of being an athlete or an elite athlete usually occurs later than in other sports. In this research data, the variation is 14–27 years. Competition is not obvious in all lifestyle sports and, therefore, the transition to the development phase does not necessarily mean competition but only deepening of the sport or activity relationship, and more intense testing of one's own physical self-competence. The possibility to compete is welcomed, if the athlete so wishes. Interestingly, in two lifestyle sports there were no competitive structures at all when two of the interviewed lifestyle sport athletes reached the age of the development phase. Many lifestyle sport athletes had experienced the sampling phase in some more traditional sport and the whole sport orientation changed in the athlete's teen years.

Lifestyle sports differ clearly from other sports but their athleticism still follows the principle of accumulation (see also Gould & Dieffenbach 2002). As for symmetry and linearity, a career in lifestyle sports leaves room for variation, change and breaks. The meaning of own agency and transitions are subject to individual choices (see Elder & Giele 2009). Career progress requires the actualization of transitions but, rather than being normative, they are a consequence of the athlete's own desires and will. Consequently, the development phase does not follow the predefined rhythm of the sport federation, club or team – they often don't even exist in these sports. Lifestyle sport athletes typically report on features typical of the development phase even in mastery. Nevertheless, measured by the traditional indicators in sport, they would be classified as very successful, world class athletes.

I: So we always start with an open question. Maybe you could tell us your life story in sport, how did you become an elite athlete?
A: An elite athlete...
I: Well yes! [with a laugh]
A: Well I don't see myself as an elite athlete…
I: Come on, you're an Olympic medallist right?

## Crossroads in the development phase

The athletic life course of many Finnish young athletes comes at a crossroads at age 14–16, in the middle of the development phase. This crossroads can lead to discontinuation, recreational sport or towards mastery and national teams of the respective age groups. This is obvious in the following quote of an athlete in traditional individual sport. Those who have the motivation for competition and development start to stand out from those without that spark. Competition becomes fiercer and tougher among those who determinedly aim for the top.

I: Was there any flexibility if somebody just couldn't take it, that hard training?
A: Well yes, there was a big contrast there, we trained really hard and that's how it should be but then we also had like pancake parties where everybody could be something else, totally. There are big differences already quite early between those who are really motivated and ambitious, and the rest. For myself, it's always been important to win, or at least to do better than what I used to do. It's not equally important to everyone but even those girls stayed in the group for a fairly long time, till they were 15 or 16.

Jean Côté et al. (2007) distinguish the development and investment phases in their developmental model for sport participation and, in this way, take into consideration the crossroads or the barrier between these two phases. Investment refers to a considerable increase in deliberate practice (op. cit.). The crossroads or the barrier is not present in the Paul Wylleman and Anke Reints (2010) model describing the transitions. In this study, this crossroads is considered, instead of a normative transition, a decisive choice and a barrier which has to be crossed in the athlete's life course.

The barrier in this crossroads often means that a young athlete becomes physically passive and chooses to quit sports. Only a few choose the recreational path in sport. (E.g. Aira et al. 2013.) Own agency and coercion from the sport institutions have an impact on the discontinuation decision. After comprehensive school there are a number of important changes in a young person's life – both physiological and psychological – which are related to transitions outside the world of sports and to new positions. At that point, a young athlete easily loses interest in instructed sport activities, loses his or her motivation, becomes tired with the one-sidedness of training, becomes unmotivated because of early specialization or simply enjoys sport less. At the same time, the prices of competitive sport activities (Puronaho 2014; Urheilusanomat/Aarre-Ahtio 4.3.2015), in particular, increase to new heights. As young people's free time is so severely restricted by sport, many may want to aspire new capitals in other fields of life. (See Tiirikainen

& Konu 2013, 34–36.) Many sports do not even offer realistic recreational paths to 15-year-olds hence these young athletes easily feel that they have to either discontinue or try to reach mastery. Discontinuation clearly affects elite sports as well. On the basis of international research (e.g. Güllich 2014b; Ostojic et al. 2014; Barreiros et al. 2014), we can conclude that there are many potential athletes among the dropouts who would reach the top later if the pyramid of sport would just narrow down slower. We will return to this issue.

Crossing that crossroads is, in many sports, a certain initiation into aspiring mastery. Especially in team sports, entry into junior national teams and transition from junior leagues to adult leagues is, according to our research data, a prerequisite for career progress. The sense of intensifying competition that many athletes describe can be seen as a phase when also team sport athletes are treated as individuals and 'talents' who need to be tuned towards the top. At the same time, among those who had reached the top, their strongest memories included the approaching national team selections and other special squad selections in their respective age groups. At least the interviewed team sport athletes had a clear understanding of that 'window of opportunity' in their sport which is followed by the separation of talents from others and investing more in the former.

In the light of the research data that window of opportunity is very narrow in Finnish elite sports, especially in team sports. Those aiming for the top have to 'train themselves' quickly, in a straightforward and determined way, without much time for reflection. In the development phase, the athlete has to grow up quickly, get selected to adults' leagues and cut out adolescence at least in a way it is usually understood (Hoikkala 1989; Mary 2012). This straightforwardness becomes particularly tough in those sports where the top leagues only exist abroad. Being an athlete becomes being in a hurry, with a wish to reach the international elite level as quickly as possible. This was seen as an explicit and implicit ethos in the accounts of the team sport athletes in this research data. Reaching the top early was seen as opening up possibilities to test one's skills in a foreign elite level team. When the window of opportunity had opened at age 14–16 the athlete had immediately jumped in. In the light of international research, such model that drives the athletes to expedite may be counterproductive and lead to a waste of potential resources (e.g. Güllich et al. 2000; Güllich & Emrich 2006). It is known to even eliminate most potential future talents from the pool of young athletes (see Côté et al. 2007; Güllich 2014b; Ostojic et al. 2014; Barreiros et al. 2014).

> Well I was there until I was 15 and I had already played my first junior-level international matches. Then the elite squad approached me and I needed to choose which team to go to. The [team X] had a very good A-junior team then and I got in when I was only 15 which was a big thing, really. That's how it went on, I played in junior-level international matches and when I got a bit older I joined the elite squad.

This quote of a ball game team player encapsulates this: the window of opportunity to join the junior national team opened at age 15 and very soon a new opportunity, joining the

men's team, opened up. There were only six team sports athletes in the research data who were not selected to the junior national team at age 15 at the latest (cf. Güllich 2014b; Barreiros et al. 2014). Volleyball was the only exception as in that sport players reach mastery later (see also Leite et al. 2009). On the basis of the research data, the way to the top in team sports goes through junior national teams and a relatively early recognition of talent. In the light of present knowledge (Leite et al. 2009; Anderson & Miller 2011; Güllich 2014b; Barreiros et al. 2014; Ostojic et al. 2014), the Finnish team sport system very probably loses a large number of potential athletes by following this road. The way to the top in many team sports is too expedited and, at the same time, physically, psychologically and socially narrow[27]. It is probable that many athletes suffer from burnouts due to early specialization and the system loses the talent of those who develop slower.

In the traditional individual sports, age at crossroads is not in the same way important as in team sports. A little less than half of the athletes in the research data had been successful in the respective age leagues, Nordic championships and in other important competitions at age 14–16. Early specialization sports are naturally excluded from this review as these athletes are typically selected to adults' leagues or national teams at a much younger age. As for track and field athletes, short distance runners and athletes in some traditional summer Olympic sports had been identified early. Slow development sports in individual sports include golf, shooting, strength sports and alpine skiing, among others. On the basis of the interviews, most athletes had participated different national level competitions from age 14–15 onwards – many even earlier than that especially in younger age groups – such as Finnish junior championships. However, the way to the top was often not straight but rather winding. Some athletes had even changed their main sport at a later stage.

## Perspective: The procedures of selection and de-selection in German soccer

In 2014, when Arne Güllich (2014b) published his extensive study of German soccer players we received some strong research evidence as to the advantages of taking into account the slow development of the athletes and the variation related to their different age phases. According to Güllich, German soccer has, in this century, tried to move towards a system where talented players are identified and developed from very early on[28]. According to his results, however, the final nomination of top players is not based on early identification but on repeated procedures of selection and de-selection. (See also Güllich & Emrich 2012.)

27 Veera Niemi, 14, stopped soccer for its seriousness. She summed this up in her newspaper opinion (Helsingin Sanomat Newspaper/Niemi 9.10.2014): "Soccer didn't feel like a free time activity anymore but it was hard work. I don't take pressure very well and was always very nervous before cups. I needed to play well and succeed in there. Therefore, I thought it was best to finish playing it."

28 Early talent identification and talent promotion.

The youth elite squad, starting at age 10, is in practice not based on continuation of the same players or nurturing the early identified talent but on annual selection and de-selection of players. Only 7 per cent of those players who played in youth elite squads at age 10 were at the elite level at age 19. On the contrary, 67 per cent of those who started in the elite squad or returned there after a few year's break at age 18 were in the elite squads at age 19. Those players who were 'recycled' to the elite squad for the first time at the high end of the age category 16–19 were more likely to reach the Bundesliga. 20 per cent of those who started in the elite squad at age 16 made it to the Bundesliga whereas nearly 60 per cent of those who were recycled to the elite squad as late as at age 19 played at the highest German league level at age 24. (Güllich 2014b.)

The same phenomenon can be seen in junior national teams. Only 36 per cent of those players who debuted in the national team at age 15 were in the junior national team at age 19. On the contrary, nearly 60 per cent of those who were selected for the first time or after at least a year's break to the national team at age 18 still played in the national team at age 19. In addition, it is to be noted that most of the players who reached the Bundesliga had been recruited to the elite squad at age 14 or older for the first time, and at age 13 or older one league level lower, respectively. A similar late development of top players can also be seen in the young players' debuts in the national team: Bundesliga players played for the first time in junior national team at age 19, on average, whereas the Bundesliga 2 players debuted in the junior national team at age 18, on average. (Güllich 2014b.)

Instead of early talent identification and a narrow window of opportunity, repeated procedures of player selection and de-selection are the more secure way to the top in Germany. Similar results have been reached in the UK (Anderson & Miller 2011). Güllich calls this approach a collectivistic approach as opposed to an individualistic approach. Güllich notes that whereas the aim of the German system has been to identify potential talent as early as possible and focus on nurturing it this is not how it works out in practice. As a consequence, a corrective system has been developed within the system, to correct the errors of the early talent identification system. The idea of the collectivistic approach is that an individual player is part of a collective system and always replaceable by another player. Therefore, it is not important who is successful but that there is a large number of potential successful players. At the same time, teenage players can very well develop outside the youth elite squads or junior national teams and simply 'side-enter' to the top level later. (Güllich 2014b; see also Güllich & Emrich 2012.)

In addition, Güllich (2014b, 534–536) lists factors challenging the idea of early talent identification and development. First of all, only a fraction, less than one per cent of the licensed, young soccer players in Germany end up in youth elite squads or national teams. Secondly, there are no guarantees that this small group, identified at an early age, are going to be those players who later reach the top. This element is emphasized in a sport like soccer where evaluation of the usefulness and the stage of development of different qualities, and therefore identifying the best players, is very difficult. Güllich (2014b, 535) illustrates this by asking whether we can really be sure that the selected youth elite squad really represents the best players of the respective age category if there

are 120 000–160 000 young players in each age category in Germany. Thirdly, there are no guarantees that the training offered by academies, assumingly of better quality than other training, actually is better than the training received outside the academies or elite squads, from the perspective of the development of an individual player. Again, Güllich (2014b, 536) illustrates this with figures: Bundesliga and Bundesliga 2 players, in 36 teams, had gone through 895 different soccer clubs. In other words, they have been developed and trained in very different environments of training, playing style and living.

In addition to Güllich's study, other studies in soccer (Leite et al. 2009; Anderson & Miller 2011; Güllich 2014b; Ostojic et al. 2014) and in other team sports (Barreiros et al. 2014) highlight the potential loss of talent in the early selection sport systems. Whilst comparison of different national sport systems is not unproblematic, we might ask, as an example, what would have happened in Germany if only those who were selected at age 16 would have been nurtured to the top level: roughly only 20–30 per cent of the present Bundesliga players would actually play in that premier league level (Güllich 2014b).

## Late bloomers in elite sports

Ten athletes in the research data discovered their main sport at age 15 or later. Some may consider it peculiar that an athlete can rise to the world-class level after having discovered his or her main sport so late – and we are not talking about late specialization but the start of a new sport. How is this possible?

First of all, it's worth noting that only two out of these ten are team sport athletes. Intuitively it is easy to see that especially the most popular ball games are so widely played and competed that someone starting late would simply not have enough time to learn the required skills for success. A Portuguese study (Leite et al. 2009), however, suggests that in basketball and partly also in volleyball a late start may lead to the top. In team sports, the main reason might be that it's simply difficult to 'side-enter' to an institutionalized training system at a later age.

Secondly, four of these athletes discovered a totally new sport which was only in its development phase, also internationally. In other words, it was easier to reach mastery as there was no definite, established elite. Still, it's clear that without an athletic background and a certain aptitude these athletes wouldn't have reached the top. All of them had a solid, athletic background that very well supported the new sport.

With all these late bloomers, the discovery of the main sport can be reviewed with the help of an effortlessness–chance axis. Two athletes discovered their sport through easy, effortlessness transition. One of them found it via physically active friends, one of them through another sport. Two athletes discovered their sport by pure chance: one athlete remembered how she mainly 'smoked cigarettes' in her youth even though she clearly was physically talented. She finally discovered her sport through boyfriend. One of the stories differs from the others in one important aspect: this athlete was not at all physically active in his childhood and youth and discovered his sport only in his late teen years, on his own and half accidentally. In his own words, he just needed 'something

to do'. After a couple of years training he realized he could aim higher and his practice became more goal oriented.

Thus embarking on a new sport had been a combination of chance and natural transition with six of the late bloomers. They had been physically active before and regarded themselves as physically talented. Five of them had practised another sport, with an aim of reaching mastery. Two of them found their sport by auxiliary training of another sport thus the transition to another sport was quick and logical. Two of them found their sport through a recommendation of a friend. Both of them quickly understood that they could do well in that new sport. One of the athletes followed his big brother to a new sport and quickly understood he had potential in that new sport. The story of the last athlete is more exceptional: he played another sport for a long time and, inspired by a newspaper ad, went to try a new, similar sport. Discovering the new sport was partly accidental but the transition from one sport to another was smooth and effortless.

Despite late discovery of their main sport these athletes have accomplished a lot: four of the late bloomers are the world champions in their sport, three of them have other world championship medals, one of them is an Olympic medalist, five of them have European championship medals, one of them golden. In addition, they hold several Finnish championships and other achievements. Some of them have, at some point of their lives, made a living on sport and three of them have received the government sport grant.

## Realization of possibilities and elite athleticism as a psychological confidence

Many of the interviewees had their first signs of their potential success in their respective sports during upper secondary school years. Typically this meant success in junior leagues at the national level. Success brings with it a realization of opportunities, an awareness that one is really good in his or her sport. This leads to a feeling of self-competence (Häkkinen 2012) and it's an important psychological turning point, an epiphany (Denzin 1989, 70–72; see also Ziehe & Stubenrauch 1982). With athletes, also the term tipping point (Wilding et al. 2012) has been used. Previous research suggests that such turning point is essential to enable the transition from the development phase to mastery (see Côté 1999). Bloom (1985b, 522–525) sums up that the motivation of elite athletes increases after realization, owing to recognitions and awards. The athletes start to draw long-term career plans and to monitor closely their own practice. Above all, the athlete's internal motivation to develop increases significantly after the realization. Internal motivation becomes the main driving force. (Op. cit.)

Of the interviewed athletes, 59/78 accounted on such realization. The average age of realization was 17 years 4 months and the median 16, i.e. at the end of the development phase, just before reaching mastery and soon after crossroads. Fourteen interviewees reported on having realized they have potential already at age 10–14, 37 reported on the realization at age 15–19 and eight at age 20 or later. The latter were mainly those

athletes who had discovered their own sport very late. They often had an immediate feeling of that sport being worth investing in (see also 'drifters' in art, Piispa & Salasuo 2014, 126–131).

Regardless of the timing and the particular sport, realization was usually connected to athletic success or to reaching a milestone. In team sports in particular, this was often the first invitation to the junior national team. The following quote illustrates this: the national team camp went well and the athlete received positive feedback. The experience was "so rewarding".

> I remember that first camp and that it went really well. I got very positive feedback from the national team coach. It boosted my confidence of course, that the national team coach gave me that feedback… I remember it really well, it was so rewarding to me.

With the athletes in individual sports, this realization was often related to being successful in a single competition. These included the Finnish junior championships or good results in international competitions. Some of the athletes reported that realization was connected to a conscious decision to practise more and to take sport more seriously. This decision wouldn't have been taken without the feeling of having potential to succeed. The following quote includes these two dimensions: first the decision to aim for "the world championship" and then the good results resulting from this decision. As a consequence, the young athlete realized that "wow, I could do well in this". Last but not least, realization was supported by the coach, the 'master of the apprentice' (see also Keegan et al. 2014):

> When I was about 16 we had this discussion with my coach. The coach asked me whether I want to be the Finnish champion in five sports or the world champion in one sport. And then, well that's what he told me, I had replied that I want to become the world champion. And then maybe it was the following summer [...] I did win two Finnish championships. And this is how it started, I really enjoyed it. The following summer I had the junior national team match and the result was quite good and then we took a look at the global statistics and I realized that my result was the third best or something. It was then when I thought that 'wow' I could do well in this.

As stated, the most important career defining decision of an elite athlete is the decision to aim for the top. It excludes many other options in life and subjects the athlete's life to determined practice and development. However, this decision wouldn't probably be taken if there was not that feeling of its meaningfulness. The realization of one's own potential is an important psychological turning point and a prerequisite for subjecting future choices to elite sports and believing in it. It is also an important driver for building the identity even more firmly around sport and athleticism (Stevenson 1990).

More serious practice means aiming at that skill level and psychological preparedness which is needed of an elite athlete (see also Jones et al. 2002). Luck is needed too: lucky coincidences – and avoidance of unfortunate coincidences – have a great impact. It means that the elite athletes consciously start to aim for continuous symmetry and the corresponding lifestyle. As Natalie Durand-Bush and John Salmela (2002) concluded,

after studying the best of the world-class elite athletes: the elite athletes had, without exception, 'everything fine' in their lives – they had both the athletic and the personal resources as well as the psychological prerequisites to practise sport at the world-class level. In the following quote a young athlete who doesn't really see himself as an elite athlete yet, tells how his whole identity and life goals are determined by the target of reaching mastery one day[29]:

> Well [elite sports] do define a lot of my [identity]. I've done sports nearly 18 years out of 20 so it clearly means a lot and of course I always try to behave accordingly. But I don't think of it that way that every time when I go to a new place that I should behave in a certain way, like an athlete does and so on. I reckon it somehow that I'm an athlete, maybe even elite athlete soon or at least on my way to the top. There's a thin line between an athlete and an elite athlete, I don't know… Some may think that you need success but maybe I see myself as an elite athlete because I practise so much and live my life like an athlete does. I don't have any success yet of the adult level as many could think I should have but then again I do my things and make my decisions with a view of being in a good physical condition all the time. That I would be an elite athlete, not only an athlete.

## Flexible institutions of education

Very few determined young athletes actually reach the top during their careers. And those who do, finish their career relatively early, typically at around 30 years of age. Hence they have to find a new place in life. Careers that provide financial security for the rest of their lives are very rare and not even possible in many sports (Huhta & Nipuli 2011, 33). Consequently, education is ever more important to athletes (cf. Heinilä & Vuolle 1970) not only because the relative importance of education on the labour market has increased, in Finland and elsewhere. Educating young athletes is important not only for the athletes themselves but also to society. (E.g. Ura-työryhmän muistio 1999.) However, combining full time and goal-oriented sport practice and studying is not unproblematic (Ura-työryhmän muistio 1999; Lämsä et al. 2014). Hence many countries have established special schools and other educational establishments to young athletes. (Metsä-Tokila 2001, 281; Huhta & Nipuli 2011, 34.) Combining determined sport practice and education without special arrangements is difficult as both of them require a lot of time and effort (Savolainen & Härkönen 2014; Härkönen 2014). Finland has offered special educational paths to athletes already from the 1980's on (Ura-työryhmän muistio 1999; Lämsä et al. 2014). The aim of these arrangements is to provide opportunities for combining effective sport practice and education. (Metsä-Tokila 2001, 11–13; 281.) Sport-oriented educational establishments have proven to be good places to recognize talent and to offer young athletes optimal conditions for elite level sport practice and education.

29 The following extract is another relevant option for the definition of an elite athlete: An elite athlete does things to become an elite athlete – and in reverse, if he can't, he's not elite. However, it's not as simple as that, though: the available resources do not always enable full-time professional athleticism even though "things were done as en elite athlete does".

At age 15, sports had become the main driving force in life to many of the interviewed athletes. After the 9-year comprehensive school one has to decide whether to invest exclusively in sport or to continue one's studies. Thus, already during the last years of comprehensive school and especially after that, the athlete's career and other demands in life increasingly collide. To alleviate these pressures, special classes with emphasis on sport were established in the 1980's. With the 1990's comprehensive school reform many schools chose sport as their special emphasis. By mid 1990's already more than a 100 Finnish schools had sport as the special emphasis in their curricula. (Ura-työryhmän muistio 1999.)

The Finnish system of upper secondary schools with special emphasis on sport has been an important element in the education of young athletes from the late 1980's onwards. Towards the end of the millennium, more than 1,500 students studied in these schools. (Ura-työryhmän muistio 1999.) The first vocational institutions with special emphasis on sport were founded in the 1980's as well. Now this practice is well established and young athletes have a large number of vocational education options to choose from. In 2014, Finland had altogether 25 secondary level educational institutions with special emphasis on sport, accredited by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and in 2012, 2,900 students studied in them (Savolainen & Härkönen 2014). Research results (Kärmeniemi et al. 2013; Lämsä et al. 2014) indicate that the present Finnish educational system offers so much flexibility to young athletes that they don't have to make a selection between sport and education.

Hence the upper secondary schools with special emphasis on sport function well in Finland. Problems typically arise after that when determined and goal-oriented sport practice and higher level education both require much more effort and investment. One solution has been sport academies, i.e. local or regional cooperation networks which have been established in Finland in this century. They focus on coordinating existing structures, trying to assist athletes to coordinate their dual careers in education and sports. One important task is to support athletes in their university level studies. (SOK 2009, 3; Lämsä et al. 2014.)

In this century, the 'dual career' concept has been launched to describe the combination of sport and education. Also the European Union and its Commission aim at improving the athletes' possibilities to study during their careers in sport. The orientation paper of 2012 lists recommendations to member states (EU Guidelines for Dual Career of Athletes 2012). Finland has been actively involved in the project since the beginning of the century. Dual career has become one of central concepts with which the EU, within the framework of its sport policy, tries to give comprehensive support to athletes during their careers.

According to Jari Lämsä and his colleagues (2014, 5) Finland is seen as a pioneer in developing flexible educational options to athletes. Their 2014 report, *'How slow the athletes are?'* (Lämsä et al. 2014) maps the dual career options in Finland. The report divides the policy of combining studies and sport to three phases in recent history. The first one started in the 1960's and 1970's when debate and planning around the issue were launched. This phase covers the establishment of special classes and upper secondary

schools with special emphasis on sport, and the connecting of vocational educational establishments to the policy of supporting athlete's education. (Op. cit.) The second phase began at the turn of the century when the networks of sport academies were founded. Increasing concern over the possibilities to continue one's education after the upper secondary level was the factor behind this decision. According to the Lämsä et al. report (2014), the development of the sport academies networks has been fast and it has focused on the improvement of educational options of athletes after the upper secondary level and on the level of higher education. (Manninen & Lämsä 2015.) The third phase was launched along with the reform process of elite sports in 2010–2012. Sport academies were named as one of the priority areas of action and the programme was named the Programme of Sport Academies. (Lämsä et al. 2014.) In 2014, there were 20 Sport Academies in Finland with more than 6000 athletes studying and training in them.

International research on this subject has been done and is frequently being done (Aquilina 2013; Debois et al. 2014; Stambulova et al. 2014). The arrangements to coordinate sport and education vary between countries. Common features between countries exist regardless of whether they aim at educating elite athletes or just sporty young people. All educational institutions aim at offering flexibility to their athlete students, targeting at better coordination between studies and sport practice. We can measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the systems of special educational establishments in many different ways but with varying national systems the figures of these comparative studies are only rarely comparable. (Huhta & Nipuli 2011, 41–42.)

Danish researchers Mette Christensen and Jan Sørensen (2009) noticed in their study that there are three essential problems between education and determined competitive sports. Firstly, many young athletes aiming at the top regarded reaching the top and the respective practice difficult if, at the same time, academic success was required. Secondly, the flexibility of the educational systems has not been fully utilized yet. Thirdly, professionalization of sports at an early stage was seen as a problem. In Denmark, for instance, young soccer players need to deal with money and contracts at a relatively early stage. Young athletes have to make choices, deal with changing clubs and contractual issues which causes stress. Researchers suggest that young athletes should be better supported at this stage; if and when the choices are mutually exclusive they might also have far-reaching consequences that the young athlete cannot thoroughly understand on his own. (Christensen & Sørensen 2009; see Huhta & Nipuli 2011, 43–44.)

Eike Emrich et al. (2009) observed the differences in Olympic and academic achievements of students studying in German elite sports schools and in ordinary schools. Despite the comprehensive German sport school system, the differences in Olympic success in summer sports and in academic success between students studying in German elite sports schools and in ordinary schools were not significant. Differences in winter sports existed but the researchers suggest that this is due to many elite sport schools' location near winter sport resorts and their excellent training facilities. Thus the research results challenge the benefits of special sport schools from the perspective of both academic and athletic achievement. Sport schools do provide more time for sport practice but, at the same time, this time is taken away from the athlete's leisure and academic pursuits. Isolation

to an elite sport school may also affect relationships to friends and family. (Emrich et al. 2009, 166–167; see also Radtke & Coalter 2009.) On the other hand, transferability of sport school models is not simple and the results obtained in, for example, Germany or Denmark are not directly applicable in Finland. Therefore, Finnish sport schools and their functionality have to be studied in the Finnish educational and sport context. (See Huhta & Nipuli 2011, 45.)

The athletes in this research data had completed their basic studies during the first and the second phase. Five athletes had completed part of the comprehensive school in a school with special emphasis on sport. In the following quote, a ball game player describes his experience on combining studies and sport:

> We had morning training [in our own sport], maybe three times a week but not every day. Well anyway we could practise our own sport already in the morning, beside our studies. In that sense it meant progress in one's own sport. We also had more PE than in ordinary schools but other than that, it was a fairly normal school.

Our research data suggests that a comprehensive school with sport emphasis was considered useful but not decisive for the subsequent career in sports. Emphasis on sport was a welcomed additional tuition element for the young athletes. All athletes emphasized the significance of peers in their basic education with special emphasis on sport: "It was more like having all those like-minded friends around." Our conclusion is that the topmost experience of the sport school was the strengthening of one's own sport agency and identity.

Also the sixth athlete would have been accepted to a secondary school with sport emphasis but he considered it too hard in combination with other training.

> Well I applied and I got in. But then I started thinking that I just can't. That there's too much sport and it takes away too big a chunk of my life. Life cannot be just sport and the school was a bit too far, too. Then in summer I said that I won't come and of course that meant some trouble. But they cannot make me go there. Then I went to an ordinary school nearby.

This quote exposes the limits of a young athlete. Motivation to sport begins to deteriorate if there's too much practice and competition at a young age. In the quotation the athlete talks about limits, of how much sport can control life and whether almost full-time practice is meaningful to a 12 or 13-year-old child. Such reflection at a very young age is a sign of maturity and decision-making skills but, at the same time, a symptomatic example of the consequences of too hard and intensive training, started at a young age.

Upper secondary school with sport emphasis had clearly been the most important educational institution providing the needed flexibility to the elite athletes of the research data in their development phase. At the time of the interviews, altogether 49 elite athletes had completed or were completing upper secondary school and 35 of them had been or were in a school with special emphasis on sport. Two athletes had completed another secondary level diploma in an educational establishment with sport emphasis. Altogether

19 athletes were studying or had graduated from a university or college. 12 athletes had graduated or were studying in a polytechnic. Only six athletes had not studied after comprehensive school and three of them made their living as a team sport professional.

For those who selected an upper secondary school with sport emphasis, combining education and sport seemed to be important from the athleticism perspective. To many, sport school was an actual prerequisite for aiming for the top. The intensifying competitiveness at age 15 includes a requirement to invest more in sport, really to 'go all out', meaning that coordination between sport and other things in life becomes very challenging. An athlete in traditional individual sport explains how studying in a special school with sport emphasis was flexible:

> My school was really very understanding [...] The teachers understood and as my brother had already been there they kind of knew me. I lived a couple of kilometres away and I had a lot of freedom. When I went on training camps I never needed to think if I'll be sanctioned or something. Instead, they just always told me what to do, for school.

An upper secondary school with an emphasis on sport offers a place to prioritize between sport and education without excluding any options. It's also a place which, with specialized practice in different sports, supports specialization and provides opportunities for versatile and persistenst sport training. (See also Emrich et al. 2009; Christensen & Sørensen 2009; Moesch et al. 2012.) The following quote is a good illustration on this:

> I was so lucky when I started the upper secondary school. We were only six girls so the coach had a lot of time to focus on each one of us. And yes, we did practise and practise, also the more boring parts. Everybody loves to attack but we also went through a lot of technique.

To many interviewed athletes, special school was the place to understand one's own athleticism. Other students were athletes too, in different sports, which expanded the perception of being an athlete. By peer support, the feeling of one's lifestyle being 'particular' has been shared and become normal (see also Ullrich-French & Smith 2005). In many interviews, peers as significant others have helped the athlete to understand what athleticism is. An athlete in traditional individual sport shares the following memory:

> Well I really liked it and of course as there are so many other athletes there it's easy to get peer support or whatever you want to call it. And it's really easy to find like-minded friends. There were also other guys from national teams and other athletes of that level so it was very motivating to train with them a couple of times a week. So it was a really nice experience, that upper secondary school.

Team sport athletes in particular emphasized the location of the school. They applied to schools in cities with a premier league team in their sport. In this way, the athletes had an opportunity, already in their upper secondary school years, to become selected to adults' teams and leagues. An athlete describes his upper secondary school years as follows:

> There we of course went to a more professional direction, practised nearly every morning and put a lot of emphasis on techniques. I was at the top of my age group so after the first year at school I was selected to the premier league team. I had my morning practice there [at school] and then my evening practice with the league team. There I trained with better players than myself, and I really needed to push myself there.

## ATHLETE AGENCY

At crossroads and realization, both connected to the development phase, the young athlete aiming at the top identifies himself or herself strongly as an athlete. This choice, as has been seen, becomes a strong, even dominant, attribute in life. However, the young person with an elite athlete identity feels that he is ready only when he has reached mastery, i.e. reached the 'athlete adulthood'. Juha Heikkala and Pauli Vuolle (1990, 93–98) write about certainty and knowledge related to the athlete's view of the world. Along the lines of their study (op. cit.), we can conclude that being an athlete becomes, after mid-teen years, the dominant view of the world, something taken for granted and with certainty. To many athletes, being an elite athlete starts to become an entity of certainties and significances which cannot be given up anymore. Should it happen, the athlete's view of the world would collapse (op. cit., 96).

Sport agency and certainty of one's own athleticism can be seen in the following answer of an Olympic-level athlete when she was questioned about the losses due to investments in elite sports. She doesn't feel she has lost anything because she has received so much from sports, already at a young age. The athlete also sees things related to normal youth in her life even though she hasn't "gone out" as much as others may have done.

> Well I don't regret anything, I think it's only a good thing that I haven't gone out as much as others have done. I don't feel I've missed anything because sport has given me so much more. It has made my world so much bigger when I've been around the world in different teams and in different age groups, and you learn so much all the time. I really don't think I've missed that much, I had my day off once a week and I've done many normal things… been shopping [with a laugh] and to the cinema and everything.

Even though the athlete cited above feels that she's living "as any other young person", the agency of the interviewed athletes had clearly narrowed down after 15 years of age, in general. Practice had become more serious and competitive sports developed into an aspiration to reach mastery. The decision and possibility to move on from the crossroads of the development phase started to define the whole athleticism of the individual. After that, options became fewer and sport was put above everything else (see also Heinilä & Vuolle 1970, 17). In the interviews, the athletes described of having realized one's own potential in sport after which athleticism started to become a kind of vocation, even an obsession. At least it becomes an attribute that strongly determines and steers the athlete's lifestyle and identity.

## The development of sport agency and choices of the young athlete

The athletes were asked in the interviews what they feel they have lost due to a demanding career in elite sports and whether they have ever regretted their choice (see also Heinilä & Vuolle 1970). The interviewees were also asked to reflect, in a more thorough way, 'what if' type questions such as possible investing in other career options. The athletes typically answered that they have been made to do some compromises but that they are happy with their choices. A classic conclusion "I wouldn't change a day!" in its different forms was heard many times. The athletes had taken a determined decision to invest in their career in sports and even though they realized they had to give up many other things, they received something meaningful in return. This could be described as following one's vocation (see also chapter 6).

As the sport career progresses, a young aspiring athlete has to make more and more compromises as regards the normal life course. For instance, higher level studies cannot be taken for granted and some of the athletes finished school already at the end of the comprehensive school. In addition, a 'normal' youth will not be experienced in full as team mates and coaches constitute the young athlete's primary peer group.

Perhaps the most important choice of a young athlete is the definition of the relationship between sport and education. The interviewed athletes had several approaches to this dilemma, often depending on the individual sport. Some of them prioritized sport, others tried to combine school and sport as well as they could, and a few compromised sport to be able to study properly. This applied to those sports, in particular, where an athlete cannot really make a living. The following three quotes illustrate these different orientations. In the first one, sport is the clear priority:

> I made my choice at a young age; my sport will be taking me forward in life. I've done some studying but it's been, and still is, clearly secondary to sport.

In the following quote, an athlete in individual sport praises the Mäkelänrinne upper secondary sport school where she could study and, at the same time, develop in sport:

> Well I've always been quite good at school, got good grades and always wanted to invest in it. But of course I've had less time than others. Well, I did well in upper secondary as I went to Mäkelänrinne. It was my natural [with a laugh] choice. I really loved being in that school, in fact, I think that I developed most during those years.

Both studying and sport are important elements of identity to the following team sport athlete. They also define the use of time. There's not much time for anything else as both elements require full effort. Sport "comes first" as the athlete describes in the following quote but the life choice has also required certain compromises from the sport perspective.

> I'm a studying elite athlete and this is the order I usually put it. The order of priorities has to be clear, if there's anything that promotes sport, it comes first, and then I use the rest of the time for studying, for instance. This is how it goes, that's what I say. It's a bit old-fashioned to keep asking simple questions such as 'are you a professional athlete?' That's what I think and our sport is a good example of that, you can practise in a professional way, I mean practise on a daily basis as much as professionals do, and still do something else in life every day. Of course it requires some effort and the days can get quite long sometimes. Due to my studies, mainly due to my studies really, I haven't been able to go abroad to play… it's been my choice, school is important and it's easier to study in Finland. And I've always been able to play in good teams here so I think as a whole, this has gone quite well, the whole thing.

In addition to school, an aspiring young athlete has to make other choices as well, when sport is often automatically put first. It can be seen as a sort of non-choice: the athlete abstains from the 'temptations of youth' and certain ceremonies and rites connected to young age. This, in turn, strengthens the primality of sport (Heikkala & Vuolle 1990). Determined sport practice naturally requires a healthy lifestyle and the interviewed athletes reported on, in particular, abstaining from the use of alcohol and from staying up late. In the following quote, an athlete in individual sport tells how sport required more disciplined choices already in secondary school. It wasn't any problem, however, as sport was "so strong":

> Of course I had to make some choices. In secondary, for instance, whether to go out with your friends or to play sports. I always had the competition on weekend so I couldn't stay up late on Fridays. So I needed to choose but it felt right. Of course it's nice to hang around with friends but I really didn't even want to go out partying on Friday nights. Sport has always been so strong in me.

Team sport athletes seemed to have a more liberal attitude towards the 'temptations of youth'. Most of them reported on having made some compromises for sport, especially when it got more serious, but they also had time to do the 'teenage stuff'. Another typical story was that the athlete had tried drinking but abstaining from it was later not difficult as it 'was not my thing' (Koski 2005). The following very typical interview extract illustrates the easiness of abstaining. On the other hand, one might question whether the explanation works the other way, too, i.e. does having 'decent' friends and a 'safe' environment protect the athlete and influence her values in such a way that she later reached the top? Most probably the answer is found somewhere halfway; certain social capitals and social networks not only encourage to a healthy lifestyle but also support the chosen path, that of athleticism.

> All those trials, well, you just have to do them all. But I've done them in different, and maybe safer circles. Of course I've done my underage drinking like everybody else in this world, and been to the pubs and drunk my ass off – all these horrible words – when I was younger than I should've been. And learned that it wasn't that cool. So I'm not more innocent than anyone else, in that sense.

Goal-oriented training doesn't only affect lifestyle at young age but it also takes time off from other activities. In many interviews, the athletes told how they had been forced to discard some of the 'milestones' of young age such as some major school events. They were seen as important but not crucial. Some of the athletes had made them, some not. Often it was pure coincidence; whether there was an important sport event at the same time, or what the attitude of the coach of that time was. Those who had to discard these rituals due to sport didn't usually think twice. The following extract illustrates this:

> I remember the Ball of the (new) Seniors very well, in upper secondary school, we had been practising all winter with my partner and then I got this invitation to the national team and of course I needed to go there then… I didn't really think about it, the choice was clear, so I just said that I'm sorry [laughs].

Compulsory military service is a potential disturbance to the sport career of male athletes. Depending on the sport, practice often suffers due to time spent in military. One option for combining military service and sport career is to serve in the Sport School of the Finnish Defence Forces in Lahti. Some of the male athletes in the research data had completed it and found it useful, although they also understood the drawbacks of the military service. In general, the athletes didn't often refer to the army in their interviews. It appears that the army is seen as an obligation that has to be completed despite its detriment to sport practice (also Hoikkala et al. 2009). On the other hand, some interviewees brought up the flexibility offered in the military service, especially in the sport troops, when the harm was not considered insurmountable. One interviewee even concluded that his physical condition actually improved during the service. Another young interviewee had more to say on the army because he had just started in the Lahti Sport School. He noted that despite being an elite athlete he has to complete the service, too. According to him, the time spent in military may affect his technique a little bit but not necessarily his physical condition, as can be read in the following quotation:

> I: And you can practise here after all?
> A: Well, not too much so far but at least the physical strain has been reasonable, so at least I haven't forgotten exercise. At least I have to use my muscles so it'll be all right… let's see how it goes. We're now in the basic training and after that we start a bit tougher training, here in the sport troops, and then I'll start my basic practice too. So I'll find out then, whether the army has been good or bad. I'd say it doesn't affect that much, at least not my physical performance.

Especially young team sport athletes had to make choices as for their sport environment in the beginning of their careers. When choosing the club they have to think whether they aim at playing in international leagues and, if yes, at what age to go there. Many uncertainty factors are related to these choices and those athletes who felt they had made good choices, considered themselves lucky but were also grateful to their social support networks. The following team sport athlete who had been successful at young age concludes how important it was that somebody advised her to stay in the national

league for another season. At this important juncture of the athlete's life, guidance and good advice were more than welcome.

> When I had these options to go abroad and I was thinking about what to do, then my [parents and coach] said that 'don't go, stay here for another season' [...] I've been lucky to have this good advice from older people around me.

## Turning points

Thus far, we have mainly discussed the important transitions in the life course of an athlete. Turning points are different from transitions as they are single events (Elder 1994; Wylleman et al. 2004; Alfermann & Stambulova 2007) or phases instead of normative transitions from one life phases or career phase to another. Positive events in an athlete's life include, for instance, winning an important contract or major achievements such as medals or championships. These athletic goals, when they materialize, typically become turning points. Also negative events, such as injuries, may become turning points. In addition to these, certain 'non-events' may become significant turning points; as an example, being left out of the Olympic team may lead to finishing the career in sports. Turning points differ from transitions in many ways but sometimes they are connected to one another. For instance, selection to junior national team (turning point) can serve as the final confirmation to pursue an elite athlete career or, alternatively, an injury (turning point) can be the last straw for giving up career in sport.

Winning and success in competitions clearly are important events in an athlete's life. This is the basis of the entire sport system; athletes are aiming for success in institutionalized competitions (e.g. Heinilä 1998, 133–134). Winning is also not 'just' winning because competitive success is the foundation for the athletic career. Cumulating success opens up new possibilities to the athlete. The next quote demonstrates how the first successful events in the athlete's career open up the door for future success. Winning meant access to competitions and sponsorship contracts.

> I got some travel budget, to be able to participate in those competitions. I did well, it must have been one of my best seasons when I won so many competitions. I won the World Cup and then, suddenly, I was a professional. After that season, I got good sponsors who paid me a real salary.

Hence winning means opening up the doors to something bigger. A typical example could be an athlete in individual sports who receives his first grant after success in junior competitions. With the help of the grant he can train more intensively, resulting in success also in adult leagues. This, in turn, leads to a full scholarship, meaning that the athlete can practice full time. In the end he is so successful that he can become a professional athlete, owing to income from sponsorships and prize money. As we can see, winning is not 'just' winning but something more concrete, a way to make a living, for example. This phenomenon is another sign of the cumulative nature of the life course of the elite athlete (see also O'Rand 2009).

At its best, athletic success is connected to other walks of life. In the following quote, the athlete tells about the beginning of the career when everything went well. First successes build trust. The psychological meaning of winning and the resulting increased self-esteem are emphasized in this extract. After the initial success everything went smoothly and other successes followed, leading to a feeling of flow in sport (Jackson & Csíkszentmihályi 1999; Csíkszentmihályi 1990).

> And then we had the first World Cup event in summer, and I got medals from two out of three competitions [...] And so it went on, everything was just so good. [...] That was a supergood summer. I was happy and healthy, and even in love, and everything just went so well… I got medals from all the World Cup competitions and then my first personal medals from international championships. [...] I just did what I could and the results were just so good, it felt almost automatic, I succeed in everything I did.

As evident in the quotes above, success in international competitions is a very important success indicator for the athletes. It provides an opportunity to compare oneself to global competition which is needed to convince the athletes that elite sports make sense. This is particularly emphasized in Olympic sports.

Competitive success and winning are not the only success events in sport. Other typical success-related turning points include winning a professional contract, being selected to the national team or to represent the country in international championships. They are naturally closely connected to competitive success as was demonstrated above. In the following quote, the interviewee reports on how being selected to a better team was an important turning point in her career. Elsewhere in the interview, she also told that this selection was such an important event that, had she not been selected, she might have discontinued her career in elite sports.

> I thought that I'll never make it. I was just hoping for the best. Then I suddenly got this text from my coach [...] that said that I was welcome to the team, if I wanted. Then I immediately rang [my team mate] to know if she had been contacted too, and she was!

Invitation to the national team is one of the most common athletic turning points named in the research data. This particular invitation entails many important implications to the athlete. It's a psychologically far-reaching recognition as it tells the athlete that he or she is one of the best in the country.

Also poor athletic success might be a psychologically important turning point. It makes the athlete think whether reaching mastery is possible, in general. Typically these disappointments are the most significant at the end of the junior years and at the beginning of the elite career, i.e. approximately at age 20. The following individual sport athlete reports on such situation; how she finally decided that she "wants to do things like an elite athlete does".

> At that time we had the junior World Championships here in Finland and my results were, for some reason, poor. After that I had this, I remember it very well, that I wanted to be better and I wanted to do this better and I knew that I could do this better than I did. And then I just tried to look for the right persons to help me. It was the first moment after difficult two years that I clearly had my own strong motivation in what I was doing. That I wanted to live like an athlete, do things like an elite athlete does. Until then it had been just for fun, without any determination. Then suddenly I realized that I wanted to have those goals and reach that level.

Psychological turning points are not always self-driven. Sometimes a coach or other members of the support network might have an important encouraging role making the athlete understand something important about the nature of elite athleticism. Supporters may be initiators or, as in the quote above, those right persons whom "the athlete was looking for", somebody to ask and to rely on. This resembles a situation where the athlete is an 'apprentice' led by his 'master' (see also Sosniak 1985; Virtanen 2001, 351–372).

Each sport has its own mental challenges that can materialize for any reason or another. In some sports these challenges appear easier and may severely disturb even a good performance. Performance anxiety might prevent success in some sports, such as shooting sports. To overcome such obstacles some interviewees had engaged a mental coach or were considering of hiring one. These problems are naturally not related to young athletes only but can occur also later in life – but the economic resources of a young athlete for hiring a mental coach might be more limited.

Different outside factors may cause other mental and psychological problems. In the next quote, the interviewee reports on her feelings of disappointment and shock, due to unexpected de-selection from the Olympic team. She saw the decision as hidden politics in sports without any relation to the real level and skill of the candidate athletes. Elsewhere in the interview she admitted that she was about to discontinue her career due to this. At best, sport offers "very positive experiences" but also the negative experiences are, at worst, so strong that you wouldn't have them in "normal" life.

> A: People I wouldn't have thought…. This was the first time I realized that it's not only athletes but also other people… who see it important, and then there are a lot of people who think that they can get something out of it. And then the athlete is actually just a small part of it.
> I: Just a man in the game...
> A: Well yes… it's been a tough school of life. Platitudes were commonplace too, many people told me that if it doesn't kill you, it will make you stronger. Well, I still don't know if it made me any stronger or what it did. Sport can give you something very big and some very positive experiences and maybe not everybody sees it like this. But then there are the negative sides, too. By living a normal life, you just don't have all those experiences.

Also certain 'non-events' (Wylleman & Reints 2010) can be decisive to an athlete's career. A typical example is not being selected to the competition where the athlete had aimed for. Nearly every second athlete in the research data had had disappointing events like this. They can actually be worse than failing in the competition itself because the athlete doesn't even have the chance to test his potential. In the following extract an individual

sport athlete reports on how it felt to have been left out of the Olympic team. The qualifiers were tough and the athlete understands that being left out was due to own performance. It doesn't take away the disappointment, however, since the Olympics had been a long-term goal and as it's an Olympic sport, they had been the main goal. If you miss the games, you have to wait four long years. This athlete actually decided to put an end to the career in sports.

> It was tough, of course. Most of all that I wasn't in that condition that I was supposed to be. Well, I don't want to go into details but still… [...] That had been my motivation for the past couple of years, to train for the Olympics. [...] Now, I've decided to stop. My last goal is the next European championships, and then I'll find something else to do.

Events not related to sport may be relevant to sport, too. A classic, by no means irrelevant, turning point is the birth of a child. In the next quote, a team sport athlete reports, using familiar phrases of how his "values in life have changed, totally", on the birth of his first child. At the same time, the athlete has calmed down which is also good for sport, as he concludes elsewhere in the interview.

> I: So now you have other priorities that you have your son and your family?
> A: Well, yes, my values in life have changed, totally. Well, I wasn't that much of a party animal even before his birth but I did find new sides in myself. I've been quite surprised myself that I've been able to switch roles so quickly. Without any so called withdrawal symptoms. Of course sometimes you get crazy at home but then you just go outside for a while, to cool down.

Injuries have an interesting role among the turning points of the athlete's life. At worst, an injury can break off the athlete's career but it can also have positive consequences. Many athletes reported on how an injury in junior years gave a welcome break from sport and enabled a more motivated return. A similar conclusion has been made in previous studies. For example, Jill Tracey (2010) noticed that the attitudes of injured athletes towards sport in general and towards own sport in particular vary a lot. Immediately after the injury, feelings of anger and disappointment, powerlessness and low self-esteem typically follow. After that, the injury is accepted and the attitude becomes more positive: it's taken as a challenge.

A similar psychological development path can be seen in the injury experiences of the athletes of this study. In the following quote a team sport athlete tells how he understood, only after being injured, how he now has "to work" and how his injury was a sort of "wake-up call":

> I had always been the best talent in Finland. Then when my knee got injured I realized that I have a long way back. And then I realized that you need more than talent. That you have to work and, after all, I think my knee injury was a good wake-up call. It was only afterwards that I realized that I also need to work hard.

An injury can have other positive consequences, too. In the following quote a team sport athlete who was injured in his late teen years tells how he, by accident, found a good doctor for the operation and was rehabilitated in a good group. In this way, he learned "professionalism" and after the injury his training became more serious and professional.

> My shoulder was dislocated in the junior European championships. Just by accident, I was first taken to [doctor X] for the shoulder operation and then to [doctor Z] for rehabilitation. During that course of events I met these other athletes who had had the same problem. And I got to train with some of them, we had a proper training programme. [...] Everything was somehow so professional, there were all those people who worked full time with team sport athletes, they trained us, so they really knew what they were doing. And I got really good tips for my rehab and through all that my training became more serious and more professional at the same time.

Due to positive consequences of injuries we can also see that a short break from sport doesn't usually destroy young athlete's chances to reach mastery. As a result, we should think whether the current sport system offers the young athletes enough breathing space and space for a 'time out'. Such breathing space would leave room for possible 'mental injuries' such as feelings of a burnout. For example, the repeated procedures of selection and de-selection of the German soccer system seem to provide that space (Güllich 2014b).

Different – wanted and unwanted – turning points are an integral part of an elite athlete's career. They are in a reciprocal relationship with the important, normative transitions of the athletic career, as the moments of training becoming more serious and of the psychological realization demonstrate. Often the unwanted turning points actually become essential turning points for the career as a whole. Sometimes, the same applies vice versa as can be seen in the chapter on dropout athletes. For example, success in junior years which, as such, is often the goal of many aspiring young athletes may lead to a point of saturation and, in turn, to early discontinuation of career.

The following conclusion on the transitions and turning points of the elite athlete's career can be made: the role of accumulation is significant throughout the athlete's career and through this accumulation the athlete tries to proceed towards the next important transition and the career goals it enables. However, no career is protected from the unforeseen. Accidental events can be either positive or negative, and their consequences are impossible to predict. Usually, an elite athlete tries to minimize the impact of the unforeseen ('nothing is left to chance') and aims at a linear, logical and successful career in sport. For example Angela O'Rand (2009, 134–138) notes that the cumulative impacts of the life course are often irreversible. Consequently, a bad life chance with bad timing may be fatal.

In this chapter, we discussed agency and transitions from the point of view of those athletes who have reached the top. One possible conclusion, on the basis of the analysis and on the interview extracts related to it, is that elite sports can be seen as a risky investment which, for the interviewees, finally bears fruit. We should underline, however, that this research data includes successful athletes. They have had their career hardships, too, and many of them concluded in the interviews that many things could have gone better. The interviews of dropout athletes, analysed in the chapter 8, provide a different

view into the issue. They emphasize that as much as talent, support networks, motivation and the athletes' own choices matter they are not enough for reaching the top and staying there. A bit of luck is always needed.

## Options to sports career and the 'what–if' debate

In the interviews, options to the present career in elite sports were often discussed. On one hand, it was about the choice of a particular sport, on the other hand, about what could have followed if the athlete had invested in something else, instead of sport. In these reflections, the elite athlete's identity and certainty of one's own career choices were emphasized. It is no coincidence that elite athletes in general are confident with their choices, especially if they have been successful (see also Koivula et al. 2002; Soyer 2011). In the following interview extract an athlete in traditional individual sport views that his own success is not so much dependent on his choice of sport but on his own "willpower". He emphasizes his own athleticism and sportiness and, in accomplishing that, his personal devotion.

> I usually give 100% of myself to what I do and I do believe that I could have made it to the top in some other sport, too. I've always been very sporty. I don't think it's because of the sport I selected, it's mostly about the willpower I have.

Situations in which the sport career has been continued even though it seemed as a nearly absurd option are another indicator of willpower, determination and maybe even a manic approach to sport. In the following quote, the interviewee tells how she "just couldn't" switch to studies even when injured but just decided to go on with sport:

> It would have been sensible, at that stage when my body just couldn't take it anymore, to opt for studying, just say that that was it. But I just couldn't [...] I don't really know… I couldn't have chosen anything else [laughs].

In addition to high self-esteem, successful elite athletes often are very ambitious. In the following extract an athlete in traditional individual sport explains how she would have had professional ambitions, too. It's interesting that the interviewed athletes have, nearly without exception, thought about their career in sports and options to it – but in reality nearly everyone has been happy with his or her choice. The following quote ends with an idea that maybe some things she can't accomplish anymore, but it "doesn't matter". On the other hand, the athlete also understands the preconditions set by her sport career; at this age, she will not become a "career person" anymore.

> Well, I could have had other options too. Maybe there would have been something else to do, some other great things… Sometimes I think how my life would be now, if I hadn't chosen sport, would I have a family of my own. There are a lot of things to speculate on, actually. But I don't think I've

> missed anything.… Well maybe to some extent, if I think that I could have had a great professional career. It's maybe not that easy anymore, to embark on a career, when I finish sport. I'm that old already, at least I don't think I'll become any career person in anything… Maybe I cannot achieve everything in that walk of life but it doesn't matter.

In the following quote, an elite level ball game player thinks about her career in sport and the sacrifices she has made. Many aspects in sport and in everyday life are brought up.

> I: Do you feel that you've missed something because of your sport career?
> A: Well, in the junior national team, there was this friend of mine, she's an institutional investor now and has reached a very good position. Maybe she put school first. And then at some point she finished sport. Now she's very successful in her career. Sometimes I realize that I'm jealous about ordinary things, often related to working life. But then again, I realize that she's jealous to me when we catch up, about the things that I do, that I'm still playing sport. Like I said I still have a lot of time for other things in life. I don't have a feeling that I've missed something. Well, I missed the upper secondary school finishing party while we were playing in Paris or somewhere. But then I got something in return, I got to visit the Eiffel Tower and so on. It takes a lot but it also gives a lot.

Envy of those who have been successful in working life is emphasized in this quote. It's interesting to compare the athletes' prioritizations to the results of the Heinilä and Vuolle survey (1970) of those athletes who were on the elite level in 1956. The athletes in this survey had made most sacrifices in relation to holiday-making (56%), family life (46%), education (41%), personal freedom (40%), economic status (37%) and professional career (36%). Being an athlete and the approach to life related to it were fundamental when the athletes were asked which fields of life were the most important to them, during the mastery phase of their careers in 1956. Athletic success rises above everything else. About half of the track and field athletes named it as the most important element in their lives. 46 per cent of cross country skiers, 38 per cent of soccer players and 32 per cent of Finnish baseball players shared this view. In all the sports listed above, professional success was the most important element for 18 per cent of the athletes. A happy family life was named as the most important element by only 13 per cent of the respondents and education and studying by 10 per cent, respectively. (Op. cit., 22–28.)

In this study, comparable percentage distributions cannot be made. Still, we may be able to conclude that similar themes were frequently brought up when asked about the sacrifices an athlete has to make. As for the valuations in life, modern athletes seem to value sport even higher than the athletes of the past. The nature of elite sports – at least on an individual, mental level – seems to have changed relatively little in half a century. Instead, many other factors including the position of sport in society, resources and requirements have changed a lot. Athletes' options and themes related to retirement from sports are also discussed in chapter 8 on dropout athletes.

## AVERAGE ACTUALIZATION OF THE SPORTS CAREER

Figure 2 illustrates, as an application of the model of Côté et al. (2007; see also Wylleman et al. 2004)), the average career development of the interviewed elite athletes and the actualization of their transitions. Thus the figure represents the 'average' of the actualized life courses. The optimal career development and the timing of transitions presented in the previous international career study (e.g. Côté 1999; Côté et al. 2007; Balyi et al. 2005; Wylleman & Reints 2010) are surprisingly similar to the research data of this study. In other words, the way in which the young athletes interviewed for this study reached mastery is, to a large extent, similar to the 'ideal' outlined in previous international research.

Initiation has typically occurred at age 6–7 on average and the sampling phase has followed many of the Côté et al. (2007) recommendations. In particular, the amount of deliberate play has been bigger than that of deliberate practice. A special Finnish feature is the early separation between team sports and traditional individual sports. The team

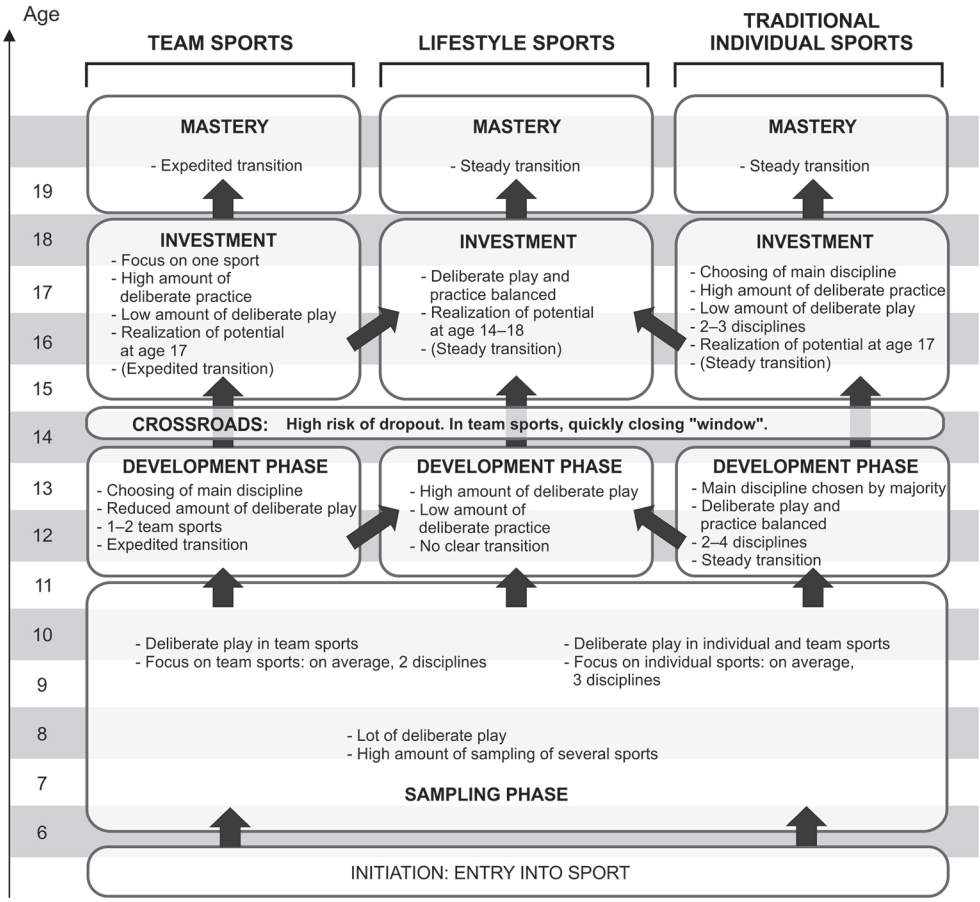


Figure 2. Average actualization of the sports career in the research data

sports athletes have, already before initiation, deliberately played team sports. Similarly, deliberate play of traditional individual sport athletes has focused on individual sports, already prior to initiation. This differentiation continued, in team sports in particular, also throughout the sampling phase. Team sport athletes played almost exclusively team sports and the same applied to deliberate play. Taking into account the importance of national and local level, as emphasized by Stambulova and Ryba (2014), the results of this study shed some further light on, for instance, the early commitment to soccer (Ford et al. 2009; Ford et al. 2012). In the Finnish sport and exercise culture team sports seem to be closely connected. Different team sports in both deliberate play and in deliberate practice seem to support each other and benefit the reaching of mastery. Deliberate play included in the sampling phase is not always easy to organize all year round, due to weather conditions in soccer, for example. This is not a problem, however, as combining different team sports can easily lead to at least as good results.

In traditional individual sports, deliberate practice focused on individual sports but also team sports were sometimes sampled. In deliberate play, individual and team sports were mixed. On average, team sport athletes played two sports and traditional individual sport athletes three sports, respectively. Lifestyle sport athletes moved flexibly between sports although few of them directly adhered to their sport. For both the traditional individual sport athletes and the lifestyle sports athletes, the sampling phase was realized literally; as multiple sport participation crossing the boundaries of individual sports.

Transition to the development phase was realized at the age anticipated by previous international research, i.e. at 12 on average for both traditional individual sport and team sport athletes. For many team sport athletes, the transition was expedited. Their practice didn't accelerate slowly but, at some point, its amount increased significantly as if it had jumped onto another level. In traditional individual sports, progress was more constant with a steady increase in the amount of practice, enabling simultaneous multiple sport participation. The transition of the lifestyle sport athletes was different: multiple sport participation continued without strong normative pressures created by the sport system. Multiple sport participation of the lifestyle sport athletes was also underlined by the fact that many of them didn't discover their main sport until the development phase. Often the sport itself, at least in that phase, didn't necessarily have any connection to the traditional institutions of sport either.

The so called crossroads in the middle of the development phase is not taken as a normative transition even though in the Côté et al. (2007) model it is defined as such. Wylleman & Reints (2010), among others, don't consider this transition in their model. In this study, 'transition' is rather an age-related step involving determined investments in sport and career. In team sports, it's also about 'being selected' to continue, at age 15–16, because at that point only the most talented are taken along. Junior national teams and the possibility to play on the highest level of one's own age group were signs of 'being selected' which was often followed by the realization of one's own potential. In traditional individual sports, most athletes had already discovered their main sport when arriving at the crossroads. Steady intensification of practice continued. With traditional individual sport athletes, the realization of one's athleticism also occurred at

age 17, on average. To many, going to an upper secondary school with special emphasis on sport concretized the idea of elite athleticism: sport practice during ordinary school days and peers representing other sports strengthened this experience. Also travelling to competitions and national team camps were important elements of this identity work. This applied to both team sports and to individual sports athletes. After the crossroads, female athletes in team sports very quickly reached the highest national league level. In the lives of the lifestyle sports athletes, competition and deliberate practice slowly rose to the level of deliberate play although the amount of practice varied considerably between different sports. Some lifestyle sport athletes realized their athleticism at age 15–19 and, to some the possibility to continue their favourite sport in a more intensive way was, most of all, a source of joy.

As with previous transitions, the average age of the transition to mastery follows the timings suggested by previous international studies. Despite the natural degree of individual variation, the average age of entering mastery was approximately 18 years. In team sports, the transition was typically very concrete, a transition to 'adult leagues' whereas in individual sports and lifestyle sports the transition typically was a result of a more constant development. The nature of the sport had an impact on the realization of the transition. The development of the athletes was characterized by hastiness especially in those sports where goals were set on professional career and international arenas. Those athletes having their career in Finland with occasional international competitions had a more stable and less stressful path to mastery.

At the end of this chapter we have to emphasize that even though the sport-related transitions and phases of the interviewed Finnish elite athletes clearly followed the ideal suggested by previous international research, this similarity does not seem planned. Rather, those athletes that have now reached the top had, more or less by coincidence, timely been in those transitions and phases which have supported their growth to elite athletes according to 'the ideal model' as outlined by international research.

In addition, this study focuses on those athletes that have already reached the top – i.e. what should be done with those athletes that are now aiming at that level doesn't belong to the scope of this study. Is the system changing or has it already changed? For example, the rising costs of sport activities indicate that the possibilities of today's children and adolescents for multiple sport participation are fewer compared to the athletes interviewed for this study, due to this silo development (Koski 2009; OPM 2010a). One thing is certain: we now have better knowledge as to how the development of today's elite athletes has really taken place (see also Côté et al. 2005) and this, or a model derived on the basis of this knowledge, should be used in elite sports in a systematic way. Exact numbers of potential elite athletes lost throughout the years, due to bad systems or other reasons, will never be found out. However, we will try to shed some light on this aspect in the chapter 8 where we analyse the mechanisms of dropping out from sport.

# 6 Artists' choices and goals

In addition to social networks and cultural backgrounds every individual's life course is defined by self-steering, own agency. Life lessons, living environment and other life course axioms have an impact on self-steering, its options, various situations of choice, choices made and their timing (Elder 1994). Individuals also plan their life in the framework of those opportunities they have accrued over their life course. Besides rational choices, target setting and its motives are related to agency, in a wider context; whether an individual is looking for, for example, mainly enjoyment, achievements or just tranquillity and security in life. Different individual decisions and choices can only be interpreted by taking into account the cumulative nature of the life course. (Giele & Elder 1998, 9–11.)

In the chapters 2 and 4 the importance of social capitals and social networks, as well as that of cultural backgrounds and the capitals accumulated thereof, in the artists' lives mainly in their childhood and teen years, has been discussed. In this chapter, we'll see how the interviewed artists have used these capitals, how they have consciously steered their lives to the directions of their intentions – what kind of choices they have made. It's natural to start at that point of time when the *realization of artisthood* started to crystallize. It precedes the consequent self-steerings in the artist's life, especially the major ones but also the minor ones. At the same time, the importance of own agency grows as the artist grows older, in teen years and towards adulthood. And, as in anybody's life course, chance plays its role, too.

## VOCATION?

Although the romantic artistic myth with its notions of genius and bohemian lifestyle has lost some of its appeal, the idea of artisthood as vocation is clearly apparent in previous research. The actors interviewed by Pia Houni (2000, 161) brought up the idea of tendency. It was associated with childhood when the actors felt that they had seen the signs of their future career. In her study, Pirre-Pauliina Majala (2003, 117–120) defined seven of the 12 elite musicians she studied as lifestyle musicians who had been guided by "donated gift" or "calling". She defined the remaining five as career musicians who also considered the "personal need to express oneself" as the starting point of their career in music. Also, being a dancer has been interpreted as a lifestyle choice (Löytönen 2004, 154–156). When writing about actors, concepts such as calling and mission are frequently used (Pirttilä & Houni 2011, 144). The motivations of working of the creative class have been explained by working primarily for the pleasure of it (Rensujeff 2005, 8).

These examples and the use of the notion of vocation require clarification. Our view is best clarified by examining the two optional terms for this notion; calling and voca-

tion. The first one refers to something as a "donated gift" and is therefore in close connection to the genius myth, that somebody is born into a certain profession or calling in life. This idea is in contrast with the modern scientific and everyday intuition, and for example the analytical chapters of this study so far suggest that there's a very clear impact of social and cultural factors behind artisthood, with no supernatural involvement. Thus the term 'vocation' is better suited for present day purposes. Its etymology is related to Christianity as well but in modern usage it's mainly understood as referring to the contents of the work; working primarily 'for the pleasure of it' (Rensujeff 2005, 8), or 'for the burning desire' (Vihma-Purovaara 2000, 181–182). The modern notion of vocation is not mystical anymore although it still has some mythic features.

Why is it pertinent to discuss and analyse the notion of vocation at this point of this publication? We believe that understanding the concept helps to understand the artists' choices and goals, i.e. the self-steering of life, even though the idea of vocation as 'predestination' is outdated. In this study, vocation is understood as the intergenerational attitude to work among generations of artists. Thus, vocation is the prevailing and mainstreaming idea behind all the themes of this chapter.

A vocational attitude to work is part of the traditions of the intergenerational artistic profession. It can be understood as an in-built assumption of making art, even as a 'law' in the field of art. Sari Karttunen (2002, 58–59), for example, notes that artistic work still requires a certain 'purity of intentions' (Bourdieu 1969) or, to put it simply, integrity and loyalty towards oneself and to one's own methods of work. At the same time, in determining who is an artist, we could ask, instead of formalities, about "how and what for he or she is making art" (Karttunen 2002, 59). This of course challenges the value of education, for instance: if being an artist is merely an 'attitude' or 'nature' what do we need education for (Røyseng et al. 2007)? The artists don't want to 'sell themselves' too much because they share the idea that "true art should not require marketing – it simply surfaces" (op. cit., 12). Erkkilä and Vesanen (1989, 15) express the same idea in other words: "by emphasizing the altruism of own actions in the field of art the artists can accrue symbolic capital that, sooner or later, also leads to economic benefits".

The artistic altruism and selflessness are also seen in the Finnish young people's position towards art activities: enjoyment, self-expression and creativity are seen as the main motives, whereas publicity and profiting from art are not seen as that important (Myllyniemi 2009, 38). Similar judging have been recognized also among amateur artists; "the same central themes – inspiring childhood experiences, ideas of self-fulfilment, receiving external support, the uniting impact of art and the enjoyment of making art – repeatedly appear" (Linko 1998, 318). Thus the professional artist's ethos is in many ways similar to that of a (young) amateur artist[30] and his or her attitude towards art.

It has also been suggested that the idea of vocational artisthood is at its strongest during studies and soon after that (e.g. Røyseng et al. 2007; Herranen et al. 2013, 102), during the turning point of the career (see also Clausen 1998). Time after graduation is

30 In this case we could see that an amateur is a "lover" of his or her own field (i.a. Stebbins 1992).

critical to an artist as he should make a breakthrough and establish his position in the chosen field. At this point, when faith may be tested, a vocational attitude to work may keep the spirits high, and difficulties and challenges may even be seen as an 'initiation rite'. If and when the artist establishes his position, the realities of work become evident in the everyday work. At this point, the notion of vocation may give way to professionalism (Røyseng et al. 2007; Jokinen 2010, 255–270). Still, to many actors in the different fields of art, work still has a vocational undertone.

The notion of artisthood as vocational profession is naturally not an illustration sketched by research only; the theme frequently appears in other art-related literature and popular writings. Autobiographies and other stories on artists, for example, regardless of time and location, are filled with different expressions on vocation. They usually don't go any deeper in the definition of the nature of the vocation but strongly witness on, for instance, the 'holiness' of artistic work. The same applies to publications on the different fields of art in Finland; whatever publication you read, at some point the vocational nature of artistic work is likely to come up.

Vocation was fairly often mentioned in the interviews of this study. In the artists' talks, however, vocation is not usually seen as destined artisthood or predetermined course of life, although a few stories like this were included in the research data. It rather refers to work and the way of working that the artist is grown up with or socialized into (Giddens 1979) over the years. Making art was seen, at the time of the interview, as an integral part of the identity; in other words, the definition of vocation that was referred to earlier. This is similar to the dictionary definition of vocation: 'a strong desire to spend your life doing a certain kind of work' (http://www.merriam-webster.com, accessed 17.3.2016). Making art can be defined as work whose main purpose is not to make a living. Seen this way, vocational professions include, among artists, many religious occupations, scientists and athletes. As the content factors and qualitative values of work increase in importance in today's work life (e.g. Myllyniemi 2007, 39–40; 2009; Siltala 2013, 196–208; Piispa et al. 2015), increasingly more people may see themselves as being engaged in vocational work.

In addition to vocation, the concept of lifestyle is strongly present in the artists' interviews. It is defined as something that strongly determines an individual's life, in an all-encompassing way. According to J.P. Roos (1988, 12), lifestyle is connected to life history, habitus and actions. It can signify the lifestyle of an individual, a family or extended family, a social group or a social generation. Artisthood as a lifestyle is built on the artist's personal history which has been shaped in certain cultural and societal circumstances and guides the individual's life and actions. From the individual point of view, lifestyle is constructed on the basis of individual subjectivity, including values and highly valued fields of life (Roos 1987, 45). Thus, artisthood as a subjectivity is the way in which the individual's life is lived and through which his or her world is interpreted and given meanings to. In the following quote, own field of art is seen rather as a lifestyle which is more than just work:

> But then again, at times my life is really something like, well I mean it's not working from 8 to 4. Sometimes I just hang around for an entire day, meet my friends and then in the evening I might write something and then, I mean even though I'm a hard working person but it's just not like that that you get up at six every morning, go for a morning run and start to work. It's more like a lifestyle, maybe.

The way in which the young artist generation in the research data of this study uses the concepts of vocation or lifestyle is very synonymous: both of them are built on a set of values where art and art making are in the focus of life and essential building blocks of identity (see also Houni & Ansio 2014). Both are close to 'conviction' (Vihma-Purovaara 2000, 181–182) or 'personal way' (Houni 2000, 254) as defined in previous studies. Whereas the artists of this study are fairly successful and have at least managed to find their own conviction or their own 'belief', not everybody succeeds in it. Even if being an artist were the ideal of the generation not everybody can aim for it. It's much simpler to find one's own lifestyle by other means than by being a purebreed artist. Still, many young generations suffer from anxiety and rootlessness stemming from not having found one's own lifestyle yet (e.g. Salasuo & Suurpää 2014). Personal choices to be made are not only related to education or working life but also to lifestyle and adherence to it (cf. Ziehe 1991; Hoikkala & Paju 2008). Thus we could conclude that vocational work as a cornerstone of lifestyle is the ideal for a number of young people today.

As noted above, the concept of vocation required some clarification and hence is always vague and open to interpretations and, inevitably, partly blurred by myth. Vocation is not to be equalled to the genius myth, i.e. as an inherent disposition for making art. Instead, the concept of vocation is better suited to describe the artist's relationship to work and, in particular, his or her experience of its meaning. In this sense, artistic work is not a choice but vocation – especially when artists themselves often point out that a large number of more rational career choices exist. However, being an artist is an irrational career choice only in the economic sense: emotionally taken it's very rational as the artist follows his or her genuine desires and wishes when striving for a balanced and happy life.

It's easy to note that artistic vocation develops within those frameworks and motives which have been discussed in the previous chapters: the inherited, learned and accumulated capitals, both social and cultural. Often chance plays its role, too. As one visual artist puts it: "The most important things are often those we cannot really see". It's worth noting that practically all artists had been involved in some kind of art activities in their childhood. This is not enough, however: at some point you need to have that desire to do more and to do things more thoroughly, i.e. to follow your vocation till the end. This may be called *realization of artisthood*. Realization refers to a moment when an artist has understood what he wants to do (for work) or what is his 'own thing'. It's a moment when making art is seen as a potential career choice or life path (see also Houni & Ansio 2013d, 74–75) and when the individual becomes "very conscious, in a special way" (Hanifi 1998, 414) of the importance of art. This may be called the moment when the cumulated capitals of the life course turn to a clear awareness of opportunities (Ziehe & Stubenrauch 1982, 35–39; Uhlenberg & Mueller 2004) or an idea of self-competence

(Häkkinen 2012; see also Gecas 2004). It's a turning point in life, an epiphany (Denzin 1989, 70–72), "a feeling of a meaningful moment" (Eskola 1998, 104) which precedes and also defines future life steerings, especially artistic ones.

All artists could identify, more or less exactly, that point of time or phase in their lives when they had that artistic realization. A small number (5) of the artists placed this point of time in their childhood, at less than 10 years of age. They felt that being an artist had been their childhood dream from very early on. Artisthood was seen as a self-evident path and, with some missionary and mythic elements – these are the artists whose vocation could also be called calling. Most (18) interviewees had experienced realization in adolescence when future-oriented choices are typically made – the 'critical period/age', as Mannheim (1952 [1928]) would put it. This could be seen in educational choices after which the artists' life courses naturally took them towards artisthood. Part of the artists (6) had experienced this realization much later than others, after age 20. Before that, their life courses had been characterized by searching.

## REALIZATION OF ARTISTHOOD

Five interviewees reported on how they, at less than 10 years of age, knew that they wanted to be artists. The dream was maintained during childhood and youth and finally materialized as a career in arts. Two of them explicitly reported on how they had this calling for art, already at a very young age.

> I've always wanted to be an artist, already when I was very little, maybe six or seven, I have a really strong ethos of an artist. Of course it was more childish then and different now. Well, and finally it changed quite a lot when it became my profession [...] it's in my character that I take these things as a life mission, in a very, let's say totalitarian way. It has always followed me throughout my life. This idea of calling, a vocational profession. It's been quite straightforward. I've never...well ever since I was six or seven, really thought about any ordinary careers or really any other choice. And now, even more than maybe ever before in my adult life, I feel like I have this calling to my work.

This quote clearly illustrates how following one's vocation has been seen as the only choice. The interviewee also tells about an artist's ethos, life mission and a totalitarian approach and takes a clear distance to "ordinary careers". This artist and others who experienced realization early are, in some way, exceptions of an ordinary life course: they had a very determined approach to their childhood dream which was maintained through adolescence, and when the dream actually comes true, it's no wonder that the career in arts is seen as "extraordinary". The artists' commitment and devotion to making art, also in their adult lives, were felt very strongly in the interviews. At the same time, a feeling of certain unavoidability, even coercion, was connected to their life choices which was not always seen as only positive. Still, they saw no other choice for their careers or even for life in general. Also the next artist expresses this vocation with a strong choice of words:

> I couldn't really imagine of doing anything else. At least anything which doesn't have anything to do with my [field of art]. I feel that it's a big part of my life. [...] Of course I have my moments when it… I mean when I'm really annoyed of doing this but… I don't feel that I've really made any conscious choices here that now I do this and now I do that. It's been more like… something that you can't escape… how should I call it… I mean that you don't choose art but art chooses you, to put it this fancy way [with a laugh]

Most interviewed artists experienced realization later in life: 18 of them placed it in their adolescence. Most of them had of course had their art activities as children, some of them so young "that I can hardly remember anything", some of them in their early teens. For them, doing arts and craft, drawing or "other creative activities" had been an integral part of their youth for years. Still, they were innocent activities without any clear intention to become an artist. Most of them placed their realization at age 16–19. Then they started to realize that their passion could become a career. Before that, they hadn't even thought about a career as a freelance artist, for instance. Some of them also reported on having thought about it for a long time, that they could very well be amateur artists but, at the same time, they should have a "decent" full time job[31].

When realization occurs in adolescence, the activities and interests of childhood are typically involved in planning career choices. Thus, realization of artisthood typically leads to education in arts, either on secondary and/or tertiary level. In the following quote, this moment is precise: when the future artist understands, for the first time, that an artistic profession and an education preparing for it exist. At the same time, ordinary upper secondary school is abandoned and an 'atypical', or exceptional, life course steps in.

> I guess it wasn't until I was in upper secondary school that I even realized that something like this could be a profession. I didn't really know any artists who did it for living so I wasn't really aware. […] I went [with my mum] to Ateneum, the art museum, and I really didn't even know that this Academy of Fine Arts existed and then I spotted this ad on its entrance exam, 'ok, six works of art to be submitted' and then I realized that I still had two weeks time left so I went for it! That was it, it was a sign of something, it was good that we went there on that day, to do that guided tour. Then I took my projects there, got in, and dropped out from ordinary school.

Six interviewed artists placed their realization after their 20th birthday. As nearly all other interviewed artists, they had had some exposure to art already in their childhood and youth. They hadn't had any clear direction, though, and all of them discovered their own particular field of art only after the upper secondary school. Some of them searched for a long time and were even educated to other fields where they never worked for a single day. When they had their artistic awakening at last, it was quickly complemented by realization that this is something that they really want to do.

31 There are interesting differences and similarities to athletes here: on one hand, aspiring athletes see investing in sports as their "only choice", something that you have to go through. On the other hand, dropout athletes clearly miss "normal life" which many see as in investing in "sensible" studying, for example.

> On the first day at that school I realized that damn, I had chosen the wrong thing [...] then of course I was disappointed although I was excited at the same time and everybody told me that it was great that I got in in that school, that it's a good school and so on… Well but it wasn't my thing, it was so much about doing things with computers but luckily we had this subject… this subject called visual planning and there we had this teacher who actually was a sculptor and they were interesting lessons, the teacher showed us his sculpting things, showed us some slides so in fact it was something to do with arts, and that was something I really liked so never missed a lesson there. And then maybe he kind of understood that I was interested in it and maybe I even said to him, I don't remember, but maybe I said something like that I don't feel this is my place and my thing so he advised me to apply to the Institute of Arts that it could be something better for you… well, that's how it went… So I changed to that Institute. And well, a couple of years went by and I thought that well, this makes even less sense, they're just painting some pictures here [laughs] and this is clearly not something one could make a living with. But then, after two years, we had [this course] there and then finally, everything felt right, that was it. So this is the road I've taken, all these steps had to be taken before I found my own thing and it felt right.

This quotation clearly reveals how it can take years to find one's own field and, at the same time, lose time in school which is not interesting. Finally, the own thing was discovered, partly by chance. On the other hand, own desires, dreams and ideas could mature for years without a clear direction: this was typical to all those with late realization. With them, it was more about a subtle development in which the life experiences accumulated over years materialize only when the individual finally finds his or her own field of interests. These artists had been going towards 'something' without really realizing it. Finding one's own way has been a long journey and realization occurred relatively late. The next quote illustrates this in an amusing way, of how there's a certain "culmination point" in every artist's life when realization occurs and, after that, things progress "in their own rhythm".

> I think that the time had come, then. People mature in different rhythms and women or girls are usually quicker, they know already when they are younger whereas boys are busy with other things at the time when girls already know a little bit of what they want to do. So they mature in different rhythms and as for me, I matured as late as six years after all the boys too. So I've been really late in everything. When the girls were at the university, I was just thinking whether I should change my rustic boots to some sort of more elegant shoes so I was really at a different level, just climbing down from the tree, so to say. But you see, everybody has his own rhythm, and the culmination point or how would you call it. That's when I asked myself for the first time whether I should get something done and then it just moved on and that's how it's been ever since and I haven't really needed to push myself to anything, it's been kind of automatic. It's been going on in that way ever since it started.

Regardless of the age of realization, it's a sum of several factors and doesn't necessarily seem a rational choice even to the artist himself. In the self-steerings of the artists' life courses, there's always some degree of following one's vocation involved and also conscious risk-taking, at least when compared to normal life courses. People often try to avoid risks instead of maximizing their profits (e.g. Kok 2007, 213). Artists typically strive for doing

exactly what they want to do, despite the risks involved, often economic in nature[32]. On the other hand, we can see that learning new things and continuous development – the basic elements of artistic work – are essential skills (Antikainen et al. 2013, 164) in today's risk society (Beck 1986). In any case it appears that the artists' life choices are typically not steered by economic rationalism. As Antti Häkkinen (2012, 382) states: "at the outset, the principle of agency doesn't mean that actions would always be conscious and rational".

Even if artisthood as such was not a choice but rather a 'dive into one's vocation' it doesn't mean that it wouldn't be reflected. The most important decision to support self-steering and artistic vocation is to apply to artistic education. To apply to a school is a conscious decision with long-term consequences. Realization of what one wants to do may be even frightening – and still that choice appears the only possible choice. In the following quote the reader can see how it's not a rational decision but one based on emotions and intuition; the career choice is done "as if in love":

> But then when I let myself think about [my own field], I always felt like… As if being in love that I couldn't believe it, that something that special really exists. Well yes, I've never been a very rational person. I think I've never taken a rational decision in my life [laughs]. It must have something to do with my field and my art. That I'm kind of intuitive, that is. Well yes, this is how it was, I really didn't have any other choice. If I feel so strongly about something I just can't fight it. [...] Then I decided that I'll apply ten times. If I don't make it, I still have time to apply to the university, I mean that I just have to see where it takes me, if anywhere.

Education is highly valued, as seen in the quote above: the interviewee was prepared to apply ten times to that particular school and if not successful, there would have still been time to apply to somewhere else. Applying to an art school was the most typical form of long-term, artistic self-steering. Nearly all interviewees had applied to art education and/or art school and most of them, like the above example illustrates, did it right after their artistic realization. This is coherent with the Finnish ethos of appreciating education[33]. Also other developments in society, such as increased amount of education in creative fields and a certain *zeitgeist* when it comes to emphasizing creativity and individuality as resources (e.g. Simola 2001), have supported this choice.

## EDUCATION AS TRANSITION

Education is an integral part of the normal Finnish life course. Good education is highly appreciated and its acquisition has almost become a norm (e.g. Jokinen 2010 45–47; Rensujeff 2014, 42–52). Education and choices related to it are important transitions

32 On the other hand we may suggest that the "relative risk" of employment in cultural fields and the general insecurity on the cultural labour market (Karttunen 2004, 34) have decreased since the 1990's depression as other fields are now suffering from insecure employment and pay, too.

33 On the other hand, we should note that young people's faith in education in improving their position on the labour market has weakened in this millennium (Myllyniemi 2007, 32).

in an individual's life, 'junctures on the educational market' (Hoikkala & Paju 2013, 16). Art is no exception: the importance of education as part of the artist's career is emphasized in the Finnish artist research, and the importance of education seems to have risen in many fields of art – "one of the milestones of the artist's professional path is the vocational education of the respective field of art" (Houni & Ansio 2013d, 72; see also Karhunen 2004; Rensujeff 2014). In some fields, in classical music and theatre in particular, formal education has been an important path in the process of becoming an artist and developing as one. Also in e.g. fine arts very few artists can enter the field without any formal education (Karttunen 1988, 51–55; Rensujeff 2014). The same applies to graphic fields, such as design, where there's been some debate on the oversupply of education and school places in recent years (OKM 2012; Herranen et al. 2013). Literature has traditionally been and still is an exception as there is no formal education leading to a degree. Many authors have completed some studies that support writing and being a writer[34] (e.g. Karhunen 2004, 43). Also in pop music, self-learning and completing supportive studies is still a very typical way.

> I always wanted to be an artist but my school didn't teach any artisthood. It wasn't, what I mean is that it's a university but somehow it's not, you can't study that way and it's not academic. And that's something I would have needed. So it was a big disappointment to me. [...] I don't have anything negative to say, no bad memories, quite the contrary. About the education itself, well, I didn't learn that much. But I got to know so many good people and I've learned from them, for example, my most important colleague went to that same school. And many other people. I feel proud to be able to say that I know these people. I mean that, in a way, they're my friends.

In the quote above, even though education itself was somewhat of a disappointment, its impact was seen as positive, if not in other ways but through friends made and colleagues met there. In the biographic studies on artists it has been seen that the meaning of education to artists is not solely related to learning new skills or obtaining a formal degree. Often the main benefit of education is the artistic identity that evolves during education, the social networks that can be formed, socialization into the activities of the world of arts and internalization of its informal codes (e.g. Herranen et al. 2013, 60–66; Houni & Ansio 2013a). Education is taken for granted, as part of the ordinary life course (e.g. Mikkola 2002, 78–79; Aapola 2005; Häkkinen 2012). To the interviewed artists, education implied partly following the normative expectations of society as well as acquiring formal competences and social capital. To many of those who dream about a career in arts, education is a welcomed transition phase during which own skills are developed, social networks are created and future with its different options can be reflected.

Artist research indicates that time after graduation is very often a critical moment to many new artists (e.g. Vihma-Purovaara 2000, 185–190; Maijala 2003, 105–109; Karttunen 2009, 59–74). Totti Tuhkanen (1988, 114) writes on this critical transition

34 These include, i.a., humanistic social science studies at the university level but also studies in non-academic establishments such as in the writing school of the Critical Academy.

from the perspective of visual artists: ”The beginning of the professional career, coming to the market from the art school, is the most critical moment during the artist's career. Most graduated artists drop out at this stage – or, rather, are never able to embark on a freelance career in arts. ”

According to Erkkilä and Vesanen (1989, 98) you can become a visual artist only by ”crossing that no man's land which is located between the graduation from art school and establishment of your 'name' on the market, i.e. obtaining accreditation by the elite of the field of art”. A quarter of a century later, in the light of this study, this quote is still valid to describe one of the most critical turning points in the artist's career. It's not only about finding a job but about whether one becomes an artist at all. In this turning point (Clausen 1998), the artists' experiences constitute a tangle in which realization of being an artist, social capitals, experience of vocation, chance and structures meet (with many artists) – this is the end of education and the beginning of the transition into the working life. Artisthood obtained at school and immediately thereafter quickly collides with realities of artistic work and the realities of the modern working life in general, however. The gatekeepers of the world of art are not only watching by the two doors of the art school but, above all, in the real world after education.

> I: When did you find [your own field of art]?
> A:.Well, I didn't, I only found it when we moved away from Finland, after graduation.
> I: Ok, so that late..
> A: Yes, that's how it went, or I had done some projects in my own field when I was still studying and this is actually how it happened, one of my teachers told me that this company had contacted them because they were looking for a young student to do something new there. And then my teacher recommended me or two other students and this is how it started.

The contacts established during a student job, the teacher's role as a 'mentor' and the role of chance are notable in this quote. Again, the relationships and networks established during education, the so called 'weak ties' (Granovetter 1973) play an important role.

The relationship between education and entry into professional life after that naturally varies between different fields of art. For example, Houni (2000, 183) notes the following on theatre: ”nowadays many actors work in a professional way already when studying”. On the other hand, finding employment is very difficult in the field of theatre. Karhunen (2004, 63) refers to statistics indicating that music and design art are the best employers whereas only fine arts are poorer employers than theatre and dance. Karhunen and Rensujeff (2006) report on similar results; statistically, the average employment rate in arts is 74 per cent.

Recently, there's been debate as to whether there currently are too many school places in art education, or is it just because society cannot properly employ the artists it has educated (Karhunen & Rensujeff 2006). For example, Christine Bauer et al. (2011) write about introducing the teaching of entrepreneurial skills to art education as, even though artists are among the best educated groups in society they also have, on average, relatively low income levels and often work in temporary jobs. The economic downturn of the recent years has further reduced the resources in the fields of art which can be seen, for instance, in the cuts in art and culture budgets in 2015–2018 (OKM 2014). The rise

of creative fields (Florida 2002; Wilenius 2004) in this century has further changed the funding of cultural fields but the fact is, in any case, that in the traditionally insecure fields the poor economic times are felt even harder than in other fields (Rensujeff 2014). As Karhunen and Rensujeff (2006) recall, in addition to insecure employment in the field of arts, even being employed does not necessarily mean an adequate level of income. In any field of art, finding a full-time employment in a job corresponding to one's educational level is so challenging that it has become a strong indicator of success in itself. In the following quote this is described as being lucky, or being rewarded for hard work:

> Of course I feel lucky because I've got all these things, it's been a kind of blessing or something, and somehow… sometimes I think if I'm grateful enough that all this has happened even though I'm still so young. Well, there's something, I've understood that already as a child I thought that all these great things just happen, or can happen. Like at some point I thought that some day I'll break through even though it required so much pain and hard work. Maybe it's just that one good thing leads to another. I feel that I'm very lucky but still I don't think that these things just like… fell from the sky. I mean I also see all the hard work that I've done for it.

This view was quite common in the interviews. Many interviewees seemed to think that "great things just happen". An optimist could say that, in the logic of the art world, good things happen to good people. It's not necessarily the case in reality, however, and this was repeated in a number of interviews. This is illustrated in the following quote where the artist states that many other artists would have deserved the same success but, on the other hand, it's just not possible due to the scarce resources in the world of arts (see also Herranen et al. 2013).

> I: Do you feel that you've always been able to do what you want to do, after graduation? Do you feel that you have, or how should I put it, do you feel that you've deserved it?
> A: Well yes, I do. But it doesn't take away the feeling that many others would have deserved it, too, those who were not given that possibility. Or who just don't have it.

Education, in one way or another, was an important transition in the lives of most of the interviewed artists in the research data. Three artists had not been educated in their fields but all of them had completed some artistic studies, however. Two of them had done "some courses" in the open university whilst one of them had completed a university degree in a totally different field of art. The interviewees viewed the importance of these studies as very irrelevant to their current career. As expected, self-taughtedness and self-initiative were emphasized in their artisthood: "[things] have just moved forward by trial and error and [I've] learned these things on my own".

## LIFE STEERING DURING PROFESSIONAL CAREER

After their educational path the artists of the research data entered professional life, a small part of them already before graduation or without any education in the field.

Many different types of life steerings are connected to professional career in arts and these are very differently valued among the artists. The most important long-term goal seems simple: to develop in one's own work and to be able to continue it as long as possible. Many hoped they'd be as "lucky" in the future as they've been so far which is understandable now that they had found their "own thing". In practice, aspiration to self-development is an in-built ideal in the artistic work and hence a common observation in artist studies: in, for example, Herranen et al. (2013, 84–86) research data the most important building block of the artist's identity was the artistic vision and the aspiration to continuously develop it. Even though an artist would have found his own field and it feels right, there's still a lot to learn, as becomes clear in the following quote:

> I: Ok, have you ever doubted it, after that? Did you ever have any doubts on being good enough?
> A: Well, yes, that's of course something I always doubt a little bit, at least on some level. The more you learn the better you understand that you actually know quite little. And… well I don't doubt of being in the wrong field, that's not the case. Especially taking into account that I can't do anything else [laughs] so it'd be better to have found the right field, as I haven't gone to any school or anything… so well… but of course I do have some doubts, and you always should have because that's the only way to develop. But it's not like feeling that 'oh, I'm so bad'. I do recognize my strengths but I also want to develop in everything I do.

In a way, constant change is in the heart of art making. An artist has do develop and have the potential for renewal. He has to generate new ideas in order to remain interesting to the public and, most importantly, to himself; he has to find his work interesting and satisfying. Most changes just occur over time and are not always planned. Artistic work takes the artist to new and surprising directions, and too much planning may be detrimental. At times, conscious decisions have an impact, too: an artist's career is full of small-scale life steerings and finetuning related to, for instance, choice of projects and time management. On the other hand, searching one's position is typical, too:

> I: Do you think there's a lot of competition... Competition between artists and so on...?
> A: Well, yes. But as I said, I try my best to exclude myself from it, to remain above it or outside it. I've chosen to do completely different things from others. To be so special that you don't have to… that you compete in your own league. So that's my method or however you want to call it.

One conscious artistic solution that repeatedly came up in the interviews was distinguishing oneself. The quote above illustrates this well: the artist tells that the starting point is to do different things from others, to distinguish oneself from the competition and create a league of one's own. The ambivalent attitude to competition is revealed too: there's no willingness to compete against other artists but, at the same time, the artist tries to secure a place of her own and exclude others from it.

Artists often have a critical stance towards commercialism and competition but not all of them find selling their own works unpleasant. Some artists reported on having considered themselves fortunate when their artistic career has progressed on its own and invitations to work in different projects have followed one another. All of them were

not that lucky and they needed to get their work in front of people in a more conscious way. An experience of being able to impact things with one's own activities becomes apparent in the following quote:

> Well, it was somehow that I understood that you can't just sit and wait, do your art and then somebody comes and takes your works of art and puts them on display. It's more that I realized how you can influence the world around you. [...] I mean that I understood that it's not that they choose you but you can also choose them. And if you actively push your ideas to them and, if they are good enough, they'll buy them.

Many artists tried to expand onto other fields of art: a musician becomes an author, a sculptor becomes a painter and so on. To many artists, being an artist literally meant being an artist, in the broad sense of the word. This is not only a conscious choice but also, at least partly, following one's own artistic 'instinct'. In this sense it's also about a conscious decision on time management. Time that could be used to something else, also something non-artistic, is used to expanding onto new fields of art – or actually developing oneself as an artist. This is a sign of multidisciplinarity of arts, not only forced by market forces (Ansio & Houni 2013a, 66–71), but also of being able to make choices on the basis of one's own desires, drawing upon the freedom of art. At the same time, it's connected to the constant renewal and reform of the artistic work. This aspect becomes evident in the following quote when one field of art starts to feel monotone:

> And then it was only later that I realized that it was that [one field of art] somehow. I felt like doing something a bit boring and monotone at that time. I had the feeling that many things annoyed me there, so I decided to try that [other field of art].

This is clearly related to the looking for new challenges within one's own artistic field. It has its drawbacks, too: when things go well, they may go too well, and suddenly the artist is faced with too much work. If you forget good time management and prioritization, challenging work and inability to turn down additional work may lead to burnout. In the following quote the interviewee concludes that if you cannot take time off, it can lead to burnout but, on the other hand, when you finally have vacation and it feels good, it can feel almost "frightening" because the artist's desire to nourish his or her creativity is so strong:

> I: Well, well… Do you ever take any time off…?
> A: Well, I've never been very good in these things. Well, I did have some days off now at Christmas. It felt so good and suddenly I realized that two weeks had gone without any work… well at least one and a half. It just went like that, almost frighteningly quickly, maybe because I didn't have any vacation last summer either… so it just went by. Well it's always a little bit like that, that maybe I should have taken some, it's good for everyone, isn't it? I mean that it's good to take some days off otherwise you may end up having too much work and stress, too, if you just can't spend your time on anything else. And also, if you're involved in art it's good to have those moments that you don't even think about it, that you spend time on doing something completely different. It's nice to do something different, every once in a while, things that normal people [with a laugh] do on holiday, something fun.

Most interviewees emphasized that making art is mostly pure work. If you really want to invest in something, you have to focus on it and often also sacrifice other things for it. Of course, when making art is your vocation and you really enjoy doing it, it's not a conscious sacrifice but something taken for granted. However, some lifestyle choices were emphasized:

> I work in a determined way and long hours too, all the time. I'm not just waiting for inspiration, if it comes from somewhere or not, instead, I get up early in the morning and work until late at night. [...] Well that's, as far as I know what other artists do, how it is nowadays, everyone does it. Competition is so fierce and you just have to work all the time. [...] I've been thinking about that bohemian myth thing. Maybe it's starting to be a thing of the past.

Hence even creative work is work that requires concentration and discipline. These aspects are evident in the quotation above, along with the fact that competition has become fiercer and "the bohemian myth" starts to be a thing of the past (see also Houni & Ansio 2013a). At the same time, vocation as defined by the term *calling* is questioned in this ethos, emphasizing diligence and hard work (see also Røyseng et al. 2007). If work was a "god's gift" one should not be obliged to make such big effort[35]. Most interviewees told that they try to work even in their bad days and create something. Disciplined work may also help in the everyday time management so that the daily grind doesn't become too challenging. The drawback of artistic (and of any other creative work) is that the limits of the working time may be expanded or blurred (e.g. Salasuo 2013). A clear time-related system is the solution found in this quote:

> Then I just decided that all emails, everything has to be finished by the evening news, a classic limit that all work has to be done by that. Otherwise I can't sleep. But it can develop into that routine that everything is so, so… there's so much of everything, people keep asking me something all the time, that I just become so tired that everything feels so, that you just forget how to take time off.

To an artist, borders between work, leisure and holiday are not easy to draw – not in time nor in place. Most artists reported on not being able to take time off and when they did, they kept on generating ideas and having that artistic view of the world. Being an artist is clearly a holistic way of life (see also Houni & Ansio 2013c, 99–104). According to the interviewed artists, an ideal situation does have some degree of balance. The artist of the following quote has solved this problem by seeing the all-embracing work as "just life". On the other hand, the artist is not stressed about thinking of work while on vacation:

35 Røyseng et al. (2007) continue on this theme. They suggest there's a common belief in art world that good art will reach success, sooner or later, as an inbuilt mechanism. They see similarities between this logic and the Calvinistic predestination doctrine: when you can't be sure about your destiny, you just have to work hard and wish for the "salvation".

> A: Well it all goes on all the time but still, I think I can have my vacation and spend it as it is and you can also generate good ideas while on holiday, can't you, but it doesn't feel like working all the time that I couldn't somehow relax. So yes, I can relax, actually quite often. If I don't have work, I can do it. But the process is somehow always going on but I wouldn't call it work.
> I: Ok, so it doesn't feel like work?
> A: No, it's just life, so… And hey, it's great if you get a good idea or you see something and realize that this is something cool that you can use in some future project but it's not working, it's just life.

Some of the interviewed artists pointed out that the typical idea of artists that "they're never on holiday" is romanticised and therefore even dangerous. This is clearly seen in the following quote where the importance of taking time off is emphasized – but the idea of two weeks "without thinking of art" also feels somewhat frightening:

> Well what I used to think, in my teen years, was that if you're an artist, you're an artist full-time, this romantic idea. That you feel that you're an artist 24/7. Well you are, in some ways. But what I try to aim for is a normal working day that you go to work and leave work and do something else, too, sport or spend some time with your friends instead of thinking about art all the time. Now I even have holidays, not the same way I used to do, that if I went somewhere I always had an art project with me. Now I can have holidays, just some time off which can be quite frightening, too, that you suddenly spend two weeks without even thinking about art at all.

Some of the interviewees told that they regularly take other work beside their artistic work. This is not only economically advantageous but also mentally balancing. It also helps to relieve pressure from artistic work. Some artists also pointed out that better paid, more commercial work projects enable less economically profitable artistic work and projects. Most of the earnings may come from art-related work whereas most of the time may be used to ambitious artistic work. Secondary jobs typically include teaching, occasional projects in other fields of art or something completely different and non-artistic.

> At the moment I have many projects and events going on, beside my [own work]. [...] I'd like to explain this as sharing my energy because I think I'm not one of those persons who can concentrate on something long-term and in detail. On the other hand, I like to have long projects, I don't want to work too fast. I really prefer long projects but in the meantime… I'd like to keep it in the back of my mind and do something else in between. It has worked very well in this way.

The situation described here is typical to many artists: ideally, own artistic work is always on but not all the artist's time is invested in it. To be able to decide how much to invest in the artistic work is one of the first indicators of artistic success. In this respect, the grant system plays a vital role.

## WHAT CAN YOU STEER BY YOURSELF, AFTER ALL?

As seen above, the life of an artist takes place in the same societal and social framework as anybody else's: via family background and socialization into education, from social restrictions and opportunities to modern ideals and ideas of their generation, and finally to the necessities of life. Still, it seems that artists somehow escape from the perimeter of the 'normal life course'. Due to following their vocation, the self-steerings or choices of their lives often seem irrational and, at the same time, artists typically abandon some of the traditional indicators of success. In other words, an artist voluntarily accepts such things in life that many others wouldn't: financial insecurity, stress on the results of their creativity, publicity, criticism and doubts about the meaningfulness of their work. Many interviewees concluded that what they actually do doesn't make any sense but still, they wouldn't change a day of their careers.

An artist's work is mentally very demanding and all-encompassing. At least in principle, the artist's life and self become material for the artist's work. Whatever can serve as inspiration and the artist can draw upon anything. In this way, life can become very consuming. At the same time it means that all life phases are an integral part of what influences the artistic work. This reminds us again on the cumulative nature of the life course (Giele & Elder 1998). Even those with late artistic realization have accrued life experiences, all of which can later become relevant to their artistic work.

All interviewed artists had had the experience that their careers, at some point, started to 'move forward' on their own (see also Karttunen 2009). This is understandable against the background that only successful artists were selected for the interviews of this study: not being successful often means that things just don't progress but become stuck (cf. Herranen et al. 2013). When career moves forward and things progress well, the artists don't even have time to reflect their choices and transitions, things just happen. Sometimes this can have negative consequences, too, as we've seen above when discussing the stress experiences. At the same time, we notice that chance plays an important role, too. The artist of the following quote had recently won a notable national award after which he was looking forward to what would happen, with great interest. At the same time, he underlines that the award itself was a total surprise to him:

> I'm also thinking about the concept of time as I'm never in a hurry to do anything, I just don't and I don't have any need to be involved in any great projects next year or so, well I had this recognition and I should be very happy with it, and I certainly am. It came as a surprise, and I'm really genuinely surprised, and I just wonder what has happened here and I'm certainly looking forward to the future, where all this leads to. [...] Well, I wasn't looking for it and I wasn't aware of all this, I didn't know anything about these eight people who were sitting around the table, and then my name somehow repeatedly came up, from one meeting to another, well…

One frequent theme in the interviews was the dichotomy between own projects and projects done for somebody else. This signifies that in one hand, there are external expectations towards artist's work and pressures from the 'normal society' related to, for instance, being successful. On the other hand, an artist should remain loyal to his own

ideals and ways of working in order not to lose his sensitivity or 'touch'. This could be seen as a dialogue and a balancing act between the artist's self-expression originating from the artist himself and the 'more popular' art looking for wider resonance (see also Røyseng et al. 2007). In some interviews, the agonising difficulty of combining ambitious artistic work and commercial success became evident, too. Some of the artists had solved this dilemma by dividing their work to artistic work in which substantial time and effort are devoted but little money is earned, and to more commercial work with less allocated effort but more money earned. Most of them concluded, however, that in the most rewarding situation their artistic work would generate sufficient income. All of them hadn't reached this yet even though we're talking about fairly successful young artists here.

In any case, it seems to be important for artistic success that the artist doesn't care about external expectations. The most often named factor for the high quality of artistic work was integrity towards oneself. Artistic work should be done in the best possible way for oneself and in the best case, success will follow. However, it's not about perfectionism which many interviewees condemned as detrimental. It's about doing everything as well as possible in the existing circumstances. The following quote wraps this up and touches upon artistic success, too:

> You do those things because you have to do them well. Not in the perfect way but well enough. As well as you can do them. But not in the perfect way and there's a thin line between those two [...] Maybe that's what defines success then. It's not possible to do it in any other way, everything has to be perfect for yourself. To yourself, not to anybody else. It's maybe important to think about nobody else in this context. Although you do work for other people, too. But the first thing to think about is to do this for yourself exactly the way you want to do it.

# 7 Artist and the *zeitgeist* – artisthood in the 21st century Finland

One of the fundamental principles of the life course analysis is that each individual's life course is located in a certain time and place (e.g. Häkkinen 2012). Thus not only societal resources and benefitting from them but also existing values and attitudes are visible in each individual's life course. Frequent themes in the interviews included the freedom and independence in the artist's work which were seen both as assets and challenges. From the generational point of view this is about the new ideal of work: the possibility and freedom to organize one's own work in a personal way. An artist is the master of his own work and his own timetables, in a way a creative entrepreneur (see also Giddens 1991; Wass & Torsti 2011). Independence and the possibility to have an impact on the timing and content of one's own work were clearly seen as important factors in the interviews, almost as an indicator of success, as the following quote indicates:

> If you can achieve such order in your life that you have enough time to [make art], it means that you've been able to organize that work, prioritize so to say… so that your life expenses are in balance with your income from work so that you can make a living on that artist's work.

This quote illustrates that work is an integral part of life. Work is meaningful and its rewardingness is more important than its pay or the stability of it (Tuohinen 2010; Siltala 2013, 196–208). This means that conscious risk-taking becomes more important (Sennett 2002, 88–93) and the border between work and non-work becomes blurred (Julkunen 2008, 136).

As for working life values, there has been a more general change in recent years compared to previous generations (Roos 1987; Tuohinen 2010; Tuohinen 2014; Piispa et al. 2015). It seems that the importance of work has by no means decreased, only changed. Thus the present generation is not work-averse. Rather, one could say it's a generation which is demanding as to the content of the work. For example, in the 2007 Youth Barometer (Myllyniemi 2007) 54 per cent of the youth named the content of the work as the most important work requirement. In addition, the amount of pay was important only to 16 per cent of the respondents. Similar results have been achieved in previous surveys in this century (op. cit., 39). As Antti Häkkinen (2013, 53) – who names those born in 1971–2000 as the urban generation – states work controls the life of young people of this generation but not as a force but as a field of life generating opportunities and capitals. Titta Tuohinen

(2010) adds values of cooperation and the sense of community to this. Expectations on the rewardingness of work lead to work and its qualities defining the identity of young professionals in a significant way. This is highlighted especially with the artists because their work is a fundamental element of their identities.

Sari Karttunen (2004, 34) has reflected the increasing popularity of art professions in young people's career choices and writes: "art promises opportunities to self-accomplishment and self-development, independence as regards working hours and the ways of working, and possibilities to flexibly move from employer, project and community to another one". The most important (working) life values of young generations include freedom and choice, the ethos of entrepreneurship and the possibility to reach self-fulfilment and "internally beautiful life" (Tuppurainen 2009, 21–25) or even "obtain life" (through work) (Sennett 2002, 129). When listing the values of young generations we have to include at least the following: creativity, freedom, choice, entrepreneurship and independence, internal rewardingness of life, life-long learning, youth cultures, cultural youth, civic activity, work as vocation and lifestyle. It's easy to see that all these are naturally and intuitively connected to artisthood, some of them even very obviously. (see also Myllyniemi 2009, 38–43.)

We could argue that the logic and values of making art are similar to the shared ideals of young generations and if not those of all young people, at least most of those with middle class backgrounds. When using generation definitions, we can talk about the generation of welfare and the generation of individual choice (born in the 1970's and 1980's respectively; Hoikkala & Paju 2008) which are often referred as X and Y generations (e.g. Siltala 2013). The interviewed artists did not mention their generations as such but in their interviews many themes, attitudes and values typical to their generations were expressed. However, we should bear in mind that in selecting the interviewees for the research data, young generations were emphasized on purpose so some of the themes were, at the outset, expected to be highlighted more in the interviews. An additional view to the generational thematic is the assumption that the members of the cultural elite, including artists, are the most sensitive interpreters of the experiences of their generations (Purhonen 2007, 77).

Central themes that bring together artists and their work include professional insecurity, unconditionality of making art, attitudes towards commercialism and entertainment, the difficulty of being a successful artist and the relativity of success, the role of chance and the different identities of artisthood. One could sum this up as the bliss and the misery of being an artist. We could also conclude that this is a very similar theme to that one present in the debate and writings about the modern abstract work (Holvas & Vähämäki 2005; Jakonen et al. 2006).

## PROFESSIONAL INSECURITY

An artist has to live with many insecurity factors. This conclusion has been made not only in this report but also in many analyses of artists in different fields of art (i.a. Throsby &

Zednik 2010; Bauer et al. 2011; Houni & Ansio 2013a). In her study on visual artists Sari Karttunen (1988) summed up the nature of artist's work already in the name of her book: *Taide pitkä, leipä kapea (Art long, bread narrow)*. Professional insecurity doesn't only mean 'narrow bread' (Rensujeff 2005, 29) but the situation where bread doesn't always come from that source the artist would like it to come (op. cit., 21), or sometimes it doesn't come at all. Income differences between different fields of art and artists are big and high incomes of a small minority of very successful artists increase the average income of artists to look better than what it actually is, with the great majority of artists (Rensujeff 2003; Rensujeff 2014). In addition to polarization, other features of modern work which are increasingly disturbing the entire working life, have been typical in many artistic fields for a long time already (Julkunen 2008; Pirttilä & Houni 2011; Herranen et al. 2013, 98–99). What is more, as for example Rensujeff (2005, 6–7) concludes, atypical work has become more frequent also in those fields of art where employment used to be more stable, such as theatre.

> I: What are the worst features [in the artist's work]?
> A: Permanent lack of money. It gets on my nerves, I can say that, especially with age, when you have to count your cents in every turn… it's really difficult to enjoy life in those moments. Well, I'm getting along, I've learned how to cope with it but it really, especially at this moment it's very topical because I'm just waiting for the decision on my annual grant… the answer on how to survive this year, I should finish a big project in six months and every evening I have to do teaching so I don't know how I'm getting along, really. I have one day off per week and I try to keep it that way. Because I don't have those energy reserves anymore, what I used to have when I was 25. I just can't stay up anymore, I need more than six hours of sleep a night, I used to sleep only six hours and it was fine, I could manage with it. But as I'm getting older I know that it's not going to get any easier. I've been thinking about how different it would be, to have some kind of a basic income, to have that freedom for ideas and other things. I remember, I think it was the summer before last summer when my greatest stress was that I didn't have time to think and it was just horrible when I realized that I'm stressed because I don't have time to think at any point [laughs]. I just go and do, go and do and I'm afraid that I'm going to have that same situation again and I also have to admit that somehow I'm more and more stressed about this as time goes on… and now that I have children, I have my responsibilities, I really need to think about other people, too, not only about myself… back then [when I was younger] I could eat porridge and live however I wanted. And then I want to have a big space for work, I need this space for work, this costs a lot of money, not to mention the other things… so this is my greatest fear, can I afford all this next month or not. It does stress me and it's a clear minus of my work.

The public sector has traditionally been and still is an important funding source for art in Finland. In fact, public funding, in the form of the grant system in its most concrete manifestation, is the mechanism to reduce the insecurity of artistic work[36] (Rautiainen

36 Pauli Rautiainen (2008, 12–16) sums up nicely why art and artists should receive public support. He concludes that even though supporting art can be both justified and contested by economic and social policy arguments, we should also bear in mind the aesthetic value of art, i.e. the intrinsic value of art should be valued more than its material value.

2008). The quote above clearly illustrates how even the grant system cannot take away the insecurity: it's stressful to wait for the grant decisions, one should always have a plan B, such as teaching work in one's own field of art (see also Herranen et al. 2013, 69–71). With age, the problem often escalates, and especially those with family responsibilities may encounter significant financial difficulties. The artist's concentration on artistic work suffers which was evident also in the passage above. (See also Houni & Ansio 2013a.) This theme was frequently brought up in many interviews.

The growth of artistic fields cannot necessarily keep up with the increase in the number of artists, thus, the average income of artists may decrease. In addition to scarcity of jobs and funding, atypical work, shorter projects, overlapping of work and necessity to take multiple jobs (e.g. Karhunen & Rensujeff 2006; Houni & Ansio 2013a) have probably only increased. In conclusion, the psychological insecurity of the artist's work has not disappeared, on the contrary.

Life-long learning and development are in the core of artisthood – as stated by a 70-year-old visual artist interviewed by Terhi Aaltonen (2012, 89), "if an artist gets old and just begins to doodle, he's not an artist anymore". In some ways, artisthood appears as eternal youth – not in a way that bohemian artists would hang around bars until the bitter end (which may have been a more realistic image with the previous artistic generations). Rather, it's a requirement of life-long curiosity which also answers to modern expectations of life-long learning (e.g. Elinikäisen oppimisen neuvosto 2010) or even of continuous self-development as an "ethical requirement" (Hautamäki 1996, 26–28; see also Hänninen 2000, 44; Julkunen 2008, 210). This is not only a demand of the 'ever more efficient' working life but also a middle class ideal, part of the normal life course. As Sinikka Aapola (2005) states, entering adulthood is postponed until after graduation among university graduates and in academic fields in general. Informal learning experiences, the 'school of life', is important along with the formal education[37] (see also Noro 1995; Hautamäki 1996, 36–38; Mikkola 2002, 78–79). This applies to artists, too. They need to tirelessly educate themselves and their 'graduation', be it artistic maturation or just growing up, is postponed or never actually takes place.

Even though the artist's work requires a certain 'eternal youth' in terms of curiosity and self-development, a disciplined adulthood is required for the determinedness of artistic work. At the same time, laziness is to be avoided: success may be a double-edged sword here, as the following, future-oriented sarcastic quotation suggests. It's interesting to see how the change in making art, from a "life mission" to "just a profession" is seen as a potential threat:

37 According to Sinikka Aapola (2005) those who study in the "school of life" feel that they enter adulthood later than vocationally focused young people. Interestingly, this might be one of the differences between artists and athletes. The life course of an athlete is more straightforward and is, in this way, similar to vocational training. At the same time, an athlete enters the adulthood earlier. This may also explain why athletes sometimes tend to be "left with nothing" after their professional career: they enter the labour market without having completed the school of life and maybe they lack other schooling, too. They have been forced to enter adulthood too early.

> A: Well this is it, whether I have this same attitude to my work in, let's say 20 years, that's another question altogether. It may be that I don't believe in what I'm doing anymore – I mean that I wouldn't see this as a life mission but just as a profession. Or maybe I've given up all my artistic ambitions. Maybe I just have commissioned work and feel that I just don't have time to anything else.
> I: Do you mean that not having time would be an excuse for not having energy?
> A: Yeah...so this is how my life would look like: in the morning at around 9–10, after my cup of coffee and the morning newspaper, I'd work a little and then send my work, and then I'd go for a walk with my big fat belly, eat my lunch somewhere and then come home for the rest of the afternoon to sip wine with my dear wife. Then I'd listen to old jazz records. It can happen. If you ask me, it's even possible. You never know, but this is not what I hope for because I still have that boasting of a 20-year-old, still believing in my omnipotence.

The artist tells that he hopes to be able to hold on to the illusion of the "boasting of a 20-year-old". The ideal of the ever-lasting youth is a typical and very common life orientation of the younger generations (Hoikkala 1989; Ketokivi 2004; Mary 2012).

However, holding on to youth might also have distressing features and an extended youth may be an unscrupulous ideal to any generation or its representative (see Salasuo & Suurpää 2014). Unlike many of his peers, an artist cannot necessarily live the typical transitions of growth and entering adulthood which would entail socialization into the norms and 'normality' (cf. Pulkkinen & Polet 2010) of the mainstream population. Nevertheless, 'eternal youth' of artists is, at its best, something else; eternal playfulness instead of an ever-lasting adolescence. In artisthood, it's more about maintaining that curiosity of a child, as if everything was always new, or at least could be. As Kari Uusikylä (2012, 41) writes, on creativity: "it's essential that an individual is free to observe the world open-mindedly, like children do, forgetting self-criticism". The following quote aptly illustrates this:

> I particularly liked that comment in that book [Hytti nro. 6; Rosa Liksom] when this guy, this old drunkard said at the end of the book, something like 'when I was five I knew everything about life and I´ve spent the following 40 years trying to understand it'. I really liked that idea; and this is exactly the instinct I mean. That quite often we are quite ready and able and we don´t need all this self-awareness that 'now I´m doing this and that here'. A child plays without being told so or being told so by himself. [...] But after that, when we have all this awareness and we understand more and our processors somehow become weaker and weaker and everything requires just so much effort.

On the other hand, qualities that describe today's work such as subjectivized, project-like, aestheticized, flexible and individual (e.g. Siltala 2004; Julkunen 2008; Pirttilä & Houni 2011) are very familiar to any art-maker. Artists are a certain vanguard of the precariat (e.g. Julkunen 2008, 112), together with researchers, for instance. And it's not all: artists typically put their entire personality into their work which is an intrinsic part of their identity (e.g. Houni 2000). This is something that is required also in other fields as work becomes more subjectivized. Raija Julkunen (2008, 123–124) states that success and achievement in this situation strengthen the whole personality but, on the other hand, also failure affects strongly. The feeling of failure is not related to performance only but 'it hits the entire self' (op. cit.; see also Houni & Ansio 2013a).

> I feel that in this profession or maybe the people that are in this are like that, and again, when you do this kind of work you have to challenge your performance all the time, if you are good enough, are my works good enough and whether the critics like them. What I mean is that we, or at least our brainchildren, are somehow public property that anybody can praise or diss. Well, I think that you have to be really brave somehow in this profession, especially taking into account that you don´t get paid. Sometimes I feel that I miss so much because I can't lead a normal, stable life. Something that you could rely on, something that you would know would lead to something, that you could achieve something… and then, when you're in need, you would have this earnings-related income support or whatever it´s called, I don´t even know these things. To have at least some protection which you simply don´t have in this job. Well, I don´t even think about my retirement, I think that I´ve accumulated some 40 euros of pension a month so far. I mean really. I don´t even think about that far ahead but… just to have a normal, simple and easy life. I don´t know if any of us has that anymore but sometimes, in my childish and naive moments I feel that I´ve lost something, that quiet, easy-going life. But can you lose something if you never had it? Well, it depends on your field of art but it would be really great to be paid sometimes.

This quotation summarises many insecurity factors in the artist's life. First of all, publicity and personality of work; your work is your "brainchild" which puts successful artists both mentally and socially in a vulnerable position where a certain courage is required. In addition, an artist's work is often poorly paid: this fine arts artist had calculated that the accumulated pension pay is only some 40 euros a month, at the age around 35. Thirdly, an artist's profession is characterized by insurmountability of the eternal youth, that period of economic and mental insecurity. Therefore the aspired "quiet, easy-going life" never actually materializes and the artist may actually never be able to reach it. Similar observations have been made in other studies. In the research data of Ansio and Houni (2013b, 150), for instance, the nature of creative work, economic worries, working conditions and being all the time publicly judged were listed as the burdens of artistic work.

In the end, it's worth emphasizing that none of the interviewed artists regret their career choice. To many, this impression is related to the concept of vocation discussed earlier when the career is not even seen as a free choice. A typical thing that artists felt they had lost due to their career choice was the certain normality, the "quiet, easy-going life" mentioned above.

## INCREASING COMMERCIALISM, ENTERTAINMENT AND 'THE SELLING OF SELF'

Separation of art and entertainment has always been an integral part of the artist's ethos (see also 'charismatic ideology of creation', Bourdieu 1993; Karttunen 2002, 55–59; Røyseng et al. 2007). According to it, an artist should never 'sell himself' to entertainment and commercialism – and should there be any commercial success, it should rather come as a by-product of high-quality, pure art, somehow by chance. According to the strictest interpretation, demonstrating any commercial interests can even lead to the decrease of artistic value (Røyseng et al. 2007). As artists typically struggle with

financial insecurity, this principle and holding on to it can be seen not only as challenging but also old-fashioned and idealistic. However, on the basis of the research data, this seems to be the only imaginable option as selling oneself would, at the same time, mean betraying oneself.

> Hugo Pratt is one of those [...] in his own genre he opened up a new depth in the war and adventure comics and ended up in those mystic levels, and to the level of great literature, with his adventure comics. And with his visual expression. To new spheres. And he became very popular among the wider public in France. Not anywhere else, really. One could say that he appeals to wider public… well at least Corto Maltese is a fictive character who's well known around the world [...] and then those poets such as Pentti Saarikoski or Allen Gingsberg or Charles Bukowski; they are such characters that one could think about… I´m thinking, I often think about their works and their lives, all of them are dead by now, they are really like real stories, stories with an end. They have that, in a way… reasonable success. The only one with commercial success was Bukowski. [...] maybe that´s why I admire poets; they sell so little. Even the big names. It has similarities with my field, comics. Fiction writers, those bastards, I always envy them, their lives seem so easy.

The quote above exposes how difficult and also enviable it is to combine high-quality artistic work and at least reasonable commercial success. Very few seem to succeed in this and if they do, they probably don't, at least intentionally, aim for big sales figures. This comic artist also ironises the "easy" life of fiction writers. However, compromise is not an option and the personal, professional pride goes above anything else, also commercial success. The following conclusion can be made of the next quote: being able to work is a happy situation in itself to many artists but it doesn't mean that they would be willing to do anything. It's better to hold on to the artistic dignity and even accept occasional unemployment as long as one doesn't have to do something which is not artistically rewarding[38]:

> I´m so lucky, financially for example that I've got work more or less on a regular basis. And then I´m a member in the union, I can get earnings-related income support whenever I´m not working, so it´s possible for me… There must be many different situations but I think that it´s up to me to think of what kind of a career I want to do or how I think that I could develop just by doing anything. Well, that´s not like that although I realize that other people don´t see it in a similar way but I do, I mean that if I cannot give anything new, if I just keep doing those things I´ve done for hundreds of times, that really paralyzes me, it makes me look boring or at least bored in my own eyes. And then, the other way around, if you can choose what you do, it makes your world somehow clearer, it makes you feel better about yourself also in a way that I can prove that I have some taste, that I have this artistic taste and artistic vision, maybe, and not just anything goes.

In the artistic work different capitals contradict in an interesting way. Commercial success can be 'traded off' for more artistic projects. On the other hand, more artistic projects

38 It's notable that even a successful artist mentions the possibility of an earnings-based unemployment benefit as a positive thing. This further demonstrates the economic uncertainty of artistic work.

accumulate the symbolic capital, highly valued in the artistic field, in such way that an artist may sometimes 'sell himself' also to more commercial projects with purely economic gain in mind (see also Røyseng et al. 2007). Balancing between art and entertainment, as defined simply, is in one way or another the everyday life of every artist interviewed for this study. On the basis of the research data it seems that exactly this possibility to choose artistically ambitious projects is, in itself, an indicator of success.

This research data does not directly tell about the blurring boundaries between culture and entertainment and the interviewed artists mostly emphasized their artistic integrity. Clues on dispelling boundaries were, however, seen. The most typical manifestation was the acceptance of entertainment; even if the artist was not involved in it himself. In some interviews the artists also stated that getting rich by artistic work is very acceptable. Some of the artists reported on having had an upbringing where both 'high brow' and 'low brow' culture were 'ok' (see also Kahma 2011) and, to some of the artists, entertaining elements were important raw material for their artistic work.

Admiration of success and the media's influence on what is 'in and out of fashion' also provoked critical comments, including from those artists who can be classified as successful and, therefore, profiting from publicity. The following quote aptly summarises this and reveals how the automatic appraisal of the winner is seen as very "blunt":

> It was silly, I was like, so what I mean that I´ve been just wondering this situation, this is all so new and odd to me, I already had a lot of art works for sale, there were so many different ones, I had made them and they were included in the annual sales event and then they were taken to the sales archive where people can go anytime and see those works of art. Then I got this news that I had [won the prize] and during that week, almost all my works of art were sold from there. And then I just couldn´t help thinking of, well, that ok this is how it works, that some authority from above releases this piece of information, that this is now cool, this is now 'it'. Well, then, I think it´s quite blunt that way.

Commercial success and good reputation as such are, however, not the most important indicators of success, on the basis of this research data. As stated earlier, success and reputation are the by-products of high-quality artistic work, whether desired or not. The most important indicator always is the internal feeling of success, the experience of doing one's work as well as possible. This reverts to the generation ideals discussed in the beginning of the chapter: internal rewardingness of work has, with younger generations, become the top value before rude achievement and success (Julkunen 2008; Siltala 2013). At the same time, this principle constitutes an interesting contrast to the modern ethos of rude neoliberal values. Artistic work can be seen as fairly unalienated work (cf. Marx 1959 [1844]; Rosenblum 1986). An interesting question for the future is whether the middle classes are willing to surrender to poverty when aspiring internal rewards, and could this downshifting be reflected in the economic elites as well?

The successful artists' talk about success and reputation is partly the product of the art system, its institutional talk, or at least a culturally shared ideal. The artists adopt, as part of the art system, certain ways to talk with which they shape their relationship to art and its conventions (see Douglas 1987). According to Mary Douglas (op. cit.,

10–30), different communities have shared ways of knowing and remembering through which these communities explain themselves, offer their members categories of thought and strengthen their identity. Commercialism and self-promotion come across as strongly negative categories of thought in the art system which was also underlined by the interviewed artists. The mode of speech produced by this category of thought can be summarised as follows: I'd rather suffer from cold and hunger than let commercial success guide my work. This position is paradoxical as an artist's breakthrough to success requires (paying) audience. At least it makes the artists tightrope walkers; when is the border to 'dirty' commercialism crossed, how much commercialism own integrity can take and can the artist afford it?

Increasing commercialism has been discussed in many writings in Finland recent years (e.g. Cronberg 2011; Mononen 2014). On one hand, it's related to the discourse on the rise of the creative economy and its possibilities, on the other hand, to questions on how artists' skills could be used in flexible ways and, in this way, improve their economic position. In recent years, talking about artists as entrepreneurs (i.a. Feinik 2011; Herranen & Karttunen 2012) has become more frequent and entrepreunial skills training has been included in the curricula of arts schools (Karhunen 2004; 60; Herranen et al. 2013, 167–177). Thus, one could say that modern artists should or even must have a certain degree of entrepreneurship (Bauer et al. 2011).

Interesting, but not necessarily surprising is that, according to research, artists have traditionally had a very hesitant stance to entrepreneurship although artistic work in basically any field has a number of entrepreunial features, such as willingness to take risks (Poorsoltan 2012). As one reason to this, Elisa Akola (2014) explains that making art usually originates from the artist himself, not from the customers' needs and, therefore, artists don't have that experience of being in contact with customers, as entrepreneurs do. In addition, the idea of the 'pure intention' (Bourdieu 1984) in making art is connected to the ideal that an artist should not work by following the economic goals which is often connected to entrepreneurship (see also Tolvanen & Pesonen 2010, 33; Herranen et al. 2013, 170–171).

Thus most artists have a doubtful attitude to business which may be related to fears about loosing the 'purity' of art, among others. As a counterbalance, art has always had to justify its specificity and, furthermore, its existence by convincing its funding sources whether the mechanism is located between a bourgeois and a bohemian, between the welfare state and an art professional or between a consumer and a salesman. For example, the relationship between the art system and the welfare state can be seen as so close that it must strongly impact on defining what kind of art is good and hence worth supporting (Alasuutari 1996, 238–244; Sevänen 1998, 352–365; Jokinen 2010, 278–310). In this sense, there is always the 'ghost of contamination' lurking behind the making of art – and it's always present also in the form of gatekeepers of art, i.e. publishing houses in literature and distributors in film-making.

Thus we can ask whether the artists' worry about the 'contaminating' effect of commercialism is justified anymore. Self-promotion may be seen as a transition from art to entertainment but the inching of entrepreneurship into art can also take place in a smaller

scale, for example, by strengthening the business and bureaucratic skills of artists by way of education (e.g. Bauer et al. 2011). At least in ideal cases, these skills are not directly related to making art but to taking care of one's own living and finances.

In the light of the values of the present art system, it appears that this contradiction between art's internal judging and market judging is permanent even though its boundaries may be changing. An artist can work towards success and keep his 'intentions pure' but this 'purity' is only defined in the appraisals and critique by fellow artists and the art system. The discourse dismissing success and reputation may also be interpreted as the shared way inside the art system to protect the artists already before the possible commercial success. An artist who either consciously or unconsciously does not share the art system's categories of thought as regards success, reputation and commercialism may even be categorized as "a loser whose understanding of aesthetics and political stance happen to contradict with the other extreme represented by the cultural elite" (Onninen 2013). One can of course question whether the stigmatized artist is even interested in gaining the acceptance of the cultural elite but it is, however, very clear that there's a need to draw a clear line between 'genuine' art and the commercially oriented entertainment within the art system.

The negative stance of the artists to business and entrepreneurship can also be seen as a counter-reaction to the empty promises of the creative talk. For example, the target put forward by Tarja Cronberg (2011; 2013) that artists should be able to finance 70 per cent of their life expenses by their art, by using the mechanisms of the creative economy, is far from its realization and as long as there's no improvement in sight, the pessimism of the artists is easy to understand. With many artists, hostility to business orientation is also purely ideological – as stated earlier, artists typically represent a certain, often left-leaning, avant-garde in the society. Consequently, resignation from all commercialism, even at the cost of one's standard of living becomes indisputable and the innovators of the creative economy cannot 'convert' such artists.

This study cannot answer all the questions on the role of the increasing commercialism and entertainmentism arisen earlier. Still, the research data of this study can confirm one phenomenon: artists want to focus on their own work without thinking of commercial success or publicity. Only by focusing on the work itself, success and publicity may possibly follow. In other words, the recipe for (commercial) success is not its direct pursuit as such. Thus we can only hope that the relative freedom and independence of art could also produce some more general common good in the society, whatever the indicators to measure it are.

## RELATIONSHIP TO WORK AND (ARTISTIC) IDENTITY

Not all the artists interviewed for the purposes of this study fully share the artist's identity. This questions the definition of the research object as already noted in the introduction of this publication. Although not all interviewees felt they were mainly artists, being an artist made up at least one element in the construction of their identities, not always positive though. To most interviewees, though, artisthood seemed to be a self-evident

and significant part of their identities. This is paralleled with the field-of-art-related sub-identity of some artists, such as being an actor or a composer, and one artist's experience of being a 'folk artist' can be placed under the umbrella of artisthood, too. Even though the artist's identity is a relatively clear identity category the artists' identities are often flexible and consist of many interrelated parts (see also Hall 1999). And, according to the basic principles of the life course analysis, an individual has a number of overlapping, co-existing and parallel positions (e.g. Häkkinen 2012) throughout his life which interact with the different identity constructions. In the interviews of this study, the most fundamental positions and identities were based on work thus, for most of the interviewed artists, on the experience of being an artist[39].

Six of the interviewed artists had a more complex relationship to the artist identity or it clearly was only one part of the identity which was, in addition, not perceived particularly strong or very much of their own. To some interviewees, the identity of an entrepreneur had become equally strong or even stronger than that of the artist, despite, for example, a degree in arts. In the following quote these two identities are parallel and unproblematically overlap, including a certain bohemianism, too:

> I think I'm, I'm somehow really bohemian, very different from my parents, for example. But I never had that rebellion, if you mean that if I had that kind of a counter-reaction to their [...] Maybe I'm quite nicely somewhere in between. I've never thought about that, being an entrepreneur, that it would somehow exclude, I mean that being an artist and being an entrepreneur, that they would somehow be opposing concepts, or mutually exclusive.

Two of the interviewees defined themselves as "workers" in the field of arts, not as artists. They saw that making art means work and making a living and underlined the meaning of diligence and humbleness. It's interesting that both of them compared their work to that of the athletes. It is notable, too, that none of them had an art and culture home background which partly explains their interpretations on artisthood. A comparable definition was that of one artist; an "artist of applied arts". This artist felt that the works of art are for other people to use, maybe to bring some joy, and the artist hadn't embraced the idea of art as free creation. Furthermore, one interviewee defined herself as an artisan and she disliked the idea of defining her works as art even though she wanted to "tell stories" with them.

Although not all the interviewees embraced the artist identity without reservation it was something against which they mirrored their identities and, in any case, their identities included at least parts of it. It is notable, too, that the experiences of being a 'worker' in the field of art, an applied art artist or an artisan can be seen as elements of the professionalization development of artisthood. An idea of artisthood as occupation, as a professional identity was brought up in many interviews. This does not mean abandoning

39 It's clear that already the research setting had an impact on this and directed the interviewees to tell about their lives as artists, in particular (see also excursion on gender in chapter 2).

the artist's identity but it's a sign of a broader change in society, signs of which have been visible for decades now (see Lepistö 1991, 18–20; Löytönen 2004, 151–161; Houni & Ansio 2013a). Being an artist is a job as anything else, artists require an appropriate financial compensation for it and it's generally seen as work. However, artisthood also has that 'little something' which is both positive and negative to the artists themselves. The ambivalence of the following quote is a good example on this:

> A: Well I don't think that my work is any more important than anybody else's work. Even if I see art as important in itself, at the same time, I think it's as important as any other profession. Well of course work is meaningful to anyone, it's often a big part of your identity. In very many fields.
> I: But do you think that you can't escape being an artist?
> A: Yes [...] I can't, really. [...] It's not something that you give up at some point in your life, not something that you retire from. In that sense it's a big part of your [identity].

## THE ROLE OF CHANCE

As seen in the previous chapters, chance always plays a role in people's life courses (e.g. Häkkinen 2012). In the world of art, where insecurity is taken for granted, chance may play an important role as to who or what rises to the surface and stays there. This was evident also in the research data of this study.

> Well then I just did this lousy piece of paper with a copying machine and sold it there in the Helsinki Comics Festival… and well… That was the first one and then I had this self-publication in 2006 with which I contacted the Sammakko publishing house and they wanted to do a hardcover on it, including some other things, too, and it turned out to be a well-measured book. That was my thesis work, then. So that was the big bang… and then just before it was published in February it was named the domestic Comic of the Month in the Ilta-Sanomat newspaper so that must have been the… big step or something… or the biggest step forward… so people already knew about it because they had read about it in the internet. And then when they realized that it had received this recognition, well that was the really big thing. Ilta-Sanomat received more positive feedback on that, more than they had ever received of any comics. And then also that self-publication… there were so many unique and unforeseen things related to that, something that had never happened to any comics before. That book, my self-publication was also the fourth most sold book in the Akateeminen bookstore… I don't remember in which month… but anyway something like that… I mean a self-publication that was one of their most sold books in one month was something that had never happened before, to a comic strip. That was pretty wild.

In this quotation, the artist reports on the quick start of the career, right after graduation. It was "the biggest step" and "pretty wild" and the artist didn't even quite understand what happened. Of course this was not a pure coincidence and a lot of work had preceded this turning point. Similar turning points were seen during the careers of almost all interviewees (see also Clausen 1998). These events are mostly logically set as part of the life course, as if they would have been in the pipeline and just waited for the right moment. One important aspect here is an individual's tendency to see the life as a logically advancing storyline

where different turns play their own, important role (Hänninen 2000). Typically, chance is seen as something that makes a difference in the details, projects, timings and success of the artistic career. As noticed earlier, however, embarking on the artistic career is not seen as a coincidence in a similar way but as following one's vocation.

> Not to mention what happens then when you've signed your contract or you've had [your work on display]. I mean how you're noticed, what kind of critics you get, I mean that you have some kind of an audience to your works, it requires more good luck and happy coincidences and of course it doesn't mean that everything's just pure chance but those elements are very much involved, anyway. [...] I was just thinking about athletes, they have it all the time, well sport requires it by definition, I mean that they have really tough competition between them, it's just not seen in the same way, and then our competition is so different from that of sports, there's actually so little what you can do yourself. [...] And actually I'd love to have this situation that us artists [with a laugh] could just go somewhere on a starting line and run and you could measure everything, not just have all these different works of art which are impossible to be put in any ranking order. Or I could easily imagine a world, a world of arts with no competition whatsoever but it's just so utopian.

In this extract, some of the twists and stumbling stones of an artist's career are discussed. Happy coincidences are needed all the time in order to have one's works on display and, through that, achieve even some success. The interviewee compares artists to athletes – this was actually quite frequent in the interviews, partly due to the fact that the interviewees knew that athletes were interviewed within the same research project – and states that measuring success is so much easier with athletes. It doesn't mean that life in general was any easier but at least their performance, whether it's good or bad, can easily be compared.

The role of chance reminds of the relativity of success. The best don't always make it to the top and nobody's success is eternal: chance can either dash you to the top or drag you down, instantly. The role of chance also demonstrates how success is never purely dependent on the abilities of an individual, contrary to what is commonly suggested in contemporary talk[40] (see also Nyytäjä 2007; Gladwell 2008).

## EXCURSION: COMPARISON TO ATHLETES

Both athletes and artists are in the focus of this research project. The interviewees were aware of this at the time of the interviews which seemed to offer an interesting perspec-

40 Yu Hua (2012, 83) in his book *China in Ten Words* gives a hilarious, from the Finnish perspective an extreme example on the role of chance in the career of an author. Yu Hua started writing after the Cultural Revolution when there suddenly were more than 1000 new literature publications on the market, within a few years. For some time, there was more demand than supply of writings until everything turned upside down: "Looking back, I rejoice that I was able to catch the tail end of that honeymoon period of '80s. If I had started writing couple of years later, I think it very unlikely that an editor would have discovered me in those mountains of unsolicited submissions, and I'd still be there in that small-town hospital in the south, brandishing my forceps and extracting teeth for eight hours a day."

tive to artists, in particular, and many of them actually compared their careers and life courses to those of the athletes. First of all, many artists pointed out that measuring performance, whether one is good or bad, is so much easier in sports. In arts, there are no quantitative indicators on offer, and acknowledgements and prizes are often won on relatively arbitrary grounds. In other words, artists speculated on the possibility of having a similar system for measuring the quality and superiority of arts but, at the same time, it was concluded that it's a good thing that art is free of easy judging.

Secondly, many artists felt relieved that their careers were not connected to physical performance and, consequently, age. An artist's career can not only start later but also continue till the normal retirement age and above. A career in sports was seen as unscrupulous and demanding, age-related and, in general, as a risky choice – thus even riskier than an artist's career which is often perceived as insecure and challenging. The following quote sums this setting up in an apt way:

> Athletes are really tragic characters in this [the length of career] sense. [...] It's unbelievable. Now that I'm not that young anymore, I've started to follow sports in the newspapers and seen how many people younger than I am finish their careers. Or maybe some of them are a bit older than I am. What I mean that an athlete's career is really short. An artist can at least hope that he can continue a bit longer.

Thirdly, in the artist's career the top of the career is not so easily identified as in sport – at least all artists hope that the best is yet to come. This is related to what was said above, that the peak of the career is not so well measurable as in sports, for example, where success in major international competitions can easily be named as the top of the career. In an artist's career, the peak may well be reached towards the end of life – and, in some cases, even after that.

Fourthly, both walks of life include competition but whereas competition is an end in itself in sports, the approach to competition is more ambivalent in arts. Still, in both careers the most important competition is against oneself, with self-development in mind. This is one of the most easily located common features between artists and athletes and some of the interviewed artists said that, in this sense, they have "the mentality of an athlete".

# IV Micro data in sport: dropout and multicultural athletes

# 8 Dropout athletes

There is a lot of international and national research on the dropout and a widespread concern in both Finland (e.g. Lämsä & Mäenpää 2004; Aira et al. 2013; Tiirikainen & Konu 2013; Puronaho 2014) and elsewhere (e.g. Butcher et al. 2002; Wall & Côté 2007; Fraser-Thomas et al. 2008) about the decreasing amount of sport and exercise in preadolescence. This phenomenon is problematic especially from the point of view of national health but it's also related to other pitfalls of sport and exercise of children and youth such as increasing participation fees and the polarization of sport and exercise (e.g. Tiirikainen & Konu 2013; Puronaho 2014).

One feature of the dropout or dropoff phenomena (e.g. Aira et al. 2013) which cannot be tackled with the help of the research data of this study is the general decrease of sport and exercise among young people. In any case, it's important to understand the problematics behind the decrease of sport and exercise also from the point of view of elite sports: decreasing physical activity among young people weakens the potential 'resource base' (OPM 2010a) of elite sports. Often the 'sport paths' designed on the conditions of elite sports may actually drop some of the potential future elite athletes off the journey. Andrew Smith and Ken Green (2005) who have studied the decreasing physical activity of adolescents remind that the reasons for the decision to quit sport cannot solely be traced in the framework of sport and exercise by, for example, thinking about what went wrong in that specific sport activity. It is more important to understand the wider and more complex mutual relations in society. The same applies to dropping out of elite sports – life courses must be analysed as a whole (Tiirikainen & Konu 2013).

## PERSPECTIVE: A HISTORICAL NOTE TO THE DROPPING OUT DEBATE

A new perspective into the dropout debate may be opened up with the help of historical studies. In their 2013 report, Mikko Tiirikainen and Anu Konu (2013) wrote about different factors influencing the dropout decision (see also Lämsä 2002). They summarise different views into the dropping out phenomenon, including the individual perspective, the sport system perspective and, for example, coaching practices (op. cit.). All these perspectives are certainly important and explain the phenomenon but the whole question on dropping out could be formulated differently. Instead of asking "why do young people drop out?" we could also ask "why should young people continue?" Dropping out of sport at approximately age 15 is not an exception to what used to be, as one could easily think when talking about the dropout phenomenon but, on the contrary, a very typical phenomenon in the historical context. Statistics can be found from the early 1980's onwards (Aaltonen 1993). Then, in the data on young people's free time

and everyday culture, the decrease in sport participation was clearly seen at about age 15 (op. cit.). Maybe we should, however, move even further back in time, to the 1920's and 1940's to better understand the development of the phenomenon of dropping out of sport in the context of the Finnish society.

In his dissertation, Rafael Helanko (1953) studied 1940's boy gangs in Turku and made observations which suggest seeing dropping out of sport as a wider phenomenon, related to urban youth and as an age-related transition. The boy gangs studied by Helanko (op. cit.) anticipated the organized sport club activities developed later although these activities were organized by the boys themselves back in the 1940's. Already in surveys made in the 1920's (Bruhn 1937) the secondary school boys had been observed to be physically very active in the 10–14 age group. The most physically active years occurred between 10 and 12 years of age. The amount of these so called 'gymnast activities' decreased clearly from age 15 onwards. Professor Karl Bruhn who wrote the study report concluded that emphasizing physical activities so much was maybe due to Paavo Nurmi's coinciding success which made young boys momentarily very fascinated by sport activities.

The research data collected by Helanko (1953) in the 1940's indicated that the amount of physical activities at leisure had, on the contrary, increased so he concluded that Bruhn (1937) put too much emphasis on the relationship between the timing of the study and Nurmi's success. Also in the boy gangs studied by Helanko (1953, 80–81), the peak in the amount of physical activities was reached at age 10–12 and it decreased sharply from age 15 onwards. Social team sports, soccer in particular, were popular among the 11–13 year olds in both Bruhn's (1937) (10 000 secondary school students) and Helanko's (1953, 83) data. The importance of team sports decreased with age as more individual free time activities increased in importance. Aesthetic activities, arts and crafts as well as track and field gave way to social team sports in the boys' lives for a few years in their late childhood years but they gained in importance as leisure activities again at age 15–16 (op. cit., 80, 84).

The 50 years time leap from Helanko's (1953) study to today does not bring very much new compared to the observations of the 1920's and 1940's. In his 2002 article *Harrastusten jääminen* ('*Dropping out of activities')* Jari Lämsä (2002) writes that young people's sports club activities are at their most active level at age 10–12. According to Lämsä (op. cit.), sport has become deliberate practice but yet the logic between age and activity level is nearly identical to the observations made half a century earlier. The studies of Bruhn (1937) and Helanko (1953), in particular, strongly signal that, in the urban environment, social ball games are the most natural way of exercise and social interaction between boys. Helanko (1953, 94) even adds that hanging around in groups and the social ball games related to it are a universal phenomenon which can be seen "in any time and in any place".

Bruhn (1937), Helanko (1953) and Lämsä (2002) offer a universally human, historical perspective into examining the modern dropout phenomenon. It appears that the meaning of social team sports and sport in general in the lives of young people – here especially boys – decreases at age 15 and has done so throughout the last 100 years, hence dropping out seems to be the norm, not an exception (Bruhn 1937; Helanko 1953; Aaltonen 1993; Lämsä 2002; e.g. Lämsä & Mäenpää 2004; Huhta & Nipuli 2011; Aira et al.

2013; Tiirikainen & Konu 2013; Puronaho 2014). It seems to be primarily connected to young people's individual and age-related transitions and socio-psychological factors (see Lämsä 2002) related to group action, and further accelerated by the excluding acts of the sport system (e.g. Tiirikainen & Konu 2013). In conclusion, there have been at least partly erroneous conclusions on the dropout phenomenon in the public debate – as if it was something new or exceptional.

This perspective suggests updating the research paradigm of the dropout phenomenon. Viewing dropping out as 'dropping' or 'dropping oneself' out of the sport system makes young people look abnormal and their acts as 'wrong' which blurs the whole perspective, from the agency point of view. In this way, the sport system is seen as if it had an inbuilt power to attract the 15+ athletes regardless of which the young person drops out. However, this is not the case and has not been in the past 100 years. All recent studies on the dropout phenomenon (e.g. Lämsä 2002; Lämsä & Mäenpää 2004; Huhta & Nipuli 2011; Aira et al. 2013; Tiirikainen & Konu 2013; Puronaho 2014) indicate that the sport system has rather speeded up the excluding push factor hence a more justified question to study this phenomenon could be 'why and how young people should, despite the typical age-related transition, continue deliberate practice in the system which actively tries to push the amateur athletes out from it?' Jari Lämsä (2002, 85) sums up the relationship between the modern sport system and the dropping out of sport of young athletes in an insightful way: "We can, however, suggest that purely on the basis of the logic of the elite sports, the dropout phenomenon is an integral part of elite and competitive sports. The system is created for winners. Less excellent athletes outside the top 10 are needed to spur the elite but there's no other role for them."

## DROPPING OUT ON THE VERGE OF MASTERY

In addition to the dropout phenomenon in adolescence, the phenomenon has also been studied in the context of elite sports. The research objects have been young talents (e.g. Enoksen 2011; Moesch et al. 2012) who have dropped out just before reaching the top and also the phenomenon of 'retirement' from elite sports (e.g. Drahota & Eitzen 1998; Torregrosa et al. 2004; Lally 2007; Price et al. 2010). In the analysis of this chapter, retirement is discussed as well but the main attention is directed to those promising young athletes who, for one reason or another, have dropped out of sport just on the verge of mastery. These athletes have not only changed discipline (cf. Butcher et al. 2002) but discontinued the goal-oriented sport practice altogether.

According to international research, factors increasing the probability of dropping out include early specialization, one-sided practice, pressure from parents and coaches and little time to other activities (e.g. Butcher et al. 2002; Fraser-Thomas et al. 2005; Wall & Côté 2007; Fraser-Thomas et al. 2008; Enoksen 2011; Moesch et al. 2012; Rottensteiner et al. 2013). Simply not having fun anymore is one of the main reasons for dropping out, as observed in a number of studies (Butcher et al. 2002; Wall & Côté 2007). In this chapter, the results of earlier studies are compared to the research data of this study

and its analysis. In particular, the qualitative reasons for dropping out are discussed as the size of the data does not allow any quantitative comparison of our research data to international data sets (cf. Enoksen 2011).

The reasons for dropout are often multiple: individual reasons, the athlete's active decisions or surrounding factors beyond his or her control. As defined in the first publication of this research project (Piispa 2013c, 33–34), the athletes who had discontinued their careers and were interviewed for the purposes of this study were either "those who didn't have enough to reach the top" or athletes "who chose to quit". Their "elite sport careers didn't ever really start or they clearly quit sport practice before reaching mastery, sometimes surprisingly".

There are 18 dropouts in the research data who have finished their careers. The starting point of the analysis is the personal experience, as told by the athlete himself. For example, the athlete in the following extract sees himself as a dropout. The reasons become evident, too: he could never concentrate that much in sport, to feel that he would have reached mastery. Elsewhere in the interview he compared himself to some of the successful athletes in his sport and told that he feels he's not on the same level with them.

> I've been thinking that I must fit into that dropout category. I've noticed that I'm quite good [...] But there's still something missing, I have not had this long, uninterrupted period to focus on [sport]. To see what I'm able to reach, that is.

Of the athletes who had dropped out, six are women and twelve are men. Six athletes have a multicultural background. The life stories of multicultural athletes and the reasons why they have finished their careers open up an interesting and previously unexplored additional dimension (see, however, Huhta 2013) which is also discussed in chapter 9. Twelve of the dropouts represented team sports, four traditional individual sports and two lifestyle sports. When collecting data, we deliberately chose ten athletes in one sport, soccer. With this decision we aimed at improved comparison possibilities and a kind of micro data within a more comprehensive data. The analysis is not restricted to soccer players only, however, as also athletes in other sports shared similar experiences and insights into the reasons behind finishing their sport careers.

Many of the interviewed dropouts had continued in their sport at the recreational level after the actual career. As elite sport is the framework of this study, such 'cooling off' is defined as finishing the career, an interpretation shared by the interviewees. Some of them stated that even though they still practised sport, they have finished their careers because they don't compete or do their sport in a goal-oriented way anymore, or in their own words, 'they don't take it seriously anymore'. We shall emphasize that none of them stopped because of an external factor, such as the practice institution, would have 'eliminated' them at some point of their careers (cf. Huijgen et al. 2014).

Reasons for dropping out were already reviewed within the first publication of this research project (Piispa 2013c). Now the interviews of these athletes are analysed in more detail and clear categorizations of the life course factors leading to discontinuation of career are made. In this way, we try to understand the discontinuation decisions from the

point of view of the life course of an individual, the structures of sport and, above all, as transitions and turning points connected to athlete's life outside the world of sports. The life course analysis is a very good tool for analysing the reasons for discontinuation and it also contributes to the comparison between the dropouts and the actual elite athletes.

This study has already illustrated what it takes to be an elite athlete: different capitals, natural talent, personal motivation and so on. It is also important to make sacrifices and to put the sports career and athletes rationality first. An elite athlete is ready for a disciplined and challenging lifestyle even though it often means abandoning or postponing many things involved in the normal life course. Kalevi Heinilä (1998, 150), for instance, states that the athlete's career coincides with that phase of life when young people typically aim for "proper education, occupational career, getting married, family life, recreational and other". Elite sports are a risky investment in many ways: an athlete's career is short and vulnerable to injuries, and often studies and other similar projects suffer. As Timo Metsä-Tokila (2001, 44) writes: "the worst case scenario may be that the young person concentrates on sport and neglects school but, after a while, also finishes his sports career".

Thus striving to be an elite athlete requires exceptional character and willingness to take risks. This is emphasized in chapter 5 where the transitions and choices of an elite athlete were discussed and where it was concluded that a career in elite sports requires stability and symmetry (see also Gould & Dieffenbach 2002). Athletes are willing to sacrifice many other things in their lives to reach the top. They have 'an abnormal rationality' (Piispa 2013c) which can also be described by the concept of experience rationality of Gerhard Schulze (1992). This means that the experiences produced by sport are valued higher than the 'stable and secure' rewards of the normal life course.

Naturally, taking risks in striving to the top in sports also means the possibility to fail. An unfortunate coincidence – an injury, for example – may anytime put an end to the dreams of becoming an elite athlete (see also Enoksen 2011). We can conclude that when they quit, the athletes move towards a more normal life course – some of them willingly, some of them not. The important transitions and turning points in life and understanding their nature are, among the other main principles of the life course (Elder & Giele 2009; Häkkinen 2012) analysis, the key factors in trying to map the reasons for dropout in sports. An elite athlete tries to avoid such disturbances in life that could interrupt his career. At the same time, he has to invest in his own development and compete against others. External conditions have to be in place in order to be able to focus on maintaining the internal symmetry and, thus, continuous development. As in the world and in people's lives in general, this symmetry is always under threat. Symmetric structures to fight chaos are, at their best, temporary. This applies to the career of an elite athlete as the symmetry can collapse anytime due to external but also internal factors.

## DROPPING OUT AS A TRANSITION OF THE LIFE COURSE

The reasons behind the dropout have been analysed in one of the articles of the first publication of this research project (Piispa 2013c, 34–39). The reasons listed in the

article serve as a good starting point. Often a single athlete has multiple reasons of the following: junior success, disappointments in sport, burnout, injuries, life difficulties, other paths and money. Other studies have made similar categorizations on the reasons for discontinuation (e.g. Rottensteiner et al. 2013).

Junior success often meant that the hunger for success had partly been satisfied when entering the adult level. We have to bear in mind, however, that each athlete defines his or her individual success goals. To some of them, success in junior competitions is 'just the beginning' whereas to others it might be a sufficient experience after which the athlete concludes that he has had enough of goal-oriented sports. On the other hand, success in junior years may create an illusion that reaching the top is easy. Consequently, investments in practice and development decrease and other athletes may overperform such athletes when entering adult leagues.

Opposite experiences in junior leagues are the internal disappointments in sports. Such experiences may involve difficulties with coaches or team mates. Some also reported that they were left alone in problem situations. Similar conclusions have been made as to the general reasons for discontinuing deliberate practice. In 2002, Jari Lämsä (2002) wrote that 40 per cent of the 14–15 year old ice hockey players stated poor coaching as one of the reasons for stopping sport. However, the researcher adds that there might be other reasons too, such as poor team spirit, bullying and other conflicts which are personified to the coach. It's also important to understand the contradicting values and ways of working between, on one hand, the traditional sport system and, on the other hand, the children of the quickly changing modern society. In traditional sports, the models and role expectations created by adults can be very rigid whereas, in the midst of the rapid change in society, youth, their mindsets and approaches to different ideas are in constant change. (Op. cit.)

Burnout that came up in the research data occurred as a result of too strong a physical and mental burden in junior years and was closely related to the one-sided nature of sport too early. As many as 11 of the dropouts reported on having practised only one sport whereas elite athletes in general had usually practised at least two, many of them many more, sports. Four of the dropouts reported on having had two sports and only three had three or more sports. (E.g. Wall & Côté 2007.) Athletes don't necessarily remember to report on every sport they've played, and many of them may have thought that the question was only related to those sports done in deliberate practice. Consequently, the actual number of practised sports is probably larger than what the research results suggest. Still, the fewer number of practised sports of the dropout athletes is marked. The median of the number of sports practised was 1 and the average 1.7 which is a remarkable difference to those who actually reached the top.

For this part, the athletes who had finished their careers and were interviewed for the purposes of this study correspond remarkably well the picture drawn in previous international research (Wall & Côté 2007; Côté et al. 2007), as to the consequences of monotonous practice and too early specialization. Of the 15 elite level soccer players, 12 had practised at least one additional sport whereas the corresponding number was 3/10 of the dropout soccer players and as low as 0/6 of the male soccer players of those.

However, it's not always about the development of skills or physical development but often also about psychological factors such as fatigue. In addition, monotonous practice may expose the athlete to strain-related injuries (e.g. Malina 2010; Huxley 2014). Next quote sums this up in an expressive way. The interviewed elite soccer player, not a dropout, tells how the diversity of soccer may be an illusion. He's "got so much" from other sports and, therefore, life is "not only soccer":

> I'm very grateful that we did so many different things when I was little. That there's been so much variation. If somebody asked me for advice, I'd tell to do many different sports when you're little, that's the first thing that comes to mind. Let's think about soccer; you would think that it's versatile enough. Well, yes, in a way. But I've got so much from track and field. And only to maintain your mental balance, you need to do other things too. I'm thinking of those talented people who only have soccer and nothing else. When soccer sucks, they collapse. I've seen those examples, from very close. One minor injury, and that's it. Then you get so gloomy that there's no return. You have no joy in life anymore. Your whole life is off when something disastrous happens.

Injuries obviously are one of the main reasons for dropout but, on the other hand, with some elite level athletes injuries at a suitable point of career had offered a welcomed break from sport in the middle of those busy youth years. Taking into account that injuries inevitably belong to sports, their impact on the decision to quit is not straightforward. It's important to analyse how athletes recover from injuries. If, for example, the young athlete feels that he or she is left alone during rehabilitation (see also Yle, Finnish Broadcasting Company/Ranta 20.5.2014) or that the extra burden of the injury does not encourage him to rehabilitate himself back to the, by definition, uncertain career, goal-oriented sports may be easily abandoned (see also Wall & Côté 2007; Enoksen 2011).

Difficulties in life stand for non-sport events that have an adverse effect on sports. One of them is, for example, parents' divorce that takes the focus out of sport. Also 'other paths' are a non-sport factor, mainly meaning other features and temptations in young people's lives. Money matters too, by this we mean the low income levels and economic uncertainty in sports (see also Kärmeniemi et al. 2013).

In addition to the reasons listed above, it is notable that only 6 out of the 18 dropouts had inherited an intergenerational sport relationship at home. Of those who had reached the top, 45/78 had inherited this relationship from their parents. The relative difference is not significant and with a research data of this size, we cannot draw any far-reaching conclusions on this. However, the difference is there and an intergenerational sport relationship may support the athlete in difficult phases and in discontinuation thoughts, and offer both material and mental resources in the struggles of sport. Comparison is made easier by looking into the soccer players in the data: out of the ten dropouts five (2/6 of men) had inherited an intergenerational sport relationship whereas the corresponding figure at the elite level was 12/15. There were no significant differences between the dropouts and the elite athletes as to the age of onset of sport and exercise in general, the main sport or the number of sporty siblings. The intergenerational sport relationship was particularly weak with the multicultural athletes who had finished their sport career: only 1/6 came from a family with strong intergenerational sport relationship. Some of

them mentioned also separately that they didn't have any model or family encouragement to a career in sports.

When comparing the dropouts' careers to the transitions of the elite athletes discussed earlier we can conclude that differences are usually seen from early on. Most have left or have been made to leave other sports except the main sport unnecessarily early. Their development phase at approximately age 12–18 has often been characterized by haste and narrow margins to other things in life. There hasn't been enough room for sampling. They have made it beyond the crossroads of the development phase but the transition to the top has never fully taken place. Some of them dropped or dropped themselves out of the elite level shortly after they had reached it. Thus something went wrong and, as sport is an expressly cumulative activity, the dropping out can often be traced much further back to adolescence instead of its actual timing.

In the following subchapters the differentiation presented earlier is brought to a new level and connected to the framework of the life course analysis (see Piispa 2013c). The previously listed reasons for finishing sport which often have a combined impact on dropping out decision are not separate from the individual's life in general. On the contrary, the decision to drop out is made, on one hand, on the basis of the personal choices of an individual and, on the other hand, on the basis of outside events and developments beyond his or her control. Thus, the process of dropout can be divided into three different types: deliberate (5 athletes), abrupt (6) and slow (7).

## Deliberate dropout

The deliberately dropped out had already thought about finishing their careers for quite some time and they decided to abandon their careers in sports in order to be able to invest in other things in life, especially studying. We can conclude that with the deliberately dropped out, other options in life took over the discipline needed in sport (see also Wall & Côté 2007; Rottensteiner et al. 2013). They opted for a lifestyle with more freedom and less risks. The model of a normal life course in the surrounding society – or some other competing model (e.g. Häkkinen 2012; see also Piispa & Salasuo 2014) – took over the challenging lifestyle of an athlete involving sacrifices and risk-taking. (See also Piispa 2013b.)

All the deliberately dropped out told that they never really had that motivation needed to reach mastery (see also Moesch et al. 2012). The interviewees formulated this in different ways: one said that he never really embraced the identity of an athlete and the other one that he didn't have that "full spark" needed in sports. A recreational ethos was emphasized in this category of dropouts: they loved their sport but when it was time to do something else, abandoning sport was not problematic. In the following quote the interviewee says that he had thought about dropping out for years and, at the same time, developed a desire to do "something new in life". The decision to drop out was well justified and its timing felt natural. Still, it's worth noting that at first he only decided to "take a year off" which later turned out to be permanent.

> It was a natural moment to take that decision. My contract came to an end. And everyone knew, not only me but the whole club management, that now I'm somehow going to decide. At least it was very clear to me. From my secondary school years on I had thought about dropping out, whether I wanted to do this anymore. [...] So at that point it was nothing new, I knew that I was going to stop. But then I didn't want to say that now I stop. It was more like I wanted something new in my life. That's why I took a year off.

When analyzing the reasons why the deliberately dropped out actually quitted (Piispa 2013c, 34–39), the importance of sampling other life paths is emphasized. Christoph Rottensteiner et al. (2013) have presented similar results when they studied young team sport athletes' reasons for dropping out: the most frequent reason was "I had something else to do" (71%). Economic insecurity and junior success were closely connected to this reason. In the following quote a young athlete in individual sports reports on the financial difficulties despite success, how the athlete has to take other jobs. If the resources were better, the willpower for hard training would be found.

> It requires so much. I just don't have all that willpower for training and competitions. If I could get money from somewhere, if I had good sponsors and money to my food and rent, it would be different. But as I have to work and everything, it just becomes too much. I'm not a robot.

Some deliberate droppers reported that the financial insecurity of sports had an impact on their decisions to stop. The desire to educate oneself to a "real occupation" with a reasonable income was often stronger than the desire to become an elite athlete. The Danes Mette Christensen and Jan Sørensen (2009) found out in their study that the pressures from both soccer and school cause stress and even mental problems among the young soccer players. Hence it often came to choosing between school and soccer (see also Enoksen 2011).

There is some hesitation in the following quote, too, but not as regards the decision to quit sport but rather to the choice of sport itself. An individual sport could have been financially more secure and would maybe have offered more personal freedom compared to team sports:

> I just had this feeling that I've had enough. Of course it was a difficult decision. But I haven't really regretted it. So I think it was the right thing to do. The only thing I do regret is that I clearly would have had talent to any sport, really. It's annoying that I didn't choose that [individual sport] then. It would have been more flexible, too, no training every day at 4:30 with the team as I could have chosen myself when to train, not with the whole team.

As the quotation illustrates, the athlete was happy with the decision. In general, the deliberately dropped out didn't regret their decisions. All of them continued doing sports in some way. Some of them reported on having sometimes missed the excitement of competitions but none of them had any second thoughts on aiming at the top again. The decision was particularly easy for the following ex-team sports athlete as his identity

was not solely built on sport. Sport had been more a personal choice and therefore "easy to let go" when the athlete so decided.

> I've never really identified myself as an athlete so that must be the reason why sport always was just my own thing, something that I chose. I've always had a feeling that it's been under my control. And then, as it hasn't had any strong impact on my identity… well it has, of course, but not in a way that I would have built my whole identity on that sport… so it was easy to let go at that point when it felt right, when I felt that I don't get so much out of it anymore, not as much as I wanted.

The stories of the deliberately dropped out correspond to the results of other international studies: when the athletes are empowered to take their own decisions, they become less painful and the transition to life after sport becomes smoother (e.g. Alfermann et al. 2004; Erpić et al. 2004; Price et al. 2010). Another conclusion in previous international research (i.a. Price et al. 2010; Alfermann et al. 2004; Lally 2007) is that when sport is not the central building block of the athlete's identity it's easier to quit. Also empowerment in one's choices and the social capitals (see also Tierney 2013) behind them are important.

Although the deliberately dropped out had had time to reflect on their decision for a longer time, the final decision was not necessarily easy. Especially other people's reactions were a source of concern. In the following quote a team sports athlete who had thought about quitting on her own for two years reports on how she started telling others by first "sensing" the reactions of her mother. When her mother approved, she had the courage to tell others, too.

> So that's how it began, I first listened to my mum's reactions, I told her that it was not fun anymore. Well, she had noticed that this was the way it was, and she approved. Maybe that's where I got the courage… I mean that I decided to test the idea with others, too, that maybe it's not the end of the world if I quit.

Elsewhere in her interview, the athlete of this quote tells that many people near her asked her to continue. Discontinuing her career was not easy and the decision was, in the end, left 'pending' for some time. Many of her acquaintances kept asking about her possible return for a long time after her decision. Actually all the deliberate dropouts reported on similar experiences. For them, being an athlete was not the strongest part of their identities and finishing goal-oriented sports felt like a natural choice to them although not all the people around them necessarily understood it in the same way. Some of them chose the strategy of talking about a possible return long after their decision even though they knew very well that this was hardly going to be the case. In this way, they could avoid unpleasant situations and maybe also keep the psychologically important window open.

## Abrupt dropout

Whereas the deliberately dropped out had thought about discontinuation for a long time and started to change the direction of their life courses well in advance, those who dropped

out abruptly had a very different situation. For them, unfortunate coincidences in either sports or outside it made the promising career in sports stop without prior warning.

As Antti Häkkinen (2012, 384) writes: "An individual may actively try to time certain key events but sometimes it's more about being passively thrown into that situation in a certain point of one's life course." Elsewhere he (op. cit., 382) continues by stressing the meaning of agency which is strongly connected to an individual's life course: "We have to bear in mind that the principle of agency does not automatically include the idea that actions were somehow very conscious and rational. [...] Chance plays its role, too." As said, an elite athlete's career is a multidimensional and well-balanced equation requiring stable conditions and symmetry (e.g. Henriksen et al. 2010). Thus, unfortunate coincidences or simply wrong timing of the turning points in life may take this symmetry out of balance and make discontinuation of the aspiring career look the best option to the athlete.

In the next passage, the interviewed athlete describes how difficult life events, such as the end of a long-term relationship, coincide and therefore had a significant impact on the athlete's mind, to the detriment of his career in sports. The situation was "sensitive" and the interviewee didn't feel "normal". Dropout occurred abruptly without any reflection – he just didn't appear in training anymore.

> I broke up with my long-term girlfriend and of course it had an impact, these are difficult things… And there were so many other things, too… well, I was not in burnout but quite close to it, really. I just couldn't take it anymore. For example when I went to my last training sessions with [the name of the team] I just had too much of everything. So after one good training session I just called my coach to tell him that I come back in January. That was before Christmas and I never went back. This illustrates the sensitivity of that situation, normally I'm not like that. I usually think more long-term. These are situations where your mental well-being is very important, too. Even though the other things don't have that much to do with playing that sport, I guess. Well, there were all those difficult other things towards the end.

There were several negative turns and unfortunate coincidences in this athlete's life in a fairly short period of time. Such turns and coincidences were typically very diverse among those who dropped out abruptly: one athlete's long-term team broke up and he couldn't find a suitable new club, another athlete suffered from wrongful medical treatment. One athlete in individual sports had very different ideas on training compared to his training mates which ended up in personal conflicts and discontinuation of that sport. Three athletes had non-sport life difficulties that coincided with difficulties in sport. These included parents' divorce at the same time when the athlete had some troubles with a new coach (see also Pensgaard & Roberts 2002). When comparing these observations to the categorisation (Piispa 2013c, 34–39) made before, the most frequent reasons to quit among the abruptly dropped out included internal disappointments in sport, junior success, injuries and life difficulties.

The impact of junior success to the discontinuation decision was twofold, and not only with the abruptly dropped out. Junior success may have had satisfied the hunger for success but, on the other hand, a successful junior athlete may have had it easier in

junior level. The following quote illustrates the latter setting. A team sport athlete tells how junior success "made him a bit arrogant". At the same time he forgot that his team mates needed to try even harder because they were not yet seen as potential future talents. He had the illusion that reaching the top was easy. Later he encountered problems not only in sports but also outside it and just couldn't overcome them. Junior success had actually been detrimental to this athlete's capabilities to handle difficulties in sport and in life in general.

> I was always the only one in my age group who was selected to national teams and was chosen as the player of the year and so on [...] So of course it made me a bit arrogant and that was one of the reasons why I didn't have that training… well, I should have understood that it was nothing yet [with a sneer]. [...] Now when I see back and try to analyse it, there was this illusion when I was praised and there was all this hype so I thought that I can just move on for forever and I forgot that I had my team mates there with me who were not that praised and they were actually working very hard, too, to have those same results. And I was just like, well, this is it, I've done my part.

This quotation reminds us of how junior success does not yet make a promising athlete to an elite athlete. Paul Ford and Mark Williams (2012) studied 15-year-old 'elite soccer players' and concluded that these young players had adhered very early to soccer in terms of deliberate play and deliberate practice – thus not to ball games in general but to soccer in particular. We might ask, however, whether these 15-year-old elite players actually reached the top in adult leagues. In addition, we may ask whether we can talk about elite players among the 15-year-olds. On the other hand, Ford and Williams (op. cit.) themselves remind that they only studied typical development paths in England which doesn't yet prove that this average were ideal: "It may be that the pathway followed by professional players in England is not optimal for developing expert performance in soccer player" (op. cit., 352). In any case, this interview quotation proves that junior success does not guarantee reaching the top in the adults' leagues (see also Anderson & Miller 2011; Güllich 2014b; Ostojic et al. 2014).

Five of those athletes who had dropped out in an abrupt way had at least some second thoughts, regrets and even bitterness after the decision. An unfortunate turning point is something you cannot prepare for. On the other hand, three of those abruptly dropped out said that they probably didn't have enough motivation to reach the top. One athlete told that he was probably not "rude enough". To some extent, these athletes lacked the experience rationality which is typical to elite athletes. Otherwise they could have overcome those difficulties that now led to finishing their careers.

All the abruptly dropped out had found other interesting things in life after their career in sports so regret and bitterness were not the topmost feelings anymore. They had gone back to a more or less normal life course. The transition period, however, was not painless to all of them. Being an athlete had been such a central element of their identities and offered a substantial meaning of life that the discontinuation of career had, in some way or another, left four athletes with nothing. Previous studies have produced similar results. For example Louis Harrison et al. (2014) suggest that Afro-American athletes in particular may rely so strongly on sport in their identities that if the elite level is not

reached, for some reason or another, the lack of optional identities leaves them with nothing in life. In the following quote an interviewee tells how there's still this "void" in his life as he can't get similar "kicks and euphoria" in studies as in sport at its best:

> Of course it felt empty. And somehow this feeling is still there even though it was so important to me to get into that school and had my degree done… After my sports career I just didn't have any strong feelings in my life, no kicks or euphoria from anywhere. Well then when I got into that school and got that project, and I did very well, well that was something similar to the feelings you get in sport [...] But still, there's an empty place in my life after sport. There's this physical effort through which you do it so it also gives you so much more than just doing something mental. If I do well in that project or in that exam, fine, but the feeling of physical euphoria out in the field, that's something I miss in my life now.

Even though an elite athlete's career excludes other paths in life, its end may provoke a situation in which there's a feeling of something important being missing in life. It's difficult to find new content in life to fill that vacuum and to build a new view of the world to replace the old, strong identity (see also Heikkala & Vuolle 1990, 92). Still, dropping out ones career in sports, even abruptly, was not only a negative experience to any of the interviewees. In the following quote the interviewee whose career was abruptly finished by wrongful medical treatment tells that he was also able to find positive sides in this unexpected change. Life was suddenly "nice and easy" and he could just go fishing in summer, for example. There are always "two sides in everything", even in an unfortunate discontinuation of the sports career.

> And then there's the other side, when you suddenly have that easy life when you don't have to practise first thing in the morning and nobody tells you to run, well, you get used to it very quickly. That I just don't have to go and I don't have my games on weekends. In summer I suddenly realized that my friends started asking me to go fishing with them or something, and I could just say yes, I can come, I have nothing special. There are always two sides in everything.

Among the abruptly dropped out, there was great variation as to whether they had second thoughts with the discontinuation or not. Some of them still reflect whether they could return whereas others have clearly moved on. In the following quote an athlete who very quickly decided not to do sport anymore tells that he has no second thoughts even though "sometimes it annoys me". The most important thing in sport had been making new friends and as a whole, sport gave him more than took away from him.

> Well it was great in that sense that I made many new friends and some of them are still my friends, after all these years. They are really good guys and I wouldn't have met them without sports. If I hadn't played soccer what would I have done. This is what I appreciate and I have no regrets that I never made it to the top, I really don't regret that I played soccer. Of course I could have had chances to move forward and sometimes I it annoys me when I think of that. But still, sport has given me more than it has taken from me, so no regrets.

Unexpected turns may break the symmetry of the sport career and lead to general life instability. The best guarantees for an athlete to reach the top are favourable, stable and symmetric conditions throughout the life course – chances are by definition unexpected and therefore can either lift the athlete to the top or drop him down from there.

## Slow dropout

The slowly dropped out shared a lot with the abruptly dropped out. They also experienced some unfortunate turns which made the sport career turn downwards. Still, they persistently tried to continue and turn their careers to a new rise until they were forced to admit to themselves that it's better to stop. Four of the slowly dropped out had the rationality of an elite athlete but it became under too much strain while their careers were going down for too long a time. Three of them said that they didn't, after all, have that competitive instinct required in elite sports, instead, they were "too kind".

Thus also unfortunate turns and chance played a role in these careers of 'slow downhill'. One of the athletes had an unfortunate change of coach, the other one lost a parent which took away the focus from sport, the third one didn't find a suitable club and the fourth one felt that there was not enough appreciation towards her sport and her career in it even from the closest family members. These turns alone were not enough for taking that decision but they contributed to the decreasing motivation and the frustrating downturn of their career development. When comparing these observations to the categorizations (Piispa 2013c, 34–39) made earlier, the most frequent reasons for this group to discontinue their careers in sport included, in particular, internal disappointments in sport and difficulties in life.

Also the financial challenges in sport became so frustrating to some of the athletes that they decided to abandon goal-oriented sport. In the following quote the athlete explains that doing sport for free was "not what I wanted". The situation could have changed if the athlete would have been paid "for something I like" in the form of a professional contract, for instance.

> But you don't get paid. I was supposed to tour around for free. And if you need to tour around the whole summer in all these second-rate events, well, that was clearly not what I wanted. [...] If I had received a normal salary for that then it would have been interesting. Then I would have thought that why do I have this [other] job if you can do something you enjoy and then even get paid for it.

Despite their difficulties, those who dropped out slowly typically tried to hang onto their career. In the following quote the interviewee, an athlete in traditional individual sport explains how her difficulties began when her coach changed. The former long-term coach needed to go elsewhere and training with new coaches didn't work out anymore. Her development "got worse and worse", and then, after nearly four years of continuous problems, she decided to quit. "The coach matters", as Pensgaard and Roberts (2002) remind.

> Then I went on to look for a new coach, and none of them worked. No good chemistries, the basic training, its structure and everything, even though we tried to hold on to the old support functions but training is really the key, it has to work. And then at that stage, I mean you're an adult and you try to change your coach, try to find somebody you feel at ease with, it just didn't work. I just didn't have that trust that everything would work. So gradually everything got just worse and worse and worse. My own development, in the end. [...] [But] we did try, always tried to build on something. And then I needed to change twice [my coach].

The slowly dropped out developed a very critical attitude to sport after their careers. Some of them felt they had been left alone when their careers didn't advance anymore. Many of them reported on having taken distance to elite sports, in particular after their decision, but also to their own sport in general. Of all dropouts, this group felt that the logic of elite sports is particularly ruthless. This is interesting against the background that many of them had previously identified themselves very strongly as elite athletes and nothing else (see also Lämsä 2002). On the other hand, all those who had dropped out slowly had tried to reach the top until the end. Some of them actually did and stayed there for a short while but in the end all gradually left sports. For them, the world of elite sports was very well known and they learned, in the hard way, that investing in sport is a risky investment which can leave you with nothing if everything goes wrong (see also Ball 1976). In the following quote a former team sport athlete tells how he really didn't tell anybody that he had quit and somehow hanged around sports because he simply didn't know what else to do. In the end, when he had clearly stopped he took some distance to his sport and, for example, started to watch it on television only years later. However, he had no longing anymore to being an athlete himself.

> I didn't tell anybody at any point that it's finished now. Sometimes somebody asked me and I told him that that's it, for my matches, it's time do other things. It took some time to take that decision. I never really knew what to do [next] so maybe that's the reason why I stayed so long in that sport, in the first place. [...] I had been training every day, even twice a day, ever since I was five. I can't say that I'm happy that I got rid of it but I do have this feeling now that I couldn't care less to watch those matches, even on television, nowhere really. I took my distance to that sport. Maybe that was the reason why I've now started to follow it again and it feels good. But I never felt that I'd like to run to that pitch anymore.

When analysed with the life course analysis, some of the slowly dropped out had difficulties to find a new direction in their life courses. For them, replacing a dominant experience rationality with another was not easy (see also Price et al. 2010). This is a clear difference to other athletes who had finished their careers. As already said in the first publication of this research project (Piispa 2013c), most of the dropouts stated that, among other reasons, one of their main reasons to stop was that they didn't have that little 'something' that elite sports require. However, some slowly dropped out differ from others in this respect: their sport agency was very strong and hence their move to everyday life outside sports was more difficult. This transition can be difficult to anyone and therefore requires a more careful analysis. The interviews of the 'retired' athletes and those who have considered discontinuation provide a helpful tool here.

## RETIRED ATHLETES AND THOSE THINKING OF DISCONTINUATION

There are three athletes in the research data who had finished a long and successful career already before the interview. They had retired from the athlete's career, moved from an athlete's life course to a normal life course, inasmuch as such transition is possible. (See also Wylleman et al. 2004; Torregrosa et al. 2004; Erpić et al. 2004; Jodai & Nogawa 2012; Moesch et al. 2012.) They were interviewed as elite athletes and the interviews focused on mainly the same themes as those of the other elite athletes. All of them reported on the phases before and after the retirement, and on the reasons behind the retirement decision.

To all retired athletes, the last years in sports had been a period of developing reflection and self-understanding, a kind of transition phase away from the world of elite sports. Jo Drahota and Stanley Eitzen (1998) suggest that the retirement decision is preceded by a phase of reflection after which a period of thinking of other options follows. In the end, the decision is made. In this way, discontinuing one's career in sports becomes a natural event. It is by its nature and its timing exactly as the athlete had planned it (e.g. Wylleman et al. 1993; Alfermann et al. 2004; Torregrosa et al. 2004). It can be defined as ideal – the ideality becomes particularly clear when a comparison to the stories of the abrupt dropouts is made. However, as illustrated by the following quote, finishing one's long career is never entirely free of problems. At home, "the roles changed" and the athlete needed to look for another job. The physical strains of elite athleticism were felt in the need of continuing sports in one way or another. The quotation also reveals how this ex team sport athlete didn't just want "to do it on my own", even on the recreational level.

> My wife started working and our roles changed. And there we are, still, but things are going in a good direction. [...] But of course my body has suffered a lot over the years and you can't just run down a factory like that, you have to keep yourself fit. I've discovered the joy of running, I've started training for marathons, we have a nice group of runners here. In a way it's doing something in a team even though I do it on my own.

The most difficult thing was to move from an athlete's life, defined by experience rationality, to a normal life course, to the 'daily grind'. In some ways retirement even appears more difficult than deliberately finishing your career, when we compared the retired to those who dropped out deliberately. It's easier to go through a big life change when you are in your 20's compared to being in your 30's. Some German studies suggest that elite athletes, on average, do very well after their sport career (Conzelmann & Nagel 2003) and are, on average, better educated than their peers (op. cit.; Brettschneider 1999). However, these studies have been made more than ten years ago so the results don't necessarily apply to the quickly changing world of elite sports anymore. Also researchers Conzelmann and Nagel (2003, 260) remind on this; the athletes they studied were successful in the Olympic games between the years 1960 and 1992. The results of this research project suggest that the optimistic results of the previous studies may be outdated even though the interviewed athletes reported on not having encountered any major problems.

An athlete who has finished his career is always a kind of 'ex', i.e. he is remembered for his athletic results even after his career in sports. Embracing the role of an 'ex' is not always easy (see also Drahota & Eitzen 1998). The previous experiences at the top often make settling in in the new role more difficult, now that the athlete is not 'in the centre of attention' anymore (Price et al. 2010). 'Ordinary life' feels mundane compared to victories and successes of the athlete's life. This is recognizable also in some sad stories of the Finnish sport legends. Juha Kankkunen (rally driver; Yle, Finnish Broadcasting Company/Ranta 15.11.2014), for example, has said he filled the emptiness after his career by alcohol and the money earned in rally driving "didn't cheer up at all". Also the tragic story of Mika Myllylä (cross-country skier) is familiar to many Finns (see also Piispa 2011; Piispa 2013a). The post-career longing is neatly summed up in the following quote:

> That moment of victory when you hear the audience cheering behind your back... and then you raise your hands. I'm going to miss that feeling. That was the reason to do sports, that fantastic feeling of victory.

Also some other active elite athletes were thinking about possibly quitting, at the time of the interview. Most of them did actually stop soon after, at least for the time being. Some of them are clearly retired: they were interviewed towards the ends of their careers when the retirement was already looming on the horizon. They seemed to be on good terms with the decision – the long and successful career had given a lot and now it was time to do something else.

A few of the younger interviewees finished their careers after the interviews. They could now be defined as dropouts but the theme was not brought up in the interviews, at least not with all of them. They were all athletes in minor individual sports, from the national perspective. All of them had been successful on the national level and reasonably successful on international level, too. Still, they couldn't invest in full-time training due to lack of funding. This was the main reason for the diminishing motivation to two out of these three athletes. Thus, a normal life course with, for example, studying seemed a more interesting and meaningful option. In addition, all of them concluded that investing in elite sports at own cost would have been possible but it would have required too many sacrifices. Hence it was not surprising that they finished their careers during the three years following the research interviews.

## TO FINISH WITH AND AFTER THE FINISHING LINE

Even though the dropouts were categorized into three groups we could see, across the division lines that one of the finishing reasons rose above others: many of them just "didn't have that motivation you need" (see also Enoksen 2011; Moesch et al. 2012). "You have to go for it 100 per cent," as the young soccer player interviewed by Mette Christensen and Jan Sørensen (2009, 126) put it. Thus we can suggest that the relationship to sport of those who had dropped out was closer to the recreational ethos instead

of the vocational ethos or the ethos of hard work (see Salasuo, Piispa & Huhta 2015, 278–291). One can reach the top also with the recreational ethos but it may not be enough if one encounters insurmountable difficulties or sacrifices during the career. In the following extract a former team sport athlete tells how he got far with his talent but how he was lacking that "will or rage" of an elite athlete. Elsewhere in the interview he adds that he thought studying was as interesting as sport and, on the other hand, if his sport had been better paid, he could have stayed.

> I'm always telling this, that I don't have that will of an elite athlete. Ok, I had talent. But I didn't have that strong will to play that game. I enjoyed it a lot but that was it. I just didn't have that rage. Had I had it, it would have been different. I've been so fortunate in life, maybe I was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth but still, I've been fortunate. It would have been different if I had had more troubles in life. [...] I was still training very hard but it was not like I was dreaming of matches or anything. Of course it was an important part of my life. But I was just so good so I didn't think too much about it.

Interesting in this extract is that favourable misfortunes could have made the athlete to try more, according to him, and through that he could have achieved that will you need in elite sports. This remark underlines the subtleness of the equation to become an elite athlete: some athletes' careers are stopped by misfortune, some athletes never even have to try harder. Other important factors behind the discontinuation decision include financial insecurity and an overall lack of resources. Such problems may be avoided but the career can also finish because sport is simply not "fun" anymore – as the following quote illustrates:

> You always do the same things, different week, different opponent but when you've been there for a while, the opponents become the same too [...] The only pay off would be money even though it might sound weird. I started to play sports because I liked it, it was fun. But then it wasn't fun anymore, it became a kind of performance and more professional. [...] Personally, I didn't find it interesting anymore.

The quote emphasizes how the equation of elite sports is different to every athlete. One may not be interested in earning money if sport has become a routine instead of being fun whereas another one finishes because there is no money, not even in sight.

As has become evident above, the dropouts were also thinking about life after sport. With a few exceptions, they insisted on being happy with their choices. Some of them of course had some second thoughts but, for the most part, they enjoyed the tranquillity and comfort of normal life. The only factors that aroused some nostalgia were the 'kicks' offered by elite sports, the feeling of euphoria and the joy of victory. However, their appeal was not so important as to attract the dropouts back to the disciplined life required by elite sports.

At the end of the chapter we should point out that dropping out of elite sports is a very natural thing. In the logic of elite sports, there is not room for everybody at the top. Certainly fewer athletes were forced to finish their careers if there were better fund-

ing opportunities in the team ball games on the national elite level, for example. Still, of those who aim for the top, *the majority* are or will be 'left behind' (see also Lämsä 2002). If, for example, the dropout athletes who were interviewed for the purposes of this study, would have made it to the top and established their position there it could have meant that some other athletes would have been forced to quit their careers at the elite level. In the wider perspective, dropouts will always be there. A coach, for example, can only support an athlete who is considering finishing his or her career by building up a supportive training spirit (see also Rottensteiner & Konttinen 2014). From the point of view of elite sports, the dropouts are 'losses' but from the perspective of an individual, it's more important to remember that finishing one's career may be a difficult transition in which an athlete could be supported better. This also applies to 'retired' athletes who have a long elite level career behind them. (See also Stephan et al. 2003a; 2003b; Torregrosa et al. 2004.)

From the society's point of view, a much more important thing than the dropping out of potential elite athletes just before they reach the top is the decreasing physical activity levels of adolescents, especially at age 12–15. The results of this development affect not only the state of national health but also the size of the pool of potential athletes for elite sports. However, solutions to these questions must be searched outside the scope of this study, in other studies and writings (Butcher et al. 2002; Lämsä & Mäenpää 2004; Puronaho 2014). Research can contribute to changing this development. Partly to minimize the number of dropouts researchers have tried to sketch such career models (e.g. Côté et al. 2007; Wylleman & Reints 2010) in which, with good timing of transitions and development phases, we could guarantee the symmetric progress of the athletes' careers. By using high quality evidence-based research and by designing models based on it we could avoid unnecessary dropouts, burnouts and overload. Too much physical pressure on a young athlete is not good for anyone, not to the sport, nor the team or the athlete himself or herself. If the groundwork is not well done, the career in elite sports will not be materialized.

# 9 On multicultural athletes

Of the athletes interviewed for this study, 20/96 had a multicultural background. These interviews have been analysed among the others, as part of Finnish elite sports. Their life courses as athletes are mainly built on similar elements as those of other athletes. Still, there are certain special characteristics related to multiculturalism including different cultural adherences, resources, struggles, meanings and experiences.

It is clear that even though multiculturalism is a certain integrative factor behind the 20 multicultural athletes, its multiple features also create differences between these athletes. In any case, the specificity due to multicultural background is more distinctive in some principles of the life course than in others. The most important of these include social networks such as home, family, sibling relations and the cultural norms at home. Identity issues are paramount from the agency point of view. Also racism is related to this historical time and place, the 21st century Finland and Finnish sports.

In this chapter we take a look into those key points in the athletes' life courses where multiculturalism adds a meaningful layer. The life story interview method enables the identification of such choices, motives and turns where the multicultural background has influenced the lives of the athletes or added special experiences or accents to it. The same thematic was already discussed in the interim report of this research project (Huhta 2013) but, other than that, there is no research on this subject in Finland. In this chapter, the special features of multiculturalism are more carefully mirrored to the elite athletes' data as a whole, and analysed in the research framework of the life course analysis (Elder & Giele 2009; Häkkinen 2012). Even though the reading approach was different from that of the interim report experiences on, for example, racism still seemed very central from the point of view of understanding the life courses of multicultural athletes. These unspoken problems of Finnish sport will have a significant impact on how multicultural young athletes can become Finnish elite athletes in the future (see also Huhta 2013).

In this study, multiculturalism refers to very different family backgrounds. A shared experience to all multicultural athletes in the research data is the actualization of their life courses under the influence of more than one culture (see also Harinen 2005, 9). This may be materialized in many ways. In this study, those athletes who were either born outside Finland or who had at least one parent born outside Finland were defined as multicultural. Of the interviewed multicultural athletes, 5/20 were born and raised during their early childhood outside Finland, thus, they were immigrants by definition. At the time of immigration, the youngest of them were three years old and the oldest was nine. Each of them has finished the Finnish comprehensive school so they are socialized into the Finnish culture already at a young age. There are two second generation immigrants, born in immigrant families in Finland, in the research data. Most multicultural athletes (11) had a Finnish mother and an immigrant father. The remaining two multicultural

athletes were adopted to Finnish families from abroad.

The geographical backgrounds of the multicultural athletes were very diverse. Two of them had family roots in Western Europe, four in Eastern Europe, nine in Africa, two in South America and three in Asia. There were no athletes in the research data who would have moved to Finland because of sport. Such dimension in the research data would have required a different research layout (i.a. Maguire & Stead 1996; Agergaard 2008; Evans & Stead 2012) and was therefore excluded from the scope of this study.

Of the interviewed multicultural athletes, five were women and 15 were men. Their average age at the time of the interviews was 24 years, a bit lower than that of the entire research material, 25.5 years. The youngest interviewed athlete was 15 and the oldest 36. Six of them were less than 20 years old, ten were between 20 and 30 and four of them were older than 30. They had nine different main sports: soccer, American football, basketball, hurdles, boxing, floorball, parkour, street dance and ice hockey. The athletes were in very different phases of their careers. Roughly one fourth were just starting their careers in sports whereas eight of them had already finished. Two of them had a long career in elite sports behind them and could therefore be classified as 'retired' whereas six of them had finished their careers for other reasons and were thus classified as dropouts.

The multicultural athletes were interviewed by using the same methods as with all the other athletes. The only exceptions were the additional questions by the interviewer[41] on topics related to multiculturalism. Most key features related to multiculturalism emerged spontaneously when the athletes told their sport-related life stories. However, the specific questions were seemingly useful. With them, issues related to racism, the relationship of the interviewee to his or her ethnic background and to Finnishness as well as the pros and cons of an ethnic background could be elaborated more, amongst other things (see interview questions, appendix 3).

There is no prior research on multicultural elite athletes in Finland. However, the different phases, turns, obstacles and resources of the careers of multicultural elite athletes share many similarities with sport and exercise experiences of other multicultural Finns. In the success stories of elite athletes we can read about overcoming the hurdles, and about exceptional cases, which are the other side of the challenges experienced by multicultural recreational athletes. Despite their success, multicultural elite athletes come from the same pool of recreational athletes as any athletes and, similarly, most of them remain in that group. Still, the possibilities of multicultural children and youth to participate in sport and exercise is an important theme from the point of view of elite sports because they are an important part of that group where the potential elite athletes actually come from. At this point we should note that in many team sports, in particular, the share of multicultural athletes in the elite squads is currently much higher than their share of the population as a whole. For example in soccer, many key players in the national team have a multicultural family background[42].

41 Most often Helena Huhta.

42 http://palloliitto.fi/maajoukkueet/miehet/pelaajat (referred 5.2.2015.)

Previous Finnish studies on the physical activity of immigrants are closest to the topic of this chapter. The first ones of them were finalized at the end of the 1990's[43]. The focus has mainly been on the exercise habits of immigrants and multicultural Finns, the amount and modes of sport and exercise and the different obstacles in them. In addition, there is some research on the integrative and adherent impacts of sport and exercise, from the point of view of the surrounding society. Most research on sport and exercise of multicultural Finns has been conducted in two large-scale projects; *Multicultural youth, leisure and participation in civic activities* started in 2004 and coordinated by the Youth Research Network and *The importance of sport and exercise in the acculturation of immigrants,* started in 2009 in the Faculty of Education in the University of Turku.

In the Turku study, one observation has been that immigrants are less physically active than native Finns (Lehtosaari 2010, 89). Also 15–19 year old immigrants seem to participate less in physical activities than their native Finn peers (Zacheus et al. 2012, 120). Reasons include poor language knowledge and the cost of activities (Honkasalo et al. 2007; Zacheus & Hakala 2010). In addition, the idea of participating in instructed, paid sport activities might be unfamiliar to immigrant parents (e.g. Kim 2009; Zacheus 2011). Lastly, the gender differences in sport participation are the opposite from native Finns (Zacheus et al. 2011, 12), in other words, immigrant men are clearly more physically active than immigrant women.

Sport clubs are without doubt the most popular forms of civic action among the immigrants hence they play an important role in the integration into the Finnish society (Harinen 2005). A very topical question is why the athleticism of multicultural youth has not been studied before and why this elite athlete resource has not been identified and acknowledged in the reports and recommendations for action in the field of sports (cf. OPM 2010a; HuMu 2012). In recent years, this topic has risen to the centre of attention in international sport research (e.g. Schinke et al. 2013; Horowitz & McDaniel 2014).

All the same, sport participation of immigrant and native Finns shares many similarities. As an example, sports favoured by immigrants are similar to those favoured by native Finns. (Myrén 1999; Zacheus et al. 2012.) The differences include less interest in traditional winter sports and the pronounced popularity of soccer (Zacheus et al. 2012, 149–151). Similarly, motives for sport participation – including sociability, meeting friends and staying in good physical condition – are very identical between immigrant and native Finns (Myrén 1999, 114). Social networks are particularly important as, with immigration, old social networks are broken or at least their maintenance becomes more difficult. The disappearance of old networks and the aspiration to create new ones may be seen in family practices during several generations as we could hear in the life stories of multicultural athletes. Changing the significant others (Berger & Luckmann 1994 [1966], 39–44) in one's life is a challenging process from the point of view of self-perception and identity. In the new social interaction, old interpretation resources are of limited use (see op. cit.,

43 The interim report of this research project has more on this literature (Huhta 2013), although in Finnish.

41–42). Partly for this reason, for example soccer is known as 'an international language' as its rules, roles and norms are universal and shared. In this framework, people can meet each other as equals even though their social interpretation repertoires were very diverse. However, reaching that 'common language' requires an equal access to that sport which is not self-evident anymore, in the age of customership thinking in sport.

In addition to obstacles of sports, the integrative impacts of sport have been studied. At the administrative level, the integrative importance of sport has been acknowledged (e.g. Zacheus & Hakala 2010) but there is still relatively little evidence-based knowledge available and the results are partly contradictory (Walseth 2006, 447; Zacheus 2010). The integrative impacts of sport and exercise, in helping in settling in in the new society are not challenged as such but many researchers are calling for a clarification as to what kind of actions promote integration and what is specifically meant by integration. Sport and exercise are seen as leisure activities in which cultural modes, language or talk have relatively little meaning and, therefore, immigrants' participation in them is thought to be easier than in other fields of life. (See Myrén 1999.) This became evident also in some elite athlete interviews.

## FAMILY CAPITALS AND THE BIG TRANSITION

Relocation to a new country or even to a new continent is a dramatic transition in the life course (Giele & Elder 1998) which in many ways changes those social networks and structures around which the life of an individual or a family has been based until then. After the immigration the whole life, including future plans, must be redirected to correspond the conditions, demands and opportunities of the new environment. Most of the interviewed multicultural athletes of this study experienced this transition in an intergenerational way through older family members. Seven athletes, including two athletes who were adopted to Finnish families, were born and raised for some time outside Finland. Due to young age at immigration, the cultural transition was experienced through the experiences and the integration process of the older family members. The divergence of cultural background and different appearance from the native Finns meant it was a personal experience to these athletes as well. The importance of family is, on one hand, a shared but in many ways also a distinguishing factor between the immigrant and the native elite athletes.

Family plays a significant role in the careers of both native and multicultural athletes. Different capitals, values and practices are transmitted from one generation to another at the family table (Häkkinen et al. 2013), including elements for building an identity and a certain 'model of good life' (Häkkinen 2016). Family capitals have been discussed in the previous chapters of this study, referring to the transmission of, in particular, social and cultural capitals from one generation to another (Häkkinen et al. 2013). In multicultural families, family capitals include also values and attitudes towards the new home country, different means of adjusting and ways to maintain the ethnic background at the 'family table'.

It is evident that in multicultural families the values, attitudes and practices of the family table are defined somewhat differently than what they are in other families. This applies also to socialization into sports and to the intergenerational sport relationship, and its active and passive transmission (see also Koski 2004) (see chapter 1). In addition, the parents' economic, social and knowledge resources as regards supporting their children's activities are obviously seen in the intergenerational interaction (see also Dubrow & Adams 2012).

In multicultural families, the asynchronous adaptation into the new home country may affect the life of a child in many ways (e.g. Alitolppa-Niitamo 2010; Berry 2006). The question of parents' integration is irrelevant only in adoptive families. Eleven athletes had immigrant fathers. In these families, the Finnish roots of the mother guaranteed adherence to the Finnish culture and local social networks. Other important integration problems in addition to employment difficulties were not brought up in the interviews. Asynchronous acculturation had been seen in many of these athletes' lives but it had not caused any significant conflicts between the parents and the children, nor affected the career choices of the children of immigrant families.

Some of the parents tried to make their children's lives easier by raising them "in the Finnish way". With one athlete, the parents' wish to raise and adjust their child to the Finnish culture influenced their choice of the first sport. The athlete's father actually chose ice hockey because he understood that the sport was important to Finns. Also two other multicultural athletes had played ice hockey during their careers because they felt that they could be more Finnish by playing that sport. Ice hockey is a very Finnish sport choice and, due to its marginal international position, the multicultural athletes see it as a typical feature of true Finnishness. Ethnic background played a role in the sport choices of many multicultural athletes, in one way or another. Multiculturalism and its reflections have a strong impact especially in the initiation phase of the athletes (see chapter 5).

## Intergenerationality and encouragement to sports

In chapter 1, the intergenerational transmission of the sport relationship in the entire research data was discussed. Many observations are similar, regardless of whether we are talking about multicultural or native Finn athletes. In this chapter we aim at bringing up some special themes and differences related to multiculturalism. We also review the role of siblings – which is of particular importance because, beside parents, the attitudes and adaptation to the new environment of siblings matters too.

Approximately half of the multicultural athletes had been taken to their first instructed sport activities and encouraged into them by their parents (see also Fagerlund & Maijala 2011, 41). The athletes had started deliberate practice at age 7 on average which corresponds the average age of the entire research data. The oldest beginner was 12 years old whereas others started at age 6–8.

Nearly all multicultural athletes had at least one parent who practised or had practised some sport and more than half had at least one parent who had practised goal-oriented

sport at some level. In the latter families, nine athletes reported that the sport relationship of their parents had been very strong, i.e. they were insiders (see Koski 2004, 191) of sport, and sport had been very much present in the everyday life of the family. A certain ethos of athleticism had been transmitted to the children via the family's interests, values and choices. On the basis of the definitions made earlier, these families can be defined as families with an intergenerational sport relationship. The relationship had been transmitted not only through the parents' activities but also through the silent transmission of values. In the other extremity, some of the parents' physical activity relationship could be defined 'tourist' or 'stranger whereas the rest of the families had a 'regular' physical activity relationship (op. cit.). Relatively fewer multicultural families (9/20) had an intergenerational sport relationship compared to native Finn families (42/76).

The model of being an elite athlete, transmitted by parents, is important from the point of view of career in elite sports. The importance of this model can be seen also in connection with the multicultural athletes as exactly those athletes with a strong, intergenerational sport relationship perceive athleticism as a nearly self-evident professional ambition. The transmission mechanisms of the intergenerational sport relationship were very similar between the two groups of families. One of the athletes had acquired many different resources thanks to his multiculturalism; both his maternal Finnish and paternal foreign families were very athletic. These resources included not only knowledge capitals from both cultures but also sports culture and role models.

> Maybe I've also seen different approaches to sport because I changed my coach under way. And I realized what works and what doesn't, and so on. And then of course I had these examples, the role models from my mother's side, and I know what they've done.

In the multicultural families with an intergenerational sport relationship, one father worked as his child's coach and another one as his child's team's caretaker. In one family, the mother was the trainer of her child. In three families, the relocation of the young athlete to another city or abroad had been facilitated by one family member accompanying the athlete. The athletes appreciated their families' multiple investments, sometimes even sacrifices, in sport. The most typical situation, however, was a kind of conducive atmosphere where there was no coercion but, instead, a willingness to provide 'as good a life as possible' (Häkkinen 2016) to the child. This is obvious in the following extract where family support and pressurelessness proved to be very good to the child's development in sport.

> Well, they took me to sport activities and to the choir and so on so they really thought these activities were important and they always supported them, in general. They didn't have any strong ambitions that I should succeed in something but they just wanted to support my activities. And I must really say that my family, and I mean in a wider sense, has supported me a lot. And it's not only been related to sport but support in general which I think was so important. And because it was not related to sport only, I think it made sport easier to me, that I was not pushed to anything. I never had this feeling that somebody was pushing me to sport.

There were exceptions, however. Three of the interviewed athletes reported that their parents' encouragement went 'over he top' and was tyrannical at times. This was not really observed in the interviews of native Finns. It can be that in multicultural families the families'– typically fathers' – worry about their children's getting along when being 'different' from others culminated in unreasonable demands. Children were pushed to profit from something which was not necessarily available in their country of origin. In the end, pressure turned out to be temporary and with age, parents stayed more in the background. In addition, parental pressure did not lead to quitting sport although too much pressure is a very common reason behind discontinuation of a career in sport (see also Fraser-Thomas et al. 2008; also chapter 8).

The living environment has an impact on what parents of multicultural families think is useful action to promote the socialization and acculturation of their children, as well as their social acceptance (i.a. Bhalla & Weiss 2010). Such intergenerational ethos was to be read in the research data, especially as regards sports (see also Fredricks & Eccles 2005). In some families, sport was seen as a means to facilitate social acceptance of children in the new living environment. This applied especially to initiation and the following sampling phase. These families had concluded that sport in itself facilitates adaptation and acceptance. With one athlete, this could be seen, for example, in the choice of sports. Parents at this family table encouraged their children to choose a sport which they thought was appreciated in Finland. This choice can be seen as being based more on a desire of social acceptance than of socioeconomic rise. This is natural because an athlete's career in Finland, with the exception of a few sports, generates more immaterial than material capital.

As elsewhere in the research data, playing sports and exercising together with the family was considered important by the multicultural athletes (see also Myllyniemi 2012, 54). Parents' interest in sports was transmitted to most interviewees in their childhood through family sport activities and backyard games. Sometimes these activities remained as an important part of the athletes' leisure at a later age, beside competitive sports.

The impact of the sport relationship of parents (Koski 2004, 191) to children was deepened also by siblings, particularly older siblings. Three athletes named the example of siblings as the main inspiring factor for starting to play sports. For many athletes, playing with siblings and their example on practicing sport in a sport club was one of the inspiring factors of many. Altogether ten interviewees had a sibling or siblings who were involved in competitive sports. The value of siblings was also seen in family support to the athlete. The family 'pulling together' was even more common than with athletic, native Finn families. Instead of enviousness, siblings offered their support to the successful family member. This is beautifully seen in the following extract:

> [My family members] have never said that they don't care or that they don't want to listen. They've always talked about it with me, always wanted to see the matches. For example, when I was playing [in foreign clubs] they always tried to come and visit me. My big brother moved with me there [abroad] now that I was there. I felt lonely and then I said that I'll give you some money for living, come here. Then he did and we were there together. [...] These are big things not many brothers would do it, even for their own brother.

The interviewee felt that the family was interested in his career, tried to come and watch the matches, offered psychological support and supported his career building abroad. The quotation also demonstrates that the mental support, in showing interest and taking care, has been important to the athlete. We could often interpret, in the interviews of the multicultural athletes, that when the family was somehow 'on an alien ground' the mutual connection between family members was more pronounced. For example, there was some sibling rivalry – as with native Finns – but also strong protection. As could be read in the quote above, a lot had been done "for the brother".

Thus parents of multicultural athletes typically had a positive and encouraging attitude to the sport activities and to a potential career in elite sports of their children. As with native Finns, the parents often stated that in order to be able to play sports, school work has to be taken seriously (see also Honkasalo et al. 2007, 22). Despite the positive attitude, roughly in one family out of four, the parents didn't concretely support the sport activities of their children. One athlete pointed out that the immigrant parents are not necessarily aware of the possibilities of organized sports activities in Finland and therefore "are not able'" to participate in their children's activities on the practical level. The same phenomenon has been noted in studies on immigrants' sport and exercise activities (Honkasalo et al. 2007, 22; Kim 2009, 169; Alitolppa-Niitamo 2010, 59; Fagerlund & Maijala 2011, 49). As one athlete put it, the idea that "now I take my child to play sports somewhere" might be unfamiliar to immigrant parents.

Although the intensity of the families' participation was varied, the family was, in one way or another, the very framework that made the sport career possible. The enabling role of the family was particularly important in childhood. With increasing age and independence, the ways and often also the intensity of family participation changed; the athletes began to use public transport to go to practice and parents didn't follow matches and training so actively anymore. As in the research data of this study in general, with increased age, the significant others (Berger & Luckmann 1994 [1966], 149–150) were often found outside the family circle and the athlete's own agency began to strengthen.

## Economic challenges

In chapter 5 we discussed how rising costs are becoming more problematic to many young athletes and may be a barrier for deliberate practice. Also in studies on immigrants' participation in sport and exercise costs have been defined as one of the major obstacles to sport participation (Honkasalo et al. 2007; Fagerlund & Maijala 2011; Zacheus 2011, 12). Some immigrants are not accustomed to the idea that leisure activities are subject to a charge (Zacheus et al. 2011, 12) and some families simply cannot afford paying the relatively expensive club fees and competition licences (Honkasalo et al. 2007, 23). At least 12 families of the interviewed multicultural athletes had had difficulties to pay the costs of sport participation at some point of the sport career.

Approximately half of the parents of multicultural athletes (10/19, no information on one parent) worked in lower income jobs as a nurse, construction worker, family carer,

cleaner or factory worker. At least in four families, relocation to Finland had meant a decrease in the relative socioeconomic position as parents, or one of them, could not work in their previous occupations. This is very common among immigrants (Sutela 2005, 88; Forsander 2002). In many athletes' families, the parents' divorce (8), the death of one of the parents (4) or severe disability (2) had further weakened the financial standing of the family. In addition, during the early 1990's depression, some immigrant parents had been temporarily unemployed. In three families, one or both parents were entrepreneurs. In both lower income jobs families and in the entrepreneur families nearly all (12/13, with the exception of one uncertain case) had had at least occasional difficulties in paying their children's sport activities.

The importance of sports in many multicultural families can be seen in saving elsewhere in challenging economic times and with high sport activity costs to make sure that children can participate in sport. With some athletes, the family's economic status had restricted the number of sports played or the choice of sports. The athletes in the research data had started their sport activities between the early 1980's and early 2000's. After this, the costs have risen significantly and, in some sports, even multiplied (Puronaho 2014, 52). According to the 2012 Youth Barometer, the family economic status is connected to the participation in competitive sports of Finnish children and youth. In families with a high economic status, 20 per cent of children were involved in competitive sports, whereas in families with a lower economic status the percentage was six. (Myllyniemi 2012, 54.) From the point of view of elite sports, the rise of costs can be seen in decreasing multiple sport participation which may have both physical and mental negative consequences (see also Baker 2003; Güllich & Emrich 2006; Fraser-Thomas et al. 2005; Wall & Côté 2007; Côté et al. 2007, 197–198).

The native Finn elite athletes in the research data mainly come from middle class backgrounds. For them, the problem of rising costs of sport activities was barely brought up in the interviews. However, the problem is well known from other contexts (e.g. Puronaho 2014) on the level of the population as a whole. Seven of the multicultural athletes in the research data participated in instructed training only in his or her main sport and sure enough, four of them were dropouts. One of the reasons were the economically narrower resources of the multicultural families. Only five of the multicultural athletes can be defined to come from middle class families, based on their parents' occupations as experts, teachers or doctors. These children didn't have to think about the cost of their sport activities or the costs of the possible sports career. A legitimate question is, what would have happened to the majority of the multicultural athletes of this study if they had started their sport activities in recent years, after 2010, when then costs of sport activities have risen significantly in a short time.

## SOCIAL NETWORKS OUTSIDE THE FAMILY

As a consequence of immigration, the social networks of individuals or entire families become weaker or break off altogether. Relationships to family members, colleagues and

friends may remain but they are not in the same way physically present in the everyday life in the new country of residence, and the possibilities they offer cannot be used in the same way. Building up new networks takes time and therefore immigrant families, in particular those recently immigrated, usually have very thin social and emotional support networks (e.g. Alitolppa-Niitamo 2010).

Approximately half of the interviewed multicultural athletes had Finnish family networks and other support networks because the other parent was a Finn (11/20). In addition, those two athletes who had been adopted to Finnish families enjoyed the local networks of the two Finnish parents. On the other hand, certain turns in the life course may disturb the social networks. These include, as mentioned above, the parents' divorce or the death or severe disability of the other parent. In such situations, networks outside the family often play an important role. More than half of the athletes told about an important person outside the family that had major impact on the athlete's career. In some cases, this person was part of the family networks but more often an outsider whose path coincidentally crossed the athlete's path and who, in one way or another, started to look after the athlete.

Most often this person outside the family who gave important support to the athlete was his or her coach who had developed a special and close relationship to the athlete. To some athletes, coaches played the role of 'facilitators' to instructed sport activities (see also Junkkala & Lallukka 2012, 27–29). The role of the coach is of particular importance in the initiation phase when the child is, for the first time, getting used to instructed training. In the following quote the coach's important role in the facilitation of the transition is emphasized, in particular against the background that the interviewee was the first multicultural child in the team:

> A: Everybody's parents were there and they immediately started talking to my dad and my coach and I are still quite close [...] Not that we keep contact on a daily basis but he has somehow raised me and knows my background. Sometimes I see him [...]. I remember when he showed me around and took me to the team.
> I: He welcomed you?
> A: Yes, very well actually. It was a good day. [...][The name of the coach] was my first coach ever. He taught me all the basic things and was so close to me back then. He was very protective towards me, and he was… a good friend if I could say so.

Coaches offered their support and guidance also in the turbulent teen years. This can also be interpreted in a way that the more serious and goal-oriented sport practice in the development phase (see also Wall & Côté 2007) introduced discipline and structure to the everyday life of the athlete. The normative, and in many parts determinative, sport system which requires discipline and symmetric control of the life course of the athlete can also be a safe haven to some young athletes. A few multicultural athletes who were raised in single parent families told that sport in general and the control of the coach curbed their adolescent restlessness in that phase. Some coaches have not only 'cooperated in educational sense' with the multicultural parents but also contributed to sport participation and travel costs. In addition to coaches, outside support had been received

from relatives, family acquaintances and parents of the team mates.

The facilities available for sport practice in childhood were also important enabling factors from the point of view of the career in sports. All multicultural athletes had grown up in cities, many of them in big cities. This is a major difference from the native Finn athletes: especially those born in the end of 1970's and early 1980's often had rural backgrounds. Multicultural athletes actively used free or affordable places for sport practice offered by cities or municipalities, many of them in all phases of their careers. First experiences of sport and exercise of most athletes had been collected near home, in the nearby sand pitches, sport parks, indoor sport halls or basketball courts. The importance of nearby sport facilities was particularly emphasized with those immigrant families that wished their children to spend their free time near home. Many multicultural athletes had continued playing backyard games up until the time of the interviews. In addition, two elite athletes in the research data had practised throughout their careers mainly in the half-free facilities offered by the city. Hence, it can be said that the Finnish public sport facility building projects, mainly completed before the childhood and youth of the interviewed athletes, has had a very positive impact promoting athleticism and equal opportunities.

## AGENCY OF A MULTICULTURAL ATHLETE

Multicultural athletes have gone through the same normative transitions as other athletes (see chapter 9). There is no need to do a separate analysis in this respect. Their athlete agency is also very similarly defined as that of other athletes. However, there are some differences in the research data that can be traced to the multicultural background. On one hand, a multicultural background may have been beneficial in sport and, on the other hand, sport may have helped in other life situations which can be challenging to a multicultural athlete yet unknown to native Finns. At best, multiculturalism and sport can thus be mutually beneficial.

Multicultural athletes reported on similar benefits of sport as everybody else, including the possibility of making new friends and developing important social skills. These may be particularly beneficial to a young person who faces the sometimes contradictory everyday life between two cultures, and who is defined different due to his or her appearance. For immigrant children, who typically have thinner social networks, sport can be good in making new friends and facilitating language learning. In addition, sport had kept some of the athletes away from "doing stupid things". In chapter 5 we read how athletes thought about their choice between being an athlete and, on the other hand, enjoying the same freedom as their peers. Abstinence from alcohol and party culture was a choice through which to invest in sport. The interviewed athletes with a Muslim background told that it was easy to abstain from alcohol use because sport only supported the substance-free behaviour learned at home and defined by religion.

In sport, also the physical ideals turn out to be somewhat different from those of the surrounding society. International role models create a diverse catalogue of athletes

that multicultural athletes can easily identify themselves with. For example, a different skin colour may be seen more 'normal' in sport fields than outside them. Thus there are several reasons why sport can be seen as a good choice for many of the multicultural athletes in the research data, at least in their childhood and teen years.

The athletes' choices include that of selecting a particular sport. Some of the interviewed athletes reported on having chosen ice hockey because they wanted to do well in a particularly Finnish sport. With the words of one athlete, ice hockey is "as Finnish as anything can be". Most interviewed athletes told that their physical 'foreignness' had contributed to their success in sports: some of them concluded they had a favourable genetic ethnicity from the perspective of their particular sport. Some of them had experienced that being "foreign" is seen as some kind of a mental resource. This can be read in the following quote:

> I clearly see it as an advantage that I feel like, that Finns… I mean maybe they're a bit more aware that this guy is a foreigner so he must be a good player. [...] That he must be very confident and so on.

Some of the interviewed athletes reflected that certain difficulties may have cultivated some of their characteristics and therefore prepared them for a career in elite sports. A few athletes stated that while encountering exclusion on ethnic grounds one just has to be "twice as good". To some of them, this was connected to a desire to show others that you can succeed in sports or in life in general even though you're "different" – especially if they had encountered racism.

In conclusion, as for agency and transitions, the experiences of multicultural athletes were mainly very similar to those of the other interviewed athletes. The interviewed had in many cases turned their multiculturalism to their benefit but, on the other hand, some structural and cultural factors may also hindered their progress in sport. One of them is racism.

## RACISM ENCOUNTERED BY MULTICULTURAL ATHLETES

The racism experiences of multicultural athletes were thoroughly discussed in the interim report of this research project (Huhta 2013). However, the topic is too important to be omitted here but a shorter analysis is justified at this point.

Eight of the interviewed multicultural athletes had started school in Finland in the 1980's, ten in the 1990's and five in the new millennium. For most athletes, participation in deliberate sport practice in sport clubs began at approximately the school starting age. During these decades, the amount of non-Finnish speaking residents in Finland has increased more than tenfold (Statistics of Finland 2014). Most of the athletes were children when large-scale immigration began in Finland but the number of foreign born residents was still very limited, especially in smaller municipalities. Immigrants are concentrated in the biggest cities of the country which can be seen also in the research data of this study. All interviewed multicultural athletes had spent their childhood in

urban environments. Still, many of them were the first foreign born children in their sport activity groups. Thus these athletes could not lean on peer support which would have facilitated their adaptation as regards culture, language and prejudices during their initiation phase in sport (see Schinke et al. 2013). Especially their immigrant parents arrived to a very homogeneous country. The attitudes of Finns towards immigration have become more positive from the 1980's onwards (Jaakkola 2005) – though this might have changed rapidly due the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe.

Sport activities in general are seen as tolerance promoting activities as they are considered to generate experiences of belonging and inclusion (Myrén 1999; 2003; OPM 2010b, 7). However, several studies indicate that, at the same time, sport and exercise are arenas where various types of exclusion and racism take place (Elling & Knoppers 2005; Walseth 2006; Honkasalo et al. 2007; Hylton 2010; Zacheus et al. 2012, 215). Racism can be defined, along the lines of Anna Rastas (2005, 77), as a negatively charged social segregation where individual's ethnic origin, whether biological or cultural, is used as a tool for racism. The interviewees were not given any specific definition of racism. The athletes seemed to define as racism only those acts that were clearly based on racist attitudes. In everyday situations however, proving such attitudes may be difficult or nearly impossible (e.g. Essed 1991, 50; Honkasalo et al. 2007, 37). In the interviews, the athletes were often critical towards their own interpretations which can partly be due to fear that their racism experiences are seen as exaggerated or even products of imagination.

The interviewees' experiences of racism varied a lot. Nine of them reported on having personally experienced racism in sport. So called positive preconceptions are not included in these experiences. Racism experiences were more common with dark skinned athletes compared to athletes with a European background. Age did not seem to be a dividing factor in racism experiences. Both younger and older athletes had experienced racism or been saved from it. It is notable, however, that athletes had experienced more racism when they were younger and when they played sports in lower league levels (see also FRA 2010, 37). Racism was rare at the top level of sport. All racism experiences occurred in team sports and more men than women had experienced racism (see also Peucker 2009, 9). One female athlete with racism experiences reflects the situation as follows:

> I think there's a big difference between a dark skinned man and a dark skinned woman. Because I think guys end up in fights more often. I've never been in any trouble because of that or as a consequence of it. But, really, many of my friends have, at some point of their lives, ended up in these "you fucking nigger" fights.

Nearly all interviewed athletes reported on having experienced racism outside sports, in school or in free time, and encountered it there more than in sports. Racism experienced in sports was often related to the behaviour of opponents, spectators or coaches. Most racism was encountered in matches played away from home. A few interviewees reported on racism in their own teams but such problems were typically considered minor. In all cases, the interviewees were not sure whether it was exactly racism but were still thinking about its possibility. One team athlete explains how he used to joke with his team mates:

> We had this joke back then that all foreigners are on the bench, what a coincidence. I mean somebody might think that [the coach] is a racist.

When telling about their racism experiences the athletes also described ways of explaining it to themselves. By doing so, they tried to overcome racism as jealousy or as a historical relic, and tried to rise above it by explaining it away as fear or redneckness or, at some point in their lives, even justifying it. In a few cases, racism was considered teasing, as part of the game (see also Long & McNamee 2004, 414–415). Explanations – laughing to racism, its belittling or even its understanding – are ways to handle racism and cope with it. Important persons who helped in coping with racist encounters included parents, siblings, team mates, coaches and parents of team mates; i.e. persons who had a significant influence in the athlete's career anyway. Still, for example coaches had in many athletes' youth had a passive attitude in racist situations and in their handling.

Not all athletes had encountered racism during their sport careers and some of them had been saved from it in their main sport. Many of them believed the lack of racism was due to the multicultural nature of sport which does not support racist attitudes (see also Harinen 2005, 65). Such multicultural, and therefore, to some extent 'racism immune' sports were considered to be dance sports, American football, boxing and basketball. It is understandable that in sports where international top players and role models are other than white skinned Westerners, racism seems awkward. Beside their racist encounters the interviewees reported on many situations in which their multiculturalism had raised positive preconceptions. In a typical situation, the athlete's ethnic background had been interpreted as exceptionally favourable physical or mental characteristics. In this way, the interviewees could turn their multiculturalism to an asset, a certain intergenerational, physical capital. This is not totally harmless either as also positive preconceptions and stereotypes may lead to an adoption of a narrower identity (e.g. Harrison et al. 2011) and cement individuals and groups to predefined roles (Feber 2007; also Rastas 2007, 118).

## EXCURSION: NATIONAL FEELING AND REPRESENTING FINLAND

All multicultural athletes had reflected and worked on their ethnic identity. These experiences were very personal and unique. Some of them had reached a satisfying balance in their identity reflections whereas others were still actively doing it. Ethnic identity had an impact in the choice of sports and created an interesting relationship as to whether to represent and cheer for Finland in sport. When following sports on television, the favourite athletes may have come from Finland and from the father's homeland, for example.

As stated before, sport may have offered a channel to integrate into Finland and even 'redeem Finnishness'. Representing Finland in its national team is, against this background, a special experience and a psychological turning point. It's a way to give something back to the country, as the interviewee concludes in the following quote:

> It was so funny, I remember when we were singing the Finnish national anthem, two dark skinned boys, all the others were Finns. But I felt so proud of myself. If you asked me, if I was selected to the men's national team and I should choose, I would choose Finland. It was really cool and I was proud of it, that I could represent Finland. [...] I wouldn't even have to think twice. I'd know immediately which one to represent. Finland. I've got everything for my life here.

In this extract the athlete states that he would, without any doubt, choose Finland if he was asked. Not everybody shared the same opinion but none of the athletes would have chosen just any other country. On the other hand, some of the multicultural athletes speculated whether they could somehow represent two countries, in an equal way. In the competitive institutions of sport this is, however, not possible at the moment. The national team representation of multicultural athletes may also provoke other controversial situations:

> The national team is something else, if you represent Finland in the national team nobody can take it away from you. Being in the team is an official recognition. And I believe it's an important thing to many athletes that you've shown that you're one of the best and then, you can represent Finland. And then of course many may have contradictory feelings. Because if you win you somehow feel that you're winning for Finland but then again you don't want to represent those people who have, in one way or another, let you understand that you're not as valuable as they are.

Against this background, it's interesting to reflect on how native Finn athletes feel when they represent Finland. In the interviews they were asked what it means to them to represent Finland, their own team and also themselves, and how these representations relate to each other. When it comes to representing Finland, the most common feeling of native Finns is crystallized in its traditional and classic form in this quote:

> Well it's just an awesome feeling, I've experienced it once that you're standing there on the highest step of the podium, you hear the national anthem and the Finnish flag is taken up there, to the highest pole. It's just so cool.

However, in this national ethos, there were some cracks here and there. First of all, in some sports where there is no proper national team action due to lack of resources, the athletes mainly felt they represented just themselves. If the sport system does not support certain sports and their athletes, the feeling of representing the nation is not created in the same way. One of the athletes commented this situation as follows:

> In most competitions I've been, I've felt that I represent only myself. [...] As we don't have any funding for national team activities in this sport there's no burning feeling that "now I'm gonna get to the national team".

Nevertheless, also in more traditional sports which are highly appreciated on the national level, some individualisation of sport representation is seen. Some of the athletes in in-

dividual sports said they represent more themselves than Finland in competitions and, for example, the medals received are "firstly to myself, secondly to Finland". A strong national feeling is maybe not that relevant anymore, in the age of individualisation and internationalisation of the sports culture (see also Kokkonen 2008).

> I: Do you have these feelings of national pride when you're abroad that "now I'm fighting for Finland"?
> A: Well, not really. I do it mainly for myself. [...] Maybe that's how it's been all the time, I've done it for myself and especially now I've started to think more about myself as an individual who plays sport and also that I'm having my own path and career.

In some sports, and in lifestyle sports in particular, athletes feel that they are more 'global citizens' than 'Finns'. In some lifestyle sports, the lacking national team competition institutions also have an impact. On the contrary, team sport athletes had more uniform answers to the questions on representing the country. For example, a uniform match kit and listening to national anthem maintain the idea and the 'special feeling' of national representation. Representing the country in its national team is also an undeniable milestone which somehow requires the athlete to have a special attitude towards the matches and motivates him. Most team sport athletes stated that they would represent Finland even without any compensation, and that they enjoy national team matches more than club team matches. The diminishing loyalty to sport clubs, a clear tendency in team sports, is seen in the fact that national team representation is generally regarded as more important than representing the club team.

# Conclusions

In this study, the life courses of Finnish elite athletes and successful young artists have been analysed and reviewed in parallel. The life course analysis (i.a. Elder & Giele 2009) has been the most important methodological tool in both parts of the study and it has also contributed to the structure of the study. Whereas the analytical chapters are separate entities, there are occasional comparisons between them and it's very likely that the reader has done some intuitive comparison throughout the reading journey, too. To sum up, it's sensible to go through the central observations of the study and compare the life courses of athletes and artists.

An athlete's or an artist's family is the primary institution of socialization. The parents of more than half of the interviewed athletes were former elite or competitive athletes themselves, i.e. insiders of sport (Koski 2004; see also Unruh 1979). Athleticism was passed on to younger generations in many ways at the 'family table' (Häkkinen et al. 2013), either by active guidance or by merely showing example. When siblings were taken into account we noticed that only about a quarter of the athletes had grown up in families where they were the only ones engaged in competitive sports. In addition, sport and exercise played a key role in the parenting practices of many families – sport and exercise were regarded as good and recommendable activities for children (see also Kay 2009).

The transmitting mechanisms of artisthood were only slightly different from those of the athletes. Many artists' parents had been at least amateur artists or insiders of art but, even more often, they shared a middle class, culturally inclined background. Hence art was an integral part of these families' parenting practices and an important element in the 'model of good life' (Häkkinen 2016; see also Allardt 1976). Being an artist was passed on in a social way, through various everyday practices, discussions, value choices and example.

Thus in family practices, the mechanisms of intergenerational transmission were very similar among the athletes and the artists. The role of friends and acquaintances as well as other social networks outside the family was somewhat different. Whilst the athletes typically spent their time in sporty circles of friends, the artists had often found their peer groups only later in life. Mid-teen years, the early planning of the future career, including the choice of upper secondary school are important elements here. In those years, it also became evident how much more 'hurried' the career of an athlete is, compared to that of an artist. When a young athlete decides, in mid-adolescence, to invest in the athletic career and aim for the top, his or her margins of choice become much narrower (see also Gould et al. 2002).

This typically leads to a very unusual or exceptional life, in many ways, of the young aspiring athlete. Sport becomes an agent and an institution that greatly steers the athlete's life and its target setting whereas other life paths become secondary or marginalized. The

development of an artist is the opposite. Although being an artist and the educational choices related to it undeniably build a strong identity, an artist is typically open to the world instead of excluding himself from it. At the same time, the various ways of developing as an artist open up new perspectives and widen the horizon which obviously may lead to insecurity, too. Contrary to being an athlete, being an artist is a profession, a career path and professional life that can last a lifetime. Being an athlete is a relatively short period of life after which the athlete has to look for something else in life.

An athlete's short career is strongly determined by different normativities (Wylleman & Reints 2010). Research helps us locate important transitions and life phases in sport. Their development within the sport system should be based on research knowledge. In this way, we could guarantee the sustainability of the growth processes of children and youth. The foundations for both a sporty lifestyle and a possible career in elite sports are laid in childhood. The average timing of the transitions of the interviewed athletes corresponded to the ideals defined in international research (e.g. Côté et al. 2007; Wylleman & Reints 2010). One very important factor is to be involved in many different sport and exercise activities in childhood, in a playful and fun way. The main sport was usually discovered through sampling and enjoyment, in turn, created a deep relationship to that sport, something that carried the athlete all the way to the top. It is also notable that practising sport became more serious only after the age of 12, on average. However, there was considerable variation between different sports.

Normativity is clearly less important in the growing up and the development of artists. Differences between artists were big, in terms of the onset of their creative or artistic activities and the timing of their artistic realization as well as their breakthrough as professional artists. Compared to athletes, transitions are not so obvious in an artist's career. Some essential transitions are recognizable, however: education is a kind of a cornerstone as the gatekeepers of art are standing by at the entry and exit doors of art schools. Graduating from an art school and the time after that are decisive in defining whether art becomes a profession or not.

Realization of being an artist is typically related to education or training in one way or another, and it not only shows direction for future life planning but also opens up a new horizon of possibilities in the artist's life. This is clearly different from the realization of athletes as with them, the realization rather excludes many other options and ties the young athlete even stronger to the world of sports – despite the fact that the timing of the realization is fairly similar in the two groups, around mid-teen years. Realization is the starting point of the relationship to artistic work to become more vocational. Vocation is not understood here in the sense of calling, as something supernatural or spiritual, but as the relationship to work. Work becomes a passion and the artist hopes that he or she can keep on doing it as long as possible (see also Røyseng et al. 2007).

Time and place, i.e. the Finnish society in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, provides a framework for the growing up of both artists and athletes (see also Hoikkala & Paju 2008). In sports, the influence of neoliberalization – of both the sport policy and the sport system – on the preconditions of sport and exercise is visible. The oldest interviewed athletes had grown up in the spirit of a free multisport culture based on

own initiative whereas the younger athletes had grown up into deliberate sport practice. According to another categorization, those athletes born before 1985 grew up in the last golden years of the civic action in sport and exercise (Ehrlich 2000, iv) whereas the younger generations operate in a quickly commercialising sport and exercise culture, defined by customerships and rising costs (e.g. Zacheus 2010). This is in close connection to urbanisation and the rise of new sports, especially lifestyle sports.

Whilst athletes and sport in general can be approached by the generational thematics of sport (e.g. Zacheus 2008), artists are typically adhered via much wider generation phenomena of their time. In Finland, artistic and creative work have become the mirrors of working life ideals of the younger generations as the content value of work is seen as more important than, for example, the monetary compensation of work (e.g. Tuohinen 2010). At the same time, multiple new values have appeared in the field of art and, for example, the relationship to commercialism is in constant change. The capital-centricness of artistic professions, in terms of education and job opportunities in Helsinki, is an additional feature, too. Different backgrounds and, for example, an ability to draw upon one's rural roots may, in fact, be a good way to distinguish oneself.

When talking about success in sport or art, we cannot omit the role of chance. An aspiring athlete naturally tries to avoid unfortunate coincidences and maintain symmetry in life. In art, chance may play a significant role; who surfaces as well as when and why, often depends on chance or coincidences. Artistic fields are insecure in many ways, financially or otherwise, and chance always plays a role in, for example, the continuation of making one's living as an artist.

The role of chance was also emphasized in the interviews of those athletes who had dropped out. One unfortunate coincidence, an injury or something else, could stop a promising career. On the other hand, many had dropped out of sports because they wanted to do something else in life – in other words, the strongly normative nature of sport did not appeal. Another underlined feature was the exceptional amount of discipline, ambition and rationality needed in sport. Without these qualities, reaching the top becomes improbable. Discipline and commitment in the artist's work were brought up, too, as many interviewees stressed that what they do is 'so crazy' that you really have to believe in it and work very hard for it if you want to succeed.

In addition to dropout athletes, multicultural athletes constituted their own 'micro' research data within the athlete interviews. Their life stories were different from those of the native Finns. The role of the family was equally important in the stories of multicultural athletes but there was also pluralism in their family backgrounds. Whereas some parents went as far as pushing their children to sports, others didn't even know that instructed sport activities exist. Racism was another important theme in the interviews of these athletes. Most of the interviewed multicultural athletes, especially those with a black skin, had experienced it. To most athletes, however, multiculturalism was seen as an asset and it should be seen as such especially from the perspective of elite sports. The theme clearly calls for some further research.

Some additional themes have been discussed in the two other publications of this research project published in Finnish (Piispa & Salasuo 2014; Salasuo & Piispa & Huhta

2015) but were left out of this book for lack of space. As for the artists, the growth stories of the 29 interviewed artists could be roughly divided into four type stories of artistic growth. The most frequent was the *normal story* where the artist typically came from a culturally inclined home and life had, in a relatively linear way, led to artisthood. In the *drifting stories*, the family background was drawing upon culture as well but the realization of one's own artisthood had taken place much later, after a long search. In the *independent stories*, the influence of the family background was weaker whereas the determinedness of the artist himself played a more significant role. In the *chance stories*, the importance of family background was equally little but, instead of own agency, chance and coincidences played an important role in embarking on an artistic career.

Similar type stories could not be established with the athletes. However, clear division lines became visible during the analysis of the mastery phase in sport. The most significant of those included the categorization into team sports, traditional individual sports and lifestyle sports and the options they offer for making a living, and the importance of gender. One of the most central observations is that the elite is very narrow in basically any sport and, behind that, there is a great number of 'workers and achievers of sport'. Only the 'elite of the elite' athletes can have really high income levels. Most athletes' careers are financially insecure and they are mostly just making the ends meet – from a life course perspective, (elite) athleticism can be considered as a risk. The Finnish sport grant system evens out the differences to some extent but it mainly serves traditional individual sports athletes in Olympic sports. It also evens out the existing big gender differences as a very limited share of professional athletes are women (Jarvie 2006, 307–312; Lämsä 2014).

Lifestyle sports (e.g. Wheaton 2004) and their athletes offer another approach to (elite) sports. Nearly all lifestyle sports athletes had other jobs beside sport and they were happy with it. To them, sport is an essential element of their lifestyles but they also enjoy other things in life. Their work was typically related to their sport which relieved pressure from sport and from succeeding in it – and guaranteed fun. Lifestyle sport athletes constitute an interesting interface between the artists and the athletes. Similarly to artists, the contents of their work and their 'love of sport' were important to them. Their careers were also not so restricted by normative transitions and phases but were more liberal. Also the meaning of aesthetic values is important in lifestyle sports.

In art, a certain narrowness of the elite could be observed, similar to sports, but it's more difficult to locate because the artists are part of the 'normal' working life. Thus a part-time artist can be seen as an artist similarly to a full-time colleague who lives on grants, whereas in elite sports, the elite is easier to distinguish – though not always that easy. In any case, many artists emphasized of how 'convenient' it is in sports, to be able to measure and compare with objective indicators not only the performances but also individual athletes. In art, ambivalence, changing judgements and a certain aesthetic vagueness are always present.

In this world of artists' insecurity, a central indicator of success is the ability to even work as an artist, in the first place. Important attributes include internal rewards, recognition and reasonableness. Aspiring for success in one's own work is important, but "to

make good art", not aspiring for success as such – it follows if it follows (see also Bourdieu 1996). Secondly, an artist wants to be recognised for his or her own work – at least by a reasonable pay with which to continue that work (see also Julkunen 2008). Thirdly, success is defined as something very reasonable: a peace of mind and the possibility to do something that you love, i.e. to follow your vocation.

In elite sports, the goals are defined partly in the same way, partly very differently. Three different ethoses were recognized in the elite athletes' interviews: a vocational ethos, a work ethos and a recreational ethos. The first one, combining enjoyment, the desire to develop and the competitive instinct was the most common. In the work ethos, hard work and success, instead of enjoyment, are relevant. The recreational ethos is the opposite; sport and exercise are enjoyed as leisure activities contrary to competition but there's also a possibility of making a living as an athlete. (See also Carless & Douglas 2012.)

The research themes opened up two very different perspectives into the life courses of today's youth in two different walks of life. Mythic perceptions and status values are connected to success and reputation in both of them (see e.g. Bloom 1985b; Ericsson 1996a). The original research idea was to analyse the 'paths' of success in sport and then collect another research data on artists, for comparison. In the end, the research data on artists gained in importance and became much more than just a comparison interface. It became a study of its own, with its own research questions and paradigms. At the same time, it was connected to very different research traditions compared to the study on athletes – and also to much more established ones, at least in the Finnish context.

Thus the study on artists became a study of its own and offered even stronger comparison point than originally intended. Being a professional artist is in many ways unusual and exceptional but still it's a culmination of ideals of a number of generations. It is very differently connected to the working life of young people than being an athlete. As a consequence, artists seem a very 'normal' group of their generation, at least compared to elite athletes. The unusual nature of the career in elite sports was emphasized through this mirroring interface and, at the same time, it underlined the significance of the artist data as part of the research project. An athlete's career which in many ways alienates the young athlete from the normal society does not, however, take place in a vacuum – reality is right outside the athlete's everyday life, influencing it in many ways. Research on artists played an important role in defining this reality and afterwards it is legitimate to say that the order of publication of these two studies was a good choice from the perspective of the research project as a whole. The study on artists was conducted and published first, offering a solid comparison point to the study on athletes and a perspective into the realization of the life courses of two different sets of successful young people of similar age. The final result is, cliché as it may be, more than the sum of its parts.

Maybe the decisive difference between these two walks of life, at least when it comes to success, is the strongly normative character of sports and the fact that it has to, in one way or another, be started at a fairly young age. In this respect, from our research data only classical music can be paralleled to sports – of other arts some types of dance such as ballet may very well fit in this category, too. Classical music, figure skating, ballet, gymnastics etc. offer interesting interfaces between sports and art which could very well be researched

and compared more. On average, becoming an artist is a much less disciplined and less normative process where an individual's development is slow and unsteady. With the exception of the 'early specialization arts' listed above, initiation into arts can occur at any time. For example, one can aspire to be a writer at basically any age. As Mikko Piispa wrote (2013d, 152) in the interim report of the study: "being an artist doesn't follow your body clock because cultivating mind, thoughts and ideas takes time". One of the fundamental differences between arts and sports is located exactly in the concept of time: time is always against the athlete whereas, in arts, time is on the artist's side.

There are certainly some clear similarities, too. These include the importance of family and the demands of determination and hard work. Many artists thought they have the 'mind of an athlete' in aspiring to continuous development and always competing against themselves. Both groups share a vocational relationship to one's own field although the contents of work are very different. Yet, these similarities do not offer any focal points for the definition of a universal formula for success, quite the opposite. Instead, they suggest that despite certain similarities different fields have their own development paths and structures which are strongly linked to time and place. They have to be analysed in their own contexts which also requires the use of research traditions and the understanding of policy realities.

The two studies offer starting points and ideas for future research and policies. First of all, career research in sports (i.a. Stambulova & Ryba 2014), connected to sports and athletes, offers interesting ideas in this field and the importance of locality emphasized in it is an important dimension to be always kept in mind. This research project offers multiple directions for future research endeavours and hopefully, not only in Finland but also elsewhere, its observations are applied in the best possible way. In addition, this is not only restricted to the perspective of elite sports but, in a wider sense, to the education of children and young people and to the themes related to national health and recreational sports. Consequently, this study also offers many ideas for applications in different policy fields. At the end of the sport study, ten recommendations were put forward (Salasuo, Piispa & Huhta 2015, 314–317). They can be summarised as follows: The sport system always has to be developed on the basis of research knowledge.

1) Broad access to instructed sport activities must be equally guaranteed to all interested children and young people, regardless of parents' income level.
2) Public authorities have to make sure that in public planning and construction all citizens have access to sport and exercise in a way that these two can become a meaningful part of everyday life.
3) The special group of multicultural athletes must be taken into account in sport and exercise, from lower levels to the top – this does not only profit elite sports but also the society as a whole.
4) Diversity and deliberate play must be prioritized in sport and exercise of children and youth until at least the age of 12.
5) The pyramid-like structure of the sport and exercise system where children and young people specialize in different sports at an early age should be abandoned.

6) The selection process of potential elite athletes should be based on procedures of selection and de-selection without aiming at the early identification and development of athletes.
7) From the perspective of the career in elite sports, life outside sports and its transitions and needs have to be better taken into account.
8) The whole system must be based on the principle of collective good, i.e. the societal, educational and national health related good whereas success in elite sports should only be seen as the byproduct of this good work.
9) The rights, freedoms and protection of children must always be taken into account when organizing sport and exercise activities for children and young people.

These recommendations – especially in their original, more elaborate form – offer concrete ideas as to how to develop sport and exercise in Finland. In principle, they could function as the basis of an ideological, national sport and exercise model (e.g. de Bosscher 2006; Huhta & Nipuli 2011), should such a model be built. Regardless whether it is built or not, bringing up these perspectives is necessary because the organization of sport and exercise has been on a very irrational and unstable basis due to the lack of a shared national model and value choices. In other countries, these recommendations may naturally be adapted to existing conditions and policies.

Even though a similar list of recommendations in art has not been made, this study also offers ideas to the needs of cultural policy. However, we have to note that cultural policy in Finland has been more firmly based on research, very differently from sports, and therefore, the need for recommendations is smaller. In any case, the 'recommendation setting' in cultural policy was turned upside down in the end of the research part on artists. The question could be – instead of society demanding 'profit potential' of art, as a producer of welfare services or economic growth, what society could learn from arts and artists? In the neoliberal competition economy resources are scarce and, therefore, we could learn from the artists a 'humbler' logic of success. Success does not necessarily have to be the appreciation of top level performance and winning but also just appreciation of good life, that you can achieve a reasonable standard of living and content to your life by doing the work you love. Spreading such ethos in society and in the working life in a broader sense could prepare us all for the existing and future age of insecurity. At the same time, we could emphasize the values of education, culture, creativity and imagination, which are difficult to find in today's money-oriented society, but the importance of which is not likely to diminish in the future.

In addition to offering ideas to the development of sports and culture and their policy dimensions this research has offered some food for thought for science, too. In sport science, it offers a new perspective and a cornerstone for further research whereas in social scientific art research it can be placed as part of the research tradition, offering an important reference research. In addition to these, the life course analysis used in both studies has proved to be a good working tool for analysing autobiographic interviews. This research approach has connected the research data to a wider societal and cultural landscape without forgetting the importance of agency, choices and social networks, such

as families, for individuals. At the same time, this common method has improved the comparability of research data sets and placed them in a wider context. This method is very appropriate also to further research endeavours or to the repetition of this research setting in other countries and cultures.

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# Appendix 1: interviewed athletes

Interviewed athletes with their main discipline and their most important accomplishments at the time of the interviews. Also mentioned whether they were interviewed as elite athletes or dropouts, if they had multicultural background, and whether they were classified as representatives of traditional individual sports, team sports or lifestyle sports. (F=Female; M=Male.)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Anne Rikala | F | Canoeing | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Olympian, multiple medalist in international championships |
| Anssi Koivuranta | M | Nordic combined | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Medalist in Olympics and World championships |
| Anssi Valtonen | M | Bowling | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | In national junior team |
| Emilia Pikkarainen | F | Swimming | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Olympian, medalist in European championships |
| Erik Eklund | M | MTB-enduro | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Finnish champion |
| Eva Wahlström | F | Boxing | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | European champion in professionals, medalist in international amateur championships |
| Jonathan Åstrand | M | Track and field/ sprint | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Participant in international championships, Finnish champion |
| Juho Kostiainen | M | Taekwondo | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Participant in international championships, Nordic champion |
| Kenneth Sandvik | M | Powerlifting | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Multiple World champion |
| Krista Lähteenmäki | F | Nordic skiing | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Medalist in Olympics and World championships |
| Laura Lepistö | F | Figure skating | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Medalist in World and European championships |
| Marcus Sandell | M | Alpine skiing | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Participant in Olympics and international championships |
| Mari Laukkanen | F | Biathlon | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Participant in Olympics and international championships |
| Markus Puolakka | M | Speed skating | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Olympian |
| Matti Hautamäki | M | Ski jumping | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Medalist in Olympics and World championships |
| Mikko Ilonen | M | Golf | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Golf professional |
| Minna Kauppi | F | Orienteering | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Multiple medalist in international championships, including World Championship |
| Minna Nieminen | F | Rowing | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Medalist in Olympics and World and European championships |
| Pasi Ahjokivi | M | Archery | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Multiple medalist in international championships, including World Championship |
| Pekka Koskela | M | Speed skating | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Medalist in World championships |
| Petra Olli | F | Freestyle wrestling | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Medalist in international junior championships |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rami Hietaniemi | M | Greco-Roman wrestling | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Medalist in World and European championships |
| Roni Ollikainen | M | Track and field/ long jump | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Participant in international championships, Finnish champion |
| Sandra Eriksson | F | Track and field/ steeplechase | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Finnish champion, participant in international championships |
| Satu Mäkelä-Nummela | F | Shooting sport | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Olympic champion |
| Tomi Tuuha | M | Gymnastics | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | European champion, participant in international championships |
| Tommi Pulli | M | Speed skating | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Olympian, medalist in international junior championships |
| Tuula Tenkanen | F | Sailing | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Olympian, medalist in World championships |
| Ville Lång | M | Badminton | Elite athlete | Traditional individual sport | Olympian |
| Anna Westerlund | F | Soccer | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, participant in international tournaments |
| Annika Kukkonen | F | Soccer | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, participant in international tournaments |
| Emilia Nyström | F | Beach volley | Elite athlete | Team sport | Medalist in international championships |
| Hanno Möttölä | M | Basketball | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, participant in international tournaments |
| Juha Lind | M | Ice hockey | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, World champion |
| Jukka Lehtovaara | M | Soccer | Elite athlete | Team sport | National level professional league, played in national team |
| Jukka Raitala | M | Soccer | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, played in national team |
| Katri Nokso-Koivisto | F | Soccer | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, participant in international tournaments |
| Kimmo Muurinen | M | Basketball | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, participant in international tournaments |
| Kristina Herbert | F | Synchronized skating | Elite athlete | Team sport | World champion |
| Leena Puranen | F | Soccer | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, participant in international tournaments |
| Linnea Tamminen | F | Synchronized skating | Elite athlete | Team sport | World champion |
| Maija Saari | F | Soccer | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, participant in international tournaments |
| Matti Oivanen | M | Volleyball | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, participant in international tournaments |
| Niklas Moisander | M | Soccer | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, played in national team |
| Niko Hovinen | M | Ice hockey | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, World champion |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Olli Kunnari | M | Volleyball | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, participant in international tournaments |
| Oscar Hänninen | M | Floorball | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, World champion |
| Riikka Lehtonen | F | Volleyball | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, played in national team |
| Rolf Larsson | M | Bandy | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, medalist in international championships |
| Salla Kyhälä | F | Ringette | Elite athlete | Team sport | World champion |
| Sasu Salin | M | Basketball | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, participant in international tournaments |
| Teemu Pukki | M | Soccer | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, played in national team |
| Teemu Pulkkinen | M | Ice hockey | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, played in national team |
| Teemu Rannikko | M | Basketball | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, participant in international tournaments |
| Tero Tiitu | M | Floorball | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, World champion |
| Tim Sparv | M | Soccer | Elite athlete | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, played in national team |
| Anniina Tikka | F | Breakdance | Elite athlete | Lifestyle sport | Finnish champion, unofficial World champion |
| Arttu Pihlainen | M | Ice cross downhill | Elite athlete | Lifestyle sport | World champion |
| Enni Rukajärvi | F | Snowboarding | Elite athlete | Lifestyle sport | Olympic medalist, World champion |
| Nikolai Alin | M | Skateboarding | Elite athlete | Lifestyle sport | Finnish champion |
| Peetu Piiroinen | M | Snowboarding | Elite athlete | Lifestyle sport | Olympic medalist, World Cup winner |
| Roosa Huhtikorpi | F | Climbing | Elite athlete | Lifestyle sport | Participant in international tournaments, Nordic champion |
| Seppo Paju | M | Disc golf | Elite athlete | Lifestyle sport | European champion, World youth champion |
| Tuomas Kärki | M | Footbag | Elite athlete | Lifestyle sport | World champion |
| Amin Asikainen | M | Boxing | Elite athlete, multicultural | Traditional individual sport | European champion in professionals |
| Nooralotta Neziri | F | Track and field/ hurdles | Elite athlete, multicultural | Traditional individual sport | Participant in international championships, Finnish champion |
| Anni Havukainen | F | Soccer | Elite athlete, multicultural | Team sport | National level, played in national junior team |
| Camilo Miettinen | M | Ice hockey | Elite athlete, multicultural | Team sport | Played in professional leagues |
| Casper Pfitzner | M | Floorball | Elite athlete, multicultural | Team sport | National level, played in national team |
| Efe Evwaraye | M | American football | Elite athlete, multicultural | Team sport | Medalist in European championships, Finnish champion |
| Fiifi Aidoo | M | Basketball | Elite athlete, multicultural | Team sport | Played in national junior team |
| Lum Rexhepi | M | Soccer | Elite athlete, multicultural | Team sport | National level, played in national junior team |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Michaela Moua | F | Basketball | Elite athlete, multicultural | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, played in national team |
| Nora Heroum | F | Soccer | Elite athlete, multicultural | Team sport | National level, participant in international tournaments |
| Nosh A Lody | M | Soccer | Elite athlete, multicultural | Team sport | National level, played in national junior team |
| Orlando Taylor | M | Basketball | Elite athlete, multicultural | Team sport | Played in national junior team |
| Tomi Petrescu | M | Soccer | Elite athlete, multicultural | Team sport | National level, played in national junior team |
| Akim Bakhtaoui | M | Locking dance | Elite athlete, multicultural | Lifestyle sport | Finnish champion |
| Elina Järvinen os. Kettunen | F | Figure skating | Dropout | Traditional individual sport | Olympian |
| Toni Berg | M | Downhill mountain biking | Dropout | Traditional individual sport | Finnish champion |
| Hanna Posa | F | Soccer | Dropout | Team sport | National level, played in national junior team |
| Ida Sundsten | F | Soccer | Dropout | Team sport | National level, played in national team |
| Jarkko Vähäsarja | M | Soccer | Dropout | Team sport | National level, played in national junior team |
| Johannes Westö | M | Soccer | Dropout | Team sport | National level, played in national junior team |
| Kristian Kunnas | M | Soccer | Dropout | Team sport | National level, played in national junior team |
| Nelli Back | F | Soccer | Dropout | Team sport | National level, played in national junior team |
| Ronja Forslund | F | Soccer | Dropout | Team sport | National level, played in national junior team |
| Werner Kaitila | M | Soccer | Dropout | Team sport | National level, played in national junior team |
| Ville Lehtonen | M | Soccer | Dropout | Team sport | National level, played in national junior team |
| Kuutti Huhtikorpi | M | Climbing | Dropout | Lifestyle sport | National level, part of national team |
| Alex Vassiliev | M | Boxing | Dropout, multicultural | Traditional individual sport | Finnish champion |
| Manuela Bosco | F | Track and field/ hurdles | Dropout, multicultural | Traditional individual sport | Finnish champion, Participant in international championships |
| Michael Quarshie | M | American football | Dropout, multicultural | Team sport | Played in professional leagues, medalist in international championships |
| Nanayaw Awuah Addae | M | Basketball | Dropout, multicultural | Team sport | Medalist in Finnish championships, played in national team |
| Ümit Menekse | M | Soccer | Dropout, multicultural | Team sport | Played in national junior team |
| Tung Bui | M | Parkour | Dropout, multicultural | Lifestyle sport | Pioneered parkour in Finland |

# Appendix 2: interviewed artists

In this appendix are all the artists interviewed for this research. Included is also the field(s) of art the interviewee primarily represented when he or she was asked to participate. Nevertheless, majority of them work in multiple fields and in different roles, thus they don't necessarily identify themselves only to these fields. We encourage the readers to look for further information on these artists and their accomplishments, as these are not as easily distinguishable as in sports. (F=Female; M=Male.)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Jasmin Anoschkin | F | Visual arts |
| Laura Birn | F | Theatre and movies |
| Mikko Franck | M | Classical music |
| Roope Gröndahl | M | Classical music |
| Samuli Heimonen | M | Visual arts |
| Hannaleena Heiska | F | Visual arts |
| Vilja-Tuulia Huotarinen | F | Literature |
| Juha Itkonen | M | Literature |
| Sanna Kantola | F | Design |
| Anssi Kasitonni | M | Visual arts |
| Krista Kosonen | F | Theatre and movies |
| Jani Leinonen | M | Visual arts |
| Sami Makkonen | M | Comics |
| Tuomas Milonoff | M | Tv and movies |
| Rauha Mäkilä | F | Visual arts |
| Mazdak Nassir | M | Documentary film |
| Mimosa Pale | F | Visual arts |
| Milla Paloniemi | F | Comics |
| Ari Pelkonen | M | Visual arts |
| Aarni Pennanen | M | Classical music |
| Ari Pulkkinen | M | Video game music |
| Ville Ranta | M | Comics |
| Mika Rättö | M | Popular music |
| Stiina Saaristo | F | Visual arts |
| Paola Suhonen | F | Design |
| Ville Tietäväinen | M | Comics |
| Katja Tukiainen | F | Visual arts |
| Anna Tuori | F | Visual arts |
| Paula Vesala | F | Popular music |

# Appendix 3: interview questions for athletes

(Appendix has been translated from Finnish to English by the authors)
*(Specific questions for dropouts in italic)*

Beginning question
- With your own words and as long as you wish, tell me your life story of athlete

Specific themes/questions

Parents
- Playing and exercising together
- How actively parents were/are involved?
- Mental, financial and other support?
- Feelings of pressure?
- Parent as a coach?
- Parents as athletes themselves?
- How parents reacted on dropping out, did they have any role in it?

Siblings
- Did the do sports?
- Involved in same sports?
- Mutual support/competition?

Environments of growing up
- Physical activity and places for it in the childhood and adolescence?
- Hobbies near home?
- Quality and quantity?
- How you got to your hobbies?

School
- Success?
- Role of teachers?
- School and athletic requirements, how did they coexist?
- Pressures of success and/or sport success?
- Sports related schools and their role?
- Studies alongside with athletic career, your success in them?

Friends
- What role did they have in your athletic lifestyle/hobbies?
- Do you have friends in sports and/or outside it?
- How has sports influenced your relationships?

Youth
- What kind of youth you've had/have?
- Have you been part of some specific youth cultures?
- Did you have other than sports-related hobbies?

Human relationships
- Has your work influenced them?
- Relationships and kids: have they been support/obstacle/etc.?
- "Sports couples"?
- Has sports influenced your family life/possibilities to it?

Coaches
- Relationship between you and your coach(es)?
- Professionality/quality of your coach?
- Flexibility, communication, *open talk on dropping out* etc.?
- Control, authoritarity, lack of confidence etc.?

Costs of your hobbies and athletic career
- Who has paid?
- Has it been tough?
- Have economic problems made you think of quitting?
- Different sources of funding?
- Can you make your living with sports?

Physical activity relationship
- Idols, fandom?
- Watching sports on television, internet etc.?

Identification and development as an athlete
- When did you choose your main discipline?
- When did you quit other sports?
- When did you realize you might have a chance to succeed?
- Have you succeeded at early age? How did it influence your later career?
- How much time have you put in practice? More than others?
- How have the transitions, e.g. moving to a different training group went?
- Psychological growth: goal-setting, evaluating your performance, self-awareness, concentration, planning, long term plans, etc.?
- How has sport influenced your character?

Motivations
- Family demands, friends, getting recognition, winning, pleasure, rebelling, something to get out from home etc...
- How do you define success and what does it mean to you?
- What does winning mean to you? Do you have competitive mentality?
- You prefer to represent yourself, your country, club...?
- Have you had lack of motivation? Why?

Regrets
- If you could choose now, would you try making it again?
- Have you had to give up on something else?
- Do you think you would've made it in other fields of sport/life?
- Injuries and their influence?
- *Dropping out: why?*
- *Lack of time, studies, friends, work, other things...?*
- Have you ever thought of quitting, why?
- What have been reasons of some of your peers that have dropped out?

Future plans
- Life after sports?
- Education and work?
- *How has dropping out influenced your life and plans? Do you miss something, what have you gained?*

**Multicultural athletes: specific questions (among with the aforementioned)**

Acculturation, sports meaning in it
- What did sport mean in your childhood?
- Has your family background influenced your sports hobbies?
- Was it easy to enter? Where did the initiative come from?
- Has sport had influence on learning language, or vice versa?
- Has sport offered other things, such as friends or other hobbies?
- Or further social capitals, or helped gain status in life in general?
- Other aspects of sport and acculturation?
- Has your background benefitted you in other ways, or denied you something?

Racism
- From other players, coaches, audience, organizations etc.?
- More racism in the fields of sport or outside of them?
- How have other people around you reacted/helped you in cases of racism?
- Do you have any procedures in case of racism in your club/sport?

Identity
- Ethnic identity: are you more a Finn or something else?
- National feelings and representing Finland?
- Has somebody ever questioned your right to represent Finland?
- Future plans? Staying in Finland, want to go somewhere else?

# Appendix 4: interview questions for artists

(Appendix has been translated from Finnish to English by the authors)

Beginning question
- With your own words and as long as you wish, tell me your life story of artist

Specific themes/questions

Parents
- Playing together, going to cultural events etc.
- Financial resources and supplying
- Parents working in field of culture?
- Parent as a teacher?
- How active have parents been in your hobbies?
- Emotional support, respect
- Pressure or other negative feedback?
- How the parents have reacted if you've thought about quitting or changing hobbies?

Siblings
- In the same fields?
- Mutual support/competition?

Places for hobbies
- Near home?
- Quality and quantity
- How you got there?

Friends
- Were they interested in arts, did you have an artistic group of friends?
- Has your artistry influenced friend-relationships? Or vice versa?
- Influence of girl-/boyfriends?

Youth
- What kind of youth you've had/have?
- Have you been part of some specific youth cultures?
- Did your artistic hobbies restrict your possibilities to participate in other things?

School
- Success?
- Role of the arts teachers (music, drawing etc.)
- Did arts influence your ability to do school work?
- Art oriented schools or self-learning?

Teaching and learning
- Was it professional/serious, when?
- Freedoms and/or authorities?

Idols and relationship to arts/culture
- The role of idols?
- "Consuming" of arts besides your own career

Costs of your hobbies
- Who paid?
- Ever had financial problems?
- Have you ever doubted whether you can make it financially?

Career
- When did you start/find your own field?
- Did you have to drop out other hobbies, at what age?
- At what age you decided to take on an artistic career? What or who influenced it?

Success and motivation
- How do you define success?
- Is art calling/vocation (kutsumus in Finnish)?
- Making arts as a compulsion?
- Family pressure?
- Respect and encouragement received?
- Competition?
- Pleasure?
- Rebelling?
- Lack of motivation, reason for that?

Regrets
- If you could choose again now, would you choose your career/field?
- Have you had to give up on something?
- Do you think you would have made it in some other field?
- Have you ever thought about quitting?
- What are the reasons behind some of your peers quitting?

Human relationships
- Has your work influenced them?
- Relationships and kids: have they been support/obstacle/etc.?

Developing as an artist
- When did you start to do your thing more goal-oriented?
- At what age you first time got artistic recognition?
- When did you "know" you'd become a professional in your field?
- Have you had some problems that have been difficult to conquer?
- You think you go on until retirement or even beyond?

Psychological development
- Goal-setting and self-evaluation
- Self-awareness, handling of pressures
- Planning ahead, own "training"
- How do you think your profession has influenced you as a human being?
- How big part of your identity artistry is?
- How does it feel like to fail?

The aim of this book is to understand those complex life course mechanisms and processes that have led 78 athletes and 29 young artists to success in 2000s Finland. Besides the successful athletes, the researchers look into the dropout of 18 particularly promising athletes. Furthermore, the research sheds light on the particular challenges faced by athletes with a multicultural background.

The majority of the interviewed athletes and artists had been born and raised in Finland; hence the study's perspective is predominantly domestic. Many of the athletes had continued their careers abroad after having reached the top, yet the essential events of their life courses are located in Finland. The vast international literature on career research of athletes, used along with the research data itself, complements the domestic perspective. As to the artists, the researchers have mainly drawn upon domestic research knowledge.

In this study, the life courses of athletes and artists are reviewed in parallel. Consequently, the reader enjoys a broad insight into the growth and development of Finnish elite athletes in the late 20th and early 21st century Finland. The same applies to the young successful artists, whose life phases are studied from childhood until the present. This study is unique in the international context, as the researchers were able to reach an exceptionally large number of the best Finnish athletes and artists of different fields.

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