

Sponsoring in a Finnish Women's Football Club

Case: Pallokissat Kuopio Ry

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Bachelor's Thesis

10. 1. 2016 **Kuopio** _____

Bachelor's degree (UAS)

SAVONIA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES
THESIS

Abstract

Field of Study Social Sciences, Business and Administration			
Degree Programme Degree Programme in International Business			
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Title of Thesis Sponsoring in a Finnish Women's Football Club - Case: Pallokissat Kuopio Ry			
Date	10.1.2017	Pages/Appendices	70/2
Supervisor(s) Virpi Oksanen, Minna Tarvainen			
Client Organisation/Partners Pallokissat Kuopio Ry			
<p>This thesis studies the challenges of sponsoring in Finnish female football. The aim of this research was to examine the challenges women's football clubs face in sponsorship management and suggest improvements for sponsorship management of Pallokissat Kuopio ry. Pallokissat plays in Naisten Liiga and is one of the biggest football clubs for girls and women in eastern Finland. This research focuses on the viewpoint of the sponsored party but in order to receive relevant and applicable data some viewpoints of sponsors are included. The results of the research are utilized by creating concrete development suggestions for sponsorship management for Pallokissat.</p> <p>The research was implemented by using qualitative methods. Theme interviews were arranged for two Naisten Liiga football clubs and two sponsors. Both parties of a sponsoring contract are interviewed to get objective results about the research topic. All the interviews were individual interviews. Validity and reliability have been ensured by describing practical implementation and progress widely to help the reader to follow the phases of the research. The interviews and interview frames including possible further questions were well planned and the interview situation was practiced beforehand. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.</p> <p>The research indicated that main difficulties in sponsorship in women's football clubs are lack of time and personnel responsible of sponsor management, difficulties of finding the right person from the sponsor company in the recruitment phase and attracting and satisfying sponsors. Cost-effective employment, for example an intern was found as a solution. This extra position would also aid in continuous development of sponsor management. Communication was valued high by the sponsors. By improving communication with regular email briefings, the already existing sponsorships can be developed. The sponsored party must be willing to develop constantly new equivalents for the sponsor in order to differentiate from other organizations. The more the sponsored party can offer for the sponsor, the more resources the sponsor can provide as support.</p> <p>By researching this topic with larger number of interviewees national generalizations can be made. In addition, comparing sponsorships in Finnish women's football to another those in Nordic country new viewpoints and development possibilities could be found. Another interesting view point for further research would be to study how the 'third party', the audience and people connected to women's football, affects sponsorships.</p>			
Keywords Football, women's football, sponsorship, Pallokissat Kuopio Ry			

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1 INTRODUCTION

Female football is one of the fastest growing sports in both, worldwide and in Finland. It is also the most popular sport among Finnish girls (Paavola 2007) and the number of players grow each year. (Suomen Palloliitto 2016) Even though most of the women's football clubs are registered associations instead of companies, money is needed to cover the costs and to attract the best players possible. Sponsors are the main source of funding for Finnish women's football clubs. (Pyykönen 18 October 2016, Virta 3 October 2016) In recent years the competition of sponsors has been extremely tight because of the unsecure financial state of the world. The unstableness has also reflected to Finland. One of the challenges in sponsoring is how to assure the sponsors and sign long-lasting contracts that benefit both parties. (Hakola 2016) The sponsor may not know about the benefits of a well succeeded sponsorship but on the other hand, an unsuccessful sponsorship might be harmful for both the sponsor and the sponsored party. (Sponsor Insight 2013, Mainostajienliitto 2015) This research is based on finding solutions to how improve sponsor management in a Finnish women's football club.

Sponsoring is a relevantly young form to market. It was established as a part of marketing plan among Finnish companies in the 20th century. (Tuori 1995, 3) Although sponsoring has already been studied rather widely the studies are incoherent. Even the term 'to sponsor' has various definitions depending on the research and the context. Therefore, the need for research is large in both theoretical and empiric sides. Finnish football sponsoring has not been studied broadly and most of the studies found were from the viewpoint of the sponsor, not of the football club. A few previous theses were found considering men's football sponsoring in Finland. Hurri and Päivelin (2013) studied culture and sport sponsoring in Finland and internationally, but the focus was on the differences between culture and sport sponsoring and on the differences between Finnish and international sponsoring. Alopaeus (2014) researched the role of sponsorship in a Finnish men's football club, HJK. This bachelor's thesis was the most relevant found, since it was on the viewpoint of the football club. Because there is a financial gap between women's and men's football clubs and there are differences in business entities these above mentioned researches cannot be generalized to women's football.

This research will focus on a new viewpoint, female football, which makes it interesting to examine and forms a base for further researches on this field. This study will be made on the point of view of the sponsored party but it will include some viewpoints of the

sponsors, since sponsorship is a two-way co-operation. The results of the research are aimed for one football club and to their specific needs. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized nationally.

The subject of the thesis was chosen because of an own interest of the researcher in sports marketing, sponsoring and football. The need for research was noticed, because of an annual trouble in sponsors recruitment and the struggle of gathering enough funds for the up-coming season especially in Kuopio. The topic is rather familiar for the researcher because of her several years' experience as a player in the case company. Besides the experience as a player, some experience the researcher has gathered in the sponsor recruitment process, when acquired an individual player sponsor for herself every year. Even though female football is the most popular sport among girls in Finland the media visibility is quite poor, which causes some difficulties in sponsor gathering. (Pyykönen 2016) Also, in Kuopio there are three other clubs who play in the national championship league and they all are competing of the same sponsors. These above-mentioned issues intrigued the researcher to study how a Finnish female football club could differentiate from other organizations recruiting sponsors and how the already existing sponsorships could be developed.

1.1 The aim of the research

The aim of the thesis is to find out what special characteristics sponsor recruitment has in Finnish women's football and to develop the sponsor recruitment process and already existing sponsorships of Pallokissat Kuopio Ry. The thesis cannot be reflected to event sponsoring or culture sponsoring since in this research the focus is on sponsorships between a women's football club and organization or company.

The subject is examined by literature, interviews and by observations and analysis by the researcher. The main focus is on the view point of the case company but as sponsorship is a co-operation of two organizations, also viewpoints of sponsors are included in the research. One aspect is how the recruitment process has developed during the years and how well the recruiter knows what sponsors require and expect in return for sponsoring. One-year sponsorship contracts are the most common type among women's football clubs. This forces the clubs to fight for new sponsors every year. If the contracts were longer-term, would it benefit more both parts of the contract? The fact that a large number of women's football clubs have a financial situation of zero profit intrigued the researcher to try to find out if it was possible to turn the zero-profit

business into a business with a healthier financial situation by just having a more means and ideas for sponsoring.

The main research problem of the thesis is: *how to develop sponsorships and the recruitment process in Pallokissat Kuopio ry*. The answers to the main problem are found by combining the answers of three other research problems:

- *What is the meaning of sponsors for women's football clubs at the moment?*
- *What is the added value women's football clubs can give to the sponsor?*
- *What are the different development possibilities in sponsorships in women's football clubs?*

These questions were chosen as the research questions in order to get comprehensive information about sponsoring and its suitable forms in women's football, and to understand the importance of turning sponsoring more into co-operation of two organizations instead of charity in order to develop a successful guideline for Pallokissat Kuopio ry. The results of this research can also be exploited in up-coming sponsor recruitment negotiations and to deepen the already existing sponsorships. By deepening the co-operation between the sponsor and the club, new added value can be brought for both, for the sponsor and for the club itself. The added value created for the sponsor can be used as a competitive advantage compared to other organizations. Companies choose the object for sponsoring to fit their needs and criteria. Is there some similarities companies want in return of the financial help and how could Pallokissat differentiate from other possible candidates for sponsoring?

1.2 Structure of the research & definitions of main concepts

After introduction, which includes the base information of the research, aims and viewpoints, definitions of main concepts, introduction of the case company and history and present state of Finnish female football, sponsoring is introduced widely. First, different definitions of the term are presented. The chapter continues by defining the differences to charity and marketing. Next, different sponsoring forms, sport sponsoring and new ways to sponsor in addition to the future of sponsoring are introduced. Last the aims and sponsoring in Finland are presented. The third chapter introduces the research methods used, and offers general information about qualitative research and focused interview. In addition, the benefits and risks of qualitative research are presented for the reader. The chapter continues with presentations of the interviewed organizations and tools used in focused interview. Next, the themes and limitation of the research are

introduced. Last, research principles: validity, reliability and ethicalness are introduced and evaluated. In the fourth chapter the interview data is presented and analyzed by the research questions and viewpoints of the research. The last chapter offers development suggestions for the case company in addition to discussion and evaluation of the research process. In addition, the learning process of the researcher is evaluated and suggestions for further research is presented.

There is no exact definition for **sponsorship**, since the popularity and growth of sponsorship has bred new aspects. Though, the term has been widely used for a long period of time to reflect co-operative actions between companies and sports. Two basic definitions for sponsorship are Daniel Tuori's "Sponsor rents the image of the object and utilizes the image in marketing." (Tuori 1995 7-9; Alaja 2000, 104) Cornwell and Maignan defined sponsorship as an act with two main activities: 1) an exchange between a sponsor and sponsored party whereby the latter receives a fee and the former obtains the right to associate itself with the activity sponsored and 2) the marketing of the association by the sponsor. (Cornwell & Maignan 1998)

Co-operative partnership is a voluntary co-operation between two or more companies that includes exchange, sharing common information and reaching towards common goals. Co-operation partnership may be strategic long-term cooperation or a short-term operative cooperation.

Sports marketing can be divided into two main groups: Marketing by sports and marketing sports itself (Shannon 1999, 517). Marketing sports may include marketing of sports events or equipment to fans and amateurs. Marketing by sports includes marketing 3rd hand non-sports related services and products by athletes or sports events. (Ratten & Ratten 2011, 651). Therefore, marketing by sports can be called sponsoring.

Translations of the Finnish abbreviations and names used in the thesis

Ab: Limited liability company

Oy: Limited liability company

Ry: Registered association

Mainostajien liitto: The Association of Finnish Advertisers

Naisten Liiga: Highest national league for women in Finland

Suomen Palloliitto: The Finnish Football Association

Veikkausliiga: Highest national league for men in Finland

1.3 Introduction of the case company, Pallokissat Kuopio Ry

The Co-operative organization in this research is Pallokissat, Kuopio ry (registered association). It was founded 21.1.2007 by the name of KMF Juniorit ry and later the name was changed into its final form Pallokissat, Kuopio ry. Pallokissat is one of the biggest football club for girls and women in eastern Finland. In August 2016, the club had 540 registered female football players, over 60 officials as coaches, directeur sportifs and trainers. In addition, the club employs a full-time training manager, executive director, head coach and talent coach and has an office at the football stadium of Kuopio. Pallokissat is a member of Suomen Palloliitto (The Football Association of Finland) and Pohjois-Savon Liikunta ry (The Sports Association of Northern Savo). The vision of the club is: "The functional area of Kuopio is one of the best concentrations for girls' and women's football in the Nordic countries." The aim of the club is to develop players into skillful players for Naisten Liiga and national team. Pallokissat also wants to take care of all the players coming to the club and offer an opportunity to play football. (Pallokissat 2016)

Pallokissat has been able to grow the number of registered players almost every year. In the end of the establishing year 2007, Pallokissat had 222 registered players and the growth was steady till the year 2011, when they reached the highest number of players so far, 410 registered players. In 2012 the number of players decreased to 336 but already in 2014 Pallokissat had topped the earlier record with their 420 registered players that year. In 2015 and 2016 the trend of registered players has been upward. In 2016 Pallokissat has the highest record of registered players in their history, 540 players. (Pallokissat 2016)

Pallokissat has different, registered teams for each age group as well as two women's teams and a non-registered team for mature women. The women's A-team play in the Finnish champions league, Naisten Liiga, and the other women's team in Naisten Kakkonen, the 3rd league in Finland. (Pallokissat 2016) The squad of the A-team consists mainly of players from Kuopio and its surrounding towns. Only 4 out of a 23-player squad has moved to Kuopio to play from further Finland and only one player is a foreigner. Pallokissat has long traditions in developing own junior players to fulfill the demands playing on the highest national level has and to bring up own juniors into the A-team. Since most of the squad is own juniors there is not as much costs as if the

squad was formed of bought foreign players. The annual budget of Pallokissat is somewhat 100 000 euros. (Pallokissat 2016; Pyykönen 18 October 2016)

1.4 Women's football in Finland

In 1971 an invitation tournament for six women's football clubs was arranged by Iltta-Sanommat tabloid paper. Soon after that a cup-tournament, Suomen Cup (the Cup of Finland), was arranged by Suomen Palloliitto and 51 women's football clubs took part in the cup. The first time women competed for the Finnish championship in Finland was also in 1971. The same year female players were registered for the first time. In 1971 there were 987 female players. (Paavola 2007) These facts make the year 1971 extremely important in the history of Finnish women's football. In the following years, several regions took competitive women's football under the activities of the area. (Tuunainen 2007, 235-253)

Years 1971-1981 were those of enthusiasm of a new sport and women's football started to get organized. (Vehviläinen, Ikonen 2009) In 1980 a female committee was established to develop women's football in Finland, because the development was far behind compared to other nations. In 1980 the focus was solely in southern Finland and only 11 regions had female clubs. In addition, the amount of registered female players was rather low. (Tuunainen 2007, 235-253)

Between the years 1982-1991 women's football started to stabilize its place as an important part of Finnish sports culture. (Vehviläinen, Ikonen 2009) In the 20th century Suomen Palloliitto started to pay more attention to women's football and local clubs created positive alacrity which tempted more and more girl and female players into football. At that time there were 90 women's and 280 girls' football teams competing in Finland. In addition, 50 women worked as football coaches. Year 1991 was named as 'Tytöfudisvuosi' (Girl Football Year) and Elisabeth Rehn, the secretary of defense at that time, was chosen as the patron. (Tuunainen 2007, 235-253)

In the 21st century football has become the most popular team sport in Finland. Football has become a pro sport and Finnish female players in growing numbers go to play pro-football as their living abroad. (Vehviläinen, H, Ikonen, H 2009) Different projects (F.U.N project, regional teams) have raised the knowledge of female football in Finland. The media has shown growing interest in female football, also the 2009 UEFA Women's Euro 2009 tournament was arranged in Finland. (Suomen Palloliitto 2006)

In 1988 Suomen Palloliitto started to register female players and that year there were 4420 female players. In ten years the amount of female players had doubled and in 1988 there were 12235 registered female players in Finland. The success of the national team influences the interest and popularity in all sports. In 2005 the Women's national team succeeded well in the Euro 2005 championship. The amount of registered female players jumped from 19944 to 22 364 from 2005 to 2006. (Korsberg 2016). Still the amount of registered female players was rather small compared to other Nordic countries. For example, in Sweden there were about 100 000 female football players in 2007. In addition, Damallsvenskan (women's Swedish championship league) is noted as one of the best women's leagues in the world. (Paavola 2007)

1.5 Women's football in Finland today

In 2016 ten female football clubs played in Naisten Liiga, the highest national league in Finland, and at the end of 2015 there were 29 072 registered female football players in Finland. The trend is upward and year by year the amount of female football players has risen. (Korsberg 2016) The average amount of audience in the upper finals of 6 teams in 2016 was 204 persons. (Palloliitto 2016) The national visibility in television is rather poor in Finland, the games are not shown in television, except for three or four games out of 30 per season. The poor visibility in television has an effect on the amount of audience in games, because a large number of people are not familiar with women's football. Visibility in television could offer an inspiration to go and see games live. Television visibility would be an important advantage in sponsor negotiations, since clubs could offer national visibility in television in addition to the local visibility.

In Naisten Liiga the number of audience has decreased slightly from season 2015. In 2016 the rating was 192 persons per game and the total amount of audience in 117 games was 22 613. In 2015 the average audience rating was 193 and the total amount of audience 22 414. The league is divided into three parts: regular season, upper finals and lower finals. In 2016 the regular season, with 90 games, had more audience than in 2015. The decrease in the amount of audience happened in upper finals, where the games were not as exciting as in 2015 and clubs were not able to get as much people to come to the games live. The greatest audience average was 297 (HJK). The audience rating of Pallokissat has followed the decreasing trend of Naisten Liiga. In 2016 the total audience rating was 263. In regular season the rating was 267, but the unsuccessful upper finals with audience rating of 243 decreased the total rating of the whole season.

In 2015 the total rating was 272, which is 5 persons more in the audience per game compared to season 2016. The decrease in the amount of audience in 2016 can also be explained by the unsuccessful upper finals. In 2016 Pallokissat lost the chance to win a medal in the beginning of upper finals, whilst in 2015 Pallokissat were competing of silver until the last game of the season. (Palloliitto 2016)

In Veikkausliiga, the men's championship league in Finland, the audience rating has decreased slightly compared to year 2015. In 2016 the average was 2551 people and 2528 people in 2015. Altogether during the 198 games the total amount of audience was 505123 people. The greatest audience average was 5101 (HJK). (Karppinen 2016)

As seen from the amount of audience in each game, gap between Naisten Liiga and Veikkausliiga is rather large. Besides the amount of people watching the games, the budgets and the earnings of players vary largely between men and women. Men's clubs are usually joint-stock companies with managing directors and employed staff while women's clubs are associations and volunteers work with small financial compensations.

2 MARKETING BY SPONSORING

This chapter introduces generally sponsoring and sports sponsoring. In the first chapter the different definitions of sponsoring are introduced. After that the differences of sponsoring compared to charity and marketing are defined. The chapter continues with a deeper review to sport sponsoring, changes in sponsoring, different ways to sponsors and new forms of sponsoring. Next, the problems and challenges sponsoring may entail are discussed in addition to the aims of sponsoring. Last, specific characters in Finnish sponsoring and the current situation of Finnish sponsoring are presented.

2.1 Definition of sponsorship

In the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2016) sponsor is defined as “a person or organization that pays the cost of an activity or event (such as a radio or television program, sports event, concert etc.) in return for the right to advertise during the activity or event.” (Merriam-Webster dictionary 2016) Sponsorship cannot be defined by just one right definition. It could be extremely challenging or even wrong to use only one definition. (Olkkonen 2001, 311). Occasionally the term is perceived in a negative way, because often sponsoring is conceived as uncompensated form of support, even referred as charity. In reality sponsoring is co-operation that is beneficial for both of the parties. In literature the definitions of sponsorship have traditionally based on the side of the sponsor but modern mindset demands sponsoring to be treated from the sides of both parts of the sponsorship agreement.

According to Renard & Sitz (2011) Sleight introduced the definition of sponsorship already in 1989 as business co-operation between funder or resource provider and a single event or organization, which offers some marketing privileges for the sponsor. In the same publication, it is told that McCracken notes the risk of mistaking the definition with just exchange process. (Renard & Sitz 2011, 121).

Alaja (2000) introduces Lipponen's (1997) definition that fits the sport's point of view in sponsoring. Sponsoring is a way for a company to communicate positively with its target group by borrowing the positive image of the sport. Sponsoring is a part of the marketing communication of the company and it cannot be separated from the entirety of marketing communication. The sponsored party, a sport club for example, receives competitive advantage from the co-operation. The sponsored party can be either an athlete, sport event, sport organization or other target related to sports. Sponsoring

should be beneficial for both parties, for the sponsor company and the sponsored object. In addition, the sponsoring must be ethically sustainable. (Lipponen 1997, according to Alaja 2000, 105; 2001, 23)

Another, up to date descriptive and short definition for sponsorship would be co-operation, hence deepest down sponsorship is co-operation between two organizations, who work towards common benefit and goals. A company gives financial or other tangible support for an event or organization, which is not directly involved with the actions of the company. Sponsorship may be either short-term projects or intense long-term co-operations. By renting the image of the sponsored party the sponsor gets certain privileges but in order to get the most benefit, the company must actively take advantage of those privileges and include sponsoring into other marketing communication. (Tuori 1995, 7-9; Alaja 2000, 104) The definition of Bergström and Leppänen (2003, 934) also confirms the thoughts of Alaja (2000) and Tuori (1995). They define sponsoring as renting or buying the image of the person, organization or other objects and using it in the marketing of the company. Bergström and Leppänen remind that sponsoring is not charity, instead it is financial or other support given to a target, which benefits both of the parties.

The most suitable definition for this research is the Alaja and Lipponen's (2000, 105; 2001, 23) definition from the sport's point of view and the above-mentioned definition, which emphasizes the meaning of the co-operation and counter value. In this research, when the studied subject is the problems and challenges in sponsor recruitment, the needs and images of the sponsor companies and equality of the both parts are essential. Companies want to get something in return for their financial support and today many organizations prefer terms co-operation and partnership instead of sponsoring in order not to confuse the term with charity. Even though, in this research terms 'sponsoring', 'partnership' and 'co-operation' are used as synonyms.

2.2 The differences compared to charity and marketing

Although to some extent sponsoring is often perceived as financing and supporting the sponsored party without any compensation, sponsoring differs from charity and marketing in various ways. From the sponsor's point of view charity differs from sponsoring in the following ways: first, charity is not based on a written or an oral contract. Second, while charity is only a one-way action and the one practicing charity does not await or require benefit or publicity, sponsorship demands actions vice versa.

Third, in charity the publicity of the support is not essential while in sponsoring it has an important role. Fourth, marketing objectives are not a part of charity unlike in sponsoring, in which the marketing objectives are visible and important. (Tuori 1995, 7; Vuokko 2010, 222-223) In sponsorship the sponsor awaits something in return for the money or other support given. (Vuokko 1993, 73). The table below shows the main factors that differentiate sponsoring from charity in a simple way. In order to emphasize the co-operative actions of both parts in the contract, large number of companies rather use the term co-operation instead of sponsoring today. (Oesch 2002, 21; Meenaghan & O'Sullivan 1999)

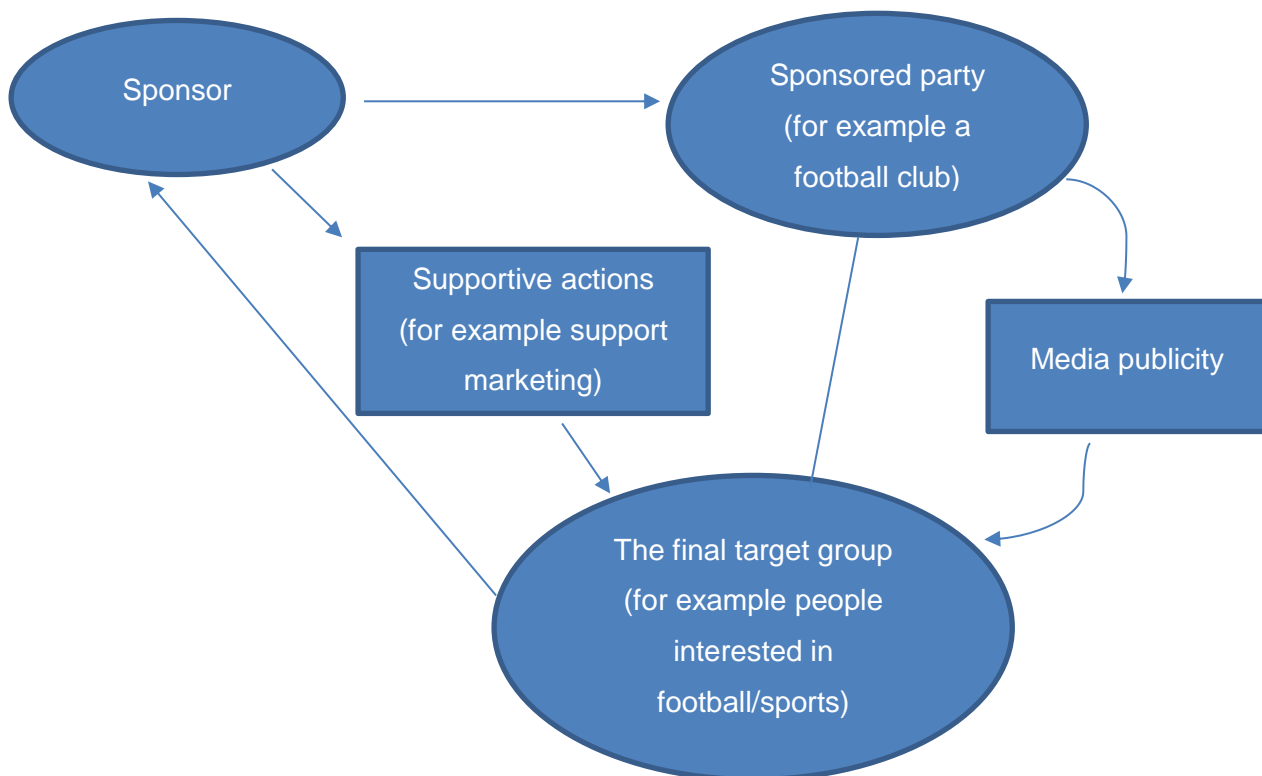


FIGURE 1. The indirect mode of action of sponsoring. (Varied from Vuokko 2010, 229)

On the point of view of the sponsored party: first, in sponsoring the sponsored party has to be able to show they can give some equivalent instead of just accepting the donation. Second, an oral or written contract should be made, which indicates the rights and responsibilities of both parties. Third, publicity is a part of sponsoring, therefore the sponsored party must take care of the challenges and demands considering publicity. Fourth, because the sponsor wants to take advantage of the sponsorship in their marketing, the sponsored party should be able to offer these kinds of opportunities and to be ready to change also own operations according to these needs. (Vuokko 2010, 223)

Compared to marketing sponsoring affects with mental images and associations, while marketing gives a straight message or urge for precise consumer group to consume a product. Marketing is paid, impersonal communication directed for large target groups, that a company contacts through different media in order to advance the demand of their products or services or to advance factors that have impact on the demand. (Vuokko 1993, 92) Sponsoring affects consumers indirectly and delicately by combining the sponsor and the object. (Valanko 2009, 52; Meenaghan 2001, 101). In marketing the image and features of media are known beforehand and the organization can predict and supervise the actions easier than in sponsoring. (Tuori 1995, 7)

2.3 Sponsoring forms

The ways of sponsoring vary depending on the needs of the parties and the aspirations set. Different sponsoring ways and models are divided into subgroups: main sponsorship, main co-operation partnership, side sponsorship, co-sponsoring and co-branding, project sponsorship, media sponsorship, functional sponsorship, license purchase, product sale, Pro-bono partnership and product license contracts. (Valanko 2009, 66-72)

Main sponsor is the main co-operative partner for the organization or event. Main sponsor receives special treatment but on the other hand offers largest investments and support for the sponsored party. It is important that the investment is beneficial and the company gets equivalent. Therefore, strategical details and common aspirations are planned already in the beginning of the co-operation. On the other hand, because of the greatest visibility main sponsor has also the greatest risk in situations where the image of the sponsored party damages somehow. (Valanko 2009, 66) For example credit card company Visa threatened to cancel the sponsoring contract with the international governing body of association football (FIFA), if FIFA does not act quickly to improve their working culture after the 2015 bribe scandal. Visa Inc. is one of the main sponsors and has sponsored FIFA from year 2007 and renewed the contract to last till year 2022 just before the bribe scandal. (Lehti, 2015)

The sponsored party can have many official main co-operation partners and the quality of the co-operation depends on the investment-output relation. In some cases, there is only one official co-operation partner separated from other sponsorships and partnerships. (Valanko 2009, 66-67) For example in 2016 the Finnish Pink Ribbon

foundation has 12 main co-operation partners besides other co-operative organizations: AIG, Kalevala Jewelry, Lindex, Lumene, Pirkka, K-Citymarket, K Supermarket, S-Market, ABC Market, Alepa, Prisma, Sale and Sokos. With main co-operation partners the activities executed are wider and longer-term than with other co-operation partners. (Roosanauha 2016)

Side sponsoring requires own activity from the sponsor, since in this kind of sponsorship the sponsor is in equal position with other sponsors and partners. The sponsor needs to work to be distinctive and remembered. (Valanko 2009, 68)

Co-sponsoring and co-branding are both variations of main sponsoring and side sponsoring. In co-sponsoring different companies issue common equal contribution or investment for sponsoring. In these cases, the companies establish a joint sponsoring contract. In joint sponsoring contracts the companies wish to maximize the odds to get their brands, products and services into the awareness of customers and interest groups. Because companies work in co-operation there is no official main sponsor and the risks and responsibility is divided between the companies. (Valanko 2009, 68)

Project sponsoring is a sponsoring form in which an organization supports a specific project. The duration of the sponsorships is specific, from the beginning of the project to the end. Since projects may not always have a clear schedule the duration of the sponsoring contract might sometimes be hard to predict beforehand. (Valanko 2009, 68)

Media sponsorship is used to reach publicity and media visibility. Usually the sponsored party receives visibility in different medias for example time on television or radio, an article in a magazine et cetera and in return the sponsored party provides the sponsor with perks agreed in the contract. International media sponsor contracts are lucrative, since they reach large audience effortlessly and often are extremely beneficial for both of the parties. (Valanko 2009, 68)

Functional sponsoring refers to natural and logical actions in a project or co-operation. Functional sponsorships are usually long-term and continuous, which reflects on the aspirations set for the sponsorship. Locality is often emphasized and this form of sponsoring is often used in local communities. (Valanko 2009, 69)

License purchase is referred to actions where big, well and widely known organizations sell the privilege to use their trademark for a sponsor and the sponsor pays for the

usage of the trademark. The one bought the license is able to gain an advantage over an already valued and well recognized image of a trademark in its own marketing communication. Ready built images may be used to enhance sales and marketing. (Valanko 2009, 70)

Product selling in events is an efficient way to sponsor, when the products are targeted in a right way for the audience of the event. Also, when the product is seen in its natural milieu and circumstances, the product exhibitions and layouts are an effective way to sponsor. (Valanko 2009, 70)

Pro-Bono co-operation is a great way to operate when the sponsored party needs the support of the sponsor in their actions. Is not financial help, instead the sponsor gives their help as work performance for example, and in that way help the sponsored party to continue operating. The sponsors do not await anything special in return and the co-operation is almost like donation. Pro-bono co-operations are becoming more common. (Valanko 2009, 70) In 2015 Zlatan Ibrahimović did a widely noted pro-bono co-operation with the United Nations World Food Programme, in order to enhance awareness of famine around the world. (Vilen 2015)

In **license contracts** a product, trademark, theme or character is licensed for the sponsor. The sponsor can use the licensed object in its own marketing and sales promotion, which will help the company to enhance their own brand and notability. (Valanko 2009, 71) An example of a product license contract is the contract between Lumene and Angry Birds trademark. Lumene uses the trademark in the packages of their cosmetics and pays license payments for the trademarks owner, Rovio Entertainment Ltd.

When choosing the type of sponsorship, it is important to clarify the needs of both parties, and to find out the possible advantages & disadvantages. After that the suitable contract type can be decided. Often, the sponsorship contracts may include many mixed types of those listed above instead of just one. (Valanko 2009, 71-72)

2.4 Sport sponsoring & the changes over the years

Besides the fact that in sport sponsoring the actions and communication links only with sports, sports sponsoring does not differ remarkably from traditional sponsoring. The object of sponsoring in sports may be a single athlete, sports club, event or a sport.

(Wilson 1988, 157) Traditionally sports in Finland are perceived as association operations rather than operations of business. (Koivunen 1999, 5) However the commercialization of sports is generalizing year by year. Sports associations in growing numbers have changed the form of the organization into limited liability company and even single athletes have corporatized their sports actions. (Lappi 2000, 3)

A big advantage in sport sponsoring compared to other sponsoring possibilities is the ethicalness of sports. Fair Play-spirit and honest competition is traditionally connected to athletes. (Holma 2001, 31) On the other hand sports have gone through critical moments because of doubtful scandals of its honesty. Due this decrease in the image of sports, sports have lost some of its competitive advantage concerning fairness and can be connected with some risks. (Hughes & Shank 2005, 207-216) A study by Itkonen, Ilmanen and Matilainen (2005) conforms that idea, 198 Finnish marketing managers and CEO's out of 250 felt that doping is the greatest threat for sponsoring in the future. Another issue discovered is that almost half of the respondents felt that negative images of sports can be a threat. Violence, bribery, frauds and public behavior of athletes were felt doubtful and as an issue that must be considered in sponsoring. Sponsoring single athletes was felt riskier than sponsoring an athletic club. (Itkonen, Ilmanen & Matilainen 2005, 41-44)

Sport sponsoring is not only limited to pro sports and athletes but also support for local sports and smaller sports clubs are included in sponsoring today. Sport sponsorship provides often financial help for the sponsored party, which reduces the financial risks at all levels of sports. (Alaja & Forssel 2004, 23) Sports sponsoring is a way for an organization to communicate with the interest group by taking advantage of the positive image a precise sports event or sport offers. Sport sponsoring has to benefit both the sponsor and the one being sponsored (Alaja 2000, 105).

Sponsoring originates from the United States of America and the earliest forms of sponsoring can be found in the 1950's. The New England Railroad sponsored a sports event, a rowing race between two universities, Yale and Harvard. The New England Railroad promoted the event comprehensively and encouraged people to travel to the event by their trains. Because of the sponsoring, the first ever sports event between two universities was arranged in the United States. (Brooks 1990, 59; Turner 1987, 11) In the beginning, sponsoring focused mainly on big sports events rather than on single athletes or athletic clubs (Pirkola 2008, 4). Ever since sponsoring, especially sports sponsoring, has grown rapidly in numbers. The competition of superiority in sports

between great powers after the World War 2 had a significant role in sports becoming more professional. Professional athletics was born. Sports became more entertaining and companies started to see marketing potential in it. (Cantelon 2005, 59-101)

The sponsoring of major events started in the Amsterdam Olympic Games in 1928 when the Coca-Cola Company sent 1000 cans of their product with the USA sports team to the Olympic games and the company got permission to use the title “the official supplier of Olympic games”. (Brooks 1990, 59) Sports grew rapidly as a part of popular culture after television was invented. After organizations and companies realized the major marketing opportunities this new part of popular culture had, they were willing to take advantage of it. (Horne 2006, 80) Shortly after the first Olympic Games were televised in 1936 sports became more commercialized and companies started to use athletes in their marketing. Soon athletes became superstars combined with specific brand. (Cantelon, 2005, 83-95) Today sponsoring single athletes or clubs has solidified its place as a part of marketing communication of companies (Pirkola 2008, 4).

Sports clothing brands are a great example of well succeeded utilizing of athletes. Nike has used athletes in their marketing for a long period of time. One of the first and most successful ones, was sponsorship with the basketball player Michael Jordan. Jordan aided Nike to rise to the top of sports brands and at the same time the sponsorship made him one of the biggest stars of his era. (Horne 2006 79-83; Klein 2000 60-63)

Another great example of today is the sponsorship between Puma and nine-time Olympic medalist Usain Bolt. In 2004 Puma almost dropped Bolt after not succeeding in 2004 Olympics in Athens but after consideration the then CEO Jochen Zeitz decided to stand up for Bolt in difficult times. In 2016 after dominating sprints for over a decade and becoming one of the most well-known athletes world-wide it can be said the chance Puma took with Bolt paid off and at also the Puma-deal made Bolt a wealthy athlete. (Moodley 2013)

2.5 New sponsoring forms & the future

Social media is one of the most major sources of information for young adults. In 2015 Over 90% of Finnish people use social media actively and only 7.3% of 15-55-year-old Finns had not used social media at all during the last three months. The most popular ones were YouTube, Facebook and WhatsApp. Younger generations use more new

forms of social media like Snapchat, Periscope and Instagram. (MTV, Kurio, Laurea UAS 2015)

When sport sponsors use their own social media page or the one of the sponsored party to advertise or engage consumers, sponsors have to remember that the rules and practices may change depending on the social media provider. Almost all social media providers are organizations, which can practically decide how and in which ways they allow other organizations to take advantage of their pages in improving business. For example, in the beginning Facebook denied companies to set up any contests straight in the company's Facebook page. If a contest was set, Facebook was allowed to delete the Facebook page of the company without further notice. Today the rules of arranging contests are looser and contests can be organized straight on Facebook pages of companies. The only rule is that the contest cannot demand participants to forward the contests onto any other Facebook feed for example by sharing the contest or 'tagging' a friend. (Facebook 2016)

Facebook offers different pages for companies and organizations along with personal pages. The moderator of the Facebook page of a company can act as a private person on Facebook and 'like' other Facebook pages, comment and share posts. For example, a supplement organization can post an intriguing post on the Facebook page of the sponsored football club, which will induce new visitors onto their own page. Facebook page of an organization can 'fan' other pages and the 'fanned' pages will show on the side of the Facebook page of the organization. This will increase visibility and ease fan gathering and interaction on Facebook. The followers of the organization will see at one glance the co-operative organizations and are easily able to find more content of their interest. (Facebook 2016)

Periscope introduced a live-streaming application on mobile device in spring 2015. It has raised popularity and in the end of 2015 it had more than 10 million users and 2 million daily users. (DMR 2016) Periscope offers a channel to attract a specified interest group and a tool to deepen the co-operation between two companies. For example, it can be used to promote new products live, send live interviews and other videos and the viewers can comment and ask questions in real time. (Periscope 2016)

Mobile social networks are a rising trend (Mashable 2011). The networks are divided into seven different types: socialization, entertainment, professional, fame, affection, social purchase and competition. It is important to recognize the different types of the

networks since mobile social networks may offer great marketing possibilities and a possibility to influence potential target groups. **Socialization** mobile social networks are used for chatting, for example WhatsApp and chat rooms. These networks offer a platform for open conversation and a place for 'question & answer' type of marketing, which can easily be used in sponsoring. **Professional** networks, for example LinkedIn, are used to search co-operation partners and jobs. **Fame** is connected to self-marketing and sharing unofficial journalism. **Affection** is used for effecting social and global problems. **Social purchasing** is comparing and sharing prices in the network. **Competition** mobile social networks are connected to games and comparing sports performances. (Perey 2008, 75-79)

For example, Sports Tracker is a globally known mobile application to compare and share one's own sports performances. In sponsoring this kind of application can be used by the sponsored athletes, who could for example share their own performances and give hints and examples of how professional athletes train to the target groups of the sponsor. (Sports Tracker 2016)

Besides the above mentioned social media and mobile social networks, **smartphone applications** can offer a new platform to deepen sponsorships. Today, consumers use applications increasingly compared to traditional websites and homepages. By offering customers an application, short-term campaigns and offers can be performed effortlessly. For example in sports, game events can be developed by providing one time offers with the application to sponsor companies and by arranging competitions during the events in the application. Also, videos, live games, interviews and promotional content could be included into the application. (Pohjola 2011, 87-88)

A new trend in sponsoring is **social responsibility**. Money and profit are not the only priorities anymore. Human capital and immaterial benefits are also valued in the co-operation and these factors influence the decisions considering sponsorships. Companies want to send a caring and responsible image to their target groups since the financial situation has been unstable the few last years. All interest groups are considered more precisely in sponsoring including customers, subcontractors and employees. Not only the benefits but also the risks are considered more carefully, for example possible doping scandals. Kesko is a good example of a pioneer in social responsibility. Kesko started to pay attention to environmental matters 10 years ago and today they give away annual grants for environment acts. In addition, sports grants are

directed to young athletes in the beginning of their careers and to athletes with special disabilities. (Saamivaara 2012)

Another remarkable factor in sponsoring is some kind of **combinative factor**, for example the sponsor feels that a sport or an event is personally important. The sponsor wants to sponsor an event or an athlete who comes from the home town or nearby. In the future this kind of co-operation with personal bonds may become even more popular, since it differentiates positively from the mass and the co-operation can be individualized. (Valanko 2009)

2.6 Problems and challenges in sponsoring

In a blog of a Finnish marketing company Tovari, it is described that the approach of the sponsored parties to possible sponsors is one of the major reasons sports clubs struggle in sponsor recruitment process in Finland. Often clubs recruit sponsors in order to get just money. The clubs do not offer enough equivalent for the sponsor and assume that sponsors will offer money in exchange for just a logo in jersey or in game leaflet. The benefits of this kind of visibility rarely compensate the funds a sponsor has given for the club. If clubs recruiting sponsors offered more concrete value for the investment, quite possibly it would be more effortless to close the sponsor deal and the amount of funds given could be greater. Companies generally want their investments to have a positive impact on the notability of their brand image or rise in sales. Would it be possible for clubs to offer experience days with the sport or advertise the equipment and products in social media? The sports club could tell the audience what kind of benefits a sports nutrition product for example has given or give an update about the recent events in the sponsoring company. If the sponsors saw the tangible benefit of the investment already in the recruiting phase, the interest in investment would be greater. (Pirhonen 2015)

On the sponsor's point of view, a great challenge in sponsoring is the fact that sponsors are not always aware of how much money can be used in sponsoring in order to match the profit with the investment. (Renard & Sitz 2011, 121) Another risk is the possibility that sponsoring does not get as much visibility as the sponsor wanted. The lack of visibility may exist if the athletic club do not success as well as expected, which can lead to decreased interest in the media. Or for some reason the target section does not come to events and games of the sponsored party. Also negative incidences may have an effect on the image of sports, which decreases the interest among possible consumers. In these cases, the sponsor may feel sponsoring was not effective and the resources

spent in sponsoring were wasted. (Vuokko 2002, 310) In this kind of situations, the importance of mutual communication cannot be underrated. The sponsored party has to be aware of the kind of publicity the sponsor desires and on the other hand the sponsor has to know what kind of publicity the sponsored party can offer. Companies aspire to support sport objectives whose reputation is positive and successful in order to gain plausible image for their products. (Vuokko 2002, 310) If the reputation or image of the sponsored club damages, it may reflect negatively to the image of the sponsor company and to the product. (Stone, Joseph & Jones 2003, 97)

Another challenge is the form of the league and the amount of audience in Naisten Liiga. The league is divided into three parts instead of one regular continuous season. Naisten Liiga consists of regular season, which has 90 games, and after that the clubs are divided into upper and lower finals. Six best clubs play in the upper finals of the medals and 4 clubs with the least points compete against dropping into the lower league. The system was brought into Naisten Liiga in 2013 instead of regular season to make the final games more interesting and exciting (Suomen Palloliitto 2013). The change was great from the sponsor's point of view, since more people came to watch the thrilling games, which decided which of the teams win medals and which will play in the league below next year.

Despite the change the winner of the league has ensured the win many rounds before the end of the season during several seasons, which of course decreases the amount of audience. Compared to other sports like ice-hockey, volley ball and Finnish baseball, in which leagues are played with play-off system, the excitement of the final games in football can be on a lower level. In 2016 the regular season in Naisten Liiga had a better audience rating than the upper and lower finals. (Suomen Palloliitto 2016) If the final games of the season were more important and the winner of the league was solved in the last game, the amount of people coming to see the games live would probably increase. Play-off games are all important and any team can lose and drop in any game. This of course interest viewers and eases the efforts to get full audience, which offers more visibility for the sponsors.

2.7 The aims of sponsoring & sponsoring in Finland

On the point of view of the sponsoring company the aims of sponsoring should be measurable, whereupon the value and added value achieved through sponsoring can be measured and the results are understandable. The aspirations of sponsor companies

vary: creating positive images in interest groups, positive publicity, product marketing, stakeholders, trade, indirect financial benefit and other aims. Improving the company image bases on improving notability of the company and the level of social responsibility shown in the company. Product marketing aims to reach the interest group and to improve product notability and the product image. Aspirations towards stakeholders are to improve work opportunities with stakeholders. Trade aspirations may open indirect or direct trade opportunities. Other aims may include long-term co-operations, in which case clear aspirations are not set. (Alaja 2001, 24-25)

Sponsoring offers a channel to beautify the company's responsibility image, which is an important part of the public image. Often, sponsoring is an advisable option for improving the public image but at times conscious customers see through this kind of actions and sponsoring turns against itself and its original targets. Good public image is a part of public relations and it never harms a company. Motives behind improving public relations are to create stronger relations and to represent good will. Besides the public image sponsoring is also used to create a better image of the company among employees and co-operation partners by inviting them to sponsored events. (De Pelsamcker, Geuens, M & Van den Bergh 2004, 313) Sponsoring is a great way to raise camaraderie, while the 'own' athlete of a company is competing. (Alaja & Forssel 2004, 30) Sponsoring is one kind of internal marketing which is important in marketing products or services for customers successfully. (Cliffe & Motion 2005, 1071)

Another natural objective for sponsoring on the company's point of view is to increase sales and maximize profit. Linking a famous athlete or a sports club into a product or service may have a positive effect on the image of the product in target groups. The better known the product and the better the brand is built, the easier it is to increase sales. (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Van den Bergh 2004, 306) In addition, a sponsor may get advantages that cannot be measured in money, e.g. mental images linked to the company or organization as the before mentioned positive images of a caring and responsible company. Social responsibility is valued high as an advantage by companies. (Saamivaara 2012) Sponsoring may also offer a chance to sell own products in a sponsored event and increase visibility and sales in that way. (Turner 1987, 18) As in sponsorship between football club Kuopion Palloseura Oy and Laitilan Wirvoitusjuomatehdas Oy. In game events of Kuopion Palloseura only beverages by Laitilan Wirvoitusjuomatehdas are sold.

In an article in Helsingin Sanomat Jaakko Haltia, lecturer of sports management in Turku UAS, mentions that sports have an exceptional power to influence a customer's mind and feelings. Sponsoring should be persistent and long-term, otherwise it is hard to create an emotional bond. Social responsibility is an important part of public relations. Would it be possible to exploit more social responsibility in it? Haltia mentions an example of some football clubs in the English Premier League who help people to find jobs. Besides social responsibility, it is also customer marketing for the sports organization, since a meaningful connection is built between the organization and people in the co-operation. In Finland HJK, a football team in Helsinki, is always offering help when Helsinki is looking for help from the third sector. Sports offer a possibility for sponsors to tell customers about their values. Also, it is important for fans to feel they benefit from the co-operations. Haltia gives an interesting idea 'Does a side advertisement benefit the watching experience of a fan or for example an offered cushion for the chair (in a game event)?' (Hakola 2016) The figure below clarifies the factors that have an effect on the company's side on sponsorship decisions.

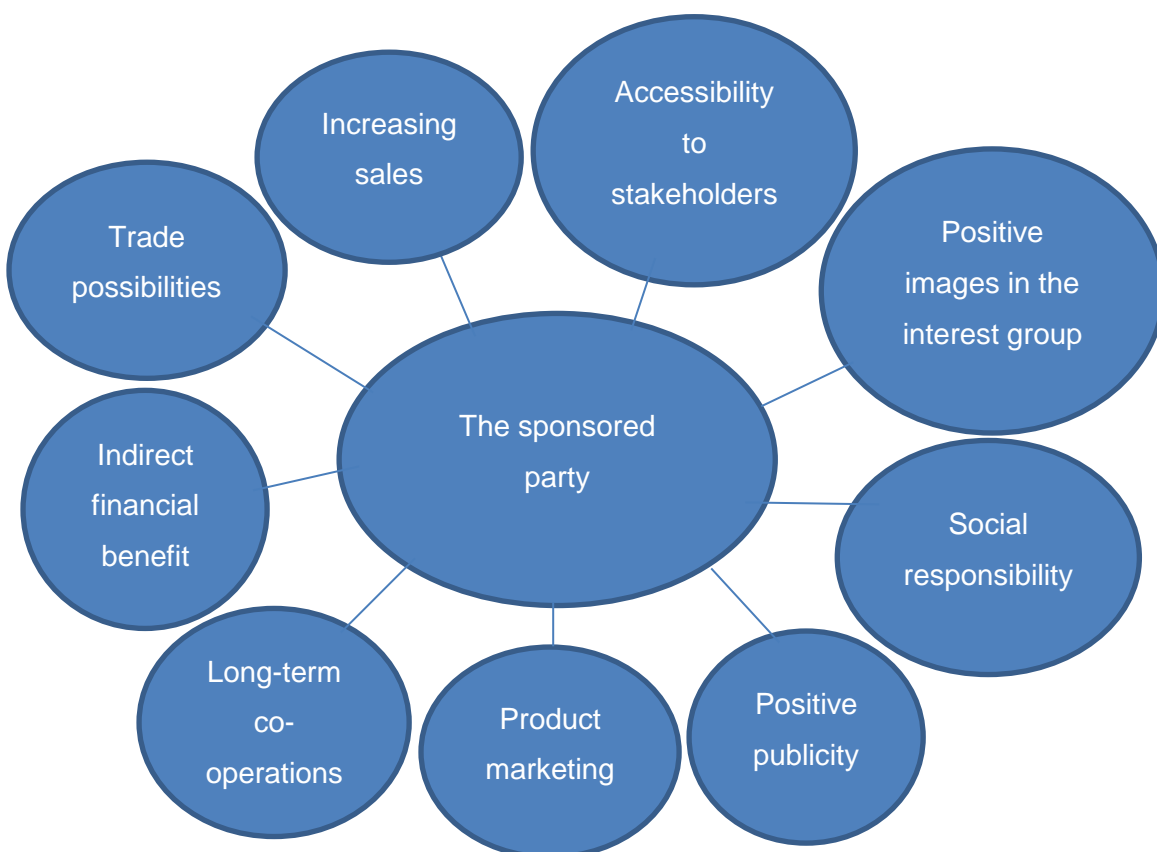


FIGURE 2. Choosing criteria of a company considering sponsorship. (Varied from Ajala & Forssel 2004, 93)

On the point of view of the sponsored party the targets are financial stability and financial help to improve the training circumstances. Sponsoring may also offer other support quadrante to financial assist like sports equipment or other products or services. (Ajala & Forssel 2004, 23) For example Pallokissat had a sponsor contract with a local sport and wellness entrepreneur, who provided heart rate monitors for the club. Another example is Åland United's contract with a local operator, which provided weekly bread and dairy products for the club and players. (Pyykönen 18 October 2016, Virta 3 October 2016) Risks may develop for the sponsored party if the sponsoring company is less responsible than predicted or has otherwise a precarious image. The actions of the sponsor may also affect the public image of the sponsored party.

The desired goals will be reached the best if the co-operation in sponsorship is productive and well utilized. The ideal is to have a win-win situation, in which both of the parties reach the aspirations set. Though sponsoring is a co-operation of two organizations third party, the interest group of the company, should not be forgotten. Interest group is the party that the sponsor tries to attract by sponsoring. If the interest group is wrong for the company, the company will not reach the objectives set for sponsorship and it is highly probable that the company will not renew the sponsoring contract. The values and interest groups should be discussed thoroughly already in the recruitment process in order to be able to build a co-operation that is beneficial and pleases both of the parties. When that is successful, also the sponsored party will benefit. The sponsor will more likely continue the sponsoring contract and maybe even offer more financial or other support. (Valanko 2009, 62-66) A sponsor barometer by Mainostajien liitto (2015) indicated that a large number of companies do not have a specific sponsoring strategy and sponsoring is quite weakly planned. If the organization recruiting sponsors shows results the sponsor can achieve in the co-operation, it will be easier to attract a possible sponsor and close the sponsoring deal. (Mainostajien liitto 2015)

Finnish companies use more than one third less capital to sponsoring compared to other Nordic countries. Still they struggle to get advantage of the investment. In 2012 the amount spent on sponsoring was 31 euros per capita whilst in Sweden the same amount was 120 euros and in Norway 104 euros. The average amount spent on sponsoring in Europe was slightly greater than in Finland, 35 euros per capita. In the United States the amount was slightly less, 26 euros per capita. (Sponsor Insight 2013) Sponsor barometer (2015) by Mainostajien liitto (The Association of Finnish Advertisers) showed that sponsoring has an upward trend. 18 percent of the answerers said they will

increase sponsoring while 25 % planned to cut down on sponsoring. The result was -7 percentage points while in 2014 the result was -21. A study by Sponsor Insight (2013) indicated that one of six sponsors utilized only the parts belonging to the sponsor contract in their sponsoring actions. Less than half utilized social media in their co-operations. Sweden is ahead of Finland when it comes to sponsoring. The more strategic approach of Swedish companies can be seen in the fact that CEOs and executive boards take part in decision making that considers sponsorships. Also, the funds for sponsoring are not only from the marketing budget but also from the budgets of the CEO and other business units. In more than half of Finnish companies the decisions considering sponsoring are made by the marketing correspondent and majority of the funds are taken from the marketing budget. (Sponsor Insight 2013) Other reasons to explain the steady status sponsoring has in Sweden are long traditions and satisfying results. An association for sponsoring was established in Finland a few years ago, Sponsorointi & Tapahtumamarkkinointi ry, while in Sweden a sponsor association has been operating already for 30 years. (Hakola 2016 HS)

Even though Finnish companies struggle to get advantage out of sponsoring, about half of the answerers in the research by Sponsor Insight (2013) said sponsoring is strategically important for them and a natural part of marketing communication. Majority of the sponsors benefit from the events organized by the sponsored party and through their channels. Sponsors' own events and channels are used more rarely to increase the benefits of sponsoring. Today, social media plays a giant part in marketing as a whole. The fact that less than half of the answerers used social media in their sponsoring operations is surprising. (Sponsor Insight 2013) Though, the activity of utilizing social media varies widely depending on the sponsorship contract. Some companies demand the sponsored party to be active in social media and for some it is one of the election criteria. (Mainostajien liitto 2015)

29% of the answerers in the sponsor barometer say that they have not set any goals for their sponsoring. In addition, 7% say they have not reached the goals. If organizations do not pay enough time and energy to strategic planning of sponsoring and how to make the investment as beneficial as possible, it is hard to get positive results. (Mainostajien liitto 2015) Development is needed in orderliness, control and taking advantage of the investment in companies, but also the sponsored party needs to bring up new ideas and show concrete benefits companies can achieve by sponsoring. At best sponsoring can be exceedingly beneficial for both of the parties and the visibility of both can be improved. In addition, sponsoring is an extremely effective way to attract consumers.

(Sponsor Insight 2013) In order to receive the benefits mutual communication is important. If the sponsor and sponsored party have different goals, it is hard to find procedures that please both parties. The less there is communication the greater is the risk of misunderstandings and failures. (Nufer & Bühler 2010, 167)

98% of the answerers of the sponsor barometer supported sports in some form and on an average 64% of a company's sponsoring budget went to sports. Youth and local sports were sponsored the most. Ice-hockey and football were sponsored by every third of the companies. (Mainostajien Liitto 2015) Sport was the main target when companies made sponsorship decisions. Compared to other Nordic countries there is still growth potential in this field in Finland. The studies show that already now companies believe sponsoring is an important part of their marketing strategy. If the sponsored party is able to offer more equivalent for the sponsor it is probable that sponsoring will be even more important part of companies' strategies in the future. It will ease the struggle of the ones requiring sponsors.

Oulun Kärpät, an ice-hockey club playing in the Finnish championship league, is a great example of successful sponsor recruitment. An important issue in the sponsorships is that the sponsors of Kärpät feel that the co-operation is easy with the chief executive officer, Juha Junno. There is equally time for all the partners, promises made are kept and Junno is truly interested in the sponsor's issues and wants to contribute them. Kärpät has also been able to acquire partners across the country. Even though Junno is known as a great partner, he still is a strict businessman and always wants to get something more for the club. The sponsors and partners have been divided into different groups 'first line' consists of 77 main partners, below the 'first line' there are about 600 companies and if all the smallest partners are included Kärpät has well over 1000 partners for each season. Junno has been able to create the game events as a possible place to promote and further business for the partners. All the main people of local business life have been brought together and the situation is a great opportunity to talk and tie new co-operative contacts. Actually he success in ice-hockey is not crucial because Junno has created the ice-hockey games as events a successful company cannot miss. (Paasi 2016) If women's football clubs would be able to create the same kind of meaningful event for business people and entrepreneurs to meet in a relaxed situation and possibly create new co-operations, the events would get more audience and it surely would be an issue that the sponsors appreciate in the sponsor recruitment process. Besides the benefits the sponsors would get, the game events can be a great

place to deepen the sponsorship and tie new liaisons and deals with the already existing sponsors.

3 RESEARCH ON SPONSORING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PALLOKISSAT

In this chapter the phases of the qualitative research on sponsoring opportunities for the case company are presented. First, the interviewed organizations besides Pallokissat are introduced. Second, the research methods used in this research are presented and the choices of methods used are reasoned. Third, tools for focused interviews and analysing methods are presented. Fourth, the limitations of this research are introduced in addition to the themes of the research. Last, research principles used in this study are introduced and evaluated.

3.1 Interviewed Organizations

In addition to the case company Pallokissat, three other organizations were interviewed in order to receive data and information about development possibilities and current situation of sponsorships in women's football and in Pallokissat. One of the organizations was a Naisten Liiga football club, Åland United from Åland Islands and two of the organizations were sponsor companies, Eriksson Capital Ab, a sponsor of Åland United and Fysiopalvelu Kunto Kuopio, a sponsor of Pallokissat.

Åland United

Åland United was founded in 2008 in Lemland, Åland Islands. The team competes in Naisten Liiga, the Finnish championship league. Compared to Pallokissat the team of Åland United is more international and consists more of bought players. In season 2015-2016 only 5 players of a 24-player squad were born on Åland Islands and six of the players were foreigners. (Åland United 2016) The fact that Åland United has many players coming outside of Åland Islands raises expenses and the need of sponsors. Geographically Åland Islands is an isolated group of islands and the population rate is rather small compared to Northern Savonia: The population of Åland Islands is 28 983 inhabitants whilst in Northern Savonia there are 248 129 inhabitants and only in Kuopio the population rate is 112 117. Traditionally Åland Islands is perceived as a wealthy region. The GDP per capita in 2015 was 126 whilst in Northern Savonia the GDP was only 82. Åland Islands is a self-government autonomy belonging to Finland. (Statistics Finland 2016)

Eriksson Capital Ab

Eriksson Capital Ab is an investment company, which headquarters locates in Mariehamn, Åland Islands. The family-owned business was established in 1984 by Trygve Eriksson. The company started in the construction contracting business but was grown over the years. Eriksson started to invest in wide range of businesses locally and internationally. At the moment, Eriksson Capital has 28 subsidiaries and 11 associated companies in the company group. They employ eight people in the headquarters and about 1400 people in the whole company group they have. (Eriksson Capital 2016) In 2015 the revenue was 144 000 euros. (Suomen Asiakastieto Oy 2016) Eriksson Capital has sponsored Åland United from year 2007, when the club was established (Virta 5 October 2016)

Fysiopalvelu Kunto Kuopio

Fysiopalvelu Kunto Kuopio is the largest company in Kuopio area to offer physio- and occupational therapy services. Besides those, they have for example a 'step clinic', which offers motion analysis of lower limbs and prepares insoles and other remedial operations. Fysiopalvelu Kunto Kuopio was established almost 40 years ago and at the moment it has 19 employees. At the moment three traditional companies work within same ownership and organization, Kunto Kuopio, Petosen Fysioterpia and Puijon Lääkintävoimistelu, which was bought two years. The combined age of all these companies is over 100 years. (Fysiopalvelu Kunto Kuopio 2016; Auvinen 21 October 2016) In 2015 the revenue was 1 400 000 euros. (Suomen Asiakastieto Oy 2016) Fysiopalvelu Kunto Kuopio has sponsored Pallokissat Kuopio for several years.

3.2 Research methods used in this study

Empiric material for this research was collected using **qualitative methods**. Other research material was collected from literature, online articles and relevant studies. Qualitative research focuses on rather small amount of cases in order to study these cases as specifically as possible, whilst quantitative research creates generalizations based on statistics compiled of large amount of answers. In other words, the quality compensates for the quantity. One feature of qualitative research is the fact that the researcher does not have prejudices for the results nor for the object of the research. Though, it is advisable for the researcher to bring up conjectures on what might be found in the research. (Eskola & Suoranta 2008, 18-20) Qualitative research is freer and

deeper than quantitative research. The material is mainly generated by inductive reasoning and theoretical generalization in qualitative research. The fragility of a qualitative research is that the research might be seen just as a case study which does not allow generalization of the research into wider context. Also, qualitative research is often non-symmetrical and different research phases are unorganized. (Räsänen, Anttila, Melin 2005, 86-87) The possibility for the researcher to commit a false conclusion is greater in qualitative research than in quantitative one because the research process is mainly based on intuition and interpretation. Qualitative research can give new unique information which may lead into new aspects and ideas in the sponsor recruitment process. (Metsämuuronen 2006, 202)

A qualitative interview gives a possibility to collect deep, valuable information and allows the interviewer to lead the conversation towards desired goals and ask further questions or arguments. On the other hand, the interviewees can speak more freely about their thoughts and opinions. The aim of qualitative interviews is to find new points of views and perceptions to complement the information already researched. (Ruusuvuori, Nikander & Hyvärinen 2010, 16)

In this research the interviews were proceeded as semi-structured **focused interviews**. (Appendix 1 & 2) Focused interview does not have beforehand made specific questions, it moves forward with defined themes. However, some viewpoints for example themes and topics are defined in focused interview, and those viewpoints are same for every interviewee. The specific form and order of questions, which is typical for structured form interviews are not used in focused interviews. On the other hand, focused interviews are not completely free unlike in-depth interviews. (Hirsijärvi & Hurme 2008, 48) Focused interview is an advisable option as the research method, when almost sub-conscious matters as values, ideals and arguments are studied. It is also efficient way to collect information when intimate and emotional matters are studied or the if the researcher wants to interpret questions and define answers. (Hirsijärvi & Hurme 1985, 15-36) Interviews have also their challenges. The answers may include noncurrent, unnecessary information for the research. This can be prevented by carefully planned, clear, and well understandable questions. Almost every interview has differences compared to another one, also the own position of the interviewer influences the course of the interview. (Uusitalo 2001, 84)

The interviews were chosen to be proceeded face-to-face, since then the interaction is more diverse than in phone interviews. The interview meetings with the **representatives**

of football clubs and **sponsors** were arranged by phone calls. Two of the interviews, Åland United and Eriksson Capital, were held in Mariehamn, Åland Islands 3-5.10.2016 in the head offices of the organizations. The other two of the interviews, Pallokissat Kuopio and Fysiopalvelu Kunto Kuopio, were performed in Kuopio in the head offices of the organizations 18-21.10.2016. The interviews were recorded to ease transcribing.

The interviewees were the main characters of sponsorships management in their own organizations. They all had several years' experience in decision making and managing sponsorships. The interviewees were able to give a wide aspect from their own viewpoints, but because of several years of experience they were able to discuss about their thoughts and assumptions of the viewpoint of the other party.

The language used in the interviews was Finnish in three of the interviews (Pallokissat Kuopio, Fysiopalvelu Kunto Kuopio, Åland United) and one of the interviews (Eriksson Capital) was conducted in English. The representatives of Pallokissat Kuopio and Fysiopalvelu Kunto Kuopio are native Finnish speakers and for the representative of Åland United Finnish is the 2nd fluent language. Also, the representative of Eriksson Capital was fluent in the language used in the interview, after having lived in the United Kingdom. The interview situations were positive and calm. The languages used did not cause any problems for the interviewees to express their thoughts and opinions.

The interviews of the two sponsors were quite similar to each other as well as the interviews of the representatives of the sponsored parties. The themes presented followed naturally the same order in both of the interviews but the order of topics under the themes changed. In the end of interviews, the interviewees were able to talk freely about other relevant opinions and ideas in their mind.

3.3 Tools for focused interviews

The interviews were **recorded** and **transcribed** into written form later so that it is possible to return to the interview and **analyze** it precisely. The interviews can be transcribed entirely, like in this research, or by choosing the main parts to be transcribed. (Hirsijärvi & Hurme, 2000, 138) After transcription the material was analyzed linguistically by different text parse technics. Analyzing of the data is often the hardest and most time-consuming part in the research process for many researches. If there is a lot of material to analyze, the researcher may need weeks to go through the whole material. (Hirsijärvi & Hurme, 2000, 135) In this research there were only four

interviews that lasted from 40 minutes to one hour and 15 minutes, therefore transcribing and analyzing were rather effortless and took only four days. New important themes to answer the research questions were found from the interview material.

One of the outlines in analyzing qualitative material is that the analyzing is done close to the material and its context. In addition, researcher uses reasoning that can either be inductive or abductive. In inductive research closeness to material is pivotal. In abductive research the researcher already has theoretical prejudices, that are tried to be proven correct with the research material. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniikka 2006, 15-16) In this research inductive inferring is used, since no hypothesis was created before the research.

The analysis of qualitative data means taking summarized viewpoints and summarizing the data in different ways. The material is gone through systematically in order to discover contextual or structural similarities and differences in the analysis. The purpose of the analysis of qualitative data is to encapsulate contents of the interviews and observe the appearance of central factors in the text. When analyzing qualitative data, the material has to be summarized. In addition, the material should be researched in relation to theory, empiricism and the own thoughts of the researcher. Analyzing process is guided by the chosen viewpoint, either the interest is traditionally in the content or the interest is in the expression and linguistics. The choice of the viewpoint often determines how accurately the interview is transcribed and if the text material ought to be coded and if so, how precisely it has to be done. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniikka 2006, 73-75) Qualitative data is richer than quantitative and it offers a possibility to get varied interpretation. On the other hand, the analyzing methods for qualitative material are quite self-dependent because there are no general analyzing methods unlike there are for quantitative material. (Räsänen, Anttila, Melin 2005, 91-94) The basic questions of discursion analysis: who said, what is said, what was meant, why something was said, what was the aim and who was the one that wanted to be influenced, can be used in the analyze of qualitative research. (Metsämuuronen 2006, 247)

New points of views have to be sought in order to find solutions for the research problem in the material analyzing process. The absolute solution cannot be reached. The material has to be studied thoroughly to be able to learn what it includes and what kind of perspectives it offers for solving the research problem. The base of everything in analysis is the research problem. The starting points of the research have to be clear so that the right viewpoints from the material become clear for the researcher. In this

research repetitiveness, similarities and new perspectives were sought from the interview data. It is also important to eliminate unnecessary information for the research from the material. (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006, 75)

Content analyses means the precise containment of the research subject and profound understanding of the subject. It is the base of all qualitative research; in principle all methods of qualitative research are some kind of content analyses. In this research content analysis is used to analyze different documents like interviews and resource literature. The aim of content analysis is to get objective, summarized and generalized image of the subject being researched. The information must be analyzed to reflect the research questions. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009, 91-92, 103) In this research content analysis was an important part in finding the most important and relevant matters of the focused interviews.

3.4 The limitation of the research and the interview themes

Differentiated and defined interview themes were composed for the representatives of football clubs and sponsor companies to be able to get the viewpoints of both angles as accurately as possible. The themes were formed to answer the research problem and questions, which were based on the subjects covered in the theory part. The themes selected to be: sport sponsorships, co-operation and women's football clubs. Theme interview frames used in the interviews are represented in appendix one and two.

The research covers the viewpoints of both parties of the sponsoring contract. On the sponsors side, general meaning and the present state of sponsoring were studied in addition to expectations, wants and needs sponsors have. On the point of view of the sponsored party in addition to general meaning and the present state of sponsors and sponsor recruitment, the possibilities, wiliness and abilities to develop sponsorships were studied. The research was conducted on the both sides of the contract because sponsorships are a two-way co-operation and opinions of both parties are equally important. By compiling those opinions, new ways to develop the sponsorship management can be found.

Even though sponsoring is typically included in the entire marketing mix of a company, in this study the main focus was only in sponsoring. The aim was to improve the sponsor recruitment process and sponsorships. The questions in the interviews were mainly limited to consider sponsoring in order to find new solutions and answers to the research

problems. When the importance of sponsoring in marketing was asked from the sponsors, naturally the whole marketing plan was touched slightly in the interviews.

3.5 Research Principles

The results and implementation of a research are traditionally evaluated by reliability and validity criteria. However, these terms are mainly used to evaluate quantitative researches. In qualitative research repeatability and evaluability of the research are more natural terms to use. Repeatability requires the classification and interpretation norms to be unambiguous and those norms to be used consistently. Evaluability means that the reader is able to follow the rationalization of the researcher. (Uusitalo 2001, 81). The next paragraphs introduce the principles used in this research and varied criteria of quality and reliability that can be used in qualitative research.

The **quality** of the research can be improved the best by creating a good frame for interviews beforehand. It is also beneficial to think about different ways to deepen the themes and what kind of additional questions can be presented. During the interview quality can be improved by ensuring that the technical equipment work. The quality of the interview research improves if transcription is carried out as soon as possible and if the interviewer and transcriber are the same person. In this research the interview data was transcribed on the following day of the interviews and the same person took care of both of the processes. Another aspiration for fast transcribing was to be able to accentuate the different meanings and emphasized issues in the interviews also in the results and improve quality of the research from that part. (Hirsijärvi & Hurme 2000, 184-185)

Validity indicates how well the research method used in the research measures the matter being researched. Instead of thinking what kind of indicators will collect valid results, the researcher should contemplate more what kind of research strategy is valid. When the research questions and research group are right the validity of the research is good. In addition, the approach must make justice to the forming of questions and to the substance of the matter being researched. The research method should be chosen according to what kind of information is needed, the method used in research does not lead into information in itself. The total absence of validity means that the research is worthless and the research studies incorrect matters. If the validity is defective the empiric perceptions and the research itself is on the side of the matters which the research was supposed to focus on. (Hiltunen 2009)

Validity can be divided into internal and external validity. External validity indicates if the research can be generalized and if so, into which groups. External validity is strongly affected by the design and sampling, which are used to eliminate the threats of validity. Internal validity indicates the own authenticity of the research. Internal validity is evaluated for example by examining are the theories chose correctly, are the concepts correct or are the meters formed correctly. The most important issues in validity of a research are right initial setting, question forming, theory as well as right design. By these means the validity of the research can be ensured. The validity decreases for example if only some of the interviewees are interviewed or if the lamprophony of the records or transcription is poor. (Metsämuuronen 2006, 55)

In this research the validity of the research has been considered by introducing the baselines of the researcher and the case company. The practical implementation and progress of the research has been described in introduction and in chapter 3.1 research methods used in this thesis. The objective has been a structure, in which the reader is able to follow the phases of the research and to be able to form own conclusions. The validity of the interviews was ensured by paying attention to the theme frame. The aim of the interviews was carefully thought beforehand and the themes and possible sub questions were precisely formed. In addition, the functionality of the recorder was checked and ensured that the recorder has a clear sound.

Reliability indicates how reliably and reproducibly the research method measures a specific phenomenon. It can be measured by repetition measurement and dimensional error is often reported. A research with reproducible measurement has good reliability and it does not include random errors. Thus, the results received in an interview are parallel to other researches. The reliability of an interview indicates for example if the same result could have been received with another interviewer or if the variables have been compartmentalized correctly. (Hirsijärvi & Hurme 1991, 128) Errors can occur also in the interview situation. The interviewee can understand the question differently than the researcher has meant or the interviewer can make a mistake when documenting the answers. Also, it is important to make a difference between the gathered data and the own views of the researcher. (Uusitalo 2001, 84)

In this research the interview situations were kept calm and easygoing without interruptions in order not to let these factors confuse the answers. The interview questions were simple in order to get truthful and relevant answers and to avoid random

errors. In the interviews the questions were understood as meant. Also, the interviewer practiced the interview situations beforehand to improve the reliability. All the interviews were recorded and littered and all citations have been marked clearly in the research report.

In the relation of reliability and validity the lower the reliability the lower the validity. The argument is false the other way around since measurement might give reliable results but about completely different matter than what was meant. This would make the results invalid. For example, if in an interview the interviewee talks systematically untruthfully. Systematic errors are the ones inside the meter, for example an unclear question. In these cases, the bias is parallel in the whole material. (Hiltunen, 2009)

Ethically right and valid research must be proceeded with honesty, general meticulousness and preciseness. Also, ethically sustainable data acquisition, research and evaluation methods compatible for scientific research criteria should be used. (Tutkimuseettinen tiedekunta 2012). The aim of ethical decisions is to emphasize justice, equal interaction and respect of other people and to evaluate critically the existing policy and sources of information. (Savonia UAS 2016) Besides the ethical questions considering the relation of the researcher and the one being researched, the researcher may have a temptation to practice plagiarism. Even though correct resource markings are made, the line between quotation and direct speech must be considered carefully. The temptation to make quotations through other sources can be great for the researcher. In these situations, what kind of behavior is accepted and what is not? In major researches the researcher can use research assistants who summarize different resource materials. These kinds of actions are commonly considered as normal actions in the research process, but on the other hand, many researchers practice an ethic in which they only reference sources read by themselves. (Räsänen, Anttila, Melin 2005, 21) In short, research ethics is based on three moral norms: do not hurt the object of your research, do not lie about matters considering your research nor steal results or material from others. (Hallamaa, Launis, Lötjönen & Sorvali 2006, 398)

4 INTERVIEWEES' EXPERIENCES AND VIEWPOINTS OF SPONSORING

In this chapter the results of the research are presented. The chapter is divided into several chapters by the research questions, aims of the research and theory base. In addition, in the end of this chapter some results that were felt important but do not exactly answer to the research question are introduced.

The first sub-question was: What is the **meaning** of sponsors for women's football clubs? It was clear that financially the sponsors are essential for women's football clubs and their operations. In Åland United the **financial support** covers two thirds of the annual budget and for Pallokissat the financial support covers about 45% of the annual budget of 110 000 euros. The rest of the budgets consist of ticket sales, snack and beverage sales in game events, sales of spin-off and fan products, different bees and operational allowances.

Sponsoring brings crucial financial aid and decreases financial risks of the clubs. Sponsoring can also offer other benefits for the football clubs: other support quadruple to money, for example free equipment or other services and products can be offered by the sponsor. (Ajala & Forsell 2004, 23) In addition to financial support, the football clubs consider also other kind of support truly important. As an example of other support the interviewees mentioned free or discounted **transportation services** for away games, **physical treatment, exercise services and equipment** and **groceries** among others as important forms of support. In addition, Pallokissat and Åland United have a **media sponsor** for extra visibility in the neighboring areas. Ålandstidningen for Åland United and Savon Sanomat for Pallokissat Kuopio. Both of the contracts include free advertisements, for Åland United all the advertisements and for Pallokissat a certain amount per year.

Besides newspapers also local radio stations sponsor both football clubs. Media sponsoring offers an easy way to increase the notability of the football clubs and game events in the neighboring area. (Virta 3 October 2016; Pyykönen 18 October 2016) The local visibility of Åland United in Åland Islands is actually rather good at the moment, and most of the people living in Mariehamn know Åland United and are aware that the club play in Naisten Liiga. (Virta 3 October 2016) Also by personal experience, after living there for 3 months it can be said that nearly everyone the researcher communicated with knew Åland United and were able to name some players. In Kuopio, maybe because of the size of the city the notability is not so great and there are many

people who have never heard of Pallokissat nor know that female football is played at the highest national level in Kuopio. Pyykönen (18 October 2016) mentions that 4 years ago as she started as the chairwoman of Pallokissat, she was surprised how few people had heard of Pallokissat and that there is a possibility to play football for girls and women in Kuopio. (Pyykönen 18 October 2016) Notability is certainly an issue that should be improved in Kuopio. If the football club is known among the locals, it is easier to offer visibility for possible sponsors. Visibility was one of the main factors sponsors valued high in the interviews. Sponsoring offers a channel also for the sponsored party to improve notability in the surrounding areas. By representing the club in the events of the sponsor, for example players visiting an event, not only the sponsor benefit but also the sponsored party gets visibility.

By broadening these kind of **non-financial supports**, it is possible to attract new players and decrease the financial burden of the club. For example, bought players coming outside of Kuopio cause an increase in the budget, but on the other hand in order to succeed in Naisten Liiga skillful players from across the country are needed. A new way to practice sponsoring could be a contract in which the sponsor offers a part-time job for the players of Pallokissat and in that way offers support for Pallokissat.

The second sub research question was: What is the **added value** football clubs can offer for the sponsor? At the moment, the representatives of the sponsored parties have noticed that a logo on the shirt or game leaflet is not enough, the sponsors want something more. The trend of replacing traditional logo marketing with something new in sport sponsoring was also indicated in a research by Pohjonen (2011, 89). Pyykönen (18 October 2016) lists the **visibility** sponsored party can offer in **social media**, the possibility to use players in the **sponsor's own events**, **good will**, **wellbeing** of the employees by season tickets, possibility to come and see good **women's football**, the amount of people who relate to Pallokissat as possible **new customers** and the opportunity to send **targeted emails** as added value the club can offer. Virta (3 October 2016) mentions the **advertisement** the sponsor gets on the homepage of Åland United or on game leaflets, **free tickets** and **season tickets** and players who the sponsor can use in their own **marketing** and events.

The representatives of sponsored parties have quite different opinions about what do they think the sponsors want to get in return of sponsoring. Virta (3 October 2016) told that **social responsibility** and creating **positive image** are the main equivalent sponsors want to get in return. Sponsoring female football can be a great way to polish

the public image of a company and support the gender equality questions that have been on display lately.

“There are of course our big (sponsors), they actually want to get that as equivalent, this might sound idealistic, but they actually want that we (Åland United) play good football and that people enjoy themselves and that female football develops in Åland and Åland United would be like there. Then there are these few others who now... they just want to show that they don't hate women haha... a bit like that.” (Virta 3 October 2016)

Pyykönen (18 October 2016) shares the idea of social responsibility and creating positive image for the sponsor company. In addition, she believes that **new customers** are wanted through sponsoring.

“Well probably clientele, that is what they probably want, that they would get new, permanent customers so that's probably the way or meaning. But as like in many of our contracts, it is written that the sponsor wants to push up the notability of the company and somehow that they want to polish their image you know. That they want to support either, girls' football or competitive sport on the highest level in Finland, that they want to show high profile as supporters of this kind of pursuit of sports, so that is an important value so they can take advantage of that in their own marketing, that they are supporting kids and youths, sports and exercise. So, that is probably also today a kind of important big media value at least for larger companies.” (Pyykönen 18 October 2016)

The sponsors' points of views are quite similar to the ones of sponsored party. Matti Auvinen (21 October 2016) mentions the importance of **visibility**. Four years ago a decision was made to retrieve visibility by sponsoring, but on the other hand there is difficulties to meter the results of sponsoring. Other valued factors by Auvinen (21 October 2016) are the possibilities to receive new customers. Not just the athletes of the club, but also possibly partners of the club and people connected to the club. He also reminds that sport clubs should think what they actually are able to offer for the sponsor as equivalent. Since sponsoring is a two-way co-operation the sponsors are ready to give more support, if the equivalent received is greater.

“I think that locally these kinds of co-operations or sponsorships are also just sponsoring. That I don’t believe that principally anyone... Or that almost everyone thinks it in that way that it (sponsoring) won’t probably give the same kind of equivalent compared to the own investment, they just in a way want to be part of the bees. But the more is offered (by the sponsored party) the more there are possibilities to give resources.”
(Auvinen 21 October 2016)

Sara Virta (5 October 2016) told that for them the reason to sponsor is basically only good will and social responsibility. Since Eriksson Capital Ab is an investment company, they do not actually have or need a marketing department or marketing plan.

“It (sponsoring) is actually not, not at all a big part of a marketing plan. We don’t have, we don’t have anything to market in Eriksson Capital actually... But we only do this for good will and to help local teams and local athletes and yeah the community in its whole you know.” “Yeah well, that (social responsibility) would be it (the reason) if there was any kind of reason for it, but well the biggest reason is to... To make... Help the whole society with something, and then we can with this or with sponsoring athletes and youth be a good part...” (Virta 5 October 2016)

The third sub research question considered the **development possibilities** women’s football clubs have in sponsoring. An issue that was discovered in the interviews, is that there is some improvement in the **visibility** from the sponsor’s point of view. Sponsors feel that they get some visibility through social media but the co-operation could and should be greater. It is also mentioned that the amount of visibility varies a lot depending on who is the sponsored party. Some offer visibility on a weekly basis, some once a year. Sponsoring can be a great and cost-effective way to get notability, visibility and the attention of a certain target group, but some companies do not know about the benefits and advantages that can be achieved by sponsoring. Sponsors wished **clear examples** of how and how often for example visibility is offered per year for the negotiation phase of the contract. Sponsors value the **measurability** of the equivalents, this way the value and added value received can be evaluated. (Ajala 2001, 24-25) It is important to be able to show some numbers in the negotiation phase so that the sponsor has some kind vision for example about the possible visibility through sponsoring. Also, the interviews showed that the interviewed representatives of the football clubs have noticed the need of being able to show numbers of hits on homepage or how many readers a piece of

news has. A study by Tarkiainen (2011, 33) indicated same factors, it is essential that the sponsored party is able to show the amount of visibility the sponsor is able to achieve in sponsorship.

Though visibility is often valued as one of the main factors for sponsorship, it should not be the only equivalent football club offers. Also other benefits should be emphasized in the sales process. (Valanko 2009, 206-208) The interviews indicated that some companies do not even want or need visibility. In those cases, the meaning of other equivalents become even more important. Also Kari Haapiainen (2013), the CEO of the men's football club HJK, mentions in a research by Tarkiainen (2014, 33-34) that true interest towards sponsors and listening to their needs are the key to successful sponsorship. Visibility is not the main value for all the sponsors.

"We only do this for good will and to help local teams and local athletes and yeah the community in its whole you know... I mean of course, if you're gonna sponsor, you want to be seen some way. But it's not like we have to have the biggest logo on the back of the t-shirt you know." (Virta 5 October 2016)

In the interviews sponsor companies mentioned visibility, social responsibility and good will as the main reasons for sponsoring. However, when companies were asked how they would change the sponsoring contracts if for example work ability days or possibility to meet other company representatives and entrepreneurs in a game event were offered, the sponsors were ready to raise the amount of financial support given. The sponsors valued these kinds of other equivalents and were ready to modify the contracts when the sponsored party offered something more.

Representatives of football clubs admitted that **longer-term** sponsor **contracts** would be beneficial for the clubs and believed that by having two-year-contracts instead of annual ones, also the sponsor would get greater advantage. Still, the interviews showed that the usual length of sponsoring contract is one year. All interviewees believed that the reason for one-year contracts is a habit and actually most of the contracts are renewed annually with the same terms. For example, Eriksson Capital has sponsored Åland United with about the same amount every year since 2007, when the club was established. Still the contract is always a one-year contract, which is renewed every year. By longer-term contracts the financial state of the sponsored party is secured and they can make longer-term decisions, because the budget can be calculated for longer a

period of time at once. For example, two-year contracts with key-players can be made. In addition, it will be easier to tighten the liaison with the sponsor and to build long-term targets and goals. The co-operations can be developed and long-term contracts give the possibility to find out which kind of operations are the most efficient ones in that partnership. Valanko (2009 92-93) stated that long-term sponsorships have to be managed jointly and professionally. Also Kari Haapiainen (2013), the chief executive manager of the Finnish men's football club HJK, emphasized the meaning of managing and leading in long-term sponsorships in a research by Tarkiainen. (2014, 38) Pyykönen (18 October 2016) mentioned that the renewal process of sponsor contracts can be time consuming, because several meetings are usually needed before the contract is signed. In long-period contracts this time could be used more efficiently to deepen and develop the co-operation as well as to discuss about the feelings and thoughts: what could be done better and what has been satisfactory. This way the clubs and sponsors save time and the co-operation will become more satisfactory for both of the parties. If the best possible outcome is wanted to be achieved in sponsoring, both parties should know and understand the needs of the other party (Ajala 2000, 111) In addition, an open communication will make it easier to achieve the goals set for sponsoring.

One aspect of this research was to define how sponsorship has already **changed** over the years. The interviewees mention that there has been some development in sponsorships. Today the co-operation is faster and **social media** is utilized in all the sponsorships and the co-operation is more varied today. Though on the sponsor's point of view the co-operation could be even more tight and varied. Interviewees mention that it is easier and faster to execute some parts of the co-operation. For example, contests or draws can be arranged in co-operation with a sponsor with just a couple of phone calls and by setting the contest up on the social media page of the organizations. Organizations have already now started to offer something more than a logo on game gear for sponsors. Traditional logo sponsoring is taking the back seat as new ways are taking over and beginning to interest sponsors. (Pohjonen 2011, 87-88) However, one of the interviewed sponsors thought that even though implementation of sponsorships has generally improved, there are still wide gaps in the quality of sponsorships depending on who is the sponsored party.

Besides social media, new **mobile technology** enables new cost effective operating models for co-operation. There are clear attempts to move forward into something new from traditional logo visibility. Increasingly companies perceive traditional logo sponsoring as support without any real equivalent rather than as sponsoring. (Pohjonen

2011, 87-88) Three of the interviewees highlighted the meaning of **digitalization** in sponsorship. According to the interviews, sponsors appreciate visibility and fastness: Social media is an effective tool to reach large groups of people in a fast and easy way. At the moment women's football clubs have mainly used Facebook, Instagram and Twitter in their actions but for example Periscope offers a great possibility to stream game events, commercials, visits in partner's locations, press conferences and by that increase the attractiveness of the club. If away games were filmed with commentary and the player sponsors and other agreed sponsors and commercials were mentioned during the games, that fact could be used in the negotiation phase with possible sponsors to offer more equivalent. One of the interviewed sponsors mentioned that mobile technology improves and develops all the time and new inventions are made. Soon the usage of social media is not enough. The representatives of football clubs were aware of the fact that they should develop and offer new equivalents and new forms of visibility. Also in Tarkiainen's research (2014, 36-37) the results were similar. Haapiainen (2013) mentioned that the development, flexibility and being able to offer new ways of visibility for sponsors is essential for the sponsored party. The sponsored party has to be up to date and adjust the equivalents it offers for sponsor as the technology develops. By offering more diverse means of visibility and ways to cooperate through mobile technology it will be easier to offer more concrete benefits for the sponsor and differentiate from other organizations. The better the channels of digitalization are utilized in sponsorship, the more diverse and beneficial the sponsorship can be.

Another theme the representatives of the football clubs and sponsors brought up were the **challenges in the recruitment process**. Pyykönen (18 October 2016) lists the difficulty of finding the right person and the decrease in the financial state of some companies. She says it can be extremely time consuming to find the right person who is responsible for the sponsoring and marketing decisions, especially in larger companies. In addition, Pyykönen (18 October 2016) mentions the benefits of a full-time employee, who would take care of the sponsor contracts. She says it would give a more professional kind of image and would ease the communication between the sponsor and the sponsored party. Also, she emphasizes the meaning of social network and contacts, which the full-time employee could maintain by being in contact with companies. Virta (3 October 2016) shares with Pyykönen the view of the hard work and the fact that recruitment of sponsors is time consuming. At the moment the sponsor management is not conducted as well as it should because of lack of time and personnel. If the sponsored party had a person who managed sponsorships and took care of the

contracts, it would not only give a more professional kind of image to the sponsors, but also would make the whole process a lot easier. The sponsors would know who to contact when needed and the person in charge of sponsoring in the sponsored party would have time to take care of the contracts, be more in contact with the sponsors and maintain large social network. The interviewed representatives of football clubs emphasized the meaning of contacts and large network. Also in research by Anssi Tarkiainen (2014, 31), Haapiainen (2013) admits that the network and contacts of the vendor are extremely important if new sponsor contracts are wanted. The sales work is easier if the vendor already knows somebody personally from the other company.

“So it is basically this work, like if we had a full-time employee who would do only this, I believe we would have quite a lot more sponsors or at least more money.” (Virta 3 October 2016)

“And it definitely is important to be upfront in a way and also to create new relationships. So thought in that way, it would be important to be able to have a full-time person who could spend time in creating those social connections.” (Pyykönen 18 October 2016)

At the moment women’s football clubs in Finland are not in the kind of financial situation that they could hire a full- or part-time employee to work with sponsor contracts. Personal sales work is time requiring and ties up plenty of resources, therefore it has to be done as efficiently as possible. (Fill 1995, 515) One solution could be longer sponsoring contracts. If the employment was financially possible for a certain period of time the person in charge of sponsors could be budgeted into the annual budget. After the specified period of time the situation could be revised. Does a full- or part-time employee bring enough money to the club in order to the employment to be cost-effective? Another solution can be an intern who will take care of sponsorship and co-operations. Savonia UAS have business students, who need to complete an internship to graduate. In addition, business students of University of Eastern Finland can complete an internship for academic credits. Business students have the latest know-how in marketing and selling. Marketing skills would be beneficial in the negotiation phase when the idea of sponsorship is being sold to a company. A third solution can be the players of the A-team. Most of the players in Naisten Liiga are either students or have a full- or part-time job. If a player is bought, could sponsorship management be offered as a part time job for a player who moves to Kuopio and does not study or work?

The representatives of football clubs have noticed that the recession period still has an effect on the financial situation of some companies and it clearly effects on the sponsorship decisions and the amounts money companies are willing to invest. The interviewees had noticed that it is important the sponsored party has an idea of the financial situation of the company contacted, and that a right kind of sponsoring contract is offered. By requiring too much or too little support the image of the organization recruiting sponsor can damage. By offering too little, sponsor company might not value the co-operation and find the sponsored party as a minor actor that is not able to give any real benefit or equivalent for the company. If too much support is required, the possible sponsor might not have enough capital to start the co-operation. When the financial abilities of the possible sponsor are known, the contract can be specialized into the needs of the sponsor that equals the financial or other assist the sponsor offers.

The representatives of the football clubs had noticed that in increasing numbers sponsors are more interested in sponsoring the youth activity instead of the A-team, which causes some challenges: the annual expenses of A-teams are the highest.

" We have this youth organization that is really, really on early stage but it is extremely selling thing, even that selling it has become disadvantage because these sponsors want to support youths which takes away from the A-team. That is always a danger. The problem is that our A-team cannot live without sponsors. So we really have to think carefully how much we are actually going to sell these youth sponsorships, even though of course it would be really wonderful (to sell the youth sponsorships) but now it is like the sponsors want to support youths and that is out from the A-team and then it can happen that there is no more A-team." (Virta 3 October 2016)

Generally, sponsors perceive the health and social benefits of sports in lives of children and youths as a strength in sponsoring sports. (Itkonen, Ilmarinen & Matilainen 2007, 41-42) Also, Alaja (2001 24-25) mentions that social responsibility is a meaningful factor for companies in sponsorships. In addition, one of the interviewed sponsors mentioned that one reason for sponsoring a Naisten Liiga team is the importance of good and healthy role model for young, local children and youths. The sponsor also mentions the benefits of successful A-team from a point of view in which the A-team acts as a target for young girls playing football. By emphasizing more to the possible sponsors the

meaning of good role models in children's lives and how the A-team acts as one, it could be easier to receive more sponsors also for the A-team.

The representatives of sponsored parties mention that the **success** of the sponsored sports club influences the recruitment of sponsors. If the club has succeeded, it is easier to find sponsors and the sponsors are more interested. When Åland United won gold the number of sponsors suddenly arose considerably. (Virta 3 October 2016) Pyykönen (18 October 2016) says she has noticed the meaning of success in the recruitment process even though not all the sponsors want to admit it.

“So, but it's always easier to approach when you have some success to offer because it has value also for the organization, even though they don't clearly admit it that it could have an effect. But like in a way that, that you would get to play of the Finnish championship or the win of Suomen Cup, like also this year it was shown on TV and there was an article in Savon Sanomat. A really small article though, but for sure if there had been a local team there it would have been much bigger. So if you think about it that way I do believe the success has influence on those contracts.”
(Pyykönen 18 October 2016)

On the other hand, the sponsor's point of view is a bit different. Virta (5 October 2016) says that **commitment** is more important and the effort given to develop and improve continuously. They feel that by sponsoring local athletes and sports that are important for young girls in the area, they can help the society and community. Auvinen (21 October 2016) shares the idea that success is not the most important part in sponsorship with Virta (5 October 2016) but on the other hand he notes the lack of success as a risk. Though, in the end the success of the club does not have remarkable value in decisions who to sponsor.

“And of course some kind of risk is the weak success of an athlete or an athletic club, but then there is the other side of the coin, that in those times the support is actually needed, when the success is not achieved.”
(Auvinen 21 October 2016)

Sponsors may have different reasons to why they choose to sponsor something. Besides visibility, common good and helping young, local athletes or local sport clubs, **an emotional or social bond** is recognized as a reason for sponsorship by the

sponsors. There are employees who are engaged in sports activities. For example, the children of the employees can belong to sport teams or the employees themselves can do sport in a club. Often, it feels right to sponsor something the organization or the employees are engaged with. Auvinen (21 October 2016) mentions they often sponsor an organization they have some kind of bond with. For example, a sports club which uses their services or an existing customer who belongs to some association or sports club. As mentioned noted before in the research, the meaning of wide social network, connections and social bonds is extremely meaningful in sponsor recruitment.

“And like maybe just that, that everybody like knows somebody and then that somebody knows. Like these kinds of relationships do make a difference, like you are able to say that you had talked with that friend of yours and based on that it is always easier to approach to those entrepreneurs. It does matter. From nothing it is really bad, or really difficult to start to create the network.” (Pyykönen 18 October 2016)

Communication is valued extremely high by the sponsors. Sponsors feel that attention should be paid to them and they should not be forgotten during the year. The interviewed sponsors mention that the amount of communication varies depending on who is the sponsored party. Some can be in touch almost on a weekly basis, while some might not be heard of the whole year, but all in all they would like to get more information and communication from the sponsored party. Auvinen (21 October 2016) gives an example of an unsuccessful sponsor contract, in which after the contract was signed, nothing was heard of the sponsored party. On the point of view of the sponsored party, communication and paying attention to the sponsors is one of the easiest and most cost-effective ways to satisfy the sponsors. Pyykönen (18 October 2016) says they arrange meetings with the sponsors during the year. The dates of the meetings are usually agreed in the contract signing phase, since otherwise the meetings could be hard to fit into the schedules. Pyykönen considers meetings important because both parties are able to speak freely about how the co-operation has worked so far, and if there something that has not been satisfactory. The situation could be revised with existing sponsors. Are they satisfied with meetings once or twice a year, or would they be more satisfied if also a briefing by e-mail about the season and latest happenings in the club was sent to them?

“Already just liaison is rather good, that keep in... that the sponsor is not forgotten. I have experience also on situations, in which after ink was spent

on signing the contract, after that nothing was heard of the sponsored party. So basically, just taking into account (is valued). Like usually in our actions, no matter if it is a household, company, personnel, work community or an organization, taking others into account is fundamental.”
(Auvinen 21 October 2016)

5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter discusses the thesis project as a whole – the challenges, successes and the outcome. First, development suggestions based on the research are introduced. Second, the actuality and value of the research for the case company are evaluated. Third, some self-evaluation is included in order to improve the learning process and to determine what could have been done differently to help further studies. Last, suggestions for further research in this field are presented.

5.1 Development suggestions

All the interviewed parties mentioned that the co-operations could be developed in various ways. This chapter discusses the development possibilities Pallokissat Kuopio has in their sponsorship management and sponsor recruitment process. The next table expresses the main problems and challenges discovered in sponsorship and solutions to them. The chapter continues with wider explanations and defined, concrete suggestions what Pallokissat can do in practice in order to develop their practices considering sponsorships.

Challenges & Problems in Sponsoring	Solutions
Difficulties of finding the right person & the time sponsor recruitment and management requires	An intern, sponsor management as a part-time job for a player, longer-term contracts
Short-term contracts	Offering bravely long-term contracts for the sponsors and reasoning the benefits of it for both of the parties
Attracting sponsors	Offering varied ways of co-operation and visibility, communication, flexibility, emphasizing commitment of the players and the club, emotional/social bond
Sponsors' increased interest in youth and children activities	Representing a successful A-team as a good and healthy role model and aim for youth and children

TABLE 1. The challenges & Problems in sponsoring and solutions to them.

As the theory base and the interviews expressed, having one person responsible of sponsorships and co-operation partners, has a positive influence on the management of sponsorships. It creates a more professional touch as well as eases the communication between the club and partners. Partners know who to contact in issues considering sponsoring and also the representative of the club will be able to create personal relationship with the sponsors. Both of the interviewed clubs mentioned the trouble in financing a hired person for sponsorship management. As mentioned before most of the

players in Naisten Liiga either study or work besides playing. Could it be possible to offer sponsorship management as a **part-time job** for a bought **player**? Another solution can be **an intern**: Savonia University of Applied Sciences and University of Eastern Finland both have business students whose study programs include a mandatory or optional internship. Sport business is an increasing field of business and by offering actively internship positions for business students, the students will find a new place to complete their studies and Pallokissat will receive an accountant for sponsoring and managing the partners of the A-team in a cost-effective way. Business students have the newest information and new ideas how to develop the system and are eager to learn new. Third possibility for this problem can be **longer sponsor contracts**. Longer contracts could enable budgeting a part- or full-time employee into the annual budget. The employee would take care of sponsorship management for a specific period of time. After the period of time has passed, the situation can be revised. Has the employee brought enough funds for the club for the employment to be cost-effective? As indicated in the analyze of the interviews and theory part, companies are ready to give more support, if the equivalent offered to them is greater. Also communication was valued high by the sponsors. By having a person who is responsible for the sponsorships the amount of communication could be improved as well as continuous development of sponsor management in Pallokissat.

Long-term sponsor contracts not only save time every year but also assists in achieving more with the sponsor contracts and in reaching objectives set for sponsoring. The time used to renew the sponsor contract every year could be used to communicate and to deepen the co-operation. Longer-term plans can be done with the sponsor, the actions for first year can be determined and the aims of how the co-operation will be developed for the second year can be agreed. In addition, if something has not been satisfactory for either of the parties the first year, by discussing the issues can be solved and solutions found to what could be done better or differently next year in order to achieve the goals set. Long-term contracts offer financial security for longer period, which gives a possibility to plan the budget further at once in Pallokissat. These factors make it advisable to offer a two-year-contract first. It is always possible to drop the offer to a one-year-contract if the sponsor sees two years as a problem. The other way around it is harder, if the sponsor has already agreed on a one-year contract it is difficult to reason the benefits of a two-year contract and get the sponsor to sign the longer contract.

Sponsor companies have different needs and expectations for sponsoring. An investment company that does not need marketing and does sponsoring for good will and social responsibility has different requirements than a local company that expects visibility and new possible customers. Already in the contract negotiations it is essential to **clarify the specific needs and expectations** of the sponsor company. Discussion about which of the implementation methods used in sponsoring are the most effective for the sponsor and what kind of sponsorship covers best the needs of both parties. Since sponsors may not always know about the different ways sponsoring can be operated in practice it is recommended to offer and negotiate about different co-operation forms. A procedure, for example a **permanent survey** with questions considering the expectations and needs of the sponsor, will ease the efforts in finding out the right expectations from the sponsor's part. After that it is possible to offer right kind of forms of co-operation. At the moment Pallokissat did not have a clear system for different levels of sponsorships. Creating different sponsor groups, for example main-, gold-, silver and bronze sponsors, would clarify the selling process and on the other hand, also the sponsors would be aware of where they are among the partners of the club.

By creating **different levels of sponsorships** and different kind of '**sponsor packages**', there will always be a suitable form of co-operation for every possible sponsor company. The content of the packages should be decided beforehand, but of course the packages can be customized to fit the sponsor's needs. The financial equivalent from the sponsor can be determined after the content of the package for the sponsor is decided. Besides possible services, as later introduced 'Pallokissat-päivä' or 'partners' game', the visibility on game gear or social media, season tickets, player visits in partner's events and other relevant information should be written down into the contract as a part of the sponsor package. This way the co-operation becomes clear and simpler. Both parties know what the up-coming co-operation requires and includes and can prepare for it. When everything is written down the risk of misunderstandings decreases and everything can be revised from the contract in uncertain situations. In addition, if players or coaches are needed to visit a partner's event or they are needed to arrange something on the pitch, a clear job description and time table will ease the arrangements. When the requirements from players or coaches or other staff are presented early enough, everyone is able to arrange their personal life (work, friends, studies) to fit the requirement and the co-operation is fluent and satisfactory for everyone.

Communication is valued high among sponsors and found as an important part of the partnership. Besides the meetings that are already arranged with the sponsors, regular briefings by email will make the sponsors feel important and they know what is happening with the sponsored party. They get an idea how the season is running and is there something else going on. In addition, if the sponsor has a development idea or wants to contact for some other reason, the threshold is lower to do so, since the club has often been regularly in contact. The email briefings offer a channel also for some marketing. One example is the previous year introduced 'Kaikki-Mukaan -Hanke' (Everybody In -Project) for children aged 2-4 and for 15-24-year-old girls and women with disabilities. In the project the players of the A-team taught and played football with the participants. (Pallokissat 2016) The partners can also be interested in this kind of actions and maybe even have their own children, who would like to take part.

Sponsoring is an investment from which the company wants to get some equivalent, for example visibility, new customers, positive image or rise in sales. (Vuokko 2002, 310) When recruiting sponsors, the person in charge of the negotiations can think outside the box. The visibility does not always have to be a 'tag' in social media or logo printed in the game leaflet. As Haltia mentioned in Helsingin Sanomat, a possible customer will benefit more and remember the sponsor that offered cushions for audience seats better than the sponsor whose advertisement the customer saw on the side of the field in a game event. (Hakola 2016). Different, new kind of visibility can stick better on customers' minds and offer better equivalent for the sponsor company. This kind of factors can be used in the negotiation phase to emphasize the visibility and possible new customer base the company can get from sponsoring.

The increased interest of sponsors towards children and youth activities of football clubs can cause some challenges when recruiting sponsors for the A-team. In sponsor recruitment phase this issue can be reasoned with the importance of **role models and aims** for youth and children. A successful A-team can act as an example how with sustainable work and training the local children can some day be a part of the A-team and play football in a successful team on the highest national level in Finland. Team sport offers channels for socialization and decreases the risk of social exclusion of children, which are important factors, when social responsibility is one of the aims of the sponsor. By emphasizing the meaning of the role models and the A-team in children's and youth's lives a new kind of reason for sponsorship can be presented for sponsors.

Generally, it is easier to create **deeper co-operations** with the already existing partners than create new ones. The results of the research indicate that if sponsors are offered more equivalent they are willing to give more financial support. A new form of co-operation can be a 'Pallokissat-day' offered along with the sponsorship for a certain amount of money. The day is suitable for work place health promotion day for different companies and includes having fun and learning the basics of football and of course games. The day can be led by the players or the head coach. By promoting the day professionally and by having a clear and well thought content for it, the event can be a valuable addition to visibility and other equivalents offered to sponsors by Pallokissat.

Another way to intensify the existing contracts and to offer something new for partners is to market the game events as an excellent way to network and communicate with other companies and organizations of the area. If not every home game, but every other or every first game of the month could be marketed as a '**partners' game**'. The main partners would be invited to the game with avec and coffee and snacks or dinner would be served. The partners would have time to get to know each other and socialize before the game and possibility to create deals and co-operations of their own. The head coach can give a briefing about the game, what to look at and to concentrate on and the partners can have a chance to ask questions. This will make the game event even more exciting for partners who have not watched football so much. Because of the briefing before the game, they are able to look at the issues pointed out and see if the game goes on as predicted. At half time the same space would be open for the partners to continue the conversations. At the end of the game, a player or two could come to greet the partners and tell opinions about the game from the player's point of view. The partners would have a possibility to ask questions about the game and season, and create a connection with the players. The partners would be able to see the commitment and how the players play with all their heart after a success or disappointment. Commitment and hard work were valued higher by the sponsors in this research than success. Business decisions are made not only by reasoning but also with feelings and emotional bond. The emotional bond created between the players and sponsors will create sustainability in the sponsorship and ease the effort in further sponsor negotiations with existing partners. Besides offering a place and time for the partners to network, the same situation offers a tempting chance for Pallokissat to communicate with the existing partners about new possibilities for co-operation and to meet new entrepreneurs. At the moment not many of the sponsors with season tickets come and see home games live so in addition the marketing of 'sponsor's game' would bring more audience to the game events. If the 'partners' game' is executed professionally and with

care the financial equivalent from it can be rather high. The idea of 'partners' game' can also be used in game host events. The same services can be offered for the game host and the host's guests by a specific price. Of course, if the guests of the game host are new the briefing of the coach or executive manager can be varied to consider more about the club and the A-team, and the aims of the season and where the team is at the moment.

As it is now, the host of the game is mentioned in the game leaflet and in commercials. To create more visibility and equivalent for the **game host**, a limited offer coupon of the services or products of the game host could be given to the audience with the game ticket. This way everyone in the audience would get the coupon and notice better who the game host is. An offer like -10% off or a free trial of a service would capture the interest of the person in audience more efficiently than just a printed advertisement in the game leaflet. If wanted, the host company could also deal out their own brochures of the company or have their own stand for example during the half-time of the game and before the game. These actions would bring even more visibility and equivalent for the game host.

Gender equality is a topic that has been on display for a long time. As mentioned in the theory base, female football is the main team sport for girls in Finland and the number of players increase year by year. The vision of Pallokissat is to be one of the leading women's football clubs in the Nordic countries. Åland United uses the equality question in their sponsor recruitment process also when contacting the existing sponsors of IFK Mariehamn, which is the men's team on the Åland Islands. When offering a possibility for sponsorship they boldly ask: "Since you sponsor men's football why wouldn't you want to sponsor women's?". Could the same argument be used in Kuopio area? If an organization already now sponsors football, why would not they want to be part of the most important sport in Finnish girls' lives and help to create a top women's football club, whose A-team is one of the best in the Nordic countries? As reasoned before, a successful A-team is a good and healthy role model to look up to for girls and women of all ages and it shows an example of the fact that by hard work and dedication girls from Kuopio area can some day be a part of a successful A-team.

5.2 The relevance of the thesis, value for the case company and evaluation

The need for the research was large and the topic was current. The novelty value of this research is notable: Finnish football sponsoring has not yet been studied widely and no

researches from the point of view of a women's football club were found. This research can be perceived as a starting point for further researches in this field. There are substantial challenges in finding enough funding and enough sponsors in Pallokissat Kuopio as well as in other women's football clubs. This thesis assists to find new ways to attract the possible sponsors and offers new viewpoints and concrete suggestions for Pallokissat to improve their actions in practice.

Pallokissat is able to utilize the whole thesis in their acts to improve sponsor management. The theory base includes wide, current and useful information about sponsorship from the viewpoints of both parties. The analyzed data from the interviews and the development suggestions offer information which Pallokissat can use in practice in the future. The aim of this thesis was to improve sponsor management and recruitment in Pallokissat and to give concrete help to the persons in charge of sponsorships the club. From this thesis these persons will get information about the viewpoints the specific literature of sponsorship offers as well as about the expectations the sponsors have for sponsoring. In that part the research fulfilled the demands set. This study was planned to answer the specific needs of one single organization, Pallokissat Kuopio, but still offers a good base for further studies in this field. The number of interviews was rather small so it is challenging to make national generalizations based on those interviews. This can be perceived as criticism towards the research. On the other hand, the baseline in sponsor management is rather similar in all Finnish women's football clubs so adapting these results and suggestions may have a positive effect also on other clubs. By taking the suggested development possibilities in action Pallokissat will be able to offer diverse possibilities for co-operative companies, which will affect positively sponsorships as a whole.

The implementation of the research progressed in practice as planned. Critically evaluated the quality, value and reliability, could have been improved. Also references and the novelty of them have to be evaluated critically. The research was implemented in a bit more than four months, which is a relatively short time for a research. The plans of the deadline of the research changed notably in the final phase of the research and a work load of a month was performed in a week. By investing more hours into the theory part, the study could have been compared better with other related, already researched material.

One of the main issues in qualitative research is the planning and implementation of the interviews. By investing more time into defining the themes more accurately and by

creating more additional questions, more answers and information could have been received from the interviewees. In addition, the unnecessary information of the interviews could have been replaced with valuable information for the research by having more additional questions. The interview situation itself is always a situation that could be improved and the interviewer could also be more professional. A more experienced interviewer would surely have received more material and information from the interviews.

5.3 Learning process of the researcher

One of the natural goals in a thesis is the learning process of the researcher. The research process included various, different and new stages for a novice researcher, which made learning diverse. First, immersing to the subject of the research, sponsorship, taught enormously about the subject. The research began with exploring women's football in Finland and the base of sponsoring: the different definitions, different forms, changes, advantages and disadvantages and problems sponsorship has. The research questions were planned to give more information about the features sponsoring has in Finnish women's football and how it could be improved. Hopefully this new approach opens the field for further research.

In addition, development has occurred in understanding sponsoring in a Finnish context. How it is practiced and what kind of equivalents are used. The challenges and opportunities of sponsorship have become clearer. Sponsoring has a notable growing potential to become even more important part of marketing communication of companies. On the other hand, the tight financial situation and demands of cost-effectiveness complicates the development and growth of sponsoring in Finland. Marketing budget is often the first one to be cut down if savings are needed and in marketing sponsoring has not yet achieved a stable position as an important part of marketing strategy of companies. This research gave an opportunity to study these opportunities and challenges more profoundly as during other studies.

Exploring previous research literature and theory base expanded conceptual and theoretical understanding. In addition, learning can be seen in conclusions and analyzing phases of the research, in which the research material was mirrored to research questions, theory base and previous researches. In previous studies analyzing and concluding has not been made in the same broadness as in this research.

Completing the research has been a path with some obstacles on the way. As a novice researcher completing a whole research has been a step to unknown and has included some challenges. Narrowing the topic, choosing right methods for analyzing and gathering research material felt challenging and caused some doubts, if the right decisions for the research had been made. That is why all the selections and viewpoints have been explained and rationalized for the reader as clearly as possible.

Gathering interview material for the research in this broadness was a new experience. The interview situations taught interaction and social skills as well as processing and interpreting verbal information. The interviews included feelings of success but also left hunger to improve skills as an interviewer. Even though varied and deep information was received, a more experienced interviewer would most likely have got even more relevant information from the interviews.

Transcribing the interviews was time-consuming but also the most straightforward phase of the research. The analyzing phase was the most challenging part for the researcher. The choice of analyzing methods, how to analyze the material, which parts of the interview material are relevant and which are not demanded long and deep thought processes from the novice researcher. After completing the research, the challenges of processing interview material and the meaning of the decisions the researcher makes in the research compared to analyzing quantitative material became clearer for the researcher. If the researcher had been more experienced, the analyzing process had probably been more proficient and less time taking.

Completing the research in a language that is not the native language felt difficult at times. Time had to be used to read chapters repeatedly to fulfill the demands of academic English and to make the text easy and understandable for the reader. Though the researcher has studied her three and a half years' degree in English, not until after three months the language started to feel more fluent and enjoyable. It mirrored to the writing work in the research, writing started to feel comfortable after three months of slight discomfort and insecurity because of the foreign language.

All in all, the research process has been an instructive experience. The challenges in selection of research and analyzing methods were all compensated as the research started to become complete and the delight of new findings and the success of the research realized to the researcher. Even though the research was time consuming and demanded sleepless nights, all things considered, it was an extremely rewarding

experience. An important milestone in studies was reached as the researcher completed her first qualitative research, and felt she understood some relevant factors from the phenomenon being researched and completed an outright succeeded research.

5.4 Further Research Suggestions

As mentioned in the introduction of this research, sport sponsoring in football is relevantly young form to market and has not been studied widely yet. This research was probably the first one from the viewpoint of a women's football club as the sponsored party. This study was planned to answer the specific needs of one single organization, Pallokissat Kuopio, but of course this thesis offers a good base for further studies in this field. The number of interviews was rather small, so it is hard to make national generalizations based on them. In further researches, by wider sampling and larger number of interviews it is possible to receive more comprehensive and general information about the challenges and special characteristics female football clubs have in sponsoring.

Another interesting viewpoint for future research is to compare sponsoring in women's football clubs in Finland to another Nordic country. For example, in Sweden football culture and the amount of female football players is a step ahead of Finland and the sponsorship is more developed. (Paavola 2007) By comparing the Finnish state of sponsoring into sponsoring that is a step ahead can bring new viewpoints and development possibilities to Finnish female football sponsoring. The cultural base in Nordic countries is rather similar, which in practice can mean that the same kind of actions performed in Sweden would most likely be usable in Finland.

Since sponsoring is a two-way co-operation and the competition of sponsors is quite intense, I believe by studying the audience and people connected with football clubs, valuable information can be discovered. The sponsored party would be able to offer more specific and useful equivalent for the sponsor, if the interest group was studied.

The capital in women's football is still quite small compared to men's football. Men's football teams are joint-stock companies with chief executive officers and employed staff, while women's football teams are registered associations with mostly volunteer work. This brings challenges to sponsor contracts in female football. Another big issue is the amount of audience in the game events. The gap in that between men's and women's team is rather large and is one of the reasons women's teams struggle in

sponsor recruitment. By further study in this field and by discovering what kind of special characteristics women's football clubs can offer, I believe the financial state of women's football clubs can be improved and sponsorships can be developed into more beneficial ones for both of the parties.

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Focused Interview Frame for the Representatives of the Sponsors

1. Background information
 - First can you tell a little about your company?
 - How are decisions considering sponsorships and other related matters made in your organization?
 - What is your role in sponsorship contracts?

2. Sponsoring as a part of marketing communication
 - What is the position of sponsoring in your marketing plan?
 - How important sponsoring is in your company?
 - How long have you practiced sponsoring?
 - How was your marketing communication before sponsoring? Has sponsoring changed marketing communication?
 - What kind of organizations/events are sponsored by your company?
 - What kind of sponsoring do you practice?
 - How long are the sponsoring contracts usually? Why?
 - What kind of changes has happened in your sponsoring habits during the years?
 - Have those changes had an effect on other marketing?

3. The goals in sponsorships
 - What kind of goals have you set for sponsoring?
 - What is the meaning of the next four: visibility, brand, sales goals, social responsibility?
 - What kind of image do you want to give of your company?
 - Do you use Åland United/Pallokissat in your own marketing? For example, players in your own events?
 - What do you get in return from sponsoring from Åland United/Pallokissat?
 - What would you like to have in return?
 - How could the co-operation be developed?

4. Choosing the sponsored companies
 - How do you choose the organizations who to sponsor?
 - How do you see sponsorships with women's sports? For example, is there any advantages/ disadvantages?
 - Which factors have an effect on the decision?
 - What kind of risks sponsoring has?
 - What kind of unsuccessful or bad experiences you have had about sponsoring?
 - Can you give an example of a well succeeded sponsorship?

5. The results of sponsoring
 - How do you follow or meter the results of sponsoring?

6. Future aspects
 - What kind of development wishes you have for sponsorships in the future?
 - What kind of possibilities mobile technology could give?

Can the name of your company be published and possibly to quote you in the research?

Focused Interview Frame for the Representatives of the Football Clubs

1. The meaning of sponsors

- How many sponsors do you have at the moment? How many main sponsors?
- Do you plan to increase the number of sponsors in the future?
- How important part sponsors are of the annual budget?
- What other income the budget consists of?
- What kind of effect the sponsors have in your organization? Do they offer financial assist, something else or both? If something else what?

2. Recruitment process

- Who is responsible of the sponsor recruitment in your organization or do the sponsors offer themselves?
- Do you always use same guideline in sponsor recruitment?
- What kind of sales argument you use in the recruitment of sponsors?
- What kind of effect the success of the club has in the recruitment of sponsors?
- How long the sponsoring contracts usually are? Why?
- Is there some benefits that longer term contracts could bring?
- What is the meaning of earlier contacts and network of the person who is responsible of sponsor recruitment? Is it easy to benefit from earlier relationships?

3. The sponsor's point of view

- What do the sponsors receive in return?
- What do you think the sponsors would want to receive in return?
- What do you think are the reasons why companies start to sponsor your club?
- How do you take care of and maintain long-term sponsorships?
- What is the meaning of the values and image of the sponsor? What is the importance of these in creating the sponsorship?

4. The risks and difficulties

- What kind of problems and difficulties you have noticed in sponsor recruitment?
- Why the co-operation has ended sometimes? Why the sponsor has not wanted to continue co-operation? If it has happened do you know what the reasons behind the decision are?
- What kind of challenges the sponsorships have caused?

5. Other

- How has the form of co-operations changed during the years as mobile and social media have become more common? Have new ways to co-operate been developed?
- Do you have shared goals with your sponsors? If so, what kind of?
- How does the visibility of female football effect on sponsoring? (For example the increased visibility of shown Naisten Liiga games on Huuhkaja-TV and other online streams)

- Can the name of your company be published and possibly to quote you in the research?

