

The legitimacy and funding of the Finnish high performance sport centers

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Aim of the paper

High Performance Sport Centers (HPSC) have become one critical factor of a successful elite sport system. Since the formation of Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) in 1981 many other countries have adopted similar structures in elite sport development, where athlete training, coaching development, sport research and sport medicine are combined in effective way (Armstrong, Hansen & Gauthier 1991). However, nations have organized and classified their HPSC's in many different ways (Digel et al 2006). This paper analyses the funding and legitimacy of the Finnish system of HPSC's by asking following questions: What kind of strategies are the HPSC's adopting in pursuit of gaining and maintaining their legitimacy? How does the public funding system of sport institutes support HPSC's and development of elite sport in overall?

There is a wide range of more or less independent HPSC's in Finland. Sport institutes (14) are the traditional and more institutionalized centers located mainly at rural areas, while the sport academies (19) are new network-kind centers with the main task to combine training and studying in cities (Mäkinen 2012). The main focus of this paper is on the sport institutes, which were established by sport federations in 1927-1977 to support their needs in education and training. Four sport institutes were named as national elite sport training centers already in 1987 and later in 2000 more detailed classification, with national and regional level centers, was created. Today sport institutes operate under the authority of the Ministry of Education and their main duty is related to education in the field of sports and physical exercise. In addition to this they are offering a wide range of services to the sport (HPSC), leisure and welfare sectors. It could be argued that sport institutes are operating in multiple, continuously changing environments, where the maintenance of legitimacy is a challenging task. The different legitimation strategies are analyzed according the model of Suchman (1995), who identifies three forms of legitimacy: pragmatic, moral and cognitive.

Methodology

Data from 14 sport institutes were gathered as part of evaluation project of the Finnish HPSC's. The data included: 1) documents (annual report, strategies and plans of sport

institutes including HPSC's), 2) questionnaires to the managers of HPSC's and elite sport managers of NGO's 3) interviews with the managers of HPSC's and the principals of the sport institutes. The state funding of sport institutes is based on the law of liberal civil education. The allocation of that state support to different domains of sport (youth sport, elite sport, adult mass sport and sport for special groups) is analyzed in years 2001-2010.

Results and discussion

The Finnish HPSC's are part of the sport institutes. The legitimacy and funding of those centers has been unsolved issue for 25 years. Main reasons for that have been the policy of the state and the collapse of the sport movements in 1994. HPSC's have not been recognized as official tasks of sport institutes by the Ministry of Education, which in turn influences to the funding of the centers. The annual turnover of all the institutes (14) in 2010 was 75 million Euros, which included 16 million Euros of state support to sport activities. The calculatory proportion of elite sport was only seven percent (1,1 m€) of the total support.

A major challenge within the fragmented Finnish sport system is that the core tasks and resources of elite sport are dispersed in several independent organizations. Finnish Olympic Committee, which has the main responsibility for developing and coordinating elite sports, doesn't have resources or power to extend control to the operational level. In order to develop their elite sport activities, the independent sport institutes need to form partnerships with the National Sport Federations. Many of the federations don't want to centralize their elite sport activities in one center. Instead they try to reduce the costs of elite sport by asking for bids from many centers to provide elite sport services.

References

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