

# ELITE SPORT INFRASTRUCTURE IN RURAL AND URBAN FINLAND

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## Aim of the paper

The Finnish approach to elite sport development could be characterized by a very fragmented organisation and administrative structure and by many competing aims and ideologies of the various actors and institutions involved (Green & Houlihan 25,26). Despite the many strategies and working groups, which all have agreed, that the country needs more strategic and coordinated elite sport policy, the implementation processes of those policies have not been successful. There exists many conflicts and tensions in Finnish sport systems, which hinder the reforms. This paper analyses one conflict - the tension between the rural and urban Finland in elite sport development. This tension is reflected by the analysis of two different elite sport structures: Finnish sport institutes (14), which are traditional and internat-type centres' located mainly at rural areas, while the sport academies (19) are new network-kind centres' with the main task to combine training and studying in cities.

## Theoretical background

This paper is based on long term policy changes in at state level in Finland. The development of the sport institutes (since 1925) and sport academies (since 1998) is discussed with the transformation of agricultural state first into to the Nordic welfare state and then into competitive state. The development of competitive state has emphasized the role of urban cities and their attractiveness as basis of the competitiveness of the whole nation (Pelkonen 2008). The development has challenged the old model of sport, which is deeply rooted in rural communities, peasant culture and sports related to endurance and stamina.

## Methodology

This paper is based on data collected on two different processes. First, data from sport institutes (annual reports, strategies and plans of sport institutes and sport academies) was collected during the evaluation process of Finnish High performance sport centres' in 2011. Secondly, the similar data from sport academies was collected in 2008-2009 and 2013. The two sets of data consisted basic structural and operational information of these two institutions e.g.; financial resources, sport facilities, number and quality of partnerships with sport organizations and number and quality of services offered to the athletes. To further deepen the analysis between the two models of sport centres', five interviews with the principals of the sport institutes (n=2) and coordinators of the sport academies (n=2) and with the officer in the Ministry of education and culture were made.

## Results and discussion

The weaknesses of Finnish fragmented and decentralized sport system could be seen in the recent development of

sport academies and the strategy of traditional sport institutes to respond to this development. When the sport academies are located "where the young people live and study", the sport institutes have not lost their position. Instead of that, they have been able to maintain the close relationship with the state and the sport organizations. They have invest heavily on sport infrastructure, invented new models of partnerships and became coordinators of sport academies. This has led to a situation, where many of the sports don't want to centralize their elite sport activities in one center and the scarce elite sport resources are dispersed widely.

## References

- Green, M. & Houlihan, B. (2005). Elite sport development. Policy learning and political priorities. Routledge.
- Pelkonen, A. (2008). The Finnish Competition State and Entrepreneurial Policies in the Helsinki Region. University of Helsinki. Department of Sociology