
The Reform of Finnish Sport

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Abstract

THE REFORM OF FINNISH SPORT

The topic of this presentation is the reform of Finnish sport, which aims to reduce the governance of national sports organizations, and in particular central organizations, and to focus the material and immaterial resources on the local level and grassroots sports.

In the early 1990s, the field of Finnish sports organizations separated to different sectors. The old centralized model was changed to a multipolar system, which meant that the power of the solid sport movement became weaker. At the same time, the Ministry of Education and Culture changed the funding systems, so the national sports organizations/federations and the regional and domain organizations received their allowances based on results. This new system gave more power to the public sector, and most of the sports organizations at the national level became very dependent on state's allowances. The long-term effect was that the national sports organizations became bureaucratic, which also meant that connection between national sport organizations and sports club in local level became weaker.

In 2009, almost 20 years after this change, the national sports organizations at various levels began to have discussions about setting up a new central organization for sports. Also state's will was strong (Hallitusohjelma 2011). The active process has already taken over five years, and it is still ongoing. Despite this, in June 2012, four central organizations set up a new organization, which is called the Finnish Sport Confederation. At the same time, the Finnish Olympic Committee reduced its own organization. The current discussion concerns the possibility of annex the Finnish Sport Confederation, Olympic Committee, and Paralympic Committee.

The reform has not been easy. The biggest problem has been the sports organizations lack of commitment to common targets. Organizations believe their own targets are more important than the common targets, but these common targets could be more important when the aim is to move the focus to the local level. Furthermore, the state's control system

influenced the sports organizations' differentiation, because the state's results-based funding system did not work. (Lehtonen 2014.)

This presentation is based on the doctoral study Structural change in the civic engagement in sport and exercise and the ethos of civic engagement, which is in its early stages. In the study, civic actors in sports and exercise are divided into three groups: 1) heads of national sports confederations, 2) heads of national sports federations and regional sports associations, and 3) local-level actors in sports clubs. A fourth group is made of the state's sports administration (i.e., public sector actors). Heads of sports associations includes both operational managers and elected leaders.

The study reviews the appreciations and ethos of civic engagement in sports and exercise following the structural reform process of the national sports federations. It seems that the ethos in different actor groups is lacking in uniformity, and this has led to a situation in which the sports organizations at different levels are both functionally and politically weak actors. Top-level reforms are expected to be seen in other actor groups involved in civic activity of sport. Structural reforms change the social configuration between actors. By studying the ethos of civic engagement, the different forms of capital that guide the actors' endeavors and objectives can be identified.

The main research data consists of thematic interviews (with the heads of national sports confederations, national sports federations, regional sports associations, and the state's sports administration), which were conducted in 2012 (n=36). In 2013–2014, this interview data will be complemented by new thematic interviews with the heads of sports associations and sports club actors (n=30) and by a survey aimed at sports club actors (n=300). The research data also includes an observation diary and written documents on the structural reform (meeting documents and news articles in printed and digital format).

References

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Hallitusohjelma 2011. Pääministeri Jyrki Kataisen hallituksen ohjelma.