

Session: **Sport policy III.**

Abstract nr: **EASM-0089**

Elite sport development in Finland: Against the mainstream

*J. Lamsa*¹

¹*Research Institute for Olympic sports, -, Jyväskylä, Finland*

jari.lamsa@kihu.fi

Background

Recent comparative studies on the development of the national elite sport systems have concluded that the systems have become more and more homogenous during the last two decades (Green & Oakley 2001; Bosscher et al 2006). Unlike this trend, the organization of Finnish sport and elite sport has become more fragmented. It is claimed that in the 1990's Finnish centralized sport system changed to polycentric physical culture (Heikkala 2009).

Finnish Olympic Committee was founded in 1907. Finland has a remarkable success in the Olympic Games held in the beginning of the 20th century. However, the role of the Olympic Committee remained marginal up to the 1960's as the intense club structure and the powerful central organizations took care of the athlete development. FOC was the interest organization for Olympic Sports in Finland. Between the years of 1965 and 1993 FOC developed into more powerful organization developing Finnish Olympic Sports with the help of increasing resources from the welfare state and effective use of experts.

Before the 1993 the major structural division of Finnish sport system was done according to the political left and right. The bourgeois and workers sport movement fought continuously for power and resources. In 1993 the structural reform of Finnish sport dissolved this political division. However, the new umbrella organization, Finnish Sports Federation (FSF) did not develop into the traditional central organization. Instead, it became more like trustee- and service organization. The reform repositioned elite sport as one of the five domains of organized sporting culture. It also created a question; how should the Finnish elite sport be managed and coordinated?

Objectives and methods

This presentation reviews and analyses the role, status and position of the Finnish Olympic Committee (FOC) in the field of Finnish Sport community since the structural reform in 1993. The study is guided by thick description of the elite sport development in Finland since 1993. A mixture of methods is applied: interviews and document analysis including elite sport strategies, and newspaper articles.

Results

Since the reform in 1993 there has been a dispute over the role of the FOC; whether it should be a domain and "central" organization for elite sport or just organization responsible for promoting

Olympic Sports. In 2004 the working group of elite sport set by the Ministry of Education concluded that FOC should be the organization responsible for the development and coordination of the Finnish elite sport. Since the report FOC has been active for developing items such as coach education and the athlete support pathways. Despite of these activities the FOC has been able to created only weak integration and coordination into the Finnish elite sport. Major reasons preventing the leading role of FOC are: many resources needed for the development of effective coordination of athlete development and coaching are located outside the sport movement, FOC support is aimed mainly to the Olympic Sports and there are altogether 74 national sport federations (NSF) in Finland and the state represented by the ministry of education has been emphasizing more the sport for all activities than elite sport.

Conclusion

The decreasing success of Finnish athletes at international stage and the criticism towards the lack of co-ordination, vision and leadership in Finnish sport have been public issues for long time. Despite of the criticism towards the current model, the organizational arrangement of the elite sport has been quite stable since the reform 1993. The FOC have many functions related to co-ordination of elite sport development and resource allocation, but the power play between national federations, FOC, FSF, other domain organizations and the state, represented by the ministry of education, has not lead to the integrated elite sport development.

References

- Bosscher, V. De, Bingham, J, Shibli, S., Bottenburg, M. van, Knop, P. De. (2008). *The Global Sporting Arms race*. Meyer & Meyer Sport.
- Green, M. & Oackley, B. (2001). Elite sport development systems and playing to win: uniformity and diversity in international approaches. *Leisure Studies* 20, p. 247-267.
- Heikkala, J. (2009) *Sport Governance in Finland*. Finnish sport Federation, Retrieved 30th of March from: http://www.slu.fi/materiaalit/julkaisut_ja_oppaat/