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Three variations of the Nordic Sport Model

*J. Mäkinen*¹

¹*Research Institute for Olympic sports, Sociology of sport, Jyväskylä, Finland*

jarmo.makinen@kihu.fi

Background

There is a widespread assumption that the Nordic countries share a common sport model in general terms. The concept *Nordic sport model* is widely used in sport literature. In more practical circumstances, it is also often referred to by the officers of the sport organizations and state administrations in Nordic countries. Each of the Nordic countries seems to consider that their own sport model is 'Nordic'.

The concept or model is not a detailed system, but it is generally defined by two main features. Firstly, the sport is organized as a movement that is based strongly on the civic activity. This refers to the historical roots of the sport organizations, strong democratic grass-root representation on the decision-making bodies as well as to everyday operations put into practice by voluntary work. The inherent and the historical ambition of the sport movement has also been to constitute step by step more and more unified *sport movement* and to gather all the sport organizations and their members under one umbrella organization (SLU in Finland, RF in Sweden and NIF in Norway). Secondly, interest groups of the organized sport movement are capable to negotiate with the state representatives. The subject of the negotiations could vary from the broad sport policy outlines to the detailed lists of names or organizations accepted to be receivers or candidates of the state subsidy. In some cases the border between state and sport movement could be unclear.

Objectives

The main objective of the study is to compare sport models between three Nordic countries: Finland, Norway and Sweden. The comparison will be done in two dimensions (civic activity and state relationship) according to main features of the *Nordic sport model* as described above. The study has two interrelated questions to answer. Firstly, which are the main differences and similarities between these models? Secondly, are the models put in practice in these countries characteristically "Nordic" by their nature? In the discussion the study, possible causes and explanations for the differences and similarities between the three models are explored.

Methods

In the case of civic activity, the comparison focuses on the complex question of how well the grass-root level representation and impact is implemented in the *sport movement*. For example how the sport clubs and their members are taken into account when electing the decision making bodies for the sport organizations. Further, how the power is distributed between these elected

officials and professional staff. Overall, the question is how the vertical hierarchy occurs in the sport movement. In other words, what are the ties binding together the individual sport club member and the uppermost committee. The comparison is based on the formal rules of the umbrella organizations (SLU, RF and NIF) and their independent member organizations. The data is collected from the proceedings and annual reports of the sport organizations and the documents concerning their rules.

In the case of state relationship, the comparison focuses on the power balance and the division of tasks between sport movement and the state. Politically: how the sport movement is taken into account when the state is setting the agenda and the goals of the sport policy. This comparison is based on the goals expressed in the official sport policy documents in each of the three states as well as the composition of the different arm's length bodies in the sport sector. Financially: how sovereign the umbrella organization is when allocating the government funding further for the member organizations. The comparison follows this earmarking and distribution process of the state's sport subsidies between years 2004 and 2008. Financial data is collected from the states' budgets and financial statements of the sport organizations.

Results

The analysis based on these two dimensions will show us clear differences between the three Nordic countries. Finland is different from Sweden and Norway in both of the two dimensions. Differences between Norway and Sweden are most visible concerning the relationship between state and sport movement. Discussion concerning the 'Nordic model' and its variations in the three Nordic countries will be opened up in the paper.