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## THE COMPARISON OF THE ELITE SPORT REFORMS IN FINLAND, NORWAY AND NEW ZEALAND

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Synopsis:

The aim of the conference paper is to present preliminary results of the comparison between the three elite sport reforms (Finland, New Zealand, Norway)

Abstract:

AIM

The aim of the conference paper is to present preliminary results of the comparison between the three elite sport reforms (Finland, New Zealand, Norway). The paper is focusing on the planning period of the reforms: how the reform was initiated and financed, how the reform makers were nominated and the plan produced. Further, how the prevailing national arrangements were altered in the reform plans. Attention will also be given to the theoretical question how to build the linkages between the cases because the reforms have taken place in different times and places.

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The study is part of the comparative research concerning the elite sport systems in Norway, Finland and New Zealand. The main focus of the study is on the interplay between elite sport system and the wider institutional context of the elite sport reforms in New Zealand, Finland and Norway. In many countries, elite sport reforms have changed since the 1990s towards more and more intentional strategic process, in which the reformers follow international currents and evaluate different approaches in other countries. This awareness has led the countries to seek and adopt best methods available to improve or to sustain their elite sport success. This policy learning process has probably been one component in making elite sport systems more homogenous in different countries (Oakley, B & Green, M., 2001). At the same time the view about the effective elite sport system or "critical factors contributing to elite sport success" has become more specified and a field of research in itself (De

Bosscher et al 2006). Due to these research and policy learning processes, an instrumentally rationalized ideal model of elite sport system has been developed (e.g. SPLISS-model in De Bosscher et al 2006).

This paper recognizes the value of the ideal model but sees it useful to complement it with the view in which the elite sport system and its goals are seen in broader cultural and political contexts in which they are embedded. The knowledge of the ideal model is easily available and recognizable but elite sport cannot reform itself if this model is conflictual with other sport policy lines or interests of other sport organizations. This helps to understand e. g. why some countries like Finland have been incapable to adopt ideal model and to reform elite sport system in spite of many attempts (Mäkinen 2012, 209).

#### METHODOLOGY, FRAMEWORK AND MATERIAL

The analysis of the reform process is based on the interviews of the sport leaders and government officials and members of the governmental workforces. To complement these personal views, the organizational level and network level data (only Finland) was also collected based on earlier studies.

#### RESULTS

All these three countries were willing to improve their elite sport success through the reform. All they seek same kind of ideal model of solution, more centralized and better coordinated elite sport system. Despite of this similar target setting the reform process itself was unique in each country. The 'platform' of the reform was made up by national arrangements with the specific policy content, administrative traditions and institutional settings in the sport sector. All these countries were facing the situation in which the new reform requirements altered old institutional settings including power balance and resource allocation. The wider the gap between new requirements and old settings were the longer the planning period was needed to implement reform. In Finland and New Zealand more than one reform plan with the similar solutions was carried out before the implementation. The list of comparable variables and their analysis will be given in the presentation.

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