

# Moral Indignation And Disappointment With The Results — Measuring Public Trust In Finnish Olympic Committee And Elite Sport Reform

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## **Aim of the research**

The purpose of this research is to measure and analyse public trust in Finnish Olympic Committee (FOC). FOC is an independent non-governmental organization but receives over 80% of its funding from the government. The study is motivated by the question of how the experience of major changes in the field of elite sport during the last few years have effected on FOCs legitimacy. The elite sport reform was carried through 2009–2012. The main outcome of this reform was the foundation of the *High Performance Unit (HPU)* under the Finnish Olympic committee, which started its operation in 2013.

## **Theoretical background**

The theoretical background of the study lies on Tost's (2011) integrative model of legitimacy judgments. The model integrates social psychological research and institutional theory. It identifies three different dimensions of legitimacy judgements: instrumental, relational and moral. The model is dynamic since it recognizes also the process of legitimacy judgement and divides it in three interlinked stages: judgement formation, use and reassessment. In addition, another model published in Finch, Deephouse and Varella (2014) is in the minor role in this study when analyzing how the news published in the media have effected on public opinion.

## **Methodology, research design, and data analysis**

The survey based mainly on the operationalization of Tost's (2011) model was launched in November 2016. The survey was divided into three sections. The first part measured the trust in FOC in different dimensions. The second part focused on the process of legitimacy judgement and traced the effect of the elite sport reform on this. In the third part of the survey, respondents were asked for their opinion on how the relationship between the state and the elite sport should be arranged. The survey got 1 690 respondents and the data is adjusted with the entire population according to age, gender and region.

## **Results and discussion**

The results cannot be interpreted against the previous results as this was the first time to measure the public trust in FOC. Instead, we compared FOC's trust level to other organizations in two other studies using similar methods of measurement. In both comparisons FOC ranked among the worst.

The study gives also support to the explanation that this legitimacy-gap has emerged over the past few years. About 42 percent of the respondents have changed their perception of FOC during the last few years. About 20 percent of the respondents named a singular event as the source of their changed opinion and 97 percent of those responded that this event changed their attitude to the negative direction.

The analysis of the named singular events indicates that the report of the ministry's financial audit regarding the FOC: s financial management (2016) significantly deflated the reputation of FOC in the eyes of the public. The report revealed cases that were contrary to good governance and public expectations. Overall in this survey instrumental legitimacy (sporting success) turned out to be secondary factor affecting in public trust in comparison to moral legitimacy issues.

Firstly, the presentation focuses on the analysis of the named singular events in more detail. Secondly, the dynamics of the public trust in Finnish Olympic Committee will be analysed in the light of the Tost's theoretical model. According to theory, individual level legitimacy judgements change slowly in time. In the presentation, we will consider whether this assumption is appropriate for elite sport organizations living in close and daily media relations. In this context, we also think about why the public trust is needed, what is sufficient level of trust and to which other organisations elite sport organisations should be compared to.

## **References**

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