

The failure of the Finnish Elite sport reform 2008-24

Jari Lämsä

jari.lamsa@kihu.fi

High Performance Sport Institute KIHU

Jyväskylä, FINLAND





Paris Olympics 1924 & 2024



Medals: $14 - 13 - 10 = 37$



Medals: $0 - 0 - 0 = 0$



FINLAND

KIHU

- Finland is a republic and a member of the European Union (EU 1995) and NATO (2023)
- The surface area of Finland is 338,432 km² (SWI 41 285 km²)
- Finland has 5.5 million inhabitants.
 - *FIN*: 18 people/km²
 - *SWI*: 207 people/km²
- Finland is divided into self-governed municipalities (309)
 - The capital is Helsinki. (665 000 inhabitants)
- The national languages are Finnish and Swedish
- Gross domestic product per capita, (current prices, IFM)
 - *FIN* 50 818 USD (2022)
 - *SWI* 92 434 USD (2022)





1,8 million membership

8000 sport clubs and associations

11+3 Sport Institutes 8 Training centers; Units of sport institutes

Sport academies 19

15 Regional Sport Federations; 2500 member sport clubs

TUL-regions

3 SFI regions

NSO:s reg. organisations

Association of regional Sport Federations

4 School and Student sport federations

Suomen Latu [outdoor recreation]

Other sport federations

Finn. ass. for swimming instruction and life saving

7 Associations of sport for disabled

Finnish Workers' Sports Federation (TUL)

7 SFI-NSOs

Finnish Swedish-speaking Sport Federation (SFI)

74 National Sport Organizations (NGB)

Finnish Paralympic Committee; 20 member NGB, 265 other member ass.

Finnish high performance sport Institute KIHU

Finnish Olympic Committee: 90 full members ass. + 30 partner member ass. + 4 individual memberships



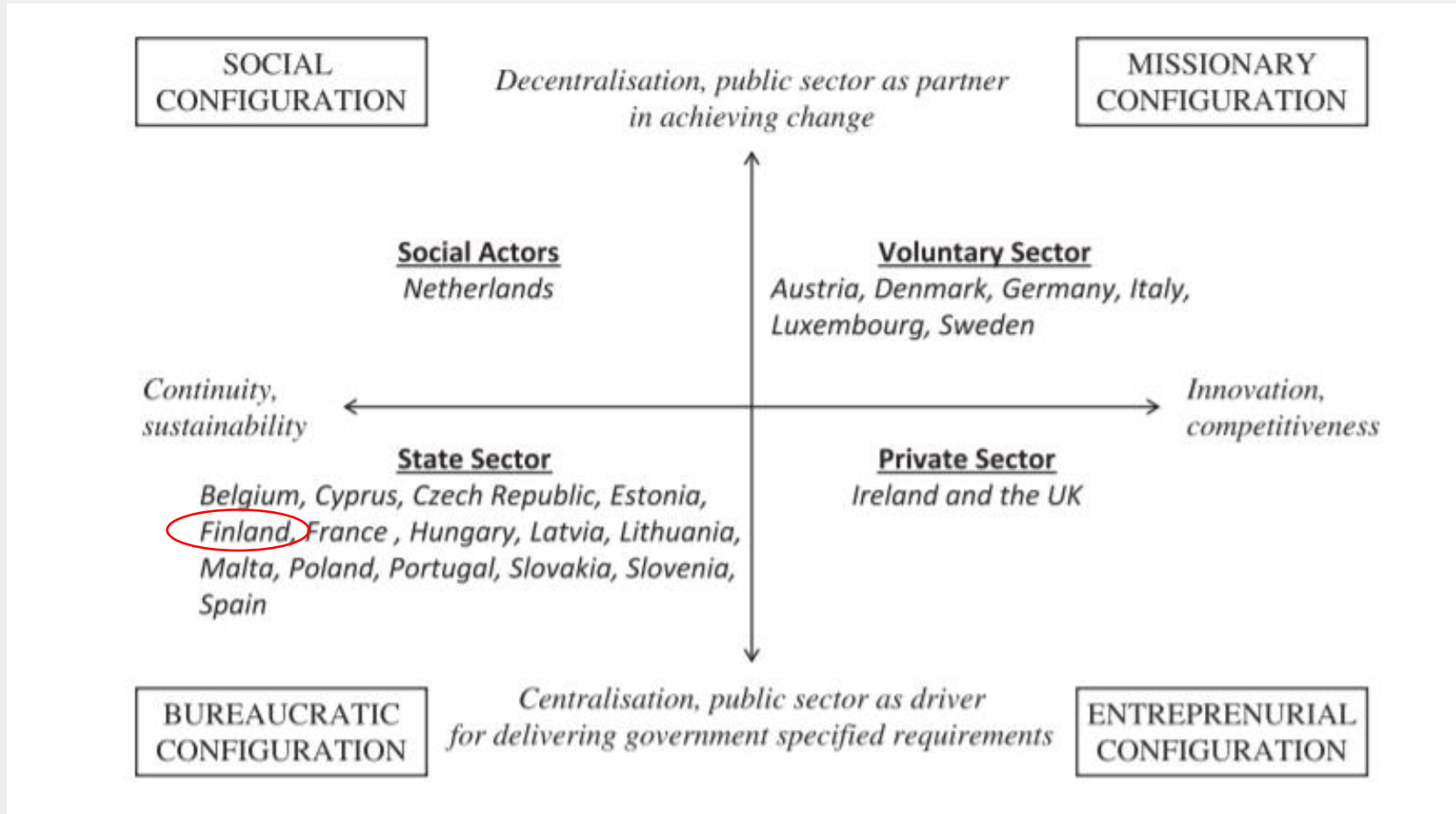
Local

Regional

national



Four types of national sport policy



Source: Henry, I. 2009. *European Models of Sport: Governance, Organisational Change and Sport Policy in the EU*. *Hitotsubashi Journal of Arts and Sciences* 50 (2009), pp.41-52.

The elite sport reform 2008 -





- **The legitimacy of Finnish sport system was constantly challenged**
 - In 1993 the collapse of SVUL – end of the sport movement era – “a bunch of independent organizations”
 - Doping cases (Lahti 2001 WC)
- **Tensions between the Sport world (NOC) and state (Ministry of culture and education)**
 - History of powerful central organizations (SVUL & TUL) being “states within state”
 - Since 1993 MINEDU has steered sport associations direct with result-based funding (NPM)
- **Changes inside the sport world**
 - Growth of the team sports (ballgames) – participant’s (boys) & professionalization
 - Criticism towards the organization of sport: trustee and lobby organization + 3 domain organization model
 - NGB’s wanted change to the sport policy and organization



Changes in the organization of sport and the role of NOC K I H U

SPORT MOVEMENTS (1906-1993)

1. **SVUL** (bourgeois / NGB's 1906-93)
2. **TUL** (worker's 1918-)
3. **TUK** (worker's II; 1959-79)
4. **CIF** (swedish speaking pop. 1912 -)
5. **SPL** (football NGB. 1907-)

NOC (1907 -)

- Olympic Sports support
- "travel agency"
- co-operative forum

DOMAIN ORGANISATIONS (1994-2012)

SLU (service and trustee org.)

Young Finland (youth sport and p.a.)

Sport for all association

NOC (Olympic sports / elite sport)

REFORMS 2010 -

VALO 2013-16

NOC / elite sport unit 2013 -

SECTOR ORG. 2017 -

NOC

- Physical activity
- Sport clubs
- Elite sport

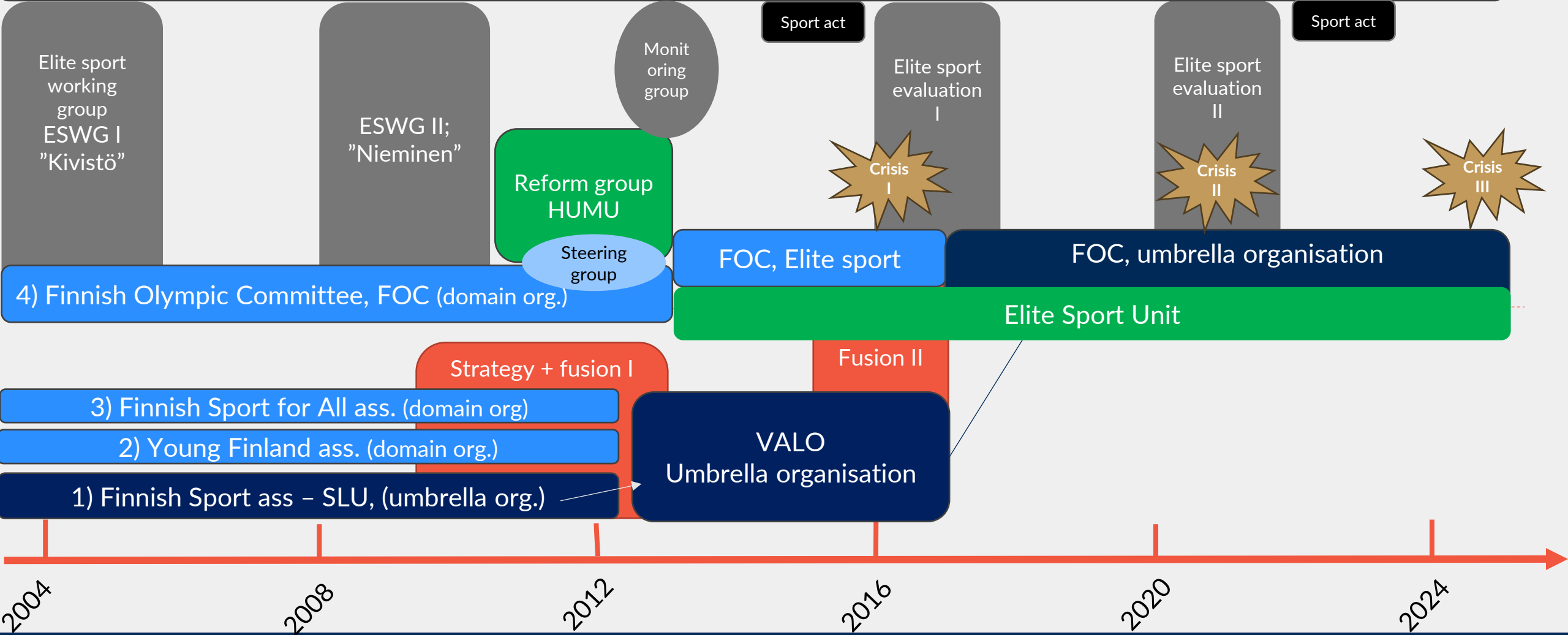


Finnish sport reforms

government
report on
sport policy

KIHU

Ministry of education and culture, MINEDU / sport unit





Elite sport working group in 2003-04

- The previous strategy process led by the Olympic Committee was completed in 2002 (strategy 2002-06)
- Tasks:
 - To evaluate the current state of elite sport and present proposals to develop elite sport from the viewpoint of the state support policy. Evaluate the need of a national coordination of elite sport and consider the special questions of paralympic sports.
- Results:
 - The working group has concluded that the systematic development of elite sports, including non-Olympic sports, requires enhancing state support policies, improving the coordination of elite sports aimed at international success, and related management.
 - Vision: Elite sports are an important part of the Finnish culture and operate ethically and socially response manner. It is an activity respected by the citizens as well as successful and visible internationally.
 - **The working group believes that this vision can be reached only if sport culture, founded on Finnish civic activity in the field of sport and physical activity, on sports activities for children and youth and on equal possibilities for all citizens to participate, maintain its fundamental values and develops in a manner corresponding to people's expectations and societal change. Elite sports in Finland lie on this foundation.**
 - **The government does not support business-oriented professional sport.**



- Appropriate use of the limited resources of the Finnish national economy requires a more effective and centralized operating model for elite sports. Operational responsibility and authority should be clarified and centralized to maintain or reach the international top level in at least nationally important sports.
- **According to the working group, the Finnish Olympic Committee is the most natural authority to take responsibility for the overall coordination and development of top-level sports in Finland.** This calls for a careful assessment of the management systems and if necessary, specifying responsibilities between different actors and within the systems.
- Changes in the policy:
 - Elite sport subsection to the national sport budget 2004
 - State subsidies to the sport academies since 2008
 - Finnish paralympic Committee as an organization for elite sport
 - Project: teams sports (state subsidies)



Working group II – Nieminen 2008-10

- The task of the working group was to renew the strategic principles and functional responsibilities of elite sports aimed at international success, so that Finnish elite sports is ethically sustainable and coaching expertise is internationally competitive.
- The group presents the vision of Finnish elite sports as:
 - 1) *Finnish children and young people move a lot and in a variety of ways! Sports and exercise are a natural and central part of Finnish children's everyday life,*
 - 2) *Top sports are a meaningful choice. It is an exciting, challenging, rewarding and valued option for a talented and motivated individual,*
 - 3) *Finnish elite sports know-how is gathered, developed and shared systematically, ambitiously and efficiently and*
 - 4) *Finn's value elite sports and the athlete's dedication to striving for the top. The popularity and appreciation of elite sports is reflected in the support of the public sector and the marketing investments of companies. Finland is internationally respected as a country of sports culture*



Working Group – Nieminen

KIHU

KIHU

- The working group states that it is not possible to raise Finnish elite sports to a new level with individual measures and the allocation of resources. The change requires a new way of working in elite sports.
- The group proposes that the Ministry of Education finance and the Finnish Olympic Committee, in cooperation with the Finnish Paralympic Committee, establish a reform group for elite sports, which in the next 3-4 years will lead the process of changing the way of working together with the sports federations that commit to it.
- In addition, the Ministry of Education will set up a monitoring group for the project, which will evaluate the effectiveness of the change work and give its opinion to the Ministry of Education on the resourcing proposals for elite sports made by the reform group.



Reform group – HUMU 1/3

- Five members appointed by Olympic Committee
 - 1 change + assistant
 - Time 8/2010 – 12/2012
 - Steering group (appointed by NOC 2010)
- Resources: ~2,5 M€ allocated by the MINEDU
 - Monitoring group (appointed by MINEDU 2011)
- Main task: to find ways/operations to realize the visions of the working group 2008-10
- Interim report 11/2011
 - 1) Athlete in the centre, 2) more cooperation 3) coaching know how
 - **Vision: best Nordic country 2020**
 - Athlete path: childhood, selection phase, elite phase
 - Elite sport unit inside NOC (3 programs; know how, academy and elite)
- Final report 12/2012





HUMU results - Vision Elite Sport 2013

**VISION OF
FINNISH SPORT
CONFEDERATION
(VALO)**

**FINLAND
- THE WORLD'S
MOST
PHYSICALLY
ACTIVE NATION**

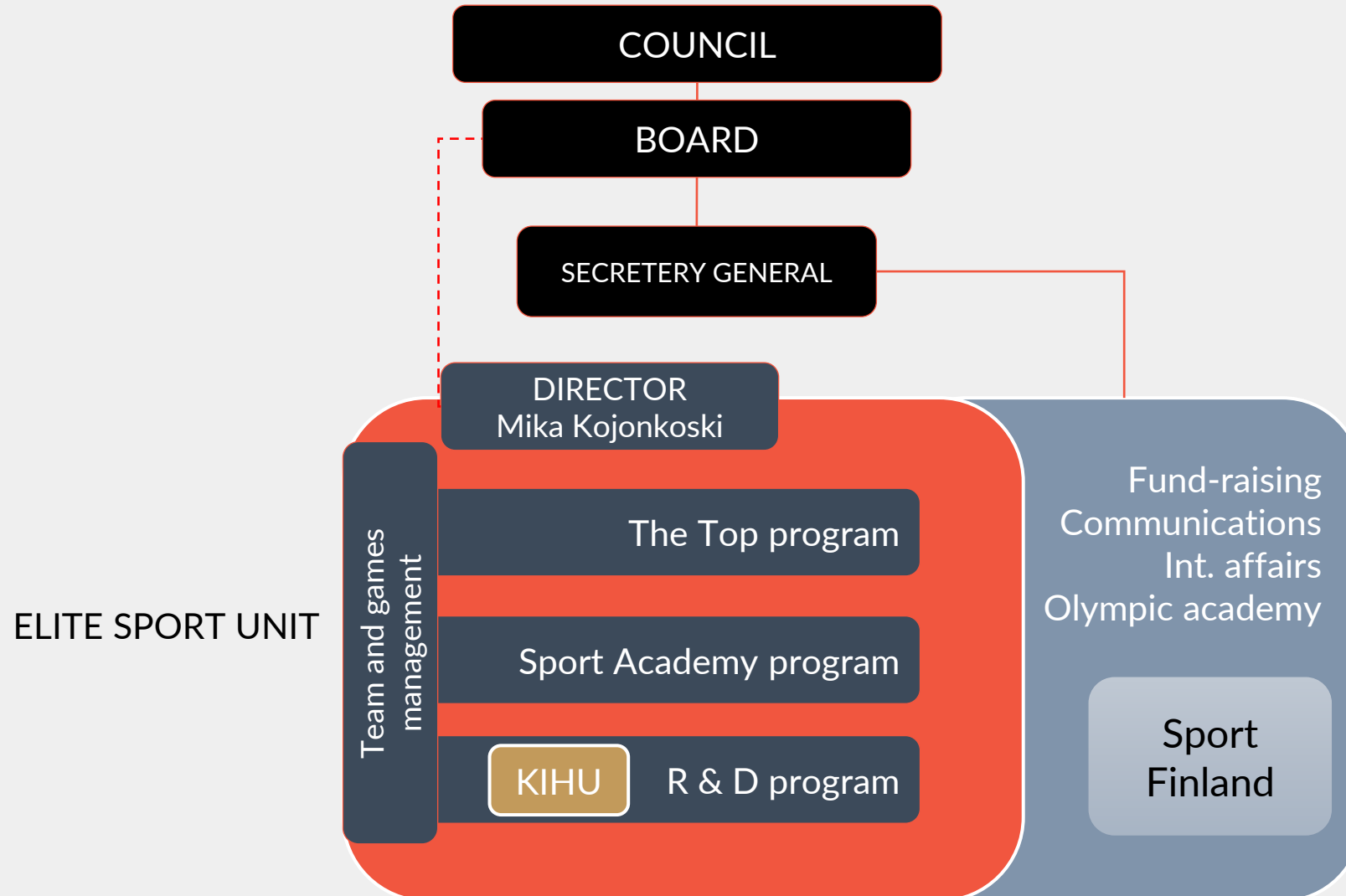
VISION FOR ELITE SPORT:

**BECOMING THE BEST
NORDIC COUNTRY 2020
THROUGH KNOW-HOW OF
THE ATHLETE'S PATH,
COOPERATION AND
PASSION!**



HUMU results - elite sport unit

KIHU





Sport academies and training centres network

- **Dual structure:**
 - Sport institutes 11 + 3
 - 8 training centre's (special tasks by MINEDU)
 - Funding model based on the education the at institute (internat, training camps)
 - Sites for vocational education for sport
 - Varala 1908 – Vierumäki 1927 – Lapland 1975
 - Sport academies ~20
 - Local and regional networks to provide better daily training
 - Based on the sport schools (sport high schools 15)
 - First founded in 2001 – all the main cities

State subsidies:
~ 30 – 35 M€
~50 % from sport budget

State subsidies:
~4 M€

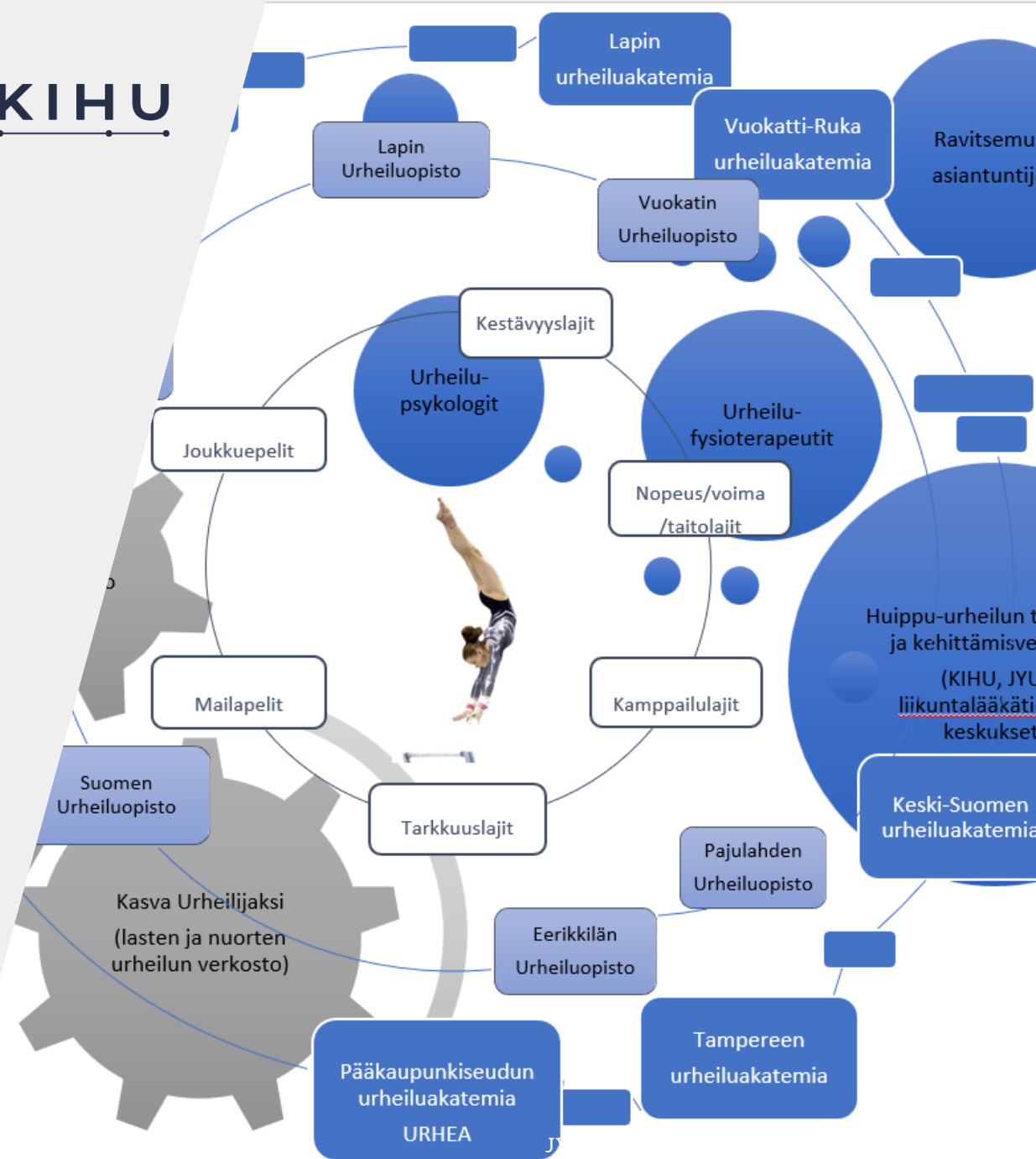




HUMU results - Network

- Large number of independent organizations (~120)
- The elite sports unit leads the network and creates a framework for cooperation through academy, competence and top programs

KIHU





Criticism towards HUMU and new elite sport organization

KIHU

KIHU

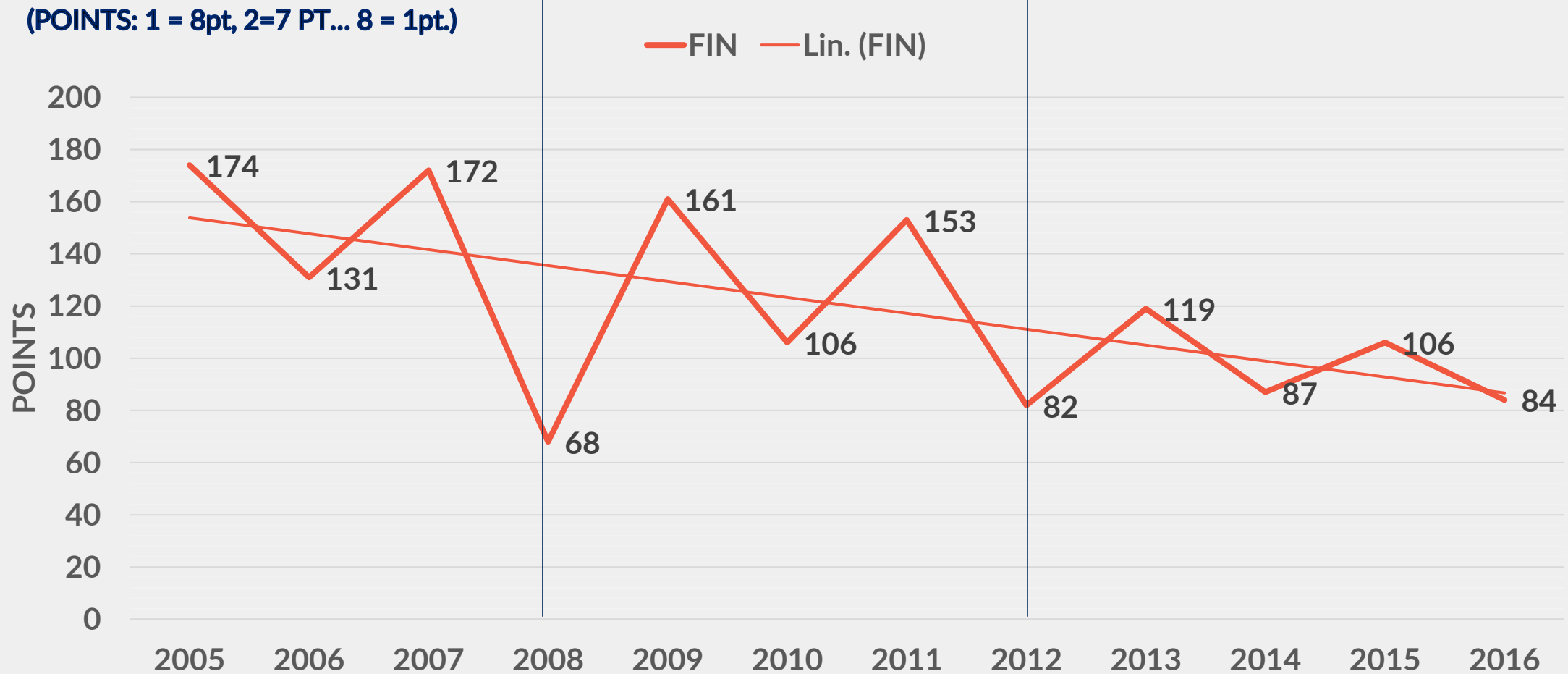
- HUMU – workers were recruited also to the NOC / elit sport unit
 - Mika Kojonkoski – Manager of the Elite sport unit
 - Leena Paavolainen – elite sport expert / deputy manager of the unit
 - Antti Paananen – head of coaching (team sports)
- Chair of the NOC board: Risto Nieminen
 - Selected as chair of the VALO board, 2013-
- The costs of the reform group versus the quality of the work
 - Athlete interviews, Final report
 - Salary of HUMU –group members – 70 % of budget
 - Slogans and “consultant talk”
- Individual sport / ball games – own strategy 2013
- Elite sport versus sport for all –debate
- Deficiencies in goal setting and monitoring of the results





Finnish TOP 8 placements in Olympic games and World Championships 2005-2016 (Olympic sports)

KIHU





The Frist crisis after Rio 2016

KIHU

2012: Critical voices towards the work of reform group

2016: The financial audit of Olympic Committee and Finnish Sport

Federation – VALO – 1,8 M€ state subsidies was not used correctly (VALO) + 0,5 M€ NOC

- VALO and NOC merged in 2017 – new NOC had to pay back 2,3 m€.

2016: Rio de Janeiro – only one bronze medal

2017: External evaluation of Elite Sport

Consequences:

- Problems with the legitimacy and transparency
 - Mika Kojonkoski did not run for next five-year period (2018-2023)
 - Risto Nieminen did not run for president again in 2017
 - Chair on the NOC board 2012-16, Chair of the VALO board 2014-16





External evaluation (Lipponen 2017)

"The approach will not change unless the change is systematically led!" This is also a key finding of this evaluation. It is critically important to quickly define who leads Finnish elite sports, with what strategy and division of labor, and where the resources will come from.

At the same time, we must be able to clearly describe the practical measures to create the conditions for success and their impact: what will be done and for whom, what immediate changes will be observed, and what more permanent changes will occur.

Elite athletes are required to maintain such discipline constantly, so to succeed, our elite sports system must be capable of at least the same."



Government report on sport policy 2018

- New NOC as a umbrella/central/service organization for 90 member associations
 - Pressure towards MINEDU about resources and power
 - First ever government report on sport policy 2018
 - “In the Finnish sports system, the integration of elite sports into other sports such as children's and youth sports has been considered important.”
 - “On the one hand, it must be possible to concentrate resources to make operations more efficient, but on the other hand, different sports must be treated equally so that a talented Finnish athlete can rise to the top of the world in any sport.”
 - “Finland, as a country that relies on a strong civil society, cannot have a state-led elite sports system. According to the external assessment of elite sports carried out in 2017, in many ways, Finland operates inefficiently in the middle ground between the association-led and the state-led model. According to the assessment, it is critically important to quickly define who will lead the entirety of Finnish elite sports, with what strategy and division of labor it will take place, and where the resources will come from.”



- The principles of cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Olympic Committee and the division of labor in the preparation of matters are agreed upon in the “target agreement” document, which is updated at regular intervals. The starting point is that the Olympic Committee manages Finnish elite sports, and its elite sports unit participates in the preparation process of state subsidies for elite sports within the framework allowed by the legislation. Through close cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Olympic Committee and follow-up meetings, the functionality of the management system of Finnish elite sports is ensured. In the future, the issue will also be investigated in a separate working group. (government report on sport policy 2018, 40)
- Olympic fund – state invest max 20 M€ (1,3 m€ 25.9.2024)
- More funding to elite sport 3 – 5 m€



New management team in the NOC: resources, centralization, power...

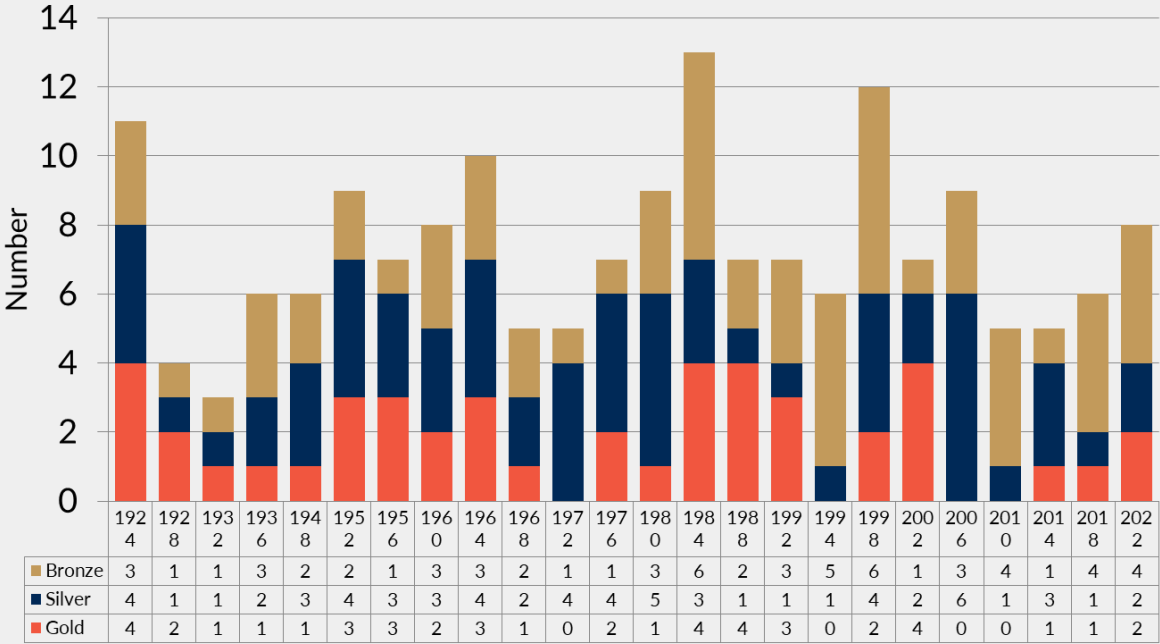
- New manager of the elite sport unit: Mika Lehtimäki (former coach and athletics expert in media)
 - New managing director since 2017
- Strong vision for more centralized elite sport lead by NOC/elite sport unit:
 - Battle's with MINEDU about resources and power
 - Money to the potential athletes and coaches
 - public talk about broader understanding of elite sport (team sports, motor sport, paralympics)
 - Two Olympic Training centres





Second crisis; case elite sport manager 2022

- Elite sport manager received a warning for inappropriate behavior in fall 2021
- In February 2022 NOC announced that it will extend manager's contract until the end of 2024
 - The case was reported in media
- Elite sports manager resigned in March 2022
- The extraordinary members' meeting of the Olympic Committee voted of confidence; the Olympic Committee's presidency received a clear vote of confidence 72 – 22 - 7.



Finnish Medals in Winter Olympics 1924 -



NOC – the sector organization of sport and physical activity 2022 -

- New president – new strategy:
 - Elite sport
 - Club activities
 - Physically active lifestyle
- Elite sport unit lost its independence
 - New manager – Matti Heikkinen (former athlete)
 - Totally new approach to management
 - Six new elite sport experts
- The sports community was surprised by the extensive talk about promoting physical activity and the absence of sports and elite sports from the agenda

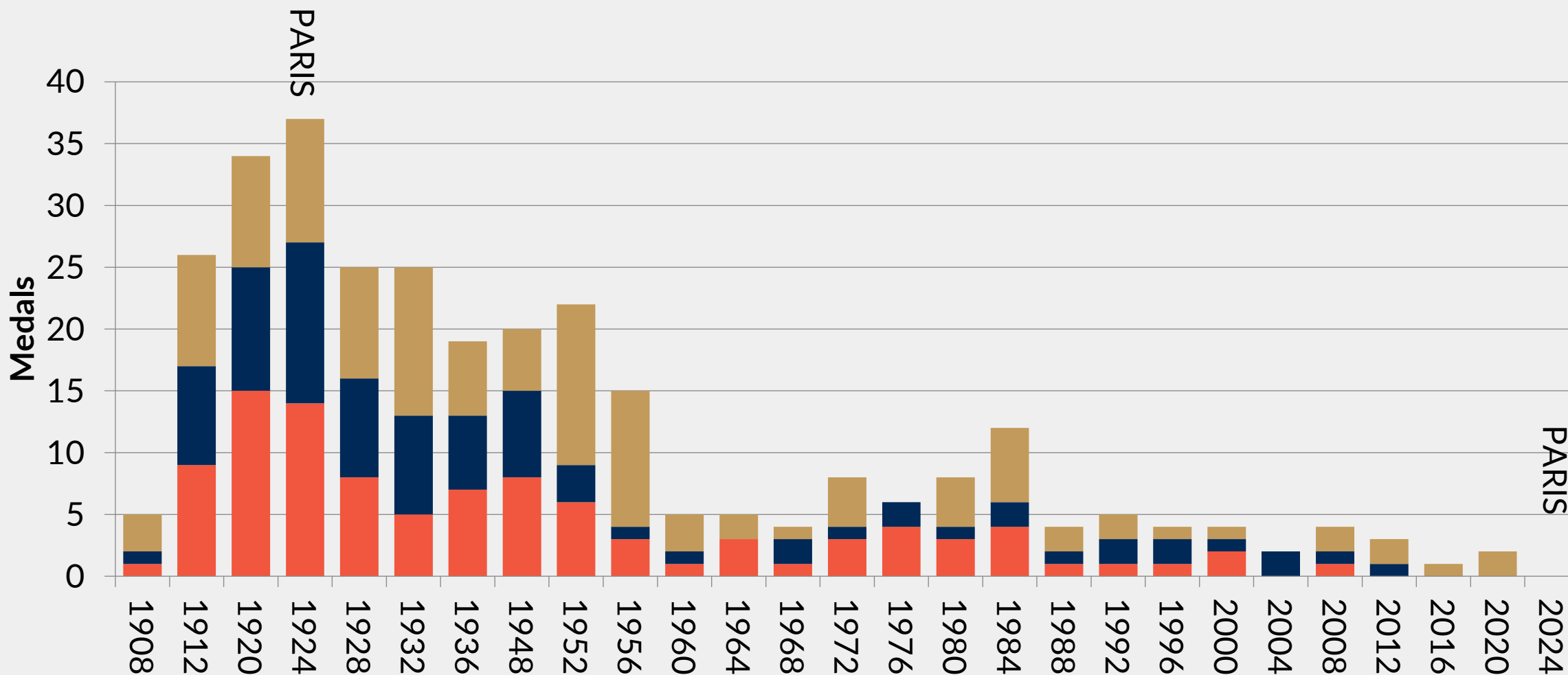
“We are a national organization for sport and physical activity, and a registered association. We promote movement and a physically active lifestyle among Finns and build the preconditions for high-quality and renewable club and organizational activities and generate success in elite sports.”

([Olympiakomitea.fi/en/about-us](https://olympiakomitea.fi/en/about-us))



Medals won by Finnish athletes at the Summer Olympics 1908 -

KIHU





Personel changes and strategic goals in the NOC

Managers	2013-16	2017-20	2021-24
President, NOC	Risto Nieminen (2012-16)	Timo Ritakallio	Jan Vapaavuori
Managing director, NOC	Mika Sulin (2012-14); Teemu Japissou 2014-17	Mikko Salonen (2017-22)	Taina Susiluoto (2022-)
Manager of the elite sport unit, NOC	Mika Kojonkoski (2013-18)	Mika Lehtimäki (2018-22)	Matti Heikkinen (2022-24) Jaana Tulla 2024 -

Strategies	2013-16	2017-20	2021-24
	Elite sport organization	Central organization	Sector organization
Main goals / organization (units)	1. Elite sport (HUMU)	1. Elite sport 2. More active citizens	1. Elite sport 2. Club activities 3. Physical activity for all

Conclusions



The failure of the reforms

- Finnish sports has not turned in the desired direction in the reforms!
- The division of power between the state (MINEDU) and the sport organization (represented by NOC) is not clear
- The legitimacy and role of NOC as sector organization of sport and physical activity is constantly contested
 - Different values and ideologies: physical activity versus elite sport
 - The field of sport and elite sport is fragmented; Olympic sports (summer & winter), Team ballgames, paralympic sports, motor sports, non-olympic and new sport (frisbee golf, cheerleading)
- Several extensive networks have been established in the field of exercise and sports, which aim to develop and promote the goals of sports policy
 - Finally independent organizations prefer to follow their own strategy rather than weak national strategy made at the top
- More money – not more (Olympic) success!
- Sport leadership positions is on the hands one party (national coalition party)



Path dependency

- “The heavy hand a history may hang over the most transformative of policy breakthroughs”
- Australia: The federal government has conceptualized sport development as how elite athletes might flourish.
- Finland: has conceptualized sport development as a means of ensuring that all citizens have equal access to and are encouraged to participate in sporting activities.
- Change is likely to be achieved only in response to a major crisis?
 - Mixed ideas between the elite sport reforms: first in line with the Scandinavian model and gradually moving towards the strategic elite sport policy model
 - Although the reforms have failed, the Ministry repeats the message: the foundation of sports in Finland is civic activity.
 - MINEDU has changed the sport act 2015 (physical activity & elite sport)

Sport Management Review, 2008, 11, 225-251
© 2008 SMAANZ

Policy, Politics and Path Dependency: Sport Development in Australia and Finland

Mick Green and Shane Collins
Loughborough University

KEYWORDS: sport development, elite sport development, Sport for All, path dependency

Sport development as a public policy priority has historically been on the periphery of governments' political agendas. This is not the case in the early twenty-first century however. Over the past decade, in nations as diverse as Canada, China, Germany, Norway, Poland, Singapore and the United Kingdom, public policies for sport development-related activity have increased in salience. This article reviews and analyses national sport development policy (across the mass-elite sport spectrum) in Australia and Finland; two countries with quite distinct political, cultural and sporting backgrounds. The analysis explores whether a path dependency approach can help towards a better understanding of sport development activity in each country. Our conclusions suggest that Australia (elite sport) and Finland (Sport for All) have remained on quite specific sport development pathways with little deviation, despite a few programs created in Australia



Repeated failure of Elite sport reforms

- “The elite sport system of reunified Germany is characterised by double federalism and strong neo-corporatist features which have served to create a large number of veto players who constantly bargain over influence and scarce resources” (Meier et al. 2021, 574)
- Similarities in Finland
 - Era of strong central organizations followed by weak umbrella lobby organization without hierarchical power
 - Scattergun approach to elite sport funding – money to everyone!
 - Policy domain is crowded by a multitude of veto players
 - Only incremental changes or success!





Corporatism and open networks

- Neo-corporatist or missionary configuration of sport governance: the voluntary sports movement enjoys a dominant role and great autonomy to make decisions.
- Similarities
 - The role of weak umbrella organization (DSB/DOSB & FOC) role has not been diminished but has rather been consolidated over time.

International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, 2014
Vol. 6, No. 3, 327–348, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2013.812573>



From corporatism to open networks? Structural changes in German sport policy-making

Henk Erik Meier^{a*} and Alexander Fuchs^b

^a*Institute for Sport and Exercise Sciences, University of Münster, Horstmarer Landweg 62b, Münster 48149, Germany;* ^b*Institute for Sport and Exercise Sciences, University of Kiel, Olshausenstraße 74, Kiel 24098, Germany*

Since the Second World War, policy-making in German sport has strongly relied on neo-corporatist arrangements where the sport associations possess negotiation capacities as well as co-regulatory skills and enjoy routine access to the government. Recently, however, a number of neo-corporatist arrangements in Germany have been eroding or have been completely refined. Accordingly, interest group involvement has been transformed from neo-corporatism into competitive corporatism or into more 'open' policy networks. Given these far-reaching changes, we explore whether policy-making in sport shows similar trends due to a number of exogenous shocks. We propose that some of the issues at stake can be addressed by conducting a quantitative study on access patterns to federal policy-making. Our findings support the idea of more complex and interdependent policy-making in sport. However, we find hardly any evidence for eroding neo-corporatism but for increased politicization of sport policy. Moreover, our study makes the limitations of a pure sociometric approach evident. While network analysis appears to be a useful tool, it has been complemented by qualitative accounts of policy processes.

Keywords: neo-corporatism; network theory; interest group politics; Germany



JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

KIHU

Thank you!