

## The Changing Roles of Public, Civic and Private Sectors in Finnish Sports Culture

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**Abstract.** *Finnish physical activity and how it is organised has changed over the last hundred years, and these changes can be seen in the civic, public and private sectors. The development of a civic sector for sport and physical activity has followed the larger changes in society and the organisation of other civic activities. At the end of the 1960s the Finnish public administration of sport started to expand. Specific attention was given to access to sports, which shifted the focus of the municipalities to consider the needs of all user groups. In the 1980s, the differentiation of Finnish sports culture began, a trend that could be seen in organisational and content changes. The amount and the type of the sports clubs increased and new sports were introduced. The private sports sector also began to grow. There is a constant revision of the relationship between the public, private and civic sectors. The challenge for these sectors is the polarisation of physical activity and how the population as whole can be motivated to be active enough for their well-being and health.*

**Keywords:** sports culture, civic sector, public sector, private sector, differentiation, Finland

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** sporto kultūra, pilietinis sektorius, viešasis sektorius, privatus sektorius, diferenciacija, Suomija

In this article, we present how the organisation of Finnish physical activity has changed over the last one hundred years. First, we describe the formation of the civic sports sector through the development of sports clubs. Second, we present how the Finnish public administration of sport has developed, with a focus on the period after the 1960s. Third, we outline the ongoing differentiation in sports culture and discuss current developments in sport and physical activities. Sports culture means all the activities which people practice and produce by exercising and playing sports. Thus, sports culture also includes the system of political decision-making and all the organisations which arrange physical activities and sports [15, p. 8]

The culture of organised physical activity in Finland is over 100 years old. The country has been described as a fanatical sports nation, a reputation based on the international success of its athletes. The development of sport and physical activity has followed the larger economic, social and cultural changes of the society. The significance of sport in Finnish society can be partly explained by its simultaneous organisation with the building of the nation. Both during the struggles to become an independent nation and during the decades after the independence in 1917, success in sport was extremely important. Finland, like the other Nordic countries, is currently known for its civic sector in sport and physical activities. Today, about half of all children and youth participate in voluntary sports activities arranged by the sports clubs. In comparisons on an international level, Finland features an active movement of sport for all.

### **The rise of the civic sector for sport and physical activity**

In Finland, perhaps more than anywhere else in the world, civic physical activities have been linked to other organizational operations [5, p. 26]. Consequently, in order to understand the Finnish sports culture, a short summary of the rise of the civic sector in Finland is necessary.

The first civic mass organisations in Finland date to the end of the 17th century while Finland was under the Swedish rule. During this era, the state remained structurally weak, and it was incapable of solving social problems. This led Finnish citizens to take care of themselves through organisations which they themselves established. The first associations addressed issues such as temperance, religion and popular enlightenment. In addition, youth associations and the worker's movement founded their own organisations [1, p. 20–39], [10, p. 13, 14].

The general strike of 1905 initiated an extensive organisation of workers, because it led to an expansion of workers' political means to more openly demand their rights. This expansion of mobilisation can be seen in the growing membership of the Social Democratic Party: in 1905 alone, the number of the members rose from 16,000 to 45,000 [1, p. 38–40]. This increase in civic activity could be seen in the establishment of youth associations and temperance societies. In 1905, there were already 526 youth associations with 40, 000 members, and there were about the same amount of members in the temperance societies [25, p. 2].

Soon after independence in 1917 from the Soviet Union, a bloody civil war began, which divided Finnish civic organisational life into two camps: bourgeoisie and working class. After the civil war, a distinctive feature of these organisations was to build their own meeting halls. Civil guards, youth and workers' associations were especially active in building their own facilities. [24, p. 44–45].

This division into bourgeoisie and working class also occurred in sport and physical activity. In 1906, the bourgeois Finnish Gymnastics and Sports Federation, was founded. Its counterpart, the Finnish Workers' Sports Federation, was formed in 1919. The rise of civic sports activities can be seen in the numbers of new member-clubs acquired by each national federation. The member-clubs of the Finnish Gymnastics and Sports Federation increased as follows: by 70 in 1907, 148 in 1908, 287 in 1911, and 637 in 1917 [19, p. 558–559]. For the Finnish Workers' Sports Federation, the growth followed a similar upward trend: 134 new member-clubs in 1919, 400 in 1923, and 461 in 1927 [4, p. 92, 163].

Finnish sports clubs were initially established under other organisations when the most common facilities were meeting halls and their surroundings. The sports clubs' close affiliation with other organisations can be seen among the member-clubs of the Finnish Central Sports Federation in 1917. The clubs of the federation belonged to the workers' association (121 clubs), youth associations (69), volunteer fire brigades (38), school clubs (28), temperance associations (8), social democratic youth associations (6) and other civic organisation clubs (3). In addition, there were 354 independent clubs [2, p. 115]. Even though the clubs were formally independent, they had a close connection to other associations and organisations. Usually, the same people who were active in sports clubs were active in other organisations as well.

The modest facilities available often determined which sports were actually practised. Meeting halls offered possibilities for gymnastics and wrestling. Athletics and skiing were also among the most popular sports. The facilities and conditions also help to explain in which sports Finnish athletes achieved success at the Olympic Games and other international competitions.

At the end of the 1930s, the traditional connections of the sports clubs to other organisations started to fade, but the number of sport-specific competitions increased. Sport increasingly became people's main hobby, a trend that reinforced the pursuit of competitive goals. These goals then strengthened the positions of the various sports which aimed for wins and record performances. As a consequence, sports federations needed to modify their course of action, which meant strengthening the positions of the national sports federations in the Finnish Gymnastics and Sports Federation. While state aid increased for the federation, the support for different sports increased as well. [3, p. 521–522] In 1930, there were 11 domain sport organisations as member organisations in the Finnish Gymnastics and Sports Federation, whereas at the end of the 1950s there were already 17 member organisations [3, p. 549]. At the same time, the amount of different sports in the Finnish Workers'

Sports Federation also increased. In 1939, the federation featured 21 sports being played among its clubs [4, p. 452–453].

Improved facilities were a prerequisite for the growth of different sports. The construction of both indoor and outdoor facilities significantly changed the competitive sports culture. This construction boom was sped up by the sports organisations as well as by the development of municipal sports policy. Civil guards, in particular, built many new playing fields, ski jumps and outdoor swimming facilities. This active role for sport in the building of new facilities was stimulated by the broader national defence goals. [26, p. 217–224]. Workers' associations also often built playing fields beside their people's halls.

Public sports administration started to develop soon after Finland gained independence. In 1920, the national sports board was founded under the Ministry of Education. In the 1930s, the municipalities started to organise public sports administration by founding their own sport boards [7, p. 25–31]. One of the main tasks of the public sector-like civic organisations was to begin construction of playing fields. In 1945, this was the issue highlighted by the State Committee for Physical Education. During the years after the Second World War, municipalities quickly developed public sports administration. By 1962, there was a municipal sports governing body in 97% of Finnish municipalities. The varying economic resources of the municipalities produced a regional differentiation of sports culture. In the 1950s, towns began to build swimming pools, ice skating rinks and municipal fitness and gymnastics facilities. In the countryside municipalities, the construction activities concentrated mainly on playing fields. [6, p. 260–266]. One explanation for the development and expansion of public sports administration after the war was the baby-boom generation. This generation, it was felt, required educational measures such as sport and physical activity.

### **Expansion of public sports administration**

In the late 1960s, a period of planning optimism began in Finland. The nation prospered quickly, which enabled significant and effective legislative work for the benefit of Finnish society. For example, the Primary Health Care Act in 1972 [16] decisively made health services available for the whole population. Meanwhile, the Act on children's day care created opportunities for women to enter working life and increased equality between sexes [14, p. 48–49]. These Acts show the important role played by legislation in building the Finnish welfare society.

Sports policy also included socio-political planning. Sport for all was considered especially important due to increasing urbanisation and the emergence of less physically active working life, changes which demanded an increase in physical activity during leisure time [10, p. 21]. Additionally, the move to a five-day working week increased the demand for leisure time activities. In the late 1960s, many measures were taken to enable sport for all among the population. One of the cor-

nerstones was the work of the Commission on Physical Fitness in 1966–1970, which aimed to promote sport for all, especially as part of leisure time. One measure was an increase in the construction of indoor facilities by the municipalities, which was enabled by financing from the Ministry of Education [17, p. 178–179].

In its report, the Commission on Physical Fitness also proposed a significant definition of sports policy. The Commission recommended that the focus of the policy should be on sport for all instead of on competitive sport, because competitive and elite sport would be financed from other sources even if public funding decreased. Thus, the commission stated that the construction of sport facilities should concentrate on projects which support sport for all or on projects which suit the multipurpose use of different user groups [17, p. 179–180].

Despite the commission's report, competitive sport remained the main activity of sport clubs. Target-oriented sports activities maintained central position in the clubs, even as the club decision-makers started to consider sport for all activities alongside competitive events. This trend toward support of sport for all was particularly visible in the municipal decision-making process, in which the needs of all inhabitants of the municipality were considered in a completely new way.

There are different explanations for the continuing dominance of competitive sport. First, civic activities change slowly because, in voluntary activities, things are learned practically and the prevailing ways of working are not necessarily questioned. Things are done as they have always been done, with little change from one generation to the next. Second, competition between different sports has made representatives from the same sport to join forces on local and national levels. Third, club operations have emphasised work with children and adolescents. It often happens that new generations become attached to sports club activities due to their participation in a specific sport [10, p. 22].

In the late 1960s, public sector activity in the promotion of sport for all created a new situation in the division of labour in Finnish sports culture. During the following decade, the division of labour between civic actors and public sports administration was an important question, especially when in the 1970s and 1980s the guidance of the Finnish state in municipal sport was strong. The main instruments for this guidance were standardisation, public funding and counselling [17, p. 184].

As the importance of sport-related issues grew in the decision-making of the public sector, they became part of social policy. Already in the early 1970s, the national parliament discussed the specific legislation of issues concerning municipal sport as well as government subsidies for sport. The main reason for the legislation was the growing profile of sport-related issues in municipalities. In 1979, after a long preparation process, the Finnish government introduced the new Sport Act to parliament. According to this Act, which came into force in 1980, sports boards were founded in every municipality. This Act was significant in many other ways too. It impacted significantly on sports services by increasing the number of sport office-holders in municipalities, supporting more voluntary sports club activities

and building functional sports facilities [7, p. 32]. As a result, from the 1960s to the end of the 1980s the number of sports facilities doubled [17, p. 187].

The main idea of the Sport Act was to guarantee possibilities to be physically active for all citizens by standardising the division of labour between the state, municipalities and sports organisations [17, p. 185]. The basic idea in this Act was that civic actors such as sports clubs are responsible for arranging activities, whereas the public sector is to build and maintain the sports facilities. This division of labour has remained generally the same in later reforms to the Act in 1995 and 2015.

### **The emergence of a differentiated sports culture**

In the 1980s, general optimism prevailed in Finnish society. The national economy was expected to grow, which ensured that the production of public services could remain at a high level. [7, p. 33] Furthermore, the private sports sector started to increase its service offering, especially to wealthier citizens, while the variety of sports and physical activities increased. These changes led to the disintegration and differentiation of the existing sports culture in the 1980s. [9], [10], [14] Differentiated sports culture can be explained by the system theory of Niklas Luhmann. According to him, modernisation has created a situation in which sub-systems of society, such as organisations, have emerged to take care of their own responsible areas (Luhmann 1997, 609-618). Thus, interpretations of the actors in sports culture are various and divergent from each other. According to Luhmann, our contemporary society can be characterised as a network of operationally closed but interdependent systems. In this network, organisations live their own certain way own life (Luhmann 1992, 202–212).

Differentiation meant both organisational and content changes. New organisations for sport and physical activities were quickly founded which could be seen in the proportion of the sport and physical training clubs among all registered associations. In the late 1970s, sports clubs accounted for about eight percent of associations, but in the 1980s the total grew to 16.4%. The content change was seen in the number of new sports and physical activities. Traditional sports were overtaken by clubs for team sports and by international, individually based power and skill sports such as karate, judo and tae-kwon-do. In addition, new associations emerged that were independent of the central federations. The trend has been towards specialisation and a part of the dramatic increase in sports was a result of the fragmentation of more comprehensive clubs into specialised single-sport clubs [25, p. 3].

Differentiation has been stronger than the list of new registered association indicates. A significant number of new organisations in the field of sport and physical activity are not registered associations. These new kinds of associations have forced decision-makers to reconsider their attitudes towards them. For example, facilities for physical activities, such as skateboarding and parkour that are characteristic of youth culture have gradually been built by the public sector. Researchers have also

started to discuss new kinds of organisations with in the physical activity of youth culture which has led to further interest by researchers in the overall phenomenon of the physical activity of youth culture [12, 13].

Differentiation of the civic activities from those of the 1980s has significantly altered the reality of the clubs for sport and physical activity. The organisational formation in the field of sports clubs can be illustrated by a typology of six club types, each of which has a different orientation and way of functioning (Figure 1).

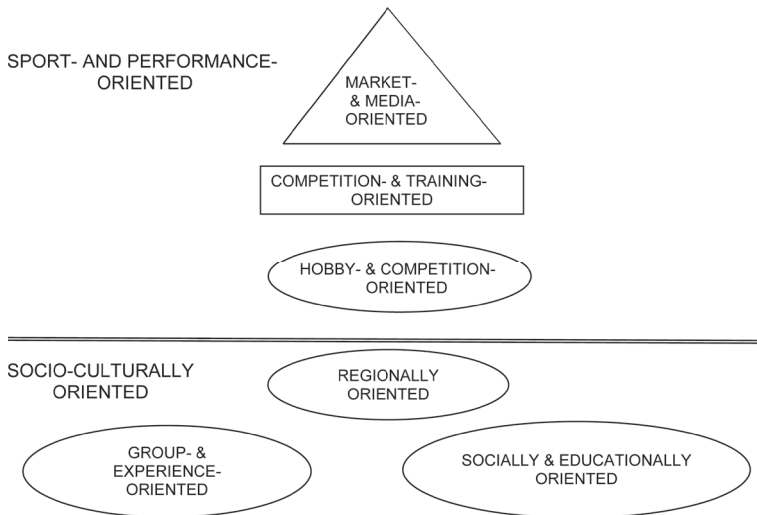


Figure 1. Typology of sports clubs in differentiated sports culture [9, p. 90], [10, p. 23].

This typology divides sport clubs into two main groups: sport- and performance-oriented clubs and socio-culturally oriented clubs. Clubs in the first group are involved in competition systems. They aim for success, good results and records. Socio-culturally oriented clubs, on the other hand, are not involved in competition systems, and their orientation is broader than competition. The sport- and performance-oriented clubs include the hobby- and competition-oriented clubs in which, for example, a junior team may train in one sport and participate in some competitions. For the members of this club type, sport is a hobby. As the goals become higher and training becomes harder, a junior athlete can move to a competition- and training-oriented activity. In this type of activity, competitions become essential. Training refers to anything from socialisation and the specific sport to learning and adopting the skills and characteristics of those sports [11, p. 46].

Market- and media-oriented clubs represent elite sports in which an athlete or a team is a product of the sport. Characteristic of this club type is the close affinity

between media visibility and markets. Naturally, as the level of the sport product decreases, the interest of the media and sponsors decrease. Making a high-quality sport product requires sufficient financial support and media visibility. Market- and media-oriented sports clubs engage in professional, business-like activity which diverges from voluntary civic activity. Athletes in these clubs become professionals similar to contractual-based staff in any other organisation [11, p. 46].

Socio-culturally oriented clubs do not seek competitive success or the capability to achieve high performances because they are not involved in competition systems. These clubs are not necessarily registered to associations like the sport- and performance-oriented sports clubs are. Regionally oriented clubs aim to satisfy the need for physical activity in a specific area, such as in a neighbourhood or on a city block. Group- and experience-oriented sports clubs search for experiences through physical training or the development of group activity. These clubs are not locally restricted as the above-mentioned clubs are. Socially and educationally oriented sports clubs use physical training as a vehicle for achieving defined objectives rather than for competitive goals. For example, using physical activity to promote health can provide the content for a new type of activity [11, p. 46].

During the 1990s, the global recession also affected Finland, which in turn influenced the public administration of sport. The need for savings caused changes in municipal board structures throughout Finland. As a result of these savings, in most municipalities the sports board was replaced by one responsible for a range of leisure time activities. Decision-making, therefore, became a joint process between those responsible for sport and those responsible for cultural and youth affairs.

Reforms in financing practices have also influenced the relationship between civic activity and public administration. From stable annual support for sports clubs, funding has become more project-based. This funding type has required changes in ways of working, represented in a shift from traditional annual planning to two- to three-year project planning. It also demands more knowledge of project work and administration.

Most of the funding for public sports administration and other beneficiaries in Finland comes from the profit of the national lottery, Veikkaus. To date, Finland has managed to maintain this monopoly [17, p. 365] even though the European Union aims to remove monopolies in order to free competition. If the monopoly is removed, the funding for sport, as for cultural and youth affairs and science, will be significantly reduced.

The globalisation of sport and physical activities has also changed the practices of national decision-making. Increasingly, policy definitions are made as a part of the decision-making process of the European Union. The EU has also launched a range of funding possibilities which can be utilised by the field of sport. EU funding typically requires larger European consortiums, a phenomenon which intensifies cooperation between different EU member states and with non-EU countries.

Another trend in recent decades in Finland is the growth of the private sector in sport and physical activities. Nowadays, there is more growth in the sport industry



than any other field in Finland [18, p. 77], currently generating billions of euros of business. During the first decades of the 2000s, consumers of services provided by the private sports sector rose from 4% to 15 %. In the same period, the money used annually for sport by one physically active adult rose 74 %. [18, p. 77] The supply of private sector sport services has been concentrated in major cities. Such a concentration of service supply increases the customer base. For the market-oriented generation – and for those who can afford private sector services – this approach comes to be viewed as a natural way of consuming. Furthermore, this pattern of consumption suggests that the private sector is set to grow in the future as well. [17, p. 359]

## Conclusions

1. Differentiated sports culture has changed the roles of the public, civic and private sector. Due to differentiation, the roles and tasks of these sectors remain unstable and the actors of the different sectors must be flexible and adopt new ways of working.

2. The current tight financial situation in the public sector increases the discussion of the social significance of sport and provides space for other sectors to function.

3. Non-competitive physical activity based on youth culture and organised by young people will increase and challenge the traditional activities of the sports clubs.

4. The productisation of sport and physical activity will also continue through the creation of new forms of sports and products. The private sector will continue to grow and offer services to those customers who can afford them.

5. One specific challenge for all bodies which organise sport and physical activity is the polarisation of physical activity. The key question is how the population as whole can be motivated to be active enough for their wellbeing and health.

6. Along with other civic activities, the civic sports sector changes slowly, which makes predicting the future challenging. Many forms of civic sector sports activities have appeared in an unpredictable way. This unpredictability guarantees that there will be a range of future research topics on sports and the civic sector. The field will be shaped by a number of issues in the years to come, including increased mobility; changes in tastes, disposable income and the environment; more competition for leisure time; and new forms of organisation.

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Hannu Itkonen, Anna-Katriina Salmikangas  
**Viešojo, pilietinio ir privataus sektorių vaidmens kaita  
Suomijos sporto kultūroje**

Anotacija

Suomijos fizinis aktyvumas ir jo organizavimas pasikeitė per pastaruosius šimtą metų, ir šie pokyčiai gali būti vertinami skirtingai pilietiniame, viešajame ir privačiame sektoriuose. Pilietinio sporto ir fizinio aktyvumo sektoriaus plėtra patyrė didesnius pokyčius visuomenėje ir kitose pilietinių veiklos organizavimo formose. Suomijos viešasis sporto administravimas pradėjo plėstis 1960 metų pabaigoje. Ypatingas dėmesys buvo skiriamas sporto prieigai kas pakeitė savivaldybių paskirtį atsižvelgti į visų vartotojų grupių poreikius. 1980 m. prasidėjo Suomijos sporto kultūros kaita ir ši tendencija gali būti vertinamas organizacinių ir turinio pokyčių kontekste. Išaugo sporto klubų skaičius ir įvairovė, atsirado naujos sporto šakos. Taip pat pradėjo augti privatus sporto sektorius. Nuolatiniai yra analizuojami santykiai tarp viešojo, privataus ir pilietinių sektorių. Šių sektorių iššūkis yra fizinio aktyvumo poliarizacija ir kaip gyventojai galėtų būti tikslingai motyvuojami fiziniam aktyvumui savo gerovės ir sveikatos tikslais.

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