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# SUCCESS FACTORS OF INTERNATIONAL SPORTING EVENTS IN DIFFERENT REGIONS OF EUROPE

Gabriella Cserhádi<sup>1</sup> & Réka Polák-Weldon<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Pannonia Department of Management

<sup>2</sup>University of Pannonia Department of Accounting and Controlling

**Abstract:** Sport events always played an important role in human life from the ancient Olympics and marathon races to today's modern Olympics, World and continental championships. In our days these remarkable sport events come to the fore because participants of the sporting world effectuate even more, greater and more varied ones. Furthermore, the competition for organisation between cities and countries is becoming more and more intense (Zeman 2005). The organisation of international sporting events is an extremely complicated and multiple task. The organising committee has to manage the duties and activities, to co-ordinate the participants' work, to satisfy the needs of international sport association(s), sponsors and other stakeholders. Within the frame of the research we reveal the success factors of international sporting events in different segments of Europe, and in addition to this compare the event organization practices of analysed regions along the identified success factors. In this study we represent the results of a quantitative research, where organizers of World and European Championships – organised between 2000 and 2008 in different European countries – were asked and statistical analyses have been applied. According to our results beside the essential technical and task oriented areas the human aspects of organisation, the partnerships, co-ordination and communication are all-important factors. Especially in countries of East-Central Europe, where organisers have to pay more attention on selection, control of partners as well as on continuous communication with them in order to assure accurate performance in time.

**Key words:** success factors, task and relation orientation, international sporting events, Europe

## Introduction

An international sport event today is a social phenomenon, which became part of our life and culture. Beside sport delegacies and official attendants, there are crowds of supporters and spectators arriving at World and European Championships, who get fascinated by the tension of competitions and the intense experience of sport triumph. During their stay, the so-called sport tourists coming to competitions not only to buy entrance tickets and merchandise, but they also spend money on accommodation, food, travelling and sightseeing, which increases the income of local economy, particularly of the service industry (Dreyer and Krüger 1995). Motivation to participate are pleasant or curative stress, supporting the national team, interest in players and aesthetics (Bresler 2011). Major international sporting events, like Olympics, World and European Championships are the focal points of interest, their preparation and implementation are constantly followed by the media and news reports. The positive effects, economical incomes and social respects of a successful event can be felt not only by the organising sport associations and local athletes but also by host towns, regions or even countries (Nyerges and Petróczi 2007).

It is a wide-ranging and extremely complicated task to organise such huge sporting events, to manage the duties and activities, to co-ordinate the participants' work. Therefore, it is inevitable to apply the methods of project and event management in order to realize successful and efficient events.

But it is not obvious at all which areas of the organization are decisive and crucial during the accomplishment of an event. The purpose of the study is to identify and evaluate factors that support the successful management of international sporting events. Furthermore the comparison of events organised in different regions of Europe in point of the identified success factors.

## Previous findings on success factors

The large international sport events are unique combinations of time, setting, management practices and people's needs (Getz 1997). They have well confinable parameters, like the fixed deadline, competition rules, numerous stakeholders and environmental aspects, which allow comparison (Haase 2004). The organisation and management of sport events is one of the most developed businesses in our days. In this sector the competent and committed professional work assures quick success and considerable profit (Graham et al. 1995). However, the work of organisers involves numerous difficulties and uncertainties as well, like managing of extensive relationships, enormous resource allocation and wide range of risks. For that very reason academic and operative experts of sport event management try to disclose areas, which require special interest and investment.

As we mentioned earlier, it is an exceptionally complex task to organise international sporting events, European and

World Championships. High level organisation requires a variety of management – especially project management – methods, techniques and skills. Appropriate application of management methods and best practices can often secure the success of organisation. But what kind of methods and techniques can facilitate the organisation?

Project success factors considerably determine the project result; they are specifics and conditions with great influence on the successful implementation of the project (Lim and Mohamed 1999). Whereas critical or significant success factors (CSFs) are those ones that shall must be realized in order to ensure project success. As a matter of fact they are those management areas that need special and permanent attention so as to guarantee a good chance for success (Boynton and Zmud 1984; Szabó and Gaál 2006).

As far as the researchers on revealing factors of projects' success are considered; the first studies focused on identification of factors influencing a project's success or failure based on empirical researches (Baker et al. 1988; Pinto and Slevin 1988). On the strength of the comparative analysis of earlier studies Gemünden and Lechler (1997) elaborated a conceptual success factor model and in it they grouped factors into categories like context, participants and functions. Cooke-Davies (Cooke-Davies 2002a), in his empirical research on revealing „real” project success factors, studied success-inducing elements at three different levels: at the level of project management activity, project and organization. In latest years researchers seem to focus more on the relationship between success factors and results achieved by the project implementation. On project performance in terms of schedule, cost and quality goals the commitment, coordination and competence of project participants are crucial factors (Jha and Iyer 2007)

**Table 1.** Findings on success factors of previous studies

Publication	Findings on success factors
<b>Baker et al. (1988)</b>	Coordination and co-operations; adequacy of project structure and control, project uniqueness, importance and public exposure; success criteria salience and consensus; internal capabilities build up
<b>Gemünden and Lechler (1997)</b>	Project context: importance, complexity, project environment People: top management, project leader and project team Project functions: participation, planning and controlling, information and communication
<b>Cooke-Davies (2002a)</b>	Clear and doable project goals; well-selected, capable and effective project team; adequate resourcing; effective planning and control; good risk management; stakeholder commitment and attitude; appropriate project strategy
<b>Jha and Iyer (2007)</b>	Project manager's competence; Top management support; Monitoring and feedback; Favourable working conditions; Commitment of all project participants; Owners' competence; Interaction between project participants; Good coordination among project participants; Availability of trained resources; Regular budget update

Source: self-editing

Experts who analysed specially the areas of successful event management identified the extensive, all-round project planning and controlling; the effective and committed

leadership; the management of human resources; problem solving; handling of relationships and co-operations with sponsors, media, authorities, publicity etc. as key factors of success (Waeffler and Pfister 2008).

According to analyses of previous studies defining success factors, two groups of factors can be defined: success factors that represent the technical part of project management, like project conception (clear and attainable goals), planning, structure, control, risk management; and the human side of it, like a competent and committed project team and project leader, client consultation, communication, co-operation and participation. This approach dates back to the task orientated and relation orientated categories established within the frame of researches of personal management at Ohio and Michigan Universities. Researches done at Ohio and Michigan Universities had similar results concerning the definition of task orientated and relation orientated managing styles; however, it largely differed in a way that researchers of Michigan considered the two categories exclusive (Likert 1961) whereas according to researchers of Ohio the two kinds of managing styles may coexist (Fleishman 1953). Hence, according to the results of Ohio State University and further researches (Blake and Mouton 1985; Ulrich and Fluri 1992) based on these results successful managers shall complete two objectives. On one hand, they shall accomplish the appointed aims by effectively structuring activities and actively managing resources and processes. On the other hand, they shall complete the objectives concerning relationships, fulfil the demands of workers, and that of team integration by encouraging participants and applying adequate managing style (Blake and McCauley 1992).

## Methodology and sample of the research

We applied empirical research to define the success factors of international sporting events. In order to raise an extensive database we asked the presidents or general secretaries of organising committees of all World and European Championships organised between 2000 and 2008 to take part in the questionnaire. In the course of the survey we gathered information from organisers of World and European Championships held in Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia; Slovenia and Switzerland. The respondents answered in three main subjects – general information, organisational characteristics of the event and results of the event – altogether in 22 themes, which contained further sub-themes.

Altogether we received 104 completed questionnaires, which constitute a return rate of 33.4%. Among participating sport movements the proportion of Hungarian (37%) sport associations was the highest, but German (21%), Swiss (12%) and Austrian (9%) associations had considerable representation as well. Approximately half of the analysed sport events were held between 2006 and 2008, but sport competitions organized between 2003 and 2005 also represented an extensive proportion. Taking the duration of

sport events into consideration, some 40% of analysed events had duration of 1 to 4 days, and about 50% of 5 to 10 days. Among examined sport events 24% was organised as a junior or youth championship and 76% for adult athletes. Most of the analysed sport events were organised in Olympic individual (59%) or in Olympic team (20%) sports, however the sport of examined events was diversified. Athletic, handball, ice-hockey, pentathlon and canoe were represented in major ratio.

**Table 2.** Characteristics of research sample

		Analysed events (n)	All events (N)
<b>Year</b>	2000-2002	18	71
	2003-2005	38	123
	2006-2008	48	117
<b>Duration</b>	1-4 days	44	131
	5-10 days	49	145
	11- days	11	35
<b>Sport</b>	Olympic individual	62	180
	Olympic team	21	58
	Non Olympic	21	73
<b>Place</b>	East-Central Europe	87	226
	German cluster	17	85
<b>Total</b>		<b>104</b>	<b>311</b>

Source: self-editing

The statistical analysis of the collected dates was carried out by the Grafstat 3.41b and SPSS programs. In order to define success factors of sport events we made factor analysis. In the course of the analysis we grouped indicators of success in order to create factors, which describe the behaviour of each indicator. According to the rules of classification we identified a variable as a part of the factor when its factor loading was over 0.4. The rotation of latent variables was carried out by Varimax rotation, in order to get independent factors. Towards revealing possible correlations and deviation between organizational characteristics of East-Central European countries and countries of German culture cluster we applied variance analysis (ANOVA). Our reason for doing variance analysis was to see if there are any differences between analysed European regions on mean of factor values (Field 2005).

## Results of the study

During the factor analysis of success factors of international sporting events six clusters were separated. The first factor is the *objective and task planning*. It indicates the detailed development of objectives and task-structure as well as the actualization of plans for the organisation activities. This area contributes to the fundamentals of the organisation: the organising committee should define the content and priority of aims, which compose the basis of planning and evaluation;

they must develop the tasks included in the process of organization and collect the activity-structure, which indicates who, what and when to realize; on the basis of objectives and tasks the detailed plans can be further elaborated. The next factor, *contract strategy*, includes the financial conditions of sub-contracts as well as the responsibilities shared among organisers and sub-contractors. In the course of the preparation and implementation the organising team has to work together with several enterprises. They should consider and work out the details of financial terms and responsibilities to be able to account for the correct implementation. The third factor is *leadership*, which contains variables connected to competence, commitment, scope and responsibilities of the leaders and the members of the organising committee. It indicates the importance of competent and committed participants, who are experienced, good specialists and inspired to organise the event. The detailed elaboration of scope and responsibilities prevent the overlap or even any lacks of execution. The fourth factor, *organisational culture*, includes cultural characteristics of the organising committee, such as information sharing and communication within the committee, the level of support of teamwork and organisational learning. These soft areas cannot be considered as important and essential parts of the organising work, although they constitute the basics and provide a framework for the organisers' everyday action. The fifth factor is *co-operation and communication*. It is the co-operation and communication with direct stakeholders, such as contractors, sponsors as well as international and national associations. Because the parties are absolutely necessary for the successful implementation the organising committee has to do its best for the effective collaboration. The sixth factor, *partnership*, contains collaboration and conversation with indirect stakeholders, such as national and local authorities, the city and its inhabitants. The indirect stakeholders do not have immediate influence on the planning and operation of the event, however they are able to sustain the success of championships – through taking over tasks and responsibilities – or even set back the organisation – through denial of permits.

These six factors determine the success of international sporting events. Among the identified factors *objective and task planning* and *contract strategy* represent the task oriented approach of management, while the other factors: *leadership*, *organisational culture*, *co-operation & communication* and *partnership* can be settled as relation oriented areas. The results of the analysis verified the assumptions of the study, according to which not only the technical, task oriented factors are essential in organising successful sport events but also soft, human oriented factors are determining. The results of factor analysis verify, that the theories represented by the Ohio State University and their followers (Blake and Mouton 1985; Ulrich and Fluri 1992) can be fully proved in the case of management of international sporting events as well. Previous studies of project success (Cooke-Davies 2002b; Kendra and Taplin 2004) also revealed that the technical factors and human oriented factors of management can be separated, which complement each other and support the effective implementation.



Table 3. Success factors of international sporting events

Success factor	Variables	Factor loading					
<b>Objective and task planning</b>	Development of task-structure	.743					
	Development of objectives of the event	.462					
	Actualization of project plans	.353					
<b>Contract strategy</b>	Responsibility shared among organisers and sub-contractors		.910				
	Financial conditions of sub-contracts		.873				
<b>Leadership</b>	Competence of OC leaders			.599			
	Commitment of OC members			.560			
	Division of scope and responsibilities			.431			
<b>Organisation-al culture</b>	Support of teamwork				.839		
	Support of individual efforts				.725		
	Communication within the OC				.702		
	Organizational learning				.674		
	Information sharing within the OC				.456		
<b>Co-operation &amp; communication</b>	Communication with contractors					.854	
	Communication with sponsors					.654	
	Communication with the international sport association (project owner)					.636	
	Control of contractors					.627	
	Selection of contractors					.508	
<b>Partnership</b>	Partnership with local authorities, the city and inhabitants						.943
	Partnership with national authorities						.444

Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

Source: self-editing

During the research we compared the factor values of international sporting events of East-Central European countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and the German culture cluster (Austria, Germany and Switzerland) as well. The purpose of the analysis was to reveal possible similarities and differences in the organisation activity of an advanced and more developed region of Europe and a segment which try to close up.

According to the results of variance analysis (ANOVA) it is verifiable, that in the comparison of success factors of different segments of Europe statistically significant (Sig. 0.073) differences appeared in the case of the co-operation & communication success factor.

Table 4. Average factor value and standard deviation

	<i>East-Central European countries</i>	<i>German culture cluster countries</i>
Mean	0.14684	-0.20417
Std. dev.	0.12280	0.14880
N	57	38

Source: self-editing

Regarding the co-operation & communication factor the analysed East-Central European countries showed higher factor values (mean 0.147) than the events organised in Germany, Switzerland and Austria (mean -0.204). In the analysed East-Central European countries the recovery of suppliers and partners, the progressive control of their performance as well as the continuous communication with partners, sponsors and project owner require more effort from the organisers than in countries of German culture cluster.

## Conclusion

Throughout the research our main objective was to determine success factors of international sporting events in order to define areas that play a crucial role in the successful organisation. The observations on the task and relation oriented success factors bear significant practical importance. The variables of success factors represent in details the existing activities as well as the tasks to development. Our findings confirmed that in the work of organisers the task oriented factors, such as the development, control and actualization of aims and activities, as well as the delivery of required resources are essential, because these areas constitute the basis of the event organization, the division of tasks and the control of activities. On the market of international sporting events the fight for the organising rights is becoming more intensive and the events are also becoming more massive and complex. In the organisation, co-ordination and implementation of events, the application of various management tools and methods are vital.

At the same time the results of factor analysis draw our attention more to the role of human factor and relation orientation. In the successful implementation of sport events the leaders and members of project team as well as the partners, contractors and authorities play an important role. The competence, commitment and organisation culture of these groups are indispensable in the effective work and in the efficient, trouble free organisation. In the preparation and implementation of international sporting events, where the deadline of the project cannot be modified and delayed, the leadership, organisational culture of the organising committee as well as the co-ordination and communication with partners, stakeholders seem to be more important than the technical dimension of organisation. Furthermore, it is reasonable, that every techniques and methods used during the organisation needs to be applied by members of the organising committee.

Consequently, they necessitate an appropriate leading, supporting culture in favour of good performance.

The findings confirm our presumption about the adequacy of task and relation oriented theory of Ohio State University in case of international sporting events. The results are also congruent with the conception of Cooke-Davies (2002b) who defined the human and technical dimension of project management and emphasized that the aggregation of the two dimensions is crucial to the realization of successful projects.

The accomplished empirical study offers us a comprehensive view about the sport event management of studied East-Central European countries and the countries of German culture cluster. In the case of co-operation & communication factor the analysed East-Central European countries showed higher factor value than the events organised in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. After evocating the content of this factor - selection and control of contractors, communication with contractors, sponsors and the project owner – the result which can seem unexpected at first is in fact not. In the analysed East-Central European countries the delivery of the required resources, assets and buildings as well as the control of the partners' work require great attention and co-ordination from the organizers. After the establishment and the maintenance of relations the continuous communication and control is indeed a relevant task for them. Unfortunately the signed contract is not enough assurance for the precise and punctual performance in many cases. While in the case of sport events organised in Austria, Germany and Switzerland it is not a concern for the organizers, because the state or the city takes more considerable part in the organisation, especially in infrastructural investments and developments.

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