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# THEORY AND PRACTICE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF UNIVERSITY CHAMPIONSHIPS ORGANIZED IN HUNGARY

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**Abstract:** After the 1989-1990 political changes the aim of the Hungarian University Sports Federation was to follow its traditions of nine decades in foreign policy as well, therefore the organization of international competitions in Hungary was promoted. Up to now the study of the management of these international events was neglected in the Hungarian scholarly literature, although all university sporting events held in Hungary were successful and they were highly appreciated internationally. Taking the example of three university world championships hosted by Hungarian towns, the *objective* of this paper is to analyze how the management succeeded to solve the major tasks of the organizational work and how some management theories were implemented in its activity. In order to collect data the following *methods* were used: analysis of documents, in-depth interviews and participant observation. The *results* are presented on the basis of some theses of the event planning theory, the event management theory, and the situational leadership theory. More specifically, the issues of motives-decision-actions, consistency- coherency- harmony and these of the quantity indicators of event organization in connection of the three underscored world championships organized in Hungary are discussed. In *conclusion* it is stated that in the management the situation theory had to be taken into consideration the most in the leading process. It was proven that despite preparations lasting often for several years and expanding to every detail of requirements, the flexibility of the management was crucial to search and to find response to every critical situation.

**Key words:** organizing competitions, event planning theory, event management theory, situation theory

## Introduction

Every experienced leader can verify that throughout their work they “dealt with uncertainty,” and with the “essence of leading process” according to Thompson (Hanson, 2009). Because of the factors of uncertainty the decision-makers cannot foresee the potential success of a certain initiatives. Although the successful leading processes, the mechanism of problem-solving and decision-making has intrigued the experts since the beginning of scientific study of management, the study of the variable situations and their effect on successful management was put in focus only by modern management theories. According to Hanson (2009) the modern leadership theories explain the variable and situational nature of leadership as the key of the process. In this study I will analyze the management of three Hungarian organized championships through the above mentioned point of view.

After the 1989-1990 political changes the aim of the Hungarian University Sports Federation was to follow its traditions of nine decades in foreign policy as well, therefore the organization of international competitions in Hungary was promoted. Up to now the study of the management of these international events was neglected in the Hungarian scholarly

literature, although all university sporting events held in Hungary were successful and they were highly appreciated internationally.

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## Methods

In order to realize the objectives of the paper a research was carried out with the help of the following *methods*: analysis of documents, in-depth interviews, and participant observation.

Documents in connection with the organization of the given three world championships, precisely: the dossier of candidature, the minutes of Organizing Committee’s meeting, the reports by the different sub committees and by the referees were analyzed from the perspective of the theoretical foundation of the managerial work.

In-depth interviews were made by key persons in the management (n=5), leaders of sporting delegations ((n=7)

and athletes (n=8). The guidelines of the in-depth interviews focused on what experiences of the interviewed persons got in the events concerning the activity of the management.

Participant observation was possible because the author of this paper was involved in the organizational work of all three examined world championships as a high level sports officials in Hungarian University sport, and, in this capacity, he was member in several decision making bodies related to the world championships held in Hungary.

## World Championships for Students

### *The Status of World University (College) Championships*

Since the beginning of the last century universities organized international sports events. Hungary not only participated in these contests but also held the 1935 World University Games (equivalent to present-day Summer Universiade). From 1959 the different university sports venues were organized under the International University Sports Federation (FISU). After creating a unified competition program and regulations in sports the International Olympic Committee recognized the FISU among other worldwide acclaimed sports organizations. By taking into consideration the length of the academic year the Summer and Winter Universiades are organized biennially. While the aforementioned games are organized in every odd year, the World University Championships in every even-numbered year. As a sports federation, the FISU has shown unique development for the past sixty years as an organization and also by the success it achieved during this time.

Member countries in 2010 was 157 (Figure 1.) In 2011 10.622 participants were registered at the Summer Universiade in Shenshen,

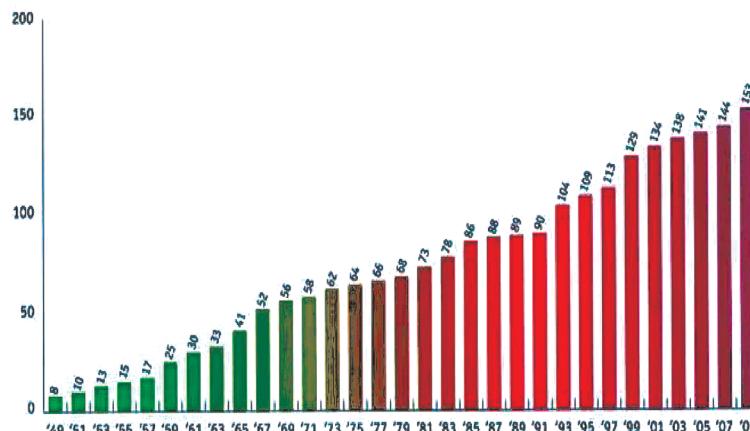


Figure 1. The number of member countries at FISU WUCs from 1949 to 2009 (FISU WUC statistics, 2010)

China. In 2013, in Kazan, Russia the participants of the 27 championships will reach the number of the olympians of the London Summer Games.

While the 1962 World University Championship with its single sports program produced only one winner among the 98 participants, in 2010 six thousand students could contest in 27 championships. (Figure 2.)

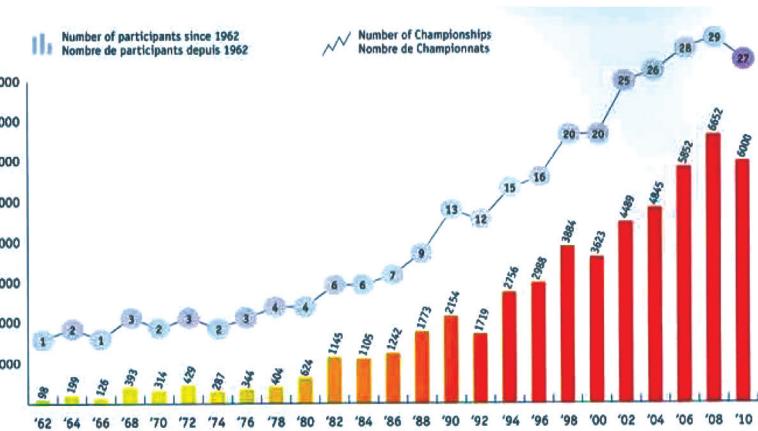


Figure 2. The number of participants and the number of championships of World University Championships through the years (FISU WUC statistics, 2010)

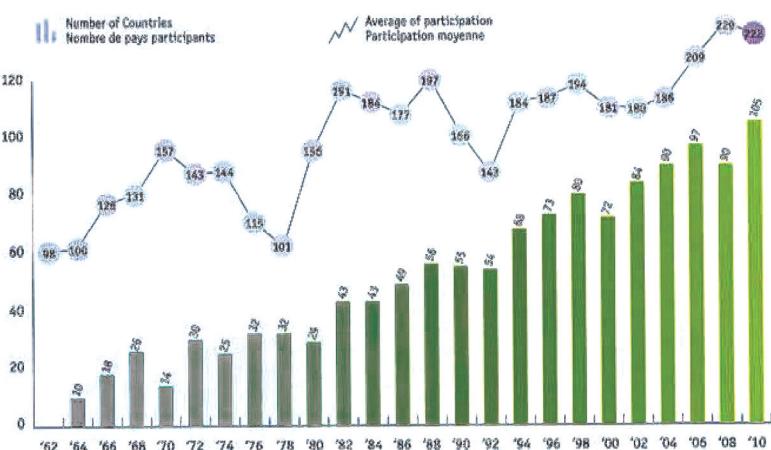


Figure 3. The number of participants countries at the World University Championships through the years (FISU WUC statistics, 2010)

Until the mid sixties the number of participant countries did not exceed twenty, in 2010 their number reached 105. (Figure 3.)

### *World University Championships organized in Hungary*

Since 1986 Hungary won the rights to organize ten WUCs in seven sports program that were held in seven university towns all over the country. Nine of these championships were coordinated by the HUSF including the active engagement of the author of the present paper.

In the period of 1990–2010, by taking into consideration the specific sports requirements, the aforementioned championships were organized among varied political and economical environments but with a fairly optimal infrastructure and circumstances. For the better comparison the topic of my analysis is the organization and management of the World University Championships in three championships: Men's handball 1996, Futsal 2002, Men's and women's handball, 2010, held in Nyíregyháza and in other towns of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county. I used multiple methods for data collecting through this research including document analysis, qualitative interview techniques and participant observation. (Table 1.)

*Table 1.* Championships in Hungary

Championships in Hungary		
Orienteering	1986	Miskolc
Table tennis	1990	Szekszárd
Men's handball	1996	Nyíregyháza
Orienteering	1996	Veszprém
Triathlon	2000	Tiszaújváros
Futsal	2002	Nyíregyháza
Table tennis	2004	Győr
Table tennis	2006	Szeged
Men's - women's handball	2010	Nyíregyháza
Rowing	2010	Szeged

## Results and Discussion

### *Motivation – Decision – Action*

The management including the classic theoretical theses of event organization can be found in every initiative. The HUSF motivation came after the successful organization of the first championship – the 1990 Table tennis WUC in Szekszárd. The decision about organizing a handball championship in 1996 was influenced by the fact, that the game was highly popular in Hungary, and also by the possibility for student players of the “B” team to compete on an international venue. In the process of choosing the locations the presence of sports-infrastructures, the ability of housing the participants, the receptivity of the county and city councils and the local popularity of the games were taken in consideration. The increase of tourism in the given regions moreover the further popularization of the games and the entertainment value were among the aims, too.

While in Szekszárd the theoretical and practical background were insufficient for the necessary tasks, not to mention the lack of time the organizers had (only seven months), contrary to the other venues where the events were arranged in harmony by the international standards regarding the time and other requirements. The responsibility and professionalism of the Organizing Committee of the Table tennis WUC proved that

with enough motivation from the local institutions, the support from the University of Pécs's departments connected to social sciences can help us to overcome every unexpected situation no matter how high the requirements are (Hédi, 2007).

In December 1993 for the first time in the post-communist block the FISU Executive Committee meeting was held in Budapest. This not only served the long term interests of Hungary and university sports but also helped the country and the HUSF to be internationally acknowledged. We ought not to forget the importance of the openness and interest the western world showed towards our country during the years of the political changes in Central-Eastern Europe. In the course of granting the applications the FISU uses – though not officially – the following factors: the international rankings of the specific sport, participation in world championships, the activity and less importantly the success. In the above mentioned games (handball and futsal) the Hungarian teams participated two times with different levels of success in the World University Championships before the games were organized in Hungary. For several decades the Hungarian university sports have been greatly acclaimed internationally thanks to the participation and activity in these world championships.

In every case the same international norms and criterions are to be followed when picking candidates, so I am only going to mention the necessary state support, the professionalism of the sports associations, the declaration of the towns and universities about hosting the events, the other sponsors that cover the necessary costs.

The HUSF was a main actor in submitting the necessary applications. All three applications were granted by the FISU that proves the high professionalism of the HUSF even amongst the Sports Federation's ever increasing requirements. Looking back now, the last presentations were only formalities before making last decision about the organization of the championships.

### *Consistency–Coherency–Harmony*

Due to limitations on extension I cannot aim to explore and present every temporal and spatial process of the organization in a detailed manner. All the Organizing Committees of WUCs held in Hungary came into existence, operated and functioned as an organization in the classic sense. Organizational culture in its context – according to Bakacs – “...is not more than the conviction of collectively interpreted assumptions and values accepted by the members of the organization...” (Bakacs, 2004.)

The structure of the Organizing Committees (OC) was developed in accordance with smaller or bigger variances and common event organizational principles, but primarily by taking into account the pronounced tasks (Nyerges and Petróczi, 2007). (Figure 4)

Variances and the pressure for change laying on an objective basis were evoked by the awaited number of teams, the emphasis shifts arising due to the new expectations of the international organization and last but not least by the changing circumstances and possibilities.



Figure 4. The common structure of Organizing Committees  
(Source: Nyerges, M.-Petroczi, A. 20007)

According to Mintzberg (2009) the planning of organizations and the success of the organization itself may depend on consistency, coherency and on the harmony between natural structures.

The main aim of the structure is to harmonize the divided work. According to Drucker's idea the test of an organization's strength is whether it is capable of bringing out more from a human being than he seems to be able to do and whether it can bring forth his hidden talents in order to help others in evolving their abilities. These principles predominated during the formation of the organizing team, the preparing of scope of activities and the detailed lay. The organizing committees held meetings regularly from their establishment on, according to determinate schedule.

In case the OC is considered as an organization possessing an independent function and goal – and we attempt to do so – then from the five configurations set up by Mintzberg we found simple structure and adhocracy the most representative. (Figure 5.)

Name of event	Handball men, WUC 1996	Futsal UWC 2002	Handball men and women WUC 2010
Characteristics of configuration	<b>SIMPLE STRUCTURE</b>		<b>ADHOCRACY</b>
Main tool of coordination	Direct supervision		Mutual adaptation
<b>COMPOSITION OF THE STRUCTURE</b>			
Training	Significant		Significant
Formalization of behavior	Organic		Less formalization, organic
Planning and controlling system	Few		Moderate
Tools of contacting	Few	Moderate	Numerous
<b>COMPOSITION OF THE SITUATION</b>			
Technical system	Simple, does not control		Complex
Authority	Control of the first leader		Professional control

Figure 5. Characteristics of configuration of three University Championships according to Mintzberg

## Quantity Indicators

In case we consider the classical ratio of quantity indicators of event organization – from planning to closing – according to which preparations require 60% input, the event itself 30% and tasks connected to windup 10%, based on our experiences it has been proven true. True, this does not indicate either the quality of work, or the amount of time and the effective organization of the competition, that is concentrated, expanded to every detail and cannot be contrasted (Nyerges and Petrőczi, 2007).

At the analyzed events the leadership of the OC paid special attention to the main tool of coordination that is training. During this the range of tasks, temporally and spatially strictly defined of every group, was expounded and worked out. During the preparation of an event the tasks more or less altered in several cases and the presumed most optimal solution was chosen in every occasion according to the given situation. In this respect the smallest so called "input" was required by the fields of sports professions, as the organization went in accordance with the regulations and rules of international associations. Even the necessary modifications could only be implemented according to planned, announced and approved screenplays. The accomplishment of directions connected to health care, to the criteria of accommodation and to security guidelines happened similarly. In this segment the handling of volunteers and protocol tasks received special attention. Although the latter: the reception, accommodation, service of Hungarian (national, local, supporting circles) and international (officials, invited guests) VIP, and providing their programs, required flexible approach, creativity and exceptional attention, beyond the – in many cases strictly regulated – plans. Based partially on earlier acquired national experiences and last but not least on the international experiences, the involvement of volunteers on a higher level in the completion of tasks proved to be emphatic and indispensable. As a result of selecting and preparing trainings lasting for several months the work of the "strategic head" was helped by a team that was prepared professionally, knew local circumstances and culture, spoke the given languages on a high level and were committed to success.

Besides the above mentioned tasks, coordination was conducted by the supervision of the organizing committee and the upper leading control in the cases of the WCs of 1996 and 2002. Besides the well-prepared "operative seed" (leaders of the groups) only this leading method could fully guarantee the responsible solution of unexpected situations. In many cases the strategic head's direct intervention was needed due to the complex situation possessing several altering factors. From the several examples, we can mention here the situation in December 1996, when the journey of two teams to a venue in the countryside was withheld by an unexpected snowstorm. Even the available information and tools, the many outlined variations and methods proved to be insufficient for the proper solution at the venue. The final decision of the leadership was the applying of two power-type snow-sweepers, which were rearranged from other, severely affected territories of the county. Contests were played with a slight delay, but according to the

program of the world championship. We can also mention the case of those competitors who were Europeans but came mainly from Islam countries, and who, after their late-night arrival, according to the decision of their leaders, did not occupy their appointed rooms at the accommodation. The decision was justified with the unacceptability of coeducational shower rooms and toilets at the end of the corridor of the college dorm, which were then common besides the double-bed rooms. Due to extension limitations we cannot go into details concerning the numerous consequences of this, starting with transportation through meals to security measures, not to mention the financial aspects of all of these. Despite its complexity, the situation could only be solved with a decision made by one person and as a result the members of the mentioned team were accommodated in a separate hotel and had meals separately. The expenses of the Organizing Committee rose, but naturally the guests' expenses of participation did not.

Regarding this method Hanson (2009) relevantly and effectively formulates in his basic thesis that there is no such thing as the best organization and the best leading method. Leaders rarely have the possibility to grab a problem in the beginning because generally there are plenty of unexpected problems and they originate from numerous situations.

Organizing Committees can be defined as open/adapting/organic organizations that have to face changing relations. Here the re-evaluation of tasks and settings is completed with special knowledge and experience for the sake of efficiency and problem solving. Decision-making became the competence of those members of the organization who could handle them the best in a given situation (Hanson, 2009).

The above principles predominated mostly in the structure and later functioning of the organization of 2010. Due to firmly changed external circumstances and decreasing economic possibilities (narrowing sponsorships and state support) the organizing committee of the world championship could successfully organize the challenging event only with the formulation of a decision-making "operative seed" that was even more prepared and trained by the experiences of previous events. Numerous external and internal factors affected that the functioning of the organization showed the Mintzberg-characteristics of adhocracy. Unipersonal control shifted partially towards expertise control. The OC doubled the tasks originally with the intention of having even more sport-lovers seeing even more contests in more cities and venues of the county, but this also induced many insecure factors. The power of the prepared leading circle and the team-escorting professional volunteers was often maximally utilized, and was even surpassed by problems and situations originating from unexpected occasions. The discussed, modifiable plans did not worth anything, in most of the cases unipersonal decisions predominated. In the end problems narrowed down to the handling of transportation and sometimes of health insurance. Despite the hardships the appointed goals were achieved in every field, but the price was that the certain 30% border had to be exceeded significantly. The fact that after 1996 both the female and male university teams won a gold medal is a professional feedback to the original aims.

## Conclusions

In conclusion it is stated that in the management the situation theory had to be taken into consideration the most in the leading process. It was proven that despite preparations lasting often for several years and expanding to every detail of requirements, the flexibility of the management was crucial to search and to find response to every critical situation. Without it there would have been no successful solutions and internationally recognized organizational achievements, whose positive reception was mirrored in the reports of the officials of the commissioning international federation (FISU) and in the manifestations of the participants. The organizer Hungarian University Sports Federation as an open system adapted well to environmental effects. Generally it gave adequate management-answers to the challenge of changing situations. Still, the media reception of the above mentioned events remained under the rightfully expected level. Despite the successes of Hungarian and international university sports, it did not experience being unheeded by the media for the first time. During the university world championships organized by Hungary average people were capable of deeds beyond the average. Inexplicably university sports, including quality sports still remain somewhat unfitting in the whole of Hungarian sports and unfortunately also in the system of higher education; although for example the WUC-successes achieved in handball (in 1996 the men's team won gold medal, and in 2010 a dual victory was achieved by the men's and women's team) contributed to a great extent not only to university sports but also to the successes of the whole branch of sport. This could be experienced in a measurable manner during the post-WC international efficiency or in the admirable achievement of the present Olympics. On the other hand the organization of the university world championships of the ten branches of sports, besides the gained organizational experiences, brought successes in sport diplomacy to university and college sports and at the same time to the whole of Hungarian sports.

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