

PROJECT MANAGEMENT CASE STUDY ON EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP 2017

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Abstract: *One of the key projects of the University of Miskolc in recent years was the organization of the European University Basketball Championship 2017. The size, complexity, and length of time of the event – which can be interpreted as a complex project – presented many challenges to the Organizing Committee, i.e. the project management. The aim of this study is to examine the project management, the project success and the factors leading to success. After the introduction of the topic (relevance and short theoretical outlook), I present the examined project and some relevant project features (project ownership structure, project management, project cycle). I analyse the success of the project with Mihály Görög's hierarchical model. After that, I perform an efficiency examination and a qualitative risk analysis and based on that I look for correlations between the activities of the project management and the success of the project. Finally, I analyse the effects of the event. The purpose of this study is not to formulate general conclusions regarding the success factors of international sports events, but I hope that the conclusions of the study can be compared with other examined events and studies' results, and can be used in future, more extensive research. One of the conclusions of the study is the importance of the identification of partners who can make a meaningful contribution to the success of the event, involving them in the project and making them interested in active involvement.*

Keywords: project management, project success, sports management, efficiency, impact assessment, risk analysis

JEL classification: H43; O22; Z29

1. Relevance of the topic

The effects of a prominent international sports event on sports development, infrastructure, tourism and country image are significant, so success has serious positive effects, just as the consequences of an unsuccessful organization can be serious. Project management has a key role in this.

The University of Miskolc is the co-organizer of the European Universities Games 2024, which is the third largest international multisport event after the Summer Olympic Games and the Summer University World Games (previously known as the Universiade) with approximately 6,000 participants. In 2017, the University of Miskolc already organized a European-level university sports event, at that time it was the host of the European Universities Basketball Championship (hereinafter referred to as University Basketball EC). The preparation for the 2024 event, which is large-scale and presents many management

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challenges, serves as an opportunity for me to evaluate the 2017 event, examine its success and the success factors.

2. Theoretical outlook

According to the most general definition, project is an activity which is a one-time and complex task for an organization, and which completion period (beginning, implementation) and costs of implementation (resources) are determined and aimed at achieving a defined goal (result).

The group of interconnected projects that manages the included projects in a unified manner and achieves goals that would not be possible by managing the projects separately, called programs by Turner (1993). A program is specifically created for the successful and efficient execution of high complexity and medium or long duration processes. The projects operating as part of the program are used to realize the objectives of the program. The programs are usually called megaprojects, which are often created to implement a unique process with a large (social) impact.

Project management is a specialized field dealing with the organization of resources and their management, the aim of which is to ensure that the goals of the project are successfully met within a given time and budget as the result of the work performed by the resources. A project is a temporary undertaking, the purpose of which is to create a unique product or service.

3. Presentation of the project examined

The organization of the University Basketball EC was considered a complex task, a temporary organization was created for its implementation, with specific goals, resources, and fixed deadlines. These properties correspond to the typical characteristics of a project (Görög, 2001), so we can talk about a project in relation to the examined sport event. According to its classification, it is an event-type project because the implementation time was fixed. It is also classified a megaproject. Of course, the complexity and effects of the investigated event cannot be compared to that of an Olympic Games, but these characteristics can also be observed here. Even if it was not directly the task of the Organizing Committee, sub-projects such as the renovation of the Miskolc University Sports Hall, the development of Miskolc University's basketball life, or the creation of an organization and services suitable for hosting future international sports events were realized in parallel with the event, under the guidance of the participants in the organization. The event had many legacies, new opportunities and projects followed from the project deliverables.

3.1. Facts about the international sport event

The event, as one of the oldest and largest European University Championships, the most watched sports event by European higher education institutions and the European university sports scene took place July 16-23, 2017. The event is not attended by national university teams, but by university teams, typically the national champions of their country, and the participants were in the 17-30 age group. A total of 16 men's and 12 women's university teams from 16 countries came to the event, representing around 330 athletes. Together with professional staffs, referees, organizers and volunteers, nearly 600 people took part in the European University Championship. The organizers have been preparing for the organization of the international sports event for almost 3 years. The total income of the event was 106 million forints (approx. 346,000 euro at that exchange rate), and the total expenses were 98 million forints (approx. 320,000 euro at that exchange rate), the difference

was spent by the Organizing Committee on the development of the basketball department of the University of Miskolc. The event's budget is presented in Table No. 1.

Table 1: The 2017 University Basketball EC budget

Revenues (million HUF)		Expenditures (million HUF)	
Participant Payments	54.5	Related to competition	2.5
EMMI grant	5	Professional costs	5
Miskolc grant	7	Provision of venues	12.2
MKOSZ grant	30	Accommodation	17.2
MEFS grant	1	Meal	32
Sponsorship	1.5	Transport	5.8
University service	2.5	Accreditation	2.2
Technical (VAT recovery)	4.5	Protocol	3.3
Altogether	106	Communication, marketing	7.3
		Additional programs	2.2
		Management	6.4
		Other	1.9
		Altogether	98

Source: Author's analysis / processing based on own data

3.2. Project ownership structure, project management

The complexity of the task was also reflected in the multi-actor project ownership structure and project management. The Hungarian University Sports Federation (MEFS), the Hungarian Basketball Federation (MKOSZ), the University of Miskolc and the Municipality of Miskolc did not appear as sponsors, but as active actors in the implementation, so these four partner organizations can be considered the owners of the project. The top leaders of these organizations formed the Board of Patrons, and their managers and/or specialists formed the Organizing Committee. The involvement of the Government of Hungary was essential in terms of legitimizing the event, this was realized through the Ministry of Human Resources: the state secretary responsible for sports held the position of chairman of the Board of Patrons. The project organization is presented in Figure 1.

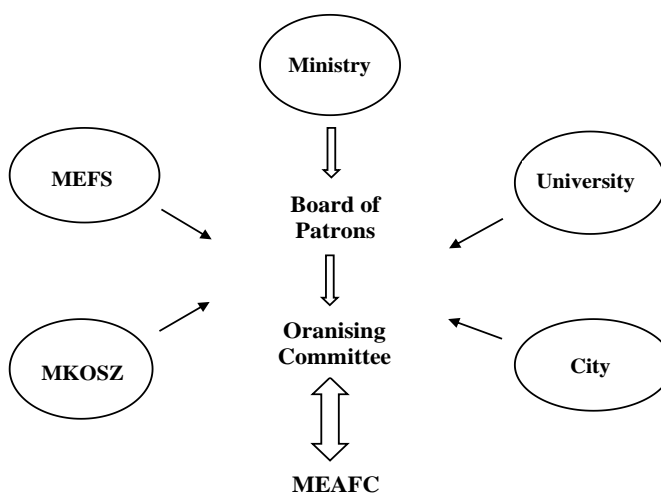


Figure 1: Project organization of the 2017 University Basketball EC

Source: Author's analysis /processing based on own data

The European University Sports Association (EUSA), the right holder, concluded a tripartite contract (Attribution Agreement) containing the rights and obligations related to the event with its Hungarian member organization, MEFS, and the Organizing Committee, thereby establishing a different system of relations.

Given that the Organizing Committee was not an independent legal entity, an organization providing a legal and economic background was needed, which exercised rights and assumed obligations in accordance with the decisions of the Organizing Committee. This role was played by the Sports Club of Miskolc University (MEAFC).

The Organizing Committee has set the following objectives of the event: organize it within the planned budget, exceeding the set of requirements issued by the EUSA (i.e. at a higher standard than expected), ensuring high satisfaction of the participants and the EUSA, as well as accumulating knowledge and building a team which will be suitable for the organization of other international (university) sports events in the future. The achievement of these objectives will be mentioned when I examine the success of the project, at the appropriate levels of success.

3.3. Project cycle

I divided the project cycle into stages of preparation, planning, implementation and closing. The preparation phase began with the formulation of the intention to organize the event and lasted until the organization right was obtained. In the meantime, important steps were taken, such as the justification of the intention to organize the event, consultation with the partner organizations (who later became the owners of the project) about whether the organizing fits into their strategy and whether they can support it. In this phase, the application documentation was compiled, and international inspectors visited.

The planning phase can be counted from winning the organizational right of the event till the formation of the Organizing Committee. In this stage, the agreements defining the goals of the event and laying the foundations for its implementation were concluded. Of course, a budget plan was drawn up as early as in the preparation phase, but the overall endorsement of the partner organizations was replaced by specific grants.

The implementation phase began with the formation of the Organizing Committee and the definition of goals, responsibilities and tasks. The implementation can be divided into several parts. On one hand, the organizational areas that run parallel to each other: accommodation, catering, transportation, facilities, competition program, accreditation and event office, communication, marketing, involvement and coordination of volunteers. On the other hand, the coordination, follow-up and revision of the organizational areas and the budget as necessary (project management). And thirdly, to organize the event, which lasted from the arrival of the first participant to the departure of the last participant.

The closure meant professional and financial closure, including tender settlements, written and/or personal reports to sponsors and individual project owners.

4. Examining the success of the project

I would like to examine the success of the project according to Mihály Görög's hierarchical model. The model consists of three levels of success that presuppose each other (fulfilment of primary project goals, satisfaction of project owners, satisfaction of interest groups involved in the project), where the success criterion at a higher level contains to some extent the success according to the criteria located below it, but the success according to each level can be interpreted on its own (Görög, 2007).

4.1. Evaluation based on primary project objectives

The project was completed on time with a positive budget balance. It was not only possible to fully meet the quality requirements of the international sports federation for certain

organizational areas, but also to reach the higher quality level set as a goal by the organizers in several cases. In addition to the satisfaction of the project team, I also rank the satisfaction of the international sports federation at this level. In his official report (Official Report of the European Universities Basketball Championship 2017), Peter George, the technical delegate present on behalf of the EUSA, who is an internationally recognized authority on the sport of basketball, called the event in Miskolc one of the best organized University Basketball EC of all time.

4.2. Evaluation based on the satisfaction of the project owner organization that initiated the project

In connection with the project, we can talk about four project owners, who already formulated their main strategic goals in the planning phase, such as the desired returns of the project result (organization of the event). The reputation of the University of Miskolc among European higher education institutions was strengthened through sport, and its sports hall was renovated. In the case of Miskolc, in addition to direct tourism revenues, we can talk about the promotion of the city's values and other PR benefits. For MEFS, the development of university basketball life and the strengthening of its position in the European university sports life were important and realized. The goal of the MKOSZ strategy was to strengthen the Hungarian university basketball championship and basketball life in Miskolc through the event. Among these, there are some that were fulfilled immediately after the event, and some that could only be judged 1-2 years later. In any case, it is sufficient confirmation that the four organizations will work together again at the European University Games 2024.

4.3. Evaluation based on the satisfaction of interest groups involved in the project

The organizers did everything to make the participants feel as comfortable as possible. In comparison with the previous University European Championships, the meal was given priority (this was reflected in the quantity, quality and variety), the accommodation was considered good, and the accompanying programs and information for the participants were the strength of the event. This was confirmed by a satisfaction survey done by EUSA among the participants after the event. The general opinion was the high-quality organization, and among the individual areas, the catering and the communication received the highest ranks. During the event, a total of 3 technical meetings took place with the participation of the head of the delegations, during which no complaints or problems came up – that, together with the received letters of thanks, also confirms the satisfaction of the participants.

The other interest group is the volunteers, for whom the event was able to provide several benefits (e.g. sports organizing experience, practicing a foreign language, building relationships). At this level, as well as at the two levels below, the project can be considered successful.

5. Efficacy examined

In order to draw conclusions, I performed an efficiency examination of several important areas (6 in total). The areas examined: preparation, planning, organization, project management, communication and controlling. I measured the efficiency on a 5-point rating scale, where each value indicates the following level of efficiency: 5 – was very effective, 4 – was effective, 3 – reached the expected level, 2 – was not effective, 1 – was not effective at all. I could, and it was appropriate, to measure the efficiency based on the subjective evaluation of the people involved in the organization from the preliminary stage to the end. I asked the members of the Organizing Committee (9 people) and the operational organizing team (15 people) to evaluate the individual areas on a 5-point scale, and I rounded the values received to whole numbers according to mathematical rules. However, before evaluating the effectiveness, I formulated as a guideline to the interviewees that they should

evaluate the effectiveness of each area according to the expectations in line with the goals and possibilities of the event. Compared to the University Basketball EC, for example, it would be unrealistic to expect the number of participants, communication or sports professional standards typical of an adult Basketball EC. Table 2 contains the examined areas and the evaluation of their efficiency.

Table 2: The efficiency of some areas of the 2017 University Basketball EC

	Area examined	Efficiency
1	Preparation	5
2	Planning	4
3	Organization	5
4	Project management	4
5	Communication	4
6	Controlling	4

Source: Author's analysis /processing based on own data

Given that the event received an extremely good rating in its category, it is not surprising that certain areas were rated at least at an efficient level during the evaluation. However, the obtained result can only be interpreted if we look at what aspects the organizing team took into account when determining the values.

The preparation of the event, due to successfully addressing the partner organizations and the winning application, as well as its organization, were both very efficient, in accordance with the results of the success examination. In the case of the planning, the thoroughness of which determined the positive outcome of the entire event, criticism was made because the announcement of the right to host was made as early as in 2014, but the Organizing Committee was officially formed only in 2016, meaning that the planning period was too long and the decisions made during this period were made without formal authorization. The project management was characterized by the agile way of thinking (Wysocki, 2013), the goal of its activity was to achieve the best possible result within the given time and budget, i.e. to organize the highest quality sports event. The project management responded flexibly to new circumstances, especially changes in the budget. The project was managed by a team, not by one person (project manager). Responsibilities were created in the form of a network, rather than in a hierarchical structure. The project management was not fully effective in the recruitment, selection and training of volunteers alone. In terms of communication, a comprehensive appearance was achieved in the local media, several promotional films were made, there were regular press releases and social media was used continuously. Due to the nature of the event, it could not be expected to be included in the national media, this would have been an extra result, which was not achieved. The project was successfully closed, the project management accounted to all supporters, provided comprehensive information to the project owners, the experiences were summarized and evaluated in each area, but deeper analyses (in terms of effects and costs) were not prepared.

6. Qualitative risk analysis

In connection with the project, I consider it important to carry out a qualitative risk analysis, which evaluates the degree of impact on a kind of rating scale. The risk factors can be classified in 4 risk groups based on the probability of occurrence and the degree of the effect caused: high probability of occurrence - high impact, high probability of occurrence - low impact, low probability of occurrence - high impact, low probability of occurrence - low impact (Daróczy, 2011). To examine the risk factors, I use the formula applied by István Fekete: $K = P + 2 \times I$, where K is the risk coefficient, P is the probability of occurrence evaluated on a

five-point scale, I is the extent of the effect also evaluated on a five-point scale (Fekete, 2000). According to the value of the risk coefficient, we can talk about negligible risk factors ($K \leq 5$), non-critical risk factors ($5 < K \leq 10$) and critical risk factors ($10 < K \leq 15$). Table 3 lists and examines the level of risks related to the event that the project management had to deal with.

Table 3: Qualitative risk analysis of the 2017 University Basketball EC

	Risk	Risk coefficient	Risk management
A	Low number of participating teams	$2 + 2 \cdot 5 = 12$	Comprehensive promotion
B	The University Sports Hall is not completed on time	$4 + 2 \cdot 4 = 12$	Contractual guarantees
C	Short subsidies	$4 + 2 \cdot 3 = 10$	Involvement of partners, alternative budget
D	Insufficient number of organizers	$4 + 2 \cdot 3 = 10$	Efficient recruitment, flexible management
E	Lack of coherence between the Organizing Committee and the MEAFC	$3 + 2 \cdot 3 = 9$	Personal overlaps
F	There is no agreement on meals	$3 + 2 \cdot 2 = 7$	Alternative options
G	Compromises in transfer	$2 + 2 \cdot 2 = 6$	Accepted risk

Source: Author's analysis /processing based on own data

During the analysis, two risk factors reached the critical level. An unfavourable trend in the number of participating teams would have had a large impact (loss of income, opinion on project owners), however, the probability of this happening was low, since the maximum number of teams participated in previous events as well. In order to further reduce the occurrence, the organizers addressed the university sports associations of European countries and the higher education institutions that participated in previous continental competitions in several rounds and in a targeted manner.

It had a high probability of occurrence and would have had a large impact if one of the competition venues, the University Sports Hall, was not completed on time. The handover deadline was only two weeks before the event, but the strong contractual guarantees and continuous consultation with the contractor proved to be effective risk management.

The other risk factors were no longer considered critical. The probability of a lack of support was high, as in the months before the event there was still uncertainty about the exact amount of several supports and sponsorships, however, the effect was moderate, because the participant payments (65 EUR/person/day) and the grants to project owners agreed upon in the planning phase covered a high-quality organization level that met the organizational requirements of the event. Therefore, there was only uncertainty around certain grants, the absence of which would have only impaired secondary goals (PR activities, communication, accompanying programs), and the organizers had an alternative budget.

The number of organizers (here we mean the organizers and volunteers involved in the event) could be expected to be low, which did not turn out to be optimal, so the other organizers had to bear a larger – but still tolerable, thanks to the recruitment, which did not endanger the event – burden.

It would have caused interruptions in the organization if there was no harmony between the project organization and the organization providing the economic and legal background, which was solved by the fact that the managing director of the Organizing Committee and the president of the MEAFC were the same.

The meals for the participants could ideally be provided by the catering company operating the university restaurant, but for a long time there was no agreement on the price. However the organizers developed an alternative solution (commissioning another service provider by moving to the university's hall), which reduced the risk effect and at the same time improved also the negotiation positions of the organizers.

The transportation of the participants (the provision of an airport transfer was a requirement) was a significant cost item, therefore, for economic reasons, the organizers used their own minibuses and employed their own drivers in the transportation, which meant more risk than if they had solved the task with transfer companies only. The organizers assumed this risk.

7. Examination of effects

According to a study (Stocker, Szabó, 2017), it is advisable to examine the effects in 6 areas: professional sports effects, sports political effects, social effects, economic effects, technological effects, environmental effects. In this study, I only examine the professional effects of the event in more detail, but I would also like to touch briefly on the other effects. Among the possible sports professional effects, the literature highlights the opportunity for domestic athletes to gain international experience and more successful domestic performances. In order to examine the professional effects of sports, I first looked at the participation of Hungarian university teams in the University Basketball ECs organized between 2013 and 2019 summarized in table no. 4. The statement refers to this period because the Hungarian university basketball team first participated at the continental competition in 2013, and the biennial event was cancelled in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4: Participation of Hungarian teams in the European Basketball University Championships (2013-2019)

Event	Men			Women		
	Hungarian team	Place	Participants	Hungarian team	Place	Participants
2013, Split	University of Debrecen	15	16	University of Pécs	11	12
2015, Koper	West Hungarian university	12	16	University of Physical Education	9	12
2017, Miskolc	University of Debrecen,	10	16	University of Physical Education	3	12
	University of Miskolc	12				
2019, Poznan	University of Physical Education	9	14	University of Physical Education	6	12

Source: Author's analysis /processing based on own data

It is easy to prove the possibility of gaining international experience. University ECs typically feature the university champions of their home country, but their regulations allow the host institutions to participate in the competitions regardless of their position in the national university championships. The men's team of the University of Miskolc, although the University of Debrecen won the Hungarian championship, was able to start thanks to this. According to the assessment of the basketball association, the professional standard of the university basketball championship is constantly rising, thanks to the possibility of regular games and the growing prestige of the championship. This is also reflected in the table: the

Hungarian university teams are achieving better and better places. Even so, the advantage of the so-called home field is clearly confirmed for the women, the Hungarian champion Physical Education University achieved by far the best performance so far with the bronze medal at the event organized in Miskolc. For the men, the advantage of the home track is not reflected, the Hungarian champion performed better in 2013 than in 2015, however - due to the different number of participants - the performances in 2017 and 2019 are the same. At the same time, in the case of the team of the University of Miskolc, a better-than-expected performance can be determined, since it participated in the University Basketball EC as a host and not as a champion team, representing a lower playing power on paper.

In the framework of a structured interview with the players and coaches of the University of Miskolc (a total of 13 people), I searched for the answers to the better-than-expected performance. The reason was clearly and unanimously cited as the extra motivation resulting from being able to play in front of relatives, friends, and acquaintances at a prestigious international sports event. Being familiar with the facility was also mentioned as a reason by some of the interviewees, but not significantly, which can be explained by the fact that none of the competition venues for the men was the University Sports Hall, which serves as the home of the team. In the case of the Generali Arena, one could speak of local knowledge, because due to the renovation of the University Sports Hall, the team trained and played there during 4 months before the event, however, the Ice Hall was temporarily transformed into a venue suitable for hosting basketball matches just for the sake of the event. The referees' tendency to favour the home team in critical situations did not arise either, because the majority of the referees were foreigners, furthermore, due to the low number of fans and the cultured encouragement resulting from the nature of the event, there was no psychological pressure on the referees. The travel fatigue of the opponents did not arise as an aspect to be considered because all teams arrived 2 days before the first match, and there was no question of jet lag in relation to the European teams.

The sports political effects of the event were not significant for Hungarian basketball, but they were for Hungarian university sports. Since 2012, the Hungarian University Basketball Championship has been the largest and most important Hungarian university championship, where 16 men and 14 women teams play against each other regularly for 8 months, and the winners gain the right to participate in the European University EC (odd years) or in the European Universities Games (even years). The successful domestic organization strengthened the prestige of the university championship. The event's media coverage and fan attendance were low by the standards of the sport of basketball, but outstanding for university sport. Another effect of the event is that the position of MEFS within the EUSA has been strengthened, and representatives of Hungarian university sports had a better chance of running for committee seats at the next renewal.

The reconstruction of the University Sports Hall was completed before the start of the event, and since then it has been serving the sporting needs of the organized community and the public at a much higher level. The renovation of the sports hall was justified anyway, but the amount and timeliness of the funds are due to the event, so it can be considered the social impact of the University Basketball EC.

The tourism tax related to the event and the expenses realized by the participants during the 9 days - primarily in hospitality - provided a perceptible economic impact at the local level. We can talk about technological impact in the case of EUSA. EUSA successfully tested a new results management system during the event in cooperation with the organizers. This system has since been generally introduced and used during the European University ECs. We cannot talk about environmental effects in connection with the event.

8. Conclusions

Based on the examination of the success of the project, it can be stated that the event was successful from the point of view of the organizers (project management), the clients (project owners) and the participants (interest groups involved in the project).

The organizational practice of international sports events can be described by three groups of success factors: task orientation, relationship orientation, random effects (Szabó, Dancsecz, 2009). Random effects, such as extreme weather or riots, did not affect the outcome of the event, the probability of their occurrence was close to zero (indoor sport, and neither the event nor the host settlement posed a security risk). Thoughtful, appropriate planning and effective risk management played a major role in the achievement of the set task goals as success factors. Regarding the relationship orientation, it can be stated that the involvement of partner organizations is considered a key factor in the success of the event.

The partner organizations provided significant financial and non-financial support (e.g. provision of services, professional support, provision of permits) and performed actual tasks for the success of the project. The project management consisted of the managers and/or specialists of the partner organizations, however, the effective cooperation was strengthened by additional synergies. At the time of the event, the managing director of the Organizing Committee not only held the position of MEAFC president but was also a member of the MEFS board and participated in the Miskolc sports management; the leaders of the University of Miskolc were members of the MEAFC management board; and the MEAFC coordinated men's basketball life in Miskolc, thus it was considered an important member organization of MKOSZ. These personal relationships all helped the mutual better understanding of the strategic goals of the individual partner organizations, the development of trust and smooth work.

Based on these, one suggestion can be composed for the project management of international sport events: the identification of partners who can make a meaningful contribution to the success of the event in the preparation phase, involving them into the project in the planning phase and making them interested and inspiring them to be active in the implementation phase is a key factor of the success.

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Bio-note:

Zoltán Rakaczki is a PhD student at the University of Miskolc, his research field is the management challenges of international multisport events. The author has been working in university sports for nearly two decades, and is currently a board member of the Hungarian University Sports Federation and the European University Sports Association. He participated in the organization of many international university sports events. He was the executive director of the Organizing Committee of the University Basketball EC examined in this article, and he made his analysis based on all the information related to the event. With his academic work, he aims to further strengthen his practical knowledge in the field of sports management and sports organization with theoretical foundation, and at the same time to develop the theory and literature of the field with practical knowledge.