



## CHALLENGES OF MANAGING INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE ALBANIAN ATHLETIC FEDERATION

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### ABSTRACT

Considering the comprehensive values of sports events, this study will be focused on the approaches and challenges of the Albanian Athletic Federation in managing and organizing international events. Taking as a study case the International Meeting "Honoring the Robert Emmiyan Figure", organized by the Albanian Athletic Federation in Tirana, it will be analyzed the management of the human resources, promotion of the activity and the awareness campaign.

The paper will discuss the following issues:

- The practices that Albanian Athletic Federation applies at the preparatory phase, during the development of the activity and its closure;
- Analysis of methodologies and selection criteria of the Local Organizing Committee;
- Exploring the techniques of promoting activity in media and marketing management.

By analyzing these aspects has been aimed to provide a thorough picture related to the problems identified during the organization of activities at an international level. Identification of these problems may assist in drafting a development platform in future activities, taking into account the role of these events in strengthening organizational capacity of the Albanian Athletic Federation and improving its image.

Using sports theories intertwined with SWOT Analysis and empirical evidences, the study suggests that the Albanian Athletic Federation needs to improve its internal mechanisms specifically on issues of management and marketing.

**Keywords:** Athletic Federation, Sport Events, International Activities, Management.

### Introduction

The organization of a sporting event can be considered as one of the most important elements for performing a thorough analysis on the functioning of sporting organizations for some reasons. First and foremost, the organizational capacities, strategies put into place, along with operational procedures followed for the implementation of a specific activity can be assessed.

Sports organizations in the world, but also state agencies, have significant awareness about the role that sports activities play at international level as well as locally in strengthening and consolidating the skills of the staff, improving the image of the country. In a longer-term perspective, sport activities have been considered as an enhanced tool of tourism, thus affecting the economic growth of a country. The 2006 report of the United Nations highlighted that "world leaders have realized that sports activities contribute not simply to the physical welfare of individuals, but are nourishing peace and development, which can contribute to create an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding."

If looking at the categorization of sports events they are characterized by scale and size. Van der Wagen depicts three types of categories of sport events. First, local events that are organized within a specific community and do have a low impact. Secondly, honoring events, organized in a memory of a talented athlete, or related to a particular date of sport history and tradition. Mega events comprise the third type of sport events, which in comparison with the local and honoring events

have a greater impact in the society but also related to media interest. Roche defines the mega events as "high cultural level activities which attract the mass and receive international recognition".

Referring to the categorization of sport events suggested by Van der Wagen, the international meeting in honoring Robert Emmiyan figure organized in Tirana can be included at the second classification. Nevertheless, taking into consideration the country's context by the Albanian authorities it has been considered as a mega event. The General Secretary of the Albanian Athletics Federation stated that "this is not just an event to honor a figure; this can be considered one of the mega events organized by our federation". Also, the official declaration of the federation stipulated that "it was the third event of this level organized in Albania since 1946".

Considering literature definitions and authors contributions "a sport event can be considered a mega event only and if can attract international media attention and have the opportunity to deliver promotional messages to billions of people".

The Albanian Federation aimed at gathering to this activity a number of 100 athletes from all over the Balkans and Europe, but in fact at the date of organization on 26 of May 2013 only six countries specifically from Balkan region such as Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Kosovo and representatives of Albania participated.

In view of practical and theoretical approaches of organizing and managing international sport events this study aims at analyzing and factorizing the consequential outcomes of non

adequate planning along with lack of experiences in promotion and management. The results of this study suggest that application of SWOT analysis before and after the event should become an applicable and sustainable mechanism in practice for the Albanian Federation.

### Materials and methods

The methodology used in this study is a combination of theoretical and analytical aspects with the qualitative resources. Theoretical consultation is based on information collected from academic texts, various publications on management and strategic planning activities. Also, articles and interviews published in printed media and online official website of the federation, as well as opinions of analysts and experts in the field of sports have been taken into consideration. SWOT analysis plays a significant role in the methodology used for the examination of this study case.

The empirical analysis is based on interviews of the sample group, which can be divided into two categories: a. Representatives of the Albanian Athletic Federation and b. Volunteers. Interviews of selected sample group have been at the center of text analysis. A standardized interview with open questions has been used, aiming to clarify the process of organizing and managing international activities. For the purpose of this paper 5 interviews were conducted with members of the Local Organizing Committee, and 4 interviews with the group of volunteers. The number of interviews could have been even higher, but it was limited to 9 people. However, the limited number has not affected the quality of information, as persons interviewed have a key and important role in Albanian Athletic Federation, such as the General Secretary of the Federation. Data collected from these interviews helped shaping this paper, and deepening constructive critical and analytical perspective on issues and challenges of the federation in organizing international activities.

### Results/Discussions

As mentioned above, even though it was planned to be an international meeting in fact it seems like a Balkan sport event. A modest number of foreign countries participated in this event, where the neighboring countries were the main actors. Experts of the sport organization activities give emphasis in setting pragmatic goals since the very beginning. In a SWOT analysis context some factors may have contributed to a low number of participating countries:

1. The calendar of activities of foreign sports clubs
2. Financial constraints
3. The available time to organize an international event
4. The purpose of activity

The President of Athletic Federation portrays as the main problem of organizing international activities the lack of financial resources and raising awareness of the local government to support such initiatives. Professor Artan Shyti gives another point of view regarding the factors affecting European countries nonparticipation in the activities organized in Albania. According to Shyti "Albania has the most deteriorated infrastructure, inappropriate compared to countries in the region." Infrastructural conditions have their impact on

the decision of a foreign club for participation in a sporting event. Also, financial constraints put into risk the implementation of promotional campaigns and marketing management.

Article 16 of the law no 9376 dated 21.04.2005 "On Sport" gives the authority to the sports federation in the Albanian territory to organize international events. Local Organizing Committee it is the main body of implementing the event. Pellegrino indicates that "international activities have the power to change how people think, behave toward a country or a model". If looking at the goal of the Robert Emmiyan meeting among others it was aimed "to launch the positive developments of Albania after the period of transition". In fact, there was no clear strategy or planning how this major objective will be achieved.

Local organizing committee comprises the main body of the organization. As such the selection and recruitment process play a significant role. The methodology for the selection of the organizing committee is composed of three components:

1. Use of internal human resources, including the highest levels
2. Selection of technical and expert staff
3. Selection of the team of volunteers

Staff selection criteria and benefits for the second and third component were unspecified. Various studies point out that "especially during the call for volunteers a number of positive outcomes must be listed". As a result, only 11 volunteers answered to the call. Analysis of determining the criteria of candidates were not carried out taking into account several factors such as: 1. Budget; 2. Activity plan; 3. Allocation of human resources.

In the preliminary stage of the planning various tasks were identified as prescribed at the following figure. Planning is the basis of success because the needs and tasks identified are prerequisites for the following steps. Tasks and responsibilities during this phase must be clearly specified, measurable and have specific indicators.

**Fig. 1 Phases of planning and tasks delegation**

<p><b>Phase 1: Setting up the infrastructure</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creation of the Local Organizing Committee</li> <li>Tender announcement published for the management of the activity</li> <li>Contractor selection</li> <li>Call for volunteers</li> <li>Staff selection</li> </ul>		<p><b>Phase 2: Activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Drafting the budget</li> <li>Finding sponsors</li> <li>Finding the place</li> <li>Preparation of the field</li> <li>Accommodation / Food / travel</li> <li>Notification for participation</li> <li>Program and invitations</li> </ul>			<p><b>Phase 3: Sharin g tasks</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Director of finance</li> <li>Director of organization</li> <li>Director of accommodation</li> <li>Director of accreditation</li> <li>Director of ceremonies</li> <li>Director of health</li> <li>Director of transport</li> <li>Director of media</li> </ul>		
<i>Director of finance</i>	<i>Director of organization</i>	<i>Director of accommodation</i>	<i>Director of accreditation</i>	<i>Director of ceremonies</i>	<i>Director of medical assistance</i>	<i>Director of transport</i>	<i>Director of media</i>
Funds Sponsorship Expenses plan	Adjustments start / finish toilets, showers Currency exchange Maintaining order Resting places Measurement of time and results	Hotel/rooms Meals Meetings	Information package Accreditation procedures Register	Opening ceremonies and closing (anthems, flags) Prices	Doping control First aid personnel, ambulance & medical staff	Transportation between the closest point of arrival Transportation from hotels Social trips	Printed publications Local publicity, national and international Media relations

right experience to act professionally. Experience and competence are two important elements, as their absence in case of crisis or unexpected incidents can put in serious risk the success of the activity. But for the executives of the federation the primary problem in this aspect relates to the insufficient budget.

Expenditure plan of Robert Emmiyan event was based on the budget of federation and also fundraising. Regarding the specifics of fundraising events and marketing strategies it was found that the federation had not adequate capacities to attract donor's supports.

Promotion techniques in media and marketing management can be considered as the weakest point of this event. Prof. Dr. Artan Fuga argues that "if an activity is not transmitted in the media, we have no way of knowing that this has happened." Not only international media coverage lacked, but also local media coverage was modest. Monitoring the online sport media, only 2 media reported about Robert Emmyian event. National Albanian TV channels like Klan, Top Channel, Vizion Plus, News 24, Ora News, and Albanian Screen, which did not cover this event. Only the Albanian Public Television covered this event. The common promotion techniques implicit various actions such as: a. Creating positive relationships with media; b. Establishment of a center dedicated solely to the media, where they can be received and transmitted continuous information; c. Delivering a complete file information about the event, where further details can be provided, in addition to the press release. Media coverage are important because can create awareness, stimulate interest and generate results. But also, lack of media coverage sends a negative message to the donor supporters and the general audience.

To sum up, taking into analysis the Robert Emmyian event three key findings were identified which essentially comprise the challenges of managing international activities of Albanian Athletic Federation in terms of human resource management and strategies applied for the promotion of activities and implementation of awareness campaigns.

1. Technical and practical skills during the preparatory phase and at the end of the activity should be consolidated taking into account contemporary developments in the management of sports activities. Application of orientating strategies for creating voluntary networking for organizing international activities and intensive training it is a necessity.

2. Process of description, classification and definition of the criteria for the selection of volunteers and other members of the local organizing committee, did not comply with standard methods of recruitment and selection. Although the selected persons in these categories may have a background on athletics, the lack of clear criteria and openness to the public have resulted in creating gaps of understanding the task and responsibilities.

3. Marketing strategies has been identified as a real challenge in terms of raising awareness, media coverage and donor supports. Marketing as the process requires great proficiency of the staff, but not only. Consolidated practices and a separate plan of action it is an indispensable axiom to be considered. Preparatory phase is the basis for the implementation of the entire activity. Every detail must be defined and should be

As noted above the division of responsibilities and functions has been prearranged but often a person fulfills other tasks besides what has previously been planned. Sports management experts suggest that overlapping of responsibilities and duplication should be avoided to the maximum, because endanger the progress of the activity. To note, this comprised one of the main issues during Robert Emmiyan event. A lack of implementation plan and human resources allocation to complete each task resulted that a person fulfilled more than one responsibility, and in some circumstances did not have the

carried out to identify all issues that are relevant to the original plan. European Union experts suggest creating a matrix or action plan including: i. Activity to be applied; ii. Time of achievement; iii. The person in charge; iv. Deadline for implementation; v. Staff involved. The drafting of such plan helps create a clear view of the various tasks, tracking and coordinating every organizational process, avoiding confusion, and the establishment of a sustainable infrastructure for the finalization of the activity based on the plan.

The lack of a specialized staff in marketing consequently affected the profitability of sufficient knowledge about marketing concepts, media promotion techniques and what it represents. Experts estimate that promotion campaigns should be realistic. Thus, the aim and objectives set at the event were far from the reality of what actually offered activity. Also, the official website of the federation, as a result of many factors such as funds, staff, etc. did not fulfill the standard criteria for promotion and public information.

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