Strategy of managing a project of organising a mass sports event

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Summary
Background and aim: Organisation of mass sports events is one of the functions of contemporary physical culture and, at the same time, a dynamically developing service, provided by both public and private institutions. Organising such an event requires a professional project-based approach, i.e. the conceptual preparation of activities related to its preparation, conduct and summing up. The aim of this study is to present project activities related to the organisation of a mass sports event, such as a marathon race, using the example of the 6th 'Wrocław Marathon'.

Material and methods: The subject matter of this study is an analysis of the system of project activities related to the organisation of mass sports events. Use was made for this purpose of the modern scientific discipline of project management and the following methods were applied: literature analysis, source documentation analysis and studies of 6 'Wrocław Marathon' cases.

Results: The following organisational phases of the 'Wrocław Marathon' were analysed in detail: event planning and preparation; implementation; controlling.

Conclusions: Project management is a deliberate measure in the organisation of a mass event, such as the 'Wrocław Marathon' – development of a reference model of such an event.

Keywords: sports management, organisation structure, management models, benchmarking

1. Introduction

Organising a large sports event requires a project-based approach and cannot be done in a spontaneous and haphazard manner. Sports organisations preparing for an event should realise that they operate within a free-market environment; therefore, everything that they engage in should be preceded by careful preparatory work. Preparing and conducting a sports event is an undertaking that requires efficient organisation and the process of organising a sports undertaking in which a particular objective is to be achieved necessitates a proper arrangement and allocation of work for members of the organisation. To this aim, detailed plans are necessary. Every sports event is different and practically unrepeatable, both in the preparation and conduct phase, requiring the cooperation and joint action of many entities.

A sports event is a specific project. The organisers must have economic knowledge in the field of sport marketing, if they wish to pursue it successfully and achieve the expected benefits. They should also be aware of its specific nature. The actual product of a sports event is unique: variable, subjective in reception, short-lived, unpredictable and, at the same time, manufactured and consumed [1].

The essential factors impacting the quality of a sports spectacle include: the choice of time and location, advertising, all public relations activities, sponsoring, a proper financial policy and legal safeguarding mechanisms. Therefore, the organisational structure of a sports event should include, among other things: administration, communication, special services (creative, ceremonies), broadcasts, information and publications, special events, services (accommodation, meals), management (budget, purchases, finance), special operations (security, medical services), special projects and a report [2].

Organisers of a mass event must make efficient use of marketing tools. Marketing is a concept closely related to the market, which is a place where a continuous exchange of goods and services into money or into goods and services takes place. The goals are to: place relevant products or services where they are demanded, supply relevant products or services to a customer that needs them and is willing to pay for them, satisfy customer needs, for which customers pay with their money or an equivalent of goods and services, and to engage in money-earning activities [3]. The theory of sport marketing has developed the concept of the marketing space of a sports organisation, which is determined by the following areas:

• ideas and values of sport (promoting health and a healthy lifestyle, consistent with the biological and psychophysical development of an individual, creating social bonds, symbiotic relationships between organisational teams, and communities),
• activity (of individuals and organisations in an organisational effort, participation in sports events),
communication of the content, forms, methods and ways specific to a sports spectacle (ideas are given concrete form through procedures and processes, while operational systems – through functions, methods and organisational forms),

human, material, financial, etc., resources.

It of fundamental importance, in organising a mass event, to ensure good organisation of the logistic system. Logistics is a sphere of economic activity concerned with, primarily, material and information processes of the flow of products within a company and between economic entities. It is an area of knowledge that investigates phenomena and processes related to production, transport, warehousing, stock management and other activities and provides economic practice with appropriate methods and ways of controlling those processes. Logistics is, first of all, the process of managing an entire “chain” of supply [4].

Sport and recreation are an area of economic activities that are particularly concerned with the notion of “quality”. An organisation that provides that type of services must take account of the fact that the emotional aspect of expectations is significantly marked and it is that aspect that determines the quality [5]. In order to effectively launch a company strategy and be able to control its implementation, an organisation must build a system that allows for full monitoring of the relationships between the effectiveness of company processes and an operationalised strategy, i.e. long-term goals. A project-based approach to the implementation of changes in building an organisation’s strategy involves the following scenarios:

• a defined mission of the organisation determines the directions of activity and strategic goals that it wishes to achieve in the short- and long-term perspective,
• the strategic goals determine the areas and resources of the organisation on which an emphasis should be placed,
• everything must be aimed towards the improvement of effectiveness,
• reconstruction of processes and, thus, value enhancement,
• the strategy of changes in the functioning of the organisation should be evaluated and monitored from the perspective of the customer, employee, owner, club management and sports and recreation organisation [6].

A mass sports event is a project that may be of great significance to the region’s promotion; therefore local authorities are involved in its organisation. Promoting sports events is also aimed at building a competitive advantage over other regions — not only those in the same country. A sponsorship project can be one of the elements of building a competitive advantage for the region’s cities and towns, as long as it has a unique character.

In order to create a successful mass sports event, one needs proper personnel. Therefore, a particular emphasis must be placed in the field of sports organisations on increasing the number of persons having formal knowledge and skills that are necessary to prepare and manage sport-related projects. It is also important to mobilise volunteers. Thus, projects aimed at popularising volunteering should be pursued [7, 8]. Organising a mass sports event requires the completion of specific tasks that can be divided into: tasks proper (sports regulations, rules of participation, all matters related to refereeing, inspection of sports facilities and equipment, conduct of competitions, announcement of the results), welfare tasks (accommodation, meals, etc.), preparation of sports facilities (routes, sports equipment), audience organisation, security [9].

The aim of this paper is to demonstrate project activities related to the organisation of a mass sports event, such as a marathon race, using the example of the 6th ‘Wroclaw Marathon’. Use was made for this purpose of the modern scientific discipline of project management, as a project-based approach enables one to identify all the necessary activities and processes that need to be planned, organised and controlled. It is a concept and tool that allows for more effective and safer organisation of long-distance races. It makes it easier for organisers to monitor the course of the activities and processes and improves the flow of information and documentation.

2. Material and methods

The principal aim of this paper is to describe and explain the function of a project-based approach to the organisation of mass sports events. The subject matter of this study is an analysis of the system of carrying out projects related to the organisation of mass sports events.

The object of this study was the organisation of marathon races, using the example of the ‘Wroclaw Marathon’ in 2010-2015. The research process included the identification and analysis of relevant activities and processes [10-27]. The following research methods were used:

• description of the organisation of the races under analysis,
• analysis of surveys completed with race participants,
• use and evaluation of IT tools.

The outcome of the study will be the demonstration of the degree to which project management is a deliberate measure in the organisation of a mass event, such as the ‘Wroclaw Marathon’, and the development of a reference model of such an event.

3. Results

A project of the size of the ‘Wroclaw Marathon’, which also includes the Polish Teachers’ Marathon Championships and the Polish Solidarity Marathon Championships, requires a detailed planning of work allocation to individ-
nal persons. To this aim, the Organisational Committee establishes the Organisational Bureau of the event, composed of the general management, the management of individual teams and their members. Each of them has his or her own tasks, which are scheduled to be completed within specific times. A review of the organisational structure makes one aware of the scope of tasks and activities that are faced by the organisers.

Table 1. Marathon management, source: own research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marathon Director</td>
<td>Sport, Marketing and Advertising Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical and Security Director</td>
<td>Head of the Accompanying Events and Guest Services Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marathon Chief Accountant</td>
<td>Head of the Security and Crisis Management Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of the Marathon Director's Office</td>
<td>Secretary of the Marathon Organisational Bureau</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Teams reporting to the Marathon Technical and Security Management, source: own research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Security and Crisis Management Operational Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route Technical Safety Control Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route Safety Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Area Safety Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport Services Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route Marking Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid Stations Provisioning Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route and Area Medical and Sanitary Safety Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event Area Technical Services Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking Services Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tidiness Maintenance Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catering services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prize Payment Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteers Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information for Contestants Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accommodation Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storerooms and Deposits Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrocław TV ‘Everybody Races in Wroclaw’ Programme Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Race Organisation Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Line Broadcasting Team</td>
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The ‘Wrocław Marathon’ sports undertaking is carried out in the following stages:
1. Decision to organise the sports event.
2. Appointment of the organisation manager.
3. Cost estimate preparation and approval.
4. Obtaining resources.
5. Organisational structure.
   - Ensuring the facility.
   - Drawing up of operational plans.
6. Human resources management.
   - Logistics.
   - Marketing.
   - Implementation control.
   - Financial control.
   - Technologies (measuring devices, information system, data compilation).
7. Preparation status control.
8. Conduct of event.
   - Quality control.
9. Post-event control.
   - Degree of the achievement of goals.
   - Financial effectiveness.
   - Managerial efficiency.

The structure of the ‘Wrocław Marathon’ event and its monitoring are based on the project activities model referred to as Mass Sports Event Organisation (Organizacja Masowych Imprezy Sportowych – OMIS), which consists of three mutually connected elements [28].

A. Entry – planning phase

On the basis of materials collected by the ‘Wrocław Marathon’ organisers, one may trace event organisation phases in practice. The first one – planning and preparation – includes activities engaged in by the organisers, beginning from the decision to organise a marathon and half-marathon to the start of the race. It is long and requires the preparation of detailed operational plans, numerous activities, efficient logistics, marketing and human resources management. The tasks are scheduled over a period of time and begin to be performed several months prior to the event. The Organisational Committee commenced its work on the marathon, half-marathon and accompanying events from the following steps:
1) Establishment of the Organisational Bureau, allocation of tasks by the Marathon Director
2) Preparation of the marathon programme and a draft cost estimate
3) Running of the Organisational Bureau
4) Furnishing invitations for volunteers to schools, sports clubs and coaches, in order to attract groups of volunteers
5) Preparation of programmes popularising running (‘Everybody Runs in Wrocław’, ‘And You Can Become a Marathon Runner’, ‘Running Student’, ‘Marathon Academy’) and a web portal for runners and their implementation
6) Development of graphic marks and their application for the Organisational Committee of the ‘Wrocław Marathon’, ‘Wrocław Half-Marathon’, accompanying events and events that popularise running
7) Development of a modern website
8) Preparation of a list of the ‘Wrocław Marathon’ and...
23) Tour of the marathon route by the Route Safety Manager’s Technical Committee, with the participation of representatives of the Police, the Town Watch, the Municipal Transport Company, the designer and the safety provider, verifying the design solutions adopted in relation to the current traffic organisation on Wrocław roads, confirming the effectiveness of the adopted project solutions regarding the safety of the contestants and road traffic participants, drawing up of a memorandum of understanding and a report on route tour

24) Positioning and installation, at the places provided for in the project, of B-36 no parking road signs together with T-24 boards and a note on how long they are to remain in force, installation of notice boards on traffic impediments and planned detours at the places provided for in the project on the Big Isle

25) Bringing and placement of all banners, advertisements, decorations and notice boards in the Olympic Stadium and along the marathon route

26) Bringing and storage, in the Olympic Stadium, of start line, finish line and route equipment

27) Bringing and storage of all materials for start packages

28) Packaging of start packages

29) Contestant verification at the Marathon Bureau

30) Opening of the SPORT EKSPO fair

31) Preparation of the Olympic Stadium for Marathon organisation

32) Ongoing services of an electric maintenance technician and execution of necessary electric connections

33) Setting up of a roofed stage, flag masts and camera platforms on a pergola as well as a guest stand

34) Provision of additional security for the Olympic Stadium by a security firm

35) Ongoing services of a water and sewage system maintenance technician and execution of necessary water and sewage system connections

36) Bringing and placement, in the Olympic Stadium, of fences, toilets and washbasins for the sanitary point, as provided for in the project

37) Bringing and setting up of a tent with a floor for the purpose of arranging a café for VIPs

38) Execution of electric connections for the stage, start line, finish line and café

39) Meeting of all the organisers

40) Closing off of the marathon route in accordance with the decision on a specific use of roads

41) Artists’ performances on the stage for event participants

42) Reception of VIPs, guests and journalists at the VIP café next to the finish line

43) Direct supervision over the marathon start line, finish line and stage

44) Medical services for the marathon provided by masseurs – 50 volunteers from the Academy of Physical Education in Wrocław, at the start line, finish line and route of the race

45) Medical services for the marathon provided by the Emergency Medical Service in Wrocław (6 ambulances), at the start line, route and finish line
46) Placement of a convoy of cars 50 meters in front of the contestants at the start, in an Olympic Stadium alley in the direction of Różyczkiego Street in the following order: filtering pilot-Police radio car, marathon pilot, second pilot with a clock on the roof, principal referee
47) Lining up of the contestants at the start of the marathon in the western alley in the direction of I.J. Paderewskiego Alley: at the start line – the disabled contestants on wheelchairs, 10 meters behind the start line – the marathon elite with start numbers from 1 to 100, with the other contestants lined up in designated time zones
48) VIPs taking their seats on the stand next to the start line
49) Placement of a convoy of cars behind all the contestants lined up for the start, including: an ‘end of marathon’ minibus, ambulances
50) Start of an online broadcast of the start and, then, the race itself
51) Provision of the Marathon Director’s dispatch to the City Mayor on the readiness of the contestants, referees and organisers for the marathon start
52) Solemn opening of the event by the Mayor of Wrocław.

B. Proceeding – implementation phase

This phase involves specific event implementation, from the start to the finish of the marathon by its participants.
1) Marathon start from the Olympic Stadium in the direction of I.J. Paderewskiego Alley.
2) Participants’ run along the designated route – Wrocław streets, music band performances, monitoring of the race along the entire length of the route (safety, communication with institutions securing the race, inspecting the technical condition of all the composite elements of the race route along Wrocław streets)
3) ‘Olympic Mile’ Family Race – an accompanying event
4) Arrival of ‘Wrocław Marathon’ participants at the finish line: VIPs, Olympic Game participants and guests awarding medals at the finish line to runners finishing the race, giving out meals and refreshing drinks to contestants, physical therapy treatment for participants, drawing of a car and 20 notebooks among all of the marathon participants, collection of deposits by contestants upon presentation of the start number.

C. Exit – controlling phase

This phase includes logistic activities related to the end of the event.
1) Dismantling and collection of equipment from the route and its storage in the Olympic Stadium
2) Dismantling and collection of route markings and their storage in the Olympic Stadium
3) Collection of fences and toilets from the route
4) Tidying of the route and rubbish removal
5) Dismantling of all barriers and road signs after the last contestant has finished his or her run
6) Loading and carrying of all barriers and road signs to storerooms
7) Social gathering of the organisers and guests at the VIP café next to the finish line
8) Guarding of the café by security guards
9) Dismantling of banners, advertisements and decorations
10) Dismantling of the Olympic Stadium sound system
11) Dismantling of own equipment, its removal to a storeroom
12) Tidying of the Olympic Stadium and Academy of Physical Education facilities – used as part of event organisation
13) Dismantling and removal of the stage, platforms, stand and other equipment
14) Loading and return of rented banners and advertisements of sponsors, co-organisers and media patrons
15) Loading and return of other rented equipment
16) Return of the cars serving the marathon to the sponsor’s hall
17) E-mailing of a survey to the event participants, with the aim of obtaining opinions on its organisation
18) Meeting of the ‘Wrocław Marathon’ management, event evaluation, discussion, drawing of conclusions.

4. Discussion

Organisation improvement should be aimed at obtaining and extending a competitive advantage. One of the management models that is meant to accomplish that purpose is benchmarking. The ‘Wrocław Marathon’ organisers try, albeit to a still limited extent, to apply that methodology, e.g. by systematically monitoring the achievements of Poland’s biggest marathons, observing competitions conducted by others and attempting to apply some of the solutions used. They follow the data that appear on the Internet and compare the results, e.g. those relating to the dynamics of the growth of the number of contestants, which reflects the popularity of the race.

The phases presented above appear in the organisation of big sports events, such as the ‘Wrocław Marathon’. The project is carried out by a group of persons, divided into teams. Each of them attends to the work assigned to him or her. Organising a marathon requires a proper project manager, the person responsible for task planning and allocation – the Marathon Director. It is him or her who presents a framework plan of actions, coordinates them, determines work stages and strives to ensure that the project is completed according to the budget planned. He or she is also a mediator. The position of project manager requires that, in addition to classic competencies, such as management skills across
typical functional areas, i.e.: strategy determination and decision making, planning, organising, motivating and rewarding as well as controlling, he or she should also exhibit leadership competencies, communication skills, appropriate personality traits and, most of all, expertise.

A project manager, in this case – the Marathon Director, is also a coach. During that process individuals focus on skills that enable them to effectively achieve the results that are of great personal importance to them. An individual selects the aspect on which the cooperation is concentrated, while the coach listens, shares his or her observations, asks questions and presents ideas and principles that may help generate possibilities and identify actions.

After each ‘Wrocław Marathon’ event, the organisers performed an internal evaluation of it, pointing to its strengths and weaknesses. This means that the organisers keep on monitoring the event and react to the shortcomings revealed. They also take due note of any modern requirements.

The structure of the ‘Wrocław Marathon’ event, its implementation and monitoring are based on the project activities model referred to as Mass Sports Event Organisation (Organizacja Masowych Imprezy Sportowych – OMIS), which consists of three mutually connected elements: Planning – Organising – Controlling. All of the organisational phases required a detailed plan and, subsequently, the allocation of tasks to individual teams and, within those teams, to specific persons. All the processes were meticulously scheduled, creating a system of feedbacks between individual processes. The organisers made efficient use of tools offered by marketing and logistics and of basic IT programs, typical for project management tasks.

Proper preparation for crisis management is an important element of organising a mass event. It requires the prediction of potential threats, their causes, effects and, most importantly, a way of avoiding them altogether or mitigating their consequences. The ‘Wrocław Marathon’ organisers, relying primarily on their own experience and drawing conclusions from other events of this type, specified the types of threats, organised them into a hierarchy and indicated measures that could prevent them. From the perspective of the current international (global) situation, a threat that, until recently, has been purely hypothetical in Poland – a terrorist attack – is becoming real and will require the employment of special measures by the relevant services and marathon organisers. It is also important to take account of the essential logistics and of basic IT programs, typical for project management tasks.

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Based on the surveys completed among ‘Wrocław Marathon’ contestants, one may create a profile of such a contestant. For 60.51% of those surveyed, a significant element is the atmosphere during the marathon; for 34.87% of the respondents, it is important to be able to have a good time in the company of persons with similar interests. More than half of those surveyed stated that running a marathon was the culmination of a long period of leading a healthy lifestyle. Tourist attractions are not particularly important for the average Polish marathon runner and Wrocław race participant; what matters is the race, with sightseeing providing an extra value. Long-distance races are preferred mostly by men, who accounted for 84% of the 2015 PKO Wrocław Marathon contestants. The participants of the last ‘Wrocław Marathon’ were, in their majority, no newcomers, having already completed several races of this type. They gave as the most important sport-related reason for their participation – a wish to complete another marathon and an intention to improve their personal best result. For them, the competitive aspect – winning a prize for the victory or a place in the general classification or an age category – is not an important motive. Almost 60% would want to win a prize for participation – in the draw among the participants.

The contestants evaluated the race organisation. Very good marks were given to the operation of the race bureau (71.54%), competition atmosphere (74.62%), race start (63.33%), race route (68.21%), aid stations along the route (76.67%) and race finish line (64.6%). A similar number of participants regarded the start package as very good (49.74%) or standard (47.95%). The organisation of 3 activities was regarded as standard: the Pasta Party event (60.51%), cheering along the route (51.79%) and post-race recovery (63.31%). Organisation was only rarely evaluated as bad. The highest percentage of negative marks was received by the Pasta Party organisation (14.62%) and post-race recovery (8.97%).

The above data demonstrate that, out of the 10 event organisation elements evaluated, 6 received a very good mark from more than 60% of the runners and 3 were evaluated as standard. The bad organisation mark appeared relatively rarely. Its presence does, however, give an idea of which elements are the weakest and which of them need to be improved.

1. Conclusions

1) The mass sports event project model resulting from this study is as follows:

As may be seen, a mass sports event project includes the following phases: planning, implementation and end. Through feedback, one must, on the one hand, continuously monitor elements of risk in the implementation phase (first feedback loop) and, following the end phase, perform an evaluation, with a view to introducing changes in the next planning phase.

2) A sports event, such as a marathon, has all the features of a project; therefore a project management methodology may be applied to its implementation, with its PRINCE2 variety, which the ‘Wrocław Marathon’ organisers try to use, being particularly useful here [29]. The project discussed has a clearly marked beginning and end and a defined timeframe and is managed in such a way as to ensure that its end result is full completion and satisfaction – for the con-
testants, spectators and organisers. The project participants are familiar with its goal, are capable of implementing it and are assigned specific tasks for which they bear responsibility. There are procedures and operational mechanisms in place that are needed to carry it out. Models of inter-team communication and of documentation have also been developed.

3) An analysis of the organisation of successive ‘Wrocław Marathons’ reveals relevant processes and operational techniques that are used to implement a mass event. We see here an efficient employment of the basic model of organising that sports event, developed as a result of the organisers’ experience. They also enrich their work with new methods and tools.

4) The positive sides of organising the ‘Wrocław Marathon’ are: a stable source of finance, a prestigious general sponsor, Internet advertising, the organisers’ extensive experience in implementing this type of spectacle, efficient execution of all of its phases, the team’s enthusiasm and readiness to take on new challenges and the atmosphere during the race.

5) The following aspects need to be refined: event popularisation by national media, acquisition of an even greater number of significant media patrons, seeking sponsors (they are still few), specialised preparation of a plan with relevant forces in order to avoid a terrorist attack, which is a real threat in today’s Europe, making the start package more attractive, addition of other accompanying events and their proper advertising, preparation of a more effective advertising campaign for the race, targeted at foreign runners, improvement of the Pasta Party organisation and making that event more attractive, making use of IT technologies that are more up-to-date than a Grantt chart and participation of relevant project participants in professional training on PRINCE 2, Benchmarking and Coaching.

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