

THE STRATEGIC SPORTS EVENT PLANNING: A CASE STUDY OF THE UEFA EUROPEAN UNDER-17 FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

The paper introduces a relatively new way of planning the sports events, the strategic approach, as an innovative and in-depth process of planning the sports events in order for the predefined events objectives to be successfully achieved. According to the authors, the strategic sports event planning is viewed as an effective extension of the traditional theories and models suggesting a more comprehensive, staged process that can enable the event to provide benefits in both longer and shorter term. As such, the staged strategic sports event planning process encompasses both short-term requirements for the implementation of the event and the long-term legacies the sports event can leave behind. The authors, then, present an application of the staged process using the UEFA European Under-17 Football Championship as an example of planning the international football event to be hosted by Serbia in May 2011, which was nominated a prestigious candidature to host the European Championship Final tournament. The paper concludes that the new approach has a great potential for broader applications on sports events of all scales, underlying importance of the strategic planning of, especially, major international sports events and influence they have in economic, social and cultural sense.

Keywords: *event management, sports events, strategic planning, UEFA european u-17 football championship*

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Sports event management integrates the principles of management and marketing to the sports industry. Sport management and also event management are both areas that are growing in stature and scope, can overlap in their content, and provide understandings to event practitioners on how the sports events can be best planned to meet the needs of the 21st century. Both discipline areas are focusing on strategic rather than reactive management of the event and also looking at alternative and innovative solutions to long-standing problems. Today, the environment in which sport organizations exist and operate has also altered; therefore, management of contemporary sports events involves application of techniques and strategies that are also used in commercial business as well as in government and not-for-profit organizations. Sport event management must employ strategic planning, manage human resources and deal with a range of different stakeholders.

Previous research has suggested that the use of the event objectives is necessary for the production of a successful event (Allen et al., 2002; Getz, 1997; Goldblatt, 2002; Shone & Parry, 2001). The argument in favor of use of the event objectives is that they provide the direction for planning and execution (Masterman, 2004). Allen et al. (2002) underline that objectives are required before any situational analysis, while Getz (1997) proposes that scanning the internal and external environments is necessary prior to setting the vision and goals for the event. Damster et al. (2006) emphasized that systems approach to event planning outlined by Getz (1997) envisaged a continual process of review and monitoring the plan and event itself during and after its implementation adding that it can be adopted to include the participation of communities emphasizing the role and responsibility of local authorities in an integrated event planning process, especially applicable in developing countries. Several of the theories also consider wind-up or shutdown (Allen et al., 2002; Catherwood & Van Kirk, 1992; Getz, 1997; Shone & Parry, 2001). Theories of Catherwood & Van Kirk (1992) and Goldblatt (1997) propose a less formal approach to event planning, although in the theories of Getz (1997), Allen et al. (2002), Shone & Parry (2001) and Torkildsen (1999) the event planning is a staged process.

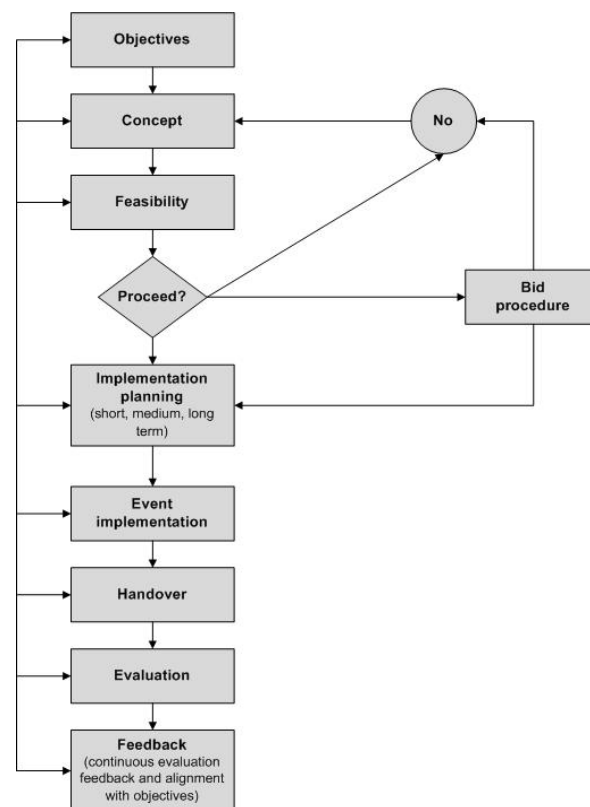
The focus of the research in this paper is on analysis of the theoretical aspects and application of a new event planning process model to an example of planning of the UEFA European Under-17 Football Championship Final tournament to be hosted by Serbia in May 2011.

Method

Research Design

The strategic planning is carried out using as a framework for the analysis the new staged event planning process model which particularly addresses the long-term legacy needs for the strategic planning of international sports events. Among the initiatives involved, the UEFA Under-17 Football Championship Final tournament is an international sports event that has all the characteristics of a major event (special event that is high in status and prestige, which attracts a large crowd and wide media attention, has a tradition and incorporates other types of events, is expensive to stage, attracts funds to the host region, lead to demand for associated services, and leave behind legacies). The sports event management planning process which consists of up to ten different stages is illustrated in Figure 1.

Fig. 1. The strategic event planning process - Staged model



Source: Masterman (2004)

In the first stage, it is important for all stakeholders to be identified and their requirements considered that they can be incorporated into the planning of the event. This include considering of potential partners and the basic five questions that should be asked: **(1) WHY is the Event to be held? (2) WHEN will the Event be held? (3) WHERE is the Event to be staged? (4) WHO is to benefit and how? (5) WHAT is to be achieved?**

The UEFA European U-17 Football Championship is an annual competition staged by the UEFA. Starting from its establishment in 2001, the host countries have been Switzerland, Portugal, France, Turkey, Russia, Spain (for the two times repeatedly), Germany and England (UEFA Regulations, 2010). The Championship represents the highest rank of competition for this age. It counts as a preliminary competition for the FIFA U-17 World Cup when the final round takes place in an uneven year; therefore, the first placed 6 teams are eligible to participate directly in the upcoming FIFA U-17 World Cup.

The Football Association of Serbia (FAS) has been nominated by the UEFA Executive Committee as a host association for the Final tournament of the 10th UEFA European U-17 Football Championship which is held in the four cities in period from 1st - 16th of May 2011. As a general rule, the final round is played as a tournament. Eight teams take part in the final round. The seven group winners of the elite round qualify. The host country qualifies automatically (UEFA Regulations, 2010). As the UEFA Executive Committee has entrusted Serbia with the organization of the final tournament, therefore, a host association of the final round, Football Association of Serbia is privileged to qualify automatically for the final round.

Objectives which have to be achieved.

Competitive: placement into the final round of the Championship - from the group phase to the semi-final, taking one of four positions (out of 53 teams from the qualifications, and 8 in the final round) would be the biggest success of our national U-17 football team and placement to the 2011 World Cup Mexico.

Sociological: a means of social intervention on the vulnerable youth population, animation of the youth to actively participate in sports, especially in football, and general popularization of football.

Cultural: regarding the fact that the matches of the European Championship will be broadcast throughout the world, the international character of this competition contributes to a more significant promotion of the state itself, its host cities, and institutions involved in the organization of this sports event.

Key stakeholders. In the organization of the UEFA European U-17 Football Championship Final tournament apart from the football stakeholders - UEFA, FIFA and FAS, will participate the following institutions: Ministry of Youth and Sports, City of Belgrade Secretariat of Youth and Sports, as well as Secretariat of Sports and Youth of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

Development of the event concept. Having determined the objectives, the concept for the event can be designed. As a rule, consideration should give meaningful answers to the explanations about the scale of the event, purposes, significance, necessary time for planning and implementation, locations

and venues, the facilities and equipment required and already available, should be incorporated into development of the concept of the sports event.

Purpose and significance of the event: FAS as the host of the Final tournament of the UEFA European U-17 Championship will not have any financial benefits that could be treated as a profit. The primary purpose of hosting this major football event can only be found in cultural concerns and affirmative benefits for all social instances involved in the promotion of Serbia at the international level, in promotion of football in Serbia and in the initiation of youth involvement in football and sports in general. Accordingly, the fact that all investments in infrastructure set up by the UEFA standards for organizing such a level of competition should not be ignored, will remain both benefit and long-term legacy for future sports events in Serbia.

Time: From 1st to 16th of May 2011

Location: Host cities (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Indjija, Smederevo)

Event program: The quality of the event program is additionally influenced by the sport services representing an extended offer to spectators (such as comfortable accommodation, available information, security issues, merchandizing, advertizing materials) and related to the parameters of accessibility, reliability, sensitivity, tangibility and safety.

Feasibility stage. This stage focuses on the financial aspects pertinent to the strategic planning of sports events, such as the acquisition of funding and the control of expenditure with an emphasis on the need for the financial risk management. The event budget serves as a valuable tool in the measurement of performance of individuals as well as the organization as a whole. According to Masterman (2004), the content of an event budget consists of: revenue targets and expenditure targets.

Designated funds from the budget of the City of Belgrade (the Secretariat of Youth and Sport) are used to co-finance renting of the sports facilities necessary for the maintenance of all preparatory activities and matches of the Final tournament.

Designated funds of the Secretariat of Sports and Youth of Vojvodina have been a precondition for this very important preparatory activity. The Semi-final and final match of the European Championship will be played in the cities of Vojvodina - Novi Sad (the Karadjordje Stadium) and Indjija (the Indjija Stadium). According to the UEFA conditions necessary for maintaining this level of competition, additional work and reconstruction of this two stadiums is obligated covering 200 seats in the stadium of FC Indjija, adaptation of toilets, adaptation of parking for more vehicles than the existing number, VIP sectors, power generators, a signage plan, internal and external decoration of the stadium, creating the optimal conditions for the TV broadcasts which will be implemented by Eurosport, etc.)

The key investor and partners from both public and private sectors have been identified to be helpful to financial planning and organization of the Final tournament. Holding of such an event could not be possible without support of the UEFA, the football authority responsible for the football

game at the European level and the national football association. In accordance with the plan of organization of the European Championship, the following institutions will also actively participate: Ministry of Youth and Sports, Secretariat of Sports and Youth of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, as well as Secretariat of Sport and Youth of the City of Belgrade, together with the football stakeholders - UEFA and FAS.

Event implementation. At this stage, the short-term requirements of the event are considered and the operational strategies are determined: human resources, partnerships, suppliers, facilities, equipment, services, sales and marketing. Successful sports events require an effective project management approach (Masterman, 2004). Staging a sports event consists of planning, setting up the organizational structure and developing the work breakdown structures and methods to achieve the predefined objectives. Several concepts in staging and implementation of the Final tournament are integrated within the program of the event, namely: *Accommodation/ Offices/ Boardrooms/ Catering; Accreditation; Ceremonies/ Youth Programs; Hospitality and Protocol; Match filming; Match organization; Media matters and communication with sub-group Media accreditations; Medical matters; Promotion/ Press releases/ Press launches; Safety and Security; Human resources and Volunteers; Natural and Artificial turf football pitches; Logistics, Transport and Parking lots; and Ticketing.*

Sports event marketing: The sports event as a product include the event as a whole and also all the various components that it can consist of. These include goods, services, information and media, places, people and also ideas (Pitts & Stotlar, 2002). The determination of the marketing mix for an event involves creating a product that satisfies customers needs, at an acceptable price, in appropriate places so that it can be promoted in such a way that the whole offering becomes known, attractive and bought by target customers (Masterman, 2004). Events are services and are therefore subject to the consideration of a separate service sector marketing mix. There is an extended approach to the marketing mix, according to Getz (1997) that becomes visible in staging and organizing major sports events such as the UEFA European U-17 Football Championship, where beside the four basic instruments - the 4Ps, people have been incorporated as a key resource in the event organization, programming, partnership and relations with intermediaries - suppliers.

Event evaluation. The evaluation process may be at the back end of the planning process, but it is not just a post-event evaluation. The three phases encompass the planning process as a whole. These are pre-event research, iterative evaluation and post-event evaluation. The most significant form of evaluation from the perspective of a sports event host is impact analysis as a determination of an event's economic contribution to its host city, region and/or nation. In order to make possible the cost-benefit analysis, it is necessary to provide a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the impacts associated with the Final tournament:

Immediate impacts and pre-Tournament: Reconstruction and preparing of the stadiums in accordance with the UEFA requirements; Associated environmental and infrastructure improvements; Associated regeneration activity (including inward investment and employment);

Training of volunteers; Pre-tournament operational employment; Marketing and promotional campaigns; Enhanced partnership working in order to deliver facilities and infrastructure.

Intermediate impacts - during the Tournament: Operating the tournament; Opening and closing ceremonies; Tournament related events and cultural activities; Visitor spend; Marketing, promotion, media coverage and exposure; Volunteer activity.

Strategic impacts - post-Tournament: Enhanced national and international image; Popularization of football; Social benefits such as health benefits brought about through the improved participation in sport, a personal pride and well-being from seeking a job or being a tournament volunteer; Spin-off benefits for the wider region: enhanced profile and image of the host cities of tournament, growth in target sectors of the economy, increased education and skill levels; Increased inward and retained investment.

Results and Discussion

In this paper, special attention is paid to the process of planning an event and its importance for the organizers. The main aim of the paper was to emphasize importance of the strategic planning process of, especially, major international sports event, potential influence which it has in economic and socio-cultural sense, as well as what legacy and values it can leave behind. Within the theoretical discussion, the paper introduced an innovative methodology to the field of sports event management, illustrated, in the applied part of the paper, by a case study on the European U-17 Football Championship. The example was chosen due to the fact that Serbia was nominated a prestigious candidature to host the Final tournament of the European Championship in youth football. The staged model of the strategic event planning replaced the more traditional approaches analyzed in the previous theory and event management literature. The strategic staged model represents a more comprehensive process which encompasses the need for the inclusion of specific long-term strategies when planning a major international sports event and strategies that will extend beyond the end of the event itself. The clear advantage is that the staged model is applicable to the strategic planning process required for all scales of sports events. Although the boundaries between each stage are frequently less than clear in the management practice, the staged model is important so that progression can be made without unnecessary action being taken too early as Masterman (2004) emphasized. The predefined event's objectives set out following the SMART principle (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely) must be combined with the application of a range of performance indicators (budget targets, deadlines for contracts to be achieved, etc.) in evaluation of all stages of the strategic planning process. It is important to underline that the need for introducing a strategic approach is more evident particularly because it may be usefully applied not in the sports event management only, but in the whole events industry.

The attractiveness and prestige of such an event, which are now bound up with the four host cities, have positive effects on the image of Serbia as a destination of growing cultural value. It also stimulated new investments which can repeat and improve the event, as well as produce initiatives of requalification of Serbia at various levels (infrastructures, services, urban renewal, etc.) Since the Final tournament of the UEFA European U-17 Football Championship do not have any interest in achieving material and financial benefits from the organization of competition, the intention is to for all sports, social, cultural and benefits of promoting the state in general to be pointed out (especially the host cities) as the main triggers for hosting this important event. On the other hand, all investments in infrastructure identified as a prerequisite, represent a significant investment in the upcoming sports events planning in Serbia.

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