

The 2024 European Universities Games: Their Success and Impact on the University of Miskolc

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SUMMARY

The University of Miskolc implemented one of its most significant and complex projects by hosting the 2024 European Universities Games. In this research, which is partly descriptive and partly empirical, I examine the success and impact of the event from the perspective of the University of Miskolc, utilizing management theory and sports science approaches. To provide a better understanding of the research question, I introduce the process of organizing the event. Changes in the legislative environment and organizational model of international sports events hosted in Hungary significantly affected the event's project organization and, consequently, its execution. I will also look at another factor that influenced the large-scale project, the transformation of the University of Miskolc into a private university, also true of the co-organizer University of Debrecen. As I participated in all phases of the organization of the event, I use primary data for the research.

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INTRODUCTION

The European University Games is one of the largest international multisport events in terms of attendance, currently only surpassed by the Olympics, Asian Games, World University Games, European Games, Commonwealth Games, and the Paralympics. It is also one of the most significant higher education events in Europe. Organized biennially by the European University Sports Association (EUSA) since 2012, the Games have previously been hosted in the following locations: Cordoba, Spain (2012), Rotterdam, Netherlands (2014), Zagreb and Rijeka, Croatia (2016), Coimbra, Portugal (2018), and Lodz, Poland (2022). Belgrade, Serbia was scheduled to host in 2020, but the event was canceled due to COVID-19. Future hosts include Salerno (2026), Split (2028), and Granada (2030) (<https://www.eusa.eu/games>). Unlike the University World Games and University World Championships, which are organized under the International University Sports Federation (FISU), the European Universities Games feature athletes and teams

representing their higher education institutions rather than competing under national flags.

The Hungarian University Sports Federation (MEFS), in collaboration with the University of Miskolc and the University of Debrecen, and with support from the municipalities of Miskolc and Debrecen, successfully bid to host the 2024 European Universities Games. The hosting rights were awarded on April 12, 2018. The event took place from July 12 to 24, 2024, with 4,736 participants representing 414 higher education institutions from 36 countries. Competitions in ten sports were held in Miskolc and seven in Debrecen, with the opening ceremony in Miskolc and the closing ceremony in Debrecen.

This event can be viewed as a unique and extremely complex megaproject. Therefore, this study considers both management theory and relevant sports science literature. The uniqueness of the event, and consequently the challenges associated with its execution, stem from the following factors:

- a. Hungary had never hosted an international sports event of this scale before. The

participant numbers were supplemented by around 800 volunteers, and the total number of referees, national and international sports federation delegates, staff, and other sports professionals involved reached 1,000.

- b. The event was connected to two fields, both in content and organization: sports and higher education.
- c. While it is common for competitions or program elements to be held at different venues during sports events and other large-scale events, in this case, the participant numbers and the number of guest nights were nearly evenly split between Miskolc and Debrecen, two cities 100 kilometers apart.
- d. The traditional stakeholders of sports events were joined by representatives of university sports, leading to a high number of stakeholders in the project, whose interests needed to be aligned along various values.

Although the event has only recently concluded, its success can already be examined qualitatively. Regarding the impacts, only the immediate effects following the event can be analyzed at this point; more time is needed to quantitatively assess the long-term economic and social impacts, such as through a cost-benefit analysis. The scope of this study does not allow for an examination of the event's success and impact from the perspective of all stakeholders involved in the project. Therefore, the research questions focus on one of the host institutions: Was the 2024 European University Games successful from the perspective of the University of Miskolc, and what impacts did the event have on the University of Miskolc? Where relevant to the analysis, and where the success and impact can be better understood by considering other stakeholders, the study will also reference other project owners.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Szabó and Dancsecz (2009) interpret international sports events as projects, defining success criteria based on the achievement of project goals and stakeholder satisfaction. Turner (1993) refers to a group of interrelated projects managed cohesively and aimed at achieving objectives that would not be possible through independent management as a program. A program is characterized by its high complexity and is created for the successful and efficient execution of medium- to long-term processes. The projects within a program serve the purpose of realizing the program's goals. Programs are often called megaprojects, typically

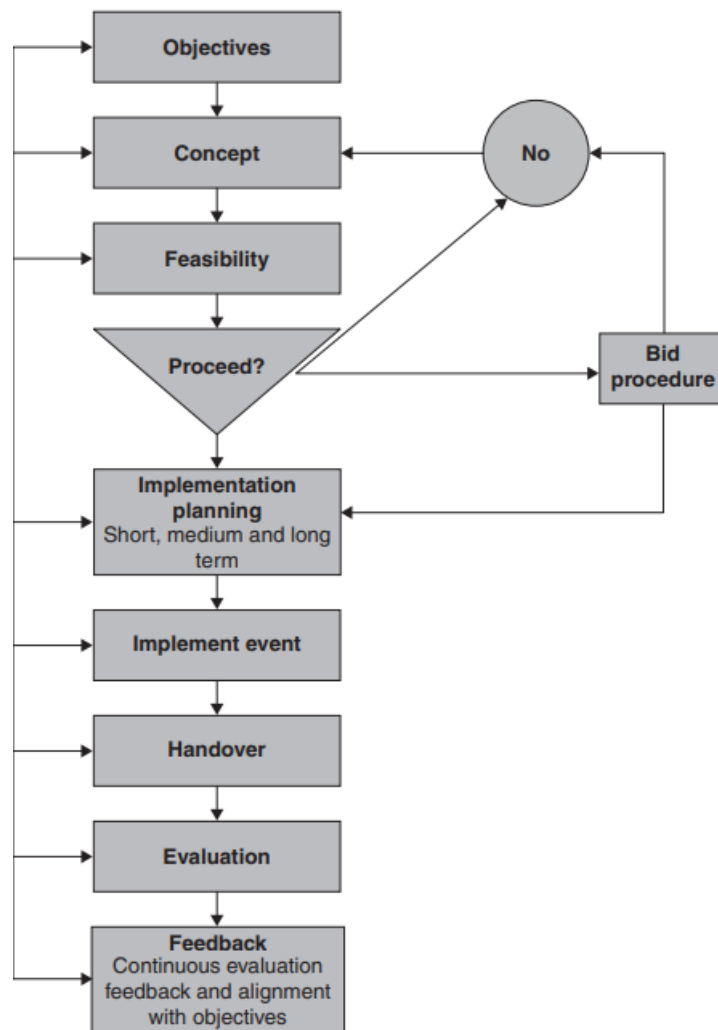
established to carry out unique processes with significant (social) impacts.

According to Piskóti's (2012) definition, large-scale events are one-time or recurring events of limited duration, attracting a significant number of visitors and receiving global media attention. The awarding of such events typically involves a formal bidding process, and the implementation is usually managed by a separate organization closely linked to the entity transferring the hosting rights. In the case of the European Universities Games, the number of visitors and amount of media attention is far below that of the Olympics, or world and continental championships in athletics, aquatic sports, or major team sports. However, the participant numbers are outstanding, the event is associated with cultural, scientific, and tourism-related programs (sub-projects), and its long-term impacts can significantly influence university sports in the host country, as well as the lives of the organizing universities and cities. Therefore, the European Universities Games can be considered a megaproject (Rakaczki, 2023b).

In sports science, distinctions are made between sports competitions, sports events, and sports activities. In the case of sports events, while sports are central, the primary goal is not necessarily competition. According to Máté's (2017) classification of international sports events, the European Universities Games are a competitive sports event held biennially in various locations, representing the European university sports movement and organized within EUSA's competition system as an international multisport event.

Mega-sporting events are also distinctly different from regular (normal) sports competitions or sports activities in terms of organization. While with regular events, operational work can begin soon after the concept of organizing the event is developed, mega-sporting events require significant preparatory work, such as feasibility studies and bidding processes. The host country and city win the hosting rights several years in advance through a formal bidding process. In the case of European or world championships, the bid is formally submitted by the sporting federation of the organizing country, with the right to host the event most often awarded to the winning bidder by the international organization of the sport. In most cases, a valid bid requires state guarantees (Sterbenz & Géczi, 2016).

The process of organizing sports events is described by Masterman's (2009) model (Figure 1), which includes 10 distinct phases, with each phase requiring the completion of the previous one.



Source: Masterman (2009)

Figure 1: The organizational process of sports events

The commonly accepted method for assessing project success is Mihály Görög's hierarchical model. This model consists of three interdependent levels of success, though each level's success can be understood independently (Görög, 2007):

- Level 1: Primary project goals (time, cost, quality),
- Level 2: Satisfaction of the project owner organization (strategic alignment),
- Level 3: Satisfaction of stakeholder groups involved in the project.

In their research, Szabó and Dancsecz (2009) break down success criteria into the achievement of project objectives, including primary and additional project objectives, and the satisfaction of external project stakeholders, including collaborating partners and additional stakeholders. The consequences of international sports events should be examined from the perspectives of impact, legacy, and multidimensional effects. Legacy refers to the more enduring outcomes, while multidimensional effects pertain to the broader community impacts (Hover et al., 2016). Stocker and Szabó (2017) identify several types of impacts related to international sports events, including sports professional, sports political, social, economic, technological, and environmental impacts.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is descriptive and includes empirical elements. Through a case study, I present the Hungarian-hosted European Universities Games of 2024, which are the focus of this research. I describe the organizational process and organizational model. To describe the relevant information for this study, I also conducted document analysis, reviewing materials such as the bid documentation and the event's master plan.

I have been involved in the entire project cycle – concept, planning and organization, implementation and completion – so I use primary data. I have first-hand information regarding the event's details, organizational processes, challenges, and outcomes, which I use to provide a comprehensive description of the event. This approach allows me to assess success and impact from the perspective of the University of Miskolc based on direct experiences and observations.

The research is primarily qualitative in nature, although it also includes quantifiable data from which I draw conclusions about the event's success and impacts. The primary aim of the research is to present and interpret the findings rather than to delve into deeper causes, such as identifying success factors.

THE EVENT ORGANIZATION PROCESS

On February 15, 2017, the EUSA announced the call for bids to host the 2022 and 2024 European Universities Games. Based on the successes achieved in international university sports – such as the 2016 World University Orienteering Championship and the 2017 European Universities Basketball Championship – the University

of Miskolc emerged as a potential host. Additionally, the University of Debrecen was considered due to its significant role in Hungarian university sports, high-quality sports services, and infrastructure. The scale of the event did not allow independent hosting, but the idea of a joint bid was well received by both universities and by the leadership of the Hungarian University Sports Federation (MEFS).

The first step was to formulate the objectives related to the potential hosting and understanding the bid requirements. MEFS had previously brought numerous World University Championships and European Universities Championships to Hungary, and winning and successfully hosting the event was a central element of their strategy (the Hajós Alfréd Plan). Through this event, they aimed to develop the Hungarian University Championships system and advance their sports diplomacy efforts. Among the objectives of the host universities were to improve their infrastructure and services thanks to the event, to further strengthen their reputation both at home and abroad, and to improve their competitiveness to organize major events in the future.

The next step was to develop the hosting concept and engage strategic partners essential for the event, including the State Secretariat for Sports, Miskolc Municipality, and Debrecen Municipality. Common thinking began on a wider scale. Based on the minimum organizational requirements, potential sports venues (in Miskolc or Debrecen) and facilities were identified. EUSA's call specified nine mandatory sports and eleven optional sports, from which applicants had to commit to organizing at least three. In addition, applicants could nominate a sport not included in the list but which they would like to involve because of its local popularity. The number, selection, and location of sports changed several times during the planning phase. The final, realized version is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Sports for the 2024 European University Games

Miskolc	Debrecen
Judo (individual)	3x3 basketball (men, women)
Karate (individual)	Table tennis (men, women)
Kickboxing (individual)	Futsal (men, women)
Basketball (men, women)	Handball (men, women)
Volleyball (men, women)	Football (men, women)
Chess (open, women)	Beach handball (men, women)
Beach volleyball (men, women)	Badminton (mixed)
Taekwondo (individual)	
Tennis (men, women)	
Water polo (men)	

Source: Own compilation

Compared to the 2022 European Universities Games in Lodz, sports climbing and swimming were removed from the competition program, while the other sports remained the same. Individual competitions were held in the four combat sports and team competitions were organized for the remaining sports.

A bidding committee was formed to compile and discuss the bid at appropriate levels. The bidding book effectively served as a feasibility study, outlining the motivations and goals of the participants, the roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders involved in implementation, a detailed presentation of the hosting concept, key organizational milestones, the anticipated legacy of the event, a detailed budget, and various supporting statements (e.g., from universities, cities, and sports federations).

Based on the feasibility study (bidding document), the initiators decided to proceed with the project, and the hosting bid was submitted by the deadline of January 15, 2018. The bidding book included a ministerial support statement and a supporting letter from the State Secretary for Sport. The state guarantee received on February 20, 2018 (Government Decree 1050/2018 (II. 20.)) regarding the hosting of the European Universities Games in Debrecen and Miskolc) enabled the completion of the bidding process. In the following months, EUSA confirmed the level of support for the intention to and the feasibility of the hosting plans, which involved numerous discussions and site visits. Based on background discussions with the government and considering the fact that Hungary would assume the presidency of the European Union starting July 1, 2024, the bidding committee's representatives presented the bid in Madrid, aiming to host the 2024 event. On April 12, 2018, EUSA's Executive Committee awarded MEFS the right to host the 2024 European Universities Games, with the location of Miskolc and Debrecen.

Among the various phases of event organization, the planning phase was the longest (just over six years), extending from the award of the hosting rights until the arrival of the first participants. The first major task was the preparation, included technical and financial consultations, of Government Decree 1201/2019 (IV. 15.), which ensured state support. The next milestone was to draw up the Master Plan for the event, from which the scenarios for all the organizational areas could be derived. Initially, the plan was for the two universities, two cities, and MEFS, or MEFS independently, to establish a company to implement the event. However, it was decided that since preparatory tasks would primarily be financed by MEFS and the two universities (as approximately 90% of state support was available in the year of the event), each entity would manage its respective organizational tasks within its own jurisdiction. However, from 2023, the company National Event Management Agency Nonprofit Plc.

assumed the role of the project organization, as detailed in the next section.

The official event dates are July 12-24, 2024, with the opening ceremony on the first day and the closing ceremony on the last. However, the first participants arrived on July 8, as some sports competitions began on July 10, and the departure of the last participants, which was also coordinated by the organizers, took place on July 25. Thus, the implementation phase can be considered from 8 to 25 July 2024.

The event was followed by returning the venues, facilities and equipment used to the operators/owners. In the case of the University of Miskolc, investments in sports infrastructure were also made, the handover of which, had already been developed at the planning phase, along with and its operation and use after the event.

The event's evaluation must be conducted both in the short and long term, based on the fulfillment of the original objectives. Short-term evaluation should focus on the event's direct costs and revenues, success, and impacts. The indirect costs and revenues, legacies, and multidimensional impacts of the event will be explored in medium and long-term evaluations. The complete closure of the event will involve feedback to the project owners, including recommendations for organizing future events.

Changes in the Legislative Environment and Organizational Model

The organizational model of international sports events in Hungary changed during the preparation phase, significantly affecting the project organization for the event. Under the previous model, sports federations received the rights to organize events and the necessary state funding, and they established an internal organizational unit or founded a company to carry out the implementation. For the European Universities Games, Government Decree 1201/2019 (IV. 15.) outlines the amount of support provided to the relevant sports federation (MEFS) for the preparation and organization of the event between 2020 and 2024.

For the 2023 World Athletics Championships, the Hungarian Athletics Federation initially created an economic company, Budapest 2023 Nonprofit Plc., for the event. However, the project organization was later restructured with the entry of National Sports Agency Nonprofit Plc. as a shareholder representing the state.

With Government Decree 1571/2022 (XI. 28.), a new situation was created by assigning the preparation and organization of major sports events and significant state events to National Event Management Agency Nonprofit Plc. starting January 1, 2023. This legal framework resulted in the following organizational model for international sports events:

- Events receiving state support over 500 million HUF fall under the responsibility of the National Event Management Agency.
- Events with state support between 100 million and 500 million HUF fall under the National Sports Agency.
- Events with state support below 100 million HUF continue under the previous model, with sports federations handling the organization.

In accordance with these guidelines, the organization of the 2024 European Universities Games was transferred to the National Event Management Agency from January 1, 2023. This also meant that the state funds shifted from the ministry responsible for sport to the Prime Minister's Cabinet Office, and the beneficiary was no longer MEFS, but the National Event Management Agency. The National Event Management Agency planned to entrust the execution to an event-organizing company selected through public procurement, similarly to other major state events. MEFS remained responsible for sports-related matters and communication with EUSA, and numerous tasks continued to fall on the organizing teams from Miskolc and Debrecen. The scope and schedule of tasks were defined by the EUSA requirements, the Organizing Committee, and the Master Plan prepared in the meantime.

The Government's goal in establishing the National Event Management Agency was to ensure quality assurance for major events, guarantee proper use of state support, optimize the event budget, and provide additional funding if necessary. The project initiators indicated that the state support awarded based on the 2018 budget needed to be supplemented due to higher-than-expected inflation. The project organizers optimized the budget by reducing the number of sports from 20 to 17, and the National Event Management Agency ensured that the required additional state support was included in the 2024 budget. By early 2024, the National Event Management Agency faced another budget shortfall due to the adverse economic situation (spill-over effects of an energy crisis and war inflation) and the additional costs of involving an event-organizing company. Instead of seeking further state support, a decision was made in March 2024 that the co-host universities and MEFS would need to take on a larger role in the implementation. The National Event Management Agency divided the organizational tasks as follows:

- National Event Management Agency: project management, opening and closing ceremonies, communication.
- Host Universities: accommodation, catering, transportation, venue provision, event technology, security services.

- MEFS: sports program, volunteering, health insurance, general event insurance, decoration and signage.

The 850 million HUF allocated to each host university by the National Event Management Agency did not cover the planned technical specifications of their assigned tasks. The minimum organizational requirements set by EUSA did not allow for a reduction in technical specifications, and any reduction would have been contrary to the strategic goals of the host universities (to provide a high-quality event and create satisfaction and a positive image among participants). Therefore, both the University of Miskolc and the University of Debrecen contributed a significant amount of their own funds to the implementation of the event. Additionally, it was a challenge for both universities and the MEFS to involve the needed number of professionals with the needed competences in the organization of the event to cope with the increased tasks in the relatively short period until the event.

Impact of the University Model Change

In 2021, the University of Miskolc, like the University of Debrecen, transitioned from direct state maintenance to a specifically established asset management foundation that took over the founder and maintenance rights. For universities undergoing this model change, state support has been retained, provided through a framework agreement including long-term guarantees and individual financing agreements linked to tasks and results for 3–5 years. In this new model, the infrastructure transitioned from state ownership to university ownership, which required the universities to manage it. Besides its educational mission, revenue-generating activities also emerged to cover operational costs.

The organization of the 2024 European Universities Games was facilitated by this model change for the following reasons, especially considering the situation mentioned above, where the organizing universities had to assume a greater role in the implementation than originally planned, within tight deadlines:

- a. Since the infrastructure became university-owned, the provision of necessary sports and other facilities (e.g., dormitories) could be handled internally.
- b. The procedures for infrastructure development were simplified, as the relevant properties were no longer under the national property law.
- c. From 2022, a new funding source specifically aimed at developing university sports (sectoral sports funding) became available to model-changing universities, totaling HUF 2.5 billion. Both the University of Miskolc and the University of Debrecen received significant

sectoral sports funding, which allowed them to finance expenses related to organizing the event (the University of Miskolc, for instance, utilized HUF 50 million for this purpose).

- d. Due to becoming private universities, the University of Miskolc and the University of Debrecen fell outside the scope of the Public Finance Act, which enabled faster and more flexible processes for decisions, contract signings, and commitments related to the event organization. In the case of the University of Miskolc, the institution's economic manager established a separate procedure for handling matters related to the event.

SUCCESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MISKOLC

In terms of the primary project objectives, the organizational tasks assigned to the University of Miskolc and to the project management (Organizing Committee) were executed within the defined budget, in compliance with – and in several cases exceeding – the EUSA requirements, thus achieving the expected quality. When examining the primary project goals, the actual values of the parameters should be compared to the revised (updated) values. Therefore, my observations on the budget are based on the revised cost framework set in March 2024. Given the nature of the project, the timeline was fixed. Thoughtful and complex work organization was required for achieving the primary project goals; however, with the detailed event organization requirements available, the main challenge was to ensure the availability and proper allocation of resources, as well as the involvement and management of competent individuals (Rakaczki, 2023a).

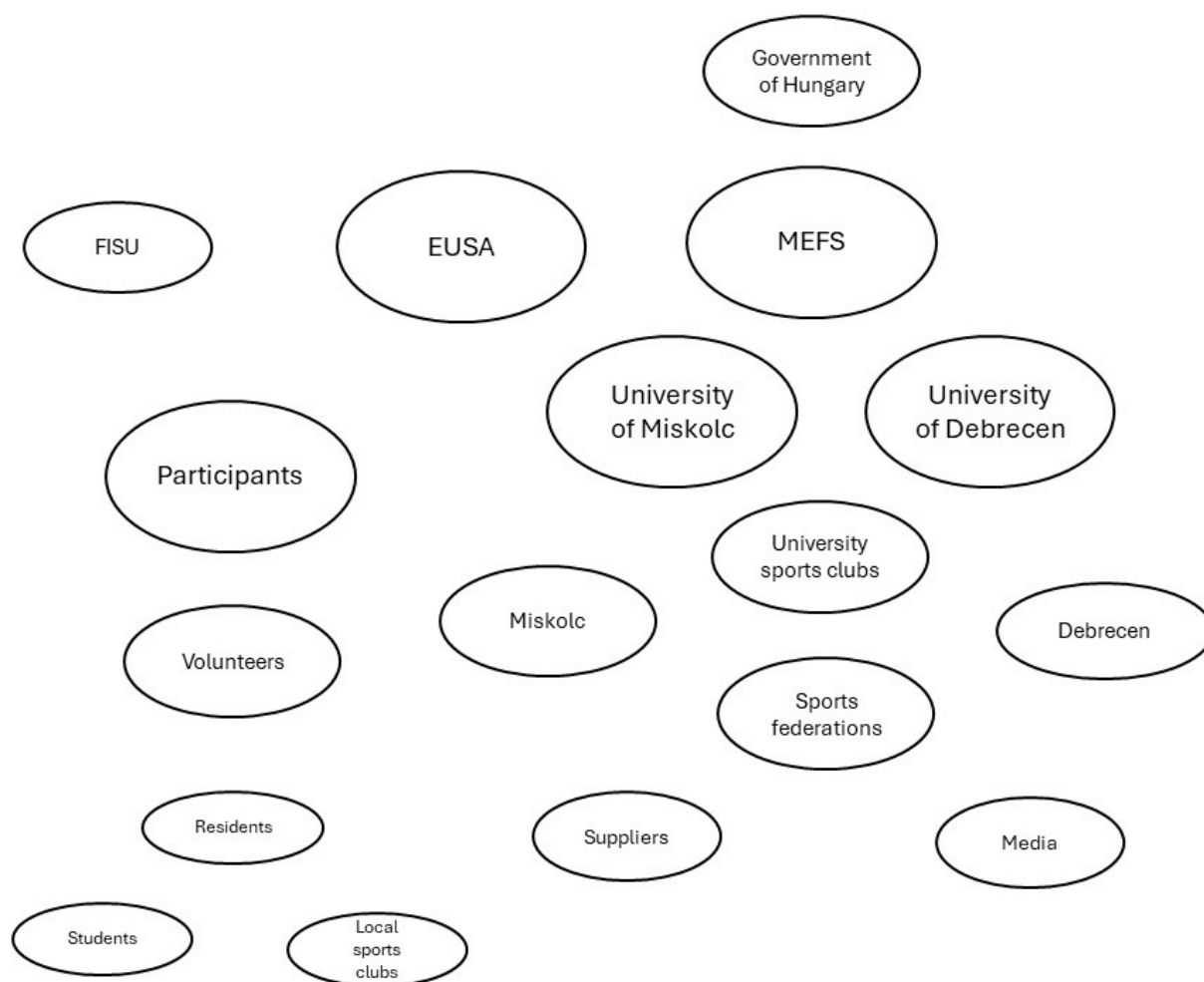
The project was initiated by MEFS, the University of Miskolc, and the University of Debrecen. The project ownership structure initially included the municipalities of Miskolc and Debrecen, which were later removed (their role in terms of event implementation became supportive and service-oriented), while the National Event Management Agency entered as a new stakeholder. For the University of Miskolc, in line with the original goals, the planned infrastructure and service developments were realized, the competitions and related services were of high quality, and the event gained significant visibility in both social and local media. Thanks to the European Universities Games, the university's reputation and positive image improved both domestically and internationally. The same conclusions apply to the University of Debrecen, with the exception of infrastructure developments related to the event. This is because, in the case of the University of Miskolc, the necessity of certain developments was known at the time of the bid submission to meet EUSA

requirements, while the University of Debrecen already had the required sports facilities and accommodation at that time. From MEFS's perspective, a strategic goal was to ensure a large and successful Hungarian participation, which was achieved: the Hungarian delegation was the largest, Hungary topped the overall medal table, and one Hungarian university (Hungarian University of Sports Science) ranked second in the institutional medal standings. It can be stated that the strategic alignment was achieved for all three initiating organizations of the project.

Figure 2 illustrates the stakeholders involved in the project. EUSA granted the organizing rights of the European Universities Games, part of its competition system, to MEFS, which applied with the University of Miskolc and the University of Debrecen. In domestic organization, the National Event Management Agency represented the Government of Hungary. Although MEFS continued to be the contracting party and in contact with EUSA, the event fell under its jurisdiction according to domestic regulations and fulfilled the role of the project organization. The International University Sports Federation (FISU) is mentioned not because EUSA is its continental organization, but because EUSA needs to coordinate the timing of its events with FISU events, and the European Universities Games represent competition for the FISU-organized World University Games. The sports clubs of the two universities played a key role in both the organization and the participation of the host universities, as a significant portion of participants from Miskolc and Debrecen were involved in sports clubs at their respective universities. The relevant sports federations actively participated in the management of the seventeen sports competitions. The event also involved city facilities and services, which is why the municipalities of the two cities were also involved and supported the organization in numerous ways. Naturally, the participants were at the center of the event. Volunteers played a crucial role not only in the organization but also in contributing to the overall positive atmosphere and perception of the event. Volunteers were often interested in gaining organizational experience, building connections, and practicing their foreign language skills. Of course, suppliers related to the event, companies tasked with various organizational duties, and media outlets reporting on and broadcasting the event are also among the stakeholders. Students from the two universities and residents of the two cities interacted with the event in various ways, either as fans or by meeting participants and organizers at university or city venues. Local sports clubs became involved through their athletes, participating in sports tasks or benefiting from the event's outcomes (infrastructure developments).

Generally, it can be stated that the stakeholders involved in the event were satisfied. EUSA's communication highlighted that Hungary hosted the best European Universities Games ever. Such statements should be approached cautiously, as there is always a certain euphoria at the end of large-scale events; however, EUSA leaders repeatedly expressed their satisfaction on-site. It is a fact that the organizers met every point of the comprehensive requirement system prepared by EUSA, which serves as a recipe for successful organization. Additionally, there were no participant complaints that needed to be addressed officially at committee levels, only a few

inconveniences and incidents were requiring other action. Having participated in all previous European Universities Games, I observed that the event has three critical organizational areas: accommodation, catering, and transfer. In past events, there were always issues with at least one of these areas, which led to complaints from participating delegations. In Miskolc and Debrecen all three areas were resolved smoothly and at a high standard.



Source: Own editing

Figure 2: Stakeholders of the 2024 European Universities Games

From the perspective of the University of Miskolc, the project was accepted and both the institution's leadership and colleagues involved in the implementation fully supported the event. The success of the project from the standpoint of the University of Miskolc should be evaluated by examining how acceptable the event was to the stakeholders involved in

the project results, who are the most important current and future partners for the university. These stakeholders are the followings: participants, volunteers, students, the university sports club, the Municipality of Miskolc, the University of Debrecen, and MEFS. Participant satisfaction has already been mentioned; this factor was particularly important for the University of Miskolc, as

it can enhance the institution's reputation across Europe and may lead to future enrollment of international students. Many volunteers were students from the University of Miskolc, and many students from the University of Miskolc participated as spectators. Special attention was paid to the selection and preparation of volunteers. The university's sports club, which is the main strategic partner in managing and developing the institution's sports life, was involved in the organization as a contributor beyond its fundamental task of preparing participating students from Miskolc. Through programs promoting Miskolc, emphasis was placed on ensuring that participants also get to know the city, leaving with positive experiences not only from the university but also from the city itself. The seven-year collaborative and ultimately successful work with the University of Debrecen and MEFS created a foundation for implementing future joint projects in either educational or sports fields. It is also worth pointing out that the fact that the University of Miskolc took on the organization of ten sports and that the maximum number of teams and numbers of participants in these sports was reached, and even – when the need arose – entries beyond the maximum number were accepted, resulting in a larger event, with even greater impact for all partners.

IMPACTS ON THE UNIVERSITY OF MISKOLC

The research was carried out at the end of the event, so it examines the immediate impacts observed directly after the event. In line with the formulated research question, this is done from the perspective of the University of Miskolc, but where significant impacts for other stakeholders are identified, they are also mentioned.

Sports Professional Impacts

The typical sports professional impact of hosting a domestic event is larger and more successful national participation. This is largely due to the host's automatic entry opportunity and the motivating, supportive effect of local spectators. Before being awarded the hosting rights, the University of Miskolc had not participated in the European Universities Games. However, since then, it participated in one sport in 2018 (11 athletes), six sports in 2022 (21 athletes), and eight sports in 2024 (27 athletes). In 2022, Miskolc athletes won one gold, two silver, and two bronze medals, while in 2024 they won one bronze medal. Notably, in 2022, Miskolc athletes achieved most of their medals (one gold, two silver, and one bronze) in swimming, but this sport was not included in the 2024 competition program. Ignoring the results of swimming, no significant difference in participation or success is observed between the 2022

and 2024 Games from the perspective of the University of Miskolc. In terms of Miskolc sports, a significant fan presence was observed in basketball (an average of 400 people per match). The performance of the men's basketball team is worth examining as they participated in 2018 (8th place), 2022 (8th place), and 2024 (7th place) with similar results, meaning the presence of local fans did not have a substantial impact on their performance.

The situation is different when examining Hungarian participation (Table 2) and success. Since the first round of general entries for the 2018 Games had already closed when the hosting rights were awarded, 2022 and 2024 participation should be examined. Government Decree 1201/2019. (IV. 15.) allocated special funding for the development of the Hungarian University Championships between 2020–2024, aiming to prepare for successful domestic participation. The 2022 event showed significant participation, but the 2024 event achieved the highest number of Hungarian participants so far, with Hungary finishing first in the medal table out of 36 countries. The Hungarian University of Sport Science finished second in the medal table out of 414 participating higher education institutions, achieving the most successful Hungarian performance in the history of the European Universities Games. It can be concluded that in the case of Hungarian university sports, sports professional impacts were significant.

Sports Political Impacts

In the case of the University of Miskolc, it can be said that the institution successfully showcased its hospitality to foreign students and various bilateral relations were established, particularly through ambassadorial visits. However, the sports political impacts were more significant from the perspective of the Hungarian University Sports Federation, as MEFS holds leadership and committee positions in both EUSA and FISU, which were strengthened as a result of the event's success. The following interaction can be observed: successful hosting of various international university sports events supports effective sports diplomacy and effective sports diplomacy supports winning the hosting rights of various international university sports events. Among MEFS's goals is the future hosting of the World University Games (formerly Universiade); a feasibility study for the 2019 event has already been prepared, and the successful hosting of the European Universities Games serves as a strong reference for achieving this goal.

Table 2

Sports and Hungarian participation for the European University Games (2012–2024)

Year	City	Sports	Hungarian participation			
			Sports	Institutions	Athletes	Medals
2012	Cordoba	10	1	1	2	0
2014	Rotterdam	10	2	4	38	4
2016	Zagreb-Rijeka	21	11	11	94	13
2018	Coimbra	13	6	8	78	10
2022	Lodz	20	18	17	314	49
2024	Debrecen-Miskolc	17	17	22	541	58

Source: Own compilation

Economic Impacts

The infrastructure investments at the University of Miskolc related to the event had significant economic impacts. In 2018, the University received HUF 500 million, and in 2019 an additional HUF 450 million from dormitory development support, which led to the renovation of one of its dormitory buildings by 2022. In 2023, the University received HUF 20.6 billion in government support for infrastructure developments related to the European Universities Games. Due to the relatively late decision from the aspect of the event, only some of the planned investments (renovation of two dormitories, tennis hall construction, tennis court renovations and beach volleyball center construction) were completed by the event, with others (two more dormitory renovations, university restaurant renovation) are planned for after the event. The full amount of government support was disbursed in 2023, indicating that the investments were pre-financed and may continue to be pre-financed in the future. It is likely that the university allocated the funds, taking advantage of the favourable interest rate environment at the time. This would have been a rational economic decision, potentially generating a return that could have been used to cover future expenses related to the event (provision of own services of HUF 200 million, financial support of HUF 100 million). The investments were originally part of the institution's medium and long-term development plan, but the event provided the funding and timing for their realization. Therefore, the later maintenance and utilization of these investments are well-planned. The investments increased the competitiveness of the University of Miskolc. They provided jobs for the local construction industry and did not have a crowding-out effect, meaning they were not realized at the expense of other investments.

According to the accreditation software data, the event saw the participation of 2,421 people at the Miskolc location (1,888 athletes and 533 accompanying persons), 381 volunteers and 20 volunteer coordinators, 152 referees, and 320 sports federation delegates and other sports professionals. This totals 3,294 people, with an additional 490 contributors (organizers, security service workers, cleaners, etc.). The number of guest nights spent in Miskolc during the event was 21,988, and 75,694 meals were provided.

Preuss (2004) pointed out that the direct economic impacts of the Olympic Games consist of investments, event organization ("Organizing Committee consumption"), and tourist spending in the host city. He noted that only locally spent, so-called autonomous funds impact the local economy. At this point, it is worth extending the analysis to cover the entire city of Miskolc. The investments completed before the event were carried out by Miskolc-based companies. The investments created new jobs and did not have a crowding-out effect.

At the time of the research, settlement with various service providers and partner organizations was still ongoing, but it is already clear that the total cost of Miskolc's tasks related to the European Universities Games will be between HUF 1,000 million HUF and 1,050 million. The largest portion of the costs was covered by state support (HUF 850 million) and the University's own resources (HUF 100 million). It is important to mention that the University of Miskolc provided approximately 200 million HUF worth of services free of charge – that is, not included in the budget – including HUF 152.5 million for dormitories, sports and other facilities, and 47.5 million for related services (security, cleaning, laundry, technical supervision). An important factor in terms of economic impacts is the personal payments related to the event (project team salaries, various assignments for contributors, overtime accounting, payments of taxes

and contributions), which will amount to around HUF 70–75 million. Another significant data point is that HUF 870–920 million was spent at Miskolc service providers and companies. A 2% local business tax is generated from the revenues of Miskolc companies, and a tourist tax of HUF 450 per night from 1,817 guest nights spent in Miskolc hotels provided revenue for the Miskolc Municipality.

There was no sports tourism related to the event, as few spectators traveled to Miskolc, and those who did were mostly domestic. However, the number of participants was outstanding, and while they received full board, they naturally also consumed at city restaurants and cafés. The impact on the retail sector will be assessed later, when data for July 2024 is available and can be compared to similar periods in previous years.

Five hotels and one high school dormitory accommodated EUSA officials and staff, volunteers, referees, sports federation delegates, and other contributors, totaling 439 people and 4,360 guest nights. This has already been included in the aforementioned amount spent at Miskolc service providers and companies, but it is also worth examining later whether the event led to significant additional bookings for accommodation providers compared to similar periods in previous years.

The value of the media appearances, which are discussed in detail in the social impacts section, are difficult to quantify, especially since most of the communication occurred on social media, promoting the event as well as the host universities and cities. However, the University of Miskolc received these media opportunities free of charge, which should be mentioned in the context of economic impacts.

Technological Impacts

At the University of Miskolc, two technological developments specifically associated with the event can be identified: the basic functions of the beach volleyball center have been supplemented with a sun sail and the basic functions of the tennis center with separating nets. Significant event-related technological development, dissemination, and use can be identified for Hungarian university sports. The primary platform for informing participants, including competition schedules and results, as well as communication with them, was an app developed specifically for the event. However, the goal during the development was to ensure that the app could be used for future major Hungarian university sports events (e.g., the Hungarian University Sports Festival). In the future, the standard of domestic university sports events will improve due to the technological impacts of the European Universities Games.

Social Impacts

The investments mentioned under the economic impacts also had social effects, as they enhanced the competitiveness of the University of Miskolc. The renovated and modernized dormitories, along with the expanded and developed sports infrastructure, have made the University of Miskolc even more attractive to potential students. The event widely promoted the University of Miskolc as a unique and compact event venue, as it is located within a defined area of the university campus, offering accommodation, a large-capacity restaurant, sports facilities for various disciplines, conference rooms, and entertainment venues.

An important social impact is the accumulation of know-how and a team of professionals during the event's organization, which makes the institution capable of winning and successfully hosting future major events.

Thanks to the event, the University of Miskolc gained significant – primarily online – media exposure. The number of followers on social media platforms developed as follows: 5,100 on Facebook, 3,900 on Instagram, 3,170 on YouTube and 5,168 on TikTok.

Nearly 20,000 photos were published, with at least three times that amount in raw photo stock. Those who could not attend the event in person to support their university teams were able to follow the matches via a total of 424 live streams. The University of Miskolc covered a total of 1,358.6 square meters with various marketing tools and decorative elements.

The University of Miskolc established a “FunZone” in a central area of the university campus, where participants who were not competing and volunteers could engage in various events (workshops, roundtable discussions, lectures, awareness-raising activities) or simply relax thanks to the numerous services available at the venue. The FunZone was an unprecedented initiative, but it was so successful that it is likely to be included in future European Universities Games, making it a legacy of the Miskolc and Debrecen event. The FunZone also ensured that the majority of participants spent their time on the university campus in a supervised, controlled, and safe environment. The organizers also focused on establishing collaborations with downtown restaurants, cafés, and entertainment venues that uphold high standards, where the staff speaks foreign languages, and where correct billing is guaranteed. These were marked as “EUG Friendly” places in the event’s app, ensuring that those who visited the downtown area were not disappointed with the service. The University of Miskolc organized two parties at the famous Cave Bath and collaborated with city programs (Kvaterka, GastroFest) during the event, where participants of the European Universities Games received discounts and special attention. Overall, it can be said that the event introduced many people (participants or those who followed the competitions of

their relatives, friends, fellow students, or trainees from home) to the University of Miskolc and created a positive image of the institution.

Environmental Impacts

The environmental impact of the event is observed as a negative effect. In my research, I examined the measures taken by the organizers in Miskolc to minimize the event's ecological footprint. I identified the following:

- Placement of water dispensers, with each participant receiving a reusable water bottle in their welcome package.
- Use of reusable boxes and cups.
- Optional cancellation of the mandatory room cleaning scheduled every two days if not needed.
- Most event venues (seven sports, catering, accommodation, fun zone) were located on the university campus, making them accessible by foot.
- Local transfers were organized in collaboration with the local public transportation company.
- Free use of public transportation for participants within the city.
- Organization of awareness-raising programs.
- Information materials (e.g., house rules, event schedules, catering menus, timetables) and promotional materials (e.g., publications by the University of Miskolc) were provided in digital format.
- Use of biodegradable packaging and marketing materials in many cases.
- Reuse of marketing tools (organizers only replaced the printed content).

CONCLUSIONS

The 2024 European Universities Games represented one of the largest and most complex projects in the history of the University of Miskolc, featuring numerous unique project attributes and challenges. The preparation, planning, organization, and execution of the event spanned a seven-year period, with the closure phase still ongoing at the time of this study. The project was initiated by three organizations: the University of Miskolc, the University of Debrecen, and the Hungarian University Sports Federation. Changes in the legislative environment and thus the organizational model for hosting international sports events in Hungary transformed the project ownership structure and project organization. During the event's organization, the model change of the co-hosting universities positively impacted the execution of the event. Based on the achievement of the primary project goals, the event was deemed successful from the perspectives of both the University of Miskolc and the project management (Organizing Committee). The University of Miskolc, as one of the initiating project-owning organizations, considered the event successful, with the strategic goals outlined by the university being met. When examining the satisfaction of other stakeholders affected by the project – due to the wide range of these stakeholders and because the research question concerned the University of Miskolc – it was assessed whether the project was accepted within the university and whether strategically important stakeholders of the university were satisfied. For the University of Miskolc, economic and social impacts were significant and positive, and efforts to mitigate the negative environmental impacts of the event were successful. Technological, sports political, and sports professional impacts were also identifiable from the perspective of the University of Miskolc, though these were not significant. This study, by its nature, focused only on the immediate post-event impacts, but it will be worthwhile to examine the medium- and long-term effects, analyze the event's legacy, and assess any potential multidimensional impacts as more time passes.

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