

The Theoretical Background of Local Sport Policy in Hungary: Sport Concepts of Hungarian Cities of County Rank

Authors' contribution:

A) conception and design
of the study

B) acquisition of data

C) analysis and interpretation
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ABSTRACT

In line with international trends, we could also observe in Hungary beginning in the late 1990s increasing attention given by local governments to sports. Hungarian provisions of law related to sports (including, in particular, Act I of 2004 on sports) put local governments in charge of some very important tasks. Among other things, local governments were to determine the local concept of sports development and to ensure its implementation, cooperate with local sports organizations and sports associations, and as owners maintain and operate the sports facilities. In light of the above facts, the study analyzes the sport concepts adopted by the local governments of the Hungarian cities of county rank and tries to find the answers to the following questions: 1. To what extent are the documents concerned in accordance with the requirements usually drafted for the development concepts and which platforms they involve?; 2. To what extent did the local governments recognize the relationship between the sports and place marketing on the level of concept-making?

As a conclusion of the study, the following significant establishments can be made: 1. Comparing the existing sport concepts with the general requirements of the development concepts, a large number of deficiencies can be observed; 2. The areas mentioned in the situation-analysis part of these documents are in close relationship with the importance of the topics concerned; 3. The local governments of the cities of county rank decisively recognized the role of sports in place marketing.

sport concept, cities of county rank, Hungary, local governments

KEYWORDS

Introduction

As a result of the increasing significance of sports, which can be observed in the past decade, local governments both in Europe and in the United States have been paying increased attention to this area. In the background of these processes is fundamentally the fact that local governments have recognized that sports can play a very important role in boosting local economies and in renewing cities (Chalkley & Essex 1999, Daniels, Norman & Henry 2005, Gold & Gold 2008, Gratton, Shibli & Coleman 2005, Maenning & du Plessis 2009, Smith 2005). The papers written on this subject (Emery 2010, King 2009, Kluka, Stier & Schilling 2005, Rein & Shields 2007) point out the necessity for an appropriate organizational background, and to also consider the elaboration of development concepts, which serve as the theoretical background for the developments, as an important task.

In accordance with international trends, we also began to observe from the mid-1990s in Hungary local governments giving increased attention to sports (Gémesi 2008, Hajdú 2000), in the background of which there are several closely intertwined factors. Firstly, due to the decrease of central resources, as well as the decrease in corporate sponsorship due to the economic recession after the political changes (Bakonyi 2007), local governments were increasingly forced to support the maintenance and development of sports using their own financial resources (Table 1). Secondly, the increase in the demand of the local population for leisure and entertainment opportunities also made it necessary for local governments to take a more active role than before. Thirdly, as a consequence of the political transformations, especially beginning in the late 1990s, competition between cities also became more pronounced in Hungary. Further, in the framework of their place marketing activities, an increasing number of settlements saw sports-related sectors (e.g., sport tourism linked to sporting events and training camps) as an opportunity for development.

Table 1. The absolute value (HUF million) and the distribution (%) of expenses related to sports* among the sub-systems of public finances between 2006 and 2009

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Public finances (HUFm)	71,309.20	67,486.40	67,360.60	66,989.30	68,081.80
Central government budget (%)	33.6	30.7	27.6	29.3	31.5
Local government budget (%)	66.4	69.3	72.4	70.7	68.5

* These figures are the amounts allocated in the appropriation accounts acts for each year under F08.a: Sports and leisure time activities and services, which is a broader category than sports alone; however, the figures are indicative of certain tendencies.

Source: the appropriation accounts bills for the individual years.

As a result of the processes outlined above, the new statutes adopted after the political changes vis-à-vis local governments (e.g., Act LXV of 1990 on local governments; Act XX of 1991 on the scope of responsibilities and powers of local governments and their organs, the delegates of the republic, and certain organs subjugated to the central government; Act CLXXXIX of 2011 on local governments of Hungary) list the support and development of the local sport life among the tasks of local governments. At the same time, the performance of their tasks at a high level made it indispensable for local governments to have adequate theoretical background in this area, which primarily made it necessary to adopt a local sports concept that, in addition to surveying the current situation, formulated an appropriate vision for the future, as well as outlined the priorities to be followed and specific steps to be taken in order to achieve this. The Hungarian government was also well aware of the above expectations. Therefore, the sports-related legislation passed in the new millennium (Act CXLV of 2000 on sport and Act I of 2004 on sport) listed among the most important sport-related tasks of local governments the elaboration of the local sports development concept and the execution of the same.

With a view to the above, it may be regarded as somewhat surprising that the Hungarian literature on sports devotes very little attention to this area. The works written on this issue (Géczi 2008, Hagyó 2008) predominantly provided a description of the sports concept of the given administrative unit, in the framework of which they outlined the organizational frameworks of sports, the status of sports facilities, and the problems of financing; they also presented the objectives to be achieved.

This study, considered as a pioneering work in this respect, analyzes the sport concepts adopted by the local governments of the Hungarian cities of county rank (Figure 1). This category of settlement first existed in Hungary between 1954 and 1989, and the local governments of the five settlements that belonged to it (Debrecen, Győr, Miskolc, Szeged, and Pécs) had the same rights and obligations as did county councils on the county level of administration. The political changes in 1990 reintroduced this category of settlements, and from the mid-1990s it has included the county seats (18 cities), as well as the settlements, each with a population over 50,000, which were given the title of city with county rank by the Hungarian Parliament (5 cities). According to Act CLXXXIX of 2011, cities of county rank also provide public services that, in addition to their own territory, also extend to the whole or a part of the county in which they are located. Their involvement in the research project was fundamentally justified by the three facts. First of all,

approximately 20% of Hungary’s population – a significant proportion – lives in these cities. Secondly, due to their better financial opportunities, they are able to devote more attention and resources to sports. Finally, and closely related to the previous point, the role that they played in Hungarian sports has increased significantly, especially over the past two decades, which is clearly reflected in the role that they have played in the most popular team sports since 1990 (Table 2).

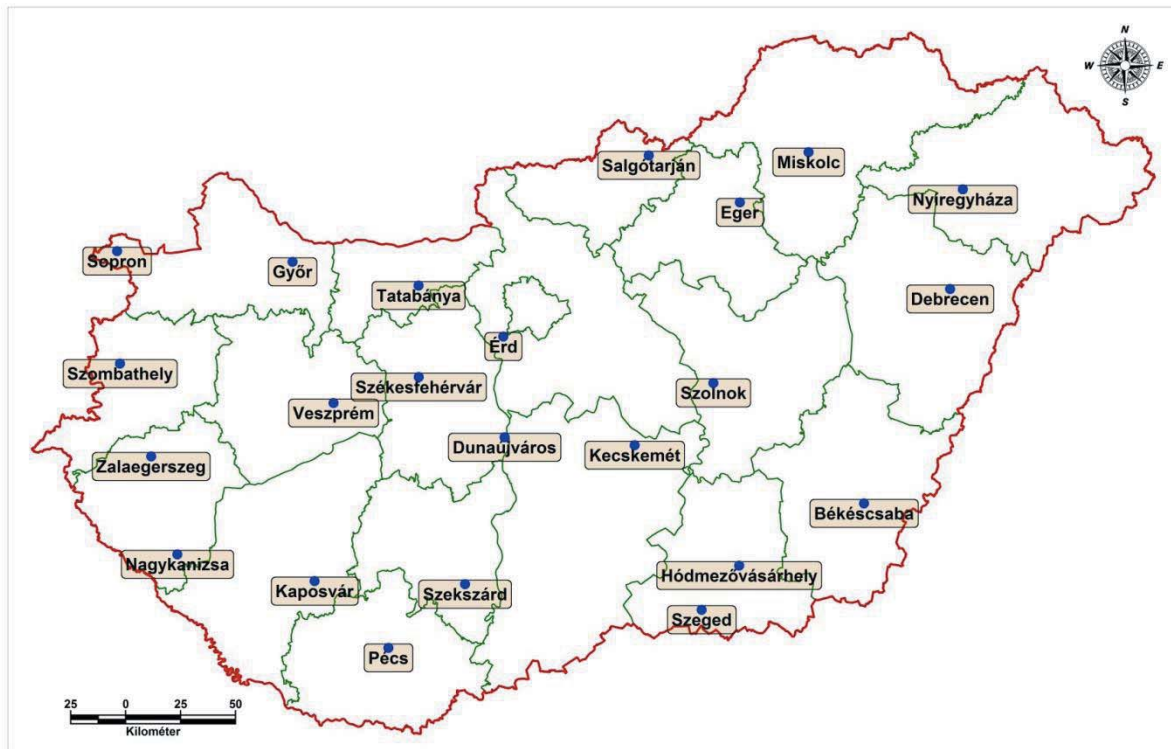


Figure 1. Location of Hungarian cities of county rank

Table 2. The cities of the teams that won championships in the most popular team sports (men’s football, men’s and women’s handball, men’s water polo, men’s and women’s basketball, men’s ice hockey) in Hungary since 1950 (%)

	Budapest	Cities of county rank	Other settlements
1950s	87.0	13.0	0.0
1960s	94.4	5.6	0.0
1970s	94.1	5.9	0.0
1980s	79.4	19.1	1.5
1990s	57.1	40.0	2.9
2000s	22.9	70.0	7.1

Source: the websites of the federations concerned

In the light of the above facts, this article tries to find answers to the following questions:

- to what extent are the documents concerned in accordance with the requirements usually drafted for the development concepts and the platforms they involve,
- to what extent the local governments recognized the relationship between the sports and place marketing on the level of concept-making.

Methods

Within the framework of the study, the town clerks of the cities of county rank and the leaders of the organizational units responsible for sports at the mayor’s office were first addressed, and the websites of the settlements concerned were studied. The aforementioned sources provided the 23 sport concepts of the 23 Hungarian cities of county rank. The contexts of the sports concepts were analyzed applying quantitative

methods and using the aforementioned aspects, and then the results received were compared with the various particularities of the cities concerned.

The sport concept as a development document was essentially analyzed from four aspects:

- depth of situation analysis (scores granted: 0-3 points),
- definition of a unanimous vision (scores granted: 0-1 point),
- presentation of clear strategic objectives (scores granted: 0-2 points),
- extension of the fields of implementation.

In the course of the analysis of the relationship between the sport concepts and place marketing, three questions were to be answered:

- whether the given document refers to the relationship between sports and place marketing (scores granted: 0-1 points),
- the kind of role sports played from the point of view of place marketing: strengthening of local self-consciousness and the reputation of the city (scores granted: 0-2 points),
- which fields of sports were able to fulfill the above-drafted roles: teams/individual sportsmen, programs (scores granted: 0-1 points).

Results and discussion

With respect to the date of the creation of the sport concepts of the cities of county rank in force, it may be established that the majority of them (16 out of 23) were prepared after 2005, which implies that the local governments, in principle, endeavored to implement the principles defined in the new act on sports into their own legislations.

Situation analysis is regarded as the basic element of all development concepts from the very beginning, and in the light of this it is not surprising that 21 of the 23 concepts provided more or less a detailed description about the most important features related to sports in their cities. However, the documents of six cities (Debrecen, Érd, Kecskemét, Nagykanizsa, Tatabánya and Veszprém) can be regarded as rather deficient (e.g., the material of Veszprém only contains a SWOT analysis).

The first significant problem with the sport concepts is the lack of the provision of a unanimous (in 1-2 sentences) vision: none of the cities made an attempt to summarize their most important objective(s) in this way.

Similar to the above, the presentation of a clear strategic objective was also problematic: the documents of the cities concerned in the chapter of this kind mostly listed the general and basic principles related to the various fields/branches and hardly ever tried to provide a synthesis or present overall strategic objectives.

In assessing the documents concerned in a quantitative manner based on the above-named three aspects and using the earlier described scores granted (Table 3), a change in time can be observed, however. The average of the sport concepts prepared before 2005 was only 2.43, the average of the sport concepts prepared between 2007 and 2008 was 3.44 while the average of ones prepared after 2008 was 3.00. There are several factors in the background of this process. For one thing, in the early years of the decade local governments had limited experience in this field, which was the reason for the lower scores achieved. By the second half of the decade, however, they have become more familiar with the international documents dealing with this area, as well as the relevant provisions of Hungarian law and each other's documents, and as a result, documents of higher quality were created. The backlash of recent years, in my opinion, is due to the fact that in the circumstances of the economic crisis, settlements had to face a great number of problems, and in the course of the necessary reviews of their sport concepts they were not able to devote sufficient time and financial resources to this area.

In addition to the above-named deficiencies, it is also a serious problem (can be met in 12 of the 21 concepts containing situation analysis) that the situation analysis in the document and the part dealing with

the development strategy are not sharply separated: the description of the current conditions of a given area (e.g., competitive sport, sport talent care) is followed immediately by listing the related development concepts.

Table 3. Overall assessments of the sports concepts of the cities of county rank

	A	B	C
Békéscsaba	2008	4	7
Debrecen	2000	2	3
Dunaújváros	2010	5	1
Eger	2008	4	6
Érd	2009	1	1
Győr	2007	4	6
Hódmezővásárhely	2008	4	5
Kaposvár	2001	4	6
Kecskemét	2004	1	1
Miskolc	2008	3	2
Nagykanizsa	2011	2	0
Nyíregyháza	2011	4	1
Pécs	2004	3	0
Salgótarján	2008	4	2
Sopron	2009	3	6
Szeged	2000	3	1
Szekszárd	2008	5	3
Székesfehérvár	2007	1	0
Szombathely	2002	1	0
Szolnok	2001	3	7
Tatabánya	2011	2	2
Veszprém	2007	2	3
Zalaegerszeg	2010	4	7

A – years of creation, B – the adaptation of the concept to the requirements defined for the development concepts, C – the appearance of place marketing in the sport concepts

Source: sport concepts of cities of county rank

With respect to the fields discussed in the sport concepts, a wide spectrum can be observed:

- sport in kindergarten and primary school,
- sport talent care,
- competitive sport,
- leisure sport,
- situation of facilities,
- financing issues,
- sport for persons with disabilities,
- organizational issues,
- traditions related to sports,
- international relations,
- sports sciences and sporting experts training,
- sport health care.

The sport concepts, of course, do not give the same emphasis on the different topics:

- The majority of the documents (21-23 documents) first discuss sport in kindergarten and primary school, competitive sport, and leisure sport as the four most important fields of the sporting life of the cities; secondly, the situation of the facilities (which constitutes the basis of the sporting activities); thirdly, the financing issues (its role is similar to the former).

- Fewer than the previous, yet still a considerable number of documents (17-19 documents), dealt with the situation of persons with disabilities, sport talent cares, and organizational issues related to sports.
- The third group consists of the international relations related to sports (11 references) and sport health care (12 references), which may be explained by the smaller significance of these fields. In the case of the latter, however, a certain development in time may be also observed: this topic occurred in only two of the seven concepts created before 2006, while it occurred in 10 out of the 16 documents prepared in the second half of the decade, suggesting that more and more local governments recognized its importance.
- The documents only occasionally dealt with the conservation of traditions related to sports (7 references), and with the issue of sports sciences and training of sporting experts (4 references) that results from the fact that the local governments regard certain topics as their duties only to a limited extent. In the case of the latter, it should be pointed out (which at the same time explains the approach of the settlements concerned) that in these cities (Eger, Győr, Nyíregyháza, and Pécs) there are some types of educational activity related to sports (e.g., training physical education teachers).

In analyzing the relationship between the sport concepts and place marketing, it may be established that a significant part of the documents are aware of the role of sports fulfilled in place marketing, refer to it, and only four concepts can be mentioned here (the materials of Pécs, Sopron, Szeged, Székesfehérvár) where this part is totally missing.

Comparing the two types of possible roles of sports in place marketing (strengthening of locals self-consciousness and the reputation of the city), it emerges that the latter plays a more important role. In analyzing the frequency and depth of the references to these two factors, and applying the scores mentioned earlier, the reference to the reputation of the city received 20 points while the strengthening of the local self-consciousness received 15 points. In my opinion, this fact may be primarily explained by local governments mainly taking into consideration the potential target groups in the course of their marketing activities (and in this context, endeavor to improve the existing image of the city) and pay somewhat less attention to the satisfaction of the demands of the actual users (that is, the local inhabitants).

From among the two potential areas of sports, the sport concepts more often refer to events related to sports than to teams and individual sportsmen (there were 10 and 7 references, respectively) which could be explained by the fact that in the past period the sports clubs of the cities examined hardly achieved any results of international importance that would have called attention to the settlement, but at the same time quite a few of them served as venues for sporting events, mostly also featuring international athletes, which received significant media attention.

Looking at the full extent of the sport concepts prepared by cities of county rank, the processes noticed in the course of the analysis of sport concepts as development concepts can also be observed here. The average score of the documents prepared before 2005 was 2.57, the average score of the documents prepared between 2007 and 2008 was 3.78, while the ones elaborated after 2008 scored 2.57. In my opinion, the growth can be explained by the fact that in the second half of the decade the local governments became more and more aware of the role of sports in place marketing (in fact, the phrase “place marketing” became very popular, often very much like a magic spell for local governments) and this is also reflected by the documents prepared by them. At the same time, behind the backsliding of recent years lies the fact that the application of the methods of place marketing fundamentally failed to deliver on the promise they had held; therefore, the most recent documents deal with this area much more skeptically and carefully.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the following significant establishments can be made:

- Comparing the existing sport concepts with the general requirements of the development concepts, a large number of deficiencies can be observed. This, in my opinion, can be principally explained by

the fact that the documents concerned were prepared by the staffs of the examined mayors' offices, and thus did not have sufficient experience in the given area.

- The areas mentioned in the situation-analysis part of these documents are in close relationship with the importance of the topics concerned; moreover, in some cases definite changes in time and certain regional particularities can be also observed.
- The local governments of the cities of county rank decisively recognized the role of sports in place marketing, though they see its importance in the strengthening of the reputation of the city, and thus they intend to rely chiefly on sports-related events organized in settlements in the course of their activities.
- In the cases of both main aspects examined (sports as development concept and the use of sports in place marketing) there is a wavering over time: the highest quality documents were adopted in 2007 and in 2008 when, on the one hand, local governments were still able to devote sufficient attention to this field, and on the other hand, they still believed more firmly that sports could play an significant role in the prosperity of their cities.

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