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PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE SPORTS MANAGER CAREER FROM THE  
PERSPECTIVE OF ACCESSING AND MANAGING EUROPEAN FUNDS

ABSTRACT  
DOCTORAL THESIS

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## **The importance of the theme**

In a complex, constantly changing environment, sports structures face new challenges. They can trigger or hinder the professionalization processes of sports structures and their members. In the current European context, where there are countless funding opportunities from non-reimbursable funds, sports structures, and managers will have to adjust to the new changes in accessing and managing funded projects. These changes have considerable implications at the national and local levels and in the participants' daily lives in sports activities.

With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, the European Union (EU) has direct responsibility for the sports field. It can intervene by supporting, coordinating, or supplementing the sports policy measures taken by the member states. The EU's task is to "contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues" and to "develop the European dimension in sport." The EU uses "soft" policy-making tools such as dialogue, cooperation, funding for projects and networks, providing information through studies or surveys, consultations, and events: "developing the European dimension in sport, by promoting fairness and openness in sport, of competitions and cooperation between bodies responsible for sports and by protecting the physical and moral integrity of sportsmen and women, especially the youngest" (European Commission, 2012, page 74).

Considering the previously exposed context, this paper aims to highlight the importance of acquiring knowledge in attracting European funds by sports managers. We thus propose to analyze comparative theories of sports management, good governance, adult education, and good practices in Europe and Romania regarding the professionalization of the manager's career in sports.

## **The motivation for choosing the theme**

The motivation to study this subject comes from my experience as an expert accessing European funds in the field of sports, accumulated both within non-governmental organizations and public institutions, such as universities and ministries. Thus, this research topic is born as a result of more than ten years of writing and implementing sports field projects and identifying at the "grassroots" the funding and training needs of sports organizations, respectively, of the representatives/employees of these entities. In addition, I obtained a series of certifications in European funds and related areas of interest: project

evaluator, European funds expert, project manager, and trainer. I also have a particular interest in adult education, examining conditional training factors, environmental factors, and personality traits that can influence the acquisition of fundraising skills.

As a graduate of the National School of Political and Administrative Studies (S.N.S.P.A.), Specialization in Political Science, I was particularly interested in the courses related to European Institutions and European Policies in 2006-2007, benefiting from an Erasmus scholarship in Italy. In 2010, I started writing projects with funding for my NGO, which carries out activities in the cultural and sports field. In 2013, I opened my consultancy firm to access European funds, offering consultancy for around 80 projects, especially in the fields of sport, culture, and youth.

My concern for the analysis of sports policies, the influence of the European Union on sports policy, at least at the level of programs and documents adopted by the Ministry of Youth and Sports/Ministry of Sports/National Agency for Sports, for the training of athletes/coaches/sports managers who need specific programs and policies, is another motivational element that determines this research project.

## **Theoretical conclusions**

In the theoretical part of the paper, I explored the general aspects of the professionalization of the sports manager career. I also explained the concepts of governance and governance, highlighting their distinctions. The idea of good governance in sports structures was also analyzed, presenting recommendations from European and international institutions such as the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and the International Olympic Committee.

The specialized literature generally focuses on the particularities of adult learning, different training methods, the link between individual/group/organizational learning and performance, and skills and abilities acquired within a training. The unique characteristics of adult learning and different participant-centered training methods are highlighted while examining the importance of English language skills for adults pursuing a career in writing and implementing European projects. Finally, the evaluation criteria for the training programs were reviewed.

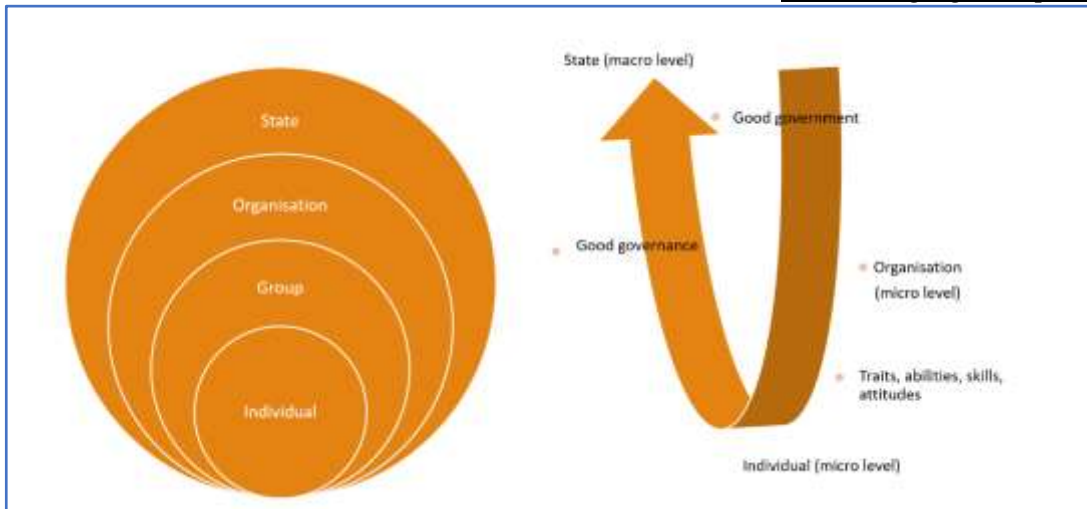
A project manager's essential competencies and skills were analyzed based on the occupational standard. Similarly, the key competencies and skills required of a sports

manager were explored, allowing a comparison between the two profiles. From this comparison, a sports manager must develop knowledge and skills in various fields, especially administration, mathematics, economics, and accounting, to become an effective project manager.

In this first part of the work, the professionalization of the sports managers' careers was proposed from the perspective of European design. The importance of education and training programs in the professionalization process was also emphasized here, especially in sports management, good governance, and European design. In addition, a Eurodesign training program was presented, and the skills needed for a project manager involved in sports projects were analyzed.

## **The general methodological framework of the research**

In the context of Romania, we are faced with a small number of projects in the field of sports due, on the one hand, to problems at the macro level (underfunding, low absorption rates, deprofessionalization of people working in the sports field) and on the other hand, micro-level problems (lack of human resources specialized in drafting and implementing projects), this research analyzes the human factors that influence organizational and individual performance in the field of attracting European funds in sports. The study is based on several main theories, applied both at the macro level (of states) and the micro level (at the level of the organization and the individual). The figure below shows the macro and micro levels of the research, starting from the analysis of good governance in two EU member states, then analyzing the excellent governance in sports organizations in the two countries and their performance in attracting European funding for sport, and finally focusing on Romanian organizations and the traits, skills, abilities, and attitudes of the high-performing participants in the Eurodesign course.



*Macro and micro levels of research*

We are thus talking about a multi-level study framework consisting of four central studies:

1. Comparative study of good governance/performance in governance in Romania and Italy (macro study)
2. Comparative analysis of the factors determining performance in accessing European funds in sports in Romania and Italy (micro study – European organizations).
3. Pilot training program in writing European projects, carried out within the Ministry of Youth and Sports (micro study - national organizations).
4. Identification of performance factors in completing a training course with European funds addressed to sports managers in Romania (micro-individual study).

The concept that appears in all four studies, in different forms, is that of performance. The main theories of performance on which the research is based are the following:

- Macro-state level: In countries with a high governance quality, funds are absorbed more. (Charron et al., 2015)
- Micro-organizational level: Organizational learning occurs when individual and group knowledge is institutionalized (Crossan et al., 1999).
- Micro-individual level: The main categories of factors that describe a performing project manager according to the conceptual model proposed by Mihaela Lutas et al. (2020):
  - Experience (Technical vs. Managerial)
  - Certifications
  - Education

## **Comparative study on good governance in Romania and Italy**

### **Premise**

According to the European Parliament, in the report "The (low) absorption of EU Structural Funds" (Katsarova, 2013), the absorption capacity represents the extent to which a country can spend its structural funds efficiently. The regions with the highest GDP per capita - southern Germany, southeastern United Kingdom, northern Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Ireland, and the Nordic countries - also have the highest absorption rate of European funds. Instead, for countries such as Greece, Latvia, and Romania, an increase in the absorption rate was introduced as a condition for granting the funds.

### **Purpose**

From a comparative perspective, this study aims to analyze the favorable contexts for increasing the number of sports projects with European funds (more precisely from the Erasmus+ Program 2014-2020) in Romania and Italy.

### **Questions of the research**

If we look at the percentage of project selection and the profile of the countries that benefited the most from EU funding, we can formulate the following research questions:

- What is the rate of use of EU funds in countries and organizations where governance is weak?
- Is there an implicit link between a sports structure with an effective system of good governance and the number of European projects and the results of successful investments?

### **Methods of research**

This statistical analysis explains the extent to which Romania accessed European funds for sport in 2014-2020, correlating the number of projects with specific indicators.



The independent variable uses several composite indices for the quality of governance: the World Governance Index (WGI), the Government Effectiveness Index (GEF), the Prosperity Index, and the European Governance Quality Index (EQI).

The dependent variable analyzed, namely EU funds at the country level in sports, is represented by all the sports projects carried out in Romania and Italy in 2014-2020. The dependent variable is the total base of all sports projects in Romania and Italy from 2014 to 2020.

The statistical methods used were paired sample correlations between independent and dependent variables. The correlation test between paired samples was used to analyze the relationship between variables.

## **Discussions and conclusions**

The main conclusion is that European funds are conditionally effective. Where a high-quality level of governance is available, economies can benefit from the support of these funds. In the case of a lower level of governance quality, the benefits are reduced. (Ederveen et al., 2006; Rodríguez-Pose and Garcilazo, 2015; Tosun, 2014).

Among the conclusions of the comparative analysis above, Italy has a better governance performance on all relevant indicators, except for economic quality and the investment environment where Romania approaches Italy. It should also be noted that, within Italy, there are significant differences in good governance between the Northern and Southern regions.

## **Comparative study on the performance in attracting European funds by organizations in Romania and Italy**

This study considers comparative research on the performance of attracting European funds at the level of the leading sports structures of the project within the Erasmus+ Sport Program in Romania and Italy.

### **Premise**

To analyze the impact of individual learning on the organization's performance in accessing European funds, a comparative analysis was carried out between Romania and Italy to examine the factors determining an organization's performance in accessing European funds. Both qualitative and quantitative means were used in this study.

### **Questions of the research**

1. What relationship exists between performance in accessing European funds and organizational variables? The targeted organizational variables were:
  - Organizational structure and dynamics;
  - Internal human resource specialized in writing and implementing projects;
  - What is the level of professional training of the internal human resources, proven by the existence of qualifications such as expert accessing funds, project manager, procurement expert, etc.?
2. What similarities and differences exist between organizations in Romania and Italy?

### **Methodology of the research**

The research started from the need to know the factors that contributed to obtaining such a good performance in the case of Italy in accessing European funds in the field of Sport, analyzing the Erasmus+ Sport program.

The database of the Erasmus+ public platform, which includes the approved projects, was used to analyze the data related to the projects carried out by the coordinating countries, Italy being in first place with 234 projects coordinated as project leaders in the period 2014-2020.

## **Purpose**

The study aimed to identify the factors determining the performance in accessing European funds in the analyzed organizations.

## **Research objectives**

- Identify and contact organizations that have won projects under the Erasmus+ Sport Program in the period 2014-2020, both in Romania and Italy.
- Identifying the internal and external factors determining the performance in attracting European funds to the organizations that obtained funding in Italy and Romania.

## **Methods of the research**

The primary data collection method used in this study was the survey, through:

- Online questionnaires addressed to representatives of sports organizations in Romania and Italy
- Structured interviews with representatives of sports organizations in Romania and Italy.

Analysis methods and data interpretation were carried out through SPSS (Factor analysis, standard deviation, Covariance Matrix).

The interpretation of the results of the structured interviews was carried out through the NVIVO platform.

## **Research sample**

In this study, the sample was made up of sports organizations that benefited from projects implemented or in the process of being implemented within the Erasmus+ Program during the 2014-2020 programming period.

- The Romanian sample consisted of 49 organizations, of which 30 were unique entries – some organizations had several projects during the analyzed period.
- The Italian sample consisted of 234 organizations, of which 200 were unique entries.

## **Organization of research**

In the first instance, a database was created with the organizations that had Erasmus+ projects on the Sport component in the period 2014-2020 (the contact data of the representatives of these organizations in Romania and Italy was collected manually by identifying the organizations from the Erasmus+ results platform and identifying emails on their sites).

The invitations to complete the online questionnaires were sent at the beginning of 2022 to the sports entities coordinating Erasmus+ projects (project leaders) on the Sports component in Romania and Italy.

## **Discussions and conclusions**

From the comparative research on the performance in attracting European funds at the level of project leader sports structures within the Erasmus+ Sports Program in Romania and Italy, the following conclusions emerged:

- Decision-making capacity, verbal and numerical skills are the most developed in people who have performed well in accessing and implementing European funds in Romania, followed by clerical skills. In Italy, the representatives of the sports organizations self-assessed their decision-making capacity, functional and numerical skills, followed by verbal skills, as highly developed.
- In Romania, the motivation indicators with the highest level are confidence in success, desire to learn, and compensatory effort. In Italy, the motivation indicators with the highest level are independence, willingness to learn, and persistence.
- Both in Romania and Italy, among the external factors that influenced the writing of Erasmus+ projects on the Sports component were organizational dynamics: difficulties on the financial side in drawing up budgets, challenges in finding external partners, and the lack of internal human resources in the organization, which could prevent problems arising in filling out the financing application.

## **Study on the relationship between individual learning and organizational learning within the structures of the Ministry of Youth and Sports**

### **Premise**

This study systematically explores training intervention development and individual and organizational dynamics in public and sport-based entities. The research on the transfer of individual learning at the organizational level was carried out within the Ministry of Youth and Sports and subordinate entities in 2021.

This research investigates the development of a training program for middle management employees from the Ministry of Youth and Sports and its 41 medium-sized subordinate organizations (DJST) in Romania.

### **Purpose**

The study aims to analyze the process by which individual learning contributes to organizational learning/organizational change and ultimately determines the performance of an organization in attracting EU funds.

### **Objectives of the research**

The objectives of the research were:

- Identification of internal and external factors that determine performance in attracting European funds;
- Analysis of the impact of the Eurodesign course six months after the completion of the courses to see the changes that have occurred in the organization and the number of projects written/approved;
- Development of the educational offer at the Ministry of Youth and Sports level through the pilot course of European design.

## **Research hypotheses**

*General hypothesis: The performance in Eurodesign and the implementation of European projects depends on the personal characteristics of the employees and the characteristics of the organization.*

*Working assumptions:*

1. The performance in attracting projects with non-reimbursable funds is higher in people with a higher level of verbal skills (an internal factor that belongs to the individual).
2. The performance in attracting projects with non-reimbursable funds is higher for people with a higher level of numerical skills (an internal factor that belongs to the individual).
3. The performance in attracting projects with non-reimbursable funds is higher for people with a higher level of functional skills (internal factor related to the individual).
4. The performance in attracting projects with non-reimbursable funds is higher for people with a higher decision-making capacity (an internal factor that belongs to the individual).
5. The performance in attracting projects with non-reimbursable funds is higher for people with a higher motivation level (internal factor related to the individual).
6. Performance in accessing funds is related to organizational dynamics – organizational learning, teamwork, and financial performance (external factors about the organization).

## **Methods of research**

In the research process, I used the following research methods:

- Research design methods (operationalization of concepts);
- Data collection methods: experiment, questionnaire, structured interviews;
- Methods of data analysis and interpretation (factor analysis, comparison, correlation tests).
- Another method used in the research was the test method:
  - Psychological tests from the CAS++ battery.

- The Performance Motivation Inventory (AMI) test.

## **Research sample**

In this study, 41 representatives of DJTS, entities subordinate to the Ministry of Youth and Sports, with approximately 30 employees in each department, were involved. Initially, 41 participants were involved in the training, with only about 30 active participants throughout the training period. Of the 30 active participants, 13 made project drafts, and three submitted funding applications immediately after the training, either as project leaders or partners in different projects.

## **Organisation of the research**

The study was initiated in early 2021 and completed in early 2022.

The period they were allowed the training development to match the organization's profile and training needs. This meant developing the training content at the beginning of the year, in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth and Sports; surveying participants about their needs in spring 2021; providing training for two months (April and May), with an evaluation of the impact of the training after six months (an impact evaluation questionnaire applied in November 2021).

## **Discussions and conclusions**

From the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data, it emerged that the general hypothesis is confirmed, namely, that the performance in writing and implementing European projects depends on a series of internal factors (the knowledge/learning dimension: verbal, numerical skills, functional skills, decision-making capacity, dimension motivation - responsibility, role in decision-making, satisfaction, recognition) and external factors such as organizational dynamics: difficulties in team building, financial difficulties; lack of human resources: reduced staff and involved in activities other than writing European projects.

- Regarding the working hypotheses, it was found that The performance in attracting projects with non-reimbursable funds is higher for people with a higher level of verbal, numerical, and functional skills and decision-making capacity (an internal factor that belongs to the individual).

- The performance in attracting projects with non-reimbursable funds is higher for people with a higher motivation level (internal factor related to the individual).
- Performance in accessing funds is determined by organizational dynamics – organizational learning, teamwork, and financial performance (external factor related to the organization).

## **STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EURO DESIGN PROGRAM IN THE FIELD OF SPORTS**

### **Premise**

This research aims to identify the performance factors in completing a training course for accessing European funds by sports managers. Starting from the premise of the existence of some features that orient sports specialists towards this area of specialization, the study aims to demonstrate the fact that, within the occupational profile, some features can be optimized by pursuing a systematic, coherent, and consistent intervention in the field of drafting projects with European funding.

In this study, we started from the comparative analysis of the occupational standards of the sports manager and the project manager.

### **Purpose**

This research aims to identify the performance factors in completing a training course with European funds addressed to representatives of sports organizations in Romania, especially club managers, federation managers, and public and private sports organizations.

### **Objectives of the research**

- Identification of performance factors in completing a European funded training course by sports managers.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of a Eurodesign training program in sports.
- Analysis of the impact of the Eurodesign course six months after the course completion to see the organization's changes and the number of projects written/approved.



### **Research hypotheses**

This study aims to test 3 (three) hypotheses:

H1. Cognitive skills (verbal, numerical, decision-making, functional) influence performance in Eurodesign.

H2. A training program designed and implemented from the perspective of European funds improves the sports management participants' competencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes).

H3. The knowledge and skills acquired during the training course are decisive for the professional performance of the participants.

### **Research methods**

The research methods used in this paper were experiment, test method (CAS++ psychological tests for testing verbal and numerical cognitive skills, functional skills, and decision-making ability), and statistical methods. We used correlations, T-tests, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), and cross-tabulations as statistical methods for data analysis and interpretation.

### **Research stages**

The main research stages were:

1. Registration of the target group. The registration of the participants was made online between 4 and 15 October 2022, based on a Google questionnaire that gathered data about their gender, age, last school graduation, level of English, type of organization, position in the sports structure (most of them were management team members in their sports organizations), number of projects, interest in writing and implementing projects. The registration questionnaire also included self-reports about the participants' knowledge of writing a European project.
2. Initial evaluation of their knowledge and cognitive skill tests on 15 October 2022
3. Delivery of the course, 15 October - 15 December 2022, about 40 hours in total
4. Final evaluation of the participants, 15-20 December 2022
5. Processing the results, December 2022 - Mars 2023

## **Target group**

The research initially involved 125 representatives of Romania's public and private sports structures. Throughout the training course, after several lessons, a part of them dropped out, and only 46 participants completed the course. The profile of the 46 participants who attended the Eurodesign course in sport is shown in Figure 2, according to which there were:

- 41% men and 59% women;
- mostly aged between 35 and 54 years;
- level of education: 24% Bachelor's degree, 54% Master's degree, 15% PhD;
- level of English: 20% beginner, 54% intermediate, 26% advanced.

## **Methodology**

The research variables are shown below:

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Scale</b>
<b>Knowledge</b>	KnowAvg	Knowledge Average: knowledge about implementation (KImplement), writing (KWrite), needs (Kneeds), scope (Kscope), Gantt (KGantt), Budget (KBudget), partners (Kpartners), calls (KCall), dissemination (KMk) (evaluated in two moments, T0 and T1)	5-point Likert scales
<b>IndScore</b>	RELEVANCE	The Relevance criterion: the relevance of the objectives of the action for the development and evolution needs of the participating organizations, the needs and objectives of the participants in the project	30 POINTS
	DESIGN	The Project Design criterion: clarity, completeness, and quality of the work program, including appropriate stages of preparation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and dissemination; Appropriateness and quality of the methodology proposed to address the identified needs; Concordance between project objectives and proposed activities	20 POINTS
	TEAM	The Team criterion – the experience of the implementation team: The extent to which: - the project involves an appropriate combination of complementary participating organizations with the necessary profile, experience, and expertise to implement all aspects of the project successfully; - the distribution of responsibilities and tasks demonstrates the commitment and active contribution of all participating organizations. Effective coordination and communication mechanisms exist between participating organizations and between them and other relevant stakeholders.	20 POINTS

	MK	The Dissemination of Project Results/Impact criterion: Quality of the project result evaluation; Potential impact of the project, quality of the dissemination plan, and quality of the plans to ensure the project's sustainability	30 POINTS
	IndScore	The total score obtained when evaluating the drafts of final projects, according to the financer's evaluation criteria above. The maximum score for all criteria was 100 points: a maximum of 30 points for the Relevance criterion, a maximum of 20 points for the Design criterion, a maximum of 20 points for the Quality of the partnership, and a maximum of 30 points for the Impact criterion. Nineteen participants were performers and produced project drafts evaluated by the facilitator (15%).	100 POINTS
<b>ScoreKnow</b>	KOPPORTUN	Participants' knowledge of known funding opportunities	multiple-choice question
	KPLATFORMU E	Participants' knowledge of the call platforms	multiple-choice question
	KDURATION	Participants' knowledge of the project duration	multiple-choice question
	KFEATURES	Participants' knowledge of the project characteristics	multiple-choice question
	KRESULTS	Participants' knowledge of the project results	multiple-choice question
	KBUDGET	Participants' knowledge of the budget items	multiple-choice question
	KDIFFERENCE	Participants' knowledge of the Gantt chart	multiple-choice question
	KSIMULTANE ITY	Participants' knowledge about the simultaneity of project activities	multiple-choice question
	KSTEPS	Participants' knowledge of the project stages	multiple-choice question
	KTREE	Participants' knowledge about the problem tree and how to write the causes and effects of their organization's problems	multiple-choice question
	KSWOT	Participants' knowledge about the SWOT analysis	multiple-choice question
	KOBSMART	Participants' knowledge of how to write SMART objectives	multiple-choice question
	IDENTIFYSMAR T	Participants' knowledge of how to identify SMART objectives	multiple-choice question
	KPERT	Participants' knowledge of the PERT method	multiple-choice question
	KGANTT	Participants' knowledge of the Gantt chart	multiple-choice question
	KEVALUATIO N	Participants' knowledge of the evaluation tools	multiple-choice question
	KIMPACT	Participants' knowledge about how to measure the impact of a project	multiple-choice question
KDEFRESULT S	Participants' knowledge about the project's results	multiple-choice question	
ScoreKnow	The 46 participants' knowledge of writing a funded project was tested through a final evaluation. If they responded correctly to all the questions, the participants could get a final score of 18 points. The questions were included in an online single-choice/multiple-choice questionnaire, with each item		18 points

		scoring 1 for a correct response and 0 for an incorrect response.	
<b>Experience</b>	ExpAvg	Experience Average: education, English, experience in organisation, experience in projects, the intention of application, certificates, experience in funds, experience in writing	5-point Likert scales and binary variables (Yes, No)
<b>Cognitive skills</b>	T0_Sverbal	Verbal ability at the initial time T0 – before the start of the course	Cognitrom test battery
	T0_Snum	Numerical ability at baseline T0 – before the start of the course	Cognitrom test battery
	T0_Sfunct	Functional ability at the initial time T0 – before the start of the course	Cognitrom test battery
	T0_Cdecide	Decision-making ability at the initial moment T0 – before the start of the course	Cognitrom test battery

## Results

- The 46 participants who attended the course were assessed with Cognitrom tests for their verbal, numerical, functional, and decision-making skills. According to these tests, the 46 participants entered this course with an average score of 2.35 for the four skills (verbal, numerical, functional, and decision-making).
- there are no correlations between managers' skills (measured with Cognitrom and analysed in detail) and the individual score.
- the average of these skills correlates strongly and positively with the individual score ( $R = 0.71$ ).
- there is a very strong positive correlation between knowledge and skills and a very strong positive correlation between knowledge and the final performance of a participant in a training course. A strong positive correlation is also observed between skills and the score achieved in the final individual assessments. Thus, acquiring knowledge and skills increases performance in attracting European funds.
- the main difference between managers before taking classes comes from their knowledge regarding the design of needs analysis ( $T0\_Kneeds = 2.03$ ), marketing/dissemination ( $T0\_KMk = 1.96$ ), how to find partners ( $T0\_Kpartners = 1.72$ ) and how to design the budget ( $T0\_KBudget = 1.65$ ). On the other hand, the main difference between managers after taking classes comes from their knowledge regarding the budget design ( $T1\_KBudget = 0.89$ ), how to find partners ( $T1\_Kpartners = 0.76$ ) and, with the same score, their knowledge about implementation, knowledge about determining the scope of the projects and

knowledge about how and where to find the suitable funds for their organization (T1\_KImplement, T1\_Kscope, T1\_KCall = 0.75). The most significant differences between managers were recorded at T0 – their knowledge about identifying the needs of the organization and target groups, and at T1, their understanding of budget creation; very few managed to outline coherent and balanced budgets about the applicant's guide and project activities.

- These findings highlight the importance of assessing the needs for writing a European project as a first step in defining a project's proper scope, objectives, and activities. Financial knowledge plays a vital role in writing a project. It is also one of the performance criteria in most project guidelines, as the evaluators search for cost-effective projects and allocate appropriate resources for each activity.
- The variance analysis (ANOVA) proves that there are statistically significant differences before and after the course because F (21.49) is more important than F critical (1.62), and the p-value (2.37E-57) is less than the 0.05 threshold.
- To test the second hypothesis, we first checked the impact of previous expertise (education, fund team's experience, project writing experience, previous English level) of the participants in European funds, and then we analysed the importance of the knowledge and skills acquired during the training course for their professional performance.
- Gender, Age, and Education do not correlate with previous experience, IndScore, or ScoreKnow. The knowledge of the English language and experience in the organization correlates to a small extent with the experience average. Thus, previous experience does not impact the participants' performance during classes, so we can deduce that the course greatly influenced the participants.
- there are specific characteristics of the highly effective participants in the course: average English level, Bachelor's studies, and greater adaptability of women to this type of occupation. This information can be helpful for future participants and future trainers in the field of Eurodesign in sport.

## **Conclusions of the thesis**

Our research mainly pursued the following objectives: analyzing good governance from the perspective of attracting European funds for sports, correlations between individual learning, group learning, and organizational learning as prerequisites for performance in attracting European funds, carrying out an analysis of continuous professionalization of managers in sport to underpin the creation of new occupations to keep pace with market needs and opportunities in the field of European funds for sport. Thus, we analyzed in a comparative way theories of sports management, good governance, adult education, the professional profile of the expert in accessing European funds, training methods specific to adult education, good practices in Europe regarding the professionalization of the manager's career in sports, as well as possible improvements in adult training in Europe and Romania.

To link learning and performance, we focused on the relationship between individual learning, group learning, organizational learning, and performance in attracting EU funds. The unique characteristics of adult learning and different participant-centered training methods were highlighted, as well as the importance of English language skills for adults pursuing a career in writing and implementing European projects. We concluded that, given that organizations are composed of individuals, organizations learn through their members. Although the three levels of learning—individual, group, and organizational—are distinct, they are interdependent. Individual learning is considered to be a prerequisite for organizational learning. Thus, theories of individual learning are very important for understanding learning and organizational change resulting from learning. From our analysis and the study of the specialized literature, it emerged that training improves the performance of an organization.

Also, to improve the performance of sports structures in Romania with European funds, we considered it necessary to analyze the skills and abilities needed by a project manager based on the occupational standard. Similarly, the key competencies and skills required of a sports manager were explored, allowing a comparison between the two profiles. From this comparison, it emerged that for a sports manager to become an effective project manager, he must develop knowledge and skills in various fields, especially in administration, mathematics, economics, and accounting.

We have concluded that education and training programs are critical in professionalization, especially in sports management, good governance, and euro design.

To contribute to the improvement of training programs in the field of European sports funds, we developed a training program in Eurodesign. We analyzed the skills needed for a project manager involved in sports projects. In this sense, we drew the guidelines for developing a Eurodesign program in the sports field. This Eurodesign program was tested on three different occasions on other target groups.

Following the pilot course conducted within the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the comparative study Romania-Italy, a series of recommendations were made for developing a European design course, which is the subject of further verification and reflection.

In the last study, we identified the performance factors in the completion of a training course in the field of European funds by sports managers.

The research highlighted that some features could be optimized within the occupational profile by pursuing a systematic, coherent, consistent intervention in drafting projects with European funding. The need for professionalization of occupations in the sports field, whether we are talking about sports manager, project manager, or sports club administrator, and the need for specialization for these respective occupations was highlighted.

It also resulted that the main factors determining the performance in drafting European projects, in order of importance, are knowledge, skills, and previous experience, which denotes the importance and significant impact of the training of sports managers in European design. Thus, the continuous training of sports managers in European design increases the performance in attracting European funds.

The research also showed that, in addition to these conditional factors that determine performance in a European project writing course in the field of sports, there are also several specific factors in their personal and professional biographies, such as average level of English, undergraduate studies, higher education, as well as the adaptability of women to this type of occupation.

Among the objectives of the research project, we can mention the creation of a professional training program for sports managers in the field of European funds, the Development of a new occupational standard - sports project manager, and the Creation of a master's degree in the field of European design in sports.

The results of this research can be effectively shared with various stakeholders, such as policymakers, industry professionals, and academics. Also, the research results could impact future project management policies in Romania or the European Union. The study could also consider how other researchers or organizations can build on these findings and further contribute to understanding strategic management in EU projects.

## **Elements of novelty and originality**

This work can make significant contributions to the development of training initiatives in the field of Eurodesign in sport:

1. Contributions regarding models of Eurodesign courses and laboratories;
2. Contributions regarding the effectiveness of training strategies in the field of adult education;
3. Contributions regarding the research carried out in the comparative analysis of modern training strategies about the psycho-socio-professional profile of the sports manager in Romania and Italy;
4. Contributions regarding existing opportunities in the field of European design;
5. Contributions regarding the effectiveness of training strategies in the field of adult education;
6. Contributions regarding public policy recommendations in the field of accessing and implementing European projects in the field of sports - Romania vs. Italy;
7. Contributions regarding recommendations of new occupations such as Project Manager in sports.



## **Limits of the research**

The first limitation arises from the need for prior research relevant to our topic, especially in sports. Although more research needs to be done to show the experience and understanding requirements for strategic planning skills, a theory of experience and understanding is emerging, the core of which is that skills are derived from the knowledge of management activities. The uniqueness of our article responds to this issue. This was a significant opportunity to identify gaps in the literature and the need for further development in managing European sports funds.

Also, the data collection and the variable measurement methods limited our ability to analyse the results thoroughly. On the other hand, our sample may not reflect the affected or relevant population. Therefore, future studies with larger sample sizes should be developed to identify critical associations between data and to explain the phenomenon of dropping out during training.

By presenting empirical data on the performance factors in completing a training course in European funds for sport, this study significantly contributes to the professionalization of occupations in the field of sport.