

# **Theses of the Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation**

**Sports management, sports policy and sports diplomacy in Hungary after  
the Second World War, with special emphasis on the organizational history  
of the OTSH**

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## **1. Objectives of the dissertation and the delineation of the topic**

In terms of Hungarian and universal history, the history of sports, especially the Olympics, is a very popular and much-researched topic, and many have addressed this issue from a variety of approaches. Especially in connection with the two boycotted Olympics, the games of 1980 and 1984, studies, textbooks, articles, and memoirs have been published extensively in Hungary and abroad too. We are talking about events that have also been affected by global politics and conflicts in the world, making sport and politics inseparable. My research and dissertation also focused mainly on the years 1973-1986, which is the period of the National Office of Physical Education and Sports. At that time, this organization was the main unit responsible for sports management, in cooperation with the Hungarian Olympic Committee. At the beginning of the research, my goal was to explore and write a complex institutional history, with a complete review of the archival material, and with the involvement of literature and personal interviews, and memoirs. The Hungarian state socialist system as a whole is a complex and intricate bureaucratic system, this statement is completely true of sports management and administration. From the beginning of the research, it was striking that the OTSH is a complex organization, which after the reorganization in 1973 was directly responsible for the management of the entire Hungarian sports life. Full centralization and planned management characterized the Hungarian sport of the era, where party instructions played a key role in all decision-making mechanisms. Be it a simple change of athlete or coach club, working or traveling abroad, contractual or study benefits, housing, and car issues, everything is decided by the OTSH, and through it the MSZMP, the party-state. Based on pre-selected aspects and topics, I seek to provide insight into decision-making mechanisms and processes on key issues.

From the point of view of sports history, the Olympics are the most important part of the period I have studied. Even the 1976 Montreal Olympics was loud from political boycotts, but the biggest cultural manifestation of the Cold War superpower opposition was the events of 1980 and 1984. The Cold War period marked a complete confrontation between the countries of the Eastern and Western blocs, primarily the United States and the Soviet Union. This opposition was felt on all fronts, but beyond political, social, economic, and military opposition, culture was not left out either. One important aspect of this was the opposition in the field of sport, culminating in the Moscow and Los Angeles Games. Not even the 1988 Seoul Olympics swam without a boycott, but despite the dangers, the Olympic movement survived the political

battles. The competition that characterized the sport during the Little Cold War had long-term consequences for the entire Olympic movement, including Hungarian sports.

## **2. The applied methodology**

For the first time in my dissertation, the most important aspect is that I would like to present the Hungarian sports management after 1945 with a concrete deep drill, focusing on the OTSH and the Hungarian Olympic movement. I do not want to write a Hungarian sports history after 1945, my goal is not to create a new, public history work. I do not want to write an Olympic history, presenting it from the point of view of Hungarian performance, many people have done this before. On the one hand, I wanted to write an institutional history in terms of genre, in which I present the sports management in Hungary after 1945, with special regard to the OTSH. Within this, I examined the decision-making mechanisms, changes, modifications, and model changes of the principles of sports management, with the staff and the decision-makers. Within the subject of the study, I focused with special attention on the Olympics as the most important event in sports history and political battlefields. To get a proper framework for the presentation of the topic, it was of course necessary to include elements of public history, sports history, state security, but these were not my main aspects when writing the dissertation. Concerning this aspect, my first hypothesis is that the leading tasks of the OTSH are the ongoing Olympic elite sports and the challenges of international sports policy. And mass sport and the control of sports propaganda, although also one of the most important responsibilities of the OTSH and the MOB, received less emphasis between 1973 and 1986.

Secondly, it is very important to emphasize that no comprehensive, institutional, or organizational history work has been done on the National Office of Physical Education and Sports before. In connection with the Olympics, the institution is often mentioned in other writings, but sports leaders have not been addressed in separate works either. No more detailed biographical research was conducted, but rather the state security line was involved in research in the field of sports diplomacy. Research on the history of the Olympic Games, especially the OTSH documents and the minutes of the meetings of the President and Vice-Presidents, have been used by many, but no systematic writing has been published on this topic. Although my work is not a completely written OTSH story, I considered it important to create an OTSH organizational history, taking into account the institutional historical aspects, which can be found in the first main chapter of my dissertation. I believe that the novelty of the topic lies mainly in this, as this work is partly an OTSH institution and organizational history, built on deep wells in sports management and sports diplomacy, and focused primarily on personal

decision-making and the presentation of decision-making mechanisms. It is important that I not only want to describe the history of an OTSH institution, but I would also like to insert this period into the history of Hungarian sports management institutions after 1945. From an institutional historical point of view, I considered it important to reconstruct the most important segments and factors of sports management, and for the sake of easier transparency, I summarized some things in figures, which can also be found in the appendices and the body text. According to my second hypothesis related to this, in Hungarian sports management, regardless of the continuous reorganizations, direct management from above can be felt throughout, the nature of which did not change during the existence of the OTSH. I hypothesized that the OTSH, as an institution, was much more than a body responsible for simple sports management. We can talk about a well-organized, carefully built institution, which was responsible for all aspects of Hungarian sports.

The basis of my third set of criteria was that in the past I had not analyzed the key individuals and decision-makers concerning the OTSH and the Olympic movement who were faithfully involved in sports management of the era, faithful to their primary and secondary executive roles. I assumed that most of the sports leaders were loyal party members who obeyed the will of the higher state. I also wanted to examine these people, also on a biographical level, in my research, I tried to gather as much material as possible for thorough, realistic imaging. There were qualitative resources to help me with this, most notably personal interviews. In Hungarian sports management after 1956, we find those who have undergone many reorganizations and model changes but have played an important, leading role throughout their political credibility or expertise, until their retirement. These people were indispensable components of a state socialist bureaucracy that made important and less important decisions under direct control, based on a top-down, party-command system. My hypothesis set at the beginning of the research was that the majority of sports leaders were simple primary executives who, although committed to Hungarian sports, simply did not have a say in certain issues due to the party-command system. The majority of those in leadership positions were loved by athletes because they tried to manage sport with their best interests in mind. At the same time, their political power was not enough for these sports leaders to make a difference in key decisions, such as the issue of Olympic participation. My third hypothesis in this regard is that the system of decision-making mechanisms within sports management was extremely diverse and complex, which the OTSH and the Hungarian sports management could only handle and supervise with great difficulty and coordinate properly.

Fourthly, I considered it important to highlight the two most important events within the era from the point of view of Hungarian sports diplomacy. For the 1980 and 1984 Olympics, I assumed that politics and diplomacy interfered heavily in sports governance for both opposing blocs. We are talking about one of the biggest cultural conflicts of the Little Cold War, it is worth examining the domestic and international processes, so the Hungarian aspects can be inserted into a more complete picture. I have presented these events and decisions in a separate chapter. In connection with the Moscow Games, I assumed that the Hungarian and Soviet sports management was not disturbed by the absence from the West, because they hoped for more medals, and there is a very strong topos that we had to travel to the Olympics because it opened up more medals. Of course, there was also a refutation of this sports diplomacy topos. In connection with the absence from the East in 1984, I assumed that the entire Hungarian sports life suffered a huge blow, as the decision was exclusively political, and the athletes drank their juices from the battle, as in 1980. In 1984, perhaps Moscow's rule was looser than in the Brezhnev era, yet why did the Olympic Committee of every Eastern country implement the Soviet decision so disciplined? What were the positions on the side of the Hungarian sports management and state apparatus? Is the issue of the politically challenging Summer Olympics on the agenda of OTSH presidency meetings between 1979 and 1986? During this period, the organization also paid attention to the issues of mass sports and sports propaganda, and based on the examined documents, these issues were equally important tasks to be solved by the institutions of sports management. My fourth hypothesis in this regard is that Hungarian sports officials, from the OTSH and the MOB, did not have a meaningful say in the processes related to international politics and the decisions of the Soviet fraternity. These were coordinated at levels above the sports leadership, and the OTSH presidency had only a primary executive role concerning the politically important decisions.

Finally, I considered it important to get to know the archival material and persons of the Central and Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist People's Party and to map out the means of controlling the state socialist system in the field of sports. During the existence of the OTSH, the Physical Education and Sports Committee continued to exist alongside the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist People's Party, and an Advisory Committee was established in addition to the Chairman of the OTSH. The Central Committee exercised close oversight over sports management. The CB has often insisted too rigidly on political implementation mechanisms. Among the TB members, we find many people who were also

members of the PB and KB or KISZ-KB. The operation of the organization was a guarantee for more effective, direct communication between the sports leadership and the party leadership. It became possible to directly supervise the implementation of decisions, to control the management of the OTSH. Although the Committee on Physical Education and Sport was a significant organization, it cannot be considered an independent institution, as its operation was directly supervised by the Central Committee. My final hypothesis is that the close control of the party-state, in addition to the positive effects, was after some time an obstacle to development, and due to the constant control of the Central Committee, the quality of sports work and OTSH work began to deteriorate. I believe that the Physical Education and Sports Committee operating under the auspices of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist People's Party can be considered the primary control body of the party-state, which was above the OTSH and the sports management and overruled its decisions. I hypothesized that political control also prevailed in state security observations, and I highlighted a few examples in my dissertation.

### **3. Scientific achievements of the dissertation**

My first assumption was that as the most important task of the OTSH, Olympic elite sports, and international sports policy challenges are constantly present among the most important issues of the institution. I hypothesized that the control of mass sports and sports propaganda, regardless of whether they were one of the most important responsibilities of the OTSH and the MOB, received less emphasis between 1973 and 1986, during the existence of the OTSH. This hypothesis of mine has only been partially confirmed. Although the OTSH was responsible for its successful participation in the biggest world events in the field of competitive sports, in the case of the two boycotted Olympics, as a decision-making institution, it was completely pushed into the background. The management of the organization and all the departments worked to make Hungarian competitive sports as successful as possible, but the OTSH does not play a significant role in issues related to international politics and diplomacy. The organization also had a direct duty to inform and report to the party leadership and the KB through the Physical Education and Sports Committee, which functioned alongside the Central Committee. Mass sports, as well as school and population mass education, on the other hand, are strongly present in the decision-making of the institution throughout. In this regard, the OTSH and its subclasses play a crucial role in short- and long-term development concepts.

According to my second hypothesis, in Hungarian sports management, regardless of the continuous reorganizations, direct management from above can be felt throughout, the nature of which did not change during the existence of the OTSH. I hypothesized that the OTSH, as an institution, is much more than a body responsible for simple sports governance. I thought we could talk about an organized, carefully built institution that was responsible for all aspects of Hungarian sports. This assumption of mine has been fully substantiated. The National Office of Physical Education and Sports was an organization with a relatively small number of employees, but with a wide range of responsibilities, which supervised the entire Hungarian sports life, from competitive sports to student Olympics to rural spartakiads. The development of the sports infrastructure in Hungary was also included in the competencies, as was the further development of the financial incentive system for athletes. The control of the party-state operated with special attention over the centrally highlighted sports associations.

My third hypothesis was that the system of decision-making mechanisms within sports management is an extremely diverse and complex thing, which the OTSH and the Hungarian sports management could only handle and supervise with great difficulty. This hypothesis was refuted in my research. In general, a good flow chart can be drawn, which covered many areas and issues in decision-making in Hungary. On many topics, the OTSH has followed a uniform practice and the organization and operational rules of the institution have clarified the powers and responsibilities. However, this has not been further developed over the years, although the tasks of the OTSH have been steadily expanding and the tasks have become more and more diverse. It would also have been necessary to develop the cadre of the OTSH's subdivisions. However, this was not possible due to the constant lack of money.

According to my fourth hypothesis, Hungarian sports officials, from the OTSH and the MOB, did not have a meaningful say in the processes related to international politics and the decisions of the Soviet fraternity. These were coordinated at levels above the sports leadership, and the OTSH presidency had only a primary executive role concerning the politically important decisions. This assumption has been proven both in the history and operation of the OTSH and in the context of the Olympic Games. Most notably, in the case of the two truncated Olympics, Moscow and Los Angeles, it can be seen that there was a top-down, Soviet-led decision-making process where the National Olympic Committees had no loophole. The countries of the socialist bloc were not given a free hand and could not pursue an independent sports policy on the international stage. They followed the ideas set by the Soviets and the party

leadership of the member states orderly controlled the sports leadership in implementing all the decisions.

My final hypothesis was that full control of the party-state, in addition to the positive effects, was an obstacle to development after a while, due to the excessive supervision of the Central Committee, the quality of sports work and OTSH work began to deteriorate. I assumed that the Physical Education and Sports Committee operating under the auspices of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist People's Party can be considered the primary control body of the party-state, which was above the OTSH and sports management and overruled its decisions. This assumption of mine was also proved during the research and writing of the dissertation. Few politicians were working in the state socialist system, nor was it any different in sports management. Mainly due to infrastructural developments, the often negative assessment of applications, the improper operation of the support system, and the inadequate development of the financial incentive system for athletes, Hungarian sport also lost its image within the socialist bloc. The paradigm shift of 1978 temporarily steered the processes within the OTSH, with a different kind of presidency led by István Buda. Ultimately, however, most of the decisions were not made on a professional but a political basis. Among them are many erroneous ideas that slowed down and in some disciplines delayed the development of competition and mass sports in Hungary.

In the 1980s, the Olympic movement, including Hungarian sports, fell victim to international Cold War political battles. Sport has perhaps never intertwined as spectacularly with politics as it has in this decade. After the boycotted Olympics, the world's leading powers also realized that it was pointless to resolve their conflicts and disagreements by engaging the sports world in its full depth. Both the U.S. and the Soviets made a big mistake. The most interesting thing is that the Winter Olympics, which were held in opposite political blocs in both years, took place in peace. No principle or consistency can be discovered in the politics of the great powers in these two cases. In fact, the boycott did not achieve its goal in either case. 1980, 1984, but even in the also truncated 1988 games, only athletes drank the juice of clashes between blocks and countries. The transformation of the world order observed in 1989-90 and the successive changes of the regime created new opportunities and frameworks for the international sports world, including Hungarian sports management and sports diplomacy.



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### List of publications related to the dissertation

#### Hungarian book chapters (1)

1. **Debreczeni, M.:** Hidegháború és a sport: a moszkvai és a Los Angeles-i olimpiák.  
In: Sport, politika és történelem. Szerk.: Károlyi Elisabeth, L'Harmattan Kiadó, Budapest, 32-38, 2014. ISBN: 9789632369525

#### Hungarian scientific articles in Hungarian journals (6)

2. **Debreczeni, M.,** Hegedűs, Z.: 20. századi egyetemes történeti szöveggyűjtemény-interaktív tananyagok a középiskolai és egyetemi történelem oktatásban.  
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3. **Debreczeni, M.:** Az Országos Testnevelési és Sporthivatal szervezettörténete 1973-1978 között.  
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