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AN UNUSED OPPORTUNITY  
OR THE WAY OF PROGRESSION? –  
WHAT DOES TENDER PROJECT MEAN  
AND HOW CAN WE BE SUCCESSFUL IN IT?

Numberless researches and theories were born in the topic of project and project management during the last decades. However there is an area, which interpretation is different from the traditional approaches in several aspects: the definition and interpretation of tender projects has been less in the focus of researchers so far. In the first part of the study I am going to partly make up for this shortcoming; then I would like to underline the surprisingly important role of tender projects through the example of the higher education sector. My empirical research was focusing especially on the cross-border tender projects. I analysed the projects implemented in the frame of cross-border co-operation (CBC) programmes between 2007 and 2013. I had focused on the projects of the Hungary-Croatia, Slovenia-Hungary and Austria-Hungary CBC programmes and tried to identify the role of higher educational institutions. An intention of the study was to draw the attention to the appearance of higher education in the cross-border tender projects and based on the previous empirical researches to highlight the possible key of success. During the research I have concluded that seven factors contribute substantially to the success of cross-border projects. These are the role of the project manager, the consciousness of the project processes, the on the job type knowledge sharing, the competences deriving from the project manager personality, the learned competences of the project manager, his or her external motivation and internal motivation factors. As a lock-up of my essay I have conceived those steps, along which a higher educational institution can tread on the project management maturity path.

## Definition and interpretation of tender project

The project definitions and its interpretations for tender projects

Numberless definitions of project management concept were born during the last decades. These definitions stress for example the unique, novel and complex nature of projects, or emphasize that it should have defined goal, budget and timeframe. Since the focus of my research is on the tender projects, in order to find the appropriate concept it could be interesting to examine different traditional project approaches and see which items are most frequently mentioned by the authors. I have collected the project concepts from the most cited authors and created an extract from the elements of the definitions (Table 1).

The described 11 definition elements are not fully overlap with each other regarding the content of the projects. Several factors, however, are mentioned by significant part of the authors. In the Table 1 we can see that out of the 11 examined definitions nine authors mentioned the defined timeframe with specified start and end date as main feature of a project. It can be concluded that it is the most common recurring item among the project definitions. Eight of the analysed authors are considered important to emphasize the unique nature of projects and seven of them to have the specific, concrete goals. Thus, these elements are considered definitely important in connection with the project definitions.

Definition element	Number of mentions	Authors
defined timeframe with specified start and end date	9	Graham, Turner-Cochrane, Aggteleky-Bajna, Görög, PMBOK, ISO 9000, Madauss, Kerzner, Pinto
unique nature	8	Turner-Cochrane, Aggteleky-Bajna, Görög, PMBOK, ISO 9000, Madauss, Gareis, Verzuh
defined, concrete goal	7	Graham, Görög, PMBOK, ISO 9000, Kerzner, Gareis, Pinto
defined budget	6	Graham, Turner-Cochrane, Görög, ISO 9000, Kerzner, Pinto
using human and other resources	5	Graham, Turner-Cochrane, ISO 9000, Kerzner, Pinto

using human and other resources	5	Graham, Turner-Cochrane, ISO 9000, Kerzner, Pinto
novel approach	5	Turner-Cochrane, Aggteleky-Bajna, Görög, Madauss, Pinto
temporary nature	3	Graham, Gareis, Verzuh
complexity	3	Aggteleky-Bajna, Görög, Madauss
practical implications	1	Aggteleky-Bajna
multifunctional nature	1	Kerzner
customer orientation	1	Pinto

Table 1 Certain element of the project concepts and their frequency in the literature  
Sources: Graham, 1979; Turner-Cochrane, 1993; Aggteleky-Bajna, 1994; Görög, 1999; Madauss, 2000; ISO 9000, 2001; Verzuh, 2006; PMBOK, 2006; Kerzner, 2006; Gareis, 2007; Pinto, 2010

In my view, however none of the above described definitions can be transferred directly to the examination of tender projects. Not all the conceptual elements shown in Table 1 can be interpreted for the tender projects. In my opinion the novel approach and the unique nature play lesser role in the tender projects, as well as the complexity and multifunctional features.

On the other hand, using the above mentioned criteria we can state that the tender projects can be described by a collection of these items:

- defined budget: granted amount of subsidy with the national and own contributions;
- defined timeframe with specified start and end date: determined timeframe in the subsidy contract;
- defined, concrete goal: fulfilment of the activities, indicators and outputs outlined in the accepted application form;
- using human and other resources: granted subsidy, involved staff and equipment;
- practical implications: in case of tender projects are also common requirement to create results applicable in the practice;
- customer orientation: to achieve the project's target group and its satisfaction.

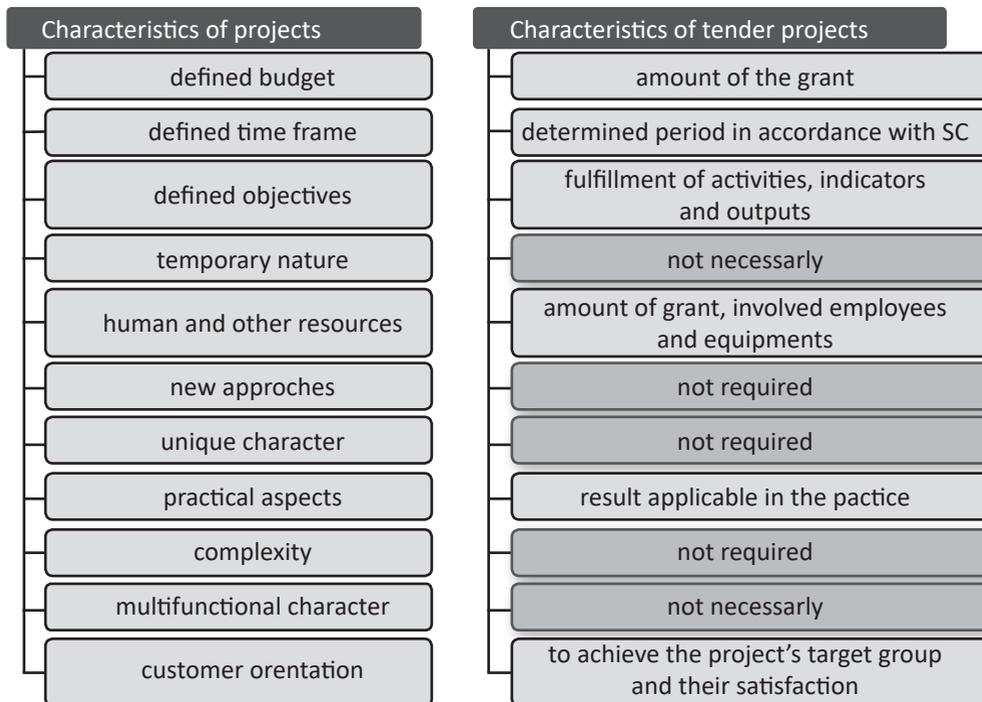


Figure 1 The characteristics of projects and tender projects  
 Source: own research, 2016

Looking for factual definition for the tender project is not an easy task, since as I have mentioned, there is scarcer literature background. Based on a generally accepted approach the tender project is a project, which financial background is provided by a financial contribution of the European Commission. Thanks to this (financial) instrument each project collaborates to achieve the long-term goals of the European Union (European Commission, 2014).

Based on the Project Life Cycle Management Guide issued by the European Committee projects are series of activities, which goal is to achieve the stated objectives till the given deadline in the granted budget (European Commission, 2004:8). This definition is fundamentally does not differ from the traditional approaches.

However, it also describes that a tender project has:

- clearly defined stakeholders, which includes the primary target groups and end-users as well;
- clearly defined coordination, management and financing rules;
- monitoring and evaluation system;
- appropriate financial and economic corroboration, to ensure that the achievements made by the project outperform expenses (European Commission, 2004:8).

In my opinion this supplement can also not be considered as tender project definition, primarily because the last thought - since we cannot talk about revenues or profits in the examined tender projects. The interpretation of expenses is same way relevant, if we are analysing the sustainability of the project results or the necessary additional expenses not funded by project. Determination of the stakeholders, coordinating organization and the monitoring, nonetheless, are important elements in this area as well. To aggregate the above mentioned I was looking for a definition which is valid for the tender projects and includes meaningful elements. So I accepted partially Pinto's approach for the projects, since it contains the most desirable items, as defined budget and timeframe, given resources, specific objectives and customer-orientation. If these elements are completed with the characteristics given by the European Commission, a total picture of the tender project concept will be established.

A tender project is a project which

- financial background is provided by the financial contribution granted by the European Committee or other external supporting institution;
- stakeholders are clearly defined;
- has clearly defined coordination, management and financing rules;
- has monitoring and evaluation system.
- Furthermore it has defined budget and timeframe, given resources, specific objectives and customer-orientation.

The project success definitions and its interpretations for tender projects

As a project never affects a single person, we can talk about a number of target groups and stakeholders regarding the projects. So it can be also stated that all stakeholder consider different things as project success.

In my opinion this supplement can also not be considered as tender project definition, primarily because the last thought - since we cannot talk about revenues or profits in the examined tender projects. The interpretation of expenses is same way relevant, if we are analysing the sustainability of the project results or the necessary additional expenses not funded by project. Determination of the stakeholders, coordinaing organization and the monitoring, nonetheless, are important elements in this area as well.

As Freeman and Beale said, an architect see the success in the aesthetic appearance, an engineer in the technical skills, an accountant in the within the budget spent amount, a human resource manager in the majority of employee satisfaction, while a CEO sees the success in the stock market value (Freeman-Beale, 1992:8–17).

So the judgement of the project success is not an exact science, and there is no one good solution or exclusive approach.

The relevant literature is highly diverse, many researchers tried to quantify the project success or determine objective indicators for that. In the following I give an overview about the different definitions of the project success, and I will attempt to describe the success of the tender projects through these approaches.

*Table 2* shows the general project success approaches and their descriptive adaptation for the tender projects, according to my own interpretation.

<b>Authors</b>	<b>General project success approaches</b>	<b>Tender project success approaches (own interpretation)</b>
<b>Görög</b>	achieving the general objectives and characteristics (time, cost, quality)	completion and closing of project within the given deadline and budget
	meet strategic goals	starting tender projects, which are in line with the organization's strategic objectives, has the necessary competencies for the task
	stakeholder satisfaction	satisfaction of the applicant, the control bodies and the target groups of the project

Authors	General project success approaches	Tender project success approaches (own interpretation)
<b>Kerzner</b>	project manager and project team	the project manager coordinates the project and prepares the requests for payment, so his/her job directly contributes to the success; while the project team complete the undertaken tasks
	home institution	the home institution can contribute to the success through its staff, their competences and assistance
	consumer organizations	the feedbacks and the satisfaction of the project target group can generate further projects
<b>Verzuh</b>	consensus among the project team, the customers and the management regarding the project's objectives	the existence of the consistency between the applicant organization and the cooperating organization in the planning and implementation
	the progress can be measured with a plan that shows the entire route and clearly identifies the responsibilities	creation of progress reports which include the implemented tasks and their performers
	constant and efficient communication among the people involved into the project	reaching the target groups is required in tender projects, what must also demonstrate a variety of ways
	regulated scope	a tender project will be supported within delimited geographical limits and to perform defined tasks
	management support	the support of the management and its appearance at certain representation events can increase the prestige, the awareness, thus the success of the tender project

<b>Authors</b>	<b>General project success approaches</b>	<b>Tender project success approaches (own interpretation)</b>
<b>Kendra - Taplin</b>	project manager competences	the project manager coordinates and manages the tender project, and as the people who is preparing the progress reports plays important role in the success
	performance evaluation system	the control and monitoring bodies also expect the performance evaluation of the project manager and other staff working on it
	business processes	the control and monitoring bodies also expect the transparency of business process in the projects
	project organizational structures	the temporary nature of the tender projects (similarly to general projects) can causes problems in the organisational structure, so the appropriate infiltration of the project into the structure can contribute to the success
<b>Shenhar et al.</b>	project efficiency (conformity in time and cost)	closing the project within the given timeframe and budget
	the effect on customer (customer satisfaction)	the satisfaction of the applicant organisation, the control bodies and the project target group
	business success	tender project rarely generate revenues, however their economic benefits in the sustainability of organizational operation are significant
	preparing for the future	tender projects can often contribute to the future development of the organisation – it is easier to implement a development in the frame of a tender project and its grant, than sustain it from own resources

Table 2 The dimensions of project success and their interpretation for tender projects  
Sources: own compilation based on Görög, 1996:15–21; Verzuh, 2006:22–24; Kerzner, 2006:7; Kendra-Taplin, 2004:30–45; Shenhar et al., 2001:699–725

An intention of this study was to draw the attention to the appearance of higher education in the cross-border tender projects and based on the previous empirical researches to highlight the possible key of success. In the next chapter I am going to introduce the emergence role of tender projects in the operation of higher educational institutions.

### **The emergence role of tender projects in the operation of higher educational institutions**

Working in the higher education sector sometimes look like balancing on a scale. The most important activities are around the education, but it is expected to make researches, publications or take care of the rising generation, looking for talented students, as well. It can be complicated not just from the aspect of time management, but sometimes from the aspect of financial background, as well. This is the point where the tender projects “come into the picture”.

Since Hungary acceded to the European Union, numerous tender opportunities became available for example for universities and colleges, as well. These calls for proposals supported some educational tasks, like talent management, staff improvement, inner trainings etc. and also supported the higher educational researches, as well. These EU projects often helped the institutions to develop their infrastructure and optimize their staff, or educational portfolio. Meantime due to the changes in the financial structure of the higher education and to the demographic “hole” in Hungary’s society, unfortunately these projects usually meant the basis of some educational or research work.

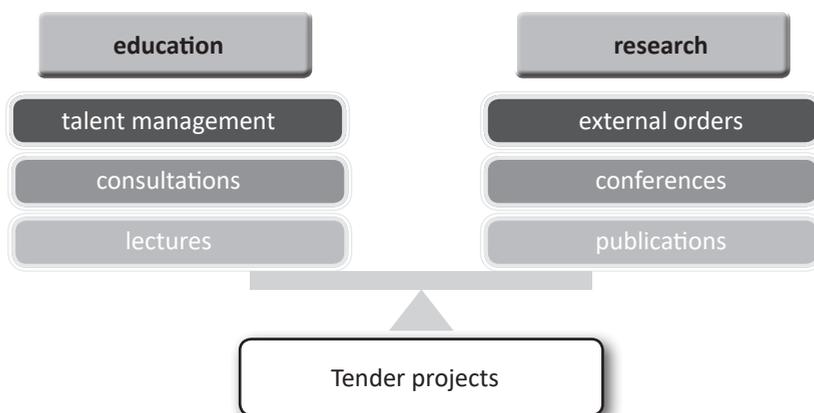


Figure 2 The supporting role of tender projects in higher education work  
Source: own research, 2016

These above processes meant that more and more higher educational institution were forced to apply not just to nationally funded projects (like TÁMOP, TIOP) but also to European Territorial Programs, as well.

Since the 1990s the European Union has paid more and more attention to support cross-border developments both in its own outer boundaries and in the border regions of future member states. Mostly public or public equivalent bodies, non-profit organisations can apply for funding: national, regional or local authorities, municipalities, universities, non-profit organisations and associations. The subsidy is quite high; beside the 85 per cent ERFA funding each organisation gets ten more per cent national funding, as well.



Figure 3 The structure of financial background of cross-border project  
Source: own research, 2016

Universities lying on the supported programme areas took advantage of these opportunities offered by the territorial programs. From the statistics of the cross-border co-operation (later CBC) programs it is displayed that 10–30 per cent of the total supported project were implemented with the participation of universities.

I have made researches in the western border region of Hungary and examined three cross-border programs: the program between Hungary and Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia and Hungary and Austria.

In the CBC program between Hungary and Croatia a total of 154 projects were supported in the period 2007–2013. Among these 154 projects there were 30 that were partly or fully implemented by universities. From Hungary three universities were concerned: University of Pécs, University of Kaposvár and the University of Pannonia through the Nagykanizsa Campus.

In the Slovenia-Hungary CBC program a total of 41 projects were implemented in the examined period, five with the participation of universities. In this case only one Hungarian university was concerned in three projects, the University of Pannonia.

Finally in the program between Hungary and Austria a total of 86 projects were supported between 2007 and 2013. Among these projects there were 22 partly or fully implemented by universities. From Hungary five universities were concerned: West-Hungarian University, Széchenyi István University, University of Pannonia, Markusovszky University and the Corvinus University.

	<b>Hungary-Croatia CBC Program</b>	<b>Slovenia-Hungary CBC Program</b>	<b>Austria-Hungary CBC Program</b>
<b>Total number of projects</b>	154	41	86
<b>Total number of involved partners</b>	616	190	358
<b>Number of projects with university participation</b>	30	5	22
<b>Number of universities involved into projects</b>	3 • University of Pécs • University of Pannonia • University of Kaposvár	1 • University of Pannonia	5 • West-Hungarian University • Széchenyi István University • University of Pannonia • Markusovszky University • Corvinus University

Table 3 The appearance of universities in cross-border programs  
Source: own research, 2016

The topics of these projects performed by universities were mostly preparing common educational programs, student exchange programs or summer schools. On the other hand strengthen the external connections was also an important element, through common researches or commonly organized events.

### **The key of success – experiences of empirical researches**

#### Methodology of the empirical researches

During the last two years I have examined the projects implemented in three different cross-border co-operation programmes (Hungary-Croatia IPA Cross-border Co-operation Program 2007–2013, Slovenia-Hungary Cross-border Co-operation Program 2007–2013, Austria-Hungary Cross-border Co-operation Program 2007–2013).

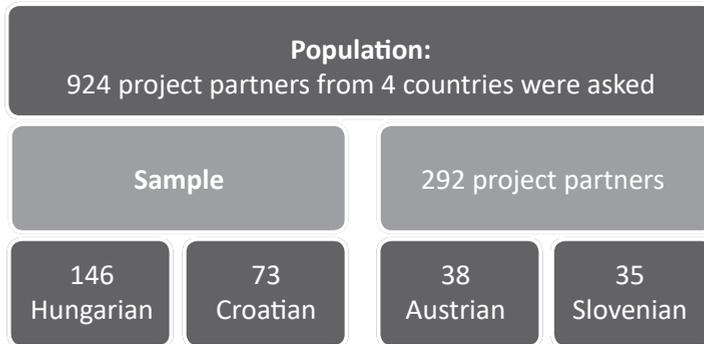


Figure 4 The characteristics of empirical research sample

Source: own research, 2014-2016

My goal was to explore the main characteristics of the implementing organisations, the key criteria and influencing factors of the project success. In order to that I attempted to accost all institutions have taken part in the above mentioned CBC program projects.

I have sent my trilingual questionnaires to a total of 924 organisations in Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia and Austria. These project partners have meant the population of my empirical research. In *Figure 4* it can be seen that I had sum 292 responses from the four countries: 146 from Hungary, 73 from Croatia, 38 from Austria and 35 from Slovenia. Here I have to notice that Hungary was concern in all the three examined CBC programmes that is the reason of the higher respondents' number from Hungary.

#### Results of the empirical researches

Based on the literature overview I supposed that the **tender project success can be measured by the three elements of the “iron triangle”: quality, time and budget.**

Regarding the success criteria of projects I involved 16 variables into the factor analyses. The analyses proved three success criteria with 0,841 KMO values, which compressed 9 variables from the original 16.

The total variance ratio, as the index of the explanatory capacity of the factors analyses was 62,188%, which also supports the success of analyses.

We can conclude that we cannot determine the tender project success with the elements of the “iron triangle” and we should define new criteria.

- Time factor:
  - implementation of activities meet deadline
  - project closing on schedule
  - meet reporting and correction deadlines
- Project management success:
  - project outputs realised
  - project indicators achieved
  - project activities performed
- Satisfaction of target group
  - the project reached its target groups
  - satisfaction of target groups members of the target group participated in project events (Kaszás et al., 2016)

Furthermore based on the literature overview **I have assumed four main project success influencing factors:**

- **organisational structure,**
- **knowledge sharing at the organisation,**
- **motivation of the project managers,**
- **competences of the project managers.**

In order to define the crucial affecting elements of tender project success I have used regression analyses. The independent variables were the details of the above mentioned four topics; while the defined tender project success criteria constitute the dependent variables.

Checking the results of the regression analyses we can conclude that the role of project manager in the organisational structure is essential. Those institutions could be successful in tender project management, in which...

- the project manager is situated between the top management and heads of different departments in the organisational structure,
- the project manager is primarily a coordinator and decision-maker,
- the project manager has the right to command and control the activities of the project participants,
- the project manager directs the organizational unit established especially for project purpose.

These elements can help notably in keeping the designed time schedule.

The **consciousness of project processes in the organizational** structure is also important. In a successful organisation...

- a high-level coordination and succession is realized between the projects,
- has significant social capital,
- there is significant potential to create applications (necessary knowledge, expertise and experience).

These can give the background for the usage of project management planning tools.

Regarding the knowledge sharing it was conducted that the **on the job type of developments** are important, like a coaching or mentoring system. So in a successful institution there is...

- coaching system (assists a certain employee to develop the competencies that are needed for the project),
- mentoring (the mentor is available as an advisor if it's required),
- grant application counsellor (an expert who provides help in the organization in planning projects),
- public procurement counsellor (an expert who provides help mainly in arranging and certifying the procurements).

Keeping the time schedule and satisfying the indicators, outputs of the projects, some **project management competences** are indispensable. There are some personal skills, **deriving from personality** that statistically proven way can help this, like:

- the ability to collaborate,
- attitude for teamwork,
- good adaptability.

There are other, learned, **methodological skills** that can contribute especially to the contact making, and clear communication with the partners, like

- clear goal definition,
- being result-oriented,
- ability to make decisions,
- identifying problems and suggestions for solution,
- cautious and efficient risk management.

Regarding the motivation of the project manager I have to mention that **both the external and internal motivation** can work in order to implement successful projects. The project managers could be motivated by:

- financial and social security ensured by the work,
- the status guaranteed by the work,
- the salary,

- the potential to be creative that lies in the job,
- the intellectual incentive and challenge that the job involves,
- the potential to develop that the job involves,
- the independence and individual work duty ensured by the job,
- the diversity that the job involves.

The primary research proved that the tender projects implemented in the analysed cross-border cooperation programs are influenced by some organizational and individual factors.

I also assumed that there are no significant differences among the project success influencing factors in the three studied programs, and the same or at least very similar affecting factors can determine the success (Kaszás et al, 2016).

### **Discussion - The first steps towards the project management maturity**

In the study I have drawn the attention to the project success influencing elements in case of tender projects. Once we know the affecting factors, we can define those steps that an organization should do in order to be successful and reach a maturity in project management.

As a closure I present the most common problems of the organisations based on the above mentioned criteria and influencing factors; and formulat those steps that can help on them.

First of all for those organizations which can **hardly keep the deadlines** I suggest first of all to solve the problem of the substitution of legally authorized signatories. Because of the representation duties sometimes days go by till a leader sign a project document. It is improper in the world of projects. As an example I can mention some universities, which have installed new rules regarding project document signatures and delegated this authority to lower levels.

Some organizations have **problems with the project management methodologies** and do not know the project planning tools, for example. Solving this problem mini courses (about for example time-planning or logical relationships of the activities) can be initiated by the Technical Secretariat, since they have the proper knowledge and tools, which may be transmitted to the project partners. I am convinced that the Technical Secretariats are able to organize these kinds of mini-courses and the potential applicants would take part on these courses. This training can be important from another aspect, as well: the applicants need more moderate and better designed indicator- and output planning, because in many cases the partners are not been able to meet these. A full description of these elements in the application form can be an advantage as early as the evaluation of the submitted proposals, as it shows the candidate's professional preparedness and sense of reality.

There are organisations that **have not paid enough attention to the target groups** of their projects. In this case I suggest identifying the proper communication channels, tools and not preparing leaflets about the project data. Experiences show neither the public nor the enterprises are not interested in the project information and the presentation of the partnership. Project publications should be much innovative, more noticeable and less conventional. So these should be more customer- or target group oriented and emphasize the benefits of the project for these groups.

The trust and so the **professional network** of an organization can be huge advantages in cross-border projects. I suggest the organizations to keep their contact active, for example through newsletters or partner parties. Networking can be helped by sending newsletters to our partners on monthly basis, which briefly outline the institutional events that have occurred and are also affected by. So the partners do not be noticed by the media when we win a project in which they might be interested. Year opening or closing partner meetings can also help to activate our contacts, where an organisation can regale its current partners, gives them a small gift. These little things can help to strengthen the relationship between the organizations.

Some organizations **do not have enough experiences** in cross-border projects. They have to use those matchmaking surfaces are offered by the Technical Secretariats, like the program webpages or the event. Participation on matchmaking events can also be successful. To these events we should arrive with already existing per-page project ideas as a draft, in which we can mark the potentially eligible organizations as well.

I also have to mention that the organization's interest to strive to keep the staffs, who have already gained experience in cross-border or other types of projects. The employees should be encouraged to participate in project management trainings, or on informational workshops and conferences organized by the Technical Secretariat.

So they can get specific information about the particular characteristics of the program. This accumulated knowledge can be extremely useful for the organisation in the long run.

### **Conclusion**

As a conclusion we can state that the tender projects should be treated differently from the general projects, since there are significant differences in its definition and interpretation. On the other hand the tender projects are project themselves, so we must not abandon what we know about project management. These general theories are the bases of the tender project interpretations.

In the first part of my study I highlighted that we need a little modified thinking if we are dealing with tender projects and we need some new ways exploring them. To that end I compiled a perception for the tender projects.

A tender project is a project which

- financial background is provided by the financial contribution granted by the European Committee or other external supporting institution;
- stakeholders are clearly defined;
- has clearly defined coordination, management and financing rules;
- has monitoring and evaluation system.
- Furthermore it has defined budget and timeframe, given resources, specific objectives and customer-orientation.

After that I presented the importance of the cross-border tender projects through the example of the higher educational institutions and defined the tender project success criteria as follow:

- Time factor: implementation of activities meet deadline, project closing on schedule, meet reporting and correction deadlines.
- Project management success: project outputs realised, project indicators achieved, project activities performed.
- Satisfaction of target group: the project reached its target groups, satisfaction of target groups, members of the target group participated in project events.

Finally I concluded that there are lot of elements that can affect the project success in the border region. In *Figure 5* we can see a summary about these elements.

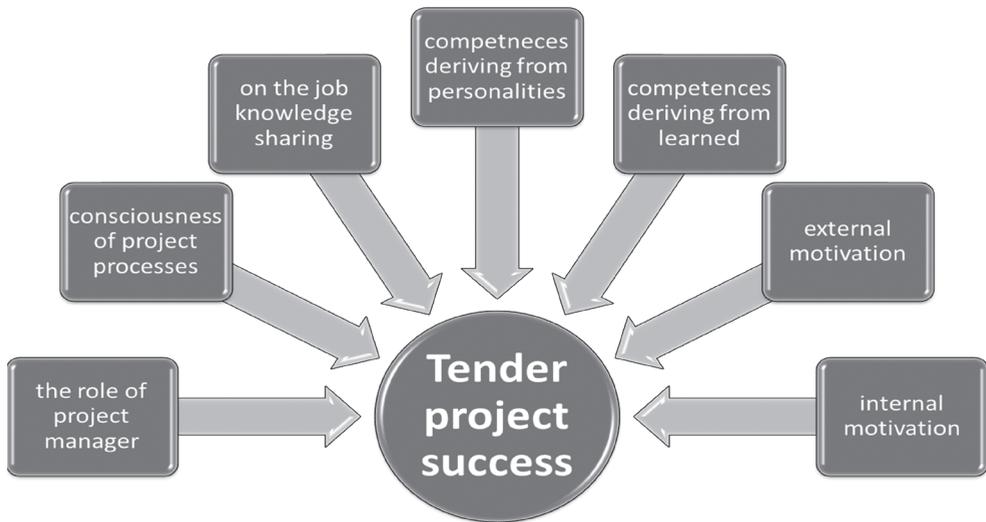


Figure 5 The project success influencing factors in case of cross-border projects

Source: own research, 2014–2016

As a closure I presented the most common problems of organisations that can hamper a project to be successful; and formulate those steps that can help to be successful in a tender project.

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During the researches she examines the success of the European Territorial Co-operation Programs and try to identify the key factors of the success.

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