Projects' success and respective factors that produce it – The case of Higher Education Institutions in Albania

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Abstract

Organizations and institutions are in a continuous change. What remains unchanged is their need for new and continuous participation in international and national projects, as an incentive to adapt to innovations and to develop cooperation. In order to realize all the set objectives and fulfil initial goals, it goes without saying that a project should be based on a framework of criterions, considered as crucial for a successful implementation and realization of projects.

The paper addresses such framework, criteria and the related issues with a special focus on HEIs in Albania. Through the review of a rich literature, we have worked on the definition of a project, the development phases, as well as some projects undertaken by HEIs. The methodology used consists in utilizing the semi-structured interviews, and the survey analysis will be done in the QDA Miner Lite program, thus drawing final conclusions, thereon.

The study shows that, generally HEIs in Albania have taken solid steps towards developing sustainable and successful projects, being aware of the necessary criteria that drive success and the monitoring of projects during all project's stages.

Keywords: *Project management, project success, project failure, higher education institutions (HEI), mobility, capacity building.*

I. Introduction

According to most of the literature, a project is considered successful with the realization of indicators such as being "on time, according to its specifications, within the budget". (Bodicha, 2015) with its completion, the success of the product, or the success in achieving business objectives inside and during the project. Over the years, these metrics alone have been seen as insufficient, making it difficult to establish a framework of standards for measuring success (Sauer et al. 2007). Different project members and stakeholders such as the project manager, team members, senior management, functional managers, CEO, directors, suppliers, vendors, customers, as well as third parties have different perspectives on the success of a project. (Ramos, P. A., & Mota, C. M, 2016).

Defining a project success is a critical key to advancing this multidimensional discipline. Most of the previous research in this field are focused on unlocking the factors that drive the success of a project rather than establishing a framework of the criteria to assess whether a project is successful or not (Baccarini, 1999)

In Institutions of Higher Education (HEIs) research projects are usually

written and applied in order to increase the research productivity and achieve the objectives set by the implementing institution. This paper aims to provide a framework of critical and important project factors that can be used especially in HEI-s to guarantee higher effectiveness. The benefits of this research include the application of these factors in projects in order to increase their success rate.

I.1. Aim & Scope

The purpose of this paper is to present research, to analyse the existing factors that lead to the development of a successful project and to identify (if any) other important elements; and besides that; to emphasize the importance of the full (100%) realization and completion of the project. The main focus of this paper are the institutions of higher education, public and not public in Albania, seen as a case study in the field of project management and implementation. The aim of the paper, after the analysing process, is to make efficient recommendations to HEI-s on how to meet and maintain the standards of a successful project.

I.2. Objectives

1. Determining the criteria of a successful project.
2. Providing general information on the influencing factors and main factors in determining the success of a project.
3. Highlighting the current situation regarding the implementation of projects in Albanian institutions of higher education.
4. Producing a qualitative research and a future reference for other studies.

I.3. Hypothesis

Institutions of higher education in Albania have established functional capacities for project management and have established a clear framework of criteria to measure their success as well.

Considering the above purpose and objectives, this paper is built on these Research Questions:

1. What is considered as a successful project by higher education institutions in Albania?
2. What are the main factors determining the success of a project in Albanian HEI-s?
3. Is Data Analytics used by HEIs in Albania?
4. What are some factors that bring about failure of projects carried out in institutions of higher education in Albania?

II. Methodology

In this paper a study and analysis of various literatures for each sub-issue was conducted, ensuring coherence in the validation of the drawn conclusions. Secondary data were also collected and used, serving as additional and necessary information in this regard. The secondary data are collected through different publications, such as: economic magazines, newspapers, information of the internet websites, books in the field of project and finance, education platforms, websites and apps and different connections. Primary data are collected through semi-structured interviews and a focus group. The collected responses were analyzed by means of the QDA Miner Lite program, finalized in an in-depth descriptive analysis. Interviews were designed with the aim of getting information on how the management and development of projects in HEIs in Albania are applied. Specifically, to answer the research questions, we aimed at identifying new project success criteria that practitioners can use in the future. Conducting interviews and organizing focus groups allow researchers to ask people about their motives, intentions, and interpretations. Considering the different survey methods, we further decided to conduct interviews, as well as creating a focus group with experts in the country to answer the stated research questions. In general, it is possible to communicate with interviewees in person, by telephone or by electronic communication (Flick, 2013). Although conducting interviews in person generates higher costs compared to other methods of communication, this method was chosen as the most suitable due to the advantages it presents: high flexibility, the possibility to raise additional questions and personal contact in a familiar environment.

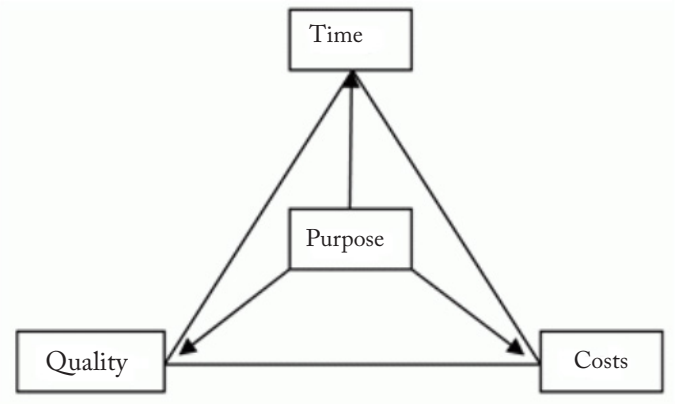
III. Literature Review

III.1. Analyzing the concept of the project and its components.

What does an organization do when it needs to change? It creates a project. The difference between organizations lies in whether they will be able to respond to continuous change in a timely manner and ahead of the competition (Satankar & Jain, 2015).

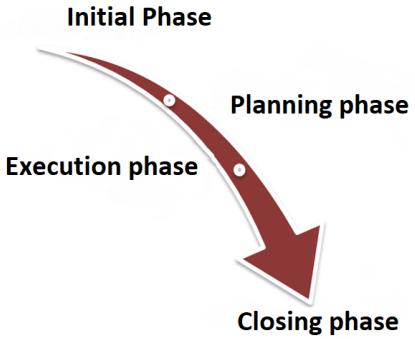
A project is an effort in which human, financial and material resources are organized in a new way to undertake a unique field of work, of given specifications, within cost and time constraints, in order to achieve a meaningful change defined by quantity, quality and objectives. (Turner, 2009). A project is an effort that

involves a series of activities and resources, aimed at achieving a certain result, taking into account constraints such as time, quality and cost, and that often brings about a meaningful change (Lake, 1997). Andersen defines projects from an organizational perspective understanding them as: "A project is a temporary organization, created by the main organization to perform a task on its behalf" (Svejvig & Andersen, 2005).



Source: (Beleiu, I., Crisan, E., & Nistor, R, 2015)

A standard project usually consists of four main phases (each with its own agenda of tasks and issues): initiation, planning, implementation and closure. Taken together, these stages represent the path a project takes from start to finish and are generally referred to as the project's "life cycle" (Meena, 2019).



III.2. Project management background

The history of project management practice starts in the Egyptian era. However, it was in the mid- 1950s that organizations began to apply formal project

management tools and techniques to complex projects (Haughey, 2010). Modern project management techniques had their origins in two parallel but different problems of project planning and control in the United States. The first case involved the US Navy, which at the time was dealing with the control of contracts for its Polaris missile project.

The second case involved the private sector, namely E.I. The du Pont de Nemours Company, which was planning to build large chemical plants in the USA (Dhopre, 2018). Carayannis at al. (2005) identify four periods in the development of modern project management (Carayannis, 2005):

- Prior 1958 - Defining the system of human relations.
  During this time, the evolution of technology, the automobiles and telecommunications one, shortened the project schedule. For example, cars allowed the efficient distribution and mobility of resources, while the telecommunications system increased the speed of communication. Similarly, the work specifications that later became the basis for the development of the Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) was widely used and Henry Gantt invented the Gantt chart.
- 1958 to 1979 - Application of Management Science
  Significant technological progress took place between 1958 and 1979, such as the first automatic plain paper copier from Xerox in 1959. Between 1956 and 1958 several major project management tools were introduced, including CPM and PERT. The advancement from the mainframe computer to the minicomputer in the 1970s made computers affordable for medium-sized companies. In 1975, Bill Gates and Paul Allen founded Microsoft. Additionally, the evolution of computer technology encouraged the emergence of several project management software companies, including Artemis and Oracle in 1977 and Scitor Corporation in 1979. In the 1970s, other project management tools such as Material Requirements Planning (MRP) were introduced. Examples of projects undertaken during this period that influenced the development of modern project management as we know it today include:
  - The Polaris missile project initiated in 1956 aimed at delivering submarine-launched nuclear missiles known as the fleet ballistic missile for the US Navy. The first Polaris rocket was successfully launched in 1961.
  - Project Apollo began in 1960 with the goal of sending a man to the moon. E.I.
  - The du Pont de Nemours Chemical Plant Project, which began in 1958, aimed to build large chemical manufacturing plants throughout the United States.

- 1980 to 1994 – Production Centre for Human Resources
  The 1980s and 1990s were characterized by revolutionary development in the information management sector with the introduction of the personal computer (PC) and devices connected to computer communication networks. During this period, relatively low-cost PC project management software, which made project management techniques more accessible, became widely available.
- 1995 to present days - Creation of a new environment
  This period is dominated by Internet-related developments that dramatically changed business practices in the mid-1990s. Many of today's project management software have an Internet connectivity feature. This allows automatic uploading of data so that anyone around the globe with a standard browser can: Enter the latest status of certain tasks; Find out how the overall project is going; Be informed of any delay or progress in the schedule; Be "in the know" about their project role while working independently in a remote location.

III.3. Realization of a successful project over the years.

While cost and time were the foundations of success in the 1970s, planning and delivery were important in the 1980s, systems and organizations were identified as a success factor in the 1990s, and during the 2000s top management support and communication appeared on the lists of project success factors (Turner, 2009). On the other hand, Kerzner emphasized that the success of the project is the achievement of the objectives, which are accepted by the client, within the planned cost, within the planned time, with the desired quality, with the effective use of resources (Kerzner, 2009). DeLone and McLean (2003) point out that product success is also a very important factor. In her article, Hyväri (2006) points out that critical success factors are closely related to the size of the company and the size of the project. Furthermore, the type of organization and the work experience of project managers has a great effect on success (Hyväri, 2006). The case studies taken as a reference and main indication to carry out this research topic are a questionnaire carried out in Belgium in 2018, a questionnaire in Germany in 2017, Bannerman's paper on the definition of project success, and a study carried out in Australia, where 150 project managers were interviewed based on D. Baccarini's research (Baccarini, 1999).

III.4. Making of a failed project

Morris (2002) gives an example about failure in his article. According to research conducted in the UK and USA in the 1980s, several factors prevented project objectives from being met. These factors are inadequate project management,

technological issues, political or environmental problems, weather conditions, geotechnical difficulties, labour issues (Morris, 2002). Moreover, there is another reason; according to Flyvbjerg, in the evaluation of projects, there is an optimism-bias among evaluators that causes the cost and time to be underestimated while on the other hand the benefits are overestimated (Flyvbjerg, 2009).

Finally, in his article Klaver (2012) provides several quotes from the well-known Ed Merrow, who is the founder of independent Project Analysis and an authority in complex megaprojects. Ed Merrow points out that the important problem is quality and his first message to everyone is 'slow down and live', then he states that the real source of failure is business professionals who generally do not understand the need of projects while the managerial level is rarely a reason to bring failure (Klaver, 2012).

IV. Project's development in Higher Education Institutions in Albania

The purpose of this section is to understand what importance has been given by higher education institutions to the development of national and international projects, their marketing and dissemination in increasing participation, the allocated funds, their management and the feedback they have had in achieving the established objectives. The HEI-s included in the study are part of the interviews and focus group, conducted in this study. These universities are: European University of Tirana (EUT) and Polis University, which represent private education in Albania, as well as two public universities, the University of Tirana and "Aleksander Moisiu" University, Durrës. From the review, the most frequent categories of projects in HEI-s were:

- *HORIZON (*Horizon is the EU's largest program for Research and Innovation) Horizon Europe - GreenFORCE
- *ERASMUS + (Key Action 1, Key Action 2, Key Action 3)*
  The Erasmus+ program aims to support actions in the field of Education, Training, Youth and Sport. Erasmus+ replaces seven programs that bring together: the Lifelong Learning Program (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, Grundtvig and Jean Monnet), the Youth in Action program, Five international cooperation programs (Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink, program for cooperation with industrialized countries), New sports action.
- *TEMPUS* is the European Union program that supports the modernization of higher education in the area around the EU.

- *CREATIVE EUROPE;* Creative Europe is the main program of the European Commission to support the cultural and audio-visual sectors.
- The Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) is a mechanism created by the EU to provide assistance to the Western Balkans and Turkey, as support for the process of membership of these countries in the European family.
- *BILATERAL PROJECTS*

For some HEIs, it has been noticed that the activity on the website is very little updated with the latest news with regard to projects. HEIs make sure that project activities are disseminated more on their social networks, such as: Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. Despite the lack of information, it is noted that in most projects (especially those KA2 of Erasmus+), HEIs, whether private or state, are part of several joint consortia. For example, Erasmus + CBHE USIA project brought together HEIs such as UNISHKO, UAMD, UET, UMSH and KPT to develop it further, while Erasmus+ CBHE Engine on the other hand brings together UT, UET, KPT, UAMD and other partners. From this we understand that the spirit of cooperation for increasing capacities, improving teaching curricula, training academic and administrative staff, training students, improving infrastructure among HEIs in Albania is strong and supporting. Another thing worth highlighting is that all HEIs have once or more than once been part of all calls (TEMPUS, HORIZON, ERASMUS +, etc.) In some of the HEIs, a lack of well-qualified writing, application, development and then monitoring staff has been noticed. So, upon the review section, it is strongly recommend and encouraged that the communication offices of these project enterprises in HEI should work more with the training of the management staff and participants in the projects, the project dissemination procedures, with the establishment of inter-university cooperative groups and drafting a framework of criteria that will guarantee the success of the projects being undertaken.

IV.1. Methodology and questionnaire

The purpose of the research is to obtain detailed data and not to compare institutions and their way of evaluating project success. In response to the research questions raised, it was aimed to identify new project success criteria that practitioners want to use in the future. Considering the different survey methods, it was further decided to conduct interviews with experts instead of answering the stated research questions. In general, it is possible to communicate with the interviewees in person, by telephone or by electronic communication (Flick, 2013).

IV.2. Design and development of semi-structured interviews

The research method is directly related to the purpose of the study. Semi-structured interviews create flexibility in "probing" the interviewee while maintaining the basic structure of the interview. The interviews were recorded and notes were taken during their conduct to highlight key points. The climate created during the process was friendly and comfortable. The interviews were recorded and notes were taken to highlight key points. The interview was first piloted in a random institution to see understandability and to see how willing someone would be to answer these questions. The field study was carried out in the period August - September 2022 and was organized in parts as follows:

Part 1 **–** The perception of the leaders/managers of the HEI project offices in the field of projects on the success of the projects. In this study, leaders/managers of HEI project offices were contacted for semi-structured interviews, one-on-one, regarding the factors that influence the success of projects in higher education in Albania. The interview takes about 30-40 minutes. Using an inductive approach, all interview transcripts were coded.

Part 2 **–** Perception of senior project specialists in higher education institutions (project writers, managers, financial leaders, etc.) on factors leading to project success. In this study, senior project managers were invited to participate in a focus group related to the factors influencing the success of a project. Using an inductive approach, interview transcripts were coded.

Part 3 - Perceptions of senior project leaders in higher education-focused research centers (project writers, managers, financial managers, etc.) on factors leading to project success. In this study, representatives of two centres, one research and the other training, engaged in projects, became part of semi-structured interviews, one on one, regarding the factors that influence the success of projects in higher education in Albania. Using an inductive approach, interview transcripts were coded.

Part 4 **–** Focus group with senior and middle level managers in HEI project offices in Albania. This group is different from the group of interviewees. Using an inductive approach, the focus group transcript was coded.

This focus group was developed keeping in mind several advantages of this method, such as: Clarifies and tests preconceived notions and findings; Understands met and unmet needs; It uncovers important ideas and issues that may not have been considered at first; Flexibility is given to dive deeper into issues that arise during the discussion.

IV.3. Data Collection

For the purpose of this research, 9 HEIs and two centers, one research center and the other being a training center that offers also financial services and participates in various projects, have been selected based on their involvement in international projects in higher education. In total, 14 interviews and a focus group were conducted, with participants different from those of the interviews. Participating institutions were 9 HEIs, out of which 5 belong to state university & professional higher education institutions, two private professional higher education institutions, two private higher education institutions, one center (which works with academia, civil society, private and public institutions, in strengthening innovation and scientific research, advocating and supporting the use of evidence for legal and regulatory initiatives, and undertaking capacity-building activities to strengthen public and private institutions, higher education institutions, media and civil society) and a center dealing with financial training, financial services and important projects. Before choosing the interviewees, we developed an analysis of the job positions of each institution and built a profile of the ideal candidates for our interview. After receiving information on the organizational structure of each HEI, we selected the interviewees as follows.

The study managed to cover all categories of higher education in Albania.

TABLE 1. Summary of the number of interviewees

		Number of participants
1	Part 1 – Project leaders/managers and high-level specialists in HEIs.	4
2	Part 2 – Project specialists (project writers, financial managers, etc.)	3
3	Part 3 – Project specialists (project writers, financial managers, etc.)	2
4	Part 4 – Focus group with senior and middle level managers in HEI project offices in Albania	5

TABLE 2. Number of interviewees for each HEI/research center

Nr.	City	Institution category	HEI/Research Centre	The position of the person in the institution	Name Surname
1	Tirana	Research centre	SCiDEV/ThinkTen	CEO, Project manager	B.B
2	Tirana	KPT (Professional College of Tirana)	Professional	Director of Finance/ Projects	A.G
3	Tirana	TESS (Tirana Esthetics & Style School)	Professional	Project manager	R.M
4	Tirana	Mediterranean University of Albania	Higher Education Institution	Specialist, project writer, project manager	I.Gj

5	Tirana	UET (European University of Tirana)	Higher Education Institution	Specialist, project writer	D.N
6	Tirana	UBT (Agricultural University of Tirana)	Higher Education Institution	Project specialist	A.K
7	Durrës	Durres University "Aleksandër Moisiu" – UAMD	Higher Education Institution	Project Manager	S.G
8	Shkodër	"Luigj Gurakuqi" University, Shkodër	Higher Education Institution	Project Manager/ Project specialist	B.D
9	Korçë	"Fan S. Noli" University	Higher Education Institution	Project specialist	A.M
10	Tirana	Mediterranean University of Albania	Higher Education Institution	Specialist, project writer	H.H
11	Tirana	KPT (Professional College of Tirana)	Higher Education Institution	Administrator/Project Manager	D.B
12	Tirana	UET (European University of Tirana)	Higher Education Institution	Head of the project office/ Manager/Project writer.	K.Ç
13	Tirana	Kreston Albania Academy	Accounting office, audit/Training Centre	Accounting experts, project experts	N.B
14	Vlorë	"Ismail Qemali", University, Vlorë	Higher Education Institution	Manager, project manager	R.S

The interviewees were initially contacted by an email, in which the research work intended to be developed was explained to them and they were asked if an interview was possible to be conducted. In conclusion, we managed to establish contact with 14 people from the main HEIs all over the country. Nine of them underwent semi-structured interviews and 5 of them became part of the focus group.

IV.4. Data analysis

Analysis of the semi-structured interviews was done using the QDA Miner Lite program. This program can be used for the analysis of textual data such as interviews, field notes, transcripts, open-ended responses, etc. as well as the analysis of still images. First, the placement of 14 interviews was done in the form of variables. After carefully reading the interviews for several times, we drafted the codes that would serve us in obtaining the final results of the interviews. Coding was developed on those questions it could be used based on the answers of 14 semi-structured interviews with a focus on the research answers raised at the beginning of the paper. After the coding of each interview, the set variables were read once and coded to avoid possible errors. After verifying the accuracy of the work performed, the results of each coding were obtained in graphic form. Also, as it was explained at the beginning of this chapter, the methodology, in addition

to conducting semi-structured interviews, we also conducted a focus group with five participants. This focus group lasted 60 minutes with framework of questions the ones used in semi-structured individual interviews, only this time the aim was to deepen the opinions given by the interviewees by getting several clashes of opinions at the same time.

Below we analyze each coding, by explaining their importance and the results obtained.

a. The interviewees were asked how they would define the success of a project. Although the answers have been in different formats, the coding has identified three main directions; purpose, objectives and criteria. 38.5% of the responses defined a successful project when it realizes and fulfils the predetermined main goal, 53.8% identified success with the fulfilment of objectives and 15.4% with the fulfilment of established criteria.
   One of the most representative answers identified during the interviews regarding this question is: "Successful project means that at least the project achieves the objective/goal defined in time, within the defined budget, according to the activities foreseen. This is for success at least. In a broader sense, a project is successful when it has achieved impact, an added value in the field in which it operated, has ensured sustainability and has brought a concrete product that can be used for the benefit of society or the group it has targeted." – B.B, SCiDEV/ThinkTen.
b. The interviewees were asked if they are currently participating in a project developed in the institution they represent or in another country. All respondents were currently participating. This question helps us understand how involved our interviewees are.
   In response, involvement in projects came as a result of the position that the interviewees had, which made them directly involved in the institution's projects, others ran companies that initiated projects and managed them.
   One of the most representative answers identified during the interviews regarding this question is: "Currently I am a coordinator in an Erasmus+ project, and I have been a member of several Tempus, Erasmus+ projects, etc." - A.M, University of Korca.
c. Although you can participate in different projects, you may not have maximum involvement, therefore the interviewees were asked if they felt involved and comfortable in the projects they participated in or are currently participating in. 84.6% expressed that they were fully involved and comfortable in the project, while 7.7% were partially involved.
   One of the most representative answers identified during the interviews regarding this question is: "As a project manager, I am 100% involved in the entire implementation cycle." - D.N, UET

d. Mere involvement is not enough, participants must willingly participate in the project to ensure that they perform their function in the best possible way. For this reason, the interviewees were asked if they think that the quality of the project depends on the desire to participate. 84.6% answered that the achievement of quality in projects depends on the desire of the participants to participate in the projects and 15.4% answered that there is no dependence between the desire of the participants and the quality of the project.

   One of the most representative answers identified during the interviews regarding this question is: "The will, desire, interest, dedication of the individuals who participate is very important, from the project leader to the team he builds and to all the individuals who get engaged. With projects works like with anything else. If individuals are not engaged, if they are not committed, if they do not implement the tasks they undertake, the deadlines, they do not have a proactive approach, they are not open, they are not cooperative, the implementation of the project becomes very difficult." – B.B, SCiDEV/ThinkTen.

e. The level of failure of the project is important to see the results of the work developed in the institutions and the quality of the work. 30.8% stated that the level of project failure in their institution was at level 0, thus indicating a maximum success of the project. 30.8% stated that the level of failure is average in the institution they represent, 7.7% answered that it is at high levels of failure and 23.10% did not give an answer in percentage of project failures.

f. Despite the fact that we may have failure in projects, it is important that the institution acts to prevent future failures. 92.3% stated that the institution they represent takes measures to act against failure and 7.7% stated that no action has been taken in cases of project failure.

g. The interviewees were asked if they use criteria in measuring the success of a project and which phase is considered the most important in the application of these criteria. 46.2% stated that the measurement of the success of a project is mostly applied in the middle of the project, 38.5% stated that it is applied at the end, 15.4% stated that the measurement of success is applied in all phases of the project, 7.7% stated at the beginning and 7.7 % state that no success measurement is done at any stage.

   One of the most representative answers identified during the interviews regarding this question is: "In all parts of the project, and throughout all phases of the project cycle (writing, management, reporting)." – K.Ç. UET.

h. The use of Data Analytics is important for a more complete evaluation of the projects, and in the HEIs interviewed it results as follows. 61.5% stated that it is used, despite the fact that not always or only in projects where this

use was required from the beginning by donors and 33.8% stated that in their knowledge the institution does not use Data Analytics.

One of the most representative answers identified during the interviews regarding this question is: "No, we only care about the maximum % absorption of funds and the realization of objectives." – A. K. UBT.

i. It can be thought that quite often the participation in various projects is forced or imposed by the need to be involved in national and international projects to have them as part of the CV, as a requirement of the job position, etc. 46.2% of the interviewees stated that they were and are voluntarily involved in the projects they participated in, 30.8% stated that they were forced by various factors and 15.4% stated that the participation was both forced and voluntary.

j. To the question, why projects fail to achieve success, the interviewees answered as follows: 38.5% stated that the non-fulfilment of the goal was and is a driving force in the non-realization of the project, 46.2% voted for the lack of team involvement in project, 38.5% poor management, 38.5% lack of communication, 23.1% lack of interest groups and 23.1% have specified that almost all of the above reasons are influential in the failure of a project.

k. The interviewees were also asked what criteria they considered important in classifying the project as successful. 84.6% stated that the achievement of objectives is important for a successful project, 61.5% involving interest groups, 61.5% having a professional team and 53.8% setting clear goals.

One of the most representative answers identified during the interviews regarding this question is: "Achieving objectives within set time and budget, to achieve stakeholder satisfaction and learning from experience. Clear and clearly articulated goals. Involvement of interest groups. Active support from leaders who share the same vision. A professionally skilled team. A skilled Project Manager with experience in implementing project management best practices. Early risk analysis and ongoing risk management.

All of the above are factors that make a project successful." - A.K, UBT.

The same results as above were evidenced during the focus group with five participants.

V. Conclusions & Recommendations

V.1. Conclusions

1. In some HEIs pat of the study, a lack of well-qualified staff for writing, applying, developing, monitoring and ensuring the retroactive effects of the projects has been noticed. Some of them did not even have a dedicated person, but the academic and administrative staff took over the realization of these processes. Also, a real framework has not yet been drawn up, but the institutions generally adapt to the specific requirements that different donors have. However, there is no lack of efforts.
2. Despite the lack of full access to information about the progress of projects in Albanian HEIs, it is noted that in most projects (especially those KA2 of Erasmus+), HEIs, whether private or public, are part of several joint consortia at home and abroad. From this we understand that the spirit of cooperation for increasing capacities, improving teaching curricula, training academic and administrative staff, training students, improving infrastructure among HEIs in Albania is strong and supportive.
3. It's not enough for a project to complete the golden trio; within time, cost and original purpose. To be considered successful, it must have a visible impact on the target group, satisfy other stakeholders and continue having impact after completion.
4. A large part of the success of the project is also due to the quality of the work done by the staff of experts. If they are satisfied, valued and feel as being an integral part of the work, the quality of their product is better. The desire and goodwill of the staff largely defines the success of the project.
5. The availability, willingness, desire and passion of experts, executive and management staff, implementers, to implement a project is a key element to ensure the safe realization of activities and thus the fulfilment of the project's fundamental objectives and goals.
6. Another very important factor identified as key to success is the application of project success metrics. These metrics should be used neither at the beginning, nor in the middle, nor at the end, but during each phase of its cycle even after the project has been completed.
7. The risk of failure of a project is always there and some of the factors identified in the study such as: unclear, inaccurate, wrong purpose and objectives, unprofessional team, unclear division of work tasks. Poor communication, lack of information, lack of transparency. Lack of experience. Lack of communication of the project and its results. Changes in the organization's strategy. Poor project management. Lack of involvement of relevant interest groups.

8. The success of winning projects starts with the recognition of the project and the allocation/assignment of the people who will be involved in most of it. Sharing information, understanding the project, its results, time and budget are essential. The prioritization of the project agenda according to its milestones is important as well as its follow-up.

V.2. Recommendations

1. HEIs should work more with the training of the management staff and participants in projects, to increase the capacities of the staff in this direction.
2. More work should be done with project dissemination procedures, defining clear procedures and actions regarding the dissemination of concrete project achievements inside and outside the organization with relevant interest groups. Transparency in communication with university staff, project staff, target group, donors is also an element that should be taken more seriously before, during and upon conclusion of projects. In the analysis of the factors that ensure the failure of the project, we have shown that the motto in projects is "Communicate, communicate, communicate!".
3. Each project should be considered as a follow-up job in terms of impact and sustainability, i.e., providing added value and benefits to the organization even after the completion of the project.
4. In addition to the great importance that the motivation of the participating staff takes in the projects, an even greater importance should be taken by the monitoring, control and evaluation structures of the project, who should be vigilant at every stage to repair the problems that may arise, up to changing the initial objectives which may be ill-defined, difficult to measure, not in accordance with the culture and mission of the implementing organization, poorly communicated, etc. It is suggested they set up inter-university cooperative groups and draw up a framework of criteria that will guarantee the success of the projects undertaken not only within the golden triangle of budget - time - objectives but also in the spirit of quality, dissemination and sustainability of the results.
5. The introduction of data analytics in HEI projects as well as in cases the project does not require it as a mandatory criterion; is a way to facilitate and simplify the identification of various 'blockages' that the project may encounter.
6. During the monitoring and control actions, the measures to be taken in some cases may lead to the reallocation of funds, postponement of deadlines or change of the implementing staff.
7. However, a plan B is never redundant or unnecessary if the regulatory steps are not seen as sufficient.

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Annex 1

Interview

"Factors that determine the success of applied projects in higher education in Albania"

Introduction

Hello,

I am doing a study for my master's thesis, with the topic **Projects' success and respective factors that produce it – The case of Higher Education Institutions in Albania**

As part of the research, your professional participation is needed.

The collected data will be used only for the purpose of this thesis. The interview will take a maximum of 45 minutes of your time.

Your contribution will be decisive for the qualitative result of this study.

Interview language: Albanian

I assure you that your anonymity and data will be preserved and if you feel uncomfortable during the questionnaire, you can stop the interview at any time. (During the interview process the interviewer is empathetic and an active listener)

The conversation will be recorded electronically and then transcribed.

Conclusions and final recommendations of this study will be sent to you respectively if you are interested.

Thank you for your participation and good luck!

Name and Surname

The higher education institution/research center that you represent

Your role/position in the institution

1. **What does the term "successful project" mean according to you?**
   *You can convey it by means of a definition
2. **What are the criteria that make a project successful?**
   *Below there are some criteria collected from previous studies that you can refer to
   a) Achieving the objectives within the defined time and the predetermined budget, to achieve the satisfaction of the interest groups and learning from the experience.
   b) Clear and clearly articulated goals
   c) Involvement of interest groups.

d) Active support from leaders and with a common vision
e) A professionally skilled team
f) A skilled Project Manager with experience in implementing project management best practices
g) Early risk analysis and continuous risk management

3. **Are you currently part of projects in your organization or in other organizations?**
   *For questions 4 and 5, answer if you said yes to the third question
4. **How comfortable / involved do you feel with the projects you are a part of?**
5. **Participation in the projects of your institution is voluntary or forced?**
6. **According your assessment, is the quality of the project determined by the desire of individuals to participate in it?**
7. **According to your assessment, what % of your institution's projects are not successfully achieved (depending on the criteria you defined)?**
8. **Why do projects fail?**
   *Below you will find some reasons gathered from previous studies that you can refer to
   a) Ambiguous, inaccurate, wrong purpose and objectives.
   b) Non-professional team
   c) Unclear division of work duties
   d) Poor communication, lack of information, lack of transparency
   e) Lack of experience
   f) Lack of communication of the project and its results.
   g) Changes in the organization's strategy
   h) Poor project management.
   i) Lack of involvement of relevant interest groups.
   j) Other
   k) [you can choose more than one alternative]
9. **What do the institutions do to ensure that the project will be successfully implemented? (Measures they take)**
10. **What criteria do you use to measure the success of a project?**
11. **In which part of the project cycle do you apply these criteria?**
12. **Does your organization use data analytics in projects?**
13. **If your project was realized within the time, budget and reached the predetermined main goal, is it guaranteed that the effect will continue after it?**
14. **What have been the consequences of not realizing the projects on time and based on the established objectives?**
15. **What do you think should have been done differently for these cases?**