

SUCCESS OF PUBLIC PROJECTS ACCORDING TO STAKEHOLDERS

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Introduction/background: It is highly probable that the criteria for assessing the implementation of public projects as successful will be different, depending on the point of view of the representatives of individual groups of stakeholders. In the paper, we present, after a brief introduction to the problems of design and the specifics of public projects, the results of surveys conducted among representatives of local governments, representatives of local communities (city citizens) and representatives of people professionally involved in project management.

Aim of the paper: The aim of the paper is to capture the criteria and conditions for the success of public projects common to various groups of stakeholders.

Materials and methods: Surveys were used as the research method and the questionnaire contained two open-ended questions. The research took the form of a direct interview. The analysis was performed using cross tables and a weighted average.

Results and conclusions: Research results indicate that criteria and conditions common to all groups of stakeholders exist and the most important are the fulfillment of basic project parameters (time, quality, costs) as a success criterion, and reliable examination/identification of the residents' needs (social consultations) as a condition for success.

Keywords: local development, sustainable development, project management.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, cities are units capable of determining their own future, because they are less dependent on national authorities and centralized decisions than in the past. Not only are they entrusted with the responsibility of meeting current social needs, but they also hold the rights to decide on directions of local economic development (Shannon, 2018). In cities (communes), many projects are usually planned and implemented simultaneously. The subject of public projects is often non-productive investments, the implementation of which aims to improve the working and living conditions of the population (housing, social and cultural facilities).

Speaking about this type of public project, it is assumed that the result of the economic profitability calculation does not affect the decision whether to invest or on what scale to meet current and future public needs (Brandenburg, 2011). Also, the political aspect of choosing this type of projects for implementation cannot be neglected. The need to take public opinion into account when choosing a public project for implementation is highlighted, among others, by M. Magdoń, according to which "in the case of public projects, next to the implementation period, costs and technical characteristics, the society's attitude should be taken into account – expressed through support for such projects" (Magdoń, 2011, p. 34). The aim of implementing public projects is, thus, to meet current and future public services.

According to F. Kuźnik, the term "public service" is not defined in literature in direct and unequivocal ways, and he questions whether the most common classification is truly that divided into market and non-market or public services (Kuźnik, 2012; see also Spicker, 2009). Kuźnik goes on to provide a definition: "In other words, a public service is one that public authorities pay for" (Kuźnik, 2012, p. 12). Similarly, S. Gasik defines the public project according to which it is "a project executed by a public administration or with the participation of a public administration, or implemented with the involvement of funds from the budget of such an administration" (Gasik, 2016, p. 352). The above definition of public project, however, does not stand the test of time. Currently, for example, many public service projects are implemented under public-private partnership, where a private investor benefits from it for some time and residents are the ones to pay (e.g. parking lots).

An additional factor distinguishing a public project from a business project is its irreversibility. Starting from a certain threshold, work on the project is continued, whatever the cost. By way of example, we can quote the implementation of the construction projects of the Sydney Opera House and Denver International Airport (Flyvbjerg, 2014). Stakeholders of public projects are various social groups: local governments, entrepreneurs, residents of communes, as well as persons/institutions professionally involved in project management. In the further part of our paper, after a short presentation of the research methodology used, we present the results of surveys carried out in 2013-2018¹ on the criteria and conditions for the success of a public project. In its final part, an attempt was made to capture the criteria and conditions for the success of a public project common to various groups of stakeholders.

2. Stakeholders of public projects and research program

E.J. Blakely defines local development as "processes consciously initiated and created by local authorities, entrepreneurs, ecological lobby, social and cultural associations and residents, aiming at the creative, effective and rational use of local intangible and material resources. Particular importance is attached to intangible assets in local development. These include

knowledge and research, higher qualifications and new skills, entrepreneurship and leadership skills." (Blakely, 1994, p. 2). In a situation where each group of local development stakeholders may have a different view on how to implement it, the main challenge facing local authorities is to activate all potential actors of local development, and, above all, to eliminate the continuing in Poland division of "We and They" (this can be done, among others, by the civic budget).

It is highly probable, therefore, that the criteria for assessing the implementation of the project as successful will be different, depending on the point of view of representatives from individual stakeholders groups (see Sebestyen, 2017). Hence, before starting the research, it was assumed that various criteria for recognizing the project as successful and the conditions for its achievement could be understood differently by individual groups of local development actors (recipients of the project results). To obtain a full picture of the issue, based on the above assumption, respondents were divided into four groups:

- representatives of local governments,
- representatives of local business,
- representatives of local communities (city citizens),
- representatives of people professionally involved in project management.

The aim of the study was to determine the approach of all stakeholder groups, both as to the concept of public project success and the conditions for its achievement. The research goal set in this way has contributed to formulating the following hypothesis: for defined groups of stakeholders there are common criteria for the success of the public project and the basic conditions for its achievement.

As mentioned in the introduction, surveys were used as the research method. The research took the form of a direct interview. The questionnaire contained two basic questions:

- Which criteria do you think determine the success of a public project? List three basic ones, giving them a weight of 1-5.
- What do you think are the basic conditions for the success of a public project? List three, giving them a weight of 1-5.

Both questions were of open form. The only suggestion in the first question was the proposal to provide an answer related to compliance with the three basic project parameters (technical characteristics, planned period and costs of its implementation) as one criterion "compliance with the project output data". The respondents were to measure the individual criteria with a scale of 1-5, where 1 was insignificant and 5 was important. In the case of success conditions, respondents were similarly asked to give weight to individual conditions on a scale of 1-5, where 1 was a very minor condition and 5 a significant one.

Due to the likelihood of different levels of knowledge about planning and implementing public projects being held, it was assumed that the research will be preceded by a short substantive introduction to the problems of public projects and its management. In order to gain opinions with the nature of the first, spontaneous associations, the respondents were given a maximum of five minutes to answer both questions.

Among the above-mentioned groups of stakeholders, the study could not be conducted among representatives of local business. Despite distribution of several thousand surveys, through the Chambers of Commerce and Industry, with which the authors of the article work closely, only five entrepreneurs replied. The authors are aware that the inability to obtain data from one of the accepted groups of stakeholders somewhat impoverishes the research results presented in this work – in the future an attempt will be made to change the research tool and repeat the research for the group of stakeholders.

Some difficulties were also encountered in the case of local government representatives. According to the presidents and mayors of the communes in which the survey was conducted, currently, councilors are not able to correctly answer the questions contained in the survey. They proposed that in this situation the survey be carried out among employees of municipal offices. This confirms the thesis about the desirability of organizing trainings for councilors in the field of local development management, especially in the initial period of holding the mandate (Brandenburg, 2015). In total, responses were obtained from 257 respondents (this does not include 55 people at the pilot study stage).

In the literature of the subject, there are many definitions of term “project”. Project Management Institute (PMI) defines it as "time-limited effort to create a unique product, service or result" (PMI, 2017, p. 4). According to PRINCE 2 methodology (PProjects IN Controlled Environments), a project is a "temporary organization that is created for the purpose of delivering one or more business products according to an agreed business case" (AXELOS, 2017, p. 8).

In the above definitions, a common statement is that the goal of the project is to create a unique product (service). Therefore, projects should never be identified with the plan. The plan is only a part of the project. A similar division can be found in the UNIDO textbook (UNIDO, 1986), where three phases are distinguished in the project development cycle: the pre-investment phase (planning), the investment phase (construction) and the operational phase (operation, use of the product). Due to the above, the research did not cover investments planned in the future, but projects accepted for implementation, implemented or already completed.

3. Survey results

3.1. Survey results among representatives of local communities (city citizens)

The first stage of the research was conducted among, according to the authors, the most important stakeholder groups of public projects, i.e. urban residents. Surveys were conducted among students of the University of Economics in Katowice.

The decision to conduct research among students can be justified in two ways:

- students are also residents of municipalities, so they can represent them,
- very often a group of students is a collection of representatives of various cities (and even regions) and environments, which further enriches the statistical sample.

Conducting surveys among randomly selected city residents would most likely cause some difficulties. Beside the barrier of reluctance to answer questions asked by accidentally met people, great probability (in some cases) should be assumed of lack of even basic knowledge about projects and local development management. In connection with the above, an additional argument regarding surveys among students was the fact that they listened to a series of lectures on management of local development and local development project management.

The main research was preceded by pilot studies carried out in 2012 in France and Poland among students of the University of Economics in Katowice (30 respondents) and students of the University of Valenciennes in France (25 respondents). According to French respondents, a project was successful when its implementation resulted in a generally available product (service) and its price was adapted to the financial capacity of the citizenry. On the other hand, Polish respondents most often indicated success to be compliance with basic project parameters (time, period of implementation and product quality). Both French and Polish respondents considered the fundamental conditions for achieving success to be the competence of the project team and social consultations (Brandenburg, 2014).

The basic research was carried out in 2013-2014 among students of the University of Economics in Katowice, full-time and part-time studies. The study involved 98 people. The results of the research regarding the basic criteria for the success of public projects are presented in Table 1. According to the information presented in it, the respondents most often mentioned (out of the nine different criteria listed) compliance with the basic parameters of the project (this criterion was indicated by 68 out of 98 inhabitants participating in the survey), and then satisfaction of the local community and accessibility for the widest possible audience.

It is also noteworthy that the distinction between "local community satisfaction" and "the project meets the real needs of recipients", which may mean that not every implemented investment should have such a high priority.

Table 1.*Basic criteria for the success of public projects – city citizens*

No.	Criterion for success	Percentage of indications	Average weight value
1.	Meets the basic parameters of the project (time, quality, costs)	26,98%	5,00
2.	Satisfaction of the local community, availability to the widest possible audience	18,25%	4,00
2.	The project meets the real needs of recipients	18,25%	4,00
4.	Great utility of the project	15,87%	4,00

The obtained research results on the basic conditions for success of public projects (from among nine different conditions listed by the respondents) are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.*Basic conditions for the success of public projects – city citizens*

No.	Condition for success	Percentage of indications	Average weight value
1.	Competent task implementers	28,91%	5,00
2.	Public consultation/project agreement with residents	28,91%	4,00
3.	Relevant budget	10,94%	4,00
4.	Reliable project implementation	10,16%	4,00
5.	Timely implementation of the project	7,03%	4,00

As seen in Table 2, the respondents again considered the basic condition for success to be proper project management (items 1, 4, 5), which is related to the competence of the project team. Compared to the results of the pilot study, it is worth noting that equal importance was attached to public consultations. The data presented in Tables 1 and 2 contain only the most frequently given answers (hence, the sum is not 100%). Answers of little selection, such as project sustainability, project implementation, proper project preparation for auction etc. were omitted.

3.2. Results of surveys among local government officials

In this stakeholder group, 50 respondents were included. The results of the research on the basic criteria for the success of public projects are presented in Table 3, while the results of the research on the basic conditions for the success of public projects are presented in Table 4. Similarly to the first group of stakeholders, the data presented in Tables 3 and 4 contain only the most frequently given answers (thus, the sum is not 100%).

Table 3.*Basic criteria for the success of public projects – local government officials*

No.	Criterion for success	Percentage of indications	Average weight value
1.	Meets the basic parameters of the project (time, quality, costs)	24,83%	4,11
2.	Improving the conditions and the quality of residents' life	18,79%	4,14
3.	Local community acceptance	14,77%	3,14
4.	Adaptation to the widest possible age group	10,07%	4,00
5.	The investment returns / pays off	8,05%	5,00
6.	Project sustainability	6,04%	3,00

As can be seen, local government members usually consider project implementation as successful (from among 11 different criteria listed) when it meets the criteria of fulfillment of its basic parameters (74% of all respondents). The reason for this may be the fact that, as already mentioned, on the request of the presidents and mayors of municipalities, the survey was conducted among employees of those municipal offices for which problems on the part of contractors (attempts to use materials/substitutes of lower quality, poor organization of the construction site, the risk of leaving it by subcontractors / search for new subcontractors, because the general contractor did not pay, etc.) are the greatest threat (Brandenburg, 2016).

Table 4.

Basic conditions for the success of public projects – local government officials

No.	Condition for success	Percentage of indications	Average weight value
1.	Good management and control of the project	20,90%	4,00
2.	Knowing of the needs of the local community	14,18%	5,00
3.	Project promoting	11,19%	5,00
4.	The availability of the project and its effects for the largest social group	11,19%	3,00
5.	Proper definition of project goals	6,72%	4,00
5.	Satisfaction of residents	6,72%	4,00
7.	Providing the right "program" for the project after the investment	4,48%	5,00

As indicated in Table 4, the respondents, likewise the inhabitants, considered proper project management as the basic condition for success (out of the 12 different conditions listed). This condition was indicated by 28 out of 50 participants of the study (56%), hence, it holds an average weight of 4.00.

3.3. Survey results among project management specialists

In the research conducted among specialists in project management, 109 people professionals took part. The research was conducted in the form of an expert survey (survey technique) in the period of October 2014 – December 2015 and December 2017 – January 2018. Participants included members and supporters of the International Project Management Association Polska – IPMA Poland (Silesian Regional Group and Lower Silesian Regional Group), students of international post-graduate "Project Management" studies at the University of Economics in Katowice and employees of the City Offices in Tarnowskie Góry and Radzionków.

The desire to obtain the widest and most complete information during the survey and the specifics of the surveyed population (project management specialists) determined the sampling method – targeted selection. The selection of a group of experts from among members and supporters of IPMA resulted from the fact that, next to the Project Management Institute (PMI), it is one of the largest organizations associating and certifying project managers in the world. In the case of post-graduate students, people with professional experience and a certain amount of knowledge in project management were invited to take part in the study. The reason for their

incorporation into the targeted population is that in deciding to participate in such studies, the main premise of these people was the desire to systematize their knowledge and possibly expand it in aspects most commonly used in practice. The same selection criterion was used for public service employees. Therefore, the described approach allowed getting to know the point of view of individuals with experience and knowledge in the sphere of research of interest to the authors.

The results of research on the basic criteria for public project success of people professionally involved in project management are presented in Table 5. Here, respondents most often indicated success to be a positive assessment (attitude, satisfaction) by the residents (local community) (64 out of 109 project management specialists or 58.72% and an average of 4.45). Utility (added value) for residents and meeting the basic parameters of the project were also very popular choices. Consequently, as in the case of the previously analyzed stakeholder groups, the data contain only the most frequently given answers (hence the sum is not 100%).

It should be noted that when respondents were asked to assess criteria compliances with the three basic project parameters (quality, budget and time) as one criterion "meeting the basic project parameters", many experts listed the indicated parameters separately, wanting to emphasize the importance of a given criterion.

Table 5.

Basic criteria for the success of public projects – project management specialists

No.	Criterion for success	Percentage of indications	Average weight value
1.	Positive assessment (attitude, satisfaction) by residents (local community)	20,71%	4,45
2.	Utility (added value) for residents (public)	19,09%	4,20
3.	Fulfillment of basic project parameters (triple constraints)	12,30%	3,89
4.	Budget (low cost, economical)	8,41%	3,58
5.	Time (punctuality)	7,77%	3,54

The obtained research results on the basic conditions for the success of public projects (among the 38 conditions listed by the respondents) are presented in Table 6. As in previous analyzes, the data contain only the most frequently given answers (hence the sum is not 100%).

Table 6.

Basic conditions for the success of public projects – project management specialists

No.	Condition for success	Percentage of indications	Average weight value
1.	Relevant project team (qualifications)	12,20%	3,94
2.	Reliable examination / identification of the residents' needs (public consultations)	11,53%	4,24
3.	Social acceptance (residents' attitude, acceptance)	10,85%	4,53
4.	Implementation in the budget	7,12%	3,81
5.	Efficient management	5,42%	4,31
6.	Short implementation time	5,42%	3,81
7.	Defining and saving a goal to meet a specific need	4,75%	4,14
8.	Marketing/support (also from the media)	4,07%	3,75

As evident from Table 6, the respondents, similarly to residents and local government officials, considered fulfilling the issues related to proper project management (items 1 and 5) as the basic conditions for success. Here, the competences of the project team were selected most often (33.03% of all respondents). They also emphasized the need for public consultations (option 2 and 3).

4. Common elements for the examined groups of stakeholders – an attempt to standardize

As mentioned, before starting the research, it was assumed that various criteria for recognizing the project as successful and the conditions for its achievement by groups of local development actors could be understood in different ways. The aim of the research was, therefore, to answer the question whether there are elements common to all groups of stakeholders. Research has shown that such criteria exist and there is a similar perception of the determinants of project success. It should be noted that in total, all respondents indicated 35 different criteria for public project success and 50 different conditions for its achievement. At this stage, the analysis was performed using cross tables and a weighted average (the number of responses was multiplied by the appropriate weight given by the respondents and then the sum was divided by the number of respondents who were surveyed within a given group of stakeholders), in this way, the impact on the analysis results by stakeholders groups cardinality differentiation was excluded.

The criteria for public project success indicated by all the stakeholder groups covered by the study are: fulfillment of the basic parameters of the project (criterion mentioned by 143 people), positive assessment by residents (criterion mentioned by 132 people), utility (added value) for residents (criterion mentioned by 127 people) and project sustainability (criterion mentioned by 22 people).

The most important criterion, taking into account the weights given by the respondents, was found to be the fulfillment of the basic parameters of the project – the weighted average being 7.87. A detailed list of public project success criteria ordered from the most important to the least important is presented in Table 7.

Table 7.

Criteria for public project success – elements common to all examined groups of stakeholders

Criterion for success	Stakeholder group – criterion weight [weighted average]			Total
	Local Community	Self- government	Specialists	
Meeting basic project parameters (time, quality, costs)	3,47	3,04	1,36	7,87

Cont. table 7.

Utility (added value) for residents	1,63	2,32	2,27	6,22
Positive assessment (attitude, satisfaction, acceptance) by residents (local community)	1,88	1,38	2,61	5,87
The sustainability of the project (usage)	0,41	0,54	0,09	1,04

Among the conditions for achieving success, only one was indicated by all groups of stakeholders – a reliable examination/identification of residential needs (social consultations). This condition was mentioned in total by 127 respondents, while 88.98% assessed this as a significant or very significant. Due to the uselessness of calculations in the weighted averages analysis (only one condition), Table 8 presents detailed juxtaposition of indication quantity for the defined weights, with division into specific groups.

Table 8.

Determinants of public project success – elements common to all examined groups of stakeholders

Stakeholder group	Reliable examination/identification of the residents' needs (public consultation) – condition weight [number of indications]					Total
	Very insignificant	Insignificant	Moderately important	Important	Very important	
Local community	0	0	7	60	7	74
Self-government	0	0	0	0	19	19
Specialists	1	0	6	10	17	34
Total	1	0	13	70	43	127

5. Summary

Local development consists in launching consciously initiated and created potential development opportunities (by local authorities, entrepreneurs, the ecological lobby, social and cultural associations, as well as residents) by undertaking tasks of socio-economic development on the territory of the community.

In a situation where each group of local development stakeholders may have a different view on how to implement it, the primary challenge facing local authorities is to activate all potential actors of local development. The criteria for assessing the implementation of a public project as successful may be different, depending on the point of view of representatives of individual groups of stakeholders. The conducted research showed that despite potential differences of interest, there are common elements and a similar perception of the conditions for achieving project success for all groups of stakeholders covered by the research. The fulfillment of the basic project parameters (time, quality, costs) was considered the basic criterion for the success of the public project. Moreover, widely-held public consultation before project approval was highlighted as the most important condition for achieving success.

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Footnotes

¹ According to the authors, the 6-year period of the conducted research does not adversely affect the results, analyzes and conclusions presented. The research results presented in this work are part of a larger research project which expected scientific effect is to define the concept of public project success. This type of research is of a basic nature, and comparing data obtained over a 6-year perspective even increases the chance of defining the concept and determinants of project success as precisely as possible.