

## LOGISTICAL SUPPORT OF THE TOUR DE FRANCE

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on the management of sports organizations in a broader sense. More narrowly, it focuses on logistics, specifically on the logistical support of the Tour de France. The aim of the article is to analyse the individual operations within the logistical support of this major sporting event. The results of this analysis will belong to the educational content necessary for the preparation of future sports managers as well as for the continuous education of current managers of sports organizations. The methods applied in the research included the process analysis, induction, deduction, and the procedure of the synthesis for obtaining the aggregate results that can be used for the educational purposes.

**Keywords:** sports management, logistics, ICT

**JEL Classification:** Z20, R41

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Tour de France is an equivalent to the total relocation of a city of 5,000 citizens overnight, with five kilometres of trucks, a total of 2,500 vehicles, and the necessary space of 8,000 square meters in each stage for journalists. For the most complex stages, logistical support is planned up to five years in advance.

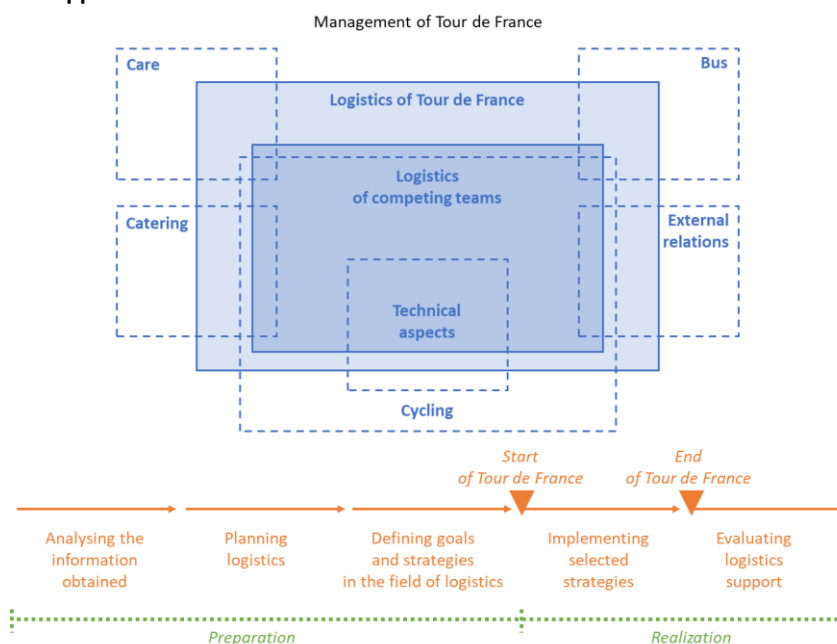
The presented pieces of information demonstrate the complexity of the topic. When planning the Tour de France, as an international sporting event, it is necessary to consider many aspects. This article focuses specifically on aspects related to logistics. Figure 1 is a graphic representation of the interconnection of individual elements analysed.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Logistical support is the coordination of material and related information and financial flows, with the aim of ensuring the race with the optimal binding of available resources. **Logistical support** focuses on the basic

parameters, which include the material, place, and time (inventories, containers, and movement). The logistic support of the race is a combination of the military and profit principle with an emphasis on the time factor (Dubovec, 2015; Dubovec et al., 2015; Dubovec, 2017).

This cycling race is broadcasted live on more than 100 channels in 190 countries, attracting more than 3.5 billion television viewers each year and more than 12 million on the side of the roads cheering on around 200 competitors along the 3,500-kilometer route. Each year, more than 2,000 journalists, consultants, and accredited photographers for almost 600 different media are to be reckoned with. More than 180 means of transport creating the caravan of the race which will give out more than 15 million gifts together cannot be omitted either. It is also necessary to mention the mobilization of 23,000 traffic and order policemen necessary to ensure safety of the race (Teams – The riders, videos, photos – Tour de France 2017, 2017).



**Figure 1** Identification of key aspects within Tour de France logistics (own elaboration)

The logistic support of the race is managed by **Amaury Sport Organization (ASO)**. Throughout the year, ASO plans and provides the people and logistical resources necessary for the smooth operation of the whole race. They ensure that everything at each level of logistical support is precisely set so that everything goes smoothly and that there are as few unexpected events and delays as possible during the whole race (A.S.O., 2022).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The presented article was created using *a systematic procedure*. The primary phase focused on defining the main areas that must be set up when planning the logistical support of the Tour de France. Subsequently, these areas were analysed from a theoretical perspective.

In the processing of individual parts, methods such as *orientation and content analysis* were used. The main method was **process analysis**, in which the technique of *dividing problems into smaller parts* was applied. The thought processes used in this article mainly include *deduction, induction, synthesis, comparison, and generalization*.

### 4. RESULTS

The results of the article focus on individual aspects of logistical support for the Tour de France. These were defined in Figure 1.

#### 4.1. Catering

The Sodexo company is responsible for providing food for all race participants. They prepare this event at least 8 months in advance. Sodexo teams cover the distance the racers need to overcome twice. This is because the shuttles and round trips from one place to another need to be arranged to prepare and provide food for each day for the organizers, motorcyclists, technicians, drivers, and invited

VIP guests, which is a total of thousands of people per day. Every year from December, which is eight months before the start of the race, they start hiring staff, ordering uniforms, reserving means of transport, testing the menu, etc. Then, from the start of the race, everything must be planned exactly to the minute. It's a challenge every day: build and pack the tents and equipment stage by stage while dealing with unexpected events.

#### 4.2. Logistics of the competing teams

Each team participating in the Tour de France has 8 cyclists (Figure 2). But to be able to devote themselves fully to their performance on the track, without wasting energy, they benefit from the constant care of numerous personnel. Each team has at least 20 people who take care of their 8 cyclists. Even at a lower level, inside each racing team, effective logistical support is necessary. On average, 22 teams participate in the race and each competitor has at least 6 bikes, 3 racing bikes, 1 cobblestone bike, and 2 trial bikes. Each competitor also has several pairs of wheels, one pair customized for each stage, for a total of 50 bikes and more than 90 pairs of wheels for the team for the duration of the whole race. Nothing is left to chance, each team has at least 3 technicians who take care of the bikes and their transfers.

During the race, mechanics are also present (in 2 sports directors' vehicles) ready to intervene when a technical difficulty occurs (defect, fall, dropped chain, etc.). A representative of the bike brand is also present at the race for approximately 3 to 5 days to verify that the material used meets expectations (is of high quality and in good condition).

Teams have one staff truck, one assistant truck, one caravan car, one bicycle storage trailer, and a trailer for 7,000 buckets of water for the competitors. That is a total of at least 8 means of transport for one team.

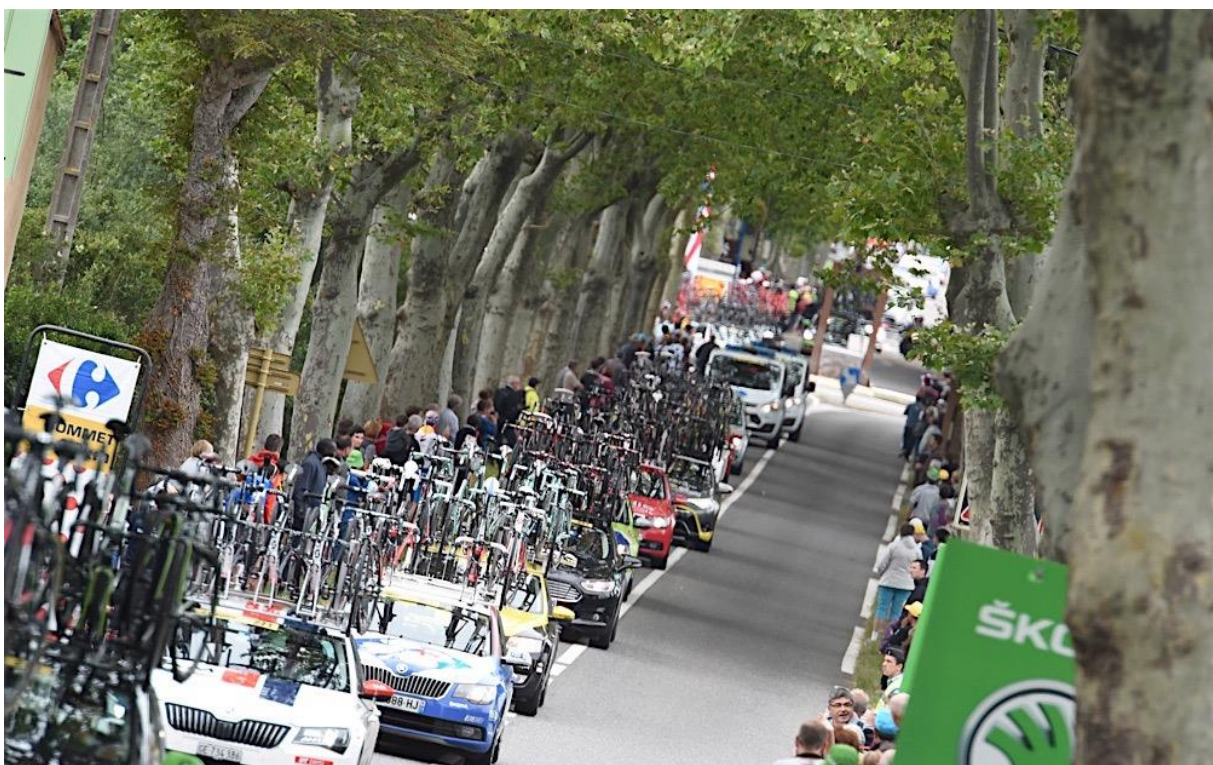


Figure 2 Logistics – moving with bicycles (Source: Steep Hill, 2017)



**Figure 3** Technical aspects – finish zone (Source: Steep Hill, 2018)

#### **4.3. Technical aspects**

A good example is the finish (finish zone, Figure 3). *“This race requires extensive logistics, above all in terms of space,”* says Tour director Christian Prudhomme. *“At the finish zone of each stage, 120 escort vehicles are expected to arrive. ASO must ensure 1,600 overnight stays in hotels in the given region, more than 3,000 bookings for the rest of the entourage: journalists, technicians, tele and radio teams. For 24 hours, the finish zone becomes the centre of the world’s media.”*

Each Tour de France route is being considered for 3 to 4 years before its final approval. The candidate lists of each city and each village sum up to more than 250 candidates each year. Logistical data weigh almost as much as sports parameters: transfers must be feasible without too many complications; conditions must also be satisfactory in terms of reception and accommodation.

Logistics is the aspect that probably concentrates the most attention of all the organizers because the Tour is a long-term race, and some parameters weigh more than others. For example, a time slip in the schedule or transfers exceeding two hours are too strenuous for the drivers. On the contrary, beautiful locations such as the Palace of Versailles, Mont-Saint-Michel and others are almost always included in a stage with a simple modification so that the peloton passes in front of such monuments. But even in that case, nothing is simple: important protected historical monuments require even more precise, careful, and strict logistics.

#### **4.4. Cycling**

On his bike, in the middle of the Tour de France, the cyclist is not alone. Of course, he is surrounded by his teammates, but he also has a headset connecting him to the two team vehicles directly behind the peloton. We find 2 sports directors behind the wheel. Their role is to manage the

race, just like a football coach does, but also to give the racers practical information such as who is on the run, who is attacking, what problems to avoid in the next kilometres, etc. The third sports director is also in direct contact with the others, but he is physically outside the track: he watches the race on television, which allows him to have a different view of the situation which is useful when quick decisions are needed.

#### **4.5. Bus**

It has become a key place for every team. Professional team buses are no longer just a means of transport between the hotel and the start of the stage and then between the finish line and the hotel. In recent years, they have been getting bigger and bigger, more and more comfortable, and better equipped to give the racers as much peace as possible before and after the race (Figure 4). Before the race, this is the place where the competitors get dressed in the racing jerseys and where they attend the sports director’s briefings. After the race, it is a private place where the competitors can shower, change, and rest.

#### **4.6. Care**

Three weeks of racing is a very long time. In such conditions, recovery plays a significant role. All competitors use massages every evening due to the presence of 3 physiotherapists and 3 assistant masseurs. These persons are multifunctional. Physiotherapists also prescribe therapies for recovery, while assistant masseurs are tasked with preparing bottles for drinks and snacks to be consumed by the racers during the race. In addition, these 6 people have the task of preparing the arrival and the check-in procedure at the hotel: distributing things to the rooms in the hotel, checking the menus and meals for the competitors, etc. Finally, the medical team consists of 1 doctor and 1 chiropractor who are with the teams throughout the whole race.



Figure 4 The important role of buses (Source: Steep Hill, 2017)

#### 4.7. External relations

The external relations consist of the media, sponsors, invited guests, marketing (Figure 5). Regarding the professionalization of sports in general, cycling included, external relations become crucial for the whole team, with 3 people dedicated to this full time. The press officer is responsible for working with the various media so that the competitors themselves are not being constantly harassed. One communication officer and one public relations person take care of invited guests and sponsors, the most important

of which accompany the race on board the sports directors' vehicles – before, during, and after the race.

#### 5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Professional cycling is currently experiencing a growth in interest from both spectators and sponsors. Improvements in the technical security of transmissions (cameras, computer graphics, additional information) have made this sport an important part of the cultural presentation of the country where this traditional competition has a strong place.



Figure 5 External relations – media (Source: Steep Hill, 2018)

Other managerial aspects of the race have already been and will be studied in the future. For example, it was revealed that the team diversity in terms of tenure has positive effects on the performance and final results of the competing teams (Prince, Wicker, 2016). Another aspect is the brand personality of such a huge sporting event (Caslavova, Petrackova, 2011). Deeper understanding of this marketing element of the Tour de France can help with the setting of an appropriate communication strategy dealing with the right communication channels used when sharing the information on the race with the fans, spectators, and the public. Incorporation these other aspects into the whole strategy of the event needs to be connected to the logistics strategy and logistical support of the race as well. Only then the best outcomes and a smooth operation of all the processes included can be achieved.

The information and the conclusions presented in this research can be approached as a piece of educational content needed for the preparation of future sports organization's managers and for the continuous training and development of the current sports managers. Thus, it needs to be made accessible for the students of sports management as well as for the sports managers, ideally via a dedicated web portal applying modern ICT tools.

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