

Creating a Body of Knowledge in Olympic Games Research Through a Government-Academia Partnership

Christian Rouillard, University of Ottawa, Canada, christian.rouillard@uottawa.ca

Milena M. Parent, University of Ottawa, Canada

Benoit Séguin, University of Ottawa, Canada

Rod Windover, 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Secretariat, Canada

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Abstract

Aim of Paper

Governments' strategic investments in hosting major sporting events have to ensure a positive return for all despite the rarity of financial resources, resulting in governments' increasing concern for performance and accountability. This paper aims to show the benefits and challenges of an emerging government-academia research partnership for creating a body of knowledge in the management of major sporting events, specifically in terms of understanding the nature of the organizing committee-government's democratic governance processes, while making sense of the various and conflicting views on governance found in the specialised literatures.

Theoretical Background

Using the 2010 Winter Games and its organizing committee (VANOC) as a case study, this presentation builds on a unique interdisciplinary approach combining sport event management (e.g., Parent, 2008), stakeholder theory (e.g., Freeman, 1984), network theory (e.g., Rowley, 1997), decision making (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1989), and democratic governance/intergovernmental relations (e.g., Pierre, 2000). The complexity of the VANOC-government relationship will benefit from this approach to democratic governance, usually defined as performance and accountability with a complementary (and varying) emphasis on participation and decision making.

Yet governance remains a polysemous concept. According to the various trends in the literature, it is about managerialism (Rhodes, 1996), state-civil society relations (Pierre, 2000), triangular dynamics between the administrative board, the direction and the shareholders of a firm (OECD, 2002), etc. Governance is conceptualized in terms of institutions, networks, (best) practices, communities, and processes (Stoker, 1998). Recent studies in public administration have argued that state-centric approaches need to be replaced by more society-centric approaches in order to better reflect and understand developments in the policy process. But, the passage from state-centric to society-centric can only make sense inasmuch as the state/civil society dichotomy holds true. Arguably, a more satisfactory democratic governance approach will

question this dichotomy and the traditional assumptions made between performance, accountability, and transparency.

Such an approach, emphasizing stakeholders' governing capacities configurations, appears to be tailor-made for the dynamic and complex nature of these multidirectional interactions, as well as the (often neglected) resilient nature of hierarchy (Damgaard, 2006).

Methodology

Theoretical and conceptual in nature, this presentation will make sense of the different and opposing views on governance found in the social sciences literature. Its analysis of the specialised literatures and key public documents will be guided by Alvesson and Skoldberg's (2000) framework for reflexive research, stressing the interplay between the following four levels:

- 1) the interactions between the researcher and empirical material/data construction,
- 2) the researcher's interpretation and search for underlying meanings,
- 3) critical interpretation of political and ideological dimensions of the research,
- 4) self-critical and linguistic reflection of the researcher.

Discussion / Implications

Though its relevance will go beyond sport management and public administration per se, this theoretical discussion will take into account the specific context and idiosyncrasies of the VANOC-government relationship. As such, the presentation will contribute to the sport management literature by moving beyond a descriptive, decision-making approach to governance and by building knowledge in another area than the traditionally studied nonprofit organizations (cf. Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007, Hoye & Inglis, 2003, Kübler & Chappelet, 2007). An integrated and innovative theoretical understanding of democratic governance, going beyond performance and accountability, will benefit many fields of empirical research in both sport management and public administration.

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