

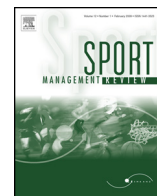


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# Stakeholder perceptions on the democratic governance of major sports events

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### ABSTRACT

This paper addressed the following research questions: (1) How do the different event stakeholders view the principles associated with democratic governance (performance, accountability, transparency and stakeholder participation) in relation to planning major sports events? and (2) How informative are democratic governance principles for studying major sports events? An exploratory study of the stakeholders involved in the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Winter Games, 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games, and 2015 Toronto Pan American Games was undertaken using 55 interviews. Stakeholders' perceptions of the principles were generally similar to definitions found in the governance literature (cf. [Bevir, 2010](#); [Callahan, 2007](#)). However, this paper demonstrates that accountability, transparency and participation should be divided into internal and external aspects in order to better understand and enact the governance of sport events. As well, stakeholder participation was found to be a central principle, evolving over time and having to be planned and actively enacted to foster an emotional connection with the event. Thus, democratic governance principles can be used to examine the governance system (structures, processes) and stakeholder relationships found in major sport events, and highlight key areas of importance for event organizers and stakeholders in governing this complex environment. A model illustrating the interrelationships between the principles is offered.

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## 1. Introduction

Governments are highly involved in major sport event planning through managing such files as security, health and visas (cf. [Houlihan & Giulianotti, 2012](#); [Parent, Rouillard, & Leopkey, 2011](#)). In democratic countries, at least, event organizers and partners are under increased scrutiny by the media, general public and other stakeholders (e.g., academics and non-governmental organizations), with calls for more transparency, accountability and stakeholder participation in decision making (cf. [Chappelet & Kübler-Mabbott, 2008](#); [Mason, Thibault, & Misener, 2006](#)). With transparency, accountability and stakeholder participation, event organizers and partners have one chance to 'do it right' – to perform – given major sport events' usually one-off nature ([Parent, 2008](#)).

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By combining performance, accountability, transparency and stakeholder participation, the concept of democratic governance comes into play (see [Bevir, 2010](#)). Democratic governance, as an approach, has rarely been explicitly used to study sport events. A close exception is [Owen \(2002, p. 323\)](#) who highlighted “the centralisation of planning powers, the increasing involvement of the private sector in government activities, and the relaxation of planning processes, resulting in reduced openness, accountability and public participation,” while investigating the urban (venue) governance in place for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. In turn, [Whitford, Phi, and Dredge \(2014\)](#) suggested having indicators for measuring event governance performance. [Enjolras and Waldahl \(2010\)](#) explicitly used democratic governance in their case study of Norwegian voluntary sport organizations, noting undemocratic practices (e.g., lack of active participation and issues of representation) can undermine organizational legitimacy and thus, arguably, performance. Finally, [Geeraert, Scheerder, and Bruyninckx \(2013\)](#) argued that anchoring European football in democratic principles, through increased metagovernance, openness and stakeholder participation, should help address football’s growing complexity.

Following the above logic, it is argued in this paper that the sport industry can benefit from following democratic governance principles. Yet, questions remain regarding the appropriateness and use of democratic governance principles in complex settings (cf. [Bevir, 2010](#)), such as the world of major sports events. Governments in democratic countries should be expected to use democratic governance principles; however, where do the other major sport event stakeholders stand regarding their understanding and use of democratic governance principles, especially if the organizing committees that usually lead the planning process ([Parent, 2008](#)) are non-profit organizations in these settings? Examples abound about undemocratic and unethical behaviour in key sport organizations, such as those related to bidding for the Olympic Games or FIFA World Cup (e.g., [Mason et al., 2006](#)). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to empirically explore (1) how the different event stakeholders view the principles associated with democratic governance in relation to planning major sports events; and (2) how informative democratic governance principles are for studying major sports events. The findings reveal that all stakeholder groups enacted democratic governance principles in the context of major sports events, highlighting the importance of building relationships and active engagement over time, strategic planning, being responsible for one’s actions, and providing the right information at the right time. In doing so, the paper defines performance, accountability, transparency and participation in a sport event context, and highlights the importance of these concepts for successfully planning such endeavours. It contributes to the sport event management literature by proposing a model that demonstrates the inter-relationships between democratic governance principles, focusing attention on the differing structures and processes of internal versus external aspects of accountability, transparency and participation.

## 2. Overview of the literature

In this section, key literature on major sports events and their stakeholders is reviewed, followed by an overview of the democratic governance principles.

### 2.1. Major sports events and stakeholders

Sport event management research has grown exponentially over the past two decades, with researchers examining a variety of topics such as governance structures and legacy (e.g., [Chappelet & Kübler-Mabbott, 2008](#); [Girginov, 2012](#); [Parent, 2008](#); [Parent et al., 2011](#)), organizational behaviour issues such as human resource (e.g., volunteers) management and organizational culture (e.g., [Costa, Chalip, Green, & Simes, 2006](#); [Parent & MacIntosh, 2013](#); [Xing & Chalip, 2009](#)), risk management and security (e.g., [Leopkey & Parent, 2009a, 2009b](#); [Toohey & Taylor, 2008](#)), and marketing, sponsorship, branding and spectator behaviour (e.g., [Bouchet, Bodet, Bernache-Assollant, & Kada, 2011](#); [Ferrand, Chappelet, & Séguin, 2012](#)).

In terms of event governance, [Theodoraki \(2007\)](#) analysed the configuration of Olympic organizing committees, noting they are a hybrid of [Mintzberg’s \(1979\)](#) missionary and divisionalized forms. In turn, [Parent \(2008\)](#) examined governance processes of major sport event organizing committees, noting they move through three operational modes (planning, implementation and wrap-up) over the course of their lifecycle and can deal with more than a dozen types of issues (e.g., operations, sport, infrastructure, human resources, visibility and financial). During the planning mode, the organizing committee prepares the business, operational and divisional plans; during the implementation mode, the organizing committee turns the function-based plans into integrated venue-specific plans, then venuizes (i.e., transitions to the venues) and hosts the event; finally, during the wrap-up mode, the organizing committee prepares the final reports, decommissions venues, manages outcomes and legacies, and ceases to exist if it is a one-off event ([Parent, 2008](#)).

Although understanding how organizing committees function is important, given the complexity of the major sports event context, it is also important to understand the stakeholder network surrounding the event and how it influences the work done by the organizing committee. Conversely, it is important to understand how the organizing committee influences the event stakeholder network. [Parent \(2008\)](#) was one of the first to examine the stakeholders in major sports events, indicating that the stakeholder network included the internal stakeholders (e.g., Games volunteers and paid staff), as well as a variety of external stakeholders: the media, sponsors, international delegations, sport organizations, host governments, and community (i.e., residents, community groups, activists, schools and local businesses). [Parent and Deephouse \(2007\)](#) analysed these stakeholders to demonstrate that stakeholder group heterogeneity is issue- and managerial-(hierarchical)

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