The 2010 Vancouver Olympic Winter Games required billions of dollars and thousands of people to coordinate. A key group for the planning of the Games was the government (federal, provincial, and municipal) stakeholder group. By looking at the democratic governance processes of the various governments, their multidimensional interactions and collaboration can be examined. Understanding that the governments were forced to work together and that none held the rights to and ultimate decision making power for the Games, how were the usual democratic governance concepts of performance, accountability, participation and transparency used? While these concepts seem clear within the literature, their application is not. Thus, our purpose is to examine and understand the concepts pertaining to democratic governance in practice. Our study is of great significance not only to those policy makers interested in sports and sporting events but also, more broadly, to those seeking to understand major inter-governmental project management. As well, our study questions the current democratic governance concepts’ definitions found in the literature.

Overall, governance is about the interaction of structures, individuals, and the environment in creating networks to achieve success (Deleoe, 2005). In turn, democratic governance typically involves examining performance, accountability, participation, and transparency (Pierre & Peters, 2000). Performance is defined as involving both effectiveness and efficiency. Accountability has been defined as “a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgment, and the actor may face consequences” (Bovens, 2005, p. 184). Having the opportunity to participate and voice one’s opinions is critical to the success of democratic governance, as citizens should be given their chance to express their concerns. Stakeholders ought to be granted the opportunity to express their opinion either verbally and/or as an individual on a given board (Talbot, 2005). Finally, when transparency is fully achieved for all interested stakeholders, there is open accessibility and flow of organizational information, from objectives and agreements to implementation (Grigorescu, 2003).

A case study (Yin, 2003) of the 2010 Olympic Winter Games was used, focusing on the 3 levels of government in Canada (federal, provincial, and municipal). First, archival material gathered included newspaper articles, organizing committee documents, and web site information from the various governments and other Games partners. Approximately 250 documents were analyzed. Second, 35 semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals who represented various government departments and/or committees. Finally, notes were taken from meetings with government representatives, as well as a daily diary from the first author’s 4-month secondment to VANOC (the Games organizing committee) where she was able to observe the impact of the governments’ efforts and coordination. Data were then analyzed in ATLAS.ti 6.0 through content analysis using both deductive (e.g., use of performance and accountability codes) and inductive (e.g., different government levels) codes. Axial coding was then performed, where data were scanned for relational aspects between and among the codes. This step was performed both within each government and between governments. This analysis resulted in the creation of the higher-order themes (i.e., our results; cf. Corley & Gioia, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

All levels spoke of the need of measurement in achieving goals but never quantified the results or objectives. Municipally, they discussed prioritizing issues, provincially yearly appraisals of departments, and federally the whole gambit of evaluations. There seems to be some focus on performance being linked to accountability which is further assigned to an individual. Municipal managers seemed less focused on the evaluation metrics and more on achieving their objectives. Civil servants participated in yearly evaluations at the municipal and provincial levels, but no additional features were added specifically for the Games. Municipal managers seemed to put direct emphasis on City Council as the people that will hold them accountable. Some accountability issues were linked to coordination, the inability to make major decisions because of its potential impact between players, and an individual not having the power to make the decision. Regarding participation, we found little evidence of other stakeholders’ participation (e.g., the general public) at the provincial or federal levels beyond the intra- and inter-government committee framework. The Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) demonstrated the strongest level of stakeholder participation thanks to its vision document titled Whistler2020. The Whistler2020 team communicated with many stakeholders to establish and facilitate task force meetings, dialogues with partners, and coordination with implementing organizations. Over 140 individuals participated in developing the strategies and actions (Whistler2020, 2010). Finally, the municipalities were
concerned with transparency in that they had a community assessment done to answer the residents’ questions (City of Vancouver), and had regular formal and informal meetings with the residents as well as publicly available scorecards (RMOW). Provincially, some information was available on their website but it was often out-of-date and not detailed. On many occasions, the federal government stated that they were accountable to the public; however, they failed to adequately inform the public of certain issues pertaining to their money and their country (cf. CTV News, 2007).

There seems to be an underlying spatial difference in terms of distance and time between those interviewed in Vancouver (municipalities, province) and Ottawa (federal). As well, interviewees often seemed to interchange the concepts of accountability and performance, thereby suggesting a need to revisit the traditional definitions of these terms in the literature. Another possible conclusion is that individuals seemed more concerned about adhering to their contract and getting the job done (performance) instead of understanding accountability processes within their government. Finally, since the municipal level of the government works closest with the general public, it makes sense that this level showed the strongest levels of participation and transparency. In conclusion, we see that the concepts of democratic governance in practice certainly include performance and accountability; however, transparency and participation seemed more relevant to the municipal level. The degree to which this is “appropriate” and the impact on the literature will be discussed during the presentation.