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Governance of the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games for Sustainability

Xinquan (Sheena) Yang, University of Texas at Austin

Governance

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**20-minute oral presentation
(including questions)**

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Sustainability has gained global interests in sport management, and planning and delivery of mega-event legacies like Olympics has become a point of directionality (Mol, 2010). Notwithstanding that the growing body of sport management literature is concerned more of sustainable development in host regions it is also limited to cost-benefit analysis and impact studies, with an emphasis on the post-games outcomes (e.g., Agha, Fairley, & Gibson, 2012; Barclay, 2009; Dansero & Puttilli, 2010; Minnaert, 2012; Preuss, 2007). While researchers have recognized the importance of processes of the construction of Olympic legacies, given the link between host cities and urban governance in the literature (e.g., Boyle & Haggerty, 2011; Girginow, 2012), there has been relatively little completed research on how such a sustainability agenda might be created by an event organizing committee, who is responsible for preparation for, and staging the Games.

Governance of mega-event sport organizations for sustainability is a somewhat complex subject matter. Hosting mega-event like Olympics involves a number of stakeholders who form a network through which resources and opportunities are distributed, so that directing and controlling the resource flows turns into a governance issue (Girginow, 2012). Research shows that network theory has been applied to explain how sport/event organizations gather support from various stakeholders such as government, corporations, and communities while dealing with external pressures to achieve their objectives (Farquhar, Machold & Ahmed, 2005; Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007). The fundamental premise of network theory is that in addition to legal contracts, sport/event organizations inherently enter into socially binding contracts with stakeholders and form a degree of interdependence between organizations to deliver promises (Farquhar et al., 2005; Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to examine governance of the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games for sustainability. It takes a network approach, suggesting that sustainability objectives are designed and achieved by a systematic process of preparation and implementation, explores the role of governance of an Olympic organizing committee (i.e., VANOC) plays in partnership with its various stakeholders including corporate partners.

This research design follows a qualitative case study approach to explore insights into complex organizational process (Hartley, 2004). VANOC (the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Organizing Committee) is a unique case because of "Vancouver's promise of the world's first sustainable Olympic Games" (Holden, MacKenzie, & VanWynsberghe, 2008, p. 882). From researchers' perspective, the VANOC governance for sustainability is something like a black box; we know it exists, but we lack of research insight with respect to why and how it functions. This case study will open the black box by offering empirical perspectives based on a combination of primary and secondary data. The primary data were gathered from 26 in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interview participants included members from VANOC Board, Board Advisory Committee on Sustainability Performance (BACSP), VANOC sustainability team, corporate sponsors, government and related community organizations. These data were supplemented by secondary data mainly sourced from five VANOC sustainability reports, 25 organizational documents, and 98 media reports from Canadian NewsStand database and local newspapers. A total of 128 documents were reviewed and analyzed. The analyzing of data involved an iterative process in which emerging themes and categories needed to be refined against various sources of evidence (Yin, 2003).

The findings of this study revealed that VANOC was essentially a hybrid, project-based organization representing corporate, governmental, and non-governmental entities, according to the interviews. This added layers of complexity to the case. By definition, VANOC was incorporated as "a not-for-profit company" and was entrusted by the IOC to organize and host the Olympic Games (Vancouver Sustainability Report 2006–07). In addition to the IOC, it had other stakeholders that provided input to its planning and operation. The Province of British Columbia acted as the guarantor to the IOC and was responsible for any financial shortfall of VANOC in hosting the Games. As a project-based entity in its lifespan of seven years, VANOC did not have formal shareholders, but there were certain stakeholders from the Olympic governing bodies, Canadian federal, provincial and local governments, as well as

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Aboriginal communities on the Board to make decisions at both local and global levels. Such a 'policy network', as Rhodes (2007) argues, must be situated in the interorganizational analysis literature.

The context of policy network was that the VANOC's operation budgets largely relied on cash and in-kind support from corporate sponsors. As such, these corporate partners could play important roles in decision-making on VANOC's sustainability projects related to planning and staging the 2010 Games, although no member of the board was selected to specifically represent the financial interests of corporate partners. To address complex interactions with various stakeholders and to manage the changing process in the Olympic context, VANOC created a multi-stakeholder Board Advisory Committee on Sustainability Performance (BACSP) in 2007. The board members were independent from VANOC, and included representatives from three corporate partners: Bell, RBC and Teck (Board Advisory Committee, 2007). The BACSP played an important advisory role by providing the third-party input regarding VANOC's sustainability performance. This was confirmed by the interview with the VANOC manager.

The findings of this study demonstrate that from network theory lens, interdependence between VANOC and its various partners, particularly the corporate partners, is boarder than VANOC boardroom. Continuing interactions between Vancouver 2010 network members for resources exchanges and shared goals (e.g., sustainability objectives) illustrate that informal authority supplements formal authority in policy-making and implementation, reaffirming network approach to governance by Rhodes (2007), that advances governance through networks and by networks. This study provides empirical evidence that network theory can be utilized to examine the governance of Olympics for sustainability, supporting the argument by Farquhar et al. (2005) as well as Hoye and Cuskelly (2007). This entails steering a network governance to guide collective actions towards a consensus amongst stakeholders involved (Girginov, 2012). This case study implies that delivery of sustainability in Olympic cities is not only an outcome, but also a process.