

Portraying ‘Paralympism’? An analysis of the evolution of Paralympic athlete media representations since the 1980s

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Abstract

Positioned within the assertion that the mass media serves as the tool for meeting the Paralympic Movement’s Vision, this study set out to analyse how Paralympic media portrayals have been representative of Paralympism since the 1980s. To achieve this, a document analysis of primary and secondary sources attained from the archives of the IPC and Dutch National Archives alongside content analyses of specific Paralympic Games was conducted. The resultant key findings included that 1) many of the commonly referenced portrayals of Paralympians throughout history are still present within Paralympic reporting today, 2) it could be determined that progress has occurred in view of meeting the Paralympic Movement’s altruistic aims since the 1980s, 3) the amount and quality of coverage of Paralympians has undergone a significant shift within the timeframe under investigation, and 4) the actions of organisers of sport for athletes with an impairment, but above all the athletes themselves, created the situation enabling the Movement’s rise to prominence and enhanced visibility. It is posited that one way the IPC may better capitalise on its present situation could be that of adopting an official definition for Paralympism, celebrating the individualities of para-sport and its specific cultural history.

Keywords

Paralympism, Paralympic media representations, Paralympic Movement, Paralympians, Paralympic history

Flindall, R.A. (2020). Portraying ‘Paralympism’? An analysis of the evolution of Paralympic athlete media representations since the 1980s. *Diagoras: International Academic Journal on Olympic Studies*, 4, 75–101. Retrieved from <http://diagorasjournal.com/index.php/diagoras/article/view/91>



Introduction

Even prior to the inaugural Rome Paralympic Games in 1960, organisers of sports for athletes with an impairment conducted their sporting competitions, first and foremost, for the benefit of the athlete (Howe & Jones, 2006; Misener & Darcy, 2014; Reismüller & Parry, 2017). Thus, this was the rationale that led certain influential individuals such as Sir Ludwig Guttman, considered the founding father of the Paralympic Movement, to devote their efforts and progress with the development of sport for athletes with an impairment (Brittain, 2016; Howe, 2008b). Without doubt, this position, at least publicly stated depending on one's view, has been maintained throughout the entirety of Paralympic Movement's history (Bailey, 2008; Inside the Games, 2012).

It can be considered that para-sport organisers differ from their counterparts in sport for able-bodied athletes in so far that the conduction of their respective competitions has as its focus the altruistic aim of enhancing societal positions of persons with a disability (International Paralympic Committee, 2019). This statement can be derived from the organisation's long-standing belief that by showcasing certain athletes with an impairment's athletic capabilities this would lead to perceptual changes about the role of persons with a disability in society. In line with this, Guttman proclaimed early on his desire that the Stoke Mandeville Games, what would go on to become the Paralympic Games, might one day be considered the Olympic equivalent for athletes with an impairment (Bailey, 2008; Reismüller & Parry, 2017). It should be noted, however, that Guttman's held position contrasts that of what is commonly accepted today; he was initially concerned with the rehabilitation of his 'patients' so that they could make a meaningful contribution to greater societal needs (Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2012; Doll-Tepper, 2003).

While never officially adopted by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) or that of the other international sports organisations for the disabled (ISODs), this notion of the Paralympic Movement's altruistic aim has clear links to what has become known within certain circles as Paralympism, the philosophy guiding the principals and actions of the Movement. Those who have attempted to elaborate on or develop a definition for Paralympism have done so by taking the IPC's aspiration, mission and, above all, values as the foundation for their

conceptual thinking (Howe, 2008c, 2008b; Howe & Parker, 2012; Howe & Silva, 2018; Landry, 1993; Legg & Steadward, 2011a; McNamee, 2017; McNamee & Parnell, 2018; Peers, 2012; Wolff, Torres, & Hums, 2008). Thus, this overriding motif concerns the IPC's intention "[...] to enable Para athletes to achieve sporting excellence" which should result in creating "[...] an inclusive world through para sport" (International Paralympic Committee, 2019, p.6-7). What is not directly stated, however, is how this might be achieved, although the apparent answer might be that of the media transmitting Paralympic news and images to the public (Howe, 2008a).

Numerous studies have been conducted to-date on the role of the media for the Paralympic Games/Movement, whereby the tendency has been to utilise the method of content analysis to evaluate how the Paralympics have been portrayed within various mediums (Claydon, 2015; Flindall, 2018; Goggin & Newell, 2000; Hibberd, 2015; Misener, 2013; Van Sterkenburg, 2015; Young Chang & Crossman, 2009; Young Chang, Crossman, Taylor, & Walker, 2011). This line of academic enquiry first took off at the end of the 1990s and has since developed into one of the most common research practices within the field of Paralympic studies. Certainly, it can be stated that the seminal works of Schell & Duncan (1999) and Schantz & Gilbert (2001) as well as those that have followed thereafter have begun to form an evaluative basis not only for Paralympic media studies but the Movement as a whole. The main analytical themes that have been included therein have been to evaluate portrayals of Paralympians, the Paralympic Movement and the Paralympic Games, which have usually been done through making comparisons to their Olympic counterparts.

Despite the above-mentioned advances within Paralympic media enquiry, there remains the potential research gap of evaluating the portrayals of Paralympians, as the key actors respectively, through the specific philosophical lens of Paralympism. Furthermore, prior research has tended to focus on one specific country and edition of the Paralympics within the respective analysis. Taking these two observations into consideration, the present study at hand sets out to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the trajectory of media depictions of Paralympians through the theoretical lens of Paralympism.

Paralympism

The theoretical concept of Paralympism can be considered as the philosophical equivalent to that of the Olympic Movement's Olympism (Brittain, 2016). However, neither the IPC nor its forerunners have ever officially claimed to have an own philosophy guiding the actions and principals of the Paralympic Movement (Howe, 2008b). It was rather Landry (1993) who first surfaced the term Paralympism during the 1993 Vista scientific congress of the IPC, although the paper concluded that a separate philosophy was probably not necessary. The rationale for this, which has also been voiced by other critics since (e.g. Wolff et al., 2008), was based on the universality of Olympism and that of the two philosophies sharing many of the same themes.

Despite such criticism of Paralympism, the philosophy has continued to appear throughout academia as well as being referenced by various bodies, most commonly on national Paralympic committees' websites (Asian Paralympic Committee, 2014; Clarke, 2014; Croatian Paralympic Committee, 2014; Paralympics Ireland, 2019). Further, even the first IPC President Robert Steadward has elected to use the term within his writings (Legg & Steadward, 2011a). Sharing the stance of Steadward, possibly the strongest voice calling for the need for Paralympism is that of the renowned Paralympic researcher and former Paralympian David Howe (Howe, 2008c, 2008a, 2008b; Howe & Jones, 2006; Howe & Parker, 2012; Howe & Silva, 2018). The justification for a Paralympic own philosophy in Howe's view can be made due to the individualities of sport for athletes with an impairment, especially that of the classification system.

One of the main issues when attempting to elaborate on Paralympism is that of there not being an accepted definition. This is mostly likely on account of the Paralympic Movement never having officially adopted an own philosophy and a result of the on-going academic debate as to 1) if a Paralympic own philosophy can be justified and 2) if so, what Paralympism might entail. That said, to the author's best knowledge, two attempts to define Paralympism presently exist. The first of these, and most widely referenced, is that of the definition outlined on the Asian Paralympic Committee's website (Asian Paralympic Committee, 2014). This definition is largely the same as that of Olympism's definition included within the international Olympic Committee's (IOC) Olympic Charter, although it does deviate to incorporate

certain specific aspects pertaining to para-sport. The second stated definition comes from the renowned sport's philosopher Mike MacNamee. MacNamee's definition was shaped by his view of there not really being a specific need for a separate philosophy while also taking into account the remarks of Howe. Resultantly, this led to his postulation of the brief definition of "the celebration of sporting difference" (McNamee & Parnell, 2018, p.476).

One commonality that has been shared by those on both sides of the argument concerning the need for Paralympism constitutes that of attempting to evaluate or conceptualise the philosophy based on the IPC's Vision, Mission and Values (International Paralympic Committee, 2019). This has entailed discussing the overall aim of utilising elite para-sport achievements to inspire the broader public in view of this leading to perceptual changes and improvements for the everyday lives of persons with an impairment. McNamee & Parnell's (2018) critique of whether there is essentially anything separate about the IPC's athlete centred Values of Courage, Determination, Inspiration and Equality from those of 'typical' sporting values is perhaps most insightful in this regard. Thereby, they presented the argument that while such values are unquestionably desirable there does not appear to be a clear ethical distinction that would justify the need for a separate philosophy. However, the paper went on to discuss certain individualities about sport for athletes with an impairment and agreed that a potential need for Paralympism does exist, although possibly represented by alternative values.

Without disregarding that, within its definition, Olympism is all encompassing enough to also include athletes with an impairment, the author shares the opinion that a Paralympic own philosophy is justified accounting for the individualities and specific history of the Paralympic Movement. Thus, also considering the empowerment potential of the Paralympic Movement as noted by its founder (Guttmann, 1976), an assessment of athlete representations in terms of portraying Paralympism can be made. For the purpose of this study, this will include evaluating how athletes are represented in view of whether these could be considered as contributing to the IPC's Vision of creating "[...] an inclusive world through para sport" (International Paralympic Committee, 2019, p.6).

Paralympism

From the stance of the IPC, the Paralympic athlete is at the centre of all of the organisation's actions, especially concerning the Paralympic Games, and those of the Paralympic Movement's stakeholders (International Paralympic Committee Agitos Foundation, n.d.). This position of the leading institution for para-sport is certainly not nuanced and has existed stretching back to the roots of the Paralympic Movement and the former Stoke Mandeville Games. However, it should be noted that who this group, Paralympians, consists of has been a focal point of contention within the Paralympic Movement throughout its history (Bailey, 2008; Howe, 2008b).

Without doubt, when tracing the trajectory of the Paralympic Games in consideration to Paralympians, the first point of contention is evident. As with the Olympics, the IPC and its forerunners have always had to regulate who would be allowed to participate within the Games and what events/sports would be included within its programme. Thus, this is in reference to the different disability categories and respective athletes therein. During the first 16 years of its existence, the Paralympic Games were only for athletes with spinal cord injuries and it took until 1976 at the Toronto Olympiad for the Physically Disabled for this to change with the inclusion of athletes with a visual impairment (Gold & Gold, 2007). This was followed by athletes with Cerebral Palsy for the Arnhem Games in 1980 and in Atlanta in 1996 the Games resembled those of today for the first time when athletes with an intellectual impairment participated; although they were later excluded from 2000-2012 following the Sydney 2000 Paralympics scandal that saw the Spanish basketball team draft non-intellectually impaired athletes (Bailey, 2008). Besides the potential implications for organising the Games, it has been documented that tensions between the organisers and even athletes, most of all concerning the inclusion of athletes with an intellectual impairment, contributed to this delay in opening up the Games to all categories (Howe, 2008b; Wedgwood, 2014).

Another theme surrounding who Paralympians are entails that of athletic excellence and classification. There is an overall consensus in academia that the leaders of the different ISODs always fought for their own athletes' best interests. Simultaneously, however, the large number of categories, opening up of the Games to different disabilities, few number of competitors in certain categories and

consequential large number of medals awarded raised questions over the elite status of Paralympians. This questioning concerned whether the Paralympic Movement should focus on sports for all or elite sport, which was the approach taken up by the IPC – especially following the signing of the cooperation agreements with the IOC at the start of the century (Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2016; Howe, 2008b).

The IPC is tasked with the challenging role of deciding which events and categories are to be included and as such who has the right to call themselves Paralympians. It would appear that this, while obviously keeping to the official participation requirement guidelines, is done by a somewhat balancing of making the Games ‘consumable’ to the public and the meeting of its ‘Paralympism-centred’ aims. Thus, the Paralympics act as the stage for the global dissemination of the athletic achievements of Paralympians with the belief that this will lead to a more equitable society. However, besides that of their athletic achievements, it is naturally the role of Paralympians to uphold and portray the Paralympic values on their enhanced platforms, acting as role models and ambassadors for Paralympism - similar to Agitos’ Proud Paralympian programme (International Paralympic Committee Agitos Foundation, n.d.).

Media Dynamics

The sports media nexus has a vital role to play in establishing the position of mega events and hence athletes within broader societal structures (Brittain, 2017; Eagleman, Burch, & Vooris, 2014; Maguire, Butler, Barnard, & Golding, 2008). For the purpose of this study, it can be claimed that the media pertains the influential role of contributing to the societal status of not only athletes but persons with a disability. This claim can be made due to the processes of media production and consumption. The media “[...] pertain the influential ability to not only determine what issues and topics their [consumers] think about but also how they think about them through the framing of their [products]” (Flindall, 2018, p150).

Mass media theories such as framing or agenda-setting posit that the media produces content in such a way that will influence what consumers think and believe (McCombs & Shaw, 1993; Murdock & Golding, 2005). Further, the typical stance adopted by academics within the field is that of the media creating content

in such a way as to optimise economic revenues. It is with this position in mind that one can make the assumption that media products reflect societal views, as people tend to consume what they perceive as of importance (Schantz & Gilbert, 2001).

However, it has been argued that the stance above only reflects 'one side of the coin'. These theories neglect 1) the fact that media proprietors often have agendas besides that of mere economic growth, such as political alignments; 2) that journalists have the ability to shape certain stories and include personal opinions within the framing of their products; and 3) that consumers also have the ability to critically reflect on media products and shape their own opinions. It is for this reason that the theory of critical political economy, which accounts for these aspects, was selected as an evaluative lens for the present study (see Maguire et al., 2008).

Research Question

Based on the aspects detailed within the literature review and theoretical considerations, the following research question guiding the study was formulated. This addresses in particular the fact that, to the author's best knowledge, there has yet to have been a study attempting to evaluate the representations specifically under the lens of Paralympism and that of the changes within athlete representations throughout the Paralympic Movement's history since the start of the 1980s.

RQ1) How have Para-athlete media portrayals been representative of Paralympism since the 1980s?

Methods

Attempting to answer the research question, this study implemented a qualitative case study design and was both explorative and explanatory in nature. Therein, this involved the undertaking of a document analysis of both primary and secondary sources. For the former group, these included documents obtained in the archives of the IPC and Dutch National Archives. The latter group included media articles either located online or through the aforementioned archives and previous studies evaluating the role of the media for the Paralympic Movement and/or media portrayals of the Paralympic Movement. In particular, the content analyses conducted since

the 1990s and media articles throughout the 1980s allowed the author to attempt to formulate a comprehensive picture as to how Paralympians have been represented throughout history. The documents concerning Paralympic governance such as the actions taken by the International Coordinating Committee (ICC), forerunner to the IPC, or the IPC made it possible to draw potential links between the changes in media representations and the Paralympic Movement.

Paralympian Portrayals

1980s

The Paralympic Movement underwent one of its largest organisational shifts throughout the 1980s. Without going into too greater detail, this was on account of the different ISODs coming together to form the collective body of the ICC (Bailey, 2008). The ICC held the responsibility to represent sports for people with an impairment globally and its foundation was largely influenced by the IOC, under the then new presidency of Juan Antonio Samaranch. This involved the withholding of patronage and support unless the Paralympic Movement came together under one respective body for all the different disability groups (Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2016; Howe, 2008b).

Although it has been documented that the ICC found it difficult, at times, to come together under a common objective, the body was a significant milestone in creating what is today the Paralympic Movement (Brittain, 2016). Besides the IOC, however, the ICC/ the Paralympic Movement also received a great deal of support from another body, namely the International Fund Sport Disabled (IFSD); the IFSD was established with funds left over from organising a televised Gala Bingo fundraiser for the organisation of the 1980 Arnhem Paralympic Games (Bailey, 2008). This fundraising body proved to be a key player throughout the 1980s in the activities of organisers of sports for the disabled on an international level, many of which could be linked to increasing the status and visibility of the Paralympic Movement.

The relationship between the media and para-sport both prior to and within the 1980s could be described as weak; it was only in 1976 in Toronto that the Games were broadcast live for the first time and this included only very limited coverage for local media networks (Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2016; Hughes, 1999). One could

make several attempts to rationalise this apparent lack of interest in para-sport by the mass media and hence the broader public. Above all, the argument stands that the Paralympic Games were still within a phase of transition, whereby it was only within the 1980s that all of the different ISODs came together for the first time (Bailey, 2008). Hence, the Paralympic Movement might have lacked the necessary professionalization required to grasp the attention of global audiences.

The aforementioned bodies coordinating and supporting the Paralympic Movement undertook several initiatives attempting to ratify this. Exemplifying perhaps the two most applicable here, namely to the representations of Para-athletes within the media, one can cite the actions and financial backing of the organisations (as well as the IOC) of demonstration events at the Olympic Games (International Fund Sport Disabled, 1986, 1990; International Fund Sport Disabled Board and Advisory Board, 1984) and the supporting of promotional/educational activities such as the Rick Hanson 'Man in Motion' World Tour (International Coordinating Committee, 1987; International Fund Sport Disabled, 1986; International Fund Sport Disabled Board and Advisory Board, 1985) or the joint initiative of the ICC, the United Nations and the IFSD to organise sport cadres seminars within the developing world (International Coordinating Committee, 1986). As it could not be determined if the latter activity of the seminars had a direct impact on the broader portrayal of athletes, only the former two will be elaborated on here.

The struggles of the organising committee for the 1984 Paralympic Games in terms of securing the necessary funds to run the Games and the consequent division of the event across both sides of the Atlantic have been documented (Andersen, 1988; Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2016; Howe, 2008b; International Fund Sport Disabled Board and Advisory Board, 1984). Further, it has even been insinuated that this occurred as a result of the ICC's inability to cooperate and too greater interest in being included within the Olympics via demonstration events. However, to the author's best knowledge, not a great deal of attention has been given on how the demonstration events both portrayed the athletes or in what way they might have fostered the development of the Games.

It can be said that the Paralympic events held for the first time at the Olympics in 1984 drew a great deal of attention (Andersen, 1988; Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2016; Howe, 2008b; International

Fund Sport Disabled Board and Advisory Board, 1984). According to Steffen Andersen (1988), a Danish journalist, the organisation of wheelchair racing demonstrations, 1500 meters for men, 800 meters for women, was a “complete success” (p.9). The journalist noted that the races were transmitted throughout the world, with the exception of Denmark (1984 Olympics). However, this initiative to coordinate demonstration events at the Olympics has received criticism. Labanowich (1988) questioned the impact of the events, especially in terms of promoting the Paralympic Movements’ principles, and rather claimed they were held for the social outreach benefit of the IOC. That said, he also put forth that “[...] they may stimulate increased participation by disabled individuals in sports as well as provoke a wider appreciation and recognition by the public [...] (p.269). Further, even David Legg and the first IPC President, Robert Steadward, who was a proponent to the notion of Olympic inclusion, noted that, unless the events were to become full medal competitions, many within the Paralympic Movement saw them with a perception of ‘tokenism’. They also noted, however, that others viewed them as “tremendous marketing opportunities for athletes with disability when television audiences were at their highest” (Legg & Steadward, 2011, p.1110).

Turning now to the second initiative aforementioned, the Rick Hansen ‘Man in Motion’ world tour saw the former Canadian Paralympian undertake a 40,000km multi-stage wheelchair marathon across 34 countries. Commencing this phenomenal challenge in 1985, Hansen initiated the activity to demonstrate the capabilities of persons with a disability and also as a means to raise funds to support athletes with a disability, which led to the still existing Rick Hansen foundation (International Coordinating Committee, 1987; Rick Hansen Foundation, n.d.; The Canadian Press, 2020). With the financial backing of numerous governments and organisations, one of which being the IFSD, the ‘Man in Motion’ tour garnished a great deal of positive press attention and it could be argued contributed significantly to progressing the status of athletes with an impairment for societies to come (International Fund Sport Disabled Board and Advisory Board, 1985). Looking back, it has been stated that Hansen was a “household name” during the 1980s (Global National, 2019). In fact, when commenting on the future of the Paralympic Movement, at the time, and its greatest challenge, namely public awareness, Paul Gaywood, former ICC Project Co-ordinator,

mentioned Hansen's tour as the one "[...] initiative that forged new links [...]" (International Coordinating Committee, 1987, p.5). Without doubt, Hansen's efforts, which saw him raise \$26 million for spinal cord research, are well deserving of accolade and he earned numerous awards and honours (Rick Hansen Foundation, n.d.; The Canadian Press, 2020).

1990s

The global transmission of the Paralympic Movement/Games started to come into fruition following the 1988 Seoul Paralympics, which was also the first Games to be held in the same city as the Olympics since the Tokyo Paralympics in 1964 (Brittain, 2016). Each edition of the Paralympics ever since Seoul have continued this trend and built on the attention afforded there (Bailey, 2008). Speaking with the Movement's organizers of the times, the Barcelona Paralympics are generally regarded as one of the most influential in terms of cementing the spirit of the Movement. Further, it was in Barcelona where the broadcast coverage of the Games took another step towards wider recognition, including live TV coverage within the home country and distributed throughout Europe (Brittain, 2016).

One might be quick to assume that there may be a direct link between the success of the Barcelona Games and the newly founded leading institution of the IPC. However, while the IPC was involved within the organisation of Barcelona, as well as the same persons being represented within both organisations, the ICC still pertained the official responsibility for the 1992 edition (Bailey, 2008). Taking this into consideration, one must also account for the fact that, although the IPC/ICC were the leaders of the Paralympic Movement, the Games' organisation and activities such as televisual coverage were still largely under the scope of Paralympic Games' organising committee. The same must also be said for the 1996 Paralympics held in Atlanta, which were also the first Games where a host broadcaster was secured and the Games broadcast on a major American TV network, namely CBS.

The Atlanta 1996 Paralympic Games can certainly be regarded as a key milestone in the recent trajectory of the Paralympic Movement. Although questions have arisen concerning the Games' organisation, securing the four hour pre-recorded

segment to be broadcast on CBS as well as on the two smaller networks of Kaleidoscope and SportSouth was no small feat (MacDonald, 2008). There was a great deal of controversy surrounding the question as to whether NBC, the long time Olympic broadcaster, would televise the Paralympics and even the coverage on CBS had to be purchased as an investment for the Paralympic Movement (Brittain, 2016).

To-date, there have been two seminal studies analysing the media representations of the Atlanta 1996 Paralympic Games. The first of these was conducted by Schell & Duncan (1999), whereby the authors undertook a content analysis of CBS' broadcast, and the second by Schantz & Gilbert (2001), who compared newspaper reporting on the Games in the French and German press. As could be expected, the segment by CBS was much more extensive than that of the almost mere results reporting of the European newspapers. Although, it might be challenging to contrast the two different mediums, especially considering that the American televisual broadcast was commissioned by the Paralympic Movement. It is perhaps incisive, however, to observe the similarities between the two different studies' results. Both determined that the coverage was by no means 'Olympic', drawing comparisons to the quality and breadth of coverage denoted to the Olympic Games. Further, there was congruence in terms of the Paralympic athletes' portrayals being to certain extents derogative; Schell and Duncan witnessed that the CBS commentators opted to draw comparisons to non-impaired athletes and Schantz and Gilbert found that, besides omission categorising the Games' coverage, the athlete representations could be coded under the themes of different, 'other' and as victims of misfortune. Positive portrayals such as evidence for athletes being represented, in some way, as the same as athletes without an impairment were, however, also detected by Schell and Duncan. Lastly, both studies found evidence supporting the common media trend of transmitting the hierarchy of social acceptability; the concept that denotes more attention/coverage being given to different impairment categories based on notions of 'normality' by the non-impaired public (see Brittain, 2016).

Reflecting on the impact of the 1990s for the Paralympic Movement and, in particular, Para-athletes, the statement of Schantz & Gilbert (2001) that reporting had not undergone a great transition throughout the decade is to a certain extent true.

Of course, one might be more inclined to directly agree with this without the benefit of temporal distance and the knowledge of the Paralympic Movement's prominent position today. Reflecting on the findings of the studies, one cannot disregard the significance of bringing the Games to the public, for many of whom, for the first time. Further, when accounting for the nuance in reporting of the journalists, it was to a degree promising that positive portrayals of the athletes were represented on CBS, although this was purchased Paralympic own coverage. One would be inclined to argue that in spite of this, however, the coverage was not yet fully representative of what could be considered as an embodiment of Paralympism. The lack of coverage meant that the IPC was not in the position to reshape societal perceptions of disability on a global scale. Schantz and Gilbert did note within their paper that it was largely accepted at the time – within wealthy Western nations – that persons with a disability would practise sport and engage in broader society. Although, there is still a clear disassociation when contrasting this 'societal acceptance' with indicators such as employment rates and education (Brittain, 2016).

2000 Onwards

As potentially one of the most analysed topics within the field of Paralympic Studies (Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2016; Gold & Gold, 2007; Howe, 2008b; Legg, Fay, Wolff, & Hums, 2015; Mason, 2002; Purdue, 2013), it is probably not surprising that the cooperation agreements between the IPC and IOC at the start of the century impacted Paralympic media (International Olympic Committee & International Paralympic Committee, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2006). Within each version of these agreements, to the author's best knowledge and accounting for not being privy to the most recent version's wording, have included the foundations for broadcasting the Paralympic Games (Etchells, 2018; International Olympic Committee, 2012; International Olympic Committee & International Paralympic Committee, 2006). Based on the minutes of the IPC General Assembly in 2001, this appears to have been largely tied to the Paralympic Movement's financial viability and marketing opportunities (International Paralympic Committee, 2001).

It serves first to outline how this cooperative agreement came into existence when exploring what potential impact the closer cooperation between the Olympic and Paralympic Movements

had for Paralympian portrayals. The Paralympic Movement following the 1996 Atlanta Games were on a steady trajectory to further their goals in spreading the Games globally, as one can exemplify through the action to utilise the Web-based broadcast initiative of WeMedia for the Sydney 2000 Paralympics. This enterprise established a quality base in terms of the broadcast production, although it failed to produce the desired revenues. The resulting costs alongside the failure of other marketing initiatives meant that the IPC forecasted a deficit of USD 149,000 in 2002 and USD 517,000 in 2003 (International Paralympic Committee, 2001). During the same time, the IOC was facing what might be considered as one of its greatest challenges since the Modern Olympics' revival, namely the Salt Lake City bribery scandal and questions of its position as the self-proclaimed world governor of sport linked to the fallout of the Festina Tour de France doping crisis (International Olympic Committee, 1999; Legg et al., 2015; MacAloon, 2011; The IOC 2000 Commission, 1999).

Thus, one might consider that it was the IOC wanting to rebuild its tarnished image and the IPC to find a sustainable revenue stream that led to the inclusion of IPC President Robert Steadward's seat in working group two of the IOC Reform Commission and resulting recommendation 15, namely the Paralympic Games (Movement) (The IOC 2000 Commission, 1999). This recommendation set the groundwork for the resulting cooperation agreements in 2000 and 2002 as well as the reinstatements in 2006, 2012 and 2018. A major aspect in all of these and a point of contention within the IPC was that of the inclusion of agreements relating to the broadcasting and marketing arrangements for the Paralympic Games. The Agreement between the IOC and the IPC on the Organisation of the Paralympic Games, which contained 22 items, was signed by Steadward and Samaranch on 19 June, 2001, in Lausanne, Switzerland (International Olympic Committee & International Paralympic Committee, 2001). The two items most prominent to this study include item 13 "Marketing and sponsorship" and item 15 "Broadcast production and coverage". Explicitly, item 13.1 states that the IOC and the IPC agreed that "all Paralympic Games-related marketing and television/broadcasting rights, including internet web-casts rights, shall be transferred to the respective OCOG", for which an appropriate fee is to be transferred to the IPC (p.8). Having both taken up their respective mantels in 2001, IPC President Sir Philip Craven and

IOC President Jacques Rogge respectively signed the agreements and amendment which stipulated that the media rights to the Paralympic Games were to be sold to the local organising committees of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in return for a fixed sum from the 2008 edition onwards (International Olympic Committee & International Paralympic Committee, 2003, 2006).

One could argue that the merging of the two largest multi-sport events - now officially – presented a tremendous opportunity for the IPC. The organisation was no longer confronted by the need to secure the Games' survival and the enhanced stage allowed for the Paralympics to be transmitted to a larger audience. Thus, this could be viewed as furthering the IPC's vision and in line with Paralympism (Mason, 2002). That said, the decision to continue down this path of merging the Olympic and Paralympic worlds received criticism, positing that the restrictions imposed on the Paralympics led to a diminishment of opportunity for the its athletes. This argument is made in connection to the fact that the agreements have a restriction on the number of events and athletes to be included in the Games, claiming this has led to the cutting of events for more severely impaired athletes (Howe, 2008a).

Nevertheless, with the agreements being enacted in-part from 2004 onwards, the IPC began to tackle the disparity in coverage throughout different regions of the world. This came about in the form of the establishment of ParalympicSport.TV (PSTV) for the 2006 Winter Paralympics in Turin (Brittain, 2016). PSTV, today in the format of a YouTube channel (International Paralympic Committee, 2017b), is the Paralympic Movement's online broadcasting platform intended to reach areas that did not secure a broadcasting rights holder (International Paralympic Committee, 2006). Above all, it was perhaps PSTV's original aim to further the vision of the IPC/Paralympic Movement that can be considered as of most relevance here (International Paralympic Committee, 2007). The initiative's enrolment included the broadcasting of over 150 hours of live coverage of the 2006 Winter Paralympic Games that was consequently consumed by just under an average of 4 and a half hours (International Paralympic Committee, n.d., 2007). PSTV has frequently been the only Paralympic viewing option for many people worldwide, although it is not entirely clear why it underwent the transition into a YouTube channel. There could be a link between this and the agreement concerning geographical rights holders, whereby

this should have been first legally enforceable from 2008 onwards. Taking this assumption into consideration, PSTV has throughout the years contributed to the aims of the Paralympic Movement, helped to disseminate para-sport to a greater audience and largely been received positively (Brittain, 2016; International Paralympic Committee, n.d., 2007).

Having officially entered into the cooperation agreements, the 2008 Beijing and 2012 London Paralympic Games cemented the new 'gigantism-enshrined' era of the Paralympic Movement; a statement that is in many respects evidenced by the global TV audiences of approximately 3.8 billion for the 2008 and 2012 Games (Brittain, 2016; International Paralympic Committee, 2018; International Paralympic Committee, 2012, 2017a). Whereas the 2008 Paralympics were unquestionably a global mega-event, most academic attention to-date, at least in the English language, has been on the London 2012 Paralympics (Claydon, Gunter, & Reilly, 2015; Devine, 2013; Thompson, 2013; Van Sterkenburg, 2015; Walsh, 2015). This is especially true considering the broadcasting coverage and package created by the UK host broadcaster, the national network Channel 4. In another first, Channel 4 won the right to broadcast the Games, competing against the long-time Olympic and Paralympic broadcaster, the British Broadcasting Corporation. The reason as to why the network took over, and has continued thereafter to showcase the Paralympics, was not only a financial decision but largely due to that of Channel 4's innovative strategic design that led to the coverage winning numerous awards (Brittain, 2016).

Channel 4's marketing campaign "We're the Superheroes" has been questioned, however, in relation to the supercrip representation that showcased athletes with an impairment as being 'superhuman' based on their ability to overcome (Silva & Howe, 2012). Without doubt, there is certainly strong evidence for this argument, although one should also consider the voices who are not opposed to the supercrip representation when evaluating whether this was the right campaign to select. Of course, what is also hard to challenge is that the coverage elevated the Games, certainly at home and there is evidence for abroad as well (Van Sterkenburg, 2015), and has to certain extents proven to alter portrayals and perceptions of disability (Claydon et al., 2015; Walsh, 2015). Once more, for assessing to what degree this and the portrayal of Paralympians have met the philosophical aims of Paralympism, London 2012 could be viewed as another step

in the right direction. There has, however, been little evidence to suggest that job opportunities or other social factors have necessarily improved. Although, this statement must be linked to that of the broader landscape within the UK; the right-wing government and press criminalised people with disabilities as fraudsters scamming taxpayers out of their 'hard earned cash' in the lead up to London 2012 (Molesworth, Jackson, & Scullion, 2015; Trevisan, 2015).

As a final remark on a possible legacy of the London 2012 Games, Flindall (2018) reported, from an analysis of the British newspapers' coverage of the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Paralympics, a potential shift in Paralympic portrayals. While many of the more traditional themes were also found to have surfaced such as nationalism and the hierarchy of normalcy, two nuances surfaced: British Summer Paralympians could be regarded as sporting stars and there had been a shift towards sexualising some Paralympians. While neither of these might stand out as embodying the Movement's philosophy, both are more in line with how athletes without an impairment are represented. In addition, one could postulate whether this newfound sporting fame of some athletes could be used to showcase the Paralympic Values, either within traditional media or via their individual platforms such as Twitter or Instagram. Looking at the coverage from the study in 2018 as a whole, an argument for the transmission of Paralympism in respect to meeting the Movement's overriding Vision has bearings. There was, however, little evidence from the reporting style of the UK press to demonstrate the espoused Paralympic Values. This latter argument is made on account of the frequency and length of articles being largely underrepresentative, with the Summer Paralympian pieces being mostly situated within the 'lifestyle' or 'opinion' pages.

Conclusion

While it could be posited that the Paralympic Movement, under the leadership of the IPC, is still undertaking its journey to meet the aims of Paralympism, the occurrences raised within this study present the conclusion that progress has been made over the last decades. This stance should be taken in light of the definition of Paralympism adopted here, namely around that of the IPC's stance of utilising the Paralympics to showcase elite para-sport in view of forming a more equitable society. Although significant

evidence for this on a global scale is not as strong as might be desired, the steps taken have been conducive with that of the organisation's Vision.

The media depictions of the Paralympic Movement and, above all, Paralympians are key to this agenda. Securing media attention through certain activities and the Games themselves has been instrumental in the development of the Paralympics. It was only back at the start of the 1980s, before the ICC came into being, that media representations of Para-athletes could be categorised nigh non-existent. The undertakings of organisers of para-sports, with the backing of external entities such as the IFSD and the IOC, but most of all the athletes competing in the Games, demonstration events or the 'Man in Motion' marathon began to garnish the attention of the broader public. These actions set the stage for the organisers to secure national American broadcasting for the 1996 Paralympics and subsequently enter the cooperation agreements with the IOC.

The perception that Paralympians were still not afforded representative or quality coverage leading up to the 21st century cannot be disregarded. Moreover, the derogative depictions found within the Atlanta 1996 coverage and thereafter by no means encapsulates the values of Paralympism. Small but potentially significant shifts in media reporting, although, have come to fruition in the short period of time surpassed since. Without doubt, the Paralympic Games in recent editions have cemented their place as a truly global mega-event. Although, if we are to speak of achieving the altruistic aims held by organisers for almost a century, the IPC, as leader of the Paralympic Movement, could possibly capitalise on this enhanced visibility to a greater extent. Not excluding the invaluable work of the Agitos Foundation, it might serve for the Movement to officially adopt an own definition of Paralympism, celebrating the individualities of para-sports' cultural history.

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