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Article

Inclusion through Sport: A Critical View on Paralympic Legacy from a Historical Perspective

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Abstract

Through its commitment to universalism, the inclusion of disabled people has become an increasingly prominent objective of the Paralympic Games. To achieve this, the organisers rely on the notion of legacy, which refers to the expected effects of major sporting events on host countries. This notion was initially founded on material aspects and then took an interest in certain intangible sides that were spotted within the organiser's goals and studied in literature. Building on the historical literature about the Paralympic movement's institutionalization, this article shows that this institutionalization took place in a context of tension between disabled communities, depending on their proximity to the Olympic model. What is the impact of this historical legacy in terms of inclusion of the greater number? By shedding light on the historical perspective of the obstacles encountered in the creation of an 'all-disabilities' sporting event, this article aims to discuss and challenge the current perspective on the inclusive legacy of the Paralympic Games.

Keywords

disability; inclusion; legacy; Paralympic Games; sport

Issue

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1. Introduction

For the last 20 years, the organization of mega sport events has been associated with the ambition to leave a legacy (Preuss, 2019). Since the 2012 London Games, having a specific and detailed Paralympic and Olympic

legacy plan has become a prerequisite for candidate cities (Leopkey & Parent, 2012). Inclusiveness has therefore become a crucial goal for every organizing committee. Thus, new big events, such as the Paris bid for the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, made the inclusion of disabled people a major priority. Tony Estanguet,

President of the Paris 2024 Committee, explained that he wished “to use the Games as part of a project to create an inclusive and humanly connected society, which gives everybody a chance” (Paris 2024, 2019). The 2024 Games must therefore reinforce the actions taken by the French government aiming to “make the practice of sports both inclusive and accessible” (Paris 2024, 2019).

In order for this to happen, four main goals have been defined in line with those promoted for the 2012 London Games and 2016 Rio Games. The first one aims to transform the way in which disabled people are perceived. The second goal concerns the issue of accessibility to all sport equipment and to the entire Olympic and Paralympic village. The third goal is to increase the number of memberships to sports federations by 20%—including those which are specifically oriented toward disabled people—while doubling the offer of timeslots available to disabled people on a national scale. Finally, the fourth goal is to develop a centre of excellence for Paralympic sports in the aftermath of the Games.

How can these ambitions, proclaimed during the bid process, be achieved? How can the research concerning the legacy of previous Games help to conceive and construct an inclusive legacy for the next Paralympic Games? The aim of this article is to review existing literature on this topic anew, by historically analysing the institutionalization of the Paralympic movement. Our research stems from a contradiction: How can we reconcile the Paralympic Games’ legacy, which mainly focuses, in a spirit of sporting performance, on the least disabled groups, with the larger goal of including a heterogeneous group? In other words, how can big sporting events promote an inclusive legacy when they focus on a small number of elite athletes?

In order to answer this research question, we propose an integrative review of literature with the aim of combining the different existing perspectives and produce a critical analysis (Snyder, 2019). A non-systematic compendium of research articles, books and book chapters, published in in English or in French, offers the possibility to create a critical qualitative analysis by topic (Torraco, 2005). The goal of this analysis is to highlight the obstacles encountered and subsequently overcome in the creation of major global disability sport events with the aim of gaining a new outlook on the inclusive legacy of the Games. In order to do this, we began by outlining the topics that constitute our literature review: 1) the historical structuring of the sporting movement for disabled people; 2) evaluating the inclusive impact of the Paralympic Games’ legacy (1989–2020) through high level performance, representations in the media, and through the effects on promoting access for every type of public to sports clubs.

We will begin here by reviewing the structuring of the Paralympic movement while highlighting the difficulties generated by the bid to take into account disabilities in all their diversity. Far from being a homogenous

group, disabled people show a heterogeneity to which the legacy of major sporting events will likely have trouble responding in a uniform manner, particularly if we consider that high level competition naturally produces more exclusion than inclusion. Next, we will focus on the three main objectives of the immaterial legacy in order to grasp the extent to which they can answer the inclusive ambitions they claim to aim for.

2. Access to the Olympics (1960–1989): Difficulties and Politico-Institutional Necessities of Bringing Disabilities Together

The history of the institutionalization of the Paralympic movement is marked by the diverging outlooks of the people involved in its development on both national and international levels (Ruffié, Ferez, & Lantz, 2014). The sport activities in the years 1940 to 1960 as a means of re-education for those with physical impairments (Anderson, 2003), were progressively structured into a competitive practice (Legg & Steadward, 2011). The year 1989 marked a milestone with the recognition of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The IPC grouped together the main sport federations of disabled people. However, this sportivisation, which began in the 1960s, led to many questions during the following decades, concerning notably the multiplicity of disabilities and how they were taken into account. A double perspective for inclusiveness thus came to bear, both in order to allow sport participation for disabled athletes, but also to promote the inclusion of the varied groups of people living daily with physical, sensory and intellectual deficiencies. How can the legacy of high-performance sport, which is selective by nature, be reconciled with the inclusion of a diverse community that can sometimes be very distant from physical excellence?

2.1. From Functional Rehabilitation to Competitive Sports

The development of physical and sport activities for disabled people is organized, both nationally and internationally, from two specific perspectives linked to the profile of those involved: doctors or disabled people. Depending on the country, and the promoters of disabled sports, two competing outlooks were developed and then turned against each other during the early days of the internationalization of the Paralympic movement. In certain countries, such as England, Japan or Italy, doctors took a firm grasp of sport activities which were seen as an additional tool in the rehabilitation process (Goodman, 1986). In other countries, such as France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland or Slovenia, it was disabled people themselves, often wounded at war, who organized themselves in an attempt to escape from this initial rehabilitative perspective, and instead produce a sportivisation of the movement.

The first initiative in this matter was the one carried out by Ludwig Guttmann (Brittain, 2011). As a neurosurgeon, specialized in spinal injuries and working for the Stoke Mandeville hospital, Guttmann created a physical activity program for young war-wounded soldiers. Having been faced with numerous medical complications, but also with high suicide rates linked to depression and posttraumatic stress (Anderson, 2003), Guttmann decided to propose sport games to his patients to rekindle their will to live but also as a rehabilitative process (Gold & Gold, 2007). In this manner, physical activities represented, in Guttmann's mind, a medical device aiming to increase the physical capacities of wheelchair users. In this period of post-war reconstruction, the goal was to re-adapt these individuals to society by finding ways to compensate for their disabilities in order to play once more an active part, notably through work (Anderson, 2003). On 28th July 1948, Guttmann inaugurated the first Stoke Mandeville Games, which progressively became an international event for wheelchair users. These sport events, defined through a medical perspective (Bailey, 2008), were also an opportunity for medical specialists to meet and exchange ideas on the subject of rehabilitation through the use of physical activities.

Other initiatives, carried by individuals touched by disability, emerged during the 1950s. Although the goals of these different initiatives were initially similar, the people concerned and the public aimed at were different. For Guttmann, physical activity should only be rehabilitative, from a medical perspective, and only concerned people in wheelchairs. In this outlook, he was quite representative of the promoters, principally professionals from the medical sector, who made propositions "for others," without being concerned themselves by any form of disability (Laville & Sainsaulieu, 1997). For those who were directly affected by war generated disabilities, the perspective was different. They had to suffer the physical, psychological and social difficulties linked to their disabilities. As both beneficiaries and promoters of physical activity, they immediately took into consideration the benefits of physical activity for every physically disabled person, regardless of the nature of the disability. These two perspectives, typical examples of the various initiatives around the world, confronted each other in the 1960s. The international development of disability sports and the institutionalization of the Paralympic movement, such as they are today, are a result of this confrontation.

The Rome 1960 'Olympic Games for Physically Disabled People,' according to the designation of the time, constituted a turning point in the sportivisation process. The annual competitions set up since 1948 by Guttmann with the Stoke Mandeville hospital were, for the first time, transferred to the same site and the same year as the Olympic Games (Ruffié & Ferez, 2013). These Games provided the opportunity to show wounded bodies in a prestigious Olympic arena. They were also an oc-

casional for assembling all the different international leaders of disabled sports, which led to the creation of an International Working Group on Sports for the Disabled. However, there were disagreements between Guttmann, representing the doctors, and some leaders who were in favour of a sportivisation of the movement. For the former, the rehabilitative orientation should remain central and, if competition were to be introduced, it should only concern those people who used wheelchairs. For the latter, the goal should be to organize international sport competitions which would be open to all types of disability (Ferez, Ruffié, & Bancel, 2016).

Guttmann created the International Stoke Mandeville Game Committee in 1959, which became the International Stoke Mandeville Wheelchair Sport Federation in 1960, in order to organize competitions and to popularize his model. In 1964, for the second edition of the Olympic Games for the Physically Disabled, which took place in Tokyo, the World Veteran Foundation decided to play an active role. It was a way for them to provide support for those wounded during war and to consolidate their implication within sports for the physically disabled, initiated several years earlier through their help in organizing the Stoke Mandeville Games (Ruffié et al., 2014). During the Tokyo Games, the International Working Group on Sports for the Disabled became the International Sport Organization for the Disabled, a federation that represented amputees, visually impaired people, those with cerebral palsy, as well as the 'others' category. Both of its first two chairmen came from the World Veteran Foundation. Although both federations regrouped the same leading people, it was a way for the World Veteran Foundation to put brakes on Guttmann and to introduce a new outlook, one which was in favour of granting access to competitions to any person living with a disability. The first two editions of the Olympic Games for the Physically Disabled were nevertheless tinted by Guttmann's medical and paternalistic perspective (Bailey, 2008). In Rome, the opening of the event took place in the presence of the minister for health, and in Tokyo, the athletes were presented as patients (Frost, 2012).

2.2. From Games for Paraplegics to Games for "Every Disability"

The 1960s were however a time for the multiplication of national and international competitions, which were the trigger for a sportivisation movement. Competitions began to be accessible to any type of disability, which opened the debate concerning access to the Olympic Games for the Physically Disabled, but also concerning the conditions for a sporting organization enabling an equitable participation for all (Ferez, Ruffié, Issanchou, & Cornaton, 2018). In Tel Aviv (1968), the competitive character of the Games became more prominent. In spite of Guttmann's election as the Head of the International Sport Organization for the Disabled, thus cumulating presidency for the two main international federations of

the time, the sporting orientation was ratified by the participants themselves who were seeking, from then onwards, to prove their excellence through performance. Records were sought after and comparison with non-disabled athletes was no longer feared. Nevertheless, this convergence with competitive sports, following the non-disabled model, questioned the current possibilities for inclusion, and therefore also the legitimacy of the legacy of great Paralympic events. The latter were only finally open to those who were able to engage in a model of physical excellence.

In this context and as early as 1970, the International Sport Organization for the Disabled announced that the 1972 Games would be open to any type of disability (Ferez, Jamain-Samson, Marin-Duval, & Villoing, 2013). However, the negotiations with the International Stoke Mandeville Wheelchair Sport Federation led nowhere. The 1972 Heidelberg Games, to which once again only athletes in wheelchairs participated, were disrupted by amputee athletes asking for their right to participate to be recognized. At the beginning of 1971, the International Sport Organization for the Disabled had made a stand for the 1976 Montreal Games to be open to all. In reality, only visually impaired and amputee athletes participated alongside those in wheelchairs. Athletes with cerebral palsy had to wait until the 1980 Arnhem Games to be integrated. For the members of the 'others' category, integration happened on a case by case basis, as a function of specific classifications being accepted on an international level (Legg & Steadward, 2011).

Throughout the 1970s, the integration of the different publics during the Olympic Games for the Physically Disabled led to a strong debate. It was difficult to imagine sport events which would be specific to each disability without it disrupting the competitive orientation. In this context, national and international competitions were a good opportunity to put classification systems to test, allowing the competitive participation of everyone. Following an initial medical approach, it was a functional orientation which was then favoured in order to allow competitions between athletes with different disabilities but similar levels of functionality within a given sport context (Ferez et al., 2018; Marcellini & Lantz, 2014). The classifications which were adopted however generated dissatisfaction, and those who were the most distant from the sporting model, became dissident. Indeed, these classifications, whilst creating participation conditions for athletes with different types of disability to one same highly competitive event, also ratified the setting aside of lower performing athletes. In this context, how can great sporting events, which are founded on principles such as competition and exclusion, be considered as generating inclusion? In 1978, the Cerebral Palsy International Sport and Recreation Association decided to leave the International Sport Organization for the Disabled. In 1980, the International Blind Sport Association decided to follow suit (Issanchou, Lantz, & Liotard, 2013). Tension punctuated the movement in a context where the desire

to get closer to the non-disabled sport movement was only growing stronger. On this point, the IOC was very clear: Exchanges on the topic of a possible recognition would only be possible if the organizations for disabled sports presented a unique spokesman.

In spite of their disagreements, the different international structures for sport for the physically disabled strove to create a single unified organization. In 1982, the International Coordinating Committee Sports for the Disabled in the World was made up of the International Sport Organization for the Disabled, the International Stoke Mandeville Games Federation (their new name since 1972), the Cerebral Palsy International Sport and Recreation Association and the International Blind Sport Association. The International Coordinating Committee Sports for the Disabled in the World opened the path to recognition by the non-disabled sports movement. A meeting with the president of the IOC took place in 1983, leading to the instigation of sport demonstrations during the 1984 Sarajevo Winter Games and during the Summer Games in Los Angeles. The evolution of the different classifications remained nevertheless controversial, and the prospect of a single organization was a source of concern, notably on the matter of filiations for strongly diversified groups such as mentally disabled individuals. In 1986, the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf and the International Sports Federation for Persons with Intellectual Disability joined the International Coordinating Committee Sports for the Disabled in the World (Ruffié & Ferez, 2013), which constituted a major opening since, up until then, only organizations for people with motor or perceptive disabilities were concerned. In 1988, during the Seoul Games, a decision was made: The Paralympic Games—the accepted term at the time—would then onwards take place every four years in the same location as the Olympic Games. This only really became systematic following the Atlanta Games of 1996. In September 1989, the IPC was officially created, which provided an official recognition from the IOC.

At the end of the 1980s, the long and slow integration process, initiated during the 1970s and based on the Para-Olympic Games, finally led to the creation of a Paralympic movement federating athletes with different types of disability that presented a strongly heterogeneous front. The creation of the IPC, alongside the organization of Olympic and Paralympic Games in the same location, within the framework of a common organization, constituted crucial steps. It was more or less at the same time that the use of the legacy concept started to develop. At this time, it was neither associated to the inclusion issue, nor even to the Paralympic Games.

3. Evaluating the Inclusive Impact of the Paralympic Games' Legacy (1989–2020)

The concept of the legacy of mega sporting events is linked to an effort to exercise power over the future,

through an attempt to anticipate and master the effects that an event will produce before, during, and after its organization. This concept is different from the one of heritage, which historians use in order to designate a past which is reconstituted from the production of meaningful traces supporting a present identity. The concept of legacy can therefore not be grasped independently from its link with the concepts of governance and sustainability (Leopkey & Parent, 2017). Using this concept, it was the managerial outlook of political and sporting organizations which, from the 1980s onwards, constructed the vision of the social impact of mega sporting events.

After 1984, it was the Olympic movement itself that introduced the prospect of a legacy within the specifications which were distributed to each organizing committee. At the beginning, the concept only related to “tangible” aspects (Gratton & Preuss, 2008). Then, more intangible dimensions progressively made an appearance after the year 2000. An interest for the political, cultural or social legacy of great sporting events emerged at the same time as the reflection concerning the impact of the Paralympic Games began to gain momentum (Mangan & Dyreson, 2010).

Early research concerning the effects of the Paralympic Games, and notably concerning the media coverage of the Paralympic Games (Marcellini & De Léséleuc, 2001; Marcellini, Lefebvre, De Léséleuc, & Bui-Xuan, 2000), did not refer to the concept of legacy, but rather to those of visibility and social integration. In the early 2000s, the concept of legacy was scarcely employed in the related literature. When the term ‘legacy’ appeared, it was never related to the issue of disabled people’s inclusion. It was only after 2010, with the preparation of the 2012 London Games, that it was considered in order to explore the specificities of the Paralympic legacy (Leopkey & Parent, 2012). Although the goal of integrating individuals who are able to prove their physical excellence is operational, what remains of the inclusion of the different disabilities? In this case, the notion of inclusion is clearly distinct from the concept of integration. Integration consists, for a group of individuals, to take part in a new group, while transforming it and creating a new collective whole (Marcellini, 2005). As for inclusion, this supposes setting up a material, human and conceptual environment allowing everyone’s participation, without discrimination, and with the expression of human rights (Fougeyrollas, 2010). Using this, can we consider that the legacy of great events such as the Paralympic Games, constructed on the basis of excluding lower performances, can allow inclusion?

Early literature focused upon the tangible legacy, using two indicators: the impact of the organization of the Games on financial investments in favour of Paralympic sports (Darcy & Appleby, 2011) and the extent to which the host city makes its infrastructures (sporting and other) accessible (Legg & Steadward, 2011). As we will see further on, the intangible stakes of the Paralympic legacy were only considered at a later time, and follow-

ing three main indicators: The development of high-level Paralympic sports, the evolution of the manner in which the media represented Paralympic athletes, and the increase in participation of disabled people. We propose to review the related literature concerning these three aspects of the intangible legacy, and to discuss their effects on inclusion.

3.1. Developing High-Level Paralympics for Inclusion?

Research concerning the trajectories followed by top-level Paralympic athletes reveals strongly diversified paths, with many different social obstacles or facilitating elements. On the subject of these latter factors making high-level practice easier, three main recurring elements were revealed: 1) early sporting socialization thanks to the support of a network on which the athlete can count; 2) the decisive role of coaches in the commitment to high-level practice; and 3) the strength of the affiliation with the ‘non-disabled’ sport environment.

On a first level, engaging in recreational sporting activities at an early age constitutes an essential basis for later sport success (Castaneda & Sherrill, 1999; Wang & DePauw, 1995). In this manner, for most of the athletes studied by McLoughlin, Weisman, Castaneda, Gwin, and Graber (2017), taking part in competitive events was preceded by the experience of several recreational sporting activities. This early engagement also instigates a family and friend support structure which, in turn, promotes access to high performance sport (McLoughlin et al., 2017; Ruddell & Shinew, 2006). The support provided by friends, peers, teammates, coaches and teachers constitutes an absolute precondition for engaging in high-level sports practice (Hutzler & Bergman, 2011).

On a second level, coaches play a crucial role in initiating and pursuing careers within high-performance sports. They become in turn ‘recruiters,’ ‘mentors,’ ‘role models’ and/or ‘personal support’ (McLoughlin et al., 2017). However, several studies deplore the lack of specialized coaches able to provide training programs which are adapted to Paralympic athletes (Liow & Hopkins, 1996). Other authors highlighted a stronger emphasis on the medical and rehabilitation character rather than on the athletics and competitive character of sport (Townsend, Cushion, & Smith, 2017). The medico-social approach to adapted physical activity thus conveys a ‘non-disabled’ ideology that vectors a symbolic violence against these athletes (Townsend, Huntley, Cushion, & Fitzgerald, 2018).

On the third and last level, athletes who engage in a Paralympic career tend to highlight their links with ‘non-disabled’ peers and with the ‘non-disabled’ sports community, insisting on the role they played in their sporting commitment (Beldame, Lantz, & Marcellini, 2016; McLoughlin et al., 2017). A number of athletes who were born with a disability lived their first sporting experiences with non-disabled friends, within a recreational framework located outside the boundaries of federal sport

(Castaneda & Sherrill, 1999) or within the 'non-disabled' sporting clubs which made the necessary adjustments in order to be able to welcome them.

On the opposite side, research points to a series of obstacles in accessing high-performance sports for disabled people: 1) injury, to which Paralympic athletes are more often exposed than Olympic ones (Davis & Ferrara, 1995; Martin, 2015; Nyland, Snouse, Anderson, Kelly, & Sterling, 2000); 2) complexity and fluctuations of the classification system (Howe & Jones, 2006; Howe & Kitchin, 2017; Hutzler & Bergman, 2011; Peers, 2009, 2012); 3) cost of practicing high-level sports (McLoughlin et al., 2017; Wheeler et al., 1999); 4) difficulty of finding a sports club and lack of information concerning the sporting offer for disabled people (Taliaferro & Hammond, 2016); and 5) difficulty in accessing sporting infrastructures (Beldame et al., 2016; Burlot, Richard, & Joncheray, 2018).

All in all, the facilitating elements and obstacles evidenced through research weigh differently and have very different ways of expressing themselves depending on the various types of disability (physical, sensory or mental) being considered. Although the legacy of the Paralympic Games aims to improve the participation conditions for the diversity of disabilities, using high-level sports as a basis is questionable. It provides visibility for certain disabled bodies, but can only highlight the multiplicity of the situations experienced depending on the disability with great difficulty. Here, once more, the legacy sought for everybody is limited by a narrow vision of disability and handicap, leaving aside the ideal of an inclusive society while promoting only those individuals who are the closest to the dominant model.

3.2. Sparking Inspiring Representations in the Media

Although media coverage for disabled athletes was almost inexistent before the 1990s, coverage has nowadays become an essential element of the so-called social legacies. It thus becomes important to discuss the role that the portrayal of disability plays in the construction of an event's legacy for the inclusion process. In this context, research has looked into three levels of media coverage: coverage of the sporting event as a whole, coverage of each competition, and coverage of Paralympic athletes. All the information produced concerned visual data, that is to say signs and traces in the form of images that were produced and broadcasted during the event (Terrenoire, 2006), whether these were photos, drawings, paintings or films.

Research in the field of sociology provides evidence of the strong increase in media coverage of the Paralympics after the 1992 Barcelona Games, which was then confirmed with the 1996 Atlanta Games and the 2000 Sydney Games. A larger part of these studies focused on the press coverage of these events (De Léséleuc, Pappous, & Marcellini, 2010; Pappous et al., 2007; Pappous, Marcellini, & De Léséleuc, 2011; Solves, Pappous, Rius, & Kohe, 2018). Studies concerning televi-

sion coverage were sparser (Paillette, Delforce, & Wille, 2002), in the same way as those looking into the overall media coverage of Paralympic sport (Gilbert & Schantz, 2008; Schantz & Gilbert, 2012). Over time, these various studies showed that the ways in which the Olympics and Paralympics are treated became progressively more similar. It must be said that, although the two events maintained a certain distance from one another, from 1992 onwards, they systematically took place in the same location. The understanding, by the management board, of mega-events and their potential side-effects also contributed to closing the gap in terms of image control. Step by step, the unification of the two events within the same organization promoted their association within the media.

A second series of research concerning representations in the media looked into the appearance of disability sport figures (Marcellini, 2007), resulting in three observations: 1) the growing importance of how technological advances are depicted; 2) a promotion of the sporting action and of the sporting effort; and 3) the exhibition of constructed bodies in reference to the sporting body, muscled, efficient, controlled and mastered (Lebel, Marcellini, & Pappous, 2010). A turn was initiated in the media coverage of disabled athletes after the year 2000. Whereas images of racing wheelchairs were initially dominant, they soon were eclipsed by Flexfoot running prosthetics, the symbol of the technologisation of human beings (Issanchou, 2014). Oscar Pistorius was the incarnation of the 'supercrip' figure who fascinated the wider public as much as it worried the sporting institution, insofar as it casted a doubt on the origin of the performances produced (Lebel et al., 2010; Silva & Howe, 2012). In an opposite manner, the lack of media coverage of athletes with mental disabilities contributed to concealing the development of high-level sport for those individuals (Bancel, Cornaton, & Marcellini, 2018; Marcellini, 2007).

In the end, although the media provided the opportunity of broadcasting positive images of the sporting disabled body, they remained standardized in reference to the non-disabled sporting body. In this way, a reference to a tibial amputee, standing, will be preferred over the image of the one in a wheelchair, sitting. What is more, the conveyed representations, constructed on powerful muscles or on modern technologies, create a distance between those who are close to an ideal and those who irremediably drift away from it with each of their peers' accomplishments. Indeed, are they even still peers? Although they give another outlook, the produced images only concern those who are the most capable of attaining the non-disabled sporting ideal. The situation of those with mental disabilities reveals here the limits of the expected change in representations.

3.3. Promoting Sport Practice for Disabled People

Many studies have looked into the links existing between the organization of the Olympic and Paralympic

Games and how much a given population engages in sports (Carmichael, Grix, & Marqués, 2013; Giulianotti, Armstrong, Hales, & Hobbs, 2014). Investment in the sectors of physical education and sports for all became a leitmotiv for the hosting towns (Pappous & Jeyacheya, 2011). Nevertheless, the evidence of a correlation between the organization of a mega-event and an increase in grassroots sport is still inconclusive. The single act of hosting such an event does not mechanically increase participation (Weed et al., 2012). The impact of the Paralympic Games on grassroots sport participation is even more questionable than the impact of the Olympics (Misener, Darcy, Legg, & Gilbert, 2013; Smith & Fleming, 2011; Solves et al., 2018).

Although Coward and Legg (2011) claimed that the 2010 Vancouver Paralympic Games increased the level of sport-for-all participation by disabled people, the authors did not provide any objective indicator allowing to verify this assertion. Following the London 2012 Games, the Head of the British Paralympic Association came to the same conclusion using data concerning Paralympic competition. In both cases, the authors did not have any information at their disposition concerning the evolution of grassroots sport participation for disabled people. Any progression was most often explained by an increase in financial support for Paralympic sport (Darcy & Appleby, 2011). For the 2008 Beijing Games, this increase was mainly beneficial for high performance sport—rather than mass sport—and for the urban and richer zones of the country (Sun, Yan, Mao, Chao, & Jing, 2011).

The organizing committee of the 2012 London Games had clearly indicated its ambition to increase sport participation of disabled people and its wish to change the sporting representations of the British population (Mahtani, Protheroe, & Slight, 2013; Weed et al., 2012). However, at the time of the survey, it was still difficult to ascertain whether this goal had been reached. On the one hand, a slight increase could be noted since 2015 (Sport England, 2017). On the other hand, 89% of the sports clubs questioned by the Sport and Recreation Alliance (2013) did not report any evolution in the number of disabled people enrolled and 86% had not registered any increase in applications to join; in addition, 61% of clubs specialized in sports for disabled people declared no visible evolution in their number of license holders since the Games took place. However, an enquiry led by the English Federation of Disability Sport (2013) showed that 79% of disabled people were interested in taking up sports practice.

In fact, after a temporary increase following the 2012 Olympics, the sporting participation of disabled people began to decline within the UK. Brown and Pappous (2018) attributed this decay to several associated factors. Firstly, they pointed out the limits of the near-exclusive reference to the ‘demonstration effects’ theory. The focus that the organizers of the Games had on this theory led them to minimise the role of social and structural obstacles in limiting the access of disabled people

to sporting activities. Indeed, for a number of these latter, identifying with Paralympic athletes was a difficult process because of the perceived disparity between the performances exhibited and the practice of mass sports. Although a certain momentum was generated by the Paralympic Games, it was difficult to focus and maintain because of the lack of information concerning the sporting offer available for disabled people. Finally, Pappous and Brown (2018) also noted that the increase in media coverage of disability sports was mainly true during the time of the Paralympic Games, but it drastically diminished once these were over.

In the end, faced with their inability to provide empiric proof, the studies concerning the levering effect of the Paralympic Games on the sporting participation of disabled people highlighted the limits of the strategies employed in order to create an inclusive legacy. They also evidenced the importance of coordinating the numerous mechanisms that could produce significant and durable evolutions in the access to mass sports for disabled people.

4. Conclusion

The institutionalization of Paralympic sport is a recent event. The sportivisation movement initiated in the 1960s developed to the accompaniment of bitter debates concerning the integration of every type of disability. Structuring the movement through one single organization was finally only possible at the end of the 1980s, at a time when the question of a legacy was emerging within the Olympic movement, as a managerial goal. In view of this history, Paralympic sport can be likened to a complex assemblage. In addition, the specific demands made by the different groups formed by disabled people, as well as the tensions these generated, reveal how much the legacy of the Paralympic Games cannot be grasped using a generic vision of ‘disability.’

Applying this socio-historical perspective finally led us to review the concept of intangible legacy of the Olympics from a new angle, focusing on inclusion. Indeed, this new reading shed light on a series of issues which can also be glimpsed within the preoccupations concerning the tangible dimensions of a legacy with an inclusive vocation, notably those linked to making accessible sporting, touristic, and transport infrastructures. Although the ideal of universal accessibility on which the inclusive model is founded is faced here with the multiplicity of disabilities and incapacities (motor, sensory, intellectual), the ambition to ensure an intangible legacy exposes it to the complexity of the sociocultural production of disability. Indeed, the impairments associated to the various disabilities can produce, or not, situations of handicap depending on the tangible and intangible norms inscribed within the sociocultural environments they are associated with (Fougeyrollas et al., 1998).

This is the main observation that emerges from the research which has, up until now, studied the three in-

tangible indicators of the inclusive legacy of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (Richard, Marcellini, Pappous, Joncheray, & Ferez, 2019). From the point of view of the leverage effect upon grassroots sport participation and the facilitation for high-level sports careers, the literature shows just how much the barriers to sporting participation can vary depending on the type of disability involved. Regarding the field of media coverage, several studies highlight the extent to which Paralympic performance is not represented in the same way depending on the disability of the athletes. In other words, intellectual disability, sensory impairments or tetraplegia—to cite only these examples—do not generate the same difficulties in accessing sports practice, whether for leisure or for a high-level sporting career. Beyond ‘disability’ as a simple category of public action and management, the existence of distinct situations and issues depending on the disabilities involved must be taken into consideration.

In this way, although Paralympic performances and their coverage by the media can contribute to long lasting transformations within our societies, evolving towards more inclusive organization methods, it is most probably by taking action and in showing these actions that the various situations of disability can be reduced or even negated. The aim should thus be to construct visibility for the performances and actions of disabled people within inclusive environments, that is to say situations which do not hold obstacles to their social participation (Fougeyrollas, 2010). This visibility of performances could participate in downplaying disability and ability limitations to the benefit of a facilitation and promotion of each and all’s social participation.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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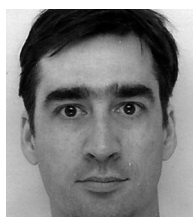
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