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**AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL INSPIRED ANALYSIS OF VISUALLY  
IMPAIRED PARTICIPATION IN A BRITISH JUDO CLUB:**

**ADVOCACY, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CARE ETHICS IN THE DISABILITY SPORT  
BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

A MASTERS THESIS

BY

BEN URBAN

THESIS SUBMITTED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KENT IN FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE of MASTERS BY RESEARCH

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## **1.1 Abstract**

This thesis provides an insider's perspective of how the current experience of Visually Impaired (VI) participants in British Judo (BJA) club environments is evolving alongside the growth of the global development of Para-Judo post London 2012. Via ethnography, the study focuses on how advocacy roles can be established within the BJA Paralympic performance pathway, an emphasis can be put upon social justice to create more ethical and accessible environments, and the experiences of past and current athletes can be learned from. Theoretically guided by phenomenological analysis of participants' lived experience and Gilligan's (1982) theorisation of care, this thesis calls upon accounts of relationships formed with coaches, and Para-Judo facilitators (facilitators being Judo coaches, club welfare officers, and other members of Judo environments whom make Judo possible for people to practice). Data for this thesis has been taken from 4 in-depth interviews conducted with athletes at varying stages in the Paralympic performance pathway, the interviews have been translated from the ethnographic perspective of this research through the development of a series of discussion and policy document analysis which contributes to the growing field of literature that aims to articulate the experience of people living with impairments in the world of culture and leisure which is designed for a non-disabled audiences. The research contributes and provides a critical interrogation of how Paralympic Judo has not only evolved in Britain, but also how its' culture and priorities have been aligned to growing demands of professionalism set by the rapidly evolving global landscape of Paralympic Judo over the last 10 years since London 2012. This is evidenced in findings which suggest that there are very little physical limitations in a VI person participating in Judo, but the obstacles that do exist are results of the cultural, environmental, and social misunderstandings of disability in the context of sporting and leisure environments.

## **1.2 Introduction**

In Great Britain Judo activity is governed by the British Judo Association (BJA) who represent Judo as an Olympic and Paralympic sport to British Olympic and Paralympic associations (BOA/BPA). Currently the BJA has 22,815 active members, and within this the most recent public record accounts for 120 members of the association are practicing Judo with a visual impairment (VI) (BJA Equality Policy / BJA Diversity Action Plan, 2017). The specific focus of this project is to deeper develop the understanding of how club coaches and facilitators from a non-disabled perspective can advocate a care ethics approach to legislate and promote an inclusive grass roots Judo club environment .This thesis begins in response to the success of the top level of Para-Judo in Britain and reflects on how at the grass roots level, we can develop a better understanding of what essential skills and cultural awareness's of visual impairment. Moreover, it seeks to develop an awareness of the relevant sensibilities to upheld by myself, a grassroots and professional coach of VI Judo. In essence this thesis is aimed at creating better understanding how the facilitator (the coach) can facilitate Judo for the facilitated (the VI Judoka). At the elite performance end, over recent years of the BJA's membership, the Paralympic VI Judo team has gained a good level of media and marketing coverage (see: Independent, 2021; Inside the Games, 2022). In particular after securing a Silver and a Bronze Medal in a home Paralympic Games in London 2012, and now post Tokyo 2020(1) with another successful Paralympic Games (1 Gold and 1 Silver) we see our current Paralympic finalists as poster faces, potentially even spear heads of the association over many of the Olympic athletes participating as part of the World Class Performance Programme (WCPP).

### **Key research objectives of this thesis:**

1. To develop a clearer understanding of the individual experience and needs of VI participants accessing club based Judo in the UK.
2. To furthered understand how the experience of VI Judo participants has been over the last 10 years since London 2012 in order to develop a blueprint in the future which maps the successes and learning points of the last 10 years as we develop a new cohort of future Paralympians in the buildup to Brisbane 2032.

3. To build on from the phenomenological data (interviews, policy document analysis, and the ethnographic position of the researcher) collected within this thesis and apply these learnings to a theoretical framework where advocacy and care can be understood within terms of social justice as acts where the performance pathway can account for the needs of future Para-Judo participants to work away from a one rule fits all model; where their individual lived experience is accounted for.

The work of this thesis is contextualized by academic notions where the term inclusion within disability sports club based practices to be more expansive than inclusion by the means removing physical obstacles it is noted to be more a process than a state, and should include knowledge, communication, and quality of experience (Christiaens & Brittain, 2021). The research is underscored by the encouragement offered by scholars such as Fitzgerald, Jobling and Kirk (2003), whose work has foregrounded the need to progress disability and disability sport research; particularly within the context of young peoples' lives and experiences at the grassroots level. This approach of focusing on the through process (knowledge, communication, and quality of experience) of grassroots disability sport delivery, is a responsibility that is possessed by the non-disabled facilitator and the interactions between the athlete, facilitator and the physical and socio-cultural environment. Throughout this thesis there is, therefore, significance applied to studies which reflect a more abstract built environment that re-conceptualises the environment as not just a building with physical limitations but a space where the complexities and needs of individual's disabled experience can be accounted for in the non-disabled sporting environments (see Richardson & Motl, 2020; Smith, Bundon, and Best 2016; Richardson et al. 2017). In British Judo club environments the types of non-physical barriers that typically occur are related to coaches and club facilitators not fully understanding what support a person living with a visual impairment requires; it may be as simple as explaining to other members of the club how to best introduce oneself to someone with a visual impairment, and this is the intention of this thesis, to deeper understand where the limitations exist in a VI persons experience of a Judo club in Britain.

The temporal perspective of the thesis is framed by the ten year journey of British Judo's Paralympic programme from London 2012 to post Tokyo 2020(1). Through this ten year period, beginning with athletes participating in this study who have gone from the Paralympic aspiration programme in London 2012 to performing at elite international levels in 2022 and beyond. To coincide with that data, this thesis gains insight from athletes beginning their 10

year progression to Brisbane 2032 Paralympic Games, who allow for a perspective on what have we learnt from the more experienced athlete's in the programme over the last ten years. Specifically, the thesis examines the role of club coaches as advocates of social justice, as care givers, and as facilitators of the disability-sport built environment. Key literature that explores effective coaching styles (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Côté, Young, North, & Duffy, 2007; Kohe and Peters, 2017) provides a contextual basis for current attitudes and approaches to disability coaching. Amongst these scholars, and others, arguments have prevailed which suggest the types of personality traits that are required for working within the disability sport environments. This is supported in anecdotal accounts from the participant pool's experience of their club coach being a 'good person' (Kohe and Peters, 2017). Within existing literature, this notion is also discussed in relations to the typical personality traits of disability sport coaches such as kindness, patience, and approachableness. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how Judo club environments can become more inclusive in order to prepare VI Judo athletes steadily for what could be a ten year trajectory from leaving club based Judo to winning their first Paralympic medal.

This thesis, whilst examining what happens within the aforementioned ten year period (club to podium), most importantly from the process of conducting this study and unintentional consequence has enabled the study to provide an initial conceptual framework for coaches to implement from the first day a VI Judoka steps into a dojo. This study has been conducted from the embedded ethnographic position that benefits the study to offer an opportunity to research from the perspective of an insider to the community of VI Judo. Through semi-structured interviews, an objective of this study was to utilise the lens of phenomenology to create a theoretical methodology where a coach or facilitator can access insight to new Judoka's lived experience as a VI person to improve the way they teach them Judo and helps them to learn about the relationship between themselves, their bodies and the environment as VI participants. As scholars note, the utilisation of a phenomenological approach to the data collection is to unearth accounts of an individual's experience of being in the world, which throughout this thesis is referred to as an embodied experience of the world (Husserl, 1970; Merleau Ponty, 1945). More recently, scholars have further emphasised the value of phenomenological approaches in articulating individual's relationships to their existence within the world in terms of being 'knowledge in the hands' (Reynolds, 2004). Sportspeople thus touch, and are in turn touched, by the physical properties of the terrain and equipment of their sport and in this instance the material of the Judo club environment:

Judo gi (kit), tatami (mat), and wooden flooring surrounding the tatami (dojo floor) and so they build a two-way, embodied relationship with them and with their surroundings (Richard, et al., 2019). The notion of learning from knowledge of the hands creates an interesting perspective for applying to this research into grass roots Paralympic Judo as it can allow for a coach to gain understanding of how a person's physical ability and physical experience is related to the non-physical components of the disability grass roots sporting environment: knowledge of disability, communication of needs, and the development of coaches who are advocates for change in the disabled experience of British grass roots sporting environments.

## **2. Literature Review:**

### **2.1 The Disabled Advocate: Disenfranchising from the wider performance system.**

This chapter focuses on exploring the existing research of how athletes living with disabilities identify within sporting environments which are pre-established for non-disabled users. Scholars in the field of disability sports participation who are responding to the inclusion and access for disabled bodies within non-disabled sporting environments include Koncul and Slatman, (2019) and Curisol and Barreira, (2021) whose work has, respectively, formulated valuable starting points for this chapter which aims to unpick why scholars are pointing out that Para-athletes are disenfranchising from wider high performance environments to highlight the needs of disabled participants at all levels of disability sport; grass roots to Paralympic podium. Butler (2014) importantly highlights in opposition to this thesis' conceptualisation of disenfranchisement, that despite the current tropes in disability studies (post London 2012) disabled groups have been most vulnerable to disenfranchisement happening to them due to our bodies being intertwined with sociopolitical dynamics of culture (Sim Butler, 2014, p.7). Butler does though cite disenfranchisement as an act which can re-center social constructions of normality (p.112), which for this study the act of Para-athletes disenfranchising from wider Olympic performance systems, forces NGBs to re-establish what normal operating of sporting environments looks like with Para-athletes re-centered following disenfranchisement within the environment.

In developing an understanding of the available vantage points to sports national governing bodies (NGB) to create more equitable sporting activities for disabled participants, a clear narrative of advocacy of experience has emerged as a useful tool in the form of Paralympic role models. Advocacy by elite Para-athletes offers NGBs an opportunity to account for experience, and to identify where improvements to their particular sporting environments

can be made. Advocacy in the format of coalitions of people within an organisation working towards a common goal has been concluded to be a useful process of identifying development areas for NGBs, despite the limitations it may have for grassroots sport due to economic support at the lower end of high performance pathways (Green & Houlihan, 2004). In progressing creating equitable sport environments which allow disabled and non-disabled athletes to participate in harmony the voice of an advocate can be utilised as an activist for change. In the case of the British Judo Association and their parallel Olympic and Paralympic performance pathways; the Paralympic athletes at the top of the performance pathway are world leaders, and have developed over the last three Paralympic cycles (2012-2021) a prominent voice for change within the association, despite these figures emerging there is little proof within the BJAs inclusion policy documents (see chapter 5.3) that they have been acknowledged by the NGB.

Para-athlete advocacy can be seen as a valuable information source for NGBs to gain deeper understanding of their membership experiences and issues related to the the route to high performance Paralympic sport from the nucleus of VI Judo: the VI athlete. Commonly, scholars who have identified disabled athlete advocacy as important information sources to NGB (Powis, 2018; Bundon & Hurd Clarke, p.352, 2015; Kidd, 2003). Collectively, this work suggests that through advocacy athletes are in pursuit of improving standards and experience of future disabled participants for their particular sports. Bundon and Hurd Clark (2015) conclude advocacy to be by or behalf of a group who deem it necessary to disenfranchise from a dominant group. Fitzgerald et al, (2003) cite Corbett (1998) who creates a framing context for the lack of awareness that powerful professional non-disabled voices assume of themselves when talking about disability and personal experience.

In the case of this study, the disenfranchisement comes from where the BJA currently analyse the effectiveness of their Paralympic performance pathway at the top/world level. In order to create a disenfranchisement the Paralympic pathway needs to be firstly assessed differently to the Olympic performance pathway. Secondly, athletes need opportunities for their experiences to be heard (in this case via ethnographic methods that include interviews and more longitudinal engagements with researchers) on the basis of their previous experience of specifically their club environment. As indicated in the introduction, the purpose of this project is to develop a clearer understanding of how the individual franchise of the Paralympic programme is effectively or ineffectively working so that a new generation of VI Judoka can emerge over the next 10 years.

Further analysis of the roles of advocacy within a disability sport context offer the need for disenfranchisement as a way of allowing the advocating franchise to point out their individual needs from the dominant group. Powis (2018, p.5,) points out from the perspective of Weiss (1994) advocacy is not necessarily a 'default setting' within social research. Yet, many sociologists adopt an advocating standpoint and use their research to advocate for their participants. Powis' work points towards the oppression which has historically existed within the methodology of disability research. The position of the researcher as non-disabled advocating for disabled lived experience creates a power dynamic which has been criticised historically as pointed out by Stone and Priestly (1996) in *Parasites, Pawns, and Partners: disability research and the role of non-disabled researchers* (Hunt's, 1981 & Finkelstein, 1980). The criticism of the position of the researcher as an advocate for oppressed groups is presented by Stone and Priestly and encouraged through academic responses to historical representations of disabled perspectives, through a need to reversing research

hierarchies. In order to recognise the need to empower and give space for advocacy from a disabled perspectives, as opposed to an academic perspective on disability. Although advocacy has been established within Powis' (2018) writing as a position where an academic can advocate through research for a certain group, this thesis seeks to produce a framework where the power of advocacy can be shifted from the academic position of the author towards the individual whom possesses the lived experience of disability. Such an approach is vital for recognising that disabled people as a group may be in an oppressed and/or marginalized position and that the conduction of research from an academic perspective is one built upon privilege and power of non-disabled people.

In the contemporary setting phenomenological studies present the disabled experience of sporting environments from both visually impaired and wider disability perspectives (see, for example, Goodwin, et al, 2011., Koncul & Slatman, 2019., Haegele & Zhu, 2017., Curisol & Barreira, 2021). These studies have created a basis for the interrogating Para-Judo and confirm from a wider focus on disability sport that there is a shared belief amongst disability sport participants that they intend to advocate for their own experience. In the case presented by Curisol and Barreira (2021) resistance to future disability sport legislation comes from the individual and is conducive with the way that athletes want to be presented to the world; as a person who plays a sport first and foremost. Then through advocacy roles their disability can then be a focus to improve dual Olympic and Paralympic environments for the future.

Widely in disability sports academia (e.g., Silva & Howe, 2018; Braye, et al., 2013; & Peers, 2012), when focusing upon the benefit that role models can have in facilitating and developing social change within realms of improving disability sports environments, scholars

suggest that Paralympian's question how active their own role can be in progressing social change as advocates for a non-normative bodies perspective within the high performance environment. This is cited to be due to the framework of the Paralympics being partially counterproductive in how it can improve the lives of disabled people in the general population as it presents an elite performance perspective of disability (Braye, et al., 2013). To point us towards the intentions of the research of this thesis we can look at Powis (2018) *Transformation, Advocacy and Voice in Disability Research* who sets out the intentions of social model theory as an underpinning strategy for` para-athlete activists and advocates. Powis considers the social model as a framework that is forging ways for elite athletes with impairments or disabilities to be understood first and foremost as an athlete, then as an athlete living with a disability, and then particular focus can then be relayed towards how society views those living with disability. The social model is described as an underpinning perspective which originates from the publication of *The Fundamental Principles in Disability* by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in 1976. Oliver (2004) sets the scene of how the social model has created a basis for disability advocacy and activism, as the understanding of disability through the social model that has been turned on its head by pointing out that impairment is not the main cause of social exclusion of disabled people. It is a result of the way society responds to people with impairments that remains the nucleus of the reasoning for why social integration of disabled people in society (but particularly in sporting and leisure environments for this study) still remains today something which is to be unraveled.

Usefully for this study, Oliver continues in Chapter 2 of *Implementing the Social Model of Disability: Theory and Research* (p.3, 2004) by pointing out that from his academic position he prefers to understand disability in terms of two models: the individual and the social. By

bringing together the breadth of perspectives within this chapter (specifically, Braye, et al., 2013; Bundon & Hurd Clarke, 2015; Curisol & Barreira, 2021; Goodwin, et al., 2011; Haegele & Zhu, 2017; Kidd, 2003; Koncul & Slatman, 2019; Peers, 2012; Powis, 2018; & Silva & Howe, 2018) it is clear that there is an appetite within disability advocacy scholarship that the role of the para-athlete in informing how future generations experience disability sport settings is vital. Centrally to this study, the social model and the way Oliver provides two models (individual and social, see chapter 2.2) for understanding disability experience of social environments informs the way that the experience of elite para-athlete advocates can be articulated within this study by creating room for understanding both the individuals own impairment and their relationship to the social environments of their particular sport, separate without societal assumptions being made of the individuals experience.

## **2.2 The Built Environment as a Location for Social Justice for People living with Disability:**

The social model which Oliver (2004) dissects into discussing the experience of disability as two components: the individual and the social becomes a starting point for how this research project introduces the built environment as a key consideration of how to develop a better understanding for creating better access for VI participants experiencing British Judo clubs for the first time. From the perspective of disability sport researchers (Peers, 2012; Powis, 2018; Silva & Howe, 2018) the valuable point of enquiry which supports this study is that impairment should be subtracted from the self, and the self is equally subtracted from disability. Oliver (1990) discussed the subtraction of self as a progressive means to allow for disability to not be the primary way para-athletes are identified in relation to their training environments which has been discussed as amongst disabled athlete communities within these studies to be conducive to how they want to be viewed by their audiences. Meaning that the disabled individual participating in their chosen sport can both be identified as a person practicing Judo, and equally a person practicing Judo with a disability, leaving space for their needs of their specific disability to be assessed separately to their ability to play their chosen sport when disability does not limit their participation. In this case, disability and the self are subtracted from one another to identify how the individual living with impairment interacts with the built environment of their chosen sport.

A potential means to assess an individual's needs through disconnecting the individual from disability is as Oliver (1990, p.3) locates the initial 'problem', or issues, of disability within the individual and secondly it sees the causes of this 'problem' as stemming from the functional limitations of disability. Problems within disability sport environments have been

identified within elite para sport studies (see Smith, et al., 2016; & Curisol and Barreira, 2021) similarly to how Oliver suggests, through encouragement of dissecting the impairment of an individual from the self.

The rationale to unpick and leave room for the needs of individual disability to be looked at separately to the individual allows for the scope of the disabled experience be to digested more easily by non-disabled stakeholders. In order to be able to account for disabled experience of sporting environments it is essential at the starting point to identify that lived experience of disability is multifaceted and requires breaking down so that in the development of understanding how disabled participants experience the built environment it gives this thesis the opportunity to identify where issues of accessibility may be identified between issues of social injustices and physical access needs.

This thesis points readers towards a way of understanding the complexities of disability through the aforementioned dissection of disabled experiences in relation to elite sports participation, which then in turn influences the disability grass roots sports participation. By considering Oliver's deconstruction of the self, we can explore how by separating the context of disability from the self as a model which allows particular focuses on how disability sport participants identify with their sporting environments, and how the built environment can protect disabled participants from social issues they may experience outside of the grass roots club environment. Currently in the United Kingdom the process in which disabling barriers are addressed and therefore improvements to facilities are made within pre-existing environments are spoken as being made as 'reasonable adjustments' as per the Equality Act (2010). Which requires those providing services to the public to anticipate the need for reasonable adjustments when presented problems with their environment for disabled

users.

Despite the above process which implies disability access to facilities is okay to be an after thought, the Women and Equalities Committee's *Building for Equality: Disability and the Built Environment* (2017) report brings us back to the social model that implies that it is neither morally or practically sustainable for every time a disabled participant of an environment experiences an inequality of access within an environment to have to request a reasonable adjustment. The means for this report as it points out in section 12 (p.7) to develop a proactive approach to preventing inaccessible places being created in the first place. Within this study the built environment can be understood as a tool used to highlight easily the role that social justice plays when considering why it is essential at the core of planning to deliver a service or in this case a sporting opportunity to the public to consider how disabled participants may experience the environment (even if no one with a disability ever steps foot in the environment) socially and physically. Citing Terzi (2005), Goodley et al. (2021) note the role of social justice includes, in particular, involving disabled people in the decision making of building environments that promote the full capacity and functioning of disabled people, this could be seen within the BJA when developing environments for future Paralympic participant to access Judo within community club environments.

In order to look upon disability sport built environments as a site for social justice, it is useful to cite Nancy Fraser's theory of social justice (1996), and the work of Mladenov (2016) who proposes a use of Fraser's social justice theory, through the lens of disability as an essential understanding for promoting social justice. Fraser (1996) offers a meaning of social justice as parity of participation which requires economic redistribution and cultural recognition. For this research, it is possible to utilize Fraser's recipe for social justice within the disability

sport context. Specifically, with the VI judo environment it may be seen that economic redistribution as a shift in investment, in adding more focus on the lived experience of how athletes engage the activities and environments of their sports. Then cultural recognition of an injustice that Fraser insists is essential in achieving parity of participation would come from the stakeholders who create sporting opportunities, be that voluntary club coaches, welfare officers, or even elite performance coaches at the elite performance end of the performance pathway. Redistribution and recognition as Fraser conceptualises social justice are fundamental reference points to create a strategy for a framework where it is clear how social justice can be achieved in the research site of this thesis: Judo clubs in Britain. By redistributing the focus of building Judo club environments for non-disabled participants and have disability usage of environments (socially and physically) in mind at the very start of creating sporting environments, so that as the Women and Equalities Committee (2017) describe it: disabled users of a buildings should not have to request a reasonable adjustment every time an oversight in design is established.

This then in turn leads naturally to the necessary recognition which is needed by non-disabled stakeholders of VI Judo in Britain that, in order to achieve built environments which do not require reasonable adjustments in the future are designed with a variety of disabilities in mind from their inception, we require a shift in awareness more than attitude as not all Judo clubs in Britain have had a VI participant ever use their facility. Particularly to widening the awareness of Judo club facilitators the development must begin at the top of the elite performance pathway where recognition of necessary cultural shifts within the NGB are to be informed by behaviours, cultures, and resources that need to be translatable towards grass roots ends of participation.

With regards to facilitators of sports and leisure facilities, it is important to consider how staff or volunteers see their role in creating accessible environments. Richardson and Motl (2020) provide us with useful data by conducting a study within a community-based fitness centre, the Lakeshore Foundation to assess the narratives between facilitators of promoting inclusion through non-impaired staff. Throughout their study Richardson and Motl propose the usage of a narrative menu for visitors to choose from to make sense of their own experience. This is achieved within the study by asking non-impaired staff to identify how their involvement with facilitating physical activity for disabled participants aligned to the narrative typology for inclusion within their place of work. Here, the institutional emphasis was on, respectively: (i) Lakeshore is a place of empowerment; (ii) Lakeshore is a community of acceptance; and, (iii) Lakeshore is a social equaliser (p.494). Despite staff of Lakeshore identifying these roles (facilitator and ally) as similar yet different roles within their establishment, it is clear that within this context, staff members recognised their role within the centre to create opportunities for physical activity and exercise, and facilitate whatever each member wants to do or achieve (p.504). In this study the role of a facilitator can be seen as an ally to disabled participants which comes as a useful way of understanding allyship as a way to advocating the needs of disabled participants within the grassroots Judo environment.

As previously noted, within this thesis some individuals living with physical impairments have become notable advocates and activists in challenging the disablism in sporting environments (see Richardson & Motl, 2020; Smith, Bundon & Best, 2016; Richardson et al. 2017). Yet, as Richardson and Motl identify (2020), there are two counterparts to the successful delivery of assessable built environments for disabled sport: the embodied voice of the lived experience of the disabled participant, and the coach, volunteer, or facility staff

member as a facilitator of the sporting activity, and also an ally of the disabled to encourage their experience and needs of their individual impairment to be realised and accounted for in the development of a safe environments for all to participate in sport.

### **2.3 Applying Care Ethics to the Principals of Advocating and Allyship in the Disabled Sporting Arena:**

Through our understanding of the social model which by Oliver's (2004) preference to understand disability in terms of two models (see chapter 2.2): the individual and the social, we can continue this literature review by the enquiry into the advocating and ally figures who are prevalent in the delivery of disabled sport activity who fulfil safeguarding roles that work towards the care that is required to create accessible environments which not only offer space for social justice but protect the disabled athlete experience through care ethics. Nel Noddings (2010) brings to focus an emphasis on attention as a key component in applying care ethics. Noddings (2010, p.8) describes receptive attention as a fundamental characteristic of caring. Noddings notes care ethics as a relational ethic, care ethics recognises the roles of both carer and cared-for in establishing and maintaining the caring relationship. The carer is attentive, open to the possibility of being affectively moved and experiencing motivational displacement, and responds in a way to meet the needs of the cared-for or, at least, to maintain the caring relation. The cared-for completes the relation by acknowledging the efforts of the carer.

The application of the caring relation through Noddings descriptions of care ethics offers and insight that facilitators of sporting environments could be seen as caregivers to enable sporting activity to be accessible, and as Dohsten, et al (2020) puts it caring is an additional coaching skill which in recent years has received specific attention. Scholars have alluded to that the primary understanding and utilisation shift of caring in the practice of coaching is that coaches are more frequently committed to the care *for* athletes, rather than the care *about* the athlete. Jones (2009) suggests that this shift involves coaches taking the time to interact and to use dialogue to build relationships with athletes. Whilst this being true

according to the developing body of literature in this field towards defining effective coaching attributes (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Côté, Young, North, & Duffy, 2007), Kohe and Peters (2017) have constructed multiple case studies of disability sport coaches, across a variety of sport contexts, have been able to create an identity of essential characteristics of a coach or facilitator working in the disability sport context. The identity and role of the coaches appears predicated first by just by being a good person, and after that, being a good person who tries to do good work and inspire goodness in others (Kohe & Peters, 2017). In commenting on their case study of Raylene Bates (New Zealand's Athletics High Performance Para Athlete Manager), Kohe and Peters comment on the drive to be a good person by disability sport coaches is intrinsic to getting whatever needs to be done; particularly, done in accordance to the needs of the caring relation that is the disabled athlete and coach relationship foremost.

In the context of this chapter, it is essential to consider the built environment of the Judo club as a location where care is a fundamental characteristic of the building to enable equal and accessible opportunities for participants with visual impairments or disabilities from the wider context of disability sport. It is useful for these environments to be protected by the ethics of care, or as Carol Gilligan (1982) theorises care ethics to open up a space where morality becomes a safeguarding tool to underpin decision making and importantly assess how decision making is made by the core definition of caring as a necessary act to maintain the protection of another being in health and welfare. Furthering Carol Gilligan's (1982) work, Christine Koggel and Joan Orme (2010) have summarised work to uncover a 'different voice' and through her theorisation of care ethics, challenges to assumed male models of moral reasoning that Kohlberg (1981) is by the account of Gilligan subject to criticism for leaving women out from their studies that implied the feminine perspective had less ability to reason.

Care ethics puts significance of impartiality, individual rights, consequences, and justice and then creates a framework where importance is placed on context, interdependence, and relationships (Koggel & Orme, 2010, p.109).

The significance of utilising care ethics as a way of understanding and prioritising the individual experience of people living with disabilities is pointed out by Morris (2001) by highlighting the importance of utilising ethics of care within the context of impairment. This then provides context for the argument that we need an ethics of care that recognises common humanity between non-disabled and disabled participants and the consequences for all of us when there is a denial of human rights (p.25). In terms of answering the key objectives of this thesis we can look at the ethics of care within a Judo club environment asks for both the experience of users of a facility who have disability and those who do not (other athletes, coaches and staff) to work towards a landscape where it is usual practice to highlight where an injustice in the environment may be, without it being the role of only disabled participants to request a reasonable adjustment every time an environment is not fully accessible.

A model of care ethics, essentially, asks for privilege to be left at the door. As Morris (2001) outlines that whilst one social group (non-disabled participants) has the power to represent, through whatever media, the reality of those perceived as different (disabled participants) there is always a danger that the “other” will be seen as not quite human. As long as non-disabled people retain the power to represent our reality, impairment will always mean at best a cause for treatment and cure, at worst a life not worth living. As Koggel and Orme claim that Gilligan’s care ethics uncovers an ‘othered’ voice in the argument of ethical considerations, it is useful to look towards Stuart Hall’s (1997) understanding that identifies

'difference' as a bridge between two matters, as 'difference' as the bridge between considerations in this context is essential to meaning. Without it, meaning could not exist, and ethics cannot be achieved. In building an understanding of the ethics of care as a conduct which enables for the discourses of the maintenance of welfare to be widened by an 'othered' position, the 'othered' perspective that Hall insists becomes in the case of considering ethics an enabling context for Gilligan's argument for care to be applied to the male ethical prospect of reasoning and decision making. Which then in the case of this research allows for care ethics to be utilised as a safeguarding mechanism to ensure that the 'othered' perspective in Gilligan's case female, and in the case of this thesis research a perspective of care can be applied to advocate for disabled experience in the Judo club environment.

Care ethics can be applied to the role of advocacy and allyship as a means to protect and maintain the roles of both carer and cared-for in the caring relationship. In the field of advocacy literature within disability sport environments Bundon and Hurd Clark (2015) create meaning for the role of the advocate to be by or behalf of a group who deem it necessary to disenfranchise from a dominant group. The act of disenfranchisement that occurs within advocacy, is similar to the act of care ethics by the means of the historical feminist prospect of caring creating a disenfranchisement from the dominant male position of ethics, where relational considerations of disabled athlete and coach relationship are less likely to be considered. Care ethics creates a space where in the case of disability sports coaching and the environments such activity occurs in can acknowledge the perspective Hall creates in his writing which could be seen as putting an emphasises on the importance of context, interdependence, relationships, and responsibilities when considering the ethics of care as a feminist perspective.

## 2.4 – Summary of Literature

The literature presented within the afore sections present a rationale for the development of this thesis through being able to establish a through process of understanding which means that we can begin to through the ethnographic lens of this study begin to develop a linear understanding of how the three sections of this literature can be understood together to address the research aims of this thesis. Firstly, the initial arguments (see chapter 2.1) that are prevalent in the field of literature surround advocacy in global disability sport systems combine the theoretical approach of disenfranchisement as equally a conceptualisation, and an act that is trending within high performance sporting environments as Butler (2014) places impetuous on the ideology that disabled communities are reclaiming the very act that they have been at risk of as an act which through repositioning themselves as an outsider, both claims power over the dominancy of non-disabled persons, but also ensures that the needs of disabled persons are individually assessed. Examples of these acts of disenfranchisement being utilised in mixed use high performance sporting environments can be found in studies such as: Braye, et al., 2013; Bundon & Hurd Clarke, 2015; Curisol & Barreira, 2021.

Then following on from the act of reclaiming disenfranchisement as an act for the needs of disabled communities within sporting, cultural, and leisure spaces to be individual assessed outside of the context of the needs of non-disabled populations, it is then useful to see the environments which become the sites for disenfranchisement to become sites for social justice. Especially it is necessary to return to the example explained within chapter 2.2 of the Lakeshore Foundation whom have designed their built environment to be a space where disabled experience takes priority, the narrative menu which is a conscious practice within

their environment to offer disabled users of the facility to have choice for how they need to interacted or supported within the building on that specific day can be considered as an example of a regular occurrence of social justice within a specific built environment. Through chapter 2.2 the discussions of the literature mentioned points towards social justice not being solely bound within legislation nor policy, it primarily exists in the physical acts of prioritising the needs of visitors to a venue who require adaption, not always prioritising visitors who can use the facility easier without assistance. It is at this point of summarising the findings of this literature review that it is important to revisit the emphasis of the values of the Lakeshore Foundation: (i) Lakeshore is a place of empowerment; (ii) Lakeshore is a community of acceptance; and, (iii) Lakeshore is a social equaliser (p.494). This thesis has taken inspiration from these values as clear demonstrations for how to answer or at least satisfy the research aims of this thesis, to build a deeper understanding of the experience of VI participants in the grass roots Judo club environment in Britain, and to provide rationale for how to make these environments more equitable in their practices whilst working with both Olympic and Paralympic athletes. All of this is also necessarily contextualized within the wider context of Great Britain slowly becoming a world leader on the International Blind Sports Association (IBSA) Judo circuit, which suggests that the top end of the performance pathway is working correctly, despite their being evident bumps in the road at the bottom end of the pathway.

Lastly the through process of this literature review is completed by the conceptualisation of an applied approach to care ethics as a principle for advocating and demonstrations of allyship in the disabled sporting arena. Care ethics can be applied to the role of advocacy and allyship to protect and maintain the roles of both carer and cared-for in the caring relationship. Within this summary we can segway back to the approach to advocacy being

both an act committed by the advocating group and by an advocate who points out the needs of the advocating group from the perspective of an outsider. This can be related the caring dynamic of the carer and cared-for, both inside and outside perspectives can work together to build foundations of spaces where the needs for the group whom are at risk of disenfranchisement are empowered, and uplifted.

In summarising the literature review of this thesis the objectives of the overall thesis can be understood to be an attempt to create a transparent and equitable theoretical framework where advocacy and care can be understood within the roles of both disenfranchisement and social justice as acts where the needs of disabled communities (specifically VI Judoka for this study).

### 3. Research Design:

This thesis interrogates lived experience as a means to account for the way VI participants utilise the British Judo club environment. To obtain and utilise lived experience as the chosen data source for this study, the research was conducted through an ethnographic lens which involved 4 semi-structured interviews of VI Judo participants for this study, Utilising immersed experience (see appendix for interview schedule) and insider access which Macbeth cites that insider research provides studies such as this value of shared experiences; greater access; cultural interpretation; and deeper clarity and thought for the researcher (2010, p.478). This research explores and acknowledges the specific embodied experiences of the diaspora of visually impaired Judoka to understand how the Judo club can be seen as a site where social justice can empower all users to become advocates for people living with a disability to access environments equally that were primarily designed for non-disabled users.

As a beginning standpoint for addressing the need for disabled lived experience to be present in the governance of physical activity for disabled populations; the United Nations convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) prioritises the involvement of disabled voices to participate in decisions that impact them. As Gerard Quinn (2009) points out that one of the key changes that the CRPD brings that disabled people as subjects are capable of making decisions regarding their own lives (Love, et al, 2017). In the Annual Disability and Activity Survey (Activity Alliance, 2021) key findings suggest that despite positive trends of inclusion and outreach by national governing sporting bodies, inequalities still exist from the perspective of disabled communities in Britain. Importantly for this study, the

recommendation for progress in improving access for disabled people in sporting environments is to change attitudes towards disabled people in sport and activity. Primarily this is suggested to be achieved by increasing visibility at all levels of decision and policy making of disabled people therefore a heightened understanding of how to account for the lived experience of disabled communities is paramount to be able to produce policy that looks towards making more cultural and leisure spaces such as sports clubs more accessible. This thesis looks to provide deeper understanding of how the lived experience of Judoka in Britain who have a visual impairment have engaged with grass roots environments associated with the elite WCPP performance pathway, which will then in turn inform how the NGB can better resources and support for educating facilitators of grass roots environments to best prepared for the first time a person with a visual impairment walks in to their Judo club.

To theoretically underpin the use of lived experience it is appropriate to utilise a phenomenological research design. Initially developed from the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945), Ponty, and Husserl (1970), describe phenomenology as a concept to explain 'being-in the world' which formulates a central premise for justifying the need to articulate the individual experience of the disabled body in relation to the built environment (in this case the built environment being the Judo club). Merleau-Ponty goes onto to explain individual experience as embodiment as how the physical body's existence in the world, which for the purpose of answering the research objectives of this study locates individual experience as the account of how the body interoperates with/in the world. The key research objective of this study to better understand how Para-Judo participants have experienced the last 10 years of development of social awareness of their needs in non-disabled environments since the growth of global Paralympic sport in 2012 is underpinned by Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of embodiment. It looks upon the body as an instrument

for one's own comprehension; in essence, meaning that the body can be conceptualised as a piece of fabric material where it's own experiences are the individual fibres that construct the overall fabric of their realities and social beingness.

In Merleau-Ponty's work, *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), he argues that habit is "knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made" (as cited by Reynolds, 2004, p.17) For the purpose of this research project the position that Merleau-Ponty encourages that habit can be identified as knowledge becomes the necessary vantage point where embodied knowledge of visually impaired (VI) Judoka's experience within the British Judo performance pathway is learnt through the individual's feeling and lived accounts of experiencing these environments through relational, social, and physical encounters of Judo activity. Furthermore, Reynolds extends that the habit of actions as embodied knowledge is "only forthcoming when the bodily effort is made and cannot be formulated in detachment from the effort" (2004, p.17) For this purpose effort can be understood as the activity of VI Judo in Britain and therefore habit can be understood as the continued exposure to social, environmental, and physical experiences of VI Judoka in the British Judo performance pathway-built environment. Williams (1996) questions the notion of phenomenological studies on disability representation by noting the crucial role that the environment plays in an embodied account of existing and participating in activity within various built environments from a disability perspective. Williams (1996) claims that the environment in phenomenological studies of disability are frequently an afterthought to the basic project of dealing with the impairment which is being represented.

Subsequently, the data collection has created understanding of how phenomenology can be applied to develop analysis from accounts of embodied lived experience of VI Judo

athletes in Britain. Following on from Ponty's theorisation of embodiment through phenomenology as an ability to articulate the body as the vehicle of 'being in the world' (1945, p.94) we can identify Williams' line of enquiry into phenomenological studies positioning disability as an afterthought in the findings of research such as this. Nick Crossely (1995, p.45) cites the lived experience of the disabled body as 'therefore, experienced from the perspective of impairment. One's body is one's window on the world.' From this premise phenomenology can be adopted as the research paradigm to articulate the experience of visual impairment in Judo athletes in Britain. The research findings inform how disability could safeguarded how participants with visual impairments experience the built and social environments of Judo clubs to develop reasons for modifications and adjustments to promote greater equity in accessing grassroots sports environments for VI participants in the future.

In the application of phenomenology as a research design for qualitative research projects in the field of disability sport, it has been noted that disabled embodied lived experience is reconfigured when applied to a sporting context through Merleau-Ponty's description of phenomenology as 'being-in the world' (Richard, et al., 2019). This reconfiguration exists through a process of disruption in the system of the body in relationship to the world. Disability distorts the function of the body in relation to the world, and it is in this case that we can rationalise the need for a conceptual framework which supports the need for this research project to utilise the lived experience of VI Judoka. In 'The Absent Body' (1990), Leder explains a conceptual framework which insists that a lived body becomes a null point in the world we inhabit (p.13). Here, essentially, Leder (1990) means that the physical presence of the body without the experience of its existence in the world cannot contribute to the phenomenological pursuit of understanding human experience. In this case we can

turn to applications of phenomenology in disability sport settings to rationalise the necessary use of accounting for lived experience through modes of transcribing the embodied experience of disability. In support of the use of phenomenologically designed studies of disability sports contexts, (Aggerholm and Martiny, 2017), bring to relevance the phenomenological approach of conducting research as a means to create a model which focuses on first-person experiences of living with disabilities and asks what the experience of it is like. By the means of several phenomenological studies of disability sport which centrally focus on first person lived experience perspectives to create analysis of sporting environments (Goodwin, et al, 2011; Koncul & Slatman, 2019; Haegele & Zhu, 2017) this thesis utilises phenomenology specifically by focusing on the first-person perspectives of the participants in the data collection as meaningful in advancing alternative ways of understanding the embodied self (Koncul & Slatman, 2019).

In the contemporary setting of utilising lived experience as a mode to articulate the way disabled participants experience sporting activities, Curisol and Barreira (2021) study the experience of athletes with disabilities in mainstream sports drawing conclusion from 6 participant interviews followed by an interpretative phenomenological study. They contend that there is an appetite across 6 different sports for athletes living with disabilities to want to engage in their sporting activity at performance levels regional to international university games standards in an integrated environment who are not disabled or living with an impairment. This study creates a foundation for this research on VI participants' experiences of Judo club environments, as there are currently no designated environments in Britain where VI participation is the sole use of the facility. Hence this study led by Curisol and Barreira (2021) will become a central reference point in how they interpret the data collected within

their study which focuses on 6 individual athlete's lived experiences from the disabled diaspora.

Curisol and Barreira (2021) is important in demonstrating that there is an appetite between disabled populations in sporting environments to be integrated with non-disabled participants and importantly for their needs to be assessed and promoted as part of the core design of integrated sports facilities. Their research and theoretical framework of phenomenology is further aligned with the methodology of this research project which aims to establish the usability of the BJA club environment by means similarly outlined in Curisol and Barreira's study; they reference Martinkova and Parry (2011) to state that phenomenology is a research method 'that is the empirical study of the differing ways in which people experience, perceive, apprehend, understand, or conceptualise various phenomena in, and aspects of, the world around them' (Martinkova & Parry, 2011; Marton, 1996).

From their findings Curisol and Barreira's (2021) discover that disabled sporting participants favour integrated environments where athletes with disabilities are working alongside athletes without disability. Moreover, participants were seen to be keen on the environment they train in being the defining way their identity is perceived over being identified by their disability by being identified as someone who plays a particular sport gave confidence to disabled athletes integrated in these environments whom over time developed their identities not as disabled participants but as "the boy of swimming" or the "boy who plays basketball" (2021, p.7). This finding is key to the development of the research paradigm for this thesis as it forms a point to be stressed that participants with visual impairment should be identified by the sporting activity they practice first and foremost, and then by their disability second.

Curisol and Barreira identify these findings in their study to align with scholars (Whilite & Shank, 2009; Woodmansee, et al., 2016) who verified an intensification of the bonds of friendships of players with and without disabilities when participating in integrated environments . Martinkova and Parry (2011) state that phenomenology is a research method ‘that is the empirical study of the differing ways in which people experience, perceive, apprehend, understand, or conceptualise various phenomena in, and aspects of, the world around them’ (Martinkova & Parry, 2011; Marton, 1996).

The use of phenomenology in the field of disabled sporting environments is useful to investigate experiences and understand some aspects of individual’s realities, that you may then use to inform institutional/structural change. Phenomenology is used within this context to ensure that specific disabilities which the Paralympic counter side of Judo is consciously considered in the environmental design and fabric of the culture which is created within these environments. For this case study have called upon VI participants to participate in this study under the definition which Martinkova and Parry (2011) conclude phenomenology as the way we look at what we normally look through, giving an account of what we are and how we experience this (p.188).

### **3.1 Data analysis: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA):**

Coherent with the philosophical foundation of the research design, I applied an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to the data collection process (Pietkiewicz, & Smith, 2012; Smith, et al, 2009). Specifically, and as detailed below, I draw participants from a small cohort of VI athletes to develop a greater understanding of the necessary development areas of social inclusion, accessibility, and the built environment of BJA club environments. By the means of a theoretical framework (of care ethics), in collaboration with a qualitative methodology (of ethnography comprising semi-structured interviews) this thesis specifically draws data from stakeholders within British Judo performance club environments to create case studies which will give access to key stakeholders how the usability of the Judo club environment effects the equitable use of these environments for Visually Impaired (VI) users.

Overall, this research design focuses on the phenomenological lived experience perspective of Visually Impaired (VI) Judo participants to build a case for modifications to the physical, social, and built environments associated with club based Judo activity in Britain. The researcher will in the conduct of this project collect qualitative data through the mode of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which is a designed process of analysis and interpretation that enables complicated grounds of study to be analysed by the researcher to make connections between participants through reoccurring themes of lived experience in the field of the enquiry. IPA asks participants to reflect on important events in their lives and enables the researcher to reflect and highlight key issues of needs taken from accounts of an individual's lived experience as a data source (Charlick, et al, 2016).

IPA has been brought into contemporary social science analysis, and has been pioneered by scholars (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) to incorporate three modes of analysis: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. A focus point for this study has been the use of Hermeneutics which can be understood in terms of how experience is interpreted from language and text (Love, et al, 2020, p.1) this contributes to the understanding of this study in identifying common threads in the study of the transcription of interviews. Specifically for this study the researcher has engaged with the process described in Figure 1 to identify throughout this research the key themes that connect participants in the sampling pool.

**Figure 1. Table identifying the activity and actions associated with an Interpretative**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Actions</b>
1	Reading and re-reading the interview transcription	Significant responses from the reader, statements, sentences, or quotes are identified in the transcripts (open coding).
2	Identifying themes	Identification of and labelling of major and minor themes.
3	Structuring the analysis	Clusters of themes are labelled in a way that captures their essence.
4	Production of a summary table of the themes	Quotations selected that illustrate themes. Abandoning of themes that are not well-represented.
5	Construction of a cohesive narrative	The narrative is based on the summary table; quotes from participants are included to add depth and richness

**Phenomenological study.**

In referencing key phenomenological literature (Merleau-Ponty and Smith, 2005; Husserl,

1970.) the analysis of this data collection considers phenomenology in the dealing with lived experience to “account of space, time and the world as we ‘live’.” In Merleau-Ponty’s (1945, p.7) explanation of the process of phenomenological process it is insisted that through phenomenology it tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin. Phenomenology has underpinned a wide base of literature in the context of both disability sport and also in the advancement of the conceptualisation of the understanding of our bodies lived experience in relationship to the world (Hughes & Paterson, 1997; Crossely, 1995; Leder, 1990; Aggerholm & Martiny, 2017; Koncul & Slatman, 2019, Haegele & Zhu, 2017). The research from an ethnographic perspective creates commentary on the usability of British Judo club environments from a non-disabled perspective. This is reinforced by accounts of lived experience of the sampling pool of participants to contribute to the use of phenomenology as a means to deeper understand the relationship between the impaired body and it’s environment.

#### **4. Methodology:**

Through the research design, this thesis employed an ethnographic approach comprising semi-structured interviews, document analysis and personal and professional reflections on the research context. Collectively, data was used to construct an account of the landscape of VI Judo in Britain that privileges the experiences of the participants and the researcher in partnership. It is important to the success of the study to acknowledge that this research is written from the perspective of a coach working in the field of VI Judo on the periphery of the national association. The position of an insider is as defined by insider researcher Greene (2014, p.4) as a position to access participants “more quickly and intimately” which has been referred to as “expediency of access”. Referencing Merton (1972), Greene (2014, p.2) places the insider to be who possesses intimate knowledge of the community and its members. By the means of the theoretical framework and the data collection of this project I produce accounts of lived experiences that might inform suggestions regarding modifications of physical and social environments which Judo clubs can utilise to encourage greater equitable practices, better access, and greater social inclusion.

Toward these ends, the research conducted as part of this study examines similarities, discrepancies, and development areas highlighted in the interview process of this research, to provide awareness to components of the British Judo club environments which contribute to a lack of equitable access for VI participants. These could indicate cross over points of how VI participants and their coaches have experienced the Judo club environment to be prohibitive in terms of accessibility and social inclusion. The data has been collected by the means of ethnography; a methodology which is aimed towards developing understanding of particular groups from the perspective of the group members (Krane & Baird, 2005) as a tradition that examines the complexity of the social world and interprets culture (Smith and

Caddick, 2012, p.62). Ethnography has been long identified as a useful qualitative data collection approach. In this project, ethnographic studies such as Waquant's (2004) and Shillington and Bunsell's (2009). Particular to this project, Shillington and Bunsell demonstrates and provide guidance on the benefit of the embedded nature of ethnographic researcher where the researchers were committed to a two year period to understand the depths of the culture of the group which is being studied. This strengthens the utilisation of ethnography as a methodology of this research given the researcher's position as an insider to the community of VI Judo participation.

Krane and Baird (2005), furthermore, emphasise ethnography as an amalgam of qualitative research activities that can give a textual account of the culture of a social group. They add an ethnographic understanding of sport is useful in drawing attention to the lived experience of athletes within the individual cultures of each sport, whilst situating it within wider cultural and societal contexts. By utilising semi-structured interviews within an ethnographic framework to gain a comprehensive awareness of individual athlete experience, the researcher will develop an understanding of VI Judo participation in Britain on the basis of Chambers' (2000) definition of ethnography in sport; which aims to uncover the cultural bases and social problems that can inform decision making in the framework of British Judo. The application of ethnography in this context could be considered to aid problem solving advancement in sports governance. Or, moreover, an ability to enhance multicultural understanding (Krane & Baird, 2005) in the pursuit of gaining a deeper understanding of VI accessibility from the position of an insider who is not visually impaired yet is embedded deeply within the political, social and cultural landscape of VI Judo in Britain.

Whilst interviews and ethnographic analysis remain important methods for building a picture

of the national situation of VI participation in Judo club activity, within this thesis examination of pre-existing analysis of social inclusion specifically focused around people living with disabilities considers the access to cultural and leisure built environments, and physical and well-being activity for people of disabled diaspora. This research takes from practice and procedure of elite disability sport to influence and progress knowledge of how people living with visual impairments can in the future better, and currently access physical activity (cultural, social, physical, and educational). Throughout this research study there is a focus on club environments within the BJA which allows the ethnographic approach (as the researcher is a member of the support coaching team of the British Paralympic Judo team) that this study is conducted in alignment to. The utilisation of ethnography references an identified body of literature (Waquant, 2004; Shilling and Bunsell, 2009; & Powis, 2018) which cites ethnography in a sport social science context to deeper understand the lived experience of athletes in their cultural and social contexts of their individual sports.

In addition to interviews, this research consists of literature analysis and policy review focused on the BJA's 'Diversity Action Plan 2017-2021' (2017)<sup>1</sup> that adds emphasis to and underpins in parallel the ethnographic study which forms the data collection methodology for this study. Within the diversity action plan the BJA have identified key figures and data that provides an accurate landscape of the diverse membership practicing Judo whom are affiliated to the BJA. The researcher explores the nuances within the data collected with this study through this inspired phenomenological study to utilise the interview transcripts to inform discussions which aim to articulate the lived experience of people living with a VI in accessing Judo environments in Britain. The interview transcripts were developed whilst the researcher was immersed in the research site, in conversation with key stakeholders

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britishjudo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/BJA-Diversity-Action-Plan-2017-2021.pdf>

of the current national senior Paralympic programme. The notes from the discussions were accounted for as voice notes post discussion recorded on the researchers Dictaphone. Through the process of writing up the phenomenological study through the discussion chapters (see chapter 6) the researcher has cross-referenced the interview transcripts and has been able to use the interviewees' own words to illustrate experiential details. Contributing to the benefit of IPA Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) in their guide to IPA in qualitative research suggest that IPA allows things to appear within the research organically and lets things speak for themselves. The process of transcription allows for the researcher to recap and go over the interview process thoroughly for the process of interpretation of common threads and thematics, which is highlighted across the participant pool.

Simultaneously to the analysis of the collected data the researcher has applied Foucauldian analysis to ratify the use of lived experience as a process of acknowledging the truth, validity, and empowerment of accounts of lived experience which this ethnographic study will collate. Foucauldian analysis which includes the use of subjectivity as a way of articulating the subject (as the participating human in this study) as a product of impersonal historical processes. This, Foucault explains as a process in which the subject constitutes itself, a process called 'subjectivation' where personal histories become attached to the subject as internal embodiment of lived experience (Kelly, 2013, p.513). Subjectivity can be understood as part of the conceptual framework of this study to support the phenomenological analysis of the collected data which looks to create discussions from the lived experiences of the subjects of this study. Particularly academic examples that are useful for this study relate to accounts of truth and validity of the personal perspective of lived experience (see: Roy, 2011.; Curran (2016).; Peers, 2012.). Narratives of embodiment which are demonstrated within the aforementioned studies rationalise the disabled embodied account of lived experience used

in this study. Whilst applying Foucault's theorisation of the subjectivity of individual experience (1982) to the individuality of the subject which is attached to their own identity this thesis considers the role of lived experience as contribution to the understanding of knowledge and the history of systems that is divided up into three sections: "Re-examinations of knowledge, the conditions of knowledge, and the knowing subject" (Rabinow, 1997 p.11) Foucault's contributions to progressing knowledge of subjectivity is progressed within the field of disability sport literature by Peers (2012). Who addresses the complications of lived experience as a data source from her own perspective in 2012 as a Paralympian through considering the Paralympic embodied experience to be made digestible for a non-disabled user. This is through the way their perspective has been questioned through accounts of truth, storytelling, disability, power, and subjectivity that are major considerations in the process of Foucauldian analysis.

In reference to disability sports literature (Roy, 2011; Curran, 2016; & Peers, 2012.) which utilise Foucauldian narratives of embodiment to rationalise the disabled embodied account of lived experience used in this study, the researcher has used the paradigm of care ethics to draw conclusions from the data collection, and further IPA analysis to advise, and inform future modifications of the Judo club environment to encourage great equitable access for VI participants.

Within the contextual chapters of this study (chapter 5.0 – 5.5) the researcher adopts a process of document analysis to inline with the phenomenological process of this study to build a deeper understanding of the lived experience of the individuals whom this thesis is inspired by. The document analysis proportion of this study provides context to the accounts of experience which the participants of this study explain within their interviews. Document analysis as systemic procedure is utilised to interpret elicited meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009., p.27).

#### **4.1 Ethical Considerations:**

This research project is an ethnographic study that analyses Visually Impaired participation in British Judo club-based activity. As such, based on professional and personal experience working in the VI Judo setting, the research has been conducted under the awareness and mindfulness that the interviews ask of participants to speak about their lived experience in relationship to their sight loss or impairment. This has in many cases asked for participants to speak about major events in their lives which have contributed towards their disability. While reflections on these issues may, at times, be sensitive, they are unlikely to be beyond the realm of discussion and experiences encountered as part of participant's daily lives. This said, such sensitivities are important to acknowledge, and all participants have been informed during the consent process and during the course of the interview that they retain the right to not answer any questions, withdraw from participating, or retract their data at a later date. Should the participant wish, there was also the opportunity to break the interview (temporarily or permanently) at any stage. Moreover, the researcher has stated in the consent form that within the data collection the researcher asks for participants to account their experience of how they first experienced grass roots sport as a VI participant and the progression through the sport of Judo to date.

The research has been conducted in alignment to University of Kent guidance for conducting research such as this and has ensured that all procedure put in place for engaging with participants to discuss personal experience such as lived experience of disability is accounted for.

The anonymity of the participants for this study will be protected throughout the entire process of the research project. All participants will be made aware that their participation within the project can be withdrawn at any stage of the project, and they will be given an opportunity for reviewing their transcribed interviews before the researcher would include their findings in the final thesis document. All personal details recorded within this project will remain confidential and will remain in accordance with the University of Kent's GDPR policy.

University of Kent - General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) – Information for researchers

<https://www.kent.ac.uk/humanities/facultyoffice/local/ethics/gdpr%20data%20protection/general%20data%20protection%20regulation%20-%20guidance%20for%20researchers.pdf>

All members of the participant sample pool are current members of the British Judo association. On this basis the researcher has made all participants aware of the BJA's 'sustainable membership' resources which are available to ensure that the mental health and well-being of all members is taken care of.

Please see the link below to the resource page on the BJA website:

<https://www.britishjudo.org.uk/member-wellbeing/>

From an ethnographic insider perspective in the study site of the research, the researcher identifies that there is a member of the participant pool who the researcher is the personal coach to as part of the BJA WCPP. Athlete 2 is a B3 VI athlete and is a member of the GB Visually Impaired WCPP team. The researcher and participant have a professional working relationship of coach and athlete. The researcher acknowledges that there is a power dynamic already established which the researcher has worked against by before the interview taking place, Athlete 2 received the semi structured interview questions before the interview was conducted to give the participant the chance to opt out of the data collection if they felt uncomfortable with sharing their experience. The researcher is aware that in discussing with the participant their experience of accessing grass roots Judo activity as a VI athlete is a direct reflection on the researcher's practice as facilitator of VI and disabled sports participation in their professional coaching practice.

## **4.2 Participant Recruitment:**

Participant recruitment has been conducted through the researchers position as a coach working with the National Paralympic Judo team on a freelance basis. The access to the participants has been supported by the BJA's GB Head Paralympic Judo coach who provided access to the stakeholders, participants, and environments that will become the key data sources for this study. Specifically, I developed relationships within the research site of VI Judo participation in Britain which allows for ease of access, and the necessary in-depth knowledge of the sports specific knowledge of the minority setting of VI Judo in Britain. In an initial scoping interview, I began with a line of questioning that asked of participants of the study to outline the current national situation of Visually Impaired Judo activity in Britain. The intention here was to provide an update from the most recent documentation from the national governing body's Visually Impaired Friendly Judo (2014) strategy document. It built a contextual ground for the forthcoming semi-structured athlete interviews as part of the ethnographic methodology. Subsequently, I developed an interview schedule (see appendix documentation) which provides each participant an opportunity to give detailed accounts of 4 focus areas of questions: 1) General VI / Para-sport background, 2) Accounts of lived experience in the Judo club environment, 3) Development of good governance of BJA VI club based Judo, and 4) The future of VI Judo in Britain.

All participants of this study have received an information pack which outlines how the data captured through the interview schedule will be utilised as part of this thesis. Following receiving the information letter each participant of the study has signed a consent form which states that they agree to be a part of this study, the described documents can be found in the appendices of this thesis.

### **4.3 Identified participants and Interview Schedule:**

In the case of athletes who are participating in this study the researcher has included in brackets each individual's graded visual impairment on a scale of B1, B2, B3, and B4: Powis and Macbeth (p. 2, 2019) describe the utilisation of the classification tiers of visual impairment in the context of international disabled sport as the different classes within VI sport at the international level are B1, B2 and B3 – with B1 being the 'most' visually impaired. With B1 being the 'most' visually impaired the researcher highlights below the classification of each participant to inform how modifications to the Judo club environment could become category specific. For example if an athlete is B1 with no vision at all the necessary modifications to the built environment may be more extensive than a B3 athlete with partial impairments to their visual fields. I identified a varying degree of impairments in the VI sampling pool listed below, and through the data analysis highlighted discrepancies and differences between differing degrees of visual impairments amongst participants in accounts of their experience of the usability of Judo club environments. These classes are based upon the World Health Organisation's (WHO) definitions of low vision and blindness and are adopted by all VI sports governed by the International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) (Ravensbergen et al., 2016; WHO, 2018).

Athlete 1, (B1), Paralympic Potential Athlete / GB Senior Squad

Athlete 2, (B2), Paralympic Performance Pathway athlete, England u18 Squad

Athlete 3 (B3), Paralympic Potential Athlete / GB Senior Squad

Athlete 4 (B2), Paralympic Athlete, GB Senior World Class Performance Programme

The interviews were scheduled by contacting the participants via the telephone, the British Judo Association advised the best contact method for each participant would be over phone, contact details were gathered via the researcher asking each participant for the

contact number in person at National squad training at the WCPP National Training Centre. Each participant was given at least one month notice of interview with the opportunity to read over the interview schedule, for accessibility purposes a large print format was created, and each participant was offered by the researcher for an audio description of the process to be developed, however no participants requested this. Interviews were all conducted either by telephone or Microsoft teams and the link was provided both to the athlete and also to someone who gives them assistance. For example Athlete 2's parent was given access to the link if they required additional support during the interview, however this support was not required.

### **Interview Schedule:**

Additionally to the below example questions (from sub section 'b'), the researcher has developed a full interview schedule which includes 4 sub sections to the interview questioning:

- A.) Your General VI / Para-sport background
- B.) Accounts of lived experience in the Judo club environment
- C.) Development of good governance for BJA VI club based Judo
- D.) The future of VI Judo in Britain

Example Questions:

B1. Can you tell me about your Judo club and its facilities, e.g. does it have a permanent mat area?

B2. Can you explain your experience of how the facilities of your chosen environment affect your ability to regularly practice Judo?

B3. Are there any distinct features of your club environment which are negative contributors to the way VI participants would access the environment? Equally are there any positives?

The researcher conducted these semi-structured interviews as a method to develop knowledge of Paralympic lived experience from an ethnographic gaze. I drew, in particular, upon 'Foundations of Interview' which Brett and Smith (2016) contend to be the activity of

qualitative data collection through interviews by constructing knowledge about the social world that participants exist within, whilst the researcher and participant interact with each other over a period of time .

#### **4.4 Data Management:**

The researcher collated qualitative data from the interview stage of this enquiry (see interview schedule). The collected data took the form of a series of transcriptions of interview dialogues. The researcher has kept all participants' basic personal details anonymous. These details and the transcripts have been stored in a password protected folder, and all participants data has been stored for a period of 18 months from the point of them participating in the study. After this date, all personal details will be deleted, and the researcher retains the anonymised transcript data for use in the thesis or further publication.

All participants were made aware within the consent form to participate in this study that they withhold the right to withdraw from the research study at any point and have all agreed to this consent form by wording presented within the appendix documents of this thesis.

The researcher has used a system of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to draw conclusions from the transcribed data to enable and piece together narratives which become clear as common threads between the data sampling pool's participants. The researcher has identified that an IPA based study will enable the research better understanding of how advocacy, social justice, and care ethics as theoretical concepts can contribute to the better understanding of the landscape of grass roots VI Judo in Britain.

This focus has been answered through questioning participants on their experiences with an emphasis on personal meaning of their own relationship to accessing equitable sporting environments. For example, a phenomenological study focuses on the experiential qualities of the obstacles which exist for VI participants to access sport and what these obstacles which exist mean to them in their ability to make sense of a particular context.

## **5. Understanding BJA VI Judo context: Background context and policy**

Within this chapter I explore three key documents which look at the effectiveness of the British Judo Association's governance and policy that safeguards and plans for future development of athletes in the performance pathway whom are potentially most vulnerable to oversights in environmental settings of performance environments. It also establishes foundation for the basis of the data collection and data analysis of this research project which responds from 4 interviews of visually impaired athletes currently in the BJA's performance Paralympic pathway to draw conclusions and development areas for the built environment of British Judo club environments so that in the future Judo club environments in Britain can be better prepared to create safer, more equitable, and greater adaptable environments for people living with first and foremost visual impairments and then in turn to set out a framework for a internal culture within the BJA to equip Judo club facilities and its staffs with the ability to implement progressive change to make their environment more accessible whether that be socially, physically, or in terms of governance and policy.

### **The documents in this chapter which will be explored will be:**

- Quadrennial Performance Review 2016-17 (British Judo Association, 2017)
- British Judo Equality Policy / British Judo Diversity Action Plan (2017 – 2021)
- Athlete Welfare Framework (2018)

## **5.1 Current Organisational / Operational Structural Context of the British Judo Association:**

The British Judo Association (BJA) is the British Olympic (BOA) and Paralympic (BPA) Committee affiliated association which governs Judo activity in Britain. Underneath this governance the BJA oversees and works in partnership with two smaller governing bodies Amateur Judo Association (AJA), and the British Judo Council (BJC) both of which are not affiliated with either the BOA and BPA. Within the organisation of the BJA there are a further 4 home nations governing bodies: the Welsh Judo Association (WJA), Judo Scotland (JS), the Northern Ireland Judo Federation (NIJF), and lastly, England Judo which unlike the other home nation organisations England Judo is constituted as a department of the BJA not as a separate entity.

Within the context of this research the primary site of investigation focuses upon the BJA, as the umbrella organisation across the United Kingdom. To access key stakeholders in the Paralympic performance pathway utilizes I utilised the qualitative data collection methodology of ethnography to access the organisation to conduct this study. The current day to day operation of the Paralympic component of the BJA World Class Performance Programme (WCPP) exists as primarily a high performance programme being delivered in parallel to the Olympic WCCPP at the national centre of excellence which has been in operation for 8 years to this date since 2013.

## **5.2 Quadrennial Performance Review 2016-17 (British Judo Association, 2017)**

Important to acknowledge that the intentions for this research project were born out of the quadrennial performance review of the BJA performance system which looks back at the previous Olympic and Paralympic cycle 2012 – 2016 and provides a basis and a beginning point for this study outlining recommendations set out in this independent review (Knight, et al., 2017) of the effectiveness of the BJA World Class Performance programme which also further comments on the expected effectiveness of the 2017 - 2020 Tokyo strategy (which due to Covid-19 became the 2017 – 2021 strategy). The timescale of the document being written 4 years prior to the point of writing this thesis allows for the data collected from the participant pool of this project to demonstrate where the British Judo Association is in its progression from the recommendations and development areas set out in this report. The comments made in review of this document set out to make room and provide rationale for the utilising the phenomenological theoretical framework

First and foremost to comment on this report it is essential to acknowledge that the BJA's integrated Olympic and Paralympic centre of excellence programme in Walsall, England has been functioning full time since 2013 when the Centre of Excellence opened on the campus of the University of Wolverhampton (at the point of this document being written there was a designated coach who was only responsible for the BJA Paralympic pathway).

“Bringing the Olympic and Paralympic programmes together is also, overall, a very positive move and is universally supported. However, as with any new system, the issues arise as much with how the system is introduced and embedded (and how people are handled) as with what the system itself offers; in effect how the process of change management is led.” (British Judo Association (BJA), 2017, p.2)

What this report will take from the quadrennial report is that it is fundamental to assess where the issues of the combined programme have raised during the 2017 – 2021 Tokyo cycle. As you can see in the quoted section above, the independent review indicates that it is expected that with any new system it is expected that issues will surface, but it does not express at this stage of the report and expected concerns which may exist within the specific and necessary ‘people handling’ management which is necessary when introducing people living with visual impairments into a new environment.

Differently to the Olympic counterpart of Judo, Paralympic Judo has a much smaller talent pool due to the very small amount of visually impaired participants practicing Judo in Britain. In this report the independent reviewers speak at length throughout the report that there is a disconnect in the consensus of the vision for high performance Judo taking a centralised approach in Britain from the perspective of environments lower down on the performance pathway than the national training centre.

“Neither are they entirely a case of the centre -v- the rest of the sport; there is not always consensus at the centre itself and equally there are issues upon which those outside the centre hold differing views.”

The language used in the report indicates a blanketing approach which quickly sweeps over and does not acknowledge the imbalanced perspective of there being many more stakeholders operating at a High-performance level outside of the centre of excellence in other ‘training centres’ as participants in the Olympic side of Judo as opposed to the amount of stakeholders (coaches and athletes) who represent the ‘outside the national centre of excellence’ Paralympic counterpart. In short the report does not acknowledge that the landscape which the Paralympic performance pathway looks like outside of the national centralised programme in comparison to the Olympic performance pathway which looks

extremely different in terms of professionalism, and access to resources. In reality, the environments below the WCPP Paralympic environment where VI Judo is practised is predominantly only in a grass roots community club setting. As opposed to the Olympic performance pathway which exists in the form of clubs, regional elite performance centres, and home nation training centres (Welsh and Scottish institutes of sport). Without stating explicitly the report indicates that there are fewer steps established in the advancement from club Judo to the WCPP for Paralympic athletes as opposed to Olympic athletes meaning that the Olympic athletes who end up training at the national training centre are much more likely in their development through the performance pathway to experience more professional environments on a regular basis as opposed to athletes aspiring to participate in the Paralympic side of Judo. It is clear that at the time, very little thought appears to have been given to how athletes of the visually impaired / blind diaspora in British Judo transition to the integrated Olympic and Paralympic high performance environment of the national training centre.

### **5.3 BJA Equality Policy / BJA Diversity Action Plan (2017 – 2021):**

In June 2022, still the most recent diversity audit carried out by the BJA (2<sup>nd</sup> October 2017) there are 929 registered members of the association who identify as disabled, within this 120 of these participants have declared that they are visually impaired (out of 26,288 overall participants). Within the adjacent equality and inclusion policy there is recognition that:

“5.2. British Judo has a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled persons. British Judo will consider all requirements and where possible will accommodate reasonable requests and will work with disabled Stakeholders to implement any adjustments that will enable them to participate more fully in sports related activities.”

What the policy doesn't say or point towards is what are the processes and protocol that should be followed by a stakeholder whom may require a reasonable adjustment to be configured to enable their equal participation in a BJA environment (club, competition, regional development centre, or national training venue).

From analysis of the BJA Equality policy (2017) and the subsequent BJA Diversity Action Plan (2017) it is important to highlight that the language used in referencing disabled participants is not conducive to how disabled participants identify themselves. Curisol and Barreira (2021) drew conclusions from the participant pool of athletes they interviewed that there was a consensus that they would prefer to be identified as a person who plays sport before their disability identity. Although this study employs a stance that disability should not frame an athletes identity; there is to the contrary of this study a qualitative research project of elite athletes from the disabled diaspora in the UK that was conducted considering how elite disabled athletes take on activism roles within their disabled sports community to progress change. These activist figures suggests that they see it to be important to be titled

as a 'disabled athlete' as their position as a high profile disabled athlete gave them the potential to challenge the way that policy and decision making is made on behalf of disabled participants.

“It’s political because when you’re disabled society often treats you like a second-class citizen, as if being disabled is a horrible, abnormal thing, and we should be grateful for help or pity. That’s wrong. It needs challenging, and if I can use my status as an athlete to do this, to bring disability rights to people’s attention, then that’s as good as any gold medal ... I’m proud to be disabled.” (Smith, et al., 2016, p.142.,).

More often or not the language used across the BJA’s equality and diversity action plans utilises the phrase ‘disabled person/s’ which does not account for the embodied lived experience of how the person living with disability may consider themselves or how they want to be accounted for in the governance of their sporting activity. Importantly, qualitative studies suggests that disabled athletes more frequently than not aim to challenge wider societal view points of how people living with disability are looked upon (Smith, et al., 2016; Curisol and Barreira, 2021). It is through activism roles that elite disabled athletes are working towards changing how disability sport is governed by non-disabled perspectives. By presenting themselves through either their personal disability to make them more visible as athletes achieving elite performances, or by making their ability as an athlete known first and foremost before their disability being spoken about. Athlete’s in both examples are working towards a focus upon their experience of practicing sport whilst living with impairment or disability as a necessary vantage point for sports governance to acknowledge them by presenting their experience through activist roles within their sports.

To this end, British Judo includes visual impairment in the overarching section of disability

within its equality policy and diversity action plan. Following on from the line of enquiry set out in this policy review chapter, there is a clear evidence in para sport activism literature that promotes that disability sport policy should identify specific disabilities rather than group them together. This leaves space to demonstrate within such policy documents an awareness of the needs of individual disabilities in relations to the practice of the chosen sporting activity (see: Green, & Houlihan, 2004; Haslett & Smith, 2019). Haslett and Smith insist that advocacy within a parasport context can implicitly or explicably, challenge ableist attitudes or structures specific to the relation of individual para-sport contexts; relating to the specific disabilities that each sport includes. It is therefore necessary to question why VI participants are categorised within 'adaptive judo' amongst participants with learning difficulties and participants with physical limb based disabilities, as their needs to practice Judo safely and equitably are different to visually impaired participants. Within the British Judo Equality policy (section 5.2., 2017) the terminology of adaptive judo is used when discussing the participation of disabled persons within Judo. In this section of this policy it states that access needs will be addressed and reasonable adjustments will be made for disabled persons in 'sports related activity'. By including VI Judo within this section and referring to it as 'sport related activity' it implies that it is something other to the Olympic counter part of the elite performance department (WCPP) of British Judo. The WCPP's vision is to have a fully integrated Olympic and Paralympic Judo programme, so by the use of language which places VI Judo outside of performance Judo activity should not be included in policy documentation as wording such as 'sports related activity' implies that VI Judo is related to Judo and not a sport which is conducted under the same rule structures of its Olympic counterpart.

There is a further need to legislate VI Judo as a separate entity from the wider umbrella of

'adaptive judo' as it fulfils as mentioned prior Judo's Paralympic counter part to Olympic Judo. To this extent VI Judo should be assessed separately to other disabilities included in the BJA diversity audit (2017) as it directly effects the sports funding capabilities from a high performance perspective. In the BJA's VI Judo friendly guide (2014) it clearly demonstrates that VI Judo has very little differences in the way that it is played as a sport, it is in this document that the focuses for equitable access to the sport are to coaches and facilitators of grass roots Judo activity to ensure that they are aware of the varying provisional support that is required when working with VI Judoka.

This being said, in the pursuit of developing a clear guidance for VI Judo activity in Britain at club levels we require separate strategies to create equitable environments for varying disabilities instead of blanket covering Non-Olympic Judo as Adaptive Judo. By these means in line with the key objectives of this research to work away from a one rule fits all model; where their individual lived experience is accounted for. we should ensure that both VI Judo and Judo for participants whom have disabilities which do not allow them to take part in Judo under the same rule structures as Olympic Judo have separate guidance ensuring that individual experience of the particular disabilities is considered in the legislation and policy documentation that governs the practice of the sport at all levels of the performance pathway. Furthermore the development of new policy and guidance which accounts for lived phenomenological research of VI Judo participation allows for the growth of the talent pool of participants living with visual impairments or blindness in this country which supports the BJA in the future development of a much larger pool of potential Paralympic athletes.

#### **5.4 Athlete Welfare Framework:**

British Judo's athlete welfare framework (2018) is largely designed to accommodate the athletes who make up the WCPP. Meaning that similarly to the aforementioned documents listed in this chapter there is a focus on safeguarding the integrated Olympic and Paralympic programmes at the top level of the high performance pathway. Here, again, the framework implies a top-heavy approach from the perspective of the investment that goes into the entire performance pathway, meaning that the main investment goes into the athletes at the senior Paralympic games end of the performance pathway.

The BJA Athlete Welfare Framework situates itself in its 'setting the scene' chapter (p.6, 2018) that the framework operates at an intersection where athletes whom are integrated in the high performance (WCPP) system find themselves in unique and challenging environments with additional stressors and situations. These additional environmental factors which may be obstacles in the pursuit of delivering fully accessible environments are not accounted for in safeguarding principles and policies designed with the general population in mind which is why this framework is deemed necessary. The use of the Athlete Welfare Framework (2018) is to provide a procedure document which provides athletes with a process to ensure that their welfare is protected. The analogy which is used describes the framework acting as an umbrella which protects against possible compromises to athlete welfare.

Within the framework the BJA introduce the complexities of the wide array of factors which may interrupt welfare of individuals participating in the performance pathway. There is a clear acknowledgement that the themes and scenarios addressed in this document are mainly focused on the elite upper side of the performance pathway and that the broad

concept of welfare will involve different things at various levels of the pathway.

In addressing the role the Athlete Welfare Framework has across the performance pathway the document states that the role of the Performance Welfare Officer (PWO) is an available resource to all athletes engaging in performance related activity across the entire BJA performance pathway. The primary focus of the PWO at the lower levels of the performance pathway is stated to be setting standards for athlete welfare and safeguarding towards any breaches of athlete welfare which may happen at essential stages of an athletes progression through the performance pathway. This would ordinarily occur at Home Nation (HN) (England Judo, Judo Scotland, Welsh Judo, and Northern Ireland Judo Federation) talent development training. The imbalance occurs which is insightful for this thesis is that as previously identified in this chapter that Paralympic potential athletes begin to engage with WCPP staff quicker with less interaction with the middle sections of the performance pathway, meaning that the foundational education training the PWO is identified to delivery at HN talent squad training would be missed by Paralympic athletes.

## **5.5 Conclusion of Policy Document Analysis:**

The culture demonstrated by the BJA's WCPP team across the three reviewed documents suggests that the elite end of the Paralympic performance pathway is utilised to set standards and ways of working which could be translated down towards more grass roots ends of the performance pathway. To this end it is clear that in the practicalities of passing down the frameworks for inclusion and accessibility are not fully considered and this is evidenced through this chapter through a lack of substantial evidence within the policy documentation where any form of strategic planning has explicitly been mentioned to easily translate tools such as the Athlete Welfare Framework (2018) downwards towards the club setting where the recruitment and retention of VI participants is at its most fragile as evidence in the BJA's diversity audit (2017) where only 120 VI participants have been accounted for.

The context that this chapter of policy review reveals for accounting for VI experience is that there is a clear lack of lived experience utilised in the review of diversity and equality action planning to safeguard and provide clear development strategies for VI Paralympic potential athletes whom are at the early stages of participating in the BJA performance pathway. Through including VI experience in umbrella assessments of the usability of BJA environments for all disabled participants sets a tone that the individual needs of VI participants has not been assessed in detail to date before athletes have made it to the point of the pathway when they are apart of the WCPP. The objectives of this thesis then become important to develop a clearer understanding of the individual experience and needs of VI participants accessing club based Judo.

At the point of this thesis being written, the Paralympic programme has been even more

integrated with the WCPP Olympic programme post Tokyo 2020 (2021) Olympic and Paralympic Games. The decision has been communicated that the Head Paralympic coach role will become a joint role as support coach for the Men's Olympic team. This is a substantial move by the Performance Director and WCPP management team as in one instance points towards the progress made in the full integration of both the Olympic and Paralympic programmes from an inclusion and non-hierarchical standpoint. But to the contrary of this it has been received largely by the Judo community in Britain as a means to use the results of 1x Gold and 1x Silver at the Tokyo Paralympic Games to cover up or at least to camouflage the fact that the Men's Olympic team were only successful in qualifying 1 male athlete to these Olympic games who did not get close to a medal. The need for this joining is to balance the Men's GB Judo team with the Women's Olympic team who qualified 6 out of a possible 7 weight categories at the Olympic Games with 1 bronze medal achieving large portions of UK Sport targeting alone without the men's Olympic team for the Tokyo edition of the Olympic games.

In theory, the merging of the Men's Olympic and Paralympic programme as a combined Men's team creates a culture where athletes living with disability are seen from the perspective of the sport's audience as "one of the athletes that practice in the national Judo training centre". As opposed to this "the visually impaired athlete who trains at the national Judo training centre." Curisol and Barreira (2021) identify in their study athletes whom are training in environments where they are integrated with non-disabled athletes prefer to identify as athletes of the sport or athletes who practice the sport. This does not add focus on their disability, and credits their practice as an athlete when referring to them within policy and governance. The progression and new structure of management that the British Judo Association has employed usefully creates a culture at the top level of our sport where there

is seemingly no difference between the practice of Paralympic and Olympic Judo, however this is not the picture at the grass roots club level of the performance pathway. In the review of the below policy documents the researcher has outlined and highlighted points of discussion across the documents where the BJA WCPP performance pathway has been assessed by its past , current, and future pursuits of equality and inclusion for athletes living with visual impairments practicing Judo in Britain. The common thread is what is not spoken about in these documents; more often than not there is little comment on the current condition and role that club based VI Judo plays in the overall strategy for British Judo's WCPP as there is a very small pool of participants where data can be collected, and is outweighed by the much bigger scope of participants who are practicing across the entire Olympic performance pathway.

## **6. Discussion**

### **6.1 Now is our time!: Disenfranchising grassroots Paralympic Judo from the Elite performance pathways**

In this chapter, I draw on participant experiences to establish a better understanding of what the BJA may need to consider to ensure newcomers that have a visual impairment access inclusive environments within the grass roots end of the BJA performance pathway. I discuss whether we need to act quickly and radically to enforce change in the association; Athlete 4 as the most senior of the athletes of the pool of participants is regimented in the sense that their experience as an athlete has been faultless, and have been extremely lucky to have been able to easily fit in the sport at all levels of the performance pathway, when being asked “Knowing what you know now. What could have been better in your journey to this point in your career?” They replied, “ I don’t think it could have been done better.” This chapter, therefore, interrogates why athletes at the top end of the Paralympic WCPP do not see an immediate reason to change the delivery of grass roots VI Judo. Specific focus is applied to connect their experience with the current climate of the association. In the last year a Non-executive member of the BJA’s board of directors has been appointed who competed in the Paralympic Games in London 2012. From my perspective within research there is evidence to suggest that this recruitment is reflective of the immediate need to track and account for the experience of Paralympic GB Judo since London 2012 in order to ensure we have clarity in the pathway for Paralympic athletes to come to the sport in the next 10 years towards the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Athlete 4 leads the way into this chapter. ‘Now is our time’, is the collected feeling across the participants of this study, it is clear that there is an inherent need to inspire from their position as athletes with disabilities within high performance sport in the United Kingdom, and to take inspiration from athletes ahead of them in their careers as Paralympic role models. Bundon and Hurd Clark (2015) conclude that the action of inspiration from a lived disabled experience can be seen as advocacy. They describe the act of advocacy as being by or behalf of a group who deem it necessary to disenfranchise from a dominant group to express the needs of the group the advocate is representing, in this instance: VI Judo separating itself temporarily for this study from Olympic non VI Judo to identify the specific needs that VI Judo requires within the dominant setting of Olympic Judo clubs in the UK.

Athlete 4 says that post Tokyo 2020(1) Paralympic Games we have a sweet spot of 3-6 months where given our success as a nation in this edition of the Paralympics, Paralympic Judo has had opportunity to momentarily come out of the minority sport spot, and capitalise upon the media attention that the sport is currently receiving; prolific athletes currently performing within the WCPP are making their debut television personality appearances, and appearing as part of Paralympics GB campaign material. This exposure for Judo as a minority sport and Paralympic Judo as a minority group within British Judo can be instrumental in the recruitment of new VI participants into the sport.

Scholars who have identified disabled athlete advocacy as important information sources to improve sporting experiences for disabled communities (Powis, 2018; Bundon & Hurd Clarke, 2015; Kidd, 2003.) say that advocacy can improve standards and experience of future participants of environments such as the BJA performance pathway, by authentically portraying the lives of disabled people, which can then inform how research of specific research sites such as British Judo can illuminate the multiple realities of being disabled and make a lasting impact upon the lives of the participants future and present (Powis, 2018).

Direct comparison between Athlete 4 and Athlete 3 who have a 10 year difference in experience act as a catalyst of this research project as the timings of this research project plans to track the development of VI Judo over the last 10 years, London 2012 – Tokyo 2020(1) in order to prepare BJA VI Judo for the next 10 years towards Brisbane 2032, where if Athlete 3 can take inspiration from current developments within the BJA WCPP pathway we could see them take a medal at those Paralympics on much more stable and clearer grounds.

Athlete 3 as the least experienced of the data pool claims that to improve the Paralympic pathway to be as focused on development of younger athletes as the Olympic pathway that the Paralympic pathway should:

“Invite me to competitions and training sessions that will challenge me! I don’t mind being thrown about, it not a loss it is something to learn from.”

As mentioned above we can see that the BJA since producing the 2017 Diversity Action Plan have began to make steps towards learning from the last 10 years of Paralympic Judo

since 2012 by reflecting the success of the diversity of our Paralympic high performance programme across the entire association. But potentially given Athlete 3's account this is still not happening in a timely fashion. However, a notable development has been within the board of directors, by appointing a member of the 2012 Paralympic team as a non-executive director; who is also currently a member of the British Paralympic Association Athlete Commission and Social Impact Committee, as well as a member of the North West Area Executive Committee (British Judo Association, 2021). This individual has also been recently recruited as the lead coach of the University of Wolverhampton's Judo programme which trains alongside the BJA's WCPP daily in Walsall, England. This progression acts in accordance to literature (Women and Equalities Committee, 2017; Oliver, 2004) that this thesis has explored which encourages disability to be accounted for through methodologies of social inclusion in Organisational structures that reflect the users of a service, in this case VI Judoka within Judo club environments.

Throughout our entire conversation, Athlete 3 insists that there is an unclear route into accessing a career as a VI Judo athlete within the BJA performance pathway, and insists that better visibility of the route to becoming a Paralympic athlete would have enabled their family and coaches to be able to navigate the early stages of their career easier. If an athlete ahead of them in the performance pathway had been advocating their experience on a more public front. For example it can highlight social issues such as lack of inclusion in club activity designed towards Olympic aspiring athletes, and lack of awareness of the types of support from coaches and facilitators that have been previously ignored; it can challenge oppression by impacting policy; and it can transform understandings of marginalised subcultures (Powis, 2018). Importantly for this study it is fundamental to acknowledge the growth in professionalism of global Paralympic Judo in the last 10 years. Athlete 4 speaks about their experience of high performance pathway beginning at the point when the National Training Centre (NTC) in Walsall, England opened in 2013 and it was at this point the beginning of a fully integrated programme between the Paralympic and Olympic counterparts of the BJA. Despite the NGB having a part time Paralympic programme at the previous National Training Centre in Dartford, England up until London 2012, Athlete 4 makes it clear that they did not have an active role model at the top of the Paralympic pathway due to the fact that at the point of 2013 Paralympic Judo was developing, and would have an enormous shift in its professionalism and representation in the Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020(1) Paralympic cycles.

Athlete 4, whilst still remaining as a participant in the research site, acts as role model for Athlete 3. Their experience of the performance system both global and national over the last 10 years (since 2012) is essential for this thesis. It builds a picture of our national level of Para-Judo which responds to the global level of athleticism which is expected by disabled athletes in current Paralympic Judo tournaments. In order to respond to the modern demands of global Paralympic Judo as a rapidly evolving counterpart to Olympic Judo, the disenfranchisement that Bundon and Clarke (2015) insists upon is still happening due to the way that Paralympic Judo in the past 10 years evolved globally by the standards of athleticism that athletes are attaining, The professionalism standards that the NGB have applied to Paralympic Judo are reflective in the development of the NTC in Walsall in 2013 that has been symbolic of the wider changes in the global development of Paralympic Judo since London 2012. The process of athletes or stakeholders of the Paralympic Judo community in Britain disenfranchising is slowly occurring due to the needs of Paralympic athletes becoming more widely understood, this appears to be happening at the top end of the Paralympic pathway, which will allow advocates to surface within the performance pathway to articulate from their experience as users to better understand the effectiveness of their route to the upper ends of the high performance pathway.

From the inception of their involvement in club based Judo activity, and at their current point of time at their individual stages of the performance pathway, Athlete 4 from their 10 year experience of the performance pathway insists a culture of everyone they have worked with during their career “doing the best with the resources they had available”. In essence,, a trial and error culture which has been successful for Athlete 4 in their development. Whilst this approach being echoed in multiple case studies of disability sport coaches (e.g. Kohe & Peters, 2017), it has not left a clear blue print behind for athlete’s such as Athlete 3 whom are beginning to look past club based Judo. In order to create and improve more accessible routes for future generations of VI persons wanting to try Judo in the future we must look at the accounts of experience of athletes in the pathway over the last 10 years since London 2012, so that we can create a clearer pathway towards Brisbane 2032.

Athlete 3 as an athlete with a visual impairment practicing in a club based setting 10 years on from London 2012, and 9 years on from the NTC opening a fully integrated environment for Olympic and Paralympic athletes. In their interview they point out that to embed the needs of VI participants in a club based settings it is necessary to locate these needs within

coaching education, by saying “when you do your level 1 coaching award they (the BJA) should offer the opportunity for coaches to create a strategy that considers the scenario that they may have a VI person in their class for the first time, how are you going to adapt your session accordingly?” They go on later to say that an important awareness perspective is that a coaches sessions doesn’t need to differentiate from a regular session, as VI persons can practice Judo in the same way as a sighted participant; Athlete 3 points out that the critical learning factor for coaches is that there may be a different way that a session needs to be communicated in order to shift demonstrations within technical sessions towards a more description based methodology, as opposed to a description from the coach which requires visual information to upholster the description. Athlete 3 shares their coaches frustration from their first club whom wanted a procedure to follow, as to know how to work with a VI athlete. Athlete 3 and I during the interview process discuss the differences of types of description that are useful for VI participants, commonly they insist on the use of ‘over describing’. For example, often coaches say things such as “Place you right hand here”, instead it is more helpful for VI participants to hear: “Place your right hand on the right lapel of your opponent, middle way between their shoulder and belt.”

Despite the notion of wanting a path to follow, from my experience of working across the entire performance pathway British Judo has a fragmented feeling across non BJA employed coaches whom are actively contributing to the WCPP, who do not fully agree with the centralised model which is in place. This then leaves a difficult task for the association to employ any form of clear identity on the pathway from club to world class podium, as there is a disconnect apparent in the message that the WCPP want to communicate to club based athletes, which is focussed on a trademarks model, where it describes the 5 trademarks a fighter needs to have to win internationally. There is consensus in the BJA community that coaches identify with these trademarks, however the trickling down of these trademarks to club level is interrupted by the political unalignment with coaches who fundamentally do not agree with centralisation. Renfree and Kohe (2019) provide an insight into the connection between NGB and clubs from a study conducted after the World Athletic Championships in 2017, they share feeling across the association that clubs ‘were thriving despite the national governing body, not because of it’. Following a methodology which aimed to unpick these thoughts through available channels, a focus on the internal political strains on the relationship of clubs with the UK Athletes NGB was used. Useful for this study Renfree and Kohe outline that clubs within the UKA wanted connection to the NGB. Such findings are

also reflected by the way club participants in this study also identified themselves within the BJA.

Scholarly responses towards NGB relationships with clubs and grassroots sports settings within the context of coaching are connected by aspirations to want to understand how to work clearly within the framework and conditions of the level of athlete they are working with (e.g., Powis, 2018; Kohe & Peters 2017; Renfree & Kohe, 2019). Throughout the participant pool of this study there is confidence that coaches do understand how to communicate Judo activity verbally without visual cues for VI Judoka. However It is clear that from the body of policy documents and interviews conducted regarding the role of coaches within the specific Paralympic Judo setting, that there is a narrative unfolding within the specific research site that due to the recent major developments in the global activity in the sport, there hasn't been enough time for advocates within the NGB to emerge who are naturally disenfranchising from the wider performance system, as currently the most senior of athletes in our participation pool says that their experience has been seemingly faultless give or take a few physical access problems. To Athlete 4 the coaching they have received has supplied the correct level of support for their development. This being said it is important to note that Athlete 4 is still continuing their career post Tokyo 2020(1) and is an active ambassador for VI Judo participation in Britain, meaning that as advocacy as a tool for highlighting and developing opportunities for people living with disabilities to access sporting opportunities, athlete 4 from the pool of participants interviewed could be a crucial stakeholder in the BJA utilising themes of advocacy to help promote and further future recruitment of VI participants to our sport in the future. Athlete 4 implies that advocacy could be seen within the grass roots setting of BJA Judo clubs in the format of coaches taking a step back and allowing for the person living with a visual impairment to be the expert of what they need.

“Do not feel like you are the expert (talking to coaches), By letting them (the VI participant) be the expert, by letting them help you to understand how they want to train.”

Useful to our understanding of how an advocate of disability sport can operate Aslett (2021) points out a trajectory of disability sports scholars who are all former Paralympians (e.g. Braye et al., 2015; Howe & Silva, 2016; Peers, 2012) to affirm that the Paralympics and Paralympians could be counterproductive as activists or advocates as spokespersons for

the experience of disabled people beyond disabled sport. Aslett in their research conclusion advises that future research into the field of Paralympic athlete activism could develop strategies to produce Paralympic athlete activism workshops (p.208, 2021). This may be useful as a developing strategy to allow athletes during their athletic career to bottom out what being an advocate from their individual context means for wider disabled populations, over being an advocate for improving systems within their context of their individual sporting context.

Following on from this starting point, it is approximately 10 years of experience that separates the two, and their accounts from this basis are different by one being retrospective, and the other based on future planning. From my position as an insider, I have been enabled to piece together these two types of narratives, in relation to my existing knowledge and ethnographic understanding of the current sport and BJA. Importantly the position of being an advocate in this research site emerged as a role not just myself, but for the entire team around the athlete. This is predominantly down to as Athlete 3 pointed out their coach despite their in depth experience and knowledge of Judo as a former Olympian, they identified that it was necessary for them to enrol onto coaching education opportunities to better understand how as a coach you can help to layout a pathway that can be followed by the current set of athletes you are working, but to lay a foundation for any athlete that steps through the doors of the Judo club. It is necessary to mention that all of the participants acknowledged their coaches to have sought after knowledge and development opportunities to improve their working relationship with the VI athlete they are individually working with.

Powis (2018) sets a scene where advocacy can be understood from an opposing perspective of scholars advocating on behalf of disabled populations, where the power of advocacy is passed on from the academic viewpoint to the athlete by the process of analysis of the specific cultures and systems which are in place within different sporting environments. Scholars such as Silva and Howe (2018), Braye, et al (2013) and Peers (2012) say that Paralympian's, when at the top end of their sport, question how active their own role can be in progressing social change from within their specific sporting context. From the process of conducting this research it has appeared to have aligned with the way scholars see the Paralympics to be partially counterproductive in how it can improve the lives of disabled people in the general population as it presents an elite performance perspective of disability (Braye, et al., 2013). This being said, the power of advocacy as

Powis (2018) describes it, hands over the academic understanding of how advocates are positioned within the Paralympic sport system, and places it with para-athletes themselves. From my contextual understanding of how advocacy exists within the British Judo system it appears that Para-athletes are unknowingly activists and advocates whom progress the practice of advocacy from the perspective of their experience by passing on knowledge in the subtleties of their progression in the developing culture of British Paralympic Judo. By constantly reviewing their practice in the Judo environment in collaboration with the core facilitators of their activity, collaboration between stakeholders through creating a culture where dialogue is fundamental for learning is to my mind what advocacy of experience looks like in the day to day operations of British Judo. This is of value in order to contribute to the understanding and knowledge of best practice for future of stakeholders whether that be: future VI participants, future coaches of VI Para-athletes, and future parents or caregivers of VI Judo participants.

In conclusion, for many of the contributors of this study the need for Paralympic advocates to emerge from within the BJA is an immediate need for the next 10 years of development to progress towards 2032. Since 2012 there has been significant growth in the professionalism of Paralympic sport and this has certainly been recognised within the British Judo community. Brown and Pappous (2021) introduce us to research carried out in Australia (Darcy et al., 2017) which founded structural constraints of sports participation which prohibit people with disabilities from participating; notably amongst many physical structural constraints, Brown and Pappous point us towards a landscape similar to the findings within this chapter; that many newcomers to Paralympic sport do not see themselves in the athletes represented in the Paralympic Games (Braye et al., 2015). Athlete 3 within this chapter is calling on needing to find a way to look forward, so that within the next 10 years, newcomers to the sport can see what their journey into disability sport looks like, not just what the end product looks like: hopefully on the podium of the Paralympic games. The data presented across this chapter amongst the body of literature referenced calls upon the process of becoming a Paralympian to be more t and be clearly mapped out to develop awareness for grass roots coaches, newcomers to the sport, and parents so that people with visual impairments can recognise themselves within the journey that athletes within the WCPP are already going through.

An important acknowledgement that has occurred within this chapter is that the participant pool are looking at multiple sources for advocacy. Advocacy within the context of this thesis is as Bundon and Hurd Clark (2015) suggest that the origin of an act of advocacy is one of inspiration from a disabled lived experience. It can be though advocacy from a person who lives with disability, or from someone who actively is engaged with and understands the context of disability sport and what it needs to improve. Advocacy in terms of its utilisation within this thesis is fundamentally about progression, athlete 3 as the representative of the participant pool currently practicing within a club environment, speaks throughout their interview about looking towards athletes further on in their journey of the BJA high performance pathway looking for an example of how to progress, In terms of building a better understanding of what the landscape of VI Judo looks like across the British WCPP pathway, advocacy has become a useful tool to consider who and what an advocate looks like within the specific context of the BJA. Advocating in this context is primarily about placing someone's experience of living with a disability at the forefront, and ensuring that their individual experience is considered in amongst a room full of people who are practicing Judo without an impairment. Athlete 2 summarises what advocacy could look like; often advocacy does not look like a protest, or public out calling of disservice within the disability sports context, it often looks like to Athlete 2 an approach where their coach would take a step back and watch how they navigated different scenarios, and would only intervene if they could see a lack of progress due to a situational obstacle; whether that be social, physical or emotional, the approach was always the same; essentially a safety blanket so that Athlete 2 never had to advocate for their own experience, they would have someone in their corner always considering the limitations of their disability.

## **6.2 The role of advocacy and social justice in the relationship between VI participants, coaches, and the Judo club environment.**

This study comes about at a significant point in the global and national development of VI Judo; the current context being that 9 years on from London 2012 in Tokyo 2020(1) GBR took a Gold and a Silver medal on an ever increasingly competitive global stage. As a non disabled coach / facilitator of Judo both Olympic and Paralympic my intentions for this research project have been inspired by both the development of Paralympic Judo since 2012, albeit from 2012 – 2016 as an athlete on the National team, and then onwards (2017 to present) as a coach. From this position, and now working in close contact with athletes on the WCPP Paralympic programme I have begun to consider why the athletes that were interviewed as part of this thesis have stayed in the sport for so long and what was / is the golden ticket or recipe to sustaining the interest of new participants living with visual impairments in Britain. Within the data collection process for this chapter, was quickly disproven for my pre assumptions of the data that I would collect, from my experience as a high performance Judo coach in Britain I had a working assumption that VI Judoka in Britain were gasping to make it known how the built environment that they began their Judo journeys in wasn't aligned with the now current developments of the elite end of the British Judo Paralympic performance pathway.

This chapter goes beyond developing a form of building control guide for Judo clubs to eliminate physical access barriers, to instead uncovers a narrative that is focused on participants whom are focussed on displaying what the built Judo club environment in Britain looks, feels, and acts like in terms of the tactics of care that their coaches, Judo club's staff, and training partners employed to deeper understand them as an individuals with a disability, which is theirs. Many of the participants focus on how their Judo club environments were different to places of education and account their experience of environments that presume the limitations of specific disabilities before considering the ability of the individual and their individualised experience of living in the world with their specific disability: in this case sight loss.

Specific insight for this chapter comes from trends across the data collected, specifically the narratives that are conducive across all participants in their relation to the Judo club built environment. Utilising both theoretical and conceptual models such as Oliver's (1990)

theoretical approach to separate the individual from the context of disability; the methodological approach of choice within the disabled sport environment by the Lakeshore Foundation (Richardson & Motl, 2020); and Nancy Fraser's (1996) theory of social justice via the theoretical lens of Mladenov (2016) as disability as a vernacular to promote social justice within an environment. Importantly for this project the theoretical framework is a mixture of multiple lenses which is reflective of the complicated landscape of disability sport in Great Britain. A clear trend across the data is that all of the participants speak about themselves first and foremost as an athlete, and then as someone living with a disability.

Oliver's approach to decontextualise the person from their disability is a useful perspective to be able to understand this study in contention with studies conducted by the likes of (Richardson & Motl, 2020; Curisol & Barreira, 2021) whom have built conclusions from interviewing athletes from disability sport contexts to not want to be identified first and foremost as disabled. The athletes across this type of study are insistent of Oliver's approach to not deny the problem of disability but locates it squarely within society. It is not individual limitations, of whatever kind, which are the cause of the problem but society's failure to provide appropriate services and adequately ensure the needs of disabled people are fully taken into account in its social organisation (1990, p.2). Nancy Fraser proposes that in order for social justice to occur within an environment or demographic that justice today requires both redistribution and recognition (1996, p.5). Then the recognition which Fraser proposes as essential to attain social justice is within the facility providers of Judo clubs (coaches, welfare officers, non-disabled athletes & staff) when they recognise that a redistribution needs to happen. Athlete 4 recognises that this redistribution needs to happen as they say:

“Coaches need to be more open to change, and place the communication of athletes need with the VI athlete, differently to how they do it in Olympic Judo. We know what we need to achieve.”

The built environment in terms of this thesis has evolved from considering the physical space of the Judo club as a space to critique in terms of obstacles that may present themselves against the ease of use for disabled visitors. This may occur by transforming the method of approach to consider the built environment as a conceptual space where attitudes, cultures, and therefore manifestations of social justice are ways of measuring the accessibility of a

place; place being in this case Judo clubs in Britain. To highlight why it is necessary to assess sporting environments by the means of their inclusive cultures Richardson and Motl (2020) as pointed toward in previous chapters explains how the Lakeshore Foundation’s approach to providing frameworks for non-disabled staff members to employ the usage of narrative menus; this is implemented to provide choice for disabled participants to have agency in how non-disabled facilitators know how they would prefer to be supported. By offering narrative menus to facility users Lakeshore is able to work with people living with disabilities by understanding and considering their embodied experience of disability when using their sports facility. Visitors chose from this menu to make sense of their own experience, within the study non-impaired staff were asked to identify how their involvement with facilitating physical activity for disabled participants aligned to the narrative typology for inclusion within their place of work. the emphasis on the use of this methodology is that it compliments the experience of both participant and facilitator as the driving force behind the way recreational sports activity is organised, delivered and assessed by how people engage with each other.

Lakeshore is a Social Vehicle	Lakeshore is a Community of Acceptance	Lakeshore is a Social Equalizer
Charlotte	Charlotte	Charlotte
Wilma	Wilma	Wilma
Laura		
Joan		Joan
Betty		Betty
David	David	David
Megan	Megan	Megan
Clive		Clive
Rachel	Rachel	
	John	John
Katie	Katie	Katie
Amelie	Amelie	Amelie
Stacey		
Alexandra		Alexandra
	Christine	Christine

Table 3: Narrative Menu, Lakeshore Foundation, Richardson and Motl, 2020.

The essence of narrative menus that Richardson and Motl praise, is echoed through this research by acclaims of the athletes interviewed which highlight the openness that all coaches that all 4 participants currently work with manifest within their coaching practices. Athlete 2 who is an athlete (who has just began training full-time as part of the WCPP at the NTC) spoke at length within their interview regarding the way that their personal club

coaches have always made it their endeavour to fully build an individual response to their needs when engaging within the Judo club environments.

“In my club, my coaches have always made my Judo for me. I’ve always felt as if I am equal, if not better understood in comparison to my training partners who can see because of my impairment.”

Within the current disability and sport research drawn upon in this thesis (see Smith, Bundon, and Best 2016; Richardson et al. 2017) there is correlating notion of embodied experience being the catalyst for how we begin to legislate, organise, and plan for sporting activity inclusive of people living with disability.

Bundon and Hurd Clark’s (2015) conclusions of advocacy as an act to be by or behalf of a group who deem it necessary to disenfranchise from a dominant group offers a way of seeing advocacy as a shared duty by the participant and the facilitator whereby advocacy becomes a process where dialogues of sharing experience of activity in the pursuit of improving how accessible an activity can be. A practical recommendation for British Judo clubs and their coaches could be that advocacy can be translated as a dialogue which occurs between athletes and coaches designed to understand what the participant needs in place to access the activity fully, where objective information that betters the facilitation of the sporting activity is shared. This could be introduced into a coach / athlete relationship by making it a standardised conversation at the beginning of each session which aims to understand how a visually impaired participant wants to be supported within a session. The necessity of this conversation is supported from my integrated observations of VI Judo activity in Britain, as VI Judoka are effected by different environmental factors which may change from session to session. For example athletes with partial sight may be effected by changes of lighting, or by how many other participants are participating in a session.

Advocacy then in this instance is as Powis (2018) points out for it be shifted from the academic position within disability studies pointing out a need for advocacy as disenfranchisement from a dominant group to be in practical terms power placed with the disenfranchising group by equipping them with the framework to highlight what they need to access the activity differently to what non-disabled users require, this then enables advocacy to be a pathway where the needs of participants is better understood. As mentioned in the

previous chapter advocacy in the context of British Judo advocates in the club environment are aware of the needs of people living with a disability whilst in a room full of people who are practicing Judo without an impairment. Powis highlights the oppression that has historically existed within disability literature as academics creating a power dynamic as they advocate for disability rather than placing the power of advocacy with the person holding the embodied experience of the disability. A progressive step towards the framework of choice which the Lakeshore Foundation have blueprinted can be utilised by coaches and facilitators of VI Judo by placing shared ownership with both the person effected by sight loss and the coach to better understand day to day how the conditions of the environment of the Judo club contributes to a participant being able to equitably participate in Judo activity depending on the uncontrollable elements which effect a VI participants engagement with each Judo session they attend.

Athlete 2's accounts for the limitations of their club's built environments in my line of enquiry through the interview schedule were always combatted by a sense of acknowledging that without the club coach and the facilitators of that environment, the environment is in fact just a building. Athlete 4 pursues a dialogue which from their individual experience presents the grass roots Judo club environment (alike the Lakeshore Foundation) is a place where choice, and personal experience are the underpinning tools which facilitators utilise to empower their participants who require reasonable adjustments to use a specific space. Reasonable adjustments as per the Equality Act (2010) is the process where facilitators of publicly accessible spaces must recognise to equitably adjust a service or provision in line with the needs of disabled users who are looking to access a particular environment or activity. As pointed out by the Women and Equalities Committee's *Building for Equality: Disability and the Built Environment report* (2017) the social model (Oliver, 2004) implies that it is neither morally or practically sustainable for every time a disabled participant of an environment experiences an inequality of access within an environment to have to request a reasonable adjustment. Athlete 2 in the below section demonstrates the narrative shift that I experienced when beginning this thesis project. When beginning this research project my assumptions as a stakeholder within the research informed how I crafted the interview schedule, subsequent discussions and narratives that emerged from the participants., I thought that this route would provide a clear framework for critique that would equip VI Judoka with the ability to question how their Judo club facilities operated to give them the most equitable access. Instead of this, as Athlete 2 narrates their awareness of the

operations of their home Judo club environment is aligned to how The people of the Judo club activated the space in order to make it more accessible for them. This is echoed across all 4 participant interviews, Athlete 2 creates comparison between their Judo club and their experience of school, which focuses mainly on how others engage with them as someone who has a visual impairment.

‘I can't fault my judo club at all in the way they spent hours on end making sure everything's okay for me, with my visual impairment compared to where when I was at school, they (school facilitators e.g teachers) wouldn't really understand what was wrong with me. And I don't think they really took the time my judo club did by looking into ways to make life easier just for me’

Usefully, this anecdote from Athlete 2 above articulates a framework of looking at disability in the context of the individual by disconnecting the two. As Oliver (2003) puts it you can locate the ‘problem’ of disability within the individual firstly, and then secondly see the causes of the ‘problem’ as a stem from the functional limitations of the specific disability. A need for a personalised approach to understanding the individual within the context of their disability is a cohesive finding across the collected data. Across all of the participants they suggest that their sustained interest in continuing Judo within their club setting was due to a mixture of sensibilities that their coach upheld within their coaching practice. These sensibilities provide choice and autonomy to the athlete in making it clear to their coach what needs they have to feel comfortable in the training environment. The example of the Lakeshore Foundation provides evidence that to build trust within the relationship of disabled facility user and the facilitator; choice is a paramount component in the recipe for sustained engagement. In a sport such as Judo where the actual practice of the sport is near enough identical minus a few rules between Olympic and Paralympic practices, it is more straightforward for a coach or facilitator to focus upon the individual as a separate focal point for identifying ‘problems’ within the context of their disability as Oliver suggests. The facilitator can focus more on the individual’s relation to the ‘problems’ of their disability, due to the practical happenings of a Judo practice for a VI participant not differing that much.

Within the collected data it is clear that Judo across both Paralympic, and Olympic Judo in practical terms are extremely similar, which is why this thesis has begun to explore further the social, relational, and physical environmental obstacles that may exist in a grass roots

Judo club, as opposed to the sport specific obstacles that the participants of this study do not acknowledge. Athlete 4 provides us with an explanation of the lack of situational differences between Paralympic and Olympic Judo:

‘I like to tell people the only difference between Paralympic and Olympic Judo is that we start on the grip. A lot of people make it complicated but you don’t need to. You take a lapel and a sleeve and then you fight. That is the beauty of this sport. A lot of people with visual impairments get a bit worried as in its so complicated. But really it is just take a grip and fight.’

Athlete 4’s explanation underpins the advantage that Judo coaches and Judo club staff members have in shrinking the difference in experience between Olympic and Paralympic Judoka when following Oliver’s route to identifying the ‘problems’ of disability when in the context of different environments. If we are to follow the theoretical approach to identifying the ‘problems’ of disability by the means of individual experience and then the functional problems of a particular disability, we by the account of Athlete 4 can side step considering the physical limitations of VI Judoka first and foremost as the practice of the sport isn’t a major barrier, it is predominantly in the way facilitators build relational understands of the individual’s ability to communicate. Athlete 2 following their comparison of their experience of school to their Judo club highlights that equal treatment within their peer group at the Judo club was a primary reason why they stuck with the sport. Equal treatment across the participant pool has been identified by means such as: ‘letting me have a go in amongst non visually impaired competitors’ (Athlete 3). Athlete 2 within their interview expresses that their visual impairment was always considered in the Judo club environment but was not the core focus of their coaches. Differently to when they were at school, it was a label their teachers would put on them that would make participating in activities more difficult; as socially others were more aware of the limitations of their disability before they were aware of the way that them as an individual had built their own adjustments around the limitations of their disability.

‘The way my judo club goes about things is in a person first, judo second way, recently since my move to the national centre, I am more aware of what my judo club has done for me exceptionally well, compared to when I was at school, it was kind of more of it (my visual impairment) was just a label I had, it was almost like I had a lanyard on with a bit of paper newspaper that said, I can't see very well. Whereas when I'm

at the judo club, it's like they're aware of that impairment, but they just treat me equally to everyone else, and let me get involved with everything, and if I can't do something, they help me make it happen, and they help me do it discreetly! Like, they (my coaches) come up to me and maybe just say, is everything all right? Like, your eyes, okay? In that sense, whereas if I was at school, or in a, some, like a town hall or something, I don't think I'd get the same. Not attention, but I don't think I'd get the same, like, care.'

From the dialogue that has become apparent throughout the participant pool that the activity of Judo across both Olympic and Paralympic practitioners doesn't particularly differ in the functionality of the sporting environment. As such, we do have to acknowledge that there is three subcategories<sup>2</sup> of Paralympic Judo; B1, B2, B3 (pre Tokyo 2020/1) within the participant pool where we discussed the Judo club environment with athletes towards the end of the VI spectrum with very little or no usable vision (B1) they did agree with the ideology that there is very little practical differences of practicing Judo between Olympic and Paralympic disciplines, and they do in fact confirm the need to follow Oliver's separation of the individual from the context of disability so that the ability of the specific individual is assessed prior to making decisions on behalf of them in relation to an assumed understanding of how their visual impairment prohibits or restricts their ability to practice within the Judo club built environment. Athlete 1 who is categorised within the B1 / J1 category of the IBSA classification group draws upon their experience of having eye sight that has got progressively worse within the time frame that they have practiced Judo to the extent that they have now fully lost all of their usable vision. Within their interview they stress that their experience of being able to practice Judo has shifted over the trajectory of losing their sight, prior to losing all of their usable vision they were able to recall visual memory of shapes and utilising light and shadow information to build awareness of how to practice Judo techniques. But since losing their sight fully this memory has left them.

In order to equip coaches and Judo club facilitators with the adequate skill sets to support and create an individualised understanding of someone's lived experience of a disability that they do not embody. An amalgamation of the methodology of the Lakeshore Foundation's

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<sup>2</sup> Post Tokyo 2020(1) Paralympics the International Blind Sports Association (IBSA) has moved to a classification system with only 2 subcategories: J1(a replacement of B1, athletes with no / little usable vision) and J2 (a replacement of B2 & B3, athletes with a visual impairment, with some useable vision.)

narrative menu and Oliver's (2003) two step approach to understanding context in relation to 'problems' of disability points us towards Nancy Fraser's theory of social justice (1996) where in the disability sport context which we are building understanding of the contextual learnings to be able to support VI Judoka within the Judo club environment. We are pointed by Fraser to shift our investment from environmental considerations of physical space and obstacles that exist within the built environment, to allow the built environment to become a site for social justice. Scholars have pointed out though, that in application within the field of disability inclusion studies, Fraser's model for social inclusion doesn't fully account for factors such as the economy in differing landscapes that include disability (Knight, 2015). For British Judo, the key landscape feature to consider within the criticism of Fraser's social justice framework is that the sport is a minority sport, which doesn't have mass media coverage, and large amounts of sponsorship, so the ability to stretch resources is finite in being able to reach wider disabled audiences. However, that being said this site through thinking about

Fraser's (1996) model then becomes a space where a redistribution occurs that's focussed upon Judo club facilitators investing in learning about someone's lived experience before making assumptions of how or what we know of someone's disability could impact their ability to participate. Fraser's nod towards redistribution and recognition as a conceptualisation for ensuring that individuals are listened to and heard within their chosen built environments allows a conclusion of the position of the facilitator acting as an ally in the dynamic of Paralympic sports facilitator and participant living with / through their disability as a relationship which works towards placing autonomy and choice with the participant. This shift in thinking which in response to the collected data across the participant pool lends itself also towards the narrative of disenfranchisement which is present in advocacy literature which embarks on a narrative to provide advocates of disability sport space to distance themselves from the dominant group; in this case Paralympic participants distancing themselves from Olympic participants of Judo.

Due to the small nuanced differences between the physical practice of Judo for both Paralympic and Olympic pathway athletes, disenfranchisement seems to be the most reasonable stance to suggest to ensure that in order for the BJA to allow Judo club environments in Britain to be able to offer a seamless and aligned programme of Judo activity the base line suggestions could be to consider how a narrative menu typology could

be applied to how a member with a visual impairment can choose to make it clear how to be supported each time they enter the environment. Although choice and clarity of types of support needed have been themes that have prevailed throughout the interview process, the starting point for enabling this type of environmental quality is in disenfranchisement (Bundon and Hurd Clark, 2015) by asking facilitators who are comfortable with their delivery of Olympic Judo to step outside of their usual practice and consider the additional access 'sensibilities' which are necessary for them to uphold within their coaching practice to ensure that they are moving towards enabling an entitlement to choice and autonomy within all of their athletes but particularly in facilitating Paralympic Judo within their club environment.

By the means of disenfranchisement as Bundon and Hurd Clark theorise allows the role of advocacy to illustrate a methodology whereby for a Judo club environment to continue its offer of Olympic Judo it must step outside of itself to essentially 'check in' to look at how choice and autonomy could be placed with new VI participants who will be practicing Judo. Due to the highlighted similarities to the practice of both Olympic and Paralympic Judo it is even more important for highlighting and creating clarity on what sensibilities are necessary to work with each participant accessing the Judo club environment. This 'sensibilities check in' could produce outputs such as offering a typology as a narrative menu alike the Lakeshore Foundation which demonstrates the way facilitators can act as ally's and enablers of disability sport environments, and then consequently by the practice of Mladenov (2016) and Oliver (2003) in their proposition of a way of separating the 'getting to know your athlete' process of understanding the lived experience of an individual's disability life-span can be seen as an application of Fraser's (1996) social justice theory which requires a redistribution of cultural understanding of a social or political area; in this instance VI Judo. The redistribution that Fraser talks about can be seen as a shifting of investment or a process of hyper-focusing on the individual needs of disability sport culture as opposed to wider sporting attitudes. This process then offers a lens whereby Paralympic Judo can be disenfranchised from Olympic Judo to create an awareness of how participants coming into the Judo club environment for the first time need to be communicated with and what level of autonomy they must be greeted with or offered.

### **6.3 The application of Care Ethics to promote disenfranchisement in Judo club environments as a site for social justice.**

As mentioned throughout, disenfranchisement is a useful theoretical method to articulate the process of advocacy and allyship in the pursuit of promoting the different environmental and relational qualities that come together to create safe and supportive Judo club environments for athletes living with visual impairments in the UK. In order to achieve this form of advocacy, a framework for the built environment of British Judo clubs has been developed as a site for social justice. Not a justice that is informed by the removal of physical barriers, but a justice that is informed by breaking down the social model of getting to know people living with disabilities throughout a coaches life of working with them to deeply understand the individual and their lived experience of their life with disability, separate to the constructs and physiological limitations of the disability itself. From what has been demonstrated in the data collection, these athletes are people who have found a way to work outside of the established perimeters of their disability and are working towards discovering their day in day out relational perimeters in relation to what types of environments and activities they do.

When asked what caring meant to them athlete 2 shared how caring in the context of the Judo club was as much a group of personalities traits that their club coach demonstrated as a feeling that they always felt when they entered the environment “the judo club have not only offered both hands out to me and I have always their hands are looking out for me in my locker. In a caring sense it's not even like a judo club, and teammates, it's a family for me. And it's been a family environment for me, ever since I've started going.” What all of the athletes in the participant pool have in common are that their identification of care within environments is how in comparison to their families or primary care givers, their Judo club matches up to the family set up as a care support system. Often, we find within this study that all of the athletes have identified a figure of care within the Judo club environment that relates to the type of care which can be related to their family or individual care set up. Terms like their coach was a ‘father figure’ or their club welfare officer was ‘like a mum to them’ have arisen in the ethnographic exposure within my time conducting this study, and this by no means is uncommon in the relationship between athletes and coaches who have worked with each other for lengthy periods of time. However what this thesis sets out to do is to interrogate how caring as an ethical act or consideration can support the delivery of Judo

club activity, to protect and to ensure that a person living with an impairment can access a Judo club environment for the first time equitably.

Caring as an act within the context laid out within this thesis has been developed as a necessary act to maintain and protect the equitability, welfare, and ethics of the activity of Judo within grass roots club environments in Britain which has been informed by the way that care in contemporary coaching practices has emerged (see: Fisher, et al., 2019; Daniels & Cronin, 2019). Daniels and Cronin (2019) speak of caring in the 'elite' coaching context which is seen by many elite performers as a balancing of nurturing support and advocacy, with 'challenge' (p.37). Protection of these qualities of the environment is by my understanding based within the definition of caring as an act to maintain the qualities that are essential for the environment or activity to be inclusive and accessible, but in order to include caring in the governance of space we can look to employ the theoretical notion of the ethics of care of being an established perimeter where spaces are governed by people who consider care ethics as a way of bringing the sensibilities (established within these discussion chapters) of coaching and or facilitation of disability sports to becomes the rule structure that governs and protects the way that people living with visual impairments who can participate in Judo.

The sensibilities identified within this thesis are from my ethnographic observations of the research site of VI Judo activity in Britain from a perspective that spans across the entire performance pathway. The reasons for identifying a typology of sensibilities that coaches, facilitators, and even team mates of participants of sports who have disabilities can take into consideration as simple approaches to attempt to level the playing field of access to sporting environments for people living with disabilities. There is to my mind no list of sensibilities in the form of personality traits, or ways of being. Neither is there a set of sensibilities that can cover all basis for protecting and ensuring that a disabled participant's experience of grass roots sports can be guaranteed. Instead of this my focus is upon how our grass roots sporting environments in Britain are governed and legislated to ensure that coaches and facilitators are aware of choice and open dialogues being the common denominators which was highlighted throughout the participant pool of this study, and backed up by academic studies into disability participation in non-disabled sporting environments (Richardson & Motl, 2020; Curisol & Barreira, 2021). My primary hopes that this thesis can support disabled sport facilitators to gain a deeper understanding of types of dialogue which can be really

useful for participants living with disabilities to have with their coaches. Athlete three's gives an account of the type of conversational dialogue which reassures them when they enter a new environment:

“Say Hi to the participant, It's Ben (for example) every time you first see someone. You often as a VI person know you know the voice, but its much easier to ensure that you know someone by them introducing themselves when they first see you at the beginning of a session. Know your athlete, say me I struggle with my peripheral vision, but another may struggle with her central vision. So know your athlete, and know what they can see and adapt in the best way you can. Say add a strip of yellow tape to the steps into the Judo club. It's not a huge adaption but it could make a load of difference for someone who struggles with depth perception, you only know this information from making your athlete aware that you will make change for them if they need it.”

From the data collected and considered within the discussion chapters it is essential that care ethics as Gilligan (1982) promotes a challenge to the assumed male voice in situations of governance and legislation, and implements or even uncovers a different voice that applies moral reasoning and ethical thinking in this case the voice being uncovered is the openness of dialogue between participant and facilitator. The call from many athletes in the Paralympic performance pathway in Britain is one where we are looking to get away from a one size fits all methodology of coaching or facilitation at the bottom end of the pathway where participants are offered a menu that offers different ways of engagement with their coach or club environment which is aligned with their lived experience of their disability. As Morris (2001) highlights, utilising ethics of care within the context of enables us to work from a point of recognising common humanity between non-disabled and disabled participants. And, moreover, that there may be fundamental consequences for all of us when there is a denial of human rights (e.g., exploitation, exclusion, marginalisation, and prejudice) What is meant by this is that in order for a non-disabled facilitators of disability sport to be able to prepare their activity for disabled participants it is essential for coaches and facilitators to acknowledge what commonalities exist between non-disabled and disabled participants. This is of value in ensuring that for non-disabled coaches and facilitators in an environment such as VI club based Judo they can protect the activity of Judo as a sport that can be taught to both disabled participants (in this scenario visually impaired participants) and non-

disabled participants. Once similarities between the groups have been identified, then care ethics can be applied to the disenfranchised group so that their lived experience is championed within the decision making processes of Judo club activity. This championing can be seen as signposting or even flagging areas of Judo club activity where there is an imbalance leaning in the favour of the dominant group (non-disabled, Olympic Judo participation).

An important component from the literature review chapter of this thesis is the way that Nel Noddings provides a way for understanding the application of care ethics as a process of maintenance and evolving understanding (2010) they describe care ethics as 'receptive attention' and this being the fundamental characteristic of caring. Noddings places care ethics as a relational ethic, through context of this thesis applying care ethics to the relationship of facilitator and participant Noddings usefully recognises the roles of both carer and cared-for in establishing and maintaining the caring relationship. To conclude this chapter Noddings creates an important contextual understanding for applying care ethics to the notions of allyship and advocacy that I have discussed throughout the last two chapters. Noddings places responsibilities in the advocate, ally and facilitator in the relationship of non-disabled coach and disabled participant to uncover the voice of the disenfranchised from the Judo club environment. Noddings describes the sensibilities which are important traits from the perspective of the carer as being attentive, open to the possibility of being affectively moved and experiencing motivational displacement, and responds in a way to meet the needs of the cared-for or, at least, to maintain the caring relation. And then the dialogue is then completed by the cared-for by acknowledging the efforts of the carer (2015). Then, additionally from the learning from the lakeshore foundation's narrative menu it is important to place ownership of the cared-for to chose from and make it clear what their choice is in how they hope to be engaged with. This creates a balanced dialogue which Noddings emphasises for the practical application of care ethic as a relational ethic, a relational ethic which promotes the carer as a person whom is an advocate, an ally whom supports the disenfranchisement of the cared-for from the non-disabled environment to gain a clear perspective to understand the individual needs of the disabled participant.

## 7. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated how the lived experience of visually impaired people is considered in the grass roots Judo club environment in the United Kingdom. Data collection has exposed the attitudes and beliefs of current VI Judoka participating in the NGB's Paralympic performance pathway, which has created a clearer understanding of how VI Judoka view their experience of entering the sport for the first time, and how their perspective of grass roots VI Judo has shifted as they have gained more experience as they progressed upwards through the high performance pathway, or at least become more aware of the particular needs that potential newcomers to the sport may have. Across all the participants within this study there were collective feelings expressed that they do not know what physical barriers could have been removed in their experience. All members instead speak about a focus on non-physical barriers which could exist in the experience of a VI participant attending a Judo club for the first time.

Before drawing formal conclusions on this thesis where the researcher connects the key research aims of this thesis to the recommendations which could be considered by the British Judo Association to build a framework for a more equitable and accessible grassroots performance environment for VI participants. My reflections on conducting this research are primarily in the limitations that the Covid-19 pandemic had enforced on conducting this research. My ethnographic position which in (June 2022) has resumed to travelling again with the GB Paralympic team globally, has highlighted that the focus of many of the participants of this study could have potentially been influenced by the challenges of the pandemic (particularly in practicing combat sport). Even though all of the participants did not focus too much on the fact they had experienced even more isolation in their training environments since Covid-19 it is important to acknowledge that the interviews were conducted in September / October 2021 when 3 out of the 4 participants were only just beginning to resume contact Judo. This for me, has led to a heightened awareness within the collected data that the participants are hyper analytical of how their disability impacts their use of facilities as opposed to what I observe in the current moment when working within the performance environment with many of the participants of this study. They were at this point just beginning to resume business as usual. I have been able to reach these reflections due to spending the majority of 2022 travelling with the team, and being aware of the further we have got away from the limitations of Covid-19, the more many of the participants are more focused

on the future within their sport, rather than focused on reflecting on past issues which seemed to dominate a lot of the findings in this thesis.

Throughout this study whilst focused upon the phenomenological experience of the participants there has been clarity that has emerged which indicates there must be clearer legislation and infrastructure that supports VI Judoka entering the grassroots environments for the first time from the NGB, British Judo. Major criticism of the NGB extends from the lack of direction which clubs receive in how to be best prepared for working with a VI participant for the first time. The participants cited this lack of direction to extend from two findings within the analysis of this thesis:

1. A heightened view on the restrictions that having a visual impairment has on doing Judo. (e.g. All of the participants insist that the BJA think there are more restrictions in physically participating in the sport at grass roots level, in fact there are very few restrictions in physically participating in the sport as VI Judoka.)
2. Within the development areas of the BJA performance pathway VI Judo is considered a component of 'Adaptive Judo' amongst disabilities such as Down Syndrome, and Cerebral Palsy (British Judo Association, 2021).

In partnership with tropes presented within the literature, three prominent catalysts have been discerned from the data that have become useful tools to promote better inclusion that is not focused on the physical implications of the sport, but on the built environment as a social model. These are, specifically, chapter advocacy, social justice and care ethics, which are I promote here as ingredients that could contribute to a more inclusive culture both within BJA (and potentially further para-sport and wider sport environments). As part of the development of this study within each of the three catalysts of the theoretical framework for this project there are sub-focuses which have become prominent in the construction of the meaning of each catalyst for change in relation to the research site.

Advocacy has become an important focus for this thesis and through the key aims of this study to explore where advocacy and care can be understood within terms of social justice as acts where the performance pathway can account for the needs of future Para-Judo participants. We can consider the act of advocacy in the disability sport context to be a mechanism for understanding the way lived experience is championed within the research site;

most useful understandings of advocacy that have surfaced throughout this study are both the Lakeshore Foundation methodology (Richardson & Motl, 2020) and Bundon and Hurd Clark's (2015) notions of disenfranchisement. The power of advocacy as Powis (2018) describes it, hands over the academic understanding of how advocates are positioned within the Paralympic sport system, and places it with para-athletes themselves. The Lakeshore Foundation places choice in the hands of the disabled participant in how they want to be supported each time they visit the foundation through a narrative menu. Which creates a framework where disabled participants are given a platform, where they can advocate for their own experience. Whereas Bundon and Hurd Clark (2015) create a focus which stresses advocacy to be an act of disenfranchisement, where for the needs of disabled participants to be understood, it is suggested that disability sports participation to be taken out of the context of non-disabled sporting environments so that the individual needs of disabled participants can be advocated on their behalf by facilitators. Bundon and Hurd Clark identify this process which for this study would be the separation of Paralympic and Olympic environments as disenfranchisement in order to better understand the needs of Paralympic Judo participants. Both of these examples are seemingly different in methodology and focus, whereby one separates disabled participants and gives non-disabled facilitators the opportunity to advocate their needs on behalf of them as a disenfranchised entity, and the other places advocacy in the hand of the advocated for. Both of these examples of advocacy contribute to the use of Nancy Fraser's (1996) proposition of social justice, which for types of justice to prevail such as advocacy or allyship, redistribution and recognition must occur. Redistribution in this instance is the disenfranchisement of Paralympic Judo from Olympic Judo that Bundon and Hurd Clark speak about, and the recognition that is an essential ingredient to social justice is located in the type of advocacy methodology that the Lakeshore Foundation adopt in recognising that the voice to be uncovered within the disability sports environment is the embodied lived experience of the visually impaired within the research site.

In conclusion, and in relation to one of the key aims to be utilise the experience of VI Judoka over the last 10 years since London 2012 to develop a blueprint in the future which maps the successes and learning points of the last 10 years as we develop a new cohort of future Paralympians. The recommendation is that caring is a fundamental act which is prominent within elite sport coaching contexts. The interpretative element to this study being conducted by assessing the nuanced details between the experiences of the participants from their

involvement within the BJA Paralympic pathway is recognisable as an act of uncovering a different voice within the narrative of disability sport research. The aims and the objectives of the research furthered understanding of how the experience of VI Judo participants has been over the last 10 years since London 2012, has uncovered a narrative which focuses on advocacy being a necessary to emerge within the NGB so that a clearer pathway can be followed by athletes about to begin their 10 year trajectory from leaving the club environment towards the Paralympic podium in Brisbane 2032.

A recommendation for this study could place the participants of this research project to be seen as co-researchers (Fitzgerald, et al., 2003), in this type of study the concentration of co-learning could be a relatable method of advocacy which can be applied to the coach / athlete relationship which transcends as an uplifted and platformed voice of the less dominant group, in this case new VI Judo participants. The research also provides support for a recommendation to the NGB and its cohort of grass roots coaches engaging with grass roots VI Judo activity. This process, firstly empowers users of a facility to either advocate for their own experience, so they feel motivated towards creating their own narrative around their embodied experience of living with a visual impairment (Richardson & Motl, 2020). Secondly, coaches should recognise that in order to achieve social inclusion, recognition of this type of care is essential in order to uncover the voice of the cared for within the care relationship (Noddings, 2010). In addition to this three members of the current British Judo Paralympic pathway also suffer from partial or complete hearing loss. This is also in combination with a varying degree of visual impairment, and creates justification for the proposition that it could be useful for coaches to consider the dialogue that they insist with participants with visual impairments as essential to providing choice in how much support they require within their training environment. This, I also believe will provide a solution to what all four participants of this study outline that until they got to more senior ranks within the British Judo Paralympic performance pathway felt that the approach that their club coaches took was based on trial and error of how to teach Judo as opposed to simply gaining better understanding of what practical support an individual needs from session to session before teaching Judo to those who cannot see it even becomes a consideration. Whilst the findings of this thesis do not entirely supply greater clarity in the way the disability sport built environment is physically experienced by VI Judoka, it does speak in volumes about the built environment being a conceptual framework which accounts the social, relational, and embodied experience of the people that use it. This study has provided a way for the facilitators of the

Judo club environment to become enablers of the types of methodology which the Lakeshore Foundation utilise that empowers the voice of VI Judoka to be uncovered and place emphasis on care ethics being a central component in the practice of grass roots disability coaching within the context of British Judo.

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## **Appendix:**

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**AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL INSPIRED ANALYSIS OF VISUALLY  
IMPAIRED PARTICIPATION IN A BRITISH JUDO CLUB:  
ADVOCACY, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CARE ETHICS IN THE DISABILITY SPORT  
BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

**Researcher:**

Name: Benjamin Urban

Email: bu23@kent.ac.uk

**Supervisory team:**

Name: Dr. Geoffery Z. Kohe

Department: School of Sport and Exercise Science, University of Kent

Email: G.Z.Kohe@kent.ac.uk

Thank you for your interest in this research project. Please read all of the information detailed within this document carefully so that you can make an informed decision whether or not you wish to take part. Please feel free to discuss details listed in this information document with others if you wish. If any information as part of this document is unclear please do contact the researcher on the email address above to ask any questions you may have about this study. Participation in this study is voluntary, and. If you do wish to participate you will be issued with a consent form detail the permission we require from you for this study.

**What is the purpose of this research?**

This research study has been developed from the experience of the researcher as a personal coach to a young developing VI athlete within a Judo club based setting in Britain. This study will aim to improve the Judo club environment by asking of stakeholders of VI Judo in Britain how their experiences could of differed when first beginning their journey in Judo. Primarily the researcher will focus on how accessible, and socially

inclusive Judo clubs are in Britain for VI participants. They will then seek to deeper understand how the different Judo clubs in the British Judo Association could be modified in terms of the buildings that grass roots Judo activity is performed.

### **Why have I been invited to take part in this study?**

You have been invited to take part in this study on the basis of your involvement with VI Judo in Britain. We see you as a key stakeholder who can allow us to deeper understand the national landscape of how grassroots Judo clubs can be developed better to allow greater access for new VI members of the British Judo Association.

### **How long am I expected to be apart of this study?**

Participants in this project are required to take patron one virtual interview (approximately 90 minutes in duration) with one or members of the research team.

### **Do I have to take part, and can I opt out of this study?**

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You can decide whether or not you wish to be involved after reading this document. All participants will be informed during the consent process and during the course of the interview that they retain the right to not answer any questions, withdraw from participating, or retract their data at a later date. Should the participant wish, there will also be the opportunity to break the interview (temporarily or permanently) at any stage.

### **What are the possible side effects taking part?**

There are minimal risks within the process of this study as the interviews will amino focus primarily on how a participants VI effects their daily life and their participation in grass roots Judo. Based on professional and personal experience working in the VI Judo setting, As the researcher I am fully aware and mindful that the interviews will ask for participants to speak about their lived experience in relationship to their sight loss or impairment. This will in many cases ask for participants to speak about major events in their lives which have contributed towards their disability. While reflections on these issues may, at times,

be sensitive, they are unlikely to be beyond the realm of discussion and experiences encountered as part of participant's daily lives.

### **What are the possible benefits from taking part?**

In taking part you are contributing to a research study which aims make the grass root Judo club in Britain a more equitable and accessible place for people living with visual impairments. This research study aims to provide the British Judo Association a summary of the findings from this data collection which will utilise your experience to enable more people living with a visual impairment access better physical activity, and access sport which will contribute to the wellbeing of VI persons nationally.

### **Will my taking part be confidential?**

Any information provided that would reveal your identity will not be included in the project. The researcher will ensure that all transcripts of interviews will use a fictitious name that shields your identity so that your anonymity is protected.

All data and consent forms will be stored on a password encrypted file that is in keeping with the University of Kent's GDPR guidance for research activities such as this.

Please note that if a disclosure is made at any point during the project that suggests, either directly or indirectly, harm to the participant or to others, or criminal activity or bad practice, the relevant authorities will be informed. In the case of concerns of a criminal nature, the police will be informed. All other welfare concerns will be reported to the British Judo Association.

### **What will happen to the results of the research?**

The data collected as part of your participation in this study will be anonymised, analysis and interpreted as part of an academic thesis paper which will presented at conferences. You are welcome to a copy of this work once it is completed. If you are interested in receiving a copy of the findings please identify this with the researcher so that they ensure that the research is sent to you.

### **Who has reviewed this study?**

This study has been reviewed by The School of Sport and Exercise Sciences (SSES) Research Ethics and Advisory Group (REAG) at the University of Kent.

### **Who can I contact if I need to ask anymore questions about the study?**

You can contact the research team at any point using the contact details below.

### **Who can I contact if I wish to complain about this study?**

If you wish to complain about the way that the study was conducted you can contact the Director of the SSES REAG, Dr Karen Hambly by email ([k.hambly@kent.ac.uk](mailto:k.hambly@kent.ac.uk)) or by phone (01634 88 8858).

### **Where can I go for support?**

If the content of the workshops has raised any issues for you and you would like to speak to someone about these, you can speak to any of the researchers.

### **What should I do now?**

If you are happy to participate in the research then please contact the research team using the contact details at the top of the document.

#### Postal address for all researchers:

School of Sport and Exercise Sciences  
The University of Kent at Medway  
The Medway Building  
Chatham Maritime  
Kent  
ME4 4AG.

**AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL INSPIRED ANALYSIS OF VISUALLY  
IMPAIRED PARTICIPATION IN A BRITISH JUDO CLUB:**

**ADVOCACY, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CARE ETHICS IN THE DISABILITY SPORT  
BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

Investigator:

Benjamin Urban

Re: Statement of consent for participation in interview research

I can confirm that I have decided to take part of this research interview that contributes to the academic research of Benjamin Urban as part of 'An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Visually Impaired participation in a British Judo Club.' I have been made aware that the information I supply as part of this process will be anonymised so that it can be used in this research project for public consumption. I have also been made aware that I can withdraw my participation from this interview at any time and that I can refuse to answer a question during the interview, with no consequences.

I am aware that the interview process will take approximately 1 - 1.5 hours and that the investigator will make a recording of the interview for transcription purposes. I am aware that at any point of the interview process I may request the investigator to terminate the recording at any time of the interview.

The interviewer has confirmed that the recording, and transcription of my interview will be stored in a password encrypted folder and will only be accessible by the researcher and their supervisory team. I understand that these records will not be disclosed to third parties without any prior consent if this situation was to arise.

I have read and understood the explanation provided in this document. All my questions and concerns for the interview have been answered to my satisfaction prior to my signing of this document. I am aware that I can contact the University supervisor, research office or ethics committee should I have wider concerns about their research I am involved in. I can confirm through signing this document that I consent to participating in this interview, and I have been given a copy of the consent form and information sheet about the research project of which the interview forms part of.

---

My signature

---

My printed name

---

Date

---

Signature of Investigator

**Interview Schedule Document:**

Research Title:

**AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL INSPIRED ANALYSIS OF VISUALLY  
IMPAIRED PARTICIPATION IN A BRITISH JUDO CLUB:**

**ADVOCACY, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CARE ETHICS IN THE DISABILITY SPORT  
BUILT ENVIRONMENT**

Key Research Question:

1. What are the key barriers (social, physical, and cultural) that exist for individuals with Visual Impairments (VI) in accessing physical activity in Britain?
2. How can the experience of VI participants improve in accessing Judo club based activity for the first time?
3. How can the improvement of the Judo club environment in terms of access for VI participants inform the BJA's inclusion policy to improve the equitability of the entire performance pathway environment?

Interview Schedule:

**General VI / Para-sport background Questions:**

- A1. Firstly, can you begin with a summary of your current involvement with the BJA's Paralympic performance pathway?
- A2. Where you are based week to week, and what level you are participating at?
- A3. How long have you been involved with Para-Judo?
- A4. Please can you tell me what your experience was like joining a Judo club for the first time?

A5. From your experience, what do you think are the most common obstacles for a person with a Visual Impairment in accessing physical activity for the first time?

A6. If you have tried / participated in multiple sports, from your experience what is it about your Judo club that encouraged you to stay within the sport, and why did you decide for Judo to be your main physical activity you participate in?

### **Accounts of lived experience in the Judo club environment**

B1. Can you tell me about your Judo club and its facilities, e.g. does it have a permanent mat area?

B2. Can you explain your experience of how the facilities of your chosen environment affect your ability to regularly practice Judo?

B3. Are there any distinct features of your club environment which are negative contributors to the way VI participants would access the environment? Equally are there any positives?

B4. What are the main social, environmental, and personal obstacles that could exist that prevent VI people in continuing Judo? Are there any distinct situations or experiences you would like to share?

B3. How did / does your club coach keep you engaged with Judo?

B5. What in your opinion did your coach, club welfare officer or other members of staff do well to help you overcome any obstacles that may exist in learning Judo as a VI participant?

B6. In your opinion, how do you feel about your overall experience of Judo club environments in comparison to other cultural or recreational spaces for how they accommodate VI participants, e.g. leisure centres, museums, perhaps even spaces of education: school, college, university ect.?

### **Development of good governance of BJA VI club based Judo**

C1. What do you believe are the key educational and awareness development areas that the BJA should focus on to give clubs and their coaches the necessary tools to make Judo clubs fair, and accessible spaces for VI participants?

C2. How well do you think the BJA provides resources to coaches and club officials as to how they develop VI Judoka?

C3. What types of resources do you think could be useful to develop club environments for VI participation?

C4. How do you think the BJA could recruit more VI participants, and what would they need to change currently to make Judo feel more friendly to prospective VI Judoka?

C5. What to you is the difference between a good and bad experience for a VI person experiencing a Judo club for the first time?

#### **The future of VI Judo in Britain:**

D1. What do you think are the main improvement areas for the BJA to increase VI participation in Judo?

D2. What policies and guidance could be put in place within the BJA to improve the experience of Judo club environments to new VI participants?

B4. Knowing what you know now, what could your club have done differently to give you equal access to your Judo club to your club mates without a visual impairment?

B5. From your experience what advice would you give to a coach, or a member of Judo club staff how they could improve their facilities to enable VI people to use the Judo club?

D5. Is there anything else you'd like to share?