SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT, MEDIA AND DISABILITY IN SPAIN

SOCIOLOGIA DO ESPORTE, MÍDIA E DEFICIÊNCIA NA ESPANHA

SOCIOLOGÍA DEL DEPORTE, MEDIOS Y DISCAPACIDAD EN ESPAÑA

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Abstract. Today, Spain is an advanced country in the field of sport for people with disabilities. Thanks to social movement led by National Blind Organization (ONCE) since the mid-80s, the Paralympic Games in Barcelona in 1992, the birth of the Spanish Paralympic Committee in 1995 and the Paralympic Sport Support Plan (ADOP) by the Government, Spain is a Paralympic power and many athletes with disabilities are socially known and admired people. However, there are yet situations of social and economic discrimination. Surely the media have powerfully influenced for improve the image of these athletes with disabilities, but still they use to give the sport for people with disabilities much less coverage than they give to other sports. From a sociological point of view, the study of sport is consolidating as a scientific area and in recent decades it has highlighted the connections between sport and society in various fields. In particular, sport for people with disabilities has become one of the areas that has evolved, especially in relation to their physical, psychological and social benefits. However, the study area relating adapted sports and mass communication is poorly developed in Spain and the references are still sporadic. The aim of this article is to show the current state of studies on sport for people with disabilities from the point of view of sociology and communication sciences in Spain, as well as the relevance of deepening these studies to achieve understanding and, as far as possible, improve the situation of these people.

Keywords: sport; media; disability.

Resumo. Hoje, a Espanha é um país avançado no campo do esporte para pessoas com deficiência. Graças ao movimento social liderado pela Organização Nacional das Cegas (ONCE) desde meados dos anos 80, os Jogos Paraolímpicos de Barcelona em 1992, o nascimento do Comitê Paralímpico Espanhol em 1995 e o Plano Paralímpico de Apoio Esportivo (ADOP) pelo Governo, a Espanha é um poder paraolímpico e muitos atletas com deficiência são pessoas socialmente conhecidas e admiradas. No entanto, existem ainda situações de discriminação social e econômica. Certamente, a mídia influenciou poderosamente para melhorar a imagem desses atletas com deficiência, mas ainda assim eles usam para dar ao esporte para pessoas com deficiência muito menos cobertura do que dão a outros esportes. Do ponto de vista sociológico, o estudo do esporte está se consolidando como uma área científica e, nas últimas décadas, destacou as conexões entre esporte e sociedade em vários campos. Em particular, o esporte para pessoas com deficiência tornou-se uma das áreas que evoluiu, especialmente em relação aos seus benefícios físicos, psicológicos e sociais. No entanto, a área de estudo relativa aos esportes adaptados e comunicação de massa é pouco desenvolvida em Espanha e as referências ainda são esporádicas. O objetivo deste artigo é mostrar o estado atual dos estudos sobre o esporte para pessoas com deficiência do ponto de vista da sociologia e das ciências da comunicação em Espanha, bem como a relevância do aprofundamento desses estudos para alcançar a compreensão e, na medida do possível, melhorar a situação dessas pessoas.

Palavras-chave: esporte; mídia; deficiência.

Resumen. En la actualidad, España es un país avanzado en el ámbito del deporte para las personas con discapacidad. Gracias al movimiento social liderado por la ONCE desde mediados de los 80, los Juegos Paralímpicos de Barcelona de 1992, el nacimiento del Comité Paralímpico Español en 1995 y el Plan Apoyo al Deporte Objetivo Paralímpico (ADOP) del Gobierno, España es una potencia Paralímpica y muchos atletas con discapacidad son personas conocidas y admiradas socialmente. Sin embargo, perduran situaciones de discriminación social y económica. Sin duda, los medios de comunicación han influido poderosamente a mejorar la imagen de estos atletas con discapacidad, pero continúan otorgando al deporte para personas con discapacidad una cobertura mucho menor que la que dan al resto de deportes. Desde el punto de vista sociológico, el estudio del deporte se está consolidando como área científica y en las últimas décadas se han puesto de relieve las conexiones entre el deporte y la sociedad en distintas esferas. En particular, el deporte para personas con discapacidad se ha convertido en una de las áreas que más ha evolucionado, en especial, en relación con sus beneficios físicos, psicológicos y sociales. Sin embargo, el área de estudio que relaciona el deporte adaptado y la comunicación de masas todavía está muy poco desarrollada en España. El objetivo de este artículo es mostrar el estado actual de los estudios acerca del deporte para personas con discapacidad desde el punto de vista de la sociología y las ciencias de la comunicación en España, así como la relevancia de profundizar en estos estudios para conseguir comprender y, en lo posible, mejorar, la situación de estas personas.

Palabras clave: deporte; medios; discapacidad.

INTRODUCTION

Sport for the disabled in Spain started to be developed in the late 1950s, when doctors and sports directors of certain healthcare centres and hospitals imitated Ludwig Guttmann's ideas for the rehabilitation of patients with spinal cord injuries and other disabilities.

For example, in 1958, Barcelona's Provincial Government, under the direction of Juan Antonio Samaranch, opened the Hogares Mundet healthcare complex to take in children and young people from the former Casa de la Caridad. The director of sports at the centre at the time, Juan Palau y Francàs, inspired by the philosophy of Doctor Guttmann, fostered the sports activity of young people with disabilities at the Centre, as a large number of the residents were patients with after-effects of poliomyelitis.

In the early 1960s, Doctor Ramón Sales Vázquez, director of traumatology of the Francisco Franco residence (now known as Hospital Vall D'Hebrón), applied Guttmann's idea of rehabilitating young paraplegics by playing basketball in wheelchairs. Similarly, Doctor Miguel Sarrias introduced sport into the activities of the National Civil Invalids' Association, now known as Hospital Instituto Guttmann (Cicuéndez, 2006).

In 1963, the Red Cross organised the first competition for athletes with disabilities at Tarragona University, known as the "I Olimpiada de la Esperanza" (1st Hope Olympiad), which was attended by representatives of 11 cities. The following year the second edition of these games was held in Reus. In view of the competitions' success, the 1st National Disabled Championships were held in Madrid in 1966, under the name of "Trofeo de la Superación" (Self-Improvement Trophy).

This was the setting in which the Spanish Federation of Sports for the Handicapped, now called the Spanish Federation of Sports for People with Physical Disabilities (FEDMF), was created in 1968. The organisation was promoted by Guillermo Cabezas Conde, with the backing of Samaranch, at that time the National Delegate for Physical Education and sport. That same year was the first time Spain took part in Paralympic Games, at the event held in Tel Aviv, in Israel.

Since then, the participation of Paralympic sportspersons in the different Games gradually increased, as well as their success in obtaining medals: 4 in Tel Aviv (1968); 4 in Heidelberg (1972); 12 in Toronto (1976); 24 in Arnhem (1980); 42 in New York (1984); and 43 in Seoul (1988). The real watershed was nevertheless the Barcelona '92 Games, at which Spain won over 100 medals for the first time. In fact, the nineties were the "golden years" of Spanish Paralympic sport: in Atlanta (1996) Spain won 106 medals and 102 in Sydney (2000).

In the last few years, Spain has continued to be a Paralympic force to be reckoned with, but two factors have led to its losing positions in the worldwide ranking. One is the fact that there are more and more countries making a determined commitment to investing in sport for persons with disabilities, trusting in its rehabilitating and integrating potential, but also aware that this can become a source of economic profit. This has meant more intense international competitiveness and thus greater difficulty in staying in the top positions. Another aspect involved has been that the successive reorganisations and regulations of Paralympic competitions have reduced the number of events that are finally competed for and consequently the number of medals given. Spain thus got 71 medals in Athens (2004), a total of 58 in Beijing (2008), 42 in London (2012) and 31 in Río (2016).

METHODOLOGY

Taking into account that the present article tries to show the state of the question of the Spanish sociological research about the sport for people with disabilities and the treatment of this sport by the media, the methodology that has been applied is the one of the bibliographical analyzes, that is to say the revision of the scientific production on this question in this country. In particular, we have analyzed the most important contributions made in Spain to the analysis of the media treatment of disability and the, still very scarce, studies on the sport for people with disabilities in this country. For the theoretical framework, the most relevant references on the treatment that the media have given to disability in general and the Paralympic Games in particular, and the most relevant studies on communication and sport produced by Spanish authors, have been used.

RESULTS

Legal framework

In Spain, sport for persons with disabilities is not expressly envisaged in the sport law, which dates back to 1990. The public and private policies that have gradually been set up in this field are organised through the following institutions.

Sports Federations

Sport for persons with disabilities in Spain has been organised since the late 1970s on an institutional and sporting basis with the gradual emergence of the different federations which group sportspersons by types of disability. The origin of all these federations was the Spanish Federation of Sports for the Handicapped which, as was already mentioned, was set up in 1968, and which grouped sportspersons with different disabilities. From this point, and over the following decades, sportspersons gradually got together in their own disability groups, so that in the early nineties (by means of the Sport Law 10/90, of 15th October, and Royal Decree of Sports Federations of 20th December 1991) the Federations were created as these are currently known: the Spanish Federation of Sports for the Blind (FEDC); the Spanish Federation of Sports for People with Intellectual Disabilities (FEDDI); the Spanish Federation of Sports for the Physically Disabled (FEDMF); the Spanish Federation of Sports for Persons with Cerebral Palsy (FEDPC); and the Spanish Federation of Sports for the Deaf (FEDS).

The ONCE

It is unquestionable that all these federations and thus the very development of sports for persons with disabilities in Spain owe a great deal to the Spanish National Organisation of the Blind (ONCE). This organisation backed adapted sport right from its beginnings, but above all made a huge commitment from the 92 Games. Its economic contribution meant for example that around 300 athletes could make use of unprecedented resources to carry out their training for the eighteen months before the Games, and the ONCE is considered to have allocated a sum of around 24 million euros to their organisation in technical adaptation, adaptation of the facilities and contracting of staff.

As from that time the relationship between the ONCE and the Spanish Paralympic movement was quite simply symbiotic. In fact, the presence of Spanish representatives on the Governing Body of the IPC has been constant since the mid-nineties. For example: Miguel Sagarra, who since 1988 has been an important member of the boards of directors of the ONCE and its Foundation, was General Secretary of the IPC from 1997 to 2005, vice-president from 2005 to 2009, and is currently a member of the Governing Body and Corporate director of Institutional Relations and Corporate Social Responsibility of this committee. Sagarra is also the director general of the Spanish News Agency Servimedia, which is part of the ONCE Foundation and Secretary-General of the Spanish Paralympic Committee (CPE). Apart from this, since 2004 the CEO of the IPC has been also Spanish Xavier González. It is lastly important to point out that Miguel Carballeda, the president of the ONCE, of the ONCE Foundation and of Servimedia, is also the president of the CPE.

The Spanish Paralympic Committee

The third major institution in sport for people with disabilities in Spain is the Spanish Paralympic Committee, which was set up on 6th September 1995. The Committee is presided over by Infanta Elena and its assembly is made up of the aforementioned five federations of sports for persons with disabilities, a further nine single-sport federations which have Paralympic modalities, the Ministries of Education, Culture and Sport, of Healthcare, Social Services and Equality and Foreign Affairs and Cooperation; as well as the Spanish Olympic Committee and the Spanish Association of Sports Journalists and Reporters.

In 1998 the Sport Law was modified, and the Spanish Paralympic Committee was acknowledged as having the same nature and functions as those of the Spanish Olympic Committee. This same Law in turn gave Public Utility status to the Spanish Paralympic Committee. Since it was created, the Spanish Paralympic Committee was seen to be the body for handling the unification and coordination of all sport for persons with disabilities in the domain of the Spanish State, in close cooperation with the Higher Sports Council.

The ADOP Plan (Paralympic Sport Support Plan)

In view of the growing competitiveness of the Paralympic Games and the drop in the number of medals achieved by the Spanish delegation from the Sydney and Athens editions, the institutional representatives of the Spanish Government took on the commitment to obtain the economic resources required for materialising a Paralympic Sport Support Plan similar to the one that Olympic sportspersons had had since 1992. As a result of this commitment the Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, the Higher Sports Council and the Spanish Paralympic Committee worked hard to recruit sponsors enabling fulfilment of this aim and on 25th June 2005 the Spanish Government presented the plan, which came into force in September that year.

At first the companies signing the Plan as sponsors were: Fundación Telefónica, Fundación ONCE, TVE, Caja Madrid, Iberdrola, ACS, Grupo Leche Pascual and El Corte Inglés, but each new cycle this group of sponsors has gradually extended. The initial budget was 7.3 million euros for the 2005-08 cycle. The plan includes grants and aid for over 400 beneficiaries in each Paralympic cycle, including already established sportspersons and promising young talent, technical staff and support personnel and it also includes direct aid for the different Federations. For 2015, the ADOP has a budget of almost 4.5 million euros.

THE BARRIERS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE SPORT ARENA

In the school field, children with any disability continue to come up against two similarly counterproductive attitudes: one is the way some physical education teachers treat them like the others and ignore the special needs of these children, and the other stems from the teachers who decide that these children can simply "not practice any physical activity" and give up trying to integrate them with their other classmates. It is also important to point out that families' predisposition is not as appropriate as it could be: many parents continue to be stuck in an attitude somewhere between resignation and withdrawal because they consider that their children are not able to carry out a physical activity comparable with that of their classmates. A lot of other difficulties should be added to these attitudes, such as the setbacks connected with facilities and sports material that are not very closely "adapted" to the needs of these children and young people.

In this respect one can for example commend most highly the work done by the CEDI (Centrefor Studies on Inclusive Sport) of Madrid Polytechnic University, directed by professor Javier Pérez, which endeavors to provide tools so that schools can integrate their pupils with disabilities in all facets of sports practice (Pérez y Sampedro, 2009). But despite these initiatives, grassroots sport for persons with disabilities is still an incipient and minority reality.

Elite sport for persons with disabilities is becoming established as a professional practice after many years of amateurism. In spite of the aforementioned ADOP Plan, Paralympic athletes continue to enjoy less aid than their Olympic equivalents, meaning that their sports careers have not yet become fully professionalised, and many of them have to complement their grants with remunerated work to be able to get by.

Beyond these plans in the field of elite professional sport and the scant initiatives by centres such as the CEDI that have been mentioned, and behind some of the declarations of "good intentions" by institutions and Governments, in Spain there are no genuine "public policies" with regard to grassroots sport for people with disabilities, that is, for adapted sport in the educational domain, leisure and free time, infrastructures, etc..

In fact, as has already been stated, in schools the medical model continues to be in force, considering that children with disabilities must be attended by the healthcare system in their sports practice: it should be doctors who decide whether a child can or should carry out this type of sport. And although the social model starts to be found in the discourse of organisations from the so-called "third sector", there are still very few real policies tackling the social exclusion of persons with disabilities in general and their exclusion in the exercise of grassroots sports activity in particular.

Over the last few decades there has been an at least apparent revolution in the social, legal and political consideration of disability in the industrialised world. Since the UN passed its Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons in 1971 and the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons itself in 1975, the governments of countries which consider themselves to be advanced have found themselves forced to consider the issue of recognition and integration of these people in the benefits and social advantages enjoyed by their citizens as a whole.

In Spain, the context of growing freedoms and recognition of rights characterising the transition to democracy, consistent with the 1978 Constitution, led to this tendency being materialised in Law 13/1982, of 7th April, on Social Integration of the Disabled (known as LISMI). This laid down the legal framework for the group and got policies of positive discrimination under way, such as the establishment of reserved quotas for people with disabilities at companies.

The law, which was expressly based on the aforementioned declarations of the UN, is a clear translation of the way disability was understood at the time: the concept that has been called the physiological and psychological "clinical model", according to which disability is simply the "unfortunate" consequence of a complaint or condition, of a physical "accident" —whether this be congenital or acquired; this physiological accident would imply a functional insufficiency in the person who has "undergone" this, which would in turn entail difficulty in their daily lives and coexistence (Ferreira, 2007).

That is to say, disability was thought of as being opposed to "the normal state", in this case, what is normal in the conception of the body, what could be known as the "healthy" body. For this reason the LISMI concentrated on developing the procedures of "prevention", "diagnosis" and "rehabilitation" (medical, psychological, educational and employment) of the "handicap", insofar as this is something individual and random which "discriminates the citizen and has to be "treated" and if possible "cured", to return them to their "natural" and desirable state (Ferreira, 2009).

At the end of that same year the legislation known as LIONDAU - the Law for Equal opportunities, non-discrimination and universal accessibility of persons with disabilities - was passed. Any references to the "handicapped" and "deficient" have disappeared in this and the only term made use of to refer to the subjects of the Law is of "persons with disabilities". But in its text, it keeps up the interest in regulating the issue of the invalidity certificate and establishing its degree, because, when all is said and done, it keeps the clinical conception of the issue. The public, legal and official discourse on disability had changed in its external forms, and the media's explicit discourse in their treatment of disability had also changed: but basically, the classical clinical model still endures (Solves, 2013a).

DISCRIMINATION, REPRESENTATION AND MEDIA

Until serious evidence in this respect can be found and confirmed, the idea that sport for the disabled reduces their risk of exclusion will continue to be an assumption. This idea has not been empirically contrasted, at least as far as Spain is concerned, meaning that this is merely a hypothesis.

From another angle, discrimination can be effectively observed by comparing the disabled's situation with that of persons with no disability, but this type of studies is in a very early stage in Spain.

The Paralympic Games

The Paralympic Games is the most important sports event after the Olympic Games (Pappous et al, 2011). As an example of this we could look at some data on these mega-events. A total number of 204 countries took part in the last edition of the Olympic Games, with over 10,500 athletes and 70,000 volunteers. During the Games over 8 million tickets were sold to attend the competitions, over 21 thousand media professionals were accredited, and it is considered that the accumulated television audience was over 4 thousand million persons. The Paralympic Games on the other hand involved 164 states, 4,237 athletes and also 70 thousand volunteers; the organisation sold 2.7 million tickets and over 6500 media professionals were accredited, working for an accumulated television audience estimated at about 3,800 million persons all over the world.

For this reason, the Paralympic Games have over the last few years meant a step forward in the social visibility of persons with disability, and could even be changing the social perception of disability in some contexts. In late 2012, the BBC announced that a survey made by ComRes for the firm showed that three quarters of the British people had a more positive feeling towards people with disabilities after the Games. Almost 80% of those interviewed with no disability claimed their perception of disability had improved after the event[1].

In Spain there are still no reliable studies like the ones performed for the BBC, but some symptoms would go to show that the change in perception of these athletes is actually taking place. One interesting example is the advertisement entitled 'Everyone's Curriculum', for a famous Spanish brand of cold meats

[1] http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-20693024 (Consulted on 25th May 2015).

(Campofrío), directed by film director Icíar Bollaín. This ended year 2012 on several of the most-watched Spanish television channels, and by then it had become a communication phenomenon on the social networks. In this a famous Spanish Television clown, along with many of the country's well-known faces, gives a list of the challenges and values which the Spanish can feel proudest of to counter the sensation of pessimism prevailing in the country, due to the economic crisis and its far-reaching consequences. The characters in the announcement read out the list of achievements and mention seven Nobel prizes obtained by the country throughout its history, Don Quixote, some of Spain's typical dishes, the national football team (world champion at that time) … and the Paralympics. What catches one's attention about the advertisement is that the scriptwriters for this spot should have precisely and explicitly included the Paralympic athletes amongst the most positive aspects, between "our own things" which Spaniards can feel happy and proud about.

Another significant example is the fame of swimmer Teresa Perales, who has won 22 Paralympic medals. In the December 2012 issue of The Paralympian, the magazine of the International Paralympic Committee, Perales asserted, after recalling that the media in Spain had compared her 22 medals with the ones won by Michael Phelps: "I think that the legacy of these games [2012] is having helped to change the way people see us" (p. 32)[2]. On 2nd November that year the Spanish Government granted her the Gran Cruz de la Real Orden del Mérito Deportivo (Great Cross of the Order of Civil Merit) the highest official recognition for a sportsperson. Perales became the first Paralympic sportsperson to be given this award. On 19th of that same month, Perales was only a single vote (nine to eight) away from being awarded the Premio Príncipe de Asturias de los Deportes (Prince of Asturias Sports Award), a prize which was finally won by Spanish golfer José María Olazábal. It may be of interest to point out in this respect that at the time when this article was written, the Paralympic swimmer had 33.1K followers on Twitter, far more than some such well-known and important Olympic athletes as Ruth Beitia, who has 28.5K, or Gemma Mengual, with 17,1K followers.

As regards the 2016 Games, the Paralympic team representing Spain in Rio was made up of 127 sportspersons, 111 of whom were contestants with disabilities and 16 support sportspersons (athletics guides, pilot cyclists, goalkeepers for blind football and Boccia auxiliaries) and they took part in 15 of the 22 disciplines in the programme. In all 31 medals were won (a ratio of one medal for each 3.5 athletes). The Olympic team was made up of 309 sportspersons, who took part in 25 disciplines and obtained a total of 17 medals (i.e. one medal for every 18.1 athletes). This means that although the Paralympics were much smaller as regards the number of participants (less than one third), they had a much greater sport "yield".

The media cover of the Olympic Games nevertheless had much greater resources than its equivalent for the Paralympics. While the Paralympic Games were attended by 86 journalists and technical staff representing around 37 media (one journalist per 0.6 athletes), counting television, radio stations and written or digital press on national and regional scales, both general and specialising in sports information, just over 270 journalists (more than triple those of the Paralympics: more than one for each athlete) went to the Olympic games.

Most of the studies that have been written on the way the media treat this mega event of the Paralympic Games deplore that the media cover of the PG is not what an event of this scale deserves (Gilbert & Schantz, 2008; Hardin & Hardin, 2003; Schantz & Gilbert, 2001, 2008; 2012; Thomas, & Smith, 2003). The importance of these criticisms stems from the fact that the media make an enormous contribution to the process of building social reality (Klapper, 1960; McCombs, 1994). This gives them great responsibility because in fact they build and disseminate groups' and individuals' images, and can thus contribute either to processes of social integration or to stigmatisation and exclusion of these people or groups. This is what happens to persons with disabilities, for example. In view of the risk of exclusion undergone by these people (Barnes, 1999), there have for this reason been a large number of studies over recent years attempting to analyse whether the media stigmatise this group or not (DePauw, & Gavron, 1995; DePauw, 1997; Haller, 2000; Nelson, 1994).

If all these complaints about the media not covering the Paralympic Games as they deserve for their importance and newsworthiness are true, this would mean that not only are they ignoring news values but also, and above all, they are discriminating against a very large sector of society, and thus not complying with a great responsibility pertaining to the media.

[2] http://www.paralympic.org/sites/default/files/magazine/150416110434319_WEB_Paralympian_03_2012_final_0.pdf

Self-perception and heteroperception of persons with disabilities

Elite sport for persons with disabilities in Spain is likely to have improved these people's social integration, as well as their self-esteem. Although no scientific studies in this respect have been carried out yet, athletes constantly acknowledge this in the media when they are interviewed and asked about the role played by sport in their lives. But whenever they get the change they also always stress that the way this type of sport is treated by the media is discriminatory and they take advantage of their appearances in the media to claim further space, more time and fairer treatment, less focussed on their personal histories and more on their sports results. They thus claim that they should be treated as sportspersons and not people with disabilities.

SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY IN SPAIN

In the specific case of persons with disabilities, scientific knowledge in sociology and in social psychology has helped to understand and to confirm that these persons are subjected to globally negative social representations, and that they are considered less valid and consequently face one form of stigmatization (Barnes, 1999).

In Spain, this general hypothesis that the media construction of the image of the disabled proves to be stigmatizing has been backed by both the initiatives taken in Spain by the Royal Board on the Disabled since the nineteen-eighties to palliate any possible adverse effects of an excessively stereotyped construction of persons with disability (Casado, 2001; Fernández Iglesias, 2007), and the research done in this respect (del Río 1986; Benavides and Fernández, 1998; Álvarez, 2003, Amer, 2009).

As regards sport as a channel for rehabilitation and social integration of the disabled, this is becoming consolidated as a growing scientific area, which is observed in many existing disciplines and in its incorporation in different disciplines involving the medical, business, psychological or journalistic sphere, amongst others. Over the last twenty years the connections between sport and society in different spheres have been stressed and the links of mutual benefit and reciprocity arising in the intersection between the media and sports expressions have begun to blossom.

Some of these studies connecting sport with culture seek to promote transformations in social patterns and conducts, from a line of work based on critical approaches. In this respect, some of the major subject areas involved in studying the representation of sport in the media, apart from violence in sport, are differentiation by genders and more recently, the research into adapted physical and sports activity. Sport adapted for persons with disabilities has in fact become one of the areas that has evolved most, as it has been handled from different fields of knowledge, in particular, with regard to its physical, psychological and social benefits (Pérez & Sampedro, 2009).

As regards the study of sport as an important phenomenon for mass communication, and especially Olympic sport and the media, the main reference in this country is Professor Miquel de Moragas (1992; Moragas et. al. 1995), who set up the Olympic Studies Centre of Barcelona Autonomous University in 1989, and who has published some of the most relevant works on this subject worldwide since then. Moragas has opened up a prolific line of research which goes on today uninterruptedly at the Centre, currently directed by Professor Emilio Fernández (2009).

One of the main subjects studied by the Group for Research into Disability and Communication (GIDYC) of CEU Cardenal Herrera University is the way the Spanish media treat the Paralympic Games as a sports event. Two approaches have specifically been developed in this respect, one on the Beijing Games (Solves, 2012; 2013b) and another in which the results of their coverage are compared with the London games. The results of these studies have already been sent to the International Paralympic Committee, which supported the research in 2012, and have previously been orally presented at the Disability Sport Conference of Coventry University in September 2014. These will be brought out in the form of articles and a monograph in 2015.

CONCLUSION

Research into sport for persons with disabilities from a sociological standpoint will help us to grasp several extremely important issues. First of all, it will help us to learn the channels for integration in the social setting which can be made use of by persons with some disability. Secondly, it will reveal some crucial

aspects for understanding how these people can change their own identity and go from being the socially "excluded" to "heroes" or "examples" and "models" for others.

In the other sense, the sociology of sport for the disabled can shed a lot of light onto the mechanisms through which sport can become a source of amalgamation and integration of societies in general, for reducing anomie and raising moral standards. In such competitive societies as ours, the sociological study of sport and its relationship with disability may help us to understand new channels of social recognition of groups at risk of exclusion.

It is vital to attempt to set up networks of researchers who can study their settings and share their knowledge to bring about progress in our understanding of this phenomenon through methodological agreements and comparison of different social and cultural contexts: on the North-South, East–West axes, those of rich and poor countries, and so on. There can be no doubt that it is precisely cultural differences, languages, the different requirements in teaching and research etc. which represent barriers for development of this type of networks. But associations such as the International Sociology of Sport Association (ISSA) can indeed be just the right sphere for these cooperative contexts to be developed in. For this to occur, nevertheless, generosity and group and institutional effort by the ISSA need to triumph over the economic or academic dynamics that only too often guide the conduct of researchers and their organisations.

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