EXPLORING THE SOCIAL LEGACY OF PARALYMPIC GAMES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

EXPLORANDO O LEGADO SOCIAL DOS JOGOS PARALÍMPICOS PARA AS PESSOAS COM DEFICIÊNCIA

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Abstract. While the concept of legacy of sporting mega-events has been highly debated and filled with the promise to deliver tangible and measurable benefits, in the context of the Paralympics, defining legacy has been a challenge, due to a lack of universally understood and accepted nature and objectives of the Paralympic Games themselves. Although many authors and disability rights activists expect the Paralympics to accelerate agenda of inclusion of disabled people, a growing number of studies found that the Paralympics misrepresent disability and the reality of disabled people, and consequently reinforce negative stereotypes. Informed by critical disability studies, the central research aim of this article is to examine the social legacies of the 2012 and 2016 Paralympic Games for disabled people as identified in the media coverage of three selected periodicals, *The Guardian*, and *O Globo*. The article presents a summary of the qualitative analysis of the media coverage related to the topic of Paralympic legacy and disability rights, highlights its central themes and offers a discussion of the findings through the lens of critical disability studies.

Keywords: Paralympics; legacy; disability rights; critical disability theory; social inclusion.

Resumo. O conceito de legado de mega-eventos esportivos tem sido altamente debatido, com promessa de trazer benefícios tangíveis e mensuráveis. Porém, no contexto dos Jogos Paralímpicos, o conceito de legado apresentou um desafio, devido à falta da compreensão universalmente aceita tanto dos legados em si como dos objetivos dos próprios Jogos paraolímpicos. Embora muitos autores e militantes dos direitos das pessoas com deficiência esperem que os Jogos Paralímpicos agilizem a agenda de inclusão de pessoas com deficiência, um número crescente de estudos mostrou que a Paralimpíada distorce a natureza de deficiência e a realidade das pessoas com deficiência e, consequentemente, reforça os estereótipos negativos. O presente artigo se baseia em estudos críticos sobre deficiência, visando examinar os legados sociais dos Jogos Paralímpicos de 2012 e 2016 para as pessoas com deficiência, identificados na cobertura de três periódicos selecionados, The Guardian, Estadão e O Globo. O artigo apresenta um resumo da análise qualitativa da cobertura de mídia relacionada ao tema do legado paralímpico e dos direitos das pessoas com deficiência, destaca os temas centrais e oferece uma discussão dos resultados sob lentes de estudos críticos de deficiência.

Palavras-chave: paralimpíada; legado; direitos das pessoas com deficiência; teoria crítica de deficiência; inclusão social.

INTRODUCTION

> No other event can empower individuals through social inclusion and societal opportunity like the Paralympic Games. Likewise, no other event can change the views of so many millions of people or stimulate Governments to create investment programmes or pass new legislation that will benefit many generations of individuals with impairments. This is why, in my view, the Paralympic Games are the world's number one sporting event for social inclusion, helping to promote the rights of persons with disabilities (Sir Philip Craven, IPC President, 2016).

The concept of legacy of a sporting mega-event has become highly debated and filled with the promise to deliver tangible and measurable benefits (GIRGINOV; HILLS, 2008). In the context of the Paralympic Games, Legg and Gilbert (2011) noted that the difficulty in defining the legacy was due to the lack of universally understood and accepted nature and objectives of the Paralympics itself. In this article, we adopt the notion of legacy suggested by Holt and Ruta (2015). The authors considered legacy as medium- to long-term impacts of the sporting mega-event, so that the events "amount to more than a few great moments, no matter how extraordinary or inspiring they might be" (HOLT; RUTA, 2015, p. 1).

Gold and Gold (2011, p. 123) highlighted the soft legacy of the Paralympics, which they framed as "improving the position of the disabled community in society generally". Their view of the Paralympic Games accelerating agenda of inclusion strongly resonates with the quote by the International Paralympic

Committee (IPC) President, Sir Philip Craven, cited above. However, despite the positive rhetoric and the associated efforts of the IPC regarding the Paralympic Games and social inclusion of disabled people, there are studies that found that many disability rights activists felt that the Paralympics misrepresent disability and disabled people, and consequently reinforce negative stereotypes (BRAYE; DIXON; GIBBONS, 2013; 2015; HODGES; JACKSON; SCULLION, 2015). For example, as Braye, Dixon and Gibbons (2015, p. 16) argued, while the Paralympics can be positive within the context of sport, disabled people at large do not necessarily benefit from the Games directly. A poll conducted in the UK among the disabled people one year after the London 2012 Paralympic Games showed that over 80% of them felt that the attitudes towards them have not improved, while over 20% felt it has gotten worse (WALKER; TOPPING, 2013).

Informed by critical disability theory (POTHIER; DEVLIN, 2006), the overarching research aim of this article is to examine the legacies of the 2012 and 2016 Paralympic Games for disabled people, with a particular focus on social legacies. Our sources of data were the articles, editorials and commentaries of three selected periodicals: *The Guardian*, *Estadão* and *O Globo*. Legg and Gilbert (2011, p. 24-25) suggested two social legacies from the Paralympics: changing perceptions of disabled people in the broader society and health legacy. In the context of health legacy, Girginov and Hills (2008) offer an example of sports participation that the mega-event organizers try to encourage.

Edwards and Skinner (2008, p. 247-248) argued that although the critical theory was not a commonly used theoretical framework among the sport practice scholars, it was helpful for the understanding of the practice of sport. They argued that critical theory helped move our understanding beyond the dominant social order, to reconstruct a more just society. In line with this argument, Pothier and Devlin (2006, p. 9) saw the goal of critical disability theory in the pursuit of empowerment and substantive equality that frames the issues of disability as "questions of power: of who and what gets valued, and who and what gets marginalized", rooted in the lived experiences of disabled people. Critical disability theory argues that if we adopt an individualist conception of disability, the primary responsibility would fall on the disabled individuals themselves (with the resulting emphases on prevention, cure, and rehabilitation); if, however, we understand disability as a socially created barrier, then the responsibility shifts to the larger community (POTHIER; DEVLIN, 2006, p. 12).

The critical disability theory does not consider language as a transparent, neutral medium of communication (DEVLIN; POTHIER, 2006, p. 7). Therefore, in light of this significance of language and definitions, we clarify our use of terminology here (see a more detailed discussion in KIRAKOSYAN, 2013; SHAKESPEARE, 2006), as "there is no apolitical way to think or talk about either impairment or disability, because language itself is an unavoidably political phenomenon" (POTHIER; DEVLIN, 2006, p. 7). We chose to adopt 'disabled people' throughout this article to point to the individuals with various impairments who are oppressed and discriminated against, or 'disabled', based on the prevailing values and attitudes. We draw on Shakespeare (2006, p. 34) who has argued that although there is no disability without impairment, the latter is necessary, but not always a sufficient cause of the difficulties that disabled people experience. Shakespeare saw disability as the consequence of the relationship between influences intrinsic to the individual (nature and severity of the impairment, their own outlooks on it, abilities and personality) and contextual elements (enabling or disabling environment, wider cultural, political, social and economic principles and attitudes) (SHAKESPEARE, 2006, p. 55-56).

Every sporting mega-event takes place within a particular cultural, political and economic context that affects its relationship with broader society, which makes it particularly challenging to effectively plan for legacy (BRITTAIN; BEACOM, 2016). Scholarship on major sporting event legacies overlooked the area of the Paralympic Games (LEGG; GILBERT, 2011; MISENER et al., 2013). Misener and her colleagues (2013, p. 332-333) pointed to some challenges to identifying Paralympic legacies: first, the authors note a relatively young history of the Paralympic Games in comparison to the Olympic Games, referring to scholars who recognize the Modem Paralympic Games not beginning until 1988 in Seoul.

The second challenge relates to the intrinsic link between the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games since Seoul 1988 and thus determining legacies specific to the Paralympic Games only is difficult at best (MISENER et al., 2013, p. 332-333). Finally, the third challenge in identifying legacy is determining the appropriate timeframe to assess it (GIRGINOV; HILLS, 2008; PREUSS, 2007), and using short-term focus after the event may likely lead to inappropriate and misleading assessments.

We organized this article into five parts: first, following this introduction, we synthesize the discussion of the Paralympic legacy in the academic literature and outline overarching themes, to frame the article's argument and contextualize the subsequent sections. Second, we briefly describe our

methodological choices and third, present a summary of the qualitative analysis of the media coverage related to the topic of Paralympic legacy and disability rights highlighting central themes. Fourth, we discuss the findings through the lens of critical disability studies and offer our conclusions at the end.

PARALYMPIC LEGACY IN THE SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

Since the first Paralympics in Rome in 1960, the Games have grown in size and organization, with Barcelona being the first city that hosted both the Olympics and the Paralympics in the same venue in 1992. In 1960, Rome hosted 400 athletes from 23 countries in the first ever Paralympics, and in 2016, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, hosted 4,350 athletes from 170 countries for the Latin America's first Paralympics (CRAVEN, 2016). The London 2012 Paralympic Games were watched by 3.8 billion people worldwide (Ibid), and the Rio 2016 Paralympics was the most viewed in history with a record audience of more than 4.1 billion people (AROUND THE RINGS, 2017).

Within the last decade or so there has been a growing body of Paralympic research covering a wide range of topics, such as the classification of disabled athletes (BECKMAN; TWEEDY, 2009); the nature and history of the Paralympic Games (BAILEY, 2008; HAIACHI; KUMAKURA, 2013); Paralympic sponsorship (BRETHERTON; SILVA; KERR, 2014); gender issues in Paralympic sport (BLAUWET, 2015); representation of the Paralympics and Paralympians in the media (HOWE, 2008); the politics of the Paralympic Movement (PURDUE; HOWE, 2011); perspectives of disabled individuals on the Paralympic Games (BRAYE; DIXON; GIBBONS, 2013; 2015; HODGES; JACKSON; SCULLION, 2015); and different aspects of Paralympic legacies (BRITTAIN; BEACOM, 2016; LEGG; GILBERT, 2011).

Discussions of legacy have become contested and controversial, with the promise to deliver concrete benefits that can be measured (GIRGINOV; HILLS, 2008; MCGUINNESS, 2016). The available literature (see, for example, AGHA et al., 2012; IPC, 2007; GOLD; GOLD, 2011, among others) conceptualizes legacy in terms of various categories, for example: Economic; Built and physical environment; Information and education; Public life, politics, and culture; Sport; Symbols, memory, and history; planned or unplanned, positive or negative, and tangible or intangible. Although most studies focus only on the planned, positive and tangible dimensions (AGHA et al., 2012) and consider "legacy as a homogenizing force for good" (McGUINNESS, 2015, p. 74), the understanding of legacy can be further complicated as the same legacy may be positive for one industry or population segment, and negative for another, depending on who is making the assessment (PREUSS, 2007). Moreover, time factor makes it difficult to quantify the legacy outcomes, as noted earlier. Ultimately, legacies seem highly interconnected: "Beautiful images of a city along with new sporting facilities can bring new visitors to a destination who use new hotel and transportation infrastructure and who spend money in the local economy."(AGHA et al., 2012, p. 132).

Planning for legacy implies delivering lasting, long-term positive benefits usually on a regional or national scale that can derive from the event itself (intrinsic legacy) or the leverage activities surrounding it (extrinsic legacy) (MISENER et al., 2013, p.329). Legacy planning has become a central component of any bid process, with international governing bodies including both the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) including the concept in their charters (MISENER et al., 2013; AGHA et al., 2012). However, as Agha and colleagues (2012) observe, there is little incentive for the Organizing Committee to focus on generating legacy when their responsibility is to deliver the Games while the international press is busy critiquing their organizational strategies. Although there are no repercussions for failed legacies, there is at least a twelve-year evaluation of consistent economic, social and environmental variables that can help future event organizers be more realistic in their legacy expectations (AGHA et al., 2012, p. 126).

As Agha and colleagues (2012, p. 128) suggested, social aspect of legacies after hosting a mega-sporting event would imply developing longer-time feelings of community after the event, improving the quality of life for residents of the host community and country. As a result, these developments may entail more opportunities for resident involvement in such pursuits as arts and music, live sites and other social gatherings. To make social participation of disabled people possible, the IPC Handbook (2007, p. 30) in its section 5.2 specifically highlighted four areas:

- Accessible infrastructure, in sports facilities and the overall urban development;

- Development of sports structures/organizations for people with a disability, from grassroots to the elite level;
- Attitudinal changes in the perception of the position and the capabilities of persons with a disability as well as in the self-esteem of the people with a disability; and
- Opportunities for people with a disability to become fully integrated into social living and to reach their full potential in aspects of life beyond sports.

Very few empirical studies focused on how the Paralympic Games are received by disabled people and what the potential implications of such perceptions are concerning their rights and the changes to policies and practices that promote their empowerment (BRAYE; DIXON; GIBBONS, 2013, p. 985). In the past decade, several scholars raised the question of whether and how the Paralympic Games contribute to the emancipation and empowerment of disabled people (BRAYE; DIXON; GIBBONS, 2013; BRITTAIN; BEACOM, 2016). This study aims to contribute to this discussion by offering a critical analysis of the 2012 and 2016 Paralympic legacy for disabled people.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We have adopted a qualitative approach for this exploratory analysis of the topic of Paralympic legacy. Qualitative research has been defined by scholars in a number of ways, including "as a means for exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (CRESWELL, 2009, p. 4) and as a way to "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2008, p. 4). Building on these views of qualitative research and drawing on the critical disability theory as a way of questioning the basic underlying assumptions, beliefs and attitudes, our methodological choice here supports the examination of the media's understanding of Paralympic legacy and the bearing it has on promoting the rights of disabled people.

Data Sources. We conducted a search of all the keywords using parentheses and commas: "Paralympics", legacy", "disability rights" and "disabled people" on the websites of the three selected periodicals, one major British media outlet, *The Guardian*, and two major Brazilian media outlets, *Estadão* and *O Globo*, as we sought to examine the coverage of 2012 and 2016 Paralympic legacy in the UK and Brazil. The search on *The Guardian* site returned 23 articles, editorials and commentaries. In the search on the sites of two major newspapers in São Paulo, *Estadão*, and in Rio, *O Globo*, we used keywords in Portuguese, "Paralímpico", "legado", and "direitos das pessoas com deficiência", which resulted in 14 and 16 articles respectively.

In the case of *Estadão*, search results included Readers' Forum (Forum dos Leitores), which we excluded from our analysis, thus considering 13 articles. In the case of *O Globo*, search results included one article that had no relevance to the Paralympics and one blog entry that was counted twice in the search results, thus considering 13 articles. As we report in the next section, the resulting 49 articles have been analyzed to identify overarching themes in the debates on 2012 and 2016 Paralympic legacy both in the UK and Brazil. From this analysis, some common themes emerged demonstrating the focus and the coverage depth of the media's attention towards Paralympic legacies. We summarized these common themes by periodical in separate tables and organized them into positive and negative legacies.

Data Analysis. We collected, compiled and analyzed the data from three media outlets independently. An initial reading of all the material helped us gain a general idea of the media accounts. Subsequently, we undertook a more detailed analysis through a coding process for which we used a combination of preset and emerging codes, where preset codes were based on the reviewed literature while emerging codes arose from the media reports. We organized the codes and the relevant passages into a large table by article and periodical. The coding process generated themes for analysis later developed a set of analytical constructs. Furthermore, this analysis highlights the importance of context, since environments play an important role in shaping individual and collective understanding of Paralympic legacies and broader attitudes toward disability.

PARALYMPIC LEGACY THEMES IN THE MEDIA

Before summarizing common themes in the selected media coverage, first, let us address the importance of media attention and its quality to the development of Paralympic movement. Scholars have argued that media plays an important role both in the development of the Paralympic sport and the legacy of the Paralympic Games (BRITTAIN, 2011; HOWE, 2008). Through a wider recognition by the media and greater consumption of Paralympic sports, the Paralympic movement seeks to increase opportunities for social and economic inclusion of disabled people (MARQUES et al., 2014, p. 1000). Ribeiro (2011) has similarly argued that media has a significant role to play in social change, which he anticipates translating into greater respect and inclusion of people with disabilities in the Brazilian society.

Several studies highlighted the benefits of the increased media coverage of disability sport and suggested that the media exposure of the Paralympics provided a potentially significant vehicle for social attitude change through opening a range of opportunities to explore our understanding, attitudes toward and reactions to disabled people (BURNS, 2012). However, the long-term impact on public attitudes towards disability remains less clear (BRAYE; DIXON; GIBBONS, 2015, p. 20).

The tables below summarize major Paralympic legacy themes identified in the selected newspaper articles, divided between positive and negative legacies. First, the discussion in *The Guardian*'s 23 articles and commentaries offered a critical view of both positive and negative aspects of the 2012 Paralympic legacy. On the positive side, we noted four common legacy themes running through the selected narratives, among them: feelings of national pride for the Paralympic athletes from team Great Britain (ASHLEY, 2016) and perception of Paralympic athletes role models and source of inspiration for both impaired and non-impaired individuals (CATCHPOLE, 2016; JONES, 2012); improved awareness about the issues surrounding impairment and disability in general (BERESFORD, 2012); more positive attitudes towards disabled British citizens, such as compassion, empathy and sympathy among general public and perceptions of disabled people as a more assertive and self-conscious minority; and finally a praised coverage of the Paralympics and disability issues on Channel 4 (CATCHPOLE, 2016).

However, next to the optimistic legacy considerations, *The Guardian*'s coverage also addressed several negative aspects, among them: hardening attitudes towards disabled people and resulting public support for disability benefit cuts in the wake of the London 2012 Paralympic Games (GIBSON; BUTLER, 2012); a perceived missed opportunity to elevate the achievements of regular disabled people, as the Paralympic success stories generated an unwanted side effect in creating an unobtainable ideal for disabled people; and finally inadequate accessibility in transportation and facilities (RYAN, 2013). The issue of public attitudes and perceptions of disabled people seemed to generate a significant disagreement, with more negative attitudes eventually taking over the public discourse and leading to thousands of disabled individuals losing their disability benefits. These cuts may come to affect not only many current Paralympic athletes in Britain who benefitted from the existing support but also prevented many disabled youths from participating in grassroots sport, due to a lack of specialist equipment, transport issues, difficulty accessing sports facilities and inadequate information about sporting opportunities (BUTLER, 2012). The heroic portrayals of the Paralympians in the media served as justification for the benefit cuts: while the Paralympics presented an "opportunity to show that disabled people are not work-avoiding stay-at-homes glued to daytime TV", there was "an implied expectation on 'the disabled' that if only they would throw away their crutches and make an effort, the rest could stop having to pay for them" (JONES, 2012).

Table 1. Common legacy themes in the 23 articles of *The Guardian*.

Positive legacies	Negative legacies
Increased sense of national pride for the Paralympic athletes in the elite sport; Paralympians as role models and source of inspiration for the public.	Hardening attitudes towards disabled people: wide support for the disability benefits cuts and demonization of disabled as scroungers.
Better awareness about the contradictions surrounding disability.	Misperceptions and misrepresentations of disability based on the portrayals of the Paralympians, leading to a missed opportunity to elevate the achievements of regular disabled people.

Changed attitudes towards and perceptions of disabled people in wider society.	Continuing inadequate accessibility in transportation and facilities.
Sustained coverage of the Paralympics and disability issues on the Channel 4 news.	

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The nature of the Rio 2016 legacy discussion in *Estadão* and *O Globo* was less critical compared to the one in *The Guardian* concerning the London 2012 Paralympics. The interviews with Brazil's Paralympic athletes and expert opinions, reports and commentaries in *Estadão* suggested changed perceptions that the general public experienced about the capacities of disabled people and growing awareness and interest in the Paralympic sport as major positive legacies of Rio 2016 Paralympics (RACY, 2016; VENTURA, 2016a; 2016b; 2016d; 2016e). Some reports also encouraged their readers to adopt a more reflective approach to the social inclusion of disabled people in Brazil (DOLZAN, 2016; GARCIA, 2016), which implied in understanding that not all disabled people could overcome the limitations caused by their impairments as the Paralympic athletes could. The success of the Brazilian Paralympic team seemed to strengthen the policymakers' commitment to continuous investment in the preparations for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic cycle (GARCIA, 2016). Moreover, not only did the new Paralympic Training Center enhance the opportunities for the Brazilian parathletes but it also raised their profile in their interactions with policymakers, sponsors and government officials (DOLZAN, 2016; GARCIA, 2016). Two of the negative legacy aspects referred to misconceptions about disability and misguided representation of the Paralympic athletes, whose superhero portrayal ends up highlighting overcoming their physical limitations and downplaying their sporting achievements (VENTURA, 2016b).

Table 2. Common legacy themes in the 13 articles of *Estadão*.

Positive legacies	Negative legacies
Changed perceptions of disabled people in the Brazilian society.	The expectation that every disabled person should overcome his or her impairment.
Paralympic Training Center (Centro de Treinamento Paralímpico) for research and development of disability sport in Brazil.	The superhero portrayal of the Paralympic athletes misrepresents their training, determination, performance and achievements.
Paralympic athletes as role models and public figures with credibility to advocate for relevant issues.	
Better awareness about Paralympic sport, disability issues, and capacity of disabled people.	
Continuous investment in the Paralympic sport.	

Source: Prepared by the authors.

O Globo's coverage of the Rio's Paralympic legacy overall was optimistic, with a light criticism of accessibility issues in Rio and Brazil in general, referring to the need for more ramps, wider sidewalks and accessible public bathrooms. An editorial dating September 11, 2016, remarked that inclusion and accessibility actions could not depend on mega-events events or individual overcoming of disabled people. Other articles and commentaries highlighted the fact that accessibility was firmly placed on the Rio's policy agenda, as the local government spent two million reals on 62 km of accessible sidewalks and 2600 reformed streets (ALENCASTRO; BARRETO, 2016; FRANÇA, 2016). Several articles commented on the better visibility of disability sport thanks to the Paralympic publicity, with 700 hours of televised coverage by the British Channel 4, in addition to the online streaming, (ROJO, 2016; O GLOBO, 2016; TEIXEIRA, 2016), which, unfortunately, was not the case of Brazil that hosted the Games. Brazilian Paralympic Committee officials expect more sports involvement of disabled people and consequently greater social inclusion (ALEXANDRINO, 2016). The theme of public awareness about disability sport brought by the Rio Paralympics (MENEZES, 2016; TEIXEIRA, 2016) was also discussed with a focus

on school-age youth and disabled adults. Finally, the articles and commentaries discussed changed perceptions about the capacity of disabled population (MENEZES, 2016; VENTURA, 2016c), with an expectation of greater respect towards and acceptance of disabled population.

Table 3. Common legacy themes in the 13 articles of *O Globo*.

Positive legacies	Negative legacies
Improved mobility and accessibility around Rio; accessibility on policy agenda in Rio.	Overall poor accessibility in Rio and Brazil.
More visibility of disability sport as a tool for social inclusion of disabled people.	
Awareness raising about disability sports among youth through teaching them at school during PE class.	
Changed perceptions about disabled people; expectation of more respect towards disabled people.	

Source: Prepared by the authors.

In sum, the themes identified across the selected periodicals revealed consistent interpretations of the social legacies of Paralympic Games, such as changed perceptions about disabled people; better awareness about disability issues and misconceptions, Paralympic sport and capacity of parathletes; accessibility, and investment in disability sport. The subsequent discussion of findings through the lens of critical disability theory examines if increasing awareness of sporting success can lead to more respect and better opportunities in sport and wider society for disabled people.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

If, as many believe, increasing awareness of Paralympic success leads to more respect and greater opportunities in sport and wider society for disabled people, the media could play an important role in encouraging social inclusion by reframing the discourse about disability (NIXON, 2007 apud HODGES; JACKSON; SCULLION, 2015, p. 190). Viewed through the lens of the critical disability theory, Edwards and Skinner (2008) suggested that the Paralympic sport needs to encourage people to embrace emancipatory actions, moving beyond coping and adaptation. Emancipation is accomplished by engaging in enlightening and empowering experiences, where people come to know who they are and have the collective power to determine the direction of their existence (EDWARDS; SKINNER, 2008, p. 250). In this section, we critically assess the identified themes in the selected media coverage against the emancipatory goals upheld by the critical disability perspective.

The British and Brazilian media coverage of the Paralympic legacy and disability rights and the IPC President's statement in the beginning of the article all seem to agree that the intangible legacy of consciousness and awareness raising is the primary benefit of the event. Consciousness-raising involves the recognition of social, political, economic and personal constraints of freedom, and it provides the forum in which to take action to challenge those constraints (EDWARDS; SKINNER, 2008, p. 248), and the Paralympic Games may provide such a public forum.

The critical analysis of the common themes in the Paralympic legacy media coverage revealed several findings we discuss below. First, we noted a lack of critical discussion of the Paralympic legacy in the media, which has been earlier argued by Marques et al. (2014). Whereas *The Guardian*'s analysis of the Paralympic legacies seemed more balanced, *Estadão*'s and *O Globo*'s coverage lacked critical approach, as we pointed out earlier. Howe (2008) also noted that almost all Paralympic media coverage is positive, while the reporting on mainstream sporting events highlights both positive and negative elements of sporting practice. He suggests that because the Paralympic movement is concerned with empowering its athletes expecting that their performances will inspire others to significant achievements, anything that negatively impacts successful athletic performances may have a damaging influence on the Paralympic sport (HOWE, 2008, p.139). As a result, the public misses out on learning more about disability sport to make choices of its relevance to their lives (HOWE, 2008).

Second, the coverage of the Paralympic legacy regarding changed public attitudes often seemed to emphasize the perceived distance between the Paralympic athletes and the realities of life for many disabled people, framing disability as an individual 'problem' to be overcome rather than a socially constructed issue. A criticism offered by scholars within the disability studies area concerns the persistent lack of consideration given to the reception of disabling narratives and images by those most affected by them (HODGES; JACKSON; SCULLION, 2015, p. 189). More specifically, a scholarly criticism of the 2012 Paralympics coverage stated that it replaced the stereotype of illness and incapacity with another stereotype of hero, bringing forth unrealistic expectations and a narrative of admiration and praise (HODGES; JACKSON; SCULLION, 2015, p. 197), which can also be applied to the 2016 Paralympics coverage in the Brazilian media.

Third, the media failed to examine the connection between a positive coverage of the Paralympic achievements and actual changes in attitudes towards disabled people. Referring to the London 2012 event, the study by Braye; Dixon and Gibbons (2015, p. 16) suggested that while the Paralympics can be positive within the context of sport, disabled people on the broader scale may not benefit directly from this mega-event. It would have been helpful if the media outlets conducted polls among the disabled viewers to see if the communicated representations of disability could resonate with the lived experiences of disabled people across Brazil. As one severely impaired British athlete noted during the 2012 Paralympics, "There's a very big gap between how the general public perceives Paralympians and how they perceive the rest of the disability community" (WALKER; TOPPING, 2013).

Fourth, the media coverage of the Paralympic legacy focused on sporting achievement and participation to the detriment of wider issues, such as employment and participation in arts, culture and the media, which disability organizations believe are vitally important not only for disabled people's economic and social well-being but also for their greater visibility and prominent place in the public eye (WOOD, 2013, p. 45).

Finally, a more informed discussion about disability sport in the media would help combating its marginalization on Brazilian television, which prevents disability sport from becoming an integral part of the social lives or the viewing habits of disabled and non-disabled population, in the way that professional, 'mainstream' sports can (HODGES; JACKSON; SCULLION, 2015, p. 192). Broader media attention to the public and non-profit sport and development projects could also help frame the sport as a catalyst for social change, with a focus on reducing the stigma of disability, promoting the ability of disabled individuals, and encouraging their empowerment.

Many agree that Brazil experienced significant advances in the way that disabled people are treated including an increase in government legislation and funding to support their development. As Rankin (2016) expected, in the aftermath of the 2016 Paralympics, the political and economic problems in Brazil resurfaced, pushing aside the discussions about the legacy of the Paralympic Games, reducing discrimination and promoting inclusivity, and almost a year after the Rio Paralympics, there is no continuous debate on its legacies in the media.

CONCLUSION

The understanding of mega-event legacy is still evolving, and the literature on the sporting mega-events lists some long-term benefits to hosting Paralympics. However, some scholars questioned such benefits of hosting major sporting events, in particular pointing out that the long-term benefits from hosting Paralympics, while viable, are hard to identify (LEGG; GILBERT, 2011). The article examined the central themes in the discussion of the Paralympic legacies in three Brazilian and British periodicals, revealing insufficient critical discussion and depth in framing the subject. Critical theory urges the scholars to subject existing sporting practice social orders to critical scrutiny and provides with some of the conceptual tools to do so, to understand our worlds in an empowering way (EDWARDS; SKINNER, 2008).

Rights campaigners in Brazil hoped that the attention brought by hosting the Paralympics could raise new awareness about the daily challenges and discrimination faced by disabled people across the country (GILBERT, 2016), but it is not clear from the analyzed media coverage whether the Paralympics truly served as the impetus Brazil needed to create lasting change. The overarching themes identified in the selected periodicals framed social legacies of Paralympic Games regarding changed perceptions about

disabled people; better awareness about disability, Paralympic sport and capacity of Paralympic athletes; accessibility, and investment in sport.

Our analysis found several shortcomings in the way the media framed the discussion of the Paralympic legacies. First, the coverage lacked a more balanced approach, especially in the Brazilian media. Second, the media seemed to have replaced the stereotype of illness and incapacity with another stereotype of superhero, setting unrealistic expectations for the vast majority of disabled people. Third, the media took for granted the connection between a positive coverage of the Paralympic achievements and changes in attitudes towards disabled people without a closer examination of these claims. Fourth, with an exception of *The Guardian*'s coverage of disability benefit cuts and related outrage of the disability community in the UK, the media coverage of the Paralympic legacy, especially in the Brazilian periodicals, failed to engage with larger issues, such as employment and participation in arts, culture and the media, which are crucial for disabled people's economic and social well-being and for their fuller inclusion. Finally, the media failed to offer a more informed discussion about the marginal position of disability sport compared to the mainstream sport and help shape viewing habits of disabled and non-disabled population concerning disability sports.

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