Analyzing twenty-first century perspectives of PWDs and accessibility at the Olympic and Paralympic Games

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Following the commercialization of the Olympic movement at the Los Angeles 1984 Games, and Seoul 1988 being the first city for over 20 years to host both the Olympic and Paralympic Games in the same location, there has been an increasing variety of literature which explores how the Olympic/Paralympic Games can be inclusive within the context of disability. In this article, we analyze twenty-first century scholarly perspectives regarding accessibility and provisions for persons with disabilities (PWDs) at the Olympic and Paralympic Games from Sydney 2000 to London 2012. We then explore the concept of legacy linked to the Olympic/Paralympic movement from London 2012 to Beijing 2022, before considering some areas of future research that are required in terms of accessibility and PWDs provisions at future Games. Whilst a host of literature has addressed inclusivity and improving facilities both within venues and in the city or region hosting the Games, we assert that more PWD spectators (and athletes), particularly at the Olympic Games, need to be heard to ensure they have a positive experience pre, during and post the Games. This could lead to improvements for PWDs at future Games including Paris 2024, Milano-Cortina d'Ampezzo 2026, LA 2028 and beyond.

Keywords: Olympics, Paralympics, accessibility, persons with disabilities, mega-events

Introduction

The commercial boom of the Los Angeles (USA) 1984 Olympic Games was followed in 1988 by Seoul (South Korea) being the first city to host both the Olympic and Paralympic Games[1] since the Tokyo 1964 Games (24 years earlier). This led to a variety of literature exploring the social and cultural changes in the Olympic/Paralympic movement, and how the Games can be inclusive within the context of disability. Since the Sydney 2000 Games, there has been increasing interest into para-sport and specifically the Paralympic Games in the twenty-first century (see Brittain and Beacom 2016; Darcy et al. 2017). In this article, we explore the historical and contemporary perspectives of the Olympic and Paralympic movement catering for persons with disabilities (PWDs[2]) and accessibility in the twenty-first century.

PWD's, adopted throughout this article, has been a commonly used term across twenty-first century literature, and many of the scholars we discuss have aligned with the definitions within the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and the four versions of the IPC's Accessibility Guide (2020) to use the acronym. We must stress here that whilst we present the stakeholder policy and UN definitions later in this article, we are fully aware of the contested terminology surrounding disability language that a number of scholars have highlighted (see Andrews et al. 2022; Dunn and Andrews 2015; Gernsbacher 2017; Gillovic et al. 2024; Ziegler 2020). Alongside this, we are also aware of the ongoing contemporary debate regarding using the term 'disabled people' versus PWDs, and Person-First Language vs. Identity-First Language (see Andrews 2019; Andrews et al. 2019; Draper 2018; Dwyer 2022;

[1] Throughout this article the 'Olympic Games' and 'Paralympic Games' may be referred to interchangeably as the 'Olympics', 'Paralympics', 'Games', or the year and city in which they took place.
[2] We utilise the term PWDs throughout this article, to align with the scholarly literature that we will critically review later in the article.

Ferrigon and Tucker 2019; Sharif et al. 2022). It is evident that it depends on the disabled person/s that one is conversing with to ascertain what their preferred terminology is.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2023), an estimated 1.3 billion people – or 16% of the global population – experience a 'significant' disability in the present day. There are several definitions and complexities of the term 'disability'. Disability has been defined as any impairment of the body or mind that limits a person's ability to partake in typical activities and social interactions in their environment (see Babik and Gardener 2021; Peterson 2005; Scheer and Groce 1988). The Equality Act (2010) defines an individual as disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term negative effect on their ability to carry out 'normal' day-to-day activities (see UK Government, 2013). As highlighted by Boo and Kim (2020), disability is a complex multidimensional experience that can be conceptualized on a continuum from minor difficulties in functioning to major impacts on a person's life. Consistent with current definitions of disability (UK Government 2010; WHO 2013; WHO 2020; IPC 2020) presented in both policy and research, this article adopts the biopsychosocial perspective on disability to analyze how venues have been inclusive within the Olympic and Paralympic movement since the turn of the millennium.

The aim of this article is to analyze twenty-first century perspectives of PWDs and accessibility at the Olympic and Paralympic Games. More specifically, there are three objectives of this paper:

- To chronologically explore scholarly perspectives regarding the Olympic and Paralympic Games/Cycles and the issues with accessibility and the provisions for PWDs;

- Discuss scholarly literature linked to the concept of legacy[3] related to the Olympic/Paralympic movement post London 2012;
- Consider areas of future research that are required in terms of accessibility and PWDs provisions at future Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Following this introduction, this article briefly conceptualizes disability, before exploring accessibility in wider literature and mega-events. The article then chronologically explores a range of literature linked to disability and accessibility in the twenty-first century Olympic and Paralympic movement, from the Sydney 2000 Games to the London 2012 Games, exploring how considerations of PWDs and accessibility has advanced and progressed since the turn of the millennium. Following this, the concept of legacy is discussed from the London 2012 Games to the Beijing 2022 Games linked to the Paralympic movement, before we recommend areas of future research that is required in terms of accessibility at Olympic and Paralympic Games for PWDs who attend the venues, and those that live within the region of where the Olympic and Paralympic Games are hosted. It is important to note at this stage that we are focusing on both Olympic and Paralympic venues due to the regulations being set for both Games, and that there is an assumption that both mega-events are set to the same parameters and regulations, which we will discuss later.

We understand that a number of scholars post the London 2012 Games have critically reviewed legacy literature and themes linked to the Paralympic Games throughout the twenty-first century (see Ferez et al. 2020; Pappous and Brown 2018). However, we aim to explore more than just legacy, and actually explore the Paralympic movement itself and how this can inform PWDs experience during the Games, and beyond.

[3] Legacy is the term used to describe the longer-term benefits and consequences of hosting a major sports event (see Preuss 2007; Thomson et al. 2013).

Conceptualizing Disability

The conceptualization of disability is complex and has evolved over time. Petasis (2019) asserted that various models of disability aim at providing a description and a conceptual framework for explaining what disability is and how disabled people experience disability. Two competing conceptual models of disability, *medical* and *social* models, were used to define the origins of the 'abnormal' physiological and psychological functioning (LoBianco and Sheppard-Jones 2008). As outlined by Babik and Gardener (2021), neither the medical nor social model acknowledged the complex nature of disability.

A comprehensive integration of the two approaches by George Engel in the late 1970s produced the *biopsychosocial model* (see Engel 1977; 1980) which considers disability in the context of an interaction between biological, psychological, and societal factors, each limiting the individual's functioning to some extent (also see Borrell-Carrió et al. 2004; Le Boutillier and Croucher 2010; Shakespeare et al. 2017; Waddell and Aylward 2010). According to Petasis (2019), the biopsychosocial model forms a common valid explanation of disability as followed by the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) of the World Health Organization (WHO) (see Cerniauskaite et al. 2011; Shakespeare et al. 2017). The ICF refers to disability as difficulties encountered in any or all three areas of functioning – the three areas being impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions (WHO 2023). Overall, the ICF encompasses an assortment of clarifications of disability and allows the role of society to be incorporated in every clarification (Shakespeare et al. 2017).

At the turn of the millennium, a new model of disability emerged within academic literature by disabled people and within disability culture - Swain and French (2000) termed this the 'affirmative' or *affirmation model.* The affirmation model is a non-tragic view of disability and impairment which encompasses positive social identities, both individual and collective, for

disabled people grounded in the benefits of lifestyle and life experience of being impaired and disabled. Swain and French's definition highlights a movement towards the empowerment of PWDs with consideration of the positives of having an impairment. Although the affirmation model aimed to address many of the shortcomings associated with the medical and social models, the affirmation model also had limitations. According to Cameron (2008), a prominent issue associated with the affirmation model is the opportunity for any perceived benefits associated with disability to become synonymous with the lived experience of PWD's and overlook the difficulties that are commonplace (also see Kearney 2020). Therefore, we align to the *biopsychosocial model*, due to the nature, aims and objectives of this study being linked to the three areas explained by Engel (1980) and advanced by Waddell and Aylward (2010). Linked to the Olympic / Paralympic Games discourse we will review in the next section, Dickson et al. (2016) also highlighted how theorizing disability has moved from the medicalized approaches to social model frameworks (also see Kayess and French 2008).

Whilst in scholarly literature it appears that the terms disability and accessibility are used interchangeably, we understand the definition of accessibility as the extent to which a product, device, service, or environment is available and navigable for PWDs, or for persons with other special requirements or functional limitations (Kulkarni 2019). It is also considered to be the "ability to access". Scholars have highlighted how disabled people should have equal access to education, employment, goods, services, facilities and transport – and that the design of accessible environments is essential for PWDs to access, use services and participate in the life of their community (see Broderick 2020; Humanity and Inclusion 2023). Kiuppis (2018) highlighted how in disability literature, there is tension over the terms of 'disabled people' versus 'people with disabilities' (see Le Clair 2011). According to the WHO (2020), 'persons with disabilities' is defined in the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with*

Disabilities (2006) and refers exclusively to persons with long-term impairments. The IPC's *Accessibility Guide* (2020: 15), also aligns with this term via the UN's protocol, stating:

> The concept of universal accessibility is a fundamental aspect of the Convention. The Convention requires countries to identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers and ensure that **persons with disabilities** can access their environment, transportation, public facilities and services, and information and communications technologies.

In sum, in keeping with the UN, the IPC and IOC's *Accessibility Guide*, and a range of contemporary tourism, events and hospitality literature (see for e.g. Gumińska et al. 2023; Herbison et al. 2023; Kearney 2020; Neven and Ectors 2023; Pryimachenko et al. 2023; Ramsden et al. 2023; Wall-Renius et al. 2023) we have utilized the term 'persons with disabilities' (PWDs) in this article. For the IPC and the aforementioned scholars (plus the scholars we will analyze later in this article), this ensures all those in need of an accessible and inclusive environment - such as people who use a wheelchair; people who have reduced mobility; people who have a vision impairment; people who are deaf or hard of hearing; people who have a cognitive impairment; and other beneficiaries (please refer to IPC, 2020, 18) are supported.

Accessibility in wider literature and defining mega-events

Finkel and Dashper (2020) provide an authoritative overview of the academic research on accessibility in a range of different event fields, including music and comedy festivals, performing arts (high and low culture) and Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE). They noted a 'turn' in events studies research from the mid-2010s onwards, highlighting how event research began to develop from a more critical perspective from cross-disciplinary literatures and cross-fertilizing with broader social science approaches and methodologies, noting McGillivray et al. (2018) and Misener et al.'s (2015, 2018) studies into

disability as being significant in this regard. There has been a wide variety of scholarly literature regarding PWDs experiences in the fields of tourism, hospitality and aviation (see Darcy and Pegg 2011; Da Silva Soares Costa et al. 2024; Eusébio et al. 2023; Moura et al. 2023; Ozcan et al. 2021; Poria et al. 2011; Reindrawati et al. 2022; Rubio-Escuderos 2021; Small et al. 2012; Tutuncu 2017). Darcy et al. (2017) argued that there had been a distinct lack of engagement with social models of understanding of disability in leisure studies (see Aitchison 2003, 2009; Singleton and Darcy 2013) and in sport management research (Misener and Darcy 2014). However, this began to increase in the 2010s in terms of mega-events and considerations concerning accessibility.

Mega-events are occasional, large-scale events that exist on an international scale, attract a large number of visitors, and have large impacts on the built environment and the population (Magno and Dossena 2020; Mair et al. 2023; Müller 2015). According to Lorde et al. (2011), they are major/mega by virtue of size, attendance, public interest, level of financial investment, and media coverage, and have a trickle-down effect to the host community in the form of new infrastructure, economic growth and urban renewal. The massive scale of these events, such as the Olympic and Paralympic Games, World Expos and FIFA World Cups, means that they have a significant effect on a broad range of stakeholders and provide opportunities for catalyzing changes (Mair et al. 2023; Tournois 2018).

The Olympic and Paralympic Movements: Sowing the seeds of disability inclusion

This article focuses on the Olympic and Paralympic movement: in this section, we provide some historical context linked to the Olympic and Paralympic movements across the twentieth century. The Olympic and Paralympic movement are categorized as multi-sport mega-events

that take place consecutively every two years (summer and winter games), for approximately two weeks, and incorporate athletes and spectators from over 200 countries across the globe participating in over 400 events (IOC 2024). The (modern) *Olympic Games*, created by Pierre de Coubertin in 1894 and first held in 1896, are governed by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The Olympics are a multisport event, held in a host location, featuring summer and winter sports competitions in which thousands of athletes participate in a variety of competitions (Horne and Whannel 2016). However, with escalating costs of hosting the Olympic Games by the 1960s and 1970s, and with many host cities, regions and associated governments facing bankruptcy after the Games, by the late 1970s, the city of Los Angeles (USA) was the sole bidder for the 1984 Olympic Games (see Baade and Matheson 2016; Mobilan 2016). However, fuelled by television broadcasting funds and the billions of viewers that the medium brought to the spectacle, the LA 1984 Olympic Games were a landmark component to the emergence of 'global television' – the new consumer culture that amalgamates a worldwide audience through the shared experiences in their viewing habits (Dyreson 2015; Ross and McDougall 2022; Wenn 2015). Principally, the LA 1984 Olympics witnessed a transformation in the economic, political and cultural dynamics of the modern Olympic movement (see Dyreson 2015). The foundations of these elements at LA 1984 led to other host cities' cultural and urban transformation: the city of Barcelona (Spain) used this to great effect after winning the right to host the 1992 Summer Games in October 1986 (see Degen and García 2012; Smith 2005, 2012).

The *Paralympic Games*, first officially held in 1960, is a multi-sport event involving athletes with a range of disabilities and is governed by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC). From the Mexico City 1968 until LA 1984, the Olympic and Paralympic Games were held in different locations (see Gold and Gold 2016; Legg 2018; Poynter and MacRury 2009).

However, the proposal by the Seoul (South Korea) organising committee, that the 1988 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games could be held in the same city and using the same facilities, allowed a new and rising generation of Paralympic athletes to compete in many of the Olympic venues (see Brittain 2012). From the Barcelona 1992 Games to the Beijing 2008 Summer Games, there was an operational partnership where the Olympic and Paralympic Games were held in the same host city with increasing levels of operational partnership. Since Beijing 2008, the Olympics and Paralympics have been organized by a single host city organizing committee, working in unison to deliver the events in quick succession in the same host location (Darcy et al. 2017; Kearney 2020). Both governing bodies (IOC and IPC) develop event goals, which they hope to achieve as a result of the games taking place.

However, we highlight this not without caution. Kell et al. (2008) asserted how the Olympics and Paralympics combine to become the largest single sporting movement on the globe, but that the combination of these mega-events is 'characterized by a complex and often contradictory relationship'. Although the Paralympic Games are intended as a parallel mega-event to the Olympic Games, Kell et al. (2008) believe that they are nothing but a 'side show'. Adding to this, Belleni (2015) said that the Paralympic Games remain separated from the 'major' Olympic Games and that 'they are a satellite of the Olympic Games'. For Belleni (2015, 77), this 'separation between the two manifestations sends the message that the two classes of athletes are not genuinely equal'.

Since mega-event organizers must consider the needs of spectators and visitors with disabilities, event hosting is said to result in accessibility legacies for host communities while facilitating the development of accessible tourism (see Dickson et al. 2016; Mair et al. 2023). Legacies associated with disability sport events, such as enhanced venues and quality of

facilities as a result of hosting the Paralympic Games, further improve quality of life for people with accessibility needs and offer a diversified tourism product to attract visitors from a growing market segment (Dickson et al. 2017). Existing research also suggests a link between increased accessibility, residential support for the event, and residents' perceived quality of life (see Kaplanidou et al. 2013; Ranasinghe and Nawarathna 2020). The apparent aligning of the Olympic and Paralympic movements has resulted in both Games moving closer together in terms of the facilities and venues available to athletes, media and fans. Also, the Paralympic movement is progressing towards an equitable set of provisions in terms of 1) events available for the Paralympic athletes to compete in, and 2) the facilities across the Paralympic sites compared to the Olympic sites. However, as the likes of Kell et al. (2008) and Belleni (2015) (amongst others) have highlighted, there was still a clear disparity between the Games. Following this historical reflection, we will now explore is the advancement of the Olympic / Paralympic Accessibility Movement in the twenty-first century.

Advancing the Olympic / Paralympic Accessibility Movement in the twenty-first century: Sydney 2000 to London 2012

There is a vast array of academic literature in Olympics/Paralympics and other major sports events and settings in the twenty-first century, with scholars using each Olympic cycle to highlight some of the critical issues with accessibility and the provisions for people with disabilities at Olympic and Paralympic Games. We will now chronologically explore some of this literature from the Sydney 2000 to the London 2012 Summer Games.

The Sydney 2000 Games were the first Olympic and Paralympic Games where focused attention was paid towards disability awareness and accessibility provisions (Gold and Gold 2007). This was in stark contrast to the Atlanta 1996 Olympic and Paralympic Games, where

the level of accessibility and resourcing fell short of expectations. The venues at Atlanta 1996 were described as not being very accessible, and training venues were over two hours away from the city and often closed upon athlete arrival (see Bamford 2020). This highlights the tension between the spectacle of inclusion and the reality of inaccessibility.

By contrast, Sydney 2000 hosted an exceptional Olympic and Paralympic Games. This included a Paralympic Games that achieved many records in terms of athletes (a record 3,879 para-athletes from 123 countries), spectator tickets purchased (a record 1.2 million sold) and significantly increased media coverage, with the Games' website attracting over 300 million hits during competition time (see Darcy 2003; IPC 2014; Lenskyj 2002). According to Davis (1996) and Higson (2000, cited in Darcy, 2003), the conventional wisdom was that Sydney 2000 delivered a lasting legacy of accessible infrastructure, a raised level of disability awareness and an improved position in society to the host city. Darcy (2003: 28) explained how the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games delivered a truly inclusive experience for all:

> Whether the Paralympics has raised the level of disability awareness in the community and led to an improved position in society for people with disabilities remains unanswered. However, the Games showed that if government and the private sector had the will then they could deliver an inclusive experience. This experience was the first time that many people with disabilities could share a common community experience whether as spectators, volunteers, employees or participants. From a planning perspective whether it was venues, common domain, customer service or transport it has been shown what people with disabilities should expect every day of our lives and not just when the world was watching. Yet for many people with disabilities in New South Wales (NSW) the Games has had no material impact on their lives, they live in a continued state of unmet needs and will continue to do so long after the Games are just a memory.

Since Sydney 2000, there has been an operational partnership between the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and the host (represented by the Organizing Committee) to deliver the Games. Gold and Gold (2007) outlined how The Official Report of the Games for Athens 2004 went so far as to call the Athens Games 'unfriendly' to the disabled community and requiring 'drastic measures' to make the city accessible. The Organizing Committee (ATHOC) produced design guidelines and accessibility information for the municipalities making up the Greater Athens area, where much of the Olympic infrastructure was located, to encourage them to upgrade their public spaces, particularly along key routes identified by ATHOC. Furthermore, it urged private businesses to promote accessibility in their own premises and to raise awareness among their staff.

The operational partnership (OP) between IOC, IPC and the host Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (OCOG) developed in its sophistication where, from Beijing 2008 onwards, environment accessibility principles were encouraged to be delivered through the wider host organizing committee facilitating infrastructure across the Games' sites (see Darcy and Taylor 2013). This led to the creation of an *Accessibility Guide* (IPC 2020), which, as of the summer of 2024, is into its fourth version. The *Accessibility Guide* draws on experience from previous OCOGs, industry experts, legislation and design standards. It contains a combination of supporting information, guidelines, recommendations and previous Games examples to help OCOGs and their delivery partners deliver truly inclusive Games for all stakeholders (IPC 2020: 10). The OP understood that legislation, design standards and practices about accessibility vary significantly around the world - even among countries with well-developed related policies and legislation. These variations produce uncertainty as to which are the 'internationally accepted' standards. Therefore, in subsequent Olympic and Paralympic

Games, each host OCOG has created their own Guide based off the main principles of the *Accessibility Guide* (see Darcy et al. 2017).

According to Craven (2016), the Beijing 2008 Olympic and Paralympic Games changed the perceptions of PWDs across China and acted as a 'trigger to improve the lives of millions of people with an impairment and protect their rights as equal members of society'. Over ¥1 billion (equivalent to €124 million) were spent on making 14,000 facilities, roads, transport hubs and public buildings accessible throughout China (see Spence 2015; NPHT 2020). Not only did the Chinese Government make the sporting venues accessible, but the tourist attractions within different cities in China as more than ¥67 million were spent on making China's tourist destinations such as the Great Wall of China and Forbidden City accessible for tourists. Zhong et al. (2022) argued that hosting the 2008 Games provided China with the confidence to join the international sports community and gain rich experience to subsequently host the 2022 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games in Beijing.

Whilst Sydney 2000 was seen as the turning point for the Paralympic Games and the ways in which PWDs were both showcased and perceived, the London 2012 Games are seen as the benchmark for Paralympic provisions and the legacy that was supposedly implemented post-Games. Whilst the Stoke Mandeville Games (England) has a historically signifying place in Paralympic history, the London 2012 Games are said to have 'set the standard' for future Paralympic Games and seemingly made the host city significantly more accessible (Ahmed 2013; Bamford 2016; Bamford and Dehe 2016; Darcy et al. 2017**;** McNevin 2014; Naish and Mason 2014). The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games aimed to deliver a legacy to citizens of the United Kingdom, to 'inspire a generation' of young people to participate in sport (see Coates and Vickerman, 2016). The UK Government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) claimed that the London 2012 Paralympic Games 'improved attitudes to

disability and provided new opportunities for disabled people to participate in society' (DCMS 2013). Paralympic Anniversary research suggested that most of the UK-based public 'agree' as 70% of people believe the London 2012 Games had a positive impact on attitudes towards disabled people (see Finch, 2022).

However, this was not necessarily PWDs experience post-Games. Martinez (2012) highlighted how the rhetoric about the Paralympics seemed 'hollow' when the UK Government were fixated on cutting benefits, provision of accessible accommodation and demonizing the PWDs who need financial support. Ahmed (2013), as a PWD detailing her experiences post the London 2012 Games, highlighted the issues with legacy post-Games and the issues that PWDs faced in terms of disability equality and gaining accessible accommodation in London in the 2010s. Scholars including Bamford (2016), Darcy (2016), and Darcy et al. (2017) highlighted that the dramatic accessibility improvements at the Games, demonstrated at Sydney 2000, had started to plateau by London 2012, and similarities were evident in terms of host OCOGs and governments gaining positive comments about accessibility provisions during the Games but wider efforts post-Games being weak or non-existent. Finch (2022) noted that, regardless of the positive points of the Paralympics and 10-year survey statistics, mega-events cannot solve the systemic inequalities faced by disabled people. Linking the findings from a supporting report (see ICM Unlimited, 2022), Finch (2022) stressed for caution in terms of uncritically celebrating a Paralympic Games. Particularly if it provides non-disabled people with an excuse to feel good about how attitudes have improved, without contributing to the wider changes that need to happen across society to improve accessible facilities and changing attitudes to PWDs in general. They urged caution to avoid the SuperCrip discourse that occurs post the Paralympic Games.

Understanding 'Legacy' in the Olympic and Paralympic Movement: London 2012 to Beijing 2022

Following the soaring financial costs of hosting Olympic Games in the 1960s and 1970s, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) proposed the Olympic legacy to provide benefits to countries hosting the Games (see Brown 2020; Karadakis et al. 2019; Preuss 2019; Zhu and Han 2018). The IOC (2017: 13) defined the Olympic legacy as "the result of a vision. It encompasses all the tangible and intangible long-term benefits initiated or accelerated by the hosting of the Olympic Games/sport events for people, cities/territories and the Olympic Movement". The concept of 'legacy' became a focal point of the bidding process for the Barcelona 1992 Games (see Garcia-Ramon and Albet 2000) and has been widely incorporated into host city's bids since the mid-2000s (Leopkey 2009) – this was a key message linked to the London 2012 Games.

Kassens-Noor et al. (2015) defined mega-events as high-profile phenomena associated with prestige and global visibility that frequently cause large-scale transformations of cities and regions through their legacies. Since the turn of the millennium, the literature and media attention devoted to mega-event legacy has grown in parallel with the multibillion-dollar investments required to stage mega-events (see Chappelet 2012; Coakley and De Souza 2013; Gratton and Preuss 2008). However, despite efforts from the IOC (2017), the legacy framework has not been fully examined in scholarly literature (see Han et al. 2022).

It is notable that since the early 2010s, advancing the likes of Simon Darcy, Ian Brittain, Laura Misener, and Tracey Dickson's research in Paralympic sport, the literary focus regarding the Paralympic Games has extensively focused upon legacy and lived experiences at the Games or

in the host region/country (see Ahmed 2013; Bamford 2016; Brittain 2016; Cashman and Horne 2013; Darcy 2016; Leopkey and Parent 2017; Misener 2017; Misener et al. 2013). These works highlighted the experiences of multiple actors such as current and former Paralympic athletes (Braye 2016; Zardini Filho et al. 2023), spectators and television viewers (Kearney 2020; Kim et al. 2022; Pullen et al. 2020a), PWD activists (Braye et al. 2013a; De Souza and Brittain 2022a, 2022b), administrators (Braye et al. 2013b; Zardini Filho et al. 2023; Song 2022; Hu and Zhang 2024), media/marketing or network-broadcast analysis (Beermann and Hallmann 2024; Brittain and Beacom 2016; Jackson-Brown 2020; Kirakosyan and Seabra Jr 2018; Kirakosyan 2021; McGillivray et al. 2021; Pearson and Misener 2024; Pullen et al. 2019) and from children/youth-based perspectives (Coates and Vickerman 2016; Colere et al. 2021; Kirakosyan 2020) amongst others. Leading into the Rio 2016 Games, an increasing number of scholars began to collect primary data from the aforementioned types of persons linked to the Paralympic movement (also see Braye 2016; Kearney et al. 2019; Kearney 2020; Shirzaipour et al. 2023).

Whilst the concept of legacy has been at the forefront of Paralympic academic literature (see Chappelet 2012; Girginov and Hills 2008; Gratton and Preuss 2008; Kaplanidou 2012; Ma and Kaplanidou 2017; Preuss 2007; IOC 2017; Roche 2000; Thompson et al. 2013), it is not without its issues. Despite the numerous attempts to define ‘legacy’, this has been problematic due to the common assertion that legacy is an overtly positive concept (see Cashman 2006; Kearney 2020). Post London 2012 and Sochi 2014 Winter Games, the likes of Gilbert and Schantz (2015, 161) noted that ‘legacy’ had become a ‘vogue or fashionable expression, frequently used, often overused, greatly misused and seldom understood in the context of mega sporting events organisation’. The concept of legacy itself is very complex, with a lack of a consistent approach to its definition, making it difficult to accurately evaluate the long-term outcomes of

mega-events (Preuss 2007; Grix 2017; Preuss and Hong 2021; Scheu et al. 2021; Zardini Filho et al. 2023). Most of the Olympic 'legacy' has focused on certain overarching elements, such as urban development and belief behavior (see Han et al. 2022; Scheu et al. 2021). Furthermore, according to Kearney (2020: 268), without a common definition, 'many event organizers and governing bodies have become quick to claim they have created a legacy without sufficient evidence to substantiate these claims'.

A significant highlight from Kearney's (2020) study was what legacy *means* to Paralympians and PWDs attending the sporting events. Kearney noted how the majority of Paralympians have not spoken out publicly about any drawbacks associated with the event itself, or of its impact on the general population with disabilities. Research at Olympic and Paralympic Games post Rio 2016 has met some of this request. Kim et al. (2022), when focusing on the PyeongChang 2018 Winter Paralympic Games, highlighted that while many researchers have investigated major sports event legacies in western societies, little attention had been paid specifically to spectators with disabilities, particularly those with physical disabilities and in non-Western cultures. They sought to investigate the legacy of the PyeongChang Paralympics through the perspective of spectators with disabilities who watched the games in South Korea, a non-Western county. Han et al. (2022) also added to the PyeongChang 2018 discourse when assessing the judgements of 12 Korean Olympic experts regarding the expected long-term benefits for the Olympic Games.

Brittain (2022) explored the Paralympic legacy of the Tokyo 2020 Games, analyzing the lived experience and social reality for Japanese PWDs who reside in the Tokyo region, who were rather negative in their assessment of how attitudes towards disability held by non-disabled people in Japan impacted their lives. Similar to various academic research from the London

2012, Rio 2016, and PyeongChang 2018 Paralympic Games, Brittain (2022) found that his participants believe that there is still a significant way to go to achieve any kind of real understanding of the issues faced by disabled people within wider Japanese society. This was further explored by Brittain amongst other scholars in Duignan et al.'s (2023) study regarding how Japan utilized Tokyo 2020 as a field configuring event to disrupt systems of ableist thinking and tackle physical and attitudinal barriers restricting PWDs to accessible tourism.

The Beijing 2022 OCOG, inspired by the IOC's *Legacy Strategic Approach*, developed their *Legacy Plan* for the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games as a continuation from the Beijing 2008 Olympics, which was 'to promote a positive legacy from the Olympic Games to the host cities, regions and countries' (Chappelet 2014). Song (2022) recently conducted research on the perceived sustainability of sports and social legacy goals of the Beijing 2008 Summer Games and the Beijing 2022 Winter Games. However, similar to a number of studies, he did not interview the Paralympians or general public. Song interviewed the Olympic officials in legacy planning for the 2008 Summer Games and/or the 2022 Winter Games, the scholars in Olympic studies, and a journalist reporting the Olympic legacy related news in Beijing. Even so, the interviewees' positive, neutral, and negative perceptions about the organized sports for people with disabilities as rehabilitations were evenly split about the social legacy of the Paralympics and its effect on the public, and the legacy of promoting public awareness for PWDs. While 40% of respondents said there were positive outcomes, 40% said that no obvious changes had been observed. Also, the interviewees could not agree if the increasing sport activities as rehabs for people with disabilities had been a legacy directly coming from hosting the Olympic and Paralympic Games. As legacies take time to develop and have an impact post Games, and research emerges, it might be too soon to analyze the impact of the Beijing 2022 Games without comparing these to the 2008 Games.

Considerations for future research on PWD's accessibility provisions at the Paris 2024 Games and beyond

After analyzing a range of scholarly literature linked to the Olympic and Paralympic movement and mega-event legacy, we now recommend some key areas of future research required to support accessibility and PWDs provisions at future Olympic and Paralympic Games which could benefit the movements of both mega-events.

1) **The uneven relationship between the Olympics and Paralympics: adaptations of venues between Games**

As identified earlier in this article, since the late 1980s (namely the Seoul 1988 Games), the Paralympic Games have accompanied the Olympic Games with increasing success, including new sports and catering to a wider range of disabilities, supporting the belief that access to sport should be open to all on equal terms (Belleni 2015). However, there is no doubt that there is still an imbalanced relationship between the two mega-events. We previously highlighted how Belleni (2015) claimed that separation between the Olympic and Paralympic Games sends the message that the two classes of athletes are not equal which could also be inferred in regard to PWDs who are spectators at the Olympic Games too. A critical point from Darcy et al. (2017) was that one of the most significant differences between the Olympics and the Paralympics is the importance of accessibility.

The specifications for venues, extensively detailed in the *Accessibility Guide*, are used by the host of the Olympic Games *and* the Paralympic Games - the provisions are slightly adapted by each host OCOG linked to the country's legislation. Future Olympic Games, which then switch to Paralympic Games, should analyze how the venues adapt their facilities between the two

Games. We recommend that future research should analyze *how* accessible the Olympic Games actually are, particularly since the inception of the fourth version of the IPC's *Accessibility Guide* (2020), and as the Paris 2024 Games are the first 2020's Olympic and Paralympic Games with a capacity crowd since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2) More research needed from PWDs live *during* the Games

It is very encouraging that recent research has focused on PWDs lived experiences at contemporary Games, in cities or regions such as Rio De Janeiro (see Rocha 2023; Taks and Rocha 2022), PyeongChang (Kim et al. 2022) and Tokyo (Brittain 2022). Scholars are collating primary data from PWDs and establishing their perspectives on the impact of the Paralympic Games and the legacies being created (also see Pullen et al. 2020a, 2020b). Most of the content when speaking to PWDs in any capacity (e.g. activists, administrators, athletes, local residents) explores the legacy of the respective Games. Kearney (2020) highlighted that the majority of Paralympians have not spoken out publicly about any drawbacks associated with the mega-event itself, or of its impact on the general population with disabilities. Linked to Kearney's points, and in line with Darcy and Dickson's extensive work, more dialogue with the general population with disabilities is required - research needs to be conducted regarding PWDs attending both the Olympics and Paralympics and their experiences *during* the Games.

3) More research needed about PWDs experiences at Olympic venues and how they are treated

Advancing the previous point, although we have quoted the two Games (Olympics and Paralympics) interchangeably in this article, the overwhelming majority of research linked to PWDs and accessibility has focused on the Paralympic movement. We believe there should be more research about PWDs experiences at Olympic venues and how they are treated, rather

than just Paralympic venues. It is notable that Paralympic venues are specifically built with PWDs in mind, but what are PWD spectators' experiences at Olympic Games venues - particularly venues in host OCOGs which are not permanent structures? By doing this, different stakeholders can gain live information about the issues that PWDs still face at each Games and improve the experience during the period of the mega-event taking place at the various venues in a host city or region.

4) Paralympic and/or Olympic Legacy? Or accessibility for all?

There are claims and counterclaims that the Paralympic Games contribute to a better world for PWDs but also, that the Paralympics could be counterproductive to the PWDs rights movement (see De Souza and Brittain 2022a). There has also been growing research exploring the legacy of the Games for PWDs in the host city, region and country. But, when considering various studies explored in this article, it could be questioned whether the concept of legacy, namely mega-event legacy, actually 'exists' or is 'flawed' (also see Bocarro et al. 2017; Boykoff and Fussey 2014; Brittain et al. 2018; Byers et al. 2020; Koenigstorfer et al. 2019; Orr and Jarvis 2018; Thomson et al. 2019). Misener (2017, 97 cited in Darcy et al. 2017) asserted that Paralympic legacies are not developed in the way that Olympic legacy discourses are, with Olympic legacies being more developed and having substantial scholarly work addressing impacts.

Kearney (2020) also highlighted that the majority of definitions has been developed with the *Olympic Games* in mind, with a notable absence of a legacy definition from the IPC. However, although a variety of scholarly research has advanced Darcy's work and explored the Paralympic legacies from the perspectives of PWDs - most of the legacy-based research regarding PWDs or accessibility has been focused on the Paralympic Games. There are several

legible reasons for this, however, more synergy is needed between Olympic and Paralympic Games legacy research. In certain ways, it is as though PWDs are not associated with the Olympic movement – they are *only* associated the Paralympic movement. In line with many scholars, we argue that accessibility at mega-event venues is for all, not just disability associated sports.

Concluding Thoughts

This article has chronologically explored scholarly perspectives regarding Olympic and Paralympic Games/Cycles and discussed some of the issues linked to accessibility and the provisions for PWDs in the twenty-first century. Whilst we have tried to chronologically explore both Games, we understand that we could not include all of the scholarly literature that explores the Olympic and Paralympic movements in such an extensively researched area. Also, the recent Games in the 2020s (Tokyo 2020 Summer Games and Beijing 2022 Winter Games) are still in the early stages of development in terms of mega-event legacy. Therefore, research will continue to emerge regarding elements linked to accessibility and the provisions for PWDs (see for e.g. Song 2022; Wang et al. 2023).

The Games over the next decade (Paris 2024 to Brisbane 2032) are crucial to understanding experiences at the Olympic and Paralympic Games from PWD spectator perspectives. The Tokyo 2020 Games did not have in-person attendance and the Beijing 2022 Games were significantly reduced due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions. Therefore, the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games are the first 'post-COVID-19' where PWDs thoughts at the Games could be analyzed in the 2020s. Researchers could analyze whether the advancements at London 2012, Rio 2016 and PyeongChang 2018 will be implemented at Paris 2024, Milan-Cortina 2026, LA 2028 and beyond. We suggest that more research into the lived experiences at both Olympic and Paralympic Games is required, but more specifically, more content from

Olympic Games and how PWDs are treated at such venues. This could help improve PWDs experiences at the Games themselves and help foster changes in perceptions of PWDs within venues and within society post mega-event.

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