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Leveraging the London 2012 Paralympic Games: What legacy for disabled people?

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Abstract

The International Paralympic Committee, UK Government and the Organising Committee for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games all contended that the London 2012 Paralympic Games would positively impact the lives of disabled people in the UK, particularly with regard to changing non-disabled attitudes towards disability. All three have claimed partial success during the course of the four year period (Olympiad) separating the London and Rio Paralympic Games. However, this is at odds with the findings of Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) and the experiences of disabled individuals. This paper, considers the claims of both sides against a backdrop of public policies that are targeting large scale benefits cuts, the media coverage of which actually appears to be hardening attitudes towards anyone on benefits and negating any positive impacts from the Games themselves. It argues that the continued predominance of 'ableist' perspectives on disability underpins many of the challenges faced by disabled people. The paper adopts a historical perspective on the development of legacy based foundations upon which the disability sport and Paralympic movements originated. It contends that the gradual move towards an elite 'Olympic' sports model of competition has actually served to undermine these foundations.

Keywords: Paralympic, Legacy, London 2012, Disabled People, Benefits Cuts.

Introduction

Despite the large body of work produced over the last decade or so that has examined major sport event legacies and event leverage, largely with respect to the Olympic Games, Misener et al (2013, p.1) claim that 'few studies have evaluated the comparative outcomes, legacies and event leverage that the Paralympic Games have generated'. This notwithstanding, in many ways, the Paralympic Games, and their forerunner the Stoke Mandeville Games, were founded on the idea of legacy as a process designed to improve the lives of disabled people. This idea has become increasingly prominent in legacy narratives relating to recent Games (Weed 2009). Notwithstanding reservations about legacy voiced by a number of Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) in Australia, the Australian Paralympic Committee (APC) as a key stakeholder in the Sydney Games of 2000 claimed, on the tenth anniversary of the Games that its legacy had changed the national and international 'mind-set', thereafter the Paralympic Games being viewed as equal with the Olympics, while (partly through record television coverage) creating a shift in how people perceived disability

internationally (APC website, 2010). Although there was widespread debate and clearly some concerns regarding the implications of the Beijing Games on the rights of disabled people, much reporting on the Games noted the efforts being made by the Chinese authorities to improve access and there was a general hopefulness that the Games would translate into an important turning point for disability rights (Disability Now, 2009).

The experience of the 2012 Games is of note since claims relating to the development of legacy for both the Olympic and Paralympic Games were integral to the success of the London bid in the face of fierce competition, particularly from Paris. Indeed London was not the front runner in the bidding process but subsequently hosted the largest Paralympic Games to date, which included a number of sell-out events and a considerable increase in media coverage over earlier Games (The Independent, 2012). This commitment to achieving a positive social legacy from the Games was reflected not just in Paralympic legacy strategies but in related areas of UK public policy (Bloyce & Smith, 2015). Many of the strategic planning documents in the lead-up to London 2012 indicated opportunities and a commitment to build on the successes and learn from the mistakes of previous Games (London East Research Institute, 2007) The stage appeared to be set for an unfolding legacy that would demonstrate the capacity of the Paralympic Games to deliver on its promise to enhance the longer term quality of life for disabled people (DCMS, 2008). As we approach the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio (and a range of aspirations for a Paralympic legacy expressed by the host city) what, if anything, has been the legacy from London 2012 for disabled people?

While there is some evidence, prior to World War Two, of organised efforts to develop or promote competitive sport for individuals with disabling conditions (Doll-Tepper 1999), especially those with spinal injuries who were considered to have no hope of surviving their injuries, it was in the aftermath of the conflict that changing practices became more apparent. Medical authorities were prompted to re-evaluate traditional methods of rehabilitation, which were not satisfactorily responding to the medical and psychological needs of the large number of soldiers disabled in combat (Steadward, 1992). According to McCann (1996), Dr Ludwig Guttman (the universally accepted founder of the Paralympic Movement¹) recognised the physiological and psychological values of sport in the rehabilitation of paraplegic hospital inpatients. At this point then, competitive sport was developed as part of their rehabilitation. The aim was not only to give hope and a sense of self-worth to the patients, but to change the attitudes of society towards the spinally injured by demonstrating that they could not only be fully integrated into wider society but could go on to excel in their chosen fields (Anderson, 2003).

Despite these positive developments many cultural and physical barriers still existed for disabled people. Attempts to explain and understand the nature of those barriers, as well as how they can be addressed, has led to the emergence of a wide body of disability studies literature. Scholars have developed a range of models that consider variously, the relationship of the individual to the impairment and of the person with a disability to wider society (Barnes & Mercer 2002; Albrecht G. et al. 2001; Cole 2007). One approach adopted in an effort to understand the root causes of discrimination is the idea of 'ableism' which contends that there is a tendency to adopt generally recognised notions of able-bodiedness as the frame of reference

against which to assess ability. Disabled people are then considered in relation to their approximation to the perceived norm of able-bodiedness (Davis, 1997, p.9; Goodley 2011). This became part of intellectual debate relating to Paralympic sport, in the sense of the argument that Paralympic athletes were judged in the context of their approximation to non-disabled Olympic athletes (Brittain, 2002, p. 47-49). Such a perspective was accentuated through debate on media representations of disability which suggested that the terms of reference for Paralympic sport resided within the Olympic / non-disabled domain and Paralympic athletes were judged on the basis of how closely they could approximate those standards. Silva and Howe's (2012) critique of the "supercrip" representation of Paralympic athletes suggests a continuation of long established concerns about how disability is framed. As in the case of Pointon's (1997) *normalisation* theory, the "supercrip" is considered worthy of praise as they have approximated able-bodied athletic performance in spite of the "problem" of their disability.

Against this backdrop the paper explores the extent to which the unfolding legacy of the London 2012 Paralympic Games has managed to challenge systemic discrimination embedded in established societal perspectives of disability and articulated through public policy and structural inertia. Alongside an assessment of scholarly literature concerning representations of disability and the development of the Paralympic Movement, the paper is based on extensive documentary research whereby stakeholder perspectives on the impact of the 2012 Paralympic Games on perceptions of disability are identified and compared. Engagement with the charity Scope enables new data on changing public attitudes toward disability to be assessed. It begins by investigating ways in which ideas of ableism and associated notions of

social Darwinism and dependency have shaped widely held perceptions of disability. It considers the evolution of the Paralympic Games, questioning the extent to which Paralympic legacy has come to represent a challenge to these established perspectives on disability. It then focuses on the experience of the London 2012 Games and, drawing on UK government and Scope findings, considers ways in which recent changing priorities of the Movement, together with heightened legacy aspirations of the 2012 Games, may have contributed to a tangible shift in the way disability is perceived and the significance of this on the lived experiences for disabled people.

First however, it is important to consider the systemic challenges presented by 'ableism' as a perspective rooted in the hegemony of normalcy, which it is argued continues as an impediment to the promotion of a more inclusive society – the ultimate Paralympic legacy aspiration.

Ableism

According to Wolbring (2012) “ableism describes prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviours toward persons with a disability. Definitions of ableism hinge on one’s understanding of normal ability and the rights and benefits afforded to persons deemed “normal”” (p.78). In the context of sport for disabled people the prioritisation of non-disabled sport within society devalues sport for disabled athletes and potentially undermines much of the hard work done by disability activists to gain acceptance for disabled people in all walks of life. Thomas Hehir of the Harvard Graduate School of Education further defines ableism as:

the devaluation of disability...that results in societal attitudes that uncritically assert that it is better for a child to walk than roll, speak than sign, read print than read Braille, spell independently than use a spell-check, and hang out with non-disabled kids as opposed to other disabled kids.

(Hehir, 2002; p.2)

Ableism, therefore, devalues disabled people and results in segregation, social isolation and social policies that limit opportunities for full societal participation.

Ableism, Social Darwinism and Disabled People.

The persistence of ableist perceptions of disability should be considered in the context of shifts in wider beliefs concerning the role of the individual within society, which have translated into a range of individualist world-views including for example, neoliberalism. The last decade has seen the global economy in one of its worst economic crises since the great depression and according to Butterwegge (2013) 'whoever isn't profitable doesn't count'. In a permanent crisis (such as the economic crisis mentioned above) neoliberalism takes on social Darwinian characteristics that subdivides society into more and less powerful or winners and losers. Ruff (2005) claimed that the rise of neoliberal economics has led to the resurgence of the social Darwinist notion of "survival of the fittest". Butterwegge (2013) claims that whoever does not use or hardly uses his/her "own" economic location and can hardly be exploited economically is excluded. The unemployed, seniors, persons with handicaps and immigrants are increasingly criticized for being "social parasites," "don't count" and live off the "location community." He claims that the worries over economic

stability dominate public discourse to such an extent that the widening gap between the rich and the poor is in danger of being ignored and any sense of social justice threatens to be completely overlooked in the ensuing panic. This is at present brought into sharp relief through the UK government's austerity measures whereby social welfare, including that relating to support for disabled people, is increasingly under attack (McVeigh, 2016).

In connection with this, economic arguments are often used to strengthen the impact of ableist perceptions of disability. Priestley (1998) claims that many researchers and academics have attempted to include the importance of culture alongside political economy. In reference to this he cites two leading writers in the field of disability, Colin Barnes for whom the oppression of people with impairments can be explained with reference to material and cultural forces (Barnes, 1994) and Mike Oliver (1990), for whom disability is produced through the complex interaction of the mode of production and the central values of the society concerned. These approaches have their roots partly in the approach of Marxist writers who 'tended to argue that the development of nineteenth century industrial capitalism and Fordist production methods required a set of social relationships that necessarily excluded most people with impairments from equal participation in the labour force' (Priestley, 1998, p. 89). According to Middleton (1999) this kind of exclusion is justified in many people's minds by a view that disabled people are non-contributing and do not merit the same equality of treatment or investment in their education since they will not grow up to take full responsibilities as citizens (a contention she argues, that can become a self-fulfilling prophecy). This builds on interpretations that individualise disability (place the blame for problems encountered squarely upon the individual and their

impairment), thereby obscuring its social and economic determinants. Middleton's explanation for such an approach is based in the arena of political economy and power. She claims that:

societal expectation is that we should compete, which means getting on at the expense of others. This means creating and maintaining hierarchical structures based on power and on status..... People, organisations, and races do not disadvantage others simply out of fear and ignorance, but are positively motivated to discriminate because it is thought to be advantageous

(Middleton, 1999, p. 69)

This kind of ideological position, Middleton contends, plays a major part in determining the financial and social positions of disabled people by restricting opportunities for paid employment and regular social interaction.

Dependency and Social Darwinism

The perceived failure to live up to their role as an independent member of society is often associated, within ableist discourse, to the individual's impairment. However, as Morris (1996, p.10) points out 'impairment does not necessarily create dependency and poor quality of life; rather it is lack of control over the physical help needed which takes away people's independence'. Therefore, the combined assumption that the problem lies within the individual and their impairment (Felske, 1994, p.182) and that everyone, especially adults, should be able to look after themselves and their own

needs within a society based upon competition (Middleton, 1999, p.69) can lead to disabled people interpreting their experience as one of creating a burden for society, for which they are blameworthy². By leading disabled individuals into this kind of self-belief, however, it can help ensure that they do not make too many demands upon society, particularly ones that have economic impacts for society as a whole (Barnes, 1994, p.220-221). This position is contested on a number of levels, including the view that rather than a concern with promoting independence, the value of interdependence as a response to meeting individual needs and promoting collective well-being should be understood. (White et al 2010)

According to the Jan-Mar 2014 Labour Force Survey 8,657,000 of 59,821,000 Great Britain residents of working age (16+) were disabled (UK Data Service, 2014), which equates to around 14.5% of the population who are of working age. The figures also show that only 27.4% of disabled people who are of working age are in employment. This compares to 31% in the mid-eighties although in general these jobs tended to be poorly paid, low status positions (Kew, 1997; Southam, 1994). In addition Oliver (1996, p. 115) pointed out that 60% of disabled people in both Britain and the USA lived below the poverty line.

Challenging these structural, ideological and cultural impediments to a society based on equity, presents many challenges. It would be unhelpful to consider the Paralympic legacy as a process that in itself, would result in a fundamental and permanent shift in social attitudes toward a more enlightened view of disability that challenges ideas about dependency and promotes equity. Each Games takes place within a particular cultural, political and economic context that influences its relationship with wider

society. Nevertheless, on the basis of widely publicised legacy objectives for 2012 that included a commitment to ‘transform the perception of disabled people in society – with a focus on changing the perception of disabled people’s economic contribution to society’ (ODI/ DCMS, 2011), it would be appropriate to consider such issues when evaluating the unfolding 2012 Paralympic legacy.

The Paralympic Games and Legacy

From the inception of the Paralympic Games in the late nineteen forties, Ludwig Guttman, described the aims of his use of sport in the rehabilitation process of the spinally injured to be social re-integration and to change the perceptions of the non-disabled within society regarding what disabled people were capable of (Guttman, 1976, p. 12-13). While subsequently challenged on the basis that a medicalized approach perpetuated unequal power relations between disabled people and non-disabled and promoted systemic inequity (Peers 2012a, 2012b) this perspective formed the underpinning philosophy of the growing Movement and has remained a guiding principle for the International Paralympic Committee (IPC 2015). These kinds of aims and the language associated with them (e.g. social integration, changing perceptions) may have contributed to the Games being perceived primarily as a rehabilitation and awareness raising event rather than one that is about sport (Brittain, 2010). These early Games had as their aim an ethos of fostering self-respect and belief amongst their participants as well as helping to solidify their social identity as a group within wider society (IPC website, undated, ‘History of the Movement’). However, the last ten years or so have seen a shift in the language used and the aims set out by the IPC. Partly through a commitment of the IPC to shift away from an

overt focus on rehabilitation and disability and toward sport, narratives relating to the Paralympic Games have increasingly focused on sporting excellence. This is reflected in the instruments of the IPC charter, which indicates its commitment:

To promote and contribute to the development of sport opportunities and competitions, from initiation to elite level, for Paralympic athletes as the foundation of elite Paralympic sport...To promote the self-governance of each Paralympic sport either as an integral part of the international sport movement for able-bodied athletes, or as an independent sport organization, whilst at all times safeguarding and preserving its own identity.

(IPC Website, 2013)

Although references to identity and integration are still inherent within the statement, the focus is explicitly on sport and sporting opportunities. There is no mention of disability with the exception of its inherent connection with the word Paralympic and all references to the word Paralympic are in connection with elite athletes and sport. This allows the IPC and the Paralympic Games in particular to shift the focus of its aims away from the acceptance of disabled people as potentially productive members of society to gaining their acceptance as elite athletes irrespective of any impairment they might have. People may still automatically associate disability with the term Paralympic, but by not using the term disability overtly and by associating themselves with the term Paralympic in its 'parallel Olympic' context the IPC clearly hope this will foreground the athletic talents of the athletes they represent. However, it should be noted that these changes away from systemic discrimination and viewing disability

in a medical context are by no means global with countries across all continents at different stages in the promotion of disability rights, which from an IPC perspective may support the notion that the organisation acts as an advocacy body (Blauwet, 2005). There is also the danger that such a move may reinforce ableist perspectives of disability by further strengthening the use of non-disabled norms, based in the Olympic Games, as terms of reference for disabled athletes, as outlined by Silva and Howe (2012) earlier.

Alternative perspectives on the Paralympic Games and Legacy.

In contradistinction to this dominant discourse around the Paralympic Games and disability, there are many disabled individuals and groups that represent disabled people who consider that the Paralympic Games and its associated legacy agenda, actually do them a disservice. Amongst these are three academics, who also happen to be former Paralympians and Paralympic medallists – Stuart Braye (Athletics), David Howe (Athletics) and Danielle Peers (Wheelchair Basketball). Peers (2009, 2012a) is quite scathing of those involved in the running and promotion of the Paralympic Movement painting them as self-serving and claiming that the IPC ‘continually reproduces the figure of the tragic disabled in order to reproduce itself’ (p.9). She claims that historically the IPC and its forebears have used the image of the ‘tragic disabled’ in order to justify its aims and existence and that IPC continues this practice today. Purdue and Howe (2012) argue that the IPC is endeavouring to situate the Paralympic Games as an elite sports competition operating within a self-contained social vacuum in which social perceptions about the impaired body are nullified by the assertion that it is the athletes’ sport performances, not their individual

impairments that should be the focus. However according to Purdue and Howe this is problematic as the athletes must perform for two distinct audiences – a non-disabled audience that is expected to only focus on the sporting performance and a disabled audience that is ‘encouraged to identify with the impairment the athlete has, whilst also appreciating their performance’ (p.194).

Braye et al. (2013a) interviewed 32 members of the United Kingdom Disabled People’s Council (UKDPC) in order to elicit their views on the Paralympic Games of London 2012 and concluded that ‘the portrayal of equality in the Paralympics is an apparent misnomer when compared with the lives of ordinary disabled people’ (p.20). By way of highlighting this viewpoint they cited the following comment from one of their participants:

I’m afraid that the focus on elite Paralympians promotes an image of disabled people which is so far from the typical experiences of a disabled person that it is damaging to the public understanding of disability

(Colin in Braye et al, 2013; p.9)

There is a danger, therefore, that Paralympians become the yardstick by which all disabled people are measured and expectations of them within non-disabled society are set. By making Paralympians the ‘norm’ by which all other disabled people are measured this simply further isolates those that are unable or simply don’t wish to take part in sport and reinforces ableist perspectives of their capabilities.

Hodges et al. (2012) from Bournemouth University in the UK found similar results in research that they carried out for Channel 4 claiming that for some disabled people the Paralympic Games ‘was a source of deep frustration because the Paralympics represented something distant from their everyday reality’ (p.4). With regard to London 2012 Braye et al. (2013b) concluded that ‘the IPC’s positive rhetoric on improving equality can also be regarded as having a limited effect on the negative daily reality faced by disabled people living in the UK today’ (p.3). It should also be noted that this is not a new finding with Purdue and Howe (2012) citing Cashman and Thomson (2008) regarding the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games who found that disabled people in Australia ‘had reservations about the Paralympians and did not regard them as relevant to their situation’ (Purdue & Howe, 2012; p.195).

The Olympification of the Paralympic Games- implications for legacy.

Clearly the title Paralympian, derived as it is from ‘Parallel Olympian,’ hints at a much closer link between the Paralympic Games and the Olympic Movement. How then have these links impacted upon the Paralympic Movement, particularly in the sense that it has informed debate relating to the legacy agenda? Historically, the founder of the Paralympic Movement, Sir Ludwig Guttmann, made concerted efforts to link his fledgling movement with the Olympic Movement (Brittain, 2010). This is significant since there has been a parallel effort to link the legacy agenda of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Indeed it may be noted that the Cultural Olympiad, closely associated with the attempt to secure a lasting cultural legacy from the Games, directs much of its work toward the disabled community (Arts Council England and LOCOG, 2013). The gradual coming together of the Olympic and Paralympic

Movements over the last seventy years, starting with the Stoke Mandeville Games in the late nineteen forties has not always been a smooth process with several threats of legal action by the IOC over the use of Olympic terminology by the fledgling Paralympic Movement. The process did, however, lead to the founding of the International Paralympic Committee in 1989 as the IOC was only willing to deal with one organisation that could speak for all of the impairment groups, which had up until then been represented by their own separate organisations (Brittain, 2014)

The year 2000 heralded the start of a much closer working relationship between the IOC and IPC, which culminated in two important events at the 2000 Sydney Olympic and Paralympic Games. First, at the 111th IOC Session, Dr Steadward, the new President of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) was elected as an IOC member, thus strengthening the credibility and profile of the Paralympic Movement. Second Dr Steadward and Juan Antonio Samaranch, the then President of the IOC signed a general memorandum of understanding, which included representation of the IPC on IOC Commissions, as well as financial assistance for the Paralympic Movement from the IOC (IPC website, undated, 'first IPC – IOC agreement'). In 2001 a Cooperative Agreement was signed between the IOC and IPC outlining a joint bid process to officially begin with the 2008 Summer Games Bid. From the 2008 Beijing Games forward any city bidding for an Olympic Games was thus required to also bid for the Paralympic Games. Until that point cities had done so, in part, because of the precedent set in 1988. In 2003, amendments were made to the IOC-IPC 2001 Agreement and in 2012 it was further changed to include new language controlling Broadcast and Marketing Rights effective until 2020 (IPC website, undated, 'IOC and IPC sign co-operation agreement').

Although the IOC and the IPC effectively remain as two independent bodies, linked through their mutual interest in sport and currently tied by both a cooperative agreement and the fact that a single host city puts on both organisations' showpiece event, it would appear that these links have had a definite impact upon the way in which the IPC has operated over the last decade or so as it has tried to solidify its place in both the global sporting and commercial spheres.

As the IPC has moved the Paralympic Games further towards a focus upon sporting achievement rather than disability, epitomised by the Olympic Games and Movement, the pressure to provide an event that is saleable to sponsors and the media has increased or as Howe and Jones (2006) put it:

“The only evaluative criteria relevant to such logic are supply, demand and profit. Good Games are profitable ones, good sports are marketable ones, and good athletes are endorsable ones. The IPC are conspiring with the IOC to repackage, remarket, refresh, modernize, and essentially sell the Paralympics. The product, however, needs revising to increase demand. The Paralympics needs to be quicker, slicker, shorter, with fewer events and fewer, but higher profile champions.”

(Howe & Jones, 2006, p.33)

However, achieving the goals laid out by Howe and Jones (above) has come at a price. Women and Athletes with High Support Needs (AHSN) have been particularly hard hit (cf. Brittain, 2010, p. 106-121). This means that although the IPC might be successfully moving towards an elite 'Olympic' style sports model for the movement,

the further they move away from raising awareness of disability issues the more they are in danger of isolating key groups of the wider community of athletes they are there to represent. Current non-disabled ableist perceptions of what elite sport is, based in non-disabled norms of physical perception and performance in absolute terms ie THE fastest, THE highest, THE strongest, mean that those who appear furthest from these 'norms' will generally be overlooked the most. Without a strong advocate to ensure their inclusion and visibility, their needs are likely to be overlooked completely. These issues provide the context for our consideration of what kind of impact, if any, the London 2102 Paralympic Games has had on British society, particularly in the sense of changing social attitudes - including challenging ableist perceptions of disability.

The London 2012 Paralympic Games: stakeholder perspectives on the Legacy Agenda

London was elected as the host city for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games at the 117th IOC session held in Singapore on 6th July 2005, beating Moscow, New York, Madrid and Paris in the process (Brittain, 2014). They were the first summer Paralympic Games to have a completely integrated Organising Committee for both Games and the bid included a major legacy element that incorporated both the Olympic and Paralympic legacies. Those relating to the Paralympic Games and outlined in '*London 2012: A legacy for disabled people*' (ODI/ DCMS, 2011) were as follows:

London 2012 Paralympic Legacy Plans

Theme 1: Transform the perception of disabled people in society – with a focus on changing the perception of disabled people’s economic contribution to society.

Within this theme there were two priority areas. Firstly the promotion of economic inclusion by changing perceptions of disabled people’s economic contribution to society particularly by promoting increased access to goods, services and employment opportunities. Secondly to work with the media to positively raise the profile of disabled people’s talents using the principles of the social model of disability to underpin this process.

Theme 2: Support opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity

The main aim of this theme was to increase the capability of national governing bodies and national disability sports organisations to deliver disability sport by training volunteers and coaches and thus increase the capacity of club infrastructures. This was to be partly achieved by the investment of £8million over two years by Sport England in order to lay the foundations for the inclusion of more disabled people in sports and physical activity either as participants or volunteers.

Theme 3: Promote community engagement through the Games

There were two priority areas in this theme. Firstly the aim was to improve the transport network and support the regeneration of East London. The second aim was

to build communities' capability to identify and remove barriers to participation for disabled people.

(ODI/ DCMS, 2011)

In his closing speech IPC President Sir Philip Craven described London 2012 as "the greatest Paralympic Games ever" (IPC website, 2012a). According to the IPC website (2012b) the Games set many new records, which the following statistics highlight. There were records for the number of competing nations (164), number of athletes (4237), number of tickets sold (2.7 million) with most events and sessions selling out and, perhaps most importantly the London 2012 Paralympic Games were televised in more countries than ever before, attracting their biggest ever international audience. In the UK, rights holder Channel 4, who won the rights in a first ever competitive bidding situation with the BBC, screened over 150 hours of live coverage, achieving record audiences. More than 11.2 million watched the Opening Ceremony, which was Channel 4's biggest audience for a decade and most days the channel enjoyed the biggest audience share of all the main UK television channels. Channel 4's coverage reached 39.9 million people, which amounts to over 69% of the UK population. According to the figures released by the International Paralympic Committee the London Paralympic 2012 Games were watched by a cumulative international audience of 3.4 billion (excluding the host nation), which is an increase of around 37 per cent on the last summer Games in Beijing. The London 2012 Games were broadcast in over 115 countries and the number of hours broadcast outside the host market grew by 82 per cent on 2008 to over 2,500 hours of content. The only real negative was the continued lack of interest in the Paralympic Games by the American television networks, with the US Olympic and Paralympic rights holder NBC showing

only five-and-a-half hours of highlights, no live coverage, and no coverage at all of the opening and closing ceremonies. Social media also played a significant role in spreading interest in Paralympic sport (Beacom, French and Kendall, 2016). A report published by Twitter revealed that the hashtag #Paralympics topped the table for the most trending UK sport event of 2012 beating off stiff competition from the Olympic Games and many leading Premiership football clubs. Around 50 leading athletes also took part in the Samsung Bloggers project which saw them record and post video blogs from behind the scenes before, during and after the London 2012 Games. Over 600 video blogs were uploaded and were viewed by over 300,000 people (Brittain, 2014).

Analysis of a range of accounts on the impact of the London 2012 Paralympic Games on British society identified one prominent factor – there is a marked difference in opinion between the findings and focus of the British government and those of Disabled People’s Organisations and the experiences of disabled individuals. The following two reports clearly demonstrate these differences.

The Government post-Games perspective on Paralympic legacy

A joint UK Government and Mayor of London report published in July 2013, nearly a year after the London Paralympic Games had ended, cited the following headline achievements under the chapter entitled ‘The Legacy of the Paralympics’:

- 81% of people surveyed thought that the Games had a positive effect on how disabled people are viewed by the British public.

- Disabled people's participation in sport is increasing.
- Increased funding for Paralympics GB through to Rio 2016
- Increased funding to support access and participation in sport at community level
- Increased accessibility on the transport system, in venues and in other environments
- Paralympic Legacy Advisory Group established to support the Cabinet Committee

(UK Government/ Mayor of London, 2013)

Disabled People's Organisation's post-Games perspective on Paralympic legacy

In contrast to the UK government perspective, the results of research by some Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) and the experiences of individual disabled people differed markedly from the upbeat findings of government reports such as those highlighted above. An example of this can be seen in a report by the charity Scope published at around the same time, which indicated the following findings after interviewing around one thousand disabled people:

- 81% of disabled people said that attitudes towards them hadn't improved in the last 12 months
- 22% said that things had actually got worse
- one in five (17%) of disabled people report they have either experienced hostile or threatening behaviour or even been attacked.

- one in five (16%) of disabled people say they cannot keep up with rising costs of living.
- Disabled people are three times more likely to take out high interest, high risk loans to pay the bills.
- ONS data showed that nearly half disabled people have had issues accessing leisure activities.
- A 2012 polling for Scope showed that three-quarters of disabled people had experienced people refusing to make adjustments or do things differently.

(Scope, 2013)

Given such contending stakeholder perspectives on the 2012 legacy what was the experience on the ground, for disabled people?

2012 and Paralympic Games – challenging the legacy benefits.

The national and indeed global economic context within which the 2012 Paralympic Games took place is significant since, taken together with a change in the UK national government in 2010, public policy developments concerning the welfare of disabled people were, rightly or wrongly, interpreted as a reflection of government commitment to legacy.

The UK Government and Benefit Cuts - A problem with timing

As part of their plans for economic recovery the UK Government introduced a series of benefit changes that, following initial testing in 2011, were fully introduced in April 2013. These include the closure of the Independent Living Fund, the introduction of Personal Independence Payments (PIP) (replacing the Disability Living Allowance, which was a tax-free benefit for children and adults who need help with personal care or their mobility needs.) and the 'Bedroom tax', which is charged to anyone who is a council or housing tenant of working age receiving housing benefit and renting a home that has 'spare bedrooms' (UK Government website, 2014)

According to Gentleman (2011) the government promised in 2010 to reduce working age expenditure on PIP by 20% on the forecast expenditure for 2015/16, triggering suspicion among campaigners that the changes were motivated by the need to cut costs rather than to improve the way the benefit is distributed. Gentleman goes on to cite Richard Hawkes of the charity Scope as saying "How can you decide that [a reform] is going to save 20% in advance? I would think that this is driven by cost reductions, and that they have come up with a way of assessing people that will result in the cost savings they want to make," As part of the introduction of the new Personal Independence Payments the Government contracted a private company, Atos, to provide 'fitness for work assessments'.

The campaigning site Disability Rights UK highlighted similar concerns about the impact of proposed changes to the quality of life of disabled people. In August 2013 it noted that the British Paralympic Association had confirmed that 'several of the

medallists who helped transform attitudes towards disability in the UK believe the scrapping of Disability Living Allowance is threatening the long-term legacy of London 2012' (Disability Rights UK, 28 August 2013). It named individual Paralympians including the triple Paralympic Equestrian champion Sophie Christiansen, who witnessed the impact not only on the short term life chances of disabled people, but also a negative impact on medal prospects for 2020 and beyond (through for example lack of funding for parents who require specially adapted cars to take young children training). More recently Disability Rights UK expressed grave concerns about the impact of the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne's plans set out in the March 2016 budget, which, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, was projected to mean that by 2020 the £4.4bn cuts to PIP would mean that '370,000 disabled people would lose an average of £3500 a year' (Disability Rights UK, 18 March 2016).

The wider social and economic dynamics of such trends have for some time, been of concern to social researchers working in this area. According to Taylor-Gooby (2012 in Garthwaite, 2012, p. 55) the UK is witnessing increasing inequality, yet decreasing sympathy for those living in poverty, including benefits' recipients. Quarmby (2012, p. 70) comments on how coverage of welfare reform has categorised sick and disabled people as either victims – unable to speak for themselves and wholly dependent – or villains – sick and disabled people who do not deserve state help who were falsely claiming benefits. One anonymous responder to a poll carried out on the Scope website commented 'people's righteous anger towards those who falsify their claim for disability and other benefits has come to over-shadow their goodwill towards those who are 'genuinely' disabled and deserving of support' (Scope website, 2012).

Government rhetoric around benefits changes with its focus upon ‘fairness for taxpayers’ has fostered the notion that disabled people are a separate group who don’t contribute (Garthwaite, 2012, p. 55). That this was taking place against the backdrop of final preparations for the 2012 Paralympic Games and the commitment to shift public attitudes towards disability, demonstrates something of the legacy dilemma that was taking shape at that time.

Atos sponsors the Paralympic Games – A legacy of distrust

Atos, a French IT services specialist that has been providing IT services to the Olympic Movement and Games since 1989, became the official IT services provider to the Olympic Movement in 2001 and is one of the ten official TOP sponsors (insidethegames, 2013). At the beginning of 2008, the IPC signed an agreement with Atos to become its Worldwide Paralympic IT Partner, although the company has been the IT Partner for the 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012 Paralympic Games. However, in 2012 the company came under extremely heavy criticism for its sponsorship of the London 2012 Paralympic Games in light of its handling of the UK governments Work Capacity Assessments that many Disabled People’s Organisations claimed were little more than a cost cutting exercise as highlighted by the quote from Hawkes above. There were also a number of stories about individuals Atos Assessors declared fit for work who either died from their illness shortly after the assessment (BBC Website, 2012) or even starved to death as a result of losing their benefits (cf. Oxford Mail, 2014) This led to a number of the protests by Disabled People’s Organisations and disabled people at the Games themselves and at various Atos headquarters around the UK. There was even an online joke circulating at the time

that the Paralympic Games in London had been cancelled because Atos had ruled that the athletes were not disabled after all! (Pathwaysgroup, 2012). In April 2013 Atos signed a deal with the International Paralympic Committee to continue its sponsorship of the Paralympic Games until Rio 2016. However, in March 2014 it also announced that it was quitting the Department of Work and Pensions contract early, having to pay considerable compensation to the government in the process and citing the negative coverage they had received and an inability to make sufficient profit as the reasons. They also claimed they and their staff had been vilified and that Atos had become a 'lightning rod' for public anger related to the Work Capacity Assessments (BBC website, 2014). It would appear, therefore, that despite their close links to the Paralympic Games and the legacy agenda set for the London 2012 Paralympic Games, particularly around raising the profile of disabled people's talents, both Atos (in terms of wanting to make a profit) and the British Government through the Department of Work and Pensions, (in terms of wanting to cut budgets) were both driven by an economic imperative. Rather than adopting an approach based on a social model of disability they were adopting a medicalised approach to assessment as well as potentially understating an individual's level of impairment in order to either cut costs or make a profit. Such an approach appeared to run completely counter to the legacy aims espoused by the British Government in the lead up to the Games. However, these criticisms appear to at least be partly borne out by comments made by Iain Duncan Smith, the former Minister at the Department of Works and Pensions, in his resignation letter to the Prime Minister, when he claimed that the current March 2016 budget, which pitted huge cuts to the disability welfare budget against tax giveaways for higher earners, seriously brought into question government claims that we are 'all in this together' (Lewis, 2016). If true, then this clearly demonstrates some

of the ways society and those with power within it give preference to those deemed most productive and how disabled people may be made to suffer by comparison.

Did the London 2012 Paralympic Games Really Change Attitudes Towards Disabled People?

So where does this leave the legacy aims espoused for the London 2012 Paralympic Games in the lead up to the Games? The signs are at best mixed with the government and the organising committee on one side proclaiming great changes as a result of the Paralympic Games and Disabled People's Organisations on the other feeling far less convinced. Particularly apparent when reading the comments by Disabled People's Organisations and disabled individuals is the disconnect they feel with both Paralympians on the one hand and society in general and government policy in particular on the other. Walker (2012) commented 'The Paralympics showcases the amazing achievements and triumphs of a tiny percentage of disabled people - just as the Olympics demonstrates what a tiny percentage of 'able-bodied' people are able to achieve.' Alice Maynard, Chair of the disability charity Scope, explained the importance of this differentiation when she stated 'The Paralympics has inspired a small number to be more involved in sport or the community. But ultimately it comes down a simple point: if you don't have the support you need to get up, get washed and get out of the house; if you're struggling to pay the bills – it's a big ask to join a tennis club (Scope website, 2013). In addition to this Alan Roulstone (2012), Professor of Applied Social Sciences (Disability Policy) in the UK wrote on the policy press blogsite 'The most difficult aspect of the Paralympics for many disabled people has been the bizarre juxtaposition of seeing great sporting achievements (rightly) being

applauded and poster girl/boy images of photogenic disabled people alongside arguably the most aggressive and top-down reform of welfare since the Poor Law.’

The media representation of disability provides an important indicator concerning continuity and change in wider public perceptions of what it means to be disabled (Happer & Philo, 2013, p. 1). Sometime in 2010 Inclusion London commissioned a report analysing changes in the way media reported disability and how it has impacted upon public attitudes towards disabled people. This was done by comparing media coverage of disability in five British newspapers in 2010-11 with a similar period in 2004-5 in conjunction with a series of focus groups. The final report, published in late 2011, highlighted the following key findings, which reflect the wider implications of how disability is represented:

- There had been a significant increase in disability related articles (713 in 2004-5, 1015 in 2010-11)
- There was an increased politicisation of the way disability was reported in 2010-11 (the point at which the current government were elected) compared with 2004-5
- There had been a reduction in the proportion of articles that described disabled people in sympathetic and deserving terms
- Articles focusing on disability benefit and fraud increased from 2.8% in 2004-5 to 6.1% in 2010-11
- The use of terms such as ‘scrounger’, ‘cheat’ and ‘skiver’ was found in 18% of articles in 2010-11 compared to 12% in 2004-5 and these changes reinforced the idea of disabled claimants as undeserving

- Disabled people are feeling threatened by the changes in the way disability is being reported and by the proposed benefit changes and these two are combining and reinforcing each other.

(Briant, Watson & Philo, 2011)

The capacity of the media to contribute to the legacy agenda, is then, mixed. Certainly, some Paralympians have become celebrities as a result of the media coverage they received from London 2012 (combined, of course, with their sporting successes). However, the apparent inability of some people to differentiate between Paralympians and the average everyday disabled person, possibly driven by media coverage of both benefits changes and the Games themselves and government rhetoric around them, is seen as causing more problems than it solves. The following quote from Bush et al (2013) is indicative of this:

He'd already sensed the disappointment lurking behind people's eyes when he told them he was not training for a future Paralympics. People would now expect this, yet he was more worried about the day-to-day struggles of being disabled

(Bush et al, 2013, p. 635)

Research carried out by the Australian Paralympic Committee (APC) interviewing spectators at disability sports events in Australia appear to confirm this as according to Tony Naar, the former Knowledge Services Manager at APC, the results appear to show that it is only spectators attitudes towards the actual athletes and not the disabled population as a whole that are changed (Naar, 2014, personal communication).

Concluding thoughts

Sports mega-events do not take place in a vacuum. They are subject to wider social, economic and political dynamics and, as such, it is extremely challenging to effectively plan for legacy. Such dynamics can work for or against the legacy process in unexpected ways. It is doubtful that the International Paralympic Committee could ever have foreseen that their move towards an elite 'Olympic' sporting model might actually cause a partial fracture with the community they are supposed to represent or that the neoliberal economic policies of the host government might work to counter the legacy plans espoused by both the IPC and the host organising committee, even though the host government claimed to back the plans.

It is clear that the austere economic situation, combined with UK government plans for benefit cuts and the media reporting of these cuts has had a negative impact upon attitudes towards disability manifesting in a hardening of attitudes towards anyone who requires state-aided financial assistance to survive. Indeed even where Ministers have presented arguments in favour of protecting disability payments, the language of dependency which permeates their statements, have the potential to reinforce the otherness that predicates ableist thinking. Be it the IPC moving towards an elite sport focus or government policies espousing the importance of individual productivity, both in their own way appear to have, possibly inadvertently, provided opportunities that actually reinforce ableist perspectives of disability within society that run completely contradictory to their espoused legacy aspirations for the Paralympic Games in general and the London 2012 Paralympic Games in particular. It is also clear that many disabled people feel little connection, if any, to Paralympians, in

terms of the issues they face in their everyday lives and the perceived expectation by the non-disabled population that all disabled people can perform like Paralympians only makes this sense of disconnection greater.

The worldwide media coverage of recent Paralympic Games present a strong platform from which to start a debate around disability issues. There is no other current platform that provides such an opportunity to reach so many non-disabled people who are otherwise generally oblivious to disability issues other than the little, frequently politically charged, information they receive through the newspapers or the often ableist views they are socialised into whilst growing up. As Richard Hawkes, Chief Executive of Scope, points out we shouldn't write off the Paralympic Games effect because disabled people tell Scope that the greater visibility and public discussion of their lives does make a difference (Scope website, 2013). However, this in itself can be problematic depending upon the way these issues are presented, the language and rhetoric used and any inherent political biases within a particular media outlet.

While there are indications that the Paralympic Games does have agency in the sense that it provides a platform from which to engage in debate about disability issues, one important lesson for future hosts is that heightened expectations can create as many problems as they solve. This paper has highlighted deep societal / structural and ideological impediments to a more enlightened view of disability. No Paralympic Games can in itself, hope to counter such forces. Legacy aims can be viewed as facilitators for discreet areas of public policy. However by themselves they cannot hope to challenge long term systemic difficulties associated with the political and economic direction of travel. In a very real sense, each games is a child of its time.

Notes

1. There are some authors such as Peers (2009) that appear to question this accolade. Peers raises a number of other issues that she feels are overlooked in the issuing of this title including the agency of disabled people, but at no point does she indicate whether the Paralympic Games would exist today had Guttman not existed. She gives no indication of whether she even feels Guttman's contribution was significant or insignificant in her view, but merely decries him as paternalistic and self-promoting. These last two points may well have a large dose of truth to them, but that should not take away from the fact that through Guttman's drive and determination first with people with spinal cord injuries and then as President of ISOD (which was responsible in the sixties and seventies for the development of sport for amputees, cerebral palsied, blind and visually impaired and les autres) that Guttman was a, if not the, key figure in the founding of the movement that spawned the Paralympic Games.
2. The debate over the 'burden' of disability could in itself be interpreted as reflecting ableist perspectives on disability and in-line with neo-liberal perspectives on individual productivity which measures individual worth in the context of productivity.

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