



Leveraging Disability Sport Events: Impacts, Promises, And Possibilities

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Book Review

Dr Jenny Hall, York St John University, United Kingdom

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Leveraging Disability Sport Events is a monograph founded upon a longitudinal research project of global scope and scale. The volume provides insight into the social and political phenomenon concerning how large-scale sporting events are used to influence societal structures to garner equity. Over three-years, the researchers investigated the Glasgow Commonwealth Games 2014 (G2014) and the Toronto Pan-Am/Parapan American Games 2015 (TO215) producing an in-depth case study 'to offer learnings from other countries and contexts' (Chapter 1, 1). The book explores how parasports are used for community development; strategic alignment between event strategies; and impacts and outcomes for addressing disability issues, such as accessibility, participation and policy. The authors challenge scholars, event organisers and governments at all levels to consider how events are positioned, used and leveraged to create positive social change pre, during and post-event. Through the lens of critical disability studies, the research makes a significant contribution by highlighting the imbalance of power affecting social and political considerations concerning how persons of disability access societal structures. Following Shildrick (2007, 233), the study is founded in neither a rights-based or citizenship-based approach but seeks 'to extend and productively critique the achievements of working through more modernist paradigms of disability' (Chapter 1). In doing so, this multi-disciplinary, multi-site and interdisciplinary project exposes how disability remains subject to systemic discrimination and oppression in large scale event production.

The researchers ask us to rethink relations between disabled and non-disabled designations in terms of ethics and ontology, exposing how sports events spaces and places are key sites of power that privilege dominant ableist values. Similarly, to Brittain and Beacom's (2016) work on the London 2012 Paralympic Games, the findings demonstrate how persons with disabilities are included/excluded and expose the imbalance of power and privilege that reproduce norms of ability. The researchers identify a dearth in the literature that examines disability sports events and in particular studies that have applied a leveraging lens to understand the social impact of parasport events. Further suggesting that an absence of literature that explores how social change takes place in parasport events is compounded by a lack of critical scrutiny that leads parasports events to reinforce and replicate inequality in urban spaces. As such, the book contributes new insight on how city-bid processes over-inflate claims that disability sports events can 'fix' urban problems, yet they fail to substantively deliver on promises made and thus, legacy.

This volume provides key insight on how G2014 and TO2015 events were subject to systemic policy failure due, in part, to a lack of back-up with appropriate funding, resources and

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3 expertise for implementation on 'promises made' beyond the games. The authors argue that
4 the strategy, 'Awareness is Enough,' failed to deliver and they therefore identify that strategy
5 can only work if it is activated through appropriate resourcing (Chapter 4, 70). For example,
6 leveraging change was too detached from the organisation and management of the G2014
7 event, which created tension between the rhetoric of 'opportunity' and the claims that the
8 games had created and delivered enhanced accessibility. Moreover, key tensions between a
9 welfarist, in contrast to entrepreneurial models concerning marketisation of disability sports
10 events, were prevalent. Although mainstream media has significant potential to change
11 perceptions about disability, the authors found that para-athletes were predominantly
12 (mis)represented through 'inspirational' or 'brave', medicalised and 'supercrip' narratives.
13 These narratives rarely showed impairment. This framing reinforces media-constructed
14 realities that are divorced from the everyday lives of persons with disabilities and are in
15 danger of commercialising the growth in parasports. The researchers suggest that such
16 narratives serve to marginalise para-athletes by framing them as 'other' and exacerbate
17 social and spatial inequalities. However, it was identified that para-athletes had begun to
18 resist such representations through self-generated social media content, creating a new
19 paradigm for media circulation that challenges ableist mainstream media representations.

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26 Through a comparative analysis of management models that integrate parasports into the
27 main event, in contrast to distinct and separate parasports events that run in parallel, the
28 merits and challenges are explored. Analysis of the implications and impact both models
29 have across several domains is made including the effectiveness of management
30 committees; policy development; representation in marketing and media and how this
31 influences the attitudes and behaviours of spectators and volunteers; volunteer training and
32 development and finally an assessment of the legacies achieved and to what extent. Notably
33 the researchers conducted a large-scale survey of both volunteers and spectators. Using an
34 adapted version of Scale of Attitudes Towards Disabled Persons (SADP) the researchers
35 aimed to understand if there was any behavioural and attitudinal change because of the
36 games. By developing a new global measure to analyse global attitudinal change the
37 researchers found a significant difference between integrated and non-integrated models,
38 with a non-integrated model having a greater impact. However, it was found that attitudes
39 and awareness did not change significantly for either volunteers or spectators. The authors
40 note the limits of their research in terms of its focus on para-events taking place in the West
41 and the need for research that explores other cultures and regions.

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48 Analysis of organisational management committees and functions showed that caution is
49 required in the adoption of either model. Integrated models offered economies of scale and
50 specific parasport management functions that had the power to influence from within.
51 However, in G2014 this proved ineffectual when it came to leveraging the event's potential
52 and the authors argue that integrated models risk marginalising parasport aspects. The non-
53 integrated model adopted by TO2015 showed that para-events have distinction and
54 emphasis on legacy planning when organised in separate models, but risk exclusion from key
55 decision-making. In sum, there is no clear approach, and the authors make a call for further
56 research. In parallel with Brittain and Beacom (2016, 516) findings, both games showed
57 agency in providing a platform for engaging in debate about disability issues but as shown
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3 'can create as many problems as they solve'. As such, each event was subject to systemic,
4 political, societal and ideological challenges that no 'Paralympic Games can in itself hope to
5 counter...In a very real sense each Games is a child of its time' (Brittain & Beacom, 2016, 516).
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8 In sum, this book will appeal to scholars, event organisers and public authorities. It provides
9 a critical analysis of how parasports events present unique opportunities to leverage social
10 change for persons of disability. It does so, through highlighting key pitfalls and challenges
11 for delivering upon the promises made to deliver long-lasting social change and thus legacy.
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15 Brittain, I., Beacom, A. (2016). Leveraging the London 2012 Paralympic Games: What Legacy
16 for Disabled People? *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 40, 6, 499 – 521.
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