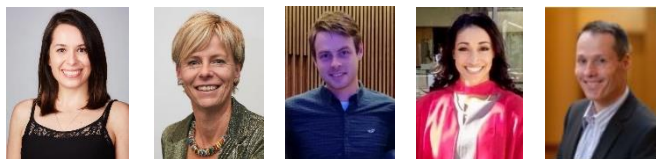


TOWARDS A SYSTEM THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE PARASPORT CONTEXT



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ABSTRACT

Research questions: Contextual factors are fundamental but often overlooked elements of Para sport that can introduce various complexities within the Para sport system. The purpose of this paper was to identify and categorize contextual factors that influence the Para sport system and to examine the extent to which these factors influence the development of Para athletes' pathways.

Research methods: Drawing from a system theoretical perspective, this research uses data gathered from 32 semi-structured interviews with stakeholders of the Brazilian Paralympic sports system.

Results and findings: Thematic analysis resulted in the identification of nine main themes that constitute the contextual factors of the Brazilian parasport system. (A) Social Components: (1) parasport awareness, (2) societal attitudes towards people with disability, (3) cultural components; (B) Political Components: (4) hosting the Paralympic Games, (5) educational components; (C) Economic Components: (6) financial aspects; (D) Legal Components: (7) accessibility; (E) Technology Components: (8) adapted equipment. The Classification System emerged as the ninth theme and reveals the complexity of parasport systems.

Implications: The findings confirmed that insofar as Para sport is embedded in the complex cultural and national environment, it is not possible to understand Para sport and the Para athlete trajectories without understanding the country's particular context with respect to disability. This paper thus provides insights toward better understanding the relationship between the diversity within the Para sport systems and the sociocultural context of a country.

This is a summary of a published paper that should be referred as follows:

Patatas, J.M., De Bosscher, V., De Cocq, S., Jacobs, S., Legg, D. (2019). Towards a system theoretical understanding of the parasport context. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, published online, DOI: 10.1080/24704067.2019.1604078.

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STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

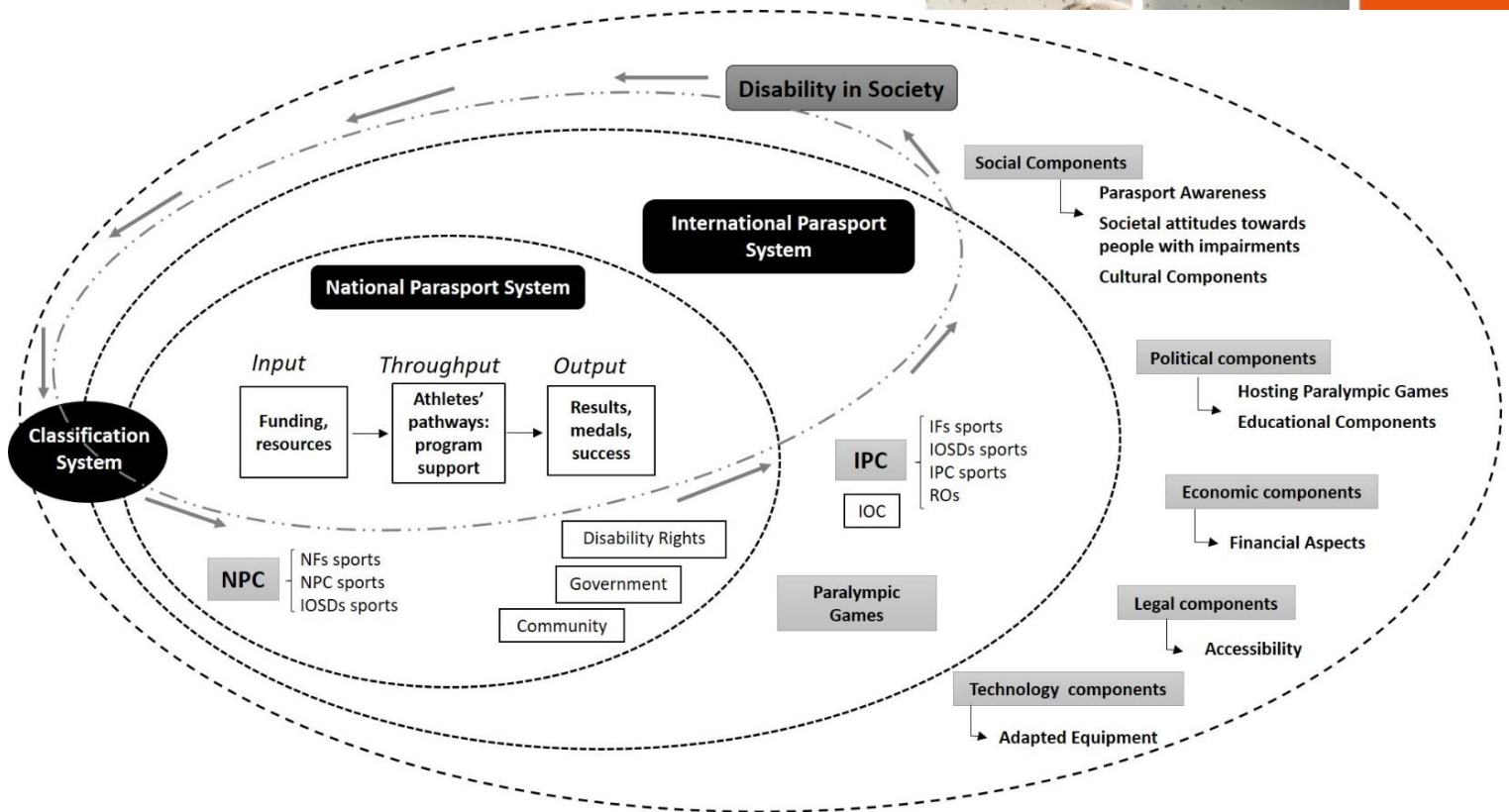
- The findings identified key contextual factors that influence the Brazilian Para sport system and the development of Para athletes' pathways.
- Results emphasized the link between Para sport and how people with disability are perceived and treated in society, the extent to which hosting the Paralympic Games in 2016 contributed to raising awareness about people with disability in Brazil, and how the Paralympic Games improved the societal attitudes towards this population in Brazil.
- Raising awareness about disability and Para sports need to be an integral part of the action plans developed by both researchers and stakeholders when addressing the Para sport context.

IMPLICATIONS

- The findings of this paper can inform future studies in the Para sport domain, contribute to the body of knowledge about Para sports, and also present a benchmark for future research as it lays a foundation for researchers that wish to adopt a system theoretical lens inspired by critical realist perspectives.
- This study provides some insights into the importance of considering national contexts in evaluating and optimizing sports systems, as well as when applying theory and conducting research in Para sports.

Figure 1. Components that constitute the contextual factors of the Brazilian Para sport system influencing the trajectory of Para athletes during the development of their sporting careers.

The findings from this paper acknowledge and recognize the unique features that characterize the Para sport milieu and the broader macro-level context in which it is situated (due to the different socio-cultural context and needs of people with an impairment both in and outside of the sports context). Furthermore, these findings could be a helpful tool for organizations from outside the Paralympic domain, who also support Para athletes in their given sport (as some Para sport is developed within able-bodied sports federations).



- The identified components influenced all three levels systematised in Figure 1 (i.e., disability within society, within the international Para sport system, and within the national Para sport system), and consequently, these levels also influence each other in a continuum. It is thus important to point out that the context of disability in society is present during all phases of a Para athlete career path in the sport.
- The ninth theme represented the classification system, which is an inherent and essential part of Para sport systems and influences the trajectory of Para athletes during the development of their sporting careers.
- The grey dotted circle in Figure 1 was created to represent the continuum of Para athletes' pathways. A person with a congenital or acquired impairment starts a trajectory in the sport, for instance, by entering into the national Para sport system. Prior to participating in a competition, a Para athlete will be assigned a sport class determined by the classification system. In this regard, the classification system distinguishes the Para sport system from the able-bodied sports system.