

# MANAGING PARASPORT: AN INVESTIGATION OF SPORT POLICY FACTORS AND STAKEHOLDERS INFLUENCING PARA ATHLETES' CAREER PATHWAYS



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## ABSTRACT

**Research questions:** The way disability is understood and positioned by key stakeholders informs how policies are implemented in the development of pathways to sporting excellence of an athlete with a disability. This paper aimed to identify which sports policy factors and stakeholders influence the development of athletic career pathways in Paralympic sport (i.e., attraction, retention, competition, talent identification and development, elite, and retirement phases).

**Research methods:** Drawing from the social relational model of disability and the nine pillars of the SPLISS framework, an interview protocol on policy dimensions and principles to support Para athletes' development was created, and 32 key stakeholders from the Brazilian Paralympic sport context were interviewed.

**Results and findings:** The data revealed that coaching provision and education as a policy factor and coaches with disability-specific knowledge as a stakeholder were perceived as most influential during all the phases of Para athletes' careers. The classification system emerged as a Para sport-specific factor that can facilitate or inhibit the development of Para athletes' careers, influencing the implementation of policies.

**Implications:** Critically positioning disability within policy decision making can improve the thinking, action, and behaviour of policymakers, coaches, and sports managers, leading to the more efficient delivery of successful Para athletes' careers.

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

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## STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

- Understanding the concept of disability is notably essential when stakeholders have to think strategically and adapt management principles from able-bodied sporting contexts.
- Coaching provision and education as a policy dimension, and the coaches themselves as a key stakeholder are highly involved during most of the phases of Para athletes' pathways.
- Athletic careers in Para sport are disability-specific driven, and the support services that are provided to the athletes should be tailored to each disability group and sport classification.

## IMPLICATIONS

- The way disability is understood could serve as a departure point for policy implementation, which may vary in order to reflect Para athletes' specific needs.
- It is recommended that the support services that are provided to the athletes, as well as, the policy agenda, should be tailored to each disability group and athlete's sport classification. In addition, the need to integrate Para athletes into a broader sporting environment should also be acknowledged while considering social and contextual factors.

Table 1. Overview of factors that facilitate or inhibit the development of para-athletes' career and the stakeholders influencing each phase of athletic pathways in Brazil as perceived by the participants.

The findings from this study suggested that the policy dimensions noted within the SPLISS framework are important and may offer some critical elements that can serve as best principles to the Para sport context. However, most of them need adaptation to effectively fit the specific needs of Para athletes. The way Para sport policies should be shaped and implemented requires a holistic, flexible, and context-specific approach.

Sport Policy Factors	Stakeholders
<b>Attraction Phase</b>	
Coaching Provision & Education	Coaches with disability-specific knowledge, PE teachers
Classification System	Classifiers
Accessible Training Facilities	Sports clubs, Schools
Foundation & Sports Participation	Health personnel, Special need schools, Rehabilitation centres, Support Staff, Caregivers
Financial Support	Family
Organisation & Structure of Parasport	NPC, Local Sports Organisations
<b>Retention Phase</b>	
Coaching Provision & Education	Coaches with disability-specific knowledge, Sports Federations
National Competition	NPC, Sports Federations
Classification System	Classifiers
Financial Support	NPC, Family
Foundation & Sports Participation	Sports clubs
Accessible Training Facilities	Coaches with disability-specific knowledge, Sports clubs
<b>Competition Phase</b>	
Coaching Provision & Education	Coaches with disability-specific knowledge
Regional and national competitions	NPC, Sports Federations
Classification System	Classifiers, NPC
Financial support	Sports Federations, Government, Sports clubs, Family
<b>Talent ID &amp; Development Phase</b>	
Coaching Provision & Education	National coaches
National Competition & Classification System	NPC, Classifiers, Coaches
Financial Support & Athletic Support	NPC, Sports Federations
<b>Elite Phase</b>	
Financial Support, Organisation & Structure	NPC, Government
Coaching Provision & Education	National Coaches
(Inter)national Competition	NPC, Federations, Classifiers, IPC
Accessible Training Facilities	Qualified Coaches, NPC, Support staff team, Medical/health team, Sport Scientist
Classification System	Inter(national) Classifiers
Athletic Support & Scientific Research	Support staff team, Medical/health team, Career Manager, Universities, Sport Scientist