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Overview of Media Coverage of the Paralympic Games in Benin

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Abstract

This study examined media coverage of the Paralympic Games in Benin. The objective was to take stock of the factors limiting the visibility of Paralympic sports in Benin. The approach followed consisted of collecting information using an interview guide addressed to sports journalists, para-athletes, and leaders of organizations that organize sports. The mechanistic approach of the SWOT model served as a theoretical framework for the research. The results reveal that the media's low enthusiasm for covering the Beninese Paralympic Games stems from insufficient financial resources, difficulties linked to division rights, and the state of the Beninese economy. In addition, the latter believes that media coverage of the Paralympic Games in Benin is excessively expensive. This hurts the development of Beninese para-sport. It is important to think about better visibility of para sport in the Republic of Benin by changing media tools for better quality of images and videos, and by creating websites to publish Beninese talents. Also, create television channels only for Beninese sports. There is also the state subsidy, which plays a vital role in the visibility of para sport in Benin. For example, the state subsidy for the Handisport federation is approximately 40000000 FCFA in 2023, compared to 15000000 FCFA in 2022. Note that a considerable effort from the government has been noted, even if this remains insufficient.

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Introduction

The Paralympic Games are a large-scale media event with the potential to raise the profile of sport for people

with disabilities and potentially highlight disability issues in a social context. The London 2012 Paralympic Games were the largest event ever recorded, with 2.7 million spectators and a television audience of 3.8 billion

(Games, 2016). The 2012 Paralympic Games were followed by the 2020 Summer Paralympics, officially the 16th Summer Paralympic Games, in Tokyo, Japan.

The portrayal of people with disabilities in the media is often stereotypical, evoking "emotions of pity, fear, and admiration" (Barnes and Mercer, 2003; Bartlett, *et al.*, 2015), with no exception for elite athletes with disabilities. Content analysis of television coverage of the 1996 Paralympic Games showed that elite athletes with disabilities were portrayed positively, but negative references remained. For example, the Paralympic Games were not a "real" competition, and the athletes were not considered "real elite athletes." Television coverage was sparse (four hours in total in the United States), and gender inequality was reinforced with male athletes being shown more than female athletes with disabilities. A "hierarchy" of the different disabilities was also noted, with more coverage of wheelchair athletes than amputees or blind athletes, while those with cerebral palsy were not shown at all (Sparkes, 2005).

Societal attitudes toward disabilities are a known barrier to the participation of people with disabilities (Rimmer *et al.*, 2004), and the media play a role in shaping it. Positive media portrayals and narratives have the potential to influence societal attitudes and behaviors toward people with disabilities (Swain & French, 2000). Indeed, media coverage of the Paralympic Games is believed to be critical in raising public awareness, changing perceptions, and promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities.

In Benin, a platform promoting Paralympic athletes would help the media break down stereotypes and showcase the extraordinary abilities of these exceptional athletes. Para sports, also known as Paralympic sports, offer people with disabilities the opportunity to actively participate in sporting activities and showcase their exceptional athletic skills. However, despite their importance in promoting social inclusion and the empowerment of people with disabilities, the media coverage of the para sports in Benin remains limited. Media coverage is a major issue in the Beninese context. These messages, broadcast through community or private radio stations, are crucial for informing and raising awareness among the population on various topics such as health, education, agriculture, etc. Nevertheless, several factors limit this media coverage in Benin. Moreover, it is crucial to emphasize that media coverage of the Paralympic Games in Benin is not only a matter of visibility for the athletes, but it is also an opportunity to

change mentalities and promote inclusion. By highlighting the stories of courage, determination, and success of Beninese Paralympic athletes, the media can play a key role in inspiring an entire generation.

Participating in an elite sport provides an opportunity to challenge society's expected norms regarding exercise, health, and well-being for people with disabilities (Blauwet and Willick, 2012). Beninese media should pay more attention to the Paralympic Games and the athletes who participate in them. This requires investment in the creation of appropriate content, as well as increased awareness of the importance of including people with disabilities in society. Based on this premise, what factors limit media coverage of Paralympic sports in Benin?

Materials and Methods

This study is based on the analysis of qualitative data. It is qualitative because it aims to research, using an interview guide addressed to media actors and Paralympic actors in Benin, the reasons that justify the absence of Paralympic athletes in the media in Benin, and to obtain the reaction of these athletes to this absence in the media. The survey population is therefore made up of all the subjects who are potentially concerned by our survey (Tito, 2021). For this purpose, we considered as the survey population the Office of Radio and Television Broadcasting of Benin (ORTB) R1 and R2, Canal 3 Benin (R3), Méga Sport (R4), Le Matinal (R5), Icone TV (R6), Radio Fraternité de Parakou (R7), and the Paralympic actors. (CNP, AT). The interview guide used opted, depending on the case and the nature of the information sought, for structured and semi-structured interviews. After data collection, the information collected was subject to computerized processing. Regarding the analysis of the questionnaire, the level of each question was evaluated by taking into account the number of times a response was said to be the most important. Similarly, out of the total number of subjects, the percentage "n" with "n" for the number of times an answer was chosen are taken into account. At the end, the ranking was made and is based on the calculation results.

Results and Discussion

Current situation of Sports and Paralympics in Benin

The level of Beninese sport is experiencing a much better boom than in previous years. This allows for the

diversification of sports disciplines and their development, as expressed by journalist R2, saying: *"Beninese sport is growing in almost all sports disciplines despite the meager resources, athletes are doing their best to be able to represent Benin with dignity on the continental and global level."* He continues by giving the elements allowing to evaluate the sporting performance: *"To truly know the current level of sport in Benin, one must measure oneself against other athletes of their discipline by taking part in regional, continental, and world competitions to know one's true level."* To obtain results, good treatment of Beninese athletes is essential, but adequate means are not available for them. It is regarding this that subject R3 says: *"Generally speaking, Benin has enough talents but the real problem is the availability of financial means for the maintenance of these talents. Sometimes some athletes take money out of their own pockets to maintain themselves, to improve their performance."* Subject R1 aligns in the same direction by saying that there is: *"A bad policy of the state."*

As for the disabled sports, which are adapted sports for people with disabilities, they are making enough effort to raise the Beninese flag in this field. This is the reason they have a federation called the Disabled Sports Federation with a National Paralympic Committee. Subject R4 follows the same logic by saying, *"Disabled sports are also struggling despite the determination of those involved. There are no benchmark competitions or prestigious victories."* Interview 1 shows that in Benin, the sports press is underdeveloped in the Paralympic field. Indeed, the vast majority of media outlets have little or no interest in adapted sports, which results in a lack of awareness of the performances of Beninese Paralympic athletes by the general public.

Sports media and the organization of para-sport events in Benin

According to sports media professionals, they are severely under-resourced in their field. Indeed, the sports press is struggling in Benin due to a lack of seriousness in this sector, such as funding, and a lack of consideration for sports journalists. Thus, subject R6 expresses it in these terms: *"Beninese sports journalists are marginalized."*

Regarding the organization of para-sporting events in Benin, we can say that there is a national competition that is organized once a year. This means that disabled sports competitions in Benin are rare. Thus, some

athletes say: *"You will train for a whole year, and it is merely a single competition of a day or two that you might play"* AT. The CNP agrees by saying: *"We are working to organize other competitions for our athletes in the different para-sporting disciplines but due to lack of financial and material resources we are not yet able to do it."*

The media coverage of the Paralympic Games in Benin has generated less enthusiasm from the media. The CNP and journalists are following this logic in these terms: *"To be honest, there has been very little media coverage of the Paralympic Games in Benin. On the other hand, there have been several coverages of the 2012 to 2019-2020 Olympic Games."* Similarly, subject 7 states: *"We can also note the presence of a few local journalists who have a real passion for adapted sport and who regularly cover national Paralympic competitions. These journalists work to offer greater visibility to the Beninese Paralympic athletes and to change mentalities regarding disability in Beninese society. Despite these initiatives, there is still much to be done to improve media coverage of the sports press in the Paralympic field in Benin. Beninese Paralympic athletes deserve to be recognized and respected for their performances and courage, and this requires greater media coverage."* From interview 2, which presents the sports media in Benin, it emerges that there is a marginalization of sports journalists, which is the basis of the lack of enthusiasm for Paralympic activities.

Media motivation and presence for sporting events and the Paralympic Games in Benin

In many federations, which typically rely on government funding, limited resources are allocated to the press for covering and promoting various activities. This concern is voiced by subject R1, who states: *"Lack of financial resources."* Consequently, the press is not prioritized, leaving journalists unmotivated to cover Paralympic events and competitions. This sentiment is echoed by subject R6, who claims, *"Beninese sports journalists are marginalized."* Another participant notes: *"The budgets and funds allocated to the media are insignificant."* R7 adds that even when the national football team plays in Benin, it often cannot be broadcast on television; subject 5 explains this by saying, *"Broadcasting rights are too expensive."* Benin, a country with a struggling economy, has a significant portion of its population living below the poverty line, resulting in inadequate funding for both the media and para-athletes, despite the Beninese government's efforts. The CNP thus asserts, *"The*

economic situation in Benin and that of para-athletes need to be reviewed." This situation leads to reduced enthusiasm from the media for Paralympic events. Consequently, subject AT believes, "The media are generally more present and motivated for sporting events that generate high interest and involve high-level competitions." Interview 3 highlights that the high costs of image rights contribute to the media's greater interest in prominent sporting events rather than Paralympic competitions, which tend to be overshadowed.

Impacts of the media on Paralympic sports and the Beninese society

Considering the impact of the media on Paralympic sport and Beninese society, media stakeholders are aware of the benefits that this coverage can have on Beninese society, such as the inclusion of people with disabilities and the visibility of the media. Subject R1 addresses this in these terms: *"The media can play a key role in raising awareness among the Beninese population about Paralympic sports and the status of people with disabilities. Media coverage can help break down stereotypes and prejudices associated with people with disabilities by showing their strength, determination, and success in sport."* Also, the CNP, along the same lines, says: *"Media coverage can also help promote Paralympic sport by providing visibility to athletes and informing the public about sporting events. The media can thus help encourage people with disabilities to practice adapted sport."* If only the media could play their role, this would allow for good visibility of Beninese Paralympic athletes. It is in this perspective that subject R5 states: *"The media can also play a lobbying role in favor of Paralympic sport by highlighting the problems faced by athletes and asking the Beninese government to provide them with adequate support."* Finally, the media reaches the largest number of people for those who cannot be on site for sporting events. They are the fastest way to share the action with those who cannot be on site for sporting events. It is in this logic that subject R5 states: *"The media can inspire young people in Benin by showing them examples of courage and determination of Paralympic athletes. A report on these athletes can influence children with disabilities to start practicing adapted sports or inspire other young people to pursue a sporting career."* From interview 4, which presents the impact that media coverage of the Paralympic Games in Benin can have on people with disabilities and Beninese societies, it should be noted that the media do not promote para-athletes because we do not feel there is any awareness-raising,

any lobbying towards the authorities, any promotion of Paralympic sport and inspiration for young people.

The Paralympic Games are a large-scale media event with the potential to raise the profile of sport for people with disabilities and highlight disability issues in a social context. The Paralympic Games take place "in parallel" to the Olympic Games and have progressed (Games, 2016). The Paralympic Games can be seen as one of the few opportunities for people with disabilities to gain media attention and communicate their requests and demands for participation in addressing social bias. Although the Olympic and Paralympic Games are officially considered parallel events, the Paralympic Games are often referred to as the poor cousin of the Olympic Games, receiving less funding from the government and other public institutions (Kell *et al.*, 2008; Green & Tanner, 2000). Analyzing the background of the interviewees, all possess national and international experience, with para-athletes and coaches having more than 10 years of international experience, while media actors have approximately 15 years of experience. Thus, we deduce that the interviewees collectively have over 10 years of experience at the international level. In addition, all stated that there is little media enthusiasm surrounding Paralympic sports events in Benin. The paradox is that these same media actors cover the Olympic Games. Many francophone studies have shown that not all public issues attract the same degree of journalistic attention (Champagne, 1993; Pappous, *et al.*, 2015; Howe, 2008). Literature on the sociology of "the event" has dealt extensively with this question. Despite the difficulty of this endeavor, which would require comparable specific work, media coverage of disabilities must be contextualized about other similar issues in TV news. If "road safety" and "cancer" can be well used in this comparison, it is because they became, like "disabilities," a priority of Jacques Chirac, the President of the Republic of France, from July 14, 2002. Despite this identical political value, the issue of disabilities is not as mediated as the other two presidential priorities. While the number of stories devoted to traffic accidents and cancer increased in 2003 (Grossetête, 2008b), those concerning disabilities decreased. Between 1995 and 2005, the issue of disabilities received approximately seven times fewer reports than road safety and three times fewer than cancer. The fact that the highest political hierarchy decrees the importance of an issue is not enough to ensure its emergence in the media, revealing that the journalistic universe is not merely a space for recording state and political logic (Marquet, *et al.*, 2016; Darcy,

2000). From the above, the Beninese media do not promote para-athletes or para-sport in Benin. However, if people with disabilities see their peers achieve sporting performances, this could facilitate good social inclusion on national and international levels. Para sport is sensational and extraordinary; focusing on these para-athletes could enhance the appeal of Beninese sport. Nevertheless, individuals with disabilities often create barriers between themselves, which hinders their sporting activities. Some authors who share this perspective argue that disabilities are less mediatized also because those affected do not form a homogeneous social group. Individuals with disabilities have little in common apart from their impairment(s). Furthermore, there are significant inequalities in access to public speaking resources depending on individual disability situations. For instance, people with mental disabilities struggle to form a collective or articulate common demands, let alone independently advocate for themselves. As some research on individuals with disabilities has indicated, "assimilation into society as a whole is preferred to identification with a particular group" (Ville, 2005). Acquired and inherited disabilities are not experienced similarly by their bearers, as "the onset of the disability at an early date favors the expression of this specific identity" (Smith & Thomas, 2005). For example, even among the hearing impaired, "oralists" oppose proponents of sign language, as a deeply deaf individual may not relate to those who became hard of hearing later in life. Solidarity and unity among people with disabilities would also contribute to better media coverage of the Paralympic Games. Furthermore, the precarious economic situation in Benin constitutes one of the main obstacles to media coverage of para sports in the country. With a GDP per capita of only \$2,265 in 2020 (World Bank), Benin faces significant financial constraints, limiting resources available to support and promote para sports.

Sports infrastructure suitable for individuals with disabilities is rare and requires considerable financial investment. Benin's economic situation plays a crucial role in media coverage of para sports. Indeed, weak economic development can lead to insufficient budget and funding allocations for media outlets, hampering their ability to broadcast para-sport content intensively and effectively. According to the World Bank's 2020 "Economic Situation of Benin" study, the country has a poverty rate exceeding 40%. This complex economic reality results in insufficient resources to develop media outlets and support the dissemination of information regarding para-sport.

Additionally, para-athletes themselves often face financial difficulties, making their participation in sporting events even more complex. Funding issues for travel, specialized equipment, and training fees make it difficult to implement a training and preparation program ahead of competitions.

Furthermore, Beninese media outlets also face budgetary constraints that limit their ability to adequately cover para-sport. According to a 2019 study conducted by the Observatory for Democracy and Human Rights (ODDH), nearly 80% of media outlets in Benin face financial difficulties, resulting in insufficient media coverage of many sporting events, including para-sport.

Budget allocation and the availability of funds for the media are essential factors in ensuring adequate media coverage of para sports. Unfortunately, in Benin, these resources are often limited and given low priority. According to a study specializing in freedom of expression, in 2019, public expenses on media in Benin were less than 0.5% of the national budget. This minimal proportion reveals a lack of priority given to the media and their ability to effectively broadcast para sports. Another significant obstacle to media coverage of Paralympic sports in Benin is broadcasting rights.

National bodies responsible for regulating and collecting broadcasting rights often require high broadcasting rights for sporting events. This discourages media from covering para sports, given that the potential audiences for this type of content are often more limited than for traditional sports. Factors related to broadcasting rights for para sports, such as regulations and administrative procedures, also limit media coverage in Benin. These factors often hinder the dissemination of these public service announcements.

Although the Beninese government has implemented various initiatives to promote sport for people with disabilities, the amount of subsidies allocated is often insufficient (3,978,548,763 CFA francs compared to 1,357,500,000 CFA francs in 2022) to cover the financial needs related to media coverage of para sports. For example, the state subsidy for the Handisport Federation is approximately 40,000,000 CFA francs in 2023 compared to 15,000,000 CFA francs in 2022. It should be noted that a considerable effort from the government is noted, even if this remains insufficient. Subsidies are generally directed towards the direct participation of para-athletes in competitions rather than the media promotion of their exploits. State subsidies can play a

major role in promoting media coverage of para sports. However, in Benin, these subsidies are often limited, and their actual impact remains mixed. According to statistics from the 2018 annual report of the Ministry of Communication of Benin, only 5% of media outlets receive government subsidies. Moreover, these subsidies are often insufficient to fully support the production and broadcasting of para-sport on a large scale.

Conclusion

This study was initiated and carried out to take stock of the factors limiting the visibility of Paralympic sports in Benin. In a mechanistic approach of the SWOT model (2022), the objectives of our investigations were to seek the reasons that justify the absence of Paralympic athletes in the media in Benin and to obtain the reaction of Paralympic athletes to their absence in the media.

To achieve this objective, we used a methodological approach to concepts mobilized by the [SWOT theory \(2022\)](#). Regarding this, we used the interview guide. Media actors, para-athletes, and coaches were interviewed anonymously. This investigative technique allowed us to collect, process, and analyze data relating to the state of play of the Paralympic Games in Benin. The data collected was subjected to analysis and interpretation. Indeed, the main results of our study confirmed that the Paralympic Games are not covered by the Beninese media, and reveal the lack of visibility in the field of para-sport in Benin. Thus, the study allowed us to confirm the hypotheses of our research, according to which in Benin, communication actors render little importance to the Paralympic Games, and the Beninese National Paralympic Committee does not have a good communication plan.

Media coverage of para sports in Benin is limited due to multiple factors, including the precarious economic situation, budget allocation, and funding allocated to the media, restrictions on broadcasting rights, and government subsidies. These obstacles hinder the effective dissemination of important messages in the country. However, it is essential to recognize the importance of para sports in promoting social inclusion and to make efforts to overcome these obstacles. Increased investment in adapted sports infrastructure, dedicated grants for media promotion of para sports, and increased public awareness of the achievements of athletes with disabilities are necessary to promote adequate and equitable media coverage of para sports in Benin.

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