

[Research Notes] Paralympics and an Inclusive Society

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One of the social roles or effects of the Paralympics that is often cited is its catalytic role or effect in creating an inclusive society.

This effect can be broadly classified into three: (1) the impact on disabled people's independence and social participation, (2) impact on able-bodied people's attitudes and views on disabled people, and (3) changes in the social environment from the impact on organizations and systems, and technological development. If such an effect can be expected to lead to the creation of an inclusive society, its process would share many similar features with the inclusion of or coexistence with social groups that are seen as "socially vulnerable" or a "minority (in political terms)" and who are often exposed to the same kind of discrimination and bias as disabled people. Such social groups include women, sexual minorities, refugees, immigrants, ethnic minorities, and the elderly. Like many disabled people, members of these groups did not choose to belong to the group; rather, external factors were often central to becoming assigned to a group. In other words, it can be said that ensuring social equality for such "vulnerable" or "minority" groups is essential for creating an inclusive society.

To consider the Paralympics and an inclusive society from this standpoint, the observational and analytical focus will be on the following three areas: (A) effects on the social participation of people with disabilities, (B) indirect effects on and the improvement of conditions for other "socially vulnerable" people, and (C) (given that social groups are formed according to disability type) the impact on the way people with different disabilities live in cooperation with each other. Among these areas, (A) can be divided into the three aspects (1), (2), and (3) mentioned above.

A. Effects on the Social Participation of People with Disabilities

(1) Impact on disabled people's feeling of independence and social participation

Participation in the Paralympics, or engagement in sports activities as a preliminary step towards the Paralympics, gives disabled people confidence, and also naturally promotes social participation through interaction with assistants, coaches, and supporters, among others. Since people with a disability tend, unconsciously or not, to restrict themselves, they often undergo a shift in self-awareness as a preliminary step to participating in sports activities. For example, when the visually-impaired track and field athlete Misato Michishita was hospitalized as a junior high school student, she was deeply moved by the words of a male patient she became acquainted with at the hospital. She quotes the man's words as follows¹:

“God only gives hardships to those who can endure them. I have been chosen, and so have you.”

The fact that only people with disabilities can take part in the Paralympics can actually work as a catalyst for overcoming disability. This is because in the Paralympics, a disability is a characteristic, a part of a person's identity. The words of Junichi Kawai, a former Paralympian swimmer, are significant in this regard²:

“To me, being blind is not a handicap. It's a bit inconvenient, but it's a part of my identity.”

Each Paralympian also represents his or her country. Participating in the Paralympics as a member of Japan's national team is a contribution to the country, and that, in and of itself, is a symbol of social participation. It means “being on the same terms as” able-bodied athletes in the words of the wheelchair basketball player Kazuyuki Kyoya who retired after the London 2012 Paralympic Games. Kyoya says about this³:

“Wait a second. If I could play among the world's top wheelchair basketball

players in the Paralympics as a member of Japan's national team, wouldn't that mean I'm on equal terms with these guys (author's note: J. League players and members of Japan's national soccer team)? The sports are different, but we'd all be representing Japan, right?"

Support and encouragement from others is essential for people with disabilities to live an active, independent life. This process is linked to the idea of coexistence. In relation to this, Kyoya recalls his relationship with his wife as follows⁴:

"Just when I was starting to get really depressed, I told myself 'Hang on, I'm not alone. I've got Yoko,' and realized the importance of Yoko. This was the first time I understood what Yoko had meant when she suddenly started talking about us getting married."

However, some may doubt the extent to which the achievements of Paralympians contribute to encouraging "ordinary" people with disabilities to participate more in sports activities or in society. For instance, a survey showed that 60 percent of people with disabilities who watched the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Paralympic Games in Korea on television considered the achievements made in the Games to be mostly irrelevant to them⁵.

On the other hand, there have been cases in which the achievements of Paralympians had a ripple effect and led to the development of new athletes. The 1998 Nagano Winter Paralympic Games (hereinafter referred to as the "Nagano Paralympics") is an example, and it cannot be denied that the achievements of Paralympians encourage people with disabilities to participate in sports activities and in the Paralympics⁶.

(2) Impact on Able-bodied People's Attitudes and Views on People with Disabilities

The Paralympics has in numerous cases led to a change in awareness, not in disabled people, but in able-bodied people. For example, one legacy of the Nagano Paralympics was a change in ski slopes. The alpine skier and medalist Kuniko Obinata recalls as follows⁷:

“(Before the Nagano Paralympics) we used to go deep into the mountains because there were no other ski slopes that would accommodate disabled skiing teams... ‘We can’t be held responsible if you have an accident,’ ‘We have to stop the lift when a disabled person gets on.’ We’d be turned down like that every time... (The Nagano Paralympics was a turning point, and) more people became supportive of disabled skiing. I’d just have to say hello and they’d let me practice on the course.”

The Nagano Paralympics also seems to have led to a change in thinking among citizens in general. Citizen-led initiatives, for example with the chamber of commerce, were effective in making shopping arcades and public places accessible⁸.

In terms of information or communication, increased consideration for the visually-impaired was seen in the creation of a sculpture of the Nagano Paralympic logo to display at an event venue⁹, can be considered another “legacy” of the Nagano Paralympics. Although not directly related to the Nagano Paralympics, the fact that Braille inscriptions have been added to the back of Paralympic Games medals as a symbol of consideration for people with disabilities represents another element of a change of awareness among able-bodied people¹⁰.

The importance of balancing the feeling of independence of disabled people with support from able-bodied people is expressed by the writer Tsutomu Mizukami, who writes about the 1964 Tokyo Paralympic Games in the novel *Kurumaisu no Uta* [Song of the Wheelchair], based on his own experience as the father of a disabled child, and who campaigned for better treatment of disabled children. In one scene in the novel, the parents of a disabled child, after watching the Paralympic Games, come to feel that they themselves are the wheels of the wheelchair for their child. The scene implies that because they want to respect their child’s sense of independence as she tries not to use a wheelchair and to stand as much as possible using prosthetic legs, they realize that a disabled person’s feeling of independence needs to coexist in balance with support from able-bodied people¹¹. They say to their daughter:

“Kojima sensei said that neither you, Toko, nor Miyo needs a wheelchair, and that if you need a wheelchair it’s us, your parents, who are the two wheels of the wheelchair.”

Another result of the change in awareness among able-bodied people can be seen in the merging of able-bodied and disabled sports associations in the sports world. A symbolic change on a national government level was the transfer of administrative responsibility for supporting disabled athletes and providing support programs for the promotion of disabled sports from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in 2014¹². In several countries, such as the UK, Australia, and Canada¹³, most sports associations have been merged and in Japan, three sports (triathlon, taekwondo, and rowing) have merged their able-bodied and disabled associations as of December 2019¹⁴. On the local government level, the number of prefectures in which the division responsible for disabled sports has been detached from the welfare division and integrated into the sports division has increased from seven in 2016 to 15 in 2019, according to the Japan Sports Agency. These changes are an example of the change in thinking among able-bodied people, and represent a step towards the creation of an inclusive society.

(3) Changes in the Social Environment, including Relevant Organizations and Systems, and Technological Development

The 1964 Tokyo Paralympic Games triggered the establishment of the Japan Sports Association for the Disabled (currently the Japanese Para-Sports Association)¹⁵, and led to the launch of the National Sports Festival for People with Physical Disabilities (currently National Sports Festival for People with Disabilities)¹⁶.

In terms of technology, the Nagano Paralympics spurred technological advances in the field of sit skiing in Japan¹⁷.

Measures for promoting disabled sports can be considered a way to improve the social environment. To improve the environment for competitive disabled sports, this includes the development of sports specifically for people with disabilities (e. g. boccia, goal ball, sitting volleyball), formulation of special rules that take into account disabled people's requirements (e. g. avoiding grappling in visually impaired judo, using a tap stick to signal to swimmers just before they approach the goal or a turn, and callers in visually impaired long jump who tell athletes where the take-off board

is located), and establishing systems that ensure fair competition conditions (what is usually called a classification system).

B. Indirect Effects on and Improvement of Conditions for Other “Socially Vulnerable” People

(i) Women

The rate of female participation in the Paralympics is considerably lower compared to the Olympics. While the rates of male and female participation are currently almost the same in the Olympics, the rate of female participation in the Paralympics was less than 40 percent in the Rio Paralympics (Fig. 1).

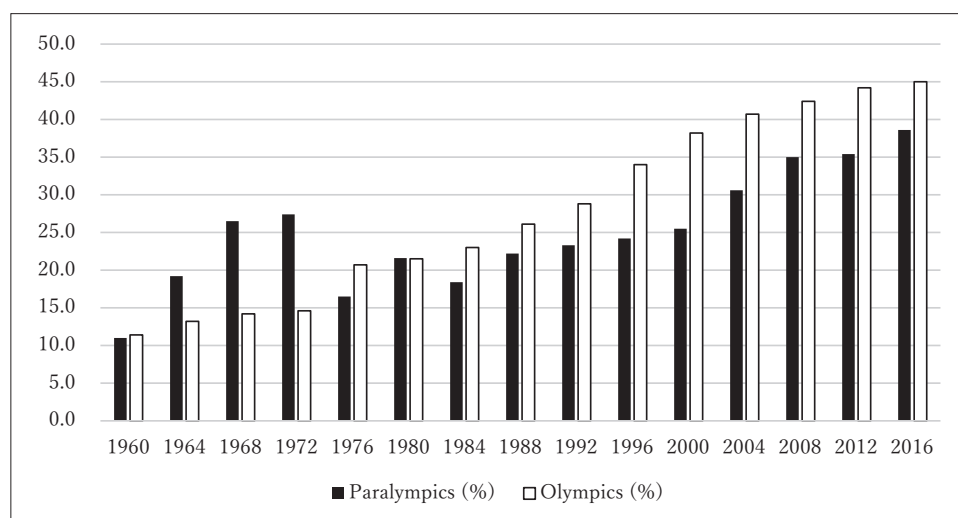


Figure 1. Women Athletes Participating in the Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games (%)

Source: IOC, 2016, Factsheet Women in the Olympic Movement; 2018, Factsheet the Olympic Winter Games and IPC database (January 21, 2020).

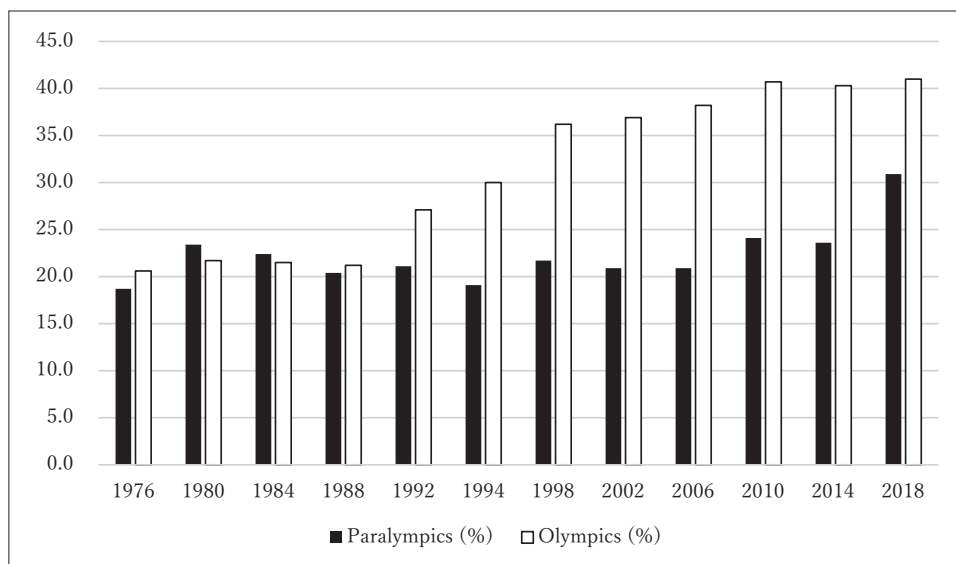


Figure 2. Women Athletes Participating in the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games (%)

Source: IOC, 2016, Factsheet Women in the Olympic Movement; 2018, Factsheet the Olympic Winter Games and IPC database (January 21, 2020).

(ii) Refugees

In order to enable refugee athletes who have lost their home country to participate in the Rio Paralympics, a Refugee Team consisting of two athletes not representing any country was formed. IPC president Andrew Parsons noted that preparations have been made to accept a Refugee Team in the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games (hereinafter referred to as the “Tokyo Paralympics”)¹⁸. Such initiatives are expected to have a positive impact in terms of promoting international engagement in refugee issues.

(iii) Sexual Minorities

Unlike the Olympics, the Paralympics has not experienced any issues related to the participation of sexual minority athletes. However, according to “Outsports,” an American website that covers LGBTQ-related sports news, there were at least 12 Paralympians who identified publicly as LGBT at the time of the Rio Paralympics¹⁹, indicating the potential of issues similar to those in the Olympics arising in the future. It should also be noted that this issue is not just about the inclusion of a social minority group, but is also related to the fundamental issue surrounding the extent to

which men and women should compete separately in order to ensure fair competition conditions in competitive sports.

(iv) Ethnic Minorities

The participation of athletes from ethnic minorities in the Paralympics could act as a catalyst for promoting the social inclusion of ethnic minorities. For example, in 2015 the Australian Paralympic Committee (currently Paralympics Australia) unveiled an honour board recognizing 11 indigenous Paralympians at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence in Sydney. The names of Amanda Reid and Torita Blake, both athletes who participated in the Rio Paralympics, as well as that of Ray Barrett who participated in the Heidelberg 1972 Paralympic Games, were newly added in 2017. Such examples may well bear considerable social significance for maintaining diversity and inclusion in sports²⁰.

(v) Elderly People

More older athletes participate in the Paralympics than in the Olympics. For example, the 132 Japanese athletes who participated in the Rio Paralympics included seven in their fifties and three in their sixties²¹. Given that many elderly people have a disability, promoting the Paralympic Movement may indirectly encourage the elderly to engage in sports and maintain their health.

(vi) Disabled Veterans

In most countries, it is the government's responsibility to support the social rehabilitation of veterans wounded in warfare, and social rehabilitation was at the origin of the Paralympics²². Even today, disabled veterans make up about 10 percent of all Paralympians in some countries, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Veterans with Disabilities in the US and UK Participating in the London and Rio Paralympic Games

	London Games	Rio Games
US	26/221 athletes 11.7%	21/278 athletes 7.6%
UK	7/287 athletes 2.4%	12/251 athletes (at least) more than 4.8%

Sources: The Huffington Post, “Paralympics 2012: 5 Most Inspiring 2 Vets Competing In Paralympics,” August 31, 2012, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/paralympics-2012-wounded-veterans_n_1844611, (March 20, 2020); U. S. Army., “Five Soldiers, 16 Army vets on Team USA for Rio Paralympics,” September 07, 2017, https://www.army.mil/article/174630/four_ncos_16_army_vets_to_compete_in_rio_paralympics, (April 12, 2017); BBC News Magazine, “Was Jimmy Carr right about the Paralympics?” July 04, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-18670966>, (March 20, 2020); Mail Online, “Great Britain’s military Paralympians ready to go in Rio after demonstrating incredible powers of recovery,” September 08, 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/othersports/article-3779510/Great-Britain-s-military-Paralympians-demonstrate-incredible-powers-recovery-Rio-2016.html>, (April 12, 2017); Blesma, “The Veterans to look out for at the Rio Paralympics,” September 08, 2016, <https://blesma.org/news-media/blesma-news/2016/the-veterans-to-look-out-for-at-the-rio-paralympics/>, (April 12, 2017).

The UK, Canada, and the US, for example, have sports participation programs for disabled veterans which lead to the discovery and training of potential Paralympians²³. Such programs are intended to promote the social rehabilitation of disabled veterans, but because in the US, many disabled sports activities receive little public assistance and rely on private funding, there is some criticism of the inequality between athletes who are disabled veterans and can receive public funding, and those who are not.

C. Impact on the Way People with Different Disabilities Live in Cooperation with Each Other

Due in part to the historical background of the Paralympics, there tends to be a focus on physically disabled athletes, especially those in wheelchairs. Of the 22 sports scheduled in the Tokyo Paralympic Games, Table 2 shows how many is open to participation by each type of disability.

【研究ノート】パラリンピックと共生社会

小倉和夫

パラリンピックの社会的役割あるいは効果については、しばしば、障がい者との共生社会実現への触媒的役割や効果が語られる。

こうした効果は、大まかに言って（イ）障がい者自身の自立・社会参加意識への影響、（ロ）健常者の障がい者に対する態度・見方への影響、（ハ）関連組織や体制などを中心とする社会環境の変化と技術開発への影響の三つに分けることが出来よう。こうした効果を通じて、障がい者との共生が実現されていくことを期待しうるとすれば、その過程は、障がい者と同じような差別や偏見を受けやすい他の「社会的弱者」あるいは「（政治的な意味での）少数派」とみられる社会的グループの包摂あるいは共生の態様と類似している面も少なくないと考えられる。そうしたグループとしては、女性・性的少数者・難民・移民・少数民族・高齢者などが考えられる。これらのグループは、多くの障がい者と同じく、自己の意思によってそのグループに属したのではなく、主として外的要因によって、それぞれのグループに属することになったと言える。言いかえれば、こうした「弱者」あるいは「少数派」のグループに対して社会的平等などを保障することが、共生社会の実現にほかならないとも言える。

このような観点に立って、パラリンピックと共生社会を考えると、観察・分析の視点は、大きく言って次の三つに分けることが出来よう。すなわち、（A）障がい者の社会参画への効果、（B）他の「社会的弱者」が置かれた状況およびその改善への間接的效果、（C）（障がいの種別によって社会的グループが形成されていることを勘案すると）異なる障がいのある人々同士の共生への影響である。このうち（A）については、上述の（イ）（ロ）（ハ）に分けることが出来よう。

A. 障がい者の社会参画への効果

（イ）障がい者自身の自立・社会参加意識への影響

パラリンピックへの参加、あるいはその前段階としてのスポーツ活動は、障がい者に

自信を与え、また、そうした活動は、補助者やコーチ、支持者などとの関係を通じ、自ずからの社会参加を促進することとなる。そもそも、無意識のうちにも自己の限界を意識しがちな障がい者にとっては、スポーツ活動への参加の前段階に自己認識の転換が必要である場合も多い。例えば、視覚障がい者で陸上選手の道下は、中学時代入院した際、病院で知り合ったある男性入院患者の言葉に感銘を受けたとして、その人の言葉を次のように引用している¹。

神様は乗り越えられる人しか試練を与えない。自分は選ばれた人。お嬢ちゃんも選ばれた人なんだよ

また、「パラリンピックには、障がい者しか参加できない」ということも、実は、障がいの克服のある種の触媒となっている。なぜなら、そこでは、障がいは一つの特性、個性となっているからである。この点に関して、パラリンピアンで水泳選手だった河合の言葉は意味深長である²。

目が見えないということは、僕にとって、ハンディでない。すこしの不自由さはあるけれど、それは、個性の一つなのです。

さらに、パラリンピックでは、選手一人ひとりが自分の「国」を背負っていることに注意を要する。日の丸を背負ってプレーすることは国家への貢献であり、そのこと自体、社会参加の象徴であるのみならず、ロンドン2012パラリンピック競技大会（以下「ロンドンパラ大会」と略す）で現役を引退した車いすバスケット選手の京谷が言うように、健常者の選手と「一緒になる」ことだからである。この点について京谷は次のように言う³。

いや、待てよ。もしおれが、車いすバスケでパラリンピックという世界最高峰の舞台に立ち、日の丸を背負ってプレーすることができれば、こいつら（筆者注：Jリーグの選手やサッカー日本代表の選手）と同じ土俵にまた立てるのではないだろうか？ 競技が違って、日の丸を背負ってプレーすることはいっしょじゃないか？

障がい者が自立し、活躍するためには、周囲の支援と励ましが不可欠である。その過程は、共生概念と結びつく。この点を、同じく京谷は、妻との関係に関連して次のように述懐している⁴。

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The Nagano Paralympics also seems to have led to a change in thinking among citizens in general. Citizen-led initiatives, for example with the chamber of commerce, were effective in making shopping arcades and public places accessible⁸.

In terms of information or communication, increased consideration for the visually-impaired was seen in the creation of a sculpture of the Nagano Paralympic logo to display at an event venue⁹, can be considered another “legacy” of the Nagano Paralympics. Although not directly related to the Nagano Paralympics, the fact that Braille inscriptions have been added to the back of Paralympic Games medals as a symbol of consideration for people with disabilities represents another element of a change of awareness among able-bodied people¹⁰.

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“Kojima sensei said that neither you, Toko, nor Miyo needs a wheelchair, and that if you need a wheelchair it’s us, your parents, who are the two wheels of the wheelchair.”

Another result of the change in awareness among able-bodied people can be seen in the merging of able-bodied and disabled sports associations in the sports world. A symbolic change on a national government level was the transfer of administrative responsibility for supporting disabled athletes and providing support programs for the promotion of disabled sports from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in 2014¹². In several countries, such as the UK, Australia, and Canada¹³, most sports associations have been merged and in Japan, three sports (triathlon, taekwondo, and rowing) have merged their able-bodied and disabled associations as of December 2019¹⁴. On the local government level, the number of prefectures in which the division responsible for disabled sports has been detached from the welfare division and integrated into the sports division has increased from seven in 2016 to 15 in 2019, according to the Japan Sports Agency. These changes are an example of the change in thinking among able-bodied people, and represent a step towards the creation of an inclusive society.

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Disability	Number of Sports (with some sports overlapping)
Physical Impairment	19 (wheelchair users can participate in 10 out of the 19)
Visual Impairment	9
Intellectual Impairment	3

Source: Parasports Section, Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games Division, Bureau of Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 Preparation, Tokyo Metropolitan Government, The Road to Paralympic Games, 7.

When considering the social inclusion of all people, deciding which types of disability — in addition to wheelchair sports that represent the origin of the Paralympics — to include in the Paralympics is difficult. This is because it involves at least two issues. First, is the issue of identity for people with a disability. For example, people with a hearing impairment have developed their own culture, including sign language, and to respect this, other international sports events such as the Deaflympics play a significant role²⁴. For people with intellectual disabilities, there is the basic issue of how much highly competitive sports should be promoted, and the principles of the Special Olympics, focusing on participation rather than competition, are considered more important in this regard²⁵. It would be difficult to integrate these international sports events for people with disabilities into the Paralympics, because of differences in their respective principles among other reasons. However, we should consider encouraging people with disabilities other than physical disabilities to participate in the Paralympics, and promoting the unification of disabled sports associations which tend to be broken down into subdivisions. This may encourage disabled people who tend to identify themselves according to their type of disability, to also consider their identity within a larger perspective that includes all people with disabilities.

Second, is the issue of participation of people with severe disabilities. Even in the Paralympics, it has in practice become difficult for people with severe disabilities to participate, and this raises questions about the role of the Paralympics as a catalyst for creating an inclusive society. There is a move to advocate the development of

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competitive sports that can be played by people with severe disabilities, and boccia has been raised as an example. However, as long as the Paralympics focuses on competition, it will inevitably be difficult for people with severe disabilities to participate. The effectiveness of using sports for the social inclusion of people with severe disabilities needs to be considered together with the effectiveness of activities in other fields such as art.

D. Principles to Consider for Creating an Inclusive Society

When thinking about the social inclusion of people with disabilities, we unconsciously tend to be trapped in the idea that a disability is something to “overcome,” physically or mentally. However, when a disability is considered part of a person’s identity, it becomes something that can be utilized rather than “overcome.” At the Art Paralympic Nagano, held to coincide with the Nagano Paralympics, one of the artworks by a disabled person that drew attention was a work of calligraphy with the word “Ganbaranai [Being Myself].” This leads to the perspective of looking at a disability as part of a person’s identity rather than something to be overcome, and implies differences in meaning between sports and art activities.

This is linked to the fact that modern society is competitive and meritocratic in nature. The more the Paralympics becomes a competitive sports event like the Olympics, it could mean applauding meritocracy, and this could be a significant problem.

If we were to assume that a disability is something to be overcome, we need to consider individual efforts towards this, and how to provide the right social environment. In 2018, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government created a poster to advertise a disabled sports promotion event. It featured the words of an athlete expressing her attitude to sports: “A disability is just an excuse. If you lose, it’s because you’re weak.” This remark could be taken to mean that overcoming a disability depends purely on an individual’s ability, and the poster was removed in the face of criticism that it paid little attention to the fact that disability is also an issue for society as a whole^{26, 27}. This was a reminder that overcoming a disability requires not only individual effort but also the engagement of society as a whole. The book *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language*²⁸ offers a similar message. On an island

where most of its residents have a hearing impairment and therefore mainly communicate in sign language, it is the able-bodied people unable to use sign language who are “disabled”, suggesting that the issue of overcoming a disability is thus one facing society as a whole.

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