

# Initial perceptions of the #WeThe15 campaign among disability rights organisations

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## Introduction

On August 19, 2021, prior to the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, twenty global disability organizations including the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) officially launched the #WeThe15 campaign. This was self-described as sport's biggest ever human rights movement to end discrimination against the 15% of the global population or 1.2 billion people living with disabilities (International Paralympic Committee, 2021). The other founding partners with the IPC included International Disability Alliance (IDA), Special Olympics, Invictus Games Foundation, the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (Deaflympics), UN Human Rights, UNESCO, the UN SDG Action Campaign, the European Commission, The Valuable 500, Global Citizen, Global Disability Innovation Hub, the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), International Disability and Development Consortium, C-Talent, Global Goals Advisory, ATscale – the Global Partnership for Assistive Technology, Zero Project, and the Global Alliance of Assistive Technology Organisations (GAATO) (International Paralympic Committee, 2021). The campaign also had widespread political support from world leaders including the UN Deputy Secretary General,

UNESCO Director General, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Duke of Sussex, Prince Harry (Included, 2021).

#### #WeThe15 Symbol



The objectives of the campaign were aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and this included “the desire to unite the world’s 1.2 billion persons with disabilities behind a movement for change, with simple and powerful messages for inclusion and putting persons with disabilities and their representative organisations at the heart of the diversity and inclusion agenda” (International Paralympic Committee, 2021). Three other objectives included breaking down societal and systemic barriers that prevented persons with disabilities being included and active members of society, ensuring greater awareness, visibility, and positive representation of persons with disabilities and delivering campaigns and rallying the power and media outreach of sports and culture to amplify the voice of persons with disabilities towards governments, businesses and the public to deliver change (International Paralympic Committee, 2021). As mentioned earlier, the kick-off was launched to coincide with the opening of the Tokyo Paralympic Games and involved lighting up over 225 landmarks around the world in purple on the launch date.

According to the International Paralympic Committee research published in 2021 and conducted by the consortium launching the campaign in its initial days:

- had the #Wethe15 film viewed 0.75 billion times.
- had the phrase #WeThe15 receive 2.5 billion impressions on Twitter.
- reach 6.2 billion people by the media coverage, (almost 80% of the world’s population).

(International Paralympic Committee, 2021)

Research from Nielsen also found that there was 41% global awareness of

#WeThe15 campaign amongst Paralympic TV viewers and 21% of the general population and the strong engagement was further noted on social platforms with 876 million views on TikTok for #Disability Awareness and 9.5 million interactions with #WeThe15 content on Instagram and Facebook (International Paralympic Committee, 2021).

The campaign thus had significant initial reach and has now lasted three years in what has been intended to be a ten-year campaign. But beyond the data points just listed, little is known about what has been accomplished and the true impact. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to initiate this process and try to better understand the perceptions of the campaign from those either living with disability or working within the disability advocacy industry six months following its launch. Because of author connections, interviews were conducted with disability advocates in Canada, Finland, Great Britain, Malawi and Peru.

## Background

Marginalized populations including those related to gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity, among others, have had social movements and associated advocacy campaigns, with the most well-known having taken place in the 1960s. These have also continued to the present day with many of the rights demanded still not achieved. Disability rights were also debated and protested in public discourse in the 1960s but have arguably been far less discussed or publicly acknowledged. That said, the film *Crip Camp* (Netflix, 2020) was widely lauded and other historical online reviews have been published such as the podcast by Throughline (2020). These stories reflected the initiation of the Rehabilitation Act in 1973, a federal law in the United States that prohibited discrimination based on disability. This was followed in 1990 by the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act which prohibited discrimination and guaranteed that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in the mainstream of American life (including sport and recreation). Social movements for persons with disabilities also occurred in other locales outside of the United States such as 'Justice, not charity' when those with visual impairments marched for equality in the United Kingdom (Main, 2020), and the wheelchair warriors also in Great Britain (Rose, Nd). Protests

for legislation around “Unfit” People also occurred in Canada (Disability Justice Network of Ontario, 2019). The Valuable 500, meanwhile, is a more recent example of a social movement for persons with disabilities and this has focused on the importance of including persons with disability in business (see [www.thevaluable500.com](http://www.thevaluable500.com)). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (United Nations, 2006) is arguably the most well-known result of the social movements for the inclusion of persons with disability and within this document was Article 30.5, the Right to Sport for All Persons with Disabilities. This states that “The sport, recreation and play domain, far from being trivial, is essential for fully realizing the human rights promise” (Hubbard, 2004).

There have also been other global campaigns led by specific organizations with the hopes of creating change in attitudes towards persons with disabilities and using sport as the medium. One example was the International Paralympic Committee’s I’mPOSSIBLE. As reported by Hoshino (2021), this was a global education program developed by the IPC to spread Paralympic values and the vision of the Paralympic Movement. UK Aid also funded Para Sport Against Stigma project (see <https://at2030.org/para-sport-against-stigma/>), which was organized through the Global Disability and Innovation Hub (see [www.disabilityinnovation.com](http://www.disabilityinnovation.com)) and aimed to use Paralympic sport as a tool to challenge disability stigma and discrimination in Sub-Saharan Africa (Haslett, Griffiths & Lupton, 2024). #Wethe15 is the most recent example and will now be the focus for the remainder of this paper.

## Review of Literature

As noted earlier there has been growing interest in activism related to Paralympic sport and this has been mirrored in academic studies (Haslett & Smith, 2022). Haslett, Griffiths and Lupton (2024) suggested that the examples of prior research could be divided into three subgroups including contextualized commentaries within the wider bodies of research on non-disabled athlete activism (see Magrath, 2022), the social legacy potential of Paralympic sport (see Brittain & Beacom, 2016, Pappous & Brown, 2018) and disability activism/advocacy (see Berghs et al. 2020, Griffiths 2022a, 2022b, Soldatic et al. 2019).

Specific to research for comparative purposes with this study, much of it has been

empirical and carried out in one specific cultural context (e.g. South Korea, Great Britain). These few studies, as suggested by Haslett, Griffiths and Lupton (2024), demonstrated the various ways that elite Para athletes (e.g. Paralympians) either engage or do not engage in various forms of activism and advocacy (e.g. Braye, 2016; Choi, Haslett, & Smith, 2019).

With the #WeThe15, there has been limited academic research but a number of commentaries and editorials (Legg, 2022). In support of the campaign, in 2022 it received the Campaign of the Year Award at the Sports Industry Awards and in 2021 it received the European Public Relations Excellence Award (International Disability Alliance, 2021; 2022). The campaign was also, however, not without its detractors. Academics, Howe and Silva (2021) penned an opinion editorial during the Tokyo Paralympic Games that noted the connection between the #Wethe15 campaign, and the Paralympic Games being ineffective. “The Games are an elite sporting event and thus by definition an exclusive domain” (Dutia & Tweedy, 2021). This reflected earlier criticism of using Paralympic sport to promote inclusion by Peers (2018) and other publications by Howe and Silva (2018) suggesting that Paralympic sport did not appropriately represent “the everyday disabled person”. The overall concern appeared to be that the public could get the impression that all persons with disabilities are like Paralympians which can then lead to a “warped understanding of most disabled people’s lived experience” (Braye, Gibbons & Dixon, 2013, 2016; Legg, 2022).

Howe and Silva (2021) did note too that they were “not condemning the #WeThe15 movement as a whole but were arguing instead, that a better step for disability activism, was what they referred to as the social empowerment of difference” (Silva & Howe, 2018). Instead of advocating that, “everyone is human,” they suggested that society “should move beyond that messaging and centre on the celebration of difference”. The social empowerment of difference they referred to was “designed to enhance not just the social emancipation of #WeThe15, but all marginalized groups. Quite simply, inclusion should not require marginalized people to wave a flag that proves their humanity. Instead, society should celebrate differences (Howe & Silva, 2021; Legg, 2022).

Legg (2022) also reviewed further criticisms of the #Wethe15 with one example presented by Amy Simmons who suggested that the campaign would simply be

tokenism at best, and patronizing paternalism at worst. She noted that “if a company edits their logo to include a patch of purple (from the campaign), but their actions do not indicate any commitment to change, their involvement in #WeThe15 only serves to boost their moral capital and sales” (Charlton-Daily, 2021). It was further suggested that “while the goal is admirable, many disabled people do not expect the campaign to bring about meaningful change. Branded badges and social media hashtags make it easy for people and companies to make a show of supporting disabled people, but some experts predict that their support will be empty” (Charlton-Daily, 2021; Legg, 2022). Also noted by Legg (2022), Deaf journalist Liam O’Dell suggested that the #Wethe15 campaign was misguided in its approach and specifically in the use of person-first terminology. This was an example, perhaps, of not being able to please all people all the time, as person-first terminology is commonly used in North America – but not universally subscribed to. O’Dell noted that “I can’t take a campaign seriously when it pledges to educate people yet uses person-first language in its launch; lights up buildings in purple as a meaningless gesture; has organizations posting promotional images without alt text and focusses more on awareness.” The IPC responded online to O’Dell’s concerns, as to why the person first approach was used, but this resulted in further pushback on twitter from the Great Britain and Northern Ireland Paralympic teams pointing out that they were proud to say “disabled” and “non-disabled” versus person with a disability (Charlton-Daily, 2021; Legg, 2022).

Haslett and Smith (2021) also reflected on the potential conflict of messaging. Paralympic athletes during the Tokyo Games, for instance, were banned from highlighting discrimination based on race in Paralympic venues (Section 2.2 of the IPC Handbook) but the #WeThe15 campaign, which was endorsed by the IPC, highlighted issues of discrimination but based only on disability. Concern was also expressed about the short-term impact of #WeThe15. In Canada, for instance, at the start of the Tokyo Paralympic Games the CN Tower and Niagara Falls were bathed in purple light (Weese, 2021), but the media spotlight quickly moved on to other issues and many have likely even forgotten the event or why the colour purple was used (Legg, 2022). In July, during Disability Pride month and within two months of the Opening Ceremonies for the 2024 Paris Paralympic Games, the campaign launched a nine-part podcast but has otherwise not been overly public (see <https://>

[www.wethe15.org/news](http://www.wethe15.org/news)).

There were also, of course, those who supported the #WeThe15 campaign beyond advertising awards. Bouchehioua (2021), for instance, suggested that the International Paralympic Committee got it right, taking as proof, the message that...

*...there was no need to heroize persons with disability, but rather to honor them at the height of their exploits. The campaign allowed clarity that there was no need to differentiate persons with disability, but instead to distinguish them for their victories, and no need to pity them, but to celebrate their efforts and their performances (Bouchehioua, 2021).*

In an editorial by the Winnipeg Free Press in Canada, the authors built upon Brown's (2021) assessment and reflected on a campaign created by a Canadian ad agency for World Wheelchair Rugby, which aired during the Tokyo Paralympic Games.

*The ads show a young man watching Team Canada's two-time Paralympian Zak Madell play, and then deciding to train to become a wheelchair rugby player himself. Later, as he races with the ball during a match, Mr. Madell hammers into him at full speed, knocking him down and stealing the ball. The closing message makes the point abundantly clear: We're not here to inspire. We're here to win. No one is suggesting viewers, able-bodied or otherwise, shouldn't be inspired watching Paralympians in their quest for medals. But these athletes don't want to be cheered simply because they are competing while disabled; they want to be celebrated for striving to be faster, higher, and stronger than anyone else on the planet (Winnipeg Free Press, 2021).*

Elizabeth Wright, an Australian swimmer who competed in the 1996 Atlanta and 2000 Sydney Paralympic Games, also thought that the Tokyo Paralympic Games were an appropriate place to launch the campaign.

*With the rising profile of the Paralympics, I can say that it is about time and so important that we use this movement to tackle the wider disability injustices and inequalities, we need to shift the view of disability from that as inspiration porn or a tragedy trope. The Games are a good start, but they're far from the endgame (Charlton-Daily, 2021).*

Wright also stated that the movement needs to "amplify the nuance of disability" beyond the lens of sport and "shift the narrative to be more inclusive of that wider

lived experience.” (Charlton-Daily, 2021; Legg, 2022).

Thus, the campaign had both its supporters and detractors. Questions of course remained as to how and if it could lead to societal change and this was part of the motivation for this paper?

## Methodology

This paper is based on an eclectic data set, and methodologically this demanded a bricolage sensibility to successfully draw it together for a rigorous analysis. The concept of the bricoleur comes from the French concept of a ‘handyman’, or ‘tinkerer’, inspired by Levi Straus’s notion of the same and described methodologically by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) who likened all qualitative research to a process of making do and blending. This was further developed by Kincheloe and Berry (2004), who saw bricolage as an approach that values a flexible, self-reflective engagement with multiple methods that are at hand in a quest for rigorous understanding of complex realities. It brings a self-consciousness to the political and social construction of prescribed and ‘correct’ forms of methodological conventions, which through application are inscribed with the researcher’s own personal history even if this fact is typically obscured (Kincheloe 2004, p 6).

Our approach can thus be considered a collaborative bricolage. Methodologically, the personal histories, identities and formal competences of the researchers involved in this study span the spectrum from being quantitative social scientists, through to more arts-based and participatory approaches. Our interpretation of the ‘disability community’ differed too, influenced by our personal histories and networks, including some from predominantly disability sport organisational contexts to people working in Disabled Persons Organisations and disability charities, to activists and artists. Some of the data was collected through focus groups, some through structured and semi-structured interviews, and some through much more exploratory, unstructured interviews, though we all started with a similar outline of interview or focus group questions. In making use of the bricolage methodology to help us negotiate these differences, it was not an ‘anything goes model’, but instead a deployment of a collaborative bricolage approach to enable us to be elastic in our shared quest for ‘genuinely rigorous, informed multi-perspectival way of exploring’ the dataset



(Kincheloe 2004, p 9), while being self-conscious of our ontological, personal and practical differences. The data were collected to gauge the perspectives from participants in five geographical locations namely, Canada, Finland, Malawi, Peru and Great Britain.

Participants were encouraged to participate in focus groups or interviews and were annotated by their country using the 3-letter code used by the International Paralympic Committee, type of data collection, and the pseudonymised identifier. For example, participant 2 in the second focus group from Canada was identified as CAN\_FG2\_02, whereas person 3 interviewed in Malawi was coded as MAW\_I\_03. Informed consent was given by the participants, and reporting of individuals were pseudonymised. The #WeThe15 campaign was launched at the Tokyo Paralympic Games in August 2021, and the interviews took place between 17th Sep 2021 and 22nd Feb 2022. The interviews traversed questions relating to first impressions of the #WeThe15 campaign, their responses to the characterisation of it as a 'movement', and to understand how these groups would like to see such a campaign evolve in the future. Prompts, which are statements used to assist or encourage a speaker to say something, were used to engage the participants into conversations in focus groups or during the interviews. All interviewers had extensive experience in carrying out data collection through these methods.

For this paper, only the data on the first impressions and future visions were used. All interviews were recorded and transcribed, and all researchers wrote a methodological reflection to accompany the transcripts. Researchers read each other's transcripts, met for analysis meetings, and iteratively generated themes and insights, looking across the data set, and to some of the differences (geography and network type). Though not the focus of this paper, it is worthy of note that one of the researchers involved developed further innovative modes of co-creation and engagement with the activists and advocates engaged with, reflections on which have been published as a stand-alone paper elsewhere (Haslett et al 2024). Procedures of ethical informed consent were followed in keeping with the approved procedures.

## Results

There were 36 representatives (24 identified to have lived experience of disability) of disability organisations or companies who took part in six focus groups and ten one-to-one interviews. The average time of the interviews was 75 mins (SD = 27.6 mins) with a range between 20 – 120 mins. Summary of the participants by country and individual characteristics are listed in Table 1.

The initial thoughts and feelings about #Wethe15 were generally positive. For some respondents, the video that accompanied the campaign and showcased how persons with disabilities challenge the assumption in light-hearted ways whether they were inspirational had a positive reception, “I think that is one of the best commercial videos that I’ve seen. The whole big idea behind the movement, it’s fantastic.” (FIN\_

**Table 1. Summary of individual characteristics by country**

	Canada (n = 9) %	Finland (n = 4) %	Malawi (n = 3) %	Peru (n = 5) %	GB (n = 15) %	Total (n = 36) %
Data collection						
Focus Group	67	75		100	67	67
Interview	33	25	100		33	33
Gender						
Female	44	75	33	80	40	50
Male	56	25	67	20	47	44
Other					13	6
Ethnicity						
Asian					20	8
Black			100		7	11
Hispanic				100	73	14
White	100	100				67
Impairment						
None	56	50	66	40	7	33
Intellectual					46	19
Physical	44	50		60	40	42
Visual			33		7	6

I\_01). The impression it gave to many respondents was that the video changes the perceptions of disabled people,

*I think was really important for disabled people and for disability rights movement so we can have everyday common stories about disabled people rather than these extreme stories that the media always used to like to represent, and then I think it also just helped how non-disabled people to see us (GBR\_FG1\_1).*

Previous videos of disabled people were talked about often, particularly around the London 2012 Paralympic Games, where the Superhumans campaign was posted around the city during the games and supported the television coverage. Although such videos were good to grab the attention of the public, there was potential that such stereotypes were not typical for many disabled people who felt “it is rather a burden for persons with disabilities to be considered as superheroes… when feelings, struggles, attitudes, experiences and needs are the same as for other human beings” (PER\_FG\_4). The #WeThe15 video thus had the potential to provide a sense of relief, “I liked very much the message that, the anti-superhero message. I’m a bit allergic to the superhero troupes, so I like it very much” (FIN\_FG1\_03). The video also brought insights to individuals to reflect on how times have changed in a decade, as there were, “really impressive strides in just over 10 years in terms of the types of messaging we’re seeing, and moving from the sort of, less of the disability quorum to more of the disability ability” (CAN\_FG1\_1).

In addition to the positive reception, the video was seen to provide authentic representation and leadership, as “I think the most effective campaigns are always ones around that representation, that’s spirit-led by people with disabilities” (CAN\_FG1\_2). Along with the involvement of disabled people, the presentation of disabled people as “we are all the same” (FIN\_I\_01) was viewed as important. In some instances, there were uncertainty of who the people directly behind the campaign were, “I looked at the website and I was like, okay, but who’s behind it? And then I can see there’s like 20 organisations, and I can see the committee’s name” (CAN\_I\_03). There were also suggestions that the campaign needed to, “value lived experience. You have to value disabled people voice and the way you show that you value it as you pay disabled people the same way you pay nondisabled people for their expertise” (GBR\_FG1\_1) to make the campaign represented in the right way.

The reach of the video was also hoped to have been global, but the responses from

this study suggested perhaps that it was not. During the data collection, the video was shown at the beginning of the interviews or focus groups and for some participants, this was the first time they had seen it. “I didn’t see that...”, continuing with the question of, “...was this purely a YouTube campaign?” (FIN\_FG1\_3).

The campaign including the purple icon, the social media hashtag, and lighting up buildings were also discussed. The purple icon was seen positively as was the slogan. “The slogan is good, it’s simple enough” (FIN\_FG1\_2), and it was...

*...giving a very clear picture of the percentage of people with disabilities in the world by saying 15% of people in the world are persons with disabilities. So even to the lay person who is not very much informed on disability, he or she would clearly understand.* (MAW\_I\_1)

Yet, in some countries the proportion of disabled people was not the same as the global 15%, and thus some participants felt the campaign undersold the importance of the disability population rates, “In the UK we actually stated 20% of our population of disabled people, so I actually thought you undersold the campaign” (GBR\_FG1\_01).

Lighting up the buildings in purple around the globe was discussed positively among the participants, “I’m not one for all these lighting buildings up normally, but actually because they tied in with the Paralympics, it worked really well. It got the message out there in a different way.” (GBR\_FG1\_03). Such aspects may have been “a very effective way to have people listen” (FIN\_I\_1).

The social media hashtag was also seen to reinforce the campaign, “Usually the hashtag is associated with the campaign... so it automatically leads me to think of the campaign and the 15 as it says in the video” (PE\_FG\_04). The hashtag itself might have benefitted from being translated into different languages. “The hashtag of #WeThe15 but I was referring to the fact that this translation is not as popular as the same phrase in English here in Peru” (PER\_FG\_02). Alternative slogans were also suggested by Finnish respondents, with the hope that it would have been more suitable to their own context. “I would love to see more of this, ‘We are not’. I loved the phrase, ‘We are ordinary’, we do the ordinary things. And that’s a very good message.” (FIN\_FG\_3).

It was also suggested by respondents that the #WeThe15 campaign seemed to have been developed to improve on earlier ways to promote the Paralympic Games, which left out many people from the disability community.

Initial perceptions of the #WeThe15 campaign among disability rights organisations

*Lots of folks were sharing the BBC, the Paralympic specific, the We Are Superhuman, the latest iteration, which took a lot of heat in previous years. So it seems like in this last year they learned a lot they reflected, they made a better campaign. And people who wouldn't have shared previous years, or would have been critical, really liked this one. I loved it.* (CAN\_I\_03)

Less was discussed by the participants about how the video could be used in the future, confirming the perceived positive reception of the campaign. Rather, discussions were constructive on ways other aspects of #WeThe15 campaign could be maximised. It was considered challenging, for instance, to turn a global campaign to influence at the local level, with suggestions that it, “should focus on the real situation in which we are living at the moment, on how the changes in the future would affect persons with disabilities because we are living in a moment of crisis” (PER\_FG\_03).

Respondents also recognized the importance of the long-term nature of the campaign. “This is going to take a decade. The campaign is to be implemented over the next decade, with different activities aimed at governments, businesses and the population” (PER\_FG\_01). This was also recognition that most previous campaigns followed a four-year cycle like the Games. “If you're just relying on a four-year cycle with the Paralympics, you're going to have you know it's going to be like stop, start stop, start and you're just going to have this three-year gap in the middle” (GBR\_FG\_01). This could then lead to problems with continuation of the campaign as “you don't want it to be a flash in the pan thing. You know it's got to be maintained throughout the 10 years” (GBR\_FG\_03). Suggestions to increase the regularity of the campaign more regularly, such as to reignite it on other occasions than just the Paralympics, were also made with specific suggestions such as, “International Day of Disabilities... it could be the exact same campaign, but like let's do another push and raise the profile” (CAN\_FG1\_1). Other suggestions included “WeThe15 day, or WeThe15 week every year. So, little by little people learn to understand what this is all about, why this building has been coloured purple. And there will be more media attention.” (FIN\_I\_1).

Key areas of communication and cooperation with companies that work with national Paralympic committees were also seen as positive next steps. It was suggested that “for our organization, we do have our own messaging and branding

and marketing. But this is a chance to include other community members outside of ourselves” (CAN\_I\_3). Commercial companies could also help spread the word if they had the chance through, “external communication about this campaign, to our customers to tell them that we are involved” (FIN\_FG2\_2). Furthermore, discussions could occur on how to tailor the slogan in national languages without losing the global continuity. One example was, “they could be used together. WeThe15 and then the Finnish version with it” (FIN\_FG2\_2). In addition, communication with the disability community would be an important aspect to create a sense of local involvement in a global campaign, “we should be making efforts towards taking into the grassroots so that persons with disabilities themselves are owning it and their campaign should be able to make an impact within the countries” (MAW\_I\_3).

As mentioned earlier, lighting the buildings in purple was also discussed positively. To improve the impact, suggestions were made such as:

*If you do this kind of colouring of buildings, then you really need to be pro-active in messaging either in the building or somehow in the media at the same time, that this is why we are colouring it purple this time. (FIN\_FG1\_3)*

Finally, the purpose of the #WeThe15 campaign could be made more explicit in terms of tangible outcomes for disabled people, and this might take some time to be realised.

*What does it want to do? Does it want to get equipment to people? Does it, is it mainly about campaigning for rights? Is it, you know what is the - and it looks like, it kind of at the moment seems to be open to working that out, so it's not very clear what it is going to do, but that might be because it's just forming, so giving it room for space to think about that. (GBR\_I\_05)*

All these suggestions, in part, echoed a statement from a respondent in Great Britain that while the Paralympic Games had made inroads into changing attitudes a campaign such as #Wethe15 was still needed. “It’s good to have Paralympics as a base, but you need to build upon that base” (GBR\_FG1\_3).

## Discussion

After the launch of the #WeThe15 campaign, general positive reception was reported by individuals connected to disability rights organizations in five

geographical locations around the world. The video was seen to have the potential to change the narrative around everyday lives of disabled people, and other innovated parts of the campaign such as lighting up buildings around the world were perceived as having potential to raise awareness. Moreover, recommendations for the campaign moving forward centred around improvements in communication, consistency of messaging related to representation, the importance of partnering with other organizations, and translation to local audiences.

## Representation

The #WeThe15 campaign was a combined effort to bring together the largest disability sports organisations around the world, namely the International Paralympic Committee, Special Olympics, Deaflympic, Invictus Games, as well as the International Disability Alliance to improve awareness, understanding and provisions for disabled people (Carty et al., 2021). This could be seen as the first attempt at the global stage to encourage representation of disabled people in a campaign of this size and breadth. In particular, the video was seen as an appropriate way to portray disabled people rather than the previously well known 'superhumans' campaign. While this had been seen as enlightening to some (Alexander, 2014), it did divide the disability community on whether it was appropriate representation of disabled people as the assistive devices used for parasports may have given a false sense of empowerment among disabled people (Howe, 2011). With the characterization of disabled people in everyday lives and being connected with the Paralympic Games for the #Wethe15 campaign this had an overwhelming positive reception by the participants.

## Partnering

The #WeThe15 campaign was created in contemporary times, where co-production was seen as an important way to influence policy and behaviour change (Smith et al., 2022). The #WeThe15 campaign thus included partnerships of various companies at multiple levels, and it was assumed that the approach used included people with disabilities. Although according to the interviews, disability rights organisations at the national level were less aware of it or had not had the opportunity to be involved

from the onset. This could be seen as a top-down approach, where most effective campaigns arise from the people who would benefit from it. For example, the recent Black lives matter or #MeToo campaigns arose from civil movements, that grew quickly with social media from organic instances of disruptive human behaviours (Bonilla & Tillery, 2020; Clark-Parsons, 2021). The #WeThe15 campaign, meanwhile, had a planned launch, which may have restricted a potential growing movement that rises from the mass public because of coordinated efforts with partners adhering to an embargo. Continuation of the campaign may require a deeply supportive environment as changing attitudes takes time (Randolph & Viswanath, 2004) and a lack of momentum if that were to happen following the Paris 2024 Summer Paralympic Games may see the campaign fall by the wayside.

## Localisation

The challenges of translating a global campaign to a local context were reported throughout the interviews and focus groups. Understanding cultural norms and language barriers meanwhile are understood as important ways to create successful campaigns, accompanied with a strategy to create appropriate marketing and effective messages (Randolph & Viswanath, 2004). The media around disabled athletes tend to on the edge of what Carty and Mont termed as 'inspiration porn', whereas in Great Britain, almost a third of the respondent's comments were about appropriate messaging (2021). Careful planning is therefore needed so that the campaign is still seen as global. Even though the interviews in this study focused on their initial thoughts and feelings about a potential 10-year campaign, there were still many novel ideas presented to make the campaign more localized. Sustaining such appeal may come at a cost, however, and there was no discussion of how funding could be made available to do this. As such, #WeThe15 appears to be a centralized campaign with the goodwill of partners to help promote it.

## Conclusion

The #WeThe15 campaign was launched at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympic Games, created from the largest known coalition of international disability sporting and



human rights organizations. The campaign included a video that presented disabled people being able to do everyday things with a bit of humour. Lighting various buildings in purple around the globe on one day demonstrated the potential global reach of the campaign, although it was deemed that more coordination was needed between the places that had buildings lit up and the messaging around it. As such, discussions of translation of information from a global campaign to a localised context were brought up with concerns of how this would be done to sustain the planned 10-year campaign. #WeThe15 had a planned and formal launch versus a grassroots approach which has typically driven social movement. Furthermore, there was uncertainty of how effective the campaign would be to reach its goals, partly because the goals lacked clarity. Despite these challenges, the lessons learnt from previous campaigns and this one most certainly should be used to make more effective campaigns in the future. More specifically, as time evolves from the advent of this campaign, it could be important to understand if there was a shift in attitudes towards disabled people in society or if access to sport and physical activity for disabled people has improved.

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## 障害者権利団体が抱いた #WeThe15キャンペーン についての初期段階での認識

クオック・ング

デイビッド・レグ

ダミアン・ハスレット

ジェシカ ノスケ・ターナー

エマ・プーレン

#WeThe15キャンペーンは、東京2020パラリンピック競技大会（コロナ・パンデミックのため2021年に開催）で発足した。世界人口の15%が障害とともに生活しており、これらの人々が社会に完全に参画する上での障壁は取り除かれるべきであるという認識を高めるために、ショートビデオとハッシュタグを付けたロゴが作られ、世界中の建物のライトアップが行われた。このキャンペーンは専門家には高く評価されたが、世間一般、特に障害者を代表する専門家や自らが障害者である専門家がこのキャンペーンをどのように受け止めたかについては、まだほとんど知られていない。そこで、このキャンペーンに対する初期段階の認識と、推奨される今後の方向性をよりよく理解するために、世界の5地域でインタビューとフォーカス・グループを実施した。データは、プリコラージュ手法によって一括して分析した。#WeThe 15キャンペーンは当初意図したほど世界的な広がりにはなかったようだが、それに対する初期の印象は、おおむね肯定的であった。提言としては、キャンペーンの背後にあるメッセージをそれぞれの地域に合わせて最適化をすることをより慎重に検討すること、キャンペーンを継続するための支援をより充実させることなどを挙げた。