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**DOCTOR IN MOVEMENT AND SPORT SCIENCES**

# **SPORTS SYSTEM AND POLICY FACTORS INFLUENCING ATHLETIC CAREER PATHWAYS IN PARALYMPIC SPORTS**

**JACQUELINE MARTINS PATATAS**

**Tuesday, November 26th 2019 at 15:00**

**Room D2.01 (Promotion Room), campus Etterbeek**

Please confirm your presence before November 19th to [Jacqueline.Patatas@vub.be](mailto:Jacqueline.Patatas@vub.be)

## **EXAM COMMISSION**

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## ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH

There has been an increasing interest among nations to win medals in major international competitions. This trend has stimulated researchers to better understand elite sport policy development. Effective elite sport policy will advance the creation of successful elite athlete pathways. Literature on the subject has increasingly examined and delineated what defines successful sport systems that can deliver successful able-bodied elite athletes. The potential of Paralympic sport system and athletes with an impairment, however, has been underexplored. Further, literature on what comprises athletic career pathways in Paralympic sports, as well as the support services that bolster the development of para-athletes, are surprisingly limited. By using Brazil as a case, this doctoral research aimed to examine the various factors influencing the development of athletic career pathways in Paralympic sports, including sports policies, support services, stakeholders, and contextual factors. To address this aim, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, and six studies, in total, form the body of this doctoral research.

Study 1 served as the basis for a preliminary investigation in which sports policy approaches were analysed in order to identify fundamental differences between able-bodied and parasport systems. Study 2 aimed to identify how the phases of athletic career pathways in Paralympic sport could be developed. The results identified six distinct phases and their unique characteristics (i.e., attraction, retention, competition, talent identification and development, elite, and retirement). Study 3 aimed to identify which sports policy factors and stakeholders influence the development of each phase of athletic career pathways in Paralympic sport using the social relational model of disability as a means of critically positioning disability within the sporting context. Study 4 used the lens of the systems theory as a helpful tool for understanding how systems or policies, at the level of inputs, throughputs, and outputs, continuously interact with the economic, social, cultural, and political components of the culture and environment of a country. Study 5 aimed to analyse how the following factors: the nature of the impairment (i.e., acquired or congenital), the para-athlete's age when progressing through his/her career phases, and the athlete's sport classification have influenced the development of para-athletes' career trajectories in Brazil. Study 6 concluded this doctoral research by further investigating, from an athlete's perspective, the quality and importance of the sports policy and support services that Brazilian para-athletes have received across their athletic career pathways. The para-athletes confirmed the perspective of the stakeholders and a total of 21 items were deemed important for the development of successful athletic career pathways in Brazil.

Finally, this doctoral research offered an initial conceptual framework encompassing factors on micro-meso-macro levels with a description of phases of athletic career pathways in Paralympic sport from which both practitioners and researchers can base their actions for policy development and implementation towards para-athlete development. This research unfolded the complexity and individuality of athletic development in Paralympic sports. Several impairment-specific factors are essential ingredients when developing para-athletes' career pathways, such as the classification system, the nature of the impairment, an early or late start in the sport, previous sports experiences, and the severity of the impairment. Overall, tailor-made policy actions considering the impairment-specific factors in the foundation may provide basis for competitive advantage by delivering more talented athletes for selection into elite sport.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Since 2015, Jacqueline Patatas is a doctoral researcher at the research group Sport & Society (SASO) of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium. She has over 13 years of involvement and experience in the area of physical education, physical activity, and sports for people with disabilities, with extensive experience in Paralympic sports events management and organisation. Jacqueline has a master's degree in adapted physical activity from the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP). She integrated for three years the Brazilian Paralympic Committee's team (CPB) working in the Sports Department as the Brazilian Paralympic Academy and Classification manager. In 2016, she was part of the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games project, and in the same year, she was appointed as Member of the World Taekwondo Federation Para-Taekwondo Research and Development Committee.

In her doctoral research, Jacqueline focused on sports management applied to Paralympic sports and para-athlete development, more specifically identifying factors that influence the development of athletic career pathways in Paralympic sports. Finally, as a postdoctoral researcher, Jacqueline will contribute to the UNESCO Chair in Inclusive Physical Education, Sport, Recreation and Fitness in developing and implementing a training methodology to build capacity to promote inclusion of people with disabilities in and through sports.

