Sport for Disable People in Romanian Press

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Abstract

Although a single wheelchair athlete, Alex Peer, competed in table tennis at the 1972 Paralympic Games in Heidelberg, Germany, Romania did not really begin regular participation at the Paralympic Games until 1996 in Atlanta, USA, and it was not until London 2012 that Romania won their first gold medal by an athlete with a physical disability. It was won by Carol-Eduard Novak in cycling's Men's Individual Pursuit C4. In 2013, Novak become the President of the Romanian Cycling Federation – the first person with a disability to hold this position. The media also had a very important role to create Novak a very good image. This in itself appears to indicate an acceptance of the capabilities of people with disabilities within Romania, at least within the sporting fraternity. However, it should be pointed out that despite the Romanian Olympic team receiving major sponsorships to attend London 2012, the Paralympic team received almost no funding, and had to halve their team size. They were only able to travel due to their British President, Sally Wood Lamont, using her own resources.

Keywords: Paralympic movement, athletes, Eduard Carol Novak.

Sports history has come in recent years, especially after the fall of the Communist Bloc, a widely discussed and analyzed subject. In this year's sport history was investigated in connection with other disciplines such as law, sociology, psychology, business studies, gender studies, international relations, economy etc.

Sport, and the Olympic movement have become an important phenomenon especially after the Second World War, due to its universalization. Sport as a form of internal and external Association helped in some way to the evolution of the existing international system, international sport organizations ware created at the end of 19th century, in 1894 was set up the International Olympic Committee (IOC). IOC is so far one of the largest institutions from around the world (205 national Olympic committees affiliated- United Nations had only 193 states recognized).

Sport institutions dedicated to people with disability appeared quite late, almost one century away from the foundation of the IOC a similar committee for people with disabilities was created- International Paralympic Committee (IPC). This was founded on September 22, 1989 in Germany. Today IPC is also a sports institution with large representation, 174 National

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Paralympic Committee are affiliated to Paralympic movement and the Paralympic Games is the third must important competition around the world after the Olympic Games and the World Football Cup.

Although the Paralympic movement has an organized form only from 1989, competition for people with disability appear immediately after the World War II, designed especially for war veterans. Competitions ware held regularly since 1960 in the same year with the Olympics but not necessarily in the same city. Starting with 1988 Paralympic Games were played immediately after the Olympic competition in the same host city (Paralympic, 2015), using the same infrastructure. This was possible because an agreement between IOC and IPC was sing for this purpose.

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The development of the sport for persons with handicap is related also with the important that different political and social institutions or organization gives to sport in general.

In 2009 in the Lisbon Treaty, one of the main objectives of the European Union is to contribute to peace, security, sustainable development of the Earth, solidarity and mutual respect among peoples, free and fair trade, eradication of poverty and protection of human rights and in particular children's rights and the strict observance and development of international law, including respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter (Lisbon Treaty, 2007). Also United Nations Office for Sport, Development and Peace supports: *Sport has a unique power to attract, mobilize and inspire. By its very nature sport is about participation. It can help social inclusion and active citizenship. Sport promotes human values such as respect for the opponent, the acceptance of rules, teamwork and fairness, all of which are principles which are also contained in the Charter of the United Nations ..... Sport plays an important role as a promoter integration of social and economic development in different geographical areas, cultural and political. Sport is a powerful tool to strengthen social ties and to promote the ideals of peace, fraternity, solidarity, non-violence, tolerance and justice ..... sport has been increasingly recognized and used as a tool low cost but high impact for the development and consolidation of peace, not only by the UN system, but also by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governments, development agencies, sports federations, the armed forces and* ***the media****. Sport can't be considered a luxury in most social systems, but is rather an important investment now and in the future, especially in developing countries (UN, 2014).*

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It can be seen paying particular attention to the two international institutions to sports phenomenon and its potential for promoting peace and social inclusion. Sport is an important social factor on which the EU, UN and other bodies responsible for turning their host and use it to promote various universal values such as peace, friendship, fair-play but also various programs to achieve social inclusion and diversity (eg. UN Programme "to Promote Social Inclusion Sport and Diversity").

In what the United Nation Office for Sport and Development for Peace the media is also mention as a structure that use sport to promote peace, social inclusion, and human values. Actually, the role that media had in promoting sport and especially sport for people with disabilities is enormous. Researches about how Paralympics are related in media ware realized in the West but in Romania nothing like that was made before.

Studies and research on sport for people with disability began risen sharply in recent years in Europe and North America, research centers and published papers on the subject appeared in most Western universities. In Romania there is a lack of research on sport in general, studies and theses on topics of sport history or sociology began to be realized only in the last 5-7 years. Sport for people with disability has not yet aroused the interest of Romanian researchers, although athletes performance and results in similar competitions exist but are not well known.

Although one athlete (Alex Peer) competed in wheelchair table tennis in 1972 at the Paralympics in Heidelberg, Germany, Romania has started regular participation in the Paralympic Games until 1996, edition of the Atlanta, United States of America, and till London 2012 Romania has not won any gold medal at the Paralympic edition. This gold medal was won by Carol Eduard Novak in cycling- 1 km track pursuit event . Additionally, he collected a silver medal in the road time trial race at the same Paralympics.

The performance that Novak obtained in London was impossible to been seen in Romania. The National Television didn't pay for the TV rights for the Paralympics never. The Romanian Public Television (TVR) only one month before the Olympic and Paralympic Games to started redefine the values and the mission that this institutions need to promote in Romania (TVR, 2015). By the decision (not paying for the TV rights for Paralympics), that was taken before the new values to be promoted, the TVR showed how part of the values that they promote and assume were not respected:

- public interest- in Romania there are more than 150.000 persons with disabilities;
- Pluralism of ideas and opinions;
- Innovation and creativity;
- Diversity in programs and approaches;

The decision was a discriminatory approach for the athletes, and the general public that couldn't see live the Paralympic competition. There was no

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reaction for any public or private institution for the decision that TVR took, only some small “protests” on different social media networks. This happened also because sport for disable people is not to present in Romanian social life. The team that represent Romania at the Paralympics 2012 had 5 athletes and won 2 medals comparing with 104 athletes that Romanian Olympic team had it and obtained 9 medals.

Till today The Paralympics or sport competitions for disable people are not presented in the sport channels, only small news related with different results can be presented in different sport news channels. This fact happen not only in Romanian but also around the world. In the same time, during the Paralympic Games, only 20% (Howe, 2008, 139) of the media center is occupied by journalists even if during the Olympics is more than 100% full. The Paralympic athletes had also “a problem” with the journalists and their approaches. Traditionally coverage of the Paralympics is laden with an appreciation for what the athletes achieved before they get to the starting line. According to different research carried out on media coverage of Paralympic athletes they tend to be presented as “victims” or “courageous” people who overcome the painful experience of disability in order to participate in sport (Howe, 2008, 144).

Till today journalist do not have the courage to wrote negative materials about any Paralympic athletes. The Oscar Pistorius case, the Paralympic champion who killed his girlfriend, started to bring also a different reaction form the media regarding a Paralympic athletes. But, unfortunately this negative reaction is not coming as an analyze sport case study and only to analyze a crime in what is involved an Paralympic champion.

In 2013, a year later after his success, Novak became president of the Romanian Federation of Cycling, and he is the first person in Romania and one of the few in the world, having such a position, a person with a disability being a president of a sport federation for athletes without disabilities. This choice of the Romanian Cycling Federation members indicates a change in perceptions towards people with disabilities and their growth and acceptance in the world of sports decision-making. Despite his accomplishments Novak and recently acquiring a "influential position" in cycling, Paralympic athletes continue to be little publicized and finance. This was especially noticeable at London 2012 when the Romanian Olympic team received major sponsorship deals while Paralympic team had financial problems. Trip to London and getting remarkable results were possible only because the president of Romanian Paralympic Committee is a British lady, Sally Wood Lamont (Dale-Haris, 2013) and she obtained all the important founds for the Romanian delegation to travel to London. The money problems comes also because the Paralympic athletes are not so visible in the media, so the sponsors do not want to finance them because the company will not have a good visibility if the media is mission at almost all important events that the Romanian Paralympic Committee is organized.

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Also, in Bucharest were wide debates on the ceiling prize for medals that were won at a Paralympic edition compere to Olympic edition. The media react, especially the two major sport newspaper- Gazeta Sporturilor and Prosport who present articles about the medal prize discrimination what the Government and the Minister of Sport wanted to do. After pressure from the media, the Romanian government offered the same prize medal to Paralympic athletes from London as the Olympic offered. This happened not only because of the media but also because in less then 2 months in Romania ware parliamentary election so the government party wouldn't to face a scandal regarding the Paralympic athletes. This difference amounts initially allocate show discriminatory approach of the Romanian state for athletes with disabilities from the beginning when the low was written.

Image of Carol Eduard Novak increased in the last years and the media had a very important role in this. Today he is very present among the public. Eduard Novak gets to reach the state of "hero" after performances in the Paralympic arena. Eduard Novak started to be invited at different public events companies or various meetings (ex. Buisness Review, Ascendis, Unicredit, etc) (Facebook, 2015) as motivational speaker. With an impressive story of life- speed skating athlete that lost his foot after a car accident in 1996 continue with sport with para-cycling, Eduard Novak today become a promoter for personas with disability.

Percentage of Novak's visibility in online social media and network (eg. Facebook) is bigger than another, this time Olympic champion, from London 2012 Alin Moldovan[2]. It's interesting to compare the two, because their reputation before the Olympics and Paralympics was somewhat similar, were known by the specialists but not know by the general public. Both athletes won the gold medal and automatically this increase their visibility by publicizing the outcome. On the largest social network Facebook- both athletes have private pages where "friends" are added but also they have Facebook pages for fans or people interested in sport. Alin Moldovan has 2500 (Facebook, 2015) friends and 470(Facebook, 2015) likes on the two pages that owns, while Eduard Novak has 1,200(Facebook, 2015) friends and 3,400(Facebook, 2015) likes. The difference between the numbers of like for every Facebook page can be also related with the fact that cycling is more popular in Romania than shooting, the sport that Alin Moldovan practice.

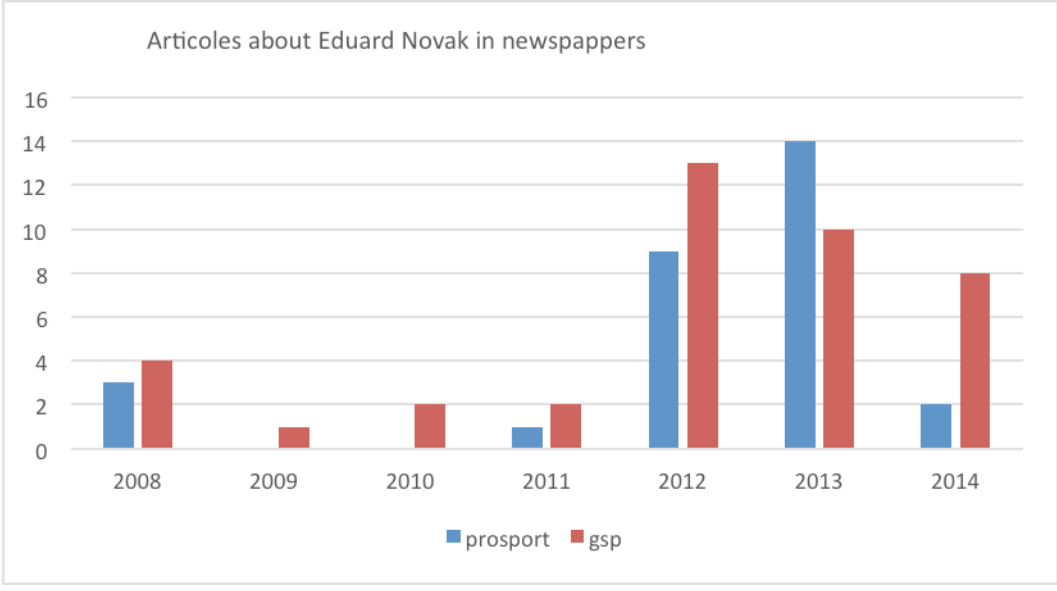
The notoriety of Eduard Novak in specialized online media is also interesting to analyze. Although the performances of him were extraordinary achieved in 2012 ProSport (Prosport, 2015) and Gazeta Sporturilor(GSP, 2015) publish the most articles about him in 2013-2014 due to the scandals about his validation as president of the Romanian Cycling Federation. This validation come only in 2014 when a letter from the International Cycling Federation accept Novak as the only president for the Romanian federation. During this

[2] Alin Moldovan won the gold medal in shooting.

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years 2013-2014 internal disputes and scandals on this choice will be very virulent in Romania, and most of this discussion will be presented also in the sports newspapers.

For better understanding can be seen in the chart below how many articles about Eduard Novak existed from 2008 to 2014 in the two must important sport newspapers in Romania- Gazetat Sporturilor and ProSport. The research started in 2008, because in that year Novak won the first medal-silver at Beijing Paralympics.



Coming antithetical to the reputation of Eduard Novak, Paul Ciobanel is an outstanding personality of Romanian Paralympic movement, unfortunately too little known and appreciated. Ciobanel was a famous rugby player, but his carrier was destroyed by a bone cancer that will make him to loses a leg. He carry more than 30 years will get a hearing and hearing both lead factory during the communist period and after (RomHandicap), offering the chance of many people and sometimes sport athletes for a new life. Paul Ciobanel remains an unknown to public opinion and specialty media. He died in 2014 and no specialized newspaper announced his death. Ciobanel was a founding member of the Federation of Sports for Persons with Disabilities and was also the president of that body.

Both Eduard Carol Novak and Paul Ciobanel changed their destiny after destiny was changed. Both took a hard struggle to integrate disabled persons. If Paul Ciobanel remained in shadow and is not very well know, even if he was the person who stared to change the legislation for persons with different disabilities or to design different prosthesis , Eduard Novak visibility enjoyed by producing changes in mentality and social behavior for the public in

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Romania. This can be seen especially at sport competitions, where number of athletes with disabilities are increasingly. This competitions usually are advertised in the newspapers or TV - ex. Bucharest Marathon, Royal Cros etc) so this help to promote sport for better social integration of disabled people.

Disability is a thorny problem in Romania. After integration into the European Union in 2007, the Romanian state began to adopt European legislation for people with disabilities but Romania still has much recovered from other European countries. The number of people with disabilities employed in public or private system is still extremely limited, infrastructure in major cities is also poor for people with invalidity, and the public found for sport for disabled people are almost nonexistent. An important role in the integration for the disable people in the society had also the mass media, who started to look more careful at this subject but not enough till now.

However the steps taken by Romania in integrating of people with disabilities are still low. The persons with disabilities began to capture more and more media and spreading what looks like it can be used successfully as a socially integrating factor and sport has an important role in this transformation.

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