



Beauftragte der Bundesregierung
für die Belange behinderter Menschen

The Paralympic Games as a driver for sustainable and inclusive development

Thursday, 16 June, 13:15-14:30 in Conference Room 11

Objective of the side event: Discuss ways in which the Paralympic Games also change the way people think and can promote sustainable and inclusive development in the public sector, particularly in the context of the development of accessible infrastructure.

Former London Mayor Ken Livingstone once made the following statement about the 2012 Olympic Games in London: “I didn’t bid for the Olympics because I wanted three weeks of sport. I bid for the Olympics because it’s the only way to get the billions of pounds out of the Government to develop the East End, to clean the soil, put in infrastructure and build housing.”

This shows that for politics and society the Olympic and Paralympic Games have long been more than just a high-level international athletic competition. It is about more than medals and well-placed advertising slogans. For the host city, the high level of investment makes the games into an important driver for local infrastructure, the labour market and the overall economy.

In addition to these components, the Olympics and the Paralympics in particular also offer the one thing above all: they change the way people think. Due to the amount of attention given to the venue, the athletes and the fans during the games, the way people see things can be changed and emotions can be aroused. This leads to a fundamental change in thinking.

The athletes present themselves and their abilities on a big stage and deliver peak performances during the games. Many sporting achievements--such as seeing that a wheelchair user can finish a marathon faster than someone on foot or seeing that people can swim without arms--show that with the right support people can push themselves to their limits and can win Olympic gold.

Many candidate cities now naturally include sustainable and inclusive thinking in their planning. The spectrum runs from accessible bus stops to the declared aim of promoting an inclusive society as a whole through the hosting of the games. When a city prepares for the games, sports venues are built, homes are constructed and the public transport system is expanded. Munich, for example, is still benefiting today from the subway that was built in 1972 on the occasion of the Games. All these construction projects provide the opportunity to consider the needs of residents, tourists and not least the sports family from the beginning. Keeping accessibility in mind also means, in a further step, building homes that can be used by the elderly, families and people with disabilities long after the games end.

It is also clear that the host cities often start from very different levels and the objective declared on paper is usually subject to high cost pressures. It can thus happen that compromises are made during the implementation. This calls for an even clearer lobbying and support from society and politics in order to create the awareness that "inclusive" also means "sustainable". Because it's clear: a city or country that makes use of these opportunities is preparing for the future. Everyone will profit from this in the end.

Format: Panel discussion

- Moderator: Prof. Dr. Theresia Degener

Opening remarks by Verena Bentele (video message), German Federal Commissioner for the Rights of People with Disabilities

Panelists:

- Willi Lemke
- Kathleen O'Kelly-Kennedy, Australian wheelchair basketball player and bronze medal winning Paralympian
- Professor Timothy Davis, Cortland Universität

Guiding questions:

- How has the way society sees the Paralympics changed? And can we thus also see a change in the way people with disabilities are seen?
- What lasting structures will remain?
- How can we get even greater support from decision-makers and society?
- What new ideas are being generated by the Paralympics for joint sports activities of people with and without disabilities in the field of amateur sport?