

Quiet Celebration, Striking Discrimination

The loud and passionate the Olympic Games were the little attention the Paralympic Games got in Hungary. Instead of live television and radio broadcasts that we experienced during the Olympics, the Paralympic Games received only 50-minute long summaries which mostly did not make it to prime time in the agenda. In spite of the low representation of the latter, the Hungarian National Television (MTV) and the Hungarian Paralympic Committee are talking about a great step forward.

Budapest, summer 2012, Ráday Street: one of the most popular streets of the city, full of cafés and restaurants. Between July the 27th and August the 12th it was impossible to walk along this street without hearing the sound of the Olympics games and rooting people being glued to the screen. During the first days of September, the same street was still full of people but quietly sitting around their tables, enjoying the warm late summer weather. The excitement of the Olympic Games was long gone and everybody got back to their daily routines. These were the days of the Paralympic Games where several Hungarians participants. Why did than the sound of cheering faded away on the streets?

Broadcasting imbalance

While the Olympic Games were broadcasted live on the Hungarian National Television (MTV), which owns the exclusive right to cover the event, the Paralympic Games received only approximately 100 minutes in the program agenda of the channel. MTV was harshly criticized by the civil society, human right groups and other entities for not giving equal attention to the Paralympics. In response to the criticism MTV could not emphasized more the fact that this year they devoted a lot more time to the Paralympics than ever before.

In 2008 the Paralympic Games during MTV covered the event only in 25-30 minutes a day. This year the television the channel quadrupled this time, says Ágnes Cserhádi, the spokesperson of MTVA (Media Support and Asset Management Fund). The Hungarian Paralympics Committee (MPB) agrees on that. The Committee considers the growth in the broadcast time of Paralympics as a huge step forward. "Certainly we would have been very happy if our sportsmen got more representation on the screen. But 4 years ago from Peking we were covered in 25 minutes in the late evening hours, now in the morning and in the evening we got 50-50 minutes a day. This is a pivotal step forward, says the MPB.

The participants` opinion

Due to the media representation of physically challenged people in general, the attitude of the society towards them is getting better. People are interested in the Paralympic Games that is why many gave voice on Facebook and various forums to their shock about the imbalance in the means and time of the coverage, says Veronika Juhász, silver medalist in wheelchair fencing.

It is a significant development comparing to previous years that there was a summary about the Paralympic Games every day on the state channel and that the swimming contest, where Tamás Sors, the Hungarian competitor won, was broadcasted live, says Csaba Sós, the head coach of the Hungarian Paralympic swimmer team. Pál Szekeres, winner of multiple medals both on the Olympic and the Paralympic Games in fencing and deputy minister of state for sport, is also happy with the development he sees. In London the participants of the Paralympics were surrounded by Hungarian journalists, they were constantly interviewed. The audience was enthusiastically cheering for the competitors. In these regards there was no difference between the Olympics and the Paralympic Games. The participants got much encouragement and power from fans, who uploaded pictures and notes on Facebook about their performance which received numerous likes, said the coach. According to Mr. Szekeres, it is all about positive attitude. „Maybe the para-sport received less time in the television than the healthy Hungarian participants, it was way more than a couple of years ago.”- says the deputy minister. In this development the devotion and hard work of Zsolt Gömöri, the president of the Paralympics Committee played an important role, emphasized both Mr. Szekeres and Mr. Sós.

The side of the Hungarian society

Hungary is still behind some of the Western European countries, for example the Netherlands where the physically challenged sportspeople are heroes just as the participants of the Olympic Games, described the situation Bandor Nagy, sociologist and sport manager. According to Mr. Nagy the state owned media has a big responsibility in informing the Hungarian society about the incredible, uplifting and tragic stories of these people which are behind their achievements. Broadcasting the Paralympic Games helps the acceptance of physical disabilities since today in Hungary we still don't know how to act when we encounter such people, says the sociologist.

The opinions of our interviewees show that there is a transformation in the attitude, interest and representation of the disabled sportspeople. In many cases the participants do not consider the situation as serious and depressing as many articles depicted it. However, it is true that there is still a long way to go to reach equality. As Mr. Szekeres aptly put it: „I'm satisfied with the tendency but not with the speed of it.”

Eszter Zámbo - Nóra Sárga - Diamantis Mastrogiannakis