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# Marginalized Bodies, Individual Efforts: Disabled Athletes in Communist Romania

Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>National University for Physical Education and Sports – Bucharest, Roumanie

## Résumé

This study examines the experiences of Paralympic athletes in communist Romania, emphasizing their individual initiatives within a context characterized by the marginalization of people with disabilities. Employing oral history interviews, press articles, and archival documents as primary sources, the research highlights the personal agency and determination of athletes who engaged in sports despite systemic neglect and social stigmatization. During the communist era in Romania, state support and attention were selectively allocated, predominantly favoring athletes capable of enhancing the country's international visibility through conventional sports achievements. Consequently, individuals with disabilities frequently encountered substantial structural and societal obstacles in their efforts to participate in competitive sports.

The analysis indicates that, owing to the absence of institutionalized support for disabled athletes, their participation in sports was predominantly self-initiated, reflecting both personal motivation and resilience. These efforts constituted not only athletic endeavors but also subtle forms of resistance against marginalization, as athletes asserted their presence within public and competitive domains despite minimal recognition.

The case of Alexander Peev, Romania's sole Paralympic representative in 1972 in wheelchair table tennis, exemplifies the exceptional nature of such participation. Peev's experience underscores the challenges encountered by Paralympic athletes, including limited access to training facilities and social indifference, thereby highlighting broader patterns of neglect faced by people with disabilities during that period.

This study contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the history of Paralympic sport in Romania, provides new insights to the limited literature on this subject, and enhances the broader scholarship concerning the intersection of sport, disability, and politics during the communist regimes.

**Mots-Clés:** Paralympic athletes, Disabled athletes, Sport in communist Romania

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\*Intervenant