



A comparative historical study of swimming and paralympic athletics participations and competitions for the period from 1960-2024

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Abstract

The Paralympic Games is a major global sporting event and is a special gathering of a group of society who have been psychologically and physically rehabilitated to represent their countries in various sports. The aim of the research is - Document the historical trajectory of the quantity and diversity of swimming and Paralympic athletics competitions at the Summer Paralympic Games during the period from 1960 to 2024 - Compare and analyze the quantitative evolution of athletes' and countries' participation in both swimming and Paralympic athletics across different cycles. The researchers used the descriptive, comparative analytical approach, the research community consisted of (all competitions, results and participation of athletes and countries in swimming and athletics in all summer Paralympic Games held during the period from 1960 (Rome Games) to 2024 (Paris Games). This includes all approved events, the number of participating athletes (males and females, and of different categories of disability), and the number of countries represented. Main Conclusions Both sports have witnessed tremendous and continuous growth in the number of male and female athletes and participating countries over sixty years, underscoring their position and their significant role in the development of the Paralympic movement – yet athletics excels in all the data studied, indicating greater flexibility in logistical requirements and a wider diversity of opportunities to participate compared to swimming, which requires more specialized and expensive infrastructure and equipment. The most important recommendations are that the officials of the Paralympic Committee should provide all the main

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support requirements for developing countries to establish and develop all the requirements of swimming to promote wider participation in it.

Keywords: history, swimming and athletics, comparison.

Introduction

The Paralympic Games are a major global sporting event and are a special gathering of a group of society who have been psychologically and physically rehabilitated to represent their countries in various sports," the Paralympic Games have played a key role in changing attitudes by focusing on achievement rather than disability.... More importantly, it raised the profile of disability sport to the point where participants gained recognition as athletes in their own right, challenging prevailing assumptions and stereotypes about disability. Gold, J. R., & Gold, M. M. (2007)p133. Historically, Paralympic sports have tended to evolve around a certain type of disability, but as the popularity of these sports has increased, more individuals with different physical disabilities have wanted to participate. Webborn, N., & Van de Vliet, P. (2012)p65, Paralympic sport is an elite, exciting and inspiring sport. The Paralympic movement transcends the boundaries of sport and plays an important role in society Willick, S. E., & Lexell, J. (2014)p1. .Swimming and athletics are one of the distinctive Paralympic Games with wide participation in the games since their establishment in 1996 to the end of the 2024 session

Paralympic swimming is one of the most popular Paralympic sports, with competitors with a wide range of physical, visual and intellectual disabilities. As in all Paralympic sports, a classification system in this sport is used to classify athletes into categories to compete based on the limited activity caused by their disability. The rating system aims to provide fair competition by minimizing the impact of disability on competition outcomes. Tweedy, S. M., & Vanlandewijck, Y. C. (2009), Since the adoption of para athletics as an official event at the first Paralympic Games in Rome in 1960, athletics has witnessed continuous development and has become one of the most popular para athletics events. Most athletes and countries participate in para athletics at the Paralympic Games. Para athletics athletes are at full capacity in 130 countries around the world, World Para Athletics Many studies on these two sports and some Paralympic studies have indicated that (Jamal Sakran et al., 2024) researchers concluded that Paralympic swimming comes as the second sport in the number of events after the arena and field, making it the second sport with the number of players who compete in its sports events, and the number of countries that participate in this sport is almost half of the countries participating in all Paralympic Games, which does not know it is very important, either a study (Khalaf, & Ali. (2021)The researchers concluded by documenting all the details of undocumented participations in the Iraqi Paralympic Committee during the period from 1990 to 2017. They recommended paying attention to documenting Iraqi



international participations periodically through special records, and keeping them in the Iraqi Central Athletics Federation. The study of Abdul Amir, 2013) was the most important recommendations: 1. Sports organizations should be encouraged to provide persons with disabilities with more opportunities to participate in sports activities. States should support the participation of people with disabilities in national and international matches and Paralympic Games morally and financially by providing all capabilities, especially equipment for individual and team games, as they need significant financial funding by strengthening and supporting Paralympic committees, federations and subcommittees. The study (Al-Ayouti et al., 2017) concluded that the Paralympic Committee should provide a sufficient number of facilities, equipment and sports equipment with legal specifications commensurate with the number of national team players, the lack of budget provided by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Paralympic Committee for Teams and increasing media attention on Paralympic teams. As for the research problem, despite the importance that swimming and athletics carry in the history of the Paralympic Games, and being one of the games participating in the first events of the Paralympic Games, which witnessed a wide participation of athletes and countries from 1960 until the Paris 2024 Games, there is a clear research gap in academic studies that provide a comparative and comprehensive historical analysis of the participation and competitions of both games at the same time. You will provide a special comparative historical analysis covering a long period of time (more than six decades) of two important sports in the Paralympic Games. This contributes to a clear lack of special literature that often focuses on a single sport or a limited period of time, or does not provide a systematic comparison between different Paralympic sports. The objectives of the research are : - Documenting the historical trajectory of the quantity and diversity of swimming and Paralympic athletics competitions in the Summer Paralympic Games during the period from 1960 to 2024 - Analyzing the quantitative evolution of athletes' and countries' participation in both swimming and Paralympic athletics across different cycles.

Methodology

This study is based on the descriptive comparative analytical approach 1- Descriptive is through documenting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data related to the development of swimming competitions and participation in Paralympic athletics for the period (1960-2024), and describing the patterns and transformations that have occurred in these sports 2- Comparative It is through comparisons between swimming and Paralympic athletics, in several aspects, namely a- Number of competitions, b- Participation (athletes, women and men) c- Participating countries . 3- Analytical is through the interpretation of patterns and Observational transformations , and



linking them to historical factors, this approach is the most appropriate for studying complex mathematical phenomena over long periods of time.

Research community sampled by

Research Community

The research community consists of (all competitions, results and participation of athletes and countries in swimming and athletics in all summer Paralympics held during the period from 1960 (Rome) to 2024 (Paris Games). This includes all approved events, the number of participating athletes (males and females, and of different categories of disability), and the number of countries represented.

Research sample: Due to the nature of the historical study and reliance on official records, all available and official data for swimming and Paralympic athletics participations and competitions will be adopted within the specified time period (1960-2024)

Data Collection Tools

To achieve the objectives of the research, a variety of data collection tools will be relied upon, commensurate with the nature of the historical and analytical method:

- 1- Official records and documents of sports committees and bodies and databases of the International Paralympic Committee The archival databases and official results published on the official website of the International Paralympic Committee (Paralympic.org) will be consulted to collect information about the Paralympic Games, including the schedule of competitions, medal results (by sport, category, country, gender), and the number of athlete and country participants for each Games.
- 2- Published academic research for analytical historical studies, reviewing books, scientific articles, and academic research that dealt with the history of Paralympic sports, and the development of swimming and athletics in them.



Results

Table 1. Events, countries and the number of women and men participating in swimming and athletics competitions at the Paralympic Games for the period from 1960 to 2024

year	Athletics					Swimming				
	Events	Country	Men	Woman	Total	Events	Country	Men	Woman	Total
1960	25	10	21	10	31	62	15	32	45	77
1964	42	16	42	40	82	62	13	65	33	98
1968	70	26	296	127	423	68	24	161	103	264
1972	73	29	378	170	548	56	33	169	110	279
1976	208	39	618	156	774	146	34	269	102	371
1980	275	40	687	249	936	192	36	293	148	441
1984	449	51	885	313	1198	345	43	349	192	541
1988	345	57	881	260	1141	257	44	502	160	662
1992	241	75	723	205	928	163	56	295	192	487
1996	210	85	711	197	908	168	50	274	183	457
2000	234	104	800	244	1044	196	62	356	219	575
2004	194	116	767	297	1064	166	61	331	229	560
2008	160	111	696	333	1029	140	62	323	224	547
2012	170	141	758	373	1131	148	75	346	269	615
2016	177	146	695	445	1140	152	79	393	264	657
2020	167	155	653	489	1142	156	74	341	263	604
2024	164	152	618	509	1127	141	72	324	281	605

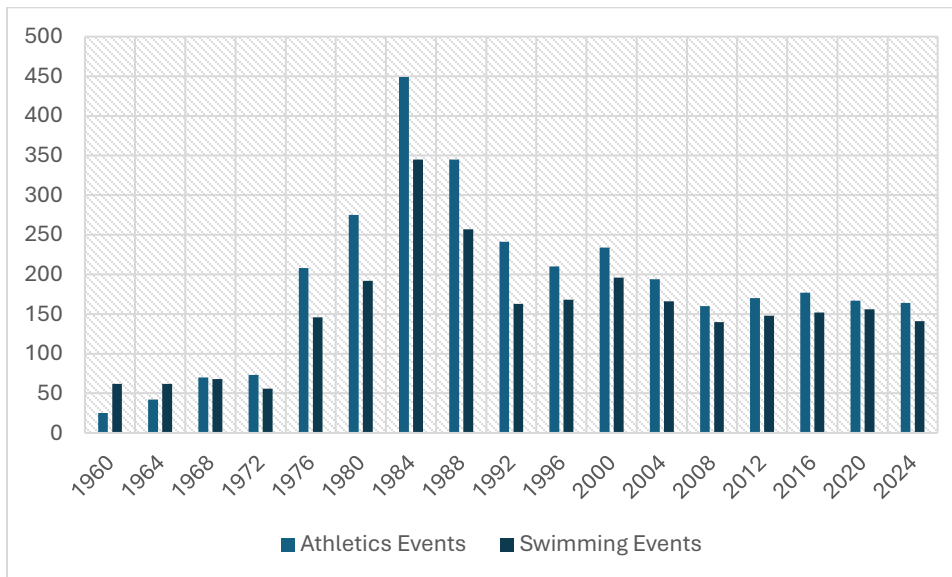


Figure 1. The number of events shows swimming and athletics from the first Paralympic Games in 1960 to the last session in 2024

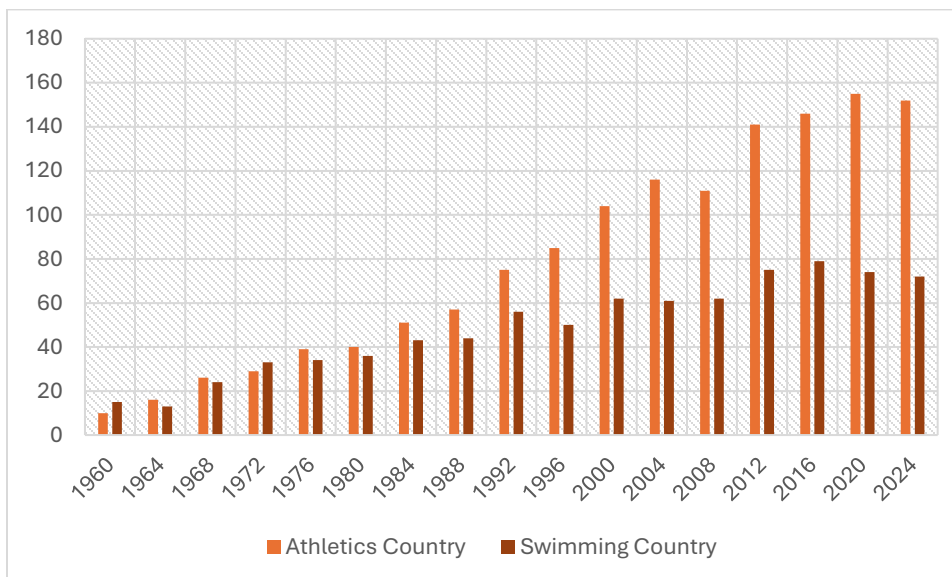


Figure 2. Shows the number of countries participating in swimming and athletics from the first Paralympic Games in 1960 to the last session in 2024

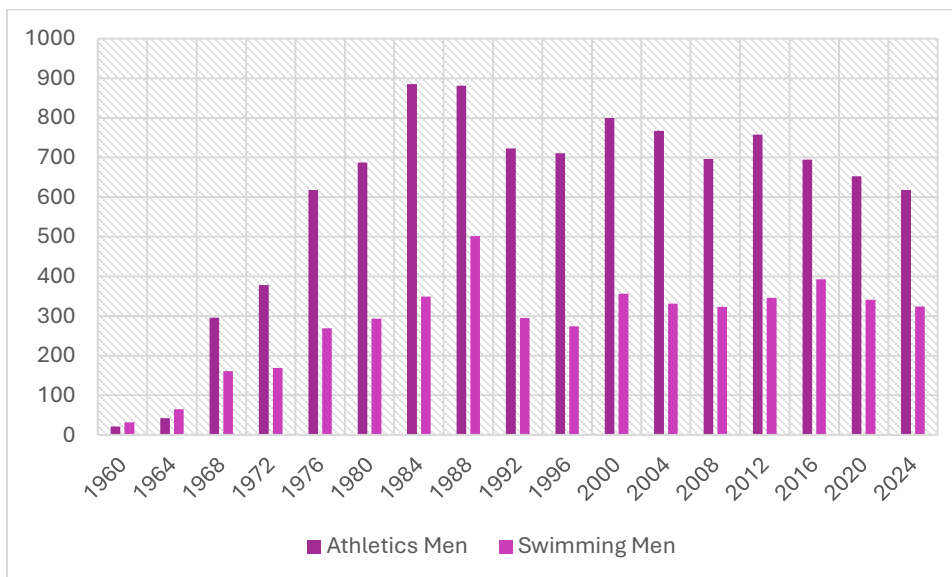


Figure 3. It shows the number of men participating in swimming and athletics from the first Paralympic Games in 1960 to the last session in 2024

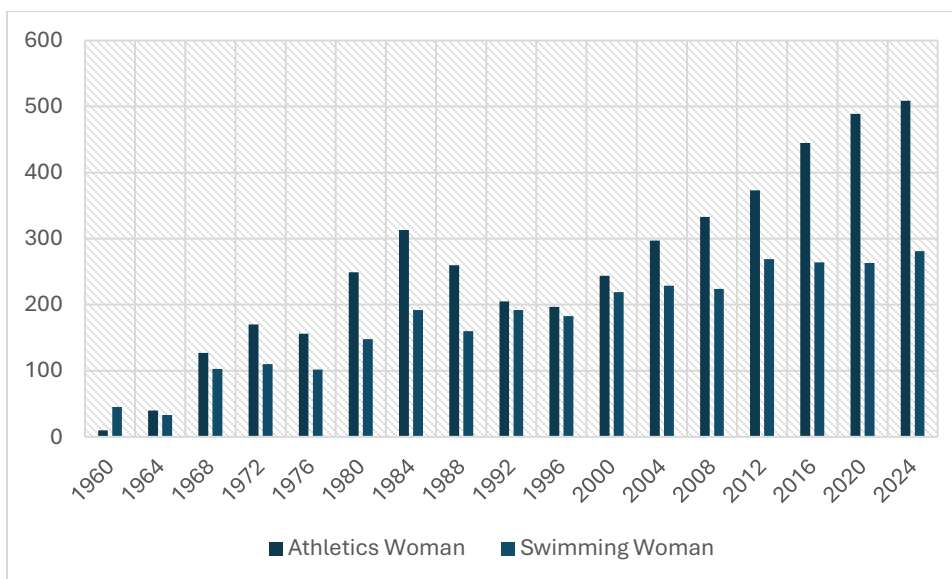


Figure 4. It shows the number of women participating in swimming and athletics from the first Paralympic Games in 1960 to the last session in 2024

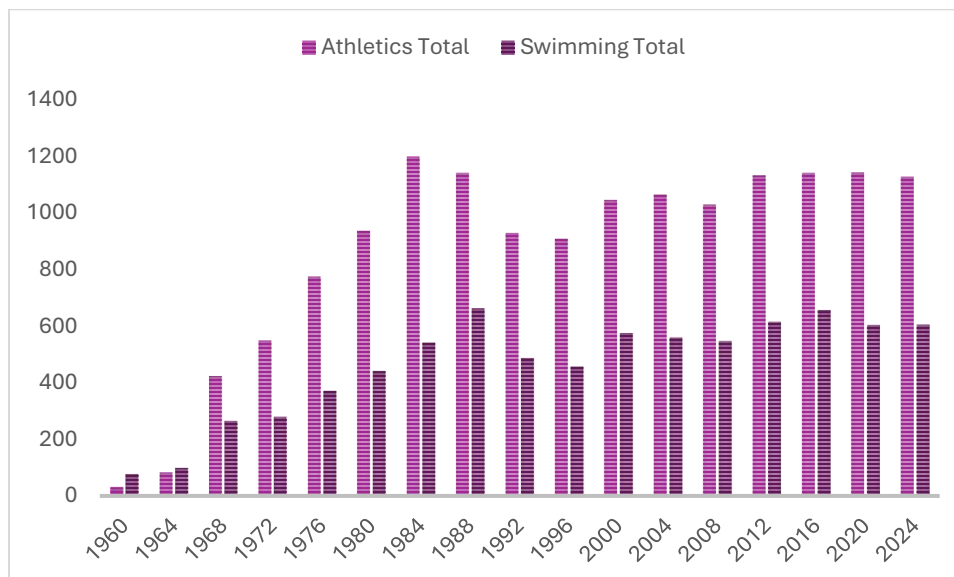


Figure 5. It shows the total number of athletes, women and men, participating in swimming and athletics from the first Paralympic Games in 1960 to the last session in 2024

Discussion

From Table (1) and Figure (1) regarding the number of events held during the first Paralympic Games in 1960 to the last session in 2024 in swimming and athletics, both athletics and swimming appear to have the largest number of events in the mid-eighties, specifically in 1984, indicating a significant expansion period for both sports within the Paralympic Games. Baumgart, J. K., Blaauw, E. R., Mulder, R., & Severin, A. C. (2022) indicate that athletics and swimming together contributed 86% of the decline in the total number of medal competitions, 55% of the decline in sports competitions, and 14% of the decline in categories.

While the number of swimming events was initially higher than athletics in 1960, athletics quickly surpassed swimming in the number of events and generally maintained a higher number throughout most of the observed period (MauerbergDecastro et al., 2016).

Until other sporting events are added to the list of sports, such as athletics, namely long jump, high jump, and triple jump, the decline in the number of events for both sports after 1984 may indicate a shift in the structure of events or classification systems within the Paralympic movement, perhaps with the aim of more uniform competition categories. Despite falling from their peak, both sports still have a large number of events, such as Disability Swimming Races include four Various swimmers (freestyle, butterfly, backstroke and breaststroke), covered over



only four distances (50, 100, 200 and 400 meters) with 14 disability classifications (Schipman, J., Saulière, G., Le Toquin, B., Marc, A., Forstmann, N., Toussaint, J. F., & Sedeaud, A. (2021).p2), highlighting their importance and continued popularity within the Paralympic Games. Swimming is one of the most common Paralympic sports, with competitors with a wide range of physical disabilities. , visual and intellectual. Athletics has undergone continuous development since its adoption as an official event at the first Paralympic Games in Rome in 1960, and has become one of the most popular events..

Paralympic athletics is a core event that underpins disability sports and is the event where athletes compete for the most medals at the Paralympic Games organized by the International Paralympic Committee. Paralympic athletes compete in track for the most medals, along with swimming (International Paralympic Committee).

By looking at Table (1) and Figure (2) of the number of participating countries from the first Paralympic Games in 1960 to the last session in 2024 in swimming and athletics, they show a significant growth in the number of countries in both sports, as athletics began with the participation of 10 countries in 1960, and this number increased significantly to reach 152 countries in 2024. In contrast, swimming began with 15 countries in 1960 and reached 72 countries in 2024.

According to the researchers, swimming needs more equipment than athletics (Howe, P. D. (2008) indicates that the existence of technological disparities negatively affects the ability of athletes with disabilities in developing and emerging economies to access the equipment they need to compete on an equal footing with athletes in richer countries. Swartz, L., Bantjes, J., Rall, D., Ferreira, S., Blauwet, C., & Derman, W. (2016) confirm this and previous studies in similar international competitions suggest that low- and middle-income countries are less likely to participate in events that require expensive equipment and technology (Mauerberg-deCastro, E., Campbell, D., & Tavares, C. P. 2016).

Because many Paralympic events require the use of high-quality assistive products, such as synthetic blades, sports wheelchairs, or race-specific manual/tricycles, lack of access to them has been associated with the achievement gap and poor representation of low- and middle-income countries at the Paralympic Games.

In addition to other important factors such as classification of disability in swimming, which affects the lack of wide participation.

As Wu, S. K., & Williams, T. (1999)p162 note, misclassification is an urgent and persistent problem in disability sports. As with many other sports, it is the root cause of extreme frustration



and anger in swimmers who feel hurt by losing to a competitor who was supposed to be in a higher category, and in coaches and swimmers who may think they are harmed by being placed in a higher category than their disability deserves. At the Paralympic Games In 1996, six appeals and protests were lodged against classification in swimming competitions.

By looking at Table (1) and Figure (3) of the number of male and female participants from the first Paralympic Games in 1960 to the last session in 2024 in swimming and athletics, it is logical that the number of participants in athletics is greater due to the large number of athletics competitions and the clear classification of them and the fact that the Paralympic swimming game needs a water medium for competitions, which constitutes a greater training time barrier, smart equipment, a larger number of assistants and larger training programs. This is with regard to the comparison between swimming and athletics, but with regard to the number of women participating in proportion to men, it is considered small and unequal (Ogoura, K. 2022).

Between 1968 and 1984, the Olympic and Paralympic Games were held in different cities, and this may have contributed to significant fluctuations in female athletes' participation rates in that period (since 1988, the proportion of female athletes at the Paralympic Games has increased continuously, as has their percentage at the Olympic Games). The overall proportion of female athletes is either equal to or less than that of male athletes, and has not yet exceeded it. This is due to very low female participation in some States. Four teams were represented by women at the 2012 Games and two at the 2016 Games.

Conclusions

- 1- Both sports have witnessed tremendous and continuous growth in the number of male and female athletes and participating countries over sixty years, which confirms their position and their great role in the development of the Paralympic movement, with this evident the superiority of athletics in all the data studied, indicating greater flexibility in logistical requirements and a wider diversity of participation opportunities compared to swimming, which requires more specialized and expensive infrastructure and equipment.
- 2- The impact of classification systems and technology in which limited the spread of swimming in some countries of the world, while joining the arena games contributed to increasing its popularity
- 3- The graphs showed the exceptional growth of women's participation in the two games, reflecting the efforts of sports bodies and organizations to strengthen the aspect of equality between men and women.



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Recommendations

- 1- Paralympic Committee officials should provide all the key support requirements for developing countries to establish and develop all swimming requirements to promote wider swimming.
- 2- Continue to study and develop classification systems in both games to reach a limit of parity in competitions and to reach results and achieve sports gains.



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