

Home > News and views > News > Including persons with disabilities in surfing

About

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Including persons with disabilities in surfing

Combining research, practice and activism, we are including persons with disabilities in the surfing world, attempting to raise awareness, reduce social barriers, and teach adaptive surfing.

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Combining research, practice and activism, we are including persons with disabilities in the surfing world, attempting to raise awareness, reduce social barriers, and teach adaptive surfing.

Denise de Siqueira – surfer, athlete, researcher

Denise de Siqueira is an adaptive surfing athlete and a member of the [Surf and Sustainability Research Group \(SandS\)](#), a multidisciplinary research group founded by Marcos Bosquetti at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), Florianópolis Island, in southern Brazil.

Denise defended her MSc thesis of Architecture & Urbanization on accessible beaches and adaptive surfing in Brazil under the research co-supervision of Professor Bosquetti. This is the first research on this topic conducted in Brazil.

During the fieldwork Denise visited 15 beaches in three states of Brazil checking – on her wheelchair - the accessibility and infrastructure of the beaches considered accessible, as well as the two community initiatives towards social inclusion of persons with disabilities in surfing in Brazil: the NGO Adaptsurf in Rio de Janeiro, and the Programa *Surf Inclusivo* (Inclusive Surf Program) in Santos.

Together, Denise and Marcos have [presented papers and published articles](#) in international events and academic journals on social inclusion of persons with disabilities in surfing, as well as contributed as guest speakers of local and regional community and sport events related to social innovation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in sport.

In terms of practice and activism, Denise de Siqueira is an inspiring example of social inclusion and adaptive surfing. Denise start learning how to surf in 2016 at *Surf Sem Fronteiras* (Surfing Without Frontiers) - an NGO that she helped to establish, in partnership with the local community, beach lifeguards, and volunteers from UFSC.

As an insider activist Denise started a social movement to include the female category in the regional and national adaptive surfing championships in 2017. In 2018, the Brazilian Federation of Surfing included the female adaptive surfing category. From 2018 to 2019 Denise participated in 5 adaptive surfing championships, winning three of them, including the national one. In March 2020, Denise represented Brazil in the 2020 International Surfing Association (ISA) World Para Surfing Championship.

Facing challenges

There are many barriers we face while working to include persons with disabilities in surfing, including:

- Social barriers, due to ableism – i.e. the discrimination of and social prejudice against persons with disabilities
- The lack of enforcement of existing policies and laws, such as the Brazilian law of Inclusion of Persons with Disability, that determines that urban projects must meet the principles of Universal Design, which entails that spaces should be inclusive for all people, without the need for adaption
- Not enough public investment in projects and initiatives to promote the social inclusion of persons with disabilities in sport

Overcoming challenges

To overcome these challenges, we generate and share knowledge to raise awareness and reduce discrimination and social prejudice, so that we can engage the community in a bottom up approach to make a change. Ideally, we would like to have more resources to invest on media campaigns, training persons with disabilities, and to organize more regional adaptive sport events to promote social inclusion.

We understand that the persons with disabilities are the change makers; however, engaging the local stakeholders (the community, municipality, sport associations, coaches, and universities) is key to empower the movement for including persons with disabilities in sports through a bottom-up approach, especially in developing countries.

Our experience in Brazil shows that sport for development organizations are doing good, but could be more proactive in including persons with disabilities in their programs.

We have federal laws for social inclusion of persons with disabilities, but we lack specific laws and policies for inclusion of persons with disabilities in sport; therefore, sport federations and governments should work proactively on this matter. Sport federations should explore the power of social media as a tool for including persons with disabilities in sport.

We also understand that the inclusion of women in sport has also contributed to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in surfing and other outdoor sports. Indeed, any type of initiatives to promote human rights and reduce racism, sexism, and ableism contribute to the social inclusion of persons with disabilities in sport.

Denise de Siqueira, MSc., is an adaptive surf athlete in the Para Surf Prone 1 category. She represented Brazil at the 2020 ISA World Para Surfing Championship at La Jolla, California. She is a research member of SandS - Surf and Sustainability Research Group at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). She represents UFSC in the Accessibility Committee of the Brazilian National Standards Organization (ABNT). Denise is one of the founders of the inclusive surfing NGO Surf Sem Fronteiras (Surf Without Frontiers). She is one of the leaders at Route-Brasil, the largest Brazilian Enviro-Surf NGO.

Marcos Bosquetti, PhD., is a full-time professor in the Socioeconomic Center of the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) and the founder and coordinator of SandS - Surf and Sustainability Research Group, the first multidisciplinary research group on this topic in Latin America. Marcos is a visiting professor at the Center for Surf Research, San Diego State University, California, USA and a member of the International Association for Surfing Researchers. In the last 10 years at UFSC Marcos has coordinated 38 outreach social projects on education, health, sports and citizenship, engaging more than two thousand university students in initiatives to promote social inclusion of young people.



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What is sport and development?

'Sport and development' refers to the use of sport as a tool for development and peace.

Actors in sport, academia, private sector, non-profit and non-governmental organisations, government agencies, UN agencies and international organisations, the media, the general public as well as young people are increasingly interested in the potential of sport as a tool to reach personal, community, national and international development objectives. They are also interested in how sport can be used as a tool for addressing some of the challenges that arise from humanitarian crises and in conflict and post-conflict settings.

As sport becomes increasingly part of humanitarian and development work, as well as a part of the corporate social responsibility practices of some private sector actors, interested parties are anxious to explore the potential, as well as the limitations, of sport in their work.

For these very different actors to understand each other better, it becomes necessary to develop common definitions and frameworks for action in order to improve practice.