

Attitudes towards the leisure of people with Intellectual Disabilities

Juan S. Fernández-Prados¹, Isabel Guirao-Piñeyro²
& María J. González-Moreno³

Abstract

The primary objective of this article is to evaluate the reality of public opinion and attitudes towards the world of disability in general and the leisure time of people with intellectual disabilities specifically. This study emerges in the context of a strategic plan by the “Asociación A Toda Vela”, a plan intended to improve the quality of life of young people with intellectual disabilities by participating in leisure activities. The most notable conclusions of this study determine that the social relationships of people within the world of disabilities are reduced to a narrow circle of people who are “close” and a socially distant majority that comprises an authentic social barrier to full inclusion. Conversely, a theoretical-practical divergence was also observed, i.e., although belief in the right to leisure for people with intellectual disabilities has a broad consensus, respondents express difficulties in acting on such attitudes in practice.

Keywords: Attitudes; Inclusive leisure; Intellectual Disabilities; Leisure; Public opinion; Rights.

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¹ Department of Sociology and CEMyRI, University of Almería. E-mail: jsprados@ual.es.

² Management of “A Toda Vela” Association, Almería. E-mail: isabel@atodavela.org.

³ Department of Sociology, University of Almería. E-mail: mgm302@ual.es.

Correspondence to: Juan S. Fernández-Prados, Department of Sociology and CEMyRI, University of Almería, 04120 Almería, Spain. Fax: +34 950 015340; E-Mail: jsprados@ual.es.

1. Introduction

1.1. Motivation and justification

At least three reasons motivated the completion of this study on attitudes towards intellectual disabilities and leisure. The first is associated with the approval of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly (Resolution 61/106) on 13 December 2006 and the paradigm shift that this resolution instigated. Spain ratified the Convention on 3 December 2007, and the convention took effect on 3 May 2008. The move from a “medical rehabilitation model” to a “social model” involving autonomy and rights compelled us to broaden the manner in which the world sees disability: beyond the “limited” person to a view, that encompasses the whole of society and the responsibility to include equal opportunities for disabled people in any environment (Palacios, 2008). In this new context or paradigm, it is essential to understand leisure in the context of disability, not only as mere therapy but also as an integral human experience and a fundamental human right that governments must ensure for all people (Lázaro, 2008). Article 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states, clearly and explicitly, that the states, parties and governments that ratify this treaty shall ensure that persons with disabilities «enjoy access to places for cultural performances and services, such as theatres, museums, cinemas, libraries and tourism services» (UN, 2007, p. 18).

The second reason is based on the reality of Spanish society captured in various studies in which both sides are presented: the world of disability in the first person and the public opinion of citizens. On the one hand, the Survey on Disabilities, Personal Autonomy and Dependency Situations (EDAD), conducted by the National Institute of Statistics (INE) in 2008, is currently the primary source of data on disabilities in Spain (INE, 2008). In addition to determining areas of leisure and free time (primarily watching television and listening to the radio), the survey also analyses the subjective perception of discrimination and the situations in which discrimination occurs. Thus, people with disabilities who acknowledge having experienced discrimination indicate social relationships (41%) and social participation (26%) as the most prominent areas in which discrimination occurred, whereas participation in cultural, leisure, and entertainment activities reached a significant 18%. Conversely, the Center for Sociological Research (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas – CIS), a dependent body of the

Ministry of the Presidency that has been key in understanding Spanish public opinion, has scarcely addressed the phenomenon of disability in its various studies (Huete, 2013). The most recent information is from survey 3008/0-0 in December 2013, in which a majority of Spaniards (57.2%) reported that accessing leisure venues such as cinemas, theatres, museums, and exhibitions is difficult or very difficult for people with disabilities (CIS, 2013).

Finally, third-sector organizations are the first to denounce the difficulties of the collective of people with disabilities with regard to accessing and enjoying leisure and free time activities because the people with disabilities must pay for tickets for their personal companions/assistants, for the use of adapted transport, etc., all of which render activities prohibitively expensive. Specifically, this study arose from the initiative of the “Asociación A Toda Vela”, founded in 1997 to incorporate a missing fundamental element into the lives of young people with intellectual disabilities: leisure activities and friendships. In its third strategic plan, the initiative proposes a goal to exert influence on the environment and on the community, understanding that a more just, supportive, and inclusive society results in the best scenario for the dignified life of people with intellectual disabilities. It is thus important to know the opinion of the people from Almería (A Toda Vela, 2012). Plena Inclusión (2016), in its V Strategic Plan for Full Inclusion 2016-2020, approved on 24 June 2016 in the General Assembly, first proposed achieving full citizenship, and one of the results would be inclusive leisure activities.

1.2. Framework: public opinions and disabilities

Public opinion, social perception, and the population’s attitudes towards disabilities appear fairly frequently in specialized studies, although studies on specific types of disabilities, such as intellectual, or determined areas, such as leisure and free time, are less frequently observed (Huete, 2013; Fernández-Prados, Lozano Díaz, & Riaño Acevedo, 2015). Thus, for example, there are only half a dozen articles with the word “leisure” in their titles in the Journal of Intellectual Disability Research; furthermore, all of these articles are from the therapeutic perspective of the disabled person, coinciding in highlighting various benefits obtained from the practice of activities in their free time for improving quality of life (García-Villamizar & Dattilo, 2010). In this sense, it is no surprise that in the “World Report on Disability” from the WHO, hours dedicated to leisure are identified as

rehabilitation indicators. The most frequent types of assistance and support services are «community support and independent living – assistance with self-care, household care, mobility, leisure, and community participation» (WHO, 2011, p. 139).

King and colleagues (King, Law, King, Rosenbaum, Kertoy, & Young, 2003) went even further and developed a conceptual model of the factors affecting the participation of disabled children in leisure and recreational activities. These authors considered not only child or family factors but also environmental factors in which informal support relationships or social networks «have a positive impact on activity levels of children with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities often cite “being believed in by others” as a crucial factor determining their success in life» (King *et al.*, 2003, p. 74). Thus, it makes sense to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of the population in general in contributing to inclusion and to success in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities, particularly in the area of leisure. Buttimer and Tierney (2005) observed that feeling unwelcome and rejected is an important barrier to the participation of people with intellectual disabilities in leisure activities. Similarly, Verdonshot and colleagues (Verdonshot, de Witte, Reichrath, Buntinx, & Curfs, 2009) confirmed the correlation between positive attitudes and integration into the community.

A focus on reports that have been published internationally reveals an exhaustive analysis of Eurobarometers (Diez & Moreno, 2014). The authors identified 23 European surveys between 1962 and 2009 with 132 questions dedicated to disabilities; these questions highlighted topics regarding discrimination and health. Other more recent national studies of interest have been conducted in Ireland and England. Beginning in 2001, the first National Disability Authority has performed a study every five years on public attitudes towards disability in Ireland (National Disability Authority, 2011). The second, in England, complements the face-to-face survey with a self-completion questionnaire sent by mail to avoid social desirability and to improve reliability (Staniland, 2010).

As previously mentioned, the CIS conducted a survey in December 2013 comprising a series of specific questions on disability; at least three ideas can be taken from this survey to outline Spanish attitudes. First, 83% of Spaniards report agreeing or strongly agreeing that “people with disabilities are exactly the same as other people”, a strong consensus. Second, 33% of respondents reported discomfort when in the presence of a disabled person (blind, in a wheelchair, or who cannot speak). However, 43% of participants

believed that people in general experience discomfort in the presence of the disabled. Finally, although 75% of the respondents claimed to know at least one disabled person, only 25% acknowledged having a disabled friend (a closer and more habitual relationship). In summary, according to this survey, the majority of Spaniards believe that people with disabilities are equal, although one-third felt uncomfortable around the disabled and only a small minority (25%) engage in a friendly relationship with a person who is disabled (see Tab. 1).

Table 1 - *Attitudes towards disability*

	Cognitive	Affective	Behavioral
	Declare that people with disabilities are completely equal	Feel uncomfortable around people with disabilities	Have friends with disabilities
Total	83%	30%	25%
Have friends with disabilities	86%	24%	100%
Do not have friends with disabilities	82%	32%	0%

Source: Prepared by the authors using CIS study N. 3008 (December 2013).

The hypotheses that having friends with disabilities may enhance the belief that people with disabilities are the same as others and that it is possible to be comfortable around the disabled are addressed using analysis of variance (ANOVA). Although results were not significant for the first question of a cognitive nature ($F = 2.6593$; $p = .1031$), the second proved to be quite significant ($F = 13.871264$; $p = .0002$). In other words, enjoying the friendship of people with some type of disability helps people feel more comfortable with the disabled but does not confirm their equality. This result may be because the vast majority of the public agrees with and supports the right to equality, whereas feelings or “being comfortable” require contact and interaction.

2. Aims and hypothesis

The primary aim of this article is to evaluate the reality of public opinion and attitudes towards the world of disability in general and the leisure time of people with intellectual disabilities specifically.

The main hypothesis is that the social relationships of people within the world of disabilities are reduced to a narrow circle of people who are “close”

and a socially distant majority that comprises an authentic social barrier to full inclusion. So, having friends with disabilities may enhance the belief that people with disabilities are the same as others and that it is possible to be comfortable around the disabled.

3. Methods: Sample, Instruments, Procedure

This study is based on survey research using a standardized questionnaire that was conducted *ad hoc*. The survey fact sheet shows the area (province of Almería), scope and size of the sample, which comprised 404 telephone interviews, assuming a 5% error, and whose fieldwork was conducted during one week in July (see Tab. 2).

Table 2 - *Survey fact sheet*

Term	Description
Area	Province of Almería
Scope	Almeria population aged 16 years and older
Sample size	404 interviews
Allocation	Proportional by gender and age
Sampling procedure	Questionnaires administered by telephone interviews. Sampling selection was simple random using the “Infobel España Office” database.
Sampling error	For a 95.5% confidence level (two sigmas), and $P = Q$, the true error is $\pm 5.0\%$ for the entire sample.
Date of completion	From 18 to 26 July 2015 by “Europ Assistance” surveyors

Source: Prepared by the authors, ADIA-2015.

The first step was the creation of a research team with technical staff from the “Asociación A Toda Vela” and from the University of Almería. After defining the objective of the study, to examine the attitudes of the province of Almería’s population towards the leisure of people with intellectual disabilities, a questionnaire was constructed by reviewing scales such as Attitudes Toward Disabled Persons (ATDP) (Yuker, Block, & Young, 1966) and other more recent scales such as The Multidimensional Attitudes Scale toward Persons with Disabilities (MAS) (Findler, Vilchinsky, & Werner, 2007). Although these scales served as guidance, our more specific topic and technical staff concerns were particularly relevant to

the “Attitudes toward Intellectual Disabilities in Almería” questionnaire (ADIA-2015). The employed instrument or questionnaire comprised three segments:

- a) socio-demographic variables;
- b) relations in the area of disability and evaluation; and
- c) a set of questions requesting the respondent to evaluate different statements regarding intellectual disabilities and leisure.

4. Data analysis

For the presentation of the results, we followed the structure of the questionnaire itself.

4.1. Socio-demographic variables

Both gender and age are relevant to the allocation designed in theoretical sampling and to the subsequent weighting to correct deviations from the data register to 1 January 2015. This weighting causes the results to adjust to the reality of the surveyed population’s socio-demographic profile: 49% women and 51% men, 26% young people aged between 16 and 30, 48% adults aged between 31 and 60, and 26% older than 60. Of the respondents, 41% were employed, 19% were retired, 17% were homemakers, 13% were students, and 10% were unemployed. Furthermore, 7% of respondents reported having some type of disability. Although this figure is lower than the 10% that the Survey on Disabilities, Personal Autonomy, and Dependency Situations stipulates, the number is justified because of the telephone interview.

4.2. Relation with the area of disability and evaluation

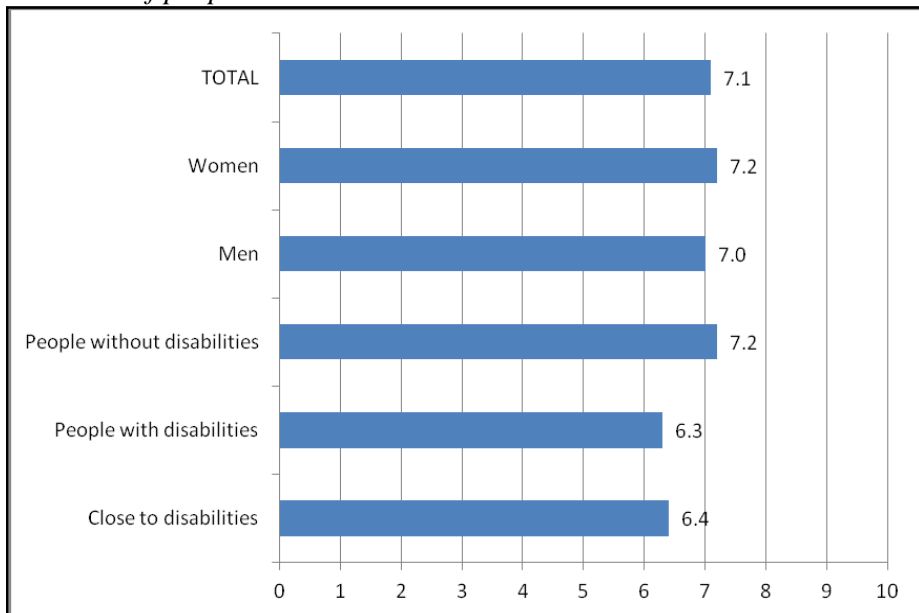
This section focuses on three issues or dimensions: personal relationships, contact with the media, and knowledge of associations whose objectives and activities favor people with disabilities. Of those interviewed, 58% reported not having a relationship with a person who has a disability whereas respondents who answered positively primarily had such relationships in the family environment (31%). Respondents who recalled having read or heard any news regarding disabilities in the media during the last year also represented a minority (36%). Only 39% reported being familiar with an association dedicated to people with disabilities. The

associations most mentioned were “Verdiblanca”, “A Toda Vela”, and “El Saliente” (22%, 15%, and 8%, respectively).

The combination of the three relational criteria with the area of disability (personal, media, and associative) presents a profile of a small minority of the survey population whom we may consider to be “close to disability” (9.7%). These participants interact with, read and listen to news about and are familiar with associations dedicated to people with disabilities.

The evaluation of the relationships between the surveyed population and people with disabilities indicated a mean of 7.1 on a scale of 10 ($SD = 2$); 68% of respondents rated the treatment received by people with disabilities at 7 points or higher. Although the population approved of the treatment received by people with intellectual disabilities, according to their scores, people with disabilities and people considered “close” are significantly more critical (see Fig. 1). The difference between the mean treatment ratings of people without disabilities ($M = 7.2$, $SD = 1.8$) and people with disabilities ($M = 6.3$, $SD = 3.6$) is nearly one significant point ($F = 4.376$; $Sig. = .037$). This result is nearly equal to people “close to disability” ($M = 6.4$, $SD = 1.5$) ($F = 5.438$; $Sig. = .020$).

Figure 1 - Mean evaluation of respondents' relationships with and treatment of people with disabilities

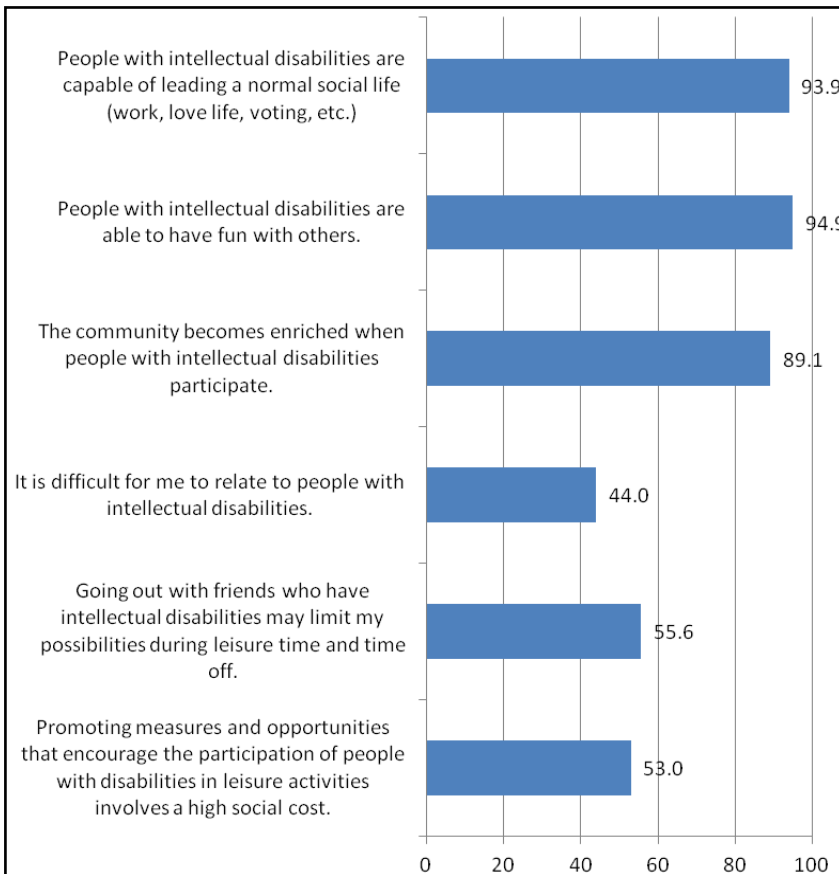


Source: Prepared by the authors, ADIA-2015

4.3. Evaluation regarding intellectual disability and leisure

On the one hand, there is a nearly absolute consensus (90% or more) on the first three general statements: “People with intellectual disabilities are capable of leading a normal life”, “They can have fun with others”, and “The community would be enriched” (see Fig. 2). Conversely, dissent occurred (approximately 50% to 50%) with the last three statements. Only half of participants agreed that “Going out with friends with intellectual disabilities may limit my possibilities with leisure and free time”, “Promoting measures and opportunities that encourage their participation in leisure activities involves a high social cost”, and “It is difficult for me to interact with people with intellectual disabilities”.

Figure 2 - Percentage of people who somewhat agree with the following statements



Source: Prepared by the authors, ADIA-2015

Thus, although there is substantial theoretical and cognitive agreement that people with intellectual disabilities can live normally and have fun with others, we observed that half of the respondents recognized the difficulties and limitations of living normally and effectively in their own relationships and leisure activities. Moreover, respondents considered the burdensome economic costs of policies that eliminate barriers in leisure spaces. In other words, nearly everyone agrees with including people with intellectual disabilities in theory and when speaking in general terms; however, qualms and misgivings emerge in daily personal practice.

4.4. Measuring instrument of the attitudes towards intellectual disabilities and leisure

The limitations of a telephone survey led us to design a brief questionnaire. Using factor analysis, the six statements proposed to respondents explained 58.9% of the variance with only two components. The questions that appeared in each component or dimension with more than .5 were identified using the Varimax rotation method with Kaiser normalization (see Tab. 3).

Table 3 - Rotated Component Matrix

Components	1	2
Q.1.- People with intellectual disabilities are capable of leading a normal social life (work, love life, voting, etc.).		.794
Q.2.- People with intellectual disabilities are able to have fun with others.		.817
Q.3.- It is difficult for me to interact with people with intellectual disabilities.	.77	
Q.4.- The community becomes enriched by the participation of people with intellectual disabilities.		.524
Q.5.- Going out with friends with intellectual disabilities may limit my possibilities for leisure activities and free time.	.793	
Q.6.- Promoting measures and opportunities that encourage the participation of people with disabilities in leisure activities comes at a high social cost.	.736	

Note: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Source: Prepared by the authors, ADIA-2015

The first component grouped questions 3, 5, and 6, related to personal and political-economic practice; in the second component, questions 1, 2, and 4 related to theory, rights, and general principles. The first sub-scale of practical attitudes resulted in a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .68. The second sub-scale of theoretical attitudes achieved .69.

The relationships between components of attitudes (theory-rights & practice-personal) and other variables are significant in “age” and in “close to disability” (see Tab. 4). The first one, has a strong relation with both components, while the second variable only has significant statistical relationship with theory-rights dimension of attitude towards intellectual disabilities and leisure. Therefore, younger people who are close to disability believe more strongly that people with disabilities have the same rights as others and that it is possible to be comfortable with the disabled while enjoying leisure together.

Table 4 - *Pearson Correlation (Sig.)*

	Theory-rights	Practice-personal	Age	Close to disability
Theory-rights	<i>I</i>	.05 (.35)	.19 (.00)**	.11 (.04)*
Practice-personal	.05 (.35)	<i>I</i>	.28 (.00)**	-.04 (.42)
Age	.19 (.00)**	.28 (.00)**	<i>I</i>	-.17 (.01)*
Close to disability	.11 (.04)*	-.04 (.42)	-.17 (.01)*	<i>I</i>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Prepared by the authors, ADIA-2015

5. Discussion

Understanding leisure as a right of people with intellectual disabilities requires moving beyond the purely therapeutic perspective of free time activities towards the involvement of the entire community in the construction of a society that promotes inclusive leisure. This finding required us to consider the role of all citizens in the achievement of this right, analyzing progress in this regard and changes in societal attitudes. The concepts of “social proximity to the world of disability” and “practical theoretical divergence” or “between evaluation and involvement” provided us with information regarding the “social distance” between the population in general and the world of disability as well as the “dysfunction” between the right (de iure) and the fact (de facto) of leisure and free time for people

with disabilities, situations in which the population poses limitations and difficulties.

Thus, on the one hand, the majority of the population (58%) did not have a relationship with a significant minority of their neighbors, people with disabilities (6.7%); had not read or heard any news regarding disability in the province's media (63.8%); or were not familiar with any disability associations (61.3%). Only a minority of the surveyed population could be considered "close to disability" (9.7%) because that group interacted with, read and heard news about, and were familiar with disability associations. Although the population approved of the treatment received by disabled people, as shown by their ratings, people with disabilities and people considered "close" to the respondents were significantly more critical.

Conversely, although there was nearly complete consensus on the idea that people with intellectual disabilities can live normally and have fun with others, half of the respondents recognized difficulties regarding inclusive leisure spaces (44%) or simply limiting those spaces (55.6%). Furthermore, respondents questioned providing economic and social resources for full participation because of their high cost (53%). Certainly, this aspect of the study requires further research to perfect the measuring instrument and to examine the dissonance among theory-practice, rights-policies, general-personal, etc. (Callus & Farrugia, 2016).

Thus, the primary challenge to encouraging the full inclusion of people with disabilities and making their right to leisure a reality occurs automatically by overcoming these dissonances and by turning the small "close" minority into a majority. For these objectives, it is essential to overcome socially constructed negative attitudes towards intellectual disabilities and increase services and interaction opportunities between people with and without intellectual disabilities (Devine, 1997; Devine & Piatt, 2013).

In this sense, for several decades, Lutfiyya (1991) has noted the importance of friendships between people with and without disabilities for the personal growth of both and to create opportunities for involvement and integration in the community in all its dimensions, including leisure activities and free time. However, Lutfiyya also noted the difficulties disabled people have meeting others and forming social networks, such as a lack of opportunities to meet people without disabilities, the lack of support, and continuity. Webster and Carter, from the Macquarie University Special Education Centre (MUSEC), analyzed friendships between people with and without disabilities at school, stating that although children establish a

mutual acceptance, share interests, and play games, these interactions rarely evolve into more intimate relationships (Webster & Carter, 2013a, 2013b). Those authors noted the need to continue investigating, given that studies on social relationships and friendships lack an appropriate methodology and necessary rigor (Webster & Carter, 2007). This last conclusion should help us remain alert to research and instruments created to understand and evaluate attitudes, such as Attitudes Toward Intellectual Disability (ATTID) (Morin, Crocker, Beaulieu-Bergeron, & Caron, 2013), for future research and studies as well as to contemplate qualitative techniques (Hutchison, 1990; Hutchison & McGill, 1990) that would help to examine the reasons for limitations and difficulties in establishing friendships in leisure environments.

This discussion as well as dialogues with other studies allow us to emphasize the importance of the dyad of friendships and inclusive leisure (Buttimer & Tierney, 2005; Amado, 2013). Increasing and intensifying friendships would undoubtedly help to promote leisure activities shared between people with and without intellectual disabilities. The ensuing issue, however, is how to achieve this; on the one hand, “A Toda Vela” already has extensive experience and incorporates good practices (Guirao-Piñeyro, 2013). In the international arena, we find proposals with specific strategies and activities to connect people with disabilities and community members (Amado, 2013). In any event, context and an inclusive society are our objectives because context and inclusiveness facilitate friendships and inclusive leisure beyond technical programs and support by spontaneously developing and including people with and without disabilities (Rossow-Kimball & Goodwin, 2014).

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