

**Climbing for equality: overcoming social inequality through sport. A narrative inquiry into the sport lives of five visually disabled climbers in Mexico City**

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Master's Thesis

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Social Sciences of Sport

University of Jyväskylä

Autumn 2016

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Department of Sport Sciences / Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences

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Climbing for equality: a narrative inquiry into the sport lives and social inequality of five visually disabled climbers in Mexico City.

Master's thesis, 102 pages. 2 appendices

Social Sciences of Sport

## ABSTRACT

This master thesis is a qualitative narrative inquiry that illustrates and explores the stories of five visually disabled participants who took up the practice of rock climbing and mountaineering as a means to overcome social inequality. The researcher's role within the study was that of active participation by being the coach and mountain guide for the participants over a period of five years. This narrative analysis reconstructs the stories of the participants in a coherent thematic analysis from a Marxist historical perspective, explaining how inequality towards the participants was created, by using the concept of Cultural Hegemony from Antonio Gramsci. The mentioned methodology was chosen because it provided an appropriate way of laying the groundwork for further analyzing how sports influenced the lives of the participants and helped them overcome social marginalization. Specifically, the work of Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning about social belonging, mimetic tension and social catharsis is proposed as suitable means of embodying and analyzing the participants' perceptions from the social viewpoint. In addition, Pierre Bourdieu's theories of habitus, field and capital are used to shed light on how socio-economic conditions can determine sport practice.

Data acquisition was done through different channels: focus group interviews, reflective and observation journals, and access to archival data (TV reports, newspaper and internet articles, and radio interview transcripts). The study constantly looks at the way the participant and society interact over a continuous period in Mexico City. This is done by comparing the individual economic, social and sports participation situations of the participants with the general situation of disabled people in Mexico by the use of various national survey data statistics as well as looking at the historical development of the different cultural ideals that dominate their present society. The results show that in many cases the participants were socially and economically objectified, which leads to a situation of discrimination and handicap. Despite this, the participants were able to overcome certain immediate marginal situations with the help of sport.

Key words: Disabled Sports, Sociology, Narrative Inquiry, Social Inequality, Cultural Hegemony.

## Acknowledgments

This master thesis, nor the opportunity to study abroad, would have never been possible if it was not for my parents. Mamá y papá, me encuentro sin palabras que sean suficientes para agradecerles todo lo que han sacrificado y dado por criarnos como unos seres humanos dignos. Se los he dicho ya una vez y se los vuelvo a decir, no hay nadie como ustedes, cada día que pasa, aunque no se los diga, pienso en lo afortunado que soy por tener la familia que tengo. Y también va para ti Rodrigo, la persona que más admiro en este mundo y más presumo a donde vaya. Espero que nunca dejes de pensar como lo haces, y que nunca dejes de cuestionar y enseñarme que en esta vida se camina con preguntas sin respuestas. Questa va anche per te Frankie, che mi hai insegnato a volare nel cielo infinito. Senza la tua pazienza di ascoltare le mie idee inutili ogni pomeriggio a casa, non avrei mai finito! TVBUBP! Para mis abuelos y abuelas, los cuales tengo su memoria viva en el corazón. Pero en especial a mi bisabuelo Miguel, quien estoy seguro, estuvo en el coro de León Felipe, sobre la colina de Madrid en 1936 gritando ¡que viene el lobo! El por sus ideales tuvo que abandonar a su patria querida. Hoy sus ideales siguen sin abandonar a su familia: *Alguns encara ens enrecordem.*

Also I would like to thank Hanna Vehmas who had the titanic patience to read and reread over my drafts and always made a great job in class, making us feel welcomed master students in Finland. Similarly, Jae Jensen, thank you for helping me by proof reading it and checking the language! Last but not least, I would like to thank all of the amazing people I have met in Finland, in this wonderful experience of studying abroad, who filled my mind and life of awesome ideas and experiences, I fear that if I mention them all here I would end up writing a second thesis...

*“Abajo y a la izquierda está el corazón”*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mexico recently celebrated its 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary of entrance to the convention of the ‘United Nations Rights of Persons with Disabilities’. The government decided to celebrate such a milestone by creating a national system for the ‘development and inclusion of disabled people’. This system’s aim is to better geographically locate all of the disabled people and provide them with effective means of accessing the public policies created for their benefit.<sup>1</sup> Ironically enough, Mexico classifies as the OECD country with the least pronounced public policy orientation towards the integration of people with disabilities and it is in fact, the country with the lowest ‘Integration Index Ranking of disabled people’ in OECD.<sup>2</sup>

Creating a ‘National System’ that better understands the needs of disabled people is one part of solving the problem. The other part is how to effectively use this information to find out how public policies and society can better integrate disabled people. Given that Mexico’s policy orientation is towards compensation, a shift is needed to the opposite direction. That direction should address the integration of disabled people as fully functional members of society by considering their unique geographical, cultural and social situations. This master thesis is oriented in that direction, it sheds light to this issue, by embodying the unique views and ideas of its visually disabled participants and through them, demonstrate how sports can be a means to achieve integration.

Either for good or bad, willingly or not, society plays a central role when it comes to integrating or marginalizing disabled people. Slowly, Mexican authorities are realizing this too. The president of Mexico recently stated that: “...it is important to fortify the participation of society when it comes to creating public policies that benefit disabled

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<sup>1</sup> <<http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2016/05/04/1090330>> Retrieved 05-05-2016, 19:37.

<sup>2</sup> “Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers. A synthesis of findings across OECD countries” Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010, Pg. 86-87

people”<sup>3</sup>. Many years before the president and government of Mexico realized this situation; different NGO’s, schools and universities, had previously set plans in motion by discussing, searching, and trying to find better strategies for inclusion of disabled people. On these tracks, ten years ago, *Sight of Emotion* (Ojos que Sienten), an NGO from Mexico City, was created in 2006 with the aim of: “changing the perceptions of visually disabled people by focusing on their abilities, empowering them and including them in social, professional and educational fields...”<sup>4</sup>. The bulk of its activities and projects are directed towards teaching photography to visually disabled people. However, in 2009 they decided to create an international voluntary sports project called “Discover Your Senses”.

This project was co-created with the first blind climber to reach the summit of Mt. Everest: Eric Weihenmayer, who led an international expedition composed of fifteen visually disabled climbers coming from USA, Canada and Mexico. The goal was to reach the summit of Mexico’s second highest Mountain: Mt Iztaccihuatl (5100mts above sea level). It was through this project that I got involved for the first time in disabled sports and it was also the first time I met the participants of this study. My job within this project, was training all the Mexican visually disabled climbers (who had no previous sport experience), so they were physically and mentally prepared to reach the summit. After eleven months of intense training and climbing, every participant got to the summit of Mt Iztaccihuatl. Throughout the project the practice of sports made the visually disabled climbers come to terms with their disabilities as well as having positive effects in different social and cultural aspects of their lives.

For me, this project brought to light the impact that sports can have on a community and how it plays a vital role in the development of the human potential of disabled populations. On the other hand, it also presented me a harsh reality: in Mexico disabled people are socially isolated and seldom practice sports. After the project’s completion,

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<sup>3</sup> <<http://www.excelsior.com.mx/nacional/2016/05/04/1090330>> Retrieved 05-05-2016, 19:37.

<sup>4</sup> <[http://www.ojosquesienten.org/en/quienes\\_somos.php](http://www.ojosquesienten.org/en/quienes_somos.php)> Retrieved 12-feb-16, 14:41.



the visually disabled climbers and I, decided to change this by keeping up a regular training schedule and weekend rock climbing sessions and mountain ascents. As a result of this, a group of energetic volunteers and even more energetic visually disabled people was born and my role of organizer, coach and mountain guide continued over a period of five years. The visually disabled climbers perceived that sport was not only having positive health benefits; it was also promoting different social, cultural, economic and psychological areas of their lives by reducing their social inequality. These notions inspired the idea of illustrating and exploring these individual stories as the main focus of my research for this master thesis.



**Photo:** The Researcher (far left) and Eric Weihenmayer (red jacket) with the international team of visually disabled climbers, after reaching the summit of Mt. Iztaccihuatl for the project: “Discover your Senses” 13/Nov/2009.

## 2. THE SETTING OF THIS STUDY

The first time I met all of the participants, I was amazed at the fact that they did not know or were probably naïve about the existence of disabled sport. For me, a soon-to-be graduate in social sciences of sport, it was obvious that even without sight you can still practice sport. But for the five visually disabled people sitting in front of me, this was their reality. Somehow and at some point, life had taken a wrong turn, a turn that led them to believe ‘disabled sport does not exist’. Or maybe they knew of its existence, but for some reason they neglected its practice. The five of them had introduced themselves; they were from different backgrounds and had different visual disabilities. However, they all had one thing in common: they did not practice any sport or type of physical activity. The most positive case: “fifteen years ago I practiced Tae Kwon do”, the most negative one: “I have never practiced any kind of physical activity”.

It was our first meeting and I was supposed to explain what my duties were as their ‘mountaineering and rock climbing coach’. *“I bet they have no idea what they signed up for...”* and *“I’m not sure if they will be able to handle the workload...”* those two thoughts kept running through my mind. They were about to plunge into a nine-month intensive training program, with no clue of how unfit they were for this task. Or so I thought, since the goal was climbing to one of the summits of Mt. Iztaccihuatl, which was just above 5000 meters above sea level. A task that looks easy on paper, but in reality it requires thousands of hours of sweat, hard work, frustration, tears, and uncertainty.

According to me we were facing ‘impossible odds’. On the other hand, the participants felt hopeful and envisioned that after ‘hours of sweat’ the rewards would crystalize in experiencing the dry and chilling wind of the mountains; the relaxing feeling of realizing the fruits of hard work, the joy that step-by-step progress brings and the clarity that one finds in the presence of nature (Transcript of group conversations, 2015).

I must admit, I was quite intimidated at the challenge in front of me. I remember that during the meeting one of the organizers bluntly voiced his concerns: “Eric Weihenmayer, the first blind climber to reach Everest, will come to Mexico with a group of American and Canadian visually disabled climbers. All of them are seasoned climbers and have gone all around the world to many different mountains. Our biggest concern here, is that the Mexican visually disabled participants make it to the top.... we have to make sure that whoever climbs with Eric and his group, is able to keep up with them.” (Reflective Journal, Miguel del Castillo, 2009.)

What I did not realize at that moment, is that the challenge ahead of them, was nothing compared to the challenge of being a visually disabled person in Mexico. Without even knowing it, these guys were already climbing mountains. These ‘mountains’, came in the form of all kinds of obstacles, which made their daily lives a challenge. Every morning they had to walk and transport themselves in an environment that is not fit physically for them; while trying to subsist on a precarious economic situation, in a society that marginalizes them socially and culturally. Training nine months was a vacation compared to what they had already gone through. But at that time I did not know this. In fact, I was very the opposite from this view of the world. To be fair, I was about to discover that far from the health promotion perspective of this project, the participants were to benefit out of sport in many different social and cultural ways. (Transcript of group conversations, 2015.)

### **2.1. The first meeting**

One long hour of meeting time passed and we were growing weary, so we decided to take a break. When I came out of the meeting room, the five of them, were already next to the coffee table. They were quietly laughing and talking to each other. Two of them were sitting down playing with their walking sticks. The other three fiddled and explored the table with their hands, searching for more cookies and coffee. I felt compelled to assist, so I darted across the room and poured some coffee for them. “*This is my entry point; I should get to know them...*” I said to myself. Feeling more confident and informal, I

asked them, why, even though they knew about its existence, had they never practiced disabled sports? The answer they gave me was quite simple: “well, because we are blind [laughing], you know... if we would try to play football, I think we’d have a very hard time finding the ball [laughing].”

“For sure you would still play better than me” I said laughing. “you guys have no idea how bad I’m at ball sports.” We all laughed together. To make my argument credible, I shared anecdotes from the very first time I played football. “I was six and I was so bad that during my first class, I was playing a friendly practice match. I was part of the red shirts team, while our opponents were using blue shirts, during the whole match every time I touched the ball, somehow I ended up passing it to a player of the opposite blue team.” The coach got so mad at me that he screamed:

“Are you blind? Can’t you differentiate between blue and red? You are playing for the red team, pass the ball to the red team only!”

Right after saying the last word, I realized it... “*What a genius, I’m saying blind in front of visually disabled people.*”. I stopped my story, ashamed, feeling awkward and unsure of what to say next; I apologized.

“I am so sorry guys. I didn’t mean it in that way... I mean the coach said it but I...” I was regretting that very moment I decided to open my mouth.

“It’s ok, don’t worry, we get this every day and we are used to it. We know you mean no harm!”, said one of the guys laughing. “Relax!”, “don’t worry!”, “we know what you meant”, echoed the others.

I stuttered: “This always happens to me; I feel like such a retard...” I stopped again. “*Strike two, you didn’t just use another really inappropriate word. Did you? ‘Retard’ another disability? Really?*” I diligently told to myself. “*These guys will really think I’m*

*here to mock them*". I stood there, interrupted by my own stupidity, fearful of opening my mouth again and getting the 'third strike and out'.

They sensed my agony and one of them earnestly said "Please don't feel like you need to treat us with 'forceps'. We're not a weird specimen and if anything, we appreciate that you are careless around us and act the same way you do around everyone else."

"I think this project is going to be as constructive for me as it will be for you. I have a lot to learn from you and I think that the best way for me to help you is if I understand the way you live and your backgrounds." Finally, I had said something that made sense.

One of the girls that had spoken the least, took advantage of the situation and with the right amount of assertiveness, said:

"If it's of any help, what just happened to you is an example of what we experience in our everyday lives. When other people think that we are handicapped because we have a disability; like using blind to laugh at someone because he's 'stupid' or calling someone a handicap to degrade... well we feel that is not fair, because even though we do not have sight, we are not 'stupid' and 'handicapped' we can still do everything. You can't reduce human beings to what they are or are not. ..."

"But then if you think like this? How is it that you don't practice sports in your own way?" I was a bit puzzled. *How do they think that they can 'do everything' but not sport - isn't sport part of 'everything'?*

"Ahhh, well that's another subject, sports were meant for the seeing people. Even though I can see with my senses, I could hardly kick around a ball in a football match." She added laughing. And we were back to the beginning... (Miguel del Castillo, Reflective Journal 2009.)

## 2.2. Research Question and Methodology

The previous narrative, describes the first time I met the participants and I still remember it like yesterday, because at that time, it was hard for me to understand this twofold view of the world. On the one hand, they knew they were able to ‘do everything’ they wanted. On the other, they took certain truths for granted like ‘sport is only for seeing people’. Surrounding these two views is always the concept of handicap, who’s meaning applies to many different contexts and situations. This sensitizing concept, accurately describes how the participants perceive discrimination and social inequality. During the following chapter, this word’s meaning will be enriched and modified by the light of the circumstances. For now, we will begin with the definition of this concept as: any situation, object or action that puts disabled people in a disadvantage towards the rest of society. The participants dream of having an ‘ideal world’, where sports, the workplace and accessibility have been adapted so that they can properly develop as human beings. (Transcript of group conversations, 2015.) The central question of this research is: how is this ‘handicap’ or social inequality created? And then a secondary question is: how did sport practice help the participants overcome that situation?

Before I started the writing of my thesis, I set to organize two last focus group interviews with the participants in which we would discuss all of the above mentioned. Bourdieu (1999), once said that during the interview process the researcher should consider two aspects; first to have a *welcoming disposition* to make the respondent’s problems one’s own and second, the capacity to take that person and understand them just as they are in their distinctive necessity.<sup>5</sup> He also stressed the fact that the interview can be considered a “sort of *spiritual exercise* that, through *forgetfulness of self*, aims at a true *conversion of the way we look at* other people in the ordinary circumstances of life.<sup>6</sup> With this fundamental idea in mind, I tried to keep my interruptions to a minimum. I wanted the

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<sup>5</sup> Pierre Bourdieu et al. “The Weight of the World, Social Suffering in Contemporary Society”, Stanford University Press, 1999, Pg. 614

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*,

participants to talk freely and as much as they needed. The few questions I asked were always directed to try and *understand them just as they are*, and for them to illustrate in a deep picture their problems, so that *these could also become my own*. During the whole process of this master thesis, to the best of my ability, I tried to give a coherent theoretical background and analysis to the narrative that each participant transmitted to me. I remain hopeful that my research will transmit the same message to the reader, that he or she grasps the problems of the participants as his or her own, and also, that it changes the way we look at disabled people in the *ordinary circumstances of life*. I believe this is crucial, because in modern Mexican society (and probably many others) there is a constant problem where minorities are marginalized and do not have the same opportunities as the rest of the mainstream population.

When I started the writing of this thesis, I had more than eight hours of interview material; several dozens of newspaper, magazine and internet articles; more than two hours of video interviews aired in different national channels; the autobiographies of the participants; conference and pep talks transcripts and my reflective journal and observation notes. Aside from this I had the privilege of working for more than five years with the participants and many other different visually disabled people, with whom I shared amazing experiences in the mountains and rock walls. In consequence this research was also a product of my active participant observation.

Aside from the two main research questions, I encountered two main dilemmas. One, is that while participants are very sure in the specific ways in which sport helped them overcome inequality in specific social fields they, however, cannot find a solid argument or theory to explain where this inequality comes from. In plain English, they can only tell how social inequality affects and how they resolve it with sport, but they cannot concisely tell from where it originates. Be that as it may, I took the liberty to use the theory I saw fitted the most, which ended up being a historical Marxist perspective, based on the premise of 'Cultural Hegemony' from Antonio Gramsci (1999). After all, I considered this methodology to be the most critical and contrasting of the situation of the participants. In terms of finding sociologists that explained the participant's narratives of

how sports benefited them to overcome inequality, that was not so hard, I chose to draw upon the theories of Norbert Elias, Eric Dunning and Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>7</sup>

About the second dilemma, it was how to concretely and adequately display all the results in a coherent fashion, for that matter I used the narrative inquiry methodology of Clandinin (2006)<sup>8</sup> in where the main elements of the narrative are: 1. An interaction between a person and society, 2. A past, present and future; a continuity in 3. A place; a situation. By putting together all of these elements, I managed to reconstruct a timeline of five-years of events and display them in a way which illustrates and explores how the narratives of *how* is social inequality produced and in *which* forms does the consequent practice of sports reduced the social inequality of the visually disabled participants.

On similar tracks the examples of the participants are holistically analyzed by comparing their situation to the rest of the disabled people's situation of Mexico by the use of economic surveys and census data. Then each story is augmented with sociological and philosophical theories that can better manifest how the participants are constantly exposed to a cultural hegemony that dominates ideals and creates inequality in a continuity of time.

### **2.3. Introduction of the Participants**

Before the story commences, this section briefly introduces the participants, and provides the most significant aspects of this study. For a detailing of the timeline of events of the present study, please refer to Appendix 2.

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<sup>7</sup> Details about all of this authors, perspectives and theories, will be outlined in the "Theoretical Framework" chapter of the present study.

<sup>8</sup> This is based on the ideas and methodology of: Jean Clandinin, "Narrative Inquiry: A Methodology for Studying Lived Experience", *Research Studies in Music Education*, Vol 27, P.g. 44–54.





### **Verenice Hernandez**

*“It was not long ago that I was born, and my life was as normal as a ‘normal life’ can be. However, when I was finishing my bachelor’s degree in accounting, I realized I could no longer see properly.”*

She lost her sight to a genetically acquired disease running in her family: “*retinitis pigmentosa*”. This affliction had previously made her other three siblings blind. Nonetheless, she has always been a positive person and will always gladly recognize that: “losing your sight is not the end of the world”. Verenice had to go through a long process of rehabilitation in order to learn how to ‘see’ with her other senses. When she became a member of the association: *Sight of Emotion* she was struck by the idea of being able to take pictures and feel emotions through the lens of a camera; for her it was like seeing again. When hearing about the project of climbing Mt. Iztaccihuatl, she was the first one to sign up for the challenge.



### **Jose Manuel Pacheco**

*“When I was in high school my visual impairment started to sharpen. During those times I used to practice Tae Kwon Do, but my parents got worried and thought it was causing vision loss. So they advised and forced me to stop practicing. And it was from then on that I walked away from practicing any type sport...”*

Being re-introduced to sport at thirty-six years old, Jose, learnt that the only way he could get back in to shape, was by sacrificing three hours each morning for nine months of his life; to training and mobility sessions. The results were rewarding when he was repeatedly, one of the faster and most agile climbers of the group. Jose Manuel is now an

achieved climber; he's gone up many mountains above 4000m and the project "Discover your senses" was the start of it all. A joking personality and very positive spirit, he is always willing to cheer up anyone and empower disabled people with his experiences.



### **Gerardo Ramirez**

"...I am 40 years old... I mean... we must let that out in the open [he laughs]. My visual impairment is acquired, this means that some time ago I had a 'normal sight' ... well to be honest, it was never completely normal. [He laughs again]"

Despite having respiratory problems that made going up the smallest hills look like miniature Mt. Everest's; Gerardo was still able to climb to the summit of his Mt. Ajusco (3900m). Later he realized, that his respiratory problems could prove a risk for this type of activity, so he decided that mountaineering was not his sport. Wanting to maintain an active lifestyle he changed to yoga classes.



### **<sup>9</sup> Edgar Angeles**

*"Not so long ago I was invited to the project of climbing Mt. Nevado de Toluca, it was there that I said: "let's see what happens." The thought of reaching or not reaching the summit, never crossed my mind. Also, the day I enlisted for the climb, I forgot to mention the fact that, I*

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<sup>9</sup> Picture taken from: <http://chicosanchezfoto.blogspot.fi/2012/01/sonidos-de-la-ciudad-de-mexico.html>

*had just come out of a head surgery... to be honest, I really wanted to go up to the summit.”*

Often bold and relentless, he will not be stopped by anyone or anything when he sets his mind to do something. Although at times he might seem quiet and reserved, you should not be fooled by this, since he is always listening and often waiting for the appropriate moment to joke and make a funny remark.



**Fabiola Mirandes**

*“I have dreams, ideals and a huge will to contributing to make this world, mi world, our world, a better world.”*

Born with profound low vision nearing total blindness, Fabiola became a part of an ongoing scientific visually disabled children research in which she learnt how to perceive colors and letters from the sense of touching through a revolutionary dermo-optic technique. After joining *Sight of Emotion* she learnt that nothing is impossible, as long as she commits. This mentality led her to enroll on the mountain climb of Mt. Iztaccihuatl and break her own paradigms and limits. She believes that helping others is the best way to give back all the positive things that life has given her.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It was December 2015 and seven years had passed since they climbed their first mountain and I wanted to understand *how* the practice of rock climbing and mountaineering had impacted their lives. The focus groups became a kind of a ‘group retrospective analysis session’. The participants critically looked at their past by analyzing and discussing where and why social disadvantages towards them originate and how they specifically affected them. Then they tried to provide an explanation of the different ways in which rock climbing and mountaineering influenced them to overcome those disadvantages.

#### 3.1. The first interview...

The first one to speak was Jose Manuel, and he had a very peculiar story to tell. He was not born visually disabled, but during his childhood he acquired a disease in the optic nerve, which increasingly deteriorated his sight and then during his teenage years he became almost completely blind (or what is medically called: “near-total visual impairment”). In the past his mindset was very different, since up to the point of “*almost completely losing his sight*”, Jose Manuel still kept practicing sport. However, the moment his loss of sight started to accelerate and became more acute; his mindset shifted and he abandoned sport for good:

*“Over the years, my eyesight kept gradually decreasing, but despite this I continued to practice sport, I was practicing ‘Tae kwon do’... Eventually when I was around sixteen years-old, my loss of sight intensified more than ever, and sooner than later, I lost most of my sight... After this happened, the thought of practicing sports never crossed my mind. Given the present conditions, it was something unfamiliar to me. And even though, sometimes, you do hear in the media about the Paralympics and disabled sports, I still felt them as something very alien and distant... you know... they say that: ‘you need good eyesight to practice sport’...” Jose Manuel Pacheco (Group Interview Transcription, 2015.)*

The moment he said these words, the rest of the participants smiled, and nodding frantically; they agreed with him. Apparently he had echoed their thoughts. Back in those years, Jose Manuel conceived the world from a very different perspective. When he went through the process of becoming blind, he kept perceiving the world as a person with sight. This brought a contradiction to his life and made him a sort of ‘walking anachronism’: he was trying to live in his ‘blind present’ under a mode of thought elaborated from his ‘sighted past’.<sup>10</sup> This contradiction came because Jose Manuel did not change his *view of the world* from a ‘sighted’ perspective to a ‘blind’ perspective.

For as much as he knew, his actions and his everyday life activities, were that of a ‘blind person’, but he still ‘logically thought’ as a sighted person. Put differently, even though he logically *affirmed in words* the *thought* that “you need good eyesight to practice sport” *his effective action*, was that of *still practicing sport* despite that his eyesight was not good and each day it was getting worse. This is what Antonio Gramsci (1999) called: *the contrast between thought and action*, and he explained that the differences come between contrasting conceptions of the world: one *affirmed in words* and another *displayed in effective action*.<sup>11</sup> By conceptions of the world, Gramsci (1999) refers to things that inform our understanding of the world and our place in it and for him each conception of the world is inherently practical and philosophical, relational and political.<sup>12</sup>

Jose Manuel’s individual example, was significant for the rest of the participants, because it explains the broader and more complex problem of their social situation. They feel that in Mexico, the visually disabled people are influenced by the thoughts and ideas of ‘sighted people’. For them, that influence roughly explains why often, disabled people act and think under the ideas and thoughts that originate from how ‘sighted people’ perceive

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<sup>10</sup> Concept borrowed from: Antonio Gramsci, “Selections from Prison Notebooks: The Study of Philosophy”, Elecbook, 1999, Pg. 628.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 632

<sup>12</sup> Joel Wainwright, “On Gramsci’s ‘conceptions of the world’”, Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, Volume 35, Issue 4, October 2010, PG. 507–521

the world and society. We can explain this argument using Verenice's example, the second one to speak in the interview. She, like Jose Manuel, was not born blind but lost her sight around her twenties. When this happened she became depressed and alienated herself from society, staying home, resenting her situation. For her at that point, it was more important what the 'other sighted people' thought of her, rather than her own thoughts and ideas:

*"The sadness I felt, was in reality anger in the form of: 'nothing is happening... I'm not losing my sight'. But when I accepted that reality and said: 'yes, it is actually happening... I lost my sight', it was then I realized, that I was caring more about the judgment of others, more about their opinions of: 'what a shame, she became blind so young', 'what will she do with her life now?', 'how is she going to survive now that she has no sight?' ...*

*But then when I confronted myself about this, and realized that I was living life under the judgment of others, I got very angry at myself for not taking my own judgment as the most valuable one."* Verenice Hernandez (Group Interview Transcription, 2015.)

For Gramsci (1999) it all comes down to the fact that when a social class has an *embryonic or immaterial view of the world*, it therefore cannot create its own "social consciousness". Put in simpler words, he meant that when a specific social group, has a very vague understanding of the world, it consequently has a very vague understanding of its role and place within it. This justifies why the social group in question, will end up adopting a conception of the world, or a "social consciousness", which is not its own but borrowed from another group.<sup>13</sup> This happens because the 'other group' has had more success in creating a more consolidated and concrete view of the world. In broad terms, this helps us explain why the social group of visually disabled people in Mexico, is lead to accept another external, more concrete conception of the world, the one of the 'sighted

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<sup>13</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *op. cit.*, Pg. 632.

people'. Ultimately, what this means is that visually disabled people are directed towards 'understanding the world' as the sighted people do and thus understand their place and role in the world under this terms. This is what Gramsci (1999) called Cultural Hegemony, and by it he meant the ideology of the dominating class and how it affects the way people think and act. He said that to properly understand how one ideology establishes itself as the dominant one, we must look at the differences between conceptions of the world of different social classes. For Gramsci (1999) the answer to *why* one social group could establish its ideology over the others, comes down to more profounder contrasts of social historical order, or a term he called the 'historical process' between different human groups.<sup>14</sup> The ideology or framework to properly analyze this is based on his philosophy of praxis.

### **3.2. Philosophy of Praxis of Antonio Gramsci**

Gramsci's (1999) concept of mankind is that man, is process and more precisely the process of his actions.<sup>15</sup> This is the outset of his philosophy of praxis and the beginning of how he critically reflects on existing forms of thought and their relation to the actual world that produced them.<sup>16</sup> Gramsci (1999) said that philosophy, must clarify in synthetic form the problems that have grown up in the process of the development of culture. The purpose of such synthesis must be to criticize the problems, to demonstrate their real value, and to determine what the new contemporary problems are and how the old problems should now be analyzed.<sup>17</sup>

The philosophy of praxis thus focuses on the same: the process of human beings thinking and doing, the process of *thought* and *action*. This same philosophy is the foundation of this master's thesis and it composes the theoretical framework. The main ideas of

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 630

<sup>15</sup> Antonio Gramsci, "Quaderni del Carcere", Vol. 2 Quaderni 6-11, Edizione Critica dell'instituto Gramsci, 1977, Pg. 1344.

<sup>16</sup> Antonio Gramsci, "Selections from Prison Notebooks: The Study of Philosophy", Elecbook, 1999, Pg. 624.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

sociologists, philosophers and thinkers used to explain the context and situation of the participants, are in broad terms, focusing on the praxis of society; the process of interaction of individual and society, of thought and action, through time and space. Equivalently, this same mode of thought is utilized to try to understand why there is a contradiction on the way the participants act and think.

Gramsci (1999) considers that everyone is a philosopher, because everybody in one way or another, has some thoughts about the nature of the world that they live in, a *conception of the world*.<sup>18</sup> However not everybody consciously and critically reflects on whether that *conception of the world* is coherent and beneficial for them. He said that a person's conception of the world is a response to certain specific problems posed by their particular reality.<sup>19</sup> What this means is that while the problems of one social group may be solved by a particular "conception of the world" another group might not solve its problems from the same "conception of the world". An example of this is the present study. While the sighted social group of people solve their *specific problems posed by their particular reality*, with sight, driving a car, walking, reading, writing, etc., the visually disabled group will not benefit from this conception of the world, since they cannot rely on their eyesight to: read, walk, write, etc.

Gramsci (1999) reflected that philosophy in general does not exist, but rather, various philosophies which shape different conceptions of the world. These conceptions of the world shapes the political action of man; the: "conscious action (praxis) in pursuit of a common social goal".<sup>20</sup> Throughout the history of mankind different dominant social classes have, through conscious action, imposed on others their conception of the world. This dominant social classes pursue a common social goal that will benefit their own class, and not always the rest of humanity. Considering this, philosophy cannot be

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<sup>18</sup> Argument posed by: Mark L. Thomas, "The uses and abuses of Antonio Gramsci" < <https://youtu.be/3ojWUNuVsf8> > Taken: 27-Oct-16 at 8.05pm

<sup>19</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Op. cit.*, Pg. 628.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 631



divorced from politics.<sup>21</sup> This is another central element to Gramsci's (1999) concept of 'Cultural Hegemony'. Within this frame of reference is where the concept of cultural hegemony comes from. Therefore, in order to correctly apply the concept to the reality of the participants of the present study, we must indulge in the field of politics.

### 3.3. Frame of reference

Since the choice and the criticism of a conception of the world is in consequence also a political matter, we must briefly explain why it is the core of the 'Cultural Hegemony' of Gramsci (1999) and how it originated and if it is still applicable. Gramsci wanted to explain how the working class of his times, the 1920's, remained unconscious of its existence, and numb towards their collective exploitation at work. More precisely the idea that people have a contradictory consciousness, that involves an acceptance of ruling class ideals, but often the actual way they live their life, develops experiences that point in a different direction, so the actual experience of being exploited means that you need to be in a trade union, that you need to have solidarity, that you might verbally accept that we always need a boss and that we need the market, but your boss is a bastard, he's greedy and is exploiting you.<sup>22</sup> Gramsci (1999) resumes this in the following quote:

*"The active man-in-the-mass has a practical activity, but has no clear theoretical consciousness of his practical activity, which nonetheless involves understanding the world in so far as it transforms it. His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousness's (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow workers in the practical*

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 631-632

<sup>22</sup> Argument posed by: Mark L Thomas, in < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ojWUNuVsf8> >  
Retrieved: 23-Oct-16 at 6:30pm.

*transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed.”*<sup>23</sup>

The deep argument that Gramsci was trying to touch was to analyze the way in which workers can create their own consciousness as a class and therefore overcome old ideas and find a fairer and more conscious way of organizing society and economic production. In other words, what he was trying to do was to build up on the theory of class consciousness of Karl Marx. Harman (2002) rounds up the argument in the following words:

“Karl Marx once made the distinction between a ‘class in itself’ that has a certain objective position within a society, and a ‘class for itself’ that fights consciously for goals of its own. The working class existed as never before as a class *in itself* at the end of the 20th century, with a core of perhaps two billion people, around which there were another two billion or so people whose lives were subject in important ways to the same logic as the core. The real argument about the role of the working class is about if and how it can become a class *for itself*... The whole point about Marx’s distinction is that no class that has arisen historically has been able to start off as a class *for itself*.”<sup>24</sup>

Now within this first frame, we can also review the situation of the participants. We can see that the world as of now is not conceived from and for people with disabilities. Although it is slowly changing, the social class of disabled people, still does not exist as a class for itself. Harman (2008) said that social classes grow up within an old order of society, and its members have no experience of any other. They necessarily begin by taking the values of that society for granted. The prejudices of the old society are also, initially at least, the prejudices of the members of the new class.<sup>25</sup> Now we can see that this is also the case, of disabled people and especially it was the case of the participants

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<sup>23</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Op. Cit.*, Pg. 641.

<sup>24</sup> Chris Harman “A Peoples History of the World”, 2002, Bookmarks Publications Ltd, Pg. 615

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*,

of this study who for a long time took the prejudices of the non-disabled people for granted. Harman (2002) added that this situation only changes when they are forced, often by circumstances beyond their own control, to fight for their interests within the old society. Such struggles lead to ties growing up between them, creating loyalties and values different to those of the society. On the terrain created by this, new notions take root about how society can be run, which in turn form part of the framework for subsequent generations' understanding of the world."<sup>26</sup> This in a limited sense has happened with disabled people in Mexico; slowly people start to realize that accessibility is a must throughout the city and at the workplace, as well as laws and public policies for the benefit of disabled people.

### 3.4. Why Marxism?

I believe that the historical perspective of class struggles from Marx, lets us understand that the fact that one group or social class controls the majority of the population, will inevitably bring inequality towards everyone, disabled or not, by gender and money. Thomas (2010), said that Gramsci was not simply concerned with hegemony or leadership in the abstract, but he is very much focused upon building the type of institutions that will enable people to participate in their own self emancipation.<sup>27</sup> The moment the workers of the world, the majority of people, find adequate structures of self-emancipation based on a conscious view of the world of them as a class for itself, will be the day society can include people from all gender, ethnical, cultural and different backgrounds. The central issue of why workers are not conscious of their existence as a class is according to Harman (2002), because their society is permeated by capitalist values, and they take these values for granted. Even their exploitation is organized through a labor *market*, where they compete with each other for jobs."<sup>28</sup> Albert Einstein (1949) resumed the same though nicely: "Production is carried on for profit, not for

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>27</sup> Peter D Thomas, "Gramsci and Hegemony", Counterforum London 3, 2010. Taken from: < <https://youtu.be/Exe5U3kFU5g> > Retrieved: 27-Oct-16 at 8:27pm

<sup>28</sup> Chris Harman, *Op. Cit.*, Pg. 615

use... The profit motive, in conjunction with competition among capitalists, is responsible for an instability in the accumulation and utilization of capital which leads to increasingly severe depressions. Unlimited competition leads to a huge waste of labour, and to crippling of the social consciousness of individuals...”<sup>29</sup>

This last sentence is very important: the crippling of the *social consciousness of individuals*, happens to the workers. Simply put, the workers are all those who do not share in the ownership of the means of production, according to Einstein.<sup>30</sup> While for the owners of the means of production, it is quite clear that their class exists as *a class for itself*, their conception of the world is clear: “acquire more profit”. Production is carried on for profit and not for use. I believe that because this motif has been central to the way we run our modern society, it creates a huge amount of inequality, towards gender, minorities and people from different nations and ethnic backgrounds. A quick glance to our society will let us see that the richest 1 percent have the same amount of wealth as half of the world’s population.<sup>31</sup> Such differences in income, lead to crisis and the fact that people, start fighting between each other for the scarce leftover resources, blaming each other for the lack of economic opportunities and growth. This exacerbates social inequality, and makes people fight and despise each other. We see it nowadays when in Europe people blame the war immigrants for many economic problems<sup>32,33</sup>, similarly in the USA, Donald Trump blames Mexicans and illegal immigrants for the economic problems of his country.<sup>34</sup> If Gramsci would be alive to see our modern society, he would still find that there is a dominant ideology, which leads people to act and think that nothing can be changed and to political indifference.

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<sup>29</sup> Albert Einstein, “Why Socialism?”, Monthly Review, 1949, Volume 1, No. 1 May.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> < <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/jan/18/richest-62-billionaires-wealthy-half-world-population-combined> > Taken: 24-Oct-16 at 5.41pm

<sup>32</sup> < <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/feb/25/racist-backlash-against-refugees-greece-real-crisis-europe> > Taken: 24-Oct-16 5.58

<sup>33</sup> < <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/05/migration-crisis-europe-leaders-blame-brussels-hungary-germany> > Taken 24-Oct-16 at 5.52pm

<sup>34</sup> < <http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2015/08/donald-trump-immigration-reform> > Taken 24-Oct-16 at 6.34pm

### 3.5. Cultural Hegemony

For Gramsci (1999), cultural hegemony, was in broad terms a: “verbal conception that holds together a specific social group, it influences moral conduct and the direction of will, with varying efficacy, but often powerfully enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit any action, any decision or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity.”<sup>35</sup> Harman (2002) grounded this in the following argument:

“Gramsci pointed out that the members of a social class are exposed to conflicting views of the world:

1. those that arise out of the everyday practice of existing society and
2. those that arise in so far as the class (or a section of it) has experience of fighting to transform that society.

Some are trapped almost completely within the views characteristic of existing society, and some have gone a very long way into breaking from these, but most are stuck somewhere in the middle, pulled first one way then another under the impact of those with more homogenous views at either extreme.”<sup>36</sup>

In a nutshell, this clarifies why the participants of this study, have experienced the views characteristic of a society that changes and transforms society by relying strongly on sight with an ideology that says: ‘for driving cars’, ‘walking’, ‘practicing sport’, ‘writing and reading books’, etc.: *you need good eye-sight*. While on the opposite hand, visually disabled people *in the everyday practice in existing society* have actually done most of these things: *they still practice sport, transport themselves, read and write and do all kinds of activities*’. But, this view is not the dominant one, is the less homogenous, or commonly found view, and since it has had limited success to change the world, the

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<sup>35</sup> Antonio Gramsci, “Selections from Prison Notebooks”, Elecbook, 1999, Pg. 641.

<sup>36</sup> Argument posed by: Chris Harman in: Chris Harman “A Peoples History of the World”, 2002, Bookmarks Publications Ltd, Pg. 618.

majority of visually disabled people act on what they are supposed to think and not on what they have done.

For Gramsci (1999) this ‘imposition’ happens automatically because the very moment a human being enters the conscious world; the external environment *works* and *has already been working* under the ‘world conception’ of one of the many social groups in existence. In other words, when we are born we automatically absorb the ideas, beliefs and conceptions of our immediate culture and society. This lets us think and accept the way society is, without having the need to ‘think’ with a critical awareness.<sup>37</sup> In terms of this study, the participants were born into a mechanically imposed environment, which works under a ‘*view of the world*’, composed and conceived from and for people with eye-sight. To remain as objective as possible, I will try to define in short words what type of ideology *influences moral conduct and the direction of will*. Cultural hegemony in the present study should be understood as coming from *the experience* that the owners of different industries had in *fighting to transform society* from feudalist monarchies into capitalist states in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>38</sup>

### **3.6. Capitalist hegemony, what it is and how it shapes society**

Put in simple words, capitalist cultural hegemony, in today’s modern society shapes not only economic interactions by shaping the relationship of producers between humans, but also the way we perceive the world and act. Marx pointed out the fact that we no longer question how value is created, and what money really represents. We perceive economic relationships as exchanges of goods in a market. He said: “What initially concerns producers in practice when they make an exchange is how much of some other product they get for their own; in what proportions can the products be exchanged? As soon as these proportions have attained a certain customary stability, they appear to result from the nature of the products, so that, for instance, one ton of iron and two ounces of gold

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<sup>37</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *opt. cit.*, Pg. 626.

<sup>38</sup> Chris Harman “A Peoples History of the World”, 2002, Bookmarks Publications Ltd, Pg. 257.

appear to be equal in value, in the same way as a pound of gold and a pound of iron are equal in weight, despite their different physical and chemical properties.”<sup>39</sup>

What this leads is to a society that is ruled by money and products, since products are created by the labor of humans. Thus ultimately what we are exchanging is human labor, masked as products.<sup>40</sup> Because we do not view human labor as it is, but rather as crystalized into an object, or a product, these relations are no longer between humans but appear as relations between material objects.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, when a product is no longer needed in the market, the labor to produce it is subsequently no longer needed, and it ends up throwing many people out of the market, leaving them without jobs. “All the different kinds of private labor are continually being reduced to the quantitative proportions in which society requires them.”<sup>42</sup> For the producers, their relationships become “*material relations between persons and social relations between things.*”<sup>43</sup>

The consequences of reducing human beings into accumulated labor in the form of an object (or objectification), brings social inequality, because just like objects in a free market are competing against each other, so too, humans seem to take the shape of objects and compete against each other. This makes it easier to discriminate other people by their race, gender, disabilities, and many other reasons. This happens for the plain and simple fact that the dominant ideology of capitalism stresses the fact that a ‘free market’ ruled by supply and demand, is what determines social production and social life in many aspects. Marx (1976) said that the capital cultural hegemony, revolves around the fact that these “forms of thought are socially valid” they are “therefore objective”.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Karl Marx, “The Capital”, Penguin Classics, Vol.1, *Section 4. The fetishism of the commodity and its secret*, 1976, Pg. 167.

<sup>40</sup> Marx said that capitalist view that “Value is a relation between persons.” But they forget that its “a relation concealed beneath a material shell.” Karl Marx, *Op cit.*, Pg. 167.

<sup>41</sup> Karl Marx, *Op. cit.*, Pg. 169

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 168

<sup>43</sup> Karl Marx, “The Capital”, Penguin Classics, Vol.1, *Section 4. The fetishism of the commodity and its secret*, Pg. 166.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*,

This is my understanding of how Marxism fits this master thesis, I do however, remain conscious that not all human relationships and in many cases the relationships of the participants of this study, can be reduced into “capitalist relations of production”. However, sports, and the socio-economic environment is full of these ideals and objectification. In those contexts I will use Marxism to explain how objectification of disabled people creates social inequality.

### **3.7. Similar sociological perspectives - sport sociology**

In one way or another, human beings always belong to a particular grouping in where there they share the same social elements, modes of acting and thinking. According to Gramsci (1999) these different ‘mass human groups’ have had different backgrounds and historical becoming’s, hence their world views differ from each other. We are all *conformists*, he said; since we conform to the customs rules and styles of the particular groups we belong. And of course, we belong to a ‘multiplicity’ of mass human groups. So an important question we must ask ourselves is: of what ‘historical type’ is the conformism, the mass humanity to which one belongs?<sup>45</sup> If we fail to ask and answer this question, Gramsci (1999) says that then a person’s conception of the world is not critical and coherent, it becomes disjointed and episodic; meaning that a single human being can belong simultaneously to a multiplicity of mass human groups that got stuck in modes of thinking from different historical pasts.

If we look at the sociological theory of ‘habitus’ from Bourdieu (1992), we find some noteworthy similarities with Gramsci’s (1999) concept of historical becoming. Bourdieu (1992) describes the habitus as “embodied history” of human beings, which they internalize as a second nature and so forgotten as history. He says it is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. Bourdieu (1992) argues that the habitus is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of

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<sup>45</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Op. cit.*, Pg. 627.



the immediate present.<sup>46</sup> Equally distant to Gramsci's (1999) different 'historical types of conformism' that determine our modes of acting and thinking; so does too Bourdieu (1989) say that the 'habitus', determines schemes of perception, thought and action of human beings.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, he agrees with the concept of 'views of the world' from Gramsci since he says that habitus, "can influence the conceptions of the social world of individuals and these conceptions consequently affect the way individuals act."<sup>48</sup>

Essentially, Bourdieu (1992) agrees with Gramsci's (1999) historical materialism, since he says that through the habitus, human beings internalize a determinate type of social and economic condition, and that in turn, shapes social arrangements or social dispositions between different human groups over different social fields.<sup>49</sup> The fields can be many different ones, sport, cultural, economic, political, etc. Bourdieu (1992) more specifically calls them "social structures"<sup>50</sup>, because they are composed of specific objective structure relationships between individuals and institutions who compete for a legitimate form of specific authority.<sup>51</sup> The form of specific authority that people compete for, is translated into capital, this can be economic, social, symbolic and cultural.<sup>52</sup> These concepts will help aid and understand how all these kinds of capitals can be acquired through sports for disabled populations.

Many years before Bourdieu, Norbert Elias (1991) came up also with a very similar view of habitus and he described it as: "The specific make-up that each individual person, different as he may be, still shares with other members of society. The specific make-up, the social habitus of individuals, forms, as it were, the soil from which grow the personal characteristics through which an individual differs from other members of society. In this way something grows out of the common language which the individual shares with

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<sup>46</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Logic of a Practice", Stanford University Press, 1992, Pg. 56

<sup>47</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "Space and Symbolic Power", *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 7, No. 1., 1989, Pg. 14

<sup>48</sup> Pierre Bourdieu & Loïc Wacquant, "An Invitation to Reflective Sociology", Polity Press, 1992, Pg. 262

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 105

<sup>50</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Op. cit.*, Pg. 14

<sup>51</sup> Pierre Bourdieu & Loïc Wacquant, "An Invitation to Reflective Sociology", Polity Press, 1992, Pg. 105

<sup>52</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Op. cit.*, Pg. 17

others and which is certainly a component of the social habitus- a more or less individual style, what might be called an unmistakably individual handwriting that grows out of the social script.”<sup>53</sup> For Elias (1991), it was priority to analyze the individual and his social environment together, for he stated that they are not separate objects but part of the same thing. Fundamentally, for Elias (1991), the concept of habitus was crucial to understand that we cannot separate the individual and society, since every “individual bears in himself the habitus of a group, and that is this habitus that he or she individualizes to a greater or lesser extent...”<sup>54</sup> hence they are both part of the same thing. Like Bourdieu (1992), Elias (1991) concepts and focus on the process of interaction of individual and society, is used to analyze the way in which the participants said sports helped them in the cultural and social environment.

### **3.8. Sensitizing concepts**

One of the main problems in social theory, according to Blumer (1954), is the fact that we try to apply “clear and definite concepts”<sup>55</sup> to describe our natural empirical world. Since our world is not isolated and is a product of its own particular situations and contexts. To use definitive formal definitions in a social science, will inaccurately embody the empirical reality that this thesis is trying to represent. Every person, group, institution or situation, has its own distinctive character, which is given by the empirical instance of its setting.<sup>56</sup> This explains why instead of definitive concepts, we must use a ‘sensitizing concept’ that gives a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching these empirical instances”<sup>57</sup>. The sensitizing concepts of this thesis must be ‘held loosely at the outset of the study’ and should not be given full operational definitions. This, with

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<sup>53</sup> Norbert Elias, “The society of Individuals”, Basil Blackwell, 1991, Pg. 182.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 183

<sup>55</sup> Herbert Blumer. "What is wrong with Social Theory." *American Sociological Review* 18 (1954): p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 7-8.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

the purpose that the inquirer might explore how the concept is manifest and given a particular meaning in the set of circumstances under this investigation”<sup>58</sup>.

**-Normal people, ‘the others’.** The participants refer to the ‘non-visually disabled’ people under these words and concepts. The most common used one is ‘normal’ this comes from the fact that since they lack sight, they perceive themselves as: ‘non normal’ people. However, it must be noted that even though the participants have surpassed this stage and consider themselves fully normal human beings, they still use this word because of its practicality.

**-Blind person or ‘we’.** When it comes to talking about themselves or other visually disabled people they utilize the word ‘blind’ or ‘we’. The participants often use these word since most of the time, people refer to them as blind. The participants do not find the word offensive, they were quite comfortable with their disability and had come to terms with it. And, on the other hand they believed that Mexican society is poorly educated when it comes to the different types of visual disability, hence they catalogue every kind of visual disability into the word: “blind”.

**-Culture.** The participants understand and refer to culture as a set of mores, traditions, and morals. All of which are regarded in a general sense of what is expected in society, referring to Mexican culture they understand these concepts as:

**Mores**, these include all the ones that are deeply involved with religion, family and sacred things. They can go from simple concepts like: small talk, kissing to salute, going to mass, offering one’s house and inviting people over, etc.

**Traditions**, the ways things have always been done. How to comfort someone when sad, how to behave at social events, celebrating important historical dates, etc.

**Morals**, the ‘unwritten’ rules of how to behave correctly and respectfully towards others. According to the participants the culture of modern Mexican society has not yet fully understood the potential and strengths that disabled people have. They believe society considers having a disability a negative thing.

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas A. Schwandt, “The Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry”, Sage Publications Inc., 2007, p274.

**-Handicap.** Often given two meanings by the participants, this word's meaning must be considered under the light of the context where it is used. In some cases, it refers to a negative way to address a disability by highlighting the obvious differences between a 'non-seeing person' and a 'seeing-person'. On the other hand, they also use this word as a synonym for a disabled person, not necessarily implying a negative demotion to it.

**-Family.** In Mexico family is very important, in general, teenagers and young people don't leave their parents protection until they get married or have a job. This leads to many years of family interaction and dependence. For the participants, Mom, Dad and siblings are usually within the inner most important family circle. However, cousins, uncles, and other relatives in many degrees can still be as equally important and considered close family.

**-Mental Blindness.** A personal and intimate way that the participants use to describe social paradigms. They often refer to other people's stubbornness not to view disabled people as normal or capable human beings as being 'mentally blind.' This may also be applied to other disabled people, when they also believe are not capable of being normal.

**-Real life.** Inside this category fall the opposite things from leisure and sports, we can find the 'more serious' aspects of the participant's lives', like: jobs, emotional relationships, school and education, etc. They often use the expression 'real life' or 'normal life' to indicate areas that are outside all their rock climbing and mountaineering activities.

**-Society.** The mass of interdependent people, which is influenced by the culture and traditions set by their ancestors and modern ideas. This word is used to specify certain attributes of the Mexican people and to explain what is the general social consensus. All societies are different and especially within a multicultural country like Mexico, society and culture change from city to city and place to place.

Mexico City is where the participants live and have lived most of their lives. As a deduction, their perceptions on the composition of Mexican society is constantly affected and biased by the unique and different growing up experiences of the participants. The social ideas, mores and traditions of Mexico City are quite modern and 'progressive', making this state the first one in the country to legalize abortion rights and LGBT marriage.

**-Personality.** This concept includes many individual facets that a person can have, like self-esteem, self-confidence, temperament, character, and other psychological factors like personal limits, motivation, attitudes, psyche and different behavioral mechanisms. Throughout the interview process, the participants explained changes in their self-esteem and self-confidence as a “change in their personalities”.

**-Sport.** Comprehends all of the different aspects that leisure, physical activity and competitive sports have. The meaning that is associated with this word can vary from talking a walk in the park all the way to participating as an Olympic athlete in an international competition. In most cases when the participants utilize the word sport or physical activity, they refer specifically to climbing and mountaineering.

**-Discrimination.** A word that is constantly used in different contexts and circumstances, although in mostly every case it is closely related to handicap, the participants consider discrimination anything that intentionally and directly alienates them from society and culture. Discrimination can be done with or without intention, yet in the end the outcome is always the same: the participants feel that they are pushed aside and not given the same opportunities as the rest of the Mexican population.

## **4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

I would like to point out the fact that this thesis does not suggest that sport ultimately, is the answer to overcoming inequality. For such a problem must be dealt with by doing structural changes to the way we have organized society. However, sport did prove to ‘remediate’ the ‘symptoms’ that social inequality produced on the participants. And so the following chapters will try to analyze how the social inequality issues mentioned by the participants were resolved through sport practice to the extent that they perceive it.

### **4.1. Cultural Hegemony in the Mexican Society**

What kind of verbal conception holds together Mexican society? The theoretical consciousness that Mexicans received from the past, and is now uncritically absorbed, is the following:

According to Harman (2002), “The second half of the 20th century witnessed an enormous spread of wage labour internationally. Textile plants, steel works, oil refineries and car assembly plants were set up in virtually every major country in every continent. Along with them went docks, airports, trucking and rail terminals, modern banking systems, and skyscraper offices. Cities expanded massively as a result. In 1945 there were arguments over whether London or New York was the world’s biggest city. By the end of the century the argument was between Mexico City, Bombay and Tokyo. The new industries and cities meant new working classes... Of course, the world’s workforce was not made up only of wageworkers. There remained many hundreds of millions of peasants owning small plots of land in Asia, Africa, parts of Latin America and even parts of Eastern Europe. The cities of the Third World contained massive impoverished petty bourgeoisies whose survival depended on the selling of whatever goods and services, however meagre, they could find a market for, and who merged into the even vaster mass of casual labour to be found in the sprawling slums around the cities. The psychology of these groups could be very different from that of the industrial workers.

Yet like them, and unlike the middle classes and peasantry of a century ago, their lives were completely tied to the market and dependent on the logic of capital....”<sup>59</sup>

Harman (2002) described the logic of capital and of wage labour as “the exploitation of the workers through a labor market where they compete with each other for jobs... and a subordination of their lives to the inhuman logic of capital accumulation.”<sup>60</sup> When we look at the reality of Mexico, we see that Harman’s ideas are not so far-fetched. A recent study of the “Mexican Middle Class” by McCadden and Del Castillo Negrete (2015), found out that that 70 percent of the 55 million working people of Mexico have subordinate jobs.<sup>61</sup> However, almost 80 percent of this subordinate population is vulnerable<sup>62</sup> or poor (Meaning they lack at least one or two of the following: education, access to health services and social security, good quality housing, basic services for their house and food).<sup>63</sup> Within this subordinate group of workers, 6 out of every ten, engages in ‘casual labor’ or ‘unskilled job’ positions<sup>64</sup>. Casual labor is usually temporary and we see that it remains true to the Mexican reality: 73 percent of Mexico’s subordinate unskilled workers work with a temporary work contract, or without a contract at all.<sup>65</sup>

So at first glance it looks like Harman was not so incorrect, workers in Mexico compete under temporary work contracts or often even without a contract between each other for jobs. We can clearly see that they are being exploited, since 80 percent of the subordinate working population lives in poverty, while at the same time they clock many work hours per day; Mexico ranked as the OCED country with the highest in ‘average annual hours actually worked per worker’.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, in the year 2012, fifty-one million Mexicans

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<sup>59</sup> Extract form: Chris Harman “A Peoples History of the World”, 2002, Bookmarks Publications Ltd, Pg. 614-15.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Carlos J. McCadden & Miguel del Castillo Negrete, “La Clase Media en México”, Senado de la Republica, LXIII Legislatura, 2015, Pg. 67.

<sup>62</sup> Meaning they can easily become poor.

<sup>63</sup> *Carlos J. McCadden, et al. Op. cit.*, Pg. 75

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 71

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 71

<sup>66</sup> < <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ANHRS> > Retrieved: 24-Oct-16, at: 7:21pm

(almost half of the total population) had ‘food insecurity’, meaning lack of access to food.<sup>67</sup> And the ones that did have access to food were malnourished; having overweight and obesity due to an improper diet of excessive saturated fats and carbohydrates. Only fourteen percent of the population in Mexico has food security; no lack of food and access to a wide variety of it. This food insecurity and malnourishment has drastic consequences in the Mexican people. When it comes to the youth, 26 percent of the children with less than five years have a vitamin A deficiency, which according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations can result in the eye disease called ‘xerophthalmia’, one of the ten main causes of avoidable blindness.<sup>68</sup> This corresponds to the reality of the participants, many of their visually disabled friends, had xerophthalmia and since they were very poor, were not able to pay for adequate medical treatment, and ended losing their sight to curable sickness. I had similar experiences with other visually disabled people I taught how to climb. Many of them lost their sight to ‘Diabetic retinopathy’, a disease they acquired due to food malnourishment and poor living conditions.

#### **4.1.1. What does this tell us about the situation?**

Going back to the opening argument, Gramsci (1999) said that a person can have two theoretical consciousness’s: one, which is implicit in its activity and which in reality unites him/her with all his/her fellow workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and another one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed.<sup>69</sup>

We can see from the previous argument study that, the grand majority of the Mexican working population, is *united with his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the real world* by working subordinately, under temporary or no contract at all, and lives

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<sup>67</sup> Carlos J. McCadden & Miguel del Castillo Negrete, *Op. Cit.*, Pg. 33.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 36. Carlos Mccaden

<sup>69</sup> Antonio Gramsci, “Selections from Prison Notebooks”, *The Study of Philosophy*, Elecbook, 1999, Pg. 641.



in a condition of poverty. This would speak of its first theoretical consciousness, and we can see that their conditions are far from being a solid, wealthy and educated working class or “middle class”. Ironically enough, when we look at what explicit, verbal conscience the Mexicans have inherited from the without critically absorbing it is the following:

During the ‘World Values Survey’ of Mexico in 2005, eight out of every ten interviewed people considered themselves “middle class” while in 2012 six out of every ten interviewed people still considered themselves “middle class”. We can see this dominant ideology is also expressed by the politicians and many intellectuals who have claimed by reason of their scientific studies that “Mexico is now a country of middle class.”<sup>70</sup>

Oddly enough, even though the grand majority of the Mexican population lives in conditions of the “lower and poor classes” they still believe they are middle class. Gramsci (1999), observed that ‘common sense’ was key in understanding the contrast between different conceptions of the world. For him, different social strata, have their own ‘common sense’, which is continually transforming itself and enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered their ordinary life.<sup>71</sup> In this case we can see how the common sense gets transformed by the science and philosophy of the politics and intellectuals, that repeat the message “Mexico is middle class”.

More specifically, this happens when a groups ‘common sense’: an *incoherent set of generally held assumptions and beliefs that are common to their existing society*, uses philosophy and science to modifying these *assumptions and beliefs* towards a *practical empirical common sense* or what he called ‘good sense’.<sup>72</sup> A short example of this is in the ‘enlightenment era’ during the 18<sup>th</sup> century that based on the rationalist philosophy of

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<sup>70</sup> Argument posed by: Carlos J. McCadden & Miguel del Castillo Negrete, *Op. Cit.*, Pg. 14.

<sup>71</sup> Antonio Gramsci, “Selections from Prison Notebooks: *The Study of Philosophy*”, Elecbook, 1999, Pg. 630.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 626

the time, it led to the belief in the power of rational understanding based on empirical knowledge.<sup>73</sup> This became the core of many scientists and intellectuals, giving birth to Newton's laws of physics and eventually Adam Smith's ideas of Capitalism and free market. Gramsci (1999), says 'Common Sense' is a collective noun, meaning that there is more than one type and each one is determined by its 'historical becoming'. Fundamentally, this explains the differences between social groups and the views on the world they adopt, because they are based on different 'common senses' product of their particular 'historical becoming'. Philosophy in general, does not in fact exist, but various philosophies or 'conceptions of the world' exist, and one always makes a choice between them.<sup>74</sup>

#### 4.1.2. What 'conception of the world' do the Mexicans have of disabled people?

*"If somebody hears that 'I am blind' they never imagine what I'm up to. All the stuff I have done; all the rock climbing, mountain climbing and things I have done. This are the things they thought were impossible for me to do because of my lack of sight..." Jose Manuel (Transcript of the interview, 2015).*

For the participants, many of the people they have met have this prejudice towards visually disabled people. They too believe that this same prejudice ends up making disabled people adopt these ideas. The first terrain in where they have experienced this type of thinking, is firstly the sports field and secondly the economic one. Non-disabled people often are surprised at the fact that the participants, being visually disabled, have climbed many faces of vertical wall and high mountains. We can encapsulate many of the prejudices they have encountered into the following phrases: *Fabiola Miranda: "most people think that we, disabled people, have a lot of limitations and that therefore we cannot do everything."*, *Edgar Angeles: "They never see you as a normal and average human being..."*, *Gerardo: "In the end we are human beings, we need exercise and*

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<sup>73</sup> Chris Harman "A Peoples History of the World", 2002, Bookmarks Publications Ltd, Pg. 242.

<sup>74</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Op. Cit.*, Pg. 631.

*physical activity and it's not important weather you have a disability or you don't"* (Transcript of interview, 2015).

This reinforces the previously mentioned key argument about 'conceptions of the world' shaping thought and action. The participants have experienced inequality from the moment they were born as a visually disabled person; they were immediately immersed in an environment full of the mentioned prejudices, that in one way or another shaped their actions and ideas into: "*normal people view a disability as a synonym of 'poor them' or handicap*"; "*they believe that we are incapable human beings, that we can't do sport or get a job...*" (Transcript of Interview, 2015.) But is it only the participant's perspective, or does it actually happen in the rest of the Mexican disabled population? During the previous National Population Census in Mexico, visually disabled people were asked: "what kind of economic activity do you participate in?" The answer that 10 percent of the respondents gave was: "I do not work, because I have a handicap".<sup>75</sup>

At first glance, it seems that the reality echoes the notions of the participants, the prejudices from the non-disabled society end up being adopted even by the visually disabled people. The participants perceive that society has prejudices on every sphere of activity in which disabled people engage. However, when they talked about the different spheres of life in where they have encountered this prejudice, they predominantly mentioned three social fields: economic activities, sport, and mass media. From the participant's stories, we can build up on the following historical narrative.

#### **4.1.3. Historical becoming of the socio-economic environment of the participant's: Mexico City**

The participants all agreed on the feeling that society's main prejudice towards disabled people is cataloguing them by default, as handicapped. This concept implies that that

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<sup>75</sup> Censo de Poblacion y Vivienda, INEGI, 2010

having a disability equals being a ‘subnormal’ person. Under this light, the concept of disabled takes a meaning of someone incapable to lead a normal life, which automatically disqualifies them from doing “normal people” activities. (Research Diary, 2015.) In this scenario Gramsci (1999) becomes relevant again, when he said that throughout the history of mankind, different mass human groups have left their traces of folklore, philosophy, science and economy into our present society. He put across the notion that these ‘traces’ compose the individuals understanding of the world. These historical ‘traces’ can come from different mass human groups, which explains why a personality can be strangely composed by elements of the Stone Age, elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history and intuitions of a future philosophy which will be that of a human race united all over the world.”<sup>76</sup>

According to my analysis, the *prejudices* that affect the participants in their Economic Activities, Sport and Mass Media all originated from a recent *past phases of history*, the 18<sup>th</sup> century industrial revolution, in where the way that we organize jobs, sport and modern mass media, were all transformed in this period. Many of the ideologies that materialized in that era, are still present in Mexican society, and conform the prejudice of why we view disabled people today as handicapped. Harman (2002) recounts the upcoming of Capitalist values during the industrial revolution, the following fragments from his book “A Peoples History of the World” will help us set the time and place and the continuity of these prejudices into our modern society:

During the industrial revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the combination of new machines, new metallurgy and the new energy source, increased immeasurably what people could produce. There was a transformation of the working and living conditions of millions of people. They began to crowd into towns and cities on a scale unknown in history. The modern factory with its giant chimneys began to dominate the landscape of the area around Manchester in Lancashire and Glasgow in Scotland. By the 1830s Britain was the

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<sup>76</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Op. Cit., Ibid.*, Pg. 630.

most urban society humanity had known. In 1750 there had been only two cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants— London and Edinburgh. By 1851 there were 29 and the majority of people lived in towns.<sup>77</sup> Human nature itself had to be changed so that people would come to think there was nothing strange about spending all their daylight hours in a closed room without seeing the sun, the trees and flowers or hearing the birds.<sup>78</sup>

More specifically talking, the industrial revolution in England took root first in textiles and mining. But in textiles it was cotton spinning that was concentrated in factories, employing mainly women and children, who were concentrated in their hundreds and thousands in factories.”<sup>79</sup> The conditions for these women were so inhuman that they had to deal with the intensive labour of the factories and also the childcare at home.<sup>80</sup> During this times, the capitalist factory owners, showed very little concern for this fact. Women and children were the cheapest and most adaptable labor for spinning mills, so they were crammed in the factories with no thought for the effect on their health.<sup>81</sup>

Eventually, they realized that something had to be done and in 1871, “the Poor Law inspectors reported, ‘It is well established that no town-bred boys of the poorer classes, especially those reared in London, ever attains...four feet ten and a half inches’ in height or a chest of 29 inches ‘at the age of 15. A stunted growth is characteristic of the race’. The Mansion House Committee of 1893 drew the conclusion that ‘the obvious remedy...is to improve the stamina, physical and moral, of the London working class’. A succession of laws restricted the hours which children could work, and banned the employment of women in industries that might damage their chances of successful pregnancy.”<sup>82</sup> This environment influenced the historical becoming of economy, sport

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<sup>77</sup> Extract from: Chris Harman “A Peoples History of the World”, 2002, Bookmarks Publications Ltd, Pg. 319.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 321

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 320-322

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 322

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 382

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

and media by creating the kind of values, common sense and cultural hegemony that not only discriminated women, but many other different sectors of the population.

## **4.2. Economic Field**

### **4.2.1. The Family Wage**

According to Harman (2002), dealing with these alleged physical defects in the population, involved campaigns by philanthropists, churches and parliamentarians which extolled the middle class ideal of the family—a stable, monogamous nuclear family of working husband, loyal housewife and disciplined children. Only such a family, it was claimed, could lead to children growing up dutiful and obedient. The woman’s place was in the home, in accordance with ‘human nature’. Practices which might challenge the model family, however widespread in the past, were branded as ‘immoral’ or ‘unnatural’. Associated with this model of the family was the notion of the ‘family wage’—of male earnings being sufficient for a wife to stay at home and bring up the children. This never became a reality for anybody except a tiny minority of workers. Many of the women who gave up jobs to become housewives after getting married and having children remained involved in various forms of work for wages (housework or cleaning). But setting an ideal and making it seem that a woman’s work was not as important as that of a male ‘breadwinner’ made it easier for employers to get away with paying low wages.<sup>83</sup> There was a “Poor Law Amendment Act”, passed in Britain in 1834, whose one main purpose was to eliminate poverty by offering inhumanely paid jobs<sup>84</sup> and to reducing ‘bastardy’, children being born out of marital relationships. With “free market” ideals they thought that by reducing the support authorities gave to the mothers of illegitimate children, women would be economically motivated to remain in chastity and faithful. They argued that ‘poor-law authorities’ should no longer attempt to identify the fathers of illegitimate children and recover the costs of child support from them. This would encourage women

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 382-383

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 321

to remain in chastity by understanding that the ‘shortest way to support was either a ‘husband or a competent maintenance’ as opposed to charity and support from the government.<sup>85</sup>

*Does the ideal that a woman’s work is still not as important as the ‘male bread winner’ is still present? Does it happen in the visually disabled population of Mexico City?*

The United Nations, in 2013 stipulated that women all around the world still win less money than men; they get from 60 to 75 percent of the salaries from their male counterparts, and at the same time they have less opportunities to get a job than men.<sup>86</sup> Although great advances have been made by the memorable social fight that many women have made, these kind of ideals still remain in modern society, especially when it comes to Mexico. When we look at the microcosm of the visually disabled people in Mexico (the place where the participants live), we see there are huge differences between job opportunities by gender. Looking at the latest economic census data, and if we divide the disabled population by sex and economic activity, we find that when it comes to jobs, disabled women have less opportunities; when it comes to being employed, the men have double the opportunities (see table 1).

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<sup>85</sup> J.W. Cowell's report quoted in "*The Amendment of the Poor Laws*". *The Examiner*. 20 April 1834.

<sup>86</sup> < <http://www.unwomen.org/es/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures> > Taken: 19.Oct.2016 at 3.29pm.

**Table 1. Economic Activities of Visually Disabled People**

Activity	Blind people in Mexico City by sex and activity, 2010		
	Total	Male	Female
Employee or worker	19.9%	15,248	8,787
Laborer or farmhand	0.3%	184	148
Apprentice	1.2%	1,121	372
Employer	1.5%	1,462	353
Freelance employee	10.9%	7,717	5,468
Family worker	0.5%	282	271
Occupation not specified	0.7%	512	281
Unemployed	1.6%	1,105	792
Pensioner or retired	13.6%	9,741	6,598
Student	5.2%	2,875	3,407
Housewife	23.0%	1,278	26,493
Handicapped	10.6%	6,160	6,583
Other	7.2%	4,230	4,439
Not specified	0.3%	165	213
Population 0 to 11 years' old	3.6%	2,349	1,938
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>52,080</b>	<b>64,205</b>

Source: INEGI, Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010 (Population Census 2010).

This gives us insight into a problematic of gender, but what happens when we compare the wage differences and employment opportunities between disabled and non-disabled people?

#### 4.2.2. Employment/Unemployment and Charity in a Labour Market

Another central fact that came up during the industrial capitalist society in Britain, was the issue, how to deal with all the poor people that were too sick, too old or too unskilled to make it even into the world of semi-permanent work.<sup>87</sup> Since the logic of the capitalist classes was that indiscriminate charity produced 'improvidence', 'dissoluteness', 'drunkenness' and 'demoralization', they believed that any attempt to alleviate poverty

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 320



would undermine the new discipline.<sup>88</sup> According to Harman (2002), Jean-Baptiste Say, a popularizer of Adam Smith's ideas, had also 'proved' that unemployment was impossible in a genuinely free market. If people could not find work it was because they demanded wages higher than the market could bear. Poor relief, by offering a cushion against destitution, simply encouraged this disastrous practice. The only way to deal with poverty was to make the poor poorer! Conditions had to be such that the 'able bodied' unemployed would do virtually anything rather than apply for relief.<sup>89</sup>

#### **4.2.3. Are these ideas still present in modern Mexican society?**

Unfortunately, yes. In many ways disabled people are offered no relief, have no public policies that benefit them and are offered wages that only 'the market can bear', which in most of the cases translate to very low ones. Like Jean-Baptist Say, we too have our modern popularizer of Adam Smith's ideas; the Nobel prize in economy, Milton Friedman (1970). He once established that "The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits", and by this he meant: that when companies are promoting desirable "social" ends; that business has a "social conscience" and takes seriously its responsibilities for providing employment, eliminating discrimination, avoiding pollution" then they are not "defending the free enterprise".<sup>90</sup> It's funny to see how things have not changed that much, since the times of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. Friedman also stated that in a genuinely free market, "there is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game, which is to say, engages in open and free competition without deception or fraud."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 382.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 321

<sup>90</sup> Milton Friedman, "The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits", New York Times Magazine, Sept 13 1970.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*,

So what kind of activities take place in the “free enterprise market” in Mexico? We can see that they follow the Friedman doctrine very diligently; most of the companies do not try to eliminate discrimination, and benefit from the lack of policies regulating wages and jobs for disabled people. This brings unfortunate consequences not only to women who are severely underpaid and discriminated, but also to many other minorities like disabled people. A recent study from the OECD 2010 compared disability policies from all its member countries. Mexico was by far, the country with the most passive disability policy<sup>92</sup>. On average, OECD countries spend 1.2 percent of GDP on disability benefits alone and this figure reaches 2 percent, Mexico spends zero percent of its GDP.<sup>93</sup> At the same time, the study concluded that high public spending is a direct consequence of very high disability beneficiary numbers, which explains why Mexico is the country with the least Disability benefit reciprocity rates for the working age population.<sup>94</sup> Clearly, Mexico is the country least inclined to have integration policies for disabled people.<sup>95</sup>

#### **4.2.4. Has this lack of regulations and policies benefiting disabled people, made for the Mexican disabled people?**

In terms of jobs, a recent study found out that 1.5 million disabled people in working age are unemployed (McCadden and Del Castillo Negrete 2015).<sup>96</sup> A Mexican NGO ‘*Incluyeme 2016*’, stated that due to this ‘disabled people unemployment situation’ there is a 3 to 7 percent loss in Mexico’s GDP<sup>97</sup>. A similar conclusion was reached from the president of the ‘Committee of Inclusion’ from the ‘Mexican Council for Business’, he

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<sup>92</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, “Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers. A synthesis of findings across OECD countries”, 2010, Pg. 87

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 68

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 86

<sup>96</sup> Carlos J. McCadden & Miguel del Castillo Negrete, *Op. Cit.*, Pg. 66.

<sup>97</sup> < <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2016/05/03/perdida-del-3-del-pib-por-exclusion-de-discapacitados> > Retrieved 05-may-2016 at 20:48

said that only 30 percent of all the disabled people in a working age, have a job.<sup>98</sup> And how does the situation for these 30 percent of workers look like?

#### **4.2.5. Wage and labor discrimination of disabled people in Mexico**

DeLeire (1984-93), made a ten-year study about the “Changes in Wage Discrimination against People with Disabilities” in the United States.<sup>99</sup> He concluded that substantial wage and earnings gaps exist between people with and without disabilities in the USA by the end of 1993. Applying a similar methodology, we can also see the gap of wage earnings between Mexican disabled and non-disabled people, in the same economic activities. Nearly on all of the economic activities, Mexican disabled people earn 50 percent less than people without disabilities (see table 2). This brings unfortunate consequences since not only is the disabled population vulnerable, but not paid fairly, meaning that they can easily fall prey to poverty. This is analogous to the situation of all the disabled populations of the OCED country members, in where the: “average equalized incomes of persons with disability are much lower than for the rest of the population, and the likelihood of income poverty is much higher”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> < <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/ultimas/2016/05/03/perdida-del-3-del-pib-por-exclusion-de-discapitados> > Retrieved 05-may-2016 at 20:48

<sup>99</sup> Thomas DeLeire, “Changes in Wage Discrimination against People with Disabilities: 1984-93”, *The Journal of Human Resources*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Winter, 2001), pp. 144-158.

<sup>100</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, Op. cit., Pg. 69

**Table 2. Difference in average monthly earned income between disabled people and people without disabilities in Distrito Federal (Mexico City), 2010**

Activity	Blind People	People without disabilities	% difference
<b>Mexican pesos</b>			
Employee or worker	6,073.90	8,544.62	40.7%
Laborer or farmhand	3,166.31	4,988.11	57.5%
Assistant	3,404.89	3,220.41	-5.4%
Employer	15,038.26	19,784.19	31.6%
Freelance <i>employee</i>	4,097.07	7,523.71	83.6%
Family worker	-	-	0.0%
Occupation not specified	3,095.83	11,059.50	257.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,615.80</b>	<b>8,429.53</b>	<b>50.1%</b>
<b>US Dollar (12.62 pesos per dollar)</b>			
Employee or worker	481.29	677.07	40.7%
Laborer or farmhand	250.90	395.25	57.5%
Assistant	269.80	255.18	-5.4%
Employer	1,191.62	1,567.69	31.6%
Freelance employee	324.65	596.17	83.6%
Family worker	-	-	0.0%
Occupation not specified	245.31	876.35	257.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>444.99</b>	<b>667.95</b>	<b>50.1%</b>

Source: INEGI, Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010 (Population Census 2010) and Banco de Mexico (Central Bank) for exchange rates peso/dólar.

#### 4.2.6. The participant's reality

This statistics, are the carbon copy of the reality that Fabiola had to face on her first job, in where she was paid 43 percent less than the minimum wage.

*“In June 2006, I took a massage course; and after a few months, I got my first job offer as an assistant in an alternative therapy clinic. I used to earn 200 pesos per week... a reflection of my first labor fruits...”*

Earning 200 pesos per week is very little money, it would mean that a Fabiola's monthly salary was 800\$ Mexican pesos per month. If we would convert that to euros of 2006 it would be approximately: 58e<sup>101</sup>. Earning that money as a monthly salary is not enough to cover the costs of living in Mexico; it does not even cover the quantities stated by the Mexican government as a minimum wage. The minimum wage in 2006 was: 47.05 pesos per day<sup>102</sup> if we multiply this by the total days June 2006 had we get a total minimum wage salary of: 1,411.5\$ versus Fabiola's salary of 800\$ meaning that she was earning 43 percent less than the minimum wage.

When the object of economic production is the reproduction of capital itself and not the development of human kind, minorities (disabled populations, women, indigenous populations) are often objectified and paid miserable wages. It's not surprising why Mexican society does not question the fact of why this happens. This is product of the economic tendency to think that: "If workers demand wages greater than the extra utility created by their labour, then no one would employ them and unemployment would exist. But if they were prepared to lower the wages for which they would work, then supply and demand would once more coincide and full employment would return." Harman (1996).<sup>103</sup>

### **4.3 Sport field**

#### **4.3.1. Sport participation in the visually disabled population of Mexico**

In terms of gender, we can see that the disabled population sector of Mexico is no exception to this rule, disabled women do not have the same opportunities of sport

<sup>101</sup> Exchange rate Mexican Pesos to Euros from 2006 taken from Mexico's National Bank web site: <http://portalweb.sgm.gob.mx/economia/es/tipos-de-cambio/mxn-eur.html>

<sup>102</sup> The General Minimum Wage of 2006 was off \$ 47.05 Mexican Pesos. Data taken from: [http://www.conasami.gob.mx/pdf/salario\\_minimo/sal\\_min\\_gral\\_prom.pdf](http://www.conasami.gob.mx/pdf/salario_minimo/sal_min_gral_prom.pdf). For more information, please visit the official web page of the government: [http://www.conasami.gob.mx/t\\_sal\\_mini\\_prof.html](http://www.conasami.gob.mx/t_sal_mini_prof.html)

<sup>103</sup> Chris Harman, "The crisis of bourgeois economics", *International Socialism* (2nd series), No.71, June 1996.

practice as disabled men. A recent study made by the National Commission of Sport in Mexico (CONADE), found out that 58 percent of the total physically inactive population of the country, are women.<sup>104</sup> When it comes to the general disabled population of the country only 10 percent of the total disabled population, practice sport. This number is quite low when we compare it to the rest of the population in where the total sport practice sums up to twenty-eight percent (Please see Table 3). Regarding the environment of the participants, Mexico City, if we apply the same ratio, we find there are around 100,000 visually disabled people that don't practice sport. (Please see Table 4).<sup>105</sup>

**Table 3. Weekly sports activity of the Mexican population 12 years of age and older, 2009**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
12 years of age and more	83,619,897	23,041,051	60,578,846
Disabled	1,107,583	115,480	999,103
	<b>Percentage</b>		
12 years of age and more	100%	27.6%	72.4%
Disabled	100%	10.4%	89.6%

Source: INEGI, Encuesta nacional de uso de tiempo 2009.

**Table 4. Estimated Weekly Sports Participation in Visually Disabled Population, Mexico City 2010**

	<b>Number of People</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Total visually disabled population	120,572	100%
Visually disabled population that practice sport	12,058	10%
Visually disabled population that do not practice sport	108,514	90%

Sources: INEGI, Censo de Poblacion y Vivienda 2010. Encuesta nacional de uso de tiempo 2009.

<sup>104</sup> < <http://www.forbes.com.mx/56-de-los-mexicanos-dice-al-ejercicio/#gs.aOOvNhA> > Retrieved: 25-Oct-16 at 5.24pm

<sup>105</sup> Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática, Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010

### 4.3.2. Sport Inequality towards disabled people

*“It’s a matter of paradigms, most people think that (we) disabled people have a lot of limitations and that therefore we cannot do everything.” Fabiola Miranda*

Bourdieu (2003) said that within the social field of sport, the probability of a social class practicing sport, depends on the frame of mind that the habitus provides. This frame of mind, “depends, to a different degree for each sport, primarily on economic capital and secondly on culture capital and spare time.”<sup>106</sup> Economic capital, was detailed on the previous section, and we can summarize the economic situation of disabled people to a very negative one. Specially the fact that ten percent of disabled people believe they cannot work because they have a ‘handicap’ (see table 1), this explains on one hand why disabled people would not practice sport. On the other hand, one of the elements of culture capital is physical appearance, this one according to my research is one of the most important factors that determines sport practice in visually disabled people. The participants perceive there is an “ideal” of what a healthy, capable body is. When it comes to mountaineering, Bourdieu (2003) said that mountaineering is associated with the symbolic gratifications associated with practicing a highly distinctive activity and it represents the highest degree of mastery of one’s own body.

Bourdieu (2003) also pointed out that sport is associated with health giving functions and aesthetic functions which he described as: “norms defining what the body ought to be, not only in its perceptible configuration but also in its motion, its gait, etc.”<sup>107</sup> Now all of these factors, play a big role in determining who and how should sport be practiced, hence leading to non-visually disabled people think: *“blind people should not be practicing rock climbing or mountaineering since they lack normal eye sight, they cannot be aware of the dangers and risks ahead of them, they cannot see where they are going...”* (Notes diary 2009). This phrase got repeated to me by numerous acquaintances

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<sup>106</sup> Eric Dunning, “Sport: Sport and power relations” Vol. 3, Taylor & Francis, 2003, Pg. 300

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 302

and class mates when they about my climbs with disabled people. These phrases also mirrors in the reality of the participants, they have heard this many times before: *“People think that because we lack sight, or a physical quality, because we are different, then we cannot practice sport.” Jose Manuel (Transcript of interview, 2015).*

It rings true to what Bourdieu (2003) said, people do have a predetermined configuration of how the body should look and act, in the case of mountaineering the motion and gait is determined by sight. As mentioned in the theoretical framework of this paper, Bourdieu (1992) said that habitus is determined by social and economic conditions. We already established the economic conditions of the participants, but what about the social ones? Where did sport originate, and how is it perceived today?

#### **4.3.3. The origins of modern sport**

*“We must understand that in the past, the concept of sport did not exist. The rhythm of life itself involved serious physical strain, and so the need for sport was unnecessary. But now, modern life has taken us to have that classification, or that definition of sport... which I believe is important. This has lead us to discover how the human body works and how it benefits from sport. In the end we are all human beings and we all have a physical part that needs constant movement and exercise. And so sports became a specialized embodiment of these needs ‘of exercise and movement’ ... And within this specialization, I believe that the important issue is not whether you ‘do or don’t’ have a disability. But rather, the issue lies on the fact that ‘everybody can practice sport’. Once that’s settled, I believe that if you take that choice, you will be benefited because you are using your body and experimenting your thoughts in pure action.” (Gerardo Transcript of Interview, 2015).*

Gerardo’s quote resounds Gramsci’s historical becoming thinking, if we look into the past of how sport developed and came to be the ‘definition’ of what it is today. The institution of who and in what condition should human beings practice modern sport, originated in parallel to the ‘model family’ ideal and ‘family wage’ fashion, in the



industrialist capitalist society of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The social values and ideals of that era, where the ones that shape our prejudices of sport today, so let us look at how they formed.

#### **4.3.4. What kind of ideals did the sport practitioners of 19-20<sup>th</sup> century Britain had?**

We can see that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain was involved in the Boer War of 1899-1902. A 'Physical Deterioration Committee' was created, so inquire into the low physical caliber of recruits for the War. Since physical caliber was considered crucial for Britain's future ability to wage war. So the liberal government made efforts to deal with the 'physical stamina' of workers, by introducing free school meals.<sup>108</sup>

Parallel to this, "the image of the strength of the male body, domination in sports, and groups centered on military values became commonplace in the interwar period. One of the most influential and representative was the League of Health and Strength. The League was one of many groups that sought to promote health and the importance of a strong male body, "for members of the League, the solution to poor physique was exercises designed to encourage muscular development, 'Health was Strength". - Being rejected from service due to inadequate fitness was a difficult thing for soldiers to face in a culture enamored with "Khaki Fever"."<sup>109</sup>

The Report of the Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration in 1904 had cemented the idea that British men were physically inept, citing a 60% rejection rate of fighting aged men into the British armed forces.<sup>110</sup> The working class was the one main sectors of the population drafted into the army, so this kind of ideals were beginning to be cemented into their sport and physical activity. While on the other hand, rugby was the sport of the elite, who had the time and resources to devote to the game, and it was

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<sup>108</sup> Argument posed by: Chris Harman, *Op. cit.*, Pg. 382.

<sup>109</sup> < <http://boerwar.weebly.com/physical-deterioration.html> > Retrieved: 25-Oct-16 at 6.42pm

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*,

considered “the best trial of the relative vigor and virility of any two or more opposing countries”. During that same period of time a series of tours from rugby teams coming from the ‘colonies’ New Zealand All Blacks in 1905, Australian 1908, and the South African Springboks in 1912, came to Britain challenging different British rugby teams. In all three tours, the colonial teams left having “beat nearly all the teams they played, and displayed vigorous and innovative styles of play previously unseen in Britain”. As the 1904 Report on physical deterioration stressed the destructive environmental effects of urban cities and factories where the working class lived and worked, the rugby tours suggested decline among the elite.<sup>111</sup>

The father of sports sociology, Norbert Elias (1986) stated that: “Sport and Parliament as they emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, were both characteristic of the same change in the power structure of England and in the social habitus of that class of people which emerged from the antecedent struggles as the ruling group.”<sup>112</sup> I believe he was right as sport came to be under the cultural hegemony of the ruling class of those times; the parliament and ‘the elite’ capitalist factory owners, that shaped the social habitus of English society. It explains why they embraced sport under the masculinity, both for the working class and ruling class, and furtherly we can see that also a poor physique was considered unhealthy. This starts to explain why nowadays, disabled people, who do not fit the “superior physically” stereotype are not found worthy or incapable of practicing sport. Along these lines, sport was also arranged by the rules of the free market, organizing teams that played according to rules which reflected the competitive ethos of capitalist industry (Harman 2002).<sup>113</sup> I believe this ideology gave birth to ruthless competition, in where minorities were left out of sport practice, because of their gender and physical qualities. Some social policy theorists have gone as far as describing the

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>112</sup> Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, *Quest for Excitement: Sports and leisure in the civilizing process*, Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986, Pg. 40

<sup>113</sup> Argument posed by: Chris Harman, in a “A Peoples History of the World”, 2002, Bookmarks Publications Ltd, Pg. 381.

competitive ethos of capitalism as “individualistic and exacerbating social inequality”, (Alcock et al. 2016).<sup>114</sup>

Many of those prejudices, still remain alive on our modern society. A recent study comparing the Olympics and Paralympics, found that “The reliance on ‘free enterprise’ contradicts the importance of the state structures to support the needs of the disabled where the market forces repeatedly fail them in all spheres of life.” (Kell P. et al, 2008)<sup>115</sup> From this study’s perspective, the ‘market forces’ have failed disabled people repeatedly when it comes to jobs and opportunities. Likewise, the study found out that the Olympic movement “glorifies the free enterprise spirit and reifies images of bodily perfection by making a fetishism about bodily perfection that perpetuates unhelpful stereotypes about “normal.”<sup>116</sup> This agrees with Bourdieu’s (2003) ideas of aesthetic functions of how the body should look and act, since Olympic sport dominates these ideals, disabled people end up being undermined. Sport is supposed to be about embracing diversity, however, when there is an ideal of how the body should look and act, diversity loses its significance and even becomes a liability. According to the participants one of the main places that shows and models sport, is the mass media, which will be the theme of the next section.

#### **4.4. The Sport and the Media**

##### **4.4.1. Paralympics versus Olympics**

Between the Paralympics and the Olympics, the latter, tabulates as more attractive in obtaining television broadcast revenue, corporate support and individual donations.<sup>117</sup> The whole sport movement has been constantly run under the ‘free enterprise’ spirit;

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<sup>114</sup> Pete Alcock et al, “The Student’s Companion to Social Policy” John Wiley & Sons, 2016.

<sup>115</sup> Kell P. et al, “Two games and one movement? The Paralympics and the Olympic movement”, University of Wollongong, 2008. Pg 70

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

identifying itself as an autonomous organism operating away from state controls.<sup>118</sup> Olympic games' athletes are virtual millionaires, with huge media contracts, grants and performance bonuses. Whereas the Paralympic movement, does not embody the 'free enterprise' spirit; since its always dependent on government institutions and its athletes depend on the voluntarist structure of welfare, charity and paternalism (Kell 2008).<sup>119</sup>

Guy Debord (1983), added to this perspective, he developed the concept of 'The Spectacle', a critical theory of the mass media. He argued that the mass media is technological content based on capitalist ideals that our society regards as neutral and objective.<sup>120</sup> Under this logic, he contended that the mass media cannot be neutral; since it's an autonomously developing separate power based on the principle increasing productivity.<sup>121</sup> Such an argument explains why our modern capitalistic free market society emphasizes The Olympics, over the Paralympics, since the former is the embodiment of its own values in its most pure form of 'free market' enterprise, and produces high profits, millionaire broadcasting rights contracts and many famous athletes. However, what happens to our society and other humans when we treat them as products, as objects of production in the form of TV content?

During the Sydney 2000 Olympics, in Australia, only two national government channels covered the Paralympics, while commercial networks didn't cover the event at all (Kell 2008). Or more recently, during the London 2012 Olympics, all the Mexican athletes received very little support from the government. Out of the total budget assigned to Sports Federations, only 13 percent of it was directed towards the Paralympic Sports Federations, while the rest was directed to Olympic and Non-Olympic Sports (See Table 5). Curiously enough, with this small amount of support, the Mexican Paralympic athletes still managed to receive 3 times more medals than Olympic athletes (see table 6). And during the last Rio's 2016 Olympics, 20 days before the Paralympics started, only

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 71

<sup>120</sup> Guy Debord, "The Society of Spectacle", Rebel Press, 1983, Pg. 13

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 14

twelve percent of the tickets to the events were sold.<sup>122</sup> While at the same time, the Brazilian federal court has blocked the Government from paying the grant of Paralympic sport, until the private company responsible for organizing the games opens up its tax and accounting records for wider scrutiny. Apparently there are claims that money meant for the Paralympics was used for the Olympics.<sup>123</sup>

**Table 5. Total Sports Budget Assigned to Sports Federations, June 2012**

(Quantities in thousands of pesos)

	<i>MXN \$</i>	<i>%</i>
Sports Federations Total Budget	\$ 122,519.60	100%
Individual Olympic Sports Federations	\$ 85,007.70	69%
Group Olympic Sports Federations	\$ 2,372.40	2%
Non-Olympic Sports Federations	\$ 19,910.00	16%
Paralympic Sports Federations	\$ 15,229.50	13%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 122,519.60</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Comisión Nacional de Cultura Física y Deporte (CONADE)

**Table 6. Medal Count Comparison for London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics**

<i>Medals London 2012</i>	<b><i>Gold</i></b>	<b><i>Silver</i></b>	<b><i>Bronze</i></b>	<b><i>Total</i></b>
<i>Olympic Sports</i>	1	3	3	<b>7</b>
<i>Paralympic Sports</i>	6	4	11	<b>21</b>

Source: Mexican Olympic Committee and Mexican Paralympic Committee

<sup>122</sup> < <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3745652/Rio-2016-organisers-admit-12-cent-Paralympics-tickets-sold.html> > Taken 12-Sep-16, 5.22pm.

<sup>123</sup> < <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/olympics/news/rio-2016-paralympics-olympics-money-organisers-spent-a7193486.html> > Taken 12-Sep-16, 5.28pm.

#### 4.4.2. What is the role that media has played in the participants lives?

By connecting their reality of sports participation to the role that the mass media played on it, the participants were able to describe how inequality is created and reproduced. For them, the relationship of the media and disabled sport is the answer to the *why* disabled Mexican people, do not engage in sport. In broad terms, the participants understand the media as something that vulgarizes the social constructs related to sport. By social constructs they understand: sports institutions, practices and beliefs. Vulgarization takes place by making traditional ‘non-disabled’ sport as the ‘one and only’ and most popular among the masses and undermining disabled sport and disabled people. Ultimately, this vulgarization leads disabled people to apprehend this as a ‘natural and inevitable’ truth of their reality in where sport is something inaccessible to them:

*“...even though, sometimes, you do hear in the media about the Paralympics and disabled sports, I still felt them as something very alien and distant...” Jose Manuel Pacheco (Group Interview Transcription, 14/Jan/2015).*

When Jose stated this in the interview, he was reflecting on his past, and remembering that he used to think just *“like every other disabled person”*. When he stated this, I asked the others if the media made them feel the same way: ‘distant and alien from sport’? Everyone agreed with Jose Manuel’s example, which had triggered an examination of their own experiences. Their personal experiences, speak from first-hand involvement in countless national interviews, documentaries, newspaper articles and radio interviews. Their personal media involvements can be disseminated into two main categories: 1. Forming part of the content, 2. Recipients of content. Edgar accurately summed up the experiences of being a recipient of content:

*“When you start losing your sight... you start to grow apart from sport, you don’t feel it’s yours any more, it’s not part of you, unlike the ‘other people’ which do feel part of it... [‘other people’ refers to non-visually disabled people]. Edgar Angeles (Transcript of Interview 16/Jan/2015.)*

For Verenice, the reason of why this happens revolves around the way media content is created:

*“The media shows the issue of being blind or not as a thing that makes life and sports difficult or unpractical. The truth is that ‘handicap’ is created by yourself when you accept that ‘reality-of-others’ and you let it become part of your attitude.” Verenice Hernandez (Transcript of Interview 16/Jan/2015)*

We can understand where Verenice’s argument comes from by looking at their experiences with the media. In 2009 the project “Discover your Senses”<sup>124</sup>, had come to a closure after the participants reached the summit of Mt. Iztaccihuatl. Hungry for getting a piece of the cake, a Mexican national news channel did a TV report on the whole event by interviewing the participants and Eric Weihenmayer. Their sport practice was vulgarized into: *‘being blind makes life and sports very difficult to practice’*. The first scene of the report opens up with the following words:

*“Alpinism, because it is practiced in very extreme conditions, it’s one of the most demanding and dangerous sports. Despite the fact that these conditions, on itself, make the practice of this sport really hard: there is one man that has been practicing this activity with a handicap that makes the fact look even more incredible! Eric Weihenmayer, he’s an Alpinist and he’s blind...” (TV Report, National Television channel, aired November, 2009)*

At the end of the day, the participants were not that wrong. The media does illustrate disabled sports as “incredible” events. With a rhetoric of: *as if life wasn’t hard enough because they’re blind, these guys make it harder by practicing a sport that is not meant for them...*

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<sup>124</sup> Event # 1 in Table 7: Timeline of Events. Annex 2.

#### 4.4.3. How was their media content produced?

The day this TV Report was filmed, we had met one hour before the filming crew arrived since we wanted to discuss how to use this opportunity to our advantage. We innocently speculated at how we would answer questions about ‘why disability does not equal a liability’ and ‘how can this liability be changed’. But reality, struck us in the form of a socially uninterested interviewer, he didn’t want to talk about deep social and cultural issues, of course not! How would that sell! Right? He wanted answers to the questions of: “tell me more about the danger, tell me more about how even though you don’t see, you are not afraid of falling off a cliff...” and no matter how many times we tried to go down the road of social issues, he kept diverting us towards the direction of the dramatic story of: ‘how the disadvantaged members of the visually disabled community came to an environment that disadvantaged even them more’. We on the other hand, wanted to stress quite the opposite: “Visually disabled people are not disadvantaged. If a person acquired a visual disability it does not mean that they acquire a disadvantage over the rest of the population. The disadvantage is acquired when they can no longer participate in what the rest of society does and when we fail to include disabled people because they have different capacities, handicap is created...” (Research Diary 2009).

Who can blame him? The interviewer wanted to exaggerate and dramatize how these underdogs went against the system<sup>125</sup>. And let’s be honest, he did a great job, apart from the already mentioned phrases, his TV report was full of pseudoscience: “*For blind people, the only difference between night and day is the cold and sleepiness, since their biological clock never changes...*”. It also extravagantly described the event of the participants reaching the summit as: “*with their heart’s beating 1000 times per minute... and with the adrenaline at its highest... they walk on a nasty terrain...you would never imagine a blind person walking on this kind of mountainous terrain*” and their whole climb was resumed in: “*after thirty-eight hours of walking with only two breaks in*

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<sup>125</sup> Term coined by: Frank Luther Mott, in “American Journalism”, Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 2000



*between and experiencing tiredness and uncertainty: the summit finally peeked*". Then the dramatic conclusion: *"with tears that came from the most profound darkness, the blind climbers cried at reaching the summit"*. This TV report was aired in national television and unfortunately, it was aired to a potential market of almost fifty million televisions.<sup>126</sup>

*But what was the real story?*

For the participants and me, climbing that mountain was anything but the depiction of what the TV report had done. For starters, the participants 'biological clock', changes all the time; their sleep schedule can be altered easily. If they would fall asleep every time they feel cold and 'sleepy', well, they would be sleeping most of the mountain climbs we did. Fabiola, who is not completely blind but has profound low vision (nearing total blindness), she can perceive light, which she uses this to understand when its 'day or night'. Regarding the claims that the participant's heartbeat was around 1000bpm, well I doubt there is a single human being that can have such vital signs. For the participants, the hardest challenge was adapting to the 5000m plus altitude and not the actual 'nasty' terrain. One thing for sure was completely false and not even close to the actual climb; the participants did not walk for thirty-eight hours in a row with only having two breaks. We took three days of sleeping at different altitudes so that we didn't need to walk for more than eight hours per day. And for the record, I am pretty sure that the moment we all reached the summit, the tears of the participants didn't come from the most 'deep darkness', they actually came from exactly the same place they came from me and anybody else there: the tear glands of our upper eyelids. (Research Diary, 2009; Transcript of Conversations, 2015.)

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<sup>126</sup> <<http://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/empresas/tv-de-paga-penetra-en-casi-50-de-hogares-mexicanos.html>>  
Taken: 30/09/2016, 15.22.

#### 4.4.4. What are the implications of this?

This type of flashy reports and shocking news dominate Mexican TV media, especially when it comes to national news. In the majority of the cases, reporters compose their media content in this format for the plain and simple reason of profit. Producing dramatized and lavish media content is what sells the most. To be fair the TV reporter was just ‘doing his job’. However, he did his job superbly and when his superb piece of work was aired, it did so in one of the most viewed national channels and news programs of Mexico. One can only imagine what happens when other possible visually disabled viewers hear the phrases: “*to climb a mountain they had to walk thirty-eight hours per day*” and etc. how can a lazy person find the motivation to become physically active in a mountain, if that’s the way they depict the story? Regardless of this speculation, what we can analyze in more depth is how the vulgarization of the social constructs of sport is done by the media.

#### 4.4.5. Social inequality? Objectification of disabled people

“We live in a spectacular society, that is, our whole life is surrounded by an immense accumulation of spectacles. Things that were once directly lived are now lived by proxy. Once an experience is taken out of the real world it becomes a commodity. As a commodity the spectacular is developed to the detriment of the real. It becomes a substitute for experience.”<sup>127</sup> Debord and Law (1970), both saw that the way mass media was organizing the social relationships of production, both consumer and producer where both ruled by the product, the commodity, an economy developing for itself and not for the good of human beings.<sup>128</sup> They observed that the products of mass media (commodities) ended up ruling the workers and the consumers, instead of the opposite: the product being ruled by them.

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<sup>127</sup> Larry Law, *Spectacular Times: Images and Everyday Life*, 1970, images 2, 4.

<sup>128</sup> Guy Debord, “The Society of Spectacle”, Rebel Press, 1983, Pg. 10

We can see that the same applied for the case of the participant's TV report. The commodity, in the form of an "attractive" and "selling" TV report, ruled the relations of production between interviewer and the participants. This fits in with the concept mentioned in the theoretical background, "the fetishism of the commodity", from Marx (1976), when we stop viewing relationships of production as human and social relationships, they become: "*material relations between persons and social relations between things.*"<sup>129</sup> The reporter viewed his relationship to the participants as material, and he viewed them as potential content in the form of exaggerating the disability of the participants and using it for profit. If we view it in economic terms, the reporter used their disability as a material to increase the economic value of his report, thus converting the participants and their disability into objects of production. This objectification happens when the goal of the relationships of production is to make profit, then human relationships become merely materialistic, and the consequence is it makes it easier for us to objectify other human beings, especially women and minorities like disabled people.

#### **4.4.6. Have the participants experienced objectification?**

Debord (1983) used Marx's fetishism of the commodity theory in 'The Spectacle', and he said that just like in our economic system, in the mass media people become an object for production, they are stripped off their humanity in what he called a: "distorting objectification of the producers."<sup>130</sup> Participant Verenice lived through a firsthand experience of the 'distorting objectification' of herself. She had recently graduated from university and was working as assistant accountant; reviewing and computing information on spreadsheets. One day she realized that she was having trouble with her eyesight and she could no longer see the spreadsheets with clarity. Concerned that she might have the same congenital eye disease that left her sisters blind, she rushed to see an eye specialist. After the doctor made his tests and evaluation, a tough reality hit Verenice:

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<sup>129</sup> Karl Marx, "The Capital", Penguin Classics, Vol.1, *Section 4. The fetishism of the commodity and its secret*, Pg. 166.

<sup>130</sup> Guy Debord, *Op. cit.*, Pg. 10

“you have been diagnosed with *retinitis pigmentosa*.”<sup>131</sup>

*“When I heard this from the doctor, my first thought was, ‘what are the solutions, is there a cure?’ I told the doctor I needed a cure because my economic future depended on it. I could not work on spreadsheets without my sight....”*

The solution, that the retina ophthalmologist doctor suggested was the following:

*“Go back home. Now you will just be another piece of the furniture collection...”*

*Verenice Hernandez (Conference transcription, 2014)*

Debord’s (1983) ‘distorting objectification of the producer’ could not be more obvious in this case, ‘becoming part of the furniture’ became the solution to her ‘cannot see the spreadsheets due to my loss of sight’. Associating a visual disability to becoming an object and form part of a furniture collection, is a crude-but-true description of this constant view of the world that the participants are exposed to. Now with all of this stated, we can come to a conclusion that this is how the participants have experienced cultural hegemony. They have experienced it in terms of a capitalistic dominant ideology that puts forward profit making ahead of human lives. This pattern keeps repeating on the experiences of the participants, especially when it comes to economic terms. Every time somebody thinks of them in economic terms, they end up being objectified, people relate to them in terms of material and economic relationships. Thus they end up fearing that the participants won’t be able to subsist economically on their own, and often end up thinking like Verenice’s doctor: “go back home and let your parents take care of you”. (Transcript of Conversations 2014, Research Diary 2011)

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<sup>131</sup> An inherited, degenerative eye disease that causes severe vision impairment. Currently there are no cures for this disease.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The following chapter will attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis into how, objectification can be broken and how the participants used sport to challenge dominant ideologies in that field and then took that experience to the rest of their social fields. By answering the following question: Did rock climbing and mountaineering sport help change the handicap situation of the participants?

### 5.1. Social alienation

Elias and Dunning (1983) explained that leisure activities: “represent a sphere of life which gives people greater opportunities for individual choice than any other. They all provide chances for experiencing a pleasurable stirring up of emotions, an enjoyable excitement which can be experienced in public and shared with others and which can be enjoyed with social approval and in good conscience.”<sup>132</sup> This remains quite true when it comes to the sport experiences of the participants:

*“I think that the best platform to break your own limits is sport. Sport involves challenges, facing tense situations, situations of adrenaline and many other situations that put you out of comfort; which you must face and resolve. Sport is a platform that helps you in many senses: physical, mental, emotional. I think a very important matter is taking advantage of sport as a space in where you have the possibility to break your own limits. And we, disabled people, have a lot of limitations and a lot of challenges; which we have to break, and what better way than doing this than through sports.” Jose Manuel (Transcript of the interview, 2015.)*

To better understand the reasons of why leisure fulfills this role, I would pose the following question: why is it that only in leisure activities, can the individual have greater

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<sup>132</sup> Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, “*Quest for Excitement: Sports and leisure in the civilizing process*”, Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986, p. 99.

choice than any other sphere of life to savor enjoyable excitement shared with others? In our modern society, experiencing the same enjoyable excitement at the work environment is no longer possible in most of the cases, and it all comes down into the way we have organized our labor society. Since the dawn of capitalism, Marx (1844), pointed out that labor alienates human beings in four main aspects: 1. the worker from his work and the product; 2. the worker from working and production; 3. the worker from his ‘species-essence’; and 4. the worker from other workers<sup>133</sup>. This, according to him, was because of the fact that “labor is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind.”

More specifically, when talking about leisure in the form of mountaineering and rock climbing, the environment, administered the participants with different social situations that stirred up their emotions and provided a place where they can create value. Since value, cannot be created in the work place, leisure time is left to make up for this task. Adding to Marx’s ideas, Debord (1983) said that when we reduce people to objects, objects seem to acquire human qualities and make truly human manifestations appear as unconscious “animal behavior.”<sup>134</sup> Hence, it explains why Elias (1986) then said that in our modern society, sport is the only place where human beings can repress this animal urges and display aggressive impulses under a controlled environment.”<sup>135</sup> Our modern society never considers the worker on terms of his “leisure and humanity”<sup>136</sup>, this is especially true in the case of Mexico, for the previously mentioned reasons in the Results Chapter, “Cultural Hegemony in the Mexican Society”. Almost 80 percent of the 39 million subordinate working population is vulnerable or poor while Mexico clocks the

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<sup>133</sup> Karl Marx, “*Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.”

<sup>134</sup> Guy Debord, “The Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy”, *Internationale Situationniste* #10, (March 1966).

<sup>135</sup> Eric Dunning “Sport Matters, *Sociological Studies of Sport, Violence and Civilization*”, Routledge, 1999, Pg. 64

<sup>136</sup> Guy Debord, “The Society of Spectacle”, Rebel Press, 1983, Pg. 21-22

highest hours of working times out of all the OECD countries.<sup>137</sup> In Mexico the worker is a mere object of production and for the participants in this study one thing remains clear, only in the leisure environment they are able to become human, to stop being objectified and find a place for self-confirmation:

*“It’s a matter of paradigms, most people think that we, disabled people, have a lot of limitations and that therefore we cannot do everything. But suddenly when I tell them about all the mountains and rocks that I have climbed... it breaks their scheme and sheds a different light. Then they become curious and say, “it is possible!”. Fabiola Miranda*

### **5.1.1. The origins of social alienation**

Albert Einstein (1949) considered that the main social dilemma of his era was the fact that individualism has taken us to the degree of viewing our tie to society as negative:

*“I have now reached the point where I may indicate briefly what to me constitutes the essence of the crisis of our time. It concerns the relationship of the individual to society. The individual has become more conscious than ever of his dependence upon society. But he does not experience this dependence as a positive asset, as an organic tie, as a protective force, but rather as a threat to his natural rights, or even to his economic existence.”<sup>138</sup>*

This rings true to some of the participants as they have experienced a society that views their tie to other human beings as a negative asset and threat to their economic existence. During the interview one of the conversation themes that came up, was the moment when the participants started to lose their sight. During these tough moments the participants remembered that many friends and acquaintances had mourning reactions towards their

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<sup>137</sup> Carlos J. McCadden & Miguel del Castillo Negrete, “La Clase Media en México”, Senado de la Republica, LXIII Legislatura, 2015, Pg. 75

<sup>138</sup> Albert Einstein, “Why Socialism?”, Monthly Review, 1949, Volume 1, No. 1 May.

situation. Their acquaintances believed that losing sight would affect their capacity to have an independent life from their parents. And on the other side, lamented the fact that from that moment onwards the participants would need “care and help” from others: *“My situation led others to think: ‘poor girl she must suffer,’ or, ‘poor girl she was the unlucky one to lose her sight’ ...” Verenice Hernandez (Transcript of Interview 2015).*

We will see that this dominant ideology also permeates disabled people in many cases who as a reflex of pitied, end up trying to be as independent and self-sustained as possible. This often leads them to social isolation and to situations where instead of asking for help and support, they end up trying to solve everything by themselves. Jose Manuel, admitted that this kind of thinking was part of his “world view”, he experienced his tie to society as a negative asset. True to this nature, in many of the mountain climbs, he used to try and be the fastest in climbing, and always trying to be ahead and separate of the group, since he thought that the rest could ‘slow him down’.

*“During the San Miguel Mt. Climb, at the beginning, I was very confident and going fast- Eventually I separated from the group. When looking behind me, I remember I said: “they are going very slow...” Jose Manuel.*

However, he then realized that he was going too fast and when the time came, to climb a very inclined slope, he was so tired that he could barely walk three steps without running out of breath:

*“The group which was being me, and whom I thought was very slow, were now overtaking me... I said to myself: ‘these guys are going to make it, and I won’t...’ Jose Manuel.*

And it was within this moment that he realized that depending on a group of people is not necessarily a bad thing:



*“However, the companionship of the group became present. When everybody saw that I could no longer climb, they started to chant ‘you are strong, we can do this, let’s go, let’s go!’ this motivated me to keep going, with at the same step of the group, and eventually I got to the Summit.” Jose Manuel*

For some, this might seem insignificant, but for him, it changed a deep seeded truth from his world view. He began to relate his dependence on companionship and a group as a positive aspect. He then went further to adapt this climbing experiences to his social life in where he learnt that depending on other people is a good thing, receiving help and helping others makes him more humane:

*“We know that we are social people, we are social beings, we always interact with our families, in our work, at school or wherever. In my case, I’ve learnt how to collaborate in every sense: when people need help, I offer myself. And whenever I need help, I ask for it. Jose Manuel. (Transcript of interview 2015.)*

Fromm’s (2004) couldn’t be more fitting to Jose’s statement: “the very aim of Marx is to liberate man from the pressure of economic needs, so that he can be fully human; ... Marx is primarily concerned with the emancipation of man as an individual, the overcoming of alienation, the restoration of his capacity to relate himself fully to man and to nature...”<sup>139</sup> We will furtherly see how the sport scenario proves with richer opportunities to relate fully with other human beings than the working scenario.

### **5.1.2. Social Catharsis**

What happened to Jose Manuel, is what Gramsci (1999) called “Catharsis”, a term that indicates the passage from the purely economic, egoistic-passional to the ethico-political moment. A movement, towards a conscious social action towards a common social goal.

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<sup>139</sup> Erich Fromm, “Marx Concept of Man”, Bloomsbury Academic, 2004, Pg. 3

Gramsci (1999) identified that catharsis is the passage from “object to subject”, from “necessity to freedom”. By this he meant, when the structure ceases to be an external force which crushes man, assimilates him to itself and makes him passive; and is transformed into a means of freedom, an instrument to create a new ethico-political form and a source of new initiatives.<sup>140</sup> In many ways, sports provided the social structures and environment where to do this. For the participants this *cathartic moment* in sport, developed many new different initiatives in their lives. Edgar for example, after figuring out that he was a capable climber and mountaineer, tackled a long life dream:

*“It was a 2012 Malibu; I drove it on the street outside my sister’s house. It was one of my dreams, and it became true... Before losing my sight I used to work as a taxi driver... I used to love driving. And so when this dream came true, my sister was very nervous, she told me ‘you are crazy, I don’t even want to see’, so she went inside the house... But after driving, when I came down from the car she was there and told me: ‘this is amazing, I can’t believe all the things that you do, you have my respect. Long time ago you were a completely different person, now you have changed for good, and you are very self-confident.’ ... I think that if I don’t do those things now, then I will never do them because of fear. I feel good with myself because I can share this to other people and tell them ‘It is possible’, I can do this and many other things.” Edgar Angeles*

Similarly, for the participants there is a phenomenon within sports and leisure activities that provide an ambient for catharsis. Carrying on with Gramsci’s (1999) catharsis idea, we can see the participants found a place in sport where they can get rid of the external forces which *used* to crush them and render them *passive*. All of the socially imposed ideas, that came from a cultural hegemony which imposed how they should think and act, were challenged and resolved in sport. The participants gained consciousness of the ideas that prejudiced them, when struggling together with other disabled people and non-disabled people in the mountain or rock climbing environment. They then used those

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<sup>140</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Op. cit.*, Pg. 691

experiences to transform and create a new consciousness with new initiatives. Verence for example, decided to speak up for disabled people, and also to speak up for herself in two radio interviews and a live TV interview. She saw the potential that challenging an ideal can have in her immediate circle of friends and family (whom previously pitied her):

*“So suddenly my families and friend’s perspectives changed, they were telling me things like: ‘hey you are a source of inspiration of the family’, ‘what you do is amazing’, ‘keep doing what you are doing’, ‘when you go to another mountain invite us or let us know where we can see you in the TV’. That’s the things I started to hear from then on, and to me it filled me with pride, my auto esteem went up and my self-confidence, but not my ego. I don’t climb to say “look at all the stuff I can do” but I climb because I say “today I’m lucky to be here, I’m grateful with what I have.” It’s a situation of being grateful, a learning process and like I have said before, I think that I have done more things being visually disabled that when I had my sight.”*

In Edgar’s perspective, everyone with whom he interacts started seeing him differently and treating him like a ‘normal person’ ever since he started to participate in sport. Or in other words, when he goes through a process of self-affirmation in sports, he ‘regains’ his humanity by seeing that he is not only a ‘visually disabled object’. Viewing this from the field of psychology, Erich Fromm (2004) said that Marx’s philosophical concept of man was: “the return of man as a real human being”.<sup>141</sup> He believed that society should be reorganized in terms of solving the “conflict between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species.”<sup>142</sup> Within this line of thought, it is interesting to note that during sports practice, Edgar, managed to break his self-alienation and objectification within his immediate family and circle of friends, by climbing and sharing his stories:

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<sup>141</sup> Erich Fromm, “Marx Concept of Man”, Bloomsbury Academic, 2004, Pg. 55.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

*“When you start to tell others about all the things that you have done even though you are blind, then they start viewing you as a different person, and in my case, they start treating you like they would treat any other ‘normal person’. For example, the other day, me and my family we were waiting for the bus at the bus stop. I was standing, playing with my walking stick. Suddenly I heard a bus about to leave, so I asked out loud: ‘are we getting up on this one?’ [He laughs] ... my mom had to rush out of the bus to fetch me! [laughing] Everyone was already inside the bus; they assumed I also saw it was ‘bus 51’ and forgot that they had to guide me [he laughs even more] ... They now treat me like any other person. So these things, are the positive things, the good vibrations and courage that you put on everything that you end up transmitting to others.”*

### **5.1.3. How exactly does the catharsis process go in sport? The idea of ‘mimetic tension’ from Elias and Dunning (1989)**

During the practice of mountaineering and rock climbing, the participants of this study found an environment where to connect with their bodies, emotions and other social beings.<sup>143</sup> By doing this emotional connection, they were consequently able to transfer the learned experiences into improving different individual and social aspects of their lives outside of sports. For example, when they learn how to control their fear in unknown rock climbing terrain, then they can also learn how to control their fears in the workplace. We can explain how this happens by using Elias (1986) idea of ‘Mimetic tension’. He pointed out that one of the most important social features of sports is that it provides an environment in where *imaginary tensions*, similar to the ones of *real life* can be recreated and resolved: “the feelings aroused in the imaginary situation of a human leisure activity are the siblings of those aroused in real-life situations”<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Based on the ideas of: Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, “*Quest for Excitement: Sports and leisure in the civilizing process*”, Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986, p. 99 – 100.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, Pg. 42.

This is an accurate description of how in this case, sport, helped the disabled participants in this study. When they all go climbing they are evoking fears, agitation, confusion, peace of mind, happiness, excitement and many other things that they experience in their daily lives. Just that in this case, they get a scenario with tangible goals in where they can overcome all of their fears and emotions whilst simultaneously learning from the experience. The same feeling of fear that was stopping Fabiola from venturing to accomplish other personal goals, was the same fear stopping her from climbing a mountain. Once she overcame that fear, she resolved the situation and took these experiences to ‘real life’: *“In my everyday life, when it comes to connecting and working with others, connecting with myself, and when trying to achieve something, I always remember the fact that: I have already been successful in fulfilling my previous goals, so there is a high possibility of this happening again, and that I can create and do even more things.”* Fabiola Miranda (Transcript of the interview 2015.)

Participant Gerardo also accurately highlighted how he experiences catharsis and mimetic tension:

*“To be able to feel those emotions, feel my body, feel my limitations, but within those limitations, to know that I could still go on and accomplish my goal. The fact that I could feel all of those things and also express them, to me, it was a very significant change. And from there I learnt a lot of different things, especially to learn to say no: I don’t want this, I won’t do this again and I don’t like this.”* Gerardo

While climbing he was able to feel all of his emotions, limitations and the capacity of his body. Hence when he overcome these emotions, he was able to learn and then become more confident when it comes to conquering similar emotions in his ‘normal life’ scenarios. On an individual level sports plays a big role as a space where disabled people, that have been limited in a lot of aspects of their lives, in an environment where to safely unwind and break different boundaries and paradigms. Successfully setting and achieving goals in leisure and sports, lead the participants to discover that they are capable of reproducing the same results in every other aspect of their lives.

## 5.2. Why does sport help undermine self-alienation? Social Catharsis, Social Belonging, “*The Established and the Outsiders*”

While studying football hooliganism in the 1960’s England, Elias (1965) found that violence within the spectators at football matches was a reflection of the economic, cultural and social situation that kids and young men of poor neighborhoods were subject to. Elias (1965) concluded that hooligans act the way they do because they suffered a neglect from society; they were considered as ‘outsiders’ or different, from the upper classes and rest of the population. Apart from this feeling of not belonging, the kids and young men of these poor neighborhoods had rather ‘uneventful lives’ and due to the lack of economic and social opportunities they ended up finding football matches a place to belong, a place where they can affirm their existence to a society that qualifies them as violent, poor and uneducated. Or like Elias (1986) puts it in his book ‘*The Established and The Outsiders*’: “They do not count; they can be treated with scorn. But they themselves, they feel, belong here, they know themselves to be English, or Scottish, or Welsh. And yet, they are treated as if they did not belong; they are treated as if they were outsiders.”<sup>145</sup>

Following this discourse, we can apply a similar analysis to the situation of disabled people in Mexico who have a feeling that they ‘do not belong’ in the ‘normal population’, the perception that they are neglected and considered different. Because of their disability, they feel that even though they were born Mexicans and are active members of society, the rest of the population still does not consider them part of the ‘normal population’. But how is this resolved?

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<sup>145</sup> Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, “*Quest for Excitement: Sports and leisure in the civilizing process*”, Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986, p. 56. See also: “*The Established and The Outsiders*” London 1965

### 5.2.1. Climbing activities create a sense of belonging in the participants

*Why is a mountaineering group, able to create a feeling of kinship?*

Elias (1983) explained that sense of belonging was created because war and sports are closely related, for they both evoke feelings of ‘us’ versus ‘them’.<sup>146</sup> He had a historical perspective and analyzed that in both in war and sports, conflicts are closely related with different factors like: cooperation, interdependence and formation of groups.<sup>147</sup> After the mountain climb of ‘Cerro de San Miguel’ (*Event 5 in Table 7: Timeline of Events, Appendix 2*), the participants reflected that one of the most pleasurable aspects of mountaineering was the fact that they felt part of a ‘normal group’. The volunteers assisting on the mountain climbs did not treat them as handicapped people, but rather they related to them like they would to any other ‘normal person’. This made the participants feel like they were part of a ‘normal people group’. One of the reasons they felt like this, was because most of their social life and activities in general was usually with other disabled people. (Research diary 2009.)

Parallel to this, it turns out that the participants felt that it was ‘us’ vs ‘the mountain’, which created a sense of belonging since everyone in the group had a common purpose and identity. Additionally, the participants were expected to be interdependent, contribute and cooperate with everyone in order to reach the summit of the mountain and hence all of these factors collided to create an active role, whilst simultaneously reducing their social isolation. (Research diary 2009; Transcript of interviews 2015.)

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<sup>146</sup> Norbert Elias, “What is Sociology?”, Columbia University Press New York, 1970, p. 122.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

### 5.3. The physiological gains of participating in sport

#### 5.3.1. Better walking on inaccessible terrains

*“Being disabled people, we go through the street and we experience the deterioration of the sidewalks, of the street, the missing drain lids... It’s a city that is in no conditions... not designed for us. We always stumble, fall down, crash, suffer accidents, we don’t take steps correctly, we twist our ankles. Without eyesight, we don’t know how to have that ‘firm walk’ in the city even though it’s a city that we are already acquainted with.” Jose Manuel Pacheco (Transcript of interview 2015.)*

This is not only Jose Manuel’s perspective, a recent study confirmed that Mexico City greatly lacks the proper conditions of accessibility for visually disabled people (Hernandez 2012).<sup>148</sup> Despite this, other studies have proven that sport for visually disabled people develops a sense of orientation in space and dynamic balance that helps them overcome the “fear of falling or crashing against hard objects.” (Chawala 1994)<sup>149</sup> Regarding the participants, this is no exception, all of them improved in this sense. They specially mentioned that when walking in Mexico City, they felt much more confident after all the mountain climbs:

*After going through the process of climbing mountains, one thing I learnt and use in my everyday life is: developing that firm walk. To have experiences the different terrains: loose dirt and gravel, rocks, mud, twigs, branches, all that diversity in the terrain that we had to walk and climb through, is what helped me develop that firm step when walking in the city... Nowadays, I do not stumble or fall down so easy, I have not twisted my ankle in a long time and in my case this was developed thanks to this climbing process.” Jose Manuel (Transcript of interview 2015.)*

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<sup>148</sup> Mariana Hernández Flores, “Ciegos conquistando la ciudad de México: vulnerabilidad y accesibilidad en un entorno discapacitante”, *Nueva Antropología*, vol.25 no.76, México ene./jun. 2012.

<sup>149</sup> J. C. Chawla, “Group Sport for People with Disability”, *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 308, No. 6942, (Jun. 4, 1994), pp. 1500-1504.



Verenice likewise accepted that her confidence and orientation in space was greatly improved by all the rock climbing and mountaineering:

*“After all those climbing experiences, I started to get more confident when walking on the streets of Mexico City. I’ve learnt how to feel the floor beneath my feet, learnt how to be more sensorial and aware when I walk. And now I can assure you, I have so much confidence when going down stairs, I feel so secure and trust my skills.” Verenice Hernandez (Transcript of interview 2015.)*

Edgar described it in a more relaxed comical way:

*“...if walking on a mountain is hard, well doing it in the street is like taking a stroll [laughs] ... Now I feel safer, I’m more cautious when I walk; before that I used to walk really fast and accidents would happen all the time...” Edgar Angeles*

### **5.3.2. Inequality in the city terrain**

Here to, again we encounter inequality of a city environment not designed for disabled people. The vast and accelerated pace of the growth of Mexico City, has left disabled people out of the equation. Even in this environment, the city, we can see how capitalist cultural hegemony has left little room for the creation of an appropriate and accessible city for disabled people. David Harvey (2008), pointed out that the question of *what* kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. He said our current concepts of how to make a better world, barely question hegemonic liberal and neoliberal market logics, or the dominant modes of legality and state action, the rights of private property and the profit rate trump all other notions of rights. This gives context to one of the most neglected rights: the ‘right to the city’, which is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation

inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization.<sup>150</sup>

Here again we come to another problematic, many people do not question how society is and came to be anymore, but rather question the fact of why individuals cannot adapt to the system. I experienced this kind of thought when a class mate told me: *“blind people should not be practicing rock climbing or mountaineering since they lack normal eye sight, they cannot be aware of the dangers and risks ahead of them, they cannot see where they are going...”* I believe sport should have a theoretical focus towards truly embracing cooperation rather than competition. Just like Harvey (2008), said that we have the right to change ourselves by changing the city, we should also be able to change ourselves by changing sport. Trying to have a “free market” ideology embracing sport athletes and teams ruthlessly competing against each other, will naturally, discriminate and leave all kinds of minorities and societies discriminated. The possibilities and paths to achieve this ‘right to change ourselves by changing sport’ could provide an interesting scenario for further study, that looks towards a new conception of sport that will benefit all kinds of minorities and humans from diverse backgrounds.

### **5.3.3. Bourdieu physical mastery**

In the initial analysis mentioned in the “4.3 Sport Field” subchapter of this thesis, I concluded that Bourdieu (2003), said the probability of a social class practicing sport, depends primarily on economic capital and secondly on culture capital and spare time.”<sup>151</sup> Culture capital is one key factor that creates discrimination towards disabled people in sports practice. Since this type of capital, dictates how the body should look and act, in the case of mountaineering that motion of the body and its gait is determined by sight. This creates an “ideal” of what a healthy, capable body is. Thus when the disabled people figure out they have no sight and do not fulfill this ideal, they end up in a

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<sup>150</sup> < <https://newleftreview.org/II/53/david-harvey-the-right-to-the-city> > Taken 26-Oct-16 at: 5.35pm.

<sup>151</sup> Eric Dunning, “Sport: Sport and power relations” Vol. 3, Taylor & Francis, 2003, Pg. 300

position of disadvantage. Dunning (1999) said that “in a society where sport is highly valued, sporting prowess is a positive power resource and that, under specific circumstances, it can be used to a greater or lesser degree to offset the disadvantages of racial stigmatization, even slavery. Another way of putting it would be to say that, in a society where sport is valued, sporting prowess can be a form of ‘embodied power’, part of a person’s habitus which gives them what Bourdieu (1984) calls ‘cultural capital’.”<sup>152</sup>

From the perspective of the participants, we can prove this thesis correct. By participating in rock climbing and mountaineering, their sporting prowess became a form of ‘embodied power’ giving them culture capital in other fields of their lives. By challenging the ideal of how the body should look, and move in the rock climbing and mountaineering field, they managed to antagonize the ideal of “you need sight to climb” and thus by proving that is incorrect, they gained culture capital. Bourdieu (1984), once concluded that practicing mountaineering “gives to the highest degree the sense of mastery of one’s own body...” Which rings true in the participant’s experiences: *“that learning process when you learn that you can master your body, that your body can tolerate breathing at 5000m of altitude and that you can tolerate the cold weather, all while you are climbing...” Verenice Hernandez (Focus group interview 2015). “...it’s amazing to recognize the capacity that your body can have, of moving... and recognizing that you can connect with everything that you are experiencing at that moment, all those emotions...” (Gerardo Ramirez, focus group interview, 2015).*

Bourdieu (1984) also recognized that every the “health-giving functions” attributed to Mountaineering are also closely associated to “aesthetic functions” which dictate “norms how the body ought to be”.<sup>153</sup> After climbing many mountains and seeing that it’s not a matter of how you look, move and if you have sight or not, the participants also negated those aesthetic functions that were disadvantaging them by creating a handicap

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<sup>152</sup> Eric Dunning, “Sport Matters”, Routledge, 1999, Pg. 192

<sup>153</sup> Eric Dunning, “Sport: Sport and power relations” Vol. 3, Taylor & Francis, 2003, Pg. 302

stigmatization: “...This lead me to ‘see the real me’ to understand that ‘I am not only sight, I am my other senses and they compose my ‘new way of seeing’. This gave me many answers to accept me the way I am now...” Verenice Hernandez (Conference Transcript 2014.) “While in a mountain, being there and being present, lets you listen to your body and live your own body... and even though you might have limitations, they don’t dictate progress, you can still keep going on...” (Fabiola Miranda Focus group interview 2015).

## 6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

“To criticize one’s own conception of the world means therefore to make it a coherent unity and to raise it to the level reached by the most advanced thought in the world. It therefore also means criticism of all previous philosophy, in so far as this has left stratified deposits in popular philosophy. The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is “knowing thyself”<sup>154</sup>, as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. The first thing to do is to make such an inventory.” Gramsci (1999.)<sup>155</sup>

Along these lines, this present master’s thesis is built upon the inventory of *historical processes*, that lead to a situation of inequality towards its visually disabled participants, in the economic sport and media related social fields. While analyzing the narratives of the participants, the central concept that created and reproduced social inequality towards them came in the form of objectification. The capitalist cultural hegemony, can be reduced to the term Marx (1976) coined as ‘the fetishism of the commodity’: “To the producers, therefore, the social relations between their private labours appear as what they are, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material [*dinglich*] relations between persons and social relations between things.”<sup>156</sup> The analysis of this paper looked at how this central and most basic rule of capitalism, permeated not only the socio-economic environment of the participants, but also the sports and cultural field. The different perceptions of social prejudices that participants have encountered, were explored from the past to the present using the concepts of historical process, from Gramsci (1999), in order to determine how the capitalist cultural hegemony was manifested in each case. We can summarize the findings into the following paragraphs.

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<sup>154</sup> Know thyself” was the inscription written above the gate of the Oracle at Delphi, and became a principle of Socratic philosophy.

<sup>155</sup> Antonio Gramsci, “*Selection of Prison Notebooks*”, Elecbook, 1999, Pg. 628.

<sup>156</sup> Karl Marx, “*The Capital*”, Penguin Classics, Vol.1, *Section 4. The fetishism of the commodity and its secret*, Pg. 166.

## **6.2. Economic field**

Free market ideology of de-regulation of public policies, has left disabled people with virtually no security on the job. This is evident since the situation of the participants coincided with that of the statistics presented by this thesis, where employers on average pay fifty percent less wages to visually disabled people in Mexico City. This reality is analogous to the mentioned literature: “Disability and Work” study from the OECD, where Mexico classifies as the country with the less pronounced public policy orientation towards the integration of people with disabilities. Because public policies have not shifted towards inclusion and if we add to this the fact that more than one million and a half of disabled people do not have a job, while the small amount of them that do are paid miserable wages, the disabled population group stands as a vulnerable group with high probability of falling into poverty. Similarly, the ideal of the ‘family wage’ as Harman (2002) understands it, seems to be still present in Mexican society since there are job opportunity differences between genders, and especially when it comes to the visually disabled population of Mexico City, where disabled women have half the opportunities of employment than men.

## **6.3. Sport field**

Only ten percent of the disabled population in sporting age is physically active. A statistic that corresponded with the viewpoints of the participants, who believed sports was an activity reserved for the able-bodied. These ideas were put to theory by utilizing Bourdieu’s (2003) approach of ‘Sport and Class’, where he stated that the probability of a class practicing a determined sport depends on economic capital and culture capital. While economic capital is very limited for disabled populations, so is the culture capital; that encompasses the way a body should look, move and act. Thus the participants had a preconception of how a body should look and act in sports, since they believed that view requires eyesight, they used to remain marginalized to sport. This whole argument was then gazed on a historical perspective where using Harman’s (2002), concept of sport embracing the competitive ethos of capitalist 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain and Elias (1986)

developmental approach to sport, in where same people involved in the political and power struggles of 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain, where the same ones that developed modern sports. By following these two ideas and looking critically into the past, we discover that modern sport was born in an environment that praised the male physique and superiority, due to the necessity of ‘string soldiers for war’. While at the same time the economic conditions of the time, created the ideal of the “family wage” and “model family” which all involved a male dominance in the house and society. This explains why in the past any woman or men, disabled or not, that does not fit this stereotype ends up being affected in terms of sport participation.

#### **6.4. Sport and media**

While the study from (Kell P., et al. 2008) concluded that the whole Olympic sport movement has been constantly run under the ‘free enterprise’ spirit; identifying itself as an autonomous organism operating away from state controls’ how ‘free market ideology’, it leads Paralympic sport to become less attractive because of its dependence on government structures. Similar findings can be applied to the Mexican reality, where we can see that government sport budget is very limited towards the disabled sport federations, despite the fact that Paralympic athletes gain more medals than Olympic ones. By applying the ideas of (Debord 1983) of commodity fetishism in the mass media, we can see how also the participants have been objectified and their disability reified in their involvement in the mass media. Some of the participants have even experienced this same objectification even outside of the media and in their social and cultural fields.

#### **6.5. The benefits of sport practice**

The concept of ‘mimetic tension’ from Elias (1983) explains how the participants, in the sport environment were able to connect with their bodies, emotions and other human beings, and then transferred this experiences to other spheres of their social life. Elias

furtherly stated that the leisure environment gives a place of immense opportunities for individual choice, when we pair this to Marx's theories of alienation, we can understand why this happens. Since in the work the human being is restricted from his human freedom and necessities, the leisure environment ends up providing a space for catharsis. In terms of the participants' experience, Gramsci's (1999), concept of catharsis helped explain how sports represented an environment where they could freely pass from the purely economic, egoistic-passional to the ethico-political moment, from object to subject, towards a moment of conscious social action towards a common social goal. The mountaineering environment produced this scenario, in where they had to cooperate with a group to overcome difficulties together. This also concurs with Elias (1983) concept of sense of belonging, where Elias war and sports are closely related, for they both evoke feelings of 'us' versus 'them' which lead to the 'cooperation, interdependence and formation of groups'. In the case of the participants, the feeling evoked was that of the mountain vs. us, although not strictly on a war sense, but mostly directed to overcoming a challenge in cooperation with other human beings.

### **6.6. Physiological gains of sport.**

The cited study from Chawala (1994) confirms the situation of the participants, their 'sense of orientation in space and dynamic balance' got improved while rock climbing and mountaineering, this like Chawala (1994) mentioned, helped the participants overcome the "fear of falling or crashing against hard objects" giving them confidence in their stride and gait. On similar tracks, Bourdieu (2003) stated that mountaineering sport is often associated with mastery of one's own body, a case that was confirmed with the participants, friends, acquaintances and family recognized that sport improved their movements and body in this sense. This according to Bourdieu (2003) creates culture capital and by doing so, the participants were able to also challenge the aesthetic ideals that are often associated to the sport, those which state that sight is needed for movement and what a normal body should be. This according to Dunning (1999) can help offset the disadvantages of stigmatization of their disability.



## 6.7. The need for a new view of sport

*“Sport will always benefit you, because you use your body and experiment your thoughts in action. It lets you exercise your mind, and clears your mind of different thoughts giving you clarity, especially on what you are going to do. And more than ever it lets you connect, and discover that part in where you can connect with others in a deep way... Gerardo (Transcript of interview, 2015).*

This is a common pattern of how the participants talk about sport. They believe that the beautiful part of sport, is the fact that day by day, it brings an improvement to you, it lets you materialize your thoughts into action, and demonstrates that the process is the important part. I go back to Gramsci (1999) and quote him again: What is man? Man is process and more exactly the process of his actions...” I would add to that man is not the finality of his actions. We did not come to this place to produce, but to enjoy the process of production. Fromm (2004) said that *the way man produces determines his thinking and his desires*, and *not* that his main desires are those for maximal material gain.<sup>157</sup>

In the same way, climbing and mountaineering have taught the participants too, that the beauty of climbing a mountain, lies within the process of the actual climb itself, which *determines thinking and desires* taking, one step at a time, appreciating the surroundings the companionship of others and consciously cooperating with others in order to achieve a common goal. I believe that one of the fundamental necessities of our modern world, is to reconsider sport in this manner, to view the potential it has to develop human beings, to use it as a tool that values and cherishes the relationship of human beings as its finality, like Kant said: “humanity as an end in itself.”, not a mean to an end<sup>158</sup> While we keep thinking in the tracks of developing an economy and society that revolves around the reproduction of capital, as opposed to developing human beings, we will furtherly go

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<sup>157</sup> Erich Fromm, “Marx Concept of Man”, Bloomsbury Academic, 2004, Pg. 10.

<sup>158</sup> Laura Denis, “Kants Metaphysics of Morals A Critical Guide”, Cambridge Critical Guides, Cambridge University Press, Pg. 170

down the tracks of inequality, inequality in terms of economic opportunities, jobs, and money distribution and also inequality in terms of race, gender, disabilities, social classes and so on. Chris Harman (2002) rightly said it, the continued survival of our species depends on planned employment of technology to meet real human needs, rather than its subordination to the blind accumulation of competing capitals.<sup>159</sup> Fromm (2004) said that Marx's aim was that of the spiritual emancipation of man, of his liberation from the chains of economic determination, of restituting him in his human wholeness, of enabling him to find unity and harmony with his fellow man and with nature.<sup>160</sup> Mountaineering and climbing provided very basic means to achieve this; the participants found harmony with their fellow human beings and nature. However, the question still remains on which are the different paths to rearrange sport and society so that we can liberate ourselves from the chains of economic determination and reconstitute our human wholeness by getting rid of the prejudices from the past faces of humanity that have created social inequality today.

## 6.8. Conclusion

The power of a stone...

I would like to end this thesis by sharing an anecdote from one of my favorite moments with the participants. We were driving back from a weekend mountain climb, since we had more than four hours of journey, I decided to talk about 'deep philosophical' questions. If my memory is not so bad, I posed the following argument to the participants:

“Throughout our history, mankind has been closely related to stones: we have used stones as fuel in the form of Coal; or as ‘precious stones’ for jewelry and symbolization of marriage unions; they have even been used by Aristoteles and many other Greek

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<sup>159</sup> Chris Harman, “A Peoples History of the World”, 2002, Bookmarks Publications Ltd., Pg. 611

<sup>160</sup> Erich Fromm, *Op. cit.*, Pg. 2.

philosophers to explain laws of physics; which during the medieval times took the forms of bullets propelled by huge catapults; artistically speaking, the gifted hands of Michelangelo beautifully sculpted David's body; some people even collect them as geological history of our earth; even the most practical man has used it as a paperweight; nowadays angry politicians want to use stones to build walls in their borders and keep immigrants away; while others use it in a humanistic way like Jesus Christ who said: "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."; recently too in our popular culture, Harry Potter discovered the power of unlimited like the "sorceress stone" could have; pioneers in the Alps and Everest used stone walls and mountains to push the limits of the human body; and one of my preferred uses: Finnish people, who have historically used scorching stones to warm up their saunas and survive the long winters."

When I asked the participants, what do *you* guys think is the power that a stone can have?

One of them responded: "Isn't it obvious? The stone always remains the same, the real power comes from the person that uses it for a purpose, from the creative process that a person has to transform it into a useful thing."

For the rest of the car ride, I remained thinking on what they really meant by that.

Even now, I still do...

*That alone is in our power, which is our own work; and in this class are our opinions, impulses, desires, and aversions. What, on the contrary, is not in our power, are our bodies, possessions, glory, and power. Any delusion on this point leads to the greatest errors, misfortunes, and troubles, and to the slavery of the soul.*

- Epictetus

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## Appendix 1 – Small Introduction to the Mountains of this text, Timeline of Events and Sensitizing Concepts.

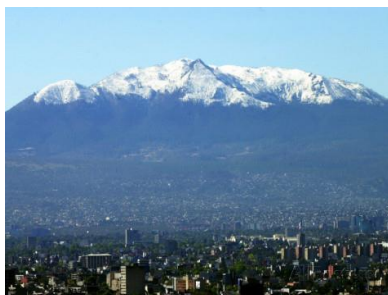
### Mountain 1: Iztaccihuatl



This mountain's altitude goes to 5.280 m, the name 'Iztaccihuatl' comes from the Nahuatl language of the Aztecs. The word Iztaccihuatl means "the sleeping woman" the volcano was named in this way based on Aztec mythology. Iztaccihuatl was a princess who fell in love with one of her father's warriors:

Popocatepetl. The emperor sent Popocatepetl to war, promising him Iztaccihuatl as his wife when he returned (which Iztaccihuatl's father presumed he would not). Iztaccihuatl was falsely told Popocatepetl had died in battle, and believing the news, she died of grief. When Popocatepetl returned to find his love dead, he took her body to a spot outside Tenochtitlan (Mexico City) and kneeled by her grave. The gods covered them with snow and changed them into mountains. If one looks at the shape of the mountain it does look like a person lying down.<sup>161</sup>

### Mountain 2: Ajusco



Located in the outskirts of Mexico City, its highest peak reaches an altitude of 3,930 m. Its proximity to the city made it an ideal place go and train with all the participants different guiding techniques they felt comfortable walking in all types of mountainous terrain.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Photo taken from: <http://www.vanguardia.com.mx/articulo/muere-alpinista-frances-al-caer-en-el-iztaccihuatl>

<sup>162</sup> Photo taken from: [http://www.allposters.com/-sp/The-Ajusco-Mountain-is-Seen-Behind-Mexico-City-Posters\\_i3707883\\_.htm](http://www.allposters.com/-sp/The-Ajusco-Mountain-is-Seen-Behind-Mexico-City-Posters_i3707883_.htm)



### **Mountain 3: Cerro de San Miguel**

Another mountain surrounding Mexico City. Although it's not really a mountain, it's considered a 'hill' but the altitude (3,790 m) and conditions make it an ideal training place. The Cerro de San Miguel is located in

Mexico's National Park: "Desierto de los Leones". Going up this hill requires a very long approach walk through a large forest area before arriving at the base of the hill.<sup>163</sup>



### **Mountain 4: Nevado de Toluca**

"Snowy Mountain of Toluca". The 4<sup>th</sup> biggest mountain in Mexico topping 4600 meters above sea level. Although in reality it's not a mountain but a sleeping volcano. This

explains the long crest that surrounds the crater. Inside the 'sealed' crater there are two permanent lakes that are maintained by a constant snowfall throughout the whole year.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Photo taken by: anonymous

<sup>164</sup> Photo taken by: Sebastian Staudt

## Appendix 2: Timeline of Events

The following Table 7: “Timeline of Events” is a short summary of the most significant events mentioned by each participant. Every event is displayed in chronological order, starting by the earliest date. In the same fashion, every mountain mentioned in Table 7, is also referenced to the previous section: ‘*Small Introduction to the Mountains of in this text*’ of the present this chapter.

**Table 7 – Time Line of Events**

<i>Event</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Description</i>
<b>1</b>	January 2009	Beginning of the project “Discover Your Senses”	An introduction meeting was carried out this day, between the participants and me. We established rapport, defined roles/responsibilities and searched for common/personal goals.
<b>2</b>	10 January 2009	Start of the 9-month physical conditioning training program, where the main aim was to make the participants of the project physically fit to climb Mt. Iztaccihuatl ( <i>Mountain 1</i> ).	My job officially started as a coach and trainer. Two groups were created in order to divide the visually disabled participants into two different training times: one in the early mornings (before work hours) and the other one in the afternoon (after working hours). Each group had two weekly sessions, plus a personalized individual training program.
<b>3</b>	8 August 2009	Mt. Ajusco ( <i>Mountain 2</i> ) climb	First climb, in here the group tried to adapt existing climbing techniques to the visually disabled participants. Different strategies were tested in order to find out which where the best techniques and tools for the volunteers to better guide each visually disabled climber.

4	10 October 2009	Mt. Ajusco ( <i>Mountain</i> 2) climb	During this ascent the endurance and physical conditioning of the participants was tested and then compared to the first Mt. Ajusco climb. From the feedback of this climb new techniques and strategies were adapted. The individual training sessions were also modified to better target the situation of each participant.
5	17 October 2009	Cerro de San Miguel ( <i>Mountain</i> 3) climb	Biggest group climb so far, this day was full of helping volunteers which took turns guiding all the visually disabled people up the mountain. Most of the visually disabled participants enjoyed this climb because it was a great opportunity for socializing, meeting new people and feeling part of a group.
6	24 October 2009	Mt. Nevado de Toluca ( <i>Mountain</i> 4) climb	This climb was on the easier ridges of the mountain, the main goal was to gain altitude (+4200mts) and help the adaptation and acclimatization process of the participants, prior to the “Discover your Senses” expedition.
7	2 Nov 2009	End of the 9-month physical conditioning training program.	On this date, the participants carried out medical and physical performance tests. This was done to make sure they were ready for the ascent and that no harm would come to their health by doing so. After the tests were administered, training was stopped for one week before the final climb. This, with the purpose to give the participants a chance for recovery, relaxation and to prevent injuries from occurring before the final project climb.
8	10-13 Nov 2009	Iztaccihuatl ( <i>Mountain</i> 1)	Culmination of the project, in here all of the hard work of the team paid off. After a three-

		climb	<p>day expedition that included a progressive climb of the mountain, the whole of international visually and non-visually disabled climbers managed to reach the summit.</p> <p>During and after the event, media attention was high, many national news channels and radio stations interviewed and made small reports about the ascent.</p>
<b>9</b>	Nov 2009 Dec 2010	Training sessions and mountain climbs	<p>After a small Christmas break, another climbing group was created and the participants of this study continued to climb mountains, rock climb and train on a regular basis. Eventually their example brought more of their friends and other visually disabled people to participate on the climbs and training sessions. A group was then created with the purpose of climbing for the joy of it and to engage in physical activity.</p>
<b>10</b>	20 Feb 2011	Mt. Nevado de Toluca ( <i>Mountain 4</i> ) climb	<p>The researcher was contacted by the international news channel: ‘Univision’, which wanted to do a special TV report on the visual disabled participants of the group, for its Latin American audiences. A decision was made to program a climb of Mexico’s 4<sup>th</sup> biggest mountain: Nevado de Toluca (4600m).</p> <p>During the climb the camera crew documented the ascent and interviewed the visually disabled climbers of the group including the participants of this study. The TV report was aired in the international news program: Primer Impacto.</p>

<b>11</b>	23 Feb 2013	Mt. Ajusco ( <i>Mountain</i> 2) climb	An experimental climb, where many of the volunteer guides decided to swap roles by wearing handkerchiefs to cover their eyes and climb the whole mountain blind. This made the volunteer guides more conscious and aware of how to better guide the visually disabled climbers up the mountain.
<b>12</b>	17 Mar 2013	Mt. Nevado de Toluca ( <i>Mountain</i> 4) climb	After this mountain was hit by a huge snowfall many of the visually disabled participants wanted to hike on snow. A 30+ person group went to climb, however the summit was not reached, since progress was very slow because most of the group was not used to climb in snowy conditions and subzero temperatures.