

SPORTS LEISURE IN POTENTIALLY VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE: PERCEIVED BENEFITS AND ORGANIZATION OF PRACTICE

OCIO DEPORTIVO EN JÓVENES POTENCIALMENTE VULNERABLES:
BENEFICIOS PERCIBIDOS Y ORGANIZACIÓN DE LA PRÁCTICA

JUVENTUDE DESPORTOS DE LAZER POTENCIALMENTE VULNERÁVEIS:
PERCEBIDA BENEFÍCIOS E ORGANIZAÇÃO DE PRÁTICA

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ABSTRACT: The acquisition of a frequent sports leisure practice is one of the objectives that our society must achieve in order to ensure proper health and an improvement of life quality of young people. In turn, sport leisure practices are considered a frontline tool to foster socialization of potentially vulnerable young people. This study examined the effect of vulnerability in sports leisure habits in young people; in their preferences of physical and sporting practices through an organized or autonomous way; and finally, in the perceptions of the benefits that these practices entail. For this purpose, a quantitative research design was conducted, administering an *ad hoc* questionnaire to a sample of 2694 post-obligatory and non-university students in Spain; 785 of them were labelled as students at potential risk of vulnerability. The results revealed the existing differences between potentially vulnerable

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	<p>and non-vulnerable young people regarding sports leisure practices. The population at risk of vulnerability displayed less active leisure habits than the rest. Likewise, it was found that vulnerable youth had a greater tendency to practice sports leisure activities in an autonomous way, unlike non-vulnerable young individuals, who preferred an organized practice. Similarly, potentially vulnerable young people obtained fewer benefits from sports leisure activities than non-vulnerable ones. The results proved the need to implement structured socio-educational interventions in order to promote sports leisure practices among the most vulnerable young people.</p>
<p>PALABRAS CLAVE: juventud deportes tiempo de ocio actividades físicas socialización</p>	<p>RESUMEN: La adquisición de un ocio físico deportivo habitual es uno de los objetivos que debe conseguir nuestra sociedad para lograr que nuestros jóvenes tengan una salud adecuada y mejoren su calidad de vida. A su vez, la práctica de ocio deportivo es reconocida como una herramienta de primer orden para lograr la socialización de los jóvenes potencialmente vulnerables. Este estudio analizó la incidencia de la vulnerabilidad en los hábitos de ocio deportivos de los jóvenes; en sus preferencias de práctica físico deportiva de forma estructurada o libre; y, finalmente, en la percepción sobre los beneficios que conlleva esta práctica. Para ello se realizó un diseño de investigación cuantitativo en el que se aplicó un cuestionario elaborado <i>ad hoc</i> a un total de 2694 estudiantes españoles de Educación Post-obligatoria no universitaria, de los que 785 fueron considerados como participantes en potencial riesgo de vulnerabilidad. Los resultados revelaron que existen diferencias entre los jóvenes potencialmente vulnerables y no vulnerables en cuanto a la práctica de actividades de ocio deportivo. La población en riesgo de vulnerabilidad manifestó hábitos de ocio menos activos que los no vulnerables. Asimismo, se encontró que los jóvenes vulnerables tenían una mayor tendencia a la práctica de ocio deportivo por su cuenta, frente a los no vulnerables que preferían realizar deporte de forma organizada. De la misma forma, los jóvenes potencialmente vulnerables percibieron menores beneficios de la práctica deportiva que los no vulnerables. De los resultados se deriva la necesidad de aplicar actuaciones socioeducativas estructuradas para promocionar la práctica de ocio deportivo entre los jóvenes más vulnerables.</p>
<p>PALAVRAS-CHAVE: juventude desporto tempo de lazer atividades físicas socialização</p>	<p>RESUMO: A aquisição de hábitos de lazer na atividade física e desportiva é um dos objetivos da nossa sociedade para que os nossos jovens tenham uma saúde adequada e uma melhor qualidade de vida. Por sua vez, a prática desportiva como lazer é reconhecida como uma ferramenta fundamental para desenvolver a socialização dos jovens potencialmente vulneráveis. Este estudo pretende analisar a incidência da vulnerabilidade nos hábitos de lazer desportivo dos jovens; na sua preferência na realização das atividades físicas e desportivas de forma estruturada e livre; e, finalmente, na percepção sobre os benefícios que advém da prática desportiva. Para isso, realizou-se um desenho de investigação quantitativo em que se aplicou um questionário elaborado <i>ad hoc</i> a um total de 2694 estudantes espanhóis de Educação Pós-obrigatória não universitária. Da totalidade dos participantes, 785 foram considerados como potenciais risco de vulnerabilidade. Os resultados revelam que existem diferenças entre os jovens potencialmente vulneráveis e não vulneráveis no que respeita à prática de atividades de lazer desportivo. Evidencia-se que os participantes de risco vulnerável manifestam hábitos de lazer desportivo menos ativo do que os não vulneráveis. Ainda, os jovens vulneráveis têm maior tendência para a prática de lazer desportivo, enquanto os não vulneráveis preferem realizar atividades desportivas de forma organizada. Da mesma forma, os jovens vulneráveis percebem menores benefícios da prática desportiva quando comparados aos não vulneráveis. Os resultados obtidos apresentam a necessidade de aplicar estratégias socioeducativas estruturadas para promover a prática de desporto como lazer entre os jovens mais vulneráveis.</p>

1. Introduction

In our current society, lifestyles of people are closely related to the use of their spare time. The enjoyment of these periods of time is a basic and individual right that must be ensured and promoted for all citizens (Cuenca, 2014). Among young people, sedentary activities related to the use of technological devices are becoming increasingly widespread. The rise of communication technologies as means of personal entertainment is gaining prominence among individuals of new generations, the so-called digital natives, at the expense of other forms of leisure (Melendro,

García-Castilla, & Goig, 2016; Valdemoros, Sanz, & Ponce de León, 2017). This rapid change towards sedentary lifestyles places daily physical activity levels of Spanish population below the recommendations of the World Health Organization (Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad, 2014), being considered as one of the major risk factors closely linked to increased obesity, diabetes, hypertension and other non-communicable diseases (Sotomayor, Aquino, Jiménez, & Trejo, 2014).

Facing passive leisure, sports leisure practices are presented as a considerable power of attraction among young people in our society. It should

not be forgotten that sports spread among youth population as social entertainment under the influence of mass media (Gómez, Puig, & Maza, 2009). The media contributes to the promotion of sporting models based on high performance, becoming the lure for many young people deciding to begin with the practice of sporting activities.

Sports leisure practices have become gradually popular because of the benefits associated to the promotion and maintenance of bodily health; however, in recent times, sportive physical activity practices related to image enhancement have increased significantly, especially among girls (Olive, Byrne, Cunningham, & Telford, 2012; Valdemoros, Sanz, & Ponce de León, 2012). This concern over body image stands out as one of the main reasons to practice sportive physical activities along with vital satisfaction per se and the fun related to this type of leisure (Zullig & White, 2011; Pedisic, Greblo, Phongsaban, Milton, & Bauman, 2015; Ahedo & Macua, 2016; Fraguera, Varela, & Sanz, 2016).

Sports leisure has other benefits that are less visible for young people, but especially relevant from a social perspective. This way, sports have a great potential for integration, promote communication and interaction among people of different nationalities and cultures (Consejo Superior de Deportes, 2010) and enables socialization processes in youth environments (Gutiérrez del Pozo, 2011). Sports activities have been traditionally used as a resource for the prevention of antisocial behavior, favoring the adoption of responsibilities, decision-making and resilience (Hellison, 2011). Therefore, sports leisure practices among potentially vulnerable young people are considered a tool for development and integration in different social contexts (Spaaij, 2009; Haudenhuyse 2013; Fernández-García, Poza-Vilches, & Fiorucci, 2015; López-Noguero, Sarrate, & Lebrero, 2016). Thus, Martínez (2016) underlined the importance of sports habits in vulnerable youth by associating them with health care, socialization and affective-social containment. In the same vein, Chalip and Hutchinson (2016) emphasized the need to propose sports activities focused on the development of social skills in this population.

Despite the studies reviewed, very few of them compare sports leisure practices of potentially vulnerable young people and non-vulnerable individuals. Data from the Survey of Sporting Habits in Spain 2010 inform that, despite the trend of the past few years showing that sports leisure of the youth population in general has increased its presence in our society, a relevant decrease among young individuals without schooling or with a low socioeconomic status has been identified. Likewise, regarding the organization of

sports practice, there seems to be a widespread increase of non-organized practice among young people between 15 and 24 years old. Sports leisure (either through free or organized practices) is a factor to take into account, given that it affects the adherence to sportive physical activities and its benefits among our young people (Ahedo & Macua, 2016). This way, during youth, the practice of organized leisure activities enhances social relations and contributes to the consolidation of sports habits in adulthood (Ransdell, Vener, & Sell, 2004), while self-management of sports leisure activities improves intrinsic motivation and satisfaction of young people (Lazcano-Quintana & Caballo-Villar, 2016).

2. Justification and objectives

This study responds to partial results of a large network research on leisure time of young people. Regarding leisure during youth, social dimension of sportive physical activities goes beyond the promotion of feelings of belonging and participation. Sports are considered a tool which contributes to social cohesion and inclusion of vulnerable young people (Comisión Europea, 2011). Therefore, it is necessary to consider the study of sports leisure habits of potentially vulnerable young people and investigate the existing differences between them and non-vulnerable young people. For the present paper, three objectives are defined. The first goal is to describe sports leisure habits of young people at risk of vulnerability and non-vulnerable young people. The second one is to analyze the preferences of potentially vulnerable and non-vulnerable young individuals when performing sports leisure activities in an organized or autonomous way. Finally, the third aim is to examine whether the perception of the benefits from sportive physical leisure for vulnerable youth follows a similar pattern to that of their non-vulnerable peers.

3. Methodology

This research has followed a quantitative methodological process within the framework of a coordinated network project conducted by seven Spanish universities. This transversal study has worked with a descriptive, inferential and ex post facto design. For this work, sports leisure choices of potentially vulnerable and non-vulnerable young people have been explored. Likewise, the goals mentioned in the previous epigraph lead to the two hypothesis guiding this study, which are presented below. The first hypothesis is that the variable vulnerability makes a difference in the preference of organized sports practices. The

second one considers that the variable vulnerability may influence the perception of the benefits from sportive physical leisure activities.

3.1. Participants

In order to select participants, a probabilistic stratified sampling using proportionate allocation

was performed, establishing as a territorial reference the Nielsen areas and, within them, type of educational center, gender and grade. A total of 2694 post-obligatory and non-university students participated. Participation was high, ensuring the representativeness of the sample with a 1.9% margin of error and a confidence level of 95%:

Table 1: Identification data of the sample				
Age \bar{X} (DT)	Gender (%)	Vulnerability (%)	Type of centre (%)	Area' (%)
19.15 (1.57)	Boy (51.3) Girl (48.7)	Yes (29.1) No (70.9)	Public school (78.6) Secular private school (4.5) Religious private school (16.9)	Northwest (17.6) East (12.8) South (28.4) Centre (22) Northeast (11.2) North (8)
Source: Own elaboration.				

3.2. Instruments

An *ad hoc* questionnaire on the organization of academic and leisure time was prepared. This article shows the results for the following variables, corresponding to description of students, free time and health and quality of life in the blocks of the questionnaire:

Vulnerability: in order to study vulnerable youth, a variable was created according to the following criteria:

- **Studies:** All the students of Initial Professional Qualification Programs (PCPI) and Basic Vocational Training (FPB) were included.
- **Household income:** students belonging to family units presenting incomes at or below five hundred euros were selected.
- **Family situation:** the situations chosen displayed students having no mother or father, being in foster care or categorized as 'others' (because they do not fit into any of the most common family types).
- **Professional status of parents:** cases of unemployed parents or cases where at least one of them was unemployed and the other stayed at home performing household chores were included, as well as those situations in which the student only had a single parent who was unemployed or stayed at home performing household chores.
- **Educational level of parents:** cases in which none of the parents had completed studies (or the person with whom the student lived in the cases of a single parent) were included.
- **Average grade:** all students with an average grade inferior to 5 were included.

- **Family satisfaction:** all cases of students who were little or no satisfied with their family life (presenting values of 1 or 2 out of a maximum value of 5) were included.

Once the cases that met at least one of the criteria were selected, we obtained a population of 785 individuals at potential risk of vulnerability (29.1% of the total sample).

Sports leisure (among the three most important leisure activities): participants were asked to indicate their most important leisure activity of a list of 49 possibilities. These activities were grouped into nine categories: *television and radio, digital leisure, sports and physical activities, tourism and hiking, cultural activities, parties / celebrations, games (other than computer games), associations and volunteering and other activities.* Based on the results of these three variables, the variable *sports leisure* is created with the following categories: *none, one activity, two activities and three activities* (depending on the number of times that a sport and physical activity has been pointed out as one of the three most important leisure activities).

Perceived benefits: Young people indicated the main benefits obtained when they practiced their most significant leisure activities, namely: *fitness improvement, fun, learning-creation, skills development and socialization.* Using a 5-point Likert-type scale, they valued the level of agreement on the existence of these five benefits. In cases where youth performed more than one sports leisure activity, the arithmetic mean was calculated for each benefit. For example, regarding the improvement of physical fitness, if a student rated

one activity with 4 and another with 2, his or her overall sports leisure experience concerning this specific benefit was rated with 3.

Organization of practice: the survey specified whether they performed the activities *freely* (independent practice), in an *organized way* or *both*. In the case of a student performing more than one sports leisure activity, the variable was recoded according to the organizational modalities of the different activities. This way, for example, if a student practiced a sport freely and another one in an organized practice, the final way to describe the organization of the sports leisure was *both* (organizational types).

3.3. Procedure

Two researchers went to each school to implement the questionnaires in classrooms. Young students participated in the research anonymously and voluntarily, with parental consent and authorization from the management teams of each center, being appropriately informed of the objectives of the research. Field work was carried out during the academic year 2015-2016.

3.4. Data analysis

A descriptive and inferential analysis was performed. For the descriptions of participation in sports leisure, organization and perceived benefits, frequency analysis and measures of central tendency were used. The *Mann-Whitney U* test was used to value the effect of the vulnerability factor on variables related to the benefits of sports leisure. The same test was made with the variables *sports leisure* and *practice organization* through *Pearson's chi-squared* test.

For the statistical treatment of the data, SPSS 22.0 software was used. As in most investigations using this design, it is not possible to establish causal relationships between dependent and independent variables.

4. Results

4.1. Sports leisure and vulnerability

As shown below, Figure 1, more than half of young people in Spain list some kind of sportive physical activity among their three main leisure activities. In the list of 9 means of entertainment studied (electronics, culture, sports, celebrations, etc.), sports leisure is by far the activity most practiced activity. Despite that, almost 45% of participants do not practice any sportive physical activity during their free time.

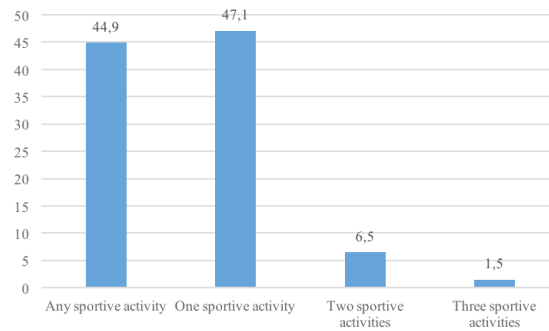


Figure 1. Sports leisure in young people in Spain

Next, we highlight the differences between vulnerable and non-vulnerable young people regarding the practice of sports leisure activities. People at risk of vulnerability have less active leisure habits than their peers. They tend to choose sports leisure among their three main leisure activities to a lesser extent, unlike non-vulnerable young people (*Chi-square* = 24.428, $p < .01$). Figure 2 studies the difference between both groups of people regarding their leisure preferences. The analysis of adjusted standardized residuals indicates that the greatest differences between both groups emerge in the categories *any sportive activity* and *one sportive activity*.

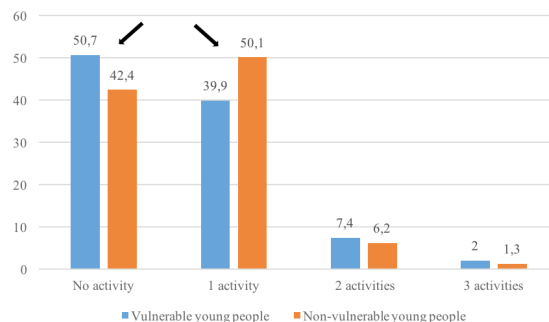


Figure 2. Sports leisure activities and vulnerability

Vulnerable youth tend not to practice any sportive activity in their free time to a greater extent than their peers, whereas the opposite happens in the category *one activity*.

With regard to young people presenting 2 or 3 sportive activities among their top three favorite leisure activities, we find a similar behavior in both groups. It seems that sports leisure is the main reference for a minority of young people –vulnerable and non-vulnerable– (8% of the sample and 14.5% of those who practice some sportive leisure activity) whose leisure interests are mainly or exclusively sportive.

4.2. Sports leisure organization and vulnerability

In the following analysis we will exclusively focus on the part of the sample who actually practices sportive physical activities in their free time (55.1%, 1486 youngsters). Young people practice sports leisure activities mainly in an organized way in clubs, associations, etc. (42.6%). The second option is to practice it autonomously (34%) and, finally, 23.4% combines both. The variable vulnerability makes a big difference in the organization of sports leisure activities ($Chi-square = 11.135, p < .01$). Vulnerable young people have a greater tendency towards autonomous sport practice than non-vulnerable people, who clearly prefer to practice sports in an organized manner (figure 3). The analysis of adjusted standardized residuals indicates that the greatest differences between both groups of people are found in categories *independent practice* and *organized practice*. Behavior in category *both* is almost identical in both groups.

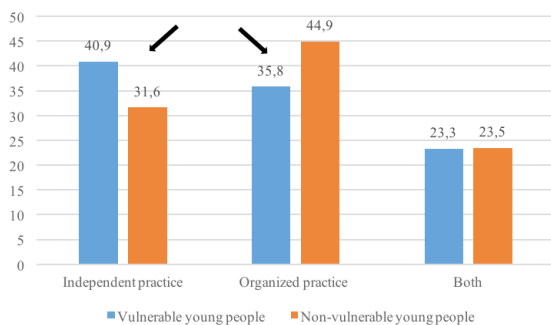


Figure 3. Sports leisure organization and vulnerability

The profile of sportive practice in vulnerable young people tends to be more individual and

less structured, in contrast with the profile of non-vulnerable youth. In the next subsection, we will study whether there is a relationship between the vulnerability and the acquisition of benefits entailed by sportive practice.

4.3. Sports leisure benefits

Regarding the acquisition of benefits through sports leisure practices we can point out satisfaction and an improvement of physical fitness. The relational dimension is also present among young people (Table 2).

Table 2: Benefits from sports leisure

Benefits (valores 1-5)	\bar{x} (DT)
Physical fitness	4.57 (.74)
Satisfaction	4.65 (.67)
Creativity	3.55 (1.27)
Skills	4.04 (1.18)
Socialization	4.12 (1.17)

Source: Own elaboration.

Comparing the acquisition of benefits from sports leisure in potentially vulnerable youth and non-vulnerable youth, it is highlighted that almost in every case (except for creativity) potentially vulnerable young people present lower scores than non-vulnerable people. In the cases of physical fitness, satisfaction and socialization, the differences are statistically significant (Table 3).

Table 3: Benefits from sports leisure and vulnerability. Mann-Whitney U test.

	N	Vulnerable vs Non-vulnerable \bar{x} (DT)	Z
Physical fitness	1330	4.47 (.83) vs 4.61 (.70)	-2.375*
Satisfaction	1317	4.56 (.76) vs 4.68 (.64)	-2.466*
Creativity	1288	3.59 (1.26) vs 3.54 (1.27)	.655
Skills	1300	3.99 (1.17) vs 4.05 (1.18)	-1.081
Socialization	1297	3.99 (1.18) vs 4.16 (1.16)	-2.732**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$
 SOURCE: Own elaboration.

Therefore, young people at risk of vulnerability not only practice sports to a lesser extent than non-vulnerable people, but also perceive fewer benefits from these practices.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Regarding our first target, which was to represent leisure sports habits in groups of young people at risk of vulnerability and non-vulnerable youth, the findings confirm the data provided by the Sports Statistics Yearbook (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2015) which reflects that, in the age range from 15 to 24 years old, 40% of the most vulnerable individuals claim to practice sportive physical activity. This information also agrees with the results obtained in the study by García-Castilla, De-Juanas and López-Noguero (2016), carried out with a similar sample. The description of the leisure sports habits of potentially vulnerable youth has also demonstrated that this group tends not to practice sports activities during leisure time to a larger extent, compared with individuals which are not vulnerable. To this respect, the results of the UNICEF report (2010) about well-being in rich countries in the world are confirmed. According to this study, Spain is considered one of the most unequal countries in the world in terms of vigorous physical exercise activities. This report highlights that the level of practice of disadvantaged students aged 11, 13 and 15 is well below national average. In this way, regarding "vigorous physical exercise activities, the Netherlands present the lowest inequality, closely followed by Switzerland and Norway. The highest levels of inequality in the bottom end of the scale correspond to France, Italy and Spain" (UNICEF 2010, p.15). The Survey of Sporting Habits in Spain 2010, drawn up by the National Sports Council (CSD), points in that direction as well. Survey data indicate that young people aged 15 or more with no schooling or a lower socioeconomic status express a reduced interest in sports. This situation has negative implications in vulnerable young people's health, and not only at the present time, but also as a prospect of less active leisure habits in later life stages. Furthermore, if we take into consideration that these results propose the presence of sport practices in family background as an influence over the actual sport practice of individuals aged 15 or more, then young people are predisposed towards the replication of the parental model in the practice of sports leisure. Nonetheless, the incidence of this contextual and family factor in leisure sports in vulnerable young people must be further explored.

Likewise, in line with our first goal, the outcomes consider the existence of a group with great affinity for sport practices as leisure activities (people selecting two or three sporting activities among their three main entertainment preferences), group that is left out of the relation between the existence of vulnerability and sport practices. In this particular case, the behavior of individuals has been very similar regardless of their situation of vulnerability, to a point where they are considered as a homogeneous group. In this way, socioeducational interventions designed to promote practices of sports leisure among vulnerable young people should focus specifically in individuals showing a moderate interest in sports leisure (those who do not practice sport activities in their free time) since they are clearly the group displaying a greater risk of acquiring passive activities in order to fill their free time.

Concerning our second target, related to the analysis of preferences about the type of organization in sports leisure of potentially vulnerable young people as well as non-vulnerable individuals, recent studies observed a general increase of the non-organized practices in the whole youth population (Consejo Superior de Deportes, 2010; Ahedo & Macua, 2016). This trend is even sharper in the vulnerable young people segment: in our research this group is characterized by weak structure and less social engagement, given that they choose to practice sport individually. In this respect, we agree with Lazcano-Quintana and Caballo-Villar (2016) when they point out that signing up for organized sport activities involve a higher level of social commitment and influence the continuity of the practice. All of this confirms the first hypothesis in this research, since vulnerable young people participate less in sports, and those who actually practice it tend to do it on their own. This fact reflects a tendency towards a weaker relation with active leisure of this specific collective of young people. From a broader perspective, less structured practices and the lack of a sense of belonging to a group are determining factors for a higher risk of giving up sports practice in the short or medium term. In any case, there is a need for further investigation on the reasons why potentially vulnerable young people tend to carry out non-organized activities whereas the rest of young individuals do not. Particularly, it is worth examining the background variables which might be affecting the decision of practicing sports autonomously and their effects in this community.

With reference to our third aim, focused on exploring the perception of benefits from sports leisure in vulnerable young people and non-vulnerable young people, there is a trend that displays

fewer benefits from sports leisure for potentially young people than for the rest of young individuals, and mainly when we talk about the three most valued benefits at these ages. Therefore, our second hypothesis is confirmed: potentially vulnerable young people enjoy less, enhance to a lesser extent their physical fitness and do not relate with their peers through sports leisure experiences. The result of this perception has a negative impact on the continuity of sports practice, since those individuals who do not achieve benefit from an activity tend to quit easily. This would ruin the adherence of this group to sports practice and would contribute to promote social degradation, in which many of these young individuals are suffering from, because they would show interest in less healthy forms of leisure (OMS, 2013), not forgetting that it implies the cessation of other benefits granted by sports leisure, especially the

socializing potential, which promotes the development of abilities that can be transferred to all walks of life (Ramos, Ponce de León, & Sanz, 2010).

On the other side, the group of vulnerable young people shows a similar interest in the enhancement of abilities through sport and in its socializing dimension. Non-vulnerable young people for their part, even though they are also interested in the development of their abilities, consider that sport enables to a greater extent the possibilities to relate to others. This data may be suggesting a practical use of sports for vulnerable groups instead of a social use. This interpretation should be treated with caution since the differences are not great; however, we can indicate a tendency to a lesser importance of the social dimension in sports leisure in vulnerable young people, which is consistent with their lower participation in organized activities.

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Nota

- ¹ Although the areas are a total of 10 (Northeast, East, South, Centre, Northwest, North, Gran Canaria, Tenerife, Barcelona city and Madrid city), we decided to reduce them in order to facilitate field work and the effectiveness of the model, including Canarias in South area, Barcelona within the frame of Northeast area and Madrid in Centre.

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