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Forbidden to Stand: the Impact of sitting volleyball participation  
on the lives of players with impairments

by

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A Doctoral Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

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“Forbidden to stand” aims to provide a comprehensive account of how participation in sitting volleyball (SV) has impacted upon the lives of players with impairments. To achieve this aim, this study uses capabilities approach, a theoretical and methodological framework unexplored in sport contexts but widely appraised in political philosophy as one of the most comprehensive approaches to well-being and quality of life. One of the implications of the use of capabilities approach was the compulsory need to pay attention not only to personal capabilities per se, but also to the contextual elements of the individuals’ experience in SV. As such, whilst identifying, describing and assessing the main personal capabilities in which participation in SV had a significant impact, the present study presents simultaneously an anthropological account of the SV field in the United Kingdom (UK) as it developed. In connecting capabilities approach and disability sport for the first time, this study contributes to our understanding of the impact of sport on the “whole lives” of people and to the development of a holistic tool to measure personal development, helping to address an acknowledged omission of such instruments in the academic field of adapted physical activity.

In order to respect the pluralism and complexity of capabilities approach, an ethnographic methodological design was used due to its flexibility in combining a plurality of theoretical insights; data sources and perspectives. During the study the researcher performed different roles within the SV community facilitating empirical data collection using the ethnographic tool kit. A key development in this process was the definition of an analytical thematic framework which directed the extensive analysis of the whole data set. A set of ten relevant capabilities were then identified as the most relevant for SV players with impairments, and SV impact on those capabilities described.

This study reveals that while the potential to enact and promote capabilities is present in SV context in the UK, it is very dependent upon influential factors operating at a personal, cultural and environmental levels. At a personal level, the enjoyment and expansion of capabilities in players with impairments was very much influenced by the possession of substantial financial resources and previous sporting capital; thus the players who have

expanded their capabilities the most were individuals who already possessed a good level of capabilities enjoyment. At the cultural level, while SV field detains important qualities to promote capabilities enjoyment such as an equalisation of the social worth between people with and without impairments, these were often overridden by the political and cultural dominance of an “able-bodied” volleyball ethos. At an environmental level, the overdependence of Volleyball institutions from the funding allocated by national sport agencies such as UK Sport, as well as the incipient development of SV grassroots stream clearly placed SV in a vulnerable position in relation to external political forces.

The most important outcomes of the present study is the identification of life dimensions that are significantly affected by participation in SV as well as the identification of the most important factors mediating such impact. Beyond the fields of disability sport and adapted physical activity, a theoretical/methodological symbiotic relation between capabilities approach and social sciences of sport would encourage those involved in sport to refocus their mission on *people* and *human* development instead of on economic and institutional benefits.

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- British Paralympic Association (BPA), 41
- BVF Sitting Volleyball Committee (BVFSVC), 104
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# CHAPTER 1 . THE RESEARCH AND THE RESEARCHER: FRAMING THE TWO RESEARCH “SUBJECTS”

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## RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

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Sport has been widely advocated as empowering for those who engage in it. Specifically in disability sport field, discourses on the role of sport in the lives of people with impairments have been suffused with inspirational tales of how it “saved” athletes, helped them overcoming disability and of how it catalyses positive social change. There are however several controversial assumptions made in this line of thinking. Not only cannot sport be assumed as inherently empowering, but also impairment does not necessarily need to be overcome for someone to live a worthwhile life. Furthermore, the historical roots of disability sport as a “normalization” and/or correction tool (Reid, 2003) point to a cautious, if not suspicious, examination of the impact of sport’ participation on the lives of people experiencing disability. In the elite stream of disability sport, the emphasis on physical excellence appears to be at odds with “dis”-ability (negation, lack of ability). More positively, this apparently paradoxical association challenges prevalent ideas of impairment as inherently negative by exhibiting efficient “moving” bodies with impairments (DePauw, 1997; Hargreaves, 2000). Nonetheless, if disability sport is interpreted as a less worthy version of mainstream sport, it may reinforce hegemonic views of human embodiment<sup>1</sup> (DePauw, 1997).

The social sciences have been quite timid in investigating the “real” impact of sport’s participation in the lives of athletes with impairments. Though exercise and health sciences have been focusing on some aspects of the life impact of impairment (mainly physical and psychological health), a more holistic approach which considers simultaneously several significant dimensions of human lives seems to be still missing from academic research. Particularly, given the still pervasive deprivation characterising life with impairment (Campbell, 2009; Oliver, 2009; World Health Organization (WHO), 2011), a thorough examination of disability sport empowerment potential deserves attention.



In the field of Adapted Physical Activity (APA) and disability sport, some academics have previously investigated how disability sport impacts on societies, cultures and individuals to empower or disempower people with impairments (e.g. Berger, 2008; DePauw, 1997; DePauw & Gavron, 2005; Howe, 2008b, c). Yet, important questions remain underexplored: Does sport really improve the lives of participants with impairments? If so, in what specific life dimensions? What criteria are the best to measure the positive and negative impact upon a life? What empirical indicators can be used to ensure that significant aspects (good and bad) are not hidden by overemphasis on others? What is clear is that because human lives are multidimensional in nature, the need for more holistic investigations is paramount.

In order to assess the potential of sport as an emancipatory agent for people with impairments it is obvious that we need a research approach which is both ethical and theoretically robust. This approach needs to harmonise emancipatory intention with an adequate research methodology and potential practical impact. In the context of trying to identify and understand the mechanisms responsible for disability oppression (cf. Chapter 2), I became acquainted with *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* by Martha Nussbaum (2006). Nussbaum not only reinforced that disability is still an enduring social justice issue but it also offered meaningfully ethical criteria for assessing sports' significance in the lives of people with impairments. These criteria are "capabilities", the opportunities people have to *do* and *be* the things they value, (having reason to value them) and their realisations (cf. Chapter 4). Because, for Nussbaum, these things are plural in nature, she proposed a list of ten central capabilities to be enjoyed by every human citizen living in a "minimally" just society.

The focus on capabilities implies not only attention to the personal experiences of each of the individual but also an examination of the layers of factors influencing social and personal choices in terms of capabilities. The personal, cultural and environmental dimensions of human experience need to be described and understood in their distinctive and interrelated aspects. This thesis proposes that *capabilities approach*- centred on the opportunities available to each person to be and do the things he or she values and has reason to value (Nussbaum, 2006, 2011; Sen, 2009) - offers a holistic paradigm that helps attuning sport enterprise with human

development. Grounded on the most ethically robust values of people's lives, this approach helps finding plausible answers for the unanswered questions highlighted above (Silva & Howe, 2012a; Silva & Howe, 2012b, see also chapter 4).

## RESEARCH GOALS

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Attempting to overcome the symptomatic fragmentation and compartmentalisation of sport's impact research, this study focuses on the particular context of sitting volleyball (SV) and its main actors: eligible (cf. pp.43, 44) players with impairments.

While the overall aim of this research project is to contribute to the understanding of the potential of sport's participation in general to ignite human development, more specifically its purpose is *to describe and assess the impact of participation in SV in the lives (capabilities) of eligible players with impairments in the United Kingdom (UK)*. In pursuing this goal, this thesis examines the cultural distinctiveness of a specific disability sport context, contributing to the establishment of a theoretical and methodological ethical framework for the evaluation and assessment of disability sport in particular, without discarding its usefulness in mainstream sport contexts.

Briefly, and by order of importance, the main objectives of this thesis are:

- a) Describe and assess the impact of SV participation in the personal capabilities of athletes with impairments;
- b) Identify and describe the most significant factors at the personal, cultural and environmental contexts of SV participation of players with impairments influencing the comprehensiveness and sustainability of SV impact on capabilities;
- c) Apply/develop a theoretical and methodological framework based in capabilities approach to investigate the impact of sport in individual lives.

## DESCRIPTION AND SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

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In terms of research methodology, *Forbidden to Stand* is an ethnographic project, as this was considered the research design which flexibility and openness to a plurality of methods best matches the multidimensional character of capabilities approach.

The present research project was limited in scope to the UK SV context at both elite and grassroots levels for a period between 2009 and 2013.

Data collection was carried out over a three and a half year period. My ethnographic “entrance” into the field of research started in October 2009, when I became an active player in one of SV clubs. This participation guaranteed me access to all the tournaments and facilitated contact with the wider SV community. Data collection started in January 2010 and finished formally on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April 2013, the last National Grand Prix (NGP) in which I participated.

### THE GENESIS OF *FORBIDDEN TO STAND* AND THE POTENTIAL FLAW OF RESEARCHER’S “ABLEDNESS”

---

In September 2009, I arrived in Loughborough determined to study disability sport globalisation and its impact on people’s lives. I was driven by my passion for sport and the conviction that sport can significantly improve human lives. While engaging in extensive readings to try to identify the causes (and possible solutions) for disability oppression, different circumstances directed me towards a different (and more realistic) project. At the time, I was playing volleyball on the university team and had initiated my participation in a SV group. Knowing my passion and sense of mission, my supervisor suggested the possibility of exploring the distinctive socio-cultural context of SV, where I already possessed some social kudos. Coincidentally, during my experience in the university volleyball team, I became acquainted with important members of the SV community, who valued my knowledge and experience as a volleyball player and coach and were keen to accept my assistance in training SV players. The organization of the Olympic and Paralympic Games in London catapulted SV development in the UK and I happened to be at the right place, at the right time.

Though the research began to take shape, a particular event at the beginning of my studies alerted me to the fact that my presence in the “disability world” could be somehow problematic. In my first year of study, during a university event for PhD students, I was explaining to a colleague my drive to expand sport opportunities to people with impairments and how it is essential to understand their experiences. In an aggressive tone he questioned: “Would you like me to hit you in the head with a

hammer, so that you know what it is like to be disabled?” Trying to absorb the shock of his reaction, I just replied “So, does the fact I’m not impaired renders me unable to understand? Does that make me incompetent to help?” He had an impairment, which was so mild that I had not noticed. Although I interpreted his question as a “How dare you to talk about disability if you are not disabled?” I did not want to discuss the issue further because it made me feel so insecure. Probably noticing my reaction, he then softened his tone to talk about how hard it was to grow up being seen as a “special” child and I understood how the stigma he has suffered made him suspicious of my “good” intentions.

This hostile interaction ignited urgent ethical reflection on my ability, given my condition as “non-disabled”, to sufficiently understand the experiences of people with impairments and forced me to examine my own motivations and actions. Would my passion be driven by selfish instincts? How could I make sure by trying to “help” I was not causing oppression, by assuming they needed to be helped? It opened my eyes to the importance of being able to clearly articulate my personal drive, but most importantly that my actions and behaviours were consistently in tune with my discourse. Because I was “able-bodied”, I would be under constant scrutiny, among people with impairments.

I also began to realise that to be successful in my mission I needed to strive, to the best of my ability, to reflect the voices and the interests of the people I wished to see empowered. That my drive for equality and social justice is genuine and beyond any academic qualification is something only possible to demonstrate in the longer term. So, though my colleague will probably never read this recollection, some of the issues hereby presented are to extemporaneously respond that “No, I don’t need a hammer on my head because I understand enough of pain, discrimination and stigma to empathise with other human beings, with or without impairments.” The common ground uniting human beings is much more significant than what separates them.

Also of importance is the role that sport has always played in my life. My love for movement and passion for volleyball are biographic features important to disclose at this juncture as they inevitably permeate my interpretation of SV reality. Nonetheless, this position is reconcilable with a critical approach, as it reinforces the responsibility

for a thorough examination of its negative and positive features. Since my main concern as a researcher is above all the best interest of athletes and people with impairments, all significant dimensions of SV culture were scrutinised in the present study: politics, power relations, practices, behaviours and discourses.

*Forbidden to stand* is therefore a very personal enterprise, with the person and the researcher intensely intermeshing in ways which are important to disclose in order to clarify (to others and myself) possible tensions, biases and tendencies of behaviour, analysis and interpretation. Scrutinizing the “why”, “how”, “what for” of my presence as a human being is both a critical aspect of qualitative research praxis and an ethical imperative (Alvesson & Skölberg, 2009; Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). The product of this reflection starts in this introduction but it will be evident throughout the thesis (cf. e.g. Chapter 5; appendix C).

## THESIS STRUCTURE

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This thesis is divided in four fundamental parts. After this introduction, the following three chapters offer a selection of relevant information and literature in the areas of knowledge and inquiry most central to the research topic and goals.

In chapter 2, the most important theoretical perspectives on disability are examined, relying strongly on disability studies, helping to conceptualise impairment/disability as a multidimensional construct. While presenting a summarised view of the historical evolution of disability sport in connection with general social approaches to disability, chapter 3 examines several trends in disability sport literature relevant for the present topic. As the present research focused on a specific disability sport, a brief historical account as well as a description of the essential characteristics of SV are also included. Chapter 4 is dedicated to outlining the capabilities approach, the main theoretical framework used in this research project. It navigates through its historical context, main concepts and principles, rationale for a closer adherence to Nussbaum’s account of capabilities as well as a revision of main criticisms and the presentation of empirical applications related to the present research. The chapter finishes with an articulation of personal capabilities and disability as inverse realities.

The second part of the thesis presents the methodological aspects of the project. It starts by illuminating the main ontological and epistemological assumptions guiding the whole research process. After exposing essential implications of a capabilities' assessment, the specific research methods and associated instruments are presented. Challenges concerning the presentation of the research report are also discussed.

The third part of the thesis (chapter 6 to chapter 9) explores the bulk of the data generated by this research. A broad lens is used to depict the socio-cultural landscape in chapter 6, so that the assessment of SV impact on personal capabilities of players with impairment in chapter 7 may be anchored in essential background knowledge on SV community. In chapter 8, I discuss to what extent the reported capabilities' impact is comprehensive and sustainable, while identifying its most critical contextual factors at the personal, cultural and environmental levels.

Finally, in the closing chapter, the overall project is assessed from a more detached point of view to identify implications for SV, disability sport and sociology of sport and internal strengths and weaknesses.

#### A FINAL CAVEAT

---

In what is intended to constitute a comprehensive account of SV world in UK, a serious tension is created, not dissimilar to the tensions inherent to most social research projects. On one hand, the generous openness of some institutions (e.g. Volleyball England (VE) and many other actors in SV context needs to be acknowledged and highly praised, for without them this research would not have been possible.

On the other side, the first and ultimate goal of this research is the well-being of people with impairments and the correction of their unequal access to meaningful sporting opportunities. In this sense, the researcher first duty is towards the athletes with impairments. For this tension no easy solution exists. It is important to emphasise that what may be perceived as criticism is intended to provide the most accurate depiction of SV reality possible so that strengths as well as fragilities may be illuminated.

In sum, the present study is an ambitious project, focused not only on a plurality of capabilities' but also on the space, time and circumstances in and by which they are enacted. It is therefore a multifocal, multivocal and multidimensional project, from which meanings, analyses and conclusions are never finally drawn, rather remain latent to be equally constructed by readers. Since such complexity can never be fully transmitted, the present thesis is inevitably reductive. While this characteristic may be perceived as indicative of lack of scientific rigor, it is the only perspective compatible with the subjective nature of reality, the inherent complexity and multidimensionality of human lives. As such, the reader of this thesis should expect potentially relevant insights but not straightforward conclusions. Any research can only present a well- grounded version of the "truth"; therefore this thesis remains itself open to fruitful discussion.

## CHAPTER 2 . LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS: DISABILITY ISSUES

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### INTRODUCTION

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A research project intended to be aligned with the ideals of social justice needs to raise awareness of both, the empowering and oppressive aspects of disability sporting practices. To do so, this project is grounded in a solid understanding of disability, which captures its lived complexity. The research in the discipline of disability studies<sup>2</sup> provides such background knowledge. Drawing upon literature in disability studies and political philosophy, this chapter explores: i) multidimensional conceptualisation of disability; ii) identification of the main causes and dimensions of disability oppression and iii) clarification of the essential aspects of the adopted disability concept, aligned with ideals of human empowerment, freedom and development.

### A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF DISABILITY PERSPECTIVES

---

From the outset it is important to situate this overview within western cultural contexts. The liberal maxim “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (United Nations (UN), 1949) has at least in principle guided the democratic project of western societies thus disability theories have unfolded within this moral background. However, disability seems to represent a challenge to the equality principle in everyday life, since it underlines human difference. Stiker locates the cause of this challenge in the human “passion for similarity”, which leads to “full blown or latent form, to exploitation, repression, sacrifice, rejection” of people with impairments” (1999, p.11). Despite this challenge, Stiker suggests that human equality can also be exercised through the “love of difference- especially if it becomes socially contagious (through education, cultural action, political action)” (1999, p.11). While the *passion for similarity* grounds the understanding of disability as a tragic abnormality, the *love of difference* leads to an articulation of disability as a universal characteristic inherent to the frailty of human existence (Stiker, 1999). Similarly, concurrent understandings of disability reflect a particular positioning within the continuum delimited by these two opposite stances.



The three influential perspectives on disability examined in this section are the individual, the social and the biopsychosocial models of disability. These models do not replicate a linear historical sequence, instead they represent cultural tendencies characteristic of particular socio-historical periods. In reality, expressions of each one of these models coexist in contemporary societies, where people experiencing disability are identified as the social minority most affected by all types of deprivation (WHO, 2011).

In his seminal book, *The Politics of Disablement*, Michael Oliver (1990) locates the causes of disability's marginalization on its social construction as an individual concern. Such individualisation of disability was instrumental in the empowerment of medical institutions and states in the control over impairment and disability (pp.46-49). Traditional models of disability, namely the charity, the medical or rehabilitation model were accommodated in a broader category which Oliver termed "individual model", rejecting the widespread term "medical model" on the basis it did not offer a "sufficient foundation for building a distinctive model of disability" (2009, p.43). According to Oliver, the individual model condenses the critical feature of dominant disability perceptions that is its conception as a personal tragedy. Within this model, the "cause" of disability (impairment) is located within the individual, therefore it can be circumscribed, attenuated or solved by individual strategies (e.g. medical intervention, social exclusion/integration, rehabilitation). The "disabled" are thus seen as responsible for their disability and expected to be the main agents of its management and/or cure.

The power of the individual model seems to derive mainly from the pervasiveness of an ideology of *ableism* (Campbell, 2009; Charlton, 2000; Davis, 1995; Morris, 1991; Siebers, 2008; Titchkosky, 2007, 2009), defined by Campbell as "A network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species typical and therefore essential and fully human" (2009, p.5). Within this insidious worldview, among other categories of difference (e.g. gender, race, sexual orientation), disability exists as the "master trope of human disqualification" (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000, p.3), as something granting its bearers a "less than human" status. It was against this cultural

background, which constructs disability as “otherness”<sup>3</sup> that the perception of disability as individual tragedy germinated and developed.

The period of most intense disability activism in UK (1980s and 1990s)<sup>4</sup> stemmed from a reaction against the individualistic perspective on disability (Campbell & Oliver 1996; Oliver, 2009), identified as the main factors in the social oppression of the “disabled”. An alternative understanding was then proposed: people with impairments are not inherently disabled; instead disability is created by the inability of social environments to accommodate people with impairments (Oliver, 1990). This understanding, known as the *social model* became the main catalyst for a myriad of improvements in law, physical environment, education, work, welfare and sport, in Western nations. Its proponents raised awareness on the social and physical obstacles faced by people experiencing disability (e.g. Barnes & Mercer, 2006; Swain, 1992) and vehemently accused the medical fraternity of being the major oppressor of people with impairments (Albrecht, 1992; Finkelstein, 1980; Morris, 1991; Oliver, 1990).

While the individual model equates impairment and disability, the social perspective considers impairment as a “biological condition” (Barnes, Mercer & Shakespeare, 1999) which does not necessarily imply disability, as long as the social environment “takes account of the differing needs of disabled people and remove the barriers they encounter” (Oliver, 1996 in Barnes, Mercer & Shakespeare, 1999, p.32). Also, research undertaken under the social model banner was/is expected to be ethically valid, that is, to be emancipatory for the people being researched. Involving people with disabilities in the process of research and equalising the power between researcher and participants was/is considered good practice (Barnes, 2003; Mercer, 2002) although some authors go as far as to defend the full exclusion of non-impaired people from research on the basis they are the main agents of disability oppression (Branfield, 1998; see also appendix C).

The following table, included by Oliver in both editions of *Understanding Disability* (1996, 2009) condenses the essential features defining the “polar end of a continuum” represented by the individual and the social models of disability.

*Table 2.1. Disability Models*

<b>Individual model</b>	<b>Social model</b>
personal tragedy theory	social oppression theory
personal problem	social problem
individual treatment	social action
medicalization	self-help
professional dominance	individual and collective responsibility
expertise	experience
adjustment	affirmation
individual identity	collective identity
prejudice	discrimination
attitudes	
care	
control	
policy	
individual adaptation	

(Adapted from Oliver, 2009, p.45)

For some time, the conceptual debate around disability developed within these polarized positions. One of the consequences of this antagonism was the oversimplification of research undertaken during the 1980s and 1990s, which basically ignored the potential positive aspects of the individual model. Aiming to correct the overemphasis on the individuals with impairments, social proponents ended up incurring a similar reductionism by overemphasising the social factors of disability construction. Although such attention was beneficial in social and political terms, it overlooked the fact that, even in optimal environmental conditions, people with impairments can still continue to experience disability (Corker, 1999; Hughes & Paterson, 1997).

In essence, social approaches have failed to recognise the highly individualistic character of disability experiences. Since pain and dysfunction are important components of disability experience, it is therefore imperative to recognise that the improvement of the quality of life for people with impairments may, under certain circumstances, demand individual rather than social adaptations or, in some cases, both. For that reason, the contribution of medicine and related disciplines cannot be

dismissed by blindly assuming they are inherently wrong. Characteristics of the individual models such as “individual treatment”; “adjustment”; “expertise”; “individual adaptation” (cf. Table 2.1) may actually work as empowering mechanisms in particular circumstances. By framing the individual model as the ultimate enemy of people with impairments, early proponents and practitioners within the social model have failed to envision its potential strengths.

At the beginning of the new millennium, however, recognizing the perverse effects of the bipolarization between the individual and social models of disability, some scholars made claims for a more comprehensive perspective (Barnes, Oliver & Barton, 2002; Longmore, 2003; Oliver, 2009; Shakespeare, 2006; Siebers, 2008; Turner, 2001). Institutionally, this claim echoed in the new *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)* (WHO, 2001), representing a *biopsychosocial* model of health. In this document, disability is framed as both a dysfunction of the person’s body and a complex social phenomenon, conciliating views present in both the medical and social models, without undermining the complexity of disability experience (p.9). In this sense, the recognition of the complex interaction of biological, psychological and social factors that form disability can be perceived as a progressive feature in the theorisation of impairment and disability.

Following the publication of ICF, disability started to be framed as a multidimensional, relational experience, incompatible with the over simplicity and reductionism of the individual/social dichotomy. For instance, Siebers (2008) proposes the complex embodiment theory as a more adequate way to conceptualise disability because it considers the intersection of overlapping identities, (e.g. gender, race, impairment) which “construct one another reciprocally” (Siebers 2008, p. 28) and the influence of several levels of factors (personal, cultural and social).<sup>5</sup> Also crucial in this new holistic understanding is the emphasis on disability as an inherent feature of human condition (Charlton, 2000; Nussbaum, 2006; Siebers, 2008; Stiker, 1999). As MacIntyre (2002) notes, “there is a scale of disability in which we all find ourselves. Disability is a matter of more or less, both in respect of degree of disability and in respect of the time periods in which we are disabled” (p.73). Understanding disability in such terms lays down any argument in favour of its conceptualisation as “otherness” and any stigmatizing approach to people with impairments.

Relying upon the multidimensional character of disability phenomenon, significant dimensions of disability oppression are examined in the next section.

## DISABILITY AS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONSTRUCT

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### ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSIONS: THE HEGEMONY OF ABLEISM

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Paul Hunt (1966) and Vic Finkelstein (1980) are often referred to as the first people to emphasize the material aspects of social relations in disability oppression:

Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society. (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), 1976)

By examining the socio-historical conditions of disability, namely in its interplay with the rise of capitalist societies, social model researchers have investigated the environmental conditions in which people with impairments lived. In doing so, they identified barriers and restrictions in physical environment and transport, education, leisure opportunities, systems of production, health care, law, media (Barnes, 1992; Barnes & Mercer, 1996, 2006; Longmore, 1985; Oliver, 1990, 1998, 2009; Swain French, Barnes, & Thomas, 1993). Similarly, significant attention was assigned to the construction, maintenance and reinforcement of ableism (cf. p.10).

In the chapter “Politics of meaning”, Oliver (1990) discusses how social discourses are able to politically disempower people with impairments, by constructing disability as “natural”, that is, as a condition directly deriving from impairment rather than a socio-cultural phenomenon. Other significant contributions to the deconstruction of this ideological disability dimension followed: *Pride Against Prejudice* (Morris, 1991); *No pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement* (Shapiro, 1994); *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness and the Body* (Davis, 1995); *Nothing About Us Without Us* (Charlton, 2000); and more recently *Reading and Writing Disability Differently: the Textured Life of Embodiment* (Titchkosky, 2007) and *Contours of Ableism: the Production of Disability and Aabledness* (Campbell, 2009). The common argument of these studies is that disability derives mainly from conscious and unconscious ideological mechanisms enacted at all levels and dimensions of social life: institutional and community practices and discourses;

physical spaces; sciences, academic disciplines and in everyday life interactions. In short, a significant component of disability experience is ideologically constructed.

One of the most critical consequences of ableism is the internalization of negative assumptions about disability by people with impairments themselves. Personal agency, that is, the degree of choice and control over one's own life<sup>6</sup> is therefore strongly restrained by what Charlton (2000), borrowing from Marx, calls *false consciousness* and *alienation*:

Most people with disabilities actually come to believe they are less normal, less capable than others. Self-pity, self-hate, shame, and other manifestations of this process are devastating for they prevent people with disabilities from knowing their real selves, their real needs, and their real capabilities and from recognising the options they in fact have. False consciousness and alienation also obscure the source of their oppression. They cannot recognize that their self-perceived pitiful lives are simply a pitiful world order. (p.27)

This mechanism echoes what Sen (1992) and Nussbaum (2006) call adaptive preferences, "preferences that simply adapt to the low level of living one has come to accept" (Nussbaum, 2006, p.342).

At a theoretical and methodological level, social approaches have benefited from the influence of social theorists such as Michel Foucault (Shakespeare & Corker, 2001; Tremain, 2005; Mitchell and Snyder 1997, 2000, 2006) and Pierre Bourdieu (Edwards & Imrie, 2003; Marks, 1999a) in the process of *de-constructing* disability. For instance, Foucault's conceptualization of *governmentality*- the practice of organizing and controlling people's behaviour through physical and social techniques (Foucault, 1977) is instrumental in the identification of ableist processes. In *Cultural locations of disability*, Snyder and Mitchell (2006) analyse the responsibility of a eugenic ideology in forging the impaired body as an object for "care, control, rehabilitation, evaluation, round up, exclusion and social erasure" (p. x) in cultural spaces such as charities, medicine and rehabilitation, disability research industry, film industry and the academy.

By uncovering the responsible social factors in disability experience, research and activism informed by the social model catalysed the fight for self-determination, empowerment, control and full participation of people with impairments in all spheres of society. In the legal sphere, this advocacy resulted in supportive legislation

of which the *Convention of Rights for people with disabilities* (UN, 2006) and the UK *Equality Act* of 2010 are landmarks. Still, environmental factors are insufficient to understand how disability oppression is enacted in everyday interactions. An examination of the cultural dimensions of disability experiences can help to fill in that gap.

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### CULTURAL DIMENSIONS: DISABILITY AS EMBODIED HABITUS

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The concept of embodiment (cf. endnote 1) situates perception and action as complementary processes in an experiencing body, that is, of an “embodied mind” or in a “body minded”; a clear distinction from a Cartesian view of a mind detached from the body. It implies a whole interdependent system constituted by body-mind-world (Clark & Chalmers, 1998; Clark, 2008; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). To understand the importance of embodiment in theorising disability we must consider how the social model forgets the “body”; how by overemphasizing the environmental aspects of disability production, the embodied individualized experience of impairment is neglected: “We focus on disability and pretend that impairment has no part in determining our experiences” (Crow, 1992, p.2). Thus, although the focus on disability as a product of social failure was essential to call for structural changes, ignoring the importance of impairment compromises the effectiveness of disability social movements because it fails to recognise that even if all social barriers are removed, impairment may still cause disability.

Influenced by emergent social theoretical perspectives such as post-structuralism and phenomenology, in the search for more accurate views of disability, attention has been more recently driven to the individualized lived experiences of impairment and disability, illuminating aspects neglected by the social model such as pain and chronic illness in its interplay with the social and cultural context. Since the body is understood as a biological, cultural and social phenomenon (Schilling, 1993), disability theorisations strive to capture that multidimensional complexity. Corker for instance, locates the failings of disability theory in its inability to capture the space in-between recurrent discursive dichotomies:

In their everyday ‘talk’, disabled people often allude to a complex existence that occupies the space between health and illness, disability and ‘normality’, impairment

and empowerment and nature and culture, to give a few examples. However, disability theory continues to dichotomise these things in a way that does not permit exploration of the space between.” (1999, p.633)

One way of harmonising these dichotomies is to explore the embodied reality of human existence. Hughes and Paterson (1997) advocate a theoretical return to the biological, cultural and social dimensions of the disability corporeal existence: “the impaired body is part of the domain of history, culture and meaning, and not as medicine would have it a historical, pre-social, purely natural object” (p.326). Bourdieu’s theory of practice is also useful to capture the interdependence between individual impaired bodies and their socio/cultural context, since it overcomes traditional dichotomies as agency/structure (Marks, 1999a; Simmons, Blackmore & Bayliss, 2008; Turner, 2001). According to Bourdieu, human embodied existence is formed through practice, that is, through embodied action within a pre-existent social world. This practice is simultaneously the cause and consequence of a specific *habitus*, defined as

A system of durable, transposable actions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representation that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (1990, p.53)

Because *habitus* happens *in* and *through* practice, and practice is necessarily embodied, impairment is central to this process. Since the impairment often implies a use of the body dissonant from the “normal” cultural *habitus*, it can significantly impact upon the agent, other actors in the community and on their shared *habitus*. According to Bourdieu (1990), while this type of dissonance may catalyse changes in the established social *habitus*, it is more plausible that it will be accommodated within its more stable structures. *Habitus* shapes the cultural space in which practices, values, behaviours and world views (*doxa*<sup>7</sup>) are transmitted, internalised and accepted as natural by people with impairments (Marks, 1999a, b), hence sanctioning them as valid.

Bourdieu’s theory of practice contributes to the understanding of how cultural norms reproduce. Nonetheless, there is some space in his theory for personal agency and change: “Actors are not rule followers or norm obeyers but strategic improvisers who



respond disproportionately to the opportunities and constraints offered by various situations” (Jenkins, 1992)<sup>8</sup>. As Thibodaux (2005) notes, not only what persons with disabilities do in their everyday lives constructs the experience of disability but also, and perhaps more importantly, their practices equally shape what is assumed as true about disability.

*Social field* is another of Bourdieu’s useful concepts. It can be defined as “a social arena within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them” (Jenkins, 1992, p.84). Drawing upon empirical research Imrie (1999) reports on the difficulty of people with disabilities in participating actively in different social fields (employment, shopping facilities, leisure, political structures) due to the ableist character of the embodied practices, in which the most obvious example is the built-in environment. Making use of Bourdieu’s central concepts, Edwards and Imrie (2003) pose critical questions:

How, then, do social fields ascribe value to disabled people, and how do disabled people manage their bodies in seeking to acquire social and cultural capital? What do such processes reveal about the interrelationships between impairment and the social contexts underpinning the (re)production of disablement? (p. 244)

These are important questions, which the present research intends to address (cf. Chapters 6 to 9). Understanding the influence of embodiment on cultural views of disability inscribed in *practice communities*<sup>9</sup>, such as SV, is essential in the analysis of its empowering or oppressive potential. These communities are formed by individuals whose idiosyncrasies are important in influencing the shape of their cultures. Moreover, the intrinsic individualistic character of disability requires an examination of disability’s subjective dimensions.

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#### SUBJECTIVE DIMENSIONS: DISABILITY PHENOMENOLOGY

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The previous section emphasised the importance of addressing the significance of cultural embodied practices in disability experience. Some scholars go even further, claiming the need to investigate disability from an insider’s perspective (Hughes & Paterson 1997; Paterson & Hughes, 1999; Williams, 1998). Turner (2001) suggests that “phenomenological studies offer a rich tradition of research that can provide a detailed understanding of the everyday experiences of disability” (p.256).

For instance, Mackenzie and Scully (2007) emphasize the need to understand the mediation of impairment on all types of cognitive development and ethical thinking drawing upon the embodied- mind paradigm: “the mind is always embodied, it is generated through the corporeal and sensory relations of the body to its world, and thinking is a product of these relations” (p. 342). As Scully notes elsewhere (2009) the clarification of this mediation is critically important in the development ethical thinking that values human difference, without the need for a fundamentally distinctive “‘disability mind’ or a ‘disability morality’” (p. 70). These works tell us that a better understanding of what it is like to be and have an impaired body is essential to expose the inadequacy of ethical ableist perspectives and to build a more universalistic ethical approach.

Equally within this phenomenological tradition, Paterson & Hughes (1999) investigated the conditions under which the body with an impairment is either made conscious or unconscious; Barnartt (2010) explores the conditions surrounding experiences of normality and disability, while others offer personal accounts of pain, injury and chronic illness (e.g. Diedrich, 2001, Frank, 1995; Murphy, 2001; Seymour, 1998; Toombs, 1995). Overall, a phenomenological perspective of disability implies telling the story from the “I” perspective, keeping the focus “on the conventions of interaction and intercorporeality” (Paterson and Hughes, 1999, p.605). Such a perspective is strongly grounded in the body conceptualised as both subject (“I am a body”) and object (“I have a body”) of human intentionality, relying heavily on the work of phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty (1962). The use of a phenomenological tradition in disability studies directs attention to the importance of the subjective phenomenological dimension for an insightful understanding of SV players’ experience.

## DISABILITY, A SOCIAL JUSTICE MATTER

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Although disability rights movement have raised disability awareness, oppression still persists in many forms today (Charlton, 2000; Oliver, 2009; WHO, 2011). The recognition of the social, cultural and personal dimensions of this oppression, some of which were acknowledged in the previous sections is useful to define possible strategies for resistance and change. Key figures from the disability studies such as

Barnes, 2003; Barnes, Mercer and Shakespeare (1999), Longmore (2003) and Oliver (2009) have recently recognised the political inefficacy of academic enquiry in advancing the social empowerment of people with impairments. It may be the case that, by insisting on “the disabled” as a social minority, the political effectiveness of emancipatory projects has been compromised. The essentialist tendency of the disability movements to consider oppression as an exclusive prerogative of disabled people (Branfield, 1998) may hinder its understanding as a universal concern, which some authors (Davis, 1995; Charlton, 2000) recognise as an important strategy in progressing from oppression to liberation: “the DRM [disability rights movement]...must unite all who can be united on the principles of empowerment and self-determination” (Charlton, 2000, p.165).

A step toward the universalization of disability could be its inclusion on general theories of social justice, but in that domain the issue has been largely ignored or been the reserve of welfare domains (Silvers, Wasserman, & Mahowald, 1998). This absence seems to denote a refusal to assign full citizen status to people experiencing disability, since: “...many traditional democratic accounts of justice have failed to embrace people with disabilities and so have not advanced them, while many others have immobilised the disabled in a suffocating embrace” (Silvers et al., 1998, p.2). Although these authors examine the adequacy of formal, distributive justice and feminist social justice perspectives in dealing with disability as a justice matter, it is Martha Nussbaum, a political philosopher, who explicitly identifies disability as one of most important challenges to a universal theory of social justice, in her *Frontiers of Justice* (2006). Relying on the Aristotelian principle of the moral equality of all human beings, especially the ones who have been systematically excluded, such as “disabled people”, she proposes a project of global justice. According to her, moral equality implies that all human beings are equally fully fledged citizens, and consequently it is a moral obligation of modern societies to offer conditions for a dignified human life to people experiencing disability: “A decent society will organize public space, public education, and other relevant areas of public policy to support such lives and fully include them, giving the caregivers all the capabilities in our list, and the disabled as many of them, and as fully, as possible” (2006, p.222).

This perspective is focused in conditions of freedom<sup>10</sup>, in the possibility that people with impairments can choose the life they want to live. Nussbaum' supporting theoretical and methodological framework- capabilities approach- offers promising avenues to increase effectiveness of disability research (cf. Chapter 4), as this study intends to demonstrate.

## DISABILITY AND IMPAIRMENT: AN INTEGRATED ACCOUNT

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In accordance with the view of disability as a product of a complex intersection of personal, cultural and social factors, the crucial aspects of disability and impairment understood in the context of this research are now summarily emphasised.

Firstly, impairment and disability are two distinct ontological realities, whose distinction is important to clarify in order to define better responses to alleviate disability. Disability is a disruption in the ability to function in a way consistent with the social “norm” and impairment a biological dysfunction (Shakespeare, 2006). While impairment does not necessarily imply disability, it may, in some cases, be its most important factor. The relational ontological nature of individual impairment and its situational context is the key feature of a more holistic understanding of disability. As Vehmas and Makela suggest, “An ontology that emphasises the physical origins of impairment and the relational nature of disability enables us to eradicate both organic and social factors that have resulted in people’s distress” (2008, p.53). In these terms, disability cannot be considered an attribute imputable to an individual, but a multidimensional reality situationally enacted.

Secondly, disability is a fluid, dynamic phenomenon linked to the impermanent and frail condition of the human body and not a stable condition (Barnartt, 2010).

Thirdly, as a result of this fluidity, disability can only be understood as a conceptual continuum, not an absolute category. No person is abled or disabled; people experience various degrees of disability. The intensity and severity of disability experience vary according to different factors, such as age, medical knowledge, technology, economic resources and the situational context. This means that for a non-impaired person, disability is always immanent and for someone already experiencing disability, that experience fluctuates through technological/medical

advances; personal adaptations or the modification of contextual conditions. Lastly, disability is a universal feature of the human condition, enacted or latent. For this reason, any type of social segregation based on human difference defies logical reasoning, apart from being morally inappropriate. In sum, in the context of this study disability is understood as a dynamic, complex and multi-dimensional embodied experience. Since impairment and disability are distinct concepts, the expressions *person/people with impairment(s)* and *person/people experiencing disability* will be used to emphasise that distinction. Occasionally, the expressions “abled” and/or “disabled” may be used, to mimic how it is used in SV community or other related contexts.

The following diagram represents the holistic nature of the disability experience, which is constructed at the nexus of environmental (material, historical, social), cultural and personal dimensions. Models of disability associated with each realm and the main authors used to assist in the analysis of each of the represented dimensions are also indicated.

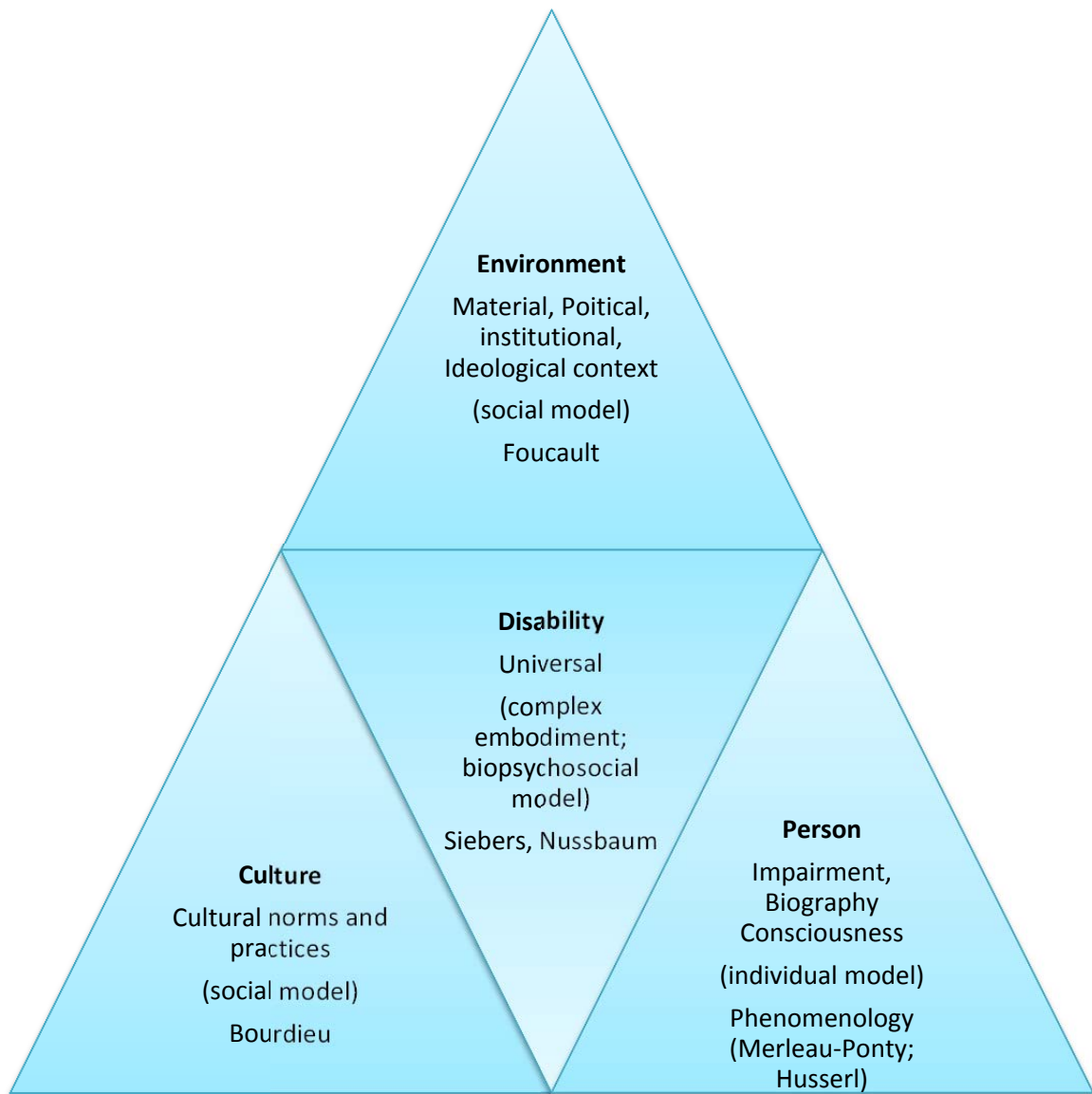


Figure 2.1. *Disability as a multidimensional construct. Main contextual factors and representative authors.*

## SUMMARY

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The academic field of disability studies provides a contextualized understanding of the multidimensional nature of disability phenomenon. This chapter has described how different models of disability inform the understanding of the complex interaction of personal, social and cultural factors to compose disability experiences. All of these contributions are important in three significant ways: for a holistic account of disability, to increase awareness on both the empowering and oppressing factors of social and cultural settings such as SV and to guide research that aims to be

emancipatory for people with disabilities, at both, the individual and collective level. The present project is aligned with Nussbaum's universalisation of disability as a matter of social justice and human development and with the conception of disability as a multidimensional, fluid and dynamic construct.

## CHAPTER 3 . LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS: DISABILITY SPORT

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### INTRODUCTION

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The present chapter provides information on pertinent features of disability sports' history and culture, drawing upon the overall contextual background in which SV developed in the UK. This overview starts with the examination of the international historical evolution of the interconnected fields of disability sport and adapted physical activity. After this, socio-cultural topics of disability sport literature relevant for the present research are examined: mainstreaming/segregation; media; the empowering potential of Paralympic sport; Paralympics legacy; distinctive aspects of disability sport culture and life impact assessments.

Next, a summary of disability sport development in the UK is followed by a brief account of SV main distinctive elements and history.

### DISABILITY SPORT

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The field of sports for individuals with various impairments is commonly referred as *disability sport* and as such this is the term adopted in this study. Disability sport designates "sport that has been designed for or is specifically practised by athletes with disabilities" (DePauw & Gavron, 2005). It provides opportunities for formal competition, by applying a classification system which intends to guarantee a level playing field. This system stipulates who is "in" and who is "out" of competition, based on "activity limitation resulting from impairment" (Tweedy & Howe, 2011, p. 23). For most of the governing bodies in disability sport, such as the World Organization of Volleyball for the Disabled (WOVD), eligibility is then defined by the impossibility of playing the mainstream version of the sport in fairly even conditions with other players, if such limitation is due to physical/functional impairment.

The existence of a segregated branch of sport for people with impairments is usually justified by the need to provide more adequate provision for their different embodiments than the mainstream settings offer (DePauw & Gavron, 2005). How much attention to difference is needed and how difference should be understood is a



contentious matter at the heart of discussions in adapted physical activity and disability sport analysed elsewhere (Silva & Howe, 2012a, b). Analysing existing literature, the historical evolution of disability sport appears to be intimately related with the development of the wider field of APA<sup>11</sup>. Reid considers four distinct phases in the evolution of APA in Canada<sup>12</sup>: *facility-based*; *service-based*; *supports-based* and *empowerment and self-determination* (Reid, 2003). These are described in parallel with Howe's (2008) division of disability sport evolution in three stages: *rehabilitation*, *participation* and *high performance*.

The facility-based paradigm dominated the social approach to disability during the first half of the twentieth century. People with impairments were often incarcerated in institutions, physically distant from the village or town where their families resided. In these institutions, physical activity was largely neglected, or solely used as corrective physical therapy (Reid, 2003). Disability sport as formal practice was non-existent. Correction was the key concept of these institutions' philosophy and dependency the prevalent dynamic of patient-staff relationship (Stiker, 2006). Thomas and Smith (2009) have found evidence of a similar process occurring in Britain.

In the second phase of APA development, which Reid (2003) calls a service-based paradigm, its focus changed from correction to rehabilitation. The main difference in relation to the previous phase was its emphasis on the re-integration of people with disabilities into mainstream society (Reid, 2003). Re-integration equated to living life as normally as possible; therefore the able-bodied norm remained basically unchallenged (Stiker, 2006). The emergence of this paradigm was connected with the need, after the Second World War, to return war-wounded men to civil life as workers and tax payers (Anderson, 2003), which culminated in the genesis of disability sport. This explains why early sport's opportunities were almost exclusively directed to men with spinal cord injuries, the first impairment group to have an international sports organisation: the International Stoke Mandeville Sports Federation (ISMSF), in 1960 (Howe, 2008b).

Dr. Ludwig Guttmann, director of the Stoke Mandeville Hospital in England, is credited as the first to extensively use sport, recreationally and competitively, as a

rehabilitation tool and the Stoke Mandeville Games are also recognised as the origin of modern Paralympic Games (Bailey, 2008; Brittain, 2010; DePauw & Gavron, 2005; Howe, 2008b; Nixon, 2000; Scruton, 1998). Though initially focused on war injured, the idea of using sport as a rehabilitation tool was soon extended to other groups of people with impairments.

A support-based paradigm followed the service-based paradigm of the rehabilitation era in APA, as a reaction to the stigma associated with “special” programs and institutions. This paradigm advocated genuine inclusion rather than mere formal integration (Reid, 2003). Genuine inclusion equates to effective participation at all decision making levels (DePauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000) and equitable social power between people with and without impairments (Nixon, 2000).

In disability sport, the rehabilitation shift resulted in the expansion of sport opportunities, supported institutionally by the creation of a number of international organizations of sport for the disabled. Howe (2008) articulates this as the participation stage, developed mainly during the 1970s and 1980s. The necessary conditions for this phase started to emerge in 1964, with the creation of the International Sports Organisation for the Disabled (IOSD), whose mission was to provide international opportunities for people with some types of impairments (mainly visual impairment, amputees and people with other physical disabilities). Several other international sports organisations followed: the Cerebral Palsy-International Sports and Recreation Association (CP-ISRA) in 1978; the International Blind Sports Association (IBSA) in 1981; International Sport Federation for People with Mental Handicap (Inas) in 1986. At this stage, concerns with competitive fairness justified a categorisation of athletes by type of impairment through a medical classification process. This system however placed great power in the hands of medical “experts” (Howe, 2008b, c; Peers, 2012), defying the principles of “true inclusion”. In 1982, an umbrella organisation was formed to coordinate disability sport internationally: the International Coordinating Committee of the IOSDs (ICC).

All these developments established a foundation for the *high performance* phase (Howe, 2008b), although its benchmark event was the establishment of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) in 1989, just after the Paralympics in Seoul

(1988). At these games, Paralympic athletes had access to the same facilities as the Olympic athletes, denoting a “transformation from a participation-based model of sport for the disabled to the high-performance model that exists today” (Howe, 2008b, p.28). The development of the elite strand of disability sport appears to coincide with the last phase in Reid’s account of adapted physical activity evolution: empowerment and self-determination (Reid, 2003), as expressed in IPC’s vision: “To enable Paralympic athletes to achieve sporting excellence and inspire and excite the world“, “enable” meaning “to create the conditions for athlete empowerment through self-determination” (IPC, n.d.).

Overall, both APA and disability sport have been influenced by disability campaigns promoted by activist movements especially active in the 1980s, as outlined in the previous chapter. As a result, the empowerment of people with impairments and the defence and promotion of self-determination became their goals (cf. endnote 11). However, several authors have identified significant barriers towards those goals (Gilbert & Schantz, 2008; Howe, 2008a, b, c; 2011a; Howe & Jones, 2006; Jones & Howe, 2005; Peers, 2009, 2012), some of which will be examined in the next section.

The several phases of disability sport evolution described above must not be understood as isolated in the past. Although empowerment and self-determination are recurrent tropes in contemporary sport’s rhetoric, it seems evident that stigma, discrimination and unequal opportunities (Brittain, 2012) as well as a paternalistic and charitable ethos (Howe, 2008b) persist in the politics and practices of disability sport and physical activity.

## PAST AND PRESENT TRENDS IN DISABILITY SPORT LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

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### DISABILITY SPORT: MAINSTREAMING OR SEGREGATION?

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As previously suggested, the birth and development of disability sport is deeply rooted in a medical understanding of disability. Hence, the compartmentalisation by type of impairment, at the institutional and practical levels of disability sport is unsurprising. In theory, this division is driven by the need to guarantee adequate sport’s provision and fair competition (Howe, 2011b), however some scholars argue

that too much emphasis given to impairment and disability may reinforce social segregation (see DePauw, 1997).

Opportunities for physical activity, including sport, seem to have progressed from a segregated to a more inclusive paradigm. However, the rhetoric of inclusion does not always translate into everyday social inclusion (DePauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000; DePauw & Gavron, 2005; Nixon, 2007; Reid, 2003; Thomas & Smith, 2009). For instance, Howe suggests that true integration implies a “full active role within society” and that “international sporting organizations achieve true integration at the high-performance end of spectrum in order to send a clear message regarding the positioning of people with disabilities within wider society” (2011b, p.105). Yet, elsewhere Howe (2008a) also expressed concerns that athletes’ voices can be silenced in this fusion. Thomas considers the mainstreaming of sport opportunities problematic if it assumes “that the able-bodied version of the sport is the norm to which disabled athletes should aspire” (2008, p.228). Likewise, research by Purdue and Howe (2012a) indicates a general worry, amongst their interviewees (Paralympians, administrators and social researchers) that a closer connection between Olympic and Paralympic movements may obscure athletes with impairments, especially those whose embodiment is more distant from the “ideal” athletic embodiment. Nixon (2007) harmonises these positions by proposing a sporting model with seven different levels, from complete segregation to complete mainstreaming. By doing so, Nixon denies that either mainstreaming or segregation are necessarily the best scenarios for disability sport, defending choice and fairness as the critical values to promote: “people with disabilities must have choices to participate in appropriate sports and sports roles that match their motivation, interests, and talent so that genuine inclusion may occur. The safeguards built into these sports models should be the same for all competitors, whether or not they are disabled” (2007, p.431). One of the most significant obstacles to this ideal scenario is perhaps the fact that disability sport is often perceived as a “paradox” (Purdue & Howe, 2012b), not recognised as “true” competitive sport (DePauw, 1997), or seen as “high performance opportunities for less than able bodies” (Howe, 2012).

The apparent contradiction between sport and disability is especially insidious in media representations of disability sport. For its magnifying potential in educating

and informing the wider public, this theme is unavoidable in disability sport literature.

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### MEDIATISATION OF DISABILITY SPORT

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Although research in media and Paralympics is still relatively scarce (e.g. Chang, Crossman, Taylor & Walker, 2011; Howe, 2008a; Schantz & Gilbert, 2001; Schell & Rodriguez, 2001; Smith & Thomas, 2005; Thomas & Smith, 2003), the literature agrees that media accounts tend to reproduce old stereotypes depicting athletes either as “tragic victims” or as “supercrips” striving to overcome their impairment; and disability sport as a lower level variant of mainstream sport. Two significant indicators of this tendency are the persistent comparison with mainstream sport, interpreted by Thomas and Smith as a mark of “ablebodiedness” emulation (2003) and the unequal amount of coverage granted to the Paralympics compared with the Olympics (Brittain, 2010).

Drawing upon auto ethnographic data, Howe reports that in the Athens Paralympic Games, 95% of the journalists were non-impaired, which explains this tendency to reproduce stereotypes and to adopt an “ultra-positive style” (Howe, 2008b, p.98). Recent examples of the supercrip stereotype are analysed elsewhere as an expression of otherness, although they seem to coexist with more progressive representations (Silva, 2008; Silva & Howe, 2012c). As previously mentioned, to reinforce disability as “otherness” (cf. endnote 3), either positively or negatively, is to reinforce it as a vehicle for social oppression.

The inherent empowerment potential of the elite strand of disability sport and more generally of APA is presented in the next section.

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### PARALYMPISM, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND EMPOWERMENT

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Reflecting on the philosophy of Paralympism, the former Paralympian Danielle Peers focuses on the power of discourses surrounding the Paralympics, which she considers counterproductive for the empowerment of people experiencing disability:

The great irony of this progressive empowerment discourse is that it serves to disempower athletes in at least five overlapping ways: it reproduces the tragic disabled object; it effaces the actions and stories of athletes; it prioritizes those

credited with empowering the athletes; it undermines athlete resistance; it justifies the increased use of power over and against Paralympians (2009, p.658).

In a more recent article, drawing upon an analysis of the most relevant published Paralympic history texts, emanated from four crucial institutions (Stoke Mandeville Hospital, IOSDs, ICC, and IPC), Peers reaffirms her position:

...I have demonstrated how Paralympic discourses and practices, in contrast to the claim of empowerment, are implicated in the perpetuation of the practices and unequal power relations in and through which disability is experienced and sustained. (2012, p.17)

Howe (2008a) expresses similar doubts concerning the empowerment potential of the Paralympic Movement. Drawing upon his experience in the IPC Athletics Committee he reports on the undervaluing of athletes' voices: "Over the past two years it had become abundantly clear to me that the position of the athletes' representative gave me a voice on the committee...., but by and large it was a voice to which few on the committee paid any attention" (p.52); the lack of real democratic processes: "decisions of significance were often taken by only a few members of the committee" (p. 60); "Often the members of the committee representing IOSDs were unable to solicit opinions from their members at such a short notice" and the institutional mainstreaming: "Who will speak for the athletes, since the role of their representatives will be increasingly marginalised in light of the new committee structure?" (p.58). If empowerment implies a reasonable degree of control over one's political and practical environment, then these signs are clearly worrying.

Classification is another dimension of disability sport identified as potentially threatening of sport's empowerment impact. Howe and Jones (2006) stress that the increasing reduction of competitive classes (to comply with media demands) is causing the exclusion of more severely impaired athletes from the Paralympic Movement. Considering the impact of classification issues at a community and personal level, elsewhere Howe highlights how the classification system also dictates athletes' social opportunities: "It determines many things within the sport for the disabled- for example, with whom I am allocated a shared room within the athletes' village and whether or not I am considered an elite athlete" (2008a, p.71).

Research recently undertaken by Purdue & Howe (2012a) reveals varied understandings of the empowerment effectiveness of Paralympic Movement. First, athletes and stakeholders have different conceptions of empowerment. Athletes tend to believe in the potential of sport for the empowerment of athletes; and stakeholders defend that the Paralympics empower even non-athletes by offering positive role models. However, the fact that Paralympians lead very different lives and possess social and cultural capital uncommon among ordinary disabled people compromises the wider identification of the disabled community with Paralympic athletes (Purdue & Howe, 2012a). Similarly, in the related field of APA, some scholars equally doubt of the practical translation of empowerment rhetoric. Hutzler (2008) stresses that “the methodology of APA as an empowering and socially liberating agent is yet to be disclosed” (p.162). Reid (2003) concurs: “This last period [empowerment and self-determination] has not yet had a profound impact in adapted physical activity, although it has had considerable influence in recreation and leisure” (p.22). In sum, although the matter of empowerment is stated as crucial for the sporting experience of people experiencing disability, there appears to be a void in terms of conceptual, methodological and practical tools in both academic and professional contexts to assess this concept.

The potential for disability sport to act as a factor of macro social change is discussed in the following section, by focusing on Paralympics legacy.

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#### PARALYMPICS LEGACY AND POTENTIAL FOR SOCIAL IMPACT

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There seems to be no consensus whether disability sport can act as a catalyst for social change and empowerment, although some authors occasionally present this as a fact:

Sport for people with disabilities has, therefore played a major role in improving the lives of people with disabilities within the wider society and can serve as a strong educational lesson for future generations of the dangers of stereotyping and also what humans are truly capable of. (Brittain, Ramshaw & Gammon, 2012, p. 9)

It is often emphasised that disability sport challenges mainstream negative perceptions of disability ideas on human performance (DePauw, 1997; Hargreaves, 2000; Jones & Howe, 2005) and boost technological and architectural advances

(Brittain, 2012), from which all people with disabilities ultimately benefit. The knowledge of empowerment mechanisms activated by disability sport is frail. For instance, Darcy (2003) notes that although the Paralympics may have provided the political context and the historical momentum for disability advocates and associations to put changes in motion, the scarce research on Paralympic legacies reveals a lack of empirical evidence validating its potential for social change (Frost, 2012; Legg & Gilbert, 2011; Weed & Dowse, 2009; Weed, Coren, Fiore, Wellard, Mansfield, Chatziefstathiou, 2012). The existing evidence is foremost grounded in personal opinions and reflections, often from people in important positions within the Paralympic Movement.

There are some exceptions to this general trend. For instance, the Olympic Games Impact Study included five Paralympic indicators, which are intended to measure changes in the public and personal disability awareness (Coward & Legg, 2011). This study by Coward and Legg (2011) reports evidence of positive social change, though it focuses only upon the personal perceptions and attitudes of the general public and not on the everyday lives of people experiencing disability. Another example is a document published by the IPC entitled “Promoting the Health and Human Rights of Individuals with a Disability through the Paralympic Movement”, in which the author proposes concrete indicators to measure sport’s social impact: increased rates of employment; increased access to education; improved quality of life for athletes and others and decreased burden on public health care and social welfare programs (Blauwet, 2005, p.11).

Although the establishment of legacy programs is a compulsory responsibility of the organisational committee of the Paralympic Games (since 2012), its evaluation in terms of benefits for people living with disability remains neglected.

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#### THE SPECIFIC CULTURAL ETHOS OF DISABILITY SPORT

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Only people with impaired bodies can be Paralympians. This is the core rule at the heart of a distinctive sporting context and inscribed in the Paralympic Movement values, practices and worldviews (Howe & Jones, 2006; Howe, 2008b, c).



To the best of my knowledge, only two previous works have comprehensively analysed disability sport distinctiveness, exploring both personal and contextual factors. David Howe, former Paralympian and athlete's representative in the Paralympic Athletics committee, athletics' coach and also an accredited media member in the Athens and London Paralympics has engaged in extensive ethnographic work, which resulted in a comprehensive cultural description of Paralympic culture. Some of the crucial features of the disability sport ethos addressed in his work are the impact of impairment on sporting social status, social capital and interpersonal relations; the potentially disempowering aspects of disability sport (e.g. classification processes; uneven power relations between technical and managerial staff and athletes with impairments; the institutional power configurations; the institutional control of media and the role of technology, amongst others (2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2011a, 2012). Besides evidencing the usefulness of ethnographic methods in the investigation of an unmapped sporting culture, Howe's work identifies critical factors affecting the potential empowering impact of sporting contexts. As will be evident throughout the rest of this thesis, all the themes highlighted above continue to be of critical importance.

Another significant cultural analysis of disability sport is Berger's *Hoop dreams on wheels* (2008). His analysis and interpretation is articulated within the sociological paradigm *social structure/ personal agency* (2008, p.43), providing in-depth individualized accounts of the sporting experiences of wheelchair basketball players in the United States. Berger captures the idiosyncrasies of their experiences; channelling their voices and examining the influence of the familiar, educational and peers' contexts on those experiences. In doing so he notes the inherent tensions of competitive sport in relation to its wider empowerment potential, for instance due to a tendency of impaired athletes to undermine people with impairments who do not engage in sport.

These two specific works confirm how the study of disability sport cultures (in which athletes with impairments are central) is essential for an understanding of its potential to improve people's lives. While this is true for both abled and disabled populations, the traditional absence of athletes' voices in the study of disability sports' field denotes its chronic devaluation. Following the steps of Howe and Berger, this

research aims to correct such a tendency by assigning the leading roles to athletes with impairments and other primary actors in the field.

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## THE IMPACT OF SPORT PARTICIPATION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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Research on the impact of sport and physical activity participation on people with disability appears to follow the same trend as research in mainstream sport, focusing mainly on public and community health concerns<sup>13</sup> (Cooper, Quatrano, Axelson, Harlan, Stineman, Franklin, Heath & Fentem, 1997; Motl & McAuley, 2010; Rimmer, Riley, Wang, Rauworth, & Jurkowski, 2004; Rimmer & Chen, 2009; Rimmer & Rowland, 2008). Another stream of research, equally influenced by a medical tradition is the study of sport's impact in particular impairments (Gaskin, Andersen & Morris, 2009, 2010; Rimmer, 2001). However, in their literature review on health and quality of life, Wilhite and Shank (2009) stress that although physical activity seem to have a positive impact in the health related factors of quality of life in older adults with impairments, there is no conclusive evidence this is the case in relation to overall quality of life, concluding that more comprehensive evaluations are needed.

Among the psychosocial aspects that have been studied in connection with disability and sport are the concepts of personal empowerment (Blinde & Taub, 1999; Guthrie, 1999; Pensgaard & Sorensen, 2002); self-identity (Huang & Brittain, 2006; Sherrill, 1997); quality of life (Groff, Lundberg, & Zabriskie, 2009; Samsoniene, 2010); well-being (Campbell, 1995); self-perception (Sousa, Corredeira, & Pereira, 2009) and friendship (Seymour, Reid, & Bloom, 2009). Although studies of this type are important to understand impact on psychological health, because specialised research often derives from a medical understanding of disability and of sport as a therapeutic tool, it fails to capture the holistic nature of human condition and the importance of physical activity and sport for a whole spectrum of life dimensions.

Albrecht (1992) captures one of the problems of this overemphasis on health: the fact that people with disabilities feed a "disability business", in whose interest it is to reinforce their dependency to keep them in need of their services. When sports' evaluation is directed toward its impact on physical health, as if this is the only important value of human lives, the disability sport sector may be seen to be adopting a similar logic. To counteract this danger, disability sport and APA projects

ought to be morally grounded in empirical evidence of their ethical value for people with disabilities. It is therefore important that evaluations cover multiple dimensions of life, so that the often overemphasised health benefits do not obscure other effects of sport's participation.

From here essential aspects of disability sport development in the UK and of SV ethos are presented as they map the wider contextual stage of the present study.

## DISABILITY SPORT IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

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In *Disability, Sport and Society*, Nigel Thomas and Andy Smith (2009) trace the emergence and development of disability sport in Britain. Their work, supported by additional literature, is the main source of information in describing the political and institutional sporting context in which SV development occurred in the UK.

The genesis of the modern form of disability sport was developed in England, from 1944 by Dr. Guttman's work in Stoke Mandeville hospital. Guttman organised the first international competitions in Stoke Mandeville Hospital and created the first disability sport institution- the British Association of Sport for the Disabled (BASD) in 1960. The mission of BASD was to lead disability sport development and coordinate its different associations. By 1982, the disability sport community in the UK was composed of seven disability groups, several National Disability Sport Organizations (NDSOs) and 25 other members. Although disability sport continued to grow, evaluations of British policy for disability sport in the late 1980s<sup>14</sup> highlighted significant flaws: the scarcity of sport opportunities for young disabled people; the lack of awareness and interest from the mainstream sport institutions; the absence of coordination between the several disability sport associations at a national and regional level (e.g. council departments), resulting in a deficient sports' provision. The institutional struggle for financial resources and the increasing privatization of local sport provision are presented by Thomas and Smith (2009) as the main causes for these failings.

To obviate some of these problems, in "People with Disabilities and Sport Policy and Current/Planned Action" (Sports Council, 1993), the Sports Council<sup>15</sup> (main government sport institution) defended the gradual shift of disability sport

governance to mainstream institutions. However, resources and further action towards integration were limited. It seemed that neither the NDSOs were interested in this shift as it would threaten their social usefulness; nor the sport's national governing bodies (NGBs) welcomed this additional responsibility. Between 1995 and 1998, the *New Start* conferences held by the Sports Council released important guidelines for disability sport: "the development of Regional forums; ii) the establishment of a National Development Agency and iii) the integration of disabled people into the mainstream of English Sport" (Thomas & Smith, 2009, p.39). As a result, in 1998, the English Federation of Disability Sport (EFDS) was created to assure the strategic coordination of the existent myriad of sport organisations and offer a unified structure to disability sport in the England.

Another critical actor in the development of British disability sport was the local authorities. Supported by the Labour Party elected in 1997, local councils were seen as crucial for disability sport provision, as part of their mission to use sport for social inclusion purposes. However, the financial effort imposed by the Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) Act<sup>16</sup> (late 1980s) on local councils hindered that goal, as disability sport was not a profitable sector of activity. Also the degree of commitment from local governments varied significantly across regions, and no coherent policy existed to enhance disability sports' provision within or between local authority areas (Thomas & Smith, 2009). Although the political importance of disability sport was justified within the rhetoric of sport as a right for all citizens; in *Raising the Game* (Department of National Heritage (DNH), 1995) the responsibility for its development was transferred almost entirely to local authorities, echoing the government clear priority on the development of school and elite sport. Meanwhile, the *Equality Standard: A Framework for sport*, launched in 2004 by Sport England (SE)<sup>17</sup> enforced directives for the application of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) anti-discrimination principles in Sport. In the international landscape, the launching in 2006 of the *UN Convention of Rights for Persons with disabilities*, ratified by UK further reinforced the moral obligation of governments to apply non-discriminatory policies in sport. Domestically, the *Equality Act* in 2010 simplified and combined all the previous anti-discrimination laws.

Within this macro context and despite extensive protective legislation, the mainstreaming of disability sport governance from NSDOs to NGBs, led by EFDS, developed very slowly (Thomas and Smith, 2009). Research undertaken by Thomas (2004) reports the weak interest of NGBs in this process, emphasising how occasional interest was “strongly associated with the external funding opportunities, that are becoming increasingly available, and the strong personal relationships between committed individuals within DSOs and NGBs” (Thomas & Smith, 2009, p.96). In parallel, the increasing significance of sport for national politics and economy lead to the formation of a centralised structure for the government of UK sport (mainstream and disability). Three major institutional bodies were then defined: the sport councils of each home nation, responsible for the grassroots, community and youth sport); UK Sport formally funded in 1997, became the national institution responsible for the elite end of sport development and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DMCS), which centrally governed sport. NGB’s, NDSO’s, local associations and council’s sports departments were positioned under the hierarchical influence of these organisations, competing amongst them for limited government financial resources.

At the elite level, the centralisation of sport’s governance by state institutions led to the transference of all disability sport performance programs to UK Sport *World Class Development Pathway*. Because in this model funding was only assigned to athletes and sports with medal chances and because this goal was perceived as easier to achieve in Paralympics than in Olympics, some NGBs (e.g. Volleyball institutions) may have seen in disability sport an additional funding opportunity.

The UK Sport *No compromise* (UK Sport, 2010)<sup>18</sup> strategy for public investment in sport may also be interpreted as a direct consequence of the government focus on two political priorities for sport:

- (i) Children and young people and the use of programmes that aim to reduce longer-term (financial) costs associated with poor health, poor educational achievement and by association a less than satisfactory contribution to the future economic well-being of the country; and (ii) the development of the elite performers and the winning of Olympic [and Paralympic] medals. (Green, 2006, p.233).

From the 1990's onwards, sport policies seemed to have been developed ignoring the *Sports for All* philosophy which had guided sport policy in the UK since the early 1970s (Houlihan & White, 2002). As Green (2006) emphasises, sport is, in the recent context, a "social investment" strategy, a tool to "promote a normative vision ... wherein the self-responsibilizing, 'active citizen' is shaped, channelled and guided into taking steps to realize well-being, a healthy lifestyle and educational benefits in particular" (p.230); in an exercise of Foucauldian governmentality (cf. p.15). Youth and children are easier targets to imprint new habits and values, so they are defined as the first priority target.

The second political priority, the achievement of performance results, is largely sustained by the rationale that trophies motivate the general population to engage in sport. Despite the uncertainty of this correlation (Green, 2006), performance goals seemed to dominate sport's political agenda from the 1990's onwards. UK Sport "No Compromise" strategy is the clearest expression of this priority:

A total of £292 million of confirmed investment has today been allocated by UK Sport to British Olympic and Paralympic sports ahead of the London Games in 2012. This funding, building on the £265 million invested for Beijing, has enabled UK Sport to agree a target of a "Top Four" finish in London, aiming to win more medals in more sports than in Beijing and thereby ensure the most successful Olympic performance by a British team for 100 years.... The funding decisions, confirmed yesterday by the UK Sport Board, are made on the basis of UK Sport's successful 'no compromise' investment strategy - which targets resources primarily at those sports and athletes most likely to win medals. It aims to ensure that every athlete supported is able to get to the start line at an Olympics or Paralympics in the knowledge that they are as best prepared as they can possibly be. (UK Sport, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2008)

Within this political atmosphere, NGB's have been operating in conditions "characterised by fragility and insecurity typified by a resource-dependent relationship: a relationship that will only endure if the sport delivers, against agreed targets, on the Olympic stage" (Green, 2006, p.227). The tensions and conflicts generated by this emphasis on results are academically framed within the binaries "development through sport" or "development of sport" (Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011; Houlihan & White, 2002; Maguire, 2011). While "development through sport" focuses on the person's and societies' development; "development of sport" identifies development with competitive achievements, as if these are inherently positive. Despite some dissonant voices, the power of the elite development narrative

dominates political discourses on sport (Green, 2006). Within this context, SV developed strongly conditioned by UK Sport, which acted in coordination with the British Paralympic Association (BPA)<sup>19</sup> and Sport England, as the institutions responsible for the allocation of the public funding for the elite and community development. The description of this historical and political context is important to understand SV recent development in the UK. As this development was on going at the time of research much of the data is original. A presentation of this data opens the third part of this thesis (chapter 6). For now, SV main characteristics, genesis and international development are presented in the next section.

### SITTING VOLLEYBALL: DESCRIPTION, HISTORY AND RESEARCH

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SV is the Paralympic version of the mainstream sport of Volleyball. While most of its technical gestures and regulations are similar to Volleyball, the way of moving on the court is fundamentally different from the standing version or any other Paralympic sport since it is forbidden to “stand up, raise the body or take steps” (rule 9.4.2, WOVD, updated September 2009). Movement on court is generated by sliding on the buttocks, using the existing limbs, especially the upper ones- to propel the body (cf. picture 3.1). The challenge of the game lies precisely in the efficient combination of the use of the hands for body propulsion and for the contact with the ball, which requires a fast transition between the two tasks.



Picture 3.1. *Grand Prix Final (2<sup>nd</sup> tier), Essex Pirates (left) vs Portsmouth Sharks (right) on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 2012. © Jon McGugan*

The sport features a smaller court (10 m x 6 m) and a lower net compared to standing volleyball (1.15 m (men) and 1.05 m (women)). The smaller proportions of the court make the game much faster than in its standing version, therefore demanding rapid physical and decision-making skills. Despite the fact SV is a multi-impairment sport, amputation is the predominant impairment amongst its players. This is because although the lack of a lower limb is usually considered a disability, in SV it is seen as an advantage in terms of speed of movement. This disability inversion- somebody with two legs may be more disadvantaged than an amputee in SV- is a significant feature of SV ethos discussed later in the thesis (chapters 6 to 8).

SV is a very dynamic game that develops upper body and core strength, speed, endurance and more complex abilities such as hand-eye coordination, spatial orientation and reaction time. In contrast with other disability sports, in SV the use of contraptions or technical aids is generally not allowed ("4.5.1. It is forbidden to wear objects which may cause injury, or give an unfair artificial advantage to a player. Bandages may be worn, but anything that may be dangerous is not permitted" (WOVD, September 2009).

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## GENESIS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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According to WOVD (Joon, n.d.), Volleyball's history is connected with a similar game played in England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but the invention of formal volleyball is consensually attributed to William G. Morgan, a young American physical educator from the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in 1895. The game was disseminated globally and by the early 1930's the first international competitions were beginning to take place.

Relying on the information provided on the WOVD web site (Joon, n.d) and on the *SV Foundation Course Handbook* (Vute, Goltnik & Cerar, 2009), the sitting variant of volleyball developed mainly in the Netherlands, from a German sport played on the floor: sitzball. In 1956, the Dutch Sports Committee officially recognized SV and in 1962 the first international tournament took place in Flensburg, with teams from Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark (Joon, n.d.).The further development and international legitimacy of SV for people with disabilities required the codification of regulations, a system of classification, the establishment of



international organizations and membership in the existent DSOs. However, the introduction of SV in the international disability sport movement was somewhat problematic since the ISODs were divided in disability categories and SV was played by athletes with various types of impairments. In 1977, the creation of “les autres” category – which included all types of impairment not covered previously - allowed volleyball to be finally accepted in the international disability sport movement.

Crucial benchmarks in SV international development were the organization of the first international Volleyball tournament for people with disabilities recognized by the ISOD in Haarlem, Netherlands, and its inclusion in the 1980 Arnhem Paralympics, (standing and SV for men) when an International Volleyball Committee was established within the ISODs. In terms of institutional development, 1992 marked the establishment of the European Committee of Volleyball for the Disabled (ECVD). After that, SV fast development justified the existence of an independent world organization, formed in 1996- the WOVD. Besides the institutional structure, SV development was also sustained through regular international competition. In Europe, bi- annual championships have been held for men since 1981 and for women since 1993. World Championships for SV have been held since 1983 but only since 1994 for both men and women (Kwok, 2012). The European teams, especially the Netherlands, dominated the competition during the early years, but around 1985 Iran appeared in the international scene as one of the strongest nations in SV.

SV is particularly popular in countries marked by war, such as the former Yugoslavia and its several republics, Iran and Egypt. According to Kwok (2012), GB participation in the SV international stage was quite irregular during the sports’ early development. Before 1992, GB national SV team was prevented by the BPA from participating in the Barcelona Paralympic Games because it was felt that they did not possess enough competitive quality<sup>20</sup> (VE, n.d.). From 1992 up to the recent phase of development initiated in 2009, SV developed little in the UK (cf. Chapter 6).

GB representatives have, notwithstanding, been a consistent presence in SV international organisations. Gordon Neale (former member of BASD) was a member of the first WOVD committee (Promotion/Development officer) (Joon, n.d.) and Denis

Le Breuilly is a long term WOVD sport's director. At the European level, Steve Walton is presently the refereeing commissioner of the ECVD board (ECVD, n.d).

The history of SV in GB can be seen to reflect the action of key personalities such as the ones mentioned above more than any political strategy to develop disability sport in the UK. Also of importance for the development of the sport was the exclusion of standing volleyball from Paralympic competition by the IPC in 2000, because it legitimised SV as volleyball "disabled" version.

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### CLASSIFICATION

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Although no minimal criterion was initially demanded as condition for participation (Joon, n.d.) in SV, as the sport developed a classification system was required for competitive credibility and legitimation. SV classification currently incorporates two disability categories- minimally disabled (MD) and disabled (D) - and two temporal categories- permanent (PS) and review status (RS). The eligible impairments include amputations, impaired muscle power, restricted joint movements and instability, impaired balance and coordination; although no categories are defined a priori since classification is based upon a hybrid functional and medical assessment (*Medical and Functional Classification Handbook*, n.d.). Players classified as MD's are often former volleyball players who have suffered knee damage, or people with reduced movement or strength in one or two joints, a foot or hand amputated, with mild cerebral palsy among a variety of possibilities. To be classified as D, the type of impairments is similar to the MD's, though the degree of functional restriction needs to be higher (cf. Appendix B).

Like most Paralympic sports, SV elite communities are regulated through controversial classificatory processes (Howe & Jones, 2006). Classification rules are not always clear and assessments highly permeable to various factors other than impairment restrictions: classifiers' subjectivity, political pressures, age, level of practice, personal skills and learning/training progress. One of the most obvious negative consequences of classification processes in SV is the instability it causes, especially in the teams with many players with minimal and temporary classification. Because classification procedures take place immediately before WOVD accredited events, the degree of anxiety for athletes and coaches is considerable. Furthermore,

as most of the national teams have limited budgets, classification impacts greatly on the initial selection of players, since athletes with more permanent and obvious impairments are preferred to others of a more ambiguous status. For this reason and because they are believed to possess the best physical qualities for the sport, SV competitive sphere is dominated by athletes with amputations. In theory, SV is open to all embodiments, as long as the “player permanently cannot play standing (classical) volleyball.” (WOVD, 2009, rule 3.6.1.2.1.), but in practice, the nature of the game and the system of classification privileges the presence of players with amputations (cf. chapter 8). At international competitions, only two MD players can be part of the team and only one is allowed on the court at any one time while all other members ought to be D players (Official SV rules, WOVD, 2009, p.12).

At a national level anyone that possesses enough strength and balance to move on the floor as well as sufficient hand-eye coordination can play the sport, so impairment diversity is greater than at the elite international level. Despite the nonexistence of classification criteria for participation, three different embodiment categories coexist at the national level. In SV slang they are D’s, (disabled); MD’s (minimally disabled) and AB’s (able-bodied). In the four years of the national competition this study covers, a system of bonus points awarded for the participation of D players was in place to encourage their participation. During the last season (2012/13) this rule was only being applied at the lower level of competition.

Among the institutional staff, SV is framed and promoted as a universal rather than a disability sport. “Universal” implies that SV is a game for everyone: “A sport in which able and disable people can play at the same time as there is no advantage to either one the groups...” (Sean, VE staff). Whether this is because the sport would not survive without the participation of AB’s or because it possesses an intrinsic universal nature is unclear. The intrinsic inclusiveness of the sport is a contested topic within the SV community especially amongst some players with impairments (cf. Chapters 6, 8).

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#### RESEARCH IN SITTING VOLLEYBALL

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A literature search with the expression “Sitting Volleyball” (through the Loughborough Library catalogue plus, which includes databases such as *Web of*

*Science* and *Medline/Pubmed*) has identified just one peer-reviewed article in an academic journal ( Akasaka, Takakura, Okuma, Kusano, Suyama & Yamamoto, 2003). This article reports research measuring health and quality of life in which differences between players with and without disabilities was assessed using the SF36 Health Questionnaire survey. Although the authors report significant differences in three of the eight scores of the scale used (physical functioning, role functioning and social functioning), the meaning of each of this parameter is not clarified and the potential influence of SV participation on these aspects is not clearly addressed. Similar search using *SportDiscus* has not identified any research source. Using Google scholar database, some more examples of articles in SV were found, although most of these are published in university based journals. The few examples of research undertaken on SV focus upon the analysis of the game itself (Häyrinen & Blomqvist, 2006), on the physical, technical and tactical aspects of players' performance (Dongmei, Le Rongrong & Hansong, 2006) and injuries associated with SV practice (Wieczorek, Jadcak, Śliwowski & Pietrzak, 2007).

In terms of research on the psychosocial aspects of SV, it is worth noting the study of Protic and Valkova (2011) on the motivational dimension of participation in SV, in which a sample of 88 elite SV players (68 with acquired disability, three with congenital disability and three with unknown disability) completed a SV participation survey. This study claims that socialization, health, entertainment and fitness are the most important motivations for players' participation, closely followed by sport competition and rehabilitation (p.12). These results are to some extent confirmed in the present research (cf. Appendix J). The last study worth noting is Vute and Krpac (2000) research, which investigated the values of elite SV athletes using the questionnaire "Values of Sport" (VS-K95), adapted for SV players. Their sample was composed of 51 female and 103 male sitting-volleyball players from thirteen European countries. They identified personal strength and friendship as the most important values for women and team work spirit as the most important for men. These two previous studies are informed by a quantitative perspective, and despite providing relevant information concerning the specific field of SV, they fail to provide a more comprehensive accounts of SV impact. Overall, the literature search

undertaken suggests a lack of academic research with sociological relevance in SV contexts.

## SUMMARY

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The international historical development of disability sport happened alongside an increasing political and social awareness on the rights of people experiencing disability, progressing from a focus on rehabilitation to the democratisation of opportunities and the development of professional and elite pathways. In the UK, it seems that a more a complex structure exists, highly permeable to political change and infused with institutional quarrels. Long-term national sport policies have been unsustainable, due to the constant political and economic changes and the complex institutional sports' structure. Despite this fluctuation and since the 1990s, two essential priorities have been identified in national sport politics: youth sport and elite sport (Green, 2006; Houlihan, 2011). Although the legitimacy of performance driven sport policy is questioned by some (cf. Green, 2006; Houlihan & White, 2002), it remains largely dominant at the highest political levels, compelling NGOs and NDSOs, highly dependent from UK sport and SE funding, to adhere to its principles.

In terms of academic research, an examination of disability sport literature exposed a lack of comprehensive evaluations of sport's life impact. Also, in analysing the validity of disability sport empowerment claims, the available literature identified conflicts between its practices, discourses, organisation and rhetoric.

In characterising the game of SV, it is important to emphasise its unique movement practice, as it is the only sport played by shuffling on the buttocks across the floor. This, alongside its multi-impairment facet distinguishes SV from any other sport. Classification processes are a problematic aspect of the SV ethos as it impacts greatly on the stability of national teams and privileges the participation of people with more unequivocal impairments. Finally, a literature review using the most comprehensive data bases on academic sport research confirms that SV culture remains largely unexplored.

## CHAPTER 4 . LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS: CAPABILITIES APPROACH

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### INTRODUCTION

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Disability sport's potential to ignite social change is usually connected with its power to challenge pervasive negative perceptions of disability by offering examples of productive, dynamic and athletic impaired bodies which broadens the usual social boundaries of what constitutes "acceptable" bodies (DePauw, 1997; Hargreaves, 2000; Howe, 2008b; Brittain, 2012). Because perceptions, beliefs and attitudes are a major factor in disability oppression (cf. Chapter 2), this potential should not be neglected. Yet, its translation in the everyday lives of people living with disability remains to be proven. Although presumed, the empowerment potential of disability sport lacks evidence-based research, justifying the urgent need for empirical studies on disability sport impact. To do so, research inquiry must gather adequate and reliable information on sport's impact upon the "real" lives of the people involved, that is, using criteria which are meaningful and significant for the athletes and people with impairments themselves.

In order to overcome traditional limitations of research on disability sport already addressed in this thesis (cf. chapter 1), two critical steps are now suggested: Define the most ethically meaningful "objects of value" (Sen, 2009) in which sport can exert significant influence and to use appropriate theoretical frameworks and methodologies to measure sports' impact on the daily lives of individuals. These two steps offer a solid foundation for the ethical and social legitimacy of disability sport.

The present study proposes that the capabilities approach provides the soil where both the "What?" and the "How?" of the assessment of sport's significance in people's lives can be ethically grounded. The answer to the question "what objects of value to choose as indicators?" is provided by its central concept: capabilities- and the answer to the "how to assess capabilities?" is derived from the methodological application of its principles (cf. Chapter 5). The novel contribution of the capabilities approach is to consider individuals and not economic and/or political benefits as the centre of

development concerns, in clear demarcation from the tendency of sports' development policy that seemed to have reigned in the UK over the last decades (cf. pp.36-47).

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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The human development approach emerged as a reaction against the economic orientated international development approaches of the 1980s. At that time, international development assessments assumed national economic growth and quality of life coexisted, when, in fact, by using aggregate and average indicators such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009) there was no real knowledge of individual quality of life. Moreover, information on atypical social groups, with "unusual" needs and expectations were largely overshadowed (cf. Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1995). By relying on average indicators such as GDP, even countries with a considerable level of deprivation and high social asymmetries could be considered as developed (see e.g. Alkire & Deneulin, 2009).

As a result of this strong contestation, international assessments were redesigned and human development redefined as "both the process of widening people's choices and the level of their achieved well-being" (United Nations Development Report (UNDR) 1990, p.9) in the first *Human Development Report* (HDR). A decade later, capabilities terminology was incorporated into this definition, by adding the "human outcomes of these *functionings* and *capabilities*" [my italics] (UNDP, 2000, p.17) to the expansion of choices. Special attention started to be granted to health and education capabilities as a standard of comparison between countries, and other indicators of social inequality have been aggregated throughout time, such as the Gender Development Index (GDI), Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) which measure gender imbalances in institutional and political power.

The main theorists of this new development paradigm are Amartya Sen<sup>21</sup>, economist and Martha Nussbaum (2000, 2006, 2011), political philosopher. In 2004, the Human Development and Capability Association (HDCA) was founded to promote research using and developing capabilities paradigm.

## DELIMITING CONCEPTUAL BOUNDARIES

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Capabilities and functionings are the two core concepts of capabilities and human development approach. Capabilities are the set of real opportunities a person possesses to “achieve functioning’s that he or she has reason to value” (Sen, 1995, p.5). Functionings are “the various things a person may value doing or being” (Sen, 1999, p.75). Functioning constitutes an inalienable component of capabilities concept, as it gives an end point to the idea of valuable opportunities. Nussbaum defines functioning as:

an active realization of one or more capabilities. Functionings need not be especially ... ‘muscular’. Enjoying good health is a functioning, as is lying peacefully in the grass. Functionings are beings and doings that are the outgrowths or realizations of capabilities. (Nussbaum, 2011, p.25)

Consensually important functionings are to be nourished, to have shelter, to enjoy friendships. In SV, they can be materialised in being an elite player or just enjoy movement, if such things are assessed as important by the person herself.

Martha Nussbaum considers three different levels of capabilities (2011):

- i) Combined Capabilities are “the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social and economic environment, what Sen calls capabilities or substantive freedoms” (p.20).
- ii) Internal capabilities: “characteristics of a person (personality traits, intellectual and emotional capacities, states of physical fitness and health, internalized learning, skills of perception and movements)....trained or developed traits and abilities, developed, in most cases, in interaction with the social, economic, familial and political environment” (p.21);
- iii) Basic capabilities: “the innate faculties of the person that make later development and training possible” (p.24).

Although the distinction between internal and combined capabilities is not precise, it is however useful in identifying more accurately social causes of deprivation.



Societies may fail to provide conditions for the early development of internal capabilities through education, for instance, even though they might offer apparent opportunities to exercise them. For instance, when a country possesses state-of-the-art sport facilities for people with disabilities, but fails to provide sporting opportunities in mandatory education, it is denying conditions to develop basic and internal capabilities in the first place. If it provides all the educational opportunities but does not offer conditions for its sustainability, it is failing in the opportunities for combined capabilities. For Nussbaum, all human beings must be given conditions to stand above a minimal threshold of combined capabilities, independently of their basic capabilities (2000, 2006, 2011).

Both concepts, capabilities and functionings, are essential criteria to evaluate social contexts. Imagine a country that offers to its citizens wonderful sport facilities, outdoor circuits and good motor education, but only a few citizens actually engage in any practice of physical activity. If the extensive literature on the benefits of physical activity is right, this cannot be considered a good society, because opportunities do not translate in practical outcomes. On the other hand, capabilities give primacy to freedom of choice. Imagine that the same country makes exercise compulsory. It cannot be considered a good society in that it does not respect the freedom of choice, of intrinsic moral value. For this reason, in assessing capabilities, both capabilities and functionings need to be granted attention.

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## ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES

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For a better understanding of capabilities approach potential as a theoretical and methodological framework, this section provides a description of its essential principles, while relating them to disability sport.

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## EQUITY

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In this approach, equity means each person possesses equal freedom to live the "kind of life he or she has reason to value" (Sen, 1999, p.87). Thus, equity demands singleness, that is, differentiated attention to individual or group specificities, especially to those who may be in a position of social disadvantage (Wolf & Shalit, 2007). Such differentiation is however completely opposite to a paternalistic or

charitable "ethos", still evident in disability sport (Howe, 2008b). Instead, it must be conceived as the fulfilment of the moral obligation to support the inalienable entitlement of each human being to dignity (Nussbaum, 2006, 2011; Sen, 2009). Embracing human diversity is defended as fundamental to guarantee equity "...recognising the many varieties of impairment, disability, need, and dependence that 'normal' human beings experience, and thus the very great continuity between 'normal' lives and those of people with lifelong impairments" (Nussbaum, 2006, p.99). Equity implies differentiation because different individuals need distinct types and amount of resources in order to achieve a similar level of capabilities enjoyment.

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### EFFICIENCY

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Efficiency concerns the optimal use of resources to benefit every citizen in their possibilities for capabilities' expansion. It demands a comprehensive awareness of the resources available and of the mechanisms that influence its conversion into capabilities (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009; see also fig. 5.1). For example, under this principle, the option to heavily fund elite sport may be inefficient if this strategy is detrimental to the development of meaningful sporting opportunities for all citizens.

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### AGENCY, FREEDOM AND PARTICIPATION

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Agency, participation and freedom are intersected key elements of capabilities approach. Agency "refers to a person's ability to pursue and realize goals that she values and has reason to value" (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009, p.31). It implies the possession of political and material power to influence the context in which one lives:

Whether at the level of policy making or implementation, this principle [agency] implies that people need to be involved at every stage, not merely as beneficiaries but as agents who are able to pursue and realize goals that they value and have reason to value. (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009, p.30)

Freedom to choose is enacted through agency but agency also needs conditions of freedom to develop. For both Sen (1999, 2009) and Nussbaum (2006, 2011) a good life is not possible without freedom. They defend that freedom incorporates not only negative freedom (non-interference from others) but also positive freedom, that is, real conditions to exercise agency, to live life according to one's own reasoning.

In sporting contexts, negative freedom is guaranteed for instance when opportunities to participate are available for people with impairments. Individuals have the freedom to engage in sport or to choose not to do so. However, this type of freedom is insufficient because it does not account for the numerous obstacles that people with impairments may have to face in order to participate (French & Hainsworth, 2001). Promoting positive freedom implies a comprehensive awareness of possible barriers to agency and participation and a valorisation of that participation at any moment, so that people can participate as true agents and not as mere beneficiaries.

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### SUSTAINABILITY AND COMPREHENSIVENESS

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Development is understood in this approach as a never-ending process, incompatible with short-term strategies. To be effective, development (capabilities' expansion) must be sustainable within a reasonable time frame. A nation cannot be considered developed if, for instance, the present state of affairs compromises the enjoyment of similar levels of development for future generations. Applying this principle to sport, decisions on whether to concentrate resources in events of a cyclical nature such as a Paralympics for instance, have to be balanced against its effects on the long-term sports' provision. On the other hand, at a personal level, the level of commitment demanded to participate in the Paralympics and the enjoyed benefits have to be evaluated against predictable long-term consequences.

Besides a temporal quality (sustainability), capabilities expansion also involves a degree of breadth (comprehensiveness). A "good life" is dependent on the enjoyment of capabilities in a spectrum of dimensions, irreducible to each other. Thus, abundance in one dimension cannot compensate for deprivation on another. A good income cannot compensate for the lack of meaningful relations with others, just as a high level of public security cannot compensate for the lack of political freedom. Wolf and Shalit (2007) suggest that true functionings and capabilities only occur when their enjoyment does not compromise the enjoyment and expansion of other important functionings or capabilities. The comprehensiveness principle demands similar attention to the whole spectrum of relevant capabilities, and the identification of positive and negative interactions between them. In sporting contexts this means that the impact assessments ought to consider several capabilities. If, for instance, by

participating in sport, one reduces significantly the scope and depth of meaningful relationships, even though certain aspects of health are improved, then comprehensiveness is compromised. In short, capabilities' assessment must consider the predictable degree of the sustainability of capabilities enjoyment but also its comprehensiveness (considering a whole set of individual relevant capabilities).

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### HUMAN RIGHTS AND ETHICAL INDIVIDUALISM

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Human rights approaches were critical tools in creating a legal and institutional backdrop in the defence of dignity and to guarantee public visibility in cases of blatant failures. Human rights legislation and correspondent discourses in international policy (e.g. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) may have induced a collective delusion that because conventions were ratified, rights are automatically respected, ultimately detracting from identifying violations to these same rights (Lang, 2009). A Capabilities approach confers central importance to the intrinsic value of human rights but goes further than human rights perspectives by stressing the instrumental value of civil and political rights (Alexander, 2008; Baylies, 2002; Deneulin & Shahani, 2009) for the enhancement of human capabilities.

Human rights principles delineate the normative ethical framework in which the concept of a life worthy of human dignity is articulated. They enact the idea of a basic set of rights and liberties that every citizen must enjoy as inalienable features of the human condition. This *ethical individualism*, that is, the focus on the individual (not groups) as the ultimate unit of moral concern is critically important to protect socially marginalised people. It stipulates that each person ought to be considered as an end in herself, therefore individual rights cannot be compromised to benefit groups' interests. Because people with impairments are quite vulnerable to manipulation especially at the hands of some professional groups where existence depends on the maintenance of their dependency (cf. p.35), it is of the utmost importance to investigate this principle in disability sport contexts. Particularly in team sport contexts, ethical individualism may be difficult to sustain because the individual needs are often undervalued to the benefit of the whole team.

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## CAPABILITIES AS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL CONSTRUCT

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Although capabilities are individual-based criteria for human development and quality of life assessments, this approach grants considerable attention to the contextual conditions in which they are forged. In fact, the effectiveness of this approach in advancing human development goals depends largely on the understanding of the myriad of contextual factors conditioning opportunities each person possesses to do and be what she values, as Nussbaum (2006) and Sen (1999, 2010) emphasise:

What people can positively achieve is influenced by economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers, and the enabling conditions of good health, basic education and the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives. The institutional arrangements for these opportunities are also influenced by the exercise of people's freedoms, through the liberty to participate in social choice and in the making of public decisions that impel the progress of these opportunities. (Sen, 1999, p.5)

If one accepts, as Mitra (2006) proposes, that disability expresses capabilities' deprivation, then the same combination of factors constructing disability also shape opportunities for capabilities development. The next diagram, a variation of Figure 2.1 (p.29), illustrates this coincidence, while presenting the relevant SV contextual realms to be considered in assessing the personal capabilities of SV players with impairments. With personal capabilities positioned at the centre of the triangle, the figure illustrates the relationship between capabilities expansion and reduction of disability factors and vice versa.

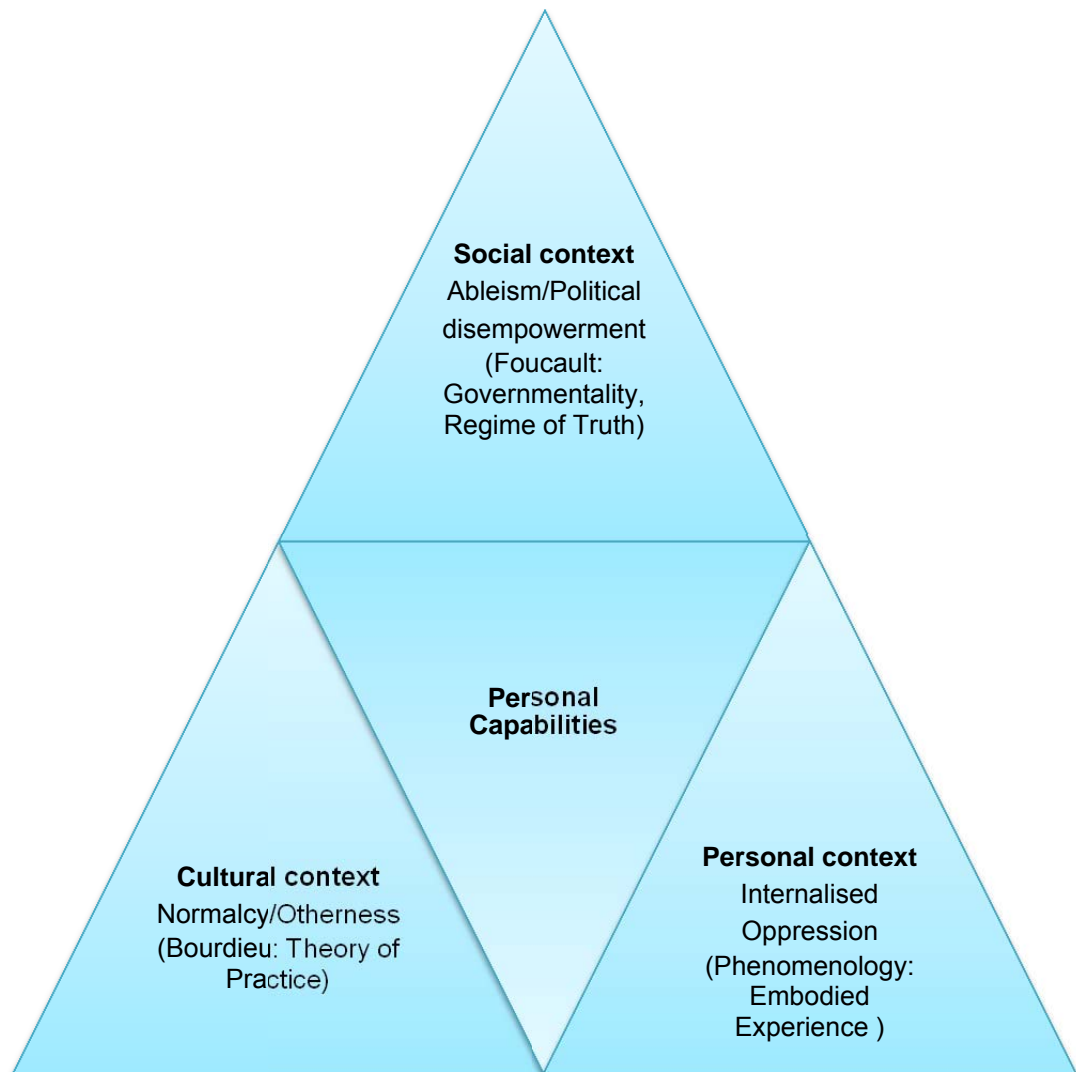


Figure 4.1. *Contextual realms of personal capabilities of people with impairments. Main obstacles theoretical contributions for its analysis in the present study.*

#### OPTING FOR NUSSBAUM

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Nussbaum outlined a list of central capabilities, which she argues is cross-culturally valid and conditional for a life worthy of human dignity (2006). These capabilities are “core human entitlements that should be respected and implemented by the governments of all nations, as a bare minimum of what respect for human dignity requires” (2006, p.70). The ten areas covered by her list are: Life; Bodily health; Bodily integrity; Senses, imagination and thought; Emotions; Practical reason; Affiliation; Other species; Play and Control over one’s own environment (cf. Appendix

A). By proposing this list, Nussbaum hopes to overcome the influence of power and other bias in the definition of crucial tenets for a dignified human life:

Since what people consider to be valuable and relevant can often be the product of structures of inequality and discrimination and because not all human freedoms are equally valuable, Nussbaum argues that one might need to go beyond the incompleteness of Sen's capability approach so that equal freedom for all can be respected. (Deneulin & Shahani, 2009, p.43)

Additionally, she claims that such cross-cultural and non-metaphysical set of central capabilities offers concrete ethical normative references to what is intrinsically vital for human dignity, while remaining flexible to adapt to particular contexts (Nussbaum, 2000, 2006, 2011). Thus, Nussbaum's list is used in this study as an ethical referent for the claims of the political and moral importance of access of people with impairments to meaningful movement activities. In these terms, the use of the term capabilities always refer to Nussbaum's combined capabilities.

The option for Nussbaum's account of capabilities is also justified by her specific attention to disability. In *Frontiers of Justice*, she allocates two chapters explaining the failure of Rawls' *Theory of Justice* (Rawls, 1971), the "strongest and most convincing theory in the tradition" (2006, p.57), in accommodating disability and explains the ways in which a normative version of capabilities approach can override it. In simple terms, the social contract at the base of Rawls' theory implies that the parties choosing and for whom the principles of justice are chosen are "free, equal and independent" (Nussbaum, 2006, p.25). This criterion, Rawls suggests, excludes people with impairments from the initial choice of basic political principles. Besides contradicting the moral equality of every person, this exclusion defers the consideration of their needs and interests to later stages of justice, making them dependent on the benevolence of others. In his view, because people with impairments are not equally productive they cannot enjoy the same rights and duties as other citizens.

Nussbaum demonstrates how capabilities approach can override this and other flaws, supporting her arguments with an Aristotelian conception of human being as a "political animal"<sup>22</sup>. If a list of basic entitlements is enforced, the responsibility of

providing dignified life conditions for people with impairments can no longer be a charitable option but rather a moral imperative of just societies.

What then, is the added value of Nussbaum perspective of capabilities in connection with disability issues? Nussbaum's proposal possesses a more immediate potential for political effectiveness than Sen's perspective. Among the several strengths of her normative and prescriptive proposal, four can be stressed:

- i) Focus on the singleness, yet moral equality, of each human being and on the moral obligation of societies to offer the conditions for each of the ten central capabilities to be enjoyed up to a minimum threshold by every single person, independently of his or her idiosyncrasies<sup>23</sup>;
- ii) Less permeability to issues of power and omission (for instance, the neglect of issues concerning social minorities or the least empowered);
- iii) Stronger commitment with multidimensionality, since all central capabilities are considered essential for human dignity;
- iv) The provision of a universal language with potential to generate overlapping consensus on which "objects of values" are required for a dignified life. It facilitates the establishment of politics, strategies and projects aiming at the expansion of critical capabilities; it ultimately increases the potential impact of its application by providing a common language for comparative assessments.

For its importance as an ethical compass, Nussbaum's perspective decisively informs this research, specifically in the identification of relevant capabilities within SV context. There is nevertheless some fragility in the application of Nussbaum's list. While claiming that defining a minimum threshold is essential, she does not offer any method to determine it. Instead she stresses its open-ended character and adaptability: "Indeed, part of the idea of the list is its *multiple realizability*; its members can be more concretely specified in accordance with local beliefs and circumstances" [author's italic] (2000, p.70). Since in the present research assessment is based upon the expansion or contraction of central capabilities, this threshold does not need to be determined. Obviously, it is accepted that having



relevant capabilities expanded is per se positive, whereas its contraction is detrimental for individual development.

Another difficulty in Nussbaum's approach is the absence of advice on how to solve value conflicts when the expansion of some capabilities is implicated in the contraction of others (Alkire, 2002). While, theoretically one agrees that each central capability must be developed up to a certain level excluding the possibility of trade-offs among them, it is important to recognise that in practice, these conflicts do occur and require appropriate ethical decisions. Because this is a list created for political application by state governments, when such tensions compromise minimum thresholds, it is reasonable to think that it is the state's responsibility to solve them. When these conflicts happen above the threshold, it seems appropriate to suggest they should be solved in first instance by the person, through the exercise of practical reason. This is congruent with the critical value assigned to agency and self-determination in capabilities approach. At another level, when and if these conflicts involve a community then they may need to be solved, as Sen defends (2009), through participatory processes that eventually lead to a consensual (or partial) agreement. Similar tensions identified in the context of this research are examined in chapter 8.

### CRITICISM OF CAPABILITIES APPROACH

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One of the criticisms raised against capabilities approach concerns the presumption of the universality of ethical values, specifically rooted in western culture, leading to charges of imperialism (Gasper, 1997). Nussbaum and Sen devote some space to address this problem claiming that capabilities expansion increases choice, without imposing specific functionings. Each person must be offered the freedom to choose between valuable options in life dimensions central for a life worthy of human dignity (see e.g. Nussbaum, 2011, chapter 5 and Sen, 2009). Nussbaum stresses the independence of capabilities approach from any specific religious or metaphysical view, while respecting cultural pluralism. The fact it is grounded in western thinking does not inherently make it unsuited for other cultures. She believes that as a political doctrine capabilities approach possesses qualities to generate an "Overlapping Consensus" on the main conditions of human dignity (2011, p.93).

Another main criticism directed toward capabilities approach is the difficulty in translating its general and complex concepts into empirical indicators, whether in research, implementation of projects or policy. Critics from research areas traditionally anchored in quantitative measurements and “objective” indicators are capabilities’ biggest detractors (Comim, 2008). For them the openness, flexibility, multi-dimensionality, incompleteness, theoretical under-specification and ethical demands of capabilities approach oppose its empirical application. Their core argument is the impossibility of undertake an objective measurement process coherent with these qualities (Srinivasan, 1994; Sugden, 1993) and that, when this is attempted, it inevitably leads to reductionisms of its inherent complexity (Robeyns, 2006).

As Nussbaum notes, the simple fact that something is easier to measure, does not make it more worthwhile than something not easily measurable (cf. Chapter 9). She refer to this as a “fallacy of measurement” in which scientific research often incurs (2011, p.60). But even though capabilities approach has been the target of criticism, the vague and complex nature of capabilities has equally been considered by academics as one of its major strengths, as long as its conceptual richness is preserved in the transposition of theoretical concepts into practice (Chiappero-Martinetti, 2008). Due to its complexity and attention to the interrelation between capabilities and environmental conditions, they are difficult but not impossible to measure. In any case, since academic traditions associate the term “measurement” with quantitative approaches, “assessment” is preferred in this project.

A considerable amount of literature focusing on issues of operationalization, measurement, empirical application of capabilities approach (e.g., Brighthouse & Robeyns, 2010; Comim, Qizilbash, & Alkire, 2008), and empirical research (Alkire, 2002; Anand & Van Hees, 2006; Burchardt & Vizard, 2011) is already developed. In the next section, a small selection of empirical projects using capabilities approach is explored and highlighted potential insights for the present project.

## EMPIRICAL APPLICATIONS OF CAPABILITIES APPROACH

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The criticisms presented in the last section are not without reason, but they can be overcome. Capabilities' richness needs to be translated into "objects of practical value", that is, empirical indicators that express the conceptual richness of the approach (Comim, 2001). How can we empirically apply capabilities? What questions can be formulated? What can we measure? How will people benefit from a practical use of capabilities?

Alkire (2002) applied and developed a qualitative application of capabilities in assessing three small-scale poverty reduction projects. Her first concern was directed to what should count as objects of value for the people being assessed and how they could be determined. After engaging in a comparative exercise of several lists of central human valuable states and actions, she highlights Finnis' method of *practical reasoning* (1980) as an important device to overcome shortcomings in Nussbaum's perspective. That is, a lack of procedural guidelines for implementation at a local level, lack of advice on how to solve disagreements and the dependence on moral judgements (Alkire, 2002). Finnis (1980) claims that human beings tend to act toward what they value the most, so when asked about the fundamental reasons why they do what they do, the answer will uncover "*a discrete heterogeneous set of most basic and simple reasons for action which reflect the complete range of kinds of valuable human states and actions*" [author's italic], in Alkire (2002, p.46). In practical terms, her conceptual work resulted in a participatory methodology in which the subjects of the programs reported and evaluate the positive and negative changes that have occurred since they have been involved in it. These are divided into the most and least relevant changes and were used to create a list of important capabilities in that context.

Alkire's (2002) participatory social assessment methodology is heavily based upon focus groups, using a process of practical reasoning in order to identify the most valued capabilities within the communities studied. In the present study, semi-structured interviewing was preferred, due to the tendency of focus groups to be monopolised by individuals, generally the most empowered and extroverted. Also, the "audience effect" can negatively impact on the honesty of statements because people will say what they think is appropriate within that group (Frediani, n.d). Nonetheless, the validity of practical reasoning in translating abstract capabilities

into meaningful categories suggested by Alkire's work (2002) was considered in the current study (cf. p.80), particularly in the flexible way the interviews were conducted.

In *Disadvantage*, Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) attempted to identify the basic categories of disadvantage through empirical work among new immigrants groups in Britain and Israel. Although the present project is quite distinctive there are a number of theoretical and methodological aspects from their work that are influential. In theoretical terms, Wolff and De-Shalit redefine capabilities as “(*genuine*) opportunities for (*secure*) functionings” [author's italic] (2007, p.37). The adjective “genuine” emphasises that opportunities are only real choices if they do not compromise other opportunities or functionings of similar importance. Although this is implicit in Nussbaum's perspective through her emphasis on the whole set of capabilities, Wolff and De-Shalit stress the importance of understanding to what extent choices are truly genuine, paying attention to the interrelations between concurrent functionings and capabilities. This specification of the concept is akin to the comprehensiveness principle outlined earlier (cf. p.52). These authors also highlight the importance of the security of functionings, that is, a person's “prospect of sustaining and achieving a level of functioning should they attempt to do so” (2007, p.72). Security is then affected in two ways, by the level of security of the functioning itself and by the consequences on other functionings. Nussbaum corroborates the importance of considering security in capabilities enjoyment: “The security perspective means that for each capability we must ask how far it has been protected from the whims of the market or from power politics” (2011, p.43). This quality objectifies the sustainability principle presented earlier in the chapter (cf. p.52). Both comprehensiveness and sustainability are critical aspects in assessing capabilities in SV community in the UK. For instance, if expanding e.g. social prestige means compromising relations with friends (affiliation), to what extent can it be considered a real opportunity? Moreover, what guarantee exist that capabilities' enjoyment can endure over a reasonable period of time?

In methodological terms, Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) start by testing the validity of Nussbaum's list within the context under study, through a process of *reflective equilibrium* by which different actors within the field reflected and discussed each

capability, using semi/structured interviews to ignite that process. That way, they were able identify as essential some capabilities which are absent from Nussbaum's list, namely "doing good to others" and "to be able to express gratitude" (p.50).

To finish the chapter I present a summary of how disability has been framed within human development and capabilities discussion, strengthening the argument for its use within the context of SV and disability sport more generally.

### CAPABILITIES APPROACH AND DISABILITY

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The connection between disability, human development and capabilities approach have been forged as a way to counteract the endemic deprivation associated with life with impairment (Baylies, 2002; Burchardt, 2004; Mitra, 2006; Nusbaum, 2006). Baylies (2002) for instance, emphasises the importance of addressing disability as a human development problem. Since impairment influences the individual potential for capabilities expansion, she argues that the political institutions of states and communities play an important preventive role "making sure that impairment does not disable" (2002, p.728); or, at least, to "assist all to be fully functioning" (p.735). While acknowledging that impairment and disability can affect individual capabilities, Baylies (2002) argues that the physical body cannot be the "only baseline from which humanity and human capability is judged"(p.737). That is, it cannot justify lowered capability expectations for people with disabilities, nor can the body be used to frame disability as "less than human". As such, the proposal of a minimum threshold for fundamental capabilities does not imply the imposition of human norms. On the contrary, it defends equality in the enjoyment of similar capabilities, irrespectively of human idiosyncrasies. Such a goal implies taking account "of the variability of human experience and competencies rather than attempt to establish rigid norms of bodily or mental functioning" (Baylies, 2002, p.737).

Burchard (2004) adds to Baylies' argument by stressing how a capabilities approach focuses primarily on general functionings rather than on the means to achieve those functionings: On mobility instead of walking, on good nutrition rather than on a cooked breakfast or on communication rather than talking. This way, "normalised" perspectives of these capabilities are completely dismissed. Applying the same

argument in disability sport contexts this would mean for instance, being able to play volleyball even if this is done sliding on the floor instead of running and jumping. Moreover, Burchardt (2004) highlights capabilities usefulness as complementary to the social model of disability. The capabilities approach shares with the social model interest in the environmental factors of disability, but it denies that material resources alone can provide a good metric to assess disadvantage associated with disability. For Burchardt, capabilities approach supersedes the social model in that it proposes a universally defined (consensual) comprehensive set of objects of value in which to base assessment. Because capabilities emphasise choice, empowerment and self-determination, a focus on capabilities expansion can direct policy efforts to increase opportunities instead of imposing goals defined by a “normal” majority.

Using a capabilities approach, Mitra (2006) conceptually defines disability as a deprivation of functionings (actual realizations) and/or as deprivation of capabilities (opportunities for choice), a distinction that may be critical for the practical efficacy of programmes and policies. She concludes her analysis stating that employment and standard of living are the two essential areas to guarantee basic conditions for the expansion of other capabilities for people with impairments. Considering disability in these terms would certainly prevent excessive attention to the correction or cure of impairment and weaken its identification with disability.

This brief account of the literature on capabilities and disability highlights and reinforces important arguments sketched in previous chapters. First, thinking of disability as capabilities deprivation helps frame it as a universal human development issue therefore it concerns and affects everyone. Secondly, capabilities and functionings are concepts with vital operational value in assessing both personal well-being and social equality. Because human difference is understood as a feature of human richness, this approach devalues “normalised” views of good life, focusing on ethically valid ends of development. In so doing, it directs attention to the several layers of contextual factors that construct disability, hence increasing the political effectiveness potential of emancipatory projects.

## SUMMARY

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As a paradigm for development and social justice, capabilities approach can be summarily defined as a theoretical and methodological normative framework that repositions people at the centre of concern. The approach proposes that human development should aim to expand capabilities, the plural opportunities (capabilities) and realizations (functionings) of the things people value to be and do (within reason). “Capabilities approach” and not human development and capability approach will be the expression used throughout the rest of this thesis, because it emphasises that distinct values such as “health, bodily integrity, education and other aspects of human lives cannot be reduced to a single metric without distortion” (Nussbaum, 2011, p.18). Capabilities are plural in nature.

By emphasising opportunities, a prominent place is then given to personal agency in this approach. Capabilities are not to be imposed, but to be made available in the form of valuable opportunities to choose. Moreover, this approach assigns equal importance to the realisation of those opportunities, to the ethically valid things people are really able to achieve (functionings) in their lives (Nussbaum, 2011). When used to assess and study disability, the use of capabilities approach allows for a focus on each individual situation, without incurring in “normalising” practices. Disability and capabilities can actually be understood as the reverse of each other. In other words, disability only occurs when the person with impairments is deprived of opportunities to enjoy central capabilities. Thus, expanding capabilities is to diminish disability and vice versa.

In short, the connection between sport, capabilities and disability is instrumental to prove and strengthen moral value of disability sport both as a human right and as a means to promote individual and collective development, in consonance with principles of human dignity.

## CHAPTER 5 . THE RESEARCH PROCESS: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

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In this chapter, the methodological options and decisions undertaken during the research process are described and explained, introduced by the core ontological and epistemological assumptions in which they are grounded. To contextualise these methodological considerations it is perhaps useful to revisit the main purpose of this research (cf. p.3): *to describe and assess the impact of participation in SV in the lives (capabilities) of (eligible) players with impairments in the UK.*

### ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

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#### BEYOND OBJECTIVISM AND RELATIVISM

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Is there a “reality” beyond the subject and their interpretation/perception of it?

The different possibilities of answering this question position the available social science paradigms on a continuum marked in one extreme by a positivistic paradigm and on the other by a participatory paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p.170). The former is characterised by ontological objectivism, as it considers that reality is “out there” to be discovered. In the latter, reality is socially and culturally constructed, not existing independently from individuals and groups, characteristic of a relativistic ontological position.

This research is grounded in a conciliatory perspective between these two extremes as both ontological perspectives, objectivistic and relativistic, are considered to be partially true. This paradigmatic position is neither complete objectivism, in that it does not assume reality as a clear discernible object; nor of complete relativism, as it does not consider reality to be exclusively and nothing more than a subjective and/or social construction. The first stance ignores the fact that we, all sentient beings, are prisoners of our own phenomenological circumstances, therefore pure objectivity is impossible to reach; the second overlooks the possibility that reality might “be” something more than what is reachable by human perception. As Heidegger (1962)



notes, knowledge is ultimately interpretation grounded in ones' own embodied experience and no one can escape that epistemological limitation.

This conciliatory ontological perspective possess similarities with a critical realistic position in that it assumes a “structured, differentiated, stratified and changing” world (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002, p.5) and a commitment to social change coherent with capabilities multidimensionality and complexity. Since the ultimate goal of the capabilities approach is to enhance human development, both the structural (more objective) and the agential (more subjective) aspects of social reality ought to be addressed. This mission implies navigating between, in and through both the *objective* and *subjective* ontological poles of reality.

Though accepting that scientific accounts are always and inevitably partial, this research is undertaken with robust faith in the ability of social science to provide reliable and valid accounts of social phenomena, in such a way that may guide human agency towards a more equitable world for all its citizens.

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#### BEYOND POSITIVISM/ INTERPRETIVISM

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Can an “objective” description of reality be provided?

In parallel with the ontological distinction objectivism/relativism stands the binary positivism/interpretivism. When/if reality is assumed to be “out there” to be discovered; then the aim of science is to discover it, to explain it. In a positivistic epistemological position, the mission of scientific enterprise is thus to find and present the “natural” empirically observable laws of the social world, in the most possible “value-free” fashion (Bryman, 2008, p.13). Alternatively, the interpretivistic position defends the claim that reality is multiple in its forms therefore knowledge can merely offer reliable but partial interpretations of it, which can never be assumed as perfect translations of *truth*. Similarly to the ontological perspective, a position of epistemological conciliation between these two opposite perspectives has been attempted in this study. Although the research methods used are mainly qualitative and strongly grounded in researcher’s interpretation of reality, this approach relies on its potential to generate an authentic and trustworthy account of reality.

The present project endeavours to assess the impact of SV on the capabilities of athletes with impairments, without ever claiming to offer the only possible interpretation of reality or that this research may be faithfully replicated in other contexts. Similarly, the identification of possible constraints and facilitators at several levels of social reality draws a particular description of reality and they are not presented as causal mechanisms. In these terms, the present project can be classified as exploratory/descriptive more than as causal/explicative. As in a critical realist perspective, the ultimate goal is to promote positive change and social and human development. Nevertheless, unlike critical realism, it does not aim to offer causal explanations but rather a reliable social and cultural account that may assist in shaping action leading to positive social change.

In brief, this research purposively refuses to follow any specific epistemological or methodological dogma, rather it dialogically engages with multiple perspectives that help answering the research questions posed. As Green (2007) states “The point is to see not who wins, but what can be learned, one from the other” (p.27). The remaining pages of this chapter will report and justify the steps taken throughout the research process after a brief examination of the inherent complexity of capabilities’ assessments.

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## ASSESSING CAPABILITIES

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### ETHICAL INDIVIDUALISM AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONTEXT

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The normative departing point of any empirical application of capabilities approach is that any social arrangement must be primarily evaluated relative to its ability to promote people’s freedom to achieve valued functionings. In other words, assessment must verify if opportunities are valuable and sufficient and whether or not each person is freely realizing some of these opportunities. Such attention to individual cases (cf. p.53 ) ensures that minorities are not overshadowed by the use of aggregate indicators (Nussbaum, 2000, 2006; Sen, 1995, 1999, 2009). Although necessarily individualized, this process cannot rely on individual statements alone to minimise the possible effect of individual adaptive preferences. Because individuals develop "preferences that simply adapt to the low level of living one has come to

accept" (Nussbaum, 2006, p.342), they may not be aware of their real possibilities and rights (cf. p.15). For instance, people with disabilities often internalise that sporting activities are neither accessible nor useful or adequate for them.

On the other hand capabilities approach moves beyond individuals. As Nussbaum notes, capabilities "are not just abilities residing inside a person, but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social and economic environment" (Nussbaum, 2011, p.20). Hence, the personal, cultural and environmental levels of social reality need to be analysed altogether so that possible constraints and facilitators to capabilities' expansion can be identified. Sen distinguishes between "personal heterogeneities"; "diversities in the physical environment"; "variations in the social climate and differences in relational perspectives" (2010, p.255) categorising the factors that may interfere in the conversion of economic goods in actual capabilities. Robeyns (2005) distinguishes between social mechanisms and personal factors as influential in the conversion of goods into personal capabilities (Figure 5.1).

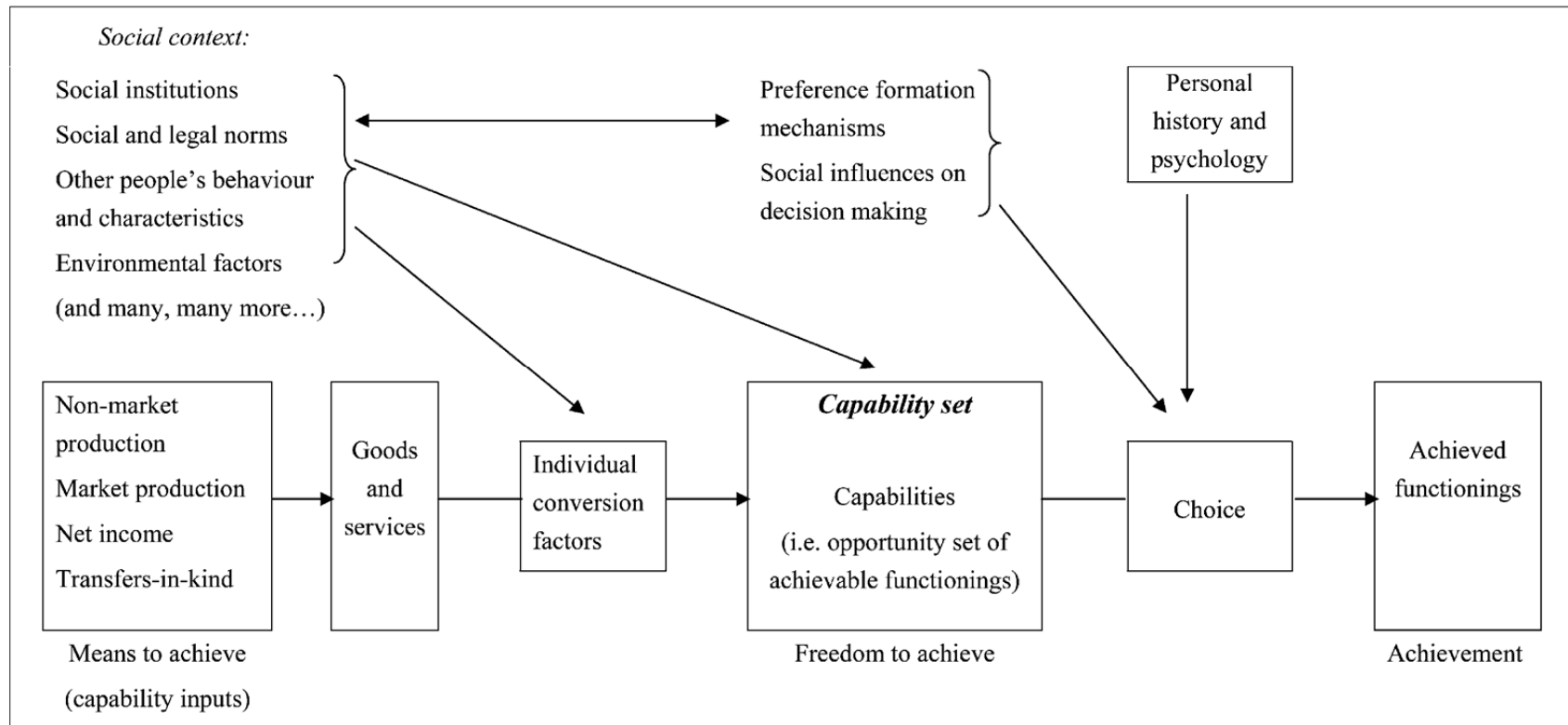


Figure 5.1. A stylised non-dynamic representation of a person's capability set and her social and personal context. From Robeyns, 2005, p.98.

In accordance with the intricate co-dependency between capabilities development and its contextual conditions, the analysis and interpretation of data entailed a comprehensive examination of the social and cultural SV context and of personal circumstances of players with impairments. The process of selecting particular areas of focus in each of these realms drew strongly upon the work of disability studies, which identified traditional and persistent disability factors (cf. chapter 2).

In the environmental realm, such an analysis implied special attention to expressions of ableism and political disempowerment, for which Foucault's examination of governmentality processes was instrumental. At the cultural level, values, beliefs and practices were explored in relation to the reinforcement or dissipation of traditional categories of "normalcy" and "otherness", for which Bourdieu's practice-theory provided theoretical assistance. On the personal level, it was essential to understand how SV practice counteracted the effect of internalised oppression in the formation of personal life goals preferences and in sporting participation more specifically, to which phenomenology has provided theoretical and methodological support. At the conflation of all these realms, personal capabilities are then expanded or contracted (see figure 4.1).

Assessing capabilities demands a primary focus on the lived reality of athletes with impairments. However the environmental, cultural and personal realms intermesh, interact and co-construct both disability and capabilities (cf. Figure 8.1). Since the ultimate purpose of this research is the improvement of conditions for capabilities expansion, a simultaneous attention to both capabilities and their contextual factors is essential. Obviously, this double concern represents a methodological challenge. The remainder of the chapter explains how this challenge was managed throughout the research process.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

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Assessing sport's impact using a capabilities approach seems to be an original enterprise in sport's research. Pioneering this connection offers new possibilities but also important challenges. Due to its potential to capture the complexity of specific cultural contexts, to engage with different theoretical methodological traditions and combine different methods of data collection and analysis, ethnography was the chosen research strategy. Ethnography is committed to the study of social life outside of a controlled environment. Murchison suggests that its "objects of study are often hard to identify and always subject to change as the result of innovation, conflict and many other factors" (2010, p.4). In this sense, ethnographic projects such as this one, do not often start with a theoretical position from where hypotheses are derived (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) but is generally mutually dependent on theory and data (Silverman, 1985).

The initial phase of research was guided by general open-ended questions, followed by an exploratory, analytical and interpretative process which is better characterised as a combined process of induction/deduction, often termed "abductive" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Blaikie, 2010). The process was initially focused on the way in which the social world was perceived by its members, but the continuous dialogue between ethnographic data and theoretical perspectives produced a level of understanding that hopefully transcends the taken-for-granted knowledge of these social actors.

## METHODS AND PROCEDURES

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Although the research process is divided in four main distinctive moments: Exploring the field; Interview process; Describing and organising data; Analysing, interpreting and writing). These must not be understood as closed and linear, but as phases that continuously overlapped.

### EXPLORING THE "FIELD"

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The "field" metaphor activates several meanings relevant in a social research context. Bourdieu (1984) uses the notion of *social field* (cf. p.18) to describe a social space in

which a specific power dynamic supports its existence as distinct and identifiable by others as such. Specifically Bourdieu suggests a social field is considered as a

field of forces, whose necessity is imposed on agents who are engaged in it, and as a field of struggles within which agents confront each other, with differentiated means and ends according to their position in the structure of the field of forces, thus contributing to conserving or transforming its structure. (Bourdieu, 1998, p.32)

Drawing upon this concept of social field the present research can be situated in the broader social field of sport, disability sport, and more specifically Volleyball and SV fields.

In contrast, the term “field” is used in ethnographic inquiry in a more practical sense. Here the goal is not to describe the field as an external reality, but as a “lived” and “living” space in which a particular culture is enacted is only comprehensible through participation in that same space. This strategy is known as *fieldwork*: “Fieldwork usually requires living with a group of people for extended periods, over one year or more, in order to document and interpret their distinctive ways of life, and the beliefs and values integral to it” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.1). “Exploring the field” is the process of becoming part of the social field under study and this way lays down the foundations for a deeper cultural understanding.

In the next section, my entrance into the SV community and the several roles I have undertaken are presented, as well as the sources and types of data collected. Additional reflections on my personal positionality and on the tensions and difficulties encountered in managing my dual identity as a participant and observer are addressed in Appendix C.

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#### AN ACQUIRED IMPAIRMENT AND MY ENTRANCE IN THE FIELD

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In June 2009, I sent an email to my supervisor in Loughborough, dreading that he would not understand why it was so important to stay in Portugal during the summer and only start my PhD in the autumn of that year. Throughout all my life, my identity and social relationships have developed around volleyball and I was at the time obsessively dedicated to beach volleyball. Luckily, my supervisor did not object my intention so I spent one more summer seriously competing at national volleyball championships.

It happened on a normal summer day. There I was, in the middle of the court, exchanging balls with a few friends. And suddenly, when I turn my body to collect the ball, the bottom half of my leg was stuck in the sand. I knew something had happened: “Well, it hurts, but it will be ok. Some rest and I will be good as new!” But I wasn’t. Several days later I bought a brace for my knee hoping it would take away the pain and return its functionality. It did not work.

Unable to accept my injury, when I started my doctoral studies in the autumn of 2009, I joined the university volleyball 1<sup>st</sup> team, playing as a libero<sup>24</sup>. At the same time, I learnt that there was a SV group in town and I saw this as an opportunity to learn a disability sport that I could develop later in Portugal, using my knowledge and my connections. The idea of helping expand disability sport opportunities was very dear to me, so I started to go to SV sessions as well.

After this, several happy coincidences facilitated my entrance into the field. Some of the people involved in university Volleyball were also VE staff members working on the development of the SV national program. VE had recently (April 2009) been endorsed by the British Volleyball Federation (BVF) with the mission to develop SV in the UK and prepare the national teams for the Paralympics (cf. Chapter 6). My struggle in playing standing volleyball additionally strengthened my interest in SV. I finally played my last standing volleyball match in November 2009 and abandoned the University team.

This story is important not only to document my entrance into the “field” but also to start disclosing aspects of my personal identity that shaped my view of SV field. The fact I had become “disabled” playing “my” sport pushed me to engage more fully with the SV community not only because I was genuinely missing volleyball, but also because I was no longer a “pure” able-bodied individual. For myself and others, my injured embodiment situated me in the liminal space between chronic injury and disability. I believe this fact was instrumental to anchor the legitimacy of my presence in the SV community.

On the academic side of things, this confluence of factors was noticed by my supervisor who identified an invaluable opportunity to conciliate academically valuable research with my drive to expand sport opportunities for people with impairments. We



discussed the potential of the idea for a while so by the time I decided to focus on SV for my research; I had already participated in SV training and competitions and was already known as an injured volleyball player looking for an opportunity to continue enjoying the sport. The official beginning of my ethnographic research can be considered as January 2010, when I informed potential gatekeepers, my team colleagues and other relevant actors of my intention to study the development of SV in UK and its impact on the lives athletes with impairments.

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### ETHNOGRAPHIC ROLES

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My participation in SV community in UK entailed several roles, which I have played concomitantly or at different occasions. My position as an ethnographer can be classified as “participant as observer” (Gold, 1958), since the participative dimension seems to have overlaid observation. I was a club player, a coach, a (unofficial) member of the technical staff for GB women’s team and a volunteer for SV events in the UK. During the first competitive season (2009/2010) I played for one of the SV clubs. I joined in one training session per week and participated in the six NGP tournaments<sup>25</sup>. Occasionally during that year, I was also invited by VE representatives to events where SV was being promoted or where players were being recruited (Amputee Games, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 2009; 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2010, Stoke Mandeville Stadium; Paralympic Potential Day, Sheffield, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2010), among other minor promotional events. The first year of my ethnographic involvement in the field constituted a preliminary stage essential to build a relatively stable and comprehensive platform of knowledge, understanding and integration in the community.

At the end of my first year of research, I decided to offer my services as a coach to one of the SV national centres<sup>26</sup>. Various reasons influenced my decision: my uneasiness with what I perceived as a frail quality of coaching at grassroots level; my genuine will in developing the sport, but, more importantly, the opportunity to experience/observe SV from a different perspective. This experience lasted from August 2010 up to March 2011. During this time, I organised and lead SV weekly training sessions (once a week) and managed the team during the NGP (six full-day competitions). My role as a player became secondary, although occasionally when needed, I still played for the team. It was

also during this competitive season that I participated more regularly in the GB women's preparation, in part due to the lack of available players. After the World championships in USA (10<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> July 2010), I started to be invited to assist in the training of the women's GB team.



*Picture 5.1. Sitting Volleyball GB programme, male and female teams and official and unofficial staff (November 2011). Courtesy of ©Andrew Skinner.*

During the two last seasons (2011/2012 and 2012/2013) I returned to my first year routine, training and playing for my local club. In spite of this, I continued to be in contact with the GB players and staff mainly during the NGP's. At the time of writing, I continue to be part of the SV community, playing for my club and communicating regularly with friends and informants, so my ethnographic enterprise continues to inform my analysis. To "be around" immediately after the Paralympic Games has been especially important to assess how the community was affected by the Paralympics (cf. chapter 8).

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#### WHAT? WHERE? WHO? HOW?

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Hammersley & Atkinson (1995) alert us to important decisions that need to be taken once access to the field is guaranteed: Where and what to observe, with whom and what

to talk about and how and what to record. In this research these decisions were based on my on-going experience as well as on capabilities approach and disability studies literature. What to observe comprised all the domains of Nussbaum's central capabilities and what I perceived as important contextual aspects. When I started my fieldwork, observational criteria were therefore quite broad. I basically tried to observe and document everything that could be important later on: the physical space, personal interactions between members of the community including myself and my own reactions, feelings and thoughts; routines and abnormal behaviours and so on and so forth. After several weeks, I was in the position of identifying different roles, social dynamics and sub-cultures within the community. I was able to plan the events where I wanted to be and who it was important to approach. In order to get a more detailed knowledge of the club environment, I also decided to visit as many clubs as possible. During those visits, I participated in their practices and interviewed some members. For reasons beyond my own control, I could not visit all the existing clubs, but I had the opportunity to meet and talk with representatives from all clubs in the UK during the NGP's.

On another front, my participation in the GB training camps was essential to access to the national GB program. In total, I have participated in four full training weekends as an unofficial member of staff, which allowed me to observe the men's team and the whole GB programme group (cf. Picture 5.1). At the beginning, my presence was seen as helpful. As the GB program progressed to more decisive phases, around the middle of 2010/2011 season, several conditions conflated to compromise the maintenance of my participation in this particular setting. After I had already done several interviews with players, it probably became evident to some institutional personnel that I was trying to access "sensitive" areas. This provoked what I perceived to be a colder attitude from some staff members towards my presence in the GB activities. I responded to this perception by reassuring my gatekeepers that all research findings would be shared and that I would be available to present these results to the community as well as to discuss any matter or concern at any time. However, as the preparation for the Paralympics intensified and all the important technical roles were being filled, my presence became redundant and I stopped being invited to GB events. My last participation in GB team activities was in July 2011, but I kept observing the GB program, by remaining in touch

with some players and following social media communications, press and internet releases.

The specific sub-group, constituted by the full-time players who lived at Roehampton University was the most difficult to access as they became progressively more isolated throughout the study. Still, while I was involved with the GB women's team, I occasionally joined the training sessions at Roehampton University, spending some time in that environment and interviewing some of the athletes living there. Besides the "practice-community" (cf. Endnote 9) being formed, I was also interested in the way the volleyball institutions were developing SV, recruiting people and promoting the sport, therefore my participation in events like the Amputee Games, Potential Paralympic days and SV Awareness days were additionally important to observe how the promotion and marketing of the sport was being conducted.

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#### ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA

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The data from participant observation was recorded in field notes. Here my experience of volleyball becomes important as the phenomenological experience of playing the game put me in a more legitimate stance to understand what it "feels like" to be a SV player and therefore in a better position to interpret and analyse facts, events and statements. This included all experiential dimensions- physically, socially and emotionally. As Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) note, the researcher's interpretation is more accurate if there is some ground of common knowledge between him/her and the object of study.

SV community was a world open to everybody who could move while sat on the floor and was willing to participate. Like everyone else, I was a beginner. By experiencing the game at this very early stage of development, I shared and retained its pleasures and pains; its challenges and rewards; its sensations and unspoken meanings. I experienced movement in a way that triggered a new awareness of my own body, which cannot be completely dissimilar from the experience of players with impairments. It is now obvious to me that the most important data I have collected was this lived experience of the game, stored in my embodied memory in the form of vivid images, sensations,

emotions and thoughts. These have shaped the way I interacted, interpreted and communicated along the research path.

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### METHODOLOGICAL OUTCOMES OF THE EXPLORING PHASE

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The end of the “exploring” phase of the research was marked by a sense of stability and increased personal comfort in my position as an actor in the field. Once the boundaries for my participation became more clear and I knew better what I could and could not do, what avenues could be explored and who should and could be approached, I was in the position re-evaluate the initial plan and decide more confidently on the next research strategies. At the end of the 2009/2010 competitive season, I took up my role as a volunteer coach where I thought that a leadership role of this nature would help me acquire the social capital I needed in order to benefit from trustworthy collaboration with other actors in the field. After the start of 2010/11 season, and enjoying of a social kudos associated with my position as a relatively successful coach of a team exclusively composed by (not especially athletic) men; I started to contact people and clubs and schedule visits and personal interviews. The more practical outcomes of this stage was the construction of the semi- structured interview guide (cf. Appendix E); the selection of interviewees; the decision to construct and apply a SV questionnaire and the identification of additional data sources. My position within the SV community and its institutions allowed me to apply a diversity of data collection methods: phenomenological experience; semi-structured interviewing; ethnographic notes; informal conversations; photographic and video documentation and access to all sorts of written sources, essential for the posterior triangulation of data sources.

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### THE INTERVIEWING PROCESS

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The interviewing process was a true dialectic method shared by the researcher and interviewees. Using Kvale’s words, it constituted “an *inter view* [sic], an interchange of views between two person conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (1996, p.2). The informal interviewing resulting from my participation in the field of research was registered in field notes. All the semi- structured interviews were conducted between January and November of 2011, during my second year of involvement in the SV

community, and were recorded electronically and in verbatim transcripts. This process is described in the following sections.

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### THE INTERVIEW SAMPLE

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The selection of interviewees followed a strategy of purposeful sampling, according to my assessment of the individual's relevance and specific role in the field. I tried to cover the SV community: people of different ages; both genders, different roles; people with and without impairments (acquired and congenital); different levels of sports experience; from different clubs, national teams and Roehampton group. Lead by the concern of gathering information on a myriad of contextual factors, I have also selected people with different institutional responsibilities to be interviewed. The diversity of roles was facilitated by the fact that often the interviewees played more than one role in the field. In total, 37 semi structured interviews were conducted involving members of the SV community. The only inclusion criterion was that the interviewee had to have been involved in SV for at least one year. The sample table (Appendix H) presents the participants' details considered most relevant for the interpretation of data: age, professional status, disability status as referred in the field (D (acquired/congenital impairment); MD and AB); sports experience; role and duration of the interview. Occasionally, one of these elements may be absent from the list to protect participants' anonymity. The first interview was done on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 2011 and the last one on the 28<sup>th</sup> November 2011. The interviews varied in length from 20 minutes to 1hr and 40 minutes.

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### INTERVIEW GUIDE

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The use of semi-structured interviewing in this project pursued two main goals. First, to allow participants to extensively report and reflect on their experiences in SV and secondly, to collect information on capabilities (relevant dimensions, opportunities and functionings) from their perspective.

In order to obtain information that truly reflected the participants' experience, which illuminated non-anticipated themes and issues, the guide for the interview was constructed in a non-directive way, covering broad areas. Patton's (2002) advice on

interviewing for program evaluations offered important guidelines in this respect: give enough space for the exploration of participant's experience, while providing some structure to the conversation; start with more descriptive questions and incorporate a temporal dimension, so that present, past and future are equally covered. As capabilities are the things people value to do and be, this advice was fit for purpose in order to illuminate relevant capabilities, since people tended to spontaneously talk about the most valued aspects of their experience. This guide also followed some of Alkire's recommendations (cf. p.60): a focus on participants' "reasons to do things" (2002, p.226) and on the significant life changes that had occurred since they had become involved in the sport.

Following these general guidelines, the interview guide (Appendix E) was then organised in different parts: description of the personal conditions of involvement in SV; reasons/motivations for involvement; most relevant life changes and its evaluation; the power structure and space for personal participation; identification of critical factors in SV context (strengths and weaknesses); expectations for the future (personal and for the sport) and finally, background demographic information. This guide was the main reference for the players' interviews. The interviews to other SV actors such as officials, coaches and managers privileged some of these aspects more than others, in accordance with their role and expertise. In most of the cases, the main guide was adapted but in some others a new interview guide was produced (cf. Appendices E, F, G).

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## INTERVIEWING PROCEDURES

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The approach to potential interviewees was undertaken during competitions, training or other SV events. When asking for their collaboration, I revealed the general goal of my research, my personal commitment to improving SV, disability sport provision and my interest on personal experiences in SV. The interview schedule and place were chosen by the interviewees in order to assure they were comfortable. The interviews were conducted in diverse places: coffee shops; interviewee's home or working places, training and competition facilities and my own house. When the physical encounter was difficult to set up, the interview was conducted through video call (4) and phone (1).

One or two days prior to the interview date, I contacted each interviewee to confirm the details of the meeting. Prior to the interview, I also gathered available information on his/her personal background and role within the SV field, so that each interview could be tailored to the interviewee. This background information as well as my personal rapport with each interviewee shaped my behaviour during the interview. On each occasion, I started by recalling the general objectives of the research, its potential impact and the specific goals of the interview: to collect participant's personal experiences and opinions on SV. This introduction was also included in the participant's informed consent form, signed before the interview (cf. Appendix D). These were sent in advance to the participants being interviewed online and returned to me by email. Before starting, I also requested permission to audio record the conversation and committed to send a verbatim transcription to the participant. During the interview process, my major concern was to allow the interviewees to freely develop their discourse, whilst keeping conversation centred on the general categories of the interview guide. Before finishing, I always asked the participant if they wanted to add something that was additional importance (Patton, 2002, p.379). I also reiterated the possibility of continuing the conversation through email, phone or any other means in case the person wanted to develop or reformulate any of the issues highlighted. Only three interviewees gave feedback on the interview transcripts, to confirm that the verbatim transcript was an accurate reflection of the interview and offering minor corrections. In many cases, after the formal terminus of the interview, the discussion continued so I registered these additional comments in field notes.

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#### CONSTRUCTION AND APPLICATION OF A SELF- COMPLETION QUESTIONNAIRE

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Qualitative data such as interviews and questionnaires are extremely important to access subjective and community values at the core of capabilities concept. However, relying solely upon qualitative data may increase permeability to the researcher's and participant's bias. More specifically, in relation to interviews, the questionnaire method of data collection eliminates the interviewer's effect (personal reaction towards the interviewer (Bryman, 2008)). To attenuate the effect of this bias and provide an additional data source, a short self-completion questionnaire was produced and applied (cf. Appendix I). The questionnaire includes a cover letter explaining the main goals of



research, the institutional affiliation and the ethical commitments. Combining open and closed questions, the first part of the questionnaire focus upon personal information (e.g. age; gender, type of impairment; sports experience; type of participation), which assisted in the characterisation of the practice-community. In the second part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked to present three main reasons for involvement in SV, answers to which highlighted valued capabilities; and secondly, to point out the three most significant life changes that occurred since the beginning of their involvement, which helped clarifying the impact of SV on their lives.

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### PROCEDURES AND APPLICATION

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The first version of the SV questionnaire was sent to two athletes on my SV team and two work colleagues, who responded and commented on the difficulties encountered. After minor edits, the document was finalized (cf. Appendix I). During the week prior to the last tournament, which would gather all the teams participating in the 2011/2012 GP, I informed VE SV development manager of my intention to distribute the questionnaire and provided him a copy of the document. On the day of the tournament (20<sup>th</sup> March 2011), I personally distributed 80 questionnaires to members of all teams and individuals with different roles in the community. From the 50 questionnaires returned, 46 were analyzable. The information on personal details was analyzed through a descriptive statistical analysis and the answers to the open questions transcribed and grouped according to thematic categories (cf. Appendix J).

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### SECONDARY DATA

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As well as the main data sources already identified, an array of *cultural artefacts*, that is, “dense representations of society and culture” (Murchison, 2010, p.161) provided valuable sources of comparative data. These can be divided in institutional and non-institutional artefacts. The first include all documents emanated from institutional agents (e.g. VE strategic plan, minutes of BVF SV Committee meetings, promotional leaflets, photographs, web pages, etc.). The non-institutional artefacts are those which do not fit into the first category: social media “posts”; documents produced (YouTube videos, photographs) or used by the community (wheelchairs, prosthesis, sport’s equipment) and mass media documents on SV community (e.g. channel 4 *Band of*

*Sisters*). These secondary sources of data not only filled in information gaps but also enlarged the number of angles and perspectives considered in this project, adding to its trustworthiness and authenticity (Bryman, 2008).

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## ORGANISING, DESCRIBING AND ANALYSING DATA

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In order to respect the ethical individualism principle inherent to capabilities approach's, the main premises of an *interpretative phenomenological analysis* were followed in data analysis.

This type of analysis aims to understand how individuals make sense of their own everyday life experiences and provides in-depth interpretation of this phenomenon (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). It implies two main levels of understanding. First, an empathetic understanding, to see what reality looks like from the participant's perspective; and after that an in depth understanding: "analysing, illuminating and making sense of something" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p.36). Though individually centred, the agent is not understood as isolated, but as a person-in-context (Larkin,Watts & Clifton, 2006), aligned with the phenomenological notion of subjective life-world as a symbiotic relation between the agential/experiential subject and its context (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2008).

My particular understanding of subjective life-world and how to capture it was further informed by Bourdieu's theory of practice. For him, the researcher must move beyond the taken-for-granted reality to expose the "unnaturalness" of everyday life experience, uncovering the practical mechanisms that compose the embodied and relational reality of agent's actions and their temporal, material and contextual circumstances. In his words, practical experience constitutes a "dialectical relationship between the objective structures and the cognitive and motivating structures which they produce and which tend to reproduce them" (Bourdieu, 1977, p.83).

The analytical research phase started by focusing on the embodied experience of the main actors -SV players with impairments- in terms of valued capabilities, while attempting to identify and examine important contextual factors.

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## THE SET OF SV RELEVANT CAPABILITIES

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First of all, assessment of capabilities implies the identification of the “doings” and “beings” that people have “reason” to value. Alkire proposes five mechanisms to identify capabilities, presented in table 5.1:

*Table 5.1. Identifying Capabilities and Poverty Dimensions*

I.	Existing data or convention	based on data or conventions that are taken to be authoritative, such as the Human Development Index.
II.	Normative Assumptions	based on informed guesses of researchers or transparent and justified use of normative assumptions such as Maslow or Nussbaum's.
III.	Public “consensus”	based on a legitimate consensus-building processes and subject to participatory evaluations.
IV.	Ongoing deliberative participatory processes,	based on people's values captured through group discussions and participatory analysis.
V.	Empirical evidence regarding people's values	based on expert analysis of people's values from empirical data.

Adapted from Alkire (2007, p.7).

In assessing capabilities in SV context, the selection of the relevant capabilities drew upon the normative approach of Martha Nussbaum (II) and the empirical evidence present in the interviews of SV actors (I), in articulation with disability studies literature and my own experience in the field (V).

Since Nussbaum's list was considered to be the basis of a universal declaration of basic political entitlements, it was unlikely that all of these capabilities were equally relevant in SV. The preliminary analysis of empirical evidence confirmed some of her central capabilities as relevant in UK SV context, while others were excluded and new ones incorporated. The final set of relevant capabilities in SV community and the way Nussbaum's list was adapted is made explicit in appendix A.

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#### INTERVIEW'S AND ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTES ANALYSIS

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Since capabilities are the things the person values to do and be, the identification of the set of relevant capabilities for SV eligible players ought to start with a thorough examination of players' accounts. Although the interviewing process was semi-directed

by Nussbaum's list; it was nevertheless conducted in such a way that encouraged personal contribution and reflection. An initial textual analysis intended to explore this. It consisted in reading and rereading the transcripts, commenting, noting, paraphrasing and interpreting without any predetermined agenda (Smith, Flowers & Larking, 2009, ch.5). At the end of this task, the main topics of the interview, interesting quotes and a preliminary thematic organisation were compiled in a personal interviewee file. Additional information on each player gathered through online sources, websites, or social media were also included. This initial process of analysis cannot be described as purely inductive, as it was theoretically influenced not only by capabilities approach, but also by critical disability studies literature and social theorists such as Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu or phenomenologists such as and Merleau-Ponty.

After the detailed examination of the interview transcript and information related to each eligible SV player, the remaining interview transcripts and field notes were also commented upon and coded. From this textual analysis it was then possible to proceed onto a higher level of abstraction. Through a new revision of the transcripts and comments, and with a comprehensive knowledge of the main data set, the essential quality of the meanings inscribed in the text were then condensed into more concise phrases, highlighting more abstract categories of meaning. This analysis was undertaken with "pen and paper", by annotating comments and notes, by hand, in the margins of the interview transcripts to preserve proximity with participants' whole statements.

The next analytic stage consisted of a more detailed analysis of the product of the previous tasks, connecting the themes identified in each of the transcripts, collating them and finally creating a higher order of themes. This resulted in a preliminary thematic structure of data (table 5.2). In doing so, Nussbaum's definition of central capabilities was reformulated, as presented in table 5.3. The suggestion offered by Wolf and De-Shalit (2007)<sup>27</sup> of "doing good to others" as a relevant capability in poverty contexts, was also considered appropriate in this research context. This task entailed a constant interaction between reader and original text, to confirm that the original meaning had not been corrupted, as recommended by Smith and Osborn (2007): "As a researcher one is drawing on one's own interpretative resources to make sense of what

the person is saying, but at the same time is constantly checking one's own sense-making against what the person actually said" (p.72).

*Table 5.2.* Preliminary list of relevant capabilities for SV eligible players

<b>1. Life</b>	Live life of a normal length in a way that people qualify as satisfactory.
<b>2. Bodily Health</b>	Health, bodily and psychological.
<b>3. Bodily Integrity</b>	Being able to move freely from place to place not only in sport, but in everyday life.
<b>4. Senses, Imagination and Thought</b>	Being confronted with challenges and new realities that stimulate senses, imagination and thought in new ways.
<b>5. Emotions</b>	Experiencing new emotions.
<b>6. Practical Reason</b>	Using the experience of sport to reformulate life goals, and everyday practices with better knowledge of one's own possibilities.
<b>7. Affiliation</b>	Opportunities to develop meaningful relations, where one feels respected and important.
<b>8. Play</b>	Enjoy playing for the sake of it.
<b>9. Control over one's own environment</b>	Opportunities for participation in the way things are happen in SV. Have a political voice.
<b>10. Doing good to others</b>	Opportunities to help others.
<b>New emergent capabilities</b>	
<b>Explore one's own potential.</b>	Opportunities to find out about hidden or unknown skills or abilities.
<b>Forging a positive identity (where impairment is not a negative mark)</b>	Opportunity to experience impairment/disability as something else than just negativity.
<b>Feeling socially equal, valuable and valued by others.</b>	Experience a social context where impairment/disability does not imply social inferiority.

<b>Respect and love one self.</b>	Opportunity for experiences that increase self-esteem.
<b>Expand knowledge of oneself, others, outside world, impairment, disability</b>	Opportunity to learn and increase the informational basis upon which to judge, more realistically, own possibilities and limitations.

In parallel with the central concern for the identification of relevant capabilities in SV context, this first moment of the interviews analysis had as a second goal the preliminary identification of contextual variables potentially important for the conversion of SV goods in personal capabilities (cf. Figure 5.1). A preliminary list of contextual themes is presented in table 5.3.

*Table 5.3.* Preliminary list of contextual factors affecting the conversion of SV goods into personal capabilities

<b>Levels</b>	<b>Themes</b>
<b>Environmental</b>	Institutional, Political and Cultural Context (Disability Sports Policy, Institutional organization) Future/ Structural Sustainability of the Sport History and Development of the Sport Social understanding of Disability, Disability sport and SV SV potential impact in wider society
<b>Cultural</b>	A distinctive sports community ethos (Inclusive sport) Abled, disabled and in between; Volleyball players Actors, social roles and structures of power, influence and participation Doxa: Discourses, Values and Beliefs Habitus, The Practices, behaviours, routines Regulations, formal and informal Relations between different actors Types of capital
<b>Personal</b>	Personal history and context Motivations and Reasons Life Changes (Positive and Negative) Best moments Personal perception of the SV experience (Game and Community) Entrance, Initiation in SV and Type of Participation Me and the Others (Team colleagues and others in SV, family, community and others) Relation with Self Space for Participation and Agency Previous sports experience Perceived significance of SV Disability, impairment, injury Expectations for the Future

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## EXTENSIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

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In the extensive thematic phase of data analysis, the whole data set<sup>28</sup> was classified, organised and coded according to the preliminary thematic structure (Tables 5.2 and 5.3), using NVIVO10 software. During this process several difficulties and challenges emerged. For instance, the empirical relevance of more specific themes could not be captured by the broad articulation of some of Nussbaum's central categories (e.g. *Senses, Imagination and Thought* which was reframed as Knowledge). Other themes revealed to be so indistinctive in empirical data that they were conjoined in one category (*Life, Bodily Health and Bodily Integrity; Emotions and Affiliation*).

From the combination of Nussbaum's central capabilities with new emergent capabilities, a new thematic analysis framework was established. The use of the Data software Nvivo10 facilitated the iterative process of interpretation, coding and recoding, by allowing the merging, division and reorganization of themes and sub-themes, whilst keeping the original coding records for continuous consultation. At this stage, simplification as well as faithfulness to empirical data was the main concern. It implied a re-evaluation of the significance and adequacy of each theme in relation to the whole data set, and a constant re-analysis of the original data sources. After this extensive analysis, a final thematic structure was then defined accordingly. The capabilities selected were assessed as the set that best translates participant's valued capabilities and relatable functionings (Table 5.4).

*Table 5.4.* Set of relevant capabilities for SV eligible players (UK)

<b>1. Life and Bodily Health</b>	Being able to preserve or improve physical and psychological health, living a life one qualifies as satisfactory.
<b>2. Explore one's own potential</b>	Being confronted with challenges that promote the exploration of one's limits and possibilities.
<b>3. Knowledge</b>	Expand knowledge on impairment, disability, oneself and others.
<b>4. Practical Reason</b>	Using SV experience to help forming a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.
<b>5. Affiliation</b>	Opportunities to develop meaningful relationships, in which one feels respected.
<b>6. Achieve,</b>	Being able to expand positive self- perceptions, through experiences of

<b>Respect and Love Oneself</b>	achievement and success.
<b>7. Feeling and Being Socially and Morally Equal</b>	Opportunities to feel morally equal and to be recognised as such by others, in acceptance of individual differences, including impairment.
<b>8. Doing good for others</b>	Opportunity to do good for others and be recognised for one's valid contribution.
<b>9. Play.</b>	Enjoy playing SV for its own sake.
<b>10. Control over one's own environment.</b>	Opportunities to participate in the way things happen in sitting volleyball. Having a political voice and a sufficient degree of control over one's own immediate context. Being able to influence others on disability matters.

In terms of contextual factors, the initial thematic structure was simplified in more comprehensive categories, as presented in table 5.5.

*Table 5.5.* Contextual factors affecting the conversion of SV goods into personal capabilities

<b>Levels</b>	<b>Themes</b>
<b>Environmental</b>	Institutional, political and wider cultural context (disability sports policy, institutional organization) Future/ structural sustainability of the sport History and development of the sport Social understanding of disability, disability sport and SV
<b>Cultural</b>	Description of the "field of practice" Actors, social roles and structures of power, scope for influence and participation Able, disabled and <i>in-between</i> ; volleyball players Relations between different actors Sv sub communities (clubs, gb teams and elite program) Doxa: discourses, values and believes, types of capital; community ethos (inclusive sport) The game and its understandings Formal regulations Image of the sport for the others around Habitus: the practices, behaviours, routines (informal regulations)
<b>Personal</b>	The personal context: disability, impairment, entrance, type of participation Motivations and reasons for practice Perceived significance of SV best moments Personal perception of experience (game and community) Changes and perceived life impact (positive and negative) Expectations for the future



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## CAPABILITIES ASSESSMENT

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The last phase of data analysis entailed a thorough recoding of the data set, according to the final thematic structure. At this stage, the main task was the identification, description and analysis of evidence of capabilities' expansion and/or contraction of SV athletes with impairments. Evidence of capabilities' expansion or contraction was of two types:

- i) Empirical evidence of functionings related with each relevant capability, valuable things that players were already enjoying being or doing (e.g. being a GB player or expanding friendships).
- ii) Empirical evidence of the existence or lack of opportunities for people to enjoy valued functionings if they chose too (for instance, the existence of viable pathways for elite development or to play a more decision making roles in the community).

Capabilities' assessment implied also the description of the contextual conditions in which expansion and/or contraction happened and the identification, when possible, of critical factors at different contextual levels (cf. table 7.1). Finally, the conclusive part of the assessment focused on the examination of comprehensiveness and sustainability of capabilities expansion (cf. Chapter 8). All these stages of analysis have facilitated a deep engagement with empirical data. The journey of the researcher into the SV world through long hours of interaction *with* and *in* data was essential to increase the accuracy and trustworthiness (Bryman, 2008) of the writing process that followed.

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## ANALYSING, INTERPRETING AND WRITING

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Capabilities are, first and foremost, lives in motion. They do not stop so that the researcher can take a snapshot nor can they be isolated from their larger context. To represent this reality, one needs to simplify discourse according to thematic and linguistic categories as a way of communicating this knowledge. This knowledge may then be translated into practical tools to be used to improve conditions to expand capabilities. It is fundamental however to emphasise that this thesis is a "craft" product, of the type that the artisan shapes and reshapes until the object can fulfil its function

(Atkinson, 1992). It is ultimately and solely one “plausible” representation of SV culture in the UK.

As an actor, observer and writer, the difficult task of fully capturing the essence of SV reality generates considerable frustration, accentuated by the weight of the responsibility of owing the “truth” to the community. Yet, it is only possible to aim at a reliable, ethically grounded, useful and valid version of the truth, one that can potentially ignite positive social change. As Ely et al. (1997) note, in examining the perils and strengths of qualitative writing,

The ongoing, swampy and often shifting written narrative of the research is not reality, but a representation of that- a highly selective, virtually constructed understanding of what you [researcher] have penetrated by being there and listening, writing, thinking, interpreting carefully and thoughtfully. (p.58)

In order to make the shaping of this version a mutual responsibility of both, writer and reader, I endeavour to provide sufficient original data to allow the reader to agree, disagree, and construct their own text. In this sense, the task of data analysis is still happening during the thesis writing and during each reading that is made of the narrative. To facilitate this process, I reveal as much as possible regarding my particular positionality as a person and a researcher, by making my own and other actors’ voices explicit in the narratives that follows.

Finally, remaining coherent with the multidimensional quality of this social reality, different writing forms are used to describe and assess capabilities: anecdotes, vignettes, ethnographic composites, interviews and personal notes excerpts. As space requirements limit the length of the stories it is possible to tell, events, facts, statements may in some instances be condensed into shorter narratives that nevertheless are believed to remain faithful to SV essential “truth”.

## SUMMARY

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Investigating the most fundamental values of human experience is a challenging task. Although scientific research has been developing tools to get closer to a “truthful” description of reality, perfection is unattainable, because reality is always subjectively shaped. Scrutiny of some of the available methodological tools has illuminated how

different perspectives can partially contribute positively to this goal. The methodological process of this research combined different methods and theoretical traditions to uncover the potential impact of a sports activity endowed with physical, social and cultural meanings, onto the beings and doings (capabilities) for SV players with impairments. In practical terms, this attempt entailed three critical aspects: an attention to the subject's values but also to contextual influences; engagement in a dialogue with complementary theoretical perspectives and an ethnographic methodological design, which sustained the iterative relation between empirical data and theoretical background.

In the following chapter a comprehensive, though brief description of the environmental, cultural and personal contextual features involving the conversion of SV participation into capabilities is provided. This knowledge grounds the understanding of capabilities assessment (chapters 7 and 8). Also, throughout the remaining chapters of this thesis, while reporting on SV impact on the lives of players with impairments, an anthropological account of a very distinctive sporting culture is simultaneously sketched.

## CHAPTER 6 . PORTRAYING RESEARCH LANDSCAPE: SITTING VOLLEYBALL AS “FIELD OF PRACTICE”

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### INTRODUCTION

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This chapter offers a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of SV community and culture, responding to Nussbaum’s premise that capabilities cannot be alienated from their contextual circumstances (2011). Furthermore, if disability and capabilities are, as suggested by Mitra (2006), multidimensional phenomena each at opposite ends of a continuum, then disability contextual facilitators constitute obstacles for capabilities expansion and vice-versa (cf. Figure 4.1). Thus, the topics covered in this chapter are not only representative of SV distinctive identity but also illustrative of areas where disability oppression has traditionally been constructed.

Drawing upon Bourdieu’s concept of social field (1990) and Morgan’s conceptualisation of sporting practice communities (1994), the chapter progresses from a broad focus on SV social image and institutional context to a narrower analysis of SV community and culture.

The relational dynamics operating in social fields is one of *practice*, the product of the nexus between the more objective structures (institutionalised order) and the subjective intentions (individual agency) expressed in a system of shared or habitual modes of action or habitus (cf. p.17) (Bourdieu, 1990). Relatedly, Morgan (1994) notes that the distinctiveness of sporting communities lies in three essential aspects: the early socialisation in the sport; the fact producers and recipients of the sporting goods are intrinsic to the practice; and the committed engagement in practice as conditional to membership.

The SV field developed in a context strongly conditioned by external forces more than by the shared values of its practice (cf. Chapter 8). It makes sense then to combine Morgan’s concept of *practice community* and Bourdieu’s *social field* to describe SV as a *field of practice*, which is neither a distinctive practice-community, nor a mere replication of any other field (e.g. volleyball). This field is inhabited by various actors,

with dissimilar motivations and strategies. SV actors are herein considered those whose participation, even if irregular or inconsistent, was clearly influential in shaping its culture.

In mapping SV as a field of practice two levels are considered. First, because SV is governed under mainstream Volleyball's NGB it is imperative to describe/analyse the institutional and historical configuration of the wider sporting field in the UK as well as the public image of SV. Secondly, the narrower SV field of practice is described and analysed, in its social composition (different sub-groups, roles and actors) and cultural ethos. To avoid breaches of anonymity, additional information related to the informants', disguised by a pseudonym will only be provided when important to the interpretation of the quotation. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, quotations correspond to statements of SV players with impairments. Whenever creative nonfiction or ethnographic vignettes or field notes are used, the text is italicised. The acronym *CFS* (Carla Filomena Silva) designates the voice of the researcher in the interviews.

#### SITTING VOLLEYBALL SOCIAL IMAGE AND STATUS

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In *Distinction* (1984), Bourdieu considers sport as one of the social spaces in which social distinction is observable. A sporting practice endows its practitioners with different types of capital (physical, symbolic, social, cultural), which, depending on the sport and on actor's positioning in the field, can be exchanged for other types of capital, facilitating access to particular social circles. For Bourdieu, *capital* is social value, "the energy of social physics" (Bourdieu, 1990, p.122) but it can be translated in capabilities language as agential power, the resources the person has available to pursue their valued goals. Yet, the extent to which the practitioners of a specific sport can gain personal capital depends on the social value of the sport itself within the wider context. For SV, this value derives from two related sporting fields: volleyball and disability sport.

Volleyball is a minor sport in the UK sporting landscape, dominated by the "GOD, otherwise known as football" (Roger, institutional manager); followed by other team sports such as rugby, cricket, field hockey and individual sports such as athletics and swimming. These are the sports traditionally taught in schools and played in

playgrounds; sports that everybody can talk about, and are able to participate either as spectators or as players, since their core features are culturally shared. Additionally, these sports are also valued for their record in international competitive success, closely linked to a British national identity (Polley, 2004). In these terms, the lower cultural and social capital of volleyball within British sporting landscape predictably hindered SV popularization from the outset.

SV is also an element of disability sport's field. Disability sport does not enjoy more social prestige than Volleyball itself. Besides being still considered as "second rate" sport (Howe, 2012; Brittain, 2012), in the UK disability sport it is also dominated by individual sports such as swimming and athletics, apart from wheelchair basketball, well-developed for historical reasons (cf. chapter 3). Similarly to volleyball in mainstream sport, SV possesses no cultural tradition within disability sport or any records of competitive success that increases its chances to successfully compete for social prestige with other disability sports like athletics or swimming. Figure 6.1 maps SV institutional network and illustrates its positioning within UK sporting landscape.

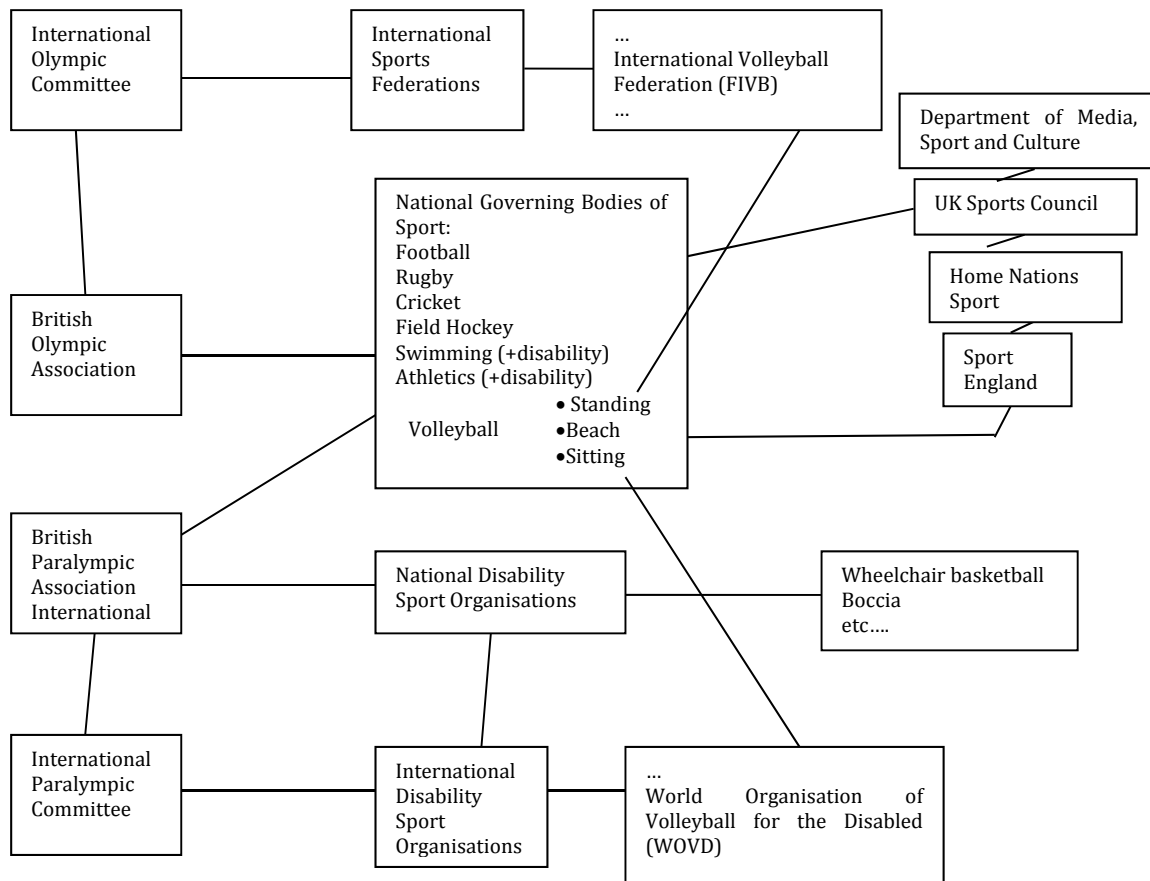


Figure 6.1. Volleyball and Sitting Volleyball institutional network.

Volleyball and SV could only improve their social image by gathering more of the types of capital mobilized in the wider sporting field (e.g. economic, social, symbolic). The financial capital was provided by the funding made available by UK Sport for the Olympic cycle 2009-2013:

That is the challenge that presents itself to other governing bodies, trying to grip onto mainstream sport. Volleyball England always tried to break through that respectful well-established group of sports without much success. The funding coming from winning the bid has allowed us to have the funding, the branding and the marketing to raise the profile of Volleyball and make SV a very well established game. (Sean, VE staff)

However, despite the funding, the Volleyball field was still devoid of cultural, sporting and social capital. Within this scenario, Volleyball institutions understood that SV could help increasing its social legitimacy by conferring on the sport a mark of universality, turning it into “one of the most inclusive sports that absolutely everybody can enjoy” (Martin, VE staff). Still, a main obstacle lay deep into the heart of its practice: the

phenomenological paradox of “sitting down” to practice sport and be active (see also chapter 8):

People hear sitting and will think: "sitting watching tele, sitting resting in the garden". So they think of relaxing, that it's an easy sport, and they will also probably never played any sport where they were sat on the floor, so the whole idea of going to play sport and then sitting down, is a different one. (Martin, VE staff)

This fact was even used by other disability sports to stigmatize SV, as Roger (institutional manager) reported: “the other Paralympic athletes tend to denigrate our sport of sitting volleyball, by calling us the floor wipers. Because people sit on the floor, there's a sort of snoberie”.

The resistance towards the sitting position can be explained by its significant negative symbolic meaning. Embodied language theory defends that language is shaped by our bodily experiences (Lakoff, 1980). In the English language (as well as in Portuguese), common metaphors traditionally attach positive moral value to “balance”, “equilibrium”, “verticality”, “uprightness”, words that convey autonomy, correctness, wisdom: “thus a good man is an upright person, or high-minded; or conversely, falls from grace. Someone can stand on her own two feet, or conversely has to be carried by everyone else” (Scully, 2009, p.69). Hence, positions such as sitting are (even if unconsciously) associated with moral inferiority. For this reason, though the “sitting” element of the game may have hindered SV social image, it is also one of its main potentially empowering aspects (cf. Chapter 7, capability 7).

Despite the apparent unnaturalness of moving whilst sitting, media representations of SV did not overtly stressed this aspect of the game. Instead, media seemed to follow the general trends of the wider coverage of disability sport, divided between the focus on sporting achievements and on players' lives. The fact Martine Wright's<sup>29</sup> story was a media favorite may be understood not only as a reflection of the media's taste for “supercrip”<sup>30</sup> narratives, but also as a sign of the importance of the impairment storyline for the social capital granted to the players. Victims of extreme forms of violence such as the London terrorist attack (Martine) and wounded soldiers seemed to media favorite characters.



A third, less common media approach was exemplified by Channel 4's documentary *Band of Sisters*, in which a realistic depiction blended with the emotional tone conveyed by the title. While practices and training were depicted as the habitus of this "band", they were granted no more attention than other leisure moments: meals, travelling and players' everyday lives. Obvious tensions emerged between normalized views of elite athletes and the athletic habitus of GB women's SV team, noticeable in their embodiments, interactions, behaviors and sporting routines. From the outset, it was made obvious by the narrator that these women were far from being accomplished athletes "In a quiet corner in West London, there's a bunch of *wildcard outsiders*, who are making an *audacious* attempt of representing their country at London 2012" [my italics] (Friend, 2011). Besides the emphasis on the importance of the group support for each of the players, the documentary is scattered with overcoming adversity narratives, but only from women whose impairment was evident.

#### LONDON 2012 AND SITTING VOLLEYBALL ELITE DEVELOPMENT

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Up until 2006, Volleyball was governed by four different home countries associations (England, Scotland, Wales and North Ireland). After UK Sport decided to fund Volleyball as an Olympic Sport, the British Federation (BVF) was by then created to manage GB programmes, with the main goal of achieving full representation in the London Games (both genders and all variants: indoor, beach, and SV). The Games offered a unique opportunity to raise the public profile of Volleyball in the UK.

Prior to this, SV was confined to scattered actions of some members of mainstream volleyball community, particularly in and around London and of people working in local councils (e.g. Kent, Essex). No organized structure, competition or community existed, however a GB team (men) had competed every now and again in European and World championships. It was not until July 2005, following the winning of the bid for hosting 2012 Olympics and Paralympics and UK Sport funding that SV becomes a sport of interest. Influential in support of SV was Richard Callicott, president of both VE and BVF, former chief executive of UK sport (1999-2004), and a BPA director (since 2005). Having someone so well positioned within GB sport structure was vital to give SV a

position within the institutional plan to raise Volleyball public profile, which seemed to be VE main mission:

The Olympics and Paralympics provide a focal point for developing a world leading community sport system. Volleyball is represented in three separate disciplines at the games, indoor volleyball, beach volleyball and sitting volleyball. This, coupled with the planned European and International Events Strategy, sets the stage to showcase our sport and inspire more people to enjoy and excel in volleyball. [original italics] (VE, 2009, p.3)

Nonetheless, the institutional aspirations suffered a setback when UK sport reduced their funding from £4,04 million (previous Olympic cycle) to £2.13 million, for 2009-2013 forcing BVF to cease funding indoor women's volleyball and men's beach volleyball, whilst keeping support to both men's and women's SV teams, possibly because their chances of competitive success were assessed as better. Under the "No compromise" UK sport strategy, the agreed performance targets for SV in London 2012 were then to finish between 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> (men and women). Because SV was perceived as internationally underdeveloped, institutional managers may have thought that the available funding and the wave of enthusiasm generated by London 2012 would help to recruit players, staff and volunteers, and create conditions for success. Under the leadership of Richard Callicott, SV was then included in all the BVF development plans, though without the expressed support of all directors:

Whereas nobody argued against it, nobody stood up and said: 'We will actually do it!' So, for a period of time I was on my own and I had to make things happen, with other people around... who I thought could help me achieve it." (Callicot, personal communication, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2011).

Callicott was instrumental in connecting the individual efforts on the ground with the higher institutional structure, which resulted in the creation of a BVF Sitting Volleyball Committee (BVFSVC) in January 2006. The chairman, Gordon Neale, was an influential actor within disability sport (former BASD manager) but the committee included also other key figures from volleyball community, some with connections with international SV institutions (cf. chapter 3); a Paralympic medallist, Robbie Barrett<sup>31</sup>; an active promoter of SV in Kent, Tom Middleton; a long term volleyball player, coach and manager in Essex, Ken Edwards, and Steve Walton, experienced international referee, also a member of the ECVD. This committee faced two main challenges: firstly, to

coordinate all the partner institutions (UK Sport, SE, DSO's, Councils, disability organisations, BPA) in a common project and secondly, to catalyse the simultaneous development of grassroots and elite strands of SV.

From the minutes of their first meetings, it is clear the committee's was concerned with developing solid grassroots to sustain the sports development after 2012. They were also worried that the performance targets agreed with the BPA and UK Sport were too ambitious, as there was no foundation from which to start. Four main areas of development were then identified: talent identification & training; competition pathway; workforce development and marketing and promotion (BVFSVC, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2006). Allocating responsibilities for each area they started the development process whilst trying to gather support from other home countries volleyball organisations and disability sport federations. Only Disability Sport Wales Federation established a club in Cardiff (Celtic Dragons) which participated in the first two competitive seasons. The action of this committee continued for more than two years, until 4<sup>th</sup> April 2008, when SV governance was transferred to BVF. After a short period however, SV governance was again transferred, this time to VE.

The reasons for the delegation of SV development to one of the home nation bodies at this point are not clear but drawing upon some of interviews and personal conversations, SV was simply not progressing fast enough given the urgency imposed by the goals agreed with UK sport. VE then included SV in its *Playground to Podium Initiative* funding, within its 2009-2013 strategic plan and appointed a full-time development officer in April 2009. From that moment onwards a more professional and concerted structure to SV developed. Within the elite strand, VE prioritised the recruitment of potential Paralympic players. Because grassroots were non-existent (the SV regional centres were being created in parallel), the recruitment of the players was concentrated in sporadic events: the Paralympic Potential Day<sup>32</sup>; the Amputee Games<sup>33</sup> and SV Awareness Days<sup>34</sup>. However, the competition between disability sports to recruit players was quite fierce<sup>35</sup>. On one hand, due to the performance driven funding logic, the future of all the other disability sports was equally dependent on Paralympic success, opening the "hunt" for talented impaired athletes. On the other hand, the pool of people eligible was rather narrow, especially in the case of women. For all these

reasons, the usual pyramid of development, from grassroots to elite development could not be developed within the short time available until the Paralympics:

Our sitting identity was initially formulated on those people who had a disability or who we could contact and identify with. But because sitting volleyball is not a huge sport in Britain yet, we have had to find people with disabilities and teach them how to play sitting volleyball....We would have preferred to go route 1, popularize the sport, build it up and then select our best players. We had to go route 2, select our best players, popularize it, and that's not how we would normally do things. We are having to teach limbless people all about the game and moving them as a squad at the same time. (Roger, institutional manager)

Another important step for SV elite development was the professionalization of the technical staff (coaches and assistant coaches), relying mainly on people with credentials in the established volleyball community, though with little knowledge of disability sport. It was during this phase that I started to be invited to assist in GB SV women's training. In the thrill of the organization of the Paralympics, some partnerships were also forged to strengthen the preparation of GB representation. Particularly, the partnership with Roehampton University was essential in providing conditions for some GB players to devote themselves to full time SV training (cf. p.111)

In short, SV elite development happened in the confluence of some critical circumstances: the funding made available by UK Sport; the individual action of Richard Callicott; the incipient efforts already happening on the ground and its centralisation by VE.

## GRASSROOTS DEVELOPMENT

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To promote SV grassroots expansion<sup>36</sup> VE organized several events: awareness days, local disability sport days and promotional days in diverse public settings (e.g. sport malls, parks, company facilities). Yet, the most systematic and significant effort to develop grassroots was the establishment of regional sitting volleyball centres and a national competition (NGP). Up to the Paralympics, these SV regional centres were supported by VE with a bursary of £500 per year and equipment (a net kit, balls). During the 2012/13 season, this support ceased, although there was an incentive of £3000 for clubs able to recruit junior members. Table 6.1 shows the main SV regional

centres, actively and consistently competing at the NGP, in each of the competitive seasons this study covers.

*Table 6.1. Active SV regional centres from 2009 to 2013*

<b>Competitive Season</b>	<b>SV regional centres</b>
<b>2009/10</b>	London Lynx (London), Celtic Dragons (Cardiff, Wales), Portsmouth Sharks (Porthsmouth), Essex Pirates (Essex), Loughborough Lyons (Loughborough), Kent Wyverns (Kent), Surrey Gators (Surrey), Battle Back (army wounded)  8 teams
<b>2010/11</b>	All previous teams plus Lincoln Imps (Lincoln) and Parabellas (GB women)  11 teams
<b>2011/12</b>	Celtic Dragons participation starts to be very inconsistent; a new team is formed in London, Mallory Eagles  11 teams
<b>2012/13</b>	Celtic Dragons did not participate. Parabellas and Mallory folded. London Lynx, Portsmouth Sharks, Essex Pirates, Loughborough Lyons, Kent Wyverns, Surrey Gators, Battle Back, Lincoln Imps  8 teams

### THE “VOLLEYBALL” FAMILY

London 2012 has allowed less popular team sports such as Volleyball an opportunity to market themselves on the world sporting stage, which could help raising their public profile, attract more participants and consolidate their national status. Within this context, in the attempt to market a distinctive identity, volleyball agents often relied on the universality and equalising potential of the sport: “volleyball was seen as a way of creating equity across not just disability but across all other characteristics. We were very interested in developing beach and a real equitable game which was sitting volleyball” (Sean) and the message it sends to wider society “We are not us and them [players with impairments]. We are all volleyballers!” (Roger, institutional manager).

Pressured by severe time constraints, SV development needed to exhibit a fast improvement internationally of both GB teams, as well as a noticeable grassroots expansion. Under a strong institutional and centralised leadership, two important side effects of this dual commitment arose. First, the undervaluation of the importance of impairment in SV practices, as the staff was non-impaired and inexperienced in disability sport; and secondly, the progressive undervaluing of long-term grassroots development, in favour of the elite strand. In these terms, it is unclear whether SV has benefitted from being part of the Volleyball family. Examining the situation of the four SV clubs with formal links with volleyball clubs, there is scarce evidence of fruitful and consistent collaboration. Moreover, from the beginning of this study up to April 2013 no new teams connected with volleyball clubs were formed nor have new regular volleyball players joined the SV community. Since the Paralympics the participation of standing volleyball players, referees, line judges and volunteers has noticeably reduced, suggesting the disinterest of the wider volleyball community.

## SV FIELD OF PRACTICE

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### CHARACTERISATION OF SV COMMUNITY

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The social description of SV community is grounded in two classificatory distinctions: the type of commitment of its members with the SV field (SV clubs; GB programme and Roehampton group) and the social roles available (players and staff).

Introducing the descriptive account of SV field of practice, the next table condenses the information provided by the questionnaire applied to 50 members of the community (cf. Appendix I), which helps characterising the community. The results are expressed in percentages, but the number of respondents is also included within brackets.

*Table 6.2.* Characterisation of SV field of practice

<b>Age</b>	Min. Value	Max. Value	Mean	Standard deviation
	13 years	57 years	35.5 years	±10.9 years
<b>Gender</b>	Male	56.5 % (26)		
	Female	43.5 % (20)		

<b>Impairment</b>	No impairment	56.5% (26)		
	Impairment	43.5% (20)	Acquired	55% (11)
			Congenital	45% (9)

<b>Sporting experience</b>	Previous experience	82.2% (37)	No impairment	59.4% (22)
			Acquired	27.2% (10)
			Congenital	13.5% (5)
	No previous experience	17.8% (8)	No impairment	37.5% (3)
			Acquired	12.5% (1)
			Congenital	50% (4)

<b>Participation (Hours p/week)</b>	More than 10 hours	30.4% (14)	No impairment	14.3% (2)
			Acquired	42.9% (6)
			Congenital	42.9% (6)
	Between 4 and 9.59 hours	10.9% (5)	No impairment	60% (3)
			Acquired	40% (2)
			Congenital	-
	Between 3:59 and 2 hours	41.3% (19)	No impairment	68.73% (13)
			Acquired	15.79% (3)
			Congenital	15.79% (3)
	Less than 2 hours	17.4% (8)	No impairment	100% (8)
			Acquired	-
			Congenital	-
<b>Role</b>	Players	65.2% (30)	No impairment	40% (20)
			Acquired	30% (9)
			Congenital	30% (9)
	Staff	17.4% (8)	No impairment	100% (8)
			Acquired	-
			Congenital	-
	Staff and players	17.4% (8)	No impairment	80% (6)
			Acquired	10% (1)
			Congenital	10% (1)

<b>Length of involvement (years)</b>	Min. value	Max. value	Mean	Standard deviation
	0.3 years	13 years	2.76 years	±1.97 years

The questionnaire results confirm SV heterogeneity in all of the categories included. In terms of age and length of involvement for instance, this heterogeneity is evident in the standard deviation value (age:  $\pm 10.9$  years; experience:  $\pm 1.97$  years) when compared with the mean values for both categories (respectively 35.5 years and 2.76 years). In relation to gender, it is important to note that the percentage of female participants (44%) is likely to have been inflated by the fact the researcher had a more empathetic relation with the GB women players and therefore they were more collaborative. VE informants indicated that only around 30% of SV players are women, which is a number more in line with my observations. With regards to impairment, it is worth stressing how the number of non-impaired people (56, 5%) surpasses the number of participants with impairments (43, 5%) even though SV is still largely perceived as a disability sport.

Analysing the category of experience, the results show that most of the people involved in SV had previous sporting experiences (82.2%). The fact most of the non-impaired people participating in the sport (20 of 26) possessed previous sporting experience seems to express the participation of former and present volleyball players in the field, at least in the competitions. Also of relevance is the fact that from the 8 participants with no sporting previous experience, 4 are congenitally impaired suggesting this group may have encountered additional barriers to participating in sport in comparison to the other groups, though the sample is too small to advance more secure conclusions.

In terms of the type of involvement of respondents in SV, these results suggest the existence of two distinct groups: elite players, whose involvement surpasses 10 hours per week (30.4 %) and the more recreational club players spending between 2 and 4 hours per week involved in SV (41.3%). The 5 respondents occupying between 4 and 10 hours per week in SV related activities are either members of the extended GB programme or people with more than one role in SV. Still relevant is the fact that solely non-impaired participants (17.4% (8)) were involved in SV activities less than 2 hours p/week, which may translate the extemporaneous participation of some AB players.

The fact that all the people on staff roles are non-impaired and that the participation of people with impairments is confined to player roles (18 of the 20 impaired individuals are solely players and only 2 players with impairments perform staff roles in addition to being players) suggests an asymmetry in the access to participative and influential roles.



The descriptive information provided by the questionnaire has complemented the ethnographic data, contributing to the robustness of the conclusive assessments throughout the next two chapters. A more detailed report of the results and additional comments are available in appendix J.

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## THE CLUBS

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The clubs are SV sub-group whose dynamics and identity better reflect Morgan's concept of sporting practice communities (1994). Clubs diversity in terms of philosophies, identities, practices and composition prevent further generalisations. They can be situated along a continuum delimited on one extreme by an emphasis on competition, in which athleticism and sporting ability are key values; and on the other by a more recreational emphasis where participation, commitment and loyalty dominate.

A thorough characterisation of SV clubs is beyond the scope of this thesis, but a schematic representation of the position of all the different clubs (from A to H) within SV field of practice is provided (cf. Figure 6.2). The space representing SV field is divided by two main referential axes, the vertical representing the main philosophy or ethos of the club (competitive/ recreational) and the horizontal, its openness to diversity (selective/universal). These oppositions are associated with other important binaries: the relational dynamics (authoritarian/ participative); access to human and material resources (resourced/ under-resourced); social cohesion of the community (cohesion/ fragmentation); the degree of formality of practices and governance of the club (formal/informal), representing tendencies suggested by ethnographic data. The diagram is divided in four levels, facilitating the relative positioning of each of the clubs according to those distinctive qualities.

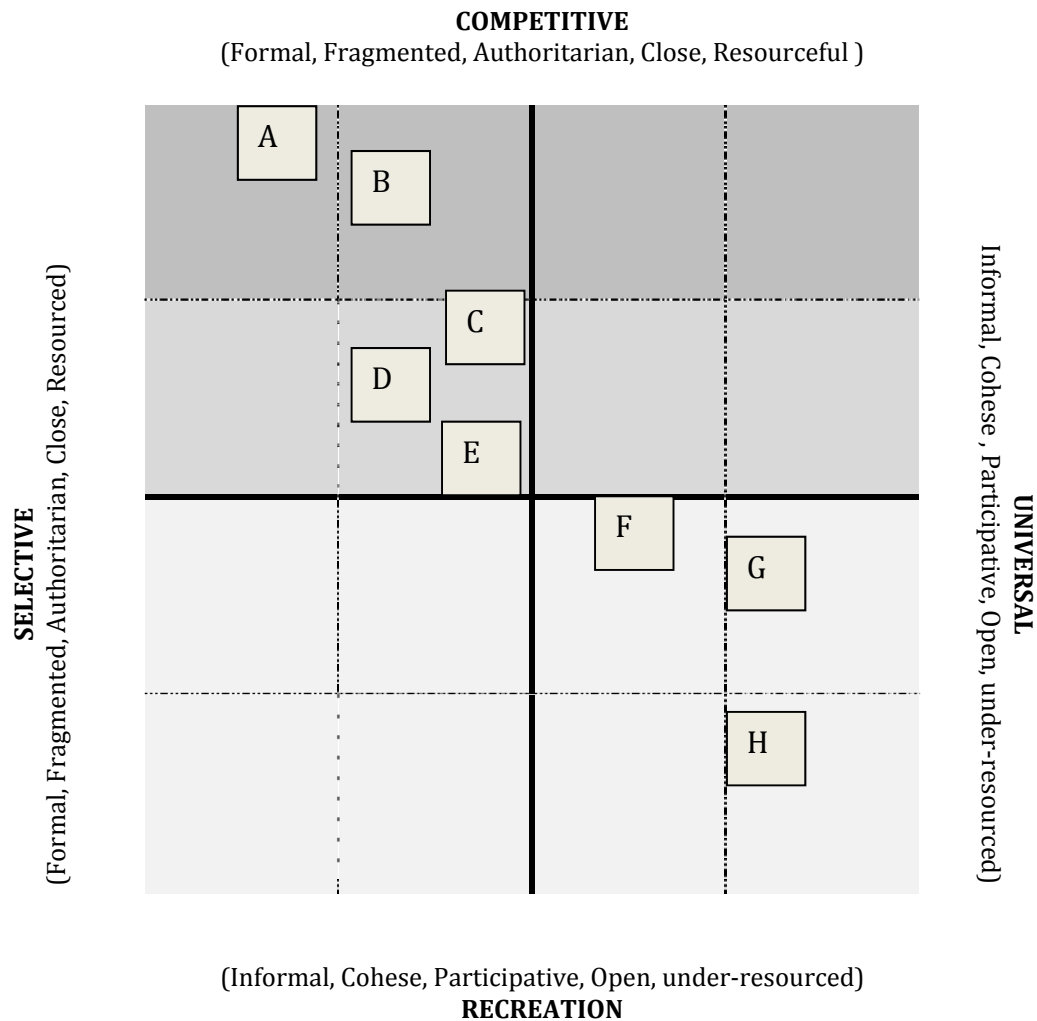


Figure 6.2. Pertinent oppositions differentiating SV clubs and their positioning in the SV field of practice.

As illustrated by the figure above, three sets of clubs can be distinguished in SV field of practice. A and B were the best SV competitive clubs. They possessed good conditions for formal practice, an institutional (volleyball club) and technical structure (coach) and access to human and material resources. Although these two are different in terms of team selection (B less selective), both clubs were clearly performance driven. However, as their practice communities were not firmly established, the squads' composition was fairly variable. Thus, they were more likely to “borrow” players from other teams, or include volleyball players in their squads during competitions (cf. p.124). Several members of GB programme (players and staff) belonged to these teams.

Those clubs that did not possess the performance level of the previous clubs but were institutionally relatively well organised compose a second group (C, D, E). These were

clubs usually formally associated to a volleyball organisation or a club, therefore they could sustain regular SV practices and when/if needed mobilise human resources, namely players for competitions. Although these teams defended inclusiveness and diversity, the emphasis on competitive success distracted them from fully accomplishing universality and inclusiveness (cf. p.130). Even though they tried to recruit players with impairments, the connection of these players with the club was seldom a long-term one. Therefore, the composition of their squads at the GP's was quite variable.

The last group of clubs (F, G, H) have a clear recreational emphasis and openness to diversity. These three clubs were formed by the initiative of a small group of people (with impairments). They possessed a weak institutional structure, limited access to material and technical resources (not very qualified and stable coaching, transportation difficulties; venues and material); but interestingly they were also the most cohesive and stable groups. They had been growing slowly and steadily as teams and practice-communities, developing a distinctive and more cohesive identity than any of the others (cf. Chapter 8). They presented a greater percentage of people with impairments in their squads and rarely invited outsiders for competitions as they exhibited a stronger sense of team identity, loyalty, camaraderie and values such as commitment, effort and participation over athletic ability.

Overall, the clubs' structures are much less formal than the elite programme and also less intense in terms of the type of commitment demanded. Most of the clubs solely offered a two-hour practice once a week, led by an accredited coach (normally non-impaired with some volleyball or disability sport background) working on a volunteer basis. At some teams, more than one person performed coaching roles, with divergent degrees of knowledge of the sport, further attesting its incipient stage of development.

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### THE PARALYMPIC GB PROGRAMME

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An essential difference between SV GB programme and most mainstream elite programmes was the inexperience of all the people involved, especially the players. SV GB programme was initiated solely after UK Sport inclusion of Volleyball as an Olympic sport (2005). Neither of the teams qualified through competition, so they were basically

dependent on BPA's permission to occupy the host places available. In turn, BPA's enforcement was dependent on the teams' ability to deliver "credible performances" as Penny Briscoe, BPA performance director stressed: "We have always been clear that there are no free tracksuits. In order to be selected for Paralympics GB, you have to demonstrate that you have got what it takes to compete on the biggest stage in disability sport"<sup>37</sup>.

After deciding to have SV squads in London 2012, the volleyball institutions were confronted with the immense difficulty in finding players with impairments, especially women. Thus, the selection for SV national programme, especially in its initial phase (from 2006-2009), relied more on people's eligibility than on their athletic or technical ability: "... if you were an amputee man playing sitting volleyball, 'congratulations, you've made GB team!'" (Ralph, VE staff). As such, from 2006 to 2009, the men's national squad was mainly composed by players in their 40's or older, most of them with little or no previous high-performance sporting experience. By then, the space and time devoted to practice was fairly limited. Apart from monthly training camps, there were virtually no SV clubs where players could practice and despite being under the leadership of a renowned international coach, the competitive level of the GB men's team was quite poor. After 2009, the more structured approach to SV elite development described earlier in the chapter resulted in the exponential participation of younger and more athletic players in the GB programme than up to then.

In relation to the women's GB team, virtually every eligible woman identified was being recruited for the extended GB programme. As a result, the group was fairly heterogeneous, with ages varying between 12 and 40 years' old, including people with different types and severity of impairment and very different sporting backgrounds. In terms of volleyball or athletic ability, the overall level of the team was even more heterogeneous and inexperienced than in the men's. One of few players recruited with experience in mainstream sports commented:

It was a bit surreal because in all the other sports I had played, there are levels. You got your club, you got your regional, then you've got the County, then you've got national, the international and those are all these stages you have to go through trials and trials. And here it was weird, I showed up and immediately I had a GB shirt. And that was a bit surreal. (Laura, MD)

Despite the inexperience of many of the players, membership to GB programme implied a visible and committed participation in a set of formal practices, namely weekend training camps, weekly training sessions with the group as well as practices at the club nearest home. This participation implied constant and sometimes long distance travelling, with the costs being mainly covered by the players themselves. Besides this formal participation, GB SV players had to conform to a set of rules perceived as in harmony with BPA's expectations of a Paralympic athlete. An informal code of conduct of the elite SV player included basic aspects such as nutrition and athletic physique; devotion to training and the eradication of unhealthy habits such as smoking and drinking. During the GB meetings, players were persistently reminded that wearing a GB kit was an honour only available to a few, which had to be paid with complete commitment and observance of the group rules.

Another significant aspect of GB membership was the protection of the public image of the elite SV player. This protection was needed to avoid jeopardising BPA's decision to include SV in the London 2012 GB team. GB players were continuously reminded by staff members and colleagues that "Looking like an athlete" was as important as being one, perhaps because in many cases, the players were not athletes yet. Changes in players' physical embodiment were assessed as more controllable and achievable within the time frame available than the tactical and technical ones.

BPA doubts were especially strong in relation to the women's team, as many of the athletes exhibited little understanding of what it meant to be elite. This lack of awareness and athletic habitus was visibly inscribed in their embodiment; therefore the concern with weight and physical fitness was a constant. In *Band of Sisters*, while observing the team practising in a very jovial atmosphere, Penny Briscoe, BPA assessor, comments:

One of the challenges that you have here is that you haven't got natural athletes. It's the all approach to life, isn't it? It's a lifestyle choice. And the sacrifices you need to make. It's all things from smoking to eating, it is everything. You can't do one without the other. And if physically you are not there, you're not going to make it. (Friend, 2011).

From 2009 onwards and up to the Paralympics, both GB SV teams participated in several international competitions<sup>38</sup>, their crucial opportunities to exhibit competitive

credibility to BPA; but which served also to raise the media interest and public profile of the sport.

While the men's squad was awarded their Paralympics host place in September 2011, the decision concerning the women's squad was deferred to March 2012, less than six months before the Paralympic Games. That delay was justified by the need to assure compliance of the team with BPA's performance criteria. In the end, the women's team also took their host place. During all the process of recruitment and preparation of the teams, it became apparent that BPA's decision was not only being played at the sporting arena but also at the media one. The media interest on particular players (e.g. Martine Wright) kept high the public profile of SV on TV, national and regional newspapers, and websites. This media trump card was perhaps exploited by Volleyball institutions to influence BPA's selection decision<sup>39</sup>.

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#### PROJECT ROEHAMPTON

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While most of the players in GB programme had to balance professional and family commitments with sporting ones, a small group of athletes (10 to 14) were given the opportunity to devote themselves full-time to SV training. In partnership with Roehampton University, in London, they were given accommodation, allowance for nutrition, training facilities and supervised strength and conditioning workouts. During the time they lived in Roehampton, none of these players was fully professional, as they were not given a wage. As such, the group largely students, war-injured athletes and some international players in search of a British passport. This group followed an intensive regime of between 25 to 30 hours training per week, constituting the most elite group in SV field of practice. The other members of GB team also benefited from these services during training camps. After London 2012, this project ceased after it lost its funding.

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#### THE MAIN SOCIAL ROLES: PLAYERS AND STAFF

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In the SV field of practice two main social roles can be distinguished: player and staff. Each of these roles presupposes different modes of action, attracts people with different characteristics and implies a particular relational dynamics. Relying on Bourdieu's

account of social actors each of these roles is defined by its specific position in the field of practice, reproducing a characteristic habitus. Its description is important to understand the power dynamics and the circulation of different types of capital (social, symbolic, sporting and political) within SV field of practice.

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## PLAYERS

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Players are obviously the central actors in the SV field of practice. Two main principles differentiated SV players: eligibility and volleyball ability. In SV everyday discourses people were often referred to as AB's or "norms", "MD's and D's, a simplification of the formal classification terminology (cf. p.48). In relation to volleyball ability, the differences between players were evident in the movement and skills displayed every time SV was played. These two factors were the most important criteria in the social positioning of each player in SV field of practice.

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## ABLE BODIED (AB)

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Unofficial VE data (shared by an informant) for the 2012/13 season indicate that 50% the players fall into this category. The questionnaire applied in March 2011, encompassing the whole community, revealed even more significant numbers (56.5%). Such result is unsurprising since SV is perceived as being equally open to AB's, MD's and D's not as disabled sport but a "sport that disabled people can play" (Ralph, VE staff).

I have encountered four main types of AB players regarding their motivations and commitment within the SV field of practice, illustrated in the following ethnographic portraits:

### **John**

*Today is the SV grand prix finals! I've played a couple of times before, when I did not have a standing match that same weekend. I was also invited for Barbarian's team for a match against the GB men's. It's amazing how the game is so strenuous, quick and tactical. I really have fun in these matches, although the SV guys still need to learn a bit more about volleyball. But the way they move on the floor is just amazing! I will definitely come anytime Mark asks me.*

### **Irina**

*It was quite strange, in the beginning, I must say, to sit down and play volleyball. I was always afraid of offending someone by saying or doing the wrong thing. In time, everything worked out fine. I started to love the game as much as "normal" volleyball, which I cannot play anymore. My joints collapsed after so many years jumping! When the teams are good, the thrill is just the same! Or even better! The exertion, the adrenaline and the effort are still there! Sometimes it is just so difficult to integrate people with impairments. Not because of the impairment. They simply don't know how to play volleyball! It takes so many years to learn it! They are not there yet. If we want to win, they can't play, or the other guys need to cover them a little bit. It is difficult... we [volleyballers] want disabled people in our team but we also want to have fun. Anyway, they normally do not stay for long. I guess they are just not motivated enough!*

### **Catherine**

*I have known Donna since we were teenagers. We walked through life as best friends. When the accident happened and she lost both legs, I didn't know how to help her. I was terrified! I avoided her for a while... I did not know what to say or how to help ... I just imagined she would be destroyed and I could do nothing to make it better. I was terribly selfish! I couldn't bear seeing her like that. One day she phones me and asks if I would go with her to SV. "Sitting what?" I had no idea such thing existed. It was also the first time I saw Donna interested in sport, since high school. I went, for her... Now, I know she does not need me. Nor does anyone else there. But I am still going, for more than two years, now. I love the exercise, the competition, the team, the time to empty my mind and just have fun! And I love being with Donna somewhere where her missing legs do not matter! Everyone has some "problem"... But, you know... everybody is just as happy as you or me... with good and bad moments! Life just goes on... It made realise how ignorant I was about disability.*

### **Thomas**

*I was never any good at sport. I am still not! Why am I here? Well, this is something I can do. I don't have to jump high or run fast. And people just do not expect me to be brilliant. And they value me, even though I am a bit crap. My presence is important so that people like Jeremy, Jonathan and Cybil have an opportunity to play sport and have fun just like anyone else. Shouldn't we all? Even when we are not that good!*



Though these are fictional characters, they represent what I perceived to be the most important types of AB players in the field, distinct for their sporting and athletic experience, motivation and relationship with other people in the field.

John, Iris, Catherine and Thomas represent each of the quadrants composing Figure 6.3, with the vertical axis representing athletic potential and the horizontal axis representing volleyball ability. John embodies the most athletic type, the volleyball player; Donna, represents the injured former volleyball player though not eligible SV player; Iris is the non-sporty person, friend of someone with impairment and Thomas is the inexperienced enthusiastic participant.

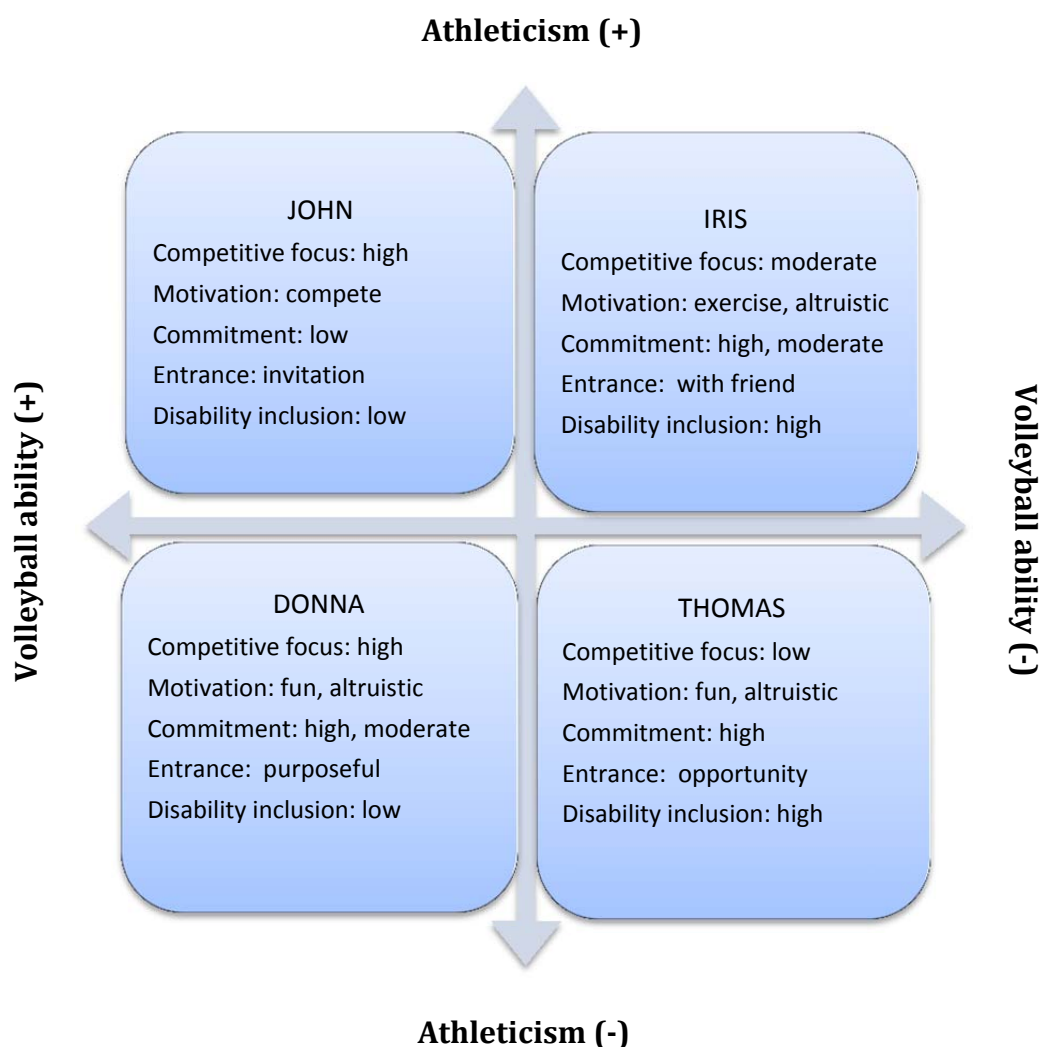


Figure 6.3. *The relative positions of AB players in SV field of practice.*

Each of these quadrants represents specific previous sporting habitus (or lack of it) and characteristic predispositions towards practice. While the more athletic and proficient players possessed significant social capital within SV, essentially due to their early socialisation into a volleyball doxa (cf. p.17); the ones whose connection with SV better promoted the establishment of a true community of practice were the least proficient and athletic AB players (high level of disability inclusion). Their participation in SV practices was more constant and their connection with the community stronger than the volleyball players, although the questionnaires results suggest that these constituted a minority (only 3 AB's participants from 46 players were inexperienced in sport).

As the thrill of the Paralympics faded away, the presence of players like John decreased while Donna, Iris and Thomas continued to participate after that, at least in the NGP's. The essential difference between these types lies in the distinctive value assigned to the enjoyment of the intrinsic goods of practice (Motivation: exercise, fun, altruistic): the pleasure of playing the sport with others; as well as their degree of necessity, loyalty and commitment towards SV community. Love and need for the sport, affiliation and altruistic motivation combined with low sporting potential seem therefore important factors in building a solid connection of AB's with SV field of practice while a competitive emphasis of volleyball players (John and Donna) seems at odds with a valued participation of players with impairments (cf. Chapter 7).

#### MINIMALLY DISABLED (MD)

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MD's were players whose impairments are significant enough to put them at disadvantage in the standing game (cf. Appendix B) but not severe enough to be granted a D status. Most MD's have acquired their impairment through illness, accident, or sport/exercise injury although one or two players had minor congenital impairments. For some MD players, SV provided an opportunity to continue playing sport at a high level, whereas for others it offered the first opportunity to be involved in sport.

The reduced number of MD's in SV field prevents me from sketching profiles of participants. What follows instead is the presentation of features I have identified as important mediators in their SV experiences. These were especially evident in MD players involved in the GB programme.

## AM I DISABLED?!

Most MD's did not recognize themselves as disabled. Their liminal embodiment (Turner, 1968; Howe, 2008b) involved personal and relational tensions, hardly solved by classification processes, since usually MD's were only temporarily eligible. Because SV is, in public understanding, the volleyball version for "disabled" people, to participate in the sport implied the public admission of one's impairment, which often implied overcoming the fear of stigma (cf. Chapter 8). The discrepancy between one's self image and this new identity marker often triggered feelings of inadequacy and misplacement:

I was questioning myself: "Oh, should I be playing this game?" Because I don't classify myself as disabled. So, that was quite a challenge. When I put myself against some of the guys in the team, I am certainly not disabled. There's almost an element of cheating, to some degree... (Ron, GB player)

The liminal embodiment of MD's also affected the relational dynamics with other players. MD's belonged to a social "minority", which relative marginality was particularly visible in the relative self-exclusion from humorous remarks, one of the most important team bonding mechanisms:

When you're in the environment of people with disability, they are almost cruel in their humour. It's funny. And it's fine... people are accepting what they are. It rubs off on you... you just carry on with it. The biggest issue is that first snigger, that first smile or that first joke... Do you take it? Do you laugh with them, or do you just stare? (Ron)

For these reasons, MD's were sometimes confused, not knowing how to behave feeling a mixture of tension and mutual learning in their interactions. Nevertheless, the awkwardness present in the social relations between MD's and D's tended to dissipate over time, as Laura (MD player) recalled:

In the beginning I was like, "Do I help?" "Do I not?" "Do I push?" And sometimes I help getting the wheelchair out of the car, but I know now that I don't have to offer, they'll ask. I've always been the professional, helping and now I see them as equal, completely equal. They don't need help. They are just my team mates. I don't even see their disability.

## AM I A (FULL) SITTING VOLLEYBALL PLAYER?

The greatest tension in being an MD player lies in the uncertain membership, felt as a burden among the players awarded temporary status (cf. p.48). The commitment required for belonging to a national team made the prospect of not being classified as

eligible very difficult to handle. As such, and unsurprisingly, thoughts of purposely worsen impairment were common: “If someone had said to me: ‘If you run every day it will make it worse’ I would probably run every day and that's a loony thing to say and a loony thing to think...” (Laura, GB player); “Part of me just wants to beat up my knee with a hammer to knock it out again, so I could get my classification back but...” (Sarah, former MD/GB player, and club player); “Some people will not try to get bits of their bodies better, just in case suddenly they cannot take part in the Paralympics” (Hannah, GB player). The possible reclassification of D players as MD’s was another factor adding to the players’ uncertainty. Because only two MD’s are allowed in a team, reclassifications of D as MD imply a reorganisation of the teams’ composition. The instability regarding the classification status of MD players also explains why GB technical staff relied mostly on D players to form the stable core of the squads. Figure 6.3 below positions all MD interviewees within the social space defined by two differentiating principles: the severity/stability of impairment and their volleyball ability. This scheme expresses my perception of their position at the initial stage of their participation. “C” indicates club players and “GB”, national team players.

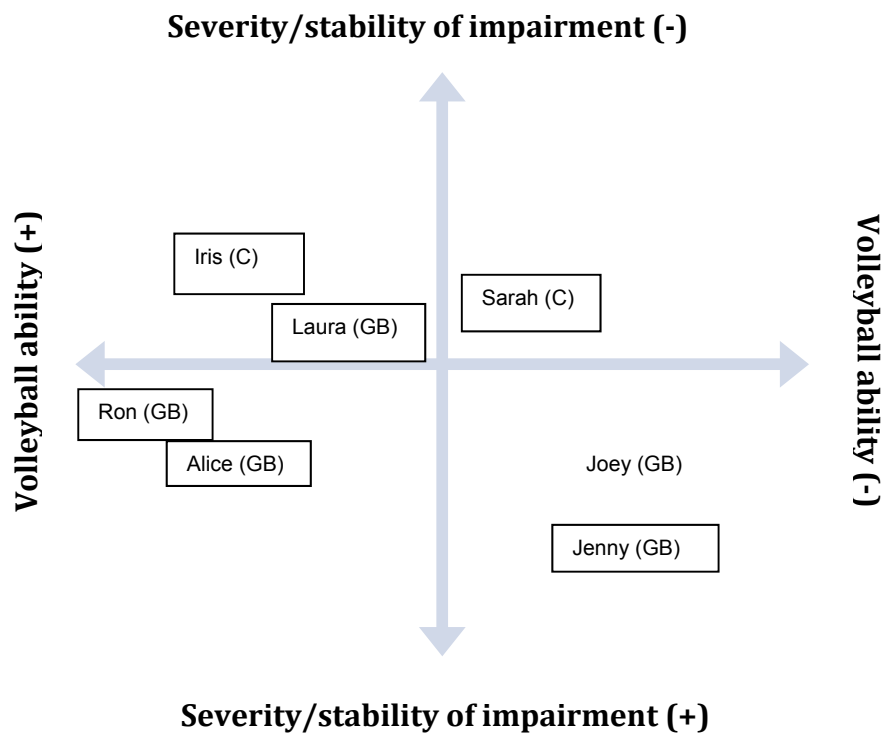


Figure 6.4. Pertinent oppositions differentiating MD players in SV field of practice.

At the top level of the diagram are presented the players with a more uncertain status. SV participation was more seriously affected by the risk of not being classified as eligible for Laura, as she was on the national team (cf. p.151). Sarah, former GB player, at the time of research had lost her eligibility, but her connection with the sport remained as a club player. In contrast, after the disappointment of her non-eligibility before the Paralympics, I did not see Laura in any SV event again.

Below, slightly more secure in terms of classification, Ron and Alice possessed as Iris and Laura, the additional strength of “knowing” volleyball habitus and they were central figures in the GB teams. Jenny and Joey (bottom level), though lacking experience in volleyball and being athletically less proficient, were more stable elements of the national teams, as their classificatory status was perceived by coaches as more reliable and stable.

#### DISABLED (D)

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The specific circumstances in which SV developed from 2009 onward, namely the institutional urgency in putting together a GB programme created the opportunity for some people with impairments to not only learn and play a new sport, but to immediately integrate a national squad. A great majority of the players interviewed were involved at some point in GB programme. For some, SV had been “enforced” by the lack of opportunities and/or competence to participate in more established (individual) sports such as athletics or swimming, since selection was more difficult. As noted earlier, SV could simply not afford to be selective. Some people grasped the opportunity; others refused because of the time, financial and material resources required and some others consciously opted for the club setting.

Alex, Irvin, Kenny, Jeremy, Joanne, Catherine, Cathy all shared the common experience of a traumatic episode, which resulted in the amputation of one or both of their legs. They underwent similar courses of adaptation, rehabilitation and reorganisation of their professional and personal lives (Seymour, 1998). They were forced to change careers; they lost or had to rebuild existent relationships; they had to readapt to a new body. In the process, they themselves also changed. On the other hand Peter, Jim, Mark, Stan and Anderson have seen their physical bodies slowly deteriorating due to illness and in some cases, being progressively “chopped like a salami” (Jim). For them, it was

the experience of illness and pain and not the amputations that had stolen their identities. In most cases the amputations returned to them the freedom of being “physical” again. Somehow, to deal with a “different” body was for this group easier than being imprisoned in constant pain and dysfunction: “When I was in pain I was quite a nasty person, people could say something and I would just react badly...”, (Stan); “For 15 years I had dropped foot, it was just a dead weight. I couldn’t do any of my sports”, (Anderson); “it was the best thing that ever happen to me because suddenly, once I got my leg off, I was walking again.” (Mark); “I was 10 years trying to save my legs and 'no, you're not taking them'. Now I wish I would have had them done straight away” (Jim).

All the D players with acquired disability have stories of adaptation, re-embodiment, a sudden or slow change in relation to their “body schema”, that is, “a universal setting, a schema of all types of perceptual unfolding and of all those inter-sensory correspondences which lie beyond the segment of the world which we are actually perceiving” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.326). As impairment disrupts that universal setting, a new universal setting of bodily possibilities needs to be constructed. Such reconstruction cannot occur without movement experiences and challenges.

Participation in SV provided opportunities for them to reformulate their body schemas and at the same time reconnect with a past identity, as for many of them sport had been essential in their personal and social selves (Alex, Irvin, Peter, Stan, Anderson, Mark, Catherine, Joanne). In other cases (Kenny, Cathy, Jim), SV offered a new opportunity. It was something they could do, compensating for the loss of the usual everyday business; an opportunity to rebuild one’s identity, one in which impairment was not central. In sum, a “second chance”<sup>40</sup> (Giddens, 1991 in Seymour, 1998, p.19).

The life experience of congenitally impaired players such as Danny, Jane, Hannah, Jay and Jack was quite different from the previous groups. These players spent their lives being treated as “special”. In most cases, this equated to social stigma, expressed in bullying: “I used to let people calling me names”, (Jane); being treated as a “golden child” “everybody kind of liked me just because I was disabled“, (Danny); a life of permanent embarrassment and shame (“I always hid my stumps from everybody“, Hannah); or simply being excluded from the mainstream world (life in a “special” institution). Their motivations and expectations for the sport did not greatly differ, as they were mainly

interested in learning a challenging new team sport. Team sports were not easily available and accessible for people with impairments, especially if they were not interested in using a wheelchair<sup>41</sup>.

The initiation of D players into SV happened in three different ways. People who perceived themselves as athletic or possessed a sporting past took the initiative to proactively search for sporting opportunities as part of their re-embodiment<sup>42</sup> strategy. They got acquainted with SV through specific events such as the Amputee Games or they were *forcefully* convinced by a friend to try the sport. Similarly to MD players, the main resistance towards participation dwelt on the public acceptance of their disability.

The specific positioning of each of these D players in the SV field is represented in figure 6.4, according to two distinctive principles: impairment appropriateness, that is, the degree of fit between the type of impairment and the sport's demands and volleyball ability.

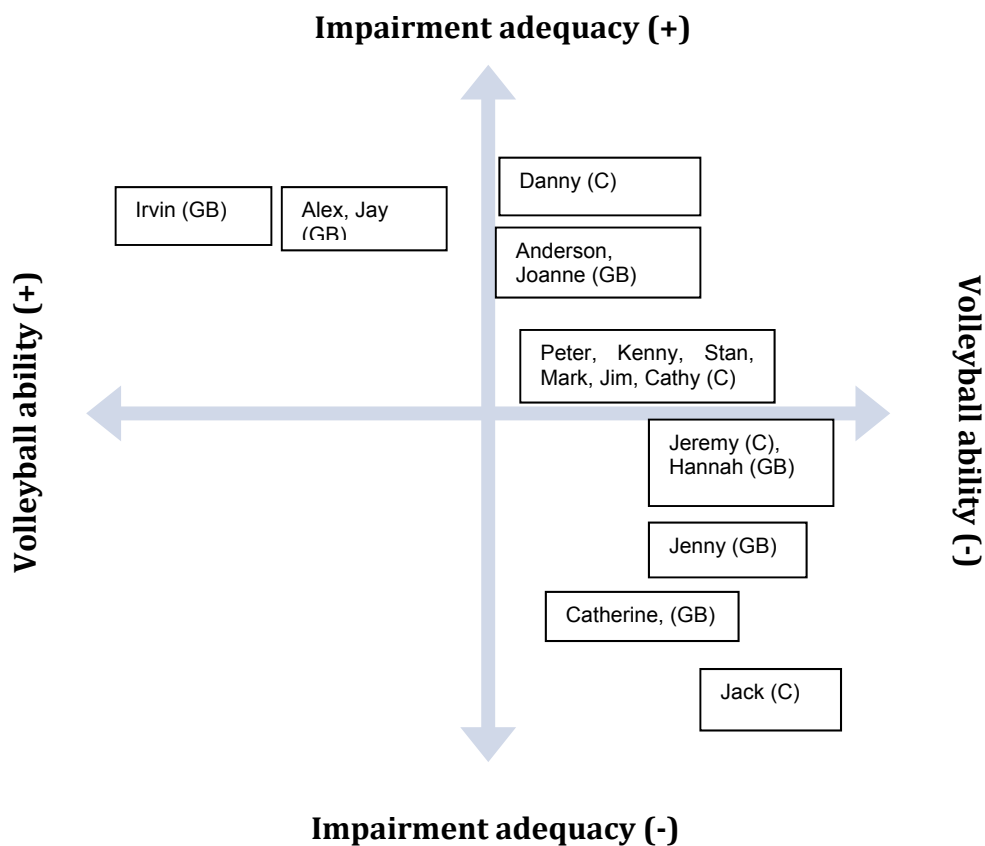


Figure 6.5. *Pertinent oppositions differentiating D players in SV field of practice.*

Although Danny possessed one of the best possible impairment fits for the sport (double amputee), he was one of the cases of players who could not be involved in the GB programme for financial and time constraints, as he lived quite far from London. Impairments affecting speed of reaction, core and upper limbs strength may be very limiting in SV: Jack's case, for instance (lower position). Worth noting is the fact that female players whose impairment fit and volleyball abilities are not too high are actually GB players, illustrating the incipient competitive level especially of the women's team.

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### STAFF

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At the institutional level, SV development was centralised in the hands of SV development officer, in cooperation with other institutional staff responsible for officials and coach development, marketing and performance programmes. This team was composed mainly by VE staff (some elements were equally players and/or coaches) who were responsible for converging UK Sport and Sport England political directives (cf. fig. 6.1) with the best interest of their organisation and the SV participants. No impaired person played institutional roles. Since this was the case, managerial staff can be understood as agents of governmentality, as they possessed the knowledge and the power to shape the conduct and identity of SV community, in close observance with BPA and UK sport ideals (cf. Chapter 8).

Foucault (1977) uses the concept of governmentality to describe the way people's behaviour is insidiously organised and controlled through physical and social techniques, the efficiency of which depends greatly on people's acceptance of the constructed "truth"<sup>43</sup>. If such truth is mainly shaped by non-disabled, the danger is not only that essential aspects of disability experience may be ignored, but also that people with impairments may perceive their reasonable needs as illegitimate. The lack of awareness of the artificiality of this hegemonic truth is translated by Bourdieu (1977) in the concept of "doxa". Because SV did not possess a distinctive and well-established identity and was governed by non-disabled "volleyballers", SV doxa (worldviews) and habitus (habitual practices) was mainly shaped by mainstream sporting culture, through systems of control and examination typical of a mainstreaming sporting habitus



imposed on SV players. These mechanisms were most heavily felt at the GB programme level.

The technical staff, a multidisciplinary team composed by psychologist, physiotherapist, assistant coach, coach, strength and conditioning instructor had the important responsibility of transforming GB SV participants' habitus to conform to what was perceived in the field as elite standards. These different professionals organised and conducted a set of "high-performance" programmes, focused on nutrition, physical preparation and a whole programme of training, tests and examinations (body composition, physical tests) and other surveillance practices (training diaries, attendance statistics, food diaries, "buddy" system, etc...). The goal of this system was to generate "Paralympians" as fast as possible.

The effect of these strategies seemed to be the "docile" acceptance of its premises, generating and reinforcing a "normalised judgment"<sup>44</sup> by which all community members panoptically surveyed each other, as the quote below exemplifies:

If I do not do what I am supposed to do, it is not just me that I am letting down but the whole team, the coaches and the group of people that is supporting this project. I am letting everybody down. So, when I hear some of the younger ones saying that they do not have time for physical conditioning for instance, when I am juggling family, work with these responsibilities, I become very angry. (Catherine. GB player)

Ultimately, the most important authority in this group was the coach, holder of the final word on team selection, and therefore the most important officialising agents of SV doxa or of a hegemonic sporting "truth". The coaches shaped, regulated, controlled and examined the conduct of the players, who were well aware that their position in that particular setting depended on the compliance to that truth and associated regimes. In turn, the coaches were also evaluated by others regarding their competency in educating and create teams which reflected institutional expectations and values.

With the exception of a brief period where the men's team was coached by a double amputee person, all the members of technical staff were non-impaired people. However, the importance of the phenomenological experience of impairment was emphasised by some SV players with impairments, including Irvin a GB player:

You don't have a lot of sitting volleyball coaches that actually play sitting volleyball that are actually disabled. I know some stuff that coaches don't; abled bodied coaches don't know, because they have never been in this situation they can't know how it is to be disabled. So they can't put themselves on the court and try to be disabled as a player. It's impossible.

Different from the GB programme, in the club context, managerial and staff roles were mainly occupied by volunteers, whose sporting doxa/habitus was very dissimilar from the national system. In most cases, coaching roles were performed by participants with little experience (though most of them officially accredited), therefore contributing to create a sporting culture characterised by informality, recreation and emphasis on the intrinsic goods of practice. Within this setting, some players (mainly men) with impairments performed more influential roles such as manager, coach and club president.

In short, examining the different staff roles available and the characteristics of the people who performed them, it is evident that these were largely dominated by mainstream volleyball culture, creating a certain tension in the communication between the staff and players regarding the factor disability: "They know nothing about disability. No awareness whatsoever" (Catherine).

#### THE NATIONAL GRAND PRIX: SITTING VOLLEYBALL "FESTIVAL"

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Every year, SV competitive season started around September/October and continued until March/April, culminating in the GP finals, held alongside the standing volleyball cup finals. GP's were one-day competitions, occupying a whole Saturday or Sunday, from around 9.30 in the morning to 6 o'clock in the evening, which happened six times during the season. These were the only occasions where almost everybody involved in SV in the UK were together: players, officials, coaches and managers, classifiers, volunteers, friends and curious people (between 120 and 150 people). These events were normally held in Kettering, the volleyball national centre; Ashcombe high school, in London (home of one of the best UK volleyball clubs) and occasionally in Stoke Mandeville hospital and Sheffield sports complex. Although the character and atmosphere of these competitions has transformed throughout time, these were the most important events for SV community during the time of this study.

For most clubs, participation in the GP's implied considerable travelling and occasionally overnight stays. Many of the teams travelled up to five hours on the day of the event, time spent outlining strategies and goals, exploring personal and team expectations, gossiping about opponents, forging "affectionate" rivalries, and generally anticipating the excitement of the day. Players, coaches and officials all characterised the community as a "family" and the event as a "friendly encounter". During the first two seasons of the study (2009/10 and 2010/11), all the teams played against each other, in one set matches. Since no criteria for the teams' composition existed, this system resulted often in very unbalanced competition. The ethnographic vignette below translates my experience of one the initial NGP's, providing a picture of its atmosphere and cultural habitus:

*7.30 a.m. I'm already on the road to the SV tournament, this time in Sheffield. Volleyball on the floor.... In my former volleyball teams, we would use it to tease somebody "You must play SV, there you will be much better!" as if it was something shameful. How ignorant!*

*I'm not sure of what is going to happen today. It seems difficult to anticipate things. In my team, though we are a small group, people are always different in practices, so who will show up for the tournament is equally a mystery. Last time I was not "needed" in my team. We have a lot of men (standing) volleyball players and a couple of D players, from the national team, so I was relegated to the bench. There is no competitive differentiation of any kind, therefore it is more difficult for girls, beginners, and some guys with impairments to participate in the games. As in volleyball, to be tall, big and strong does matter!*

*Finally here! I help my driver (VE staff) carrying some material. The Sheffield sport complex is amazing! Indoor athletics track with public seats, a massive building... The GP happens in two smaller halls on the first floor, each one big enough to set up two courts. We put everything in the lift and go back for more. Other cars arrive and everybody greets each other. There is a sense of camaraderie, joy and excitement in the air. Ray greets me at the reception. He's already equipped, his shorts just covering the top edge of what looks like a very fancy prosthesis. "How are you, Ray?" "Well, good, but I would be better if my team hadn't deserted me. Would you have some players to lend us?" I laugh. Is he joking?*

*Entering the hall, I immediately sense the animation of a place growing in excitement! It's a shame that today we are spread in these two separated halls. The open space of the last tournament was fabulous, as we could easily follow everything that was happening in any of the four courts. Mike is setting up the courts and the nets, taping some cords to the floor;*

*some of my team mates are standing, showing-off their volleyball skills. Here and there, close to the walls, some people take their prosthesis off, get equipped, displaying what seems to be a rehearsed routine: a bit of balm in their stump, putting on a sort of sock...chatting ... two of the guys seem to discuss the material of their stumps .... One of them struggles to bend his prosthesis and sit. Any chairs around? It doesn't look like it. Anyway, so many referees. This must be a special day!*

*In time, both halls are filled with small islands of bags, balls, legs, crutches, one or two wheelchairs and the courts start to be filled in with hordes of people shuffling around on their bottoms, exchanging some balls. There is laughter and smiles, which I interpret as a mixture of nervous apprehension and happy excitement.*

*I put my things in my team's territory and go for a tour around the premises. "Hi, Mena. How are you doing? Ready to play for the 'Barbies' again?" It's Kate, the captain of my improvised team in the last tournament. We were only girls (AB's), but everyone knew more or less what to do, so we had great fun. The team's name provokes cold chills down my spine, but the early morning fatigue shortened the answer: "Oh, of course. As long my team does not need me." I am however more interested in action than in team politics, so I ask Ray and Charlie who are already on the floor volleying and digging some balls: "Can I join you?" "Oh, yes, please." While I struggle to move to the ball, the other guys, all amputees, smile at my discomfort. "Too many legs! Ok, our game starts in 5 min. Will you play for us?" Oh, he was not joking! I don't know exactly what he meant with "playing for us". I soon realize it was more "Can you stay so that we have six players", as the ball keep flying 'over me' instead of 'to me'. I feel the irritation rising but I refrain from letting it out. The classic script of girls playing among men, I'm living it again! It is now my turn to serve and I prove my skills by getting us two direct points serving strong and sharp. I feel a bit sorry for the other team, as they are real beginners, but I had to fight for my dignity. I feel bad. It's ok to play your best, if you believe the other team is roughly equal, but most of the people with impairments playing do not know the basics of volleying, digging and serving skills. As the game continues in the same way, it quickly comes to an end and I rush to join the other "Barbies". At least we are all girls!*

*In the Barbies is a different story. We are all excited with the fact that we are only girls and I use the matches to ease up some of the resentment gained in my earlier experience. Once or twice, when the score was quite close and I felt the other team growing in respect for us I couldn't help provoking: "Hey, are you getting nervous? No need for that!" And there isn't really. The competition is quite uneven, as they are taller and stronger. To compensate for*

*my short height, I lift my bottom a bit so that I can block a ball and I get it! "Oh, no! Mr. referee, please, come on... They are so much bigger! Come on! Why don't you just let it pass?" Though the atmosphere is quite informal, in each game we have all the officials, two referees and two line judges, which I almost never had during my volleyball career. The referee ignores me. I knew he would, as I cannot lift my buttocks to play the ball. But my point is pertinent. The net is lower for them, and they are taller. How does that facilitate things for a team only composed of women?*

*Around 5.30', when the competition is over, the most valuable player award is given to Sam, a young man from Wales. Apparently - no impairment. "Spina bifida", someone says: I thought he was very skillful and stood out because of his competitive determination, on the verge of aggressiveness. Everybody is normally so polite and courteous.... Well deserved, anyway!*

*Time to go back home, exhausted, but happy! The "Barbies" put up good fights against the best teams. Belinda is a bit upset for not playing in our own club for the second time in a row. "Well, at least we played; we did not sit down on the bench all the time!" I say. But it still seems unfair. She is always at the training sessions. "They [coaches] just play with volleyball players to win and the D players to get the bonus points, so Kenny and Anderson have to play the whole set and then there is no space for us!" she ripostes. "In a way, I am happy that I did not play for our team. I would be quite upset if someone with impairment did not play because of me." I try to explain my argument further but Belinda disagrees: "But we have as much right as them. We are also part of the team."*

(Ethnographic vignette, December, 2009)

During this first year of competition (2009/2010), the GP recreational and experimental character was obvious at many levels. Although there was a feeling that something new, exciting and important was happening and no one seemed sure what to do and how to behave as the rules were quite "flexible" and undefined. The number of officials and volunteers for each court was probably as high as the number of players, since the competitions provided urgent training for all that wanted to be part of the Paralympics in 2012, but the competitive level was still very poor. The composition of the teams was extremely variable from tournament to tournament, and players would even sometimes play on different teams during the same tournament, without any complaint from the other competitors. All the clubs would occasionally struggle to present a full team.

Because of this lack of formality, the GP overall atmosphere was of tolerance, openness and sympathy, encouraging people to mix and talk with everyone. In competitive terms, the gap between the stronger (with volleyball or experienced SV players) and the weakest teams was fairly obvious. I often asked myself if some of the teams (which lost almost every game) could actually be having fun under these conditions.

These competitions exposed how SV habitus and identity was strongly influenced by the volleyball field, though differently shaped by its very particular circumstances: the lack of sporting categorisation (gender, age, impairment) and the “family ethos” of the community. Nonetheless, although a team could integrate men, women, young, old, AB’s and D’s, this heterogeneity was more common between than within the teams. Some teams are composed mainly of AB’s volleyball players, by men with impairments or by both genders with impairments. The possibilities were diverse, though rarely a team presented a rich internal diversity.

During the 2010/11 and 2011/12 competitive seasons, some changes occurred in the NGP’s, transforming substantially SV field of practice. My own perspective during 2010/11 season changed as I performed a coaching role. In this new position, I was struck by the lack of formality of the competition, especially visible in the “borrowing” of players from other teams. However, it was during this season that the clubs started to scrutinise more closely the sport regulations and be more attentive to competitive fairness. As their knowledge of the sport improved and their team identities strengthened, the sporting “truth” became more important than the “family ethos”. The rules for the bonus point also changed supposedly to allow more flexibility in the use of players. Whereas in the previous year, this point would be awarded only when the eligible player played a full set, in the new season it would be granted even if the D players played for just a single point. This modification opened the way for occasional abuse with some teams literally “using” players with impairments for a couple of points, without allowing them to actually play. The argument for this change seemed to be that “SV is a level playing field anyway, so why should we distinguish players. It is just competition. Some play and some sit on the bench! That’s sport!” (Martin, VE staff).

The next two years of the NGP (2011/12 and 2012/13) were organized in two tiers, the 1<sup>st</sup>, more advanced and the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the less competitive; responding to clubs’ concern that

the uneven competitive level could be discouraging and demotivating for both the better and the weaker teams. Within these two tiers, each teams played against all the other teams in matches at the best of three sets, a model close to the formal competition (which is of five sets). This division in competitive levels accentuated the social (informal) division between clubs, visible for instance in the organisation of the physical space. Only the 1<sup>st</sup> tier matches would have all official referees and an appropriate SV floor (cf. picture 6.1 and 6.2). Also, under this new system, the sporting hall was usually divided in two distinctive competitive spaces, which hindered the interaction between members of clubs competing at different levels. This was the biggest difference I noted in relation to the initial two competitive seasons, where it was completely natural and habitual to interact with any member of any team.



Picture 6.1. *First tier match, Stoke Mandeville stadium (21st March 2011). Researcher's photograph.*



Picture 6.2. *Second tier match. Stoke Mandeville Stadium (21st March 2011).* Courtesy of an anonymous informant.

The final competitive season (2012/13) of this study covers the post-Paralympic Games period. It became apparent during this last season that many of the people previously involved were mainly motivated by London 2012 Games because the number of people involved in the tournaments decreased significantly. There were fewer officials, staff and volunteers; fewer teams and players, especially in the best teams, as many of the GB players did not consistently participate. In contrast, the community-based teams appeared stronger, with some new players in their squads, including some juniors (around 12 under 18 year olds according to unofficial VE sources).

## SUMMARY

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SV context can be characterised as a *field of practice*, as a social space which dynamics and identity is constructed through and in the actor's embodied practice, influenced by a complex set of personal (motivations, interests, position in the field), cultural (the dominant doxa and habitus) and environmental (political, economic, social) circumstances. At the environmental level, SV development was strongly conditioned by the organisation of the London 2012 Olympics/Paralympics Games and by a set of political decisions, which created the opportunity for SV to emerge as an important



element in the institutional plan to raise volleyball's national status. Under these circumstances, and with public funding granted by UK Sport, SV was regulated, managed and conditioned by a mainstream volleyball culture that promoted it as a "universal sport" that could be played by anyone. Within a short period of time SV developed both at the level of the GB programme and grassroots.

SV community can be divided in three main social sub-groups: clubs, GB programme and Roehampton group, each with its own distinctive features in terms of membership, commitments and obligations. Translating its universality promise, the SV community is constituted by people with very diverse characteristics, the most important being impairment (AB's, MD's and D's); though only eligible players are allowed to compete at WOVD international events.

The most important events of SV field of practice were the NGP's, competitions where SV doxa and habitus were constructed, challenged and/or reinforced. However, as SV developed in close observance of national sport institutional interests (UK sport, BPA) as well as of Volleyball NGB's (BVF and VE), a SV distinctive ethos did not have space to germinate. This characterisation of SV contextual circumstances offers an indispensable mapping of the complex network of multidimensional and multilevel circumstances shaping its potential for the expansion of the personal capabilities of players with impairments. The inclusion of this chapter before the more detailed capabilities assessment in the next responds to the concern that such analysis is understood in context.

## Chapter 7 . ZOOMING THE LENS: PERSONAL CAPABILITIES, MULTIPLE PORTRAYS

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### INTRODUCTION

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Nussbaum's list of central capabilities derived from "years of cross cultural discussion" on the universal conditions of a life consistent with basic human dignity, and is based upon intuitive moral judgment (2000, 2006). The present assessment relies equally on these assumptions and although not all elements of SV list of relevant capabilities derive from Nussbaum's original list, it is believed its intuitive moral worth and comprehensive nature subsist.

In this chapter, capabilities assessment SV captures the ethically valued things players with impairments like to "do" and "be", which are influenced by their participation in SV.

The chapter is divided in ten sections, one for each capability. Each section starts with the capability's definition and its examination. This is then followed by its most significant functionings and contextual conditions. The writing style combines personal narrative, researcher's interpretation of empirical data and statements by SV actors, to mimic the mosaic of perspectives and experiences that have been explored. Besides a qualitative capabilities' assessment, this chapter constitutes also an anthropological incursion into SV field of practice, reporting on what were perceived as its most distinctive cultural features.

### 1. HEALTH AND LIFE

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*Being able to preserve or improve physical and psychological health, living a life one qualifies as satisfactory.*

*Murder volleyball<sup>45</sup>?*

*Today is my first time in SV. The guys are already playing, six against five. Strangely, most of them do not seem impaired at all. Two prosthetic legs stand against the wall.*

*"Hi, guys, I hope you don't mind me watching you play for a while." I said, preparing to sit on one of the benches near the court. "We are missing one! Just sit down and play!"*

*And here I am. How am I supposed to play seated? If there isn't any running, jumping, diving, it can't be that difficult, can it? I just have to wait for the ball. I did not plan to play, because obviously I am not "disabled"! I just couldn't imagine myself, who needs to feel exhausted in a workout, finding SV demanding enough. There is not much going on. So, I'll just stay here waiting....*

*The problem is....the ball never comes exactly to where I am. I have to reach out a bit,... so I keep losing balance and falling. Auuuuugh... it hurts! Is that it?! I look around me. Some of the guys seem as bad as me, but some others are moving much better ... the amputee guys... How do they do it? How can I move? Nobody seems to be teaching how to do it. I observe them while I try to play. Their hands are on the ground and they push themselves to make the rest of the body slide. I try to do the same. I push hard to move just a couple of inches. I can't get my hands to the ball on time. I try again, this time sliding on my butt after the push. Ufff! I can feel the sweat running down my spine! I look at Anderson again and... SMASHH!!!... A ball right on my nose! A ball right on my nose! I can't believe! In 10 minutes! It hurts badly! The pain definitely humbles me! The game is so fast that I can hardly keep up with the pace. No more thinking now. All my senses alert!*

*Finally nine o'clock. I'm going home exhausted, physically and mentally! And more clever, I guess! My nose still hurts!*

(Field notes, 1<sup>st</sup> SV practice at *Flying Butts* <sup>46</sup>, 6th November 2009)

In the same way people with impairments are seen as more dependent and passive than non-impaired, so disability sport is often understood as less competitive, serious and physically demanding than mainstream sport. To some extent, I held similar views. To get a ball smashed at my nose the first day I played the game was an enlightening (though painful!) experience. It forced me to question my presumed physical superiority as an "abled" person. Not only was I quite ineffective playing the game, as I had to use all my senses and abilities in order to play.

The story of a smashed nose may be a paradoxical way to start exploring SV potential to preserve or improve health. Yet, this experience utterly changed my initial and misguided assumptions. I always thought of SV as a recreational "tool", not dynamic or "physical" enough to induce health changes. I simply assumed that players did not move! And without sufficient physical exertion, the health adaptations traditionally associated with exercise would be minimal. However, the lived experience of the sport exposed me to its enormous potential to stimulate general cardio fitness, balance, strength,

flexibility, coordination and reaction and mental abilities such as strategic thinking and quick decisions. In fact, SV can be, depending on the level of engagement of the people involved and on the quality and adequacy of the sessions, a strenuous experience, physically and mentally.

The health functionings reported by players varied from the obvious such as weight loss to changes in nutrition, smoking and exercise habits (some players started to frequent the gym to play the sport better). For some players, SV offered an opportunity to compensate for the diminished activity in their everyday life activities (e.g. Kenny, Cathy; Jeremy) since they acquired their impairments; for others it provided an opportunity to recover lost levels of fitness (e.g. Stan, Peter, Rob, Anderson, Catherine). Overall, the acquisition of a SV sporting habitus promised a long term active lifestyle, as expressed by Jenny:

From now on I will definitely be an athlete. I can't see myself sitting and do my ... I don't even know what I used to do all the time... Just sat doing nothing all the time. I think I would probably start to miss the gym, even though I used to hate it. I would think: "I need to do something; I need to go out and do something energetic". I can't see myself going back to how I was before SV.

For Kenny, the advantage of SV relatively to other forms of exercise was the combination of fun and purposeful exercise:

Before SV, I remember I went to the physio and he said "You need to build your core. Because as you walk, your core needs to be strong so you don't roll from side to side." So, instead of doing ordinary core exercises which is quite boring, by playing sitting volleyball I exercise my core muscles, which will then improve the way I walk when I put my prosthesis back on...

SV was considered by players as a very dynamic sport, able to provide a challenging physical workout unlike many other disability sports:

A lot of disability sports, I do not feel them energetic enough. If I want to do exercise, I want to really feel it. I don't want to be doing sailing or something... I want to really feel it... not to throw out balls or something... Something that makes you feel you've worked hard. (Hannah)

I've tried the archery, fencing, power lifting, I've tried them all, but the one that gets the cardiovascular side of things is wheelchair basketball and sitting volleyball. It is a better workout. (Stan)

The perception that SV can improve fitness/health was confirmed by SV survey results. Health and fitness related motives (“To be fitter, physical fitness/fitness”; “Exercising”; “keep active and healthy”; “being active again” and “part of rehabilitation”) were the second key motivation for engagement in SV activities and one of areas in which respondents have felt more significant changes (cf. Appendix J).

Next, are presented functionings more closely related with psychological health, hereby broadly understood as satisfaction with one’s own life.

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### A NEW (POSITIVE) START

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*A new “me”*

*To have some private time away from the other “sisters” in the “Band”, Catherine and I walk together from the small apartment at the university to coffee shop nearby. When she’s tired, Catherine uses her wheelchair but today she walks.*

*She walks differently, leading with one leg and dragging the other one behind, knowing that some people, as she once said “look at me as if there’s something wrong far more than just a physical disability”. She does it anyway. But I understand from our conversation that Catherine was not always that strong.*

*After her accident, when she almost lost completely the use of her right leg, life dramatically changed. Though she was forced to leave a high profile job, it was mainly her family life that suffered. It became about how her “disability stopped us from doing things” as she recalls with evident sorrow. Catherine states “Before the accident I used to participate in all sport competitions for parents and children. Suddenly, it all became, I can’t do this anymore, I can’t do that anymore... is it wheelchair accessible? Not only had my own life but also my family’s life suddenly had to be centred on MY impairment, MY disability!”*

*She tells me also about the frustration with the doctors that kept giving up her hope but did not really know what to do. Not knowing what to expect, during two years she navigated between hope and despair. SV presented Catherine with new possibilities: “After having seen amputees in SV and how they coped, I asked the doctors: ‘Can’t you just chop it off?’ They turned to me ‘Why, are you having depressive thoughts about it?’ as if I wanted to kill myself. On another occasion I complained to the physio about the pain in my hip and he said I should stop playing SV. Probably the only positive thing that came from being disabled! They just don’t have a clue! One day, I stopped hoping for a cure.*

This one doctor finally had the courage to say that I will never get better. And from that moment, I could move on, I could deal with it. SV was the one thing of my life that really helped me to start again. In SV, everything was new! There my disability disappeared. It was not something that I was either trying to hang on to, that I couldn't do any more or something that was forced on me by doctors or physios. It was almost like a fresh start." *I realise how important it was for Catherine this new start provided by the fact that no one there could compare the 'new' with the 'old' Catherine. She could just be herself, with no past and a new future to build. She conquered a new identity as a GB SV player and not just as the Catherine that was once upon a time somebody important and now is confined to a wheelchair.*

(Reflections on Catherine's interview, London, 17<sup>th</sup> February 2011)

The "second chance" narrative, herein described by Catherine as a "new fresh start" denotes a reflexive reconstruction of the self after a traumatic life event. In situations of acquired impairment this reconstruction happens alongside a re-embodiment process (cf. Note 42). The reconnection of the self with a different body implies not only the phenomenological construction of new body schemas and new movement habitus but additionally the management of the cultural and social meanings attached to their "damaged" bodies. One of the most significant aspects of this process was the possibility of a new (positive) start. Catherine's narrative is coherent with the narratives of many other players with acquired impairment. SV was something which was positive and novelty helped them to focus on the possibilities, and provide a pause from the overwhelming confrontation with the obvious loss.

A different expression of the second chance theme was offered by Danny (congenitally impaired). For him, the crisis moment happened in his transition to adulthood. In his case a new positive start was marked by the construction of a sporting identity, which counteracted the complete dominance of the impairment category in his social identity:

As I got older, it was in some ways similar to Hollywood child stars who as they grow, they don't know how to deal with the transition from childhood to adulthood. I went through some really rocky stages. But now, SV has given me the chance to be the sitting volleyball guy rather than just the disabled guy. So, it's kind of funny to say that disabled sport has led me away from just being seen as purely disabled.

Closely connected with the second chance theme is the narrative of SV as "life saver". I was occasionally told stories of how SV have "saved" people from being "imprisoned" in

a life of deprivation. Two particular cases of players with congenital impairments were consistently highlighted:

Jerry has come from the wrong side of the tracks. He had a very tough upbringing. He's had his disability since birth, and the environment where he's been living has been really, really tough. When I first met him, he was so quiet and suspicious ... So, to see him changing, very slowly.... SV has given the guy... It's almost like he was in prison and he passed to day release, now turning into full release...If Jerry hadn't joined sitting, I dread to think what could have happened. (Anderson)

Jack was a club player with a severe impairment, who spent great part of his life in a "special" institution. He never seemed to miss a SV event. The changes in his general attitude were noticed by other community members:

SV has changed his life enormously. I think he was probably virtually *a recluse* [my italics]. Now, he comes to these major events. Everybody knows him, everybody stops and has a chat with him and he gets to actually do a physical sport, which he probably thought that he couldn't do... Besides throwing beanbags or something like that, which was as far as he would ever been engaged in sport. So I think SV has changed is life enormously, and in a very positive way. (Rob)

All these stories have in common the fact that SV have ignited a new drive for life, not always explicit in words, but evident in the players' general attitude towards life. Jenny remembered: "My grandma said that I have more of a sparkle in my eyes now!"

## 2. EXPLORE ONE'S OWN POTENTIAL

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*Being confronted with challenges that promote the exploration of one's limits and possibilities.*

Since I've had the accident I've found that impairment almost gives me an excuse to stop trying. Because everyone tells me: "Oh, never mind. You tried your hardest." In volleyball it is just the opposite. If I don't try my hardest I let everybody else down. And I know I let everybody else down. And they'll know I've let them down. It gives me that push to challenge myself and REALLY do my best. (Catherine)

When I meet people and I tell them what I have done, they say: "Oh, you're such an inspiration!" Why am I an inspiration? Why? Because I have a metal leg? Why does that make me an inspiration? I am just doing something that I class as normal. I don't class myself as being disabled because I can do everything you can. (Anderson)

Why do we immediately lower our expectations of individuals whose bodies are impaired? Why is it so inspiring to see an amputee playing sport? Is it because the

accepted norm is so powerful that it prevents human imagination from envisioning new/different possibilities for “damaged” bodies? This seems to be the case, even though several sources of evidence suggest that “damaged” bodies possess many more possibilities than the ones our ableist viewpoint allow us to envision.

Even before recent advances in cognitive sciences confirmed the symbiotic relation between mind, body and world, phenomenology had already alerted us to this possibility. Husserl concept of “life-world” (1970), Heidegger’s “Dasein” (1962) or Merleau-Ponty “being-in-the-body-in-the-world” (1962), all emphasise the shared ontological reality of these entities. Recent investigations in cognitive science confirmed that body, brain and world compose a system that re-adapts whenever any of this elements change, keeping the functional purpose of the whole system (Clark, 2007, 2008). This means that even in conditions of severe bodily impairment, important functionalities of the triad mind-body-world may be kept and/or new ones developed when/if there is enough stimuli to promote re-adaptation. This stimulus can be provided through movement experiences.

According to Sheets-Johnstone (2011), movement is not only the first human interaction with the world; but also the central one. By moving, the person constructs her repertoire of “I cans” (Husserl, 1989 in Johnstone, 2011), the essential foundation for self-agency. Unfortunately, people with impairments are often denied opportunities to explore new dynamics through movement because social views of movement, activity and agency are by and large solely associated with an idealised “undamaged” body. Not only are adequate movement opportunities<sup>47</sup> scarce, as people with impairments often internalise their low physical competence (“impairment almost gives you an excuse to stop trying”, Catherine) and consequently resist participating in physical activities even if/when they are available.

The reaction of players with “damaged” bodies to the general understanding that they were supposed to “sit around all day doing nothing” (Hannah, D) varied. One of the first and most common reactions of players with acquired impairment was of some conformity, because their functional reassessment focused on the losses: “After I had my accident, all my life became centred on what I couldn’t do any more”. (Catherine). Among the congenitally impaired players, I have found two different stances: the ones



who have measured themselves against the able bodied norm and internalised their inadequacy, such as Jenny (“I thought I would never be any good at sport, because I was different”) and the ones who, not conforming to those expectations, explored their possibilities: “When I was little, I played my own invention of football, crawling on the floor. I would use my hands instead of feet trying to make my own game, and pretend I was playing for Liverpool or whatever” (Danny, double-leg amputee); “I learned throughout my life that if I couldn’t do something I would watch how other kids were doing it. I would work out how to do it in my head and the next day I could do it, my own way” (Gerard, single-leg amputee).

Obviously, these different stances were shaped by the situational context in which people acted. For Danny and Gerard, the experience of mainstream education exposed them to a cultural sporting habitus which emulated a “normal” body, urging them to “fit in”. Therefore they developed strategies accordingly. The possibility to “work it in my head”, that is to “imagine” movement possibilities, suggests a deep phenomenological knowledge of one’s own body only attainable through constant experimentation, so in this case wanting to “do as others” constituted an important stimulus for movement exploration. Still, opportunities to explore one’s possibilities should not be forced on people who strive to “fit in” or to “overcome impairment”. This presupposes that impairment is somehow “wrong”, reproducing a “normalised” logic opposite to goals of social and personal empowerment of people with impairment. Instead, sport opportunities should be better tailored to accommodate a range of diverse bodies and motivations (Nixon, 2007).

My own experience of the field and other empirical data suggests that SV can be a good space to forge new efficient dynamics within the mind-body-world unity, which remains true even for a wide variety of embodiments. Herein I focus on the more explicit SV challenges, recognised by players with impairments as important and their reported consequences.

First, by proposing an alternative way of moving (shuffling on the buttocks), SV generates a new bodily awareness. My own experience of the game helps understanding this process:

*Hands on the floor. Hands up. Volley. Hands down. Feet push. Arms stretch forwards to recover the ball from the block in a dig. Feet soles down, hands down, push, slide. Sliding! Backwards, left, right... Pushing, dig! Falling, straightening up, moving, falling... Straight up! Breathe....end of rally<sup>48</sup>... My heart jumps out of my chest to tell how these few metres are in fact kilometres and how a second is actually a lot. Sitting????!! Disabled?! What?! Are you kidding me?! Speeding Volleyball! I'm knackered...*

(Field notes, SV practice at *Flying Butts*, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2010)

The first SV challenge is the suspension of old body schemas and a willingness to explore new movement possibilities. Because my movement experiences were so heavily grounded in the use of feet to move, I initially assumed movement was impossible. Coaching, observation of others but most of all, practical experimentation unveiled a universe of possibilities that slowly became internalised, relocating my conscious awareness from my own body to the crucial elements of the game: ball, opponents, and teammates. But the full challenge SV imposed, which I would never be able to appreciate had I not played the game, was the combination of a whole set of physical and mental skills: perceptive skills (being aware of the position of opponents and teammates; the direction, speed and anticipation of the falling point of the ball; the empty and the occupied space); fast decision-making processes and even faster actions. The complexity of and intensity of this abilities' network was such that SV was always demanding, regardless of player's expertise level, as Jeremy noted:

You have to be ready, and move quickly, you got to be alert all the time. It's physically and mentally challenging. You've got to be there waiting for that ball, you've got to know that if you move slightly you have better chances to get the ball. You have to anticipate. There is no time. I've not mastered that yet. It's a very quick sport. It doesn't matter what stage you are, it will always challenge you. Because there is always a player out there that can hit it a bit faster than you.

SV helped constructing a new subject-body-world awareness through the mastery of one's own biological body, as no additional devices are allowed in SV. Players felt they could still be "whole" despite their "damaged" bodies, because they didn't need to rely on objects traditionally associated with disability, as the wheelchair: "It is not about how great your wheelchair is, it's about you!" (Catherine).

By instituting a movement habitus challenging for non-impaired and impaired players alike, SV practice offered conditions for everyone to explore new possibilities, within

one's own limits. Creating new patterns of interaction within the system body-mind-world, each player expanded his/her repertoire of "I cans". An important consequence of this process seemed to be the concomitant reconfiguration of narrow understandings on the real possibilities of "damaged" bodies. By experiencing the game and its inherent difficulties, impaired and non-impaired people alike acknowledged the situational character of disability, as SV often proved how the apparently "abled" body can be less efficient than a "disabled" one (see also capability 8 and chapter 8).

The consequences of these opportunities to expand one's own potential extended to other contexts of players' practical lives, namely in performing everyday life tasks:

I've learnt a lot simply and purely from seeing other people doing it and giving it a go... Emily is a good example. She said she would never ever go out of her wheelchair other than to get into a seat, but now quite often she shuffles at home because it's quicker to get somewhere or it's easier to get to something rather than trying to fit a chair through and balance on the edge... (Joanna)

Because you're more active playing the sports then you tend to be..., when you want to do things, you think... 'If I was on the court I could get there by shuffling that way or do that'. So you end up shuffling around at home as well. (Stan)

Personally, it did help me because I'm feeling physically better. It has made things a lot easier. Probably if I wasn't doing any sport at all, I would struggle doing everyday tasks at home, whereas now I can do a lot of things. (Peter)

Furthermore, psychologically, players became more prone to engage in new challenges and to deal with both failure and success, as Stan noted:

You go through a stage of saying: "Okay, what can I do? No, can't do this, I can't do that." Well, it's getting out of that mentality to the mentality of "well, I'll give it a go." If it doesn't work, you know... tick that off the list: "Ok, I can't do that." (Stan)

And it worked in everyday things as well. Not just in sport, I'm thinking: "well, I can do that." Whereas before I might think: "Humm, I don't know whether I could do that" instead of giving it a go. Now, I do have a go and do try anything... (Peter)

In social terms, playing the sport obliged players to act in an environment where each person's action had a direct effect on others (cf. capability 5), especially challenging for those players who had withdrawn from the outside world after impairment.

SV's potential to explore one's own possibilities was affected by many important factors. For most of the players, the agonistic character of competitive sport provided additional motivation to test one's limits ("I love the challenge of playing against the best teams,

even if we lose.” Danny). However, if the competition dominated over other aspects of SV practice, it could also be quite demotivating for many players with impairments (cf. chapter 8). Related to this experiencing fun whilst playing the game appeared to be a determinant factor in leading people to explore unknown possibilities and embrace new challenges (cf. Capability 9).

Finally, in a team sport like SV, where the interaction between players is so essential for success, the incentive to give one’s best was magnified by peer actions. The team was considered a new “family”, where cohesion and membership depended on the close adherence to a sporting “doxa” that valued self-transcendence. Nobody wanted to be the one that let teammates down. Like most of the other players, Joanna stressed the co-dependence between team members as a motivational factor: “If you don't push yourself to achieve what you can achieve you are not actually letting yourself down, you are also letting down other team members. If you're not in the will to give it all in the future, there is no point of wasting people's time now!” (Joanna). Especially in the GB programme, these family members held high expectations on each other regarding commitment and behaviour. In SV the “family” no one was “disabled” in the sense that being disabled is being a victim, passive, dependent: “Every girl in SV, nobody feels sorry for themselves ...Everyone just wants to get on with their life” (Imogen in *Band of Sisters*, Friend, 2011).

In short, the process of exploring one’s own possibilities by continuously trying to overcome challenges seemed to teach both people with and without impairments that all bodies, “damaged” and “undamaged”, do *adapt* to new circumstances. In that discovery, impairment and disability were often demystified and stripped of their inflated negativity.

### 3. KNOWLEDGE

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*Expand knowledge on impairment, disability, oneself and others.*

Knowledge is always referentially situated, shaped by the specific dynamics of one’s own body-mind-world system. What one does, how one moves and perceives the world, the interactions and events in which one engages shaped by the obstacles and

possibilities one encounters and this transforms one's knowledge. Equally, personal knowledge shapes one's embodied actions, in a circular and dynamic iterative process (Bourdieu, 1977; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In other words, there is no knowledge without experience or action without knowledge. Relying once again upon Sheets-Johnstone central argument that movement is the first and central phenomenological experience (2011), it then follows that movement experiences are absolutely essential to build sufficient self-knowledge and ground a basic sense of agency. If movement experiences are diverse and challenging, the possibilities for knowledge expansion rise, as the analysis of the previous capability demonstrates.

The present capability highlights the importance of an informed and comprehensive knowledge of oneself (including impairment, disability and others) in forming one's own life preferences and in the expansion of all the other capabilities, but especially of practical reason. In expanding this capability, the great challenge for people with impairments is to overcome the effect of pervasive ableist distortions (Campbell, 1999). It is therefore appropriate to start by examining to what extent SV can promote a more accurate knowledge of impairment and disability.

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#### DISABILITY, A NEW (POSITIVE) UNDERSTANDING

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Among many others researchers, Jenny Morris (1991) notes how people with impairments are deprived of social relations with people with similar impairments, reinforcing the social alienation promoted by their everyday interactions with the able-bodied world. For this reason it is important to know and relate to other people with impairments, especially those who have defied traditional scripts and can provide positive role models. Catherine, for instance, recalled how she was completely fascinated by the action of a man with a similar impairment, during her first international tournament:

Seeing so many people with so many disabilities, how different people moved around was a massive turning point for me... I remember sitting, watching a man, a whole match watching just one man that had a similar disability to mine. And just seeing how he moved and began to think, "If he can do that, I can also do it". It was amazing!

Stan had a similar experience:

During the Amputee Games, sitting volleyball was a kick up in my back side: “Look at all these physically disabled people. All of them are doing sports you can do. Look at them and get off your back side... do something.” And I said “All right, I will help to set it up.” [SV club] Since then I am back. Actually now, I went back to scuba-diving, I kayak and I’m doing sitting volleyball... (Stan, single leg amputee)

As with Stan and Catherine, prior to SV most players only knew other people with impairments from medical institutions or self-help groups, who exhibited mainly the negative disability script. SV, on the contrary, exposed them to positive role models, as Hannah noted:

The only other disabled person that I used to see, apart from swimming competitions were in limp centres. It's always a really depressing place to go. It's always full of people that are using crutches or in wheelchairs. You very rarely see anyone young, with a zest for life, who sees that gap and goes for it. It's very nice to see people, so full of life determined to get on with everything... I think that's really helpful. It makes you feel that disability it's not such a bad thing all the time...

By watching so many people with different impairments “getting on with their lives”, people came to realize that “It is not a bad life!” (Gerard). This realisation was not only important for people with impairments but for non-impaired people whose fear of disability was thus questioned:

It makes you think about your own life and how fast you can go from being able bodied to disabled and that you are quite fortunate to not be disabled. On the other hand, these people are not unhappy... If you become disabled, you can still have a good life. My initial apprehension came from not knowing. Not being confronted with that before. (Iris, AB player)

The knowledge expansion on disability issues was equally promoted by the great co-dependence induced by the own game dynamics, as it demanded a thorough knowledge of each other’s’ embodiments, strengths and weaknesses:

When you're playing in a team where people have different “problems” and a mixture of different disabilities you have to become a lot more aware of every single player on court, so that you understand how to use those limitations, turn them into strengths and make the team stronger. (Sophie, AB, former MD player)

Something revealing, though a little unexpected, was the absence of public conversations surrounding impairment/disability, which I initially interpreted as a sign those topics were not being given any “special” attention. I often heard staff members saying they were focused “on what people could do, not on what they could not do”

(Sean), and it was clear they perceived this attitude as the most correct because it expressed a positive take on disability. But focusing only on what people can do and ignore their undeniable functional limitations, leaving it solely to the individual sphere may also override important and irrevocable needs. Over time, I came to understand that such absence concealed perhaps a more negative dimension, at least within the “elite” strand. A personal episode of injury illuminated an important element of SV team habitus, the discouragement of any expression of physical weakness:

*It is much harder now to keep up the pace with the girls in these training camps. Almost two years have passed since the first training camp and their evolution is amazing... their volleyball skills are still a bit incipient, but the way they are moving is amazing! Meanwhile, my shoulder decides to collapse. The couple of times I couldn't hit the ball properly, I complained: "Oh, my shoulder! It's giving me problems!" Though I was not expecting a choir of sympathy, the reactions my complaint generated surprised me. Amongst smirks and rolling eyes, one or two girls recited the team mantra: "Oh, yeah, your shoulder, poor you... There is not time or space for excuses around here." Wait a minute... Excuses???? What is going on here? I cannot lift my shoulder without pain. That is not imaginary. Should I just hit the ball no matter what? I wonder what happens if or when some of the players, who possess "real" impairments, with "real" limitations and "real" pain need some particular attention. What may be the real impact of the attitude of "nobody feels sorry for themselves" on the well-being of these players? What happens when/if these players have reasonable complaints and needs? Will they express them or will they hide them fearing that they may be interpreted as weak? When, how and with whom do these players share the negatives of impairment? It starts to be obvious to me that they believe that being a Paralympian requires another form of passing disability: the complete disguise of pain and physical limitations.*

(Field notes, GB training camp, Kettering, 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2011)

This experience made me realise that perhaps the elite habitus that the GB staff were trying to implement was at odds with an overt acknowledgment of the limitations and obstacles inherent to the “carnal politics of everyday life” (Patterson & Hughes, 1999) of impaired bodies. This realisation was later confirmed by one of the GB female players: “We were aware that any complaint of an injury would be reported to the coaches and could be a reason for de-selection”. Yet, it seems reasonable to suggest that improving the knowledge of disability and impairment implies not only learning that “not all is bad”

but also to deal with negative dimensions such as pain and functional limitations in the best possible way. In this sense, the lack of openness to discuss disability matters within SV culture can act as a limiting factor for knowledge expansion.

Although in SV public sphere, the negative dimensions of experiences of impairment seemed to be overlooked, some players reported that these issues were often discussed more privately with their closest friends and teammates. It was in this space that the expansion of a more practical knowledge of disability and impairment seemed to germinate: sharing of tips and practical advice on how to deal with impairment in everyday life:

I had in my head what I needed to do, how I should be walking, how my leg should fit, what was and wasn't acceptable. Through meeting people in SV, you then realize "Actually you can do that. If you do that, that will happen, so don't do that". It gives you... It opens up a lot more options. What spray do you use to put your sock on, what form of fixing is best... (Kenny)

When you lose a leg all the weight goes to the other leg and it messes with your back muscles. That creates problems in your hips, in your back muscles, in your knees. I met people that passed through this 20 years ago or 10 years ago so they helped me. They can be useful. People can give you good advice because they have been through that. (Irvin)

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### EXPAND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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Alongside with the expansion of knowledge of impairment and disability, opportunities to discover unknown personal skills were then created. This self-knowledge expressed itself in many different ways. For instance, in Danny's case, the most significant discovery was his potential for leadership roles:

I've realized I'm not as much of an idiot as I used to think I was. I've learned that I can lead people on and off the court, either as a captain or possibly as a coach. I've learned that when people see me working hard, they get a degree of respect for me, even if they don't necessarily follow my kind of influence.

Irvin (elite player) emphasised the self-knowledge gained from experiencing competitive success and failure, which helped him to know himself and deal better with frustration and success in other aspects of life:

I've gained a lot of psychology, of spiritual strength through playing any sport...When I'm not playing well I know how I am going to react and the same when I'm playing well. I



know how to deal better with bad stuff in my life because I know that you can lose a game when you thought you had already won it. You can be leading 24 to 16 and lose 26-24. You have to deal with it. Yeah, you can put a lot of different aspects of sports in your life and also some aspects of your life into sport.

Jenny (GB player), previously a very shy and insecure girl, discovered that she could be really passionate, determined and committed about something: “I realised how committed I can be to something and how I can be ambitious and that I have got a competitive side, whereas before I never really thought about fighting for anything“. Though social and psychological skills were promoted by participation in SV, it was the knowledge of one’s own physical possibilities in relation to the physical space that more explicitly developed through SV, illustrated by the account of my own learning experience (cf. p.144). When in May 2010, I participated in the first GB women training camp, I was doubtful that the players could improve significantly. However, in April 2011, I was confronted with a completely different scenario, where the players had mastered their bodies in the particular form of movement used in SV and were much better attuned with their physical selves.

Knowledge expansion is obviously dependent on numerous factors inherent to personal biographies and circumstances, whether one experiences disability or not. There is however a substantial a priori difference in the social circumstances of people with impairments. Social expectations of damaged bodies are restricted from the outset by narrow disability social scripts. Because people usually tailor their dreams in accordance to what they assess as possible, they can only challenge those scripts by engaging in experiences which expand their knowledge of impairment and themselves. The better informed the person is about their own possibilities, the more effective they will be as a reflective agent, that is, more able to efficiently exercise practical reason.

#### 4. PRACTICAL REASON

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*Using SV experience to help forming a conception of the good and engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life.*

Practical reason is the process whereby a person reflectively decides what course of action to take. For Nussbaum (2006) and Sen (2009) this process entails a moral

grounding, explained in lay terms by Jon Nixon: “practical reason is the means whereby the practitioner meets his moral requirements, the means, that is, whereby practice become morally purposeful and purposes are imbued with practical input” (Nixon, 2008, p.124). In particular for people with impairments, the realization of the equal moral worth of human beings independent of their embodiment is vital to neutralize their often internalized “inferiority”; allowing them to progress from a “false consciousness” (Charlton 2000, p.117) to a “raised consciousness” (p.118). By discovering the significance of their commonality with others they can then progress to an “empowered consciousness” (p.119). Only at this level are people with impairments in the position to actively fight the mechanisms of disability oppression.

The contribution of SV participation to the development of an empowering moral stance (“forming a conception of the good”) is implicit throughout all the capabilities on the SV list in the form of opportunities to know the possibilities and limits of one’s own potential, free from discriminating or distorted views. This section will focus specifically on the two most significant and explicit dimensions of practical reason illuminated in the data: SV impact on the way people structure their everyday lives and the extent to which SV promotes informed critical reflection on planning one’s life.

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### A NEW SENSE OF LIFE STRUCTURE

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The assertion that SV fostered a new sense of life’s structure was common amongst club and GB players. Jack is perhaps the most noteworthy example. Jack is a severely impaired club athlete- with profound mobility limitations - who spent a great part of his life in institutionalized care. When he became an adult and left the institution, SV became central in his everyday life. The motivation to be a better player gave him a sense of purpose evident in the way his practical life unfolded around sitting volleyball: “I think about things more than I did before playing the sport, about what I am going to do during the day. I have a ball at home, so I try to train. I just want to get better”. By consciously planning his day around the things he chooses to do, Jack enjoyed a sense of agency that expanded to other areas of SV field. These days, Jack is also a leader in his SV club and performs several important administrative roles.

The way SV influences everyday life planning was also evident in the practical lives of GB players. The allocation of between 15 and 25 hours/week to the sport demanded great organization skills, more evident for people who had to balance work and family responsibilities with GB commitments. For Alex, this pressure was assessed as a source of stability:

It has created a structure in my life. So, my life happened as I want it to, when I want it to, the way that I want it to... in order to do well in volleyball, you need to build a routine and that has been going on for about two years now, and it will continue until the Paralympics. That has been great because it has given a lot of stability to my life.

As Joanna expressed, the influence of SV in the organization of time was dependent on the importance granted to the sport and with the perception of one's role in SV community: "Actually SV made me more motivated for everything in general, more organized with my time, there is purpose. I don't want to let myself down and I don't want to let my team down". However, SV can also impact negatively on practical lives as most of the GB athletes reported difficulties in balancing all the important areas of their lives such as study, work, family and friends. Many have made the informed choice of compromising other areas for a short period of time to accomplish their dream of participating in the Paralympics, perceived as a once in a lifetime opportunity. Others however, may have optimistically misjudged their chances of being selected for the GB team, aided by the particular circumstances of SV development in the thrill of London 2012 (cf. chapter 6).

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### NEW LIFE AVENUES

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Practical reason implies an informed moral understanding of what one can reasonably wish and strive for. However, these personal aspirations are strongly shaped by one's own circumstances. Nussbaum (2006) and Sen (2009) alert us to the significant effect of adaptive preferences on one's life preferences (cf. p.15), and Bourdieu highlights the influence of habitus on the correlation between one's "subjective aspirations" and what one perceives as "objective probabilities" (1977, p.77). No wonder then that SV was a constant reference in players' discourses about future life achievements and goals. The most significant and common aspiration was to be selected for the final GB team and to help develop the sport.

As explained earlier, SV the pool of selectable players was so limited that to be selected for the GB programme was relatively easy, offering unforeseen attractive opportunities, which most players seemed eager to enjoy. Jane, for instance, situated her dreams and hopes in Rio, 2016:

Once I become fitter I'll be able to represent Great Britain, when I'm older [this was almost said with a bit of shyness as if she is aiming too high]. I'm quite young now, so for 2016, which is five years away, if I can get more and more training, and I can be better... I can be there...

Another frequent future aspiration was to help developing the sport: "I've experienced the benefits of this. It would be lovely if other people could also experience them." (Alex). Anderson stated: "That's why I am here. Because I believe it can really change perceptions. Not just in sport, but across all spheres" (Anderson). This goal seems grounded in a conception of the good centred on the equal moral value of people with and without impairments, denoting also a drive to modify the negative social perception of disability. Such willingness to take action suggests the development of an "empowered consciousness" (Charlton, 2000), which, if supported, can have a wider social impact in and outside SV context (cf. chapter 8).

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#### KNOWLEDGE OF ONE'S CIRCUMSTANCES

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Sen (2009) associates practical morality with reflection on the' consequences of actions<sup>49</sup>, anchored in the best informed knowledge of one's circumstances. The more complete and truthful this knowledge is the more conscious and adequate this critical reflection will be. This process implies anticipating the comprehensive consequences of one's action, within reasonable limits. Hence, it is important to understand to what extent the players were in possession of relevant knowledge, available within the SV field, to ground their choices. Kate, a member of the VE technical staff corroborated my initial perception that not all the GB players were well aware of their particular circumstances:

I talk to the girls a lot. Some of them are so motivated by sitting volleyball.... They say: "I've got a disability, but this is what I can do. I would never had an opportunity, if I was still able bodied. Now that I am disabled, I can actually represent my country. It's amazing!".... Some of the girls may have anchored the sitting volleyball thing as their whole life now: "I found something new. I love it so much. This is what I want to achieve.

This is what I want to do. This is my life now.” But there's no guarantee that sitting volleyball will give them that. In some respects, it could be short term.

*CFS*: Do you think they know it?

I don't think so, some of them. But we currently have a goal, which is a one year, two-year plan and that is what they are living for. I have a concern that for some of them, if sitting volleyball goes away suddenly, then everything in which they've grounded all their motivation and happiness will disappear. (Kate, GB staff)

Some players were cautious in giving SV and Paralympic participation the central stage in their lives: “I think to be in the Paralympics would be a massive goal. I am quite cautious about setting that as one of my life goals, because there is a lot of ‘maybes’ in the middle” (Catherine), however, most of the initially selected players invested significantly in their GB participation. I believe that the circumstances in which SV elite strand developed favoured a certain dazzlement, in that people with little or no elite sporting experience were suddenly confronted with the honorific possibility of wearing a GB kit.

At an institutional level, GB programme staff had to rapidly transform the people recruited into elite athletes to prove to BPA they had a “credible elite programme”. Because one of the significant indicators for the credibility of the program was the number of athletes involved, the GB programme staff had to maintain an extended number of people until a very late stage of preparation, after considerable investment had been made. This situation threatened practical reason because it may have prevented the technical and managerial team from fully informing each player of their real chances for selection. Also, in elite disability sport world and in sitting volleyball in particular, the standard criteria to what constitutes an elite performance are not only under defined as they are also dependent on the quality of the eligible players available. Additionally, the lack of previous sporting experience in many players hindered their ability to interpret the signs in the context and make reasonably informed choices concerning the intensity of their commitment. In fact, it was not only impossible for the VE institutions to assure the sustainability of the program after the Paralympics as the players involved in the GB programme were also initially unaware of the time, commitment, money and effort this participation demanded. Even walking on such wobbly terrain, some players prioritised SV over all their other life dimensions, perhaps amazed by the “Paralympic dream”. Not surprisingly, when asked during the interviews

in what position would they rank SV in terms of its importance on their lives, most of the SV GB players positioned it in first place.

Less expected was the fact that many of the club players also considered SV extremely important, positioning it after family. The difference between the two SV settings was that while club participation did not have a significant negative impact in other dimensions of club player's lives, at a GB level this impact was considerable. Most of the players were constantly faced with the need to choose between SV and many other "doings" and "beings" they also valued, even without evident signs that their "sacrifices" would take them closer to their desired goals (for most of them, participating in the Paralympics). It can be argued that such insecurity is a prerogative of elite sport in general, and not just disability sport. While this might be true, disability sport is affected by additional and perhaps avoidable insecurity factors. The first, evident in the SV context, is the possibility to become a Paralympian almost instantaneously, without the long term involvement that would more firmly ground one's understanding of the implications of their choices and avoid disillusionment. Another significant additional instability factor is classification, the eligibility to participate. In SV, all the players temporarily classified can actually be excluded from official competitions at very later stages. As Laura expressed, the possibility of being declassified immediately before competition threatened the purposefulness of all the difficult choices undertaken:

Classification it's like a tsunami. I can't do anything about it. It's out of my control. I can do all the training, all the hours, all the physical fitness, but I have ultimately absolutely no control over classification. How is that fair on sports people when they train, they put in the hours, they say no to family, no to friends, no to this, no to that and yet, in the end, somebody else says: "No, actually I can't classify you."

*CFS:* And it is also the timing, isn't it?

Yes, it's stupid, because classification happens just before majors tournaments. So, imagine how that affects a player who is expecting to play, turns up and then isn't classified.

In brief, an informed perception on one's real chances to be selected for the teams seems vital for the exercise of practical reason. Relying on my conversations with players, I believe that many of them overestimated their selection chances, causing them to act differently had they been informed about their real chances (cf. Appendix C). Anderson is perhaps one of the most dramatic examples of someone who, having

invested in the sport at great expenses of his family life, in the end suffered the disappointment of failing his dream:

SV has made me quite narrow minded, with my family life. Not that I don't really care but ... my family life came second. Volleyball has precedence over everything else. So that has made me quite, not a nasty person but...if my wife asks me to do something, I would say: "Oh, no, because of volleyball." "It's always the volleyball." "Yeah, that's right. Volleyball comes first." Knowing the reaction that it gets, I still say it. Well, 2012 is there and that is where I'm going. Anyone who is in the way, get out of the way because that's where I'm going." I will have my family after 2012, and that's how I look at it. It's a year and a half more. (Anderson)

In sum, while SV presents potential for a positive impact in building a conception of the good which emphasise moral equality (cf. Other capabilities especially 2, 3 and 7); the particular circumstances involving the recent development of the sport may have prevented GB players from exercising practical reason in relation to their participation in the sport, under conditions of reasonably informed choice.

## 5. AFFILIATION

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*Opportunities to develop meaningful social relations, in which one feels respected.*

Affiliation is for Nussbaum (2011) a cardinal capability, because it reinforces the respect for the person as a social being, which is conditional to human dignity. Though Nussbaum's definition is simplified in SV's list of capabilities, it still implies the same premises namely b) "the social basis of self-respect and non-humiliation" and c) "to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others" (Nussbaum, 2006, p.77). Because in the context of this research these conditions were assessed significant in their own right, they were considered distinctively (respectively capabilities 6 and 7 and 9; cf. Appendix A). For this reason, the present section explores solely SV conditions to extend one's network of meaningful personal relationships.

In contexts of impairment and/or disability, affiliation is perhaps even more significant than in other contexts. Because of the negative social meanings ascribed to impairment, people often have their identity "spoiled" (Goffman, 1963) in other's and one's own eyes. This damaged social identity compromises the development of meaningful social relationships because the "disabled" often internalize their difference (Morris, 1991).

Additionally, traditional barriers imposed by the environmental, social and physical circumstances of one's impairment further hinder affiliation opportunities (Shakespeare, 2006).

In APA and disability sport, although affiliation has received limited attention (Seymour, Reid & Bloom, 2009), some studies confirm its importance in terms of the values (Vute & Krpač, 2000) and motivation of SV players (Protic, 2011). The present study reinforces that importance. In the SV questionnaire, affiliation (e.g. "team context", "camaraderie", "opportunities to socialize", "to make friends" and to "be part of a larger community") is the most expressed reason for practice. Similarly, when asked about the most important life changes triggered by SV, affiliation related changes are once again the most mentioned ("have more friends", "belong to a community", "recognized by peers" and "Not feel different from others", cf. Appendix J). Likewise, in the semi-structured interviews, SV players consistently referred to the expansion of friendships and social network as the most valued outcomes of their participation.

Affiliation assessment focuses upon the interpersonal relations interpreted as meaningful, significant and valued by the players. Obviously, the personal context of each player impacts on SV potential to expand affiliation. As suggested by Howe (2008a, 2011), the distinction between people with congenital and acquired impairment is a relevant one. The sample of SV players with congenital or long term impairment usually expressed life narratives marked by uniqueness and bullying (Jane: "I was the only one with disability in my school"), feelings of unworthiness (Danny: "Feeling very, very different and thinking that no one could ever love me"), feelings of social inadequacy (Hannah: "I would hide that I was disabled") or specialness (Danny: "Everybody loved me because I was like the golden child"). For these athletes, to be in an environment where they could be themselves and accepted by people with and without impairments was extremely valued.

People who became impaired were confronted with different challenges. As Murphy (1987) so well describes, not only their "self" changes, as their world of social relations also changed because others equally needed to adapt. In this process, redefining old relationships may be "often a harder job than forging a new one" (p.124). In this sense, the establishment of a new social network plays an important part in the re-



embodiment process. Empirical analysis of the data set suggests three particularly important affiliation functionings: relating to others with similar impairments; to feel one belongs and relating to others with different embodiments.

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### RELATING TO OTHERS WITH SIMILAR IMPAIRMENTS

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People with impairments are often deprived of the opportunity to relate to people with similar experiences, leading to feelings of loneliness, lack of understanding and uniqueness (Morris, 1991). Similar feelings were reported by SV players: “When you become an amputee you think you're the only person; you think you are the only one that is disabled and there's nobody else” (Anderson). Talking about how SV could be positive for people with impairments, Danny confirmed this stance:

That person would probably be sat on their own, feeling quite lame, not believing anyone else knows what they are going through. They probably don't think there is any one to whom they can talk and they don't see any escape from it. I would say volleyball answers all of them.

The simple opportunity to be with other people with similar impairments seemed to create an immediate rapport, an instantaneous understanding, dissolving feelings of uniqueness:

When you come and play sitting volleyball, a good thing is that 80% are amputees. So mixing with other amputees it's quite inspiring because you were thinking you were the only person. So, the game as a whole opens your eyes up....It relaxes me, because I know there are other amputees around with the same issues, the same problems that I have. They might not be talking about it, but they do have them. (Anderson)

When he lost his leg in an accident, Irvin, a young man with prospects in professional sport, saw his world and identity collapsing. His connection with players with similar impairment allowed him to accept his new embodiment:

I wasn't okay. When I lost my leg I didn't want... I went to the seaside ... for holidays but I didn't go swimming because I didn't want people to see that I don't have a leg. It lasted for about three or four years, then I realized I didn't care about it. When I started to get involved in sitting volleyball and saw people doing this and that, I changed. I met a lot of people with the same disability that acted normal so I started acting normal. It helped me. It did. To accept. I don't care if someone is going to see that I don't have a leg. They are just going to realize... “He is dealing really well with it.” It's nothing special. It's not a big deal.

Meeting others who have accepted and adapted to their impairments facilitated similar process in many of the SV players. Further positive outcomes of the relationship with other people with disabilities are explored in other capabilities (e.g. capabilities 2, 3, 4).

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### TO FEEL ONE BELONGS

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For most players with impairments, SV team/club became a context in relation to which they developed a sense of belonging. Danny's case was especially significant as he was the only child with congenital impairment in his mainstream school: "Growing up disabled in an able-bodied environment, I've really struggled to feel part of a team or another group, whereas in my team I really fit in naturally and easily." An important dimension of this feeling of belonging was that people around really "knew" him therefore they did not treat him as "special" or with unnecessary concern:

People know me. They know I might be grumpy or quiet, or angry about something... And they will just, you know..."Oh, that's Danny, he will be fine!" It's very similar to my mum saying "He will be injured a bit and then he will get on." The feeling of belonging. That is really, really important. That's what SV has given me, which I didn't have before. (Danny).

Because SV is a multi-impairment sport, it can also offer a more inviting environment for people whose impairment is more atypical, such as Jenny, a girl whose congenital minor impairment prevented her from fitting in, in both mainstream and disability sports settings:

I did try other sports before but I never felt I could fit in, really, because I couldn't do the same as the other people. But as soon as they mentioned disability sport, I thought, "Oh, okay I will try this. I can fit in. I have a chance". But a lot of the other sports... it was the other way around. I didn't fit in because I wasn't as disabled as some of other people. Like the wheelchair basketball, I was in a wheelchair but suddenly walked off... It was a bit strange.

The feeling of camaraderie between the elements of the different SV sub-groups was forged in various ways, not too different from the ones I have experienced in mainstream sport. For instance, by sharing the common goal of victory in competitive challenges: "when you do work as a team, especially when you win... less so when you fail ... you do get a really strong camaraderie", (Danny); "When you go and play sitting volleyball and you win a match and you're part of that team that's won the match, no matter how big or little part of it you are, you still won as a team" (Kenny).

In particular the constant banter and humor directed at impairment itself constituted a pervasive bonding mechanism in SV. In *Band of Sisters*, Martine (double amputee) and Emma (double leg paralysis) meet each other on the way to the toilet. “Spazzy legs!” is the way Martine greets Emma, to which she replies “Jealous!”. Joking and teasing each other about impairment constitutes a “transgressive re-appropriation” (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000, p.35) of the derogatory terms associated with impairment. Most players find this banter bonding, liberating and positive for the social perception of disability. Rob Richardson, GB men’s captain, explains on BBC sports blog:

As a group of amputees in a team, we have quite a dark humor about disability and we just get on with it, we don’t get down hearted or anything like that. That’s kind of my background to it all – it’s not about feeling sorry for yourself. When you have a taboo subject, like disability, once you can start to make fun of it in public and on TV and stuff, then you know that you’re starting to break down some boundaries.<sup>50</sup>

On another occasion, Jessica Frezza, the youngest member of GB women’s team and a single amputee expressed her curiosity about the destination of the amputated limbs: “You know... when you lose your legs... Where do they put it?” to which Charlie replies “They put it in a garden and grow new legs out of it!” (*Band of Sisters*, Friend, 2011). But targeting embodiment in humorous remarks was often extended to non-impaired players, as a way to assure them they were part of the group: “Oh, those stupid legs always getting in the way! You got legs; you might as well use them. Go and get the balls!” And he was always joking about it, joking about the disability of being able bodied” (Ralph, AB player); “The beauty with a team sport is you’re never left out in a joke with the rest of the guys and it’s good” (Peter).

SV potential to generate this feeling of belonging was also evident in the way SV contexts reproduced the “family”: “I’m quite surprised how sitting volleyball is quite a close family compared to other sports that I’ve played”, (Irvin); “It started to feel like a little family!” Jenny) or “Band” (in *Band of Sisters*), evidencing the high degree of support, intimacy and loyalty of the interpersonal relations developed within SV. Joey (GB player) expressed this family ethos in the following way: “This is awesome, you would do anything for these guys and you like to think that they would do anything for you. And some people, even though they take the mickey out of me chronically. I know they are only doing it because they care“.

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## RELATING WITH DIFFERENT PEOPLE

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I think there's a tendency of disabled people to enclose themselves in one part of their lives. In your SV club you play with disabled, non-disabled, learning difficulties, they are all your teammates, so it gives you that border thing. It's that exposure thing, widening perspectives. (Catherine)

Some social approaches to disability focus upon how societies create “disability ghettos” which reinforce impairment as difference and otherness (cf. chapter 2). SV created a context of human diversity, where people with different ages, gender and all embodiments interacted. One of the important effects of this mixture was the opportunity to discover and explore commonalities and increase the understanding of differences. Affiliation with a diverse mixture of people was usually highly valued, as it counteracts the social division between the “abled” and “disabled” worlds.

For players with impairments, opportunities to affiliate had positive consequences outside SV sphere, as there was an increased sense of social competence that helped players overcoming social fears. For instance, while recovering his social confidence through SV, Joey was conquering his fear of approaching the opposite sex:

I went to University, I started to work and I got closed into my shell a bit. But now, since I came to SV I like to think that I am getting back to what I was. And have the confidence to go and speak to people. The only thing that I am still working... and this is going to sound really sad... it's asking out for a drink, or for a date, members of the opposite sex. I am rubbish at things like that. I get really nervous. Why would she go out with someone like me? But I think the way I am going with volleyball getting that confidence out, I will be able to do that without being scared.

In the next three sections, important conditions for affiliation and other capabilities are explored. “Achieve, respect and love oneself” concerns the sense of self-worth and respect conditional to relate with others; “Feeling and being socially and morally equal” assess SV in terms of equality and “Doing good for others” examines the opportunities for players to be recognized as valuable contributive SV members.

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### 6. ACHIEVE, RESPECT AND LOVE ONESELF

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*Being able to expand positive self- perceptions, through experiences of achievement and success.*

People grow up with the perception that disabled people are lazy or that they can't do it. (Joanna)

A special moment? It has to be the Grand Prix finals in Crystal Palace. I couldn't believe that we were going to the finals in the first year of competition. We made it! We actually did! We lost that game then, but just being there and giving them such a good fight was fantastic! I still remember how nice it felt to walk down the street in my shorts; everybody seeing my prosthetic leg and I could tell them "Yeah, I'm just coming from volleyball." People went: "WHAT?" "Yes, that's right. I just came back from Crystal Palace." And feeling really proud! (Jim, club player)

According to Morris (1991), often non-disabled people assume "That we can't actually do anything. That we 'sit around' all day 'doing nothing'" (p.21). This perception is reaffirmed by Joanna in the quote above. The same assumption is evident in other instances. Nussbaum explains that people with disabilities were excluded from the initial contract in Rawls' theory of justice because of their inability to be productive citizens (2006) and Campbell relates this assumption with a hegemonic unreachable concept of autonomy (2009) that does not account for the inherent dependency of all human beings. These negative social expectations frequently undermine the perception of self-worth of people with impairments, as Murphy testifies: "If a person is treated with ridicule, contempt or aversion, then his own ego is diminished, his dignity and humanity are called into question.... Damage to the body, then, causes diminution of the self, which is further magnified by debasement by others" (1987, p.93).

Sport achievements imply a level of physical and psychological self-mastery which can challenge such assumptions. When negative meanings are removed, the person usually accepts impairment as part of his/her identity, as Jim expressed: "I don't feel that me and Mark [another single leg amputee team player] are disabled. I really do not feel we are a disabled even one bit. We are more abled now than we ever were". The interconnection between achievement, self-respect and self-esteem has long been acknowledged. For instance, Basch (1988) defines self-esteem as "a genuine sense of one's self as worthy of nurture and protection, capable of growth and development, [stemming] from the experience of competence, the experience of functioning appropriately" (p.24). Similarly, self-determination theory considers competence as a basic psychological need to feel effective (Deci & Ryan, 2002). This interrelation was confirmed in the present study. The analysis of this capability focuses on players' self-esteem perceptions, documenting positive changes after SV involvement.

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## FEELING DIFFERENT, SHAMEFUL OR GUILTY

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When I first started sitting volleyball I was very self-conscious. I wore long trousers over my stumps, so nobody could see them and if I ever trained in a sports hall, where people could look in I was very nervous, very self-conscious, and aware of who was around me. To suddenly be in a big sports hall with no legs on, sat on the floor, moving on the floor with no legs on was such a horrible image... Seeing someone...Arghhhhh... If I watched myself on video, I hated it. I hated to see the way I moved on the floor... (Hannah)

The way people react to their own impairment is subjective and dependent on multiple factors. Nevertheless, people whose impairment is more visible may have been subjected more strongly to the normalising stare (Garland-Thomson, 2009) of non-disabled people. Jane and Jessica were both young girls whose legs were amputated in their infancy. They grew up being the only ones in their social environment who had an impairment. Jessica remembered “As a child, I was bullied for not having one leg: ‘Peg leg; Freak; Pirate!’” (in *Band of Sisters*). Jane’s experience was not much different “Yeah, cos’ I used to just let people called me names and stuff”. Other players (Jason, Jenny) disguised their impairments while growing up, trying to “fit in” as much as they could. Hannah (initial quote) would never expose her legs in public and took some time to be comfortable with that exposition in SV. Differently, people with acquired impairment may feel the shock of a sudden change in their personal self and social “selves”. Yet, in both cases, feeling different and ashamed of one’s own body tends to be coupled. The most common expression of these feelings was the need to hide impairment (and themselves) as much as possible, as Hannah (above) and Jenny (below) recalled: “I’ve never shown people my leg. I never let anyone see my foot. I always thought it was horrible and I was quite embarrassed. I thought it was awful and then people would see it straight away and think: ‘Oh my god, what’s wrong with her?’” (Jenny).

Guilt was a less verbalised reaction to one’s impairment, but quite evident for instance when Catherine, injured by a distracted driver, admitted that to be a GB player compensated her family for the fact their life had become “all about what they could not do anymore”:

And then I hear my son saying to someone: ‘that’s my mom, she’s going to be in the Paralympics, you know, she plays volleyball for Great Britain.’ can I come...can I watch? It has given me something I can give them *back*, if that makes some sense. It has given them that thing they can be *proud* of me. (Catherine) [my italics]

Similar motivations were expressed by other GB players who valued being in the Paralympics as a way to give their family and friends a source of pride, “compensating” them for the inconveniences brought on by their impairment.

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### ACHIEVEMENT AND SELF-ESTEEM

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I used to get embarrassed when I went swimming. I couldn't swim in a straight line, because my left leg is a lot weaker. In my first swimming lesson I was laughed at by a little girl because I couldn't swim in a straight line. So it put me off and I always associated that with playing sports. I thought they would always bully me because I wasn't the same. (Jenny)

Previous experiences in sport and physical education usually contributed to low self-competence and self-esteem. Many congenitally or long-term impaired SV players said that failure in sport or physical education settings impacted upon self-esteem. Jane's experience of mainstream sport was not much different from Jenny's (above), but in wheelchair basketball:

In basketball I was completely helpless. I was always falling off the wheelchair, and I felt even more disabled than if I just played normal basketball. I seemed to be so much worse than anyone else, so there was no point of continuing because I didn't feel I could get better at it.

In these cases, SV practice provided the phenomenological proof that they could be competent at sport, contradicting their internalised incompetence promoted by past negative experiences. For some, to participate in SV was in itself an achievement conducive to increasing self-esteem, because it counteracted disability stereotypes they had been long exposed to:

I actually come out and did something. I could be just lounging around, being very disabled, stereotypically disabled, just getting on with life, looking down upon myself saying “Oh, I will never be able to do sport, what's the point?” I could choose that, but I feel pretty good about myself because I still try at sport. I think I am more proud of myself. By doing sport, we have something good to think about ourselves. We are less likely to look down at ourselves. (Jane)

For the players with acquired disability, for whom sport had been important, SV gave them a chance to prove they could “still do it!” The fact that SV was hard, physically demanding and played without additional devices was essential in this respect:

I hadn't been able to walk properly for some time. Suddenly I was walking properly and the idea of doing something where I had to sit in a wheelchair to do it, it felt like I was going back instead of pushing forward. SV did not really seem like it was moving backwards. Yeah, it is all so much to prove to myself that I can still do it. (Joanna)

One of the most important indicators of achievement in SV was often articulated by players as moments where they felt physically competent: reaching a ball that was almost impossible to reach (Kenny); or the first time they hit a ball like a “proper” elite player (Irvin). Interestingly these experiences were described with so much liveliness, detail and excitement that they seemed to be almost re-lived:

I remember I managed to slow down and rotate and I remember I hit that ball and we won that point, and I just went down to my knees to celebrate. I had never done it to celebrate. I would just go, yeeessss... But on that occasion, I literally got on to my knees, screamed the loudest that I could, YEESSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS! (Joey)

The connection between achievement, self-competence and self-esteem derived also from the perception that they were doing something important, noticeable in the way they were often praised. This was especially salient in the GB players, and connected with a feeling of pride:

She asked me if I wanted to come along and if I wanted to practice with the GB people. I enjoyed that... I guess... It turned my head a little bit. It made me think that there were possibilities out there that haven't been offered to me before. ... It was just that... Just that feeling that maybe... Just doing something with the GB title makes you feel really proud... You know....If I can't make it all the way to Paralympics I still have all this of not quite like being a celebrity but people are so amazed... “Oh, you're training with the GB team!” You can't help to feel proud. (Hannah, GB player)

The occasion Jeremy came to play for the team I was coaching was perhaps the best example of the importance of achievement. Jeremy was feeling like a “spared tire” in his own team. I had often observed that when not on the bench, he was on court waiting for a chance to play while his teammates were actually avoiding using him. At one tournament, because his team had too many players and ours not enough, we borrowed him as he was often training with us anyway. Here's what happened:

*Now, our opponents seem worried! Suddenly, there is no more joking around and the atmosphere is heavy on that side of the court. On this side, Kenny, Jason, Ben, Duddley, Jeremy and I are just trying to stick together. I have never felt the team this connected. Our opponents are one the best teams in the tournament, but this time the scoreboard is on our*



*side. Jeremy is definitely noisier, taller and stronger today. I have never seen him so vibrant and passionate. Three points to win the match. Are we REALLY going to win this? Jeremy grabs the ball and prepares to serve. The others don't dare to look at him. I hold my breath just in case the noise distracts him. It is not that we distrust him, but he was never the most confident of players... The ball flies over the net and hits an empty area of the court. Point! I give the ball back to Jeremy as I notice his determination. I know now he's not going to fail. Second serve and the ball flies directly to one of the guys that decide out of despair to return it immediately to our side. I am in charge of setting that one and Dudley smashes it with no mercy! One more point and that is it! Jeremy rushes to serve again. The ball slaps behind me and appears on the opponents' side of the court as a threat they want to get rid of as quickly as possible, immediately sending the ball back to us. OUT, Kenny shouts! As the ball touches the ground out of bounds on our side of the court, Jeremy jumps on his leg and stump! He's completely out of himself! I need to move away to avoid being squashed by so many pounds of happiness!*

*(Field notes, GP Kettering, 21<sup>st</sup> December 2011)*

The glow of happiness on Jeremy's face and the way he celebrated that victory remains one of my most vivid and important memories in SV. Later, reflecting on this episode I realised how the dynamics of the game is still distant from the universality and evenness that some people proclaim. It is still possible to exclude people from the game even when they are physically on court, therefore opportunities for success and achievement are still not equalised (cf. also capabilities 8, 10).

The most important factor for the expansion of the present capability is the adequate provision of the sport, in which the challenges are optimal in relation to players' possibilities both in practice and competitive settings. The fact Jeremy was not a confident player has to be connected with the fact he seldom played on his team. Besides not feeling (and being) valued, he did not have an opportunity to overcome challenges, experience success and achievement. So, can SV become a game where people with diverse embodiments possess similar opportunities to experience success? The answer to this question is closely connected to the way SV promotes or hinders the next capability.

## 7. FEELING AND BEING MORALLY AND SOCIALLY EQUAL

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*Opportunities to feel morally equal and to be recognised as such by others, in acceptance of individual differences, including impairment.*

There is so much stigma in this country.... If you are disabled you're not as good as an able-bodied person. It shouldn't be like that.... I was in a third world country and I was accepted, I was walking around with my prosthetic leg and not even one person stared or patronised me. The only person that stared at me was a guy that had lost his leg and he wanted to know about my prosthetic, how I got mine and if he could afford it. (Joanne, single amputee)

We are needy temporal animal beings who begin as babies and end, often, in other forms of dependency, ...rationality and sociability are themselves temporal, having growth, maturity, and (if time permits) decline....The kind of sociability that is fully human includes symmetrical relations... but also relations of more or less extreme asymmetry: ...non symmetrical relations can still contain reciprocity and truly human functioning. (Nussbaum, 2006, p. 160)

“We are all equal!”; “We are all freaks of nature!”, “We are all the same!” were recurrent slogans in SV community attesting the fundamental importance of equality within this context. Equality must be understood as the moral equality of each and all human beings, based on their inherent dignity, rational and animal roots (Nussbaum, quote above). Accepting this assertion human dignity cannot be damaged, even if the person is not productive exactly in the same way as others, or needs “unusual” care. If people need to rely on asymmetrical relations with other human beings, this should not result in asymmetrical worth since dignity is a basic, inalienable and inviolable entitlement of everyone (Nussbaum, 2006) therefore unusual needs ought be handled within the scope of the human duty of care. Nonetheless, people with impairments are often still considered as “not as good as able-bodied”, as Joanna said.

The analysis of this capability explores SV potential to alter the traditional relational dynamics between people with and without impairments transmuting it towards an acceptance of individual differences and recognition of moral equality.

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### EVERYBODY SITS DOWN!

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Relying on Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the embodied mind (1962), MacKenzie and Scully (2007) explore the limits imposed by embodiment on our moral imagination, that

is, for our ability to understand the *other*. We can never fully imagine how it is to be another person, because we cannot be, have and perceive a world through any other body than our own. Yet, moral imagination can still “expand the scope of our moral sympathies” (MacKenzie and Scully 2007, p.346) if people base their relationships with others on the acceptance of universal “asymmetrical reciprocity”. Asymmetrical reciprocity means the other is acknowledged as a distinctive person, with unavoidable and unreachable distinct (asymmetrical) points of view, but remains a person similar to oneself in the essential.

A major obstacle to the development of a sympathetic quality- that is, “taking the other’s situation- her needs, concerns or distress- as object of one’s concern” (Mackenzie and Scully, 2007, p.346)- is to overvalue difference. In other words, valuing commonalities, while being aware of personal distinctiveness, is perhaps the only attitude conducive to the recognition of moral equality. However, this ability is only nourished when people are given opportunities to recognise similarities, when they interact in a relatively level playing field.

In SV, the weakening of the cultural “apartheid” between impaired and non-impaired people happens in significantly different ways. The first equalisation mechanism is the levelling of the bodies. The symbolic ascendance of a standing body is eliminated, a phenomenon recognised by Alice (MD player): “Sitting volleyball puts all at eye level, which is really important. When I’m on the court, I stand up and there are people on wheelchairs, I feel different, whereas if we are sat on the floor on a mutual field I feel we are the same”. Thus, although sitting down does not provide immediate access to other’s experience (impaired or not), it nevertheless provides a shared experiential ground that dilutes “strangeness” between AB’s, MD’s and D’s. SV instituted a new habitus, fundamentally different from the hegemonic ableist one. Also, in SV people with impairments did not need to “overcome” their impairment to play with non-impaired people: “I go to tennis and I am expected to play as everyone else” (Jeremy); nor did they need “special” attention or rules:

There is no advantage for being abled bodied, therefore it almost takes the disability factor away. People are playing the same sport without different adaptations... It’s not like tennis, where if you are in wheelchair you can play with a standing person, but

you're allowed to let the ball bounce twice. It is an equal game and there is no advantage for any of the parties. (Catherine)

The second SV equalisation mechanism was the fact the sport was equally challenging for any player, without the need for different rules. It was even alleged that some D players may have an advantage over others “It's one of the few sports where being a disabled person and missing a leg for instance can actually be an advantage over an abled person; all other things being equal...” (Alex).

In absolute terms, whether SV is a level playing field, or advantageous for people with impairments is a contentious matter (cf. capability 10). Still, the shared practice of the game seemed to accentuate the situational character of disability, since somebody apparently “dis-abled” could actually be more efficient than someone “abled”, at least in some aspects (e.g. movement speed), so the potential to learn from others beyond the distinction abled/disabled was created: “It's like different disabilities have different strengths and weaknesses on the court” (Jenny).

The third equalisation property of SV is that sitting down to play reduces possible competitive asymmetries associated with the use of technological devices, common in other disability sports: “But the big win here is, you come along and you're using strength from the skill of your body. It's not about how expensive your wheelchair is, or how fast it is, or how tuff it is...” (Kate, VE staff). Sitting down also allowed people with impairments to explore their bodily possibilities without technology, thus in similar circumstances to any other player. For some, this constituted a unique opportunity to display “natural” forms of movement in a social context:

*CFS:* How is it the experience of being on the court without your legs?

Oh, I love it. Yeah, it's like being at home for me. Possibly because I have had my disability almost since birth, I am quite natural and happy with my legs off. I don't really notice people staring at me, in an environment like that, with so many disabled people. I am really comfortable. I can't wait to take my legs off and get on court. It's brilliant. I feel more natural with my legs off. (Danny).

In short, because the embodied distinctiveness of most of the SV players with impairments is mainly emphasised by bipedal locomotion, the act of sitting down to play eliminated the main source of physical (and social) distinction.

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## MIXED EMBODIMENTS

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To enact the opportunity for players with impairments to feel and be equal to their non-impaired counterparts, the presence of the AB players both as partners and competitive opponents in SV events was crucial. It was in the confrontation and collaboration between people with and without impairments through SV shared practice that old assumptions were revised. Players with impairments challenged their internalised inferiority, while non-impaired players questioned their superiority. The reaction of Joanna's friend, after a SV practice, offers an example of this process:

He loves the challenge of it. He said to me: "I'll be honest. It frustrated me that disabled people can actually be better than me. I was beaten by a disabled person. How great do I feel?" Before we started, he was walking a bit taller and a bit presumptuous... "I came with an attitude that I was going to beat you and it was pointless for me coming. I came for you... because you wanted to play and I felt like I could support you. In the end, I got annihilated. What an arrogant bastard I am!"

Because all SV actors testified that the physical potential of players with different embodiments can be a strength, it became consensual within the community that diversity helped dissolving the social separation between "abled" and "disabled": "If you mix in sport, you mix in life" (Joanna). The availability demonstrated by non-impaired people to play a "disabled" game was often interpreted as a sign of willingness to rescind of their alleged superiority: "There are some girls that have all the legs and everything but they come down to your level on the floor so everyone is on that same level... "(Hannah); "We are not *us* and *them*. We are *volleyballers*." (Roger, institutional manager); "You are all doing the same stuff, we are all moving the same way, so it does not matter if you are disabled or able. We are not different, really" (Cathy).

If Mackenzie and Scully (2007) are right in their assumption that phenomenological experience shapes moral imagination, then there are reasons to believe that SV expands the sympathetic understanding between AB, MD and D players. Among many others, Stan addressed this expansion:

Dave, our coach said: "You have to put your best foot forward" and he was embarrassed. Of course we've all laughed, but he realized with all of us taking the mickey out of one another that he didn't have to worry so much about what he said because he knew we wouldn't take it the wrong way. And that's the thing behind it. If there were more sports where you could combine the two [impaired and non-impaired people] I think a lot of these misconceptions would go. A lot of people would understand that just because

you've lost a limp, you are no different... if there were more sports where you could combine the two [abled and disabled], then a lot of these misconceptions would go. (Stan)

In sum, SV encouraged people with all types of embodiments to exercise moral imagination and re-examine their own assumptions about impairment and disability: “The word disabled means that they can’t do something as well as others. If you change the tone to differently abled, they are still able but in a different way. It opened my eyes to that” (Sophie, former MD player). This process may have further implications in contexts outside SV, because if non-impaired people develop disability awareness, they are more likely to facilitate equality in other social spaces. Walter (official), noted that influence in his work place:

It has made me much more concerned in my job for things like providing good access to buildings for people with disabilities and making sure we find ways of adapting....so that people who have a disability can get the most out of it and not be disadvantaged compared to the able-bodied colleagues.

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#### FEELING EQUAL OUTSIDE SITTING VOLLEYBALL

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Another important consequence of having non-impaired players in SV the community was SV social validation by the very ones who represented the hegemonic norm. Richard Dobell, the most capped GB international volleyball player, and GB SV player commented to BBC television: “the actual game is so more combative, because you’re so much closer to your opposition. ...The feeling is that there is so much more contact there. And the game is so much quicker than the standing game”<sup>51</sup>. Because the sport was recognised by AB’s that were former or current volleyball players as tiring, hard, challenging, fast and fun, players with impairments felt their effort socially recognised:

Often when you bring standing players in, they are like: “Oh, my god, this is so hard!”, whereas normally a Paralympic sport is seen as a soft version of the real sport. I've never played standing volleyball but it is nice when you hear that. It makes you feel like you can do something that they almost can't. (Catherine)

Also, since SV is a Paralympic sport, being a SV player endowed its members with considerable physical, sporting and social capital, important in and outside SV contexts. This seemed true, whether the player was a GB member, who attracted media interest (e.g wounded soldiers, Martine Wright and others) or just a club player. For instance,

Jane, aware of her increased social capital as a SV player used her new facet to defend herself against other's attempts to undermine her:

They come to you and say how good they are in sport. Now I can reply: "Well, I play in a local team as well. Just because it is a different sport, it doesn't mean that you're better than me. It doesn't mean that I'm better than you as well.

*CFS*: And before sitting volleyball you couldn't answer like that?

No, because I didn't do anything. They would say "Oh, I'm in that county hockey." And I would just say, "You are. Well done. Good for you." And now I think I can go, "Well, I play for *Flying Butts*. I play for a team as well."

The next capability covers one of the most important conditions to feel and be equal: the opportunity to contribute for the good of others and for the good of the all community.

## 8. DOING GOOD FOR OTHERS

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*Opportunity to do good for others and to be recognised for one's valid contribution.*

*Another full day! All the excitement and agitation of the competition is now replaced by a rushed farewell. The intense roar of people talking, balls snapping, whistles buzzing and excited cheering transformed in a gentle murmur of goodbyes and "see you next month!" Here and there a few players pack their belongings carelessly and I do the same. When I finish, I suddenly realise that everybody else from my team has left. I grab my stuff and run to make sure my lift does not leave me behind. Gerard, the new guy (I had never seen him before... It is not uncommon to have new players coming for the tournaments) struggles to carry his bag and walk with the crutches. "Do you need some help?"- I ask immediately, giving little thought to my offer. His look hits me hard, even before the harshness of his words: "Why, DO YOU?" Oops... I understand immediately.... his anger, resentment.... I feel embarrassed and ashamed. Did I deserve that? Wait a moment.... I would probably say the same to any other person struggling with bags, with or without crutches... Should I feel bad for offering help? What is it about help that it generates such a strong reaction?*

(Field notes, GP, Kettering, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2009)

For the majority of people experiencing disability help is a contentious matter. This is because people with disabilities are more usually the recipients of the *good* that others do, than its agents. Moreover, "the terms on which help is offered is often demeaning and oppressive" (Morris, 1991, p.32) because "they [non-impaired people] assume they know what we want" (p.31). Thus, a person with impairment often interprets help as a

statement that they are incapable of taking care of themselves. Actually, non-impaired people may have difficulty in assessing their real needs because impairment is usually misunderstood as something affecting *all* the person's abilities. This stigmatisation (Goffman, 1963) and stereotyping (Hall, 2003) pervades everyday encounters between the "abled" and "disabled".

SV players with impairments reported similar experiences. People judging their whole being by their impairment, undermining their true ability: "I was in Tesco's and there was this woman really struggling with all those bags. When I tried to help her with the bags, she just turns to me and says: 'I think I am a bit more able bodied than you'" (Joanna, single amputee). Or people being excessively careful and apologetic because they perceive impaired people as frail, as Jane (single amputee) noted: "People are always very sensitive about you. They might knock you on the street or something, and they will say 'Sorry.' And then they will look again and notice that you are disabled. And then plead and ask for forgiveness 'My God, I am sooooo soooooorry!'" (Deep sigh).

It became evident during my ethnographic experience that the initial social interaction between people with different embodiments was a sensitive matter. On one hand, AB's were worried with the correctness of their behaviour: "I didn't want to feel and be pitiful. Obviously I wanted to act normal, but I didn't know how to do it." (Iris); "When I first started I thought that was a minefield. What can I say? What can I do?" (Ralph). On the other hand, people with impairments wanted to be treated as "normal": "It is nice that people are not afraid. The other day Karen was actually banging into me, whereas a lot of people would say: 'No, no, no! You can hurt her!' I can fall over as much as anyone else, it's natural!" (Joanna).

In modern western societies, personal worth has been traditionally equated with productivity and autonomy (Nussbaum, 2006). As such, being always the one receiving help places the person, at best, in a position of inferiority (Nadler & Fisher, 1986), or, at worst, reduces him/her to a non-person status (Ikäheimo, 2009). Undoubtedly, help acts as a power mechanism, if/when unequally and inadequately practised (Goodwin, 2001; Nadler & Fisher, 1986).



Gerard's reaction to my help, highlighted above, is just an example of many episodes where help was offered, exchanged or negotiated in SV between people with all types of embodiment. I consider them functionings of "doing good for others". These episodes and the fact that people with and without impairments seemed to interact relatively well suggests to me that maybe there was in SV some antidote for the usual misunderstandings between the impaired and non-impaired worlds. Part of the answer was provided by several reports of the initial contact with SV, which I am now "compressing" in a fictional vignette:

*Today is my second day in SV. It is amazing that I came back, considering that after the last time my butt hurt like hell, my hands had sores from pushing around and I went home without a shred of energy in any of my cells. The thing is....I felt simultaneously knackered and...GREAT!*

*Everybody is already here. After the shock of seeing amputees like me changing their clothes in public, displaying their stumps and the fleshy details of their impairments I feel now able to do the same. I look around... I feel utterly nude exposing my two stumps, but nobody seems to care... some guys are already on the floor mucking around while passing some balls. Tom shouts at me: "Hey, you prick, next time wash your feet. We can barely breathe! Your socks smell!" "And you better RUN... You're late! If we lose this weekend's tournament it's your fault!" says Danny, who just decided to increase the choir of insults. I'd never imagined I could feel this good being teased on the account of my two missing legs. Better hurry... they're not joking. There's this tournament in Kent and they are not going to spare me. I don't understand! I am a just a beginner! Why on earth would you want me? I cannot believe that I was actually being asked to compete for them at my first practice. I don't know much yet, but well, what better time to start learning? It feels really nice to be asked, it makes me feel like I matter! I had forgotten the feeling!*

In SV contexts, it was not only significant that the person with impairment lost the usual negative "special" tag, but that he/she loses it to a point where eventual victimisation is nullified by high expectations that they can take up challenges and even deal with mockery. "I WAS INVITED"; "I WAS ASKED"; "THEY WANTED ME THERE" were phrases slowly emphasised by many players, stressing its importance when explaining why they stayed involved after the initial contact with the sport. They felt they were genuinely needed and felt their potential contribution valued.

To be recognised by others as someone who can contribute is, as articulated by Ikäheimo, essential to ones' personhood: "To be a person in this interpersonal sense is to be on the receiving end of particular kinds of 'recognitive attitudes' from the part of relevant, concrete others" (2009, p.77). Thus personhood is at least partially constructed by attitudes from others that recognise that quality in us. Three types of recognitive attitudes are especially relevant for this interpersonal personhood: "*respect, love and contributing valuing*" [author's italics] (Honneth, 1995 quoted by Ikäheimo, 2009, p.80).

To understand why this capability was selected in SV context, I draw upon the importance of the third type of recognitive attitude: contributive valuing. Ikäheimo (2009) argues that the feeling one is a person and to be recognised as one is intimately tied up with "deeply inbuilt hopes of having something to contribute to the good of others and the hope that others would value them as contributors" (p.82). In other words, people need to feel they can do good, altruistically, and by so doing, being granted social recognition. As one of the interviewees in Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) study says: "Doing good to others allows one self-esteem. Being human means not only to receive; one wants to give" (p.47). Similarly, Nussbaum's Aristotelian account of political personhood emphasises the person's status as a political and social animal, for whom the "good of others is not only a constraint on this person's pursuit of her own good; it is part of her good" (2006, p.158).

Through my empirical analysis I have identified five main expressions of this capability in SV: helping others dealing with disability; promoting and teaching the sport; contributing for the success of the team; influencing social perceptions of disability and disability sport and being recognised by others as valuable.

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#### HELPING OTHERS DEALING WITH IMPAIRMENT

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Though disability was a taboo subject in the public sphere of SV field of practice, usually concealed in humorous remarks; the discussion around it was common in one-on-one interactions, and extremely valued as an opportunity to help others. Peter noted: "I'd

like to think that I have encouraged and helped people in similar situations to myself in some way, shape or form". Moreover, D players frequently argued that because they had an embodied understanding of the difficulties and possibilities posed by impairment, they were better placed than AB's to teach and convince others to engage in the sport:

I can pass on the experiences that I've had in sitting volleyball and prove to people how great that sport is. And with anyone that has ever played volleyball before. Through the impression I will put across they will want to play it. (Anderson);

You see somebody that is struggling to do something and you're next to them saying "Come on, you can do it". And guiding them through it and giving them the ability to do it or the patience to show them how to do it, that is very fulfilling. Because, I was once there thinking: "I can't do it". So, I really do understand their situation. (Kenny)

Connected with these feelings, the drive to help develop the sport in the near future was also perceived as an altruistic mission, with potential social impact:

I've realised how much one person helped me because he invited me to sitting volleyball. So I am trying to do that for others; that's why I am trying to develop and promote sitting volleyball all over the world especially in Europe. If it wasn't for SV ... I would never try to help others in this way. (Irvin)

Additionally, the own structure of the game encourages the participation of all the members of the team as a factor essential for the collective success. Each player needs to support and being supported by others, in such a way that dilutes individuality. One's own good and the good of other team members are intertwined. Everyone knows that their actions will impact on others, thus every time the game was played, the opportunity to do good for others occurred: "I love when people rely on you. When you're on court, people have to rely on you. There is a great amount of responsibility on your shoulders and you have to carry it well. I'm quite good at that, at least I think so" (Irvin). Yet, this potential was sometimes undermined by the presence of AB and volleyball players in the teams (cf. capability 10). This is why, after being often undervalued by his own team, Jeremy described the occasion he played for another team with special emotion:

I remember the time I went to play with another team. They took me on straightaway and it was like a proper team from stage one rather than feeling like a spare tire. I WAS INVITED! [Slowly stressed] They WANTED me and that was something I had not experienced before in SV.

The opportunity to do good for others overflowed SV boundaries. Some players with impairments were asked to talk about disability sport and disability, in contexts outside SV (schools, companies), which was considered as an important social mission:

One of the most special moments? Oh, yeah, I quite like giving the talks to the kids at school, because you are in the frontline and you are talking about yourself and feeling important. I try to broaden their horizons. Show them that disabled people do not sit at home all day doing nothing nor do they jump from the couch to be in the Paralympics. If it wasn't for sitting volleyball I would never be asked to do something like that. It is wonderful to share some knowledge. If you teach one child something about disability, that is even more important than SV. They need to realize that disabled people can do things as well. (Hannah)

This opportunity seemed to be mainly available to GB players with more visible impairments and media-friendly stories. The case of Martine Wright who was awarded the BBC Helen Rollason Award for 2012, for outstanding sporting achievement in the face of adversity, is the most striking expression of this opportunity. Though most of the GB players had no long-term engagement with sport, being on the GB team brought them unexpected fame, which they embraced and tried to use to positively affect disability perceptions. Catherine for instance, whilst acknowledging that there was something “fake” about that fame SV (as she was still a beginner), celebrated the occasion she spoke for the TV, for the impact it generated and for other's appreciation and recognition:

I received this feedback from family, friends and strangers saying how inspirational it was. And this woman came to my door asking me if I could meet her son with impairment? I couldn't help feeling moved. It made me feel more valuable. It made me feel that I still have an important role to play... This made me feel like I am doing something that matters to other people therefore *I matter* to other people.

In Catherine's case, the perceived loss of social importance caused by impairment (“I passed from having an important job to being disabled”) was compensated by the new opportunities to socially intervene, granted by her status as a GB player.

To be able to contribute for the common good created the opportunity for others to recognise players with impairments as fully valuable individuals but, more importantly, opportunities for them to feel valued by others.

## 9. PLAY

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*Enjoy playing SV for its own sake.*

What play and free expansion of imagination contribute to a human life is not merely instrumental but partly constitutive of a worthwhile human life. (Nussbaum, 2011, p.36)

*I started to play SV to “help” out. When did I start fighting with the referees, shouting out loud in the games every time we won a point; and swearing in three different languages because I failed a shot, I don't really know! Today, we almost beat the Canadian men's national team! The old thrill is still there! In the time and space of that match nothing mattered more than making the ball fall on the other side of the net. There's no Carla, or Dominic or Kenny, just these SV warriors in pursuit of the victory! In the end we didn't win. It's ok. We enjoyed every second of the challenge!*

(Field notes, Stoke Mandeville Grand Prix Tournament, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2011)

On the 18<sup>th</sup> March 2013, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights releases the following comment on the article 31, considered the “forgotten article” of the Convention of Rights for the Child:

Play, recreation, rest, leisure and involvement in cultural and artistic life are all interrelated and critical to a happy, healthy childhood. Problems arise when such activities are considered luxurious or frivolous. Nothing could be further from the truth. (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 18th March 2013, p.2).

Informants in Wolf and De-Shalit study also validated leisure as a category of disadvantage although they acknowledged that “people's lives do not have to be full of leisure” (2007, p.27). Though *play* is not overtly valued in western cultures, playing with no other pursuit than the intrinsic joy of a gratuitous activity is omnipresent in our personal, cultural and social lives (Huizinga, 1955). This assertion is confirmed by SV survey respondents who expressed that fun or enjoyment were amongst the most important motivations for their participation (cf. Appendix J). When asked what were their three main reasons for being involved in SV, of the 46 respondents 14 responded “enjoy playing the sport”; 5 “love of volleyball”; 6 “fun and fast” and 1 said “new sport and love it”.

How then do we assess the potential to enact this capability in SV? Connecting empirical data with classical discussions on the personal and cultural significance of play and games (Huizinga, 1955; Elias & Dunning, 1985), three main functionings were identified: the fun of the contest; the fun of the challenge and the “quest for excitement”. The opening vignette of this section illustrates all these functionings to some extent. What is not explicitly captured either by the referred authors nor by my own personal reflection is what perhaps constitutes the central functioning of this capability, which I call “the simple joy of moving”.

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### THE SIMPLE JOY OF MOVING

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Animation is, for Sheets-Johnstone, the most fundamental ontological and epistemological premise of human existence: “What is already there is movement, movement in and through which the perceptible world and an acting subject come to be constituted, which is to say movement in and through which we make sense of both the world and ourselves” (2011, p.119). Moving is pleasurable because it is our primordial facet of being “in” the world. In this sense, to discover the real possibilities of our “moving” body is itself an act of play, discovery and experimentation. However, empirical evidence of this functioning is very difficult to provide as it remains largely at the level of unconscious awareness. Players frequently answered questions such as “Why are you playing SV?” with “I don't know, I just love to play. I just love it.” (Alice) or “I enjoy it.” (Jack); “It was jolly, exciting and new!” (Laura), which I interpret as possible expressions of this “simple joy of moving”. It is revealed primarily in the players’ body language and in the complete surrender to the tasks at hand, enacted every time one explores one’s own bodily possibilities and face new challenges. One illustration of this functioning is present in the picture 7.1., showing two players with amputations volleying a ball to each other, whilst moving in a wheelchair. One of them, a double amputee is sat on the foot support and the other one (single amputee) propels the chair. The subversion of both the wheelchair and the SV habitus attests the imaginative freedom induced by the several elements of SV field of practice: the ball, the new relationship with the “disability objects”, and the new relational dynamics with others’ and one’s own body. Their facial expression is also revealing.



Picture 7.1. *The “simple joy of movement”*. Researcher’s photograph.

The “simple joy of movement” can be also associated with a phenomenological state which sport psychologists call “flow”. “To feel completely at one with what you are doing, to know you are strong and able to control your destiny at least for the moment, and to gain a sense of pleasure independently of results is to experience flow” (Jackson, 1999, p.vii). When a physical skill is mastered, the body “disappears” and the players are so attuned with their bodies and the game that they lose consciousness of themselves. This experience is addressed by many players as one important sources of enjoyment. Some of these moments were a product of achievement and self-competence experiences described in capability 6. Even when their occurrence was sporadic as it is the case with less proficient players, they constituted important sources of motivation for their involvement. These moments tended to happen when the level of emotional stress was manageable. Joey recalled: “Sometimes, when I’m playing with Lynx, I forget about making a mistake. It’s just playing and things happen effortlessly. And I hit some of the best hits that I’ve ever hit and I spike the best serves that I’ve ever served”.

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#### THE FUN OF THE CONTEST

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For Huizinga “it is precisely the fun-element that characterizes the essence of play” (1955, p.3). Play is opposed to the seriousness of other dimensions of life, even though it can be very serious once you are immersed in its particular habitus: “In the time and

space of that match nothing mattered more than making the ball fall on the other side” (cf. p.174). The fun of the competition is, according to some players, even greater in sitting than in the mainstream version of the game given the closer spatial presence of the opposition (cf. Picture 7.2):

What is actually quite enjoyable is the fact that SV is almost as close as you can get to a contact sport, without having the contact. There’s a net in the way, but everybody is so close.... I quite like that, I’m quite a competitive player, not an aggressive player but I love the heat of the game, and there are a lot more opportunities to battle in SV than in the standing version. (Ron, GB player)



Picture 7.2. *Grand Prix Final, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tier, Essex Pirates (Left) vs Portsmouth Sharks (Right), (14<sup>th</sup> April 2012).* © Jon McGugan

The conditions to have fun in the contest depend on numerous factors, for instance the compatibility between the individual’s and the team’s motivations and expectations for practice. Given the incipient development of the sport such convergence was not always easy as the number of teams across the country was still very limited. Within the teams there were also different degrees of competitiveness, as Danny noted “I love to compete and I love to win and I love to train hard. I thought that they would be people who really want go out and compete, and win. And it’s not, there’s lot of recreational people in my team”.



Obviously, fun in competition depended strongly on the competitive equity. During the first two seasons of the national grand prix, as previously mentioned the competitive level was highly asymmetric, to some extent attenuated with the development of two different leagues in the following seasons (2011/12; 2012/13). Nonetheless, the sporadic and instrumental use of former volleyball players in important phases of the competition seemed to increase that differential in competition. GP finals were always reached by teams that could recruit proficient players for those occasions. This dominance was obviously detrimental for the motivational level of the teams with no volleyball background, constraining SV potential to provide fun in competition (cf. chapter 8).

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### THE FUN OF THE CHALLENGE

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The extent to which SV offers opportunities to experience fun in overcoming obstacles depends on multiple factors. The functional limitation imposed by impairment is one of the most important ones, but even more so is the ability of SV technical staff to adapt the level of SV tasks to the players' possibilities (in a way one can experience success). In the presence of some type of impairments, such as multiple sclerosis or cerebral palsy, the fast speed of the formal game often constituted a threat to bodily integrity, because the possibilities of appropriate reactions were diminished, as exposed in the next vignette:

*This is the second time Gina came to practice. It's impossible for her to move quickly, or even grab the ball, let alone, volley or dig it. She can't even protect her face in case a ball flies in her direction. Her impairment is just too limiting to play SV. She sits on the court, but there is not much she can do. Being there is maybe more important for her than I can possibly imagine, but I found myself deeply uncomfortable with the situation. Is it just comforting for the others to think they are "including" her? Does she really get any pleasure from being sat in the middle of the court? The SV all the others are playing is certainly too difficult for her, nevertheless there is no adaptation of rules or anything. The fact is that Gina has little opportunity to participate in the game, except for when the ball accidentally hits her.*

(Field notes, *Flying Butts* practice, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2013)

Situations such as this could be prevented if SV activities offer was broad enough to accommodate everybody, but, similarly to other Paralympic sports, SV includes some and excludes other types of bodies. This exclusion is not overt, but insidiously constructed by the non-adaptability of the sport's habitus and the unwillingness of SV agents to facilitate change, limiting the opportunities for "unsuitable" bodies to experience fun and success. This seems to confirm the existence in SV of a hierarchy of embodiment based on the body's athletic potential, which positions players (men) with lower limb amputations at the top of the scale and women and others with impairments affecting the upper body at the lower levels. The ability to propel oneself on the floor using the upper body power is a crucial skill in the potential to play formal SV therefore unless the game dynamics and its rules change, this hierarchy will remain unchallenged (cf. chapter 8).

Even so, for the majority of the players involved at a club and GB level, the sport appeared to provide numerous opportunities to experience the fun of an achievable challenge. For instance, Joanne approached competition as a permanent internal challenge:

When we were playing against *Flying Butts* in the last Grand Prix I just wanted to hit one good hit to Silvia's area, because everyone said that she was one of the best players in the world. So, to hit a ball that she couldn't get back up was just superb, that was my mission for that game. I wanted to prove I could do that. That motivates me, gives me a morale boost. If I play a really good game and I lose I feel the same as if I win. I'd rather play really well and lose, than play bad and win.

The motivation of the challenge independent of extrinsic outcomes (e.g. result or prizes) was also valued by club players, such as Mark: "I just love the challenge of playing against Surrey and Lynx and the other teams. To be in a situation against excellent players and to test myself..."

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#### "QUEST FOR EXCITEMENT"

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According to Elias and Dunning (1986), the "civilised society" in which we live implies such a degree of routinisation and emotional restraint that people need to engage in leisure activities to experience pleasurable emotional states. Sport provides a context where usually forbidden emotional expressions are allowed, configuring a process of

“de-controlling of emotional control” (p.49). In SV field of practice, this emotional “high” acquired numerous expressions. For me, it was the “shouting”, “swearing” and “fighting with the referee” that signalled it (cf. initial vignette of this chapter). For many players, with limited experience in competitive sport, this emotional “high” was unfamiliar but highly valued, as Jenny and Joey recognised:

My colleague used to tell me I was so laid back and horizontal and...“Yeah, yeah, ok...” and I wouldn’t get excited about anything. When I started to play volleyball, I was on court and I started to get angry. I had never been angry before in my life. Not at people. Because I wanted to win the game, I had ambition! I had never had that before.

I remember I hit that ball and we won that point, and I just went down to my knees to celebrate. I had never done it before. I would just go, yes... But I literally got into my knees, screamed the loudest that I could. YEAHHHHHHH!!!! ..... In SV, I am experiencing most of what I have felt before but to a new extreme, a different level.

The team element further magnified this emotional experience:

If we’re all happy I will join in with them, and if we’re all sad, because we’ve lost a match, I will join in with them on that as well. And it feels a lot stronger than if I was just upset or happy by myself. Definitely, I had never had emotions like that before. When you’re winning a match, there’s no way to explain it... And after we had actually done well, I just want to do that again. (Jenny)

Play is a vital dimension of the players’ participation in SV. Hence, to ensure that the demands of the sport and the competition are adequate for the level of proficiency and potential of the players is paramount. Obviously, the extent to which this adequacy is achieved depends also on the space for people with diverse impairments to influence SV habitus, a topic explored in the next section.

## 10. CONTROL OVER ONE’S OWN ENVIRONMENT

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*Opportunities to participate in the way things happen in SV. Having a political voice and a sufficient degree of control over one’s own immediate context. Being able to influence others on disability matters.*

Although agency, freedom and participation are principles intrinsic to all capabilities, control over one’s own environment is the capability where these become most apparent. The freedom to ethically choose one’s own valuable life goals and effectively

undertake the steps to achieve them is intimately connected with the people's influence in their life circumstances, in turn conditioned by their social, cultural and economic capital. For people with impairments, the accumulation of these types of capital may be hindered by the influence of the ableist habitus in which they are socialised. Hence, it may not be sufficient to "allow" for participation, but it seems necessary to actively promote the political participation of people with impairments in all the processes affecting their lives more directly (Charlton, 2000).

In assessing the extent to which players retained control over their own environment in SV field of practice, the specificities of the dynamic of social power within the community are equally addressed.

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### SV SOCIAL HIERARCHY

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From the first moment I entered the field I was very attentive to the presence of people with impairments in politically influential roles such as officials, managers, coaches and institutional representatives. I had been alerted by disability scholars to the institutional reproduction of a "politics of disablement" enacted by a paternalistic dynamic of programs "for" people with impairments instead of "by" or "with" people with impairments (Charlton, 2000; Oliver, 1990; Howe, 2008b). Thus, the extent to which SV promoted the participation of people with impairment in the design, implementation and regulation of activities is conditional for the expansion of all relevant capabilities. The present assessment is mainly focused on the GB programme setting, as I believe this was the most influential group in the overall philosophy and ethos of SV during the period of the research.

Before proceeding, it is important to recall the strong association of SV development with a sports policy that is performance-driven with the SV mainstreaming and the nonexistence of a SV distinctive culture. Though the institutional priority was GB programme success, the group of players recruited was composed of many people with limited or no sporting and volleyball experience, therefore with a reduced amount of the valued knowledge in the field. The possession of such knowledge conditioned the hierarchical positioning of SV actors, as represented in figure 7.3:

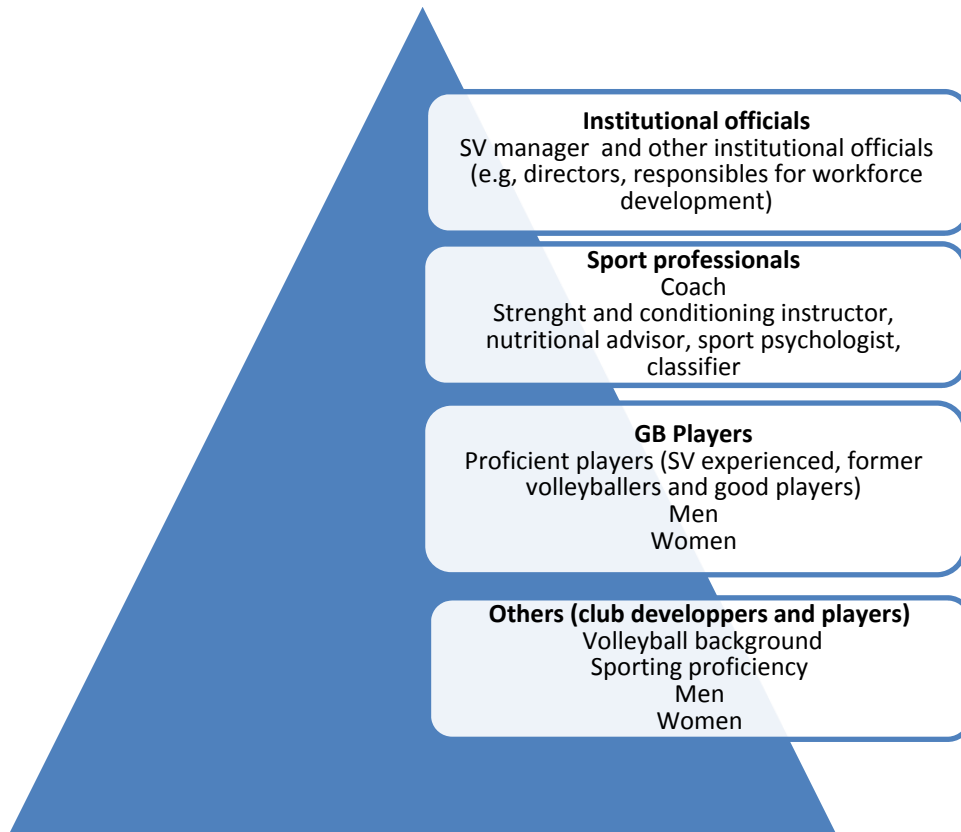


Figure 7.1. *Pyramid of actors' influence in SV field of practice.*

Because SV enterprise was more focused on the performance of the GB teams than on grassroots development, the actors possessing the greatest social capital in the field were first, the people being paid to design and apply the SV development plan (SV development manager) and secondly the people in technical roles, knowledgeable on elite sports culture, performance training regimes (strength and conditioning coach, nutritionist, physiotherapist, sport psychologist) and/or volleyball (coaches, volleyball players and the more proficient SV players). As such, opportunities for new SV players to conquer valued capital were limited, curtailing their opportunities for political influence. In turn, this limited their influence in the “way things happened” at all levels of community life, from the practices at the clubs to the definition of institutional strategic plans.

At the higher institutional level, the decision- making bodies of BVF and VE, which ruled SV, were almost exclusively composed by able bodied people with a volleyball background and no disability sport experience. The results revealed by SV survey when

the type of role performed was combined with the category impairment confirmed this absence (cf. Table 7.1).

*Table 7. 1. Type of role played in SV community in relation to impairment status*

	Player	Staff	Player and staff
Non-impaired	12	8	6
Congenital impairment	8	-	1
Acquired impairment	10	-	1
Total	30	8	8

The next section presents a more detailed description of how political influence was exercised at the practical level.

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#### POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF SV PLAYERS

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During the first stage of SV development (before VE governance) the informality and lack of institutionalisation allowed for a more direct participation in SV politics of the reduced number of people involved. After 2009, a stronger institutional leadership seemed to have hindered these informal routes of political participation. Sophie, who performed a volunteer role in the initial GB programme structure, noted:

When I was involved with the GB level there wasn't paid staff in the middle, so it was a lot easier for everyone to feed in, and say: "Actually, I think we should do this and I think we should do that." And then when they pay somebody everything became centralised on him. I think it's now a lot harder to feed into that.

Likewise, Alex (GB player) recalled how the institutional structure was initially more open: "In the beginning there were a lot of questionnaires and a bunch of other different things but I understand that that might not be necessary anymore and that there is a lot of work going on anyway". Alex regretted the lack of opportunities to offer his input more often "Maybe we could have more opportunities to talk directly with important people, such as the development manager and the coach". Despite this apparent

reduction of opportunities to participate in the politics of SV, generally the GB male players whom I interviewed reported a reasonable degree of control over their participation and the dynamics of the field: “I don't think there is a lot of things going on there that I cannot say, or do anything about it” (Alex); “Nothing in SV is an imposition per se. If I say I have to work, people will understand, they will say, ‘Ok. So when can you come?’ They will try to solve it” (Joey). This is however in contrast to the absence of control articulated by my female informants.

An important difference between the men's and women's teams was the heterogeneity of impairments in the latter. Most of the male players were ambulant amputees; in the women's team some of the players were wheelchair users, which demanded additional attention to accessibility issues. This seemed to not always have been taken into consideration. For example, the bungalows available for the players to stay in at Roehampton were not wheelchair accessible. Similar situations may have been at the heart of the following comment:

With all due respect for the people that organise it [SV], it is organised by young people, with very little understanding of disability in the main and who try to apply things that worked for the volleyball youth structure in disability sport. I don't think they take account of disability or that they understand the dynamics of the group they are working with. I think communication is shit. You're asked your opinion and when you voice it, either you are criticised for it or you are completely and utterly ignored. We could progress so much better if we had a more open structure. (Catherine)

Other players were worried that voicing their opinion too much would compromise their GB selection chances:

I do not trust the higher structures, the guys [men] there. We tend to be very careful to not irritate people. Otherwise you could be deselected, I think. There was a player that spoke her mind and irritated management, so we tend to keep quiet. They say they are open, but I do not feel that openness, except from the coaches. (Alice)

Unsurprisingly, the communication between the managerial strand of SV and the GB female players did not seem to flow harmoniously:

They (managerial staff) ask for comments about some things, and you make them in a constructive way like “this is quite difficult. Can you just change this?” and you get a really negative email back. Almost telling you to mind your own business and shut up. It just makes you stop bothering. What is the point, if you are not going to be heard? (Hannah)

The difficulty that women had in making themselves heard and valued by their peers was also evident at the club level. In sporting cultures, the perception of the player's sporting ability strongly determines their scope of influence. In other words, their physical capital is converted in social capital, using Bourdieu's terminology (Bourdieu, 1998). Since the perception of women's sporting ability was a priori undermined by their gender, it was more difficult for them to gain social capital. At the level of SV competition practices, this perception was often confirmed. When I assisted at the SV GP final on 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2011, I was particularly interested in the women's competitive participation. How would the "all-inclusive" system work when the competitive pressure was on? One of the teams in the final had Iris as a regular player: she was a good former volleyball player who had participated in all the previous tournaments. The other team had at least three GB female players, one of them with a long international career. I cannot say I was surprised when I saw Iris playing solely for one single point during the whole final. Also, on the other team, although the female players were on court, the men often avoided playing with them. In conversation, Iris just said she was happy that her team won, avoiding being negative about her participation. She did not even refer that the team played with standing volleyball players who were rarely seen before. Other examples of women's lower status in this context were consistently observed throughout the study (e.g. in my coaching experience, cf. Appendix C).

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### THE POWER OF SPORT "EXPERTS"

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The political power of sport specialists was particularly evident in GB training camps. Their influence was not so much manifest in the governance of the sport as in the SV embodied habitus, the disciplining of the players' sporting bodies (Markula & Pringle, 2006). In a GB context, it seems reasonable that people in technical roles had a great amount of influence and leadership. What seemed to be problematic was how the lack of shared cultural ground hindered the understanding between some staff members and the players, as the following field notes highlight:

*This time, the meeting is just with the staff. The terrible news is revealed in a shocking tone by the strength/conditioning and nutritional advisor. "This is very serious! According to the reference values presented by ACSM (American College of Sports Medicine) for body*



*composition, most of these girls are overweight and two of them are on the first level of obesity. Only two are within the values for athletes!" "Which athletes? With or without impairments?" I wanted to ask, but I did not interrupt. She proceeds: "I do not understand how this is possible! They have no idea. These are not athletes; these are people at high risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and so on."*

*Contrary to my usual discretion in these public events, I intervene: "you know, most of these girls have had an accident and they struggled to adapt to a new body. Most of them do not have any idea of what to do to control their weight and how to be a proper elite athlete. But they did not deceive anyone. They never said they had." I did not say that most of them were lured into a glowing world having little or no idea of what would be required from them. I also did not say that many of the world class SV players were clearly overweight. Yes, some of the girls are maybe more interested in being at the Paralympics than in doing all the physical, technical and nutritional regimes that is required, but it is also true that there hasn't been enough investment with enough time to create conditions for these athletes to grow, steady and slowly.*

*Later, in the staff meeting with the women's team the tone is softened, but the players still felt under attack. They reacted later, in more private contexts: "Well, if we are fat, then they should tell us what to do and how to do it, not just say the obvious!" I believe that most of the players did not genuinely know what they were doing wrong. How quickly can you build a Paralympian, anyway?*

(GB training camp, Kettering, GB programme staff meeting, 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 2011)

This episode exposed how mutual understanding was compromised on one side by the low awareness of impairment and disability by staff specialists and on the other side, by the lack of a sporting habitus of most female players. However, as the valued knowledge was mainly possessed by specialists, and as Foucault stressed power and knowledge reinforce each other (Foucault & Gordon, 1980), the hierarchical political structure remained unchallenged. Such power hegemony was evident of GB programme meetings in which, besides the "experts", for the most, only the most experienced male players dared to intervene.

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#### THE POWER OF VOLLEYBALL CULTURE

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The dominant influence of people with volleyball background in SV field of practice derived fundamentally from the perceived importance of volleyball knowledge to

advance institutional goals, undermining the possible input of non-volleyball players, as Catherine expressed: “I think it's good that you have a mix of volleyball and SV players, but it doesn't mean that people who haven't played volleyball before are stupid. I think that is somehow the impression that is given, rightly or wrongly”. According to her, the existence of a well-established informal volleyball network further reinforced these actors' influence in all aspect of SV communal life:

I do not think the power differences are so connected with the type of impairment, but more with volleyball background. Some MD's have more influence, but just because they are in that friendship group. When we went to Finland for example we flew out from Manchester into Gatwick. When you move in a wheelchair, popping on and off public transport it is the most difficult thing in the world. But because it was that little friendship group that organised the transport, they did not think about other people so much. They are of a similar age, they are all single and they've all just left a student life style behind. I don't think they understand that some of us are trying to juggle lots of other things as well (Catherine).

At the level of the SV practice, the weight of a standing volleyball culture was mainly evident in the GP competitions. Not only did the best SV clubs play with former volleyball players, as they often made use of their connections to recruit current volleyball players to win important competitions. Depending on the club, D players with no volleyball background were usually the last ones to play. Nonetheless, there were also some cases of former volleyball players who were consistently involved in teaching the sport, as well as playing (cf. chapter 6). It is difficult to draw a consistent pattern in this regard, as attitudes towards competition were conditioned by many other factors, such as the nature and importance of competition, the number of players available and the specific club culture. The main point is that most of the clubs did not offer more than one practice per week and therefore the possibility for beginners to improve up to a level where they could compete with volleyball players for a place on court were diminished.

The conditions to be successful in the sport and therefore to acquire valued physical capital were fairly unbalanced for men and women, amputees and people with other types of impairment. However, this seemed to pass unnoticed to most SV actors, who often relied on the apparent equality of conditions offered by the structure of the game to defend that no rule was needed to protect the participation of people with impairments: “It is meant to be completely equal on the floor playing sitting volleyball

so if that's the case, certainly you shouldn't be scoring points just because you are disabled, should you?" (Hannah). The selectivity based upon sporting competence was often seen as natural: "in some ways that's the nature of sport. There are always people that play more. And there are people who don't play so much" (Ralph, VE staff). At the moment, the one point bonus rule for the participation of each player with impairment is only active in the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier, suggesting that its predictable evolution is to be eliminated completely. Nevertheless, though in theory D players with impairments have identical chances to become good players, only when the conditions to access good quality SV practice are available, can these chances be roughly equalised (cf. also chapter 8).

Moreover, the institutions responsible for the governance of the SV seemed to not have recognised the importance of actively including people with impairments in all phases of SV development. Opportunities for influence and participation were often quite formalised (questionnaires) and/or constrained by the public pressure of general meetings. Furthermore, in such a diverse environment, women, beginners and players with lower sporting potential (and "less suitable" bodies) were additionally limited in their opportunities for political participation.

## SUMMARY

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In this chapter, each section explored the reasons behind the choice of each capability to be included in the set of relevant capabilities for SV players with impairments; providing also examples of significant functionings illuminated by empirical data. The table 7.2 provides a comprehensive snapshot of the main conclusions of the empirical analysis reported in each of these sections: the main functionings associated with each capability and its most influential contextual factors.

Table 7.1. Summary of SV capabilities, functionings and critical contextual factors

Capabilities	Functionings	Critical SV contextual factors
1.Life and Health	Experience health improvements. Increase satisfaction with one's own life.	Social and cultural status of SV. Quality and quantity that SV offers (practices and competition).
2.Explore one's own potential	Face meaningful challenges. Explore unknown possibilities.	Adequacy of the SV practice, in terms of attainable and fun challenges.
3.Knowledge	Expand knowledge of impairment and disability issues. Expand knowledge of oneself (implies relations with others and the world around).	Human diversity in SV context. Disability awareness and education of SV community. SV ethos in which personal development goals surpass competitive ones.
4.Practical reason	Be able to plan one own life using of critical reflexion, in possession of the relevant available information and aligned with a conception of the good which equalises the moral worth of people with and without impairments.	SV ethos in which personal relations between the several actors are driven by honesty and trust. SV ethos in which personal development goals surpass competitive ones. Participative SV culture.
5.Affiliation	Expand network of friends and social relations. Feel one belongs.	Social and political equality of all the groups involved. Human diversity in SV context. Equal opportunities for all involved to expand valued capabilities.
6.Achieve, respect and love oneself	Feel competent in all aspects of SV participation. Feel more positive about oneself.	Quality and quantity that SV offers (practices and competition).
7.Feeling and being morally equal	Feeling and being morally equal in an environment where people have or don not have impairments, inside and outside SV	Social and political equality between the several groups who participate in the field or practice SV potential to alter wider social perceptions on impairment and disability.
8.Doing good for others	Help others dealing with disability. Be able to make a positive contribution for the success of the group (team, club, SV community). Help developing the sport.	Social and political equality between the several groups who participate in the field or practice (AB's, MD's and D's; with or without volleyball background; men and women).

9.Play	Experiencing fun in moving. Experiencing fun in competing against others. Experiencing fun facing challenges. Experiencing fun through emotional engagement with SV activities	Quality and quantity that SV offers (practices and competition).
10.Control over one's own environment	Be able to participate in all the dimensions and areas of SV planning, development and implementation.	Social and political equality between the several groups participating.

Absent from this chapter is the analysis of two important criteria of capabilities assessments: the extent to which comprehensiveness and sustainability of the whole set of capabilities can be secured. This is the focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 8 . WIDENING THE LENS: CRITICAL CONTEXTUAL FACTORS FOR A COMPREHENSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE CAPABILITIES' EXPANSION

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### INTRODUCTION

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For each capability in the set of relevant capabilities in SV, the last chapter offered empirical examples of valued functionings. The current chapter presents the most significant factors for a comprehensive and sustainable capabilities' expansion at each of the SV contextual levels. It explores SV potential to reduce disability experience, while presenting suggestions to overcome constraints and strengthen the organisation of the sport in that process.

### COMPREHENSIVENESS

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Comprehensiveness is one of the qualities adding value to Nussbaum's (2006) perspective on capabilities. It relies upon the argument that each capability in her list is of irrefutable value for human flourishing, therefore none of them can be removed or traded for another.

There are important challenges in assessing comprehensiveness, which Nussbaum does not solve. The first challenge is the definition of a satisfactory threshold for each of the relevant capabilities, below which the comprehensiveness of the whole set is endangered. In what terms can this socially agreed threshold be defined and whose responsibility it is to define it? As Nussbaum explains, this threshold need not to be too specific, because "it may shift in subtle ways over time" (2006, p.180). Even so, some definition is important to advance justice as equality because the existence of agreed capabilities' standards increases the chances of deprived people getting what they should reasonably wish for, not having their capabilities compromised to favour others' well-being. By reflecting upon the possible effect the enjoyment of each capability may have on others, a collective consensus on the details of each capability's threshold can be achieved. Once thresholds were defined for each capability, safeguarding the

comprehensive and sustained expansion of the whole set, it would then be possible to evaluate capabilities' expansion more effectively.

Although the present study does not define capabilities' thresholds, because it did not possess the necessary conditions to host public discussion with the relevant actors in and outside the field<sup>52</sup>, it does however provide an informational basis in which to base such discussion, first by identifying the valued capabilities in SV (chapter 7) and secondly by detecting challenges to the comprehensiveness and sustainability of capabilities' expansion.

## SUSTAINABILITY

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Sustainability expresses a temporal criterion. It concerns the "person's prospect of achieving and sustaining a level of functioning should they attempt to do so". Sustainability is threatened when "one's functionings are or become insecure involuntarily, or when, in order to secure certain functionings, one is forced to make other functionings insecure" (Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007, p.72). Although Wolff and De-Shalit (2007) focus solely on functionings, a double focus on capabilities/functionings seems essential to safeguard agential freedom. For instance, even if a person is not interested in actively participating in SV politics (capability 10), this capability must be available for the person to choose whether or not she wants to enjoy it. Also, in some cases, it is important to assess functionings' sustainability. In fact, some functionings are so essential for player's well-being that it does not make sense that the person chooses not to enjoy them, for instance, "Play" or "Feeling and Being Equal". Actually, the lack of sustainability of these functionings compromises participation in SV from the outset. Thus, the first sustainability premise is that valued functionings/capabilities are sustainable for a reasonable time frame, that is, available for the person to enjoy them if she wishes to do so.

The second crucial sustainability premise stipulates that the security of some functionings/capabilities enjoyment does not compromise the sustainability of other functionings/capabilities in the list. If, for instance, some players refuse medical treatment or worsen their impairment in order to guarantee their eligibility to play, they compromise the sustainability of health functionings. In these terms, it starts to be

obvious that the practical application of comprehensiveness and sustainability principles overlap and intermesh.

## COMPREHENSIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

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In most instances, dilemmas in capabilities enjoyment are to be ultimately solved by the person. However, the SV field of practice may grow stronger if it adopts as central concern that *all* participants possess similar opportunities to enjoy the essential set of goods the sport offers, up to a reasonable and satisfactory level (comprehensiveness) and continue to enjoy them if they wish to do so (sustainability). Although it is not possible to eliminate all sources of insecurity and conflicting choices, the process of identifying a list of essential and ethically valued capabilities minimises these dilemmas and provide ethical guidance to solve conflicts, if they are democratically and institutionally validated. Moreover, a list of capabilities can also be used to pressure social organisations to aim towards the expansion of valued and valid capabilities so that less people have to choose between “doings” and “beings” which are all of them central for a dignified human life.

Comprehensiveness and sustainability can be assessed at different levels and in different ways. Considering evaluation targets, it may focus on specific individuals; particular sub-groups or the whole community. In terms of its focus, it may concern capabilities (opportunities), its realisations (functionings) or both. They can also be assessed through a spectrum of methods, from the more quantitative (surveys, questionnaires) to the more qualitative (interviews, focus groups) (Comim, 2001, 2008; Kuklys, 2005; Trani, 2011). This evaluation needs therefore to be defined in relation to the context, means and goals. A quantitative assessment, based for instance on data sources such as questionnaires can provide statistically validated information on the most significant correlations between different capabilities; the quality and intensity of those correlations and its perceived sustainability. A qualitative study, such as the present one, offers a broad knowledge of the field, illuminating personal, cultural, social and environmental circumstances affecting both comprehensiveness and sustainability criteria, which may pass unnoticed in more quantitative approaches. In chapters 6 and 7, information was presented regarding the SV field of practice from which others can



form their own opinions/analysis regarding comprehensiveness and sustainability of capabilities expansion. The present chapter now reports on what has been assessed as actual or potential threats to these criteria.

For each capability/functioning, table 8.1 presents empirical evidence regarding conflicts in comprehensiveness and sustainability. These must be understood as examples and not representative of all players', as these criteria are strongly affected by particular circumstances such as type of impairment, motivation, sporting experience, and type of engagement with the sport. Capabilities expansion can be observed to be most apparent within the GB squad but at one in the same time the possible threats to sustainability and comprehensiveness are also greatest here. Though recreational players are less affected in their capabilities than competitive players, the comprehensiveness and sustainability of the impact on the whole capabilities' set is less conflicting and more stable.

Table 8.1. Summarised report on potential conflicts in comprehensiveness and sustainability of SV set of relevant capabilities

Capability	Threats to comprehensiveness <sup>a</sup>	Threats to sustainability <sup>b</sup>	Examples
Life and Health	<p>An obsessive relationship with SV can lead to overtraining, increasing the chances of physical and psychological burn out (Health).</p> <p>If SV becomes the only source of life satisfaction, it can obstruct other life avenues or negatively affect other capabilities such as knowledge, practical reason and affiliation.</p>	<p>Threats to health (such as chronic or acute injuries) may compromise personal conditions for practice and lead to abandonment.</p> <p>If life satisfaction is solely dependent of participation in GB teams, the potential for abandonment is higher, if things do not happen as expected.</p>	<p>Satisfaction compromised by competitive pressure.</p> <p>Injuries hidden for fear of team exclusion (p.144).</p> <p>Intense conflicts in managing SV with other life dimensions (p.151).</p> <p>Some potential players abandoned the sport when they were not selected for the GB teams.</p>
Explore one's own potential	<p>Some people spent considerable time, money and damaged personal relationships searching/engaging in an adequate SV outlet (e.g. through changing club; club far from home; sustaining participation in GB programme).</p> <p>In exploring unknown possibilities it was sometimes difficult to calibrate the balance between risk and safety.</p>	<p>The lack of meaningful challenges can lead to demotivation and ultimately abandonment of the activity.</p> <p>Potential for accidents and disillusion with the activity.</p>	<p>Some players did not feel their club offered the adequate level of challenge (p.177).</p> <p>Some people participating in SV were clearly threatening their physical integrity (pp.178, 184).</p>
Knowledge	<p>The particular type of knowledge on impairment/disability promoted in SV context may lead to a derogatory evaluation of the experiences of other people with impairments who are involved in less active sports or less prone to embrace challenges.</p> <p>An inappropriate level of knowledge on other's circumstances impacts negatively on affiliation opportunities.</p>	<p>Narrow classification criteria, compromising human heterogeneity in SV field of practice hinders this capability sustainability in relation to knowledge on impairment/disability.</p>	<p>Derogatory comments on boccia players.</p> <p>Derogatory comments on some people with impairments who seemed less "brave" or less "driven" than SV players. (p. 160)</p>
Practical reason	<p>A new sense of life purpose solely centred on SV participation may detract people from exploring other viable avenues and lead to excessive emotional dependence.</p>	<p>Lack of informed knowledge of one's own realistic possibilities in the sport creates the potential for (self and externally induced) deception,</p>	<p>Some of the players seemed too optimistic concerning their potential in the elite stream of the sport (p.149).</p> <p>Some players, expecting to be selected for the</p>

	If/when one's expectations of SV participation are unreasonable and everyday life decisions are made in consonance, tensions with the expansion of other capabilities is inevitable.	frustration and potential abandonment of the sport.	GB, invested considerable even though their chances were minimal (p.150). Negative effects on other life dimensions (p.205).
Affiliation	Affiliation with people with similar impairments can detract from exploring stronger relationships with people with different embodiments. The strengthening of teams' cohesion throughout the years seemed to have hindered affiliation with people outside one's own team. Peer's pressure and team ethos may have lead people to act against their practical reason, making them compromise on other valued capabilities.	To feel one belongs and is cherished and respected by others is conditional to one's sustained participation in the sport and to the sustained enjoyment of all other capabilities.	Social inequality between SV members (p. 213) Social distancing between the different teams (p. 128). Compromising of commitments, responsibilities and affiliation relations outside SV, in order to respond to SV demands (mainly at the elite level) (p.151). Peer's and staff pressure (p.122).
Achieve, respect and love oneself	When/if self-esteem and self-respect derive solely from sporting competence, then a relation of excessive dependence with the sport is created, with potential negative consequences if participation ceases. If achievement equates solely with competitive results, then if/when these are not attained, feelings of social superiority/inferiority may emerge. A minimal level of positive self-perceptions is conditional for the expansion of all the other capabilities namely capability 2, 5, 7, 8 and 10.	If achievement equates results instead of physical, technical and tactical progression, the potential for desistence is higher. When expansion of positive self-perceptions stems mainly from the prestige of belonging to the GB team, the potential is created for an instrumental rather than genuine connection with the sport and for a short term capability expansion.	Isolation and depression felt by some players when injured. Feeling intimidated by better players. Possible reason that led some people to abandon the sport, after having been involved in GB programme. Instrumental rather than genuine connection with the sport. (p. 207)
Feeling and being morally equal	A low degree of the enjoyment of this capability undermines the expansion of other capabilities namely 4, 5, 6, 8, because it supports the minimal levels of self-confidence needed to relate with others.	The potential to socially equalise people is one of the most valued features of SV for players with impairments, therefore crucial for one's sustained participation and the sustainability of the sport itself.	Possibility to feel equal to others in the community (pp.163-173 ).
Doing good for others	The possibility to contribute for other's good appears to	The active involvement of players with	Low or devalued participation in competitive,

	be an important condition for the previous capability, as well as for the expansion of positive self-perceptions (6) and affiliation possibilities (5).	impairments in the sport appears essential for a sustainable, steady and robust development of a true community of practice.	technical and political roles of players with impairments (pp. 183-191).
Play	Experiencing fun is one of the main motivations for practice and a reason to prefer SV over other exercise practices. Failure to expand <i>play</i> may compromise one's participation.	Failure in responding to these expectations may affect the sustainability of the teams/sport.	Grand Prix as a good promoter of these capabilities, though needing some attention to obvious inequalities (pp.124-134).
10. Control over one's own environment	Failure in promote the participation of players with impairments compromises the adequacy of SV provision to respond to the interests, needs and motivations of the people from whom the future of the sport is more clearly dependent.	Involvement of players with impairments at all levels of SV practice increases chances for a successful long term development.	Incipient understanding of the personal circumstances of people with impairments (p.185) Insufficient protection of the competitive participation of players with impairments (p. 187 )

- a) Situations in which an inadequate level of enjoyment of one capability affect negatively the expansion of other capabilities of the capabilities' set.
- b) Sustainability includes herein two interdependent different levels: the sustainability of the person's engagement with the sport and the sustainability of the enjoyment of valued capabilities/functionings.

The following sections examine the contextual factors which more clearly affected SV potential to promote a comprehensive and sustainable expansion of players' capabilities.

### EXPANDING CAPABILITIES/CONTRACTING DISABILITY

In chapter 2, disability was presented as a multidimensional and multilevel construct (cf. Figure 2.1) and in chapter 4, capabilities were conceived as the opposite phenomenon (cf. Figure 4.1). This means that, even when it is not possible to cure impairment, if people with impairments are offered conditions to fulfil their capabilities' potential, impairment does not necessarily cause disability. Figure 8.1 graphically represents this potential for capabilities to override disability.

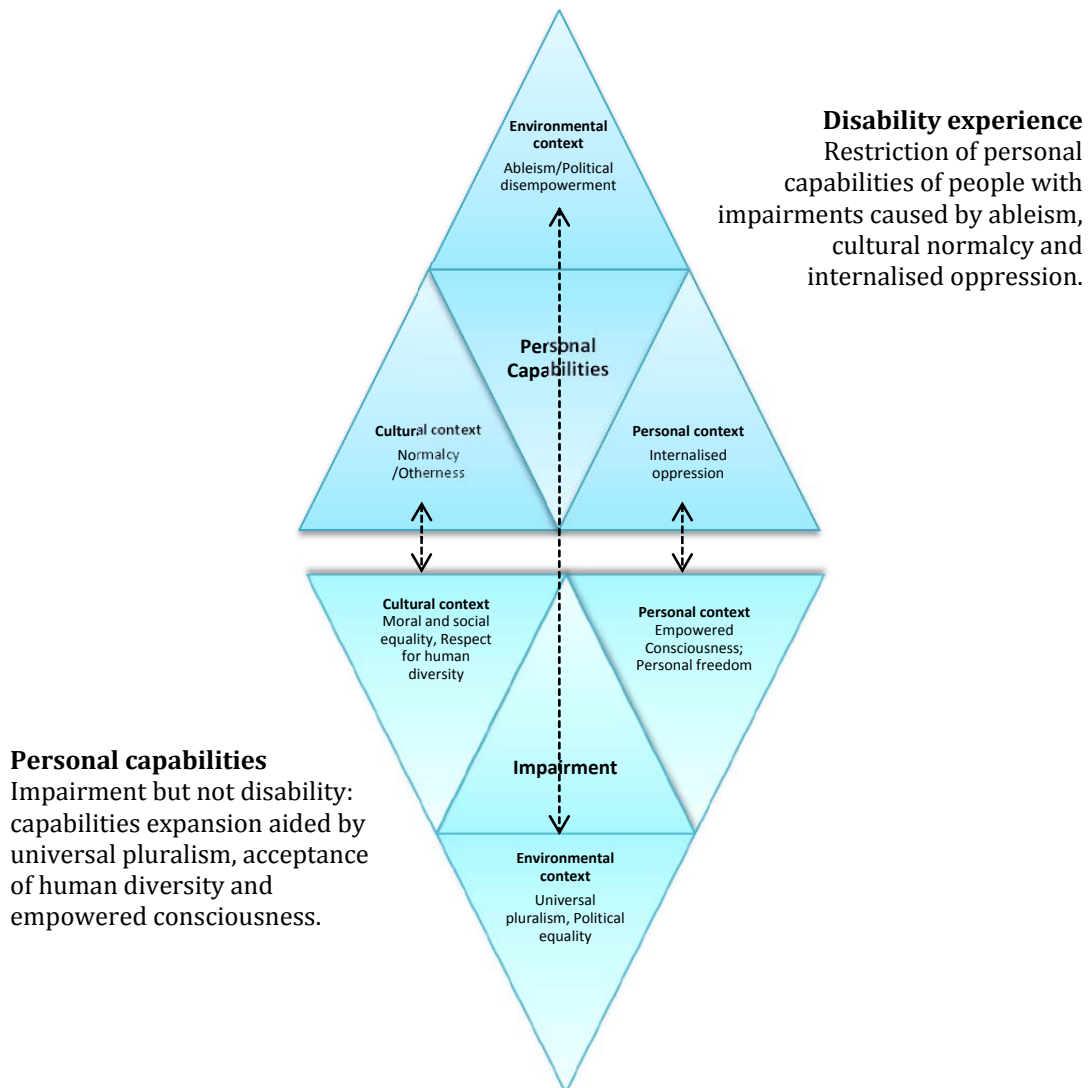


Figure 8.1. *Capabilities and disability as an inversion of each other. Main contextual factors at the personal, cultural and environmental levels.*

The inversion of the top triangle of the figure represents the end of a concomitant process of capabilities' expansion/disability reduction, in its most optimistic form, when capabilities expansion nullifies disability factors (cf. also figure 8.5). At the environmental level, the ableist worldview needs to be substituted for a universalistic ethical framework, in which diversity is embraced, valued and integrated, incorporating the intransigent defence of essential human values. The expression universal pluralism (bottom triangle), not to be confused with cultural imperialism or normalisation, captures the essence of this hypothetical framework:

...in addition to recognising and honouring the differences between cultures, we also attempt to cherish those things that we have in common as human beings living in a very small planet, a healthy universalism ...(Which I also call unity in diversity, universal pluralism, unitas multiplex, universal integralism, etc). (Wilber, 2001, p.126)

At the cultural level, this transformation concerns both the realm of doxa and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, 1998). It entails a transmutation of engrained beliefs of superiority attached to some human characteristic (e.g. race, gender, ability) into an internalisation the moral equality of all human beings, daily enacted in the respect for each person's contribution to the common good. Such cultural transformation implies "a great deal from human beings", requiring social relationships to be based on other values rather than mutual advantage (e.g. compassion) and that "people have great sympathy and benevolence and sustain these sentiments over time" (Nussbaum, 2006, p.409). When other's well-being is as important as one's own, the overlooked needs of people with impairments will be more easily accommodated within a culture of acceptance, care and responsibility.

At the personal level, the full expansion of personal capabilities implies the acceptance of one's own and other's individuality, including the unchangeable features, as it is often the case with impairments. Accepting the (im)perfection inherent to each human being, one is imbued with a sense of personal freedom, derived from an empowered consciousness- the awareness that independently of one's circumstances, personal agency can always be preserved. It implies an informed knowledge of what a life worthy of human dignity is and should be, not only for oneself but for others whom one sees as full equals. Such a perspective is thus transposed onto others, ultimately contributing to positive changes at all the other levels.

Each of these levels feeds and is fed by the others. An ideology of universal integralism is enacted in all cultural practices (e.g. education, arts, sport) and depends upon a critical mass of empowered and proactive individuals with impairments. Also, due to its interdependence, the closer each realm is to an ideal state, the stronger will be the pressure on others to develop in a similar fashion. While this influence is arguably stronger from the environmental (macro) to the personal (micro) realms, under adequate conditions it is reasonable to conceive that such influence can also occur in the opposite direction (Johnson, 2008).

Ontologically, each of these realms is a crucial part of a complex unit; a social “reality” distinctive from the mere sum of its parts, within which the environmental realm includes and transcends the cultural and the cultural includes and transcends the personal (Johnson, 2008); configuring a holonic structure<sup>53</sup> (cf. fig. 8.2). Given this co-constituency, it is only by examining each one of these realms and its most significant interactions that is possible to discern effective ways of evaluating and promoting capabilities. None of these levels is either independent or more important than the others.

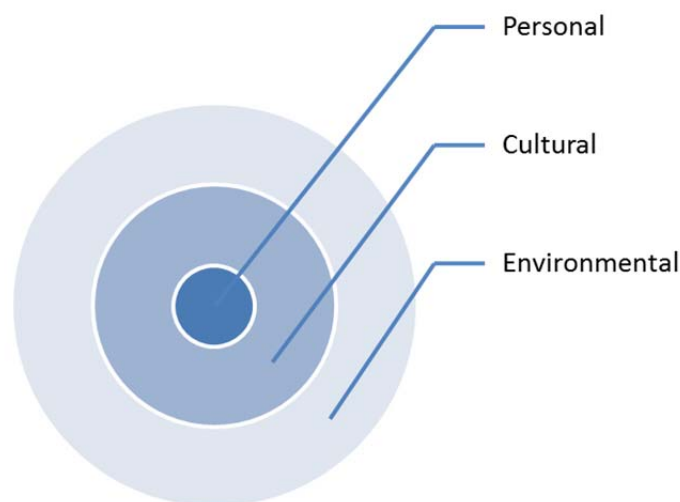


Figure 8.2. *Holonic structure of social reality (personal, cultural and environmental levels).*

Since capabilities and disability are the inverse reality of each other, SV’s potential to expand personal capabilities coincides with its potential to reduce disability factors. Though it is not reasonable to expect that impairments may be “cured” by playing SV,

it can however help the person “do and be” what they reasonably value, thus reducing disability. The next sections present the main contextual factors affecting the conversion of SV goods deriving from participation into a comprehensive and sustainable expansion of personal capabilities, or disability reduction.

### THE PERSONAL LEVEL

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Internalised disability can only be transformed into empowered consciousness through consistent and sufficient phenomenological experience that is able to counteract engrained negative beliefs of the potential of impaired bodies (cf. chapter 2). Throughout chapter 7 were exposed different ways in which SV phenomenological experience contributes to this process. If, ideally, SV practice could ignite the full development of an empowered consciousness, grounded in the informed and realistic knowledge of one’s possibilities and inherent rights as human beings, such phenomenon could be represented by a triangle that completely overrides internalised oppression (cf. Figure 8.3).



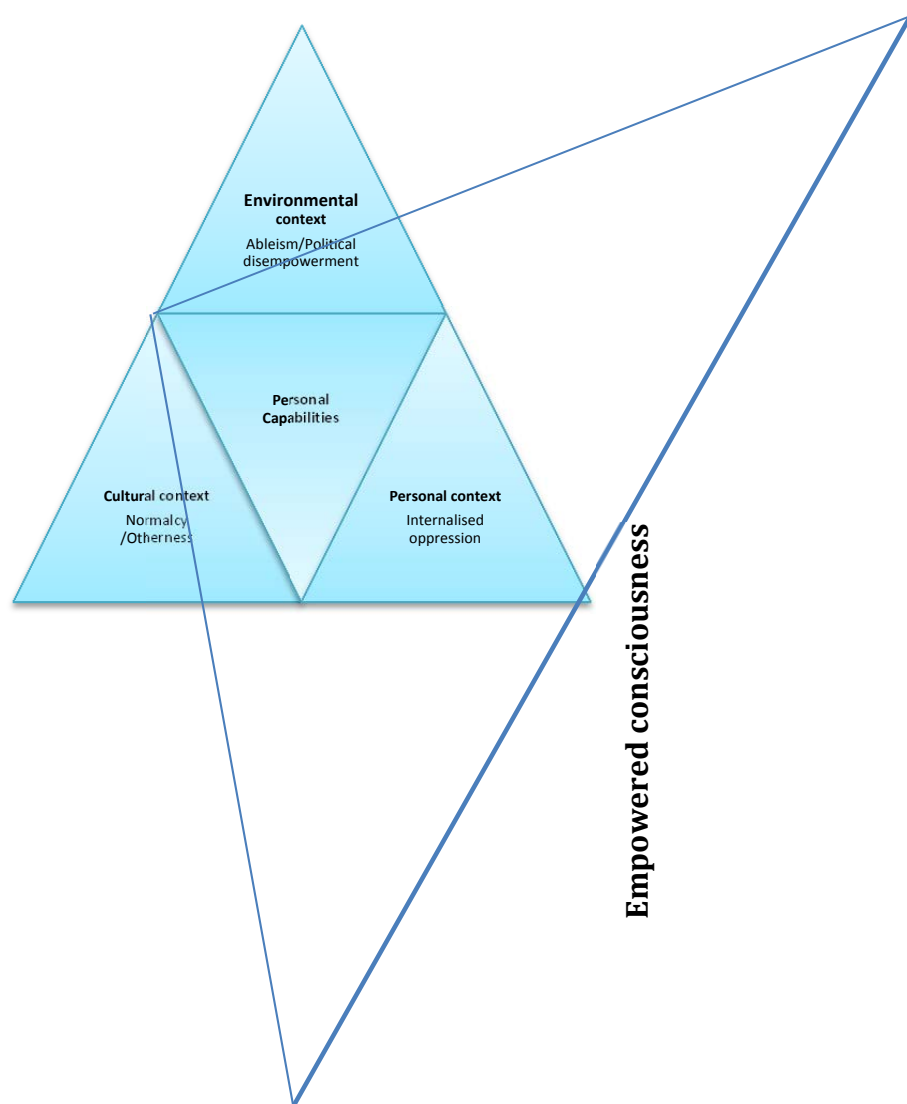


Figure 8.3. *Expansion of personal capabilities supported by a fully empowered personal consciousness.*

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### INTEGRATING IMPAIRMENT IN ONE'S IDENTITY

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Most SV amputee players were able to avoid social stigma, hiding their prosthetics legs from the “normalising”<sup>54</sup> judgment of others. Since most of them did not consider themselves “disabled”, to engage in SV meant they rescinded a social identity they fought hard to maintain. Not only because playing SV immediately granted them a disability status, but essentially because their impairment could no longer be hidden. For many, the exposure of impairment constituted a major obstacle as it implied accepting the risk of being labelled as disabled. Nevertheless, it also offered them an

opportunity to accept impairment as part of one's self; to stop "*passing as normal*", thus, to narrow the gap between the private and public self (Goffman, 1963).

Amongst the SV community, the acceptance of one's own condition as an impaired person was recognised as the main barrier to one's initial engagement in the sport:

*CFS*: Imagine that you know somebody that just had an accident....and you want to convince him to try sitting volleyball. What would you say?  
They've got to want to accept that they're no longer able bodied. And this is a chance to get on with their life and to be as normal as possible again. So with each person it is different, depending if they accepted it or don't. The ones that accept it will probably have a good life. Some people take longer than others. (Gerard)

When players with impairments undertook this challenge, the necessary space for an empowered consciousness was created. And when the several dimensions of SV practice- from the control of the physical environment, the mastery of the physical tasks of the game (cf. chapter 7, capabilities 2, 3, 6, 9) to the interaction with others (capabilities 5, 8)- *phenomenologically* reinforced their self-worth and competence, this consciousness grew.

The willingness to accept one's impairment influenced capabilities' expansion in two different ways. It facilitated a set of internally transformative phenomenological experiences which generally lead the players to perceive themselves more positively. Indirectly, being present and participating in a larger heterogeneous community also exerted an important influence on the way others perceived disability. By playing the game themselves non-impaired people testified what may be the real possibilities of impaired bodies and were forced to reshape beliefs and attitudes towards disability, ultimately affecting the way they acted in other social contexts.

At a personal level, signs of this foundational stage for empowered consciousness were visible in the acceptance of impairment as a feature of the personal and social identity of players with impairments, as Anderson illustrates: "I want to take SV around to places, not to promote disability but to tell people that we are not afraid. *We are not ashamed to be disabled. We're not different*" [my italics]. This acceptance was also evident when prosthetic legs were exhibited instead of hidden and used to affirm one's own identity as a central focus of the project of the body (Shilling, 1993).



Picture 8.1. *From Hiding to “Showing Off”. The technological body as central to the body project.* Researcher’s photograph.



Picture 8.2. *“I am a Canadian SV player!”* by P.D. Howe.

The first and fundamental barrier SV imposes upon people with impairments is then to overcome the fear of disability stigma and to accept impairment as a central feature of one’s identity.

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## PERSONAL RESOURCES

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Even at the end of this research (April, 2013) SV was still at very early stage of its development. The number of clubs available was limited and most of them located in the Midlands or South of England, so the quantity and quality of SV offer was narrow, implying considerable travelling costs for many players. The elite stream demanded even more substantial financial cost (cf. chapter 6). The athletes involved in *Project Roehampton* were people able to live full-time in a facility away from home: students, former soldiers, single, with no children, who could afford spending two years devoted to SV earning no wage. There were also significant costs associated with travelling necessary to participate in GB training camps, practices and competitions. This meant that at the GB level, player's participation was as much dependent on the possession of financial and time resources as on sporting talent. In most cases, people had to compromise other dimensions of their lives in order to participate in the GB team. Some compromised their financial health (reduced their professional activities or spent considerable part of their savings). Others have undergone extremely difficult situations to sustain their participation, as documented in an article on the GB women's team, in the *Sunday Times*:

Last year Wiggs was working full-time in a school, which meant she was up at 5.15 am every day to fit in the gym before school, taught for the full day and then got in her car three nights a week to drive from Chichester to London and back for three hours' training. The exhaustion was exacerbated by the thought that she was spending more than £8.000 a year on petrol. If the squad wants to compete as a team in club competitions abroad, they have to pay for everything themselves: flights, meals, hotels. "It's difficult to afford", says Wiggs. "But we do have to do it to maintain our rate of progress. We're improved massively, but there has to be no let-up". (Mott, 2011)

For all these reasons, involvement at SV elite level constituted a major challenge to capabilities' comprehensiveness due to the considerable strain imposed upon other dimensions of live (family, professional and social). Even though players assessed their participation as positive overall, its sustainability was equally endangered by the excessive strain it put on their personal lives, as it became evident in the period after the Paralympics. In the last competitive season (2012/2013) of the study, many of the GB members were absent from the GP's. It became clear from numerous conversations with the remaining GB players that the Paralympic experience had been so intense and overwhelming that the balance of valued capabilities had been

compromised. Affiliation was definitely one of most affected, with some noticeable tensions in the relationships between former team GB members. Play was another capability difficult to sustain, as some players found it difficult to readapt to a club reality, which seldom offered them adequate, challenging SV practice. In some other cases, players' continuity in the sport was undermined by the absence of a SV club nearby their home town. Many of the GB players were also been seduced by individual Paralympic sports (e.g. canoeing and athletics), which apparently offered them the training conditions and financial support that SV was unable to guarantee (cf. environmental section).

The SV clubs presented a different reality, as the community of people involved remained quite stable throughout the research period. Three SV clubs were created and managed by players with impairments; so in terms of personal factors, it was essential that a group of individuals or one particular leader had the initial drive to initiate such a project. In one of these cases (Portsmouth Sharks), the project was also a community project, developed with the support of a rehabilitation technician and a charity organization connected with the local hospital (*Moving Forward*), which played a crucial role in recruiting people for the club. In the two other cases, the clubs were initiated by players with previous connections with Paralympic sport. Kent Wyverns was strongly supported by the action of a council disability sport development officer with personal interest in SV and disability. In all these cases, the proactivity of leaders with a close relation with disability was extremely important in the creation of opportunities for themselves and others to sustain SV benefits. The existence of a sufficient supportive network from friends (Lincoln Imps); sponsors (London Lynx), medical services (Portsmouth) and/or the council (Kent Wyverns) was equally important.

Within the clubs, the personal factors signaled earlier such as financial resources were less influential in player's opportunities to enjoy capabilities benefits, but still influential, especially in more deprived regions, as Kenny explained:

----- is a rural council, so most people have to travel a distance. Economically, ----- its farmers, its low paid work, its factory work, its land work. It's not an affluent county, so it does come down to money. There are some people out there that are on low incomes, that don't work; they couldn't afford to travel in. That doesn't mean they didn't want to do the sports; it means it's not accessible to them, because they can't physically afford the money that it costs to get there. They've got the time, they've got

the kit, and they've got the willingness. The first thing they think is: "Can I afford it? Yes, I can. Can I get there? No." What they will not do is to ring up to the club and ask: "Well, I live 20 miles away, is there any chance that you can pay me to get in?" Because they are pretty sure that the club will probably say: "Well, we can't, actually." So, they won't even ask that question, for fear of embarrassment.

Almost all the clubs charged a small amount of money per training session (approx. £3), and some charged a small monthly tuition (approx. £5), which for some players added to other travelling costs, constituting serious obstacles to participation. As the quote above indicates, this reality varies significantly between regions of the country and personal circumstances therefore it needs to be considered by political institutions and the clubs themselves when designing SV programs.

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### PLAYER'S CONNECTION WITH SV

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The personal connection with SV was essentially of two types: a genuine strong connection motivated by the enjoyment of the intrinsic goods generated through active engagement in sporting practices and an instrumental connection, motivated by the pursuit of extrinsic goods such as the victory, specific awards or, in Bourdieu's terms, capital (social, physical, symbolic). According to Morgan, the focus on intrinsic rather than on extrinsic sporting goods distinguishes genuine from "quasi-players" (Morgan, 1994, p.223). Genuine players completely respect the "ethos" of the SV game, that is, "the interest in the internal goods that are realized in the course of trying to achieve its standards of excellence" (Morgan, 1994, p.225), which is a vital personal factor for both the comprehensiveness and sustainability of capabilities expansion. If intrinsic goods such as the joy of movement, feeling competent in one's own body or the joy of playing against and with others are central motivations of one's engagement, this expansion becomes less dependent of uncontrollable and unstable circumstances such as victory, prizes, fame and media's attention.

It was not clear that all SV players, especially in the elite program, were genuine players, in Morgan's (1994) sense, as their desertion immediately after the Paralympics Games attests. Because most of the players were recruited to the GB programme, without the time to develop a deeper engagement with the sport, when their expectations of representing their country were not realized or motivated mainly by external goods (fame, social status, media attention) or when the Paralympics were over, their link with the sport was too weak to sustain participation.

Signs of a frail relation with the sport were already evident 18 months before the Paralympics:

*Today, in the general group meeting, we are discussing what it means to be an elite athlete. "Why would you have to have this discussion if you really were an elite athlete?" I thought immediately. But everyone in the GB program is a beginner in SV, so I guess the debate does make sense. Everybody writes down some words on a piece of paper and at the end the little pieces of paper are given to the leaders of the session, both Men's and women's team sport psychologists. "Discipline, strong will, fitness, determination, discipline, talent, determination (again), discipline (again), time management, winning attitude, strive, sacrifice, ready to suffer, compromise, dedication...." I remain focused on the torrent of words, thinking how in some moments of my life volleyball was as vital for my survival as the air that I breathe. I was fully and completely immersed in the sport. While absorbed in my own thoughts, I guess I am waiting for something similar to come out. Is "Passion" written in any of those little papers? All the small papers were open, without passionate words for SV. I always thought that nobody could be an elite sportsperson without passion. Maybe I'm wrong! At least in the Paralympic world, it seems so!*

(GB General Meeting, Kettering, 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2011)

Few of the players I have met seemed to be driven by this genuine passion for SV. Some of them had the passion for sport in general; elite sport or, first and foremost, for the GB kit. Some of these players could be described as "professional Paralympians"- athletes that gravitate between different Paralympic sports, choosing the one offering better practice conditions and better chances of competitive success.

None of these motivations can be judged independently from their cultural and environmental circumstances, nor necessarily assessed as negative as they might promote a sustained expansion of personal capabilities in other sporting settings. However, the fragility of many of the GB player's relation with SV can curtail opportunities for others to enjoy similar experiences, given the relative small numbers in the SV community. It is the sustainability of the sport itself that is being threatened. How the absence of GB players and their migration to other sports will impact on SV's long-term sustainability will only be possible to assess during the next Paralympiad and beyond.

Unlike the GB players, the other SV club players seemed to have developed a stronger, more durable and genuine connection with the sport, perhaps because the opportunities to join another sport were slim. This connection suggests that these particular actors/settings and the construction of a robust SV ethos constitute the vital pillars for the activation of SV potential for a comprehensive and sustained expansion of capabilities for players with impairments.

#### THE CULTURAL LEVEL

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Exploring the conditions for capabilities' comprehensiveness and sustainability within the cultural level implies a focus on SV conditions to lessen the gulf between the "abled" and "disabled" worlds; examining its ability to transform a cultural norm that diminishes or excludes certain types of embodiments into one that accepts and celebrates diversity. Such cultural transformation can be represented in the capabilities/disability figure by a new triangle completely overlapping disability factors (cf. figure 8. 4).



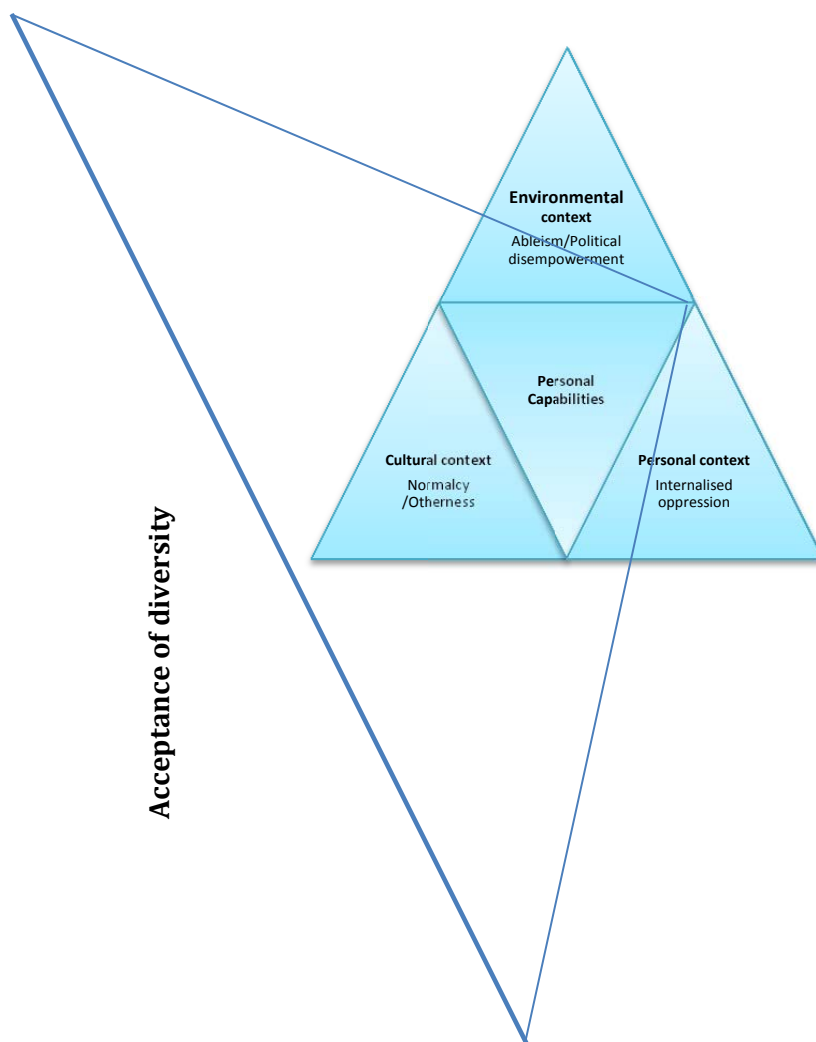


Figure 8.4. *Expansion of personal capabilities supported by the full expansion of a culture of acceptance of individual diversity.*

The essential factor for this process to be initiated was SV openness to all people who had the minimum movement skills to play the sport (the ability to slide on the floor using upper body strength), including non-impaired individuals. Without the participation of this group, SV would be merely replicating the social segregation of people with impairments. Moreover, it would be extremely hard for SV to germinate and survive due to the difficulty in recruiting participants with impairments. Most of the club were unable to field at least six players with impairments in the competitions. Whether this situation occurred because people with impairments were not

interested, faced insurmountable access barriers (cf. previous section) or because the clubs did not sufficiently invest in the promotion of the sport for this population (as they could rely on AB's to play), remains unanswered. Although managers reported to have tried to recruit people with impairments, their number did not significantly increase after the first year of SV development. Thus, the presence of players with different types of embodiments is not only vital for a transformation of wider cultural perspectives on impairment and disability (cf. chapter 7, capability 3, 7), but for the sustainability of the sport itself.

One of the “official” claims within SV community was that SV offered a “neutral” social ground. Whereas so many of the disability sports are adapted versions of the mainstream sport, keeping the essential movement features created for non-impaired bodies, SV demanded adaptations from both, people with and without impairments. Therefore individuals with impairments did not feel singled out as “special”. SV provided a middle ground between the “abled” and “disabled” worlds.

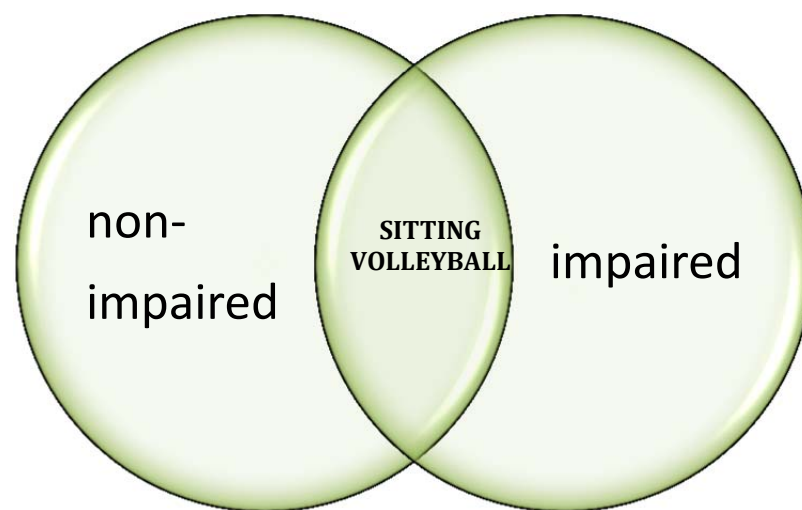


Figure 8.5. *Sitting volleyball as a “neutral embodiment” field.*

Despite SV apparent cultural openness to human diversity, there are still important challenges for SV to overcome if the goal is to build a culture of acceptance of impairment and disability, able to ground comprehensive and sustainable capabilities' expansion. These challenges - equalisation of political power between people with and without impairments; equalisation of opportunities to acquire the type of capital

mobilised in the field (sporting, physical, social, symbolic); ability of SV community to develop a strong distinctive community ethos - will be now examined.

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### EQUALISATION OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL POWER

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The conditions offered by the SV community for the active involvement of people with impairments in the way “things happened” has been described and examined previously in this thesis (cf. Chapter 7, capability 10). Thinking about the future development of the sport, it is now critical to reiterate the need to promote the participation of individuals with impairments who have demonstrated a genuine attachment to the sport in its leadership and governance (cf. p.207). Similar integration should be attempted at all dimensions and levels of the SV practice (management, coaching), with special concern for the representation of minority groups such as youth and women. A management structure that adheres to this approach would go some way to eliminating under-representation of all the constitute parts of the SV community.

The main obstacle for such participation lay in the way SV field of practice was modelled by mainstream volleyball *doxa* and *habitus* at all levels, from the institutional to the most basic level of practices (cf. chapter 6). Sean, a VE staff member, confirmed the absence of a distinctive SV culture:

The makeup of the teams around the grand prix aren't what I would call traditional volleyball players...I wouldn't say they have yet established a sort of place, in this country. I don't know if they've established a face that they can call their own yet, they are sort of copying a lot from the standing game in terms of behaviours and institutions.

The lack of a distinctive SV ethos is not surprising because the participation of people with impairments in the governance of field of practice was largely regulated by the mainstream volleyball institutions, endowed with the responsibility of managing the state funding, on which SV was dependent. As players with impairments did not possess a significant influence in this process, SV governance by mainstream volleyball institutional agents remained relatively unchallenged. Nonetheless, in consonance with the central role capabilities approach confers on participation, agency and freedom, an equalisation of political power is conditional to a culture of diversity acceptance and concomitantly, to capabilities expansion.

Although one of the *truths*<sup>55</sup> widely accepted within SV field of practice was that SV was a “level playing field”, this research revealed this was not always the case. Inequalities were especially salient in competitions (see e.g. p.124). This belief led to the assertion that players with impairments just needed to train, learn the sport and compete with everybody else for a place in the team. However, this type of reasoning failed to consider that the limited sporting background of people with impairments induced by a myriad of obstacles to participation in sport did actually disadvantage them. As such, only after people with impairments had the opportunity to learn and practice the sport for a sufficient period of time, in a high quality learning environment, could conditions between impaired and non-impaired players be levelled. These circumstances were not yet present during this research as the participation of some players with impairments in SV practice was often devalued (cf. e.g. Chapter 7, capability 8, 10).

The “mixed” embodied environment created additional difficulties for women and young players, whose physical differences disadvantaged them in terms of opportunities for an effective, valued and valid contribution within the teams and therefore in their opportunities to acquire the types of capital available in the field (Bourdieu, 1984). In sporting fields, physical capital can be conquered by mastering the movement of the sport as well as its rules and the relatable knowledge required but also by the ability to be among the “best”. In the SV community, this capital was retained mainly by the already proficient volleyball players (predominantly male), not leaving much space for less experience players to affirm themselves. This differential was aggravated by the belief in SV’s intrinsic equalising nature because it prevented SV community from correcting inequalities through specific regulations. Perhaps, as some actors in the field have argued, exclusion is an unavoidable prerogative of sport. I am doubtful of this inevitability, at least, not if they are governed by a focus on capabilities and definitely not at all levels of practice. It is important to remember that the national GP was a competition uniting recreational and competitive players -from the grassroots to the elite level, therefore even weaker players should be able to enjoy competing.

For these reasons, the valorisation of the sporting participation for players with impairments, particularly women, youngsters and beginners, needs to be further promoted if the goal is to provide equal conditions for everybody to enjoy capabilities expansion. However, because the core ideal of mainstream sporting ethos (within which SV developed) seems to be sporting achievement, players with particular profiles (women, youngsters, people with more limiting impairments and beginners) will likely continue to have reduced opportunities for social affirmation. If the best teams present full squads of (amputee) male players and competition is non-categorised (cf. p.124), why would clubs invest in the development of women or youngsters, whose physical prowess is inferior from the outset? For these reasons, it is vital that the hegemony of AB volleyball players and of male amputee players is attenuated through regulations that promote and value the active participation of all the different groups involved in SV.

Relying upon the examination and analysis of the SV community and opinions collected, the following regulatory procedures are suggested as ways of correcting some of these inequalities:

- i. Compulsory participation of a minimum number of players with impairments on court (some actors suggested a ratio of 60/40 impaired, non-impaired players), or at the minimum, that the teams presenting this ratio are rewarded with bonus points in competitions;
- ii. Similar regulation for the participation of women and youngsters; or
- iii. The establishment of team's classification using a point system based upon each person's physical potential, similar to the classification system used in wheelchair basketball and wheelchair rugby. According to the severity and type of impairment, a number of points would be assigned to each person and no team could have more than a certain number of points on court at any one time. (age and gender could also be considered until numbers are high enough for junior and men and women's leagues);
- iv. Adjustment of the regulations of VE funding to the clubs rewarding the ability to recruit people with impairments, women, youngsters and beginners;

- v. Bonus points for the utilisation of beginners in matches (for instance during the first two seasons), to support their initial engagement and motivate a longer engagement with SV;
- vi. In the final stages of competition, confine participation to players who have played in a minimum number of previous competitions<sup>56</sup>, to counteract the instrumental and extemporaneous participation of volleyball players/AB players with the main goal of winning matches.

The equalisation of the opportunities to acquire and mobilise the types of capital circulating in the SV field of practice, is of great importance because without sufficient physical and symbolic capital, the individual participation in the SV field is also curtailed, as well as the opportunities to expand relevant capabilities. In turn, without a minimum enhancement of individual capabilities, the sustainability of the participation of people with impairments and of SV itself is also compromised. Obviously, regulations of this type ought to be discussed in democratic forums, involving representatives of *all* SV participants. Such management structure would not only promote personal agency, but help build a “true” community of practice and a distinctive SV ethos.

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#### THE ABILITY OF SV COMMUNITY TO DEVELOP A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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In December 2012, UK Sport ceased funding all elite volleyball squads. This decision was interpreted by SV community as very negative, as it seriously compromised the sustainability of the elite SV strand and, consequently, of the sport itself<sup>57</sup>. Though Sport England, the funding body for community and youth sport allocated funding for the development of Sitting Volleyball, UK Sport financial withdraw was considered very negative, due to the role of the elite realm in the promotion of the sport. Yet, this scenario was predicted earlier by some SV actors. In April 2011, Kate expressed her concern for a lasting legacy:

What I don't like is that legacy is not supported as much as it should be. VE is getting better at that but everything is still very much focused on “let's achieve Paralympics.” I understand that achieving success at the elite level is connected with legacy. But I still think that some of the morals of decision making aren't made towards the good of the sport or running a business. What tends to happen with management is that it jumps from side to side and that is a very confusing message. If we do very badly, some of the elite athletes will leave it behind and disappear. And then I am not sure

whether we have the infrastructure to keep it going. If you don't have VE or some other governing body running it, organising the grand prix, funding clubs, you will start to lose the legacy. That is my fear! (Kate, VE staff)

In fact, in tune with Kate's predictions, even before the announcement of UK Sport decision, it was already apparent that SV elite strand had suffered a setback, with so many of the elite players absent from GP's. This phenomenon reinforced my perception that the establishment of a stable SV practice community and ethos was dependent upon the grassroots strand. The stable participation in the GP's after the Paralympics Games was solely noticeable in the lower profile SV teams, as they were the only teams presenting new players, whereas the more competitive teams were clearly inconsistent in their team's composition.

The lack of investment of volleyball institutions in SV grassroots was pointed out by many SV actors as one of the strategic flaws in SV recent development, though it was also recognised that GB participation was crucial to the promotion and credibility of SV as a competitive, exciting sport, and essential to attract public interest and private sponsorship. It would be however unfair to not relate the institutional prioritising of SV elite strand with the heavy influence of national sport's politics (cf. Chapter 3 and next section). One of the possible explanations for the failure in recruiting more players after the Paralympics lies in the fact that people with impairments seldom search proactively for sport opportunities. Some lessons can perhaps be learned from the clubs with higher participation of people with impairments, such as Portsmouth Sharks and Kent Wyverns. In the first case, the close connection with the rehabilitation services of the local hospital and the action of a committed medical specialist were instrumental in directing impaired people to the SV club; in Kent, the action of a very driven disability sport officer was determinant in building a very welcoming and inclusive club.

Despite the complex national sporting structure and the limited local council's resources, forging partnerships with medical, educational and administrative local institutions may strengthen the chances of reaching people with impairments, who seem to be the ones guaranteeing a stronger connection with the sport (cf. p. 207). In addition, to secure the long term engagement of members with impairments, it is important to implement strategies to promote the active and meaningful<sup>58</sup>

participation of players with impairments in all aspects of SV culture. It is for instance essential that coaches and leaders explore adaptive strategies, developed and improved in the field of APA to create the conditions for a larger number of people with impairments to expand their personal capabilities. This may imply developing different versions of the SV game, from the more exclusive and formal SV to the invention of more universal variants<sup>59</sup>. Nonetheless, SV field may still experience difficulty in growing its community if it overlooks participation barriers and does not invest in potential solutions in partnership with relevant institutions.

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#### ABILITY TO INCREASE AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE OTHER.

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This research unveiled some signs that the social gulf separating people with and without impairments diminished in the cooperative process enacted during SV practice (cf. Chapter 7), though it was also evident that it could be further developed. It was noticeable for instance in the resistance to adopt SV core movement, except when strictly demanded by regulations. On many occasions, even though some people could not stand or walk, other players would still stand to celebrate, talk, present themselves to the public, salute the opponent or play around with a ball (Pictures 8.3-8.5). Though most players seemed aware of the symbolic power associated with bodies' positionality, it was evident that the level of awareness and understanding of people with different embodiments was highly variable. The following episode happened in a GP of the last competitive season, during a *time-out*:

*Here we are! Sahara is the only player who cannot stand on her feet or even on her knees. Yet, nobody seems to notice it. Or at least, give it much thought, as we continue to stand above her head, talking "over" her. I look down at her. She is just there, looking inside herself. Looking out she would only see hairy legs, anyway!*

*How many times have we done this? This not only in exclusion from conversation but also in exclusion from the game, as she barely got on court. Later, when I commented on this fact, I got the following answer:*

*"Well, I also think she is a bit lazy... she does not seem to be trying hard....". "Maybe she needs a bit more encouragement and support. Maybe she does not know yet that she can do better. Maybe the fact that the team does not use her in the matches reinforces her self-belief that she is not good enough." "Maybe...; maybe...there are a lot of maybes and perhaps along the way..." I did not share these thoughts with my colleague, as I usually*



*refrained from being overtly judgmental when I was in "the field". It seems to me however that the sporting culture internalised by many of these players still holds victory and social prestige as more important than personal well-being. I don't think that my colleague understood the extent of maybes that justify the need to provide Sahara with better assistance and support. So, does SV really help understanding the situation of a person living with impairment? We may say it does, but we are far from fully including people... this is obvious in the most simple things such as sitting down to allow everybody to participate!*

(Field notes, Grand prix tournament, Kettering, 23/10/2012)

Though standing and walking accentuated the power differential between differently embodied players, they remained the norm, clearly distinguishing between the ones who can choose to walk from the ones who have no choice: "When you go to fetch the ball, why stand up to fetch the ball? Slide across and get it. That's how it is. Amputees do not have the option to stand up and go and run and fetch the ball!" (Kenny). This reluctance in fully embracing a SV habitus was also interpreted as sign of the low commitment of some (AB) volleyball players, which lead some D players to doubt of the usefulness of their participation: "And then they have some volleyball players, you kind of see them in between games standing up and volleying and passing and everything else. I don't know if their presence is really good for SV!" (Danny).



Picture 8.3. Amputee players playing volleyball in-between SV matches. At the Stoke Mandeville Grand Prix (21<sup>st</sup> March 2011). Researcher's photograph.



Picture 8.4. Harpers tournament (24<sup>th</sup> March 2011). Netherlands x Great Britain, final greeting. Researcher's photograph.



Picture 8.5. *Grand Prix Final, 1<sup>st</sup> Tier, Kettering (14<sup>th</sup> April 2012). Surrey Gators squad celebrating one more point.* © Jon McGugan

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#### SV CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

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Classificatory regulations are imposed internationally, by WOVD in close collaboration with the IPC, yet its effects are heavily felt at the most practical level of SV culture

At the Paralympic level, SV is played mostly by lower limb amputees. Analysing the situation from a capabilities perspective, a more flexible system of classification (see p. 214) would better promote diversity acceptance, because it would encourage the cooperation of people with a wider diversity of embodiments (including people with more and less severe impairments). This flexibility would also support sustainability in that it would guarantee that even if the functional impact of individual impairment changed, player's participation could still be secured (cf. p.151).

SV's position as a member of the Paralympic "family" raises evident limitations to such a classification system. The presence of people with more severe impairments can make SV competition look less credible and interesting for the public, therefore less marketable (Jones & Howe, 2005). Another obvious difficulty is that the inclusion of people not visibly impaired threatens the distinctive ethos of SV and Paralympic Games, where the *raison d'être* is based upon the distinction between able and disabled bodies. As such, WODV action in classification terms is constrained by the institutional ties with IPC. Again, a democratic discussion of these matters at all levels

of SV governance with the all interested parts is paramount to defend the best interest of players.

Though many equalising and inclusive mechanisms can be promoted within SV community, the necessary conditions to ignite this cultural transformation are intimately connected with macro/environmental factors, presented in the next section.

### THE ENVIRONMENTAL LEVEL

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The analysis of SV environmental contextual level entailed the examination of the macro conditions affecting both, the comprehensiveness and sustainability of capabilities expansion and the advancement of an ideology of universal integralism (cf. p.199). An ideal scenario for the facilitation of capabilities' in the environmental context is represented in figure 8.6 by a triangle that completely overlaps the sphere of ableism and political disempowerment of people with impairments.

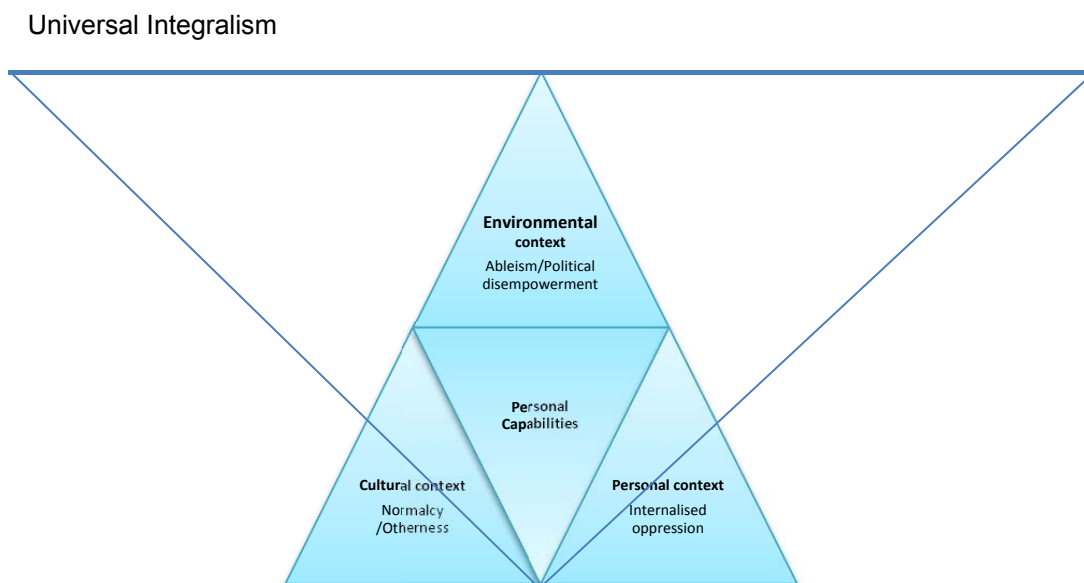


Figure 8.6. *Expansion of personal capabilities supported by an ideology of Universal Integralism.*

Although critical factors can be identified within a variety of dimensions (economic, political, scientific, technological, physical environment), this section focus upon the two most critical environmental factors identified: the social status of disability sport and the political position of SV in the Paralympic family and UK sporting landscape.

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## SOCIAL STATUS OF DISABILITY SPORT

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In chapter 2, it was argued that disability is constructed and kept marginal by powerful and pervasive governmentality processes. Some scholars even argued that movement practices such as exercise and sport can be understood as a “technologies of dominance” that reinforce hegemonic values around human body, health, performance (Markula & Pringle, 2006). Disability sport is often shaped at the image of mainstream sport and assessed according to its values and criteria. Athletes with impairments are more often praised for the display of courage and bravery in “overcoming” their impairment by playing an (able bodied) sport (Silva & Howe, 2012c) than for being skilful athletes (cf. p.97, 109).

The truth is that the general public is not familiar with the excellence benchmarks of Paralympic sport nor do they have enough knowledge of the possibilities and limitations of impaired bodies to allow them to appreciate their sporting feats. As Laura Williamson writes in the *Mail Online*, the Paralympics generates confusing reactions: “The ‘brave new world’ of a Paralympics on home soil began on Thursday with many of us feeling very uncertain, even unsettled, about what we were about to see....Is there really such a thing as elite disability sport or is it just sport for disabled people?”<sup>60</sup> This doubt is not surprising, as most Paralympic sports are simply adaptations from mainstream sports. When a Paralympic sport is adapted from a culturally significant mainstream sport, the non-impaired spectator can relate with it. This rapport is difficult to establish with disability sports such as goalball, boccia or even SV because these are further away from the phenomenological and cultural universes of the general public. Thus, the most popular Paralympic sports are those in which visibly impairments and associated limitations are more easily understood, usually adapted from mainstream sports (e.g. athletics, swimming) and wheelchair sports, as the wheelchair makes obvious the functional limitation and non-impaired people can relate with it more easily.

The underlying logic of this phenomenon is that the more distant a sporting ethos or impairment is from a “normal” referent, the lower it is located within a “hierarchy of acceptability” (Cashman, Tighe, and Darcy, 2008; Mastro, Burton, Rosendahl & Sherrill, 1996) of humanness. In a way, the existence of an event distinct from the

Olympics (Para-lympics) is itself a by-product of a hegemonic worldview in which some bodies are “normal” and all the others inscribed in “special” categories. Even though classification is perhaps essential for competitive fairness, this practice constitutes also an instrument of “biopower”, a technology of the hegemonic ableist dominance over impaired bodies (Howe, 2008b, c). Classificatory processes stipulate which bodies are included and excluded from the Paralympic world, impacting decisively on Paralympics’ potential to alter the ableist lenses through which wider society “sees” disability (Purdue & Howe, 2012a) (cf. also chapter 3).

The critical point is: if an ideology of universal integralism supports and is supported by capabilities expansion for people with impairments and vice versa, then the extent to which SV, disability sport and Paralympics can contribute to both depends greatly on the scope of human diversity they include and expose to the public eye. However, the development of modern sport happens in close interdependence with the powerful marketing and media realms, composing a *media-sport-marketing* holy triad (Maguire, 2002). Because not all impaired bodies and disability sports are media and market “friendly”, events and people whose embodiments and movement practices challenge ableist understandings of human movement performances may struggle to survive.

Pressured by great economic constraints, Paralympic sports need to prove they are credible and worthwhile (thus, marketable). Relatedly, athletes with impairments ought to prove they are “real” athletes, because the background assumption is that impairment and elite performance are an unlikely combination. The conception of “credible” sports and “real” athletes is attuned with the hegemonic athletic ideal held for non-impaired bodies. Within such an ideological and political environment, the space to negotiate new meanings for human embodiment and movement practices is quite limited. It seems therefore that the dynamics of globalised modern sport limits the innovative potential of disability sports to exhibit human diversity and challenge public perceptions of “normalcy”.

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#### SV POPULARITY AND POSITION WITHIN UK SPORTING LANDSCAPE

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Two essential aspects of SV raise considerable obstacles to its popularisation in the UK: the low cultural significance of mainstream volleyball and the national sport

political obsession with achievement goals. A third aspect inherent to the very intrinsic character of the game, the “sitting” position, was previously examined (cf. p.96). Although SV actors recognised the relative insignificance of volleyball as an obstacle to the development of SV, it was mainly presented as something external to their concerns when envisioning ways to develop SV. Part of the SV community believed that the competitive success of the SV GB teams in the Paralympics 2012 would exponentially raise its popularity. For them, success depended not only on competitive results but on how athletic GB players looked, reflecting one of the features of the internalised SV doxa shared by many Paralympic sports: the perennial need for comparison with mainstream sport. This pervasive concern was also the product of the extent to which institutional discourses on Paralympic “credibility” have echoed in the community doxa. A side effect of this fundamental concern was that impairment was largely overlooked as something not essentially relevant in the mission of building “credible” Paralympians. The act of dismissing impairment altogether can also be so harmful for SV’s potential to alter worldviews on disability as the act of giving it primacy (cf. chapter 3, 6), because it misses a golden opportunity to promote its deeper knowledge. Another side effect of this logic, referred to elsewhere in this thesis was the undermining of grassroots development (cf. p.103). It appears therefore that SV community was not able to distance itself from the same type of pressure exerted over mainstream sports which limited its potential to act as an agent of a universalistic ideology.

This development logic centred primarily on the elite stream needs however to be connected with the national sports politics, illustrated essentially by UK Sport “no compromise” strategy: “The application of our 'no compromise' approach means that we fund on a top down, meritocratic basis, as resources allow, and in pursuit of our high level goals for more medals in Rio and further success in 2020.”<sup>61</sup> To better understand the negative implications of this politics of sport funding, an important aspect concerning success in Paralympic sport needs to be clarified. Concerning the fundamental distinction between access to Olympic and Paralympics competition Howe states:

It is clear, from data collected in the context of Paralympic athletics, that it is easier across the board to be selected for the Paralympics than for the Olympic Games. This

is the case because many of the classes of impaired athletes struggle to get enough competitors to reach the qualifying standards for the Paralympic Games. (2010, p. 34)

Not only is access to competition places in individual Paralympic sports facilitated by the reduced number of competitors in some competitive categories, the number of medal events in each sport strongly impact on funding interest. If the chances of medalling is the main criteria for elite funding, SV (and other team sports) will have considerable difficulty competing with individual sports because they have more medal events (2 in SV, 170 in athletics, 148 in swimming, 50 in cycling (road and track)). Recently, in a personal communication, a UK sport official commented: "I don't think we (GB) did so well. We had a considerable number of athletes in team sports and all that investment did not produce one single medal!". None of other aspects, such as the number of medals available, the number of athletes/teams competing, the interest generated in the media and in the general public, the number of female teams, the development in international competitive rankings or the human value of participation seemed important enough to be mentioned. As one of the interviewed players noted, it seemed that

...they [politicians] are not interested in team sports because they don't get enough medals. Until they change... So you pay for 12 people and that's one medal, even if we win gold, that's one medal. And it's because of politics, if they change the rule... If you win gold and you have a team of 12, that's 12 medals and that would be very, very different. The whole political structure would change from athletics towards all sports. (Ray, player and manager)

In short, UK elite disability sport politics appears to follow an economic logic based upon the ratio between investment and probabilities of reaching the aimed outcomes. These are, as noted in the quote above, better guaranteed by individual sports.

The practical consequences of these environmental factors at the cultural and personal levels were evident in numerous ways during the research. Perhaps the most obvious illustration of the "no compromise" policy was the organisation of Potential Paralympic Days (cf. endnote 32), providing opportunities for sport federations to identify potential Paralympians without having to invest in grassroots development. Having participated as a volleyball coach in one of these days, I reflected on what I had experienced:

*Today, I taught the basics of SV to more than 100 people. I was never asked to give my opinion on which individuals could be potential Paralympians. I tried to alert the VE*



*manager to some individuals who seemed genuinely interested and minimally talented for the sport, perhaps not for 2012, but for 2016. He was peremptory: "We do not have money even for a main squad, let alone a development squad. Not a very good day, from the three, four individuals with chances, they all have some limitation that prevents their immediate integration on the GB teams." This explains why VE did not take this opportunity to recruit more people for the sport. Apart from myself, I did not hear any concern being expressed about providing opportunity for the non-potential Paralympic players. Despite some information being given on SV opportunities in clubs, the support that would perhaps convince them to initiate a sporting practice in SV was missing. I wonder how this approach may impact on their self-perceptions and on their interest and motivation to engage in other sport opportunities...*

(Field notes, Paralympic Potential Day, Sheffield, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2010)

The "hunt" for potential Paralympians was also evident in the informal existence of a "skills transfer market", that is, the investment of sport federations in athletes from other sports, a strategy that hinders the formation of true sporting practice communities and favours the instrumental use of the sport for political and personal interests. Such instrumentalisation was however induced by the national sports policy and the very circumstances of Paralympic sport, because it lead to the institutional prioritisation of sports and competitive classes in which medals were more easily attainable (from which the funding from UK Sport was dependent upon).

While medals and trophies may be sources of economic and social capital, the important question to ask is to what extent do these symbols truly reflect the development of what should matter the most: people and their opportunities to do and be what they value (capabilities); and to what extent they can actually hinder such development. The present research suggests that SV potential to promote an ideology of universalism needs to be supported by a national sport politics which posits more value on human development goals than on the attainment of medals, especially if such a focus relies upon short rather than long-term development, as it seemed to be the case with SV. Suggested ways to promote SV in a sustainable longer term development, advanced by community members themselves are:

- i) A greater investment in the promotion of the sport in (mainstream and special) educational settings, therefore reaching the younger generations;

- ii) A greater investment in the sport's promotion and development in more urban centres, where the number of athletes involved is easier to guarantee;
- iii) Decentralisation of SV to other areas of the country, creating the possibility for regional competitions, alleviating the strain on clubs in terms of travelling for practices and competitions;
- iv) Generally much greater investment in the grassroots development of the sport.

## SUMMARY

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If capabilities and disability experiences are the inverse of each other and if sport programmes such as SV can expand the former and reduce the later, then national sport politics needs to be more attentive to the different ways in which this transformation can be effectively promoted and/or hindered. This chapter stressed some factors which need to be explored further.

First, it emphasised the need to include comprehensiveness and sustainability as indispensable criteria to a successful process of capabilities expansion and presented some of the significant conflicts and threats evident in this research (cf. Table 8.1). Secondly, it identified several factors at the different contextual levels which seemed to affect these qualities. Since they are coincident, the examination of these factors was undertaken in tandem with SV's potential to alter the factors of disability construction.

The ability to integrate impairment into one's own identity, the personal material/financial resources and the character of the players' connection with the sport were presented as the most important contextual factors at the personal level. At the cultural contextual level, the equality of the social power between players with different types of embodiments needs to be further promoted at all levels of SV organisation, from practices in the clubs to the institutional strategic plans. Activation of mechanisms (e.g. classification system) that on one hand can guarantee equal opportunities to influence politics and on the other hand promotes the enjoyable and successful participation of each person with impairment at all dimensions and levels of SV practice are essential for the comprehensive and sustainable expansion of personal capabilities in SV. Finally, at the environmental level, the social status of

disability sport and SV's popularity and position within UK sporting landscape were examined. An excessive emphasis on achievement goals for sport development was advanced as one of critical environmental constraint to SV sustainability, to the comprehensiveness and sustainability of capabilities' expansion and to its potential to promote universal integralism.

As we have seen, the SV field of practice exhibits both facilitators and constraints to the expansion of personal capabilities of players with impairments. The ideal situation where SV could promote the full expansion of personal capabilities to the point where disability factors were confined and controlled is represented by Figure 8.37.

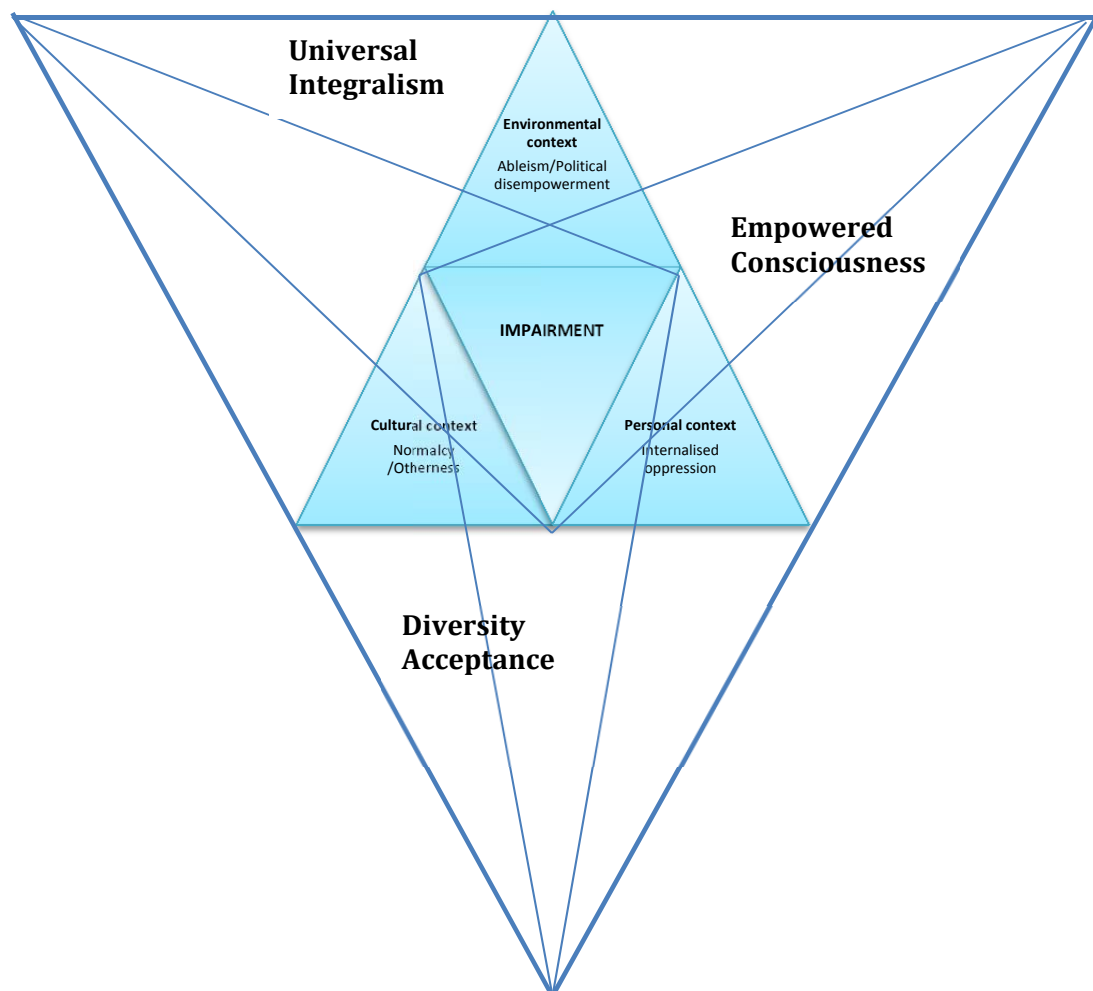


Figure 8.7. Representation of the maximum expansion of personal capabilities, in which impairment does not imply disability.

There are serious and difficult challenges to overcome, needing urgent ethical reflection. The crossroads at which Paralympic Movement stands is to choose between daring to present alternative models for human bodies and performances, risking on financial viability; or to continue being closely linked to a model of sport that reinforces a hegemonic ableistic ideology and keep their economic integrity. The solutions to these dilemmas are far from easy. As examined in the next chapter, an important implication that may accrue from the present study is the need for ethical orientation that a focus on personal capabilities as central goal of sport enterprise can provide.

## CHAPTER 9 . LOOKING “IN”, LOOKING “OUT”: ASSESSING RESEARCH AND POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

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### INTRODUCTION

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Introducing this final chapter I need to explain its title. “Looking in”, the present chapter summarises the main findings this study and proceeds to analyse its strengths and limitations, focusing essentially on the use of capabilities approach as the main theoretical/methodological framework. “Looking out”, the potential implications of the present study for SV in particular, disability sport and sport in general are explored. The chapter finishes by proposing some steps for future development of social research in sport grounded in the capabilities approach.

### MAIN FINDINGS

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*Forbidden to stand* aimed to investigate whether participation in disability sport was as empowering and positive for people with impairments as it is often conveyed. This research suggests a “new” approach to sport’s impact evaluation, relying on capabilities as the best indicators to assess such impact. Because capabilities are a novelty in social studies in sport, the first and main task of this research was the identification of relevant personal capabilities within SV context. This selection responded to two essential criteria: first, these indicators had to be ethically valid and valued by the players themselves and secondly, they ought to cover areas in which SV had a recognisable influence. From the thorough analysis of empirical data in articulation with multiple relevant theoretical insights and particularly with Nussbaum’s (2006, 2011) capabilities’ account, a list of ten relevant capabilities was then generated. Capabilities such as “Life and Health”, “Affiliation”, “Practical Reason”, “Play” and “Control over one’s own environment” were adapted from Nussbaum’s list of central capabilities to SV context, as well as “Doing good for others” proposed by Wolff and De-Shalit (2007). New capabilities assessed as especially significant for SV players with impairments were “Explore one’s own potential”; “Knowledge”; “Achieve, respect and love oneself”, “Feeling and being socially and morally equal”. After identifying this set of essential capabilities, a qualitative assessment unveiled its most

significant functionings (cf. Chapter 7), whilst describing its critical contextual factors (cf. Chapter 8).

A positive expansion of personal capabilities requires that all significant capabilities expand and that the enjoyment of the expanded capabilities is possible to sustain for a reasonable period of time. This study suggests that personal capabilities expanded more among the SV elite group, however threats to its comprehensiveness and sustainability were also higher within this group. Under the conditions described, in the elite stream, SV practice impacted so much on the players' lives that it compromised a balanced enjoyment of all capabilities. Relatedly, on the other significant SV sub-group, the recreational players, the reduced offer of SV activities (competition 6 days per year and practice one a week) can be insufficient to promote a balanced and sustained expansion of players' capabilities. The lack of a middle way between the elite and recreational settings can be interpreted as a symptom of SV underdevelopment and fragility within the wider sport field. As the study demonstrated, SV development was more dependent on political tides than on the emergence of strong communities of practice.

Since the identification of capabilities is by itself insufficient to understand the process of conversion of SV goods into personal capabilities (cf. figure 5.1), this study focused equally on the identification of critical factors for capabilities expansion at the cultural and environmental levels. The acceptance of impairment in one's identity, the possession of sufficient personal material/financial resources and the player's connection with SV community were identified as the most influential factors at the personal level, though these are obviously intimately dependent on the interaction of multiple conditions at the cultural and environmental levels. Factors at the cultural level such as the equalisation of political power between people with and without impairments; the equalisation of opportunities to acquire the types of capital mobilised in the field (sporting, physical, social, symbolic) and the ability of SV community to develop a strong ethos shaped personal circumstances. In turn, these cultural aspects were also conditioned at the environmental level by the social status of disability sport and SV position within the Paralympic family and UK sporting landscape. The combination of all these factors composes the net of interconnected circumstances for SV to promote an empowered consciousness, a culture of

acceptance of difference and a widespread ideology of universal integralism. In other words, the study provides a road map for SV's potential to directly promote the expansion of players' capabilities, but also to indirectly promote it by reducing contextual disability factors.

Taken together, these results suggest that while SV possesses conditions to expand personal capabilities and reduce disability experience (and vice-versa), the concretization of this potential depends upon a combination of factors, some of them external to the community itself. There are however a range of more controllable mechanisms wherein prospective action can prevent the negative and stimulate SV positive impact, as identified and described throughout this thesis such as appropriate competitive and classificatory rules; the enhancement of SV quality and the expansion of settings with diverse competitive levels and the promotion of an effective participation of people with impairments at all levels and dimensions of SV field of practice.

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#### RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE AND POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

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Hopefully, this study goes some way toward enhancing our understanding of the human development potential of SV in particular and of disability sport in general. By focusing on criteria which are ethically valid and crucially meaningful for players with impairments, it also illuminates the political usefulness of adopting a capabilities approach. Some potential implications of this particular study in SV field of practice, in disability sport and in social sport studies are next presented.

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#### SITTING VOLLEYBALL FIELD OF PRACTICE

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*Forbidden to stand* has revealed unsurprising news: SV possesses conditions to promote the expansion of the personal capabilities of players with impairments but they are not automatically enacted by engaging in the sport. Working towards capabilities' expansion needs to be made a formal political and communitarian goal, to be planned and evaluated, otherwise SV is in danger of merely replicating normalised and superficial processes of "inclusion", not always empowering for people with impairments. Three essential aspects deserve special attention: the fashion in which SV field promotes equality; the way it is able (or not) to involve

people with a variety of impairments in all aspects of SV community life (governance, management, practice) and the status of SV within the wider institutional sporting structure and national sports' culture.

SV community needs to be more attentive in particular to the practical translation of the widespread belief that SV is a "level-playing field" between people with and without impairments. Throughout this thesis many empirical examples suggested this is not yet the case. Solely by being aware of these asymmetries at even the most basic level of practice (e.g. practices and competitions), it will then be possible to minimise them through concrete measures and regulations .

SV dependence from state funding appears to be at the genesis of potentially harmful strategic decisions prioritising short over long-term goals. Such a strategy has not only compromised the expansion of personal capabilities of the players involved, it may have also compromised the sustainability of the sport itself. Political statements repudiating the government obsession with medals<sup>62</sup> may be justified but it is essential that SV strengthens its grassroots community and its identity so that it becomes less dependent on political decisions and external institutions. The better SV field guarantees the expansion of personal capabilities, keeping participants involved and motivated, the stronger it will be, socially and politically.

The people with impairments active in the club settings are especially important for SV sustainability as they were the ones more genuinely connected with the sport. Although grassroots' SV players seemed to have been neglected due to the urgency of the elite stream development, this study suggests that SV can only increase its social legitimacy and political position by strengthening and enlarging its grassroots community of practice; reinforcing its ethos and eliminating its fragilities. This ethnographic study presents a reliable description of the impact SV on players' lives, essential to ground ethical discussion around SV practices and to plan its future. "Forbidden to stand" does not offer obvious solutions for dilemmas or difficulties, but it hopefully presents valuable information and suggestions.



Even when people with impairments are formally “included” in non-segregated settings, unless each individual of the whole community is aware of their own ableist assumptions, as well as of the uncovered dimensions of disability oppression, it is very difficult to create an empowering environment. This is because without identifying the reasons why impairment so often leads to disability there is no possibility of envisaging a remedy.

The way in which this study can perhaps provide an important breakthrough for disability sport is the identification of capabilities as the most appropriate criteria by which to assess sport’s impact. Capabilities are not only ethically valid indicators, valued by individuals with impairments themselves as they may also be considered as antidotes for disability factors. To agree on a set of core personal capabilities does not imply that participation under precisely defined conditions should be compulsory or that every individual will retain the same values and be affected by participation in the same way. It simply means that institutions would be able to direct their efforts towards making these opportunities available for the individual to choose or realize these opportunities. This ethical individualism constitutes a very important distinction between capabilities and other frameworks. Nothing is externally imposed. Freedom, self-determination and agency are crucial values of the underlying notion of human development (see e.g. Sen, 2000) in a capabilities approach.

Besides the obvious value in identifying central capabilities, this study suggests important lines of investigation in disability sport, related with the identification of critical contextual conditions for capabilities’ expansion: the potential offered by a “mixed embodied” habitus; the political power enjoyed by people with impairments at all levels and dimensions of sport contexts and the political and economic instrumentalisation of disability sport.

Currently, in the UK SV context, it appears that only a small percentage of people with impairments are enjoying the full capabilities’ benefits of participation in the sport. These are mainly people already “well-included” in mainstream society, with educational and material resources and who were lucky enough to fit into an accessible competitive sports’ niche. Attracted by the chance of UK Sport funding, predominantly directed to sports with medal chances, not only the volleyball institutions, but also other NGB’s seem to invest greater energy in the elite stream,

overlooking grassroots development and consequently limiting opportunities for *all* people with impairments. This is not surprising, as within a sport's world strongly ruled by media and marketing, it may be very difficult for governing bodies to develop grassroots without the elite stream to assuring its public visibility. A balance between these two streams needs to be attempted, so that the sport's sustainability is not dependent on competitive results and external funding.

If disability sport's *raison d'être* lies on the importance of movement for each and all human beings (Kidd & Donnelly, 2000), as much as on its potential to improve social conditions for people with disabilities (Brittain, 2012), then its increased instrumentalisation, commercialisation and obsession with results are clear signs that the field needs to urgently engage in critical reflection. Ultimately, a focus on capabilities' expansion as the ends and means of disability sport programs could help the field align its provision with the best interests of each participant and with its empowerment rhetoric.

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## SPORT

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In a time where international development was solely assessed by focusing on GDP, Mahbub ul Haq, a Pakistani economist, claimed that development needed to shift its focus from money to people. Human development reports were then created by the UN as a mechanism to assess a whole set of development indicators such as "health, education, nutrition, work, political freedoms, security and many other aspects of people's lives" (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009, p.24). In fact, GDP indicators, based upon average individual income are not only highly reductive of human potential, since this prioritises wealth over a whole set of other fundamental human values; but it fails to represent individual heterogeneities. At the same time<sup>63</sup>, Sen's concept of human capabilities offered a metric by which both of these limitations could be overcome, because while it involves a systematic examination of a plurality of indicators telling more about how people really lead their lives; its coherence does not compromise attention to individual diversity (Sen, 2000). The concept of capabilities entails both plurality and individuality. But why is all this important for sport's field?

A similar debate is now active in the social sciences of sport. Critical questions have been raised concerning development and sport: the relation between sport and

development (Hartmann & Kwawk, 2011; Kidd, 2008); development conceptualisation in sport's field (Black, 2012; Maguire, 2011a, 2011b); how specific understandings of sport's development are politically and practically enforced (Houlihan & White, 2002) and development evaluation in sport contexts (Levermore, 2011; Levermore & Beacom, 2009). Although a thorough examination of these issues is beyond the scope of this thesis, a brief comment here is needed on the potential impact of this present study to this debate.

In the same way capabilities approach was instrumental in guiding international development assessments and other contexts such as poverty, education and disability; capabilities approach can help solving the debate between "development through sport" or "development of sport" (Houlihan and White, 2002). If this debate adopts a human development focus, these two perspectives can start overlapping. One of the signs attesting their non-convergence at the moment is the rising of a new movement entitled "Sport for Development and Peace" (Kidd, 2008), as the differentiation of a specific strand of sport for development implies that development is not a concern in all sport contexts. Obviously, the term *Development* is itself highly ambiguous but what seems clear is that sport's world seemed to have all but lost its ethical dimension and exists mainly as a commoditized good (Sewart, 1987; Slack, 2004) in the western world, led by political and economic interests (Maguire, 2011a). Though a widespread rhetoric still claims for sport's intrinsic human value and development potential; at the practical level inequalities between nations are increasingly exacerbated by technology and economic power (Maguire, 2011a); the access to sport opportunities is highly asymmetric (Houlihan & White, 2002) and sport is more often used as a tool to feed the public's hunger for records rather than as a tool for human development (Maguire, 2011b).

Specifically, the present study illustrates how the national political obsession with medals dominates sports' development politics, so much so that it is hardly questioned (except when a NGB loses a substantial part of their funding, as happened with volleyball). Although medals and achievements are often presented and constructed as the most valuable ends of sport and mistaken by tangible indicators of sports' development, in reality they tell us nothing about the real impact of sport neither in the individual lives of recognised athletes nor on the everyday lives of

ordinary citizens. It can thus be said that medals are reductionist and misguided indicators to evaluate sports' development in much the same way as GDP was to evaluate international development.

The sport's field needs to be able to answer questions such as: What makes sport a legitimate individual and collective endeavour? Why do just human societies need sport? And perhaps, less philosophically, why should public resources be spent in sport? If the answer to these questions is centred on medals and records, then sport is destined to be an instrument of political and economic interests. On the contrary, if the answer to these questions is "human development", then I am hopeful the present study highlights the promising potential of a notion of development focused on human capabilities. Because each human being is conceived as a multidimensional "whole" being rather than a fragmented "self"; such a shift would alter the way sport programs are conceived and evaluated at all levels. From national politics to the most specific contexts, the obsession with results would transmute into an attention to a range of ethically significant indicators, such as equality in the access to sport opportunities; equality of access to all available roles in sport; and the extent to which activities promote the expansion of valid and valuable opportunities for every single individual involved.

It is evident that sport's world needs engaging in an extensive and deep reflection on its own ethical mission within the wider scope of global human development. Such reflection is an imperative before so many evident signs of its "malignancy" (Cashmore, 2012). In sum, the sport's world should be able to clearly articulate its social, cultural and human legitimacy and capabilities approach offers great potential to ground such endeavour.

## RESEARCH STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

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Evaluating the extent to which this study responds to the goals defined in the opening chapter, the features presented in this section can be considered simultaneously strengths and limitations. We will start by examining issues on the practical methodological details then focus on some more structural aspects of the theoretical/methodological design.

To start with, one important practical methodological conditioning to consider is the fact that the whole research project was centred in the action of one sole researcher. Because I am somebody with recognised independence and some impartiality in relation to the field of study, such lonely endeavour allowed more flexibility and spontaneity in performing the ethnographic roles, increasing mutual trust and facilitating the access to deeper levels of truth within the SV community. This depth of ethnographic “immersion” could have been hindered if another researcher was involved. However, the ethical judgment exercised in the selection of valid and valuable capabilities was devoid of the potential richness generated through debate with others. To overcome this limitation, the identification of relevant capabilities derived from an extensive and thorough analysis of a broad data sample, which was representative of the plurality of voices involved in SV field of practice, though prioritising the perspective of players with impairments. Even so, the partiality inherent to a singular research view was attenuated by the “in depth” view facilitated by the long ethnographic engagement with the community. Ideally, in future studies, the legitimacy of similar accounts would be strengthened if the selection of capabilities’ was submitted to the community scrutiny. If such a task is doomed impossible, such selection should at least derive from a consensus generated through the confrontation of more than one informed interpretation (e.g. team of researchers).

Another acknowledged practical limitation relates to the lack of representativeness of people who, after being involved in SV for some time, decided to abandon the sport. Though I have tried to reach these individuals, whose view could balance the optimistic tendency of the other players’ perspectives, I was not successful in my intent because obviously the personal rapport was impossible to establish. Some of these perspectives were, as I understood from others, full of resentment and negativity, and not surprisingly people did not seem to be interested in recalling them. I have tried to attenuate this limitation by exploring these cases through third person narratives; hence their experiences were still somehow considered in the final account of capabilities’ assessment.

I will now focus on the more structural level of the theoretical/methodological framework. Comprehensiveness and vagueness have been identified as the most significant strengths and simultaneously weaknesses of capabilities framework

(Chiappero- Martinetti, 2008). The same twofold quality applies to the present project. “Capabilities” is a complex concept because it comprises states and actions (“beings” and “doings”); opportunities (capabilities) and its realisations (functionings); multiple dimensions (health, affiliation, self-concept, among others); individual agency and ethical normativity; individual lives and its structural conditionings. On one hand, such complexity promotes the holistic understanding of each aspect of the phenomena, its relations with the whole unity and with the other interconnected parts. In order to deal with such complexity this study relied on the combination of multiple theoretical aids, which have enhanced the analytical interpretation of that complexity (cf. Chapter 5). On the other hand, to embrace capabilities’ complexity was the only epistemological option compatible with the complex ontological nature of capabilities, disability and each human being. The fragmentation of this inherent conceptual complexity would limit understanding and ultimately curtail its potential for social change.

Besides being complex, capabilities are also quite vague concepts. Its conceptual boundaries are so diffuse that a great range of “things” can fall within their semantic jurisdiction. Adding to this semantic ambiguity, they are also context-dependent, so that relevant capabilities in one setting may be not be relevant in another, or be relevant to one person but not to another.

Capabilities’ conceptual vagueness results in recognisable limitations. Possibly the most noteworthy is the considerable degree of subjectivity implied in the selection of the relevant capabilities and its empirical expressions, aggravated in the present study by the impossibility of triangulating perspectives with another researcher. Besides that, it is perhaps noticeable that some of functionings presented for each capability (cf. Chapter 7) could have equally been allocated to other capabilities in the set. This is because, besides being deeply interconnected, some capabilities overlap in their meaning. Despite this overlapping, each one represented an irreducible distinctive and significant value in the experience of SV players. This is not a great limitation, since more important than the precise conceptual definition of each element is that the whole capabilities’ set reflect the most fundamental values of SV players with impairments and that its assessment may contribute to improve their

lives. To insist on the need for sharp meaning boundaries would be to deny the inherent complexity and ultimate ineffable nature of life experiences. As Sen notes

Even when precisely capturing an ambiguity proves a difficult exercise, that is not an argument for forgetting the complex nature of the concept and seeking a spuriously narrow exactness. In social investigation and measurement, it is undoubtedly more important to be *vaguely right* than to be *'precisely' wrong*" [my emphasis]. (2004, p.6)

Hence, the only possibly compatible epistemological and methodological research stance was to acknowledge from the outset the impossibility to define, describe or assess capabilities in a completely accurate fashion. This is an inescapable consequence of capabilities intrinsic complexity, but it is this same complexity that constitutes its analytical power.

Notwithstanding potential limitations, vagueness adds to the flexibility and adaptability of capabilities approach. Values may diverge between groups, or be articulated in different ways but it is the overall correspondence between the addressed capabilities and people's life experiences that define good capabilities research, in so far as the essential meaning of each capability is sufficiently understandable, morally intuitive and ethically robust. Overall complexity and vagueness are collateral effects of the holistic perspective that capabilities approach defends as the most adequate lens to conceptualise and evaluate human development. Such holism (despite and because of its complexity and vagueness), constitutes the additional strength of capabilities approach in relation to other concurrent approaches to investigate human well-being and development.

In the present study, this holistic concern resulted in the need to cover multiple aspects of personal capabilities as well as its personal, cultural and environmental contextual realms. Such a broad focus may have somehow compromised a deeper and more detailed analysis to each of these realms. Thinking of the emancipatory potential of the present study, it was judged as more important to map a comprehensive picture than to explore intensely a reductive selection of topics. The rationale for this option was that any plan of action will be more effective if informed by a comprehensive rather than partial view of phenomena. Although an analytical detailed focus and concomitant attention to comprehensiveness would be very difficultly achievable in one sole report, a balanced articulation was nonetheless attempted in the way complexity and vagueness was communicated throughout this

thesis. The selection of the information presented was based upon three main criteria: be fundamentally important for the experience of some players; be critically important for the experience of most SV players and be essentially important to map the contextual circumstances in which SV promote capabilities expansion. At the same time, this selection and the chosen forms of communicating had to be to sufficiently clear to enhance understanding of both the wider SV field and each of the capabilities addressed but also sufficiently provocative to evoke critical reflection. Despite some eventual superficiality in some of the matters addressed in the present thesis, all these can be further explored in subsequent opportunities, as the extent and quality of the data collected enables such endeavour. In sum, the panoramic picture of SV capabilities, community and context constitutes at one and the same time the greatest strength and the main limitation of this study.

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#### FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

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In a previous section, the general potential implications of the present study in three different sport fields (SV, disability sport and sport) were presented. Now I turn to more practical ideas for future developments of the present study.

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#### SITTING VOLLEYBALL COMMUNITY

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The first immediate task to undertake following the conclusion of the present thesis is the production of a less academic report which can then be disseminated among all the institutions and actors involved in SV community. As noted, the information gathered can potentially help SV agents improve sporting opportunities from which each participant can optimally expand their personal capabilities.

Considering sustainability criteria which should characterise a capabilities' assessment, it would be also of extreme importance to follow up on the experiences and trajectories of the different SV players portrayed in the study. A more longitudinal study would cover some areas inevitably left blank by the present project. The main essential question that remains unanswered is: Will SV survive without the elite funding?

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#### DISABILITY AND MAINSTREAM SPORT

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Mindful that one of the main obstacles to the application of capabilities approach is the difficulty in translating its essential concepts into practical tools, one of the most useful outcomes of this research will be the production of an assessment tool which could facilitate the initial application of capabilities' concept in evaluating sport programmes. At the moment, a preliminary version of a capabilities questionnaire for participants is being developed. The main intention behind it is that this questionnaire works as a reference from which other questionnaires or other tools can be adapted to each specific context in both disability and mainstream sport contexts. This does not mean that a focus on capabilities needs necessarily to be addressed by a specific method of data collection, it solely responds to the immediate anxiety of how to apply its concepts empirically. It also does not preclude the opportunity for political participation of every member. That is, the implementation of a questionnaire should not prevent us from insisting on the need for a honest and open communication and power equalisation between all members of the sporting practice.

The present thesis suggests how a capabilities' focus can improve the world of sport by aligning it with the most important "things" in life. I am hopeful that it has been eloquent enough to convince the academic and non-academic sport's field of the worthiness of engaging in subsequent work to enforce its principles across all levels of sport contexts, from the local practices to international politics. There are obviously important challenges to overcome in essential matters such as how to best deal with complexity and vagueness; the definition of ethically universal norms relevant to ground the selection of capabilities at more concrete and practical levels and how to best apply capabilities' approach at the empirical level, conjugating scientific rigour with complexity and vagueness. Research avenues where a capabilities focus would be particularly useful are for instance:

- i. comparative studies (considering the influence of relevant variables such as impairment, race, age, national, sport settings on the personal capabilities of participants);
- ii. monitoring and evaluation of sport programmes and policies, at different scales and levels, from the youth and school sport to international projects;

- iii. definition of indexes of capabilities which could then be used as evaluation indicators at different levels and contexts;
- iv. planning and design of sport programmes.

A collective human endeavour as culturally and socially significant as sport cannot be left indomitable, helplessly vulnerable to the rules of global market that dominates the modern world. If we decide to ignore the signs of visibly malignancy in the world of sport, it is predictable that it becomes confined to a commercial product and more distant from constituting a driving force towards human flourishing. To shape sport in accordance to the things that really matter in human lives may be our best option to ethically rehabilitate the sports' world.

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## APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A. TABLE OF NUSSBAUM'S LIST OF CENTRAL CAPABILITIES  
AND THE SET OF RELEVANT CAPABILITIES IN SITTING VOLLEYBALL IN  
THE UK

Nussbaum's list of central capabilities (2011, pp. 33,34)	Set of relevant capabilities in SV (UK)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Life</i>. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.</li> <li>2. <i>Bodily Health</i>. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.</li> </ol>	<p>Due to its deep interconnection evident in the analysis of empirical data, Nussbaum first two capabilities were combined.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Life and Bodily Health</i>. Being able to preserve or improve physical and psychological health, living a life one qualifies as satisfactory.</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. <i>Bodily Integrity</i>. Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.</li> </ol>	<p>Not relevant in SV context.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. <i>Senses, Imagination, and Thought</i>. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason—and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain.</li> </ol>	<p>Nussbaum 4<sup>th</sup> capability was adapted to the specificity of SV context, according the empirical data analysis and divided in two important capabilities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. <i>Explore one's own potential</i>. Being confronted with challenges that promote the exploration of one's limits and possibilities.</li> <li>3. <i>Knowledge</i>. Expand knowledge on impairment, disability, oneself and others.</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. <i>Emotions</i>. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional</li> </ol>	<p>Aggregated with Affiliation (5), by virtue of the difficulty in distinguish them at an empirical level.</p>

<p>development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)</p>	
<p>6. <i>Practical Reason</i>. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)</p>	<p>4. <i>Practical Reason</i>. Using SV experience to help forming a conception of the good and engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.</p>
<p>5. <i>Other Species</i>. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.</p>	<p>Not relevant in SV context.</p>
<p>6. <i>Affiliation</i>.</p> <p>(A) Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other humans, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.)</p> <p>(B) Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin and species.</p>	<p>Part A) of Nussbaum affiliation capability translates almost literally.</p> <p>5. <i>Affiliation</i>. Opportunities to develop meaningful relationships, in which one feels respected.</p> <p>In contexts of impairment, part (B) is important per se, as people with impairments are considered less worthy which often leads to feelings of low self-worth, self-competence and self-esteem. Capability 6,7 and 8 translate part B) of Nussbaum's description.</p> <p>6. <i>Achieve, respect and love oneself</i>. Being able to expand positive self-perceptions, through experiences of achievement and success.</p> <p>7. <i>Feeling and being socially and morally equal</i>. Opportunities to feel morally equal and to be recognised as such by others, in acceptance of individual differences, including impairment</p> <p>8. <i>Doing good for others</i>. Opportunity to do good for others and be recognised for one's valid contribution</p> <p>The 8<sup>th</sup> capability emerged as important in Wolf and De-Shalit study (2007, p.58). Because being "disabled" often puts the person in a situation of assymetric dependence, being able to help others is essential for one's sense of dignity and self worth.</p>
<p>9. <i>Play</i>. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.</p>	<p>9. <i>Play</i>. Enjoy playing for its own sake.</p>

10. *Control over one's Environment. (A) Political.*

Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association.

*(B) Material.* Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

10. *Control over one's own environment.*

Opportunities to participate in the way things happen in sitting volleyball. Having a political voice and a sufficient degree of control over one's own immediate context. Being able to influence others on disability matters

Classification for a Sitting Volleyball Player

**Minimal Disability**

**Medical Conditions:**

Amputee  
Cerebral Palsy

**Upper Limb -**

1 U/L shorter by up to 1/2

**For Joints:**

**Elbow -** at least 30° but no more than 60° movement

**Wrist -** 7 or more fingers (2 hands) not functional/missing

**Lower Limb:**

1 L/L shorter by up to 1/3

**Foot -** Amputation above the toes



**Full Classification**

**Medical Conditions:**

Amputee Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida

**Upper Limb:** 1 U/L shorter by more than 1/2

**Shoulder -** Unable to lift arm above 90°

**Lower Limb:**

1 L/L shorter by more than 1/3

**Knee -** Through knee amputation with prosthesis

**Ankle -** amputation both sides

All GB players would be required to undergo a classification test. The above classification does not stop other abilities playing at a club, local, regional or national level of competition.

----- = Amputation/ Absence of Limb

○ = No Movement

○ = Reduced Movement

X = Replacement Joint

W = Mild Weakness of Limb

W/P = Weakness/ Paralysis



Please Note: that this is only designed to give a sample of the wide range of possibilities with classification for International Competition. For more clarification over a specific disability please contact [m.rogers@volleyballengland.org](mailto:m.rogers@volleyballengland.org)

## Appendix C. MY ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSONA

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### UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCE

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My understanding of the pain of stigma and discrimination happened long ago. It started with my entrance in school. I was born in a lower middle class family that had come from the countryside to the Portuguese capital Lisbon, with scarce financial resources. It was after interaction with other children at school that I realised my life experience was different from theirs and they made sure I realised that. As I started to internalise my difference, a conviction started to grow in me, slowly but steadily, that maybe it was other's visions of the world that needed adjustment. At the time, I promised myself that once I was an adult, I would commit to do whatever I could so that others did not have to experience similar stigma. I wonder now if this narrative would resonate with the experience of my angry impaired colleague (cf. vignette on pp.4, 5).

Involvement with sport is interwoven in this biographical narrative. There was not money to pay extracurricular activities and I did not have formal physical education classes at my primary school. So, it was not until eighth grade that I got the opportunity to join a gymnastic class in a community centre nearby (because I was overweight, the doctor told my mother it would do me good). I loved it! Before this I remember being a person that just loved to move and I was constantly playing sports with my brothers but my mother constantly reminded me that sport was only for boys. Despite her opposition, as I grew older, my love for movement exponentially grew. As my mother was determined to make me a housewife, when I was in high school, I used to deceive her by using the excuse of group studying to *sneak out* of home to play volleyball, basketball and football on the school courts. Soon I was the setter of the high school volleyball team and was playing against other schools. I was not alone anymore. I was in a team! I was good! I was important! When playing, I was just happy! I have enjoyed in my lifelong relation with sport, it allowed me to respect myself more and others started to gain more respect for me.

I have represented my school, my universities, many other teams and clubs over the last two decades. Although the conflicts with my mother over my participation in



sport remained a constant, my relation with sport strengthened. It became my main source of happiness, identity and pride and it has never ceased to be so. Obviously, not everything in my sporting life was positive, but even the negative experiences made me learn about myself, other and the world.

The personal, sporting and professional dimensions of my life have always been intertwined. While the commitment to equal sporting opportunities was always present (as a PE teacher, a volleyball player and coach, a guide athlete for runners with visual impairments, a fitness instructor and an exercise instructor for elderly people); I have now fully embraced the mission of contributing to the democratisation of sport opportunities, as my life experience has proven to me sport can be extraordinarily important to flourish as a human being.

In revealing these sensitive details of my personal biography, I am hoping to prove that discrimination and its pains are not an exclusive prerogative of people with impairments, and that suggesting so amounts to arrogance. At the same time, I unveil the person in the researcher; one that does not know what is to be “disabled” but knows what it feels like to be convinced one is “different” and “inferior”. In any case, I firmly believe that the essential human qualities shared by each person are sufficient to ground empathy and compassion. This assumption not only legitimates my presence in disability sport research as it also justifies the universalization of disability activism. Non-impaired people cannot be excluded from disability activism and research on the grounds of their “normal” embodiment, as to do so helps perpetuating the social apartheid between “abled” and “disabled”.

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#### MY POSITION IN THE FIELD

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Ethnography dissolves the artificial boundaries keeping science apart from real life. Though promising, this breakthrough is also strenuous precisely because the two worlds (science and everyday life) and the two identities (person and ethnographer) get so blurred that only with great effort and mastery it is possible to efficiently juggle them. The balance between these two components is the most important aspect for the ethnographer to master: to engage in participation that is meaningful without being intrusive and to observe empathetically while still participating (Murchison, 2010).

Being a participant observer in a context where the actors know that we are observing and analysing their experiences is always problematic, as it can easily bring distrust into the social relationship. For me, it means that I need to be permanently self-aware of my behaviour, to not do anything that could jeopardise the trust I need to create around me. Knowing that my behaviour is likely, at least when I initially entered the field of sitting volleyball (SV), to be the object of close scrutiny, makes participant observation exhausting. I tried to tune myself to who, what and how things were communicated; with the actions, the behaviours and the silences so that my presence was neither blatantly obvious nor undetectable. At all times I had two essential premises working as my ethical compass: first, the intransigent defense of what I believe is the best interest of athletes with impairments and second, my commitment to the preservation of my participants' integrity. These ethical boundaries and my genuine motivation to help improving the quality of sporting experiences for people with impairments made me progressively more at ease with my dual persona.

Because the researcher and the person are inseparable, there are essential aspects of my identity which I believe have determined the direction and outcomes of this project. I would like at this point to examine the importance of four particular tracks of my identity: being a former long-time volleyball player, an "able-bodied", a woman and a non-native English speaker. In doing so, I do not intend to occupy the central stage, which is undoubtedly reserved for the athletes with impairments. Instead, disclosing my personal stance to the readers allows them to manage and articulate the "multiple ways of seeing and thinking about what is being researched and the researcher's journey toward understanding" (Ely, 1997, p.40).

## VOLLEYBALL

I have spent more than half of my life playing and coaching standing volleyball. For the others in SV community, as well as for myself, I embodied volleyball. I believe this was the key to my acceptance in the field, as there was no need to say "how much I love the sport". It was evident. Obviously, to be able to play the sport has facilitated my interaction with all the other actors in the practice community as movement communication happens irrespectively of conversational skills, social status or

common background. It helped tremendously in approaching people for the first time and in managing my liminal insider/outsider position. I assume the fact I could play the sport with some mastery granted me some respect, legitimacy and trust especially within the GB group. As I did not possess any official role, my presence there could only be justified by the usefulness of my skills that could offer competent opposition in training and matches and occasional technical advice.

In the training sessions in which I have participated, I have played with and against the GB women's players. I believe this participation have made me relatively popular among the few players with previous volleyball experience (two foreign and one British) and less popular among the weaker players. Often I would also be assigned with the task of helping some specific players improving their technical abilities. On one occasion, Sarah was sent to me to work on her volley and dig. I suggested some exercises, in which we engaged for a while when I started to realise that she was angry! Although she did not verbalise it, all her body language was telling me that she did not want to be there. I realised at that moment that I had become the coach to whom the weaker players were sent. This was a serious issue, because all the players were constantly told that no one had their place guaranteed, and my "help" reinforced that they were still far. To be sent to work with me seemed to be interpreted as a statement of vulnerability. Although this did not prevent me from interviewing some of the players involved in the GB squad, I believe my role as "technical tutor for the weak" was in fact responsible for some difficulty in "blending" with the group.

Another essential consequence of my volleyball background was the acute awareness of what I perceived to be a very basic level of physical, technical, tactical and sporting education. Most of the female players had no awareness of volleyball, or of what it means to be an athlete. Often I felt such a discrepancy between what I perceived as an elite training and the reality of GB training that I had to refrain from expressing shock, frustration or act beyond my limited responsibilities. This tension would not be especially relevant in the final research report, but it is worth to address as it is tied with the most significant ethical dilemma I had to face in my participation in the field.

I possess, perhaps not unsurprisingly, after all the years of practice and coaching, what I perceive, without modesty, to be a very accurate ability to distinguish potential

talented players from the ones who, within the short time available until the Paralympics, had slim chances to make the team. In conversations and interviews some of these players were telling me about their dreams, hopes and the sacrifices they were undertaking in their pursuit of a place in the Paralympic team. I was very aware that their chances to be in the Paralympics were slim. It was in the best interest of the GB group to keep the number of people involved high to guarantee training conditions and mediate against problems such as injuries so many players were kept by GB staff until the last moment. Also, to show to the BPA that the SV GB programme was credible. This situation was probably not in best interest of the players, and I did not do anything to temper their hopes. In the end, my previsions were confirmed as none of these players was selected for the team. One is still involved with the local team and is constant presence at the national tournaments; the other one has completely vanished from the sport. I still do not know if I should have acted differently.

#### ABLE-BODIEDNESS

Obviously, you have an advantage, because you are completely able-bodied, whereas I am missing a leg!

*CFS:* Well, obviously I am not. Standing volleyball was the centre of my life and now I can't play - I can't jump anymore! (Anderson)

This conversation with Anderson was often replicated with some variations in my interactions with SV athletes with impairments. It seems that their own perception of what is disability is so deeply shaped by the conditions of one's own embodiment and phenomenological experience that it becomes the reference by which to judge others.

As amputation was the most frequent impairment among volleyball players, everything that falls outside of this category was minimised. While perception on what constitutes disability may, as I am convinced, have changed during their engagement with the community, the world was divided between D's and AB's. And I was definitely an AB, as I did not have any visible impairment. The real impact of this characteristic on my positionality in the field is impossible to determine. I am convinced that my able-bodieness has influenced the nature and quality of my relations and especially the perception of others of my motivations and behaviours. I

was not one of them, completely. I certainly cannot describe accurately other's impressions on me, but I would like to express how this fact has influenced the way I managed my participation in the field.

Since the first moment, I was aware that my presence in SV could be as problematic as helpful. By making myself available to play, I could in practice be depriving someone with impairment from participating. Between the alternative of choosing between me or a D athlete, how would the coach decide? And how would I feel, being on court while somebody I was trying to help was kept on the sideline? My golden rule was always to play only if that did not imply the exclusion of another player with impairment. But in practice, it was far from being that simple, and I had to face critical dilemmas. As a player on a team I need to be part of for the sake of my research, how will it be received if I refuse to play? Could I do anything to prevent this situation without compromising my position in the field? This situation has happen quite often and I did try to remediate it, without much success. I must say the logic of competition seemed to overrule the valuing of the participation of people with impairments. As an AB, I also understood that some things were expected from me. Maybe the most important one was the collection of the balls during training sessions. Ambulant players with two legs were expected to use them for something useful and I understood that by doing so I was in some way "compensating" for my intrusion.

Being an AB I have also experienced the tensions, fragilities and difficulties of the communication between people with and without impairments. What could I say and do, what was interdict, how would I be understood? This tension became more obvious in the GB group, where I was one the few people not eligible for the sport playing in the training sessions. They would tease each other about their impairments constantly, but I couldn't because I was not one of them. Could I laugh at their jokes? Could I use the same type of humor? Could I go and try the wheelchairs and do some *wheelies* as I often saw the other members of the team doing? I never believed I was "inside" enough to do so, although I saw other members of staff without impairment taking those liberties. Could they do it because they were in a position of authority? Or could they do it because, unlike me, they had been accepted? In any case, I did possess neither the authority nor the legitimacy granted by impairment. This struck

me as evident in several occasions. The following vignette highlights one of those occasions.

*The game is on, the ball is flying around, most of the times so quickly that it is even hard to see. This time it is sent to the middle of the net with such a speed that not even the best of hitters could have got it. Martha on the other side, could not even follow that one with her sight and looks frustrated. 'Oh, do not worry. It would have been impossible to hit it anyway!', I say, trying to tranquilise her. 'Why? Because I am disabled?' Obviously not because you are disabled!, I thought, in silence. Why would I mean something like that? I did not understand if Martha told me that to put me in the right place, if she was genuinely upset or if it was just a reminder that I was not one of them. I did not answer her question.*

Ethnographic notes, Kettering, 13<sup>th</sup> November 2011

On another occasion before one grand prix tournament, I had this conversation with Ken. Ken was quite upset with the fact that, unless people really had to sit down to play the game they would otherwise get up (the ones who could). This was especially evident at the end of the game when the teams had to shake hands over the net. Even though some people could not get up and had to shake hand from a lower position, the others would still get up and walk. Understanding his point, this one time I shuffled across the net to shake hands to the other team. Jeremy, my friend from the opposite team reacts: 'What are you doing? You are not disabled! You can stand up.'

These episodes illustrate what I noticed were quite common issues in the communication between people with and without impairments. My experience as an able bodied in SV field documents aspects addressed by other AB's: the feelings of inadequacy, the fear of saying something that could be offensive; the sense that I may be invading someone's space...

Although the main focus of this thesis detracts me from thoroughly exploring all these matters, they are crucial to understand the particular cultural ethos of a sporting setting where people with and without impairments participate together. I believe that overcoming this sense of separation, of otherness is crucial for the advancement of personal capabilities. Disability studies have been showing how fear and suspicion between the abled and disabled world have been responsible for the curtailment of opportunities for true inclusion based on mutual respect and understanding. Fear,

suspicion and distance can only be overcome by noting and acknowledging their irrational nature and substituting them with openness, trust and respect. The extent to which SV community offers conditions for this shift is obviously one of the essential premises of its potential to mobilise capabilities.

### BEING A (FOREIGN)WOMAN

The marginal position of women in a predominantly male orientated society approximates them to people with disabilities by virtue of their common situation of social oppression. Somehow, their perceived vulnerability seems to facilitate communication between women and disabled, as noted by Murphy (1987) when he says that his recent condition of disability has made him much more popular among women than he ever was. In practice, I believe that my condition as a woman has facilitated my entrance in the field as well as my communication especially with athletes with impairments because of the cultural perception that I am more likely to be more nurturing than if I were a man.

Although it is usually accepted that SV is a successful case of universal sport, where people with and without impairments participate in harmony, my perception is that this was definitely not the case. Although it was something covertly shared, some athletes with impairments who were starting to learn the game manifested their resentment against able bodied players playing their sport:

...when I see those able bodied playing our volleyball game, I get really annoyed (laugh). I know that's quite strange but...They should go and play standing volleyball.' And I felt the need to justify my presence: 'Well, you know, I cannot actually play standing because of my injury.' 'Oh, yes, you are really frightening...' (laughing)! It just feels a little bit unfair. It's not so bad with someone of your frame, but when they are 6 1/2 foot, when they are bearing down in front of you... There's nothing wrong with the man.' I did not need to be so worried after all. Jim:

Although I have played volleyball for more than twenty years, I was not seen as a competitive threat because I was a (short) woman.

Interestingly, when I occupied a position of authority, I believe that my embodiment impeded it significantly, as all the athletes on the team I coached were male, with no sporting experience, who exhibited, most of them obvious difficulties in accepting that female authority.

At a practical level, I knew that my specific embodiment would facilitate communication with some people and maybe hinder communication with other. I feared that for being apparently able bodied, the people I was trying to give voice through my research would turn their back on me. I believe the fact I was a female has somehow attenuated this problem. My status as a non-native English speaker further accentuated a certain aura of harmless and neutrality, which I assess as essential for the overall openness and collaboration I was granted in this research. On the positive side, this fact facilitated overhearing conversations in which people clearly thought that I could not understand them; on the other hand, it has also kept me at the margin of great part of jokes and mockery, essential bonding mechanisms within a group.





**Forbidden to stand: Sitting Volleyball development in the UK and its impact in athlete's lives**

The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further scientific knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee.

I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.

I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in the study.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.

I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence and will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researchers unless (under the statutory obligations of the agencies which the researchers are working with), it is judged that confidentiality will have to be breached for the safety of the participant or others.

I agree to participate in this study.

Your name:

\_\_\_\_\_

Your signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of investigator:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E. INTERVIEW GUIDE.

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General introduction:

I am interested in understanding the positive and negative impact of participation in sitting volleyball upon athlete's lives. For that, I need to gather information from key individuals the athletes being of greatest importance. I would like to learn about the space volleyball occupies in their lives, what changes they felt after starting the activity, their opinions, knowledge, feelings and expectations about important issues concerning sitting volleyball. I am hopeful, the information, once analysed synthesised and presented to Volleyball England will help to improve the provision for the sport. For future analysis, the interview will, with your permission, be recorded and transcribed. If you wish I will send the interview transcript to you to give you the opportunity to clarify your views. All interviews will be treated in the strictest confidence and all data used in reports will be given pseudonyms.

Give the participant information sheet and the informed consent to sign.

Is there anything that was not clear for you and that you would like to ask me before we start our conversation?

During our conversation, please do not hesitate in requesting further explanation anytime the meaning of the question is not clear. And please, allow me to interrupt you when I also need that type of clarification.

Category/ goal	Questions
Descriptive information on the personal conditions of involvement in sitting volleyball context	<p>So, I would like to start by understanding the type of involvement and commitment you have with sitting volleyball activities?</p> <p>Can you describe to me your current involvement in sitting volleyball activities?</p> <p>Hours of practice</p> <p>Teams</p> <p>National team</p> <p>Roles</p> <p>What space does sitting occupies in your life at the moment?</p>
Reasons/ Motivations for involvement; contextual interference	<p>How did you become involved in sitting?</p> <p>Previous experience in sport</p> <p>Years of involvement</p> <p>Did you have other sports and other activities available? Choice or</p>

	<p>a result of circumstances?</p> <p>What attracted you to and motivates you to be involved in sitting?</p>
Expectations	<p>Is it possible to remember what your personal expectations were when you started?</p> <p>Did your expectations change over time? If so, why? In what ways?</p> <p>What do others expect from you as a national and team player? What rules do you have to conform to?</p>
<p>Impact in capabilities' Dimensions</p> <p>Bodily life (health, vigour and safety)</p> <p>Knowledge of reality</p> <p>Senses</p> <p>Control over one's environment Political Material</p> <p>Competence/ autonomy</p> <p>Practical reasonableness, Identity, self-perceptions</p> <p>Affiliation</p> <p>Knowledge, Senses,</p>	<p>Now, I would like to know more about the direct and indirect effects of participation in sitting volleyball in your life. That might be difficult and take some time to reflect upon but I will try to help in that process.</p> <p>So, I would ask you to try to describe the most significant changes that occurring in your life, which you can relate with participation in sitting volleyball?</p> <p>Was your everyday life affected by this participation? In what ways? (What did you use to do that you don't do any more, other things you do that you didn't use to, do you do things differently)</p> <p>The way you experience and use your body, are the skills transferable in any way for everyday life? (doings)</p> <p>Impact in professional terms?</p> <p>Health/ vigour/energy levels</p> <p>Did it change the way you experience and deal with your impairment?</p> <p>Did it change your character or personality in any way? (beings)</p> <p>The way you perceive yourself? The opinions you have about yourself and the way you think you are?</p> <p>How did it impact in your relationships in general terms?</p> <p>The way you experience life in general? Do you find yourself experiencing different emotions, or paying attention to different things or perceiving situations differently from before?</p> <p>Your own life goals/ the way you see yourself in the world? Did your perspective on life change in any way?</p> <p>What do you have presently in your life and that you highly value that you couldn't have had or experienced if you weren't involved in this sport?</p>

<p>Imagination, thought</p> <p>Most significant changes</p> <p>Most significant impact</p> <p>Skilful performance and play for its own sake (?)</p>	<p>What negative changes impacted on your life ? Were they inevitable or avoidable?</p> <p>Can I ask you to remember the best moment/situation you experienced in sitting? Can you describe it and explain why it was so special? Does it happen frequently? What did you feel physically and emotionally?</p>
<p>Evaluation of state of affairs from personal experience</p>	<p>Imagine you know somebody that is just recovering from an accident and had to have a leg amputated and is a bit frightened by the idea of joining sitting...</p> <p>What would be your arguments to convince that person to come to your club?</p> <p>And what would be the caveats?</p>
<p>Opinion on the state of affairs of SV organisation</p>	<p>Let's now focus our conversation in the actual and real conditions that characterize sitting volleyball in England...I would like to listen to your opinion.</p> <p>What is your opinion about the current state of sitting volleyball and the way it is being developed?</p> <p>Competition  Opportunity to practice  Teams organization  Relationships  Opportunities for different motivational levels...</p> <p>What is your opinion about the participation of people without impairments in a sport that is primarily designed for persons some type of impairment? Pros and cons?</p> <p>What is your opinion about former standing volleyball players participating?</p>
<p>Power structure/ Agency/Participation</p>	<p>One of the points I think is important to understand is the circuit of power and influence within sitting volleyball. Who decides and how and what is the participation in of the different persons involved...</p> <p>Do you have any influence on the way things happen and are organized? In your team? In national team? In institutional decisions?</p>

	<p>Who has more influence? Who does actually decide? Who is consulted and whose opinions are most valued? How do you think that happens?</p> <p>Do you have any chance of give your opinion?</p> <p>What is your opinion about that? Do athletes have enough influence in the process?</p>
<p>Evaluation</p> <p>Significant factors</p> <p>Identifying constraints and facilitators to development</p>	<p>This question is especially important to identify strengths and weaknesses in the actual state of affairs....</p> <p>If you had the power and means to improve sitting significantly in the near and far away future, what would you do, change....</p> <p>Why do you think those changes are not yet in action?</p>
<p>Future expectations/ sustainability</p>	<p>What would you like to happen in the future concerning</p> <p>Personal achievements For sitting as a sport</p> <p>How high is the chance of that becoming true? What are the chances of things happen the way you're hoping?</p>
<p>Background information</p>	<p>Would you mind give me some personal background details: age, professional status and field, familiar context, some information concerning lifestyle, hobbies, occupations...interests...</p>

### Some tips:

Be prepared for the possibility of the interviewee does not appear.

Reformulate previous statements to make sure that you the meaning is clear and at the same time for the interviewee to revise what he just said.

Sometimes, before asking something, provide a small introduction to the subject...

Or make the transition, summarising the previous point that was discussed...

It might be useful to use some probes and follow-up questions:

Can you develop those ideas a bit more?

That's helpful. Can you explain that in a bit more detail?

Would you elaborate on that? I want to make sure I get exactly what you mean.

Give some positive reinforcement during the interview. Express recognition.

Allow some time to explain why certain questions are being asked.

Be prepared to intervene politely if the answer is not being very relevant.

**Date:** Friday, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2011

10.00 a.m.

Skype

### **Interview guide**

Topics:

Sitting volleyball identity

History of sitting volleyball

The current development and strategic plan

Future expectations

Impact on participants and society more broadly

- 1) In your opinion, what is the space of sitting volleyball, within both contexts, the volleyball and disability sport, in Britain? How important can it be? And why, if it's the case? What are the strengths of a sport like sitting volleyball compared to other disability sports?
- 2) Information that can be relevant for the history of sitting volleyball and that help to explain the present moment. How did sitting start, and why? Who were the main characters and what were the conditions?
- 3) Can you develop a bit your opinion about the current state of affairs and the factors that may hinder or help further development?
- 4) What would you like to see happening, concerning the future of sitting volleyball?
- 5) 5) At a different level, what are your feelings about the impact that sitting volleyball can have in the athletes that play and society in general concerning issues of disability?

APPENDIX G. INTERVIEW GUIDE (STAFF: COACHES, OFFICIALS, MANAGERS)

Category	Questions
Structural conditions	<p>Sitting volleyball has been developing at a high speed over the last two years in Britain. What were the conditions that made it possible?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political structural financial</li> <li>• what are the main goals</li> <li>• national sport</li> <li>• volleyball England/disability sport Federation/ GB team</li> </ul> <p>Expectations for the future of sitting volleyball in England's and possible constraints and facilitators. Your opinion.</p>
Cultural aspects	<p>In what ways is to practice requirements similar and distinctive of the mainstream sport?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The interaction between players</li> <li>• the interaction between coaches and players and other staff</li> <li>• the attitudes towards training</li> <li>• the philosophy</li> <li>• the believes</li> <li>• the behaviours</li> <li>• the understanding of being an athlete</li> </ul> <p>Did you have to change your used for approach as a coach/manager or not? If you had, in what ways?</p>
Impact in athletes' capabilities	<p>Everyday life</p> <p>Are the skills transferable?</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• professional terms</li> <li>• Health, vigour, energy levels</li> <li>• Relations with impairments</li> <li>• Personality/character</li> <li>• Self-perceptions</li> <li>• Relation with the others</li> <li>• Enjoyment</li> </ul> <p>Most significant impact?</p>
Personal impact	<p>What are your personal goals and motivations?</p> <p>What are the things you would like to see growing in your players?</p> <p>What impacts is this experience having upon you?</p>
Power structure/ agency/Participation	Who decides what happens in sitting volleyball in Britain? How to the different people (coaches, athletes and others) and players participate in the process?
Background information	Age, professional status, sports experience, other relevant



APPENDIX H. INTERVIEWEE PROFILES

	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Impairment	Professional Status	Sports Experience	Role(s)/Relevance	Interview format, place	Date
1.	Alex	30-35	Male	Acquired (D)	Self-employed	Several sports	GB/Club player	Face-to-face Bar	27/01/11
2.	Jack	25-30	Male	Congenital (D)	Unemployed	Wheelchair basketball	Club player and chairman	Face-to-face Training facility	11/02/11
3.	Sophie	25-30	Female	Injury, Ineligible (AB)	Employee	Volleyball	Club player and coach	Face-to-face Coffee shop	12/02/11
4.	Hannah	40-45	Female	Congenital (D)	Special needs teacher, part time	Swimming	GB/Club player	Face-to-face Her Home	12/02/11
5.	Irvin	20-25	Male	Acquired (D)	Student	Basketball	GB/Club player	Face-to-face Training camp Hotel lounge	13/02/11
6.	Kenny	40-45	Male	Acquired (D)	Retired	None	Club chairman and player	Face-to-face His home	15/02/11
7.	Cathy	35-40	Female	Acquired (D)	Homemaker	None	Club player	Face-to-face Coffee shop	17/02/11
8.	Tracy	30-35	Female	None (AB)	Homemaker	None	Club player	Face-to-face Coffee shop	17/02/11

9.	Joanne	35-40	Female	Acquired (D)	Self-employed	Several sports	GB/Club player	Face-to-face Car travelling and restaurant	18/02/11
10.	Danny	30-35	Male	Congenital (D)	Employee	Several sports	Potential GB/ Club player	Face-to-face Coffee shop	18/02/11
11.	Stan	50-55	Male	Acquired (D)	Retired and occasional work	Several sports	Director/ Club player	Face-to-face Coffee shop	18/02/11
12.	Mark	40-45	Male	Acquired (D)	Leadership organisation in	Some in youth	Club player	Face-to-face Restaurant	18/02/11
13.	Jim	40-45	Male	Acquired (D)	Self-employed	None	Club player	Face-to-face Restaurant	18/02/11
14.	Sean	55-60	Male	None (AB)	Employee at VE	Swimming, Volleyball	GB/VE Staff	Face-to-face Car travelling	28/02/11
15.	Catherine	35-40	Female	Acquired (D)	Employee (psychologist)	One sport national level	GB/Club player	Face- to-face Coffee shop	28/02/11
16.	Jenny	15-20	Female	Congenital (D)	Full time athlete	Some experience at school sports	GB player	Face- to-face Coffee shop	01/03/11
17.	Jay	20-25	Male	Acquired (D)	Full time athlete	Elite sport	GB player	Face-to-face Coffee shop	01/03/11
18.	Ray	45-50	Male	Acquired (D)	Self-employed	Elite sport	GB/Club player/Club manager	Face-to-face Coffee shop	02/03/11

19.	Joey	25-30	Male	Congenital (MD)	Employee	Several sports	GB/Club player	Face-to-face	02/03/11
20.	Martin	25-30	Male	None (AB)	VE employee	Volleyball	Staff	Face-to-face Sport facilities Lounge	08/03/11
21.	Jeremy	20-25	Male	Acquired (D)	Unemployed	Boxing and others	Club player	Face-to-face My home	09/03/11
22.	Laura	25-30	Female	Injury, ineligible (AB- MD)	Employee	Several sports	GB/Club player	Face-to-face Her home	11/03/11
23.	Anderson	40-45	Male	Acquired (D)	Self- employed	Football	Club/GB player	Face-to-face Training weekend Hotel lounge	12/03/11
24.	Ralph	20-25	Male	None (AB)	Employed	Several Sports	Staff/Coach/ Manager/Player	Face-to-face Sport facilities lounge	16/03/11
25.	Alice	40-45	Female	Acquired (MD)	Employed	Volleyball	GB/club player	Face-to-face My home	18/03/11
26.	Walter	55-60	Male	None (AB)	Employed	Volleyball	Referee	Video call (Skype)	09/04/11
27.	Ron	40-45	Male	Acquired- (MD)	Employed	Volleyball	GB/Club player	Video call (Skype)	21/04/11

28.	Kate	40-45	Female	None (AB)	Employed	Volleyball	Staff/Club player/Club manager	Face-to-face Sport facilities /conference room	23/04/11
29.	Peter	50-55	Male	Acquired (D)	Retired	Several Sports	Club player/Former GB	Face-to-face My home	18/05/11
30.	Miles	30-35	Male	Acquired, not classified	Unemployed		Recreational club player	Face-to-face	19/05/11
31.	Percy	30-35	Male	Acquired, not eligible	Part-time employed	Several Sports	Recreational club player	Face-to-face	19/05/11
32.	Gareth	30-35	Male	Acquired, not classified	Unemployed	Several Sports	Recreational club player	Face-to-face	19/05/11
33.	Roger	65-70	Male	None (AB)	Employed	Volleyball	Institutional Manager	Video call (Skype)	20/05/11
34.	Mary	25-30	Female	None (AB)	Employed		Group manager	Phone call	02/06/11
35.	Iris	35-40	Female	Injured (AB)	Employed	Volleyball	Club player	Face-to-face	05/06/11
36.	Jane	10-15	Female	Congenital (D)	Student	School sports	GB/Club player	Face-to-face	20/11/11
37.	Colin	60-65	Male	None (AB)	Retired	Volleyball	Consultant/Club coach/Club player	Video call (Skype)	28/11/11

## APPENDIX I. FINAL VERSION OF THE SV SELF- COMPLETION QUESTIONNAIRE

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### **Forbidden to stand: Sitting volleyball development and its impact on athlete's lives**

This questionnaire aims to collect information about the living impact of participating in sitting volleyball. It is part of a wider research project on sitting volleyball development in UK and its impact in people's lives. The outcomes of research may assist in the expansion of disability sport and in the sustainability and improvement of sitting volleyball provision. A shortened version of the academic thesis will be provided to all that require it; as well as to Volleyball England, British Volleyball Federation and British Paralympic Association. This research has been ethically approved by Loughborough University ethical committee and any complaints or comments should be addressed to Carla Filomena Silva (main researcher), Loughborough University, Leicestershire, UK, LE11 3TU, room ZZ008; [C.F.Silva@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:C.F.Silva@lboro.ac.uk); Dr. David Howe (supervisor and principal investigator), Loughborough University, Leicestershire, UK, LE11 3TU, room JB.0.07 and [P.D.Howe@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:P.D.Howe@lboro.ac.uk); Phone: +44 (0)1509 226389; Fax: +44 (0)1509 226301.

Please try to answer as complete and accurately as possible. This questionnaire will take you five to ten minutes to complete.

Thank you very much!

**A. Personal details:**

Please, mark with X the correct answer.

1. Gender: Male\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_
  
2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Did you have any sporting experience before sitting volleyball? Yes \_\_\_\_  
No \_\_\_\_  
If yes, which sport, how many years, your role (player, coach, referee, other) and  
at what level (Club, National teams, Institutional level?)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Do you have an impairment? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_  
If Yes,  
3.1. Congenital \_\_\_\_ Acquired \_\_\_\_  
3.2. How do you describe your impairment?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. How long have you been involved in sitting volleyball for?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
6. How many hours per week, in average, are you involved in sitting volleyball  
activities? \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. What are the 3 most important reasons for you to be involved in sitting volleyball,  
**at the moment?**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
8. What is your current role in Sitting Volleyball? (cross all that apply)  
  
Player\_\_\_\_ Referee\_\_\_\_ Coach\_\_\_\_ Manager\_\_\_\_ Other (Which?)\_\_\_\_\_
  
9. Please, refer the 3 most significant changes that occurred in your life since you  
started to get involved in sitting volleyball, which are related with that  
involvement.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much!

## APPENDIX J. QUESTIONNAIRES REPORT

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This report is an analysis of questionnaire data and also a commentary on how this is aligned or not with observations taken in the field.

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### CARACTERISATION OF SV COMMUNITY

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This characterization is based upon the descriptive statistical analysis of the information gathered through the self-completion questionnaires applied and collected on the last tournament of the competitive season 2010/12, on the 20th March 2011. 50 people have responded the questionnaire, but 4 were too incomplete to be used so 46 questionnaires were used in the present analysis. This number corresponds to approximately 1/3rd of the people involved in that tournament according to VE officials.

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### AGE

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The age of the respondents was between 13 and 57 years old. The mean value is 35,5 years old and the standard deviation of  $\pm 10,9$  years old. This relatively high standard deviation and amplitude of age are consistent with the non- restrictive nature of the competition, as at this stage of development there is no formal segmentation according to age or gender.

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### GENDER

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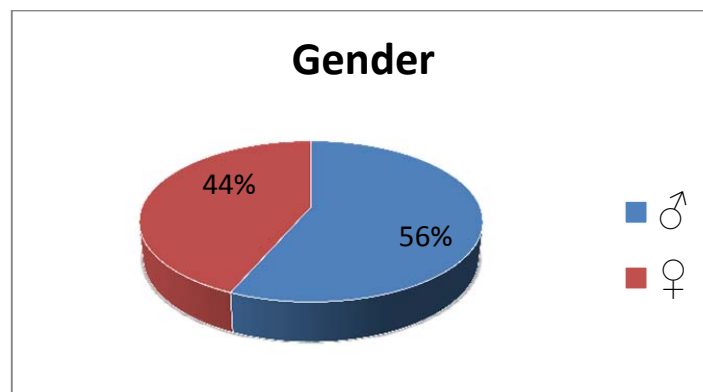


Figure 1. *Percentage of completed questionnaires by gender*

26 (56,5%) men and 20 (43,5%) women completed the questionnaire. Similar results across genders may have been affected by what I have verified to be a more collaborative attitude on the part of women in responding to the questionnaire. In reality, from my presence in the field I believe the women's percentage would be much lower (app. 30%). This impression is supported by data provided by VE concerning the present competitive season concerning players (26,8% female players).

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### IMPAIRMENT

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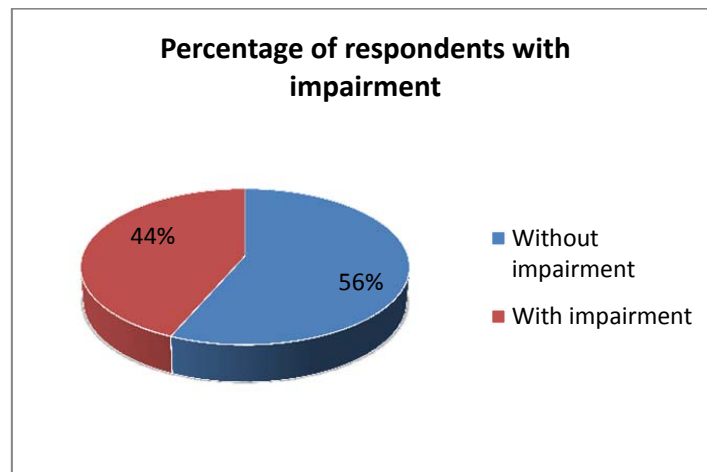


Figure 2 - *Percentage of respondents with and without impairment.*

26 (56,5%) of the respondents expressed not possessing any impairment and 20 (43,5%) acknowledged they possess some kind of impairment. 9 players (19,6% of the total) qualified their impairment as congenital, and 11 players described it as acquired (23,9 % of total).

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### SPORTING EXPERIENCE

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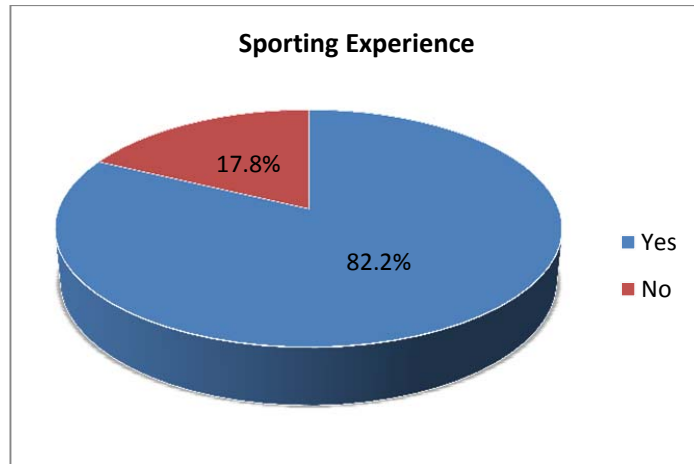


Figure 3. *Percentage of respondents with and without sporting experience.*

From the 46 respondents 1 questionnaire was considered invalid. With respect to this question, 37 (82,2%) respondents had previous sporting experience and 8 (17,8%) no previous experience.

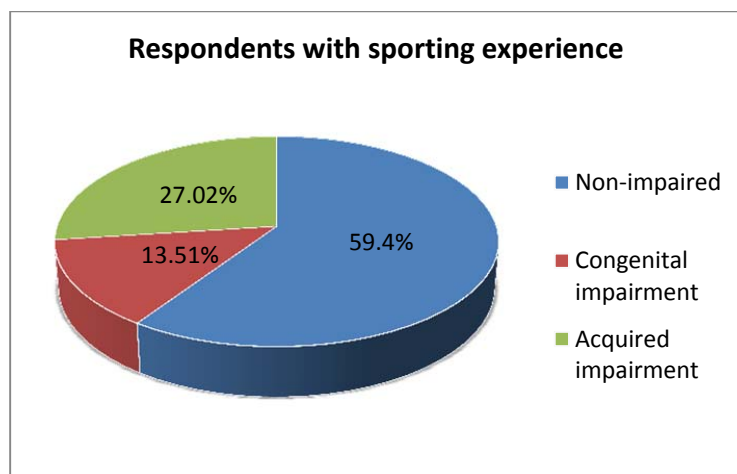


Figure 4. *Distribution of the variable impairment within the group of respondents with sporting experience.*

From the group of people with previous sporting experience, 22 (59,4%) people were non-impaired, 5 (13,51%) possessed a congenital impairment and 10 (27,02%) possessed an acquired impairment.

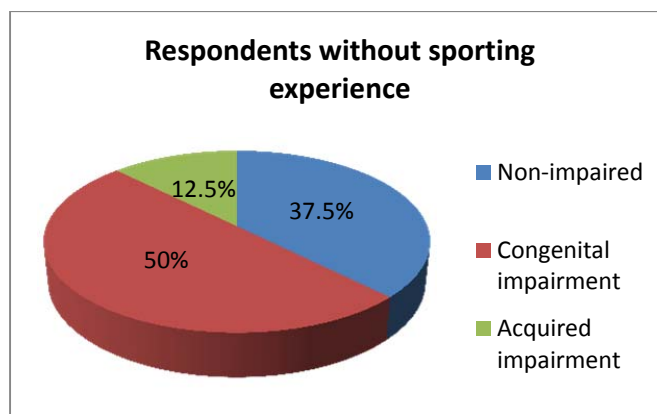


Figure 5. Distribution of the variable impairment within the group of respondents with sporting experience.

From the 8 respondents with no previous sporting experience, 3 (37,5%) were non-impaired, 4 possessed (50%) congenital impairment and 1 (12,5%) an acquired impairment.

Although with low statistical significance given the number of people included in some of the categories above, this information matches my knowledge of the field. Most of the people involved in the sport had some sporting involvement before. For some non-impaired people without any previous sporting experience, SV seems to be a not too demanding and non-threatening outlet for what they perceived to their low sporting skills. The fact 4 of the 9 people with congenital impairment did not have any previous sporting experience may denote a lack of true opportunities to engage in sport for people with impairments. Although most of the respondents with acquired impairment had previous sporting experience, in some cases, their renewed interest in sport comes as a way to compensate for the decrease of physical activity in everyday life routines (cf. Chapter 6).

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#### PARTICIPATION PER WEEK IN HOURS IN SV ACTIVITIES

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Answers to this question were divided in four intervals. The 1<sup>st</sup> interval (more than 10 hours/week), was intended to cover the SV participation in the GB programme; the 2<sup>nd</sup>

interval (between 10 and 4 hours) may apply to people either from the extended GB program either people involved in clubs who performed more than one role; the 3<sup>rd</sup> interval (between 3:59 and 2 hours) covers the time of practice offered by most of the clubs. The 4<sup>th</sup> interval (less than 2 hours) covers the participation of the more occasional participation. The results are distributed as it follows.

*Tabela 2 – statistical values for participation per week in Hours in SV*

<b>Weekly participation/hours</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative percentage</b>
More than 10 hours	14	30,4	30,4
Between 4 and 9.59 hours	5	10,9	41,3
Between 3:59 and 2 hours	19	41,3	82,6
Less than 2 hours	8	17,4	100,0

These results highlight the existence of two main groups in SV concerning the type of involvement in the sport: one composed by people involved in more than 10 hours/week, mainly the staff and players involved in the GB programme; and the second group composed by people involved at a club level, who participated in SV between 2 and 4 hours/week. The relative closeness of the percentage values between these two groups (30,4% and 41,3% respectively) attests the incipient stage of the development of the sport in which a great part of the overall number of people involved were actually part of the GB teams. The differentiation between the elite and the other levels of competition was not evident at this stage.

Analysing the frequency of the category impairment in relation to the volume of hours per week spend in SV activities, in the first group (more than 10 hours) only 2 people did not possess any impairment. As expected, most of the people in this group were eligible players, 6 with congenital and 6 with acquired impairment.

*Tabela 3. Week Volume Participation according to Impairment*

		Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Participation week volume	Data for classification			
More than 10 hours/week	No impairment	2	14,3	14,3
	Congenital impairment	6	42,9	57,1
	Aquired impairment	6	42,9	100,0
Between 4 and 9.59 hours	No impairment	3	60,0	60,0
	Congenital impairment	0	0,0	60,0
	Aquired impairment	2	40,0	100,0
Between 3:59 and 2 hours	No impairment	13	68,42	68,42
	Congenital impairment	3	15,79	84,02
	Aquired impairment	3	15,79	100,0
Less than 2 hours	No impairment	8	100,0	100,0
	Congenital impairment	0	0,0	-
	Aquired impairment	0	0,0	100,0

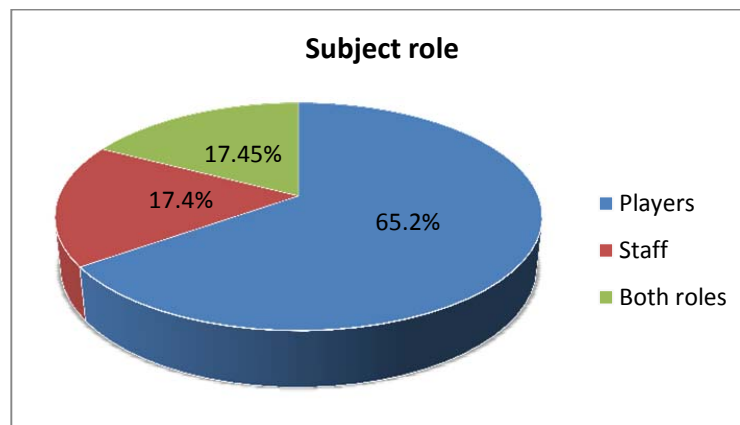
It is worth highlighting some information included in this table. While in the other categories the number of people with and without impairments is relatively balanced, within the category of people participating between 3.59 and 2 hours p/week which corresponds to the club level, the number of non-impaired people was more than twice the number of people with impairment. There is no other data source available to compare these numbers, but these correspond to my perception of the participation ratio of people with and without impairments, including staff and players. When we consider just the players, this ratio tends to be levelled. It is important to note that the composition of the clubs was also very heterogeneous, with some with no players with impairments and others where almost all the players were officially eligible for the sport. Talking about this ratio, Mike, one member of VE staff assessed the participation of non-disabled players in the Grand Prix's noting that *'In the beginning started off with 62, but I*

think in the last Grand Prix it would have been around 40%'. In the last group, less than 2 hours of participation per week, only 8 people with no impairments are included. These are likely to be people who very occasionally only participate in SV, usually volleyball players invited for the competitions (cf. chapter 6).

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#### ROLE IN THE FIELD OF PRACTICE

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*Figure 6 – Percentage of subjects in each type of role available in SV*

The category role is divided in three subcategories: player, staff and player and staff, as many of the people involved actually perform more than one type of role, which is usual in amateur sports. Most of the respondents (30) were players (65,2%), and each of the other categories, staff and player and staff simultaneously included 8 people (total of 34,8%).

In relation to the category impairment, the group of people that are just players is distributed as it follows in table 4.

*Tabela 4 - Statistical Frequency for type of role according to impairment*

	Players	Staff	Staff and players
Data for classification			
No impairment	12	8	6
Congenital impairment	8	0	1
Acquired impairment	10	0	1
total	30	8	8

In this category, it is of special relevance the information on the participation of people with impairments in other aspects of SV community other than as players, since such participation constitutes an indicator of their degree of political influence on the field. The respondents who only performed staff roles were all non-impaired; the group of player as well as staff roles included 6 people without impairment, 1 person with congenital impairment and one person with acquired impairment.

These results confirmed my experience of the field as it was rare to find people with impairments in roles of institutional or technical relevance (such as managers and coaches) The few exceptions to this tendency were only existent in the local SV clubs. It has to be said however that throughout the time that I have participated, the BVF and VE organised referee and coaching courses during the GB training camps, therefore most of the people involved in the program had access to some type of formation and accreditation for other roles.

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#### TIME OF INVOLVEMENT IN SV

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The time of involvement in SV varied between 3 months and 13 years, however these two extremes are both outlier results. The mean of this category is 2 years and 7 months years and the standard deviation of 1.97 years. These results show that most of the respondents have started their involvement in the sport after VE has been endorsed with

the responsibility to develop the sport and prepare the national teams for London 2012, in 2009.

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**MAIN REASONS FOR BEING INVOLVED IN SITTING VOLLEYBALL**

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The answers provided to this question were divided in more general categories (Affiliation; Health and Fitness related; Enjoyment; Characteristics of the sport; Be at the Paralympics; Help others and Other). The type of statements provided and the number of similar are included in the next table.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Reason/Statement</b>
<b>1. Affiliation:</b> 44 statements	Great team sport, interaction with other team members: 3 Team participation: 6 Team spirit (moral): 4 Supporting team mates Camaraderie: 2 Team cohesion Keeping in touch with others involved: 19 Meet people with same disability: 2 Play with friends/friendships: 6 Breaking down of social barriers Involvement in local community
<b>2. Health And Fitness:</b> 32 statements	To be fitter, physical fitness/fitness: 9 Exercising: 4 Keep active and healthy: 2 Being active again: 16 Part of rehab
<b>3. Enjoyment</b> (I like it, I have fun): 26 statements	Enjoy playing the sport 14 Love of volleyball: 5 Fun and fast: 6 New sport and love it
<b>4. Characteristics of the sport:</b> 20 statements	Disability sport, Inclusive: 2 Physical challenge Challenging sport The fact you move on the floor My disability does not affect my sport Disabled and abled Skill technique: 2 Learning more about the game/development of play Eligibility

	Competitive/ confrontation within restriction: 7 Something different
<b>5. GB/Paralympics:</b> 10 statements	Opportunity to play for GB: 2 enjoy the games/Paralympics: 4 To improve and be successful for the team be involved in a paralympic sport which is being represented at GBParalympics British success
<b>6. Help others, help the sport:</b> 7 statements	Satisfaction helping people playing a great sport: 2 Support disabled people getting back to sport Satisfaction helping referees to improve The feeling of contributing to something positive Performance enhancement(others) Support the development of the game
<b>7. Others:</b> 6 statements	extension of standing referee skills play with girlfriend travel the world Coach at GB level Disability involvement Get better at refereeing

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**THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGES SINCE I STARTED PLAYING**

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Category	Reason/Statement
<b>1.Affiliation:</b> 28 statements	Become part of the community, team: 3 Meet new people:3 New friends: 7 Better social life Meeting nice people Meet people with the same disability as me Become part of the team outside of family, teamwork/teamspirit: 3 Making new friends with people from other countries: 2 Feeling involved Not feeling different Meet people to whom I can relate and learn from Increased peer recognition Support:2  <b>Negative:</b> no time for social life outside SV
<b>2. Sporting life impact:</b> 21	Train full time: 2



statements	<p>Coaching volunteer  Fun challenge/having fun with new people  Started to train more again  I have become involved with a sport that I am able to access and therefore I enjoy it more  Better coach  Better player:2  High performance coaching  International competition  Development of working with others: 2  Building the team  Encourage players to play for GB  Want to get more involved with injured/disabled sports persons  Started playing sport again  SV more exciting and entertaining than standing  Need to be more organized in terms of time management  More patient when coaching players with learning disabilities  Experience working with athletes with disabilities (sports psychologist)</p>
<b>3. Personal changes:</b> 18 statements	<p>Happier/ Gained confidence: 4  Better understanding of disabled sports persons and of disability as something that can be positive as well: 2  Social inclusion (this person does not have a disability)  Awareness of physical impairments  More interaction with disabled athletes/more confident about disabled people: 4  Know more about disabled sport  I have a new drive to do my best  Have a purpose  Know a new sport:2  Better self-control and reflection</p>
<b>4. Practical life impact:</b> 18 statements	<p>Not working  Playing for GB women  More time away from home  Entering competitions  Running a club  Separated from partner  Used all my savings/poorer  Very busy: 2  Travelling:3  Met girlfriend  Live in London, move from home: 2  Travel to places that I wouldn't know otherwise  Serving on international boards and committees  Job change</p>
<b>5. Health and fitness:</b> 17	Much fitter and stronger: 2

statements	Improved fitness: 8 Maintain fitness: 1 More healthy: 2 Lost weight: 2 Exercise  <b>negative:</b> Joints starting to feel sore again
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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> “Embodiment is an accomplishment by which a social actor embraces a set of dispositions, practices and strategies and, as a result, comfortably occupies a unique habitus.” (Turner, 2001, p.260).

<sup>2</sup> “The applied study of disability tends to cross disciplinary boundaries and draws on a variety of disciplines including philosophy, sociology, psychology, history and the experiences of disabled people. The functional and theoretical relationships between these elements inform the boundaries of our understanding of both a personal disability identity and notions of how to identify with disability politics at a community level (Peters, 2000). Ultimately, Disability Studies forms a basis for understanding both disability culture and social justice.” (Johnstone, 2012, Kindle locations 173-177)

<sup>3</sup> Otherness is defined as a space outside the accepted normality: “the belief in normality has defined the nature of the representation of disability and impairment (and non- disability) by formulating it as the basis upon which otherness (abject humanity bordering on inhumanity) has been defined in all figurative representations of humanity.” (Swain, 1993, p.103).

<sup>4</sup> Important benchmarks are the foundation of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) by Paul Hunt and Vic Finkelstein *Attitudes and Disabled People*, presented to the World Rehabilitation Fund in New York in 1980 (Finkelstein,1980).

<sup>5</sup> “The theory of complex embodiment raises awareness of the effects of disabling environments on people’s lived experiences of the body, but it emphasizes as well that some factors affecting disability, such as chronic pain, secondary health effects, and aging, derive from the body. These last disabilities are neither less significant than disabilities caused by the environment nor to be considered defects or deviations merely because they are resistant to change. Rather, they belong to the spectrum of human variation, conceived both as variability between individuals and as variability within an individual’s life cycle, and they need to be considered in tandem with social forces affecting disability. The theory of complex embodiment views the economy between social representations and the body not as unidirectional as in the social model, or non-existent as in the medical model, but as reciprocal. Complex embodiment theorizes the body and its representations and mutually representative.” (Siebers, 2008, p.25)

<sup>6</sup> In *Development as Freedom* (1999) Sen describes an agent as “someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of their own values and objectives” (p.19).

<sup>7</sup> “Practical taxonomies, which are a transformed, misrecognisable form of the real divisions of the social order, contribute to the reproduction of that order by producing objectively orchestrated practices adjusted to those divisions” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.163); “When the natural and social world appears as self-evident....” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.164)

<sup>8</sup> “Because the habitus is an endless capacity to engender products- thoughts, perceptions, expressions, actions- whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it secures is as remote from a creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from a simple mechanical reproduction of the initial conditionings.” (Bourdieu, 1977, p.95)

<sup>9</sup> Practice community is used by Howe (2008b) and Howe and Jones (2006), borrowing the expression from Morgan (1994) to distinguish between the “institution ... and the practice community (which comprises those who are actively involved with the practice, i.e. athletes, coaches and officials...) (Howe, 2008b, p.84).

<sup>10</sup> “There are degrees of freedom just as there are degrees of power and degrees of control. Each of these is fashioned in the course of everyday life and in the course of political struggle. In short, by people, in their individual and collective practices of controlling their lives.” (Charlton, 2000, p.161)

<sup>11</sup> APA can be defined as “a service delivery profession and an academic field of study that supports an attitude of acceptance of individual differences, advocates access to active lifestyles and sport, and promotes innovation and cooperative service delivery programs and empowerment systems. Adapted physical activity includes, but is not limited to, physical education, sport, recreation, dance and creative arts, nutrition, medicine, and rehabilitation.” (International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity (IFAPA), 2004)

<sup>12</sup> APA evolution is similar in Canada, USA and Europe, except for the specific timeline of development.

<sup>13</sup> In these studies, health is largely understood in terms of physical capabilities.

<sup>14</sup> Some important references are the Sport’s Council study entitled *Everybody active* (Stafford, 1989) in 1987 and the report from the Minister of Sports Review Group entitled *Building on Ability* in 1989.

<sup>15</sup> UK Sport succeeded the Sports Council in 1997 by Royal Charter. Each of the four home nations was governed by its own sports council, Sport England, Sport Scotland, Sport Wales and Sport Northern Ireland.

<sup>16</sup> As explained in Houlihan and White (2002), this act derived from the need of the Conservative Government (80’s) to exert closer control over local government financial expenditure during the 1980’s.

<sup>17</sup> Sport England (SE) is the rebranded name of the English Sport Council. This council is responsible for the community sport in England.

<sup>18</sup> UK Sport, 2010 Performance investment principles, available at <http://www.uk sport.gov.uk/publications/2009-13-funding-investment-principles>, Consulted in 13 Nov. 2012.

<sup>19</sup> The British Paralympic Association is responsible for the selection, funding, and preparation of the athletes representing GB in the Paralympics (cf. <http://www.paralympics.org.uk/about-us>).

<sup>20</sup> “Up to 1992 GB took part regularly in competition and prior to the Barcelona Paralympic Games the Men's team was ranked in the top eight in the world, though did not attend the Games. As a consequence focus on SV lessened and only gained momentum again with the announcement of London as the host city in 2012.” Available at [http://www.volleyballengland.org/performance/gb\\_sitting\\_volleyball](http://www.volleyballengland.org/performance/gb_sitting_volleyball), assessed on the 12<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Amartya Sen is the first important theorist of capabilities approach. He introduces the term in “Equality of What?” (Sen, 1980)

<sup>22</sup> The idea that humans are “political animals” dissolves the illusion of independence: “their [people] interests are thoroughly bound up with the interests of others throughout their lives, and their goals are shared goals ....they depend on others asymmetrically during certain phases of their lives, and some remain in a situation of asymmetrical dependency throughout their lives” (Nussbaum, 2006, pp.88, 89).

<sup>23</sup> As Nussbaum stresses, people with mental and physical impairments have seen their possibility for a valid contribution denigrated, as a way to justify the refusal in mobilising the necessary resources to make this participation possible, as if their impairments allocates them into another class of citizenship (Nussbaum, 2006, pp.187-191).

<sup>24</sup> Libero is a player who only performs defensive roles, therefore he/she does not often jump during the game.

<sup>25</sup> Grand Prix are tournaments that run normally on a Sunday, involving all the SV clubs in Britain.

<sup>26</sup> The national centres for SV are officially recognised as such by VE. These centres were seen as very important to recruit athletes for the national teams and offer opportunities for them to train.

<sup>27</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> capability is adapted from Nussbaum list of central capabilities and the 10<sup>th</sup> is suggested by Wolf and De-Shalit (2007).

<sup>28</sup> The full data set includes not only the 37 semi- structured interviews and the ethnographic field notes, but all types of additional data such as media and institutional documents and personal videos and photographs.

<sup>29</sup> Media’s interest in Martine was so strong, that she would provide material for a whole case study on the media interest on Paralympics and disability sport (cf. e.g. <http://www.itv.com/news/2012-03-14/martine-wrights-journey-to-make-the-paralympic-team/>, <http://www.itv.com/news/2012-08-31/7->

[7-bombings-survivor-realises-dream-of-playing-at-paralympics/, http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/sports-personality/20691586](http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/sports-personality/20691586)).

<sup>30</sup> “Supercrip implies a stereotyping process that requires an individual ‘to fight against his/her impairment’ in order to overcome it and achieve unlikely ‘success’.” (Silva & Howe, 2012c, p.175)

<sup>31</sup> Co-funder of the 1<sup>st</sup> SV club in GB, the London Lynx, alongside Karen Hung, former GB player.

<sup>32</sup> Paralympic potential days were one-day events promoted and organised by BPA where athletes could try different sports and potentially get selected for a Paralympic team.

<sup>33</sup> The Amputee Games were one-day events where people with physical impairments, mainly amputees could try different sports. They were organised by LimbPower, an association dedicated to improve the quality of life through recreational and competitive sport, (cf. <http://www.limbpower.com/what-we-do/>).

<sup>34</sup> These are one-day events where the basics of SV are presented (classification; athletic, technical and tactical skills) with a theoretical and practical component.

<sup>35</sup> In one of the BVFSV committee meeting minutes, the expression “skills transfer market” was used to euphemistically refer to what I realised later is a widespread practice in elite paralympic sport, that is, identify potential athletes in other sports, who could be “recycled” to a new sport, originating a category of athletes I denominate of “paralympic professionals”, athletes who move from sport to sport, and are able to compete successfully in more than one paralympic sport.

<sup>36</sup> UK sport funding requires alongside the establishment of elite pathways, the development of the sport’ grassroots, constituting a compulsory obligation for the governing body.

<sup>37</sup> See e.g. <http://www.volleyballengland.org/news/article/4445/paralympicsgb-sitting-volleyball-teams-announced#> (assessed on 26<sup>th</sup> August 2012) for a better understanding of what the expression “credible performance” implies.

<sup>38</sup> Some important benchmarks were: 2010 WOVD World Championships in Edmond, Oklahoma, United States; Harpers tournament (23<sup>rd</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> March 2011) in Stoke Mandeville; BT Paralympic World Cup in Manchester in 26<sup>th</sup> May 2011 (just men); ECVD Continental Men’s Cup in Kettering (11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> July 2011) and the European championships (9<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2011, Rotterdam, Netherlands).

<sup>39</sup> Coincidence or not, after BPA’s deferral of the decision on women’s team Paralympic participation, giving them three more months to prove their value, a feature article (“You Wanted female sports stars, Auntie”) was published on *Sunday Times* (4<sup>th</sup> December 2011, pp.2,3), focusing on players stories, including Martine Wright and Sam Bower, a female war-injured soldier.

<sup>40</sup> As Seymour explains, Giddens' idea of a "second chance" generated by a crisis event implies a process of self-reflexivity by which people transform themselves and the world around (Seymour, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Wheelchair basketball is much more developed than sitting volleyball in the UK.

<sup>42</sup> Re-embodiment is the key concept in Seymour's *Remaking the body* (1998). It can be defined as a set of processes by which individuals who have suffered significant changes in their physical bodies reconstruct their identities, their everyday lives and their relation with the world.

<sup>43</sup> Regime of truth may be understood as the general worldview that provides the fertile soil for technologies of dominance to develop and operate. Foucault defines regime of truth as a "system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" (Foucault, 1980, p.13).

<sup>44</sup> The normalising judgment steams from the power of the "norm". That is, within a system of formal equality, "a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shades of individual differences" (Foucault, 1977, p.184).

<sup>45</sup> *Murderball* (Rubin et al., 2005) is the name of an acclaimed documentary on wheelchair rugby, an epithet that emphasises the sport's aggressiveness and competitiveness.

<sup>46</sup> Fictional name.

<sup>47</sup> Adequate activities are the ones which match the real possibilities of "different" embodiments, and not activities designed for "abled" bodies, in which people with impairments need to strive to engage in.

<sup>48</sup> A rally is the dispute of one point during the game when the ball goes over the net at least twice, therefore it implies an answer from the opponent.

<sup>49</sup> Sen understands consequences not only as the explicit aimed results (culmination outcomes), but also the implications of the processes undertaken, its impact on agencies, people and relationships (comprehensive outcomes) (2009, chapter 10). Using an analogy from the SV context, a culmination outcome could be winning the match and a comprehensive outcome -playing the best one can, in respect for everybody involved and rules of fair-play.

<sup>50</sup> Available on <http://www.bluebadgestyle.com/2013/02/bbs-sports-blog-week-7-sitting-volleyball-captain-rob-richardson-when-you-take-the-stigma-of-it-being-a-disability-sport-away-kids-are-just-like-what/>, assessed on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

<sup>51</sup> "GB sitting volleyball players fight for 2012 spots", 18<sup>th</sup> October 2011, accessible on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/disability-sport/15358303>, assessed on the 20<sup>th</sup> October 2012,

<sup>52</sup> Sen suggests that a democratic consensus based upon an open impartiality needs to be open not only to the community members but also to outsiders (cf. Sen, 2009, “Non- parochialism as a requirement of Justice”, pp.403-407)

<sup>53</sup> In 1968, in his book *Ghost in the Machine*, Koestler defends the idea that every world phenomenon is at one and the same time a whole in itself and part of a larger whole, constituting “holons”. Holons are nested in each other, influencing both higher and lower holons.

<sup>54</sup>“Normalising judgment” is one of the mechanisms of surveillance identified by Foucault as supporting governmentality processes (Foucault, 1977).

<sup>55</sup> Truth is herein used in the sense that Foucault (1980) uses it, as something that is largely manufactured by the established powers.

<sup>56</sup> As it stands at the moment, players who were rarely seen throughout the rest of the competitive season were often playing in grand prix semi- finals and finals as ‘ringers’.

<sup>57</sup> Some reactions on <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/disability-sport/20781484>, assessed on the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Meaningful in this context means the alignment of SV practices and activities with the valued capabilities of the players involved.

<sup>59</sup> There are already attempts to develop more universal design. For instance, Baskin is a derivative of basketball, developing in Italy during the 1980’s. More information on <http://theinclusionclub.com/episodes/baskin/> and Valet, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Available on <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/othersports/article-2197345/London-Paralympics-2012-Is-sport--Laura-Williamson.html>, assessed on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>61</sup> Available on <http://www.uk sport.gov.uk/news/uk-sport-announce-additional-sports-to-receive-funding-for-rio-cycle-010213>, UK Sport 01 February 2013, assessed on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

<sup>62</sup> Richard Callicot, president of BVF and VE, has publicly repudiated the UK Sport decision to withdraw all the funding for Volleyball and SV elite squads, in national newspapers.

<sup>63</sup> The first time Sen talked about capabilities was in a “Tanner Lecture on Human Values” delivered at Stanford University in 1979 entitled “Equality of What?” (Sen, 1980).



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