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# Approach to disability policies during the first part of Franco's regime: control, rehabilitation and charity

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## Abstract

This article reviews the disability policies implemented during the early years of Franco's dictatorship, up until the mid-1950s, when different conditions changed the sociopolitical and economic course of the country. For this purpose, a gradually increasing bibliography has been used, mostly focused on specific aspects of the History of Disability. Furthermore, the different regulations have been reviewed in order to offer a story that, although synthetic, aims to point out the underlying political-ideological complexity. The conclusions highlight that the implementation of the dictatorship interfered with the development of the rights of people with disabilities, both due to the consolidation of traditional paradigms and due to the lack of real support, beyond propaganda. However, characterizing this period as a simple regression would be inaccurate, not only due to the development of international interpretations but also due to the organizational strategies of those affected cornered by control and paternalism.

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## Keywords

Disability history, Franco dictatorship, disability policies, associative movements.

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More than two decades ago, the history of disability consolidated itself as an independent discipline in the Anglo-Saxon academic sphere, within what is known as Disability Studies. This historiographical line pointed out the benefits making disability a focal point of investigation, not only as a way to rescue fascinating life stories but, above all, to better approach the understanding of the complex and contradictory evolution of our societies (Longmore & Goldberg, 2000; Baynton, 2001; Kudlick, 2003). Since then, the evolution of disability history has been slow but determined in the face of the vast historiographical desert it confronts (Nielsen, 2012).

Spain also finds itself at the early stages of this journey, but with a noticeable upward trajectory, particularly in contemporary studies. While the fields of educational and medical history have spearheaded these efforts, recent years have witnessed a diversification of perspectives (Grau Rubio, 1991; Molina, 1992; Aguado Díaz, 1995; Garvía Soto, 1992; Martínez Pérez and Porras Gallo, 2006; del Cura González, 2010; Martos Contreras, 2014; Cayuela Sánchez, 2014). Yet, despite this progress, disability history remains a peripheral focus within the broader historiographical landscape. There is still much ground to cover, both in local case studies, where microhistory can offer valuable insights and in broader syntheses and reflections.

In this way, our work aims to revisit and reflect on disability policies during the early Franco era, spanning from the Civil War to the early 1950s. Even though subsequent decades witnessed a transformative “emergence of disability,” catalyzed by international influences and shifting sociopolitical dynamics, our focus remains on the preceding period, crucial for understanding subsequent political evaluations.

Our goal is not to offer groundbreaking results, as some previous studies have focused on the topic of disability in these years. Among them, we can mention works that have reflected on medical evolution and the understanding of disability (Martínez Pérez, 2009), with notable studies conducted around polio (Porras Gallo et al., 2013) or those that have focused on some of the organizations (Vega, 1981; Garvía Soto, 1992; Wright, 2016; Brégain, 2013; del Cura González and Martínez Pérez, 2016; Martos Contreras, 2016, 2021). Policies affecting disability have also been worked on collaterally in the extensive bibliography on the development of medicine and social provision during the dictatorship (Guillén Rodríguez, 2000; Porras Gallo, 2006; Pons Pons, 2009; Molinero Ruiz, 2005; Pons Pons & Vilar Rodríguez, 2014; Cayuela Sánchez, 2014; Galán García, 2016; Marín Casado, 2016), and of course, within the field of education (Vicente Guillén & Vicente Villena, 2001; Berrueto Albéniz & Conejero López, 2009).

Our aim with this work is to compile and synthesize information, providing a comprehensive understanding of disability policies during the early Franco regime. Our goal is to offer an updated and overarching perspective. To accomplish this, we will examine disability-related policies through three lenses: provision, education, and the associative movement. In the interest of brevity, a necessity in this type of discourse, we will only focus on political provisions, omitting discussions on the origins of disability and the harsh realities faced by affected individuals, topics that warrant dedicated exploration. Furthermore, we will not delve into the evolution of the disability concept or the nuanced understandings within the regime’s different factions. However, while discussing the period’s policies, we will make occasional references to these aspects, primarily in the subsequent introductory section.

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## 1. Some notes on disability in early Francoism

In post-war Spain, as throughout history, individuals with bodily, intellectual, or sensory differences often faced lives of begging, exclusion, or even imprisonment. Though the war briefly elevated those with physical scars, particularly those aligned with the victorious faction, the reality was that prevailing negative perceptions overshadowed this heroic narrative (Martos Contreras, 2016; Wright, 2016, 2022). Referred to as “invalid” during that era, individuals were considered “non-valid,” a deeply derogatory label in the context of constructing a “New Spain,” where masculinity was a pivotal value measured by social engagement primarily through gainful employment (Jiménez Aguilar, 2021). This discourse, influenced by international currents, took root in Spain alongside the prevailing fascism of the early Franco years, readily embraced by other political factions within the regime. Consequently, women with disabilities faced double marginalization, as their contribution to nation-building was not evaluated based on paid employment but rather on their capacity for procreation, although within the established rules (Prieto Borrego, 2018). Those considered unsuitable for this role found themselves confined to domestic duties, reinforcing traditional gender roles. The marginalization of people with disabilities consigned them to lives of poverty and isolation, both socially and physically, whether within their own homes or institutionalized settings such as psychiatric facilities or prisons (Mínguez Álvarez, 2004). This grim reality persisted throughout the Franco era and beyond.

However, it is inaccurate to assert that the advent of the dictatorship directly exacerbated the living conditions of people with disabilities, as they were already marginalized despite modest advancements in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Pozo, 1980; Molina Roldán, 2009; del Cura González, 2012; Alcina Madueño & Navarro Juárez, 2014). Nonetheless, the Spanish Civil War and the subsequent establishment of a dictatorial regime unquestionably had a detrimental impact, representing a setback in the gradual journey toward social justice. An illustrative example of this regression is the decline of the vibrant associative landscape of the Republican era, supplanted by top-down organizations in which affected individuals had little representation. Francoism was characterized by a lack of rights, social control, hierarchical organizations, and a paternalistic approach to care, all of which directly affected the situation of people with disabilities.

Moreover, while the condition of people with disabilities did not significantly improve during the dictatorship, it is incorrect to assume that the Francoist State did not enact related policies. Indeed, although the most well-known initiatives emerged in the 1960s, early measures were implemented during the war years, exemplified by the establishment of the National Organization for the Blind in 1938. These early regulations were part of the dictatorship's strategy to use social policies as a means of consolidating power, although under the shadow of severe repression. Social action, influenced by Catholic charity and Falangist rhetoric of “social justice,” served as a primary propaganda tool for the regime (Molinero Ruiz, 2013). In the realm of disability, policies operated within the ambiguous realm of charity, propaganda, and the pursuit of a “reintegration” solution for affected individuals into the workforce, a crucial element in constructing the New State.

This “workforce reintegration” strategy drew inspiration from new international medical and social trends developed post-World War periods, which had given rise to disciplines such as physiotherapy. This heralded a new understanding of disability, often referred to as the “medical” or “rehabilitative” model. This approach emphasized medical care and its role in guiding affected individuals toward “adaptation and integration into normalcy,” primarily referring to workplace integration (Barnes et al., 2002). Disability policies throughout much of the 20th century must be understood within the economic context of states recovering from major

conflicts and expanding social welfare systems (Lassiter et al., 1987). This new phase in understanding disability gradually supplanted the traditional approach, oscillating between rejection and charity, which had shaped the lives of affected individuals for centuries.

This rehabilitative model represented a significant evolution in disability history, both due to the medical advances it accompanied and for challenging the term “invalidity,” advocating for the labor integration of at least some affected individuals. However, the model proved to have significant shortcomings, hindering progress toward equality. Among the negative aspects, the obsession with “normalization” over “functionality” stands out, exemplified by the preference for prosthetics over wheelchairs, which often proved detrimental to affected individuals (Martínez Pérez, 2009). Another negative consequence was the excessive individual responsibility placed on affected individuals in the “reintegration” process, overlooking various social determinants, as well as the focus on “men with physical disabilities.” Nevertheless, it must also be acknowledged that one of the main shortcomings of the paradigm was the lack of political and budgetary support to implement its principles, meaning that even the questionable “workforce integration” failed to materialize in any of the welfare states being constructed during those years; even less so in a Spain limited by repression, totalitarianism, and economic backwardness.

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## 2. Social provision and rehabilitation policies

The dictatorship’s first specific measures regarding disability were implemented in the rear echelon and primarily targeted soldiers wounded in the war. This rationale underpins the establishment of the Corps of Mutilated Gentlemen and the approval of the National Organization of the Blind. However, disability found an indirect mention in the initial regulations for social provisions, as outlined in the Labour Charter decreed in March 1938: “Social provision will provide workers with the security of protection from misfortune (...) pensions for old age, disability, maternity, work accidents, occupational diseases, tuberculosis, and unemployment will be increased, aiming for the implementation of comprehensive insurance” (p. 6180).

These principles were further developed in subsequent years through a plethora of disjointed regulations that, despite incremental improvements over time, never achieved the goal of “comprehensive insurance.” In 1940, the regulations governing old age benefits introduced the possibility of an early pension for those “permanently incapacitated for any work.” A year later, the first occupational disease insurance was approved, namely the Silicosis Health Insurance (Molero Mesa, 1994). In 1942, the Mandatory Health Insurance was established, a significant development as the first compulsory health protection scheme in Spain (Pons Pons, 2009). Notably, regarding our topic, this legislation referred to services such as “prosthetics, baths, and orthopedics,” although specifying that they would only be provided “by medical prescription” (Law of December 14, 1942, p. 10593). Furthermore, labor regulations laid the groundwork for job reservation in companies with over fifty employees, although repeated provisions highlighted their consistent non-compliance (Law of October 16, 1942).

In 1947, the Mandatory Old Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) was enacted, a significant development as it included, for the first time, “disability protection on a general basis,” covering non-work-related accidents and non-professional illnesses, and introduced temporary disability coverage for periods exceeding the scope of Health Insurance. The Francoist social provision system was supplemented by labor

mutual societies, which essentially comprised a variety of professionally or territorially organized institutions (Campos Egozcue, 1996). The pensions offered by these mutual societies, in conjunction with Company Funds, were initially supplementary but eventually became so crucial that some viewed them as “fundamentally essential” (Alegre, 1963, p. 36).

Overall, the social provision system developed by the dictatorship was highly complex and fragmented, unequal across professions and incomes, and ineffective due to its disorganization. While the number of insured individuals grew significantly in the first decade, surpassing 4 million in 1947, this figure fell far short of regime propaganda. Regarding the number of recipients of “old age or disability” benefits, there was a notable increase from approximately 167,000 in 1941 to just over 817,000 in 1957 (González Murillo, 1997, pp. 738 and 822). However, considering that Spain had nearly 30 million inhabitants by the late 1950s, with over 3 million aged over 65, the impact of old age and disability provision was minimal. Indeed, the eligibility criteria for disability pensions were quite restrictive, and even within Francoism itself, it had been alleged that:

The extremely rudimentary and limited protection that the insurance provides for disability is immediately apparent; it only covers extreme cases, and, in a manifest absurdity for disability protection, age is a determining factor. (Olea, 1959, p. 124, as cited in González Murillo, 1997)

Moreover, these benefits were meager, ranging from 225 to 400 pesetas per month in the early 1960s (García Padilla, 1990, p. 490). Considering that the minimum interprofessional wage in 1963 was 1800 pesetas, we can get an idea of the standard of living of the beneficiaries (Carreras & Tafunell, 2005, p. 1229).

The social provision of the early Franco years primarily focused on financial contributions, with limited development of services. Regarding disability, these proposals centered on prevention and, shortly thereafter, rehabilitation, primarily for physically affected individuals. The approval of these measures occurred in a context where the incidence of disability was increasing, not only due to the effects of the Civil War but also due to post-war epidemics and severe socio-sanitary deficiencies. One direct contributor to disability was maternal and child healthcare deficiencies, a reality acknowledged by the government in its Maternal and Child Health Act of 1941, aimed at reducing “maternal and infant mortality to a minimum,” as the government was “eager to improve positive demographic factors” (p. 5650). Although the law did not immediately alleviate the issue, it introduced, for our purposes, references to “dispensaries and specialized treatment centers (...) for the recovery of children with disabilities and deformities, as well as those with mental abnormalities” (p. 5653).

As evidenced by the regulations, the dictatorship embraced the discourse of “recovery” for people with disabilities, although referring to a “return to work” philosophy aligned with the prevailing political and medical trends, such as social medicine and preventive occupational medicine (González, 1982). These healthcare strategies found favor, though not exclusively, among the fascist sectors of the regime, who sought to implement them within their spheres of influence, such as the Ministry of Labour, headed by Falangist José Antonio Girón de Velasco. Apart from the social provision policies we have discussed, this ministry approved the creation of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in 1944, aimed at promoting institutions focused on worker rehabilitation. The preamble of the regulation stated the institute’s goal:

The study and research concerning the physiology, pathology, hygiene, and safety of work (...) has an important role in the labor sphere, as it would lead not only to a significant increase in national production but, more importantly, to an improvement in the living conditions of workers (...) thereby fulfilling the doctrine of our movement, which considers the human factor essential. (p. 5707)

Towards the end of the decade, the Ministry of Interior, specifically the Health Directorate of José Alberto Palanca y Martínez-Fortún, launched the “National Health Campaign against Disability.” The project was pursued independently of the Ministry of Labour’s strategies, a consistent trend in Francoist regulations characterized by disorganization and duplication resulting from internal conflicts and competing factions within the regime (Molero Mesa, 1994). In fact, according to the preamble of the plan, it was recognized as a fundamental objective to eliminate this “disconnection” between the actors, with the Directorate-General for Health as the main organizer of this task:

The number of individuals with disabilities in childhood and youth is very high, and with immediate treatment and constant vigilance, many could be recovered, benefiting the nation’s economic interests and the personal well-being of patients and their families (...) Technical reports on various causes (...) indicate a noticeable gap between Public and Private Institutions (...) as well as charitable foundations, religious orders, hospitals, the National Antituberculosis Board, the Child Hygiene Service of the General Directorate of Health, and others. (Decree of June 6, 1949, pp. 3227-3228)

From this plan emerged the National Board for Disability Prevention, which later became the National Board for Rehabilitation and Disabled Recovery. According to the decree, its main goal was to rationalize and promote specialized assistance centers, aiming to “re-educate and reintegrate people with disabilities,” thus duplicating, to a large extent, the work of the Ministry of Labour’s Institute. Despite potential duplication and friction, there were notable synergies in their approaches. As outlined in the preamble of the “National Health Campaign against Disability,” the strategy was framed as being of “great advantage for the nation’s economic interests.” Another shared aspect between the board and the institute was their minimal practical involvement in the field (Águila Maturana, 2000). By the late 1950s, the report generated by visitors from the World Health Organization highlighted multiple deficiencies in the field of prevention and rehabilitation (Safford & Jansson, 1957). The «First Technical Study Conference on the Problem of Subnormal Children» attributed the shortcomings of the National Board for Rehabilitation and Disabled Recovery to:

... the lack of adequate resources to meet the wide range of needs it is responsible for. This scarcity has hindered its ability to establish a strong presence at the peripheral level and to effectively serve the 96,200 individuals with disabilities affiliated with it, not to mention the estimated 300,000 individuals in Spain. (Rubio Nombela, 1964, p. 9)

This Francoist tendency to pass measures without providing adequate funding was a consistent feature that characterized the development of all its social policies, whose effectiveness always fell far short of its propagandistic claims. This lack of budget, understandable in the context of the crisis, also demonstrated a clear lack of genuine support and a pronounced disinterest, justifying the fact that most of the agencies created during Francoism, led by political figures, rarely held meetings. However, it is logical that the tempered criticisms from that period preferred to focus exclusively on the economic perspective.

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### 3. The education of the “deprived childhood”

The establishment of the dictatorship, with its staunch conservatism and purging of the teaching profession, marked the end of the pedagogical fervor of the Republic. Education played a significant role in the regime’s

propaganda and consolidation strategy, which in 1945 approved its Primary Education Law (Puelles Benítez, 2002). The regulation, driven by the Ministry of Education under José Ibáñez Martín, was guided by its national-Catholic ideas, articulated around patriotism, the Church, and the rejection of the “atheist materialism” of the republican era, which led to “a radical subversion of values” in schools. The law, in its exaltation of the “glorious Spanish pedagogical tradition,” reminded that it was also “a Spanish creation (...) the first system of education for the deaf and dumb, invented by our Ponce de León” (p. 385).

Beyond rhetoric and the clear intention of framing and propaganda, the regulation marked a new episode in the national history of education and, specifically, in the subject at hand (Molina, 1992; Berruezo Albéniz & Conejero López, 2009). While the so-called Moyano Law of 1857 (Public Instruction Law) had referred to the education of “deaf mutes and blind people,” the 1945 legislation marked advancements of the era by extending education to include “children with abnormalities and cognitive disabilities” and even the ones with “mental disabilities”, regulating the so-called “special schools” and laying the foundations for professionalization in the field:

The State, to attend to deprived childhood and provide adequate education, will establish special schools for children with abnormalities and cognitive disabilities, and will promote private initiative. In the same way, it will create and promote, equally special schools for deaf-mute, blind, and children with mental disabilities. All will be governed by peculiar regulations. Their teaching staff will be part of the national scale and will enjoy the stipulated remuneration. All of them must also be qualified in the specialty they teach. In their training, which will take place in certain schools of Teaching, the Spanish pedagogical tradition will continue, integrating modern scientific procedures. (p. 394)

The main contribution of this law is the explicit acknowledgment of diversity, the commitment to educate students, and the professionalization of teachers. Essentially, the legislation proposed a system of segregation by distinguishing between “regular” and “special” schools, tailored to accommodate students based on a somewhat vague list of conditions (Lledó Carreres, 2012). Regarding the establishment and management of these schools, the law directly targeted private institutions, which had traditionally overseen some of them, creating legal avenues for subsidies and shared governance. This strategy, mindful of the financial limitations of the time, also demonstrated confidence in private social sectors, particularly religious ones. In practice, female congregations would predominantly be tasked with caring for the most vulnerable groups throughout the Francoist era, actively involved in implementing the regime’s social initiatives through their voluntary contributions.

After the approval of the law, there was a noticeable increase in the establishment of special education schools, many of which were operated by various religious organizations. However, there were also institutions overseen by Social Aid, which, toward the end of the 1940s, shifted their focus to the elderly and those with disabilities. The educational approaches in these schools varied widely and often depended on the sensibilities and expertise of their administrators and educators. However, it was later criticized that, in general, their functioning resembled more of an “asylum” than a “school” (López Rosat, 1964). It was not until the 1960s that some of these institutions began to professionalize and implement aspects of what became known as therapeutic pedagogy (Ortiz & Martín, 2008).

Another initiative concerning disability by the Ministry of Education involved partially reopening three national schools for “deaf-mutes”, “blind”, and “children with abnormalities”. The war ended, and by the mid-1940s, they did not fully return to normal functioning, as evidenced by budgetary regulations of the National School for the Deaf and Mute, which highlighted the regime’s apparent lack of interest stating:

Given the exceptional teaching, economic, and administrative circumstances that the school has faced due to the lack of suitable premises, it has been unable to function normally. Therefore, it is not feasible to admit the same number of students as when the aforementioned center was operating regularly. Until the School restores its normal functioning (...) thirty percent of the allocated funds will be released quarterly. (Order of April 13, 1946, p. 3970).

By the end of the decade, when the National School for the Blind had already passed to the ONCE (Spanish National Organization of the Blind), these centers continued without having recovered their activity, also remaining stagnant in an archaic educational system that would not modernize until the mid-1960s (Alcina Madueño, 2014).

In any case, the maximum paradigm of the slowdown in this field was represented by the trajectory of the National Board for Deaf-Mutes, Blind, and People with Abnormalities, the first historical antecedent of the current Board for Disability, which, after its disappearance during the Civil War, would have to wait until the fifties for its recovery (del Cura González, 2012 and Alcina Madueño & Navarro Juárez, 2014). The center was resumed in 1953, with the Ministry of Education led by the Falangist Joaquín Ruíz Giménez, with a regulation that proclaimed:

The realization of an accurate work in this aspect will allow for a Christian solution to be provided for the issue presented by these children, as well as for the reintegration into society and the workforce of many young individuals who, otherwise, would constitute a burden or pose a threat to social order. (Decree of March 6, 1953, p. 1486).

In the above excerpt, we see the clear permanence of the most traditional vision of disability, in which affected individuals were considered “problem subjects” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 1990). In that sense, the problems that the board intended to solve were not those faced by the affected individuals, but those they “caused”. Additionally, there is a clear association between people with disabilities and the “breakdown of public order,” a discourse that was at the basis of the nineteenth-century trend towards confinement. On the other hand, we can point out that, despite synergies with religious charitable discourse, there was a significant economic interpretation, intending to limit the “burden,” incorporating the “boys” into the labor scene. As in the other regulations of the time, concern is expressed for the “dimension that the problem has acquired,” as well as a certain attempt to end the lack of coordination. In that sense, the board proposed itself as an organizing axis between the Ministries of Education, Justice, and Governance, which reinforced the clear strategy of control and the benevolent nature of its principles.

However, it must be noted that the shortcomings of its approaches soon became evident, as in the fifties, a new stage in understanding and addressing disability was emerging. Consequently, the board would be forced into a gradual modernization, as symbolized by its name change in 1956 to the National Board for Special Education. The development of this center, like that of the National Board for Psychiatric Assistance, created in 1955, will not be addressed in this article, as it goes beyond the temporal framework of interest. However, we can anticipate that its impact was, as in all the cases we have seen, limited, with once again, insufficient funding serving as one of the primary justifications.

Since its creation until recently, this board has faced limitations due to the inadequate resources available to fulfill its broad objectives. Consequently, its efforts have primarily focused on internal organization, strategic planning for future endeavors, and experimenting with methods that could be scaled up once sufficient resources are obtained, based on the lessons learned from the experience. (Rubio Nombela, 1964, p. 209)



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#### 4. Organizations for affected individuals

The establishment of a totalitarian and dictatorial state brought an end to the associative flourishing of the Republican years, which had had a positive influence in the realm of disability, especially among sensory-impaired individuals. The post-war State was built on directives of repression and control, leading, following fascist proposals, to the creation of para-state and vertical organizations to regiment society. In this context, the approval of the National Organization of the Blind (ONCE) in the early date of 1938 stands out. Before this, a group of affected individuals worked on establishing a self-managed organization to address the labor and subsistence issues of the collective. Thanks to their alignment with the insurgent side, the project leaders obtained approval for the organization, although it is true that they had to adapt their proposal to ideological and state control guidelines. Nevertheless, the institution achieved some of its demands, such as relative self-management and economic independence, thanks to the concession of exclusivity in the sale of lottery tickets (Garvía Soto, 1992). Despite its shortcomings, the ONCE managed to survive throughout the Franco dictatorship, offering visually impaired individuals training and opportunities that, while limited, were enviable by other groups.

Regarding the organization's basic ideas, it is worth highlighting their push to depart from charity and the historical begging of individuals with visual impairments, and their incorporation as "active" agents of society. This discourse aligned perfectly with the interpretation of disability embraced by Falangism, a political movement that shared ideological similarities with the early leaders of ONCE. The Falangist Javier Martínez de Bedoya, director general of charity in these early years, stated in the organization's first council:

We aimed to approach the issue with a sense of national unity, devoid of inappropriate pity. The visually impaired (...) are calling for public recognition that regards them not as inherently unfortunate, but as ordinary members of society whose contributions can benefit collective life. (Gutiérrez de Tovar, 1988, p. 46)

The first activity developed by ONCE was the rehabilitation of those affected by the Civil War, both soldiers and so-called "civilian mutilated," a collective that included Republican soldiers, according to Montoro Martínez (1998, p. 60). ONCE quickly spread throughout all provinces, absorbing existing associations and monopolizing funding through lotteries. Although the earnings from these lotteries were meager in the early years and coexisted with begging, by the 1950s, they became a relatively stable income source. Initially, ONCE aimed for this protected employment to be temporary, transitioning individuals to regular integration into the job market. However, the opposite happened, as the lottery tickets practically became the only employment opportunity. In essence, ONCE ended up creating a support system that separated its members from the rest of society, exemplified by its educational initiative carried out through four residential schools. While this approach to special education aligned with contemporary educational practices, ONCE's provision of free education and scholarships gave its students a notable advantage over other children with disabilities. The organization also developed various social security strategies, though most of their implementation occurred in subsequent decades (Garvía Soto, 1992).

In the same year as ONCE's approval, in 1938, and following previous models, the Meritorious Corps of War Mutilated for the Homeland was created, directed by General Millán Astray, and during the post-war period, it represented the most symbolic and particular conception of disability. This corps was created to serve as a synonym for bravery and struggle for the new Spain, as demonstrated by its "medal of

sufferings for the Homeland,” and its members were exhibited in propagandistic events as genuine living martyrs. Regarding practical advantages, the Francoist government regulated some specific rules for labor reintegration, offering them positions in public administration, which contributed to the social exposure of these former combatants. However, beyond its symbolic role, the limited practical scope of this organization soon deteriorated, especially after the fall of fascism and the regime’s propagandistic shift (Aguilar, 1999; Martos Contreras, 2016; Wright, 2016, 2022).

The rest of the individuals with physical disabilities, whether civilians or soldiers from the Republican side, had limited opportunities for organization during the early Francoist years. Although various local initiatives were attempting to continue the previous trend of association, they were effectively absorbed into the early Order issued by the Ministry of Governance on November 8, 1940, which regulated Disabled Workers Associations. This legislation makes clear the government’s intention, which was not to promote unity among the affected individuals through these associations, but rather to centralize them for effective control. Additionally, the regulation served to protect the ONCE’s exclusive economic project:

According to the legal principles guiding the new Spanish State, it is inappropriate for the Public Authority’s involvement with socially significant Associations to be limited to surveillance measures (...) The State’s responsibilities over charitable activities demand the proper organization of these Associations to prevent mutual interference or harm to other similarly important organizations (...) It seeks to prevent abuses or unjust inequalities among members under current freedoms and to avoid an excessive proliferation of associational spirit leading to overall weakness. (Order of November 8, 1940, p. 7746)

The initial local associations had limited impact, prompting early efforts to consolidate into a larger organization. Progress was slow and marked by conflicts between involved ministries. It was not until 1958 that the National Association for Invalid Civilians was finally established (Brégain, 2013; Martos Contreras, 2017). The belated formation of this association coincided with the emergence of other charitable and Christian institutions, such as “Auxilia y Fraternidad Católica de Enfermos”, which played a crucial role in transitioning towards a new associative model (Díaz Casanova, 1985; Vilà i Mancebo, 1994).

Regarding hearing disabilities, it is important to point out that shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War, in 1935, different associations managed to establish the National Association of Deaf and Mute Societies of Spain (Marroquín Cabiedas, 1986, p. 63). The Civil War interrupted the project, which would not be resumed for over a decade. During the forties, the different local associations tried, with little success, to continue their work independently (Bernal, 1994). The association finally resumed its activities in 1949, with the celebration of the First National Congress of Deaf and Mute People. Juan Luis Marroquín, a prominent figure in the associative movement who had previously served as president in 1935, was once again appointed to lead the association. Unlike the ONCE, the association was established with a clear distance from the government, which was understandable given Marroquín’s involvement in the Republican faction. This divergence was exemplified by the federation’s attempts to maintain its headquarters in Barcelona, which were blocked by the regime, resulting in its relocation to Madrid (Rodríguez Márquez, 1994, p. 119).

In contrast to the other organizations discussed, this federation was not a quasi-state entity, but its complete dependence on the government was evident. However, it did not attain the same privileges as ONCE. Instead, it was granted an annual lottery from the mid-1950s onwards (BOE, November 23, 1955, p. 7057). Regarding its objectives, it shared the common goal of promoting employment with other institutions, but its practical achievements were limited. Overall, during its initial years, the federation had minimal impact,

yet it should be recognized for its international outreach and the revival of the collective's sports activities (Gascón Risco, 2004).

Regarding intellectual diversity, there were no organized initiatives during these initial decades. It was not until the late 1950s, with the growing concern for intellectual disability, that the first Spanish Federations of Societies for the Protection of the Subnormal began to take shape. These federations would later emerge as key drivers of modernization efforts during the latter years of Franco's regime (Ferrer, 2003; Martos Contreras, 2014; del Cura González & Martínez Pérez, 2016).

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## 5. Conclusions

The Spanish Civil War and the end of the Republic decisively marked the history of disability in Spain. Although the situation of affected individuals did not directly get worse due to the change of government, since the undeniable reality for the majority was poverty and marginalization, stagnation, and even regression, in the long road towards inclusion is evident. This reality was especially reflected in the efforts of associations, which had to adapt to the state's strategy of control and verticality, hindering the direct involvement of affected individuals in addressing their own needs. Although state intervention facilitated the establishment of organizations like ONCE, which, despite accentuating differences, brought about undeniable improvements in the living conditions of its members over time, similar successes were not replicated elsewhere during the early Franco era. Even initiatives like the recognition of benefits for the "Mutilated Knights" failed to have a significant impact on the broader population, and did not represent progress in the conception of disability.

The State's disregard for disability issues was notably reflected in the educational sector, where the operation of the so-called national schools and oversight by the board was put on hold for over a decade. Indeed, in the context of post-war poverty and devastation, addressing the educational needs of children with disabilities was not considered a top priority. Nonetheless, the 1945 Education Law included considerations for this sector in its principles, recognizing the changing times and encouraging the establishment of special education schools, although relegating responsibility to the private sector.

During the economic crisis, adults with disabilities, mainly physical ones, drew greater interest. The new "homeland" sought a labor force committed to participating in reconstruction efforts. Rehabilitation of affected individuals emerged as a political strategy embraced by numerous post-war nations, especially those rolling out social security systems. During the early Francoist era, influenced by Falangism, social security development became a focal point of propaganda efforts to pacify labor discourse and solidify mass allegiance. In the development of this social security, we witnessed progress in the protection of people with disabilities, although its value should be understood more at a normative level than at a practical level.

Regarding the consolidation of the medical rehabilitation model, we observe the emergence of specific institutions. However, these were characterized by disorganization and inefficiency in practice, despite efforts by professionals of the era to modernize them. The regime's administrative shortcomings, coupled with a focus on propaganda and a charitable approach typical of a state lacking in rights, defined the essence of social policies that fell far short of the expectations promoted by the government. In all cases, the least

benefited area was the extensive rural Spain, isolated and disconnected, where inhabitants with disabilities would remain oblivious to even the slightest improvements, even in the subsequent decades. In addition, women with disabilities faced significant delays in benefiting from advancements primarily designed for men.

Regarding the understanding of disability, there was a clear embrace of the medical theory advocating for the “normalization” of individuals and their integration into the workforce, but as a means to alleviate their perceived “burden”. This adoption served as an empowering factor for a segment of the community, moving away from traditional charitable perspectives and normalizing discourse around employment as a matter of “social justice” for people with disabilities. Despite the Franco regime’s failure to fully implement these ideals in practice, acknowledging the importance of this adoption is crucial for understanding the evolving advocacy discourse among affected individuals.

In any case, the regulations of early Francoism also reflected the clear continuity of more archaic concepts, both in the paternalistic and charitable aspects, as well as in the “demonizing” view that essentially associated individuals with intellectual disabilities with violence and public disorder. This assimilation had a clear continuation in most religious charitable institutions, which had traditionally been the primary caregivers for marginalized minorities and now saw their involvement reinforced by the dictatorship’s delegation. However, it is worth noting that in later decades, some of these private institutions, driven by associated families, would advocate for modernization and professionalization, becoming leaders in assistance and pedagogical renewal.

Therefore, as we have sought to demonstrate in this condensed overview, the establishment of the Franco dictatorship left a distinct mark on the field of disability. Broadly speaking, it led to a state of stagnation, though delving into its exceptions and nuances is essential for understanding the complex trajectory of the rights of those affected. The new perception of disability merged with traditional views, fitting theoretically within the tenets of the New State. This approach became ingrained in Francoist policies and society, setting the stage for significant modernization in the 1960s and 1970s, with its impact lingering to the present day.

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