

Communicating about Disability: The Role of the Media in the Process of Integration

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Conclusion

This thesis focuses on the relationships between disability and communication from different points of view

We attempted to analyse how the categories of disability enters into public discourse through the media, as the new technologies can amplify,- or restrict, and even exclude – the integration options of disabled people. This implies that the imminent realisation of a cultural achievement such as the Paralympic games, may change the existing information on these themes.

Although there are verified improvements on the past, it is also clear that little is being spoken about disability still, and at times badly.

As confirmed by the adherents of the world of communication, too often the media has the need for strong headlines, or of celebrities to confront these themes. This is due to the media being blocked between problems of reaching audiences and models of representation full of stereotypes which are difficult to get rid of.

As we write, the newspapers write yet again about “false invalids” in different Italian regions and then allow a bit of indignation to be expressed, because of sensationalist influence, often superficial, that does not get to the core of the matter.

No one knows ever what has happened to the doctors who have signed such bogus certificates, and the trouble this causes disabled people to get the right economic recognition necessary for their existence.

The responsibility for this type of communication rests also in the hands of disabled people themselves and the associations representing them. The communication on disability comes mainly from public sector institutions, semi-public or from private not-for-profit organisations, wishing to improve the quality of life of disabled people. However, often they too accept compromises in order to get mass media attention and that of the public, as a means to get financial help necessary for their existence.

For example, the participation of disabled people in television marathons to get funded form Telethon, in which often the existence of these individuals is subordinated to the show.

To enable disabled people to be represented as they are, it is necessary to hear their views about their problems and difficulties, and especially to learn about their hopes and aspirations for the future, without falling into despair or triumphalism.

People – such as Alex Zanardi – can pass the message that disability is not necessarily a limit one cannot live with, and that a variety of aids can help in enabling to develop one’s full capacity.

The problem is that not all people can afford these opportunities, and in some cases the disabled people themselves do not know about existing services and the rights they have. For example, ISTAT 2004 shows the figures of social integration in which 20% of Italian disabled people experience access difficulties in their homes, due to architectural barriers, have not asked for the state contribution to which they are entitled for the elimination of these barriers.

It needs to be stated that at times disabled people try to profit from their privileges, such as highlighted in cases in which people have been fined for transporting other people with disabilities in their cars.

The first communication should be about services, rights, duties related to being treated as equals.

The role of the internet is central for the delivery of key information, which should be about health, prevention, and anything that can be done to ensure that the number of disabled people does not grow annually.

The need to talk about this issue continues to be paramount.

This text was translated by Prof. Shula Ramon, January 2016.

You are invited to read the whole thesis which is attached here in Italian, or you can use the available translation from Italian to English in most computers.

Stefania is an administrator in the public administration of Asti, who is also in a wheelchair due to a physical disability.

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