Logos[1] on disability: itinerary of an idea[2].

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1 Prologue

As a researcher in the University of Reggio Calabria, I find that it would be desirable to make such university an Athenaeum able to, more than others in Italy, welcome people with disabilities. I say this on the basis of the personal knowledge and experience I have gained on the topic, which I believe could be successfully invested for the benefit of the community.

I have a dream: to make my disability an engine for development, and an opportunity of improvement for the whole Athenaeum and the community[3]. It can be a resource rather then impairment. I wish, in other words, my disability to be the chance for other people to grow and improve themselves so that, this can be a real resource for the achievement of the common good.

How does such a wish deal with scientific knowledge and improvement? The first answer may be the following: from a certain point of view, science is to be useful to people and social development, so that, if the former is missing (most likely) the second will be missing as well. As a consequence, as in the present society a progress about disability issues is doubtless needed, thus, using a kind of syllogism, an academic though on the topic is needed as well.

A true need for scientific research arises from the lack of study and discussion about disability, particularly with reference to the following aspects: (i) the need for social inclusion of people with disabilities (I am

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[1]   The word "logos", borrowed from the philosophical register, is here used due its polisense meaning: it should be intended not merely as speech, discussion but, more properly, as line of reasoning or thought.

[2]   A brief version of this paper was initially written after the workshop in the context of the Cooperation Days 2004-2005, "The Italian cooperation to development and the role of universities: initiatives of the University "Mediterranea" for cooperation and development" held in the University "Mediterranea" of Reggio Calabria on 23rd November 2004. It basically contains personal reflections on what disability is, and what the contribution of the academic world might be in order to solve the issues that such matter raises.

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[3]   In my home town in Italy, Reggio Calabria, accessibility to environment and the buildings by people with disability is in facts obstructed because of bad design and attitudes. Almost all shops in town are inaccessible for witchery users; even public and institutional buildings are not accessible: it often depends on a design issue but, when this is not the case, the facilities provided to grant access are likely not to work because of the lack of experience by the staff in using them or lack of maintenance.

thinking about inclusion within university as well[4]) should be researched more, and (ii) it would be more appropriate to study disability from a scientific point of view *other than* the medical approach[5], for example from a social point of view[6].

2 Making the "*Logos*" on disability more scientific

Given that disability is a general condition, which is likely to be experienced by most of people at least when they reach and old age, it is now time to look at this human condition with a more scientific rigour. In particular, a strong change of perspective is needed: to study disability in depth would even mean to increase consciousness about disability issues and promote critical awareness on them.

This is necessary in order to make a society on a human scale (for everyone, whether disabled or not) become effective. The purpose of such project is to aim general awareness on what disability related rights are, and develop a higher consciousness on civil rights and citizenship.

It seems to be necessary to learn how to speak about disability, and how to do it in a proper manner. All universities should do this primarily, and Università Mediterranea of Reggio Calabria might have a leading position in this, promoting a new approach to the phenomenon.

Looking at disability under a merely pathological aspect, even appears still to be very common[7]; but, indeed, there's much more, beyond medical issues[8], that has to be considered.

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[4]   See the guide to accessibility services in Higher Education Institutions across Europe; for some information about accessibility of universities please visit web site http://www.heagnet.org,. According to the independent life institute

(http://www.independentliving.org/studyworkabroad/) there are only 9 universities which in Italy provide specific information for disabled students.

[5]   A medical definition of who is to be considered a "handicapped person" is given by article 4 of law No. 104/1992. This medical based definition is still the base of the legislation on the subject

[6]   Such an approach seems to be used in the course on "human rights and disability" held at the University of Padova (see http://www.centrodirittiumani.unipd.it/a_formazione/corsivv/agg_0506.asp?menu=formazione   and http://superando.eosservice.com/content/view/685/112/).

[7]   In a research on the topic of disability carried out by the City Council of Reggio Calabria, it can be seen that disability is still understood as a medical condition: the report takes in great account medical issues and the rehabilitation aspects, although the research was supposed to focus on the phenomenon on disability in general and the situation enjoyed by disabled people, rather than on medical aspects only.

[8]   A measure of direct involvement of the disabled in normal daily activities can be found by examining the use of public services such as the post office, local health authorities, banks and so on (ISTAT 1999). Only 25.8% of disabled persons of 14 years and over were served over a 12 month period in a registry office for documents, certificates etc (43.4% non disabled). In the Post Office, 53.7% against 72.4%, and in the bank, 37.8% against 62.3%. Not surprisingly, at local health authorities the situation is reversed: 50.9% against 41.0%. Obviously, for reason of certification or due to the need for more frequent monitoring, the disabled person enters more frequently and willingly his or her local health authority.

Social participation can also be evaluated by the level of knowledge of current affairs of the society in which one lives. Disabled persons appear to be less informed than their peers. This tendency increases with age, perhaps due to the lower scholastic level reached by older disabled persons. The difference, in fact is from 13.3% in favour of the non disabled in the age group 6-44, to 17.1% for 65 yrs and above. The difference is even greater for those who listen to the radio: 43.7% of disabled persons against 65.8%, for persons 18 yrs and above.

Sporting activity is also important for social integration. Between 1989 and 1997, the number of members of the Italian Disabled Sports Federation increased by 20.4%. (Coni-FISD-Censis, 1989-97).

Analysis of social participation allows recognition of undressed needs and implementation of strategies which favour a wider range of benefits and services. (From http://www.disabilitaincifre.it/prehome/e_link_vitasociale.asp).

There are for instance those aspects which may be defined, by contrast with the former, "physiological". By using this term I refer to the everyday experienced disability which has indeed nothing to do with medical matters. Disability beyond the impairment has to be brought out.

3 From help as a favour to the right for inclusion and independent life

Setting out a discussion on disability, and on the rights related with it, means to ascribe a precise content and meaning to a number of provisions of law concerning (not only) human rights. Thus the meaning ascribed to provisions has to be concrete and accurate, so that the promotion of the human person can be fully accomplished (pursuant to article 2 of the Italian Constitution[9]) and it shall not remain an empty declaration of a principle.

It means as well to abandon the logic of charity and compassion for the poor disabled, preferring instead the most opportune logic of civil rights enjoyment and enforcement. It would result in a cultural up-grade to abandon the logic under which acknowledgement of right equals to lavishing favours. It is instead appropriate to accept the existence of a number of rights in force concerning disability. It is important not to see those rights as privileges, or even as an abuse of power over non-disabled citizens. Such a cultural shifting, even if concerning disability only, has to be deemed as having general validity. I suggest that we should give up the former lavishing attitude in favour of a *lawful* attitude, which clearly is fundamental for the cultural *humus* needed for any organised collective to develop.

From this point of view, making disabled people's rights clear, *i.e.* clearly point out what each right means, those rights, may become the occasion - the benchmark - to apply principles which, once understood and made clear, maintain validity for any aspect of social life. Such principles are necessary in order for our society to reach a development based on a human scale, in other words a development aimed to respect everyone's needs as well as the needs of the whole community.

4 Laboratory for a method

Developing a method of cooperation, in accordance with which to share a number of skills, an to make a network to solve a specific problem, means - if the bet is won - to have reached a methodology, which will be used to work together with respect for the neighbour in a way which will be easily and successfully imported in many other sectors.

Thus, to be aware of disabled persons' needs becomes an opportunity to try new methods of problem solving. The point is to promote a different attitude of thinking at the society and the relationships among citizens. So that, even starting from studying disability issues, if this "laboratory" works well, eventually we will have obtained a different approach: networking, useful for the whole community.

5 Spread effects

Such approach promotes a positive thinking, which would certainly have favourable effects if applied on a large scale. The goal is to create new thoughts to achieve a better community suitable for all its members. Thinking about disability makes it clear that, in order to achieve results, we need to plan things in advance: even this good practice, once implemented in this limited field, can be easily exported in other policy-making sectors.

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[9]   See below for a discussion over article 2 of the Italian Constitution and related provisions.

6 Virtuous example

Speaking as a member of the University of Reggio Calabria (and therefore of the community of the town of Reggio Calabria), I believe that it would be excellent for my home region, Calabria, to learn from the example given by the University of Reggio Calabria that our future and our way of approaching problems can be changed into a very positive one. Even if people from Calabria are often seen as unable to change their own destiny, Calabria may become the testing laboratory for a method. And if such methodology is acknowledged as valid elsewhere, it might be exported to other Countries. If the University "Mediterranea" develops such method in the field of integration and cooperation to development, then it would benefit from its excellence. Co-development, cultural renovation, pole of attraction for a lot of activities all linked to the aim of enhancing the quality of our lives.

7 International mobility

The idea that pushed my work of research is that integration (and valorisation) of the human resources who are inside the Athenaeum is a value not only for every single student or researcher, but also for the whole University "Mediterranea". Such University needs to find its peculiar attitude, in order to gain a specific profile among Italian background. It is now broadly considered as strongly advisable for universities to favour the exchange of experiences and knowledge among different countries in the world. In addition to the international approach, therefore, I believe that even better results might be achieved if the University "Mediterranea" opens its doors to an international perspective in relation to disability, and accepts to exchange values and researches on disability studies. Promoting mobility of disabled researchers among universities may become the main task for the University "Mediterranea".

The University of Leeds, and its Centre for Disability Studies, has a long-term experience on such approach, and it should be looked at as an example by other universities in the world. The If the University "Mediterranea", as well as any other university in the world, becomes able to valorise its own students and researchers with disabilities, then each of those universities may become a centre of excellence. Appreciating the human being means to consider every person the centre of interest of every action, and this makes the civil society develop.

8 Italian law and possible suggestions

Disability is often approached in a disjointed way[10]. Therefore the whole picture is likely to be missed. It is clear, for instance, that inclusion at work is very important (hence why we have several provisions about employment of disabled workers[11]), but what is often forgotten is that achieving such a result should be the end of a lifelong complete inclusive process. A stronger effort is needed to identify which steps are necessary in order to achieve social inclusion of the so called weak subjects.

It must be said that, if we want to make it possible for everybody to have an independent experience in everyday life, which should be our goal according to Legislator's declared intentions, then it should be pointed out the fact that for the disabled with physical impairments there is mainly a problem that must be challenged: it is the impossibility to set up the efficient and natural relationship with the environment. This issue involves

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[10]   Below, a list of the most important provisions concerning different aspects of the phenomenon is provided.

[11]   It has been noted that: In spite of the notable legislation relating to improvement in social integration of disabled persons, those employed are estimated at less than 150,000, or 21% of those of working age. For those with more than one disability the number falls to 12%. This compares with 54.6% employment of their non-disabled contemporaries. From 15-44 years, 32% of disabled men are employed, compared with almost 70% of non-disabled men. Evident once more is the increased disadvantage of disabled women, with a percentage of employment even lower than that of disabled men and lower than their non disabled contemporaries   (18.3%   in   the   15-44   age   group   compared   with   45.6%)   (from http://www.disabilitaincifre.it/prehome/e_link_lavoroeoccupazione.asp).

access matters but it goes even beyond pure access in itself: it is the whole anthropological experience that is involved.

I think it is appropriate to give an overview of what Italian law provides for. As I have already said, many provisions were issued in Italy about different aspects of disability. Here follows a list of the most important. As regards design and Architecture, see law No. 13/1989 on demolition of architectural obstacles in private buildings, issue which is now entirely regulated by articles 10-15 of the Consolidated Building Act (Decree of the President of the Republic No. 380/01) and linked provisions.

Law No. 104 /1992 (frame-law on rights of handicapped persons) gives the official definition of "handicapped person", as it (i) sets out what the general rights for disabled persons are, based on medical statements, used in the whole further legislation; and (ii) concerns: medical issues, rehabilitation, education, permits given to parents, competitions undertook by disabled applicants, work, sort, transport, mobility, design, civil rights, housing, taxes and general policy.

As regards rights in employment and at work, law No. 68/2000 on right of disabled people to work, and legislative decree 216/2003, implementing 2000/78/CE directive, provide for equal treatment and aim to improve the employment of disabled workers.

Law No. 4/2004 issues ITC and new technology aspects: it regards access of disabled to computer systems; in the same year law No. 6/2004 on support administration was issued.

The most recent provision is law No. 67 of 1 March 2006, which sets out provisions for judicial protection of persons with disabilities, who are victims of discrimination (and which is published on the Italian Official Journal No. 54 of 6 March 2006).

Today, the most highly regarded and used solution is provided by law No. 6/2004: it makes possible to provide disabled people with a representative, entitled to carry out their affairs on their behalf. It is quite obvious that, if the problem concerns a man/environment relationship, it cannot be properly solved by giving the person an attorney or a representative.

My everyday life would not change in better if there was someone going to carry out things on my behalf: a real change would happen, on the contrary, if I in person could enjoy the environment and carry out activities by myself. The solution of a representative risks to be a false solution, or even to make the actual situation worse, as it could reinforce the vision of people with disability as constant care needers.

Indeed autonomy, independence and equal access are definitely needed both for disabled and non disabled[12]. We can (and we have to) tend to inclusion: it cannot be forgotten that, *It is duty of the Republic to remove those obstacles [...] which, limiting in fact the freedom end equality among citizens, hinder the full development of any human person* (Italian Constitution, article 3)[13].

9 Steps for the inclusion

I have already mentioned the environment/human being relationship as the occasion in which differences between disabled and non disabled people come out and therefore they become a handicap. It is here,
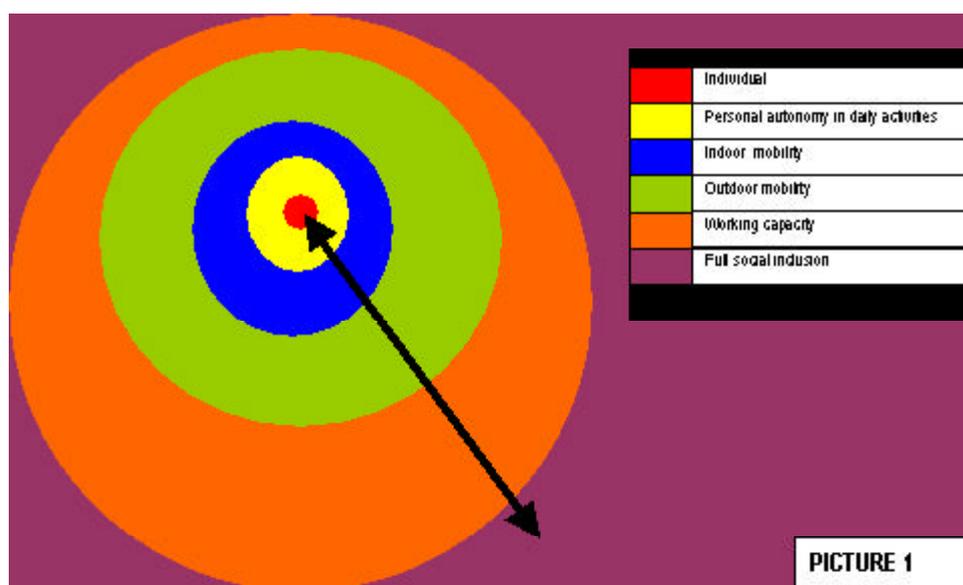
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[12]   Information technology really helps dealing with daily functions in full autonomy. As an example, taxes may be paid through information systems, as well as subscription fees, other charges, expenses, loans, frequent payments, apartment rental or property taxes. Please note that this allows abandon the logic of "special solutions for the handicapped". Interposition of an electronic *medium* allows the followings: (a) bypass mobility matters; (b) make the communication channel fit the actual needs of the person concerned (see the interesting *Ausili informatici per le disabilità visive: la firma digitale come strumento di tutela,* by G. ROGNETTA, intervention at the convention "L'integrazione sociale dei giovani non vedenti", Great Hall of the Accademia di Belle Arti of Reggio Calabria, 20 January 2001); and (c) "normalize", at a *cultural* level, disabled people, avoiding to push them to follow a "special" path or procedure.

[13]   Translation of all the articles of the Italian Constitution used in this paper is by the Author, and is non-official.

having the possibility (despite limitations coming from mobility or sensorial impairments) of a physiological relationship with what is outside the person, that the autonomy in everyday life is in actual fact realised or lost forever.

In other words, the achievement of full social inclusion (this is true for everyone, disabled or not) is the result of a growing anthropological process of evolution. The human being has its very first relationship with himself and its own physicalness; the person then learns how to self manage, and subsequently the indoor mobility is learned, which happens in a safe environment (*i.e.* home). Then, while growing up, the person discovers the persons other-than-himself. The person becomes then able to move outdoor (this is in both anthropological and physical sense). Only at a certain stage of this process the individual is able to live independently and can be said socially included (having an economic independence as well).

Well, this anthropological process (see picture 1), is in itself worthy of attention. It is much more delicate if the person concerned has impairment (even only a physical one). In fact, as is immediately clear, in this case each of the phases previously considered (which normally follow one another physiologically), could be dangerous risking to compromise the achievement of full autonomy. That's because I said that the problem, if we are in presence of a physically impaired individual, lays in particular in the relationship human being-environment.

Individual	(red)
Personal autonomy in daily activities	(yellow)
Indoor mobility	(blue)
Outdoor mobility	(green)
Working capacity	(orange)
Full social inclusion	

PICTURE 1

The growing and developing process of any human being is important to enjoy a normal education, this is imperative for people with disabilities, given that social inclusion can only be achieved if an inclusive educational experience has been enjoyed by the individual with impairments: otherwise this person will be an outsider, marginalised and left out, cultural disability being added to physical one. This would be a further obstacle to the goal of getting equal inclusion within the social context.

Employment issues (as decisive factor to the achievement of independent life of the individual) cannot be avoided as well: in order to have a person who is actually included within the society, this individual has to have a job and feel useful for the society.

If the goal is to achieve satisfaction and personal realisation of the person with disability, there's no doubt that such a satisfaction could not be achieved unless using the skills which everyone has in order to be with its own role in the community without being too much dependent from the community itself.

It is crucial that a person with disability has the chance to reach a self-sufficient working position. Thanks to such different reasoning on disability, the perspective of pure welfarism should be abandoned with the aim of making this individual equal to other citizens and to cut the bond of subalternity and dependence from the lavish of the world.

In other words, if we want the person to be included within the social context it is mandatory that such individual grows up participating to the development of the community itself, the disabled individual being - as much as possible - not merely assisted and taken care of, but an active subject able to have its own productive position (not only in an economic sense) within the given group. Only in this way real social inclusion and integration will be achieved.

Thus, the positive actions fitted to promote the recovery of autonomy in daily activities by physically impaired people must tend to restore, where possible, the physiological relation, which risks to be compromised because of the impairment.

Appropriate legal measures provided for by the law, therefore, should tend to simply include the individual in the social context. Never, in principle, preferring solutions based upon a representative or delegate as, it is obvious, delegating someone to execute practical undertakings on behalf of another individual means, in a sense, to withdraw the disabled to the border of the social context. Then, it should be clear that what we need are positive actions to remove obstacles to real inclusion.

10 A common interest

The question may arise, on why the whole society should concern about the needs of people with disabilities. Question may be, could this issue be considered as a very private concern, so that State and community should not be involved in it?

To understand why the community should support the inclusion of each member, it is important to look at Italian constitution. Article 2 provides for a fundamental principle, and can be looked at as the "compass" for the inclusive society. Article 2, often rewarded only in the part trough which inviolable human rights as an individual and as a social group are protected, states also that *"the Republic recognises and grants the inviolable human rights [...] and requires the fulfilment of the imperative duty of [...] social solidarity".*

Therefore, social solidarity is an imperative duty under Italian law, not merely a human attitude justifiable under religious or ethical believes. This principle must pervade the whole legal system, which has to prevent marginalisation and exclusion. Furthermore, under article 3 of Italian Constitution the State, on the contrary, is (or *should* be) dedicated to social inclusion.

There are many supports in this direction, coming from international conventions among which at least the followings should be remembered: the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms signed in Rome in 1950, the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities[14], the European Social Charter[15], the Treaty of Amsterdam (which has led to the Framework Equal Treatment Directive 2000 which expressly prevents people from being discriminated against on the ground of their disability in the area of employment and occupation)[16] and the Convention signed in The

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[14]   United Nations Resolution No. 48/96.

[15]   Signed in Strasbourg in 1996.

[16]   Here follows the text added by the treaty of Amsterdam: "*Without prejudice to the other provisions of this Treaty and within the limits of the powers conferred by it upon the Community, the Council, acting unanimously on a proposal from the Commission*

Hague on 13 January 2000 on the International Protection of Adults.

Article II-86 of the recently drafted European Constitution would be worth of a deeper analysis (which unfortunately cannot be done within this paper), as in its title it addresses exactly to the social inclusion of disabled people[17].

Furthermore, there is an increasing effort to adopt a new UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: in 2001 there was a proposal from Mexico to establish *Ad Hoc* Committee to consider dedicated convention on rights of persons with disabilities[18]. While the first meeting took place in July – August 2002, works are still in progress and a working session (the eighth) of the committee is going to be held from 14th to 25th August 2006. considering that "now widely accepted that the human rights of persons with disabilities must be protected and promoted through general as well as specially designed, laws policies and programs"[19] the aims of the new convention are a) to extend particular protection to vulnerable groups, b) to articulate single set of binding norms and rules to protect and promote rights, c) to establish monitoring and reporting mechanisms[20].

In order to achieve an inclusive society, a crucial role is played by the social legislation[21] which aims to avoid marginalisation of citizens. It is appropriate to point out that legislation should not be the occasion for welfarism. On the contrary, the aforementioned solidarity principle needs to be re-read in a very promotional way, so to attribute equal dignity to disabled people, whereas equal dignity means equal rights and same duties as well[22].

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and after consulting the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation".

[17]   Here follows the text of *article II-86* (*Integration of persons with disabilities*): "*The Union recognises and respects the right of persons with disabilities to benefit from measures designed to ensure their independence, social and occupational integration and participation in the life of the community*".

[18] See the presentation *Development Directions: Current Challenges and Lessons from the South Development Studies Centre, Kimmage Where is Disability on the Development Agenda? Towards a U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* delivered by Dr. Donal McAnaney, National Secretary, *Rehabilitation International – Ireland* on 20 January, 2005 available on http://sys.connectit.ie/download.aspx?guid=fbcfe56e-d27c-40a7-bed0-8b5f33e65a43

[19] According to McAnaney's presentation this is the statement of the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

[20] For more detailed information on the initiative go to http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/index.html

[21]   It is crucial, for the social promotion of the persons having a disability, to knock down the costs. Nowadays, to be a, so to speak, "integrated disabled" has a high cost. In terms of money, culture, and experience: in order to achieve inclusion also some luck is needed. This worries and saddens, most of all if considering that Italian law expressly provides for an obligation to remove existential disparities, and furthermore given that the times are now mature for a different view, based on an inclusive and not discriminating culture.

Appreciable is the change of perspective recorded (in the architectonic field) in the so called "*design for all* philosophy": no more constructions, alternative routes, and various remedies strictly "designed for the disabled". Instead, simple projects, comfortable and functional design for everyone, independently on their condition.

Such approach has shown that it is more convenient to take weaker categories into account from the beginning, and it carries out an intuition which may be treasured in the social and legal fields as well. If we had to express it in chemical terms we would say that, speed of the reaction depends on the slower stage; fully including disabled people in the society comes to be useful to the society itself, which will fit the needs of any person and result to be just better.

[22]   On the other hand, in similar cases it is probably not possible to design an existential situation better that the one provided through the support administration under Italian law, given that it is impracticable to follow that (inter)relational path that "physiologic" integration is based upon.

11 *Logos* on disability

As a conclusion, it may be affirmed that there are certain problems concerning disability that need to be pointed out.

First of all, it is clear that we are still experiencing a lack of knowledge on the phenomenon of disability in itself[23]. Most are not aware of the matters related to access, unless they come into contact with a person having a visible impairment.

It is not yet clear that access is a general concern, which all people are related to. It is not clear that the condition which currently goes under the name "disability" is the result of the impossibility of a standard relationship with the world. This impossibility comes out from an impairment that can either be temporary or not. It be noted that the condition of disabled is actually quite common. Just think, for example, to the elderly.

The reason for such lack of clarity probably lies in that the approach to disability is often fragmented, so that only a particular aspect related with that specific human condition has been regarded. This is likely to cause misunderstandings, so that a number of wrong attitudes and feelings about disabilities can be experienced day by day. This problem could be overcome through a proper education.

Secondarily, such disjointed approach to disability gives bad solutions. All the problems experienced by disabled people are strictly related one to the other, so that it is almost impossible to achieve inclusion, as it is the result of several factors which should be considered together.

Unfortunately, this approach meant an overestimation of the medical side of disability. Real inclusion goes far beyond mere medical issues, and the goal of inclusion cannot be achieved unless a number of different perspectives and skills are used jointly to challenge exclusion and marginalisation.

As a consequence, with reference to disability issues a holistic approach seems to be the best. Adopting this different approach more results can be achieved; the contribution of diverse people, providing different experiences and skills, is simply more useful.

Academia can help improving studies within this field, discarding the exclusive medical approach. This should be done by promoting cooperation and exchange of knowledge among different fields, such as design, law, medical science, engineering, business, sociology, all of which are involved, for different reasons and from different perspective angles, within the issue of social inclusion or exclusion. So it appears to be essential that academic institutions are involved in this process.

12 An overview of some primary issues

The most common problems faced by people with disability can be summarized as follows.

A. Access: this is the most concrete display of importance of the relationship between the environment and the individual. This relationship can start properly only if equal access is granted to disabled and non disabled people. We must be aware that litter changes in build-environment can make independent life possible or absolutely impossible in case of an impairment (things like lack of toilet facilities or heavy doors can simply obstruct an individual with physical impairment by having an independent life during the day putting his/her dignity at risk).

B. Lack of education: often disabled people cannot enjoy a good level education maybe because, for a matter of attitude (see below), they are not expected to be able to do it: this is a choice made by parents who are, most likely, unable to challenge with disability with a proper attitude yet and so can make mistakes even

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[23]   A good web site containing statistics on disability in Italy is www.disabilitaincifre.it/ e_index.asp.

pushed by relatives. This chain of events can seriously affect the possibility of real inclusion of the individual in the future; unfortunately, is to be noticed that the community is not able to give good advice in this cases.

It is true that Italy fully integrated its disabled pupils in mainstream schools[24]but, however, as a statistical survey demonstrates, "distribution of disabled and non disabled persons according to qualifications reveals a disconcerting fact: 32.6% of disabled persons have no formal qualifications, compared with 5.2% of non disabled persons. For those with more than one type of disability the figure increases to 40%. Again, disabled women are the most disadvantaged with 36.2% without qualifications against 25.7% of their male peers. The difference between disabled and non disabled persons is even more evident in the 15-44 age group: 14% disabled persons without qualifications against 1% non disabled.

Among those with a higher diploma or a degree, there is a ratio of 1:2 (with respect to total numbers of disabled and non disabled persons) between disabled and non disabled persons among 45-64 year olds, while among 15-44 year olds the ratio decreases"[25].

C. Wrong attitudes: facing wrong attitudes is the second most important challenge for disabled citizens after access[26]. The main attitude which needs to be erased from the current society is probably (as seen before) the fact that often non disabled people believe people with impairments to be constant care needers not able, in principle, to make decisions by themselves. Another problem is that most people believe disability to be a rare this causes general misunderstanding about real needs related with disability. Formerly we considered the impact that attitude of parents and relatives can have on the education of the person in question. Although to make a complete list of bad attitudes to be removed is impossible, it can be certainly affirmed that attitudes must change to achieve inclusion.

D. Lack of information: how does this impact on a person with disabilities? There is an issue related with disability that is often unseen unless a kind of disability is experienced: disabled customers, individuals, users, people, often need more information than ordinary people (for instance room size, toilet facilities, access related information, etc). Some of those information are not provided or not easily findable. On the other hand, ordinary information could be useless, because they are not accessible due of impairment. In both these cases, disabled people as non disabled have wasted their time. This time issue has a massive impact on everyday life of people with disabilities, and should be considered as a factor of exclusion as well. Again better attitude and better design could aid inclusion rather than exclusion.

E. Financial aspects.   There are also financial aspects related to the achievement of inclusion by disabled people. Being an "included disabled" means, *coeteris paribus*, to spend much more money than ordinary people. Materials needed to disabled people, in terms of sticks, tires, tubes for a wheelchair, etc. have an enormous additional cost (often unjustifiable). Furthermore, due to special needs related to accommodation, the solution (not chosen, but) needed in order to be equal to anyone else is granted only with a high-level (and high-cost) housing solutions. It is obvious that in such cases there is no actual choice: simply the most expensive solution is the only one suitable for access needs. This strongly affects daily life of the user so that, only upon condition that access and usability of the environment are a granted, then independent life is possible. Otherwise, it is not.

F. Narrowness of options: from the previous point comes that users with disabilities have fewer alternatives then ordinary ones, unless they have none at all. Often these issue must be added to the former mentioned of information.

G. Need to plan things in advance.   A last aspect should be mentioned: people with disability always need to plan things in advance which, although within the policymaking process should be seen as a good

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[24]   According to the Ministry of Public Education there are around 130,000 disabled pupils having an active school life with additional assistance from specially trained teachers.

[25]   The quoted text and datas come from http://www.disabilitaincifre.it/prehome/e_link_istruzione.asp.

[26]   Colin Barnes, Workshop on Reasonable Access, Malta, 16-18 May 2006.

practice, in everyday life of a single individual person is definitely a weakness. Because more time than ordinary people is needed to achieve same result, and then, in case of failure, narrowness of alternatives is to be faced. Planning things in advance needs a whole picture of what is going to be done, when, where, by whom and how. Again, all this process requires a lot of time so that time strikes back as a relevant and potential impairing issue considering the phenomenon of disability.   More, there's almost no tolerance for contingences. All this, combined with the fact that a lack of information is likely to be faced, can be devasting and really obstructing of a normal level of quality of life.

13 Conclusion

All of the above listed problems are related one to another, so that it is not possible to separate them precisely nor is desirable to tackle them singly, as it would probably be a resultless effort. A holistic approach, considering the whole picture of the disability as a complex matter as it is, is more likely to be successful in achieving social inclusion and disability related problem solving in order to make independent life possible.

Doubtless, it is necessary that a new culture about disability is created: it has to be different. First of all, there must be more awareness of the real issues concerning the phenomenon which goes under the name of disability.

To increase culture and knowledge about disability is needed on both the theoretical and practical sides. As regards the practical side, this growth can help to find out solutions to concrete problems of everyday life (with the useful and necessary support provided by a high-level scientific thought oriented to serve the community).

As regards the theoretical side, and academic institution dedicated to the field can spread the culture of true inclusion and equal dignity. It is beyond doubt that the academic contribution for a better society can (and has to) reach even very practical and concrete aspects of the life.

It must be said that training about inclusion in the society, even if with reference to disability issues at the beginning, would result to be more useful in general, considering the likely development of current society.

To deal with disability as research field means to try to go beyond practical outcomes, and it can lay the basis for an excellence centre that could be reason of pride for the University of Reggio Calabria. Disability issues are a bet on future. More, this excellence centre on inclusive rights for people with disabilities could be praiseworthy in Italy and could push other institutions to follow our example.

Beyond this, to increase the cultural feeling about inclusion, whether or not related to disability, is a challenge that can not be missed, expressly in Italy where soon new issues with a wide number of immigrants will be faced and new cultural challenges will require society to be prepared for cultural mediation.