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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DISABILITY AND WORK: A META-ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE CRITICAL DISABILITY STUDIES

THE CRITICAL DISABILITIES STUDY PERSPECTIVE

To contemplate disability is to consider a politicised phenomenon framed by precarity, crisis and uncertainty. Of course, political upheaval, peripheral community participation and economic uncertainty have been an ever-present experience for the most marginalised members of society. Also, we know that many of the world's poorest are concentrated in Global South. Of the one billion disabled people across the globe, most live in the majority world[1]. To contemplate disability is to scrutinise inequality. Disabled people's organisations posit a simple but powerful idea: disability is a phenomenon associated with the discrimination of people with sensory, physical and cognitive impairments[2]. Disability is not a flaw, an individual tragedy nor a whispered recognition of another's embodied failing or a shameful family truth. Disability is a matter of public discourse and international disgrace, exemplified in the continued exclusion of impaired children from mainstream schools[3], the

1 World Healt Organization & World Bank, *Word Report on Disability* 2011. World Health Organization. 2011 https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/44575.

2 M. Oliver, C. Barnes, *The New Politics of Disablement*, Palgrane Macmillan, Tavistock 2011.

3 R. Slee, T. Corcoran, *Disability Studies in Education – Building Platforms to Reclaim Disability and Recognise Disablement*, In Journal of Disability Studies in Education, March 24,

segregation of disabled adults from employment contexts and the denial of access to basic human rights as a consequence of reducing welfare and essential services. It could be argued that research and theory on disability have never been more needed. The politics of disability continue to reveal the very conditions of inequity that blight the human condition. This is not to say that disability embodies human failing. Rather, it is to acknowledge the precarious positions occupied by disabled people in societies blighted by disablism: the exclusion of people with sensory, physical and cognitive impairments[4]. But, of course, disability is so much more than this. Disability politics, arts, scholarship and culture offer new ways of conceiving and living life, existing with one another and recreating communities that include, augment and emphasise the qualities we all hold as human beings. Disability is both a signifier of inequity and the promise of something new and affirmative. It is these built in contradictory qualities that have given rise to the study of disability: which forms the subject and object of disability research and scholarship. Disability studies theory has re-sited disability as an object through which to understand the workings of capitalist society, a political category around which to mobilise, a rich phenomenon produced through social and cultural practices, an identity around which to politically organize the society, a cultural script marked by processes of normalisation and an ontological experience ever shaped by a host of external factors[5]. This work has emerged across diverse disciplines of the arts, humanities and the social sciences – influencing the human, medical and psychological sciences – and has given rise to terminology that has trickled down into everyday parlance associated with minority, social, cultural and right models of disability. Over the last decade we have witnessed the rise of Critical Disability Studies. This interdisciplinary field has built upon the early work of disability studies and

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4 C. Thomas, *Sociologies of Disability and Illnes*s, Red Globe Press, United Kingdom 2007.

5 M. Oliver, *Disability, empowerment and the inclusive society*, in Removing disabled barriers, edited by G. Zarb, Policy Studies Institute, London, 1995; L. Davis*, Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body*, Verso, New York, 2005; D. Mitchell, S. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2007.

produced a body of contemporary knowledge that boasts sophistication and nuance. This is not to say that disability studies theory before the critical turn was basic or simplistic. What Critical Disability Studies has done is to welcome in a smorgasbord of perspectives drawn from inside and outside of the disability experience. What unites Critical Disability Studies theorists is an agreement that disabled people are undervalued and discriminated and this cannot be changed simply through liberal or neo-liberal legislation and policy.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DISABILITY AND WORK: A META-ANALYSIS

The Lisbon Memorandum states that "For most people and for most of their, independence, self-esteem and well-being are associated with paid employment, which is therefore a crucial factor in their quality of life, and employability, that is to say, the ability to find and keep a job, is therefore an essential dimension of active citizenship, but it is also the key to achieving full employment, improving Europe's competitiveness and ensuring its prosperity in the "new economy"[6]. In light of this it looks interesting to explore how the scientific literature deals with the relationship between disability and work and how does scientific literature talk about disabled workers? These research questions are guided the following meta-analysis. With regard to the methodological approach, a qualitative analysis has been employed, using the Nvivo software[7] with the aim of exploring the corpus of scientifically selected materials in a systematic way. It was decided to carry out the analysis of the scientific literature moving in the perspective of the Grounded Theory[8] and the Critical Disability Studies. The analysis of the corpus of texts provided for an initial phase of open coding, analyzing the texts line by line with reference to the formula "all is data" at the base of a Grounded methodology. This coding phase led to the identification of the nodes, that is those themes, those concepts and those topics put in place by the

6 Commissione Europea, *Memorandum sull'Istruzione e la Formazione Permanente*, Bruxelles, 2000, p. 6, http://archivio.pubblica.istruzione.it/dg_postsecondaria/memo- randum.pdf

7 Richards L., *Using NVivo in Qualitative Research*, Sage, London 1999.

8 B. Glaser & A. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, Sociology Press, Mill Valley, CA 1967.

researcher, during the reading and exploration of the content of the research materials. In a subsequent step, the nodes were merged as some of them were superimposable and subsequently reduced further. In the focused coding phase, a series of macro-categories were identified through a process of re-labeling the first labels. For each macro-category the nodes that contribute to their definition have been identified. This work of classification and aggregation of the nodes for the formulation of the macro-categories was carried out with the help of the Nvivo software through the creation of Sets, intended as conceptual containers that allow to group those concepts that belong to the macro-categories enucleated through the focused coding. Below are summarized the identified macro-categories:

- The world of enteprises compared to disabled people
- The disabled worker at the center: from the condition of disability to the enhancement of skills
- The factors that influence the professional experience of people with disabilities
- The organizational characteristics
- The personal qualities of disabled workers
- The point of view of employers and colleagues.

With regard to the world of enteprises compared to disabled people, the relationship between the disability services dedicated to the job research and the human resources managers is important. The recruiting phase is critical because, given the initial availability that employers declare, there does not always seem to be as much clarity in the recruitment procedures. In particular, there are two factors that decisively influence this step: the stereotypes and prejudices of the organization; the prototype of the ideal candidate the stereotypes are linked to the condition of disability. In addition, companies tend to want to change the person to be selected, rather than offering accommodations to make the assessment. It is also important identifying the task to be assigned to the disabled worker through a job analysed[9]. It is necessary that employers shift attention from the condition of disability to the skill set of disabled people

9 F. Chan et al., *Demand side factors related to employment of people with disabilities: a survey of employers in the MidWest region of the United States* in Occup Rehabil 20: 412-419, 2010.

in terms of a specific training to improve the candidate's reading skills, so as to capture their potential and skills and the attempt to focus on individualized projects, which explore and enhance abilities and try to expand the potential of candidates is important [10].

Regarding the factors that influence the professional experience of people with disabilities, legislation and organizational characteristics influence the attributes of the disabled person, those of the observer and the nature of the work. These elements, in turn, determine both the psychologist's reactions to the observer (categorization, stereotypes, expectations and affective reactions) and his expectations regarding work (possibility of contact and expected results of interaction). The combination of these factors, then, affects the treatment of disabled people and their responses both in terms of behavior and affect states[11].

About the organizational characteristics it is interesting to observe that the managers of small and medium-sized enterprises are more concerned about the presence of disabled employees than those of large companies. The latter, in fact they are more accustomed to dealing with a diverse workforce; have a more solid organizational structure; they have more available tasks and are able to offer more accommodations, limiting any costs. From the studies carried out, it seems that disabled people have more chances of finding employment in the public sector, rather than in the private sector[12]. For example, one of the classic tasks assigned to them is that of the school assistant; in the office as back office or data entry manager or manager of administrative and commercial activities; in the production sector: to assemble parts in different materials, also using tools such as screwdrivers and pliers; in the hotel sector in order to cope with auxiliary activities, such as washing and preparation of

10 S. Angeloni, *L'aziendabilità. Il valore delle risorse disabili per l'azienda e il valore dell'azienda per le risorse* disabili, Collana di studi aziendali applicati, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 2011; S. Angeloni, *Il Disability Management Integrato. Un'analisi interdisciplinare per la valorizzazione delle persone con disabilità* , Quaderni Monografici Rirea n. 94, 2011.

11 D. L. Stone, A. Colella, *A model of factors affecting the treatment of disabled individuals in organizations,* in "Academy of Management Review", 21,199, pp. 352-401, 1996.

12 B. Hernandez B. et al, *Reflections from employers on the disabled workforce: focus groups with healthcare, hospitality and retail administrators* in "Employ REspons Rights", pp. 157-164, 2008.

ingredients, cleaning of dishes and kitchen tools[13]. Thus, organizational culture influences the way of people are treated; the type of work entrusted to employees and the possibilities they have of obtaining a career advancement. For these reasons it is one of the most studied elements and allows to understand how disability can be built with the workplace; it also helps assess the weight of beliefs in the opportunities offered to disabled employees[14]. Furthermore, investigating the organizational culture is important, because:

• it can be an obstacle to work experience: sometimes it can contribute to creating physical, behavioral and psychological barriers that affect the entry, and permanence, of new employees in the work context (Shur et al, 2005: 12-13);

• it highlights the rules for inclusion: it allows to understand which values are required for new members to be accepted within the group;

• it highlights the power structures: it allows to analyze the rules that allow individuals to obtain, maintain (or lose) power within the organization;

• it shows the reward systems within the organization: it helps to learn positively valued behaviors and those that are discouraged.

Regarding the macro-category "the personal qualities of disabled workers" this reference is influenced by the presence of two elements: the experiences that condition his attitudes and pathology and its consequences in the work environment. The disabled person often experiences an experience characterized by painful moments that which attributes to the bad will of others, to excessive claims and discrimination due to the presence of the disability. These experiences, of course, can cause anger and a sense of injustice that make them less attentive to the needs of colleagues. The type of disability is certainly the main element, investigated by numerous researches. Observers assign the worker to one

13 D. Foster, P. Fosh , *Negotiating difference: representing disabled employees in the british workplace* in British journal of industrial relations, 48(3), pp.563-567, 2010; L. Colombo (a cura di), *Siamo tutti diversamente occupabili. Strumenti e risorse per l'inserimento lavorativo di disabili*, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2007.

14 B. Kirsh et al., "Best practice in occupational therapy: program characteristics that influence vocational outcomes for people with serious mental illness" in *Canadian Journal of occupational therapy*, 72, 5, pp. 265- 279, 2005.

of six categories: physical, mental, sensory diseases, learning difficulties, neurological disorders and addiction. Mental disability is what seems to have the most negative effects on job opportunities[15].

About the origin of the disability, if disabled people are held responsible for their pathology, they are more likely to be considered undesirable and to elicit negative affective responses. On the contrary, instead, when the origin of the invalidating condition is considered as external to the control of the employee (multiple sclerosis or muscular dystrophy, for example) then it is even easier for this to be evaluated as courageous and highly motivated[16]. The duration of disability is another important factor. There are temporary or reversible pathologies (such as, for example, the breaking of a limb) and others, instead, progressive and irreversible. When the disability is progressive, chronic or incurable, the individual is classified in a negative way and this, consequently, influences his possibilities of relationship with his colleagues. It seems that the judgment is more negative when the disability is visible than when, instead, it is hidden. In this last case, in fact, he has more chances to be assigned to demanding jobs and included in the work group. Another factor is represented by the impetus: concerns the extent to which the disability condition can interfere with communication and the possibility of interacting with others. Obviously, the more disability is disruptive, the more the chances of it being seen as undesirable increase and the employee risks exclusion from informal activities. The perception of danger is also important because disability arouses different sensations both with respect to the danger of the person and to a possible risk of infection. People with mental illnesses, for example, are considered less able to complete the required tasks but also more dangerous due to the unpredictability of their reactions. Instead, those who have dependency problems, are also assessed the risks that can damage the integrity of colleagues, as well as that of the company.

With regard to the point of view of employers and colleagues, the experiences that employers have had in the past condition their attitude

15 D. Hall, *Employment and support allowance - What next?* in "*Journal Of Poverty and Social Justice"*, 19,1, pp. 71-74,2011.

16 D. L. Stone, A. Colella A., *A model of factors affecting the treatment of disabled individuals in organizations* in *Academy of Management Review*, 21, pp. 352-401,1996.

towards new hires. For this reason, observers are divided into three large groups:

• the "favorable" ones: they face the situation using the tools and means made available by current legislation, they activate synergies between the various actors and positively welcome all the proposals that facilitate the task of the company;

• the "problematic": do not respond adequately and struggle to decide which are the regulatory or operational paths on which to rely;

• the "irreducible": they are opposed to any type of proposal and solution, they deny any type of contact, limiting themselves to asking: "to find the right person for that job"[17].

The two main elements that can determine these experiences are the personal experiences with the disability and the proximity and frequency of contacts.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL POINTS ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DISABILITY AND WORK? AND WHAT ARE THE FUTURE PERSPECTIVES?

This meta-analysis shows how the professional experience and the job placement of people with disabilities are mainly defined from the point of view of employers and colleagues rather than from people with disabilities. Stereotypes and prejudices also emerge which lead to building the image of the disabled person as "incapable" or capable of performing only specific tasks. Often the entreprises see the disability like a pathology and not like a life condition. A relevant contribution to the realization of the new professional subjectivity of young people with disabilities can be made by exploring the perception of their employability. The INAPP model defines employability as the intertwining of the human, social and psychological capital of the person - mediated by the situational variables - which allows the individual to place himself / herself in the labor market, with a professional project adhering to the context[18]. This definition supports the hypothesis that employability is

17 G. Mazzonis (a cura di), *Dal miraggio al percorso, l'integrazione lavorativa delle persone disabili. I lavoratori, le aziende, i problemi e le «soluzioni» nella pratica* quotidiana," Ed. Del Cerro. Tirrenia 2006.

18 A. Grimaldi, R. Porcelli, *Orientamento: dimensioni e strumenti per l'occupabilità: la proposta*

an individual potential that depends on personal resources and skills. In particular, INAPP has considered it essential to relate these resources to some aspects indicative of a person's ways of acting:

• job search strategies put in place;
• knowledge and use of the services available on their territory;
• social participation.

Therefore a "subjective" or dispositional measure of employability has been developed and validated that aggregates some factors emerging from the literature, such as salient[19] in a single index. The meta-analysis carried out calls for a reflection on the design and implementation of the professional project of people with disabilities, with specific reference to the role of guidance. One wonders, in fact, what kind of guidance should be put in place to support the thinkability of the individual life project of people with disabilities, with specific reference to the professional project and to the exploration of internal and external resources, in a systemic perspective, which contribute to the realization of this project. A possible answer could concern the declination of the guidance (in education and for training) as an educational work[20] meaning guidance as a process that the person puts in place to guide his relationship with training and with the work, through development, in the lifelong and lifewide dimensions of the 3B Competency recognizable as the ability to define and implement plans for life and personal projects. We could consider this competence as reflective because it supports individuals in the interpretation of their own life, giving them meaning[21]. Therefore, as highlighted by Grimaldi et al.[22] both self-orientation skills (thinking and consciously choosing one's own future), and self-design skills (life

dell'isfol al servizio dei giovani, in "*Osservatorio Isfol"*, IV, n. 1-2, pp. 45-63, 2014.

19 A. Grimaldi, M. A.Bosca, Porcelli R., A. Rossi, *AVO: lo strumento* Isfol *per l'occupabilità dei giovani. Dalle premesse culturali ai criteri generativi*, in "*Osservatorio Isfol"*, 1-2, pp. 63-86, 2015.

20 M. Striano, Orientamento per la formazione e orientamento nella formazione. In E. Frauenfelder & V. Sarracino (eds.), *L'orientamento, questioni pedagogiche*, pp. 9-23, Liguori, Napoli 2010.

21 OECD, Organisation for Economy Co-operation and Development, Annual Report. Paris 2005.

22 A. Grimaldi, R. Porcelli, A. Rossi, Orientamento: dimensioni e strumenti per l'occupabilità: la proposta dell'isfol al servizio dei giovani, "*Osservatorio Isfol"*, IV n. 1-2, pp. 45-63,2014.

design) allow the individual to be employable, that is to say / re-present themselves in the labor market with a personal professional project adhering to the context. In this scenario, it is essential to enhance both the relationship of the person with the working world in the perspective of the Business University Cooperation, and the support for human and social development in the sense of the Capability Approach[23]. The capability approach aims to restore dignity to the person through the centrality of the human being. The set of individual skills is composed of opportunities, skills and their interaction with access to resources available in different contexts. Capability in Italian means ability, and it is from this concept that it develops, that is from the ability of people to be able to do or be what they wish to do or be[24] . Martha Nussbaum has compiled a list of fundamental capabilities, equal for all human beings, trying to overcome in this way the distinction between normal people and people with disabilities, giving everyone the same identical rights. So, if someone - whether or not has an impairment - fails to perform one of these functions, the company will have to do everything possible so that he can do it. In this sense, a person with a disability is defined as someone who has a limited capability set with respect to his or her goals, ambitions and value system. From an educational perspective, we all have the potential to decide to be what we want and the role of education is to allow the activation of this potential through the creation of a facilitating environment[25]. On this basis, for young people with disabilities we can hypothesize the design of an inclusive guidance format, which makes use of tools such as the ICF[26], in order to explore both in a systemic perspective, both the functioning of the person according to the bio-psycho-social perspective, and the resources and barriers of the socio-cultural contexts in which the subjects will have to decline their life project, creating synergies between education, guidsnce and the world of work. In this perspective, guidance is placed at the service

23 A. Sen, Development as capability expansion, in *Journal of Development Planning*, 19, 41–58, 1993.
24 *Ibidem.*
25 E. Ghedin, E. Ben-essere disabili: un approccio positivo all'inclusione. Liguori Napoli.
26 WHO. World Health Organization (2001). International Classification of Functioning and Health Disabilities, World Health Organization, Geneva 2011.

of training, taking the form of an interface device between life paths, training paths and occupational paths. By supporting both the implementation of individual capacities and the development of the employability potential of young people with disabilities, guidance is thus a fundamental resource for a conscious and reflective entry into a world of work that is still too inaccessible and not inclusive. It is equally important to give voice to the abilities and attitudes of young people with disabilities, to change the discriminating view of the Other by shifting attention from the condition of disability to knowing how to do young people with disabilities. The size of the policy must recognize the central role conferred on the person with disabilities and the life project. There must be a rethinking of disability policies which, in order to increase the well-being of people with disabilities, focus attention on the opportunities and potential of these people, allowing them to expand their choices and enjoy their rights. This also contributes to enhancing the people. The differences, from this point of view, represent a wealth to be taken into due consideration and to be supported through appropriate interventions at political and social level and by educational agencies and guidance services. Rethinking disability policies implies a reorganization of the current model, involving a transition from cure to care.

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