

PLENARY I: DISABILITY PORTRAYAL IN THE MEDIA

“The History of the portrayal of disabled people is the history of oppressive and negative representation. This has meant that disabled people have been presented as socially flawed able bodied people, not as disabled people with their own identities.”

David Hevey, 25-3-1992

The image of a person with disability in the society has been for a long time attached with a negative connotation, where the disability of the person is represented as the sole characteristics of the person, and where the other individual aspects such as personal emotional, intellectual and other physical features, gender, sexuality, religion, abilities and potentials..., these are often undermined if not ignored. As the mirror of how society thinks and sees things, mass media can perpetuate this negative and subjective image of disabled people, contributing to stigmatisation and consequently to discriminatory attitudes towards disabled people in the society.

This session will be introduced by British NGO *Disability Equality in Education* Director and Disability Trainer for Trainers **Mr. Richard Rieser**, who will take a look at the history of attitudes towards disabled people in Britain, and how that has negatively affected the portrayal of disability in the British media, through several visual illustrations of good and bad examples of such portrayal.

As the General Director and Chief Editor of a German TV production company **Mr. Peter Radtke** will examine how mass media, as a major vehicle that shapes the image of people with disabilities, much too often concentrates on either the pretended helplessness or – quite contrary to this conception - promote the idea of "hero that conquers destiny". Both one-dimensional approaches do not reflect the reality of disabled people's life as an integrated part of our society.

Mr. Carlo Romeo from the Social Secretariat of the RAI will present the views of the Italian public broadcaster towards disability, focusing on the concrete measures developed to increase the visibility of disabled people in the media and to improve disability portrayal.

Key issues for discussion:

- How would disabled people like to be portrayed in the media? Is there a consensus? Which messages to be delivered?
- How can media not contribute to the maintenance of negative and discriminatory attitudes towards disabled people in the society and play a role to overcome stigmatisation?
 - By increasing the visibility of disability in the mainstream media?
 - Through the mainstreaming of disability in the media? (presence of disabled people not only in discussion involving disability issues, but also all other political, social and cultural issues)
 - By providing more air and screen time for disabled people to express their points of view and participate to the public and political arena?
- Mass media, can play a key role in delivering a positive message regarding disability. Which are the difficulties and the ways to deliver this message?

The session will be moderated by **Mr. Christophoros Vernadakis**, Project Research Consulting (VPRC)