

INTERNATIONAL MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF RESEARCH INTO DYSFUNCTIONS AND HANDICAPS

N° 2 coordinated by Christian Rossignol

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Impairments, dysfunctions and handicaps:

For a terminology and operational concepts

The great confusion which is found in the field of terminology and basic concepts used in disability studies constitutes not only a hurdle to the development of international research in these fields but can also make it almost impossible to produce legal texts that ensure a minimum of legal security to the persons concerned.

After more than 25 years of laborious and chaotic political attempts carried out by the W.H.O. and its collaborating centres, aiming at a consensus towards an international terminology which would be intercultural, multi-usage and politically correct¹, in May 2001 the World Health Assembly adopted an “*International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health*”.

The essentially political operation which led to the development of this classification left little room for research into operating concepts which can be used in scientific research.

As a result, the analysis of the structure of this so-called “*international classification*” shows that in spite of the affirmation that it had been made in order to give a scientific basis into the understanding and study of the functional states linked to health problems, it is, from this point of view, unusable. It is also true that the “*research version*” of this “*classification*”, awaited for more than 15 years and supposedly “answering specific needs of research and supplying precise operational definitions” is not on the agenda.

¹ See the following articles:

BARRAL C., & ROUSSEL P. (2002) De la C.I.H. à la C.I.F. Le processus de révision. *Handicap* 94-95, pp. 1-23

MILES M. (2003) Regard critique des experts français sur la nouvelle classification des handicaps de l’OMS. *Handicap*, 100, pp. 69-73.

ROSSIGNOL, C. (2007) Classifications internationales des altérations corporelles, dysfonctionnements et handicaps. Pour une clarification des concepts. In *Entretiens de Bichat, Entretiens d’orthophonie*. Paris: Expansion Formation Editions, p. 62-69. Internet : <http://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00242420>

ROSSIGNOL C. (2002) La « classification » dite CIF proposée par l’OMS peut elle avoir une portée scientifique ? *Handicap*, 94-95, pp. 51-93. Internet : <http://www.lpl.univ-aix.fr/~fulltext/1427.pdf>

The situation is not better in the field of legal texts. One only has to refer to the “Convention concerning the rights of disabled persons”. Adopted by the general assembly of the United Nations in December 26, article 2 of this “Convention” contains “definitions” of “communication”, “language”, or “discrimination founded on disability” that are at the very least appalling. But, at the same time, it does not define its subject, namely “disability” and “the disabled persons”.

One has to refer to the preamble to find two sketchy definitions of the concept of “disability” presented as an “evolving concept”

“disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”

Or, in article 1 of the same text in which the disabled are described as :

“those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”

This definition presented as something new and “evolving”, is none other than a reformulation of the definition of handicap proposed by Philip Wood at the end of the 1970’s. Having since then been discarded by the WHO, it reappears today with, as a consequence, for example, the fact that this definition is now incompatible with the notion of “handicap” as it is used in French legal texts and as it is widely used in French language specialised literature. It is moreover incompatible with the notion of “handicap” widely used in French “translations” of international texts.

At this point, the elaboration of conceptual structures based on clear distinctions between impairment, dysfunctions and handicaps is a priority and an urgent task on which depends the possibility of significant advances in the analysis of interactions between these different orders of phenomena. The responsibility of this enterprise, which is necessarily multidisciplinary, lies in the international scientific community that includes all disciplines.

The thematic journal *Interactions*, open without restriction to all scientific disciplines and methodology, supports this work by opening up its columns to every contribution that can establish an inventory of terminologies and concepts used in one of the fields concerned or can contribute to the establishment of clear distinctions and definitions of operating concepts indispensable to the development of scientific thinking and reasoning.

The following is a non exhaustive list of themes that can be discussed.

- Consequences on research of the confusion concerning basic concepts
- History of concepts and notions used
- Terminology in a particular professional field and/or basic concepts in a particular disciplinary field
- Definitions, absence of definitions, contradictions, notions used in legal texts concerning disability and handicaps
- The notion of disability and handicap in ordinary, professional, administrative or political language