

ROMANIAN MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF DISABILITY

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ABSTRACT. Media portrayals in different ways persons with disabilities, and this is not just because of the societal stigma. This article represents a contribution to the representation of people with disabilities theme, from a Romanian perspective and it will help to underline the evolution and the transformation of these representations in a crucial economical period for Romania, the years of socio-economical transition (1991-1999). Enumerative analysis will present the descriptive elements, but also the substance of the article, emphasizing the society's difficulties and the changing from a negative representation of disability (the impact of disability) to a positive one (the possibility of improving the condition of person with disabilities). The final of the paper will point out the political, social and economical factors which influence the formation of Romanian media social representations of disability.

Keywords: *media portrayals of disability, impact of disability, possibility of improvement of the condition of persons with disability*

ABSTRAKT. Die Medien stellen die behinderten Personen unterschiedlich dar, was aber nicht nur auf das soziale Stigma zurückzuführen ist. Die vorliegende Arbeit versteht sich als ein Beitrag aus einer rumänischen Perspektive zur Darstellungsproblematik der behinderten Personen und trägt bei der Aufnahme deren Entwicklung und Transformation, während einer wirtschaftlich grundlegenden Zeitspanne für die Entwicklung Rumäniens nach Dezember 1989, während der Jahre des wirtschaftlichen - sozialen Übergangs (1991-1999), bei. Die aufzählende Analyse wird eine Aufnahme der deskriptiven Elemente aber auch der Elemente, die an der Substanz des Artikels gebunden sind, ermöglichen, wobei die Schwierigkeiten der Gesellschaft beim Übergang von einer negativen Darstellung der Behinderungen (Behinderungsauswirkung) auf eine Positive (die Möglichkeit einer Verbesserung der Lage der behinderten Personen) dargestellt werden. Zum Schluss werden die politischen, sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Faktoren hervorgehoben, die die Gestaltung der sozialen Darstellungen der Behinderung durch die rumänischen Massenmedien beeinflussen.

Schlüsselwörter: *Behinderungsdarstellungen in Massenmedien, Behinderungsauswirkungen, Verbesserungsmöglichkeit der Lage der behinderten Personen*

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Problem formulation

Attitudes, beliefs and misconceptions of society constitute a major barrier for people with disabilities. Attitude change can follow heightened awareness of, increased contact with and increased meaningful communication between people with or without disabilities. Although personal interaction is the most effective medium for conveying the personal experience of disability, the media can be an effective vehicle for bringing about greater understanding and a consequent gradual change in public perceptions of people with disabilities (Dahl, 1993).

Higgins (1992) noted that as a society we **construct disability** through our language, the media and other public and visible ways, such as photography, art and literature. People with disabilities are portrayed as “different” or as people who may not fit within the mainstream. This affects the public’s view on disability, as well as the self-concept of people with disabilities (Nelson, 1996).

The representation of disabilities in the Romanian cultural arena is an interesting topic, because the modalities in which the media has framed disability will cover an unexplored field of Romanian research.

This paper represents just a part of a complex research project that includes an enumerative analysis of the Romanian written press from 1989-1999 and 2003, and it will focus only on the publications from 1991-1999, because these years represents the years of economical transition and will underline the importance and the influence of these factors on the formation of Romanian media portrayals of people with disabilities.

The article will begin with a presentation of general media models of disability, as described in the research literature, in order to create a frame for reporting the criteria which will be used for enumerative analysis.

The questions of the research will then be framed. After it, the presentation of the design of research will follow, identifying the time periods of the present investigation, the sources of evidence and the description of the method used for the research. This research is qualitative, which is an important new element for Romanian research field, where traditional quantitative research exists for a long time, but the option of this article will go for the enumerative analysis, which is the known the “cvasi-quantitative method” from qualitative methods.

The analysis and interpretation of the results will be the next part and it will contain a general overview of the investigated publications. It is presented in a pertinent intra-cultural comparison between the years of investigation. The final conclusions will highlight the major findings of the research.

General Media Models of Disability

Media are a product of society. This does not mean however that they reflect existing attitudes exclusively and under all circumstances. They may also open new horizons or try to educate their audience. Nevertheless, they stay rather close to the ideas cherished by their consumers (Ciot, 2009). Therefore, an analysis must first of all list the stereotypes and prejudices concerning people with disabilities.

For centuries, disability and people with disabilities have been looked upon as an accident of nature. Homer in his “Iliad” describes how the Olympian Gods mock Hephaistos because he is limping, and throw him out of heaven. In Sparta disabled children were exposed to death. In the Old Testament people with a physical deformation were excluded from the priesthood. Even the German reformer Martin Luther writes in his diary about a disabled child: “If I were sovereign, I would throw the cripple into the river to be drowned”. The climax of such social hostility to people with disabilities was reached during the Third Reich when the Nazi regime murdered about 100,000 physically or mentally disabled persons. Though times have changed, the new discussion on prenatal diagnosis and abortion show, that even in our days, general opinion is not so much in favor of any disabled existence. It is against this background that we have to evaluate the role of media and the way they take “responsibility” in this matter (Radtke, 2003).

In the beginning, the media portrayed disabled persons in a very negative way. For a long time evil character was closely related to physical deformation. When disabled persons made their appearance in theatre plays, they were always characters to laugh at or to be despised. The stuttering man, who becomes the fool of the whole community, is such a well-known stereotype (Czech opera “The Bartered Bride”, by Bedrich Smetana).

Media images depicted *wheelchair use* as the main symbol of disability. Wheelchair use dominated modern news photographs, as well as popular culture images such as films (Norden, 1993). Knoll (1988) noted that disability might include symbols as: medical equipment, cues for impaired immobility, beds, bandages, twisted hands. These allow to a person to be labeled as having a disability, without it being stated.

In journalistic terms, wheelchairs and other disability-related equipment may pull viewers through the rhetoric of tragedy and a sense of people “coping with adversity”, themes that won important journalistic awards (Haller, 2000, Singletary, Lamb, 1984). Disability in photos shows drama and human interest, two long-held values in journalism. Another journalistic value, oddity, fits well with how editors might view photos or video footage of disability (Fedler, 1997). Although disability is manifested in many forms, media imagery relies on one type of disability – mobility impairment that requires wheelchair use.

Dahl (1993) made an analysis of the whole of the media in promoting images of disability. She was speaking about *disability as a metaphor*, especially about the *Evil Crip* as a stereotype for representing disability.

There was also an issue of gender and racial dimension in representation of people with disability. Media images portrayed disability as Caucasian and male. In terms of gender, this image conflicts with the incidence of disability among women. A study made on the representation on photos of persons with disabilities showed that 46% were men and 40% women. According to some studies, women have disability more often than men and there are slightly more women than men in the population.

Although these images do not represent the racial and gender of disability, they do accurately reflect the disability rights movement, which is composed of many white males. Many disability researchers currently believe that the incidence of disability in minority racial groups has been underestimated in the past. With a reliance on pictures of white people with disability, the media framed disability as a “White issue” (Haller, 2000).

Similar to the above affirmation, Zola (1985) and Makas (1993) found most people with disabilities on TV to be *young, single, White males*.

By allowing visibly people with disabilities a few opportunities to be seen as socially acceptable and attractive human beings or as valuable employees, the media have not disrupted the seemingly indissoluble link between these images that were forgotten by advertising. The missing element from the disability media research is the recognition of the extent to which human conduct is affected by how other people look at them (Hahn, 1997).

Research Question

The present study has the following question as its starting point: *Are there any specific political, social, and cultural factors or positive and negative elements that characterize the Romanian media models of disability?*

Research design

Taking into account the political and social importance of certain years when the investigated publications appeared, we confined the present article to the following *time periods*: 1991-1999, the years of Romanian economic transition to capitalism. Examining these years will help us to witness the evolution of the type of disability framed by different type of article as well as the impact of disability on individual’s life of family members and the possibility of improvement of the condition of the person with disabilities.

The design of the research also identifies the sources of evidence and the research method. The *sample of publications* was drawn in the following manner: the study includes all the daily, weekly, and monthly publications from the year 1991-1999 at the central and local levels with a circulation level of more than 500,000 and with specific social and political elements. In figures, the situation of the investigated publications is as follows:

The *method* used for this study was *content analysis*, with *enumerative analysis*. Even though this method isn’t the most modern one, for Romanian research context, the use of a qualitative method represents a novelty and the use of it represents the connecting and a starting point for the creation of a bridge between the traditional quantitative methods and the actual methods of research.

Table 1.

The situation of investigated publications for the investigated years 1991-1999.

Investigated year	Number of investigated publications	Total of investigated publications
1991	11	115
1992	13	
1993	13	
1994	13	
1995	13	
1996	13	
1997	13	
1998	13	
1999	13	

As a key for selecting newspaper articles for content analysis, a list of words and phrases relating to a wide variety of disabling conditions was constructed. The base of this list were the study developed by Keller et al. (1990) and the dimensions of *quality of life* concept constructed by Schalock (2002, 2006).

Two major areas were considered for *enumerative analysis*. The first included *descriptive information* related to (a) whether the disability was a major or a minor focus of the article, (b) the type of impairment covered (intellectual impairment, hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical impairment, the use of the general term of handicapped or impairment, and “other” for additional terms of the list), and (c) the type of article (feature, news, editorial, soft news article, notices, and “other”). The feature article is a reportage, which focuses on events; it is the story of a fact, the description of a certain place, based on the information taken directly from the event. The news article contains always impact information, making in this sense the difference from soft news article, which doesn’t contains impact information. The editorials are opinions articles, written often by one of the editors and giving the paper’s opinion on a matter, rather than reporting information. The notices are referring to announcements.

The second area focused on the *substance of the article*, considering the article’s portrayal of *the impact of the disability* and *the possibility for improvement of the condition of persons with disabilities* as it is described in the following table:

Table 2.

The criteria of *substance of the article*, the second area from enumerative analysis.

	Negative	Physical Well-Being
		Emotional Well-Being
		Material Well-Being

Impact of Disability on Individual's Life or Family Members		General Well-Being		
		Interpersonal Relations		
	Positive			
	Neutral			
Possibility of the Improvement of the Condition of the Person with Disabilities	Yes	Intervention	Therapy	
			Medicine	
			Education	
			Other	
		Personal effort		
		Religion		
		Charity		
		Social contact		
		Technology		
		Other		
	No Reason Given			
		No		
	Neutral			

Analysis and interpretation

This part will offer a general overview of the publications investigated. It is presented in a pertinent intra-cultural comparison between the years of investigation, which will frame the principal Romanian differences and commonalities between the periods of investigation. These comparisons will reveal the evolution of the influence of specific cultural, social, political, and economic factors in the construction of images of disability. Each of the investigated years has its own characteristics that played a role in shaping the evolution toward a complex image of disability.

The results will be presented in tables, each table containing the results identified after a certain criterion. The interpretation of the data from the tables will be resumed.

The first criterion of analysis was *the number of articles focusing on disability*. A synthetic table of the results identified after this criterion on each investigated year shows the following situation:

Table 3.

The distribution of articles after the *number of articles focusing on disability* criterion for the years 1991-1999.

Year of investigated period	Number of articles focusing on disability (%)	Number of articles with a major focus on disability (%)	Percentages for the articles with major focus on disability (%)
1991	58	58	100.00
1992	47	45	96.75

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1993	51	48	94.12
1994	46	41	89.13
1995	64	60	93.75
1996	39	33	84.61
1997	62	54	87.10
1998	69	54	78.26
1999	98	89	90.82

This period of investigation is very interesting. It has a sinuous curve of evolution. The deepest point of this curve is the year 1996, when the number of articles decreased considerably (from 64 articles in the previous year to 39 articles in 1996), followed by an increasing of 23 articles for the next year (1997), with a total of 64 articles. The considerable number of articles from the last year of this period (1999) must be mentioned, 98 articles, underlying the importance of this topic on the media agenda and the increasing tendency of reporting this subject (disability). For the percentages that represent the articles with a major focus on disability, the tendency is to “close the circle” that began at 100% (for 1991) and ended at 90.82% (for 1999).

The *type of disability* presented in the articles was the second criterion of enumerative analysis. The situation is as follows:

Table 4.

The distribution of articles after the *type of impairment* criterion for the years 1991-1999.

Year	Intellectual impairment	Hearing impairment	Visual impairment	Physical impairment	<i>The use of the general term of handicapped or impairment</i>	Other terms
1991	5 articles- 8.62%	2 articles- 3.45%	3 articles- 5.17%	11 articles- 18.97%	36 articles- 62.07%	1 article- 1.72%
1992	2 articles- 4.25%	-	11 articles- 23.41%	12 articles- 25.53%	22 articles- 46.81%	-
1993	-	3 articles- 5.88%	4 articles- 7.84%	17 articles- 33.33%	25 articles- 49.02%	2 articles- 3.92%
1994	4 articles- 8.7%	5 articles- 10.87%	6 articles- 13.04%	6 articles- 13.04%	21 articles- 45.65%	4 articles- 8.7%
1995	2 articles- 3.125%	2 articles- 3.125%	8 articles- 12.50%	5 articles- 7.81%	40 articles- 62.50%	7 articles- 10.94%
1996	-	1 article- 2.56%	5 articles- 12.82%	7 articles- 17.95	18 articles- 46.15%	8 articles- 20.51%
1997	2 articles- 3.23%	4 articles- 6.45%	5 articles- 8.06%	17 articles- 27.42%	26 articles- 41.94%	8 articles- 12.90%
1998	3 articles- 4.35%	6 articles- 8.70%	10 articles- 14.49%	18 articles- 26.09%	27 articles – 39.13%	5 articles- 7.24%
1999	2 articles- 2.04%	4 articles- 4.08%	10 articles- 10.20%	16 articles- 16.33%	54 articles- 55.10%	12 articles- 12.24%

A general look on the table indicates that the category mental disability is missing for two years (1993, 1996), also hearing impairment (for 1992) and “other” (for 1992). The distribution of the number of articles is similar for each year of investigated period: the general term of handicapped/disability is the most represented category, followed by physical disability, visual impairment, “other”, hearing impairment and mental disability. This tendency is obvious and it can be seen at the enumerative analysis for each year of the period 1991-1999. The arguments are the same as mentioned in the detailed enumerative analysis: the predominance of the general term of handicapped signifies the interest that the media had in different categories of disability (the presence of the term handicapped still signifies the lack of the evolution in the emancipation process; this will be underlined by the subcategories from “other” category), visual impact determined the number of articles for physical disability and visual impairment. The next categories are “other”, hearing impairment and mental disability.

The complex distribution of disability of different types could be noticed: mental, physical, hearing impairment, visual impairment. This is an improvement since the pregnant image of disability from Western researchers was physical disability and the Romanian image for the year 1990, was mental, physical or both.

The increased interest the media had in this topic at the end of period is obvious, so the distribution is a sinuous curve with an ascendant tendency.

Table 5.

The distribution of the subcategories from “*other*” category for the period 1991-1999.

Year of investigated period	Autistic	Double disability/deficiency	Language disorders	Educational Special Needs	Malformations	Unprivileged children	Multiple handicaps	Paralyzed	Infirmary	Assisted person	Sensorial Disorders	Abandoned	Institutionalized	Invalid
1991	1 article (1.72%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1993	-	1 article (50%)	1 article (50%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1994	-	1 article (25%)	-	1 article (25%)	1 article (25%)	1 article (25%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1995	-	-	-	3 articles (42.86%)	-	-	1 article (14.28%)	3 articles (42.8%)	-	-	-	-	-	-
1996	-	1 article (12.5%)	-	5 articles (62.5%)	-	2 articles (25%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1997	-	-	1 article (12.5%)	3 articles (37.5%)	-	-	-	-	2 articles (25%)	1 article (12.5%)	-	-	-	-
1998	1 article (20%)	1 article (20%)	-	2 articles (40%)	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 article (20%)	-	-	-
1999	1 article (8.33%)	-	2 articles (16.67%)	3 articles (25%)	-	2 articles (16.67%)	-	-	-	1 article (8.33%)	-	1 article (8.33%)	1 article (8.33%)	1 article (8.33%)

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The diverse subcategories that composed the “other” category are very interesting (see Table 5). The distribution of the terms used for describing people with disabilities increased during this period. It was observed that some of the words disappeared after their first use (malformations, multiple handicaps, paralysed, infirmity, sensorial disorders), others appeared for the first time in the last year of the investigated period (1999 – abandoned, institutionalised, invalid) and the rest of the terms appeared more frequently than in just one year. “Abandoned” and “institutionalised” hide the disability elements in reference to the articles where they were used. The connotations went behind the simple understanding; for instance a child could be abandoned because he/she has a disability or he/she will be institutionalised because he/she was abandoned or because he/she has a disability.

The permanent presence of the term “educational special needs” from 1994 until 1999 is to be noticed. It seems that the media understood the importance of the use of this syntagm and it fulfilled its role of opinion shaper. The majority of terms keep a negative stigma and they disappear by the last year of investigation as a visible result of intense work from this field (by organizations, authorities, media) and of the emancipation movement. The impact of social and political factors is evident.

The last criterion from the first major area of research was the *type of articles*. The situation for the period 1991-1999 is:

Table 6.
The distribution of articles by the type of articles criterion for the period 1991-1999.

Year of investigated period	Feature	News	Editorial	Soft news article	Notices
1991	19 articles – 32.76%	12 articles – 20.69%	22 articles – 37.93%	-	5 articles – 8.62%
1992	26 articles – 55.32%	7 articles – 14.89%	10 articles – 21.28%	-	4 articles – 8.51%
1993	21 articles – 41.18%	12 articles – 23.53%	17 articles – 33.33%	-	1 article – 1.96%
1994	12 articles – 26.09%	19 articles – 41.30%	11 articles – 23.91%	4 articles – 8.70%	-
1995	32 articles – 50%	24 articles – 37.50%	7 articles – 10.94%	1 article – 1.56%	-
1996	19 articles – 48.72%	13 articles – 33.33%	7 articles – 17.95%	-	-
1997	32 articles – 51.61%	24 articles – 38.71%	4 articles – 6.45%	2 articles – 3.23%	-
1998	33 articles – 47.82%	32 articles – 46.38%	3 articles – 4.35%	1 article – 1.45%	-
1999	52 articles – 53.06%	41 articles – 41.84%	5 articles – 5.10%	-	-

There is a predominance of features (with one exception, for the year 1991, when editorials were predominant and for 1994, when news were articles predominant). For all investigated periods there was the permanent presence of three types of articles: feature, news and editorial. The predominance of opinion articles indicated the importance that the media gave to the topic of people with disabilities due to its understanding of its opinion shaper role. Soft news articles and notices appeared sporadically and never together. The presence of these last types of article signifies the diversification of interests for this category of people (expressing an opinion regarding people with disabilities and informing about them). The last year of the investigated period (1999) brought a balance between information and opinion, demonstrated by the presence of certain types of articles (feature and editorial/ news).

The second major area of investigation from the enumerative analysis was the *substance of the article*, considering the articles that portrayed the impact of disability and the possibility of improvement of the condition of people with disabilities.

First, the kind of impact– negative, positive, or neutral –each type of disability, mentioned in the article had on the individual’s life or on the life of family members mentioned in the article was monitored:

Table 7.
The distribution of articles by the impact of disability upon individual’s life or the lives of family members’ criterion for the period 1991-1999.

Year of investigated period	Negative impact of disability	Positive impact of disability	Neutral impact of disability
1991	6 articles - 11.35%	-	52 articles - 89.65%
1992	6 articles - 12.76%	1 article - 2.14%	40 articles - 85.10%
1993	13 articles - 25.49%	3 articles - 5.89%	35 articles - 68.62%
1994	31 articles - 67.39%	5 articles - 10.87%	10 articles - 21.74%
1995	38 articles - 59.57%	7 articles - 10.74%	19 articles - 29.69%
1996	25 articles - 64.10%	2 articles - 5.13%	12 articles - 30.77%
1997	38 articles - 61.30%	7 articles - 11.29%	17 articles - 27.41%
1998	41 articles - 40.58%	4 articles - 5.80%	24 articles - 34.78%
1999	73 articles - 74.49%	4 articles - 4.08%	21 articles - 21.43%

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The figures show a fluent predominance of the negative and/or neutral impact. The neutral category appears only from 1990, as an effect of access to information. The neutral answers led for three years (1991, 1992, 1993) – maybe as a result of the trust in the possibility of improvement the situation for people with disabilities – after which the balance was in favour of negative impact. We should also notice the fact that the neutral impact was well represented in all years and the presence of positive impact (which could express the compensation process in a positive way) is nothing else than a step forward for the inclusion movement.

Concerning negative impact, some other criteria were established which will reveal important aspects:

Table 8.

The distribution of articles by the categories at negative impact criteria for the period 1991 – 1999.

Year	Physical well-being	Emotional well-being	Material well-being	General well-being	Interpersonal relations
1991	1 article – 16.67%	-	1 article – 16.67%	4 articles – 66.66%	-
1992	1 article – 16.67%	2 articles – 33.32%	1 article – 16.67%	2 articles – 33.32%	-
1993	3 articles – 23.08%	1 article – 7.69%	4 articles – 30.77%	5 articles – 38.46%	-
1994	5 articles – 16.13%	4 articles – 12.90%	7 articles – 22.58%	12 articles – 38.71%	3 articles – 9.68%
1995	3 articles – 7.89%	10 articles – 26.32%	8 articles – 21.05%	17 articles – 44.74%	-
1996	3 articles – 12%	6 articles – 24%	5 articles – 20%	11 articles – 44%	-
1997	4 articles – 10.53%	5 articles – 13.16%	4 articles – 10.53%	25 articles – 65.78%	-
1998	12 articles – 29.27%	7 articles – 17.07%	1 article – 2.44%	21 articles – 51.22%	-
1999	13 articles – 17.81%	6 articles – 8.22%	14 articles – 19.18%	38 articles – 52.05%	2 articles – 2.74%

The categories of negative impact were established according to the quality of life theory (Shalock and other, 2002, 2006). We can easily see that a disability affects every field of an active life: physical, emotional, material and interpersonal relations. A pleasing fact is the weak presence of the negative impact in the interpersonal relations category. This is a proof that disability does not necessarily create handicap (which is a social construct which determines social isolation). Of course, disability has physical and emotional effects, which affect general well-being, but the most important thing is that people with disabilities can have a normal social life.

The last criterion from the enumerative analysis was the *possibility of improvement of the condition of people with disabilities*. There were three possible answers: yes, no or neutral. The situation was:

Table 9.

The distribution of articles by the possibility of improvement of condition of the person with disability criteria for the period 1991-1999.

Year	Yes answer	No answer	Neutral answer
1991	42 articles – 72.41%	2 articles – 3.45%	14 articles – 24.14%
1992	36 articles – 76.60%	-	11 articles – 23.40%
1993	47 articles – 92.15%	1 article – 1.97%	3 articles – 5.88%
1994	43 articles – 93.48%	1 article – 2.17%	2 articles – 4.35%
1995	61 articles – 95.32%	1 article – 1.56%	2 articles – 3.12%
1996	39 articles – 100%	-	-
1997	62 articles – 100%	-	-
1998	68 articles – 98.55%	-	1 article – 1.45%
1999	97 articles – 98.98%	1 article – 1.02%	-

The possibility of improvement criteria is a sign of the existence of an emancipation movement. All the answers were in favour of yes. Even if we recognize that disability has a major negative impact on the life of the person with disabilities and his/her family, we all think that his/her situation **could** be improved. The media, as a spokesman for public consciousness, shows this fact by evidencing this possibility for improvement.

The following table is clear proof for the meanings through which we can all overcome the presence of disability in someone's life.

At "yes" category a reason was stated how the condition could be improved, using the following categories: (a) personal effort, (b) religion, (c) charity, (d) intervention (medicine, education, therapy, others), (e) social contact, (f) technology, (g) other, and (h) no reason given. The distribution of reasons was:

Table 10.

The distribution of articles by the subcategories at yes answer at possibility of improvement of the condition of the person with disability criteria for the period 1991 – 1999.

Year	Personal effort %	Religion %	Charity %	Intervention				Social contact %	Technology %	Other %
				Med %	Ed %	Th. %	Oth %			
1991	7.14	2.38	9.53	-	19.04	-	-	4.76	2.38	54.77
1992	2.78	-	8.33	2.78	8.33	-	-	2.78	5.56	69.44
1993	12.76	-	8.51	4.26	8.51	2.13	-	4.26	8.51	51.06

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1994	20.93	2.33	2.33	9.30	9.30	-	-	9.30	9.30	37.21
1995	8.25	-	4.92	4.92	14.75	-	4.92	4.92	1.64	52.46
1996	5.13	-	5.13	5.13	25.64	-	15.38	2.56	2.56	38.46
1997	12.90	-	4.84	3.23	4.84	4.84	3.23	1.61	1.61	62.90
1998	13.24	-	5.88	-	26.47	7.35	10.29	1.47	1.47	33.83
1999	11.34	-	12.37	1.03	8.25	3.09	1.03	1.03	-	52.58

As the above table shows, personal effort and intervention-education category are the best represented, with the exception of the “other” subcategory that will be described below. Only a good policy of emancipation, moving in the direction of inclusiveness, could underpin and assist the person’s capabilities and the power of education and community. Social contacts, technology and intervention through medicine and therapy will enlarge the circle of support in the best interest of people with disabilities.

Table 11.

The distribution of articles by the subcategories of “other” category from the *possibility of improvement* criterion for the period 1991-1999.

Year of investigated period	Legislation	Changing attitude	Financial	Administrative reason	Eliminating social ignorance	Media	Legislation+ changing attitude	Human solidarity	Accessibility	Pity	Social protection
1991	18 articles – 78.26%	4 articles – 17.39%	1 article – 4.35%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1992	11 articles – 44%	11 articles – 44%	1 article – 4%	1 article – 4%	1 article – 4%	-	-	-	-	-	-
1993	18 articles – 75%	4 articles – 16.67%	2 articles – 8.33%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1994	11 articles – 68.75%	-	3 articles – 18.75%	-	-	2 articles – 12%	-	-	-	-	-
1995	24 articles – 75%	4 articles – 12.5%	-	-	-	1 article – 3.125%	3 articles – 9.375%	-	-	-	-
1996	9 articles – 60%	5 articles – 33.33%	-	-	-	-	-	1 article – 6.67%	-	-	-
1997	24 articles – 61.54%	9 articles – 23.08%	-	-	-	-	5 articles – 12.82%	-	1 article – 2.56%	-	-
1998	12 articles – 52.17%	6 articles – 26.09%	-	-	-	-	1 article – 4.35%	-	3 articles – 13.04%	1 article – 4.35%	-
1999	43 articles – 84.31%	1 article – 1.96%	-	-	-	-	-	-	3 articles – 5.88%	-	4 articles – 7.84%

The distribution of subcategories of “other” category is very interesting (see Table 11). The subcategories from the “other” category demonstrated that the improvement of situation for people with disabilities is possible through proper

legislation and attitude. Both have to be changed. These subcategories were present during the whole period of investigation (with the exception changing attitude for the year 1994). The combined subcategory legislation + changing attitude expressed the understanding of the convergent action from both directions. The media could also influence the improvement of the situation for people with disabilities and the presence of this subcategory proves the people's trust in the media's power to influence mentalities and disseminate information. Social protection is a subcategory linked to legislation and changing attitude, expressing the aim of their actions. Accessibility appears in legislation as a direct effect of changing attitude movement. Social protection could be the final result aimed for by all the actions exerted by all actors involved. Its presence in the last year of this period signifies the final understanding of the social and political actions.

Final Conclusions

The cultural, political and social elements specific to Romanian culture influenced, through media channels, the formation of the Romanian images of disability – this is the answer of the question of the article. From these elements we could mention: collectivism (group representations), social perception (“Other”), emotional experience (victimization, discrimination, moral abuse) – as *cultural factors*; political regime (communism and post-communism), transition characteristics (for the institution for persons with disabilities, for the media system, for social policies, for legislation for persons with disabilities, and with a direct link to the evolution of the national economy), political orientation of government (social democratic or liberal orientation with its effect on social policies and legislation), pre-adherence to the EU process (criterion regarding people with disabilities that has to be realized with effects on social policies, legislation, and social protection: de-medicalization, equalizing of chances, European Social Charta, design for all) – as *political elements* and group mentality evolution (from a segregationist view on persons with disabilities to an integrated and then to an inclusive approach), group image, social intervention mechanism, the competencies of media vectors that contributed to the changing attitude process (advocating mission), advocacy/empowering actions of organizations for persons with disabilities (proposals for improving legislation for persons with disabilities, public manifestations, disseminating the information in media channels), and the reform of the educational system regarding children with disabilities (integrated classrooms, then inclusive projects adapted to characteristics of the Romanian educational system) – as *social elements*.

Social injustice will be always present. Social representations have an identification function. Only by comparing the cognitions of specific groups, the social representations that they have could be discovered. The expression of these groups for this research was written/printed media.

The knowledge of different social image of disability could compose a basis for the program of improving the lives of people with disabilities. The beginning could be the identification of the social representations of disability from common consciousness, followed by communication or actions of dissemination. By facilitating the access of professionals to social representations of disabilities, human actions toward a better direction could change.

The enumerative analysis of the articles revealed the fact that social representations of disability reflect the socio-economic and political context of the investigated years; it is quite clear that there are positive and negative images for a person with disabilities.

Written media fulfils its role of informing the population, but also to emancipate the readers, being in this context a real advocate for the empowerment movement for people with disability.

By the type of disability presented, by the type of articles used to focus on disability, written media had its own evolution process. It reflected the evolution of collective consciousness very well. It contributed to the removal of social barriers. This could happen only through civic participation. The handicap is exclusively diminished only by social mechanism that aimed to remove the obstacles from social integration of individual.

Acting as a social element, the media succeeded in fulfilling its role of constructing a better attitude toward people with disabilities. Print media acted as an advocate for people with disabilities, with a major contribution toward enlarging knowledge about disability and a real understanding of this minority.

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