Research and the UK disability movement

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The rise of UK disability rights

- **1970s**  
  Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, Liberation Network of People with Disabilities, beginning of de-institutionalisation.

- **1980s**  
  Coalitions and Centres for Integrated Living spring up across UK, BCODP formed, direct action demonstrations. Beginning of community care.

- **1990s**  
  Campaigns for anti-discrimination legislation and for direct payments for personal assistance

- **2000s**  
  Disabled people’s organisations as service providers

- **2010s**  
  Welfare reform, cut backs, renewed campaigning
Rethinking disability

- **Move from “medical model” to “social model”**
  - People are disabled by society not by their bodies
  - Emphasis on environmental/social barriers, not individual deficits
  - Discrimination and prejudice as the problems
  - Cross impairment

- **Rights not charity**
  - Growth of human rights approaches: CRPD (UN, 2006)

- **Conceptualisation of personal assistance, as opposed to care**
  - Distinguish physical dependency from social dependency
  - Emphasis on taking control of one’s life
  - Separation of tasks from emotions

- **“Nothing about us without us”**
  - Emphasis on user involvement and participation
  - Organisations “of” disabled people, not organisations “for” disabled people
Changing role of academia

• 1970s Le Court Cheshire Home: Miller and Gwynne *A Life Apart*. UPIAS vs Disability Alliance. Paul Hunt, “Settling accounts with the parasite people”.

• 1980s Vic Finkelstein and others set up OU course. Professor Michael Oliver coins term “social model”. BCODP research unit at Leeds University

• 1991 Colin Barnes, *Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination* provides evidence which leads to DDA. MA in Disability Research at Leeds University.

• 1990s Conceptualisation of emancipatory research
  • Following social model
  • Disabled people/their organisations in control
  • Commitment to empowerment

• 2000s Disability studies conferences at Lancaster
Other academic research

- **Chronic illness** tradition of medical sociology: Michael Bury, Gareth Williams, Simon Williams, Ruth Pinder.
- Research with **people with learning difficulties**: Open University (Dorothy Atkinson, Jan Walmsley), Nora Fry Research Unit at Bristol (Linda Ward)
- Research on **mental health** (David Pilgrim, Peter Beresford)
- **Deaf** studies (Paddy Ladd)

- **US disability politics/disability studies**: minority group perspectives, civil rights tradition, cultural disability studies.
Diversification of disability studies

- **Materialist disability studies**: Mike Oliver, Colin Barnes, Carol Thomas
  - Committed to strong social model approach
  - Research for social change

- **Critical disability studies**: Lennard Davis, Dan Goodley, Fiona Kumari Campbell, Rob McRuer, Helen Meekosha, Griet Roets
  - Post-structuralist, post-modernist approaches
  - Critique of categories and dichotomies: growth of theory
  - Building the academic discipline

- **Critical realist disability studies**: Tom Shakespeare, Nick Watson, Berthe Dannermark, Anders Gustavsson.
  - Multi-factorial, relational model
  - Engaged and empirical social research
Why not emancipatory research?

• Social model is not adequate for understanding complexity of disability, difficult to operationalise as research.
• Danger of circularity
• Research should be engaged, committed – but also independent and free of political control
  • Examples of assisted suicide, genetics etc.
• Process of research is important - should be ethical, empowering - but product of research has to be as objective as possible if it is to have an impact.
• Accountability to research participants, not to disability organisations
• Conclusion: sometimes, but not always, emancipatory research
Pluralism in disability research

- Different questions, different approaches
- Close collaboration between academia and disability movement
- Division of labour between disabled people’s organisations and researchers – complementary expertise
- Research on all dimensions of disability – from medical, rehabilitation needs, via psychology, personal/social experiences, up to structural issues in policy, law, economics
- Collaboration between disciplines
- Sometimes researching “disabled people”, sometimes “people with physical impairments”, “people with mobility impairments”, “wheelchair users”, “people with SCI” etc.