

DISABILITY

research & activism

European Disability Network Meeting
Centre for Disability Studies, University of Leeds
7-9 September 2007



Joe Camilleri

Kummissjoni Nazzjonali Persuni b'Dizabilita' (Malta)

Background to disability activism in Malta

- 1987 – Establishment of KNPD (social model led)
- 1993 – Disability Issues Lectures at Institute of Health Care, then Faculty of Education, Social Policy Social Work
- 1994 – Inclusive Education Policy in all schools
- 2000 – Equal Opportunities (Persons with Disability) Act & Regulation on Access for All



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Background to disability activism in Malta

- 1890s – Rise of Institutionalisation in Malta
- 1945-70s – Rise of impairment centred NGOs for disabled people focusing on rehabilitation
- 1980s – parent power and improvement in service provision
- Late 1980s – establishment of parents' working group on disability (social model led)
- 1987 – Establishment of KNPD (social model led)



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Background to disability activism in Malta

- 1986 – approach to disability activism & research changes with less focus on personal history and 'moral' argument, to scientific research (Cordina Report).



Establishing Disability Studies

- For us, establishing a research presence at the University of Malta is vital, however, we see that there may be challenges ahead.



Mind the Gap

- From the perspective of activists we often see a gap between much of academic work (*especially at a theoretical level*) and the everyday reality of disabled people's lives.
- Are Disability Studies having a direct impact on the improvement of disabled people's quality of life?



The role of the *Social Model*

- The Social Model discourse remains central to our work
 - The debate should not be taken to its extreme.
 - The impairment aspect needs to be recognised, without overshadowing the effect of social barriers.



Inclusion *in action*

- Having more disabled researchers is important, but, we definitely need to see more participatory/ emancipatory research.
- Wherever possible, disabled people need to be included even more in setting the agenda, the research methodologies and helping with the dissemination of information
- Disabled people's involvement in research projects should be valued in concrete terms.
 - *Researchers are often paid well, while researchees give time and effort with no return. This arrangement perpetuates the charity model with disabled people's participation seen as a purely voluntary activity.*



Hierarchies of disabled people

- EU documents (for example, The Lisbon Agenda) focus almost exclusively on employment issues, disregarding the reality of disabled people unable to hold down full-time employment in the open market.
 - the tiny percentage of very severely disabled (multiple disabilities)
 - people with learning disabilities & mental health survivors
 - The need for Day Services is never mentioned



European Commission tender for an
'Academic Network of European Disability experts' (ANED)

- 'Academic' may distance the group from non-academic activists and
- 'Experts' will alienate most disabled people for whom the term has pejorative connotations



European Commission tender for an
'Academic Network of European Disability experts' (ANED)

- Tender should cost the input of all partners
 - (ex., Leonard Cheshire Foundation in Malta; comparative analysis on de-institutionalisation)
- organising work & activities (questionnaires, consultation meetings, etc) takes much time & effort
- especially difficult for small organisations, like KNPD



Limitations

- Resources (human; financial; technological)
- Constraints of time, language, commitment
- Negligible presence of disability graduates. Disability activism/ academics not a favourite career choice
- Struggle with daily living (social services, environmental barriers, relationships) hurdles to participation in political/ academic debate
- Lack of national disability movement



Future aspirations

- To develop a Euro-Mediterranean perspective to Disability Activism and Disability Studies



RATIONALE

OUR WEBSITE

<http://www.knpd.org/>



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centre for disability studies. university of leeds
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