

Disability and an evaluation of the social relations of research production

Keynote Speaker: Rob Imrie is Professor of Geography at King's College London.

Abstract

Oliver's (1992) paper about the social relations of research and disability suggested that research had done little to change in any significant way the lives of disabled people. His critique of academic research was part of a broader awareness of how research subjects often become part of the objectivist gaze of experts and, in the process, are drawn into exploitative relationships. Disabled people, in this view, are passive victims, or 'psychological dopes' that feed into the academic production line. Reflecting on 15 years or so of research with/of disabled people, we seek to evaluate the views of Oliver and others and, in doing so, offer an analysis that stresses the positive roles of the academe, the importance of experts and expertism, and the roles and responsibilities that research subjects ought to assume and exercise in the process of research production.

Rob Imrie

Rob Imrie is Professor of Geography at King's College London and former Director of the Cities Group. His background is in geography, sociology, and planning studies and he has a doctorate in industrial sociology. He was previously Professor in Human Geography in the Department of Geography at Royal Holloway University of London (1991 to 2005). His main research interests are urban governance and community development in cities, the impact and implications of urban policy in British and international cities, the geographies of disability and the built environment, and urban design and the codification and regulation of architecture.

In 2004, Rob was awarded the 'Back Award' by the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers), in recognition of 'contributions to research on national and local policies in urban development and local governance', June 14th. Between 2003 and 2007, Rob was visiting professor, Department of Geography, University of Strathclyde. He has since held visiting professorships in the Urban Research Centre, University of Western Sydney (2008), and the Department of Applied Social Studies, University of Cork (2009). He is a former member of: the Department of Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) Working Party advising on changes to Part M of the Building Regulations; the DCLG's Housing Research Network, with responsibility to develop links between housing research and policy; and, the Lifetime Homes Group, Joseph Rowntree Foundation. He is an editorial board member of the 'Access Journal'.