

Participatory Research Projects involving Academics and Disabled Peoples' Organisations – One Academic's Perspective



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Many Different Ways of Doing Participatory Research – Evidence from the EuRADE Summer School

There are a lot of different ways of developing participatory research projects.

Nevertheless, few academics develop truly participatory research projects, involving DPOs as equal partners.

Barriers to Carrying out Participatory Research

Reflect on:

- Barriers to carrying out participatory research as (these can be) perceived by academics and academic institutions (not the same!).
- Barriers in terms of securing appropriate funding for participatory research.

Identifying Fields which are Suitable for Participatory Research

Not all academic research which touches on disability issues is suitable for participatory research.

However, even where participatory research is appropriate and valuable, it often does not take place.

Barriers to Developing a Fruitful partnership between Academics and DPOs (1)

- Participatory research is difficult. It requires that DPOs are involved in the research as full and equal partners, and – for many reasons – that can be difficult for both partners to achieve.
- Participatory research works best if all research partners are aware of specialised research knowledge, language and values.
- If DPOs are to participate in a meaningful way in any research project, they have to be aware of that knowledge, language and set of values. Otherwise they risk being sidelined and not able to participate and exercise influence over the research.

Barriers to Developing a Fruitful partnership between Academics and DPOs (2)

- Where DPOs do not already have this knowledge, it is necessary to provide support and training for them. However, academics usually do not have relevant experience of providing this training.
- Also, academics may simply not want to share control of their research project with others.

Barriers to Developing a Fruitful partnership between Academics and DPOs (3)

In essence:

Academics who are not committed to participatory research in principle, will be deterred by the high costs involved – in terms of money and effort, and by the prospect of losing control.

Academics who are committed, may not find the support from their home institutions or funders to carry out such research given the costs, and may not know how to engage with DPOs as research partners.

Funding Restrictions which present a Barrier to Participatory Research (1)

Participatory research is often going to be more expensive and time consuming than participatory research only involving academic partners.

Current funding rules (including co-funding requirement) can make it more difficult to establish participatory research projects:

- The work involved in preparing DPOs to participate in any research project does not, as such, amount to research itself. It is difficult for universities to co-fund training activities. 100% funding would be helpful.
- It is difficult for DPOs to co-fund their own research activities. 100% funding would be helpful.

Funding Restrictions which present a Barrier to Participatory Research (2)

- If extra funding is provided for participatory research projects, funders must examine proposals closely to ensure that only truly participatory projects benefit from extra funding.
- Funding for projects to train academics in how to work with DPOs and develop participatory research projects would be valuable.
- Funding for more projects to train DPOs in research methodology / approaches would be valuable – so that DPOs are better able to take the initiative and develop research projects with academics.

How can these Barriers be Addressed?

– Proposals (1)

- Provide training and support to Academics who wish to develop participatory research projects for the first time (e.g. a EuRADE summer school for academics!);
- Provide training and support to DPOs which wish to develop participatory research projects for the first time (e.g. a repetition of the EuRADE summer school. These summer schools could be field specific, e.g. law, political science, sociology ...);

How can these Barriers be Addressed? – Proposals (2)

- Funders to recognize the extra costs and time involved in developing participatory research projects;
- Funders to cover training costs and the research activities of DPOs at 100%;
- Funders to ensure that only projects which are truly participatory benefit from extra funding.