

Miro Griffiths – Claire Hamilton – UK BBC Merseyside Radio 19-3-21

[00:00:00] **Claire Hamilton:** Now young people with disabilities are being asked to participate in a research project, which explores activism and social movements across Europe. It's the first study of its kind to speak to young, disabled activists and gain insights into disability politics, the barriers limiting participation, and young people's vision for the future.

The research is being led by Dr. Miro Griffiths. Who's from the university of Leeds, but he's based on the Wirral and he joins us now. Dr. Griffiths. Thanks very much indeed for your time this afternoon. Tell us a bit about the study. First of all, why have you launched it and what do you want to find out?

Miro Griffiths : Thanks Claire. And thanks for having me. so we launched it because there is a lack of evidence capturing young, disabled people's views about, activism, about politics, either local or regional, national, even international level. And what we want to try to do is [00:01:00] understand, how do young disabled people engage in activism and social movements, but also what are the barriers that young disabled people face when they're engaging in activism and what are their ideas about building an inclusive and accessible society?

Because we always hear these times being used social justice, accessibility, inclusion, but sometimes we don't have the conversation about what that means in reality and what that means in contemporary society. So this is an opportunity to hear from young people about their ideas, about how do we want the future to look and how do we want to make sure it's inclusive and accessible for everybody in our communities.

Claire Hamilton: Do you know so far then about how young disabled people are participating in activism? I mean, obviously at the moment, everything is online for everybody and, and lots of activism. Albeit there have been some sort of physical protests, uh, this year, but mainly, you know, people have been engaging online.

So is that, is that true of the young, disabled people that you've already spoken to? [00:02:00] What's their experience of the way that they are being politically active at the moment or protesting or campaigning or whatever it is.

Miro Griffiths : So this project builds on, on my earlier research, which was from my PhD that looked at young, disabled people's views and experiences of activism in the UK.

And what we found was that young disabled people often feel, denied access to, to participate. Their views are often framed around only youth. So although young people want to have opportunities to engage and influence ideas about the community, ideas about politics. Often that's only shaped around a young person's contribution and actually young people and young disabled people have ideas that are relevant, not just for youth issues, but beyond that.

So it's also thinking about how we create accessible infrastructures and mechanisms so that young people can influence the broader agendas within the local and national arenas. But there's also a question about how, particularly for disability, [00:03:00] how disabled activists and campaigners can be engaged in aspects of social movements and activism beyond the disability.

So often when we think about disability, disabled people engage in activism. We only think about it in terms of disability activism, and actually disabled people have various interests associated with environmental issues, gender issues, feminism issues, sexuality, and so on. So it's also thinking about the intersectionality. So the cross-cutting issues that are important for disabled people, so that they can engage and have an opportunity to put forward views and perspectives. The online issue that you raise is, I think, is really interesting. And we have seen a surge of activity online for disabled people and young, disabled people.

Engaging in those platforms. Again, there's an issue with accessibility. So we have digital poverty and a lot of disabled people don't have access to, either, the internet or accessible technologies in order to access the internet because of health needs or impairment needs. So there's a question about how we resource and mobilized to provide the [00:04:00] necessary equipment.

So people can have a voice and that voice can be valued and listened to by those with considerable influence and power.

Claire Hamilton: Following on from that, I suppose how's the pandemic meant that young, disabled people have felt less connected with the world or have the technology, things like zoom meant that there is actually more access to events? And there is more equality of being connected, apart from, as you say, potentially with a sort of financial inequality, people don't have access to the, to the kit they need to get online.

Miro Griffiths : So it's interesting. You see a mixed picture. So on one hand we saw a move towards utilizing technology. If we think about work, if we think about education, there was a move to utilize these technologies, which is interesting because if you look at the history of disability activism, a lot of activists have championed for having alternative ways to engage in education.

Having alternative ways to engage in employment, that [00:05:00] often wanted to utilize technology, but it was always, we were always told as activists that that's not possible. Now with the pandemic, we can see that there are alternative ways to engage, not just in our local communities, but also in terms of labour market, in terms of education and so on.

So on the one hand, we've seen people be more receptive to that. And I think there's been some good examples where disabled people are being able to sustain their social networks online, continue with their studies, continue in the labour market. But for other people, that's not been the case because of the issues I've highlighted.

The question now, as we build beyond the pandemic, is that, well, how are we going to create inclusive mechanisms that capture some of the good stuff that happened during the pandemic when we had opportunities to utilize technology and so on. But. Without going

back to traditional forms that were never really accessible and that weren't very, very helpful or useful for disabled people?

So for me, you know, I think we, we need that space to discuss what's great about how we worked, how we communicate with each other and how can we [00:06:00] build that into longstanding, sustainable and effective programs of activity. When, when we think about work or education or access to important services and how we have that remain in our communities going forward. And I think a way to do that is creating these spaces for activists, and for disabled people to have a voice that is valued, that is respected, and that can influence our thinking, our short term and longterm plans around building back better from the pandemic.

Claire Hamilton: In terms of political engagements and sort of, you know, the grassroots politics. We've got the local elections coming up in May. Um, you know, there's a wider question about engagement with people in, you know, local elections and, and turn out is low and so on and so forth. But do you think that young disabled people feel engaged at the level of local elections, for example, and there are lots of issues around access to the elections themselves this year because of the pandemic, um, and, and having access to candidates and stuff like that.

I mean, is that something that's sort of grassroots political [00:07:00] engagement, something that you'd be looking at as well?

Miro Griffiths : We've certainly been looking at it in the research. Yes. So we want to understand how do young disabled people engage in politics and, and activities surrounding campaigns and activism and how that influence the political agendas at our local and national level.

It's interesting. So there's almost two parts to your question, really. One is. Recognizing that disabled people are politicised and young, disabled people are interested in political issues affecting them as disabled people, but also people in the community, people with different characteristics and so on.

But the question then is do we have the effective mechanisms so that their voices are heard so that they are engaged? They have opportunities to run for stand in elections, stand for cabinet office and so on. And the answer for the latter question is, is no, because there is a lack of support, uh, tailored specifically for supporting disabled people to participate.

There's also, I think a cultural issue that we have to identify, which is we don't, as a society, value [00:08:00] the contributions disabled people. We can see that in terms of the, the marginalization and oppression, disabled people experience across the country. So there's also a question of how do we support disabled people to take part, but also how do we support disabled people to access those positions of influence and of power so that we can respect and learn from the experiences of disabled people and their families.

And I would encourage anybody who has an opinion on this to take part in my research.

Claire Hamilton: So if people want to get involved in the research and they've listened to this and it really chimes with them, how can they contact you?

Miro Griffiths : So there's two options. So you can look at my research website, which is www.disabilityactivism.leeds.ac.uk.

Or you can and search my name on Google Miro Griffiths and you can find me not that details, but my email address is m.griffiths1@leeds.ac.uk. [00:09:00] And if anybody wants to contact me, I'll respond and we can have a chat. And particularly for young disabled people aged between 18 and 35, if you have an interest or experience of disability activism, I really encourage you to take part in the survey that's been launched this week.

Claire Hamilton: Okay, well, thanks very much, indeed, for telling us all about it and I'll have those contact details. So if anyone's listening and didn't manage to catch it, but wants to get involved, then they can get in touch with me. That's Dr. Miro Griffiths. He's from the university of Leeds based on the Wirral.