# Day 3 Transcript: Mark Groulx

**Alison Whiting:** Mark is an Associate Professor at UNBC's School of Planning and Sustainability and he is a Registered Professional Planner. His current work includes a social sciences and humanities research council-funded Nature for All Project that supports an evidence-based approach to promoting inclusive experiences in British Columbia's nature through barrier-free design. Welcome Mark.

**Mark Groulx:** Thanks so much Alison. I really appreciate the introduction including a proper pronunciation of my last name. So before I get going today, I'd like to acknowledge that I'm joining from the traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh and Prince George where I've been an uninvited guest since 2016. Next slide.

As was mentioned, my name is Mark Groulx and I'm an Associate Professor in the UNBC School of Planning and Sustainability. I am a white male, have dark brown hair, a rather long beard at the moment, and I wear glasses. Today I'm going to share a little bit about some of the recent work I've been doing along with partners looking at the context of remote and rural outdoor tourism and recreation spaces. This work has unfolded over the past five years in partnership with Spinal Cord Injury BC in their Acess BC Initiative. The conceptual foundations I'll speak to at the beginning stem from some of Mike Oliver's work, establishing the social model of disability and after briefly discussing some of those context, concepts, I'll talk about the process of conducting a scoping review and share some of the insights from the work that we have done. Next slide.

So the picture on this slide is of an older gentleman wearing glasses with a beard. This is Mike Oliver, a British sociologist and advocate for persons with a disability, as well as a Professor of Disability Studies. And throughout his work in the 1980s and 1990s. Oliver was highly critical of what he saw as an inaccurate and disempowering societal view and practice of ascribing the source of a person's disability to their bodily function and it's perceived deviation from some sort of a and I'll use quotes, normal distribution of people in society. So he critiqued this medicalized view of disability or the medical model of disability along several lines. At first, he argued that the medical model of disability stems from a problematic view that a person's inability to access certain places, like a playground or many of the spaces we just heard about from our previous presenter, stems from some sort of a missing or diminished function within a person's body rather than a set of attitudes and designs that create spaces that include some while excluding others. He also suggested that the medical model was based in what he referred to as a theory of personal tragedy where society unconsciously saw persons with a disability as necessarily being victims of a circumstance rather than being fully empowered individuals. Next slide.

As an alternative to the medical model of disability, Oliver outlined what he first called the Social Oppression Model of Disability. Rather than disempowered victims, Oliver talked about disabled individuals as empowered actors in charge of creating and leading fulfilled lives. Rather than believing in a non-existent normal member of society, he saw a population simply as involving a continuum of different functional leads over the life course and over a range of society. And rather than a person's impairment being the reason for their own exclusion, he argued as we know for exclusion being the predictable outcome of the creation of a society where we made design choices based in attitudes that include some again while being inaccessible to others. Next slide.

So as part of the Nature for All projects, we were interested in exploring how some of these views on accessibility might be represented within particularly the planning design and management literature as it relates to outdoor rural and recreation spaces. So we examine this by completing a scoping review which is a research approach that tries to answer a question not by collecting new primary data but by looking at existing sources, in our case academic research. And in a lot of ways, I would say that what we were doing in our scoping review was taking some of the foundational questions that Oliver asked over forty years ago and looking back at the literature to see what we might have learned about accessibility in the context of nature based spaces in rural and remote areas. We were particularly interested in this because we recognize at this point that nature contact is an incredible wellspring of health and well-being benefits for individuals, communities, and societies and that everyone should have an opportunity to to benefit from that wellspring. So, we did this by asking a fairly straightforward review question as we looked at the literature and the research on this topic. Basically, what principal standards guidelines and policies are used in the evaluation and design of accessible outdoor tourism recreation spaces? Next slide.

So, when conducting a scoping review, rather than looking for it including studies in an organic fashion through something like a Google Scholar search, you set out ahead of time a whole range of rules that you follow to make sure your your study is predictable and transparent. An image of the flow chart on the right of the screen here which shows a series of cascading boxes basically shows how we moved from capturing initially about eighteen hundred studies. Reviewing some of those studies to identify what was going to be relevant to our question and what wasn't going to be relevant to our question and ultimately we got down to about forty one studies that included a relevant focus which was again on accessibility in rural nature contexts. A setting which was rural and remote outside of the urban environment in particular and a focus on a population which included folks with a disability but we are also interested in benefits that we know accrue for for many many members of society who benefit from accessibility. Next slide.

So speaking to the theme, I think of this section of the conference around solutions one of the things that we are interested in is what the starting point for some of those solutions might be in terms of how the literature is conceptualizing accessibility or barrier-free access in rural and remote nature. Next slide. We developed a diagram shown on the screen here and again in three slides which is a map of the key concepts that are shown as bubbles in this diagram connected with some lines and arrows, to identify how the literature and how researchers are thinking about accessibility in remote and rural spaces. I won't try and describe all of the relationships that are captured here but I do want to draw your attention to the fact that the diagram has the social model of disability as a prominent, although by no means universal approach to thinking about accessibility in in outdoor spaces. There was with this quite a widespread recognition and discussion of some of the societal barriers that might limit outdoor access in tourism and recreation spaces capturing I think many of the discussions that I've heard over the course of this conference so far. And these range from physical limitations, like the design of trails and washrooms you know but also a recognition of some of the things that folks in the conference have talked about, like the design and delivery of interpretive programming that relies fully on the visual consumption of nature while leaving out those who might have a different sensory experience of natural environments. Next slide.

Participation in nature and particularly the ability to be self-determining in this pursuit was given as the core objective of accessibility work. So in this sense I think the literature is in line with many of the folks who I've had a chance to hear from at this conference and while this aligns closely with Oliver's original work and much other research on accessibility, the specifics of the importance of accessibility in nature spaces did emerge in more recent literature where scholars have looked at accessibility not only as a matter of health equity but specifically as a matter of equitable access to the type of nature contact that the first speaker spoke to and the benefits that can accrue from this this nature contact. So drawing on one of the scholars, Ringolan and colleagues, this suggests that those involved in the management of spaces that hold these health related ecosystem services or benefits like our national parks should have regard for accessibility as a matter of social inclusion but also as a potential driver of and I quote these authors here a disparity in health outcomes that is caused by social or economic disadvantage that has their roots in poverty and discrimination. Next slide.

So as a team of planners and public health researchers and I think again relevant to the theme of this session, we were interested also in what the literature said about accessibility and the types of solution pathways that were envisioned for rural and remote nature. Next slide.

Looking again at that concept diagram linking some of the concepts used in the literature, we could see that if participation and self-determination is the normative or desired goal for accessibility, the literature presently identifies or conceptualizes three solution pathways to being able to to enable that participation, all of those informed or directed at overcoming barriers that individuals might face along with their families and potentially their caregivers. Next slide.

So the first of these pathways focuses on the solution of personal adaptation overcoming barriers through potential behavioral changes, often incorporating different supportive or adaptive technologies. This is I think demonstrated well over the course of this conference and again on the screen here in terms of the individuals using using an adaptive mountain bike in a forested setting. One of the things that this pathway acknowledges or that research examining it acknowledges is that there's a capacity for a benefit to having personal challenge growth and empowerment. So being able to use supportive technology to tackle more challenging environments but the literature also talks about or highlights the equity issues that can come with this, particularly in terms of the disproportionate burdens often time and finances that might come with the requirement to access adaptive technologies and very exciting to hear about a lot of the work that's happening through this conference to overcome some of some of these potential equity issues. Next slide.

The second path that the literature identifies or refers to what we have termed as structural accommodation. So this path that emphasizes structural changes often to a physical environment sometimes identifying the need to make changes in service environments but in this case directed only at a certain segment of the the population. So the path pathway identifies the need to to reduce burdens and promote full and equal participation but in this case scholars and research identifies fairly clear equity issues involved in creating structural accommodations that create a group of other users or visitors. So this is demonstrated here in Prince George with the image on the right of our four-story wood innovation and design building which despite being one of the newest buildings built in downtown has a staired main entrance with a separate ramped entrance for those who might have differing mobility needs and it has been an ongoing source of discussion about doing better around universal design in our community. So finally, the last solution pathway discussed within the literature recognizes the opportunity and long-standing conversation about bringing universal design principles into remote and rural nature contexts. This is illustrated on the slide, on the image on the right which is of the accessible boardwalk set within the cedars of the ancient forest here near Prince George and again the focus on this pathway is not putting in place barriers to begin with and creating solutions that work for all segments of society equally. So not investing in solutions that create that set of other users or visitors. Next slide please.

So finally, maybe where we might be able to tackle most directly some of the theme around innovation and solutions what we were really interested in as we move through our review of the literature especially with new legislation around accessibility at a federal and provincial level. It was really any aspect of what we might be doing in the research realm to support an understanding of the development and implementation of accessibility standards in remote and rural spaces. Next slide.

So we were actually quite surprised starting with over studies as we move through our review to only identify six studies that directly address the topic of accessibility standards and in most cases this involved conducting an accessibility audit of a destination using some sort of a predefined set of standards. The absence from the literature was research examining some of the collaborative work that we know is happening within processes like Canada's federal task force on accessibility standards. Really we weren't able to identify a focus or a strong focus on longitudinal evaluation of destinations to see if accessibility improvements are actually being made over time in remote and rural nature and I think really importantly, we weren't ident able to identify any studies that have worked with folks who might have lived experience with a disability to determine whether and how implementing standards in rural nature spaces is it improving a sense of inclusion and access to the well-being benefits that these spaces provide. Next slide.

So my wrap up here, my conclusion slide asks a little bit about what we might learn from the state of the literature on accessibility in rural and remote nature spaces that might be relevant to the theme of innovation and solutions. So first I think it's important to point out that there's no lack of concepts being identified within the literature related to research on accessibility including framings like universal design that will be familiar I think to many at this conference but one of the things that was noticed that was that cross-fertilization with concepts from environmental planning, key discourses like ecosystem services and resilience that are very common in conservation management doesn't seem to be happening. So given that there seems to be a need for more work exploring where these realms overlap particularly when planning for spaces where equity and accessibility have to sit hand in hand with sustainability and conservation. Many studies either presented or recognized a prevalent view that accessibility in universal design is somehow a threat to environmental sustainability. My sense is that's a pretty antiquated and unsubstantiated view but it seems to me that there's a lot of solutions work to do focusing on the limitation of this attitudinal barrier in conservation management and we need to think a lot more work examining how accessibility and sustainability practice can be integrated and a lot more examples like the ancient forest boardwalk and many many other solutions that we're seeing across this conference and across BC, across BC story that show how accessibility and conservation can live hand in hand. Thanks very much for the opportunity to share and happy to take any questions that might be arising. Thank you.

**Alison Whiting:** Thank you so much Mark. That was really enlightening and some like really great insights there obviously. So much work still to be done. Unfortunately, we don't have time for live questions but we will gather up the questions that we received and we'll flip them over to you to answer at a later time.