

**Title: Bridging collective roots and individuals choices: a critical reflection on disability and community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

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**Abstract:**

Disabled people's horizons across the 'developed' western world have been much improved by the prospect of independent living. Build on the key principles of choices, rights and self-determination the disabled people's movements of Europe, North America and beyond have helped place such issues squarely on the political and policy agenda of their respective countries. The implications are clear for state, civil society and community planning if they are to support disabled people toward independent living. However, the significance of the timing and wider political context of even major progressive ideas needs to be fully accounted for if we are to understand, predict and build on notions of meaningful independent living. The consolidation of independent living for a small but important group of disabled people has taken place at a time of a retrenched neo-liberalism that held suspicion of collectivist forms of government and life. The roots of independent living in collective struggles needs to be borne in mind here as the expansion of disabled people's movement thinking on independence and choice severely risks being appropriated by neo-liberal agendas that may atomise choices, identity and choice in a way that risks making solidarity, community and collective struggle and awareness mere historical footnotes. In this paper we will explore critically the origins, tensions and unlikely convergences of individualist and collective notions that underpin a disability rights and a neo-liberal marketised approach to independent lives. Arguably choices and rights only equate to progress where interdependence, community, collective identities and personal choices can be reconciled.

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