# Abstract

This study examined disabled people’s access to independent living in Scotland and Norway. At the time of the field work for this research in 2012, the literature revealed no comparable social enquiry combining the concepts of citizenship, independent living and governance. Within disability studies, independent living denotes a perspective that recognises the interconnected nature of life areas that affect lived experiences of disablement and inclusion of disabled citizens. From the independent living movement, Centres for Inclusive Living emerged as unique governance structures with full service-user involvement and run by disabled people for disabled people.

This study focused upon to what extent the organisational governance structures in the Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living (GCIL) and Uloba Centre for Independent Living (Uloba) in Norway facilitate or impede disabled people’s access to independent living. The methodology adopted a mixed methods approach. The central method involved organisational case studies with GCIL and Uloba. This enabled an in-depth qualitative exploration through semi-structured interviews with the case study employees, service-user/co-owners and key experts within each country. In addition, an online survey was distributed to other organisations that operated within the disability field.

The analytical framework used an integration of the social relational model of disability (Thomas, 1999) and meso level governance analysis (Lowe, 2004). The social relational model of disability provided structural (macro) and agency (micro) level interpretations and an emphasis on psychosocial elements of disability. It also enabled the synergy of a theory of impairment alongside a theory of disability. Meso (organisational) governance analysis focused attention on the connections between organisations in society. This focus revealed the lateral relationships with other meso level bodies, macro institutions and micro individual action.

Research participants prioritised the areas of peer support, accessible housing and personal assistance. Peer support was found to take both informal and formal manifestations and acted as a foundation for the other two areas of independent living. The findings highlighted that Centres for Inclusive Living provide facilitation for access to independent living across macro, meso and micro tiers of society. In particular, empowerment, peer support and user led governance formed key strategies that enhanced disabled people’s access to independent living in Scotland and Norway.