

# ADOLF RATZKA

(1943–2024)

## A pioneer in disability activism and independent living

*“Independent Living is a philosophy and a movement of people with disabilities who work for self-determination, equal opportunities and self-respect. [...] Independent Living means that we demand the same choices and control in our everyday lives, that our non-disabled brothers and sisters, neighbors and friends take for granted... Since we are the best experts on our needs, we need to show the solutions we want, need to be in charge of our lives, think and speak for ourselves...”*

Adolf Ratzka



Stopping the traffic. STIL-demonstration in Stockholm, 1988.



ILI conference with Kalle Könkkölä and Judy Heumann, 2008.



Workshop in Ramallah, 2010.



Conference in Taipei, 2017.

Adolf Ratzka was born in 1943 in Karlsbad in today's Czech Republic and grew up in Bavaria. At the age of 17 he attracted polio and has used a power wheelchair and a ventilator since then.

After five years of hospitalization in Munich, Adolf got a scholarship that included money for personal assistance, and he moved to California to study. There he encountered the emerging Independent Living movement and when he returned to Europe, he worked on implementing the movement's ideas. In Sweden he founded the

STIL co-operative in 1984 and the Independent Living Institute in 1993. He also co-founded ENIL in 1998. STIL served as a model for the Swedish assistance reform of 1994.

Adolf had a wide international network. He was a role model and mentor for disabled people all over the world. He lectured in more than 30 countries and published numerous articles on issues including Independent Living, personal assistance, deinstitutionalization, universal design, disability rights, antidiscrimination, and ag-

ing with disability. He inspired and assisted disability organizations to start programs for personal assistance and for other pertinent issues. He was invited to several United Nations Expert Seminars on disability as a resource person.

Adolf's contributions to the Independent Living movement are deeply rooted in his personal experience and his belief in the necessity of self-determination for disabled people. His work not only improved the life of thousands of disabled people but also inspired a movement that continues to grow today.

### ADOLF RATZKA'S ACADEMIC CAREER\*

- PhD in urban land economics (1981)
- Research Economist at the Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm (1984–1995)
- Associate Coordinator, CIB W 84 Building Non-Handicapping Environments (1986–1994)
- Professor ad honorem, Disability Studies, University of Costa Rica (1994–1995)

### RECOGNITIONS\*

- ULOBA Pride Award 2017
- European Citizen Award 2008
- Recognized by TIME magazine as “European Visionary”

\*among others

*“We must support and learn from each other, organize ourselves and work for political changes that lead to legal protection of our human rights.*

*As long as we regard our disabilities as tragedies, we will be pitied. As long as we remain silent, we will be told by others what to do. As long as we feel*

*ashamed of who we are, our lives will be regarded useless. That's the plan! Now let's work for it.”*  
Adolf Ratzka



The Independent Living Institute (ILI) is a policy development center specializing in consumer-driven policies for disabled peoples' freedom of choice, self-determination, self-respect and dignity (independentliving.org).



The Founders of Independent Living in Sweden that enables disabled individuals to recruit, train and manage their own assistance (stil.se).



The European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) is a user-led network of disabled people, with members throughout Europe promoting Independent Living (enil.eu).