

**Cultural Scapes, Older Age  
and Learning Difficulties:  
narrative accounts of living in  
the 'inscape of yesterday'**

A presentation of work-in-  
progress by Dr Deborah Phillips

# Background

1. Challenging Positions? New possibilities?
2. Reviving data: oral histories of three older women labelled as having 'learning difficulties' living in inner city area in UK
3. Drawing on work of George Giarchi' s (1974) concept of 'SCAPES' and 'INSCAPES'

# The Reworked 'Scapes'

- 1. SOCIO-CULTURAL scape: to incorporate social and cultural processes and ramifications**
  - 2. LOCAL scape: man made or natural environment**
  - 3. OUTERSCAPE: nearer or wider social influences e.g. policies, legislation**
  - 4. WIDER OUTERSCAPES: may not be directly observable but can have major influences e.g. globalisation**
- Other scapes which impact: political, economic, military, media = INSTRESSES**

# Participants and their 'scapes'

**SADIE:** aged 60, born in City. Educated at home. Moved into 'care' when parents died.

**BERTHA:** aged 68, born in village. Went to school for the 'blind' Lived most of adult life in institutions

**ALICE:** aged 76, born in village. Spent most of adult life in institutions. Memories of war years working in the woollen mills

# **INSCAPES: reactive process between individual / environment**

**LOCAL SCAPE:** Inner city. Felt 'under siege', unsafe streets. Alienated from personal belongings. 'Not a day goes by without police!'

**WIDER SOCIO CULTURAL SCAPE:** attend day centre and outreach centre – again, on edge of city, but networks of friendships

# But..living in the INSCAPE OF YESTERDAY

The inscape of older people a 'precious commodity'

The past can absorb the present

A 'golden age' of community, village life, war time, hostels but also very practical and real reasons

Cultural clashes occur when living in an out of scapes: **instresses**

# Living IN and OUT of SCAPES

**HISTORY SCAPE:** a shared history

**MEDICAL SCAPE:** medicalisation of label –  
subjected to medical interventions

**SUB-CULTURAL SCAPE:** sub culture of  
institutionalisation

**WIDER OUTERSCAPE:** underpinning  
ideologies and political influences – Social  
Darwinism, Eugenics, Social Exclusion,  
Gender Differences.

# Conclusion

- ‘Scapes’ (methods and theory) can provide an alternative framework. Allows for a more fluid yet complex analysis of disability ‘identity’
- Provides an understanding of how people live in a complexity of scapes as opposed to systems and structures
- Captures the scapes of the ‘oppressed’ and give voice to those ‘lives without histories’
- What about RESISTANCE? Resistance in ‘scape’ terms?