

Edinburgh based sociologists document their social transformation by the COVID-19 pandemic to create new sociological knowledge, writes Ashaluck Bhatiasavi

As sociologists voice out on how the COVID-19 lockdown is impacting societies across the world by transforming the social relations and interactions, a group of sociologists at the University of Edinburgh have come together to curate a blog to document and share personal experiences on how the pandemic has transformed them socially. The objective of this virtual diary in the form of a blog, is to share experiences as a collective, and to generate new knowledge on social transformation.

I recently interviewed Prof Liz Stanley and Dr Angus Bancroft, curators of the blog Edinburgh Decameron: Lockdown Sociology at Work. They told me about how the blog emerged from conversations they had with other members of the Sociology Department through Skype, Zoom and Teams meetings under the lockdown. Dr Bancroft is interested in maintaining the sociological community and documenting the social change which may influence the creation of new knowledge, while Prof Stanley is interested in ideas of storytelling, from the "Decameron" perspective where different people who may be in similar situations, tell different stories because of their different experiences. Both the experts wanted their blog to get away from the usual scientific discussions they have in the academia, to reflect on the COVID-19 times as sociologists and as human beings, which includes being able to express

anger and upsetness with the situation.

Concerning some of the contradictory things happening, Prof Stanley spoke about one of these being the tussle between rationality and emotionality that many people, herself included, are presently experiencing. Although not a sentimental person, she commented on finding that things like the Thursday clap for care staff and reports of hundred-year birthdays touched an emotional nerve because linked to the shared sorrow or trauma of so many deaths occurring.

Dr Bancroft says the lockdown has changed their lives as academics. "How we do scholarship and teaching will be very different. Whether our students will be based in Edinburgh or not in the coming year, we don't know." Inspired by renowned British sociologist Sir Patrick Geddes' observational techniques to discover and work with relationships among place, work and folk, Dr Bancroft says this form of documentation of experiences may lead to new knowledge and theories in sociology. For instance, Edinburgh as a place which houses the University is important to the discovery of how education may be transformed by COVID-19. The notion of how time is perceived and during the lockdown is very different for different people, says Prof Stanley. While some people say they have a lot of free time at hand, others may feel their time has passed by quickly without being able to do what they had planned to.

As a collective, they want to document the different stories told by sociologists living in a real pandemic, a transformation from the imagination, only a month ago. These stories, told in forms of structured narratives through written texts, poems, images and voice or video recordings, carry momentum that moves forward accounts. Interpretations of these viewpoints in future dates will provide evidence and arguments, analysis and conclusions to inform development of social theory.

The blog is open to the university's staff, students and alumni, to share their experiences from different parts of the world.

Prof Liz Stanley is a professor of Sociology in the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh.

Dr Angus Bancroft is a senior lecturer of Sociology in the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh.