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Dr Glenn Laverack has 35 years experience in public health and has worked in 50 countries. He was a community engagement and communication adviser to UNMEER during the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in West African. He has also been involved in international responses for SARS and Zika Virus Disease as well as national level responses for cholera and dengue.

Presently he's living in Spain and advising the regional health promotion authorities on the C19 outbreak. Since 2016 he is advisor of DoRS Regione Piemonte (Italy).

Giving a 'Voz' to the people during COVID-19: Identifying community perceptions using 'FOTOVOZ' in Zaragoza, Spain

updated to the 27th of July 2020

Living with COVID-19 in the future will depend on maintaining low community transmission and on social responsibility to respect the measures to prevent infection and to shield and support the vulnerable. Communities that suffer most inequalities are also more adversely affected by COVID-19, especially those that are overcrowded, partly because social distancing is difficult to maintain. Las Delicias is a low socio-economic, multi-cultural and densely populated neighbourhood in the city of Zaragoza, Spain. The residents are Spanish, South American, Romania, Chinese and African as well as a significant elderly population. 'FOTOVOZ' was applied in Las Delicias in May 2020 to help identify community perceptions of the COVID-19 lock-down. 'Fotovoz' is a low cost approach that has been used in projects around the world to allow people to identify their needs and to improve their awareness through photographic images. The immediacy of the visual image and the short narrative that goes with it can provide a powerful record of what really matters in the lives of people. In Las Delicias, mobile phones were used so that people could 'act as a camera' to record personal experiences, feelings and needs, both positive and negative, during the period of 'lock-down'.

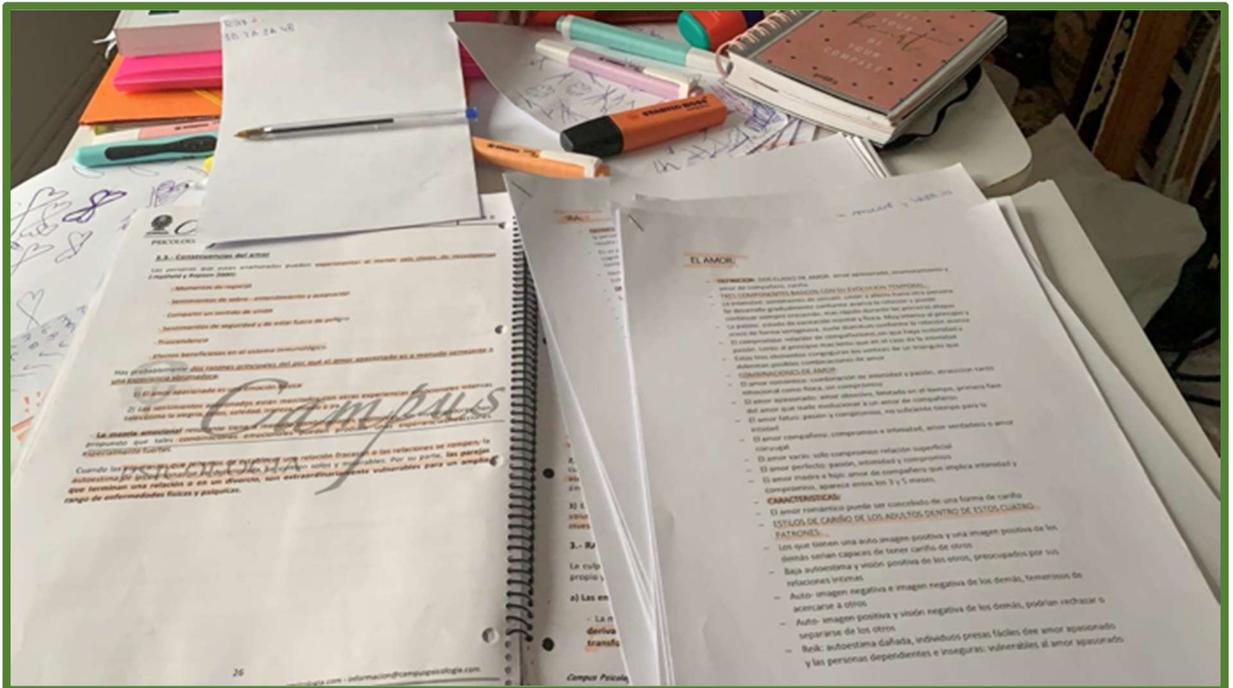
The use of 'FOTOVOZ' was coordinated by the Association of Neighbours of Delicias ("Manuel Viola") and the Delicias south Health Centre in collaboration with the Public Health Department of the Government of Aragon and with Glenn Laverack, Visiting Professor at the University of Trento.

Identifying community perceptions of the COVID-19 lock-down with 'FOTOVOZ' used the following steps:

1. Electronically, identify people that will represent the community from different ethnic groups, zones, gender, age and faiths. Community representatives were asked to further identify other residents that were willing to voluntarily participate.
2. An email, WhatsApp or another similar mode was used so that the participants could send 2 or 3 images with a short narrative that reflected their experiences of the lock-down to a central point. The site was private so that the images were not shared with anyone other than the organiser/focal point. A specific time limit was given to provide the images and the following question was used as a guide:
 - Please share a picture/image using your mobile phone of a scene, an event or location that best reflects how you feel about the COVID lock-down in Las Delicias. Give a short (2 sentences) story about the picture/image.
3. The focal point/organiser collates the photographs and then a small group of representatives met (following social distancing and masks) to view and select those images that were clear, non-offensive and confidential. The participants were contacted to request their permission to use the images and the narratives and all unused images were permanently deleted.

In Las Delicias, 39 residents voluntarily participated, sending 85 photographs to the central focal point in the Association of Neighbours. Some of these photographs reflected different personal experiences of isolation, anxiety and loneliness, for example:

- The suspension of routines and activities with a special emphasis on education (exams, back to school, stress for teachers, students and families).
- The importance of pets that filled the need for contact.
- The importance of grandchildren in the elderly population and friendship in adolescents.
- The time for reflection and solidarity.
- Uncertainty about the consequences of confinement, closing of schools, companies and other services.
- Balconies and windows were the only contact with the outside world.
- For those who lived alone, sadness, loneliness and fear were reflected in the images of empty streets.



Narrative. Estrés por no saber lo que va a pasar con los exámenes.



Narrative. Más tiempo con mis perros

The images also reflected experiences of innovation in the home, gratitude and the voluntary support given to others, for example:

- Homes became makeshift gyms and sport reinvents itself because it was necessary for physical and mental health.
- Confidence in the work of health personnel.
- Reinvention at a work level, the new ways in which people had to adapt their work such as using the internet much more.
- Engaging in other activities such as reading and listening to music.
- Cleaning as means of entertainment.
- The opportunity to help others such as making cloth masks.



Narrative: En el confinamiento, mi manera de hacer ejercicio: Caminar



Narrative. Una de mis ayudas. Para vecinos y familias. Me sentí muy bien al poder ayudar

‘Fotovoz’ expressed people’s experiences of hope of a de-escalation, relief at the end of a long confinement and the joy of again seeing friends and family, for example:

- Fear of the first outings into the street, cafes and bars.
- Joy for the return to the streets, mainly for the boys and girls of the neighbourhood.
- Joy and relief for being able to go outside with their family.
- Fear of crowded spaces and the lack of other people using social distancing.
- The tranquillity in the parks during the first days after the confinement.



Narrative: Puertas que se abren: apertura, incertidumbre, precaución, alegría, esperanza de cambios profundos y positivos, con personas, árboles con hojas



Narrative. Este paseo lo que tiene de raro es que en la cuarentena, antes, las calles estaban vacías y es raro que ahora, tan rápido, tan juntos, haya tanta gente después de la larga cuarentena.

‘FOTOVOZ’ was a unique approach in Las Delicias and a powerful tool that combined the use of a mobile phone, an image and a short narrative. It gave the residents of Las Delicias a ‘voice (VOZ)’ to express their concerns, fears and hopes about the situation in their community during the period of confinement. ‘FOTOVOZ’ also allowed public health professionals to better understand ‘grass-root’ issues that directly impacted people’s lives such as discarded masks, loneliness and the need for social support networks. In turn, this will provide better planning to facilitate local action and service support to help prepare for the next phases of the COVID outbreak.

An exhibition of the ‘FOTOVOZ’ images and narratives from Las Delicias has been held in Zaragoza to share the experiences with other communities and with other community members as well as with local decision makers.