The past year has been dominated by the unprecedented event of the Covid-19 Pandemic. It is extraordinary in itself, but is also characterised by a rapid acceleration of social trends, an amplification of persistent inequalities, and intensifying pressure to address questions of social justice. In addition, long-standing societal challenges, looming political dilemmas, and economic debates remain unresolved. Thus, we invite papers on the theme: ‘Atomised Solidarities: Together / Apart’. Tremendous reserves of social solidarity have been revealed, while the concrete contexts of interaction, sociability and cooperation have been emptied by distancing and cocooning. The technologisation and mediatisation of social life has accelerated, producing a hyper-connected society, while the privatisation of life becomes entrenched. Espirit de corps and civic virtues were witnessed, all the while, the pandemic has affected the most vulnerable and socially excluded more acutely. Some have been able to feel, through their good fortune, that ‘we are all in it together’, but this has also been used to excuse not addressing others’ demands and needs. What we have witnessed in the past year is new, but not novel, as the pandemic has accelerated, intensified, worsened and amplified social trends and realities that we have been living with for some time. The pandemic is after all an outcome of globalisation, the risk society, extractive capitalism and habitat destruction. It has also hardened resolve that was already strong, built collective efficacy, produced a sense that things can be different, and sparked imaginations about better arrangements.

Our aim for the conference is for it to be a forum for sociologists to come together (while apart), to learn from each other’s work so that we can clarify the social trends, challenges, dilemmas and scandals we have pointed to. We want the sociological community to participate and reflect not just on where we are and how we got here, but where we are going, where we could go, and where we should go as a society. We will offer addresses from leading figures in sociology and panels on a range of specialisms, but also a strong emphasis on interaction, participation, exchange, dialogue, and fun, to make our online conference as close to the social experience of a conference that we all long for.
In our virtual conference we will have:
> Addresses by Keynote speakers
> Pre-recorded panel presentations that will have live discussion following these
> Breakout discussion groups on shared problematics
> Creative events to foster dialogue and exchange
> Social events to foster the sociable atmosphere of a live event

The conference at a glance...
• Opening reflection on cancellations, disruptions and virtual academic existence by Dr. Perry Share, Institute of Technology Sligo
• Keynote - Professor Sally Shortall, Newcastle University
• Keynote - Professor Katy Hayward, Queen's University Belfast
• Keynote - Professor Kieran Keohane, University College Cork
• Keynote - Professor Frances McGinnity, ESRI & Trinity College Dublin
• Parallel Sessions. We welcome both individual papers and proposals for panels
• SAI Study Group Panels
• Postgrad pdf poster presentations
• Special events, to be announced
A reflection on a missed year…

Last year’s Call for Papers – Ireland on the Edge - was written with a concrete place in mind and the assumption that the community of sociologists would be hosted and meet there together – listen, mix, talk and share. It was to take place in a highly particular place – Sligo – which possesses myriad resonances and is a case study for many of the social challenges we face. Sligo is literally a surfer’s paradise on the edge of the world so is full of metaphorical possibility. But we have been torn from concrete contexts by the pandemic. For us, Sligo represented in particular how the edge speaks back to the centre. Sligo is regional, and the politics in the Western societies are now to a large extent shaped by the regions reacting against the centre. It is a town like countless others fighting to maintain its gravitational pull, retain jobs and people. Such questions of regional development and regional distribution of services and opportunities are crucial to our times. It is close to the border, which threatens to harden again post-UK Exit. Being on the edge does not in any way mean marginality and irrelevance. Sligo and its position on the ‘Wild Atlantic Way’ is the type of place metropolitan people go to in their minds to escape the anxieties of the present. The margin is an imaginative space that shapes and attracts artists and intellectuals. It is not mere romanticism, as the regions have always spoken back to, and transformed the centre in profound ways – whether Dublin, London or other metropoles. It was Sligonians such as Douglas Hyde and the Yeats and Gore-Booth families that framed the national question, gender and class politics, the aesthetic sensibility of modern Ireland, and even the tone of the entire epoch. Its bellwether status for worrying trends is seen in how it is the setting for much of the best contemporary Irish crime fiction. Along with all of that, the event was to be framed by the spectacular surroundings of Sligo, and our enjoyment of nature there, and IT Sligo, which is so central to the education and life of the region.

All changed, changed utterly… The edges that we stand on have drawn nearer – UK-Exit, growing pressure for constitutional change, pressing questions of social justice, social pathologies produced by accelerating modernity, and environmental catastrophe, amplified or momentarily stalled by the pandemic. But the place and concrete connections that we drew symbolic resources and solidarity from seem to have dissolved as we have been forced to withdraw into cocoons, distance, to transform ourselves into virtual beings. Societal challenges continue to be very real, but the reality we drew our collective efficacy from has retreated, while oligopolistic technology companies have solidified their central role in our lives, culture and politics. Society has shown that it does indeed exist over the course of the pandemic. But many are ‘on edge’, society is ‘on the edge’ while in the economy ‘the cutting edge’ sharpens, as technology has solidified its place in social life. Being ‘at the cutting edge’ and of achieving ‘breakthroughs’ are metaphors that have seeped into research, inherited from the military, combined with an obsession with consequent ‘disruption’. Sociology is no laggard in terms of advancement, but its essence is communication, interaction, dialogue and understanding rather than forging new territory and undermining the resilience of neighbouring entities. Thus we propose that the task of sociology in this present moment is to stay true to its identity, and hence we call for papers that can clarify the nature of the edges that we stand on, in this particularly disorienting time. We are together though apart now more than ever, and the depth of social solidarity is evident all the while we experience atomisation, compounded by social exclusion for many. We invite sociologists in Ireland and internationally to address the conference them to clarify the nature of the present moment and reveal possibilities of where we go from here.