

Sociology Retreat at Cumberland Lodge – Part One

A Weekend to Remember

*This post reflects on MSc student **Tanya Anne Pinto's** experiences of the LSE Department of Sociology annual retreat at Cumberland Lodge, 24-26 January 2014.*

When I first received an email informing me of an 'academic' getaway at Cumberland Lodge, I was wary of it. Already entrenched in coursework and essays, I didn't think life could get any more 'academic'. Luckily, I followed my instinct and decided to book a place on the trip. The refreshing experience that I followed to have made it the best decision I could make.

On 24th January 2014, staff and students across various years met up at Cumberland Lodge in the outskirts of London. It was a pleasant coach ride to our destination, with the travel transforming into an impromptu icebreaker session with other students who were attending the conference. It was interesting to speak to classmates outside of the classroom setup. Often we are so caught up with readings and lectures; we hardly have the time to get to know our classmates better. Though we reached the lodge only in the evening, its majestic architecture and royal heritage were unmistakable. As soon as I had stepped into the entrance lobby, I was swept into an era of luxury. The satin covered walls were adorned with oil paintings that were valuable enough to be kept in a museum.



The theme for this year was, 'Methods and Methodologies in Sociological Research'. The weekend programme had a schedule of interesting sociological seminars and events. PhD students presently pursuing their studies at the Sociology Department of LSE presented their work, the challenges they faced during research and also encouraged questions from the audience. For a Master's student like me, it was a wonderful learning experience as I had an insight into the field of academic research at the doctoral level. The talks covered a broad range of topics- right from studying international borders to the way emails impact workplace dynamics. There was also a diversity of research methods – ethnography, qualitative interviews, mixed methods and discourse analysis – all of which require different considerations in terms of rigour and validity.

There were some lectures by faculty also,, throwing open interesting discussions about research ethics and methodology. An interesting debate about the strengths and weaknesses of Qualitative vs. Quantitative research methodology left an impression on me. Professors involved in ethnographic work and those involved with quantitative research shared their concerns about the limitations of these domains. Eventually, however, both conceded that there was no 'right' way of conducting research. Both methodologies had their own pros and cons and depend to a large degree on the nature of the research question.

On Sunday morning we also had the opportunity to attend a service at the royal chapel, which is otherwise restricted to common public. It was a surreal experience, knowing that this place was regularly visited by HRH Queen Elizabeth as well. Some of the students chose to visit Windsor Castle, which is neatly tucked away in the Great Park not far from the Lodge. During lunch, students had the opportunity to interact with faculty and peers, which helped form stronger friendships.

Overall, the weekend at Cumberland Lodge was an excellent learning experience. Being a Master's student, it is the sole platform to interact with more senior students and staff. This helps to explore study and research opportunities to follow at a later stage. This weekend is a memory that will stand out from my time at the London School of Economics.

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