

# Publishers respond to growing need for collaboration by offering an open access home for interdisciplinary research.

**LSE** [blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/05/20/finding-a-home-for-interdisciplinary-research/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/05/20/finding-a-home-for-interdisciplinary-research/)

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*The new journal Palgrave Communications aims to support interdisciplinary development by offering a high-quality outlet for research in the humanities, the social sciences and business, hoping to foster interaction, creativity and reflection within and between disciplines. **Sam Burridge** provides an initial overview of the new outlet. But developing truly collaborative research takes time, a feature with little appreciation in funding and policy demands, and dialogue. Editorial board member **Michele Acuto** finds that as we strive for truly interdisciplinary research, between social and natural sciences, and for truly global research, as a balanced dialogue between north and south, the issue of how and where we publish is an important facet of interdisciplinary development.*



**Sam Burridge, Managing Director of Open Research Palgrave Macmillan/Nature Publishing Group**

Options for open access publication have been increasingly abundant fairly widely for scientists over recent years. But there are fewer options if you are a sociologist, fewer still if you are a historian. And the options don't increase if you are conducting interdisciplinary research, with many journals still reflecting traditional discipline boundaries.



We see this as a particular need given the rise of funding streams for interdisciplinary work: What if your funder mandates that you must publish open access – but you can't find a journal which is the right fit for your findings? And then there is the rather more idealistic premise that interdisciplinary thinking can benefit the outcomes and breadth of use of research and therefore society as a whole.

This is why we've launched *Palgrave Communications* – a high-quality peer-reviewed research in all areas of the humanities, the social sciences and business. The new journal will champion, and particularly welcome interdisciplinary research, fostering interaction, creativity and reflection within and between disciplines.

Palgrave Communications will offer immediate, free online dissemination via a CC BY license (other licenses are available on request.) Many open access journals will pledge to publish all work so long as it is methodologically sound, but Palgrave Communications is committed to high-quality, original research, published speedily. In order to help us do this, we hope to build an editorial board of hundreds of expert scholars across the HSS subjects. We already have over eighty editorial board members.

As costs are involved in every stage of the publication process, from peer-review to curation, copy editing, production of multiple formats and hosting the final article on dedicated servers, authors will be asked to pay an article-processing charge (APC) in order for their article to be published open access, without access control. After paying the one-off APC of £750+VAT, if they would like authors can also post the final, published PDF of their article on a web site, institutional repository or other free public server, immediately on publication.

We hope that eventually, *Palgrave Communications* will be the definitive peer-reviewed outlet for open access academic research, in and between our subjects; giving high quality, interdisciplinary research a home, and making it open and accessible too.

## Michele Acuto, editorial board member of *Palgrave Communications*



Certainly “interdisciplinary” has for the past few years been an increasingly common buzz word for academia and the ecosystem of institutions shaping the science-policy interface. Governmental research councils push towards greater ‘exploratory’ methods and ‘cross-domain’ interactions to integrate various modes of scholarly inquiry. International and regional institutions linking universities and inter-state cooperation bodies, like the European Research Council, promote grant funding and research initiatives based on collaborative modes of engagement between disciplines and sub-disciplines. The ‘impact agenda’ in the UK (and increasingly Australia), has laid some firm critiques against silo-ed academic inquiry, while the extensive focus on ‘capacity building’ in the UN and multilateral arena, including World Bank or OECD, has been setting increasing cooperation demands on academics in specific disciplines. In short, the time is ripe for successful and well-funded interdisciplinary research.

The challenges of interdisciplinary research are, nonetheless, momentous and certainly more and more pressing as this demand grows. Typically, interdisciplinary research is confronted by a challenge of effective and productive communication. Even in the 21st century, academic disciplines remain silo-ed into relatively different linguistic styles and terminologies, presenting substantial barriers to direct and productive cross-disciplinary discussions. As Bracken and Oughton recently [highlighted](#) this is for instance the case of geography, which could be seen as boundary discipline between social and natural worlds, and yet also as strongly divided camp where former and latter ‘currents’ almost constantly constitute two separated realities.

As a member of the [Department of Science, Engineering, Technology and Public Policy](#) (or STEaPP) at UCL in London, I can testify that some universities have attempted to respond to this pressing gap. Being raised as a purely social scientist and yet working in the heart of STEM research in UCL’s faculties of Engineering Sciences and Built Environment, I regularly witness the confrontation of social and natural modes of enquiry, which require complex, and not least humble, shifts of viewpoints by scholars in all disciplines. Crucially, outlets like *Palgrave Communications* present a very important step in this direction, where publishers offer a response to the need for experimental arenas where to connect, for instance, engineers, geographers and artists.

Academics are also inevitably confronted by a second pressing challenge: rigour in the face of a need for intelligibility. We are faced with the need to retain solid scientific bases and theoretical development of their respective traditions versus a spreading ‘light touch interdisciplinarity’ that sees superficial engagements between disciplines for the sake of funding streams and ‘innovative’ policy advice. Developing truly collaborative research takes time, a feature with little appreciation in funding and policy demands, and dialogue, something projects like *Palgrave Communications* can help with enormously.

This is all the more relevant when the costs of interdisciplinary collaboration, alongside the costs of truly global research that engages ‘North’ and ‘South’ universities on equal grounds, are increasingly influential. Light touch interdisciplinarity is most deleterious when coupled with scholarly variants of development tourism, where Northern institutions shop for brief cross-institutional and cross-disciplinary encounters in the ‘South’ for the sake of greater funding pools, PR and outreach. Interdisciplinary engagement, while still dependent on substantial funding from the global North, can and should be developed on equal partnership ground. The recent scheme of cooperation between UK Research Councils and Brazil’s FAPESP (the Sao Paulo Research Foundation) are upsetting the status quo.

Overall *Palgrave Communications* has begun to answer some of these challenges: it offers open access options at relatively (by Western standards for the moment) affordable rates, it was thought from the beginning, rather than as promotional branding, as a widely cross-disciplinary outlet, and has the backing of a large and solid publisher capable of reaching out internationally as well as of linking directly with the (wide) sphere of STEM research via its Nature Publishing Group connection, while ‘getting into the real world’ – a fundamental step to get out of ivory tower models. Interdisciplinarity is in fact often an academic challenge more than a policy obstacle: academic collaboration needs to be spurred by pressing problems in ‘the field’ where the subtle differences between realist

and neorealist IR, or ANT and SCOT sociology, might have little impact on everyday policy challenges. Here the collaboration between STEM and social sciences, amongst others, might offer some of the most promising fruits.

From the vantage point of UK research, the possibilities and incentives for interdisciplinary research are many. However, as we strive for truly interdisciplinary research, between social and natural sciences, and for truly global research, as a balanced dialogue between north and south, we are inevitably reminded that the path ahead needs to become a more systematic, patient, practice-oriented and concerted effort. Publishing is a partial answer. Education should follow suit.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.*

### **About the Authors**

**Sam Burridge** is Managing Director, Open Research, Palgrave Macmillan/Nature Publishing Group. Joining Macmillan in 1995, Sam started as a Sales Representative for Eastern and Central Europe. During her time at Palgrave she has fulfilled several senior roles across sales, business development and executive publishing. In January 2014 Sam took on her current role of Managing Director, Open Research of Palgrave Macmillan/Nature Publishing Group.

**Michele Acuto** is Research Director and Senior Lecturer in Global Networks and Diplomacy in the Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy (STeAPP) at University College London, and an associate fellow of the Institute for Science, Innovation and Society at the University of Oxford. Michele leads the City Leadership Initiative at UCL, in partnership with World Bank and UN-Habitat, and the section on Science, Technology, Art and International Relations (STAIR) of the International Studies Association.

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