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Editorial

A New Venture

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It is with great honour that I have accepted the invitation to become the Editor-in Chief of this new online journal, *Social Sciences*. Even if there ever existed a time when it could be argued that “interdisciplinary” research was unnecessary or a luxury, there can be little doubt that today it is essential to helping understand and solve the world’s problems. And the first building block of trans-disciplinary research must be raising knowledge and awareness of what other disciplines are doing. It could be said that this is what lies at the heart of this new venture, for this journal aims to publish work from an extensive range of fields, thus bringing scholars from a variety of disciplines “together”, promoting greater cross-disciplinary awareness of major themes and debates, and hopefully prompting inter-disciplinary projects in the future. This, moreover, is very much needed because the challenges facing the social sciences today are probably greater than at any time in their history.

The social sciences have an honourable history of achievement, which, cumulatively one can say have laid to rest any notion that the natural sciences are sufficient to address society’s challenges and problems. True, no one doubts the essential and vital nature of the natural sciences to addressing a range of worldwide problems (from illnesses to poverty to climate change to feeding the world, *etc.*). Yet, aside of debates about the value of some scientific research, the fact remains that a comprehensive understanding of both the problems and potential solutions to most scientific questions or issues today requires the input of their sister disciplines: “Social sciences are needed to understand and influence how humans act. They are crucial to implement the UN Millennium Development Goals: from reducing poverty to promoting gender equality; they are needed to face challenges such as climate change, which are as much social as natural” [1]. They are pervasive to the point that they do not grab attention, whether it be in relation to the formulation of public policies, to analyses of societal problems or to dissecting government reform proposals, and so on. Paradoxically, perhaps one of the key weaknesses of the social sciences is that they are so pervasive that their practitioners tend to be slow to develop arguments to justify their existence, and this can expose them to cutbacks in times of

difficulty (recent actions by the UK government are an example of this). Significantly, some of the greatest supporters of the social sciences are to be found amongst the natural sciences. Their practitioners know our value and are not hesitant to rise to our defence when we are challenged. Indeed, they are aware that comprehensive responses to the world's problems do not just depend on interdisciplinary work *within* the social sciences but trans-disciplinary research *across* the social and natural sciences divide.

What that means for social sciences as a group of disciplines is unclear. It would be an exaggeration to speak of, or aim for, a post-disciplinary age in which the boundaries between the natural sciences and social sciences disappear around the formulation of trans-disciplinary research projects aimed at resolving society's problems. It is safe to say that the autonomy of the social sciences is intact and probably represents its strength in meeting its natural science counterparts across the divide. However, what it does mean is that the social sciences themselves need to be more aware of what is going on in their own house. This does not necessarily mean more united in what they do (irrespective of the belief of some that the future lies in an "integrated social science") for it would be wrong to see the divisions that exist within the social sciences as a weakness. On the contrary, the history of the social sciences over the past two centuries suggests that disciplinary reconfigurations are the result of evolutions in the production of increasing levels of specialisation of social scientific knowledge. From that perspective, disciplines can be seen to be here to stay. Yet, if the production of knowledge has required ever more specialised fields to develop, then at the same time it means that greater attention should also be focused on creating bridges of awareness, knowledge and expertise between the social science disciplines, such that their cumulative impact can be enhanced.

This journal represents an innovative attempt to help meet that goal. We wish to bring together readers and writers from across the social sciences, exposing the work of their respective disciplines to each other, raising awareness and facilitating interaction. So whether you work in anthropology, law, sociology, psychology, political science, geography, economics, history, linguistics, education or other related areas, do not hesitate to send in your submissions. Journal publication times (*i.e.*, from submission to print) are being drastically reduced through technology, and we aim to exploit this technology to the full. Submissions will be externally evaluated and, once accepted for publication, processed rapidly for publication online. *Social Sciences* aims to become a major worldwide forum for the publication of disciplinary and inter-disciplinary knowledge and debate; and it is an opportunity which we hope social scientists everywhere will seize.

References

1. International Social Science Council. *World Social Science Report 2010: Knowledge Divides*; UNESCO: Paris, France, 2010.

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