

Editorial

Dear Reader,

We are proud to present to you the first issue of the new graduate school journal, *Hydra – Interdisciplinary Journal of Social Sciences*. As postgraduate students of the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh, we started this peer-reviewed journal to not only provide students with an opportunity for early-career publications, but also to strengthen the dialogue between the many disciplines and subject areas within our graduate school. Interdisciplinarity is a fashionable term that is often used in academia today, but far less often put into practice. When we are busy with day-to-day tasks – attending courses, tutoring and meeting deadlines – all embedded in the specific discourse and literature of our disciplines – how is it possible to break down the boundaries of our own subject to interact with the world beyond? How can we establish an active and diverse ‘scientific community’ that is more than just a slogan?

A good first step is always to get to know what is going on. The School of Social and Political Science offers 26 different Taught MSc courses, 11 MSc by Research courses and 10 PhD programmes, including disciplines such as political science, anthropology, sociology, international relations, science and technology and public policy. Within these courses, some of us might be working on very similar topics without being aware of it. But apart from the occasional chat in the kitchen or the lift, we do not often get to interact with other discipline’s research. Therefore, *Hydra* wants to open a window to show what students at the SPS are studying and thinking about, and to enable our engagement with each other in ongoing discussions in the graduate school. *Hydra* is interdisciplinary rather than multidisciplinary in that we look for articles and arguments that take a multiplicity of perspectives into account in order to reach a more nuanced and dynamic conclusion than might otherwise be achieved.

You may be wondering: why the name *Hydra*? This mystical creature resided in the lake of Lerna in ancient Greece, and it is famously known for possessing many heads on one body. We found this image quite fitting for the graduate school. Surely our many heads are stretching out in different directions, but our common body sits, well, not in a lake, it sits in the Chrystal Macmillan Building. Cutting off each other’s heads in order to silence the multiplicity of voices is clearly not a good idea when dealing with Hydra. They just grow back, more divided than before. Therefore, we chose this name to stress our journal’s role as a base for dialogue and exchange.

Hydra is also the name of a small multi-cellular organism found in freshwater lakes and streams. It has an adhesive foot on the bottom of its body, and a number of tentacles on its top. The hydra’s cells are not coordinated by a central brain, but instead they are connected by a non-hierarchical nerve net. The reason why this hydra has received so much attention is that it

seems to be biologically immortal: it can be cut up into little pieces, each of which after a short time reorganises itself to form a coherent, functioning one. That is what Hydra aims to achieve – taking all of the great streams of knowledge present throughout the Graduate School, and making them more than the sum of their parts.

The journal grew as an idea between a small group of postgraduate students within the Graduate School of Social and Political Sciences during the summer of 2012. By the end of January we had received over 30 excellent submissions from Public Policy, Social Anthropology, Africa and International Studies, Social Work, Sociology, International Relations, Science and Technology Studies, Childhood Studies, Global Social Change and South Asian Studies. Sixteen peer-reviewers volunteered to be involved in the difficult task of choosing and preparing ten articles for the inaugural issue. Articles went back and forth between the editorial team, the reviewers, and the authors over several months, culminating in publication on the new *Hydra* website.

As a result, you will find in this issue articles that address diverse topics and events of international political importance, such as fear of crime in the US (Roisin Timmins), piracy in Somalia (Toke Wolff), social movements in Bolivia (Modestos Siotos), subalternity in the Kashmir conflict (Dustie Spencer) and slum upgrading in African cities (Laura MacPherson). Other more conceptual articles discuss the ontological challenges of the history of ideas (Matthijs Maas), knowledge production in interviews (Peter M. Yates), the anti-social character of business corporations (Helene Ryding), ethnographies of the body (Agathe Faure) and the role of ritual in politics (Joso Skarica).

We thank Angela Laurins from the Library and University Collection for her immense assistance in designing and setting up the *Hydra* Journal website. Thank you to Richard Freeman, Head of the Graduate School, for providing invaluable guidance from start to finish. And, of course, we would only have been able to present empty pages without the many hours of work that our authors and peer-reviewers invested in the papers.

Thank you all!

With our best wishes,
The Hydra Editorial Team