Communicating research beyond the academy

Royal Geographical Society with IBG

Advancing geography and geographical learning

A guide for researchers

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About this guide

There's a long tradition of geographers communicating research 'beyond the academy' - to policy, to publics, to young people, to school teachers - whether to recruit students, for career development, critical praxis and activism, or requirements of funders to document 'impact'. Ten years ago we published the Communicating Geographical Research Beyond the Academy guide. It sought to bring together and share collective experience and learning, from within and beyond the academy. Today, there's ever more opportunities and modes and media with which to do this. While many of the points made – about audience, about access, about brevity and the use of plain English – still stand, this collection covers these already familiar issues as well as bringing new perspectives to encourage readers to reflect on motives, means and methods and to illuminate examples of good practice.

Introducing the 'communicating research beyond the academy' guide

By Peter Hopkins, Newcastle University and Catherine Souch, Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

Ten years ago, we published a Guide 'Communicating Geographical Research Beyond the Academy'. It sought to bring together and share collective experience and learning, from within and beyond the academy.

The guide drew on the long tradition of geographers communicating their research to a broad range of audiences - policy makers, teachers, younger people, older people, people belonging to specific minority groups or another specific group - in lots of different ways.

Many of the points made in the first guide – such as those about understanding different audiences and their preferences, accessibility, clarity and brevity – still stand. This collection covers familiar issues as well as bringing new perspectives to encourage readers to reflect on the motives, means and methods of communicating geographical research beyond the academy, and to illuminate examples of good practice.

There are many possible benefits to exploring other forms of communication for your geographical research:

- It can contribute to building public understanding about the importance and value of geographical research.
- It can help you to justify and explain what public money has been spent on, and can contribute to generating research impact.
- It can contribute to enhancing your approach to teaching and learning by improving your communication skills and understanding of broader issues.
- It can enrich your teaching ensuring that your students are engaging with research that is closely connected to broader issues in wider society.
- It can help you demonstrate your commitment to meaningful change whilst challenging stereotypes about the 'ivory tower'.
- It can be a useful way of demonstrating your commitment to being a public intellectual.

This is not a comprehensive guide, but it does cover a wide range of topics and issues. There is no best way to communicate geography beyond the academy and sometimes, your attempts will not always work out, but these can all contribute towards how engaging to be more effective next time round. It is also not a 'how to' guide but we hope you will find useful suggestions and pointers in each contribution. The focus is mostly upon UK case studies but there are many forms of communication that could be useful in other contexts and some of the contributions speak specifically to these. In a sense then, this is not intended to be read beginning to end; instead, we invite you to engage with those contributions you find most useful for your research.

How to cite

Hopkins, P. and Souch, C. (2023) Introducing the 'communicating research beyond the academy' guide. Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/UOQQ3715

Writing for general audiences

By Alastair Bonnett, Newcastle University

The world wants to hear from you. Getting your message across to wider publics has never been more important and there is a huge appetite for stories about geography. But it is not enough to sit and wait for the phone to ring. If you want to expand your audience you have to make it happen. This means pitching ideas but also learning how to write stuff that people want to read.

There are many forms of public dissemination and any of them can work for you. It is helpful to be clear what your aims are and be realistic about them. Although there is a growing appetite amongst commercial publishers for geography, in my experience writing a 'trade' book is more work than writing an academic monograph (I have done both). The revision and proofing process is exhaustive and exhausting. Few academics and would-be academics have the time to devote themselves to producing 'trade' books, especially once they learn that, irrespective of the sweat poured into them, they are not eligible for submission to research assessment exercises.

Your most useful and realistic aim is not a best seller but to get media coverage for your work. Many universities have press offices that can give advice and can help you draw up a 'press release'. These are statements directed at the press, announcing significant findings or outputs. However, many press releases do not lead to press coverage. To get things moving you need to learn the art of the pitch. A pitch consists of three things: an editor who you are pitching to; a title, and a very short (one, two, or three sentences) outline. All three of these ducks need to be lined up for a pitch to work. It is often more productive to pitch to specific, named editors than to write to a general email address. Local newspapers, radio stations, blogs, and specialist magazines and websites are often more responsive than mainstream national outlets. This is especially so in countries such as the UK, where 'big media' is highly centralised, politicised, and insular, offering relatively few opportunities for meaningful input from outsiders. A specific health warning has to be issued in respect to British national newspapers. Professional standards on the 'London papers' are notoriously low, and political hostility and shock value determine content.

There are, thankfully, many other outlets for your work and a growing and eager audience for geography.

The four words that will help you navigate this, sometimes daunting, landscape are concision, clarity, timeliness, and persistence. Let's start with the last. Newspaper and website editors have an effective way of responding to pitches that they are not interested in. They don't. You can send a pitch to twenty different outlets and the reaction may be zilch: your hopeful inbox looking as unpopulated as the surface of the Moon. Don't take it personally; rebuffs are part of the process. You do need to learn from them though; to recalibrate, take a break, and come again with a different story or angle.

Often pitches don't work because of timing. In order to get interest in a piece it has to be 'of the moment' and interesting. Being 'of the moment' can be as simple as pitching around an anniversary. For example, 'this year is the fiftieth anniversary of "Science City"'. The date creates a hook to peg an article on.

Your title needs to be straightforward but intriguing. For example, 'What's Wrong with 'Science City'? Fifty Years of Failure?'. The topic and the angle are clear and upfront. The title should be followed up with a short outline, which can also be used to explain why you are the right person to be writing this piece. 'As one of the founders of Science City'; 'having worked in Science City': these are the sort of catches that establish why you are a plausible 'go-to' for this story.

If you get any sort of response, then the door is open and you need to think about how to write your piece. You are not writing an academic article. There will be no references; no jargon; and as few 'isms' as possible. Academic papers are often written with no regard for flow or style. In some ways 'academic writing' is simply bad writing; though it is fairer to think of it as a specialist dialect, arising from a language community with its own distinct heritage and purpose.

Communicating with wider audiences means knowing how to tell an engaging story. You have to think about pace, imagery, and the arc of your narrative. Starting with an engaging image can be a helpful device and so too can personal anecdote and, more generally, use - but not overuse - of a personal voice. Slightly eccentric detail and humour can also be effective,

though they also work best in moderation. Writing that has punch and rhythm often uses short sentences, followed by a longer one and makes use of alliteration, and thoughtfully chosen but 'unfancy' adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. Reading your work out aloud can help with this: good writing sounds good to the ear.

Above all, good stories are not boring. No one wants to listen to a story told in a tedious or patronising manner: 'this is important; that is important; I've got a PhD so I'm important'. Don't make the mistake of thinking that, since your story was accepted, at least in part because of your academic credentials, readers want to read 'an academic account'.

Another mistake is to construe what you are doing as 'dumbing down'. It's not lesser; but it is different. And it requires skills that need to be practiced and honed, so that your work finds the diverse audiences it deserves.

How to cite

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Image by Thomas Charters / Unsplash.

Book festivals

By Jo Sharp, St Andrews University

Writing a 'popular' book offers great potential to reach wider audiences. In 2020 I co-edited a collection, Imagine a Country, with crime writer Val McDermid, as a response to the increasingly binary and divisive nature of political debate in Scotland. Our intention in putting the book together was to stimulate discussion and understanding. The book consciously avoided a singular voice; reading through the contributions should be like sitting on the bus or in the pub, eavesdropping on conversations, rants, daydreams and hopes, rather than reading a neat or coherent agenda.

Writing the book was different from my usual academic practice and so too were the ways the book was produced and consumed. First off, the turnaround from manuscript submission to publication was very speedy, and the nature of trade publishing meant that there simply wasn't the deadline wriggle-room that I had come to expect from academic publishing – the requirements of the publicity department, as well as the printers, meant that deadlines had to be adhered to.

The book came out in the first week of lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic and so our big launch event had to be cancelled. We had a number of events scheduled at book shops and book festivals to discuss the issues that our contributors had raised in the book. Many of these went online, which was a wonderful way to reach a wider audience, but it was much more challenging to manage the conversation between writers and audience.

One of the encouraging things about lockdown has been the rise in the number of independent local bookshops. These have worked hard to attract customers away from the internet giants by holding events and getting authors in front of audiences. Some of the independent bookshops in Edinburgh have speaker events. Although lockdown meant that authors could be brought in from across the world for virtual events, in-person events are what most readers are keen to attend. This is our opportunity! Local authors have a competitive advantage (no travel and accommodation costs). Many of these events involve a discounted book purchase. And so, the book sellers are looking for events that will attract an audience and sales – and having a local author is one such draw.

There are increasing numbers of book and literature festivals emerging too. Book festivals are places where ideas are discussed amongst interested but quite general publics. There are opportunities for us there to have our work discussed, or to enter debate as chairs or session convenors. But timing and pitch are important: we were lucky with Imagine a Country. Despite the impact of the pandemic, as the Edinburgh International Book Festival (EIBF) theme that year was "keep the conversation going", and people were keen to think about a more optimistic future and so the theme of our book was a perfect fit (so much so that to our surprise the only book that outsold us at the EIBF shop during the festival was Bernadine Evaristo's Booker-winning Girl, Woman, Other).

Many cities and towns have book festivals, and my experience is that the organisers are always looking for new ideas and enthusiastic contributors. Some libraries are also organising reading groups and author-events. As well as presenting our own work, there are opportunities as session chairs. I have suggested speakers to get geography discussed in these fora with the additional hope that I will be selected to chair, although my first event was a topic that was offered to me - a session on paleoecology. This was far from my expertise, but I suspect that was an advantage as it meant I acted as an informed but general reader (and so it stopped me from going down academic rabbit holes). It was quite an intimidating experience, but one that I have learned a lot from. Chairing at a book festival is not like chairing at an academic event: my role was not to interrogate every aspect of the argument, but instead to draw out the best from my authors.

How to cite

Sharp, J. (2023) Book festivals. Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/LHJN41

Do

- Speak to independent bookshops about an event linked to your upcoming book (but, unfortunately, it will probably not be possible if this is a £120 academic hardback – the shop will want to ensure it is going to be able to sell multiple copies).
- Get in touch with festival organisers early – programmes may be being put together nearly a year ahead of the events.
- Make it clear how your book will engage an audience – is there a current debate it can contribute to?
- As a chair, do your homework – the best chairs appear to do very little, but this is because of being on top of their material and always knowing what is the right question to ask.

Image by Clem Onojeghuo / Unsplash.

Working with museums

By Cheryl McGeachan, University of Glasgow

Museums come in all different shapes, sizes and forms, and are exciting sites of collaboration for geographers. A range of public, private and personal museums exist across the world, and these can come in concrete, virtual and hybrid forms. Museums have distinctive potential for collaboration due to the wide array of remits they fill, from cultural conservators to forums of diverse community engagement.

The most common engagement with museums for geographers comes in the form of utilising the collections they hold for research. Museums hold a vast array of items, both on and off display, and these can be accessed and viewed in several ways. Most museums have large storage facilities where most of their collections are held. Accessing these resources is usually done through online booking systems and scouring online catalogues for items to book time with. Some museums have research rooms within their museum spaces, offering opportunities to view materials on-site. The ability to see objects up-close can be highly rewarding, allowing new insights in the worlds of their making to come into view. However, online museum spaces are becoming increasingly accessible allowing the opportunity to view objects from the comfort of your own computer miles away from their currently placed locations.

A fascinating array of people work in museums that hold great potential for sharing and shaping aspects of geographical research. Curators, as gatekeepers of certain collections, can offer insight and expertise into the items themselves but also into the lives and afterlives of their display. Making strong connections with curators, and respecting their knowledge and ideas, is central to successful museum research. Curators often undertake their own research with their collections and can provide important links to wider communities and bodies of research in these areas

Whilst the curator is often a first, and hugely important, point of contact other workers such as technical officers, graphic technicians, learning assistants, outreach officers and volunteers are extremely important figures that can aid greatly in different aspects of research. These are people who have often worked with the collections you are researching, understanding a great deal about their intricacies and their journey through the museum. Taking the time to speak with museum staff about your work as it takes shape – in person or virtually - can be hugely beneficial to generating new questions and research pathways to other people, places and collections.

Museums are vibrant places of community interaction and can, therefore, be incredible resources for meeting and collaborating with experts by experience in a range of fields. Showcasing your research in a temporary exhibition or at an engagement event within the museum allows dialogue between your research and communities to take place. Many museums offer a public programme of events, such as tours and talks, and offering to undertake a range of these is a very useful way to communicate your research beyond academic circles and to hear real and varied responses to your work.

Overall, viewing museums as places that can be worked with rather than places where knowledge is extracted from, is a crucial change in our collaboration practice. The vast potential museums hold for encountering and engaging communities, workers, and collections offers exciting avenues of genuine exchange that can benefit and strengthen our geographical understandings of the lively worlds we seek to research.

How to cite

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Summary

- Consider your engagement with museums as a wider aspect of collaborative practice, being open to share ideas, knowledge, and experience.
- Connect with key people at the museum, such as curators and technicians, in order to further research dialogues and initiate access to collections.
- Utilise the potential for community interaction through volunteering for public events and attending museum events.

Image by Armand Khoury / Unsplash.

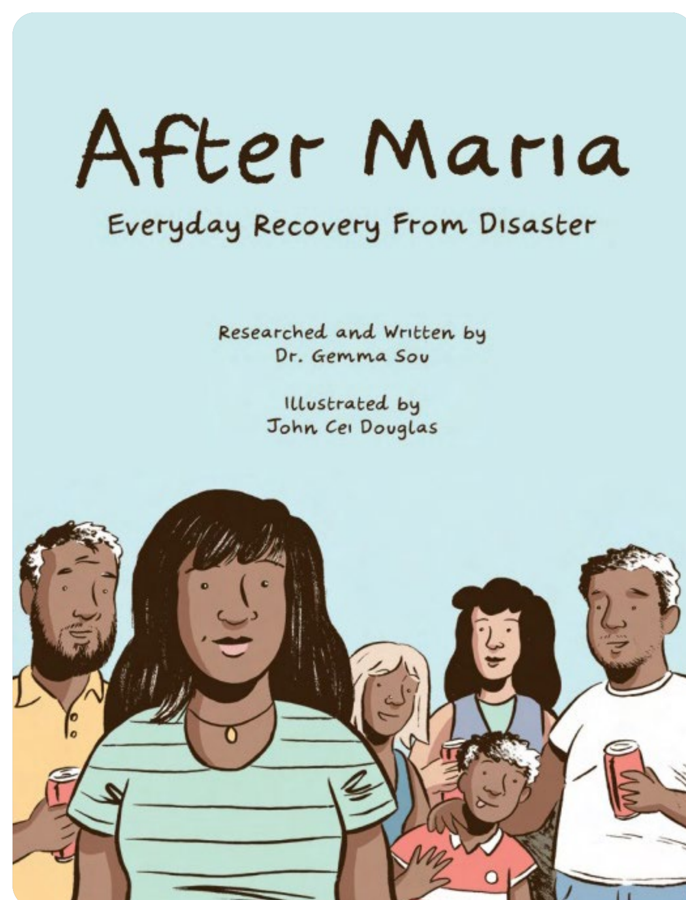
Graphic geographical research

By Gemma Sou, University of Manchester

In an anglophone context, comics that centre on and challenge mainstream ideas of political, social, or economic issues are known as 'serious' comics. Inspired by the idea that comics can deal with 'serious' issues. I, and other geographers, are increasingly translating our research into comics. Below I outline some opportunities for geographers working in the comic medium, including some dos and don'ts

With the illustrator John Cei Douglas, I created the comic, After Maria: Everyday Recovery from Disaster in 2019, based on my one-year ethnography about Puerto Rican families' recovery from Hurricane Maria. Later in 2022, I created a second comic, Everyday Stories of Climate Change, with the illustrator Cat Sims, and fellow geographers, Gina Ziervogel, and Adeeba Nuraina Risha. That story threads together vignettes from our research about the everyday ways that low-income families adapt to climate change in Bangladesh, South Africa, Bolivia, Puerto Rico, and Barbuda.

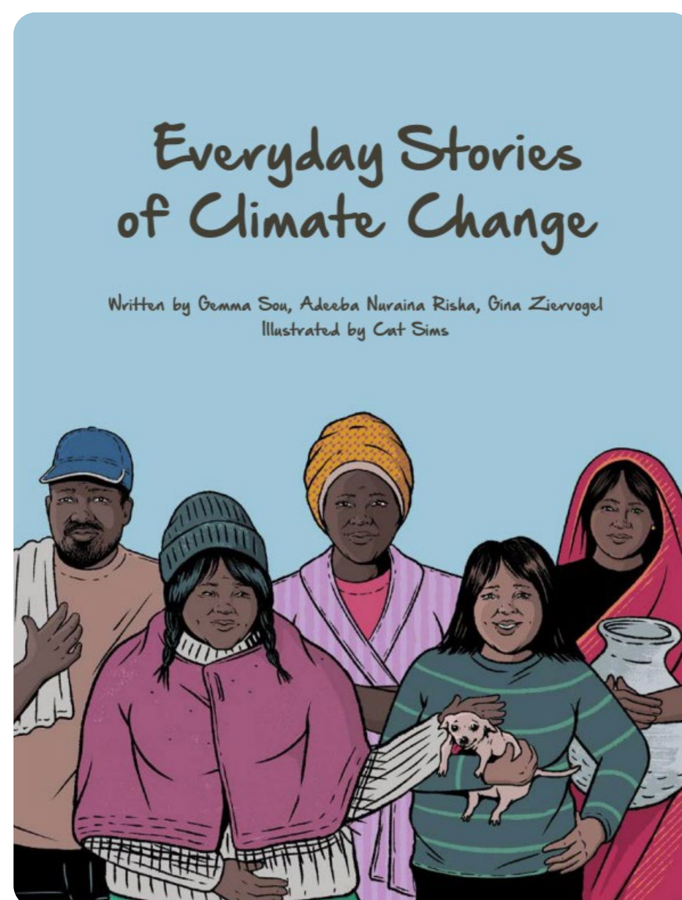
Image by John Cei Douglas.



Taking readers to hidden moments and places

One of the most exciting things about working in the comic form is that you can take readers to everyday places and moments that cannot be captured in other media, such as participants' inner thoughts, as well as experiences that are typically inaccessible to researchers. For example, in Puerto Rico, many people temporarily lived with extended family, often sleeping on mattresses in living rooms until their houses were reconstructed. However, several research participants explained that this made it difficult to be sexually intimate with their partners (see image 3). Such intimate moments are impossible to capture using audio-visual equipment. Yet, illustration allows readers to 'go' to some of the most intimate, mundane, and routine spaces that make up the landscape of research participants' everyday lives. Thus, allowing you to create convincing worlds where your characters—or research participants—live.

Image by Cat Sims.



Visualising participants' histories and aspirations, as well as possible futures

Comics can also allow you to visualise the histories, memories, aspirations, and even daydreams of research participants that are difficult to capture in other visual media such as photography or film. For example, in Bolivia I was able to visualise research participants' dreams of constructing resilient (and beautiful) houses in their landslide-prone communities (see image 4). Visualising people as future-oriented agents allowed me to challenge persistent stereotypes about people in the so-called 'global south' as 'static' and 'traditional'. Yet, comics can also allow you to visualise alternative and still possible future scenarios that could address some of the problems highlighted in your research. This can be an exciting and playful way for you to critically present potential solutions and policy recommendations that your research has revealed.

Participatory research with participants and artists

When creating a comic research participants can become active collaborators providing feedback on draft sketches, which de-centres the researcher as the chief 'storyteller'. I found that when participants can 'see' representations of themselves they are more invested in providing feedback because it holds greater personal significance. And unless you're confident with drawing you will inevitably work closely with an illustrator who will bring your script to life.

Image by John Cei Douglas.

Illustrators prefer scripts composed of 'thick descriptions' that include dialogue, narration, captions, thoughts, sound, smells, what is happening, whom we can see, the layout of each panel, the ambience, the emotion of characters, the time of day – as much detail as possible! As academics who are comfortable communicating in text, your initial script will probably rely too much on dialogue to drive the story. However, illustrators force you to strip back text to craft a visual argument where readers can use their imagination and wider knowledge to unpack the story's images and text, which can feel less directive.

Final thoughts

Comics offer an exciting opportunity to communicate beautiful, sensitive, and compelling first-person narratives that can evoke in readers "a critical outrage grounded in empathy." (Fall, 2014: 106). And as different publics continue to develop visual literacy, comics can be revelatory for understanding and representing the everyday, hidden, and multitemporal experiences of research participants.

Further reading

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How to cite

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Image by Cat Sims.

Suggestions for translating your research into a comic

1. Read lots of comics and graphic novels! This will really help you to imagine your research as a visual story and to write the script.
2. Work with an illustrator who is familiar with comics' unique language and syntax because being good at illustration does not automatically make you good at drawing comics.
3. Try to keep dialogue and captions to a minimum so that the images drive the story.

Academia, animated

By Laura Evans, Nifty Fox

It's no longer enough to publish or perish as a researcher. Around 2.5 million scientific research articles are published every year (Bornmann et al, 2011). Out of those, it's estimated that only 20-30% are cited at least once within the first two years of publication (Waltman et al., 2023). Whilst this will vary across fields, these estimates are concerning - that's 70%-80% of publications that languish unread. Researchers are missing out on audiences who want to read their work. There are world changing ideas that never end up in the hands of those who need them most.

You need to get eyes on your work for the best chance of driving change with your ideas. You need to be VISIBLE or your research will vanish.

Researchers must have more engaging communication tools in their arsenal than the academic article to reach audiences like policy makers, funders, the lay public, and even other academics. Visual and creative ways to plan, do, and communicate research are increasingly becoming requirements of funders, alongside public engagement and clear routes to real world change

So how do you become visible as a researcher?

Animation.

Animation - moving pictures with a voiceover that explain complicated ideas visually - is a tool for increasing the:

- visibility
- accessibility
- and impact

of your research with new and traditional audiences

Increasing visibility

Being visible means competing with all the other demands for audiences' attention online.

Do your audiences want to read your 50 page report, or watch a 90 second cat meme montage? (I know which one I'd rather get stuck into!).

Animations encourage audiences to stop their scroll and pay attention to your work. For example, pages with animated video lead to audiences spending 160% more time exploring the content on that site (Wistia, 2023). PLUS, research articles with animated abstracts receive up to 120% more citations than those without (Zong et Al., 2019).

This means that animation is both good for your public engagement, AND your publication reach too

Increasing accessibility

Animation forces academics and designers to break down complicated ideas into simple, easy to understand, and engaging narratives. This opens up the world of research to wider and more diverse people, increasing the potential for impact.

Animation improves recall of research messaging and perceptions of credibility and trustworthiness of science research (Lepito, 2019). This is crucial for the long term engagement of audiences who have previously mistrusted the academy. In fact, animation also opens up academic knowledge to previously underserved audiences - George et al., (2013) found that animation improved health literacy in underserved groups by improving participants' ability to identify personal information-gaps, engage in meaningful community-level dialogue, and ask questions about health research.

Image by Nifty Fox Creative.

Increasing impact

Cutting through complexity and appealing to a wider audience means viewers are more likely to ACT upon research recommendations. For instance, animations improved the uptake of mental health services in young people, where researchers based the script on empirical research findings (Coughlan et al., 2021); and animations have proven to be useful in improving pathways to policy impact too (Reed et al., 2018

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How to cite

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Summary

Animations have the power to increase the visibility, accessibility, and impact of your research, in two minutes or less!

Think this sounds good, but have no idea where to start with your own research animations? Here's where to start:

1. First, consider your audience and script. Here's a two minute video on how to use a simple storytelling framework to distil your research into a simple, compelling story.
2. Second, you need to build an animation but might not have the funding to commission one. Here's a free tool to start building an animation with no experience needed, and another tool to get an AI generated voiceover if you're not ready to be a video star!
3. Finally, if the whole process terrifies you - work with a professional research animation company. Think about costing professional animation in at the bid writing stage, or applying for public engagement funding at your institution.

Here at Nifty Fox Creative we specialise in bringing research stories to life through animation - from treating cancer to fighting climate change. View our showreal and get in touch here.

Why zines + geography beyond the academy = <3

By Jen Bagelman and Daniel Jones, Newcastle University

Why geographers love zines?

Zines (rhymes with 'scenes') are intimately-crafted and purposefully less glossy than your regular magazine. These small-circulation, self-published works of original and reused texts and images have long existed as a powerful way to share ideas that might not fit neatly within conventional publishing outlets.

In recent years, geographers have taken up zines with great zest. For example, they have been explored as an engaged research method (Hawkins, 2019), a medium for building complex solidarities (Smith, 2020) and a teaching and learning tool in and beyond the classroom (Bagelman & Bagelman, 2016).

This energetic uptake in geography is not surprising. After all, this medium is deeply geographical: creators can bring together diverse bits and pieces to map-out experiences, space, place. It is a tool and a process that allows makers to intervene (with scissors, glue, sparkly pens...) into existing narratives where one might not feel they currently fit. Zines are an opportunity to craft new visceral cartographies layered with story, bursting with life. In these ways, zines are geography in critical and creative practice.

Who can zines reach?

Zines yearn to be picked up. Their hand-crafted often quirky and intimate form whisper: 'psst: read me.'

The idea with zines is that they really can be made by and designed for anyone. First, and perhaps foremost, they can be an inward-facing medium: a place simply to reflect and process life. They can also be a tool for reaching out more widely. Zines can be designed to connect with public audiences as we saw with the feminist themed-zines emerging from the underground riot grrl movement of the 90s (acknowledging the non-academic roots of zines remains important!). Zines can inform policy-makers (Miewald, 2014). They can bring communities together (Valli, 2021). They can be assigned as essential readings or as a form of course assessment (they are a wonderful break from Turnitin). Zines can be in analogue form (our personal favourite) or digitised to be shared.

Zines in practice (and as process)

Daniel Jones, in his doctoral research, has worked with adults with Tourette Syndrome to co-create zine content as a way of interfering into geographical narratives about public space and interaction. He focussed on the zineing process in workshop settings, rather than the zine as product, and argues that zineing itself is valuable as a mode of communication; it creates unique opportunities for sharing through visual prompts, empowering multiple literacies. The dialogues that form between participants, researchers, and other makers is a generative way of articulating diverse experiences in a relaxed environment and can help forge new solidarities.

Zines emerged in defiance of elite forms of knowledge dissemination. It is worth considering, while zines may be generative for academics, what might be lost when zines move into academic space? We suggest that an ethics of care - foundational to zine cultures - can sometimes fade in academic environments which emphasise speed, metrics and formalised processes which equate risk-assessment with care. If you are an academic considering using zines you might find inspiration from Jones' approach of working closely with a zine practitioner in co-designing 'care plans' which explore how various participants can be supported throughout and even after workshops. In the case of Jones' work, for example, he considered and adjusted zine workshops to account for the triggering effects of tourettic tics.

Suggested reading

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How to cite

Bagelman, J. and Jones, D. (2023) Why zines + geography beyond the academy = . Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/RYLT9155

The 'To Do' (and do-some-more) of zines

- We were asked to reflect on the 'do' and 'do nots' of zines. There really are only do's.
- Do follow an ethics of care (consider how a zine workshop can be inclusive to all). Dive into your creativity. Let yourself express what you're feeling. Put on some music, experiment and play. Free yourself from the pressure of producing a perfect paper worthy of publication.
- Do think about who you want to connect with (maybe it's yourself... maybe its others). Visualise this audience, how will you reach them?
- Do allow yourself to experiment with different ways of communicating: maybe some poetry? Everyone can do poetry (you can do 'found poetry' where you pick up a piece of paper with words already written, like a page from The Guardian. Then cross out the words you don't want leaving only those words you do want – tada here's your 'found' poem!). Maybe you want to create an image? Remember: everyone has an inner artist (you can cut and paste existing images if you feel safer here. Some of the most powerful collages have been produced by those who claimed 'I'm not artistic')
- If you're leading a workshop with others, guiding them through zines, all you need to do is grab some source materials (we love raiding a recycling bin for newspapers, magazines). Bring some scissors and glue.
- And then - most importantly - have fun!

Image by cottonbro studio / Pexels.

Inside radio

By Hayden Lorimer, University of Edinburgh

I should describe my own relationship with radio to begin. It's the soundtrack I choose for so many ordinary aspects of life. At home while working and cooking, during journeys, when out walking the dog. And since, just like him, I am a creature of habit, scheduled programming continues to serve as a comforting backdrop for the unrolling day. But when radio is at its most arresting and intense, I know it more like a state of mind. The most memorable programmes and features are those that demand repeat listening. Not only to re-enter a world of sound, but because there are technical pleasures to be taken, in listening closer, hanging on every word, and asking myself: "What's happening here?"; "How is this story being shaped?"; "Who's points of view are we hearing?"; "What role does the presenter have?"; "Where is this feature taking us?". Questions like these, about the art and craft of making radio, have given shape to a handful of programmes where the voice behind the mic happens to be mine, and the ideas presented originate in my writing and research.

For many in the research community, the chief appeal in a radio appearance will, of course, be its effectiveness as an explanatory medium: to cast new knowledge broadly, to report on breakthrough findings, and to pair up arguments with evidence. A schooling in science communication and media training are what matter here, ensuring geographical research can be reported clearly and impactfully, and that the exercise of translation from academic publishing to the public at large makes necessary concessions without undermining authority or expertise.

But there are more expansive reaches of radio equally worthy of researchers' consideration, diverse formats that are welcoming of compositional and creative experiment, where geography is not just the subject matter, but an imaginative space emerging between the listener's ears. These parts of the broadcasting schedule offer programme content that is impressionistic and atmospheric in character, evoking places and people through a language of description and the imagery that attends them, offering points of view that are suggestively poetic or political.

I'm fortunate in having had opportunities to learn different versions of the creative process for making this kind of radio: pitching ideas for new features; writing essays to be read on air; scripting material ready for recording on location; then improvising when local conditions and circumstances invite it. The resulting programmes have taken different shapes. Some rooted in the intimacy of a single uninterrupted voice. Others polyvocal, where a single theme is explored by an assembly of creative writers, or structured as a biographical quest where the subject of investigative enquiry proves complex and elusive.

For anyone harbouring an ambition to give radio a shot, I ought to explain how I got a foot in the door. Some years ago, when attending a conference, I bumped into a BBC producer; an uncommonly good one as it turns out. We hit it off. Some of our ideas grew legs, leading to commissions and collaborations on several programmes. What began in recording studios, later ventured out into the wild, on hill and fjord-sides, passing through woods and valleys, derelict buildings, farmyards and petrol station forecourts. We cobbled stuff together, as it spilled out from parked cars and rucksacks, around the campfire and dining table. I learned the value of chancing upon found sounds and being open to happy accident.

During these excursions we forged a strong working relationship. This, I've learned, is vital. Trust plays a big part in the practice of making radio. Likely enough, at some stage in the proceedings, the producer will ask the presenter to give a bit more of themself over to the listeners. Sharing some personal history can work wonders, making an otherwise disembodied voice, more personable and relatable. It took a little cajoling for me loosen off but having struck up the courage I now appreciate the freedom to make that connection

This performative aspect of radio is significant in other ways. Broadcasting is an exercise in giving voice to thought. The expectant moment before the light glows green, and the producer silently nods, are constant reminders that recording radio is a physical exercise, making demands on lungs and lips, breath and body. During script-drafting, I do plenty of practice that involves reading out loud. Reworking short passages, shifting the sequence of sentences, until the words sound like they're lifting off the page. Not everything from the writing desk turns out to be pitch perfect. I recall lines or phrases which left me tongue-tied,

requiring retake after retake. With experience, a voice is amplified, more than mere vehicle for words. Delivery is something that can be patterned with feeling and emotion. An accent can be an asset, deployed for dramatic effect. Care with language can pair up percussive words and play with sibilant sounds.

How to cite

Lorimer, H. (2023) Inside radio. Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/SBRE3131

Three quick tips for getting inside radio

1. Do your due diligence as an active listener, treating programmes as cultural texts that can be subject to critical interpretation.
2. Listen out for the independent companies producing the programmes you enjoy and admire (they are credited at the close of any broadcast) then get in touch to explore opportunities and discuss ideas.
3. Apply to schemes designed to identify future broadcasting talent in the academic community (AHRC/BBC Radio 3 New Generation Thinkers).

Image by Jonathan Velasquez / Unsplash.

Doing a radio interview

By Raksha Pande, Newcastle University

At the global level, radio remains one of the most trusted and widely consumed means of communication (Unesco, 2022). In the UK, at least nine in ten people (88.8%) listen to the radio at least once a week (RAJAR, 2022). Doing an interview on the radio to share your research is a powerful way of communicating your work to a public audience

In this short piece, I will share my experiences and tips of doing radio interviews for the BBC and for a community radio station.

In order to feature on the radio, you need to first start by using already established channels in your institution to advertise your research findings. A press release that targets key media outlets is the first step in getting your research noticed. Presenting your research in flagship disciplinary conferences such as the RGS-IBG annual conference and the conference of the British Sociological Association (BSA) is another way of publicising your work as they can often feature 'live' radio broadcasts covered by BBC Radio 4 for example. Your institution's press office and your publisher may also mobilise existing contacts within the radio media sector to share your research.

Once you have secured a radio interview, the preparation varies slightly, depending on whether it is a 'live' or 'recorded' broadcast. In both the cases, however, you will have a pre-broadcast meeting with an editor or producer where they will go through the format of the programme and the content. For example, when participating in a panel discussion – you will be informed about the other panellists' affiliations, a 'rough' running order of the questions will be shared and the editorial rules and guidelines of the station regarding language and syntax may also be highlighted. It is important to use this meeting to find out as much as you can about the process, especially if it is the first time that you are appearing on the radio. Knowing what to expect on the day of the broadcast/recording will help you then to focus on the substantive content of your talk. It is in this meeting that you should also specify your affiliation and how you would like to be addressed, don't assume that the producers will be familiar with university/research conventions and job titles.

For a live broadcast, it is always helpful to gather your thoughts in a logical format using the indicative questions provided beforehand so that you can avoid rambling or going off point. Live interviews rarely last more than 5 minutes so focus on being succinct, clear and free of jargon. During the broadcast, which could be in the media studio or via a web-conferencing platform such as Zoom, make sure you listen carefully to the questions and answer using your expertise. It may also be useful to specify what your research did not cover to counter journalistic tendencies to focus on the controversial and sensational in search of a sound-bite. Academic research doesn't always lead to easy soundbites without sacrificing nuance, but speaking in clear, short sentences and using examples and analogies can help in communicating your points effectively. If your research involves numerical data, translate them into percentages and ratios and have then written down for reference to avoid misquoting figures during the interview. Because of the nature of live radio, there is no opportunity to retract or clarify what you have shared but sticking to the core messages of your research will help you to avoid any embarrassing faux-pas. However, for a pre-recorded broadcast, you will have that opportunity, you can ask the editor to share the 'rough cut' of the programme before it is broadcast to make sure that the editing process hasn't compromised the context or nuance of your argument. You can also ask to re-record sections if needed.

After the broadcast, it is common to be approached by people, who heard you on the radio, to comment, reflect and critique on your research. In my experience, this can be one of the most challenging parts of the process of sharing your research outside of the relatively civil confines of the university. This is because of the nature of the topics I cover in my research. Immigration, arranged marriages and gender relations are all topics on which the general public has strong opinions and their response to my research findings (especially if it disrupts conventional knowledge) can lead to hostile reactions. Depending on the mode of contact (I usually receive emails), you can choose to respond to selected message and just acknowledge the others as comments. You can ignore hostile and ad-hominem messages. If contacted via social media, where the exchange could be public, directing the

inquirer to your research paper/book for more detail is usually a good idea.

Lastly, I have refrained from giving tips on 'how to sound' on the radio – you don't need lessons in voice training and received pronunciation. If the power of radio lies in its ability to reach a diversity of audience, then we need to hear a diversity of voices in all the varying inflections of speech, accent, awkward pauses and the 'uhms' and 'ahs' that give a glimpse of the speaker's heritage without flattening it into a standard 'radio voice'.

How to cite

Pande, R. (2023) Doing a radio interview. Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/ZTTU7381

Image by CoWomen / Unsplash.

Podcasts and audio

By Celia Robbins, University of Exeter

Podcasts have become a staple of our media consumption, with people seeking out both popular and highly specialised offerings in preference to scheduled radio. Many universities and academic departments use podcasts to communicate their work, often using an interview format, or publishing audio recordings of talks and lectures and these can be an effective, and relatively accessible, way to publish digital content. Delivering a whole podcast series won't be right for all researchers, but getting some great audio that illustrates your research could be an asset in a number of ways, either by contributing an episode to a podcast series, incorporating into talks and lectures or bringing social media posts to life.

Beyond interview and lecture podcast formats

My career has taken me from academia into practice, and back again. While working outside the academy, I wanted accessible, intelligent content but I seldom listened to the lecture or interview formats often used for university podcasts. I found myself more engaged by geography-related audio that used sound to create atmosphere and sense of place alongside the spoken word, like BBC radio documentaries (e.g. Open Country) and in podcast series (often US-based ones like outsideinradio.org). Geography's engagement with people and places across the globe creates limitless opportunities to use sound, as well as voices, to tell stories about the work geographers do. Audio that goes beyond 'talking heads' can be colourful and compelling; when I returned to academia as a PhD student, I got the opportunity to explore this idea, using field recordings and sound design alongside interviews to bring geography research to life in a series of podcasts.

Thinking about sound in how we communicate research doesn't necessarily mean producing a series of podcasts though; it could be a one-off piece for public engagement associated with a project website, an episode for your university's main podcast strand, or clips inserted into presentations or social media posts. It could be an interview participant's voice conveying the urgency or emotional impact of the research, a soundscape of a threatened ecosystem, or recordings that reflect your research process in the lab, the street, or wherever your work takes place. The common denominator is that sound can bring an extra dimension to communicating research that is relevant across the discipline.

Do

- Think about how audio could communicate something about your research, the interview-based podcast is just one option.
- Recognise sounds generated in your research process as a potential resource. Can you capture natural or human sounds that say something about your work? Can you get permission from interviewees to use their voices?
- Learn the basics of making good quality recordings, this will pay dividends whether you are producing and editing a podcast yourself or are working with someone else.
- Liaise with your university comms team. A podcast series of your own is possible albeit quite a commitment; including your work as an episode in an institutional podcast is very achievable.

Don't

- Record without practising with your equipment first.
- Feel constrained by lack of equipment. Specialist equipment is great and you may have access to it, but some experimentation with your phone or laptop can yield good results. The key is to try things out and know what works for the type of sound you want to capture. Low-cost options like plug-in microphones for laptops and phones can augment what you already have.

How to cite

Robbins, C. (2023) Podcasts and audio. Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/WVKW4088

Key points

- Audio has great potential to be used more widely to bring research to life in talks, social media, websites and publications as well as in podcasts.
- The process of geography research generates a wealth of engaging natural and spoken sounds.
- Creating audio clips is accessible to most researchers in terms of the skill and cost require.

Image by Alphacolor / Unsplash.

Broadcasting and narrowcasting: radio and podcasts

By Joanne Norcup, Centre for Caribbean Studies, University of Warwick and the Open University

The global pandemic of 2020 saw an upturn in listeners and viewers to online content, especially mediums such as podcasts. Prior to 2020, technological shift in cultures of listening had been changing as mainstream broadcast radio stations such as the BBC were restructuring their general online content provision for an increasingly online and global streaming listening landscape.

Broadcasting can be defined as the production of visual and oral content for general listeners and the shaping of the content and narratives within such programmes can be more of a general overview of themes, issues and empirical information which prioritises breadth of audiences' interests. Podcasting or narrowcasting offers capacities for individuals and specialist groups to create content that is entirely focused on unique passion-projects or highly specialist fields of interest. Both radio and podcast technologies offer geographers expansive possibilities to pitch and share research outputs connected to specialist fields within the discipline.

Between 2016 and 2019, my independent production company Geography Workshop worked on a series of radio programmes as well as running podcast workshops with the intention of engaging wider public audiences with interdisciplinary humanities geography content. One of the central aims of Geography Workshop is to generate public engagements between geographical researchers, writers, educators, artists, communities and activists to better understand, communicate and create nuanced geographical knowledges to enable diverse voices to be better heard.

While radio programmes often mean pitching ideas to a pre-defined programming structure (where editors and sound engineers are already in place, often necessitating fitting your research within a pre-existing programme format), podcasting offers complete control to the creator regarding how a podcast – whether a one-off or as part of a series – is conceived, constructed, and edited, giving greater freedom to the producer and creative capacities for the kinds of content one might wish to include. As researchers and writers, this gives us the capacity to envisage and create podcasts responsive to both the content we wish to share and the needs of our potential listeners

General tips for creating listening content

If you are thinking about creating a podcast output for your research, consider whether you might be able to pitch a special one-off to a particular podcast host who you might wish to work with (for example the RGS-IBG's Ask the geographer podcast series). Consider podcasts or radio programmes where your work might already find target listeners and approach commissioning editors with a pitch. This is likely to be less resource intensive than creating a podcast from scratch.

Listen to radio programmes and podcasts and find out from these the kind of pitch, tone, content and duration for your listening output - do you prefer conversations or a lone narrator telling a story? What kind of narrative style would best suit your research output? What kind would best suit your target audience(s) of listeners? Are there programmes and podcasts already created to which your work could be contributed?

On average, a podcast listener will tune in to listen to a show that averages between 12 and 28 minutes in length if it is part of a series, or between 38 to 45 minutes if it is a one-off interview or special themed programme. What kind of podcast do you wish to create? Is your podcast going to be a limited series (2 – 6 programmes), or a one-off special – for example an interview with one specialist or a special panel discussion? Whatever you decide is appropriate for the outputs of your research, be aware of the time listeners will have to engage with the interview, discussion, conversation or chapter of the story you wish to tell. The listener's experience is your priority.

If you do decide you want to create your own podcast, you need to plan. You will need to timetable and pace the rhythm of your individual podcast/series as a whole, so make sure you have a clear structure that suits the purpose of your podcast. Will you be adding a pre-recorded introduction to your programme? Intro and outro music? Visual designs/logos for uploading onto streaming channels? Will you need to add any disclaimers? Do you need to have time allocated for promoting any sponsors of your show (because

podcasts cost financially to produce and to be sustained on a dedicated streaming channel). Do you have the financial capacities to pay for the technical skill support to undertake the pre-production, to sound record, script, edit, upload, and maintain what you wish to create? Do you have the time to do this work? All these factors will be unique to your vision for your podcast.

How to cite

Norcup, J. (2023) Broadcasting and narrowcasting: radio and podcasts. Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/DTDU7479

Image by Alan Findlay on Unsplash.

Engaging with the arts community

By Stephen Tooth, Aberystwyth University

Like many academic geographers, as my career progresses, I find myself communicating with increasingly diverse audiences, both within and outside of academia. I have become interested in communication approaches in geography, especially in geomorphology and environmental change, but also in geoscience generally. Other contributions to this guide address communication with teachers, policy makers, business communities, and so on. But what about the visual and non-visual arts communities: can these provide alternative communication channels for our data and concepts?

In recent years, I have talked to and collaborated with various artists engaging in different practices (e.g. painting, digital images, film making, sculpture, poetry, storytelling). Working collaboratively at the geoscience-art interface, I have been involved in PhD supervision, organisation of symposia and exhibitions (Figure 1), editing of a journal special issue devoted to mapping in geoscience-art collaborations, guiding field tours, and writing books to interweave science, humanities, and the arts for an integrated view of bedrock river scenery.

Example exhibits displayed at the 2016 Annual Meeting of the British Society for Geomorphology (BSG), University of Plymouth. Developed by the BSG's 'Visualising Geomorphology' Fixed Term Working Group, which included a range of geomorphologists and artists, the exhibition was entitled '7½ ways in which the arts can help to communicate geomorphology' and incorporated visual, auditory and tactile exhibits to illustrate the shared conceptual concerns of geomorphologists and artists, and the challenges and rewards of working collaboratively. The title was designed to invite additional and ongoing input to help develop what is potentially very fertile collaborative ground.

What have I learned along the way?

Working with artists can be challenging but also enormously rewarding. Collaborations normally do not happen quickly: time, patience, and continual open dialogue are key. It's easy for academic geographers to forget that many artists see, feel and experience the world very differently to us. They may also have very different methods of working that have very different end goals. For many artists, the art may be as much about the practice of 'experimenting' or 'making', rather than necessarily about outputs (e.g. 'finished' artworks or exhibition catalogues). Practices and outputs may be more about provoking individual, subjective, emotional responses in viewers (e.g. wonder, fear, hope) rather than conveying universal, semi-objective, discrete findings.

For me, learning these lessons has not only made me a more rounded geographer – which, after all, is partly about appreciating how people interact with, and respond to, space, place and environment – but also enlarged my intellectual horizons, provided many research stimuli, and significantly improved my oral and written communication skills.

Key recommendations and suggestions

Key to any collaboration is to: i) identify shared conceptual concerns through dialogue; ii) establish (perhaps through trial-and-error) different methods of working; iii) be open to developing different practices and outputs that can collectively satisfy both parties

For geomorphology, shared conceptual concerns with artists include ideas around time and history (conveying ideas of dynamism and memory in landscapes), processes (engaging different senses to perceive landscape process interactions), and uncertain futures (imagining possible scenarios of future landscape change in a putative Anthropocene time interval). Diverse collaborative working methods are possible, with individual artists working alongside scientists, or larger teams of artists and scientists working together, on these shared concepts. Geoscience-art need not even involve collaboration across the art-geoscience divide sensu stricto, for single individuals or small teams from predominantly geoscience backgrounds may work with artistic matter to achieve scientific insights (e.g. comparing old paintings to new photographs to assess landscape changes), or artists may re-purpose scientific material (e.g. aerial photographs) to create images with aesthetic appeal. Diverse artistic practices can be applied to geoscience data and concepts to create visual and non-visual outputs, and collaborations can be employed in various contexts, including research,

education, and public engagement/outreach.

Don't:

Be inflexible. Rarely are artists prepared simply to be 'commissioned' to communicate a particular objective or semi-objective geoscientific 'fact'. They will want to have control of parts of the collaborative process and communicate in their own way with their own audiences. So do establish and maintain that open dialogue to explore different working methods, practices and outputs that will enable a dual purpose of communicating geoscientific meaning while maintaining artistic integrity.

Do:

Have fun. Although geoscience and art in many ways are very different, both involve creative processes of knowledge generation (perhaps involving knowledge reworking and even destruction). These creative processes have greater overlap in terms of scope for intuition, trial-and-error, and serendipity than is commonly acknowledged. So, relax and just enjoy seeing where your collaborations can lead.

Image by Stephen Tooth.

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How to cite

Tooth, S. (2023) Engaging with the arts community. Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/AUGP4530

Theatre

By Ruth Raynor, Newcastle University

Geographers have become interested in theatre's potential for public engagement because it offers opportunities to communicate research in live, direct, and sometimes participative and/or action orientated ways. There are a number of different approaches that can be used to communicate, develop or extend geographical research through theatre including but not limited to: forum and legislative theatre; verbatim theatre; site-responsive theatre, and community-based theatre. Sometimes these approaches intersect. Here I outline their core principles before talking through some broader practicalities for geographers interested in the benefits of theatre to communicate their research.

Forum and legislative theatre

Pioneered by Boal in 1970's Brazil, forum theatre seeks to make forms of oppression visible on stage, and challenge audiences (named 'spect-actors') to intervene and play out alternatives. The related legislative theatre enables policy makers, advocates, and communities to come together with the aim of solving policy problems. Through interactive theatre performances community members identify issues and act out possible solutions. They then work with officials to transform these solutions into new laws. Participatory geographers seeking to work with communities to enact social change may be particularly interested in these approaches, which can be adapted for work with a range of stakeholders and in various institutional contexts.

Verbatim theatre

Here existing research materials, usually interview or transcripts, are curated and performed by actors on stage. Sometimes actors perform while listening live (using headphones) to a 'real life' recording in order to convey intonation, speech rhythm, and emotion as closely as possible to the original. This work may be particularly useful for geographers who would like to commission others to bring their research to life and in doing so target specific audiences with their work.

Site responsive theatre

Theatre does not have to be performed in a building with curtains and a proscenium arch. Sometimes it happens in other places, and in site responsive theatre the place in which theatre is performed is integral to the performance itself. This kind of work may be particularly interesting for geographers seeking to engage deeply with specific sites, knowing, representing and intervening in locality, materiality atmosphere, and emphasising the agency of non-human actors.

Community based theatre

Some geographers, including myself, have worked directly with community groups in order to co-create theatre based on participants' lived experience. Usually this involves making fictional narratives together using methods from applied theatre, such as 'roll on a wall', whereby we ascertain a character's likes and dislikes, fears, hopes, opinions motivations, and '6 part story', whereby we identify key events in the life of a character. This approach is particularly useful when researching sensitive topics. This work includes research participants in the stories that are told about them, and again you can target specific audiences with this work.

Practicalities

You might wish to create a piece of theatre yourself if, like me, this was your background and training but more often geographers either collaborate to co-develop their research, or commission theatre makers to communicate their research. In a commission you are handing over your research to a theatre maker who will have creative control over the output. Collaboration involves developing a project together. It's important to understand the difference between these two kinds of relationship, and to recognise power imbalances that can exist between theatre makers, who are often precarious or part of very small organisations, and researchers when they are based permanently at universities. Theatre-makers should be paid for their time even in early development stages; be careful not to rely on good will or accidentally demand unpaid labour by asking for guidance or advice. Work together to create a contract, be clear about who owns the intellectual property of the performance, exactly what people's contribution will be and how they will be named in the work and related publications. Understand administrative processes including how and when artists will be paid, so that you can be

upfront about this from the start, and make sure you have decided ahead of time what will happen to any profits from the performance. Bearing all of that in mind, when carefully considered theatre can provide many opportunities for both communicating and creating geographical research in lively ways that generate engaged and involved audiences.

How to cite

Raynor, R. (2023) Theatre. Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/WOLN8666

Key points

- There are different theatrical approaches through which you can communicate and/or develop your research.
- Sometime audiences and even places are involved in creating a performance.
- It is important to think carefully about the nature of your relationship with theatre makers.

Image by Graydon Driver on Unsplash.

Photojournalism

By Laurie Parsons, Royal Holloway, University of London

Many projects have the capacity to speak to multiple audiences, to law and policymakers, the public and the media in turns, but planning these engagements from the start is key. Photographers and photojournalists make fantastic project partners, not only as communicators to be brought in at the close of a project, but as collaborators to be integrated into exploratory work. In one of my own projects, Blood Bricks, it was a photojournalist that first discovered the link between brick kilns and the garment industry in Cambodia: a finding that would become central to the project. His photographs, similarly, would be the driving force in a raft of global media coverage. Effective communication is, above all, about collaboration.

The implication of this is that thinking towards external communication has to happen not at the end, but at the start of a program of work, when decisions about partnership and collaboration are being made. Not all projects are well suited to photographs, but other methods are available. Working with artists, for example, can be a highly effective way of communicating even abstract ideas, by helping to bridge the gap in background knowledge between academia and the public.

By the same token, geographers must not be afraid to tread beyond their favoured territory, bringing results into the world in the form of galleries, newspaper articles, industry or public events. Successful communication does not mean crafting one perfect message, but finding ways to tell a story in different ways to engage with different audiences.

This means, quite literally, stepping out of the ivory tower and into the world on its own terms, to play an active role in shaping it. It is a huge opportunity. And the bearish suspicion that many retain over public engagement makes it all the more so. In a world increasingly assailed by the interested vacuity of the post-truth era, the public and their policymakers are desperate for the kind of integrity and authority brought by academic voices. Collaborating towards communicating that voice is essential because the future, increasingly, lies outside Castilia. All that remains is for Geographers to grasp it.

How to cite

Parsons, L. (2023) Photojournalism. Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/TFXT8982

Key points

- Communication beyond the academy is an increasingly important part of an academic's role.
- Effective non-academic communication requires collaboration and partnership.
- The same message can – and should – be communicated in multiple ways to reach different audiences.

I make maps

By James Cheshire, University College London

I'm always amused to hear fellow academics tie themselves in knots as they try to explain to those outside the discipline what it is they actually do for a living. The pre-conceptions around 'geography' are so entrenched, they're very hard to overcome. I've long given up trying to convince anyone kind enough to ask that geography isn't just about listing capital cities! I used to tell them: "I'm interested in the geospatial analysis and visualisation of spatially referenced population datasets", but soon came to recognise their blank stare and sudden pivot to discussing the weather that day. I've since learnt to lean into another stereotype and give a much simpler answer: "I make maps."

This response never extinguishes a conversation, it ignites it with further questions: "What kind of maps?", "I thought we had mapped everything already?", "Did you see that map of...?" and so on. People connect with maps and, unlike a geographer's love of tweed jackets, they are one of the few useful stereotypes we can capitalise on as a discipline. So it's my firm view that academic geographers can further embrace maps as a medium integral to the communication of geographical ideas and research findings.

For example, maps can give you both the local and the global perspective. In the context of the climate crisis they can show that global heating is not uniform, with temperatures increasing in some areas more than others not just across the earth but also within cities as concrete-laden neighbourhoods (typically more deprived) suffer the worst aspects of the urban heat island. They can be used to leverage change by highlighting illogical positions held by those in power, something suffragists did to great effect with their map-based Votes for Women a Success campaign in the first half of the 20th century.

There is no expectation to be a cartographic genius, geographers can engage with maps already in the public sphere. All major media outlets have teams of data journalists, some of whom have geography degrees, generating maps to illustrate their stories and all looking to improve their outputs and also challenge their audiences. If you spot a mistake or have concerns about (mis)representations leading to misconceptions then share your concerns. When Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 the visual language adopted to portray the flows of refugees was that of large arrows, akin to those used to depict the invading army. I challenged this and as a result the BBC, Financial Times and The Economist all changed their symbols away from arrowheads.

Government too is keen to learn from geographers how to better use maps and visualisations. For example, there was a chorus of critiques about the use of visualisations in the COVID-19 briefing slides during the first year of the pandemic that triggered improvements. Any critique needs to extend beyond the 'all maps are wrong' tropes and offer constructive suggestions. When done well there are lasting positive impacts on the ways that complex issues are portrayed to the public.

For those looking to make maps and share them widely, I'd offer the following advice: firstly, you need to convey a clear narrative to achieve impact. Think about the most important thing you want your readers to take away when they have seen the map. Is there a way you can amplify that message (whilst remaining true to the data)? A map that needs lots of caveats in its explanation and a raft of side notes should stay in academic publications. Assume all nuance is lost when it is posted online, so you should be comfortable with the impression the map gives at face value. With that in mind, be sure of your data; check it and check again. The first thing a reader does when they look at a map is locate somewhere familiar, such as where they live, and then compare that to the other parts of the map. They'll soon spot a mistake if something is amiss

And finally, find some critical friends to offer feedback before sharing more widely. I've never once had a bad suggestion for an improvement. If readers don't understand the map, it's your problem not theirs!

My last thought comes from John K. Wright, who's 1942 paper entitled 'Map Makers are Human' is often on my mind when I'm creating a map. In the midst of World War II he said:

"Maps help to form public opinion and build public morale. When the war is over, they will contribute to shaping the thought and action of those responsible for the reconstruction of a shattered world."

Maps are powerful things so we'd be foolish to overlook them when encouraging others to think geographically.

Image by Annie Spratt on Unsplash.

How to cite

Cheshire, J. (2023) I make maps. Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/MASJ5124

Key points

- Maps are an immensely powerful tool to communicate geographical research outputs and ideas.
- Geographers don't have to make maps to engage with them in public.
- Narrative, confidence in the content and feedback are essential if maps are to be successful.

Working with the media

By Matthew Blackett, Coventry University

The chances are that at sometime today you'll have some sort of interaction with 'the media'. This may be listening to the radio over breakfast, reading the news on your commute or clicking a link as you scroll through your social profiles before bed. You've had this interaction and so do millions of others. Now imagine this interaction consisted of commentary on your research, detailing the significance of findings you've made and the impact they are likely to have, or perhaps it consisted of you being asked your expert opinion on a contemporary geographical issue. In just a couple of minutes, you will have been heard by many people, seen your Twitter followers increase significantly and had your profile raised infinitesimally more than it ever would have been by being confined to an academic journal.

I don't think anyone could argue with the fact that working with the media is great for raising one's profile in the 'real world'.

So how might you go about being approached by the media?

Well, there's a bit of a catch-22 situation here in that you won't be approached unless you have some sort of profile – the very one that the media will help you raise. So if you think you'd like to work with the media, you should do all you can to get your research and expertise 'out there'. Make sure to Tweet regularly about your research and opinions, particularly when a topic is trending that has relevance (even vaguely) to your work; try also to engage in conversations where you have the expertise. Ensure you have an up-to-date and outward facing online presence, whether through your institution's webpages or your own (or both) and, if possible, liaise with your institution's media department so that they know you exist and can push you and your work at any opportune moment and get known by the Society.

Once contacted, however, here is a word of advice: do not be drawn into answering questions that you do not know the answers to or that you are uncomfortable answering, or into agreeing with opinions that you do not agree with! This is unlikely to happen as you've been called upon for expert comment – the media needs you at this moment and the interviewers will, by and large, be nice to you – but do be careful.

One of my earliest experiences of working with the media came in 2011, when I was approached by the local BBC radio station to discuss the earthquake, and associated damage, experienced in Christchurch, New Zealand. I was an early career academic at the time and was terrified at the prospect, but the presenters put me at ease, told me what they'd like to discuss beforehand and overall it went very well. I had been found because the radio station had contacted my institution to ask if anyone could comment. Since then I have been contacted for comment, interpretation and opinion in relation to natural hazards events globally. Over the years, I found myself on various breakfast television couches and at a range of broadcasting stations and even today, the relationship I have developed with the media continues.

My experiences with the media have always been positive but here are some tips to be selected by the media and/or for working with them:

Do

- Have an outward facing profile detailing your research and expertise in keywords
- Liaise with your media department and the Society's press office
- Use Twitter (and other platforms) to make your research and opinions known
- Take some media training (often offered by your institution)
- Ask for an idea of the question you might be asked

Don't

- Worry if you can't answer a question – simply say you don't know
- If on television, wear clothes that are busy or likely to distract viewers
- Partake in an interview in a location where you might be distracted
- Be drawn into giving opinions on issues you do not feel comfortable about
- Be scared – treat the interaction as an informal chat and forget the viewers / listeners

Like it or loathe it, the media is central to many facets of today's society; it informs and influences, entertains and educates. And, given that the media is so prominent in today's digital environment, by working with it, researchers and academics can significantly raise their profile, and that of their work, far beyond the usual reach of the academy.

Image by Korie Cull on Unsplash.

Go on, get out there and give it a try – you're unlikely to be paid for your work but the experience is fun and rewarding and can add a new dimension to your career.

How to cite

Blackett, M. (2023) Working with the media. Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/YSGT4868

Engaging with the media

By Danny Dorling, University of Oxford

Why bother?

Working with the media is optional for academic geographers. Most will hardly ever engage with newspapers, magazines, go on radio or television. Their footprint on social media will be small, or not existent at all. This is all as it should be. It would be impossible for many of us to be much involved. There is simply not enough space in the pages of newspapers or magazines, not enough time in the schedules of radio or television programmes, and no huge unguided audience out there aching to read your blog posts, hear your podcasts, or retweet your thoughts.

Occasionally, however, you may have something you really want other people to know about, a book you have written or a finding in an article. Even more occasionally, journalists may come to you and you might wonder whether you should engage. Many academics are extremely trepidatious about having their words taken out of context. Some may even think that what they do should be confined to the ivory tower because it is simply too complex for other people to understand. Others are a little more open and curious.

Academic training in nit-picking phrases and worrying greatly about the nuance of arguments is not a particularly good starting point for engaging with the wider media. You cannot expect what you want to say to be conveyed exactly as you would like it to be. Write an article for a newspaper, for example, and you have absolutely no say over the headline that is put above that article. This alone can be enough to put many academics off; but it is the price you have to pay if you want more than a few dozen people to know what you have to say.

Some of the dos and don'ts

Look up the published work of any journalists who contacts you before replying. Don't talk to journalists who write nasty articles – you won't change their views and they are very likely to twist yours. Give preference to newspapers and magazine that are free-to-read on the web, or that at least allow a few articles to be read a month for free.

Do make you main point early on and clearly. Don't believe that you will get more than a few seconds to talk on a 24 hour TV news programme or radio show. If you become confident enough, chose live media over pre-recorded programmes. The producer can't edit out your key point if you are live.

Don't publish, tweet, retweet, 'like', say or claim anything that you would not be happy defending years from now. Nothing in the media ever disappears (it can be found in web archives). Don't be afraid of being boring, the worst that can happen is that they don't ask you back again. If you do make a mistake, just admit to it – this is so rarely done it is refreshing.

What is the worst that can happen?

In March 2019 the editor of the Spectator magazine published an advert for internships in his magazine. A copy is below. I did ask him, but he never sent me any of the successful answers to his fourth question, which is a pity as I must have made many mistakes. I suspect that people who want to be interns at the Spectator are just not very good at spotting them.

I joke about this, and in a way it is quite an honour for a human geographer, rather than a political scientist, economist or sociologist to be singled out in this way. But this is the kind of thing that worries academics and it is done to try to dissuade them from speaking out, or to imply that what they find must be riddled with errors, because it suggests that otherwise the worldview of the Spectator editor is misguided.

Sometimes what appears to be bad is not. Later on in 2019 I wrote a paper published in a very obscure academic journal. Unbeknown to me, a journalist at the Times Higher saw it and wrote a summary under the headline 'Geography seen as "soft option" by "posh" students, warns Dorling'. Then a dozen British newspapers wrote their own version of the story under a title akin to 'posh and dim'. I was a little annoyed that they used the word dim (I never had), but as a means to let other geographers know that geography had a problem - it was effective. Many of my colleagues responded angrily, until they saw the data. In 2019 human geography was the UK university degree which took the most students from the most affluent neighbourhoods and the fewest from the poorest. No other degree was as posh. I suspect that when the latest, post-pandemic data is analysed this will no longer the case. However, it will never be possible to prove if those newspaper stories put some posher students off applying, due to the fear of being labelled dim.

Image by Kaboompics.com on Pexels.

How to cite

Dorling, D. (2023) Engaging with the media. Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/WIKF7987

Social media

By Ella Gilbert, British Antarctic Survey

One of my favourite quotes is “Science isn't finished until it's communicated”. What a line from Sir Mark Walport! And in geography, it's especially relevant. After all, we are working on subjects that impact everybody – so everybody should have a right to understand the research.

The good news is that if you have something you want to tell the world about, you no longer have to rely on the traditional method of press releases and media interviews. In fact, it's never been easier to communicate online with a diverse range of audiences

Because love it or hate it, social media is here to stay

In the early days of social media, engaging audiences with your research was easy. You got a Twitter account, you posted a little bit about your work with a picture, and hey presto – engagement. If you were feeling enthusiastic, you could make a YouTube video and tell your friends on Facebook.

But as the number of platforms and users has increased exponentially, so has the quality of content. Which means it's important to optimise! So here, I'm sharing a few tips and tricks to super-charge your communication.

Before you start making any content, some of the key questions to ask yourself are:

- What do I want people to take away? This is the most important part. Keep it simple. Stick to one message for short-form (photo, short video, tweets) or three messages for long-form (podcasts, longer videos)
- What kind of format does your research lend itself to? A podcast? A 10 second video? An image? How can you tell your story best?
- Who do you want to communicate with? Different platforms tend to focus on different demographics and so content needs to be tailored to those audiences.
- What's your style? Which platform matches best?

I mainly use YouTube and Twitter but am increasingly making videos for Tiktok and Instagram to talk about climate change and polar science. It's a fun way to engage with people beyond academia and for my work to have broader impact. But each platform has its own vibe...

Facebook

- Why?: Once the only site that mattered, Facebook is now in its death-spiral, especially amongst younger people. At any rate, no-one under 30 seems to use it. But it can still be helpful, e.g. if you post in groups.
- Do: Post pictures, ideally with faces.
- Don't: Embed external links in posts – the algorithm will penalise you. Get around it by posting a picture (screenshot, photo, video thumbnail etc.) and posting the link in the comments.

Twitter

- Why?: It's interactive and lets you reach a wider audience than you otherwise might. I've made lasting and valuable professional connections here. However, it's changed a lot recently! Is it still worth it? Hard to know. Many scientists are moving to Mastodon.
- Do: Curate your feed by choosing who you follow wisely.
- Don't: Engage with the trolls.

LinkedIn

- Why?: Increasingly being used following the demise of Facebook/Twitter for professional content.
- Do: Keep the tone more serious and work-oriented. Videos do quite well.
- Don't: Post the same type of thing you'd put on e.g. TikTok on LinkedIn – it's a different audience.

TikTok

- Why?: A great way to connect with younger audiences. Very trend-focussed and fast-moving
- Do:
  - Piggy-back on current trends to get your content seen (did someone say Wednesday Addams x Monster Mash?) – do some research to see what's popular.
  - Add trending music
  - Post regularly to feed the algorithm
  - Keep it fun
  - Keep it short
  - Create a good cover image with brief(!) descriptive text
  - Grab the viewer's interest within the first 2-3 seconds
- Don't: Be disheartened if your videos don't get loads of views – keep trying!

Instagram

- Why?: Generally a more supportive and positive environment if your work can be visual. It has more space for descriptive captions than elsewhere on social media.
- Do: Post portrait videos (reels) – these can be similar/the same as those you post to TikTok (two birds one stone!).
- Don't: Post links in captions (they're not clickable). Instead send people to your bio where you can have one link. Use a site like linktree to direct people to a curated list of links that you want to promote (eg personal website, recent publications, video).

YouTube

- Why?: My favourite platform, although not really social media.
- If you create good content, you can build a real community of people that keep coming back and engaging with your work.
- Do:
  - Take inspiration from other creators and try to emulate what you like about their work.
  - Research search terms in your field – you can find where there are gaps in the market and aim to fill that niche.
  - Think of fun/interesting angles and ways to present your topic, ideally reacting to topical or current events.
- Don't: let yourself down with poor quality videos. The standard of videos on YouTube is really high, and a bad technical set-up can really distract from the content. So make sure you get the basics right: decent audio, lighting, framing and focus. Most smartphones these days should be good enough for the video, and you can find phone tripods pretty cheaply online. Try to have something interesting behind you (and be aware of what you're showing in the background!). Plants, books, scenery etc work well. Invest in a proper mic and make sure you're well (and consistently) lit throughout the video, and not backlit.

How to cite

Gilbert, E. (2023) Social media. Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/PPCK7896

Some general tips

- Find something you enjoy. It should be fun, not a chore!
- Imaginative and creative takes do best – catch the audience's imagination and make them interested to find out more.
- Be prepared to fail a few times before you find something that works – get feedback, try new things, and experiment. Good luck!

Scientific websites and blogs

By Bethan Davies, Newcastle University

The opportunities of online science communication

The digital age brings many opportunities for impactful science communication. The Pew Research Center (2021) reports that 86% of Americans get news on digital devices. Those under 50 years old are more likely to turn to digital devices for their news, and those under 29 especially turn to social media. Specialist sources are often seen as as more trustworthy than the traditional media, and more likely to get the science right (Pew Research Centre, 2017).

For researchers, the internet offers a way to reach households worldwide. Blogs (arranged chronologically) and websites (arranged thematically) can be a trustworthy source for both lay audiences and journalists, with high levels of perceived credibility (Su et al., 2015). They allow academics to talk about their research, explain or comment on important topics such as climate change, and to tell personal stories about their work. They can also form a means to interact meaningfully with journalists.

Blogs and websites can be set up quickly, easily and cheaply on various platforms, such as WordPress, Blogger, SquareSpace, Joomla and Drupal. Given the time and energy required to maintain an active site, they work well as a group activity. Increasingly, they are set up for specific funded projects, research groups or labs. They can also have academic benefits, increasing the visibility of research and profiles of the writers, or widening career prospects. Furthermore, most researchers are trained in writing, and most would consider this a key skill (compared with, for example, videography, comedy or drawing).

However, in a world with thousands of science blogs and websites, how can you ensure a successful science communication strategy, and ensure that articles reach their intended audience?

Case study: Antarctic Glaciers

I set up www.AntarcticGlaciers.org in 2012, originally to support an Antarctic research project. Active for over 10 years, now it acts as a kind of online textbook, and covers process glaciology, glacial geology, the Antarctic, Greenland, Patagonian and British ice sheets, and disseminates cutting-edge research for public and educational use. It aims to inspire young people with glaciology, and specifically targets teachers with engaging, original content, interesting visuals and teaching resources. Currently, it has 294 webpages and 121 blog posts, arranged into introductory (age 14+), intermediate (teachers and students in post-16 education) and in-depth (undergraduate, postgraduate and professionals) articles. It also has unique interactive teaching resources, such as the Younger Dryas Glacial Map, and the prize-winning Antarctic StoryMap Series.

The website has been recognised externally with a 2020 Certificate of Excellence from the Geologists Association, the 2022 SCAR Medal for Antarctic Education and Communication, and is cited by NASA JPL and NASA Earth Observatory, the National Geographic, NSIDC, American Geophysical Union, Royal Geographical Society, Geologists' Association and RealClimate.org, as well as numerous news outlets. Journalists frequently reach out through the website.

AntarcticGlaciers.org is used as a teaching resource by universities and schools worldwide, which is tracked by referrals (inbound links) and direct emails. Website resources have been used in textbooks for GCSE and A Level Geography, and in several MOOCs. Google Analytics shows that a substantial portion of the website audience are engaged in the education sector.

Since launch, AntarcticGlaciers.org has had 4.6 m page views, from 2.5 m users, from almost every country. In the year 2022, there were 647,000 page views, with ~40,000 users per month. 78% of the traffic came from organic searches, 17% from direct sources, and rest from referrals or social media. 88% of website visitors in 2022 were new, and 12% were returning. This highlights how important it is to strategically optimise a digital resource to build traffic from Google.

The website receives a range of external funding, from bodies such as the International Association of Sedimentologists, an Antarctic Science educational bursary, the Scientific Committee for Antarctic Research, the Geologists' Association, and from university impact funds. These funds have enabled the website to remain advert free and non-profit, and most importantly, have allowed the part-time employment of a series of early career researchers. They have provided regular new content for the website and have received mentoring in writing for science communication.

Dos and Don'ts

When setting up a science blog or website, do:

- Be strategic and deliberate. Define short-term and long-term goals. Have a clear vision about the specific niche and the values of your new site.
- Recognise it requires a significant time investment. Setting one up alone is time consuming and can result in later abandonment. However, they can work really well for a group, such as a research group, lab or particular research project, with multiple writers.
- Identify an audience. Examples could include policy makers, politicians, journalists, school teachers (a different audience to school children or students), academics and researchers, local people (for specific local projects), interested lay people. A common pitfall is to just start writing, without researching or interacting with the audience first. Who are you writing for? What do they need? What is their level of education? Why are they reading your site?
- Google rewards regular original content. Be wary of reposting content from elsewhere, and find a strategy to maintain momentum. Plan out a content delivery strategy.
- Install a Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) plug in, which will help authors ensure that potential readers can find their page on Google. Basic principles of SEO include:
    - For each page, identify a unique keyword that readers will put into Google, and use this within the page title and URL, within subtitles with HTML H1, H2, H3 tags, and within the text and in figure captions.
    - Ensure the sitemap is submitted to Google.
    - Build internal and external links, especially from large sites highly ranked in Google (like universities).
- Remember that Content is King. Websites do not need to look particularly flashy or have a lot of exciting functionality. You can use an off-the-peg template (e.g. in WordPress) which looks sleek and professional. Invest time and energy in regular original content instead. However, do ensure that your site can be easily navigated to avoid frustrating users.
- Track and measure progress. Statistics on numbers visiting, visitor behaviour, most popular pages, traffic sources, can be easily tracked on Google Analytics.

When writing articles, do:

- Highlight the relevance to the audience. Why should they care, and how are they affected?
- Invert the Order. People generally skim read articles and want to know what the most important information is right away. Put the key details and take-home messages right at the top of the article and follow up with supporting details. The take home message should be highlighted and signposted with headings, to make it easy for the reader.
- Keep the language simple and straightforward. Avoid jargon and complex terms and be aware that some terms routinely used in research (e.g., bias, theory, positive trend, uncertainty, error) may have very different connotations to lay audiences. Use text that is easy to understand and tell a story with human interest.
- Keep individual entries short, ~700 words maximum. Readers quickly lose interest.
- Provide the background information, commentary and relevance to people that is often missing in news and in the media.
- Illustrate articles well.
- Keep sentences and paragraphs short, with white space between paragraphs. When reading on a screen, it is hard to read dense text. Use headings to break up text and to allow readers to skim read and find relevant sections quickly.
- Cite sources, which can ensure articles are seen as trustworthy and enables readers to check up on facts themselves.

How to cite

Davies, B. (2023) Scientific websites and blogs. Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/UVDX5964

Key recommendations

- Research and understand your audience. Understand who you are writing for, why you are writing for them, and what your audience needs and wants.
- Be strategic and deliberate, with a planned out content delivery strategy that can be sustained, ideally by a group of writers.
- Write short, accessible, interesting articles, with pictures, avoiding jargon and complex language.
- Delivering regular high quality content and original commentary will bring readers to your site. This is the single most important point to underline.

Image by cottonbro studio on Pexels.

School engagement: mapping home during the COVID crisis

By Alison Blunt, Queen Mary University of London

In the wise words of JK Rowling's, Dumbledore, "A child's voice, however honest and true, is meaningless to those who have forgotten how to listen." Our recent experience working with and hearing from children and young people about their experiences during the COVID crisis has opened up a number of opportunities for us as researchers, not only in terms of working with children and young people as an audience for our research, but in terms of considering children and young people as collaborators, investigators and future thinkers.

But what does it look like to engage with and reach out to the next generation of geographers, to pose important questions and really listen to the answers that come forward?

From 2020-2022 we were part of the AHRC funded Stay Home Stories project. Our particular strand of work sought to understand how children's experiences of home changed during the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated restrictions. When we began the study, everyone's day to day lives had been thrown into turmoil. This was particularly the case for children and young people whose lives normally tend to operate around the framing of the normal school day. With children of care workers being the exception, most children and young people were no longer able to attend school in person; while some were able to access learning online, there were mixed experiences therein, depending on availability and access to adequate technology and resources. Some had moved in with grandparents or relatives while their parents worked on the front line. Time outside was severely restricted and socialising beyond immediate family bubbles was prohibited, affecting types and modes of play. In many cases, children and young people were spending much more time in very close proximity with family, competing to find spaces of their own, and many were feeling the effects of external, national level decisions being imposed on them.

In the midst of this moment of unprecedent disruption, we saw a real need to give children and young people the opportunity to talk and express their feelings about their lived experiences at home. We were keen to explore how we might use geography as a platform for this work and to encourage those children and young people to use their observational and mapping skills to articulate their personal and individual experience of the pandemic.

Through the Stay Home Stories project we invited children, via their schools, to draw us a map of their home as they perceived and experienced it during the COVID crisis. With the support of the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) and concurrent running of their Young Geographer of the Year competition on the same theme, we received over 375 maps from pupils in schools across the UK and in some cases from other countries too. Once lockdown restrictions were relaxed, we also hosted a number of mapping workshops in the classroom at schools in the Liverpool City region to work with teachers and pupils on the development of their maps while discussing the content with their creators. The act of mapping encouraged engagement with a sense of place while also honing spatial skills. Given the work involved children and young people, ethical and safeguarding considerations were front and centre of all our planning with this work right from the research design phase

The maps from across the different strands of work, a selection of which can be seen on the map gallery hosted by the RGS-IBG, revealed how young people's experiences of the home space may have changed during the COVID-19 restrictions. There were several recurrent themes represented on the maps, including the sense of being bounded in at home, with the walls of the home providing at once a physical restriction but also a defensive barrier to a hazardous outside world. Many of the maps include depictions of the COVID virus as an alien invader from outer space and there is a very clear focus on the use of technology in the home, for home schooling or in terms of connection with friends and family. Outdoor spaces including gardens, yards, pavements, balconies, local green spaces and parks, assumed greater prominence on many of the maps for the sense of escape they offered. On the theme of green spaces, we also had the privilege of working with Write Back - a young writers' project based in Barking and Dagenham - and together produced a film My Place My Space in which this talented group of writers express in their own words the importance of green spaces for wellbeing. Further work is now being developed looking at the relationship between COVID experience, use of green spaces and

improvements in environmental competency.

Some of these themes formed the focus for short written pieces, blog posts and podcasts during the course of the project. The mapping initiative also provided a set of materials from which Dr Paula Owens, an independent education consultant specialising in primary geography and curriculum development, was able to develop educational resources for key stage 1 and 2 Geography pupils on themes of home, the outside world, memory and spatial awareness, changing spatial relationships and places of the future.

Having a platform in the form of the gallery to showcase the maps as they were being submitted, along with these educational resources, was key for encouraging schools to participate in the initiative, though having a range of public engagement tools was also essential to maintain momentum and engagement with the work during what was unprecedented period of crisis. Our hope is that the materials produced as a result of the mapping project will be preserved as a unique archive, expressing children and young people's experiences of an extraordinary time.

The work provides a rich source of social data for our own research and for other academics to better understand, place-making, children's spatial perceptions, environmental competency to name just a few key areas of enquiry. The maps that were produced have also become core to the policy reports produced as part of the broader Stay Home project (see Burrell et al., 2021 and Blunt et al., 2022).

Image by Miki Fath on Unsplash.

In terms of our next steps, we have begun extension work with the Greater London Authority, applying the methodology through schools-based workshops to co-explore how children understand and articulate concerns over local place based environmental issues. In addition to providing a suite of maps for the GLA's Community Insights Hub, we have worked with an independent animator, Diwas Bisht, to produce a short public engagement animation based on some of the school workshop maps. We look forward to seeing how this kind of approach might help to further young people's engagement with geography and environmental issues.

Further reading

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Submitting evidence to a Select Committee

By Sarah Mills, Loughborough University

In the UK, both the House of Commons and House of Lords lead and work with Select Committees. These are an important way that researchers, including geographers, can and do submit evidence from their research to UK Parliament.

A Select Committee is a small group of MPs and/or members of the Lords from different political parties who are tasked with exploring a timely topic that either has a UK focus or international policy relevance. There is a Select Committee to examine the work of every government department (via House of Commons) as well as 'permanent' and 'special' inquiries (usually via House of Lords). Most of the 'permanent' committees cover topics that geographers are well placed to contribute on (eg the Environment and Climate Change Committee) and special inquiries cover a wide range of geographical themes (eg Citizenship and Civic Engagement or Rural Economy). You can browse the latest Select Committees and sign-up for regular alerts when new calls for evidence are announced.

A Select Committee process usually begins with a call for written evidence. This is an open call for short written submissions from researchers, organisations, and members of the public, in response to set questions they are investigating. If these questions relate to your research expertise, you should strongly consider submitting written evidence; the whole process can be very engaging and worthwhile. You should answer the relevant questions in short paragraphs with indicative supporting evidence or examples, and if you can, include links to any publications or reports. You can still submit evidence even if your work only relates to one of a Select Committee's published questions. In my experience, it is best to focus on the key areas where you can really support an answer and preferably any recommendations. Most calls for written evidence will have clear formatting guidelines and most submissions are only a few pages in length. It is always useful to include a short biography at the beginning of your submission including contact details and relevant links

After a Select Committee has considered the written evidence, they usually organise sessions to hear oral evidence and so you may be invited to UK Parliament. These sessions give members of the Select Committee an opportunity to ask any follow-up questions about your written submission, or to discuss the Committee's work. Your support will be welcomed and eventually the Select Committee will produce a public report. This output will often be written by an academic who has been appointed to work with the Committee and synthesise the most relevant evidence into clear findings and recommendations for UK Government. It can therefore be an important potential pathway to impact from your research, as most Select Committee reports require a formal response from government. Furthermore, all written evidence submissions made to a Select Committee become available online after their work has finished, which can be a great way to share your research findings with a wider engaged audience, even if you are not called to give oral evidence or cited in the final report.

One way to begin engaging in parliamentary spaces and to hear about the work of Select Committees is to contact and attend events of an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG). These are cross-party groups focused on a particular topic, such as 'Air Pollution', 'Energy Security', 'Political Literacy' or 'Race Equality in Education'. There are also APPGs about most countries worldwide, with a register of all APPGs regularly updated here. These Groups are primarily formed of MPs and Members of the House of Lords, and sometimes co-ordinated by a relevant charity or organisation. APPGs sometimes have Academic Advisory Groups, but even without these, many APPGs look for new evidence and reports from researchers to cite within their own submissions to a relevant Select Committee. More broadly, their events are a fantastic way to get involved in a network of engaged organisations and individuals interested in the same topic and advocacy for political or policy change. APPGs usually have several meetings a year and are keen to hear from academics as potential guest speakers. With around 750 APPGs at the time of writing, there is genuinely one out there for every geographer!

Overall, engaging with UK Parliament via Select Committees and an APPG has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my career to date. I strongly encourage you to get involved where possible and to share your research through this wider democratically engaged process to reach new audiences.

How to cite

Mills, S. (2023) Submitting evidence to a Select Committee. Communicating research beyond the academy. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Guide. Available at: https://doi.org/10.55203/DHKB8409

Key points

- Sign-up for email alerts about new calls for evidence from relevant Select Committees.
- Consult examples of written and oral evidence on the UK Parliament website and read their guidance on giving evidence to Commons or Lords Select Committees.
- Reach out to an All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) linked to your research topic to learn more about the parliamentary process, as well as gaining a valuable network.

The riches of an applied geography of poverty

By John H. McKendrick, Glasgow Caledonian University

There are many ways in which the knowledge and skills of the geographer can be utilised to tackle poverty, and to support those who tackle poverty

Geographers should practice what they preach – we should be as concerned to tackle the problems in the Academy (including in the discipline) as tackling the problems that persist in wide society.

Poverty is no stranger to geographers. At a fundamental level, poverty influences who has access to geography and how geography is experienced, both in schools and in higher education. Beyond the Academy, poverty manifests itself in many ways, and specialists from a broad range of sub-disciplines have ruminated on how it shapes their geographies, including transport, food, economy, gender and so on.

And of course, poverty is placed. At every geographical scale, concentrations of poverty are to be found, and how life is experienced is shaped by poverty. There is a global geography: 'No poverty' is the first of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, acknowledging that far too many citizens in far too many countries have lives afflicted and constricted by poverty. It has a local geography: although poverty often endures in localities, the geographies of poverty have also been found to be dynamic.

Although it would be easy to despair at the problem of poverty, given the enormity and complexity of the task of tackling it, and its apparent resistance to anti-poverty interventions, geographers are not only involved in better understanding poverty, but are actively involved in work to tackle it. In my own practice, I have given equal weight to the pursuit of academic and applied geographies of poverty.

From the outset of my career, I have been interested in challenging social injustices (poverty included) and challenging the misperceptions that abound in relation to them. A move back to Scotland in 2002 coincided with the formative years of a Scottish Government, which created new possibilities for working with government (local and national), other public bodies and Third Sector/community groups. From the outset, there was a mission to promote social inclusion and tackle poverty, which provided opportunities to apply geographical research skills to appraise public policy. Equally important, was working in an institution that valued community connection and at least did not discourage staff from forging connections with community groups and facilitating opportunities for students to apply their skills and knowledge to support this.

Over the last twenty years, I have found many ways to apply my geographical skills and knowledge to support others in efforts to tackle poverty in Scotland. In no particular order, here is a list of the top ten practices in my applied geographical work:

1. Applied research. The bread and butter of applied geography is the application of our geographical research skills. In addition to delivering research for the Poverty and Inequality Commission and the Scottish Government, much of my effort has been directed to undertaking research to inform the work of community groups.
2. Contribute to wider debates - Social mobility and Sustainable Development Goals. Although with a national commitment to eradicate child poverty in Scotland by 2030 opportunities abound to apply geography locally, I have also contributed to wider work to appraise policy interventions in the UK and beyond.
3. Keynote presentations. I have delivered over 50 keynote addresses and been invited to deliver over 150 presentations at seminars and workshops focused on poverty. Among those delivered in 2023 are presentations to the Dundee Fairness Commission, School Leaders Scotland, Glasgow Community Planning Partnership, British Nutrition Foundation, Scottish Trades Union Congress, Renfrewshire Nurture Conference, and the Tenant Participation Advisory Service.
4. Columnist in the Scottish Anti-Poverty Review. I write a research column for SAPR, the magazine of The Poverty Alliance, Scotland's alliance of organisations committed to tackling poverty.
5. Committee Work. I serve on a range of national and local committees, including the Scottish Pantry Network, the Child Poverty Programme Board (of the Scottish Government), the Vulnerable Consumers Group (of Consumer Scotland),

Feeding Britain (Academic Panel) and the Perth and Kinross Poverty Action Group.

6. Local Poverty Directory. With the support of the Abrdn Financial Fairness Trust, SPIRU is just about to launch a Directory of Local Practice, to raise awareness of work being undertaken across Scotland (and beyond) to tackle poverty locally.
7. SPIRU Work Placement. I afford opportunities for my students to undertake applied research. Students can elect to join SPIRU for a Work Placement module, a key element of which has been to undertake community research. In recent years, we have reported on Home Economics teachers experience during the cost of living crisis, a nationwide survey of secondary school pupils canvassing their opinions on school meals, the introduction of a breakfast cart to tackle food poverty in schools, and plans to introduce a community supermarket in a deprived neighbourhood in Glasgow.
8. Poverty-proofing the University. SPIRU is developing a project to 'poverty-proof' the university, reviewing ways in which everyday practice could be altered to improve the experience of HE for students from financially disadvantaged backgrounds.
9. Alliance of Working Class Academics. I am a committee member of the Alliance, an organisation concerned to support faculty and students from working class backgrounds in academia.
10. Commissioner for Fair Access. In January 2023, I was appointed Commissioner to advise HEIs in Scotland and the Scottish Government on what should be done to ensure that by 2030, 20% of Scottish-domiciled students entering higher education in Scotland are from Scotland's 20% Most Deprived Areas.

How to cite

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Engaging with policy-makers

By Anna Jackman, University of Reading

As geographers, we're centrally concerned with the 'grand challenges' and 'wicked problems' confounding lives and environments alike. As a discipline, we are well-positioned to engage, inform and challenge 'policy direction' and decision-making. While recognising that policy-making involves wide-ranging contexts and considerations, this entry provides a practical guide to routes geographers might pursue in engaging UK policy-makers. Drawing upon my research into the impacts of drones on contemporary warfare and everyday life in the UK, it outlines routes to offering evidence, providing guidance, and widening research networks.

Offering evidence

Written and oral responses to House of Commons and House of Lords Select Committee inquiries, covering a wide range of societally-relevant issues, offer opportunities to share important findings from geographical research. For example, in 2019 the Commons Defence Committee launched the Domestic threat of drones inquiry, examining the risk of 'terrorists and extremists maliciously using drones, and what the Government should do to address this threat' (Defence Committee 2019).

Once announced, Committees open submissions of written evidence to 'the public, including academics' (UK Parliament n.d). While details are listed on inquiry webpages, general guidance stresses being concise, using sub-headings, avoiding jargon, and directly addressing the 'terms of reference of the inquiry' (UK Parliament n.d.a). You can be selective with the questions you respond to, based on your expertise. Once written evidence is submitted, it is processed and made publicly available (see, for example, the Domestic Threat of Drones submission page, including my submission).

As written evidence is reviewed, Committees can opt to invite respondents to act as 'witnesses', providing further information through oral testimony (UK Parliament n.d.a). As I learned as a witness, the Committee contacts you regarding session timing, format and scope, including confirming other witness that may be present (UK Parliament n.d.a). Committee members pose questions in sessions which last up to two hours and are typically streamed on Parliament TV (see, for example, the session I appeared in on Parliament.tv). It's important to consider the key messages you wish to communicate and the ways you can frame your research in relation to both the inquiry and wider policy landscape.

Providing guidance

Geographers can also pursue engagement with policy-makers through the provision of guidance, including acting as a specialist adviser to a committee inquiry, or contributing to or reviewing a POST-note.

When Select Committees launch an inquiry, they may choose to appoint a 'specialist adviser', an 'outside specialist paid by the day' who assists with the inquiry (UK Parliament n.d.b). Potential candidates may be invited to 'pre-appointment hearings' wherein they present to the committee (UK Parliament n.d.b). While the role varies, it can include input into: the ways written evidence is solicited, witness sourcing, and published materials (UK Parliament n.d). As specialist adviser for the Science and Technology Committee 'Commercial and recreational use of drones in the UK' inquiry, over a five month period, I provided Members of Parliament (MPs) and the Committee secretariat (public servants who are not specialist in the policy area) with information on potential policy matters to consider, guidance on potential witnesses and questions to ask, and input into briefing materials, such as the Committee's published report.

Another great opportunity for engagement is with the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST), through their production of POST-notes, short 'briefings reviewing emerging areas of research' (POST n.d.). Spanning wide-ranging themes, the development of a POST-note involves interviewing academics with relevant expertise (POST n.d.a). In my interview for the 2020 'Misuse of civilian drones' POST-note, I answered subject-matter questions and offered information on wider areas and issues the briefing might consider. I was later asked to peer review the POST-note, a review process that is typically undertaken by 15-20 experts in the field (POST n.d.a).

Widening networks

Academics can also widen their policy networks through attending and participating in relevant events, such as those hosted by Westminster Forum Projects, a group with 'origins in UK parliament' and who organise public policy area focused conferences involving 'Ministers and regulators, opposition spokesmen and industry and interest groups' (Westminster Forum Projects n.d). While there are fees for attendance, eligible participants can apply for free or reduced fee places.

In addition, you can identify relevant All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), namely 'cross-party groups' that are 'run by and for Members of the Commons and Lords' and focus on a policy area of shared interest (UK Parliament n.d.c). For example, upon contacting the 'Drones and Modern Conflict APPG', I was invited to speak at their 2019 Westminster 'Rogue Drones' event. Such participation can aid with both networking and forging potential policy engagement opportunities.

It's also important to note that policy engagement is not limited to working with policy-makers. There are a range of actors, from 'civil servants to local councils and think tanks' that work to explore and 'confront policy problems' (Rahman et al. 2022). In my research project, Diversifying Drone Stories, I have sought connection with a range of civil actors, whether by presenting at key events for UK local authorities (e.g. Chartered Institute of Environmental Health's Noise Management Conference), or approaching professional body groups such as the Institute of Acoustics (IOA). Pursuing an interest in the policy dimensions of drone noise, I approached the IOA and was invited to present my research to a relevant working group and to assist with their written consultation response to the Department for Transport's Future of Flight regulatory review.

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Recommendations

- Get to know the policy landscape and the place of your research within it. Search for relevant parliamentary committees and All Party Parliamentary Groups, identify committee inquiries, search existing POST-notes, and identify resources on the House of Commons' and House of Lords' online libraries.
- Understand potential opportunities. Get started with the Knowledge Exchange Unit, a small team 'supporting the exchange of information and expertise between researchers and Parliament' (UK Parliament n.d.d). The team's online resources introduce how parliament 'uses research' and detail policy-engagement opportunities for academics at different careers stages. You can also search for select committee inquiries currently accepting written evidence, open consultations to which you can respond, and upcoming work in the POST work programme.
- Don't forget University resources. Universities often have useful resources, from impact managers that can highlight policy engagement opportunities and networks (including the Universities Policy Engagement Network, a community of UK universities working to increase the impact of research on policy, or partnership with the Open Innovation Team, which provides policy-focused training for academics), to IT, communications and/training support to assist with using social media for research and setting up a research website, to aid with the search and discoverability of your research.
- Keep a record of engagement. Whether through a running CV or through requesting a letter detailing the scope of your policy-engagement, it's useful to keep a record of your experience, as this can support job, probation, and promotion applications, or act as Research Excellence Framework evidence.

Communicating with policy makers

By Michael Collyer, University of Sussex

An interest in producing research which has a direct impact on the world, including through the policy-making process, has been a significant priority for geographers. The understanding of policymakers goes beyond those involved in formulating national government policy to include other tiers of government (local or supranational) as well as civil society organisations or private companies; both sectors may develop their own policies that are relevant to the research but also have an indirect influence on government policymaking.

Much applied research has the potential to make a positive change in the world, particularly if this is managed well and prepared for carefully. The idea that policy is the end point of a process in which a problem is identified, potential solutions are evaluated through research and policy is formulated to implement the best solution still reflects some elements of policy-making, particularly in more technocratic areas, but these are largely the exception. It is more common for policy to arise from trade-offs between different interest groups, sometimes these trade-offs are explicitly acknowledged, but often they are not. In such cases policy is not a reflection of the best evidence, but a result of a much messier process involving the lobbying power of different interest groups, perceptions of wider public opinion or the ideological viewpoints of policy makers.

The recognition of the messiness of the policy making process does not mean that evidence cannot inform policy, but it requires a shift in approach. Researchers must start with a relatively clear idea of what the key issues are and how competing interest groups are positioned in relation to them. Expertise may be marshalled by different sides of a political debate to gain legitimacy. It may even be delegitimised entirely if the weight of the apparent evidence suggests a solution that is viewed as unacceptable by one side or another. The danger here is that any pretence of objectivity fades and rather than evidence-based policy, the result is policy-based evidence; evidence that is produced purely for the purpose of supporting a pre-determined policy solution.

Engagement with policymakers in the research process is essential. Effective communication is more likely to result if policy makers are given the opportunity to influence elements of the research process, though this must be managed carefully to ensure this does not skew the research.

Policymakers are unlikely to read classic academic outputs, such as journal articles and are more likely to pick up on blogs or specially produced concise policy briefs. Early engagement will also encourage early interest in the research and improve the likelihood that dissemination will find an audience and research outputs will at least be read. Where research is conducted alongside civil society organisations, it may feed into the organisations own campaigning or advocacy work, which may help the research to develop a more indirect influence. Engagement is not the same as research impact, which requires some kind of change, but it is very difficult for impact to occur without effective communication with policy makers.

The Migrants on the Margins project and communication with policy audiences

The Migrants on the Margins project investigated migration into low-income neighbourhoods in the cities of Colombo, Dhaka, Harare and Hargeisa. In city stakeholder groups were formed very early in the project and met at least annually. Policy engagement has been very effective: key policy makers in both government and civil society helped shape research results and were very receptive to attending meetings and discussing results. Yet in most cases it is difficult to highlight clear examples of policy change. The policy influence that has occurred happened for two clear reasons: working with partners and longevity of research.

The first reason for policy influence that the project has achieved is the excellent partners that we worked with. It was not the Migrants on the Margins project alone that produced results but research aligned with broader policy objectives of these organisations. In Bangladesh, for example, the International Centre on Climate Change and Development has had considerable success with Bangladeshi government adoption of a policy called 'Climate Resilient, Migrant Friendly Cities' which has resulted in sustained attention to migration into smaller cities in the country.

Migrants on the Margins was able to contribute to the understanding of impacts of migration into low-income neighbourhoods of Dhaka, which provided further justification for this approach.

The second lesson for policy influence is the need for longer term approaches. Most research is financed in project time frames of three years, or even shorter. This is too brief a period to develop any significant engagement. With the Migrants on the Margins project, thanks to RGS-IBG support, we were able to link different sources of finance over a period of five years. We have also been successful in securing follow-on funding with the same partners, for a further three years. In some cases, this has allowed us to deepen relationships with policy makers: for example, the Ministry of Planning of Somaliland became a partner in the follow-on research thanks in part to relationships developed through Migrants on the Margins.

This means that channels of communication with this important actor are more easily available. In other cases, we have been able to shift focus. A long-standing relationship with the Zimbabwean organisation Dialogue on Shelter allowed the follow-on project to expand beyond Harare, where policy making in this field is blocked for various reasons, to a smaller Zimbabwean city where policy is much more open.

How to cite

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Engaging commercial organisations

By Alex Singleton, University of Liverpool

It is common for academic geographers to work with public sector organisations when promoting their outputs, however, the commercial sector offers many opportunities that can both illustrate the importance of your work and promote the relevance of the discipline of geography to a wider audience. However, the task of involving commercial entities in research projects or prompting them to utilise research findings presents significant challenges. Where this works best is when there is a mutual benefit that can be assured for both the commercial organisation and the academic. Without this, interest is often difficult to maintain, and engagements are likely to fail.

Here I provide some general guidance on working with commercial organisations with some tips about what helps these engagements be successful. Although presented generally, these learnings have been developed while running the Consumer Data Research Centre which is a national data infrastructure service funded by the ESRC that has worked with commercial and business partners for over a decade.

Selling motivations for engagement

Commercial organisations are typically motivated by different things to academics. Many decisions within business are focused on maximising profit by enhancing efficiency or reducing costs. Although academic motivation of research may be to contribute new theory or advance methodological approaches, within the commercial sector, potential end users will primarily be interested in how your work could be applied.

Do: Recognise that commercial motivations are different and promote your work in terms of what it can do for an organisation, particularly if this would help increase their efficiency or reduce costs.

Don't: Make communications complicated through specialist language, or over emphasise the academic over potential applied contributions. The more difficult an output is to understand, use or access, the less likely that it will be applied.

Trust takes time

It is less likely that a commercial organisation will work with an academic in an operational context if there is no pre-established relationship. These can take time to build, and it is often more fruitful to build engagements from smaller activities that are less costly or risky than those that would be more involved and require higher degrees of buy in. Growing relationships through partnership working requires persistent and continued efforts. There are many ways in which you can work with a commercial organisation including: Masters dissertations, PhD projects, collaborative research projects and consultancy.

Do: Reach out to your partnership and innovation teams within your organisation as they may be able to assist you contacting organisations who have existing relationships with your university.

Don't: Attempt to initiate an engagement with an organisation by asking for too much (finance, time etc.) or that has a lot of risk associated with it.

Aligning timescales

Timescales for seeing results are often much shorter in a commercial setting and longer-term engagements can often be a more challenging sell to an organisation. For example, an 18-month grant with potential future results/benefits at the end might be less attractive than a shorter-term project. It is important to remember that even when no finances are involved, there is a cost to a commercial organisation for engagement, as they spend time on these activities rather than doing something else.

Do: Have conversations with potential partners about what timescales work for them, and choose engagement opportunities that would be most effective within these contexts.

Don't: Assume that an engagement without cost is "free" for the organisation.

Dynamic networks

Commercial organisations are not static, and relative to academia, there tends to be a greater mobility of workers within and between them. Keeping track of these movements can be useful to develop new opportunities with additional organisations or in new areas, and acutely as people are promoted into more senior roles. Setting up your own networks around

areas of interest and engagement can be very useful, and a great way of initiating new contacts – this has become much easier to do remotely through technologies such as Zoom and Teams.

Do: Keep track of where people are moving to through platforms such as LinkedIn, and make note of the destinations of students that you have supervised – they will be useful future contacts.

Image by Fatemeh Rezvani on Unsplash.

Don't: Engage networks unstrategically, especially those online. Ensure that communications are tailored, relevant and useful to the intended audience.

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