

Making the Mission Possible - Connecting Collaborative and Mission-Driven Research and Publishing with a Wider Audience in the Face of Global Social Challenges

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Abstract

The social world is rapidly changing with the development of new technologies, challenges to expertise and evidence-based knowledge, the effects of climate change, continued poverty and inequality, and the recent need for COVID-19 recovery. Tackling social challenges has been at the heart of Bristol University Press (BUP) from the 1996 inception of Policy Press, its imprint, to becoming the first university press to sign on to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Publishers Compact in 2021. Additionally, a forthcoming strategy refresh at the University of Bristol will emphasize civic engagement and social responsibility using the SDGs to monitor impact across their education, research, and civic missions. This session presented the story of BUP's strategy for cross-collaboration with the University of Bristol to address global social challenges and make meaningful and impactful contributions to real-world problems. A key initiative is the development of BUP's new Open Access *Global Social Challenges Journal*, which seeks to decolonize participation in and access to truly global research in the social sciences while maintaining an ongoing commitment to promoting equality, diversity, and social justice.

Keywords: global social challenges, sustainable development goals, EDI, scholarly communications, Open Access

Bristol University Press (BUP) and its imprint, Policy Press, exist with one purpose. The staff, authors, editors, partners, and the University of Bristol are all deeply committed to moving toward a world that is caring and compassionate to its people and planet and opposes injustice in all its forms. In their first NASIG conference presentation, Simon Bell, Institutional Sales Manager at BUP, with support from Julia Mortimer, Journals and Open Access Director, described their collaborative journey over the past year to build upon a mission-driven publishing ethos while aligning with the University of Bristol's core strategies. At this uncertain time in history, conditions such as the interrupted global food chain, catastrophic events in Ukraine, and differing national responses to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrate why good and fair government, well-supported public services, and social protections are vital in managing such threats. It is more important than ever to look at how scholarship and other forms of expertise can help policy, practice, and civil society respond to the challenges and opportunities ahead and what new forms of scholarly communication will provide support. Throughout the presentation, participants were given opportunities to answer questions about their related experiences and reflect on the feedback provided by the group.

Addressing social issues, inequality, and discrimination has been in the Policy Press DNA since its founding in 1996. The mission broadened in 2016 when BUP was established to address a wider range of global social challenges drawing on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to set priorities.¹ Policy Press, possibly the BUP imprint most familiar to the library community, has its roots in social and public policy, focusing on the social problems affecting individuals and their daily lives. Policy Press's tagline, "publishing with a purpose," is as pertinent today as it was twenty-five years ago. The BUP publishing lists are broader, keeping a foot in the social sciences but also encompassing environment

and sustainability, politics and international relations, international development, law, business, economics and society, and human geography. The two imprints work together to cover all SDG areas of concern.

While in the midst of a global pandemic that caused a seismic impact on academia, the push to carry teaching and research forward practically and sustainably is an ongoing process that continues to require skills and ingenuity from all sectors of higher education. Content management and delivery have changed dramatically, possibly permanently for libraries and information services, and collaboration has never been more important. To address this need, BUP established its inaugural Library Advisory Board, bringing together library community members from across the globe with various skills and expertise.² With the cancellation of conferences and scholarly publishing meetings, the Library Advisory Board has become an invaluable channel. It allows BUP to continue to foster dialogue with libraries and the broader scholarly community toward a mutual understanding of the challenges libraries and publishers face and the best way to navigate these challenges in the unpredictable years ahead.

While examining ways to support the library community, BUP has also been turning its attention to the rapidly changing research agendas within universities, beginning with its own parent institution. There is an increasing move in the scholarly community toward setting up interdisciplinary research centers and restructuring degree programs to solve complex problems and create new opportunities. University of Bristol's research agenda calls for equitable access to sustainable development, sustainable economies and societies, human rights, good governance, and social justice. BUP's books, journals, and digital products support the university's research goals and Research Excellence Framework (REF) contribution, and its textbooks are used in forty-three distinct University of Bristol modules.³ BUP's global author, reviewer, and customer bases support the university's internalization agenda, and its international profile helps the student recruitment strategy. Last year, uniquely, they appointed a new publisher for interdisciplinarity whose focus is on new research practices.

Research silos hold back interdisciplinary collaboration, with further exacerbation by the impact of COVID-19, so universities are looking more at their civic roles to address power imbalances and decolonize research. Examples of such collaborative work are output through BUP blogs, particularly the *Transforming Society* blog and its journals blogs, *Policy & Politics* and *Futures of Work*.^{4,5,6} These channels address global social challenges with articles, podcasts, policy briefings, videos, and other supplemental content, all open and free to access. They facilitate exploration in an alternative space with an emphasis on interdisciplinary impact through the co-production of content geared toward the non-specialist. These channels have allowed meaningful contributions to be made swiftly to topical issues, such as via their COVID-19 workstream launched in April 2021 with eighteen commissioned articles. For their contributions, BUP received several Gold Green Impact Awards from the University of Cambridge.⁷

BUP's new fully Open Access interdisciplinary journal, *Global Social Challenges Journal*, is central to its publishing ethos. Engaging with research from the humanities, arts, and STEM, *Global Social Challenges Journal* aims to become the journal of choice to address the complexities of global social challenges across disciplines and fields and to facilitate thinking about positive new trajectories. Including marginalized minority and indigenous worldviews, the journal will be an essential home for research that contributes to creating alternative futures. Highly accessible, impactful, and policy-facing, it hopes to foster dialogue between academics, policymakers, thought-leaders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), practitioners, and the public by publishing fully Open Access, evidence-based collaborative work in the collective interest.

When BUP proposed the development of *Global Social Challenges Journal*, the University of Bristol welcomed the idea and established funding to support it. An internal advisory group of academics from across faculties and departments of the university was formed to help define the aims and scope. The most crucial step was finding and recruiting the core editorial team who worked to shape the project

further. The editorial team needed to be as globally representative as possible and cover considerable ground discipline-wise between them. The editors are based in China, the U.S., India, Australia, and Europe, bringing specialist knowledge of food security and food policy, politics and international relations, law, sociology, and geography, with a particular focus on interdisciplinary working. There is also a team of global associate editors who provide support in different areas of specialization and echo the breadth and diversity of the editorial board. *Global Social Challenges Journal* is a landmark project developed collaboratively between the University of Bristol and BUP, so University of Bristol scholars can publish in the journal free of charge.

BUP has a proud history of publishing participatory research conducted by the users of health, welfare, and other services, themselves, publishing with, not just about, those experiencing social challenges. The *Global Social Challenges Journal* will enable sharing of the knowledge needed to help build a fairer world across the Global South and Global North.⁸ Articles will be searchable by global social challenges, and the journal will publish special collections on a wide range of topics. Intervention sections, including policy and practice, provocations, and debates, will ensure a forum for interaction beyond the walls of academia. Accessibility and inclusivity are key to the journal's success, with almost 50 percent of contributions to the inaugural collection coming from authors from the Global South. To encourage a range of content types from a broad spectrum of sources, from policymakers and activists to practitioners, article processing charge waivers and discounts are available to authors from the Global South and those without funding.

The mission of the *Global Social Challenges Journal* project aligns well with BUP's broader Open Access strategy to bring equality and inclusivity to participation in and publishing of research. It is committed to the accessibility of the published outputs by offering transformative agreements that foster a scholarly journal publishing system that is open and equitable but also sustainable. BUP partnered with Jisc to offer its entire journals portfolio through an uncapped

read-and-publish deal, and BUP is also working with partners at Accucoms to roll out this model to libraries within the USA and Canada.^{9,10} BUP partners with Knowledge Unlatched to flip titles to gold Open Access where possible and likewise to have its own gold options.¹¹ BUP is currently working on an Open Access pilot in the UK to help early career researchers publish their first monographs as Open Access.

Structural equality was the key theme of Open Access Week 2021 and is a driver of the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science.¹² BUP shares the common goal that, through cross-community collaboration in building structural equality, the resulting research can have a societal impact and be a force for positive change to tackle global social challenges. As part of its commitment to making a meaningful contribution to these objectives, BUP was the first university press to sign on to the United Nations SDGs Publisher Compact, which aims to accelerate progress to achieve the goals by the year 2030.¹³ In addition to Open Access publishing routes, BUP continues to use a range of other approaches to ensure that its content can reach its intended audiences. As part of this diversification of routes to access, BUP partners with Research4Life to provide read access to the BUP and Policy Press journals and e-books for researchers around the world.¹⁴

BUP is a member of the Association of University Presses (AUP), which also signed on to the United Nations SDGs Publishers Compact in October 2021. Initially, the Association focused on SDG 17 pertaining to partnerships for the goals; however, with the help of its member publishers and its numerous committees, the AUP is looking to advance additional goals in the coming decade of action, including SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG 4 (quality education). BUP, as a partner publisher, helped create a community hub dedicated to the Publisher Compact where member presses can share knowledge and ideas in support of sustainable action. As of April 2022, six other AUP member presses followed in signing on to the Publisher

Compact, including Liverpool University Press, Marine Corps University Press, Ottawa University Press, Oxford University Press, Qatar University Press, and West Indies University Press.

Another initiative that BUP has undertaken, as a founding member, is Even Up, a recently launched initiative of the university presses in the UK and Ireland inspired by the work of the Association of University Presses.¹⁵ Even Up demonstrates the commitment of UK and Irish university presses to equity, diversity, inclusion (EDI) and belonging in their workplaces, with whom they work, and in what they publish. Although it is recognized that each institution has its own EDI initiatives, the hope is that collaboration will make them stronger and better able to work toward the shared goals listed on their website:

- Share best practices for EDI across presses.
- Collect demographic data to assess and understand areas for improvement.
- Create and share an ongoing program of training and events.
- Promote and demonstrate transparency and equal opportunity in recruitment and career progression processes.
- Raise awareness of career opportunities in the presses with groups currently underrepresented in scholarly publishing.

In conclusion, the primary goal of BUP, in collaboration with the University of Bristol, is to publish high-quality, evidence-informed work that helps increase understanding of the global social challenges facing the world and to provide solutions to address them. The overarching challenge is to do this in a way that supports social change, not just analysis and debate, so that actual progress can be made. In the spirit of promoting dialogue across the wider scholarly community, BUP welcomed members of NASIG to visit their conference booth to share thoughts and feedback on the press's work toward achieving equitable and sustainable development.

Contributor Notes

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Notes

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