We launch the first of our updates on research in the Media and Communications Department at time when the department is growing in academic staff numbers and has just had its strong position in the communication, culture and media studies field in the UK confirmed by the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise. 75 per cent of our research was judged to be ‘world-leading’ or ‘internationally excellent’ and on grade point average, we were rated third-best in the UK of 47 ranked departments.

Rapid change in media, technology and society demands dynamic, imaginative and critical research to keep pace with it and this has been our aim since we were established as a department at LSE in 2003. Our research encompasses the global and the local, the institutional and the everyday. We develop interdisciplinary perspectives on issues and themes including Communication, Identity and Difference; Democracy, Politics and Journalism Ethics; Globalisation and Comparative Studies; Innovation, Governance and Policy; and Media and New Media Literacies.

Our department is home to the media think-tank POLIS, a joint initiative with the London College of Communication, directed by Charlie Beckett; which is the leading UK forum for debate and research into contemporary media, hosting high-profile events for journalists, activists, politicians and academics.

We have many research projects underway, international conferences being planned for 2009 and 2010 and 35 PhD students who are working closely with our 10 academic staff. Our Masters programmes in Media and Communications, including Media and Communication Governance; Politics and Communication; Global Media and Communications; and Media, Communication and Development, attract some 225 students each year from around the world.

This is an exciting department. If you would like to join our regular media@lse email list for notices of events, please join at: http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/media@lse/

We hope this newsletter which profiles recently completed work will peak your interest in us. Email media@lse.ac.uk for further information about topics or researchers included in this issue.

Professor Robin Mansell, Head of Department of Media and Communications
What is Financial Journalism for? A report by Dr. Damian Tambini

When the LSE awarded seed research funding to Dr. Damian Tambini in late 2007 to develop a study on financial reporting, few could have predicted the timeliness of the research. The project was initially conceived just before the Northern Rock scandal of September of that year. “It started as a rather obscure subject in 2007 but because of the financial crisis, it has become very topical,” said Dr. Tambini. Without a doubt, the financial crisis that has gripped the world economy has made questions surrounding the role of financial reporting in global economics all the more pressing. The joint Pols and LSE Media and Communications Department initiative included more than 50 interviews conducted internationally with some of the leading financial and business journalists, editors, regulators and other experts from London, New York and Hong Kong.

A first report, published by Dr Tambini and POLIS in November 2008 represented the initial London phase of the project. It focussed on an examination of the profession of financial journalism. It found that few financial journalists saw themselves as simply serving the interests of shareholders while others viewed themselves as financial watchdogs who bear certain ethical and social responsibilities to the public. Where the journalists did agree on, however, is the importance of the challenges facing their profession which included: dealing with the speed and complexity of financial information circulating globally, the issues of public relations between financial services and the wider public, and finding sustainable business models for financial reporting. The global response to the report is positive with write-ups in the Columbia Journalism Review, the Guardian, and by the BBC’s Today Programme and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Dr. Tambini was also invited to submit evidence to the Treasury Select Committee Inquiry on The Banking Crisis.

POLIS is developing a second phase for comparative analysis with New York and Hong Kong. Following on from a presentation by Dr. Tambini on 20 January based on the report, a second event organised through POLIS, The Media and the Challenge of Risk Regulation, took place on the 23rd February. The panel is chaired by Howard Davies, and includes Evan Davis of the BBC, Alex Brummer of the Daily Mail, Vince Cable MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, and Jillian Beagley, Assistant Editor, The Financial Times, and Professor William Butler of the LSE.

You can access the Financial Journalism report at: http://www.polismedia.org/research/
A Tale of Open Source Software Collaboration to meet the needs of Europe's SMEs.

The Department of Media and Communications at the LSE is proud of its commitment to interdisciplinary research. We are leading a European Commission funded project called OPAALS or Open Philosophies for Associative Autopoietic Digital Ecosystems.

This is an interdisciplinary, large network of researchers which is developing the social science, science and technology to underpin 'Digital Business Ecosystems', the new generation of Internet-based services that, in this case, are aimed at enables small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to conduct their business on the global stage.

Paolo Dini, Senior Research Associate, andProfessor Robin Mansell, are leading this €9.1 million research network (of which €1.5m stays with LSE) together with partners representing computing science and the natural sciences based all over Europe.

We think that open and low-cost peer-to-peer architectures for contact sharing and business interactions, or Digital Business Ecosystems, represent the future of technical, social and economic aspects of the connected world. Current eBusiness practices and technologies do not encourage openness because they promote models of proprietary eBusiness developments. A transformation of the web from a distributed and interconnected information repository to a platform for social networking and content sharing is underway – Web 2.0. This project, we are committed to the idea that this development can be applied potentially to empower firms, no matter how small, to operate in the eBusiness environment.

This can be achieved by distributing the source of value throughout a network in much the same way as Facebook and Flickr do this. This is the challenge for science. The research team aims to understand how the human beings involved make their judgements about when to invest in the development of these services, how much return on investment they expect and what the long-term benefits will be as widely distributed as the technologies and models developed. The social scientists are aware that such questions may be made for reasons – often not based on fully worked out models.

Our students are being immersed in work with others that would never happen if they were not put together in the more familiar terrain of the social scientist. Our LSE team is working with other social scientists in this project (led by Dr. Frauke Zeller University of Kassel, Germany who specializes in computational linguistics) helping to contribute insight into the politics of the technology. We may know there is a need for an open infrastructure that is interoperable and which allows SMEs to move freely in the market, avoiding lock-in to proprietary systems, information asymmetries, uncertainty and high risk, but we do not necessarily know how this should happen or what the consequences are for the SMEs.

We are applying our theories about the power relationships which are mediating the emergence of new information and communication technology systems. Under what circumstances, for instance, is it likely that open source software platforms developed in a participatory way can trump the endless stream of new proprietary 'service infrastructures' in which services running on a computing 'cloud' are made available to a firm so that it can build its higher level services even if the providers have brand names like Google?

The simulation in software of an apparently simple mechanism of service evolution actually requires an understanding of the structural principles and dynamical processes upon which it is based and a strategy for translating these principles and processes from physical and biological systems to information systems. That is the challenge, many scientists believe.

This is the challenge for our researchers at LSE and the others in OPAALS with a social science training which can understand and analyse the technical nature of technical change, to understand its dynamics, and where possible, to feed those insights into the mix of technically-oriented decision-making.

The ‘associative’ in OPAALS’s title signals the project’s commitment to studying the mediated associations between human beings in this area, whereas ‘autopoietic’ signals a commitment to understanding how this enormously complex, and some would say – self-organising - system of people and technology, is likely to develop.

OPAALS’s website is at: http://www.opaals.org/

For more information contact Paolo Dini, p.dini@lse.ac.uk or Robin Mansell, r.mansell@lse.ac.uk

Creative Commons and P2P in China

An article in the International Journal of Communication (2009, Volume 3) presents some of Dr. Bingchun Meng's recent findings related to the introduction of Creative Commons in China. In the article, ‘Articulating a Chinese Commons: An Explorative Study of Creative Commons in China’, she introduces the use of the Creative Commons approach to China as a lens, which she uses to examine the processes of framing arguments in a way that shape public attitudes.

Creative Commons (CC) has been organized as a social movement which tries to implement and render immediate, a cultural shift. Dr. Meng argues that how CC diffuses its message in China is key to understanding its effort to reform attitudes towards the dominant paradigm of copying right.

She discusses CC as a global movement aiming at building a cultural commons for the future. She then explains the differences between the original context from which CC movement emerged and the Chinese one where CC is now picking up momentum. Dr. Meng finds that the combined effect of the ideological ambiguity of CC and local conditions ends up producing a different discursive positioning for CC China. Instead of acting primarily as a counter-force against the privatization of intellectual works, CC China is first and foremost about cultivating the ‘rights consciousness’ of Chinese people and giving individual creators (especially marginalized groups) a sense of controlling their own work in a communication environment that is dominated by both the state and the market forces.

Dr. Meng has been awarded a seed fund grant from the LSE to examine Peer-to-Peer (P2P) file sharing in China. She will investigate why people engage in file sharing through volunteer work, such as translating subtitles for P2P distributed foreign movies. Her research questions include how do file sharers relate to each other on and offline, what are the common cultural perspectives binding file sharers together, and how do file sharers seek to negotiate their position with state censors and commercial establishments in China and with what outcomes?

POLIS: Think Tank on Journalism and Society

As a joint initiative of the LSE and the London College of Communication, POLIS was created to work with academics, people in public life, and students to help journalism to adapt to the world of today and examine and discuss the media and its impact on society.

Charlie Beckett, its director, describes POLIS as an intermediaty between academia and the public, fostering interdisciplinary experiments, such as the legitimacy of decision making and involving citizens. Two multi-stakeholder consultation processes beyond the nation state were evaluated from a sociological and human rights perspective - the UN/ITU World Summit on the Information Society and the European Convention on the Future of Europe.
Niall Brennan: Knowledge

Niall Brennan has had his first peer-reviewed publication made available in volume 2, issue 1 of ‘Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MECSA PGW’ following last July’s MeCCSA Post-Graduate Network Conference at University of Sussex.

Indrek Brus: Creative metropoles and public policies

PhD student, Indrek Brus, together with associates from The Estonian Institute for Futures Studies won a €2.44 million public procurement bid to conduct research for the Tallinn City Government as part of the project ‘Creative Metropoles: Public Policies and Instruments in Support of Creative Industries’ (2008-2011, funded by Interreg IV C).

The aim of the project is to create a well-functioning, focused, flexible and efficient public support system for creative industries in the 11 participating cities: Riga (Laud partner), Helsinki, Oslo, Tallinn, Wlkoś, Stockholm, Warsaw, Birmingham, Amsterdam, Barcelona, and Berlin. The project will provide ample opportunities for experience, exchange and learning among the municipalities, increasing understanding of decision-makers at all levels about the creative industries and their role in the overall economy. The objective is to increase awareness about the policies and approaches that have a positive impact on the growth and development of the creative sector, to better enable setting of the ‘right’ policies.

Zoetanya Sujon: Citizenship and technology

Zoa’s doctoral research, entitled ‘Technological Citizenship? Patterns of connection in mediated citizenship initiatives’, examines emerging discourses of electronically mediated forms of citizenship and two new media citizenship initiatives (‘BBC’s i-Players’ and ‘Urban Tapestry’). This research contributes to a fuller understanding of the ways in which new technologies articulate particular strategies of inclusion for those who are culturally and technologically ‘connected’. Although the case studies strive to extend publicly oriented citizenship frameworks, significant gaps emerged between formalized institutional and individual practices.

Announcements and Appointments

Sonia Livingstone has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Erasmus University Rotterdam as ‘one of the most talented scholars of her generation’ in the field of media and communication and ‘as the leading international expert in the media use of children and young people and the domestic, familial and educational contexts of new media access and use’.

William Melody, one of the department’s visiting professors has stepped down as founding director of LIRNE.NET (www.lirne.net) and the World Dialogue on Regulation (WDR, www.regulationenline.org) but is continuing as advisor and researcher. Bill is also a Guest Professor at the Center for Communication, Media and IT (CMI), Copenhagen Institute of Technology, Denmark; Visiting Professor, at the LINK Centre, University of Westminster, S. Africa, and has been appointed as a new member of the Scientific Advisory Board, Next Generation Infrastructures Foundation, Delft University of Technology, NL; and Advisory Board for Competition and Regulation in Network Industries.

Claire Milne, a visiting research associate in the Media and Communications Department, has helped to re-launch the Consumer Forum on Communications (CFC). The CFC includes more than twenty national and regional consumer and disability organisations such as Age Concern, Action with Communities in Rural England, Consumer Focus, Mediawatch, National Federation of Women’s Institutes, and the Royal Institute for the Blind. The CFC constitutes one of the bodies that reports to Ofcom for engaging with the public and its interests. Its new website: http://ofcomconsumersforum.collectivex.com

Mark Poster, Centennial Professor of Film and Media Studies at LSE, has a new book coming out this year, entitled, Dilemmas and New Media, edited with David Savat (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press). Mark has also been appointed to the advisory boards of several journals including Journal of Critical Studies on Business and Society, and the Journal of a Media Studies.

Suzanne Stein, a PhD candidate, has been appointed the Deputy Director, SMARTlab, University of East London as of February 1st, 2009.

Panayiotis Tsatsos, a doctoral student in the department, has been appointed as a Lecturer in Media and Communication Studies at Swansea University: http://www.swansea.ac.uk/staff/academic/Arts/tsatsoup/
## Academic Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cammaerts, Bart (Dr)</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td><a href="mailto:b.cammaerts@lse.ac.uk">b.cammaerts@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chouliaraki, Lilie (Prof)</td>
<td>Professor of Media &amp; Communications</td>
<td><a href="mailto:l.chouliaraki@lse.ac.uk">l.chouliaraki@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feigenbaum, Anna (Dr)</td>
<td>LSE Fellow</td>
<td><a href="mailto:a.feigenbaum@lse.ac.uk">a.feigenbaum@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livingstone, Sonia (Prof)</td>
<td>Professor of Social Psychology,</td>
<td><a href="mailto:s.livingstone@lse.ac.uk">s.livingstone@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Director of Graduate Studies (Media@lse)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mansell, Robin (Prof)</td>
<td>Head of Department, Professor of New Media and the Internet</td>
<td><a href="mailto:r.e.mansell@lse.ac.uk">r.e.mansell@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manyozo, Linje (Dr)</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>L <a href="mailto:MANYOZO@LSE.AC.UK">MANYOZO@LSE.AC.UK</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matos, Carolina (Dr)</td>
<td>LSE Fellow</td>
<td><a href="mailto:c.matos@lse.ac.uk">c.matos@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meng, Bingchun (Dr)</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td><a href="mailto:b.meng@lse.ac.uk">b.meng@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orgad, Shani (Dr)</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td><a href="mailto:S.S.ORGAD@LSE.AC.UK">S.S.ORGAD@LSE.AC.UK</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rantanen, Terhi (Prof)</td>
<td>Professor of Global Media &amp; Communications, Chair of Exam Board (Media@lse)</td>
<td><a href="mailto:T.RANTANEN@LSE.AC.UK">T.RANTANEN@LSE.AC.UK</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sujon, Zoe</td>
<td>LSE Fellow</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Z.T.SUJON@LSE.AC.UK">Z.T.SUJON@LSE.AC.UK</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tambini, Damian (Dr)</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer</td>
<td><a href="mailto:D.TAMBINI@LSE.AC.UK">D.TAMBINI@LSE.AC.UK</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thumim Nancy (Dr)</td>
<td>LSE Fellow</td>
<td><a href="mailto:N.T.THUMIM@LSE.AC.UK">N.T.THUMIM@LSE.AC.UK</a></td>
</tr>
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## POLIS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beckett, Charlie</td>
<td>Director, Polis</td>
<td><a href="mailto:c.h.beckett@lse.ac.uk">c.h.beckett@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
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## Administrative staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bennett, Catherine</td>
<td>Departmental Manager, MSc Programme Administrator, Exam Board Administrator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:c.l.bennett@lse.ac.uk">c.l.bennett@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cragoe, Vanessa</td>
<td>MSc Programme Administrator, Exam Board Administrator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:v.cragoe@lse.ac.uk">v.cragoe@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris, Jean</td>
<td>PhD Programme Administrator, MSc in Global Media and Communications</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jean.morris@lse.ac.uk">jean.morris@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Associate and visiting staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alevizou, Panagiota</td>
<td>Visiting Fellow</td>
<td><a href="mailto:p.alevizou@lse.ac.uk">p.alevizou@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dini, Paolo (Dr)</td>
<td>Research Fellow</td>
<td><a href="mailto:p.dini@lse.ac.uk">p.dini@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foresta, Don (Mr)</td>
<td>Visiting Fellow</td>
<td><a href="mailto:don@donforesta.net">don@donforesta.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gould, Phillip (Lord)</td>
<td>Visiting Professor</td>
<td><a href="mailto:p.gould@lse.ac.uk">p.gould@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haddon, Leslie (Dr)</td>
<td>Visiting Fellow</td>
<td><a href="mailto:leshaddon@aol.com">leshaddon@aol.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim, Eun-Mee (Dr)</td>
<td>Visiting Professor</td>
<td><a href="mailto:e.kim1@lse.ac.uk">e.kim1@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahizhnan, Arun (Prof)</td>
<td>Visiting Professor</td>
<td><a href="mailto:a.mahizhnan@lse.ac.uk">a.mahizhnan@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melody, William (Prof)</td>
<td>Visiting Professor</td>
<td><a href="mailto:melody@lime.net">melody@lime.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milne, Claire</td>
<td>Visiting Fellow</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cbm@antelope.org.uk">cbm@antelope.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poster, Mark (Prof)</td>
<td>Centennial Professor</td>
<td><a href="mailto:gerry.poster@bbc.co.uk">gerry.poster@bbc.co.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power, Gerry (Dr)</td>
<td>Guest Lecturer</td>
<td><a href="mailto:david.souter@runbox.com">david.souter@runbox.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Souter, David (Dr)</td>
<td>Visiting Fellow</td>
<td><a href="mailto:etsaliki@media.uoa.gr">etsaliki@media.uoa.gr</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tsaliki Lisa (Dr)</td>
<td>Visiting Fellow</td>
<td><a href="mailto:y.n.zhang@lse.ac.uk">y.n.zhang@lse.ac.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhang, Yanqui (Dr)</td>
<td>Visiting Fellow</td>
<td></td>
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