

Review of: "Forming The Rapid Survey Interdisciplinary Team with Multiscalar Tradecraft: a Plea in the Backdrop of the Anthropocene"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This paper presents an interesting possibility for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of field research projects. For any project, much of the expense involves transportation, room and board for the field team. There is a tendency for such teams to be comprised entirely of experts in the primary discipline of the project, even though data collection can often be done by fieldworkers with basic scientific and technical literacy, under the direction of a disciplinary expert. In fact, data collection can actually be more consistent when fieldworkers defer to a single authority with respect to specific details than when there are several authorities, each of whom have their own ideas and commitments regarding what good data should be.

The proposal here is for field projects to be conceived as not just multidisciplinary efforts, but interdisciplinary efforts, where a team with expertise in different disciplines converge on a single field site and work collectively to collect data suitable for addressing questions in each discipline, and in the spaces between disciplines. The primary advantage of this approach, it seems to me, is that it reduces the expense of the project for any specific discipline by sharing the basic practical expenses across several disciplines. The potential disadvantage is that this approach requires experts in each discipline to spend a portion of their time in the field collecting data that contribute to research in a different discipline. In other words, fieldworkers need to feel the benefits of collaborative work outweigh these costs. Whether this would prove to be true seems difficult to know ahead of time, and I would expect the balance to vary across contexts.

There is also the issue of funding. There are many funding sources that are discipline based, and this approach would probably have a hard time competing with traditional disciplinary proposals. On the other hand, there are increasing numbers of explicitly interdisciplinary grant programs, and for these an approach like that advocated here may provide a novel and compelling argument.