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My learning, scientific and human experience in the postgraduate training workshop in Windsor Great Park (UK)

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The postgraduate training workshop organised by the British Society for Geomorphology (BSG) was an unique experience in the early stage of my PhD program and, likely, of my general academic life. In the centre of the Windsor Great Park, we were housed in the wonderful, tradition-rich Cumberland Lodge, which provided us a cosy and very familiar atmosphere for the training workshop. Already the first welcome tea, held in one of the historical sitting rooms, made it very comfortable for me to get to know the other 30 postgraduates. Even though most of the participants were enrolled at British universities, it quickly became clear that our common denominator was our young age, our situation as first-year PhD-student and, above all, our passion for Geomorphology and research.

During the four days at Windsor, the BSG-academics gave a number of very interesting and really inspiring talks, e.g., from philosophy of science, literature review, research planning and methodology up to the publishing processes of scientific articles. Since my PhD-project includes numerical modelling at the catchment scale, the sessions about different modelling approaches were especially useful for my view on the purpose, benefit and even risk of modelling. One thing that made me particularly reflecting was not to assume that the output of a model tells us something about the real world. Instead, it tells us about the model. However, it became clear that modelling may provide an excellent tool to sharpen the research questions of our PhD projects and it may help – in combination with field observation! – to increase the understanding of geomorphic phenomena. In my opinion, the exercise with *NetLogo*, a multi-agent programmable modelling environment, illustrated very well, how modelling might enable the examination of chaotic, complex, non-linear, competitive and emergent behaviour of geomorphic systems.

For me as a PhD-student, who spends a lot of time on research in the field, the topic “fieldwork” was only a minor topic of the Windsor-workshop, unfortunately. Nevertheless, the BSG-academics gave us valuable advices concerning time management, work organisation, logistical support and risk assessment, which will be definitively helpful for my next field campaign in the Alps next summer. One major take-home message for me – although deriving from the modelling-session, but I think, also transferable for fieldwork – was not to be afraid of any scatter in your data or measurements, as it does not mean that they are wrong. In most

instances, we can learn more from those investigations, which does not fit with our experience.

With regard to the early stage of my PhD, the BSG-workshop was a very supportive as we talked about the time management and the structuring of the PhD-timeline, the pros and cons of the freedom a postgraduate has, potential challenges during the doctorate and problems, which might result in the breakup of the PhD – and all this in a very private and familiar atmosphere between us PhD-students and the BSG-academics. A special and, for my opinion, a very important experience of the workshop was the teamwork, in which we had to plan and, subsequently, to defend a fictive PhD-project in just a few hours and without any specific knowledge on the research area. This exercise emphasised very well the importance of a well-structured, but also pragmatic project design and time management at the early beginning of the PhD.

One of my major highlights of the training workshop was also the presentation of our individual PhD-projects. Besides the fact, that it was my first talk to an international auditorium, I got a number of good ideas for the methodological design of my work from the constructive suggestions as well as from the presentations of the other PhD-projects.

To conclude, the postgraduate workshop at Windsor was in many respects a fruitful experience, both scientifically and personally. Particularly, I have benefited greatly from the intensive exchange with other young PhD-students being all in their early stages of their doctorate and struggling with similar problems in their academic life like me. Besides the networking with young European geomorphologists, it was very interesting for me as a German postgraduate to get a look into the PhD-system of British universities. Moreover, I particularly appreciate the number of very personal advices of the BSG-academics and their insights into a researcher's life – which was not least thanks to the familiar atmosphere at the Cumberland Lodge. Tom Coulthard, Brian Whalley, Anthony Parsons, Paul Farres and Dave Favis-Mortlock showed us that the enthusiasm of the early stage of a PhD will certainly be followed, sooner or later, by some problems that could result in disillusionment, but, if having a reasoned time management, a good supervisor, a well-developed network and a large endurance and passion for your topic, we will finally succeed. Above all, they gave us a calming feeling that failures occurring during a PhD, such as method mistakes or a major revision of the first publication, do not automatically mean the failure of the PhD. Instead, it is research – and probably personal – experience.

Therefore, I would like to thank very much the International Association of Geomorphologists (IAG) for the grant to support my participation at the BSB postgraduate training workshop. It was an excellent time for living the enthusiasm for geomorphology and research as well as for making me want to go on with me PhD even more. The workshop was definitely one of the major stages of my doctorate and the big package of helpful advices and new contacts let me look forward euphorically and self-confidently to the next years of my PhD.

Yours faithfully,
Karoline Meßenzehl