

Report on the Workshop of the British Society for Geomorphology (Windsor, UK, 8-11 December 2014)

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In a small historical town in the middle of the Queen's properties, as usual, the current edition of the British Society for Geomorphology Workshop takes place. The Attenders come mainly from geographical departments of the British universities. Furthermore, there were some Italians, followed by Germans and French (taking in account institutional belongings).

Day one started with a welcome introduction from Professors Tom Coulthard and Brian Whalley about the British Geomorphological Society and the aim of the Workshop. They explained that the Workshop has been carried on since the 80s and several young PhD students gained a lot of benefits from this experience. The average of the attenders has been already enrolled in a PhD program between 3 and 6 months. Several questions and comments followed the professors' talk. The second Workshop activity consisted in an exercise in which students tried to identify landforms from pictures, such as splash erosion, debris slides, glacial deposits, coastal landscapes; it was a useful exercise to understand how the general attitude of the attenders is. After that, Professor Antony Parsons gave a talk about the nature of PhD, and addressed a clear message to the class: we need scientific innovation. After dinner, the activities started again: Professor Brian Whalley presented the subject "philosophy of science" and its high usefulness. This insight brought us a lot of examples about what PhD students have to keep in mind in terms of inductive methodology.

Day two started with an introduction to Models in Geomorphology (numerical and theoretical) held by Professor Tom Coulthard. A lot of numerical models were showed during the lecture and the interaction between the parts suggested me that Modelling as a subject is going to be the principal topic of the whole Workshop. The second activity of the day was an attempt to characterize the molehills damage in the landscape; the exercise consisted in a short fieldwork in the near Windsor's fields with professor Paus Farres, with the aim to describe the reasons why the molehills occurred in particular areas of the landscape. The conclusions were collected in a discussion and the general point of view of the geomorphologists is based to a different approach to the ecologist's first question. For the rest of the day we were busy with an exercise in which, students (divided in small groups) are asked to handle a PhD project, and from a title we did have to provide, aims objects and a timetable of the planned activities. The exercise was quite hard. The reasons of those difficulties are mainly found in the fact that some of the attenders are inside an already structured project and they manage only a part of it. For the other few of us that have their own project this was anyway a difficult task and generally the lack of organization arose in the step of the timetable planning. After dinner John Groves' (PhD candidate London UCL) contribute takes place. Probably it represented the highlight of the day, with the top ten PhD tips he encouraged and warned us about how facing the PhD every day.

Day three started with a Modelling session held by the professors Tom Coulthard and Antony Parsons. They gave us a wide explanation about conceptual, descriptive and predictive models. The session was undoubtedly one highlight of the Workshop where professor Anthony Parsons held an interesting discussion about the use of modelling in Geomorphology applications. After that professor Parsons explained the management, technical and logistic things related to the PhD field works. Doing research abroad always brings lots of enthusiasm in the people that are doing it but at the same time collecting all the data required and having facilities is not always easy to pursue. In this frame professor Parsons reported a series of examples that showed the rules and the general behavior for successful field works. Laboratory and measurement was the topic faced by professor Paul Farres. He focused about the practice and the organization that PhD students have to keep in respect to the relevant samples. Individual presentations were our tasks for all the rest of the afternoon. Attenders were divided in 5 groups, each one with one supervisor. Discussions between students and professors took place after the presentation session. After dinner, the brilliant and successful career of professor Joanna Bullard (Chair of BSG) enriched our day with precious lived science experiences. Last session in the last day of the Workshop was carried out by Dr. Lucy Clarke, who dealt with the issues: Social Media and their utilization in the Academia. Twitter, facebook, linkedin, academia.eu, were reviewed and a lot of positive points emerged from this insight on the use of social media for young geomorphologists. For example, advertisement of a conference session or a poster and other academic activities. From my point of view the Workshop itself has been full of contents and insights and I would suggest to every first year PhD student to take part in it.