

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GEOMORPHOLOGY - Italy 1997
Workshop for Young Geomorphologists

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CURRENT ISSUES OF GEOMORPHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

At the personal request of President Dietrich Barsch who had made the future of young scientists the main aim of his Presidency, a distinguished panel of international geomorphologists, including Robert Allison (IAG Secretary, University of Durham, UK), Riccardo Casale (DG XII, European Commission, Bruxelles), Michael J. Crozier (IAG Co-opted Member, Victoria University, New Zealand), Mario Panizza (IAG Co-opted Member, University of Modena, Italy), Keith Richards (University of Cambridge, UK), Olav Slaymaker (IAG Vice-President, University of British Columbia, Canada), Tom Spencer (University of Cambridge, UK), Leszek Starkel (Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland), Noel Trustrum (Land Care Ltd, New Zealand), Jesse Walker (IAG Honorary Fellow, Louisiana State University, USA) and Brian Whalley (Queens University of Belfast, Northern Ireland), met ninety young geomorphologists to welcome them to the international geomorphological community and to discuss how best the IAG might serve them.

The meeting centred around a generous lunch and was kept as informal as possible because the aim was to get to know each other and to help the participants to meet their contemporaries from other countries. The participants quickly warmed to the «spirit of Manchester» and freely discussed their needs and personal interests.

The main conclusions reached were as follows.

1) The opportunities for advanced training should be developed. The participants from developing countries said that training was the greatest need, especially with respect to advanced techniques, but also with respect to scientific method and general approaches to research.

2) The example of the ERASMUS and SOCRATES programmes of the EU were described and it was agreed that the IAG should actively seek links between the IAG, EU, UNESCO and other agencies in order to develop Intensive Courses similar to the highly successful Modena (Italy) ERASMUS courses in applied geomorphology, the productive EU Research Schools or the long standing post-graduate courses run by the British Geomorphological Research Group at Windsor and Belfast. It was proposed to set up teams of experienced geomorphologists who may hold in turn intensive courses in developing countries, especially on applied geomorphological topics.

3) Inevitably the problem of funding was raised from both developed and developing country representatives. An exciting discovery was that the generous training programme of the EU could be extended to non-Europeans especially those from developing countries. The Fifth Framework Programme allows for this cooperation facility under the «Training and Mobility of Researchers» grants.

4) It was therefore proposed to recommend to the IAG executive the need to organise and to fund:

- a. postgraduate intensive courses of 3-10 days;
- b. postgraduate, subject oriented, teaching «schools»;
- c. regional conferences for Young Geomorphologists (30 years old circa).

It is further suggested that the courses be provided with low-cost course books which should also be available to those who could not attend.

d. Suitable subjects for course included introduction to research; strategies and perspectives on modern geomorphology, analytical techniques; GIS; remote sensing expertise; modelling in geomorphology; master classes in regional or thematic subjects.

5) An essential task for the IAG was to seek funding from world agencies. Perhaps a committee member might undertake this task as a matter of urgency.

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6) Many postgraduates praised the poster method of presentation, since this helped those who were not yet confident in English. It provided a good chance for postgraduates to meet established workers in a friendly forum and was less intimidating than a lecture.

7) It was therefore agreed to encourage the IAG

a. To organise a postgraduate symposium at the next conference in which «experts» could discuss in a constructive way each poster and give personal advice on the presentation and the content. It was emphasised that this proposal should not downgrade the position of the postgraduate. Many produced high class work capable of acceptance within the main programme. The choice whether to submit a poster to the symposium or the subject areas was that of the postgraduate concerned.

b. It was suggested that there might be a prize for the best poster!

c. The postgraduate programme should be held on the first day to give the students a chance to get to know each other.

This useful discussion was followed by a less structured set of questions about specific research problems. The central points were the need for the IAG to provide guidelines in the following areas:

- 1) current guiding research methodologies;
- 2) the need to encourage relationships with other disciplines, mainly engineering;
- 3) the need to publish international standards and technical methods so that data are comparable and acceptable;
- 4) guidance on research applications and the structuring of acceptable scientific methods and standards;
- 5) the provision of global data sets at a verifiable standard.

Certain subjects arose more than once to indicate the need for IAG textbooks on problem areas. These included:

- 1) the rationalisation of scale problems;
- 2) guidance on both spatial-scale and temporal-scale sampling programmes;
- 3) time scales in geomorphological systems;
- 4) the nature of paraglacial processes;
- 5) dating;
- 6) climatic change.

The Workshop was an agreeable and useful meeting. This report concludes with an invitation to anyone in the International Geomorphological Community who feels that they can help, to write to the President with offers of funding, courses training or work notes. The IAG and the young geomorphologists will be grateful and the future of our subject ensured.