

20

The Concept of Geomorphology

What sort of a science is geomorphology itself? It is an Earth surface science, like some others, and one that interacts with parent sciences (physics, chemistry, biology, social sciences) and neighbouring sciences (geology, hydrology, glaciology, atmospheric sciences and soil science). Organized as an Earth Science or a branch of Geography, it has also begun to develop specialisms and has subdivided to produce others (e.g., speleology). It also retains distinctive characteristics, involves a fascinating form of human enquiry, has significant practical social value, and is recognizing its own conceptual merits and difficulties. The current state of geomorphology within the range of the sciences is reviewed, using a SWOT approach.

UPDATES

The updates provided for Chapter 1 also relate to this concluding chapter. See particularly Gregory, K.J. and Lewin, J. (2015) Making concepts more explicit for geomorphology, *Progress in Physical Geography*, 39: 711–27, and Lewin, J. (2016) The lexicon of geomorphology, *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms*, 41: 5–15.

The paper referred to for Chapter 1 (Woodward, J. (2015) Is geomorphology sleepwalking into oblivion?, *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms*, 40: 706–9) advocates understanding of where we need to be most visible to ensure the long-term health of our discipline.

Papers in a special issue provide recent context for the concept of geomorphology:

Tadaki, M., Slaymaker, O. and Martin, Y. (2017) Changing priorities in physical geography: Introduction to the Special Issue, *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien*, 61: 4–10.

Thus an article which suggests a slowing down in Physical Geography could have application to geomorphology: Lane, S. N. (2017) Slow science, the geographical expedition, and Critical Physical Geography, *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien*, 61: 84–101.

A report of findings from an online survey of BSG members alongside an empirical assessment of the term's prominence in academic output: international peer-reviewed journals, undergraduate Geoscience degrees in world-leading institutions and the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) impact statements is given by Clarke, L., Schillereff, D. and Shuttleworth, E. (2017) Communicating geomorphology: an empirical evaluation of the discipline's impact and visibility, *Earth Surface Processes and Landforms*, 42: 1148–52.