**Editorial 2016: valorising our research in all its forms**

Stuart N. Lane
Université de Lausanne

One of the challenges to valorising research, across our discipline, is that there is a range of established practices when it comes to writing scientific manuscripts. Some of these are more 'developed' than others. We are working hard to support less experienced geomorphologists to understand some of the basic principles of scientific paper writing in the mode that we expect at ESPL. For instance, the paper that we published in 2014 (Lane, 2014) has been translated into Mandarin Chinese. Whilst I cannot personally speak for the fidelity of the translation, this is a good example of where we can support the wider community to valorise the research they do. If you are linked to a learned society related to geomorphic science and would like an Associate Editor or myself to support your society with an author workshop, perhaps during an annual meeting, please do not hesitate to let me know. But the publishing industry is developing very rapidly and the ESPL Board is now looking more widely at what we can do to valorise the work that we do. This may require some new kinds of scientific articles, presented in new ways that might better valorise the other kinds of knowledge that we produce (e.g. data, imagery). I am hopeful that during 2016 we will be able to develop some new opportunities for publication in this sense.

For young scientists in particular, valorisation is a critical step in the academic career ladder, whether to obtain a new post or to be confirmed in an existing post. It is not surprising, then, that there is much pressure to speed up the way we handle papers. We have maintained our policy in seeking to get a first decision to authors within 7 weeks of the paper arriving with us. We achieve this for more than the majority of papers that we receive. When I reflect on whether this target is right or not, my first thought is that there is "only one Fiona Kirkby". Before we can even consider sending a paper out to review, we now have a series of tasks that we undertake (e.g. routine checking of plagiarism) that take quite some time. Once we have the reviews needed to decide on a paper, my Associate Editors make a recommendation and then myself the decision, within one to two weeks. If we are to accelerate the process even more, then it is only really possible through the review process. Indeed, it is the latter that remains our primary challenge whether because: reviewers don't return reviews; of the struggle to get two reviewers to agree to consider a paper (our record is 18); or because we need to seek a third view when we can't reconcile contradictory assessments. Thus, whilst we meet our 7 week target for more than the majority of papers, the distribution is skewed, with some papers taking longer. In such situations, we will not compromise on quality and we insist on making sure that we have enough reviews before we make a decision, something that is only fair to both authors and readers. Whilst we have asked ourselves if we can do better it will only be possible by further squeezing our reviewers into shorter turnaround times, a move that might simply make it harder to find willing reviewers in the first place and eventually downgrade the quality of the review process.

However, I have a broader concern. If you haven't thought about 'Slow Science' have a look at articles like Aleva's (2006) *Nature* commentary or www.slow-science.org. The 'Slow Science' agenda raises important questions about the conditions in which we do creative and innovative science and, crucially, the time that it takes to do that science.

About 10 years ago, the philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers captured what, for me, is the essence of the 'Slow Science' agenda in posing a simple question: "*How can we present a proposal intended not to say what is, or what ought to be, but to provoke thought, a proposal that requires no other verification than the way in which it is able to "slow down" reasoning and create an opportunity to arouse a slightly different awareness of the problems and situations mobilising us?*" Stengers (2005, 994). For me, this kind of 'slightly different awareness' is precisely what constitutes scientific progress. Stengers' arguments go significantly further than the question of academic publication, but her question is one that I increasingly find myself applying to ESPL's submissions (and yes, I do have to read all of them). Where in the paper are the ideas, data, interpretations etc. that might make the community think differently about the science that we do? This is why ESPL is now clear to authors and to reviewers that to be accepted, an article must contain material of originality and significance, as well as being rigorous. The number of papers we publish per year is not a goal that we pay much attention to. Rather, by paying attention to those papers that make us think differently it is our one small contribution to an academic world where we are publishing ever more volumes of material (Gregory *et al.*, 2014) ever more quickly.

This is why peer review is so important to us. It exists to help us to prioritise what we should be reading to focus on that which meets the twin requirement of being rigorous *and* important. It needs (at least some) time for it to be done effectively. The emphasis on time makes interesting contrast with some recent developments in publishing such as *Nature Scientific Reports's* trial with enabling authors to pay for a more rapid peer review[1]. 'Slow Science' does not provide a justification for the tardy handling of manuscripts but it does remind us of the need to think carefully and fully about the science that we judge, to make sure that we take the time to follow our peer review policies correctly, and to make sure that the science that we publish benefits fully from peer review. It takes time, and eroding into that time does not necessarily lead to better outcomes, for authors or for readers.

We do our best to choose reviewers whom we think will respond in a timely fashion (and who will also return reviews that are constructive and fair), and we owe our thanks to these reviewers. I must also thank the team that supports my editorial activities: we now have seven Associate Editors (Chris Houser, Mike Kirkby, Larissa Naylor, Josh Roering, Heather Viles, Ellen Wohl) and this is helping significantly to spread the burden of handling papers. With year-on-year growth in the number of submissions, this involvement is sorely needed. Of course, Fiona Kirkby continues to manage the ever-growing volume of papers and tasks associated with handling those papers, and I am particularly grateful to her for her support this year.

Finally, many of you will have met Fiona Murphy, the publisher of ESPL at Wiley. Fiona moved on to new challenges during 2015 and I would like to wish her well on behalf of the ESPL community as she worked very hard to raise the profile of geomorphic science through the decade or so that she was connected to ESPL. You may meet her replacement, Rhys Griffiths, at future scientific meetings.

---

[1] http://www.nature.com/news/concern-raised-over-payment-for-fast-track-peer-review-1.17204, accessed 9th November 2015

**References**

Alleva, L., 2006. Taking time to savour the rewards of slow science. *Nature*, 443, 271

Gregory, K.J., Lane, S.N., Lewin, J., Ashworth, P.J., Downs, P.W., Kirkby, M.J. and Viles, H.A., 2014. Communicating geomorphology: global challenges for the twenty-first century. *Earth Surf. Process. Landforms*, 39, 476–486

Lane, S.N., 2014. Good practice in authoring manuscripts on geomorphology. *Earth Surf. Process. Landforms*, 39, 126–132.

Stengers, I., 2005. The cosmopolitical proposal. In Latour B. and P. Weibel (eds), *Making Things Public*, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 994-1003.