

**Comments on 'A sustainable future for geography?' by John Westaway  
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**Sustainability: Looks like geography, feels like geography but is it geography?**

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Here is a random selection of some of the undergraduate geography dissertations submitted last year here at the University of Plymouth:

- The impacts of a motorsport tracks on the surrounding area.
- What effect does online social networking have on our social skills in the real world?
- How do glaciers affect the geomorphology of mountain landscapes that were last glaciated during the Pleistocene?
- Effectiveness of gap year volunteer projects in Latin America
- Gloucestershire 2007 flooding: causes, effects and the future
- Sustainable management of household waste in Plymouth, Devon

I include these for two reasons. First, the titles are a credit to the imagination and enthusiasm of Plymouth students, demonstrating the power of geography to excite and engage students on so many levels. Secondly, they illustrate John Westaway's point that 'Geography is, of course, about more than sustainability'.

Sustainability, as Westaway's article demonstrates so well, offers an excellent opportunity for geographers to re-assert themselves in the educational curriculum. The study of sustainability is important and geography, of all academic subjects, is best positioned to champion its cause. Sustainability entwines economic, social, cultural and natural networks in complex ways that are frequently missed by the media or pressure groups. Geographers can recognise neo-Malthusian warnings about ignoring sustainability and can also illuminate alternative pathways using ideas from culturally informed, cornucopian thinking; radical political thought and, most recently, the concept of hybridity. Geographers should, therefore, embrace the opportunities offered by ESD.

However, sustainability is only a part of geographical enquiry. As the dissertation titles illustrate, there is so much more to geography than the study of sustainability. To focus solely on this topic would close the door on so many parts of geography that contribute to its diversity. So, while we should embrace the opportunities that ESD offers geographers, we should be cautious not to conflate geography with sustainability.

Diversity is the strength of geography and is the reason why many students are excited by it. We should ensure that a focus on sustainability does not dilute the rich mix of geographical topics that we expose our students to. Of course, geography's diversity so makes it very difficult for many to say what geography is (the study of space and place in my books). However, rather than being allowed to chisel away at our identity, the diversity of geography should be shared and celebrated by geographers of all callings. In particular, there is a need for greater dialogue between schools and universities to reveal fully the depth and breadth of the subject. Cross-sector support for the Geographical Association, including GS branches and publications, is one practical way of doing this.

It would be tragic that if, in a few years time, 'sustainable' or 'land-based' studies have replaced geography entirely. These subjects might look and feel a bit like geography, but they are not geography. Let's contribute our geographical skills to ESD, remembering that we are contributing to, not converting to, this discipline.