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Hydrology and Earth System Sciences Discussions

HESSD

9, C5545–C5551, 2012

Interactive Comment

Interactive comment on "Thermodynamics, maximum power, and the dynamics of preferential river flow structures on continents" *by* A. Kleidon et al.

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We thank Hubert Savenije for his thoughtful and constructive comments and for pointing out a couple of errors in our interpretations. In the following, we respond to each of the points. The individual points are taken from the review and listed in the following in *italic*, with our response following in plain text.

comment 1: *Although I think the paper provides an enormous leap forward in our understanding of the thermodynamics of landscape formation and the structure of river basins, there is still something missing. It does not tell us why the majority of the water* *travels through the sub-surface, where it helps to erode the subsurface by chemical processes, where it allows ecosystems to live on the substrate, and where it dissipates the potential energy very regularly and equally distributed along the pathway. In fact, the subsurface processes of chemical erosion are required to break-up the rock into finer particles that can be eroded by surface runoff described in this paper. Hence the subsurface processes should be part of the overall analysis (but this can be done in a follow-up paper).*

Yes, it seems logical and relatively straightforward to apply a similar analysis to flow processes in the soil and the groundwater. We added a little bit of text to the discussion and summary section to emphasize such extension.

comment 2: *Also, I am still curious to understand why groundwater flow in river basins can be so well described by a simple linear reservoir. This paper concentrates on surface runoff only (indeed responsible for landscape formation), but it neglects the subsurface processes, where also a substantial amount of potential energy is dissipated. Groundwater flow is probably similar to the sapflow in leafs (although opposed in the direction of flow). It is not by accident that a catchment is often compared to a leaf. The development of the drainage structure in a groundwater system and a leaf are not driven by erosion, but the result is an efficient structure to transport water and to dissipate a gradient.*

We are sure that this is the case, and that our work relates quite closely to these topics. We defer it though to future studies.

comment 3: *An interesting thought may be that in arid climates the runoff is primarily through surface runoff, whereas in wet climates the runoff is predominantly through sub-surface processes. As a result, the examples presented in this paper are particularly relevant for arid climates, where we can indeed see these structures being developed after torrential rains.*

Yes, indeed. Again, we only briefly mention that the variation across climates should

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Printer-friendly Version

Interactive Discussion

Discussion Paper

be evaluated as well in the discussion.

comment 4: *I hope the authors see these observations as a recommendation for further research, in line with their observation on P7360, L20, and the closing remarks on the last page.*

Agreed. We briefly mention this also in the conclusion.

comment 5: *I think that the derivation of Eq (4) is unclear. There does not seem to be a match between Eq (1), $dW/dt = P = J_{h,in} - J_{h,out}$, Eq. (2), and dS=dQ/T. There are some steps missing in this derivation and it is not clear if the last equation should be interpreted as: dS/dt=1/T dQ/dt or dS/dt= d(Q/T)/dt. I suggest this is explained either in the discussion, or in the paper itself. Since it is not essential to the argument of the paper, maybe it is best to make it part of the discussion in HESSD.*

This has been clarified by a comment posted in the discussion forum. We added a reference to the comment in the manuscript.

comment 6: *One mistake is probably due to my own incorrect suggestion during some earlier discussion. On page 7335, it is suggested that the case of low drag ($N_d \ll 1$) corresponds with Chezy flow and that the case of large Drag ($N_d \gg 1$) would correspond with Darcy flow. This is not correct. In fact one can show that the case of large drag corresponds with Chezy flow, while the case of low drag corresponds with supercritical flow (since $v^2 = g\Delta z$ while critical flow occurs when $v^2 > gh$ and Δz is much larger than the depth of flow). That the case of high drag corresponds with Chezy can be simply seen by substituting in (24):*

$$J_{w,in} = \rho Q = \rho v B h \tag{1}$$

$$F_{w,d} = \rho g B L v^2 / C^2 \tag{2}$$

where Q is the river discharge, B is the stream width, h is the stream depth, and C is Chezy's coefficient. Substitution yields:

$$v^2 = C^2 h \Delta z / L \tag{3}$$

which is Chezy's equation for channel flow. This realisation bears on several statements later in the paper that need to be revised, in particular: P7344, L8; P7358, L15.

Thanks for catching this error in the interpretation. We have revised the interpretation in the text.

comment 7: *By the way, if $F_{w,d}$ is considered a linear relation of the flow velocity (linear friction) then we find that the flow velocity is indeed directly proportional to the slope, which is Darcy's equation. So the case of v being proportional to $\Delta\phi$ can imply both the Darcy and the Chezy equation depending on the assumption of linear or quadratic friction (laminar or turbulent flow).*

We included this point in the interpretation of the limits as well.

comment 8: *Regarding the conclusion that channels tend to have uniform slope (P7358, L24), this is not true. What they tend to have is a uniform sediment transport capacity, which is proportional to the velocity at a power of 2.5. For uniform sediment this would lead to a constant velocity, but coarser sediments require higher velocities and hence larger slopes. As a result there is a gradual decrease in slope and an associated decrease in sediment size as we move downstream.*

We changed the text following the reviewer's explanations.

comment 9: *P7319, L24: replace by yields*

done.

comment 10: *P7324: It is better not to use multi-symbol variables. Why not use instead of NEE the expression $\sum J_s$ for the sum of all the entropy exports. This would be consistent with the rest of the definitions.*

agreed. We altered the equations for entropy exchange in the manuscript.

comment 11: *P7331: Similarly I don't like the use of PE and KE in eqs (11)-(14). Why not use (consistent with the rest of the paper) $m_w\phi_w$, $m_s\phi_s$, p_wv_w, p_sv_s. This also*

HESSD

9, C5545–C5551, 2012

Interactive Comment

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Interactive Discussion

Discussion Paper

applies to the equations and text of Section 5.2 and 6.1

agreed. We followed the suggestion and changed the respective terms.

comment 12: *P7331, L23: replace 'power' by 'kinetic energy'*

done.

comment 13: *P7334: put brackets in the second term of (20)*

terms were rearranged in the equation, so no brackets were needed.

comment 14: *P7335, L5: this is wrong. There should be brackets around* $(2N_d)$

done.

comment 15: *P7335, L10-11: is consistent with supercritical flow in a low friction channel, while Eq.(24) is consistent with the flow in a frictional channel (i.e. Chezy flow).*

Agreed. Eqn. (23) represents supercritical flow. With regards to Eqn. (24), it depends on the choice of $F_{w,d}$ whether this equation would yield Chezy or Darcy flow. We have added text to explain this, as follows: "... while Eq. (24) can yield expressions for Chezy or Darcy flow. The latter depends on the choice of $F_{w,d}$. If $F_{w,d}$ is a turbulent, frictional force that depends on the flow velocity, this equation would yield the expression for Chezy flow. If $F_{w,d}$ is a binding force that does not depend on the flow velocity, this equation yields an expression for Darcy flow."

comment 16: *P7339, L8: I don't understand the word quadratic here*

the term "quadratic" was removed, as it was not relevant for the description.

comment 17: *P7339, L9: remove "at the top"*

done.

comment 18: *P7339, L11: remove 'of'*

HESSD

9, C5545–C5551, 2012

Interactive Comment

done.

comment 19: *P7339, L20: There are again brackets missing. It should read $L/(4N)$. This leads to the erroneous observation in the next line that $N = 0$, whereas N should become infinitely large.*

corrected.

comment 20: *P7340, L12: replace 'as' by 'with'*

done.

comment 21: *P7340: I think in Eq.(43) there is a mistake. It should be $(2\pi)^{(1/3)}$. But maybe I made a mistake.*

I rechecked the equation. The $\pi^{1/3}$ is correct, but an exponent was lost in the L term, which should read $L^{4/3}$. The equation was corrected.

comment 22: *Subsequently the reasoning below these equations is wrong. Because J also depends on the density, the density has no effect. In fact the water inflow equals:*

$$J_{w,in} = \rho i L^2 \tag{4}$$

where i is the effective precipitation intensity. It then follows that:

$$N_{opt}^3 = 1/8\pi v/i \tag{5}$$

Hence the drainage density depends on the ratio of flow velocity to rainfall intensity. If there is no effective rainfall, then there is no flow velocity and the equation is not determined. I don't know what the asymptotic ratio is. That would be nice to find out. What we can conclude is that the stream velocity is something that does not vary too much from river system to river system (about 1 m/s). Hence a high rainfall intensity leads to a low channel density and a low rainfall to a high channel density. I don't know if there is empirical proof for this.

HESSD

9, C5545–C5551, 2012

Interactive Comment

We have corrected and adjusted the text according to the reviewer's suggestion.

comment 23: *P7345, L7: I think this is not true. The above calculation shows that N_{opt} is size independent. L^2 drops out. One can say that large rainfall amounts (with a limited velocity of flow), hence wetter climates lead to larger and fewer channels. Please check if this is true.*

We agree and removed the text.

comment 24: *P7347, L22: I suggest to write 'Taylor approximations'*

done.

comment 25: *P7354, L9: 'dominant'*

done.

comment 26: *P7359, L9: 'pursue'*

done.

Interactive comment on Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci. Discuss., 9, 7317, 2012.