An influence diagram for urban flood risk assessment through pluvial flood hazards under non-stationary conditions

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List of contents

Session 2: Research and development in low- and middle income countries

P.E. Holm: Water and Environment theme, Sino-Danish Center for Education and Research (SDC), Beijing 3
L.F. Jørgensen and H. Dissing: China Europe Water Platform (CEWP) 4
S. Stisen et al.: Hydrological modelling for climate change and water management impact assessment in data sparse regions 5
M. Chongo et al. Geophysical and geochemical characterisation of groundwater resources in Western Zambia 6
M. J. Calopietro et al.: SUSA Ghana – A multi-disciplinary research project on sustainable sanitation in peri-urban Ghana 7
F. Plauborg et al.: Growth, yield and WUE of drip and sprinkler irrigated okra grown on sandy soil under semi-arid conditions in Southeast Ghana 8

Session 3: Water and health

C. Jørgensen: Water and Health – Challenges in Denmark today 9
S.M. Kristiansen et al.: Iodine in Danish ground and drinking water – preliminary speciation results and design of a nationwide sampling campaign 10
A. Forsslund et al.: E. coli contamination and health aspect associated with the use of on-site treated wastewater and canal water for irrigation of potatoes and tomatoes 11
An influence diagram for urban flood risk assessment through pluvial flood hazards under non-stationary conditions


Abstract

Urban flooding introduces significant risk to society. Extreme flood events can grow into national threats if timely adaptation and protection measures are not implemented. More information is needed to understand climate change impacts and other non-stationary conditions for development of suitable adaptation strategies at a regional scale.

Infrastructures are important assets in urban environments and their continuous operation is crucial to society. Urban infrastructures have a long technical lifetime. For example the technical lifetime for drainage systems is often assumed to be 100 years. On these time scales the effects of climate change will be statistically evident; because of this, adaptation of long-lived infrastructures should be investigated well ahead of their construction.

Decision-makers need to agree on how to adapt urban areas to flooding. However, non-stationarity leads to increased uncertainty and this is shown to be difficult to include into actual decision-making. Transparent methods are needed to facilitate the decision-making process. While decision-makers can gain an understanding of future climatic changes through scenarios and projections there is still a considerable knowledge gap between different projections and actual decision-making based on these projections. The large uncertainties introduced by future projections can lead to aversion in making a decision and investing in adaptation to floods.

The primary objective of this study was to develop a risk assessment and decision support framework for pluvial urban flood risk under non-stationary conditions using an Influence diagram (ID). Non-stationarity is considered to be the influence of climate change where extreme precipitation patterns change over time. The overall risk is quantified in monetary terms expressed as expected annual damage (EAD). The network is dynamic inasmuch as it assesses risk at different points in time to evaluate the non-stationarity in the urban system. The framework provides a means for decision-makers to assess how different decisions on flood adaptation affect the risk now and in the future. For the development of the ID we used the HUGIN software. The result from the ID was extended with a cost-benefit analysis defining the net benefits for the investment plans. We tested our framework in a case study where the risk for flooding was assessed on a railway track in Risskov (Aarhus). Drainage system improvements are planned for the area and our case study presents how the developed BN illustrates the increase in risk over time and the decrease in risk due to the planned improvement.

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