Geophysical Research Abstracts
Vol. 19, EGU2017-14371, 2017
EGU General Assembly 2017

The pluralistic water research concept – a new human-water system research approach

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Sustainable water resources management has been and still is a main challenge for decision makers even though for the past number of decades integrative approaches and concepts (e.g. Integrated Water Resources Management - IWRM) have been developed to address problems on floods, droughts, water quality, water quantity, environment and ecology. Although somehow these approaches are aiming to address water related problems in an integrative approach and to some extent include or involve society in the planning and management, they still lack some of the vital components in including the social dimensions and their interaction with water. Understanding these dynamics in a holistic way and how they are shaped by time and space may tackle these shortcomings and provide more effective and sustainable management solutions with respect to a set of potential present social actions and values as well as possible futures. This paper aims to discuss challenges to coherently and comprehensively integrate the social dimensions of different human-water concepts like IWRM, socio-hydrology and waterscape. Against this background it will develop criteria for an integrative approach and present a newly developed concept termed pluralistic water research (PWR) concept. PWR is not only a pluralistic but also an integrative and interdisciplinary approach to acknowledge the social and water dimensions and their interaction and dynamics by considering more than one perspective of a water-related issue, hereby providing a set of multiple (future) developments. Our PWR concept will be illustrated by a case study application of the Canary island La Gomera. Furthermore an outlook on further possible developments of the PWR concept will be presented and discussed.