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Losing faith

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The presented session examines the politicization of hydrological science and discusses the current implications for misinterpreting the hydrological data that undermine trust in science. As a result of growing medialization of hydrological studies and simplifying the research conclusions for the wide public, it is more difficult for hydrologists to keep scientific integrity and not fall into the realm of subjectivism. By close analysis of two hydrological studies (Pöyry Report and Eyes on Earth Studies), we noticed that (1) research conclusions may be tailored to political demand, (2) intentionally overlook basic theoretical-methodological research standards, and (3) negatively influenced by social media, especially when the research conclusions do not correspond with scientific reviews nor official speech acts from state authorities. On the other hand, we also found several unintended consequences that make politicization science useful and even positive, especially in terms of changing the social perception of water or deepening the water cooperation in hydrological monitoring which still remain sensitive political issues in many corners of the world.

By drawing on the socio-hydrology and critical hydropolitical theories, this session (i) explores the current challenges for interpreting the hydrological studies, (ii) clarify the techniques how to prevent misinterpretation of the hydrological data, and (iii) demonstrate the politicization of the hydrological science on two micro-case studies within the Mekong River Basin that raise controversies among scientists and potential disputes among states. While the Pöyry Report conclusions served as a political tool to justify the construction of Xayaburi hydropower dam in Laos regardless the opposition of downstream countries, the Eyes on Earth Study was designed to undermine mutual trust among Mekong states and damage the credibility of other hydrological studies that do not share the same opinion on hydrological changes in the Mekong River Basin. The data were retrieved from the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation and Conflict Database (LMCCD) and double-checked with the literature review of the official documents and media sources related to Pöyry Report and Eyes on Earth Study.