EMS Annual Meeting Abstracts
Vol. 14, EMS2017-225, 2017

Out with it! The need to talk plain text to non-climate experts

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Increasingly, projects and initiatives to provide climate change and climate change impact information to users have to tackle this communication challenge: When involving very diverse communities, i.e. climate researchers, impact researchers and societal or other end-users with a need of information for decision making, language can become an obstacle. Several projects have identified related problems and pitfalls. There are already attempts to "bridge the gap", e.g., in ClipC or VALUE.

There is awareness for this problem as well in the German project ReKliEs-DE (engl. title: "regional climate scenario ensemble for Germany"). It contributes high resolution simulations for Europe (using dynamical downscaling) or Germany (using statistical downscaling) to the EURO-CORDEX ensemble. It is a central goal of ReKliEs-DE to provide not just data, but to improve the usability of the project's results in local decision-making contexts.

User consultations within the project bear similarities with user surveys and workshops in previous and ongoing projects and activities. So, while most of the user requests are not entirely new, we wish to highlight several points that are – in our perception – so far not satisfactorily covered.

Climate modelers have expert knowledge of inherent strengths and weaknesses of global and regional climate models. This applies to the models in general as well as to some features in specific models or model groups. This expert knowledge is to a high extent published in the scientific literature (e.g. IPCC reports). However, the language and depth of these original publications is too discipline-specific for both, the climate impact research community and the climate advisory staff in administration, economy and society. Users which we consulted in the course of the project have requested to gain better understanding of the of the climate modelers' expert knowledge. Now, it is impossible, to educate all climate information users to become climate and climate modeling experts. Thus, there is a strong need to communicate this information in plain text to the users. We need to plainly and fairly state weaknesses of models compared to other models. One should bear in mind that this might be not well received by the respective model community. Moreover, even scientific publications include this information just as a sub-text. They may mention the improved performance of the current generation GCMs in simulating atmospheric blockings but they may not point out that the performance is still not very good.

As a lesson learned, in the project ReKliEs-De a user handbook will be provided. Following user requests, a chapter on the above described expert knowledge will be inserted. Descriptions of the GCMs and RCMs used in the project are added, trying to meet an information level that serves the users desire for better understandable text information.