

HESS-2017-748 Socio-hydrological spaces in the Jamuna River floodplain in Bangladesh

Referees comments, Author's response and Author's changes in manuscript

1 Comments from editor, referees/public

Editor's comments and guidance:

- 5 Editor Decision: Reconsider after major revisions (further review by editor and referees) (09 Jul 2018) by Murugesu Sivapalan

I have now received further comments from 3 of the original reviewers. They agree that the paper has seen considerable improvement, but they remain unsatisfied that the revised manuscript is in a form ready for publication. They provide considerable guidance towards possible areas that future improvements can be made.

- 10 I am now satisfied that a case now exists for this manuscript to be published but only one more round of revisions. Please study these comments carefully and come up with a plan/strategy of possible revisions that will satisfy the reviewers. I will be happy to provide feedback before you actually undertake the final revisions.

However, the final decision on any future manuscript will depend on the opinions of the reviewers. I will go for one more (hopefully final) round of reviews before I make the final decision. I promise to make the next round of reviews reasonably

- 15 fast so there is a chance for the paper to be published before the end of the year (at the latest).

Non-public comments to the Author:

I have ticked the major revisions box, I am hoping that it will not involve major new work. However, it is entirely up to you how you want to address the criticisms.

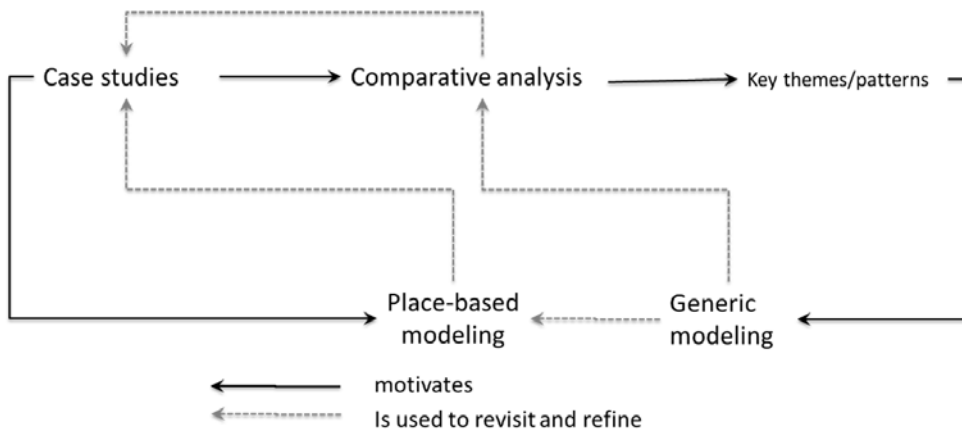
Comments from Anonymous Referee #1

- 20 Although the paper improved, I still find the authors' explanation of and rationale behind the concept of sociohydrological space to be esoteric and verbose.

The authors made efforts to improve the paper and explain their rationale behind the concept of socio-hydrological space (SHS). Thank you for that. However, despite the attempt, I still find their explanation of the concept and rationale behind it to be esoteric and verbose. If one cannot explain his/her ideas in a plain (clear & obvious) manner, it is probably a case of
25 overdoing.

The authors say SHS is a middle ground between two methods: generic modeling and placedbased modeling (or specific case studies or attempts to exploring applicability of a placed-based model to other sites). It is also described as “the empirical expression of a specific combination of generic patterns (here: fighting and adaptation dynamics) in a geographical area that is distinct from the neighbouring one.” I find these to be abstruse and difficult to understand.

Whether generic/abstract modeling or placed-based modeling, the approach is still the same for both—deductive modeling for various purposes (e.g., prediction, uncovering/testing hypotheses or underlying mechanisms that generate observed phenomena, explore the future possibility space, etc.) that are difficult to achieve by the means of other methods. Place-based modelling uses more specific assumptions and parameter values that are based on and motivated by a specific case/site. Generic models can be purely based on stylized facts/theories or motivated by certain recurring themes emerging from comparative analysis of multiple cases. A fundamental purpose of any modeling is not to capture reality as close as possible. Rather, models are like maps with only essential details. They are most useful when they contain only essential details. There is also bi-directional feedback between modeling and empirical studies. Empirical studies motivate modeling. Insights learned from modeling can be used to re-visit empirical case studies and refine knowledge gained. So, I don't understand the author's criticism about models "not being realistic" and it is also unclear to me what can be middle ground between the generic models and placed-based models. These are just different styles of modeling differentiated by modelers' intent or data availability. The figure below is useful for thinking about the mutually reinforcing feedback between empirical studies and modelling studies.



Also, this expression in the paper "SHS is also the empirical expression of a specific combination of generic patterns (here: fighting and adaptation dynamics) in a geographical area that is distinct from the neighbouring one" is a good example of why I'm saying the authors' explanation is esoteric and verbose. I don't think readers who are not so familiar with sociohydrology will understand this. If one cannot explain in plain words, chances are that it is case of overdoing. So what can be done now? One way to salvage this work is taking a step back and re-think about how to simplify the story of the paper. The concept of SHS seems to emphasize rich historical patterns in a particular place. Thus, I think a good example to follow is Erik Mostert's recent paper in HESS (Mostert, E. (2017), An alternative approach for socio-hydrology: case study research, Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci. Discuss., 1–14, doi:10.5194/hess-2017-299). The authors might reframe the paper as (1) emphasizing the importance of historical patterns in particular geographies for fully understanding generic as well as place-based models (show how) as well as (2) demonstrating how combining such rich historical patterns can help mutual reinforcing feedback between empirical studies and modeling studies.

Comments from Anonymous Referee #2

Ferdous and colleagues developed a new concept called 'socio-hydrological spaces' which they define as a geographical area with distinct hydrological and social features that give rise to distinct patterns and emergent behavior. They then apply this concept to an analysis of the Jamuna River floodplain in Bangladesh. In case study they identify three distinct socio-hydrological spaces defined by geographical features and support this delineation with primary and secondary data. The example application is well supported by primary data collection. The application of mixed-method approaches is important in socio-hydrology and the topic is of interest to HESS readers. However, I do have a series of concerns that if addressed would strengthen the paper. I believe that with certain revisions it would be suitable for publication.

Comments

1. The definition of 'socio-hydrological spaces' hints at two different types of spaces. The first is space as a geographical area. The second is space as a portion of the parameter space which leads to a distinct set of emergent dynamics. (The examples of the adaptation space and levy effect space on page 4 further raise the question of the second type of space.) In the case presented, geographical features (e.g. embankment) are used to divide the case area into three sub-areas with different dynamics. Because these geographic features define the dynamics of the system all of the unions exhibiting similar dynamics are spatially clustered. However, I can envision cases in which the features defining the socio- hydrological dynamics are social not physical features. In these cases, I am not sure the 'spaces' would be contiguous. How would this approach be applied to a case where geographical features are poorly aligned with system dynamics? Or is this tool suitable for only the cases where geographical features are aligned with system dynamics?
2. In the definition section (pages 3-4), the authors present this concept/tool as an alternative to either narratives or mathematical models. However, in the case that follows the authors present both the 'socio-hydrological space' delineation with a case narrative, which I think was effective. Rather than serving as an effective standalone tool, 'socio-hydrological spaces' compliments these other approaches. I think the author's argument for this tool would be more convincing if they could frame it as part of a broad research plan. For example, the authors note that SHS is descriptive not explanatory. If combined with other approaches could it enhance the explanatory power of a study?
3. While it is important to expand the approaches used to address socio-hydrological questions and to synthesize quantitative and qualitative data, this is not the first study to do so. The authors should acknowledge other efforts in this space such as data-driven narratives (Treuer et al. 2017) and the pairing of statistical analysis and narratives (Hornberger et al. 2015), and articulate what 'socio-hydrological spaces' adds.
4. I think there is potential for this concept to be used comparatively across say multiple flood plain cases. Please speak to this potential.
5. Lastly, there are some typographic errors and awkward phrasing in the manuscript and it would benefit from a thorough review.

References

Hornberger GM, Hess DJ, Gilligan J (2015) Water conservation and hydrological transitions in cities in the United States. *Water Resour Res* 51(6):4635–4649.

Treuer G, et al. (2017) A narrative method for analyzing transitions in urban water management: The case of the Miami-Dade Water and Sewer Department. *Water Resour Res* 53(1):891–908.

5 **Comments from Anonymous Referee #4**

The authors propose a new mid-level method for socio-hydrological research, which is a possible connection between the narratives of case studies and socio-hydrological models and allows for the detection of different socio-hydrological processes in real world cases studies and connect them with generic patterns described in socio-hydrological models.

The method is an interesting addition to socio-hydrological research and the manuscript very well describes the method and its application. The introduction makes the case for SHS and defines where in socio-hydrological research SHS is placed and the analysis of the SHS Jamuna river floodplain is a good example of the application of this new method. However, I think the connection with the general processes described with socio-hydrological models is still a bit weak. I miss an extra step at the end of the paper where the authors describe the different socio-hydrological feedbacks that explain the behavior of each SHS (perhaps the authors could construct some causal loop diagrams based on the analysis they did). The conclusion now is that SHS 1 is fighting, SHS 2 is adapting and SHS 3 is a mix of the two. This is very general and I think the authors could and perhaps should try to come up with some sub-patterns (i.e. there are different types of adaptation going on in these SHS) that they find in their analysis.

In section 6.2 the authors discuss the differences in flood frequency between the SHS and refer to figure 4b. It seems that figure 4b does not report anything about frequency, since it only shows the percentage of households that reported flooding? Does the information about frequency come from other data that is not reported here? In that case I would change the figure. Otherwise the analysis in the text should be revised.

2 Author's final response to editor's decision and guidance and final response to referees

General response to editor and reviewers

We are grateful that the editor thinks there is a case for our paper to be published if we address the remaining issues. It is clear from the reviewers' comments that we did not yet explain clearly enough what our proposal entails = using socio-hydrological spaces as a new research approach that complements existing approaches. We revised especially Sections 1 and 3 to explain this better. We have implemented the following general changes in the paper:

- (particularly in response to reviewer #1) We emphasise that we are not looking to propose a way to model but to find patterns, which are two different research approaches to analysing data. The patterns can not only complement conceptual and/or deterministic modelling, but can also be used to understand and compare cases more qualitatively. Our approach is therefore adductive, i.e. to let the (qualitative and/or quantitative) data 'speak' for themselves while being guided by expectations from previous research, in this case the patterns 'fight' and 'adapt'. Our text has been carefully revised to be clearer on this point, especially Section 1.
- (particularly in response to reviewers #2 and #4) These reviewers seem to suggest that 'narrative' is a separate research method. They oppose narratives to statistics (reviewer #2) or models (reviewer #4). However, all research produces narratives, because they describe the findings (after all, scientific papers are mainly text). Relevant dichotomies to describe research methods are quantitative/qualitative, deductive/adductive, predictive/descriptive. We have been more explicit about the choices that we made in terms of these dichotomies.

We now respond to the specific comments made by the reviewers

Reflection on other comments by the referees

Reply to anonymous referee #1

We appreciate the constructive comments provided by Referee #1, which will help us improve the description of our work, though we are taken aback by some of her/his negative charges.

We agree with her/his suggestion that we could better "demonstrate how combining such rich historical patterns can help mutual reinforcing feedback between empirical studies and modeling studies". This is also requested by Referee #4. We have expanded the discussion on this topic. We emphasise that we are not looking to propose a way to model but to find patterns, which are two different research approaches. The patterns can not only complement conceptual and/or deterministic modelling, but can also be used to understand and compare cases more qualitatively. It is therefore a middle way between data and models, not between modelling in case studies and generic models. We do not propose "different style of modelling" but a different approach to research: to find patterns. Our previous text was not clear enough on this issue. Our text has been carefully revised to be clearer on this point, especially in Section 1 but changes have been made throughout the paper (highlighted by tracked changes). By implication, we now emphasise more that (historical) patterns are important.

However, we disagree that Mostert (2017) is an example to follow, since we propose a new research approach, not a combination of existing ones.

Reply to anonymous referee #2

5 We appreciate the constructive comments provided by Referee #2, which helped us improve the description of our work.

- We agree with the reviewer that SHS should be combined with other approaches than on its own. We clarify this point in the revised manuscript. This sentence at the end of Section emphasises this: “By providing locally relevant details and texture to more generically deduced patterns, SHS provides a useful methodological addition to the socio-hydrological understanding of floodplains.” Also, our revised text for Section 1 is more explicit about pattern
10 finding as complementary to modelling.
- As for policy relevance, the fact that use of SHS gives incentives to go to the field, talk to inhabitants and officials, and obtain a thorough understanding of the specifics of the location already means make socio-hydrological analyses potentially more policy-relevant than office-based modelling based on available data only. In terms of practical use of SHS, it can for instance be added as additional element to rapid rural appraisals, or other social
15 assessments, to draw attention to how material conditions (hydrological and technical/infrastructure) co-shape social situations. We have expanded the text in this issue (Section 8).
- The reason why we changed the classification from levee effect/adaptation effect to fight/adapt is that we realised that we needed to separate the immediate response (fight or adapt) from the impacts this can have (levee effects and adaptation effects) and the different ways (technologies, behaviour) fighting or adapting is implemented. Fight/adapt
20 are generic, while the resulting socio-hydrological changes are location specific. If the latter are taken into account, every SHS is different, as the reviewer says as well: “the multiple dimensions of human-water interactions can result in several distinct types of outcome patterns”. This means that no truly generic patterns can be distinguished in ‘levee effect’ and adaptation effect’.
- We have also acknowledged that further study of the area reveals more details of the socio-hydrology of the spaces.
25 However, the purpose of this paper as to introduce the concept SHS; further publications will expand on the details we found.
- We will include more details on the Chi-square test and ANOVA test in the supplemental information.

Reply to anonymous referee #4

30 We appreciate the constructive comments provided by Referee #4, which helped us improve the description of our work.

- Reviewer #4’s concerns are mostly addressed by our actions on the comments by reviewer #1 and #2. We emphasise that we are not looking to propose a way to model but to find patterns, which are two different research approaches. The patterns can not only complement conceptual and/or deterministic modelling, but can also be used to understand and compare cases more qualitatively. It is therefore a middle way between data and models, not between modelling

in case studies and generic models. We do not propose “different style of modelling” but a different approach to research: to find patterns. Our previous text was not clear enough on this issue. Our text has been carefully revised to be clearer on this point, especially in Section 1 but changes have been made throughout the paper (highlighted by tracked changes).

- We also expanded on our conclusion that SHS 1 is fighting, SHS 2 is adapting and SHS 3 is a mix of the two. There are indeed sub-patterns within these spaces; these are explored in our further work together with the feedback loops that constitute the socio-hydrological character of each SHS. However, the purpose of this paper as to introduce the concept SHS; further publications will expand on the details we found.
- Regarding the use of ‘narrative’ as separate research method (and opposed to modelling): narrative is one qualitative research method amongst several, and can be used at case study level as well as for generic studies. Narratives can be combined with other qualitative data and also with quantitative data, as we do in our paper. We have edited the text to be more explicit about these dichotomies in our paper: quantitative/qualitative research methods, and case study vs generic study.
- We thank the reviewer for pointing out the mistake in Figure 4b. The figure title was indeed incorrect and will be changed to ‘flood occurrence’.

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¹Department of Integrated Water Systems and Governance, IHE Delft Institute for Water Education, 2611 AX, Delft, The Netherlands

³Sustainability Assessment and Management, KTH, SE-100 44, Stockholm, Sweden

⁴Deltares, 2600 MH, Delft, The Netherlands

⁵Department of Earth Sciences, Uppsala University, SE-75236 Uppsala, Sweden

⁶Centre of Natural Hazards and Disaster Science, CNDS, SE-75236 Uppsala, Sweden

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1 Introduction

The hydrological sciences community has recently launched socio-hydrology as one of the research themes of the current scientific decade of the International Association of Hydrological Sciences (IAHS) “Panta Rhei – Everything Flows” (2013-2022), which aspires to ‘advance the science of hydrology for the benefit of society’ (Montanari et al., 2013 p.1257). Socio-hydrology aims to understand the dynamics and co-evolution of coupled human-water systems (Sivapalan et al., 2012). In traditional hydrology, humans are either conceptualised as an external force to the system under study, or taken into account as boundary conditions (Milly et al., 2008; Peel and Blöschl, 2011). In socio-hydrology, human factors are considered an integral part of the system. Understanding such coupled system dynamics is expected to be of high interest to governments who are dealing with strategic and long term water management and governance decisions (Sivapalan et al., 2012).

As in any newly defined research area, socio-hydrology researchers are looking to determine how to implement their shared goal. This has resulted in a number of overview or position papers (e.g. Blair & Buytaert, 2016; Sivapalan, 2015; Pande & Sivapalan, 2017; Sivapalan & Blöschl, 2015; Troy et al. 2015) as well as several case studies (e.g. Gober & Wheeler, 2014; Kandasamy et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2014; Mehta et al., 2014; Srinivasan, 2015; Mostert, 2018). In the discussions, the use of conceptual and deterministic models to analyse concrete situations is an important issue/topic. As in any attempt to produce insights that transcend specific cases, methods of abstraction from reality to find generic patterns/causal relationships and stylised equations (generalisation) are sometimes difficult to reconcile with more detailed representations of what is happening in a specific location (Blair & Buytaert, 2016). While enabling global comparison by using data sets from different locations, generic models unavoidably foreground some elements or dimensions of flood-society dynamics to the neglect of others (Magliocca et al., 2018). On the other hand, attempts to generalize from case-specific detailed models need to be looked at critically in terms of the comparability and commensurability of the ~~phenomena and patterns observed with what happens elsewhere~~ (e.g. Elshafei et al. 2014). ~~In this paper, we propose a middle way between these two methods of generalisation by focussing on tracing patterns in socio-hydrological dynamics. Such patterns appear both in the stylised representations of generic models, but can also be observed in the messy reality of specific cases. Rather than assuming that one form of broad-based set of abstractions or generalizations ‘fits’ all situations, this mid-level theorizing on the basis of empirically observable patterns was identified by Castree et al. (2014 p.766) as a desirable way forward in environmental research, as it makes it easier to link and translate model deduced patterns with experienced realities modelled phenomena with what happens elsewhere: detailed causal relationships in one case do not usually correspond to those in other cases (e.g. Elshafei et al. 2014).~~

~~We operationalise the search for patterns by proposing a new socio-hydrological concept: socio-hydrological spaces (SHS).~~
~~The~~In this paper, we focus on another, less formal way to capture socio-hydrological dynamics than causal relationships and models: patterns. Pattern detection is no new activity in socio-hydrology, because patterns are at the basis of the stylised representations (equations) in generic models. Historical patterns are foundational for a full understanding of generic as well as place-based models, and pattern finding reinforces the feedback between empirical studies and modelling studies.

However, we propose a new socio-hydrological concept to operationalise the search for patterns in the messy reality of specific cases: socio-hydrological spaces (SHS). Eventually, patterns found in cases may be formalised into causal relationships, but this does not necessary have to be the goal. We contend that patterns in and by themselves are valuable research results, especially in policy development and where data are scarce (Section 8). The SHS concept will be defined and its implementation explained in Section 3. To illustrate how the concept can be used, we analyse human-flood interactions in the Jamuna floodplain, Bangladesh, making use of the two generic ~~patterns~~responses to flood risk ‘fight’ or ‘adapt’, that were found in earlier research on human-flood interactions. ~~We present this research in~~ (Section 2). In the Jamuna floodplain the differences between land and water are temporary and shifting, as is the size of the human population. The application of SHS allows capturing the different socio-hydrological patterns that result from different societal choices on how to deal with rivers, floods and erosion, which in turn produce different living conditions and watery environments (Sections 4 and 5).

The detection of patterns in socio-hydrological relationships can be based on the interpretation of a combination of qualitative and quantitative data; it is therefore more feasible where quantitative data are scarce. This mid-level theorizing on the basis of empirically observable patterns was identified by Castree et al. (2014) as a desirable way forward in environmental research, as it makes it easier to link and translate model-deduced patterns with experienced realities. By providing locally relevant details and texture to more generically deduced patterns, SHS provides a useful methodological addition to the socio-hydrological understanding of floodplains. Its usefulness to other contexts such as irrigated catchments or urban water systems could also be investigated.

2 Patterns in the socio-hydrology of floodplains: fight or adapt

One type of situation that is relatively well studied by socio-hydrologists is the co-evolution of human societies and water in floodplains. After all, the existence of interdependencies between societies and their natural environment is particularly obvious in floodplains. Since the beginning of human civilization, many societies have developed in floodplains along major rivers (Vis et al., 2003). In spite of periodical inundations, a distinct preference for floodplain areas as places to settle and live in stems from their favourable conditions for agricultural production and transportation, enabling trade and economic growth (Di Baldassarre et al., 2010). Yet, floodplain societies have to learn how to deal and live with periodic floods and the relocation of river channels by erosion and deposition (Sarker et al., 2003). In general terms, floodplain societies do this by evaluating the costs of flooding and erosion against the benefits that rivers bring, and deciding whether to try to mitigate the risks by defending themselves against floods (‘fight’), or to live with floods (‘adapt’), or any combination of the two (Di Baldassarre, et al., 2013a,b). Whether and how societies can fight or adapt to flooding depends on the society’s economic and technological possibilities. Therefore, ‘fight’ and ‘adapt’ are the two generic ~~patterns~~responses in the socio-hydrological dynamics of human-flood interaction. These combine ~~and manifest~~ differently in different contexts and locations, resulting in different socio-hydrological patterns.

For flood mitigation, societies have usually relied on engineering measures like embankments or levees to prevent flooding, and bank protection and spurs or guide bunds stretching into the river to prevent erosion. These measures can be seasonal (temporary) or permanent, and have more or less effect on flood prevention (Sultana et al., 2008). The construction of flood control measures might in turn alter the frequency and severity of floods, leading to a dynamic interaction between the river and the society living alongside it (Hofer and Messerli, 2006). An alternative response to flooding is adaptation, ~~the second pattern in human flood interactions.~~ In order to adapt to flood risks, societies may limit costly investments in property or make them movable, adjust cropping patterns or choose crops that can cope with flooding, or move away altogether if alternative locations for settlement are available. Even when flood protection measures are in place, residual risks may necessitate adaptation measures. This means that in any real situation the two ~~patterns~~responses of ‘fight’ and ‘adapt’ are usually found together in a site-specific configuration, depending on socio-economic, institutional, and natural conditions. We label the areas where the proportions are analogous due to similar conditions ‘socio-hydrological spaces’ (SHS) (see Section 3).

The study of floodplains using a socio-hydrological approach has advanced rapidly in the last few years (Di Baldassarre et al., 2013a,b; 2015; O’Connell and O’Donnell, 2014; Viglione et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2016; Grames et al., 2016; Ciullo et al., 2017; Barendrecht et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2017). In this research, the two ~~patterns~~responses to flooding ‘fight’ and ‘adapt’ take centre stage. The overall aim of this work is to further understanding on ‘how different sociotechnical approaches in floodplains are formed, adapted, and reformed through social, political, technical, and economic processes; how they require and/or entail a reordering of social relations leading to shifts in governance and creating new institutions, organizations, and knowledge; and how these societal shifts then impact floodplain hydrology and flooding patterns’ (Di Baldassarre et al., 2014, p.137).

Two different methodologies for the study of floodplains can be broadly distinguished, in parallel with general trends in socio-hydrology found by Wesselink et al. (2017). ~~In the~~The first approach, presents a narrative representation of the floodplain’s socio-hydrological system ~~and its development.~~ The narrative is ~~generated~~generally based on qualitative research, often informed by experiences and knowledges of local experts and inhabitants about histories of living with floods, but may also include statistical data e.g. on trends. The resulting studies describe historical patterns in the co-evolution of river dynamics, settlement patterns and technological choices (Di Baldassarre et al., 2013a, 2014). Not all researchers who engage in this kind of studies identify their work as belonging to socio-hydrology (e.g. Van Staveren and Tatenhove, 2016, Van Staveren et al., 2017a, 2017b). In this qualitative research, the actual societal choices between ‘fight’ and ‘adapt’ are descriptively represented, without formalisation.

The second approach to studying socio-hydrological dynamics of floodplains focusses on the development and use of a generic conceptual model of human-nature interactions, which is subsequently expressed in terms of differential equations (e.g. Di Baldassarre et al., 2013b, 2015; reviewed in Barendrecht et al., 2017). This second approach also starts with a narrative understanding of the situation, in which patterns are key for deriving causal relationships. These narratives narrow down complex realities to a selection of phenomena and elaborate trends and causal relationships that are subsequently

captured in mathematical models (see Elshafei et al. 2014 for a clear example of the role of narratives). Generic models aim to explain the feedback mechanisms that produce certain phenomena (often paradoxes or unintended consequences) that have been observed in many places around the world. For example, the stylised models of human-flood interactions introduced by Di Baldassarre et al. (2013b) use a mathematical formalization of a fundamental hypothesis: the levee effect (White, 1945) is explained by a decrease in risk awareness when flooding becomes less frequent because of the introduction (or reinforcement) of structural protection measures. This generic model has been used to explore and compare alternative scenarios of floodplain development (Di Baldassarre et al., 2015; Viglione et al., 2014). Current research includes further refinement (Grames et al. 2016; Yu et al., 2017) or comparison of this generic model to actual data for specific cases (Ciullo et al., 2017; Di Baldassarre et al., 2017). Yet, as societal responses to hydrological changes (including flood occurrences) are ‘very complex and highly unpredictable as it strongly depends on economic interests and cultural values’ (Di Baldassarre et al., 2015 p.4780), formalisation is challenging.

~~We propose the use of SHS to provide a method to capture actual choices in a more formal and generalisable manner as compared to single case descriptions, thereby making comparisons between cases possible, without being constrained by deterministic models or mathematical equations.~~

15 3 Socio-hydrological spaces defined

To reflect ~~the pattern detection as~~ intermediary ~~position of SHS activity~~ between ~~generic models modelling~~ and ~~specific cases reality~~, we define a socio-hydrological space in two ways: from the empirical observations, which may include quantitative data but also general contextual knowledge (‘bottom-up’), and from the conceptual models of the general patterns found in human-flood interactions (‘top-down’).

20 Starting from the empirical observations captured in quantitative and qualitative data, we define a socio-hydrological space as a geographical area in the landscape with distinct hydrological and social features that give rise to the emergence of distinct interactions and dynamics between society and water. Starting from the generic patterns captured in conceptual modelling, a socio-hydrological space is ~~also~~ the empirical expression of a specific combination of generic ~~patterns responses~~ (here: fighting and adaptation dynamics) in a geographical area that is distinct from the neighbouring one. Importantly, both definitions apply simultaneously, and are operationalised in an iterative manner to study the socio-hydrology of an area as shown in the example for the Jamuna flood plain (Sections 4 to 6).

Using SHS in the analysis of socio-hydrological dynamics helps to make the necessary intermediary step between the messy and many details used to characterize a specific location (space) and the stylised abstraction of generic models. With the proposal of SHS we are looking for a middle ground where we preserve the variability of reality and the unpredictability of human behaviour and decisions, not force-fitting these into a model, while at the same time recognising patterns (~~due to~~ combinations of similar or comparable fight and/or adapt responses).

We thus propose that SHS can serve the function of a lens through which to view and filter the complex reality of specific cases, in order to find patterns in human-water interactions. Such patterns can then be compared and contrasted to patterns in other locations to see if further generalisation towards generic models is possible. The use of SHS invites the researcher to have an open mind to the existence of expected or unexpected patterns in the location under investigation, using a thorough understanding of the specifics of this location in terms of society, history, economics, natural system, technical interventions, etc. Insights from one location can then be compared to analyses of other cases in order to explore whether the same or different patterns occur, and for the same reasons. These patterns can then be generalised through a more formal conceptualisation of socio-hydrological systems, whereby the existing conceptual models may be taken as a starting point. On the one hand SHS thereby relates to a specific space, on the other hand it helps to find general patterns of human-water interactions, which means that use of SHS to analyse different cases enables global comparison.

It is interesting to note that some of the earlier socio-hydrological research on floodplains can be said to implicitly employ something resembling the SHS concept (Fig. 1). In their study, which is partly based on the Po floodplain, Di Baldassarre et al. (2013a, 2014) identify two patterns of society-river interactions. In the ‘adaptation effect’ pattern the use of flood defence technology is limited, resulting in frequent flooding which is in turn associated with decreasing vulnerability (see also Kreibich et al., 2017). The ‘levee effect’ pattern results when flood protection structures lead to less frequent but more severe flooding, which is in turn associated with increasing vulnerability (Di Baldassarre et al., 2015) (already identified by White, 1945; see also Kates et al., 2006). These two patterns can be rendered in terms of SHS, yielding a classification of:

- a) the ~~‘adaptation space’~~ **‘adaptation space’** where frequent flooding results in less economic development and lower population density and other human adjustments;
- b) the ~~‘fighting space’~~ **‘fighting space’** where flood protection structures lead to less frequent but more severe flooding, more economic development and higher population density and other human adjustments.

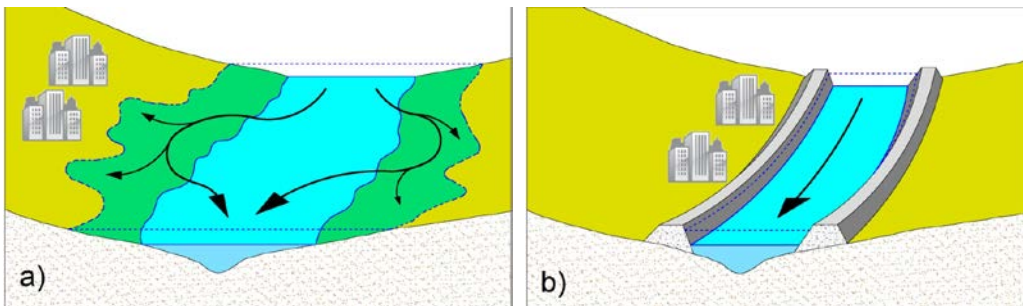


Figure 1: Schematic of human adjustments to flooding: (a) adaptation: settling away from the river, and (b) fighting: raising levees or dikes (after Di Baldassarre et al., 2013b).

In these first conceptualizations, one floodplain is assumed to show one or the other pattern at one point in time, while allowing shifts over time from adaptation to levee effect (Di Baldassarre et al., 2013a). This classification categorises a floodplain as having one single socio-hydrological pattern (‘fight’ or ‘adapt’). Di Baldassarre et al. (2015) then classify several floodplains worldwide in one of the two patterns. For example, they classify Bangladesh as a whole into the ‘adapt’

type. However, it turns out that several sections of the floodplain in Bangladesh are protected by an embankment (see Section 5), with residual flood risks giving rise to adaptation behaviour. Similarly, their classification of the Rhine floodplain in The Netherlands as ‘fighting floods’ holds in general, though in several places adaptation is being experimented with (Wesselink et al. 2007, Van Staveren and Van Tatenhove, 2016). In the same country, the Meuse valley was classified as

5 ‘adaptation’ although embankments have been added to protect built-up areas (Reuber et al., 2005; Wesselink et al., 2013). As the goal of generic models is to describe decadal dynamics at large scale (Di Baldassarre et al., 2013b), they can only capture the main phenomena in large areas, such as a whole floodplain (in time or space) or a river basin. Instead, SHS induce the researcher to further refine the analysis of human-flood interactions from the generic to the more local where, for example, both response may co-exist at one time in specific proportions. In this way, SHS allow more specific and detailed

10 representation of the reality of these interactions, while still enabling comparison between cases by referring to generic patterns. In what follows, we illustrate how the concept can be used in a more detailed and refined analysis of the Jamuna floodplain in Bangladesh. We show how its use can provide nuances to the broad-sweep overall classification by showing that within this overall characterisation some areas to some extent exhibit a ‘levee effect’, while other areas do not fit the two-way classification.

15 To use the concept of SHS, we propose a two-step approach. First, the top down definition of SHS guides the researcher to look for the generic patterns in the information collected about the study area. As notes this information is based on a thorough understanding of a specific floodplain (geography, history, technology, societal occupation etc.). This results in a preliminary geographical delineation of distinct SHS and their qualitative descriptions by means of narratives, schematised drawings, maps etc.; these results have the function of being hypotheses in the next step. In the second step, quantitative data

20 analysis is employed to confirm, reject or correct these initial hypotheses, that is, this analysis provides the data driven (bottom up) delineation of SHS. If the classification is not statistically significant, merging or splitting of categories should be considered as well as re-drawing the boundaries (repeat step 1). However, this adjustment should always be based on arguments based on a good understanding of the floodplain, since statistical significance by itself does not explain socio-hydrological dynamics.

25 Similar research methods were used before in socio-hydrology, e.g. geo-statistics to study the interaction between river bank erosion and land use (Hazarika et al., 2015), or so-called data-driven narratives (Treuer et al. 2017) and the pairing of statistical analysis and narratives (Hornberger et al., 2015, [Mostert, 2018](#)). While the combination of narrative and statistical methods that we use is therefore not new, their application to SHS enables transcending single case studies in the search for more generalizable patterns. We could therefore envisage that the methods used in Step 2 could be different, as long as they

30 contribute to the goal of identifying and validating SHS.

The following case study demonstrates how the SHS approach can be used. Our goal is not to include all available data to provide an exhaustive analysis, but to show how SHS help to detect and understand socio-hydrological dynamics. The socio-hydrological characteristics and data availability guide the choice of methods in our socio-hydrological analysis of a part of

To understand these relationships between river and people better, this study focusses on a small area along approx. 30 km of the Jamuna River in the north of Bangladesh (Fig. 2). The total area is about 500 square km and the total population is approx. 0.36 million (BBS, 2011). The case study area includes parts of Gaibandha district and parts of Jamalpur district (Fig. 2). The total width of the case study area is around 24 km, of which the braided river bed takes approx. 12-16 km; this includes many inhabited river islands (chars) that flood with varying frequency (every year to only with severe floods). The maintenance of the BRE in the study area has been sporadic. When constructed, the average height was 4.5m, width 6m and slope 1:3 on both sides (CEGIS, 2007). Though extreme discharges could not overtop this embankment, breaches have occurred which caused catastrophic floods and damages (RBIP, 2015). In the 2016 flood (observed during the field survey), the BRE was breached in Gaibandha district, resulting in a large area being flooded. On the left bank there is no human-made protection, but there is a natural levee that has been deposited by the river.

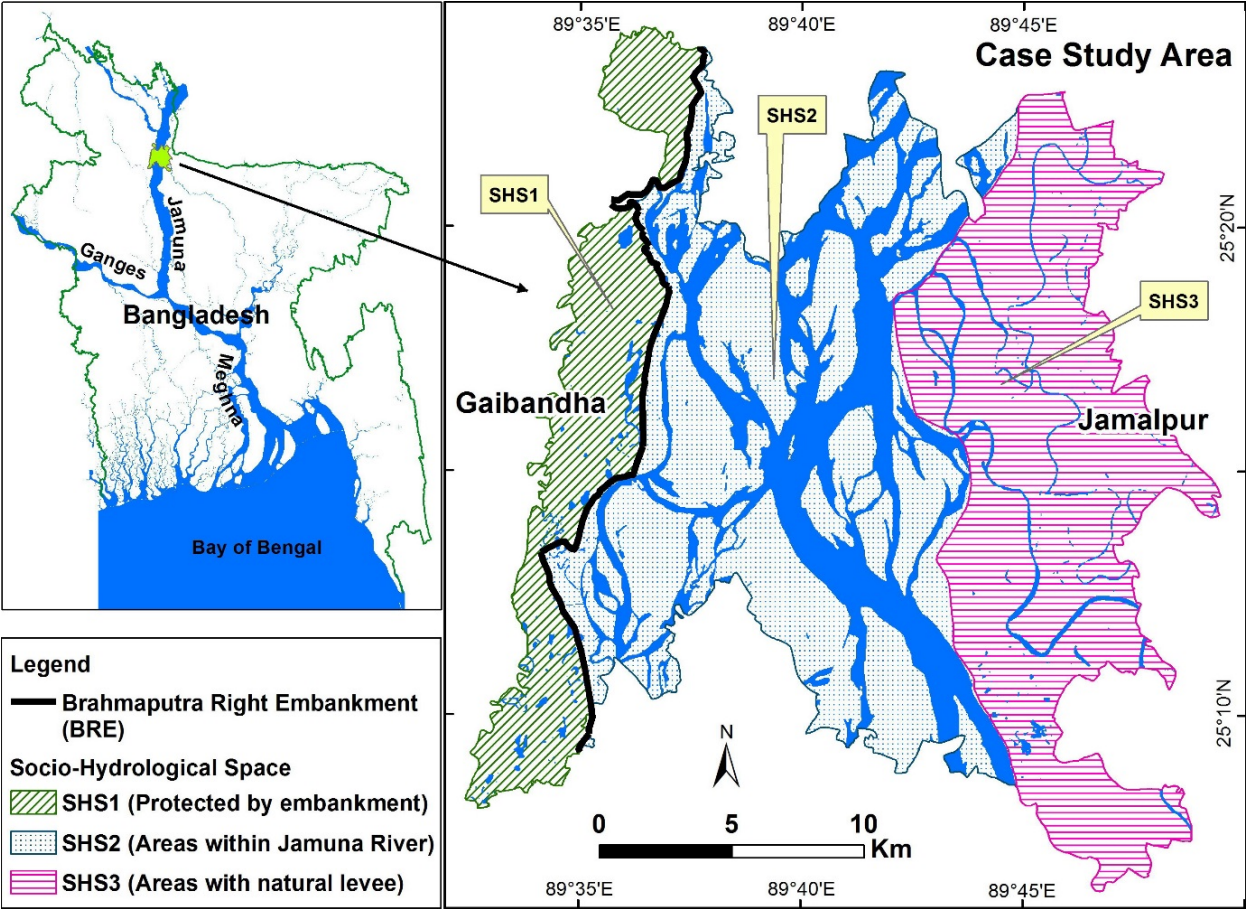


Figure 2: Bangladesh map with case study area and SHS.

4.2 Step 1: preliminary identification of SHS and classification of areas

Throughout the fieldwork period needed to collect the primary data described in Section 4.3 below, a detailed knowledge of physical, technical and social conditions of the area was accumulated by the first author. In collecting this information, he built upon and was guided by his personal knowledge as a resident in a nearby area, as well as by 10 years of professional experience throughout Bangladesh as a water engineer charged with flood forecasting and training residents on using flood and erosion forecasts. Since flood control measures were only developed along some rivers (see Section 4.1 above), the study area is characterized by different degrees of protection. In addition to these human-made structures, different geomorphological conditions influence local flood frequency and extent as well as the extent of river bank erosion. Inhabitants adapt to these physical conditions, which is apparent e.g. in private investment levels and cropping patterns, but also in public investment e.g. in schools and roads. These qualitative observations formed the basis for distinguishing three SHS in the landscape, which are described in a narrative fashion in Section 5. To demarcate the SHS we used administrative boundaries (unions and mauza) since this enabled the use of Government data in Step 2; 15 unions are included in the study area.

4.3 Step 2: evidence

The demarcation of SHS was validated through the analysis of primary data (household surveys and focus group discussions) and secondary data (statistics, maps etc.) collected during the dry seasons of 2015 and 2016. The principal set of primary data consists of approx. 900 questionnaires dealing with several themes: general information (location of settlement and agricultural land, main occupation, age, income and expenditures, wealth and origin of the households), information on different flood experiences (depth of floods, frequency, duration, flood damages, effects on agricultural income and expenditures, adaptation options, migration etc.) and experiences with river erosion (frequency, damages, migration, adaptation options etc.). We also set up focus group discussions in most unions in the case study area to validate and contextualize the survey data. Details of these methods are given below.

A cross-sectional method was used to gather the primary data of the case study area. Cross-sectional research involves using different groups of people, both male and female (farmer, fisherman, day-labour, service holder etc.) who differ in the variables of interest but share other characteristics, such as socio-economic status and ethnicity. We aimed to collect approximately the same number of surveys in each of the three SHS. Due to the rural character, most of the respondents were farmers. We introduced an age bias because we wanted to collect historical information on flooding, riverbank erosion, livelihood etc. The household surveys were implemented with a combination of purposive sampling and quota sampling. Purposive sampling is a method where individuals are selected because they meet specific criteria (e.g., farmer, fisherman, day labour etc.). The quota sampling method selects a specific number of respondents with particular qualities (like farmer's age should be 40 or above). We used the Raosoft sample size calculator to determine the required sample size for the surveys by union. This calculator allowed to enter values including acceptable margin of error, response distribution, confidence

level and size of the population that is to be surveyed. We accepted a 5% margin of error with 95% confidence level to determine the sample size, which is 1% households (863 household surveys) of the case study area. The questionnaire for the survey is provided in [the](#) supplementary materials (ESM1).

In addition, we performed 12 focus group discussions in the case study area, four meetings in different unions in each SHS.

- 5 About 20 participants were present in each of the meetings. Participants were selected based on occupation and location of the households, guaranteeing a uniform spread over the union area. The topics of the discussions were: how is flooding affecting livelihoods; what household coping strategies are used in relation to flooding, for example changing occupation or raising homesteads; migration patterns; community interventions against flooding; river bank erosion and household coping strategies; community interventions against riverbank erosion; governmental initiatives against flooding and riverbank erosion etc. The agenda of the focus group discussions is provided in the supplementary materials (ESM2).

We also collected secondary data like time series satellite images to analyse the morphological dynamics of the Jamuna, census population data to analyse population density from different governmental and non-governmental organisations of Bangladesh. Results of Step 2 are discussed in Section 6.

5 Results step 1: Identification of socio-hydrological spaces along the Jamuna River

- 15 As noted, in our study area along the Jamuna three distinct socio-hydrological spaces were identified. SHS1 covers the areas protected by the BRE (on the west bank), SHS2 covers the char areas (in the river bed) and SHS3 includes areas with a natural levee (on the east bank). These are depicted in a schematized fashion in Fig. 3 and described by means of narratives below.

5.1 Areas protected with flood embankment (west bank) (SHS1)

- 20 This socio-hydrological space is protected from regular annual flooding, the so-called ‘normal floods’, by the embankment along the main river Jamuna (BRE) and along some smaller Jamuna tributaries. However, different parts of the area are still frequently inundated with excess rainwater, due to their low elevation and limited drainage capacity. Further, a few small rivers (Ghagot and Alai) inundate unprotected areas yearly in the western part of the area. Because the BRE effectively protects the area against all but the largest riverine flooding from the Jamuna, inhabitants feel confident enough to invest in
- 25 businesses and homesteads. In the study area, Gaibandha district, the BRE is not very well maintained, so the BRE sometimes breaches. Inhabitants build their houses on artificially raised platforms – often several metres above ground level – to reduce their vulnerability to the resulting floods. River bank erosion in this area is not widespread, but does occur in several locations. SHS1 therefore shows a combination of the ‘fight’ and ‘adapt’ patterns.

5.2 Floodplain outside the embankment (west bank) and chars (SHS2)

This is a very dynamic environment. The Jamuna is a braided river, where multiple channels crisscross within the outer boundary of the river. When considered over decades, the outer boundary is moving in a westward direction (CEGIS, 2007). The ‘chars’ – or river islands – are also moving, progressing or disappearing, due to local erosion processes. Chars have different ages, which have a direct relation to the height level. As the river still deposits sediment on chars, some older chars have higher elevations than the areas in SHS1, and have shown to remain dry in extreme flood conditions. If a newly developed char does not erode immediately, it is first colonized by grass, which accelerates deposition of silt during the next flooding. Subsequently, people start to occupy the char, planting fast growing trees and laying out agricultural fields. In the course of time, all kind of facilities like schools, mosques, small shops, bazars etc. are established. Since the chars are not stable, most of the houses built in the chars are semi-permanent and easy to take apart and move. House types are kutcha (wood, straw and bamboo mats) or jhupri (straw). Many people raise the plinth levels of their houses to avoid flood damages, but this is not very effective.

On the chars inhabitants regularly face damages from flooding and river bank erosion to agricultural land and crops and their homestead, often leading to complete destruction. Temporary migration during the flood season to safer places, for example the embankment or on railway lines, is therefore very common. Permanent resettlement occurs only when the land that people live and farm on simply disappears, although they usually find another place to settle on a nearby char when flood water have receded. People also sometimes change their occupation temporarily or permanently. As char dwellers’ life styles are defined by flood and erosion, they appear to be able to cope with the harsh conditions. Yet, most of them become poorer through time, because of landlessness, unreliable and changing sources of employment, and frequent temporary migration or resettlement. SHS2 therefore shows only the ‘adapt’ pattern.

5.3 Eastbank (areas with natural levee) (SHS3)

The natural levee on the east bank of the Jamuna protects this area from about half of the annual riverine flooding; flooding occurs more frequently than in SHS1. A few areas are flooded by smaller rivers like the Old Brahmaputra and Jinjira. High water levels in these rivers sometimes occur independently of high water levels of the Jamuna, as these are not part of the same drainage basin. River bank erosion is conspicuous in this area. Even though the river as a whole shows a gradual westward shift, due to the presence of highly erodible bank materials on the left bank erosion is still severe in SHS3. For example, 75 ha of land eroded in 2015 in this area, of which 4 ha with housing (CEGIS, 2016). Inhabitants take the initiative to build small spurs and bank protection, made from bamboo and wood, to try to stop erosion. However, while these encourage sedimentation at a local scale, they are not sufficient to stop large scale erosion. As in SHS1, most houses are built on artificially raised mounds, substantially reducing potential for flood impacts. Flooding and riverbank erosion cause damage to agriculture, homesteads and businesses, in turn impoverishing people. As in SHS1 and SHS2, migration is one of the coping strategies, while households also adapt their cropping pattern to accommodate flooding and cultivate fast growing

crops after the flood season. SHS3 therefore shows a combination of the ‘fight’ and ‘adapt’ patterns, with more ‘adapt’ and less ‘fight’ than SHS1.

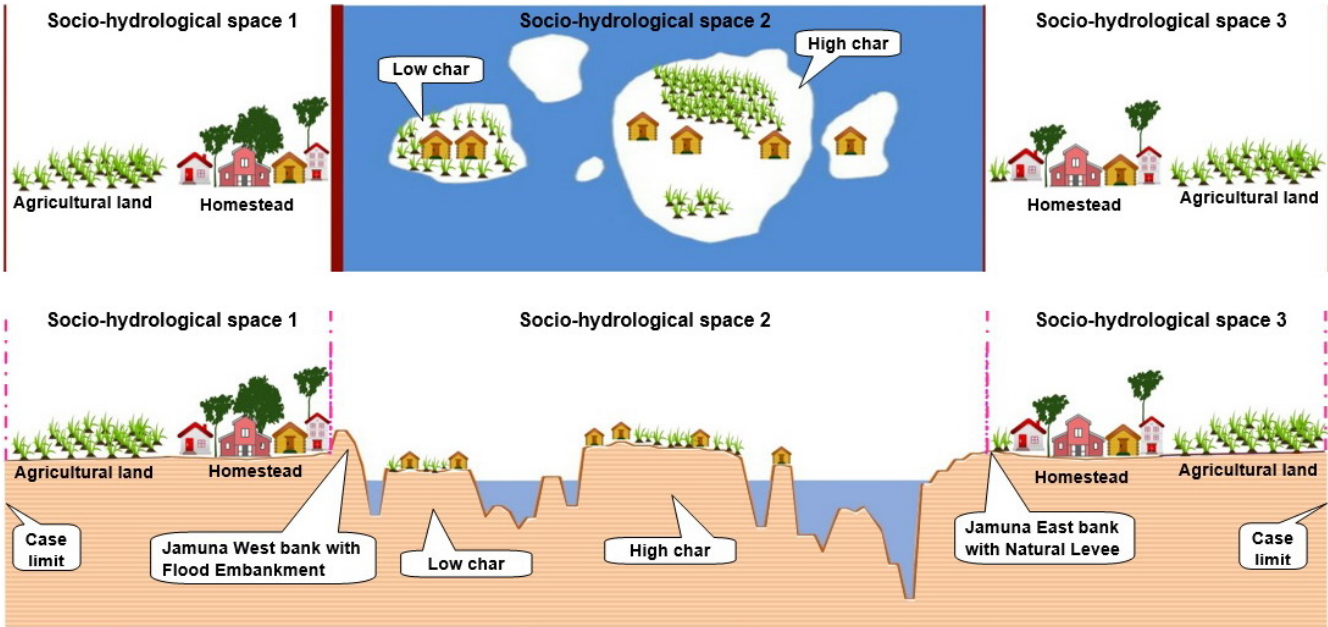


Figure 3: A typical planform and cross-section with distinct SHS along the Jamuna.

6 Results step 2: Evidence of socio-hydrological spaces along the Jamuna River

Using the data described in Section 4.3, in this section we show that the three SHS described above are significantly different. We only show the results for a limited number of variables: perceptions of the sources of flooding; flood frequency; flood damages; average household income and wealth; river bank erosion; migration; homestead types in the three identified SHS. We performed statistical analysis [Chi-square test and](#) ANOVA test ($p < 0.05$) with these data for all analyses below- [\(details are provided in ESM3\)](#). In each case the data for the three socio-hydrological spaces were significantly different.

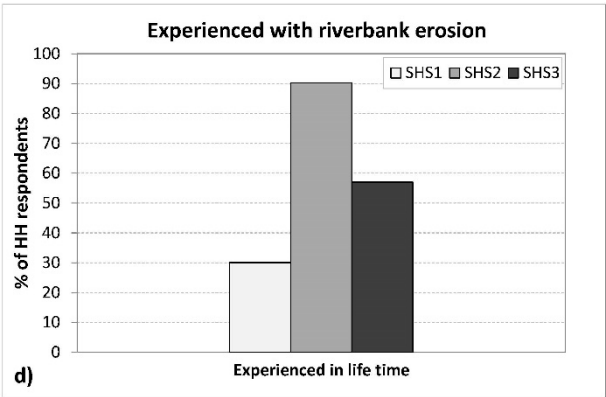
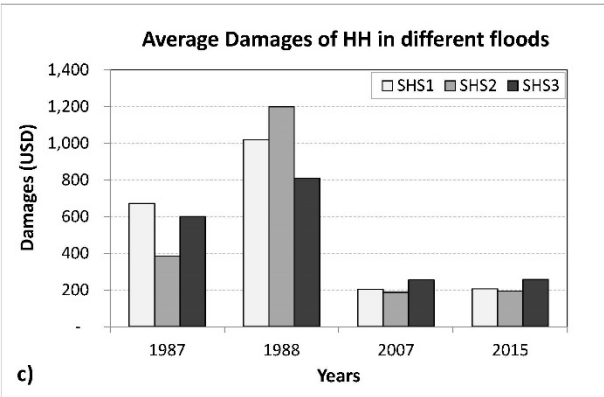
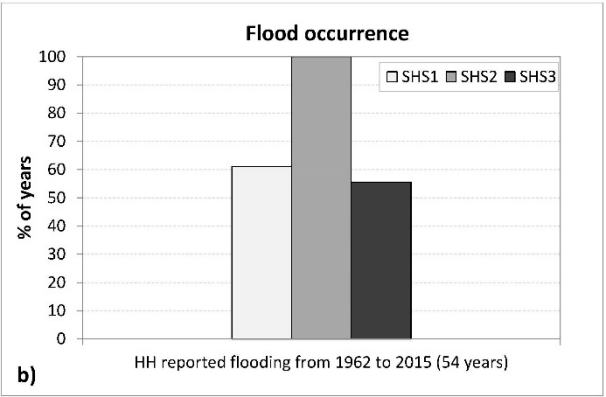
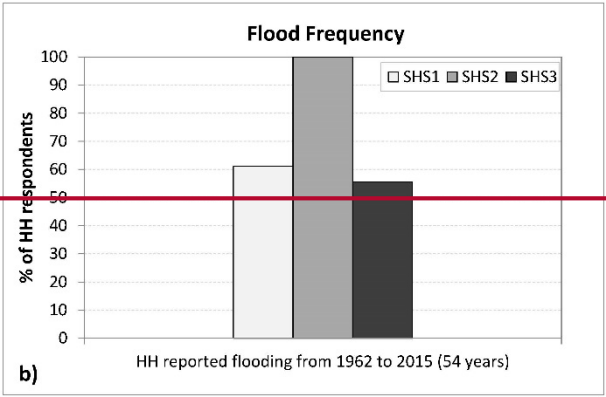
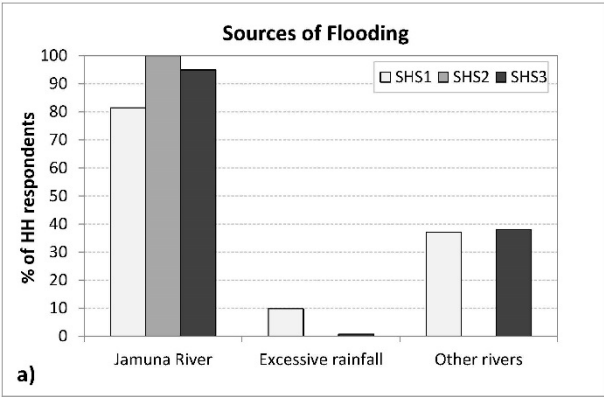
6.1 Perception of the sources of flooding

All respondents have experienced flooding in their lifetime, but their perceptions about the sources of flooding are different (Fig. 4a). The main sources of flooding in space SHS1 are excessive rainfall, neighbouring small rivers and the Jamuna (through breaching of the BRE), whereas the sources of flooding mentioned in SHS2 is only Jamuna, and for SHS3 they are the Jamuna, the Old Brahmaputra River and other smaller rivers. A good number of people in SHS3 mentioned that the lack of embankment is one of the reasons for flooding, although they also mention excess discharges and river sedimentation.

6.2 Flood frequency occurrence

When asked about their recollection of historical flood events (Fig. 4b), in SHS2 people indicated experiencing flooding every year. In both other spaces, this is roughly only once every 2 years. The unexpected relatively high flood frequency for the protected SHS1 may be attributed to the frequent failure of the embankment and to the fact that the area is flooded from

the west by the Ghagot River, a tributary of the Jamuna.



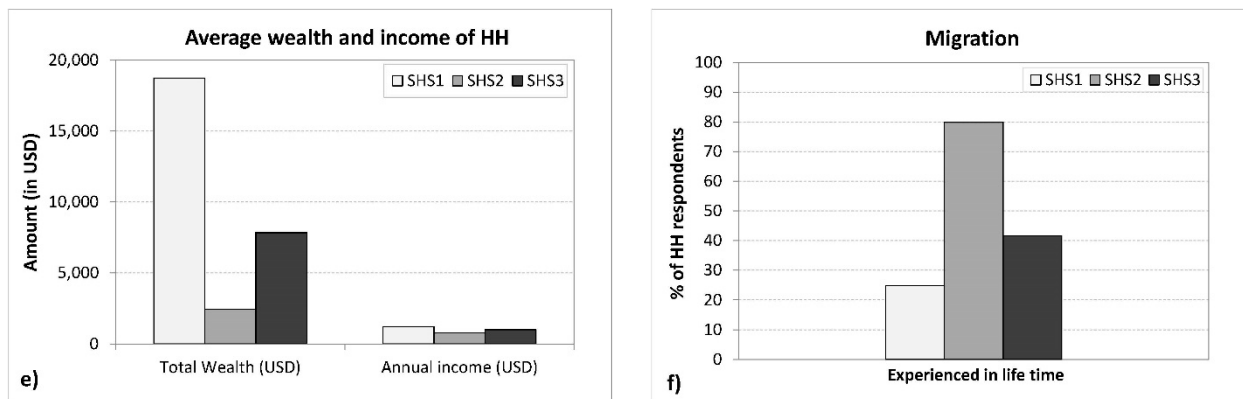


Figure 4: Comparison in between different socio-hydrological spaces (HH = household).

6.3 Flood damages

From analysing the flood damage information for extreme events in 1987, 1988 and 2007 and normal conditions in 2015, it becomes clear that 1988 was the most severe year for all three spaces, ranging from 800 USD per household in SHS3 to 1200 USD in SHS2 (Fig. 4c). In other years, average damages were much less. In 1987, damages in SHS1 were highest of the three spaces (~700 USD/household). This may be attributed to poor drainage capacity in SHS1, as well as a lower average land elevation, resulting in deeper and longer water logging. Damages in 2007 and 2015 show little difference between the three SHS (~200 USD/household).

6.4 River bank erosion

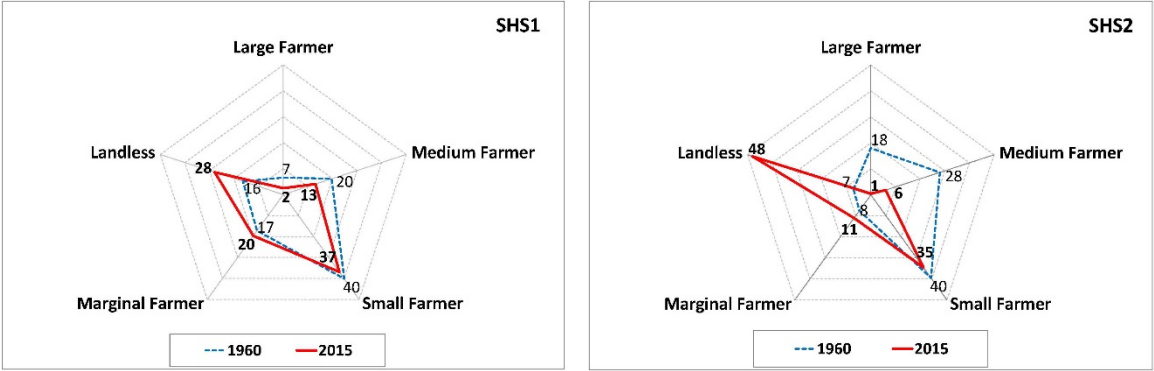
Riverbank erosion is experienced in each SHS, but (as expected) mainly by inhabitants in the dynamic SHS2 (Fig. 4d). However, erosion in SHS3 is also very high, with over 50% of the interviewed people having experienced it. In SHS1 expected rates are lowest, but still considerable, as 30% have experienced it due to breaching of the BRE.

6.5 Average household income and wealth

The average wealth distribution (Fig. 4e) shows clearly the economic differences between the households in the three SHS. In the protected areas, people have much more wealth, on average about 19,000 USD/household, against approx. 2,500 USD in SHS2 and 8,000 USD in SHS3. Household wealth includes land (homestead, agricultural, other land), ponds, houses and housing materials, livestock and portable wealth like savings, gold and silver. About 80% of the people in the case study area are farmers, so their income mostly depends on their agricultural production, complemented by remittances from migrant labour by family members for some families and from occasional day labour in agriculture, construction or fishing, or as rickshaw driver or van puller. Their starting position and subsequent losses depend to a large extent on where they live. The current situation is (much) worse for most households than in the past. As per our survey, in SHS1 there were 7% large farmer households (with land > 3 hectare) in 1960 but after consecutive flooding events, this was reduced to only 2% in 2015

(Fig. 5). Those who owned most land in the past (> 3 hectare) gradually saw a decline in their farm land to medium (1-2.99 hectare) or small (0.2-0.99 hectare), with some even becoming landless. There were only 16% landless households in 1960, but this increased to 28% in 2015.

In SHS2 and SHS3 a comparable pattern can be observed. The number of large farm households reduced from 18% to 1% and landless farmer households increased from 7% to 48% in SHS2. In SHS3 the proportion of large landowners reduced from 10% to 2% and that of landless farmers increased from 18% to 41%. More than 80% of the respondents from SHS2 reported that they could not recover from the losses due to flooding and riverbank erosion. Many of them have to change their occupation temporarily, and 3% of the respondents in SHS2 changed their occupation permanently from farmer to day labourer. This is less than the reduction in land ownership would suggest because landless farmers will try to rent land to be able to cultivate their own crops. If this is the case, they share crops with the land owners or pay a fixed amount per year. There is a possibility that some respondents exaggerated reported losses in the hope that the research would help to mobilize funds. The focus group discussions clarified this issue. They revealed that cropping patterns in SHS1, SHS2 and SHS3 are different. Respondents in SHS1 are cultivating three crops per year. In SHS3 people used to cultivate three crops in the past, but due to flooding, they now cultivate either two crops or only one crop per year, only in the dry season after floods have subsided. From the survey data it appears that in SHS1 only 15% of the respondents changed cropping patterns between the 1960s and the 2010s, against 53% in SHS3 and 40% in SHS2. A very small number of people have changed land use completely, for example from agriculture to homestead, from low elevation land to high elevation land by filling silts, or from agriculture to fallow etc.



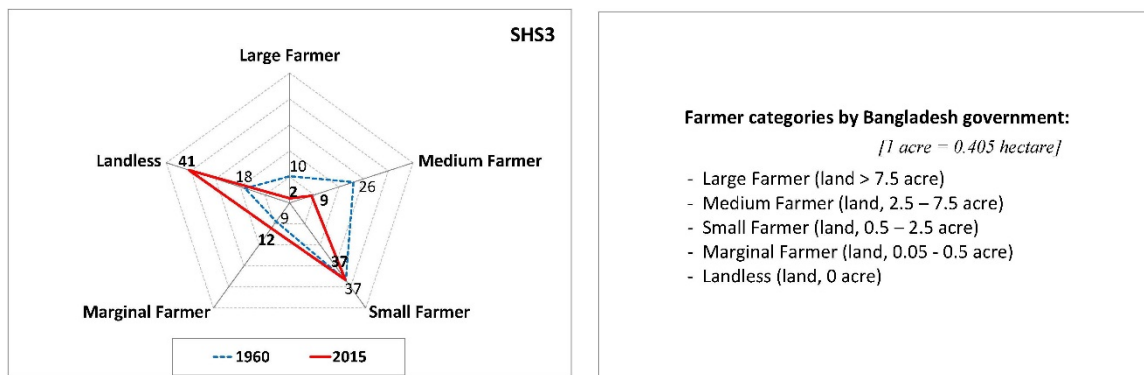


Figure 5 Agricultural land changes with time of the different types of farmer (% of HH respondents).

6.6 Migration

The population density in the three spaces from census data show much higher densities in SHS1 than in SHS2 and SHS3. In SHS1 it is 1,500 person per square km (varying between 1,000 to 3,000 person per square km in the different villages in SHS1), while population density in SHS3 is 800 person per square km (between 100 to 2,000 person per square km, the lowest figure being for very few villages adjacent to the east bank). It is lowest in SHS2 at 400 person per square km (varying between 30 to 1,000 person per square km) (BBS, 2011). The historical population data from 1961 to 2011 show that population density has increased in most of the unions, except in SHS2 (CPP, 1961; BBS 1974, 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011). Unfortunately, there are no official records of the exact number of people who migrate out of the area on a temporary or permanent basis. From our survey, we found that temporary or permanent migration is most frequent in SHS2, mostly to SHS1 and SHS3. From 1988 to 2015, 17% of respondents had migrated to SHS1 and 8% to SHS3.

Riverbank erosion is one of the main reasons for relocation from their place of origin (Fig. 4f). We found that 80% of the households in SHS2 had moved at least once. Most of them moved within 5 km, but in focus groups it was said that about 25% of people of that area had migrated away to other districts. About 68% of respondents were born in SHS1 and still live there, while 25% migrated to SHS1 from other places due to riverbank erosion. In SHS3, about 58% were born locally and the rest moved into the area, again mostly due to riverbank erosion. The respondents who relocated within the study area knew that their destination was flood prone and at risk from riverbank erosion. However, the lack of available land is a major problem so they contend with sub-optimal conditions.

6.7 Homestead types

The construction type of houses is different between the spaces (Fig. 6). Most of the pucca houses (well-constructed buildings using modern masonry materials) and semi-pucca or half pucca houses (made of brick and tin) are within SHS1 and SHS3, where people feel comparatively safe against flooding and erosion. As a result, they invest more in their home. In SHS2 a high proportion of kutchha (wood, straw and bamboo mats) and jhupri (straw) houses is observed, since these are easy to take apart and move in case of flooding or erosion, and less costly to construct.

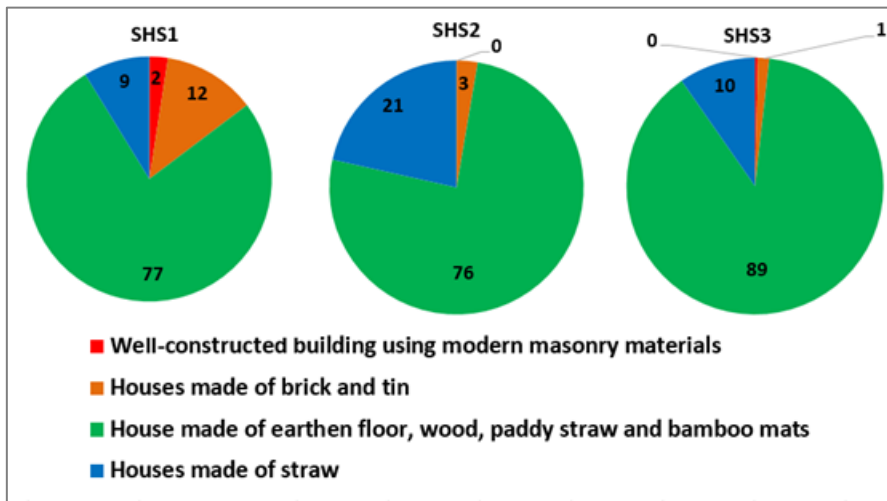


Figure 6: Homestead type of households.

7 Discussion

Based on thorough in-depth knowledge of the natural, technical and social conditions of the study area in the floodplain of the Jamuna River in Bangladesh, we proposed distinguishing between three SHS as the basic spatial units each with distinct socio-hydrological characteristics. Human-flood dynamics are different in each space, ranking from ‘adapt to floods’ (SHS3), to more (SHS1) or less (SHS2) ‘fighting floods’ in combination with ‘adapt to floods’ to the extent necessary. We then proceeded to demonstrate, through statistical analysis of primary and secondary data, that the SHS show significant differences in the following hydrological and social variables: perceptions of the sources of flooding, flood frequency, flood damages, average household income and wealth, river bank erosion, migration, and homestead types. ~~Our goal was not to prove that these boundaries to the SHS are the best, since this would require much more detailed social and hydrological data than currently available. However, we did show~~

We thereby showed that there are good reasons to consider the three SHS as distinct both from a narrative and from a statistical perspective, and that such a distinction provides a good starting point for further socio-hydrological analysis of human-flood dynamics of the area. Further research can reveal more details of the socio-hydrological feedback loops and resulting patterns in data within the three SHS, for example by including urban areas. Our research is limited to rural inhabitants, and other patterns are likely to be revealed in SHS1 and SHS3 for urban areas, creating subdivisions within the spaces – or a reason to distinguish five instead of three spaces. The categorisation of the study area into spaces therefore depends on the focus of the study, but this does not invalidate the results. Rather, it shows that every abstraction, whether to find patterns or causal relationships, requires selective treatment of reality.

The issue of drawing boundaries around the SHS ~~merits some further discussion~~ gives rise to another qualification. We started by outlining the boundaries of three SHS based on the presence of distinct physical features in the landscape: the

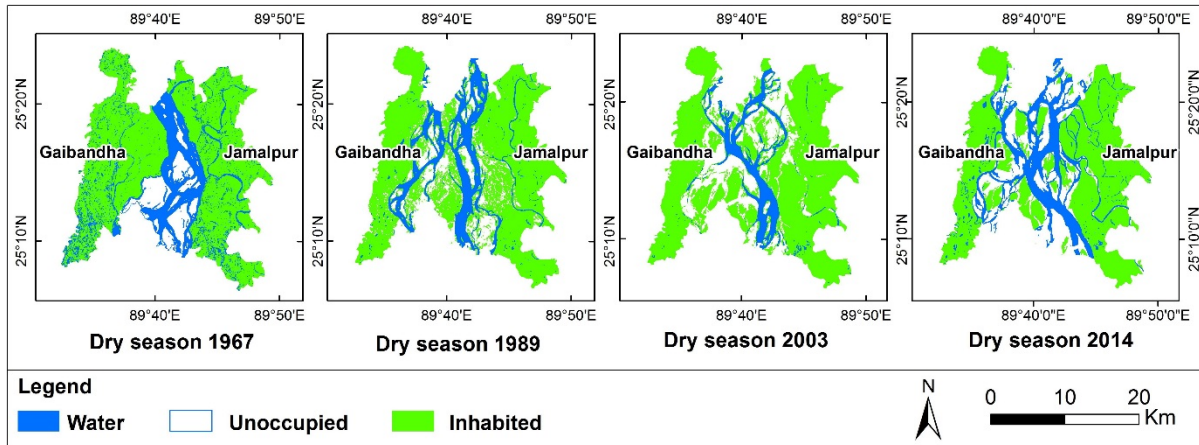
embankment on the west bank, the natural levee on the east bank, and the riverbed in between. The exact boundaries were drawn on pragmatic grounds, using the administrative boundaries that best align with the physical features. These boundaries might show the approximate SHS in the present, but the boundaries of the physical and social systems are not fixed in time. The physical boundaries of the SHS are quite dynamic due to continuing bank erosion along both banks of the Jamuna

5 (CEGIS, 2007). In particular, by analysing satellite images of the case study area from the late 1960s up to now, it appears that the west bank has been migrating westward and the east bank has been migrating eastward. As a result, the length-averaged width of the river has increased from 8.17 km to 11.68 km (CEGIS, 2007). Since the construction of the BRE in the 1960s, many breaches have occurred due to river bank erosion, forcing relocation of the embankment in many places (RBIP, 2015). At the same time due, to erosion of the east bank the natural levee also moved somewhat over time. Thus the physical

10 boundaries between SHS1-SHS2 and SHS2-SHS3 are not fixed in time, while our statistical analyses assume that they are since they use the current physical boundaries. The social boundaries of the SHS in the Jamuna floodplain are also dynamic. Due to frequent relocations and migrations, the current inhabitants of the SHS may not have lived there throughout the study period since in every extreme event some migration occurs among the spaces (see Section 6.6). Therefore, the social boundaries between SHS1-SHS2 and SHS2-SHS3 are not fixed in time either, while our statistical analyses assume that they

15 are since they relate to the current inhabitants. The dynamic nature of the boundaries of the SHS is unavoidable and indeed intrinsic to the highly dynamic socio-hydrology of the floodplain system. It is therefore important to remember that the SHS are defined by their unique socio-hydrological characteristics compared with the surrounding area, not by their exact coordinates. For example, SHS2 is defined as a char within the river. If the river moves a kilometre and the char moves with it (or a different char forms), this does not change the definition of SHS2 as a char within the river. The same holds for the

20 social boundaries, if one person moves to another SHS and adopts the strategies of that SHS, then the SHS does not change¹. Ideally, the data collection and analyses of time series in Step 2 would follow these shifting boundaries, but this will most likely not be possible for due to data scarcity or time constraints.



¹ We would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for helping us to formulate this insight.

Figure 7: Time series dry season satellite images of the case study area.

8 Conclusions

We introduced the concept of socio-hydrological spaces (SHS) and applied it to a floodplain area along the Jamuna River in Bangladesh. SHS delineate areas where the interaction between social and hydrological processes show distinct characteristics, which in the case of floodplains can be ~~expressed~~classified as different combinations of two basic ~~patterns~~already responses identified in the literature: ‘fight floods’ or ‘adapt to floods’. ~~Applying SHS~~SHS are therefore primarily a research tool that helps to identify patterns in a specific case. However, when SHS are applied to other floodplains this will enable global comparison of ~~the existence and effects of these patterns in~~ human-flood interactions elsewhere. For example, similar SHS to the ones found in the Jamuna floodplain are known to exist further down and upstream along the same river (known as Brahmaputra in India), so it would be worthwhile to compare socio-hydrological characteristics and analyse their differences and similarities.

Applying the SHS concept draws attention to the historical patterns in the co-evolution of social behaviour, natural processes and technological adoptions that give rise to different landscapes, different styles of living, and different ways of organizing livelihoods in specific geographical locations. The SHS concept suggests that the interactions between society and water are place-bound and specific because of differences in social processes, technological choices and opportunities, and hydrological dynamics. Such attention is useful anywhere in the world and also for other socio-hydrological systems than floodplains. It will be therefore be worthwhile to see whether SHS can also be used to analyse physical processes other than floods, such as droughts, salt intrusion, irrigated catchments or urban systems.

The usefulness of SHS does not only result from what it allows to see, as explained above, but also from the relative ease of application in situations where data are too sparse to use fully deterministic models (which is the case nearly anywhere in the world). Compared with existing approaches in socio-hydrology, the concept allows taking an intermediary (narrative and/or statistical) position between ~~specific cases~~complex realities and generic models. As such, it is argued that ~~specific case studies,~~ SHS, and generic models are complementary approaches with their respective advantages and disadvantages, making them useful for different purposes in different contexts.

Because SHS are place bound, and can only be found (literally) on the ground, the use of SHS forces the researcher to actually go to the field, talk to inhabitants and officials, and obtain a thorough understanding of the specifics of the location. This also means that the use of SHS will make socio-hydrological analyses more policy-relevant. In terms of practical use, it can be added as additional element to rapid rural appraisals, or other social assessments, to draw attention to how material conditions (hydrological and technical/infrastructure) co-shape social situations. ~~This would be~~The application of SHS is particularly useful to avoid broad-brush generalisations that do not take account of locality-bound problems due to the physical environment, without the need to interview every single household. SHS are therefore useful for developing

interventions under disaster management, but also other development goals. In summary, SHS provides a new way of looking at and analysing socio-hydrological systems.

Acknowledgements

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