Resource; Conduit; Agent: Water and the development of the human geography of Central Asia

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Since the end of the Cold War, Central Asia has seen a burgeoning of research agendas, many addressing hydrosocial dynamics. The environmental and geographical challenges of the region, where vast desert regions and semi-arid steppe environments have been subjected to extensive agro-economic and pastoral pressures, have focused international attention on the fragile but essential balance between societies and water resources.

Somewhat lost in the drive to understand these relationships in the context of modern-day concerns such as climate change, sustainability and resource management is a grasp of the historical trajectories of these human/water relationships, not only with respect to the better-studied river systems and delta environments, but also with respect to smaller or less accessible water resources such as pools, ephemeral lakes or aquifers. In Central Asia, a region characterized historically by movement, exchange and communication across vast desert regions, the indispensable role of such varied hydrological features becomes increasingly clear: not simply as static resources, but as natural agents in the facilitation of movement and interaction. Even today, the identification, exploitation and management of these varied resources remains central to understanding marginal subsistence strategies, and their co-evolutionary role in wider landscapes of human geography.

This session aims to broaden our understanding of water as resource, conduit and agent in the development of societies and landscapes across Central Asia. We welcome papers that present new theoretical and methodological approaches to understanding hydro-social dynamics. These may include remote sensing, bio/geoarchaeology, simulation or papers that emphasize the social aspect of hydrology, including ethnoarchaeology or research that considers water as heritage in Central Asia. We feel that this creative approach to water research in Central Asia will be beneficial to regional researchers and to a wider audience seeking to broaden the scope of hydrosocial research in Central Asia more generally.

Presentation Preference - Regular session (half day)