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Development of an Automatic Calibration Framework for Hydrologic Modelling Using Approximate Bayesian Computation

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Abstract : Hydrologic models are increasingly used as tools to predict stormwater quantity and quality from urban catchments. However, due to a range of practical issues, most models produce gross errors in simulating complex hydraulic and hydrologic systems. Difficulty in finding a robust approach for model calibration is one of the main issues. Though automatic calibration techniques are available, they are rarely used in common commercial hydraulic and hydrologic modelling software e.g. MIKE URBAN. This is partly due to the need for a large number of parameters and large datasets in the calibration process. To overcome this practical issue, a framework for automatic calibration of a hydrologic model was developed in R platform and presented in this paper. The model was developed based on the time-area conceptualization. Four calibration parameters, including initial loss, reduction factor, time of concentration and time-lag were considered as the primary set of parameters. Using these parameters, automatic calibration was performed using Approximate Bayesian Computation (ABC). ABC is a simulation-based technique for performing Bayesian inference when the likelihood is intractable or computationally expensive to compute. To test the performance and usefulness, the technique was used to simulate three small catchments in Gold Coast. For comparison, simulation outcomes from the same three catchments using commercial modelling software, MIKE URBAN were used. The graphical comparison shows strong agreement of MIKE URBAN result within the upper and lower 95% credible intervals of posterior predictions as obtained via ABC. Statistical validation for posterior predictions of runoff result using coefficient of determination (CD), root mean square error (RMSE) and maximum error (ME) was found reasonable for three study catchments. The main benefit of using ABC over MIKE URBAN is that ABC provides a posterior distribution for runoff flow prediction, and therefore associated uncertainty in predictions can be obtained. In contrast, MIKE URBAN just provides a point estimate. Based on the results of the analysis, it appears as though ABC the developed framework performs well for automatic calibration.

Keywords : automatic calibration framework, approximate bayesian computation, hydrologic and hydraulic modelling, MIKE URBAN software, R platform
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