Preparing a georeferenced soil database for Albania at scale 2:250,000 using the European soil bureau manual of procedures 1.1


In


Bari : CIHEAM
Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 50

2002
pages 135-144

Article available on line / Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

http://om.ciheam.org/article.php?IDPDF=4002027

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Introduction

The Interreg II Italy-Albania Project has a wide variety of components that try to bridge the two nations together. The project aims the overall development of the Republic of Albania and of the Region of Apulia. Funding is provided partially by the European Union and from the Italian Government. Among many issues developed under the Project, there was also a component that dealt with soil survey and soil mapping in both Apulia and Albania.

The Albanian share of the Project was divided in two parts:

Part 1: Development of a Georeferenced Soil Database of the complete territory (ca. 2,874,800 hectares) of the Republic of Albania at scale 1:250,000; and
Part 2: Development of a Georeferenced Soil Database for the coastal plains of the Republic of Albania at scale 1:50,000 (ca 250,000 ha of agricultural land)

The project included the soil survey of the whole territory of Albania and was finalised with the creation of a new soil map of the country at scale 1:250,000 (Map 2). Along with the preparation of the map, a georeferenced soil database was made possible. This enabled the creation of the Soil Information System of Albania, which is fully compatible with the European Soil Information System (EUSIS).

Following the objectives of Part 2, a much more detailed soil database was created for the western coastal plains of the country. An appropriate soil map at scale 1:50,000 accomplished this goal.

The most important aspect of this project however, is that for the first time Albania posses a soil database that was fully compiled according to modern European standards. Such databases are crucial for making environmental impact assessments and forecasting the trends of agricultural development. Part 2 in particular, has a strategic importance since deals with the most productive agricultural areas of the country.

Methodology

Methodology followed the document "Georeferenced Soil Database for Europe” Manual of Procedures - Version 1.1. - (doc. EUR 18092 EN) prepared by the Scientific Committee
of the European Soil Bureau (ESB) of the European Commission, otherwise known as the ESB Manual.

A step-by-step procedure included:
- Use of existing knowledge;
- Revision of the Soil Regions Map for Albania;
- First delineation of soilsceps with the aid of aerial photographs, and remote sensing images;
- Definition of the dominant soil for each soilscape;
- Exploratory soil survey and validation of the geometrical layers of the soilsceps;
- Database construction;
- Final mapping and preparation of the legend for the soil map; and
- Creation of the digital Albanian Soil Information System.

**Results and Discussions**

**Revising of Soil Region for Albania**

The existing Soil Regions Map of Europe at scale 1:5,000,000 enclosed in the ESB Manual shows just two soil regions for Albania. The reality of the territory of country however, is much more complex, therefore this map was revised thoroughly and a new one was prepared (Map 1). The criteria for delineating soil regions are given in Table 1.

**First delineation of soilsceps**

The digital GIS coverage available for the project derived from digitised local soil maps of all the districts of Albania. These maps were developed in the late 1980s according to the Albanian Soil Classification System (Zdruli 1997). These maps were revised and then converted to the World Reference Base for Soil Resources (WRB) system.

The procedure for delineating soilsceps is described in the ESB Manual. The methodology for soilscape delineation followed the "descending method" (Table 2). In order to make the best delineation of the polygons the following data sets were used:
- Topographic maps available at the archives of the Soil Science Institute (SSI) in Tirana, which covered both scales 1:200,000 and 1:50,000;
- Geological map of Albania at scale 1:200,000;
- Geomorphological map of Albania at scale 1:500,000;
- Forestry map of Albania at scale 1:200,000;
- Hydrological map of Albania at scale 1:200,000; and
- Soil map of Albania at scale 1:1,000,000 as well as other available sources of soil information.
The original old GIS coverage contained a total of 902 polygons, however many of them were very small and less than 1.5 km², which is the minimum size delineating (MSD) unit according to the ESB Manual. Therefore they were merged with adjacent polygons after a careful investigation was made to decide which one polygon will adsorb the smallest ones. For Albanian conditions, however, the MSD was reduced to 1 km².

The main criteria used for delineating the soilscapes at scale 1:250,000 (Map 2) were geomorphological characteristics, land use and vegetation. Especially natural vegetation in Albania has a strong correlation with elevation, and has been used as major criteria by the Albanian System of Soil Classification.

Typically, the flat areas of the western coastal plains are covered by graminacea type of vegetation, while the hills (up to 600 m) hold machia mediterranea vegetation. Moving towards the east of the country, the intermountain narrow valleys of alluvial and/or colluvial origin replace the ridge of hills paralleling the Adriatic and the Ionian coast. The high-eroded mountains at their footsteps have shrubs, followed by a sequence of oak, beech and pine forests at higher elevations. In many mountains, especially in the North Albanian Alps, at elevations above 2,000 m alpine meadows occur, which are used only for summer grazing.

**Field soil survey and validation of the geometrical layers of the soilscapes**

A team of Albanian and Italian soil scientists visited Albania during the months of March and May 2001 and sampled a total of 209 soil profiles. About 700 auger observations were collected through field surveys and existing soil data from the archives of the SSI. Part 1 included 100 profiles sampled throughout Albania and for Part 2 a total of 109 profiles were studied.

For the coastal plains survey, (Part 2) the guideline was to have 0.1 observations for each cm² of 1:50,000 soil map. The ratio between profile sampling and auger observation was about 1 to 0.7. No auger observations were made for Part 1. For all the sampled profiles (Part 1 and 2) about 900 soil samples were collected during the survey. Soil samples were analysed for standard analyses (EUR 18092 EN) at the Soil Laboratory of the SSI in Tirana.

All the studied soil profiles and auger observations were georeferenced using Geographic Positioning System (GPS) equipment. Consequently, the existing GIS coverage and the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Criteria for definition</th>
<th>Criteria for delineation</th>
<th>Guidelines</th>
<th>Delineation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soilscape</td>
<td><strong>Minimally:</strong> characteristic association of physiography and parent material</td>
<td><strong>Minimally:</strong> physiography and parent material</td>
<td>1 Minimal size polygon: 1 km²</td>
<td>Using DTM, geologic and geomorphologic maps, land use maps, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Additionally:</strong> geomorphology and texture</td>
<td><strong>Additionally:</strong> geomorphology and texture</td>
<td>2 Minimal distance on map of two arcs: 1 mm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 Minimal size soilscape unit: 6 km²</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 Soilscape= contiguous group of soil bodies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Summary of criteria and guidelines for the definition and delineation of soilscapes

The relationships between soils, climate and vegetation in Quercus Suber L. formations of the Sulcis-Iglesiente (Southern Sardinia, Italy)
geometry of soilscapes was checked and validated. Important changes were included in the final GIS polygon coverage of the map.

Photo 1. The valley of Shushica river, one of the major afluents of Vjosa river in Central Albania. On the foreground the deep alluvial/colluvial soils formed by fluvial and erosion activity. On the background the mountain of Lungara. As it could be seen the upper elevations are almost bare of vegetation

**Definition of the dominant soil of the soilscape**

Using the "ascending method" it was made possible to establish the dominant soil for each soilscape of the map. The criteria and guidelines for the definition of soil bodies within a soilscape are given in the ESB Manual (Table 3).

Table 3. Summary of criteria and guidelines for the definition of soil bodies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Guidelines</th>
<th>Delineation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soil Body</td>
<td>for definition</td>
<td>for delineation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 WRB-classification *</td>
<td>not applicable</td>
<td>1 One profile with estimated data in database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Parent material</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 Two or more profiles with measured data in database</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Depth to obstacle for roots</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 More than 90% of the area of a soilscape should be described by soil bodies ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Dominant texture and gravel content class 0-30 cm **</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Reference soil group plus 2 qualifiers  
** If an abrupt textural change occurs within the upper 30 cm, dominant texture and gravel content class refer to the layer(s) above the abrupt textural change  
*** including similar soils. Similar soils are soils that show a minor variation in a soil property that induces a different classification.
Relationships Between Soils, Climate and Vegetation in Quercus Suber L. Formations of the Sulcis-Iglesiente (Southern Sardinia, Italy)
The process of mapping and cartography is relatively easier for the sloping lands of the hills and mountains, but it is more complicated in the flat areas where neither geology nor the geomorphology or vegetation could provide all the changes in types of soils and their distribution. To achieve this, the flat lands were surveyed with much more priority and intensity.

To simplify this discussion an example could be used: the borderline between a Fluvic Cambisol and a Eutric Fluvisol was established relatively with a good degree of confidence. However, even for a map of 1:50,000 scale this is not an easy task to achieve. Moreover, the pedological landscapes of Albania as a Mediterranean country are very diverse and changes are observed rather frequently in short spatial distances.

A wide diversity of soils was discovered during the survey. The flat lands of the coastal plains are covered mainly with young soils of alluvial origin and typically silty nature. More typically they include Fluvic, Gleyic, and Calcaric Cambisols; Eutric and Gleyic Fluvisols; Calcaric and Haplic Arenosols; Haplic Calciisol; Luvic and Calcaric Phaeozems; Calcic, Vertic, Arenic, Chromic, Rhodic, and Haplic Luvisols; and Gleyic Solonchaks (see the Legend of Map 2).

Hills of the coastal area are mainly formed from sandstones, siltstones, and claystones (Geology of Albania, 1984). Many of them are calcareous; therefore the same characteristic is evident also on the hilly soils. Based on the field soil survey 60 soil bodies (SB) were identified for the whole country.

Conclusions

From this study could be revealed that land degradation is seriously damaging the natural resources of the country. Soil erosion is a major environmental problem. All kinds of soil erosion, including rill, sheet, and gully erosion are easily observable throughout the country.

Other forms of land degradation include deforestation, overgrazing, urbanisation, and chemical pollution near the old and abandoned mines as found in north Albania. Chemical pollution is a problem also in the oil fields.

Meantime the increase population trend continues to be high, putting therefore pressure on limited natural resources. The current population density is approximately 114 inhabitants per square km or 4.7 per ha of arable land. With its high population growth rate (which is the highest in Eastern and Southern Europe), it is expected that Albania will have 4.8 million people in 2025. Most of the population lives in rural areas (roughly 65 percent) and this makes difficult the rapid development of agriculture.

At present, there is tremendous pressure on the limited soil resources of the country. The fertile flat lands in the valleys are being “invaded” by the some time planned and often chaotic urbanisation, while deforestation, soil erosion and overgrazing are reducing the quantity and the quality of the sloping lands. Houses, businesses, and highways are being developed throughout the country, without considering carefully the quality of the land that is lost and the medium and long-term consequences of such actions are yet to be estimated.
The battle between industrial expansion, tourism, housing, and agriculture was lost by the agriculture sector in many developed countries of Europe and especially of the Mediterranean region (i.e. Italy, Spain, Greece, and Turkey) and it is most likely that will be lost also in Albania.

The problem with Albania however, is that the agricultural land is finite and there are no left areas where there is space for expansion of cropland. Many mistakes were done in the past by converting natural pastures and forests to cropland and the negative results of such actions are well known in the country. (Zdruli, 1997a, 1998).

Salinity in the coastal area is on the rise and could strongly reduce the land available for crop production. The following picture was taken in Rremas, Lushnje (central coastal Albania) during the summer of 2001. The white mantel on the soil's surface is not snow but a thick layer of accumulated salt. It is estimated that about 15,000 hectares are affected by salinity in the country.

Photo 2. Typical Solonchaks of Rremas, Lushnje

**Acknowledgement**

Funding for this Project was made possible from the European Commission and the Italian Government through the INTERREG II Italy-Albania Project managed by the Region of Apulia. The authors are grateful for their support to Ing. Luigi Minena, Chief of the
Servizio Cartografico della Regione Puglia, Dr. Luca Montanarella, Dr. Ezio Rusco and Dr. Nicola Fiippi of the European Soil Bureau (ESB) of the European Commission.

This project is the first one that involves both Albanian and Italian soil scientists to make pedological surveys in Albania. We are grateful to the support provided by the Albanian team. We can never forget the tens of Albanian farmers that very kindly helped us to dig and sample in their lands. Their generosity, hospitality and friendship is another important aspect of the soil survey experience and the human relationships that such a work can produce.
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Forestry Map of Albania 1986. Forestry Map of Albania at scale 1:200,000. Publication of the Forestry Institute, Tirana, Albania.


