

Proceedings

Monday, 24 June 2019

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Future climate change: projections of indices relevant to agriculture in the Aegean region

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In order to identify the most vulnerable regions and prioritize future interventions in the Aegean area, potential future climate changes are examined using projections derived from state-of-the-art Regional Climate Model (RCM) simulations developed within the framework of EURO-CORDEX (Coordinated Regional Climate Downscaling Experiment). In addition valuable information, based on observational data from installed meteorological stations, for selected areas in Andros island are used to provide a solid basis for comparisons with changes projected in frequency, duration and intensity for the future climate. This work is part of the LIFETERRACESCAPE project that aims to demonstrate at the Aegean island of Andros the use of drystone terraces as green infrastructures resilient to climate change impacts. The islands of the Aegean are characterised by strong relief and low vegetation cover and are listed as a region of high desertification risk (Giorgi, 2006; Zanis et al., 2008). The impacts of climate change such as decreased rainfall, temperature increases, and extreme weather phenomena, are expected to affect significantly agricultural production, biodiversity, soil structure, and, as a result, local economic activities (JRC, 2014). For millennia terraces allowed the cultivation of island areas with poor and dry soils, reducing soil erosion and wildfire risk.

In order to study the micro-climate change in Andros after land-use modifications, seven automated meteorological stations were installed in representative locations during 2018 and five more will be installed during 2019, providing basic meteorological parameters such as air temperature and relative humidity. A time series analysis of the collected observational data will be performed, focusing on extreme events such as heatwaves and floods. For future projections, the RCA4 regional climate model SMHI (Collins et al., 2011; Martin et al., 2010) with boundary conditions from the global HadGEM-ES model of the Met Office Hadley Centre (MOHC) was found to give the best results for the Aegean region following detailed evaluation. Geographical maps for the Aegean were constructed for depicting changes in climatic indices based on model simulations of daily maximum - or minimum temperature (resp. Tmax and Tmin) and daily total precipitation (PR) at a horizontal resolution of approximately 12km. Model data spanning 1950 to 2098 were split into a control period (1971-2000) and two future periods, the "near future" period from 2031 to 2060 and the "distant future" period from 2069 to 2098, that were compared and evaluated. Changes in climate indices between control and future periods are examined under two new IPCC (2013) emissions scenarios, namely the RCP4.5 and the RCP8.5, representing the medium mitigation scenario and the high emission scenario with no climate mitigation policies, respectively. The selected climatic indices which directly or indirectly affect agriculture in the examined areas, are: mean Tmax or Tmin temperatures (absolute index); Number of days with: Tmax>30°C (hot days), Tmax> 35°C (heatwave), Tmin> 20°C (tropical nights) and Total Precipitation -PR; Maximum length of dry spell (consecutive days with PR<1mm). The results show annual averaged Tmax and Tmin increases in the range of 4-6°C across the wider Aegean region in the near- and distant future, especially under the RCP8.5 climate change scenario. All extreme temperature indices are projected to increase considerably in the future. Hot days show large increases, reaching up to 75-80 days/year in the E-N Aegean (Figure 1) in the distant future, while tropical nights are to double and triple in the near- to distant future for all Aegean Islands. Total annual precipitation is to decrease significantly in the distant future, by 15-25%, while the maximum length of dry spells shows large increases across the Aegean under both RCP scenarios with increases by 50% in the SE Aegean (Figure 1). These results generally are in agreement with studies focusing on changes in temperature and rainfall extremes (e.g. Diffenbaugh et al., 2007; Giannakopoulos et al., 2009). The future vegetation cover and composition is likely to change under influence of the declining annual PR and the increasing length of dry spells. Using the observational data from the meteorological stations installed throughout the project, the anticipated improvement of the micro-climate of the areas after the land-use changes will be 'quantified', providing information on how frequent, long or intense an extreme event was in the past and how will become in the future. In that case, the TERRACESCAPE project will take advantage of the Land Stewardship practices and their climate adaptation features to improve agricultural ecosystem resilience, promote sustainable and climate change adapted island economies and support a modern, extensive and climate smart agricultural sector for the Mediterranean islands, with benefits for local societies.

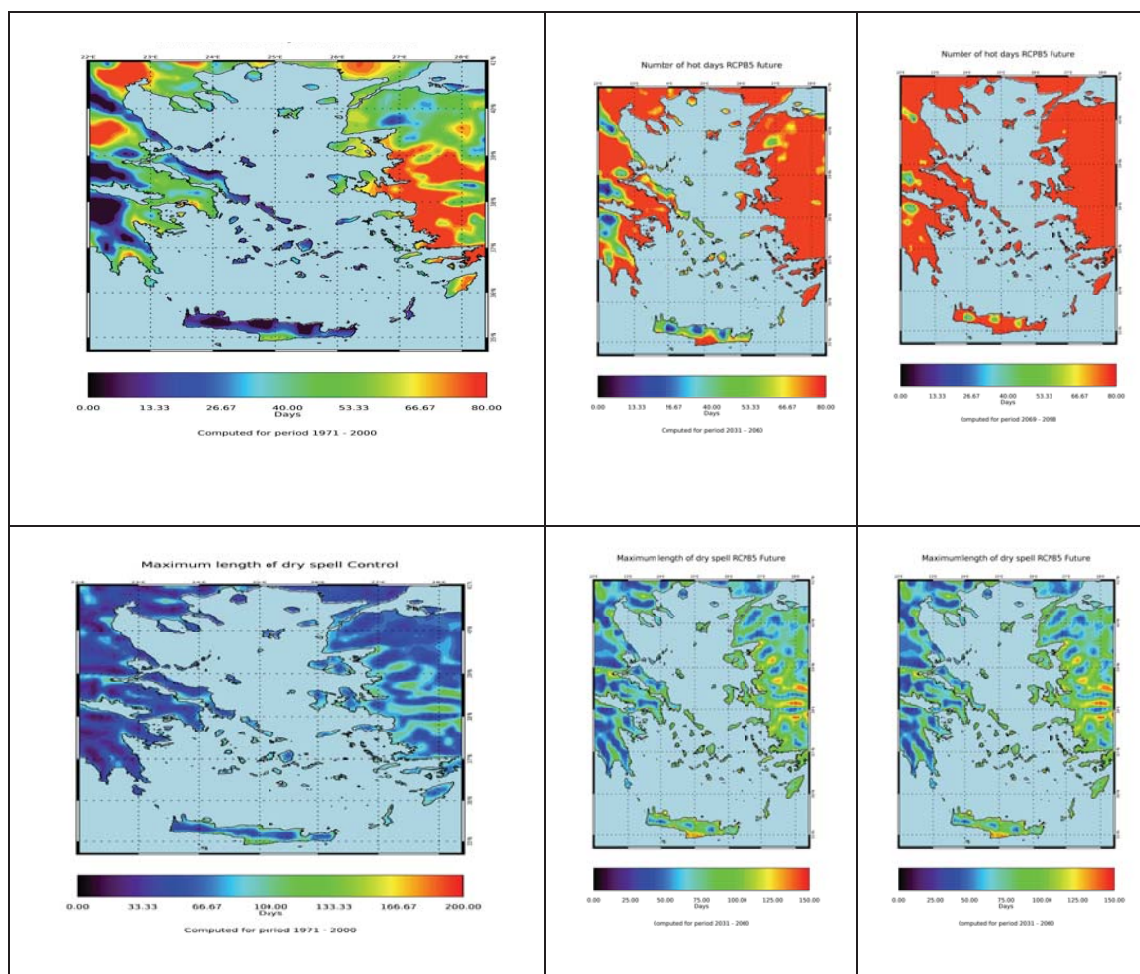


Figure 1. Average annual number of days with $T_{max} > 30^{\circ}C$ / hot days (top panel) and maximum length of dry spell /days with $PR < 1mm$ (bottom panel) for Aegean during the control period 1971-2000 (left column), the near future 2031-2060 (middle column) and the distant future 2069-2098 (right column) period, under the RCP8.5 scenario.

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