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SOILS, PROPERTIES AND LIMITATIONS IN RELATION TO LAND USE IN GEOAGIU

Casiana MIHUȚ, Anișoara DUMA COPCEA, Adalbert OKROS, Nelu Daniel POPA, Sorin Tiberiu BUNGESCU, Vlad Dragoslav MIRCOV, Attila BLENEȘI-DIMA, Veaceslav MAZĂRE, Maria Mihaela MOATĂR, Marius Silviu STROIA, Natalia MOCANU

¹University of Life Sciences "King Mihai I" from Timișoara, România

²State University of Moldova, 60 Alexei Mateevici str., MD-2009

Corresponding author: anisoaradumacopcea@usvt.ro; mariusstroia@usvt.ro

Abstract: This study provides an integrated analysis of the pedological characteristics of soils in the Geoagiu area (Hunedoara County, Romania), with a focus on soil types, physico-chemical properties, limiting factors, and their land use implications. The study area is characterized by a high diversity of pedogenetic conditions, resulting from the interaction of major geomorphological units and the variability of lithological substrate, climate, and hydrological regime.

The results highlight the predominance of Cambisols (approximately 79%), followed by Luvisols and other soil types occurring in smaller proportions. Cambisols exhibit favorable properties, including high humus content and well-developed structure, being associated with moderate to high fertility. In contrast, Luvisols are characterized by clay accumulation in subsurface horizons, leading to hydrophysical constraints, while Dystric Cambisols are affected by high acidity and low nutrient status.

The main limiting factors identified include soil acidity, high skeletal content, clay-rich texture, erosion, and the influence of altitude on climatic conditions. The analysis of pedological relationships reveals direct links between parent material, soil properties, and vegetation types, confirming the key role of lithological substrate and climatic conditions in soil formation and evolution.

The findings emphasize the importance of site-specific land use according to soil properties and limitations, as well as the need for sustainable management practices aimed at maintaining soil fertility and preventing soil degradation in the studied area.

Introduction

Soil is one of the most important natural resources, playing an essential role in supporting agricultural production, ecosystems and global biogeochemical cycles (BRADY & WEIL, 2016; LAL, 2004). The formation and evolution of soils are the result of the complex interaction between pedogenetic factors, namely the bedrock, climate, relief, organisms and time (BUOL ET AL., 2011; MIRCOV ET AL., 2025).

At the international level, numerous studies highlight the role of soil in regulating the carbon cycle and mitigating climate change, through its ability to store organic carbon (LAL, 2004; SIX ET AL., 2002). Also, the physical and chemical properties of the soil, such as texture, structure, pH, and humus content, are decisive for fertility and productivity (HILLEL, 2004; WARDLE, 2002; MIHUȚ ET AL., 2024).

Material and method

1. Location and geographical classification of the studied area

The studied area is located in the Geoagiu area, located in the central-western part of Romania, in Hunedoara County, within the hydrographic basin of the Mureș River. Geographically, this region is at the interference of major relief units, namely the Apuseni Mountains, belonging to the Western Carpathians, the Transylvanian Depression and the Șureanu Massif, part of the Southern Carpathians. This positioning gives the area a high complexity from a geomorphological and geological point of view, which is directly reflected in the variability of pedogenetic factors and, implicitly, in the diversity of soil types.

The interaction between these geographical units determines a marked heterogeneity of soil formation conditions, through the combined influence of relief, lithological substrate and climatic regime. Thus, the area is characterized by a high diversity of pedogenetic processes, which lead to the formation of a complex and spatially differentiated soil cover.

The exact location of the studied area is illustrated in Figure 1, where its position is highlighted both within Romania and at the level of Hunedoara County, providing visual support for understanding the geographical and pedological context of the study.

The climatic conditions of the area fall into the temperate-continental type, with topoclimatic variations determined by altitude and relief fragmentation. The average annual temperature is about 10.1°C, and the average annual amount of precipitation is about 578 mm.

The vegetation period lasts for 160–190 days, ensuring favorable conditions for biological and pedogenetic processes.

The distribution of precipitation is uneven, with a maximum in June–July and a minimum in the winter period, which favors the eluviation and alluvial processes and leads to the differentiation of Bt horizons in the soil profile.

The geological and lithological substrate is characterized by high variability, including rocks such as basalts, marls, sandstones, limestones, micaschists, and gneisses. This lithological diversity directly controls soil reaction, nutrient content, texture, and structure, thus determining a wide range of soil types with distinct properties.

Soils developed on basalts tend to be more fertile, while those formed on micaschists and gneisses show more acidic reactions, and those developed on limestone have a pronounced basic character.

From a pedological point of view, cambisols predominate in the area, occupying about 79% of the surface, followed by luvisols, with about 15%, and other types of soil, which amount to about 6%. This distribution reflects the combined influence of lithological substrate, climatic conditions, relief and vegetation on soil formation and evolution processes.

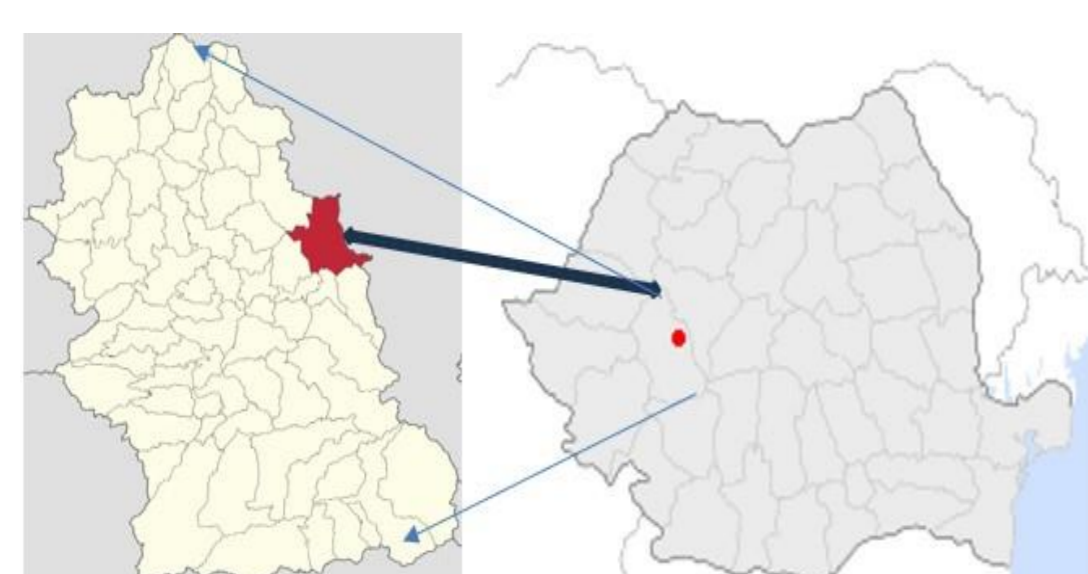


Figure 1. Location of the study area (Geoagiu, Hunedoara County, Romania).

The research methodology included soil mapping, with a density of approximately one profile per 50 ha, accompanied by detailed morphological description of the profiles and sampling for laboratory analysis.

The analyzed parameters were correlated with environmental factors, in order to highlight the relationships between soil, rock, climate and vegetation.

Results and discussions

1. Soil types and their distribution

The analysis of soil distribution highlights the dominance of cambisols (79%), followed by luvisols and other soil types in smaller proportions

Cambisols are considered moderately evolved soils, with favorable properties for forest vegetation, being frequently found in temperate forest ecosystems (BRADY & WEIL, 2016; BUOL ET AL., 2011). In Romania, their predominance in mountainous and submontane areas was also highlighted by FLOREA AND MUNTEANU (2012), who emphasize their important role in forestry.

Luvisols, although less extensive, are of pedological importance through clay illuvial processes, which lead to textural differentiation on the profile and hydrophysical limitations (HILLEL, 2004). These characteristics negatively influence permeability and can generate temporary stagnation of water.

The analysis of the distribution of soils in the Geoagiu area highlights a clear predominance of cambisols, which occupy about 79% of the surface, followed by luvisols, with about 15%, while the other types of soil, such as spodosols, protisols and chernisols, have a low share. This distribution reflects a moderate pedogenetic stage, characteristic of hilly and submontane areas, where the processes of alteration, eluviation and accumulation are manifested in a relatively stable balance.

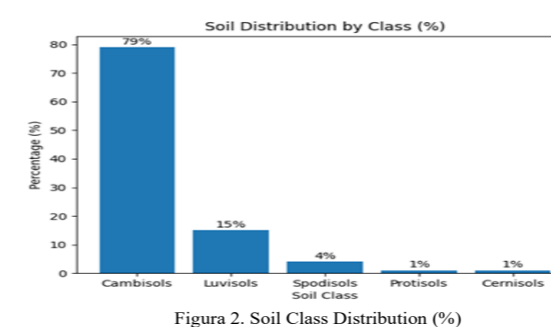


Figure 2. Soil Class Distribution (%)

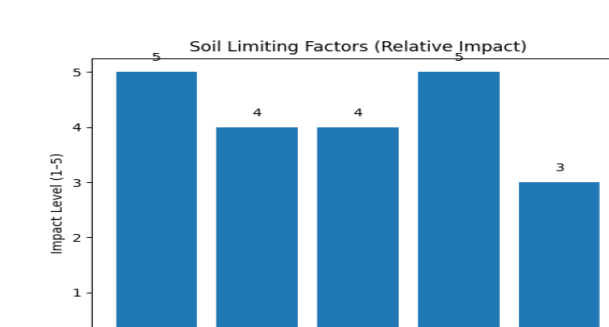


Figure 3. Soil Limiting Factors

Pedological correlations highlight a direct relationship between the lithological substrate, soil properties and vegetation type (Table 4).

Correlations between soils, rock and vegetation		
Rock	Soil	Vegetation
Basalt	Eutric cambisol	Forest
Tracing	Rendzina	Forest
Gneiss	Dystric cambisol	Forest
Clay	Luvisol	Limited

Table 4.

Data in Table 4, shows that basic rocks favor the formation of fertile soils, associated with beech forests, while acidic rocks lead to the development of poorly fertile soils, specific to spruces.

The clay deposits are associated with luvisols and mixed vegetation, confirming the decisive role of the mother rock in the formation of soils.

The influence of climate on pedogenetic processes is manifested by the control of temperature and precipitation on eluviation and alluvial processes, which determines the spatial distribution of soils and vegetation. The interaction between these factors leads to the formation of a complex pedological system, in which the properties of the soil reflect the environmental conditions.

Soil use is closely correlated with their properties and limitations. Cambisols are predominantly used in forestry, due to their fertility and stability, while luvisols require careful management to compensate for physical and chemical limitations. Skeletal soils are mainly used as pastures, having a reduced capacity to support other uses.

Conclusions

The study highlights the fact that the Geoagiu area has a high pedological diversity, determined by the variability of the lithological substrate and climatic conditions. Cambisols are the dominant type of soil, being characterized by favorable properties and high productive potential, which makes them suitable for intensive forestry use.

Luvisols and dystric cambisols are limited by unfavorable physical and chemical properties, especially by clay accumulation and acid reaction, which reduce fertility and agricultural use capacity.

The main limiting factors identified are acidity, erosion, clay texture and skeleton content, which directly influence productivity and land use.

The results confirm the existence of a close relationship between the lithological substrate, climatic conditions and soil properties, which determines the spatial distribution of vegetation and land use. The pedological system in the studied area is characterized by a relative balance between pedogenetic processes, being controlled by multiple and interdependent factors.

In order to improve fertility and sustainable land use, differentiated management measures are recommended. Acidic soils require amendment with calcareous materials, to correct the reaction and increase the availability of nutrients. In the case of soils affected by erosion, anti-erosion works and maintenance of the vegetation carpet are necessary to prevent the loss of the fertile layer.

Luvisols require specific interventions to improve drainage and reduce compaction, while skeletal soils must be used properly, mainly as pastures. It is also necessary to adapt forest species and management systems to specific pedoclimatic conditions, as well as to continuously monitor soil properties.