



Anaerobic methane oxidation may be more prevalent in surface soils than was originally thought

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Anaerobic oxidation of methane (CH_4) (AOM) is a process that was first reported to occur in deep anoxic marine sediments. In this environment, CH_4 is oxidized with sulphate (SO_4^{2-}) as the terminal electron acceptor. It is mediated by a syntrophic consortium formed by SO_4^{2-} reducing bacteria and anaerobic CH_4 oxidizing Archaea, or by the latter alone. Since this landmark discovery, AOM was found to occur in other environments including freshwater lake sediments and water columns, mud volcanoes, landfill leachate, deep buried Holocene sediments and hydrocarbon contaminated aquifers. All of these situations are very specific and point to AOM as being primarily occurring in highly reducing conditions. Thus, observations of AOM in surface soils with fluctuating REDOX conditions are relatively scarce, although a few independent studies have reported AOM in surface peatlands as well as in a forest soil. Furthermore, AOM may follow different pathways, such as via the coupled oxidation of CH_4 and reduction of manganese (Mn(IV)) or iron (Fe(III)), or by a lone denitrifying species that converts nitrite to nitric oxide in order to generate O_2 that is then used internally to oxidize CH_4 . Thus, the goal of our study was to determine whether AOM is more prevalent than was thought in hydromorphic surface soils across different environments, and whether the addition of NO_3^- or SO_4^{2-} as alternative electron acceptors may stimulate the process. We collected samples from 3 peatland soils in Scotland, 2 acid-sulphate soils in Finland, and shore sediments of 15 drained fish ponds in the Czech Republic. Subsamples were incubated in the absence of O_2 and amended with either NO_3^- , SO_4^{2-} , or left unamended (control). The net flux of CH_4 and CO_2 were assessed by gas chromatography after 2, 20, 40 and 60 days. We also used a ^{13}C - CH_4 isotope dilution technique to determine gross production and consumption rates of CH_4 . We detected AOM in all of our soils, with oxidation rates ranging between 0.001 and 37.28 $\text{nmol g}^{-1} \text{day}^{-1}$, suggesting that AOM may be more ubiquitous than was originally thought. On the other hand, no clear patterns emerged as to the effects of NO_3^- or SO_4^{2-} amendments on this process.