Influence of biocrusts coverage on microbial communities from underlying arid lands soils

Manuel Anguita-Maeso (1,2), Isabel Miralles* (3,4), Bas van Wesemael (3), Roberto Lázaro (4), Raúl Ortega (1), José Antonio García-Salcedo (5), Miguel Soriano** (1,2)

(1) Dpto. Edafología y Q. Agrícola, Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingeniería, Universidad de Almería, Campus de la Cañada, E-04120 Almería, Spain., (2) Centro Pfizer-Universidad de Granada-Junta de Andalucía de Genómica e Investigación Oncológica (GENYO), Granada, Spain., (3) Earth and Life Institute, Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium., (4) Experimental Station of Arid Zones (EEZA-CSIC), Almeria, Spain., (5) Unidad de Enfermedades Infecciosas y Microbiología, Instituto de Investigación Biosanitaria ibs.GRANADA, Hospitales Universitarios de Granada/Universidad de Granada, Granada, Spain.

In regions where the water availability limits the plant cover, biological soil crusts are especially essential in the development of an almost continuous living skin mediating the inputs and outputs across the soil surface boundary. However, the entire area is not covered equally and microbial communities from underlying soils might be influenced by biocrust type and the percentage of biocrust coverage. To clarify this question, we have collected underlying soils from biocrust samples dominated by i) incipient colonization by cyanobacteria, ii) cyanobacteria, biocrusts formed by the lichens: iii) Diploschistes diacapsis and Squamarina lentigera and iv) Lepraria issidiata from Tabernas desert (southeast of Spain) so as to determine the differences in the microbial communities from these underlying soils at two extremes of its spatial distribution range: one with a high percentage of biocrust coverage and fewer degradation and other with a huge degradation and less percentage of biocrust coverage. DNA from these samples was isolated by using a commercial kit and it was taken as template for metagenomic analysis. We conducted a sequencing of the amplicons V4-V5 of the 16S rRNA gene with Next-Generation Sequencing (NGS) Illumina MiSeq platform and a relative quantity of bacteria and fungi were accomplished by quantitative qPCR of rRNA 16S and ITS1-5.8S, respectively. The high biocrust coverage position revealed the highest number of bacteria per gram of soil (1.64E+09 in L. issidiata, in 1.89E+09 D. diacapsis and S. lentigera, 1.63E+09 in cyanobacteria and 2.08E+09 in incipient colonization by cyanobacteria) whereas the less favourable position according to the percentage of biocrust coverage showed fewer amount (1.16E+09 in L. issidiata, 6.98E+08 in D. diacapsis and S. lentigera, 1.46E+09 in cyanobacteria and 7.92E+08 in incipient cyanobacteria biocrust). Similarly, the amount of fungi per gram of soil presented identical correlation ranging from the favourable position of biocrust cover (1.59E+12 in L. issidiata, in 1.19E+12 D. diacapsis and S. lentigera, 2.71E+12 in cyanobacteria and 2.15E+12 in incipient colonization by cyanobacteria) to the unfavourable state (8.94E+11 in L. issidiata, in 7.62E+11 D. diacapsis and S. lentigera, 1.30E+12 in cyanobacteria and 5.49E+11 in incipient cyanobacteria biocrust). Clearly, it is observed that the percentage of biocrusts coverage affects the number of bacteria and fungi in underlying biocrusts soils. Furthermore, metagenomic and statistical analysis displays the variability of microbial communities depending on the percentage of biocrusts coverage. Segetibacter (5.28%), Rubrobacter (3.12%) and Blastopirellulla (0.77%) tend to be present in advantageous state of biocrust coverage while Rubellimicrobium (1.17%), Arthrobacter (0.35%) and Gp16 (0.65%) lean towards the adverse positions. Our results concluded with the idea that different microorganisms have a tendency to be located at certain percentage of biocrust coverage, which playing an essential role in the maintenance of microbial communities structure in underlying soils.

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