Online measurements of nitrous oxide and methane in the soil profile of a pre-alpine grassland subject to extreme climatic manipulations

Eugenio Diaz-Pines (1), Alexandre Fahringer (1), Evi Deltedesco (1), Katharina Keiblinger (1), David Reinthaler (2), Markus Herndl (3), Erich Pötsch (3), Michael Bahn (2), and Sophie Zechmeister-Boltenstern (1)
(1) BOKU, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Institute of Soil Research, Vienna, Austria, (2) University of Innsbruck, Institute of Ecology, Innsbruck, Austria, (3) Agricultural Research and Education Centre Raumberg-Gumpenstein, Department of Grassland Management and Cultural Landscape, Irdning-Donnersbachtal, Austria

Soils are known to take up and emit nitrous oxide (N$_2$O) and methane (CH$_4$) in different microsites within the soil profile. Understanding the production and consumption rates in different soil layers, as well as the transport processes between those layers, will contribute to a better mechanistic understanding of the exchange of these greenhouse gases between the soil surface and the atmosphere.

In the frame of a manipulation experiment in a pre-alpine grassland in Austria, we have combined “traditional” static chamber measurements with online monitoring of concentrations of N$_2$O and CH$_4$ at 5 different soil depths (from 0 to 36 cm) with permeable tubes connected to a laser-based gas monitor.

During our observation period, the grassland soils acted as a N$_2$O source and a CH$_4$ sink, respectively, as determined by the chamber measurements. We observed an almost linear increase of soil N$_2$O concentrations and a linear decrease of soil CH$_4$ concentrations with depth, suggesting that the whole soil profile (up to 36 cm depth) significantly emitted N$_2$O and took up CH$_4$. N$_2$O concentrations at 36 cm depth were variable, ranging from 700 to 2200 ppb. CH$_4$ concentrations at this depth were very low, usually < 500 ppb, with some single observations < 100 ppb.

Simulated drought likely reduced the N$_2$O production along the whole soil profile, with overall lower N$_2$O concentrations, which resulted in lower N$_2$O emissions from the soil into the atmosphere in the drought treatment compared to the control. With regard to CH$_4$, our results suggest that lower soil water content provoked by the drought promoted higher diffusion rates of atmospheric CH$_4$ into deeper layers of the soil profile, which in turn stimulated a larger CH$_4$ uptake rate in the drought treatment.

We will further compare our soil flux estimations as inferred from both chamber measurements and soil concentrations in order to evaluate the feasibility of soil profile measurements to estimate N$_2$O and CH$_4$ exchange rates from soils, and will evaluate the specific role and temporal dynamics of the different soil layers in the production and consumption of those greenhouse gases.