



UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE
Technical Faculty in Bor

PROCEEDINGS

32nd International Conference

Ecological Truth & Environmental Research

24-26 June 2026

Editor
Prof. Dr Ana Radojević

*Eco***TER'26**

Hotel Sunce, Sokobanja, Serbia



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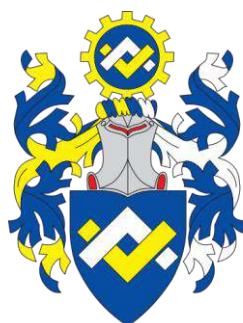
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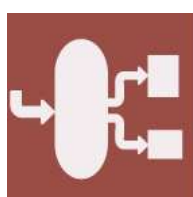


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PREFACE

The 32nd International Conference *Ecological Truth & Environmental Research – EcoTER'26* has been dedicated for more than three decades to presenting the latest scientific achievements, research findings, and innovative approaches in the fields of ecology, environmental protection, and sustainable development. In 2026, the conference was held in Sokobanja, Serbia, at Hotel Sunce, from 24 to 26 June.

The primary aim of the conference is to bring together leading experts, researchers, professionals, and young scientists from diverse fields in order to foster the exchange of knowledge, strengthen scientific collaboration, and promote innovative solutions to contemporary environmental challenges. By connecting science, education, industry, and society, EcoTER'26 seeks to inspire the transformation of attitudes and practices in everyday life, as well as within economic and industrial systems, contributing to a more sustainable future.

The 32nd International Conference *Ecological Truth & Environmental Research – EcoTER'26* is organized by the University of Belgrade, the Technical Faculty in Bor, with the co-organization of the University of Banja Luka, the Faculty of Technology; the University of Montenegro, the Faculty of Technology – Podgorica; the University of Zagreb, the Faculty of Metallurgy – Sisak; the University of Pristina, the Faculty of Technical Sciences – Kosovska Mitrovica; and the Association of Young Researchers – Bor (Serbia).

The Proceedings of EcoTER'26 include 98 scientific papers authored by researchers, academics, and industry representatives from universities, research institutions, and organizations across the following countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Romania, Slovenia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Uzbekistan, and Serbia. It is our great honour and pleasure to welcome all participants and contributors and to express our sincere appreciation for their valuable scientific contributions.

Within this year's conference programme, the 7th Student Section – EcoTERS'26 was also organized. We highly value the contribution of students and their mentors, whose enthusiasm, creativity, and dedication represent an important foundation for the advancement of scientific knowledge. We encourage young researchers to continue exploring, questioning, and expanding the boundaries of knowledge, recognizing that education and scientific discovery are lifelong processes.

The support of our donors, together with their commitment, trust, and willingness to cooperate, has significantly contributed to the successful organization of the conference. The Organizing Committee expresses its deepest gratitude to the Platinum donors of the conference – Serbia Zijin Mining DOO Bor and Serbia Zijin Copper DOO Bor; the Gold donors – HBIS SERBIA, the Serbian Chamber of Engineers, and Elixir Prahovo; and the Silver donor – Rudex Explosives.

We extend our sincere appreciation to all authors who contributed to these Proceedings. Special recognition is given to the members of the Scientific, Organizing, and Honorary Committees, reviewers, invited speakers, session chairs, and all participants whose dedication and support have contributed to the success and continuity of EcoTER.

Our sincere gratitude goes to everyone who has contributed to the organization and delivery of this conference. Your efforts and collaboration continue to strengthen the mission of EcoTER and its role in promoting scientific excellence, environmental responsibility, and sustainable development.



Prof. Dr Ana Radojević

President of the Organizing Committee



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Plenary Lectures

Jay Wadhawan

DROPLET ELECTROCHEMISTRY: FROM LABORATORY TO INDUSTRIAL APPLICATIONS 1

Grozdanka Bogdanović

FROM WASTE TO RESOURCE: A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH TO LEACHING OF SULFIDIC TAILINGS 2

Invited Lectures

Vesna Vučurović

BIOETHANOL AS A RENEWABLE ENERGY SOURCE: EFFICIENCY, SUSTAINABILITY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT 5

Bojana Bajić, D. Vučurović, S. Dodić

BIOPROCESS ENGINEERING FOR CIRCULAR BIOECONOMY: MODELLING, OPTIMIZATION AND VALORISATION OF AGRO-INDUSTRIAL RESIDUES AND WASTES 12

Ana Simonović

APPLICATION OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SAFE INHIBITORS FOR METAL CORROSION PROTECTION 18

Ivan Savić, I. Savić Gajić, T. Palanački Malešević, I. Mihalj Lubašćik, Z. Svirčev, J. Meriluoto

PAN-LIFE-CARPET CONCEPT: INTEGRATING WASTE VALORIZATION AND BIOCRUST ENGINEERING 22

Jovana Bezdan, A. Bezdan

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS UNDER CLIMATE CHANGE: AN OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS FROM THE UNSFA PILOT SITE WITHIN THE DALIA AND SWIM PROJECTS 29

Conference Papers

Žarko Radović, N. Tadić

EFFECT OF AIR OXYGEN ENRICHMENT AND EXCESS AIR RATIO ON SOLID FUELS COMBUSTION 40

Nebojša Tadić, I. Nikolić, N. Jovović, A. Drakulović, V. Radmilović STRENGTH AND MICROSTRUCTURE OF FLY ASH BASED GEOPOLYMERS CONTAINING WASTE PLASTIC	46
Aleksandra Papludis, S. Alagić, S. Milić, D. Medić, J. Nikolić, V. Stankov Jovanović, G. Stojanović AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PRESENCE OF DIBENZ(a,h)ANTHRACENE, A PROBABLE HUMAN CARCINOGEN, IN THE BOR REGION, ON THE BASIS OF ITS CONTENT IN STEMS AND LEAVES OF COMMON IVY, LILAC, AND FIG	51
Aleksandar Cvetković, Ž. Tasić, M. Petrović Mihajlović, A. Simonović, M. Radovanović, A. Bogdanović, M. Antonijević, S. Stanković ELECTROCHEMICAL SENSING OF CAFFEINE	57
Milutin Stojadinović, V. Marjanović, I. Svrkota FUNDAMENTALS OF WASTE CHARACTERISATION SAMPLING ACCORDING TO CEN/TR 15310	63
Boris Novaković, N. Paskaš, Z. Stojanović, V. Lakušić, I. Živić ENVIRONMENTAL VARIABLES AFFECT DISTRIBUTIONAL PATTERNS OF THE RIFFLE BEETLE (Coleoptera: Elmidae) SPECIES IN THE SERBIAN STREAMS AND RIVERS	71
Boris Novaković, J. Đuknić, N. Paskaš, M. Raković, V. Lakušić, I. Živić RIFFLE BEETLE <i>Elmis maugetii</i> Latreille, 1802 (Coleoptera: Elmidae): NOTES ON THE SPECIES' MORPHOLOGICAL PLASTICITY IN THE BALKAN PENINSULA	78
Radenka Kolarov, Dj. Petrov, N. Galečić, D. Skočajić, J. Čukanović, S. Đorđević, M. Ocokoljić CHALLENGES, LIMITATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS CONCERNING ALLOCHTHONOUS TREES IN URBAN ENVIRONMENTS: WINGED ELM	83
Radenka Kolarov, Dj. Petrov, N. Galečić, D. Skočajić, J. Čukanović, S. Đorđević, M. Ocokoljić THE INFLUENCE OF THE URBAN HEAT ISLAND ON <i>Abelia × grandiflora</i> (ROVELLI EX ANDRÉ) REHDER TAXA	85
Radenka Kolarov, Dj. Petrov, N. Galečić, D. Skočajić, J. Čukanović, S. Đorđević, M. Ocokoljić <i>Pyracantha angustifolia</i> (Franch.) C.K.SCHNEID. A NEW EXOTIC SPECIES IN THE DENDROFLORA OF BELGRADE	93
Milena Nikolić, A. Zdravković, D. Marković Nikolić, D. Stojadinović, T. Nikolić EVALUATION OF ECOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF VETERNICA RIVER BASED ON CHEMICAL QUALITY PARAMETERS	100
Vesna Obradović, M. Perović, T. Vučković MICROBIOLOGICAL QUALITY OF THE VELIKA MORAVA RIVER: ECOLOGICAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH ASPECTS	106

Milan Đorđević, B. Stojanović, A. Zdravković, D. Stojadinović, T. Nikolić, Đ. Miltenović	
ANALYSIS OF PHYSICAL HAZARDS IN THE ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR IMPACT ON HUMAN HEALTH: CASE STUDY OF THE CITY OF NIŠ, REPUBLIC OF SERBIA	112
Milan Đorđević, B. Stojanović, A. Zdravković, D. Stojadinović, T. Nikolić, M. Nikolić	
IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF NON-IONIZING ELECTROMAGNETIC RADIATION IN THE ENVIRONMENT: CASE STUDY OF LESKOVAC CITY, REPUBLIC OF SERBIA	119
Sanja Pavlović	
COMBINED METEOROLOGICAL MEASUREMENTS OF URBAN AND RURAL THERMAL ENVIRONMENTS IN BELGRADE	126
Jovana Galjak, M. Krstić, S. Milojević, G. Milentijević	
HEAVY METAL DISTRIBUTION AND CHEMICAL SPECIATION IN SOILS NEAR THE GORNJE POLJE FLOTATION TAILINGS	135
Ivana Kostić Kokić, D. Bogdanović, N. Stanković, T. Anđelković	
AMMONIUM HYDROXIDE AND MILK FAT CONTENT EFFECT ON BENZYL BUTYL PHTHALATE EXTRACTION	142
Viša Tasić, V. Kamenović, B. Radović, R. Kovačević, N. Ristić, Z. Damnjanović, M. Cocić	
INDOOR PM ₁₀ AND PM _{2.5} IN RESIDENTIAL APARTMENTS IN BOR, SERBIA: NON-HEATING SEASON ANALYSIS	146
Biljana Budzakoska Gjoreska, S. Trajanovski, S. Trajanovska	
INFLUENCE OF LITTORAL HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS ON MACROINVERTEBRATE COMMUNITIES IN LAKE OHRID	153
Vesna Marjanović, Z. Štirbanović, R. Marković	
PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF MINING WASTE SAMPLING: STANDARDS AND LEGAL REGULATIONS	162
Miljan Vilimonović, J. Vesković, A. Okolišan, M. Vesković, M. Lučić, A. Onjia	
MULTIVARIATE ASSESSMENT OF HEAVY METALS IN RIVER WATER FROM NOVI PAZAR AREA	169
Branislava Matić, V. Vukmanović, S. Živković Perišić	
URBAN AIR QUALITY MEASURED CLOSE TO SCHOOLS AND KINDERGARTENS WITHIN THE LOCAL MONITORING NETWORK IN SERBIA	175
Tamara Mitić, A. Marić, K. Jovičić, V. Đikanović, N. Marinković, S. Anđus, J. Čanak Atlagić	
UNCOVERING HIDDEN DIVERSITY OF <i>Sabanejewia balcanica</i> IN SERBIA: THE DISCOVERY OF NOVEL HAPLOTYPES	181

<i>Olga Jakovljević, S. Popović, M. Pečić, D. Jerinkić</i>	
DIATOMS FROM LUDAŠ LAKE AND THEIR APPLICATION IN BIOINDICATION	187
<i>Predrag Pajic, Ž. Rudic, N. Rakonjac</i>	
ASSESSMENT OF GROUNDWATER SUITABILITY FOR IRRIGATING URBAN GREEN SPACES IN ALLUVIAL AQUIFERS	194
<i>Predrag Pajic, Ž. Rudic, N. Rakonjac</i>	
LONG-TERM PERSISTENCE OF FLUORIDE CONTAMINATION IN ALLUVIAL GROUNDWATER: A CASE STUDY OF THE CARINA WELLFIELD IN KLADOVO (SERBIA)	201
<i>Željko Ćirović, D. Kleut, D. B. Stojanović, M. Jovašević-Stojanović</i>	
COMPARISON OF SATELLITE DATA WITH LOW-COST SENSOR NETWORK PM DATA IN FOUR CITIES IN SERBIA	210
<i>Madalina Zot, F. Popescu</i>	
ASSESSMENT OF SEDIMENTABLE PARTICULATE MATTER IN TIMISOARA	217
<i>Ivana Kostić Kokić, N. Stanković, D. Bogdanović, T. Petronijević, M. Dudić, T. Anđelković</i>	
IMPACT OF DIMETHYL PHTHALATE ON THE GROWTH AND STRUCTURE OF CYANOBACTERIA (<i>Microcystis</i> sp.)	222
<i>Ivana Kostić Kokić, N. Stanković, D. Bogdanović, T. Petronijević, M. Dudić, T. Anđelković</i>	
IMPACT OF DIMETHYL PHTHALATE ON THE GROWTH AND STRUCTURE OF GREEN ALGAE (<i>Chlorella</i> sp.)	228
<i>Anđelija Bogdanović, Ž. Tasić, M. Petrović Mihajlović, A. Simonović, M. Radovanović, M. Antonijević, A. Cvetković</i>	
ELECTROCHEMICAL DETERMINATION OF CEFTRIAXONE USING A GRAPHITE ROD ELECTRODE	233
<i>Milan Gorgievski, M. Marković, V. Grekulović, N. Štrbac, M. Marković, M. Zdravković, K. Božinović</i>	
SEM-EDS AND DTA-TGA ANALYSIS OF CORN STALKS USED FOR THE BIOSORPTION OF COPPER IONS FROM SYNTHETIC SOLUTIONS	239
<i>Dubravka Nikolovski, S. Đurić, D. Mičić, G. Trajkovska, Lj. Lazić, T. Stajić, D. Stošić, K. Kralj, J. Zec</i>	
LONG-TERM TRENDS OF AIRBORNE POLLEN IN PANČEVO	243
<i>Milena Nikolić, A. Zdravković, D. Marković Nikolić, G. Petković, T. Nikolić</i>	
REMOVAL OF SYNTHETIC DYE FROM AQUEOUS SOLUTIONS USING <i>Qercus cerris</i> ACORN CUPS	250
<i>Milena Nikolić, A. Zdravković, D. Marković Nikolić, N. Ristić, I. Ristić</i>	
KINETIC AND THERMODYNAMIC ASPECTS OF PESTICIDE SORPTION ONTO HORSE CHESTNUT SEED SORBENT	256

Jovana Perendija, V. Ljubić, D. Milošević, S. Cvetković, M. Đuriš, Ž. Milovanović	COMPARATIVE KINETIC ANALYSIS OF CATIONIC DYES ADSORPTION ONTO SUSTAINABLE LIGNOCELLULOSIC BIOSORBENTS	261
Verica Ljubić, J. Perendija, D. Milošević, Ž. Milovanović, S. Cvetković, K. Trivunac	MECHANISMS AND FACTORS INFLUENCING Ni(II) BIOSORPTION BY BACTERIAL EXOPOLYSACCHARIDES: A REVIEW	266
Dunja Bandur, R. Prodanović, M. Spasojević Savković, M. Stanković, D. Bartolić, O. Prodanović, N. Surudžić	ENZYMATIC DEGRADATION OF PHENOL VIA HRP PERIODATELY IMMOBILIZED ONTO GMA-CO-EGDMA MACROPOROUS CARRIERS	273
Nena Velinov Georgiev, M. Radović Vučić, M. Petrović, M. Kostić, M. Momčilović, J. Mitrović, A. Bojić	SORPTION OF TEXTILE DYES ONTO BISMUTH-MODIFIED WOOD WASTE SORBENT: KINETIC AND EQUILIBRIUM ANALYSIS	279
Saša Rančev, M. Petrović, S. Najdanović, N. Velinov Georgiev, J. Mitrović, M. Radović Vučić, A. Bojić	SELF-MADE PULSATING ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE CORONA PLASMA REACTOR FOR DEGRADATION OF A TEXTILE DYE IN SYNTHETIC TEXTILE EFFLUENT	284
Jelena Mitrović, N. Velinov Georgiev, M. Momčilović, M. Petrović, M. Kostić, S. Najdanović, A. Bojić	THERMALLY ACTIVATED PEROXYDISULFATE DEGRADATION OF REACTIVE TEXTILE DYES	290
Darko Anđelković, M. Branković	DIRECT INFUSION MS AS A PROMISING TOOL FOR PESTICIDES QUALITATIVE SCREENING IN APPLES	297
Darko Anđelković, M. Branković	CALIBRATION PERFORMANCES OF A MULTIRESIDUE PESTICIDES ANALYSIS IN LEMON AND LETTUCE ON QqQ AND ION TRAP MASS SPECTROMETERS	304
Darko Anđelković, M. Branković	THE NATURE OF THE MATRIX EFFECT IN GC/MS PESTICIDES ANALYSIS IN APPLES AND ITS RELATION TO EXTRACT DILUTION	310
Isidora Santrač, F. Sekereš, M. Živković, J. Korać Jačić, M. Milenković, J. Danilović Luković	DEGRADATION OF PONCEAU S DYE BY ADVANCED OXIDATION PROCESSES: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND TOXICITY OF TRANSFORMATION PRODUCTS	316

Isidora Santrač, F. Sekereš, M. Živković, J. Korać Jačić, M. Milenković, J. Danilović Luković	
BIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF EVANS BLUE AND ITS DEGRADATION PRODUCTS ON GROWTH AND VIABILITY OF THE GREEN MICROALGA <i>Chlamydomonas cccidophila</i> PM01	324
Irina Vasić, I. Čeliković, A. Samolov, T. Milanović, A. Kandić, M. Đurašević	
ANNUAL EFFECTIVE DOSE DUE TO INGESTION OF HERBAL INFUSIONS FROM ASTERACEAE MEDICINAL PLANTS	330
Dušan Nikolić, S. Marjanović, M. Dimitrijević, Z. Marković, A. Dobričić, M. Stanković, B. Rašković	
CONCENTRATIONS OF METALS AND METALLOIDS IN MEAT OF THE COMMON CARP (<i>Cyprinus carpio</i>) FARMED USING FEED BASED ON INVERTEBRATE ANIMAL PROTEIN ORIGIN	336
Dunja Bandur, D. Bartolić, M. Stanković, M. Prokopijević, N. Surudžić, S. Stanković, M. Mičić	
LABEL-FREE FLUORESCENCE-BASED OPTICAL BIOSENSOR FOR RAPID DETECTION OF FUNGAL PATHOGENS	343
Katarina Jovičić, V. Đikanović, J. S. Vranković	
REDOX BIOMARKERS IN SEMINAL PLASMA OF CULTURED RAINBOW TROUT: TOS, TAS, AND OSI	348
Petar Petrov	
UTILIZATION OF A PRODUCT FROM SULFURIC ACID PRODUCTION, POLLUTING THE ENVIRONMENT, WITH APPLICATION IN FERROUS METALLURGY	353
Despina Kostadinova Jankovski, M. Arizanova, B. Ristovski, E. Velickova, D. Doneva-Shapcheska	
VALORIZATION OF BREWERY SPENT GRAIN INTO BIOPLASTIC FILMS: INFLUENCE OF BIOMASS LOADING ON BARRIER AND ANTIOXIDANT PROPERTIES	360
Boris Novaković, M. Raković	
SOUTHEASTERN EUROPEAN BLACKBIRD <i>Turdus merula aterrimus</i> (MADARÁSZ, 1903) IN THE BALKAN PENINSULA	368
Pasquale Napoletano, E. Vitale, A. De Marco, C. Arena	
PROPERTIES OF PLANT AND SOIL SHAPING FRUIT AND OIL TRAITS IN DIFFERENT CULTIVARS OF <i>Olea europaea</i> L.	374
Dragana Randelović, S. Valiyev, M. Nasirov, J. Amirov	
GERMINATION OF <i>Artemisia diffusa</i> Krasch. ex. Poljakov SEEDS ORIGINATED FROM RANGELAND SITES OF DIFFERENT GRAZING INTENSITIES	381
Mihajlo Stanković, N. Beslac, D. Romčević	
NEW FINDING SPECIES ABLEPHARUS KITAIBELII BIBRON & BORY, 1833 (<i>Reptilia: Squamata: Scincidae</i>) IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	386

Mihajlo Stanković

CONTRIBUTION OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SPECIES *Ricciocarpos natans* (L.) CORDA 1829 IN THE SNR ZASAVICA AND MAČVA WITH THE ANALYSIS OF THE HABITAT

394

Sonja Stanković, M. Radovanović, A. Simonović, Ž. Tasić, A. Cvetković, V. Nedelkovski, D. Medić

PROCESS OPTIMIZATION OF ZnO-ASSISTED PHOTOCATALYTIC DEGRADATION OF METHYL ORANGE USING RESPONSE SURFACE METHODOLOGY

403

Uroš Stamenković, I. Marković, D. Manasijević, K. Božinović, M. Nedeljković, A. Kovačević

CHARACTERIZATION OF THE Sn78Bi22 ALLOY AS AN ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY LEAD-FREE SOLDER

410

Miljan Marković, M. Gorgievski, V. Grekulović, N. Štrbac, M. Marković, K. Božinović, M. Zdravković

CHANGE IN METAL REMOVAL DEGREE DURING COPPER ION BIOSORPTION ONTO RAW AND CALCINED CHICKEN EGGSHELLS

417

Ivana Marković, U. Stamenković, M. Nedeljković, D. Manasijević, Lj. Balanović

ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS AND EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATION OF SAC/GNS COMPOSITE LEAD-FREE SOLDER

422

Katarina Stojanović, M. Simić, D. Aćimović, B. Savić Rosić, M. Ječmenica Dučić, T. Brdarić

THERMAL TRANSFORMATION OF NSAID-DERIVED MATERIALS: MORPHOLOGICAL AND COMPOSITIONAL INSIGHTS

427

Katarina Stojanović, M. Simić, D. Aćimović, B. Savić Rosić, M. Ječmenica Dučić, T. Brdarić

PRODUCTION COST ASSESSMENT OF SnO₂-MWCNT@SS ELECTRODE FOR WASTEWATER TREATMENT

432

Natalija Nedić, S. Bulatović, T. Tadić, B. Marković, A. Nastasović

AMBROSIA-BASED BIOSORBENTS FOR REMOVAL OF RHODAMINE B FROM AQUATIC SOLUTION

438

Ljubiša Balanović, U. Stamenković, I. Marković, K. Božinović, M. Gorgievski, V. Grekulović, T. Jogrić

EFFECT OF Ni AND Si ADDITIONS ON FUNCTIONAL PROPERTIES OF Cu-30Zn BRASS

443

Katarina Stojanović, M. Simić, D. Aćimović, B. Savić Rosić, M. Ječmenica Dučić, D. Maksin, T. Brdarić (SERBIA)

SYNERGISTIC INTERACTION BETWEEN Sb AND RARE-EARTH OXIDES IN SnO₂ ELECTROCATALYSTS

452

Milan Đorđević, B. Stojanović, A. Zdravković, D. Stojadinović, T. Nikolić, S. Stojanović	
QUANTITATIVE DETERMINATION OF ESSENTIAL AND TOXIC ELEMENTS CONTENT IN PEACH FRUITS BY ICP-OES METHOD	456
Sofija Banković, M. Lj. Petrović, A. Janković, M. Rakin, M. Vukašinović Sekulić	
ANTIOXIDANT ACTIVITY OF CLOVE ESSENTIAL OIL	463
Dragana Randjelović, V. Savić, V. Topalović, M. Koprivica, J. Nikolić	
GROWTH PARAMETERS RESPONSE OF <i>Ocimum basilicum</i> 'Genovese' TO PHOSPHATE GLASS AS AN ALTERNATIVE FERTILIZER	471
Milan Grozdanović, M. Mančić, J. Đoković, D. Tanikić, A. Đorđević	
INTEGRATED HYBRID SYSTEMS FOR RESIDENTIAL ENERGY AUTONOMY: A LITERATURE REVIEW	478
Milan Nedeljković, S. Mladenović, V. Čosović, I. Marković, J. Petrović, U. Stamenković	
GREEN ENGINEERING APPROACH TO Sn-0.7Cu/xGNS COMPOSITES PRODUCED BY POWDER METALLURGY: MICROSTRUCTURAL AND MECHANICAL PROPERTIES FOR SUSTAINABLE ELECTRONICS	485
Snežana Urošević, M. Vuković	
TEXTILE WASTE MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND ITS SOCIOECONOMIC EFFECTS	490
Danijela Voza, M. Veličković, M. Panić, A. Fedajev, S. Arsić, D. Mladenović	
GREEN PURCHASING DETERMINANTS AMONG GENERATION Z: AN EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS	497
Marija Ivanović, S. Knežević, Lj. Kljajević, N. Mladenović Nikolić, I. Maksimović, K. Cmiljanović, S. Nenadović	
GREEN METAKAOLIN GEOPOLYMERS: SYNTHESIS AND CHARACTERIZATION DURING AGEING	503
Dragi Peltechki	
DIAGNOSING CRITICAL RAW MATERIALS SECTOR READINESS IN CANDIDATE COUNTRIES: A PESTLE-BASED ASSESSMENT OF NORTH MACEDONIA	509
Marija Stojanoska, V. Atanasova	
SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT AND FIGHT AGAINST POLLUTION, CASE STUDY	516
Luka Grbović, O. Jakovljević, J. Krizmanić, B. Tubić, M. Kračun Kolarević, S. Andus, B. Vasiljević	
ADDITIONAL RECORDS ON BENTHIC DIATOM <i>Encyonema Bonapartei</i> Heudre, C.E. Wetzel & Ector (Cymbellales, Bacillariophyceae) IN WATER BODIES OF THE UVAC SPECIAL NATURE RESERVE (SERBIA)	523

Bojana Tubić, J. Đuknić, N. Marinković, N. Popović, L. Grbović, M. Raković, M. Paunović	
AQUATIC MACROINVERTEBRATE FAUNA AT SELECTED SAMPLING SITES IN THE GRADAC RIVER	530
Olga Jakovljević, A. Božić, S. Popović	
DIATOM ASSEMBLAGES IN BIOFILMS OF FRUŠKA GORA WATERFALLS (SERBIA)	536
Sladana Popović, Z. Krantić, O. Jakovljević, A. Anđelković, A. Milićević	
pH-DEPENDENT GROWTH RESPONSES OF <i>Chlorella</i> STRAINS IN BG11 MEDIUM	541
Nataša Kojadinović, S. Đuretanović, M. Radenković, A. Milošković, T. Veličković, M. Jakovljević, V. Simić	
ASSESSMENT OF THE LENGTH-WEIGHT RELATIONSHIP AND RELATIVE CONDITION FACTOR OF SCADAR BLEAK IN THREE WESTERN BALKAN LAKES	546
Vesna Obradović, M. Perović, T. Vučković	
QUANTIFYING SAMPLING CONTRIBUTION TO MEASUREMENT UNCERTAINTY IN MICROBIOLOGICAL GROUNDWATER ANALYSIS	551
Vesna Obradović, M. Perović, J. Lekić	
MEASUREMENT UNCERTAINTY OF WASTEWATER SAMPLING FOR MICROBIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS USING DUPLICATE SAMPLING AND ANOVA APPROACH	556
Maja Nujkić, Ž. Tasić, T. Kalinović, D. Medić, A. Radojević, J. Kalinović, J. Jordanović, S. Đorđievski, N. Apostolov	
PREPARATION AND APPLICATION OF MODIFIED ZEOLITE FROM INDUSTRIAL WASTE	561
Vanja Trifunović, S. Milić, Lj. Avramović, S. Vasiljević, D. Medić, V. Nedelkovski, D. Božić	
TRANSFORMATION OF WASTE FROM HAZARDOUS TO NON-HAZARDOUS: STABILIZATION OF SOLID RESIDUE OBTAINED AFTER TWO-STEP HYDROMETALLURGICAL TREATMENT OF EAF DUST	568
Isidora Santrač, J. Korać Jačić, M. Milenković, M. Živković	
HOW STRUCTURAL MODIFICATIONS INFLUENCE ENVIRONMENTAL RISK: A CASE STUDY OF STEROIDAL DERIVATIVES	576
Jelena Janjić, M. Ćurić	
IMPACT OF FOG DISPERSION ON AVIATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY	582
Vesna Djikanović, J. Vranković, K. Jovičić	
MICRO AND MESOPLASTIC PARTICLES IN WATER AND SEDIMENT IN SPECIAL NATURE RESERVE “OBEDSKA BARA”	590

Original Research

QUANTIFYING SAMPLING CONTRIBUTION TO MEASUREMENT
UNCERTAINTY IN MICROBIOLOGICAL GROUNDWATER ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Sampling is often an underestimated source of measurement uncertainty in microbiological water quality assessment. This study quantifies the contribution of groundwater sampling to overall measurement uncertainty using a balanced split-level design and statistical approaches recommended by ISO 29201 (Annex H) and EURACHEM (Annex D). Groundwater samples were collected during 2023–2024 across different seasons following the EN ISO 19458 sampling protocol. Ten duplicate samples were taken under reproducible field conditions by two operators at the same location within a short time interval. Each sample and its replica were analyzed in duplicate for aerobic mesophilic bacteria (CFU·mL⁻¹) using Standard Method 9215B. Data were processed using range statistics (split-level design), classical one-way ANOVA, and robust ANOVA (RANOVA) after logarithmic transformation. Results showed that the relative standard uncertainty of sampling (23.35–24.45%) was almost twice the analytical uncertainty (12.53%) and approached the total measurement uncertainty (26.50%). The expanded sampling uncertainty (k=2.95% confidence) reached 46.7%, demonstrating that sampling is a dominant contributor to uncertainty in microbiological groundwater assessment. Although EN ISO 19458 showed acceptable performance (RSD < 30%), the results reveal that sampling uncertainty is frequently underestimated and should be routinely included in ISO/IEC 17025 uncertainty evaluations for microbiological groundwater analysis.

Keywords: groundwater sampling, measurement uncertainty, microbiological analysis, sampling uncertainty.

INTRODUCTION

A reliable evaluation of microbiological groundwater quality depends not only on laboratory analysis but also on the representativeness of the collected sample. Microbiological assessment of groundwater quality relies on the assumption that collected samples accurately represent *in situ* conditions. While laboratories routinely evaluate analytical uncertainty in accordance with ISO/IEC 17025, [1] the uncertainty introduced during sampling is rarely quantified in practice, despite clear requirements in ISO 29201 to address it [2].

Variability associated with groundwater sampling may arise from field conditions, operator influence, seasonal changes, and the applied sampling technique. Although EN ISO 19458 [3] provides detailed procedural guidance for microbiological water sampling, its performance is

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typically assumed rather than experimentally verified through estimation of sampling uncertainty under real field conditions.

The present study addresses this gap by experimentally evaluating the contribution of groundwater sampling to overall measurement uncertainty using a balanced split-level design and statistical approaches recommended by ISO 29201 and EURACHEM guidelines [2,4].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design

A balanced split-level (duplicate) design recommended by ISO 29201 (Annex H) and EURACHEM guidelines was applied in this study [2,4]. Ten independent duplicate samples were collected by two operators at the same sampling location, within a short time interval and under identical field conditions. Each sample and its replica were transported to the laboratory and analyzed independently. The structure of this experimental design is presented in Figure 1.

In this approach, two independent field samples (A and B) were collected at the same location. Each sample was subsequently analyzed in duplicate in the laboratory (A1, A2 and B1, B2), enabling separation of analytical and sampling variability through statistical evaluation.

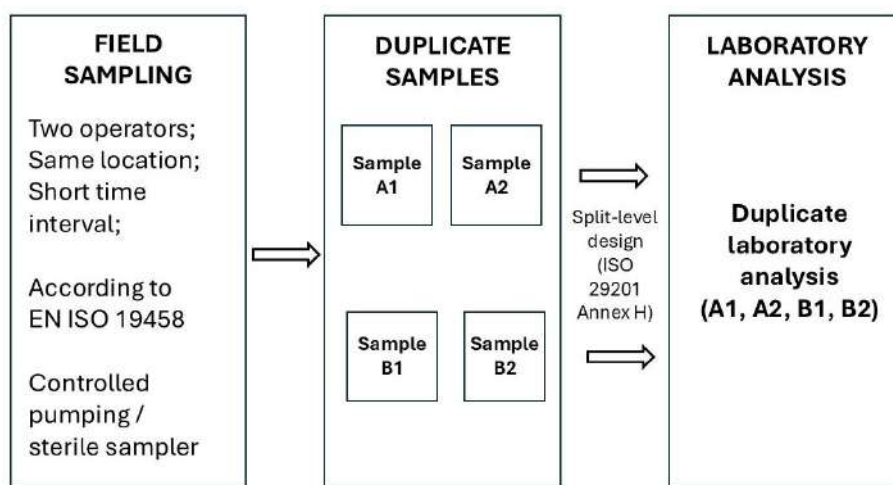


Figure 1 Balanced split-level design for estimation of sampling and analytical uncertainty according to ISO 29201 Annex H

Sampling procedure

Groundwater sampling was conducted in accordance with EN ISO 19458 [3]. Sterile 500 mL glass sampling bottles were used and protected from contamination until sampling. Depending on well conditions, sampling was performed either after controlled pumping through an installed outlet or using a sterile metal sampler for wells without permanent pumping systems. Extended pumping was applied when the objective was to characterize groundwater quality, ensuring stabilization of temperature and conductivity prior to sampling. Samples were transported to the laboratory in portable coolers for immediate analysis.

Microbiological analysis

Microbiological testing was performed using Standard Method 9215B for the determination of aerobic mesophilic bacteria (CFU·mL⁻¹) [5]. Each sample and its replica were analyzed in duplicate. Serial dilutions were prepared in phosphate dilution water and inoculated onto nutrient agar plates. Quality control of the method was ensured using reference strains (*A. viridans* ATCC 11563, *B. spizizenii* ATCC 6633, *E. faecalis* ATCC 29212, *E. coli* ATCC 25922, *S. aureus* ATCC 25923). Incubation was carried out under controlled conditions at 35 ± 0.5°C.

Verification approach for sampling uncertainty

Sampling uncertainty was verified using statistical approaches recommended by ISO 29201 Annex H and EURACHEM guidelines [2,4]. Data from duplicate sampling and duplicate laboratory analyses were processed after logarithmic transformation assuming lognormal distribution of microbiological counts.

Evaluation was performed using:

- range statistics within the split-level design,
- one-way ANOVA,
- robust ANOVA (RANOVA) using the Royal Society of Chemistry statistical tool [6].

Sampling standard deviation was derived using the split-level range statistics approach according to ISO 29201 Annex H [2] (Eq. 1):

$$S_{\text{sampl}}^2 = S_{\text{meas}}^2 - \left(\frac{S_{\text{anal}}}{\sqrt{2}} \right)^2 \quad (1)$$

Relative standard uncertainties (RSD, %) were calculated for analytical, sampling, and total measurement components. Expanded uncertainty was determined using a coverage factor $k=2$, corresponding to a 95% confidence level.

Control range charts (R-charts) were constructed during validation and internal quality control to monitor variability between duplicate results and to confirm the stability of the sampling process throughout the study, in accordance with ISO/IEC 17025 requirements [1]. Quality control included duplicate analyses performed under identical incubation conditions, using the same equipment and consumables to ensure reproducibility. R-charts were used to monitor variability between duplicate results in accordance with laboratory quality procedures and ISO/IEC 17025 requirements [1].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The statistical evaluation of duplicate groundwater samples and their laboratory replicates enabled the separation of analytical, sampling, and total measurement uncertainty in microbiological analysis. Data were processed after logarithmic transformation using range statistics (split-level design), one-way ANOVA, and robust ANOVA (RANOVA), in accordance with ISO 29201 (Annex H) and EURACHEM recommendations [2,4].

The obtained relative standard uncertainties (RSD) showed clear differences between the analytical and sampling components, as summarized in Table 1. The relative analytical uncertainty was 12.53%, while the relative sampling uncertainty ranged between 23.35% and

24.45%, depending on the statistical approach applied. The relative standard uncertainty of the overall measurement was 26.50%.

These results demonstrate that the variability introduced during sampling is almost twice as large as the variability originating from laboratory analysis. Moreover, the sampling uncertainty approaches the total measurement uncertainty, indicating that sampling represents a dominant contributor to the variability of microbiological groundwater results.

The expanded sampling uncertainty ($k=2$, 95% confidence level) reached 46.7%, as presented in Table 1, confirming that nearly half of the uncertainty associated with microbiological groundwater results originates from the sampling stage. This finding is particularly important in the context of ISO/IEC 17025 uncertainty evaluation, where laboratories often focus primarily on analytical sources of variability [1].

Comparison of classical ANOVA, robust ANOVA, and range statistics showed consistent results, confirming the reliability of the applied statistical model and the suitability of the balanced split-level design for evaluating sampling uncertainty under real field conditions [2,4,6]. The agreement between statistical approaches also validates the applicability of ISO 29201 Annex H for microbiological groundwater sampling [2].

The results further confirm that the application of the EN ISO 19458 sampling protocol under controlled conditions provides acceptable performance ($RSD < 30\%$), in accordance with EURACHEM and NORDTEST recommendations for sampling quality [3,4,7]. However, despite proper adherence to the sampling standard, significant variability remains inherent to the sampling process due to field conditions, operator influence, and groundwater heterogeneity. These findings highlight that sampling cannot be considered a negligible step in microbiological groundwater assessment. Instead, it must be recognized as a major source of variability that should be experimentally quantified and routinely included in uncertainty evaluation [1,2].

Table 1 Relative standard uncertainties of analytical, sampling and total measurement components in microbiological groundwater analysis

Component	RSD (%)
Analytical uncertainty (U_{anal})	12.53
Sampling uncertainty (U_{sampl})	23.35–24.45
Measurement uncertainty (U_{meas})	26.50
Expanded sampling uncertainty ($k=2$)	46.7

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that sampling is a major contributor to overall uncertainty in microbiological groundwater analysis and cannot be treated as a minor or secondary step in the assessment process. By applying a balanced split-level design recommended by ISO 29201 Annex H, it was possible to experimentally separate analytical and sampling components of variability under real field conditions.

The results showed that sampling uncertainty was nearly twice as large as analytical uncertainty and approached the total measurement uncertainty, confirming that a significant

part of the variability in microbiological groundwater results originates from the sampling stage rather than from laboratory procedures.

Although the EN ISO 19458 protocol provided acceptable performance ($RSD < 30\%$), the findings indicate that inherent field variability remains substantial even when the sampling procedure is properly implemented. These results emphasize the need to recognize sampling as a dominant source of uncertainty and to include experimentally determined sampling uncertainty in routine ISO/IEC 17025 uncertainty evaluations for microbiological groundwater analysis.

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