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Long term, low technicality sewage sludge amendment and irrigation with treated wastewater under Mediterranean climate: impact on agronomical soil quality.

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Abstract

We evaluated the agronomic quality of loam to clay-loam soils from a Mediterranean area, that have been submitted for more than 10 years to irregular and poorly controlled treated wastewater (TWW) irrigation and sewage sludge (SS) amendment, both TWW and SS issuing from a domestic effluent treatment plant. A soil was submitted to SS-amendment only, another to TWW-irrigation only, another to both treatments and another was not submitted to any of these treatments. We found that the agronomic quality of the treated soils has not decreased. In treated soils it was observed a slight increase of pH, an increase of the CEC, no change of either salinity or electrical conductivity. *SAR* and *ESP* remained satisfactory, below 13 and 15, respectively, and no infiltration problems were observed, indicating that rainwater percolation was sufficient to leach the salt brought by SS or TWW. The soil organic matter (SOM) increased in all SS-amended and/or TWW-irrigated soils, the increase being higher in SS-amended soils. The SOM kept a satisfactory C/N ratio, lower than 15; the SUVA and E2/E3 index showed normal characteristics of the water-extracted organic matter (WEOC). Both SS amendment and TWW irrigation brought high amounts of nutrients in the considered soils and increased the nutrients disponibility, especially regarding K and P, as shown by the nutrient concentrations in the soil water extracts. The pH increase does not seem to be a problem for the bioavailability of trace elements, at least regarding Cu, Zn, Co and Fe. Complementary studies should be undertaken for Ni. These observations highlight the potential agronomical benefits of application of wastewater and sewage sludge, even without great technicality, the better results being obtained using both SS amendment and TWW irrigation.



29

30 **Keywords:** Wastewater reuse, sewage sludge reuse, Mediterranean zones, soil quality, water-extractible
31 nutrients, metal bioavailability

32

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36

37 **Introduction**

38

39 In Algeria, the quantity of sewage sludge (SS) currently produced from wastewater treatment plants is
40 around 250 000 tons per year; it is estimated that the quantities of sludge will reach 450 000 tons in 2020. The
41 treatment techniques applied for sludge are incineration, landfill, composting or spreading on agricultural land. A
42 large part of the sludge is deposited along rivers or in domestic waste disposal sites, while only 25% are spread
43 on agricultural lands.

44 Moreover, the volume of treated wastewater (TWW) in Algeria is estimated at 560 000 cubic meters and
45 65% of this water are used for the irrigation of cultivated lands (Hannachi et al. 2014). The scarcity of water
46 resources has increasingly encouraged recycled wastewater as suitable resource substitute (Pereira et al. 2002;
47 Qadir et al. 2010) since this practice offers various advantages: the reuse of TWW avoids their direct discharge
48 into streams, supports fresh water resources protection, recycles nutrients and minimizes water and soil pollution
49 with regard to uncontrolled disposal (Rehman et al. 2013). However, wastewater irrigation also involves
50 potential risks to soil quality and to the quality of crops production, because of the presence of various inorganic
51 substances, including potential toxic elements (Cr, Cd, Pb, Ni and Hg) (Rehman, et al. 2013; Elifantz, et al.
52 2011), and to high levels of Na, which in the long term could degrade the physical properties of the soils (e.g.
53 Halliwell et al. 2001; Stevens et al. 2003). These risks must be taken into account and evaluated.

54 The sludge spreading practice on agricultural lands is considered as the easiest and economically cheapest
55 disposal procedure (Pedrero et al 2010; Fytili and Zabaniotou 2008). As generally admitted wastewater and
56 sludge are attractive alternatives for water and fertilizers because they provide the nutrients and water necessary



for crop growth. Application of unprocessed wastewater sludge and wastewater sludge have been reported as beneficial organic fertilizers (Singh and Agrawal 2008; Roca-Perez et al. 2009). Wastewater irrigation and sludge spreading lead to higher yields than usual for most crops and reduce the requirements for fertilizers, resulting in net cost savings for farmers (Warman and Termeer 2005; Zebarth et al. 2000; Hussain et al. 2002). The sludge is a source of major nutrients such as P, K, S, Ca, Mg, micro nutrients and organic matter. Sludge applications usually improve the physico-chemical and biological soil properties, such as porosity, field capacity pH, organic matter content, available phosphorus (Mtshali et al. 2014; Delibacak et al. 2009; Tarchouna et al. 2010). For these reasons, the sludge is considered as an interesting alternative as fertilizer in agricultural lands and as the tool to maintain the soil carbon stock. On the other hand, sludge produced after wastewater treatment are particularly difficult to manage due to the increasing quantities produced and the potential pathogenic organisms and metal contents present in the sludge. The great variability in the sludge composition requires a specific analysis before use.

In Algeria, the application of sludge and waste water on agricultural land has been developed only recently and is spreading rapidly. The research and scientific contributions that address the above issues are scarce and only considered the agronomic value of sludges (Ramdani et al 2015; Benmouffouk 1994; Igoud 2001). Our informal discussions have shown that local farmers in Algeria have observed a significant increase in yields after using sludge or TWW, but no data are available.

In the absence of regulatory requirements in Algeria and as the agricultural use of SS and TWW began empirically, without prior local agronomic experiment and without precise control of the quantities brought, our objective is to verify that the existing recovery routes for sewage sludge and TWW are both economically viable on the long-term and safe in terms of health. Planning efforts toward this goal should include the evaluation of potential changes in soil quality when amended with SS or irrigated with TWW and the understanding of the related agronomic and environmental issues.

This part of the study is focused on the impact of 10-years wastewater irrigation and sludge amendments on soil agronomic quality, in a context where the application of SS amendment or TWW irrigation is irregular and relatively poorly controlled. The potential contamination with potentially toxic elements will be considered in a further publication.



Study Site

The study area is located in northern Algeria, in the Corso city territory (district of Boumerdes). The geological substrate is an upper Pliocene compact red sand that recovers an older marl. The region climate is Mediterranean, characterized by hot and dry summer followed by a relatively cold and rainy season, from November to May, with an annual average rainfall of 650mm.

The use of sewage SS and TWW issued from the Boumerdes wastewater plant had begun in 2002 on agricultural land cultivated for table grape (Dattier de Beyrouth variety). The sludge is spread once a year at an estimated dose between 15 and 20 tons per hectare, while the drop-irrigation with TWW is practiced from May to October to compensate for the hydric shortages.

A specific pipeline network transports daily 5200m³ of TWW for irrigation of 70 hectares. It was very difficult to obtain reliable information about the use of fertilizer in the selected farms. Commonly used fertilizers are ammonium nitrate NH₄NO₃ 33.5% N; urea 46% N; sulphate of potash K₂SO₄ 50% K₂O and superphosphate Ca(H₂PO₄)₂.CaSO₄ 20% P₂O₅. Unfortunately, applied quantities remain unknown by the farmers themselves.

We sampled five representative vineyards soils, similar in terms of parent rock, soil type, topographical situation and technical farming. They differentiate only for the use of SS, TWW and river water applications. The map (Fig.1) locates the sampling sites, situated about 1km from the sea coast. The different treatments to the soil surface have been applied for 14 years and the samples collected were representative of each of them. We collected a soil receiving sewage sludge (S-SS), a soil irrigated with TWW (S-TW), a soil receiving both sludge and TWW (S-STW), and a reference soil that did not received neither sludge or TWW (S-NA). Some farms use river water to irrigate vineyards in summer; so we also sampled a farm (S-WR) that have been using for 5 years river water issued from the Corso River, which is issued from the Keddara dam, in order to compare with sludge and TWW applications. Unlike the other studied soils, however, the S-WR soil received organic amendments of cattle manure.

The sewage sludge (SS) and the treated wastewater (TWW) were sampled at the Boumerdes wastewater Treatment Plant.



Materials and methods

Soil Sampling

The sampling was performed in April 2013 at three depths (P1: 0-10cm; P2: 10-25cm; P3: 25-40cm). The soil samples were taken during the same month in order to take into account the turn-over process that can lead to carbon content variability. At each site, and for each depth, five cores were sampled at the corners and at the center of a 1m square plot of 60cm deep with an auger. A composite soil sample was generated by thoroughly mixing together the five subsamples from a given depth. Samples were air-dried and sieved at 2 mm. Aliquots of the <2 mm soil fraction were ground in an agate mortar and stored in polyethylene containers at 4°C until analysis. The dry bulk density (ρ_d) was determined using the ring method.

Analysis

All solutions were prepared with high purity water (resistivity $\approx 18 \mu\text{s.cm}^{-1}$, Milli-Q Plus system, Millipore Corporation, USA) and analytical grade (Merck). For sludge and soil samples, pH was determined at a 1:5 soil-to-water ratio. The soil texture was determined with the Robinson pipet method. In the literature, water-extractable organic carbon or major species are measured on water-extracts obtained using a soil-to-water ratio ranging from 1:2 (Zsolnay 2003) to 1:10 or more (Zeng et al. 2015). Here we choose a 1:10 soil-to-water ratio, agitation for 24 h and filtration at 0.45 μm . Organic carbon and total nitrogen of solid samples (soils and SS) were determined using a CHNS apparatus (Shimadzu, Flash2000) after H_3PO_4 pretreatment (Pastor et al. 2011). For liquid samples (TWW and water extracts) dissolved organic carbon was determined using a TOC analyser (TOC-V CSH, Shimadzu) after acidification and nitrogen purging. At least three sample replicates and three analysis replicates for each sample were performed in order to meet statistical acceptance requirements. The soil organic matter (SOM) was calculated from the soil organic carbon (SOC) using the formula:

$$\text{SOM (\%)} = \text{SOC (\%)} \times 1.72$$

Cation exchange capacity (CEC) was determined for sludge and soil samples by the cobaltihexamine procedure (Tarchouna et al. 2010). Metal contents were quantified by ICP-AES (inductively coupled plasma



atomic emission spectrophotometry) while ions concentrations in solution (nutrients and other major species) were determined by ionic chromatography (Dionex-DX-120). The electrical conductivity EC was determined on a 1:10 soil-to-water ratio using a conductimeter. In order to compare with the literature data, we calculated the EC corresponding to saturated paste extract (EC_{SP}) from the value measured on the 1:10 extract ($EC_{1:10}$) using the following correlation equation (de Souza et al. 2013) where EC_{SP} and $EC_{1:10}$ are expressed in $mS\ cm^{-1}$:

$$EC_{SP} = 23.654\ EC_{1:10} - 0.2664$$

The exchangeable sodium percentage (*ESP*) was calculated using the CEC and the Na concentration in the 1:10 soil extract. The sodium adsorption ratio (*SAR*), widely used to evaluate probable risks of irrigation water on the soil structure and the sodicity hazard of a soil, was calculated using the formula

$$SAR = \frac{[Na^+]}{\sqrt{\frac{[Ca^{2+}] + [Mg^{2+}]}{2}}}$$

where $[Na^+]$, $[Ca^{2+}]$ and $[Mg^{2+}]$ $mmol_c\ L^{-1}$ concentrations in the 1:5 water extract (He et al. 2015).

The organic matter in the water extract (WEOC, water extractable organic matter) was characterized by UV-visible spectrometry to calculate the SUVA 254 index (UV absorbance at 254 nm normalized for dissolved organic carbon concentration, here expressed in $L.mgC^{-1}\ m^{-1}$) and the E2/E3 ratio (ratio of UV absorbance at 250 and 365 nm). The SUVA 254 index is indicative of the organic matter aromaticity, usually related to humification (Weishaar et al. 2003), and the E2/E3 ratio is positively related to low-molecular-weight compounds (Peuravouri and Pihlaja 1997).

Bioavailability of trace elements likely to cause deficiencies in soils with basic pH (Cu, Zn, Mn, Co, Ni) was evaluated by water- and sodium acetate extractions. Water-extraction was performed at a 1:5 soil-to-water ratio, agitation for 24 h and filtration at $0.45\ \mu m$. Sodium acetate extraction was performed by introducing 2 g soil or sludge in 20mL KNO_3 1M, shaking for 16 h, adding 16mL of CH_3COONa 1M, shaking 3h and filtrating at $0.2\ \mu m$. Bioavailability of iron was evaluated by quantifying the amorphous iron phase by citrate/ascorbate extraction: 3g of soil was suspended in 60mL of a $NaHCO_3$ 0.024M, $C_6H_9Na_3O_9$ 0.02M, $C_6H_8O_6$ 0.003M solution adjusted to pH 8 by N purging, shaken for 24 h and filtrated at $0.2\ \mu m$. Metal contents were quantified by ICP-AES.

Principal components analysis (PCA) were performed using XLSTAT 2017 on various set of the obtained data. PCA project multidimensional data cloud to subspace such as maximize the residual variance, choosing the most relevant directions (principal components) in the data (Jolliffe 2002). We chose a correlation-type PCA on standardized variables to avoid sensitivity to the scaling of the variables.

Results and discussion

Main agronomical characteristics of the studied soils, sludge and wastewater

The Tables 1 and 2 gives the main agronomical characteristics of the soils, SS and TWW. Regarding soils, values given in Table 1 refer to the 0-40cm soil layer as they were calculated as the mean of the values obtained over the three sampled depths weighted by the thickness of the sampled layers.

The SS contained high contents of organic matter (OM) and total nitrogen, with a low C/N ratio (6.4). The SS water extract showed high concentrations of dissolved OM (3826 mg.L⁻¹), but also of N (mainly as nitrites and ammonium, 25.4 and 9.2 mg kg⁻¹, respectively, corresponding to 0.55 and 0.51 mmol kg⁻¹, respectively), Ca, Mg, K and P. Its high SO₄²⁻ value may be related to the possible use of ferric sulfate or chlorosulfate during the wastewater treatment process, which was expected with regard to their high solubility. The TWW brought those elements in the same relative proportions than the ones in SS water extract, but Na⁺ and Cl⁻ had relative higher values than in SS. The given values for nutrients confirm the potentially positive agronomical effect of spreading sludge or irrigating with TWW. We must ensure, however, that beneficial impacts are observed without negative consequences on soil quality parameters in order to maintain long-term high yields and environmental quality. The details of the composition of the soils depth by depth are given in Table 2.

Granulometry and dry bulk density – The five studied soils showed similar mineral particles size distribution. According to the texture triangle, S-SS is loam, S-TW and S-NA are silt-loam, S-STW and S-WR are clay loam, this variability being consistent with the natural variability of the red sand parent material. Values of dry bulk density are in the range expected for this type of soil. They remained lower in the topsoil than in depth, indicating that the use of SS or TWW did not lead to a collapse of the porosity of the surface horizons as frequently observed after such applications (Singh et al. 2008). Here no infiltration problems were related, However, attention should be paid since these observations, even if numerous, are not general. As observed in a

Mediterranean soil irrigated with TWW by Tarchouna et al (2010), saturated hydraulic conductivity remained high enough to allow water percolation during rainy periods and subsequent leaching of accumulated salts, preventing soil salinization.

Soil pH – All soils exhibited a neutral to slightly alkaline pH (USDA 1993): pH of all samples was comprised between 6.93 and 7.70. With regard to the reference S-NA soil, the application of SS, TWW and SS+TWW raised the average soil pH from 7.0 to 7.5, 7.2 and 7.6, respectively, which is slight but significant. Most studies showed for non-acidic soils that sludge application results in a pH decrease presumably due to humic substances decomposition or accelerated nitrification (Ahmed et al. 2010 ; Brallier et al. 1996). Each case, however, is dependent on the initial soil pH and the composition of the amendment. Here the high K^+ , Ca^{2+} and Mg^{2+} basic cations input from SS and TWW combined to a low soil OM contents is likely to increase the soil alkalinity and subsequently the soil pH. In agricultural soils, pH should preferentially be between 6 and 7 because higher values, especially >7.5 , result in reduced availability of several nutrients or micronutrients, particularly P, Fe, Mn, Cu, Zn, Co and Ni (Jones 2012). Here the pH observed in soils SS-amended and/or TWW-irrigated remained compatible with good soil quality and crop production.

Cation exchange capacity CEC – CEC values are in the range usually observed for this type of soils. They were higher in SS-amended and/or TWW-irrigated soils than in the S-NA reference soil, which can be related to the lower clay and organic matter content of the latter. There is no significant change in CEC between SS-amended and/or TWW-irrigated soils that can be attributed to the type of amendment or irrigation.

Electrical conductivity EC – The EC value for TWW indicated a good quality with regard to salinity according to Fipps (1996). The $EC_{1:10}$ values in all studied soils extracts remained below $70 \mu S cm^{-1}$ and values were below or comparable to the values observed for the reference soil. The corresponding EC_{SP} values were lower than $2 mS cm^{-1}$, indicating a low salt rank and very little chance of injury on all plants (Lamond and Whitney 1992). It was observed in several studies that sludge application induces an EC increase (Clapp et al 1986). Here the maintenance of low EC values in SS and STW soils despite the fact that SS extract exhibited significant conductivity ($677 \mu S cm^{-1}$) indicates sufficient leaching by annual deep drainage of the soluble species brought in, especially Na^+ and Cl^- .

Sodium adsorption ratio (SAR) and exchangeable sodium percentage (ESP) – Notwithstanding the fact that the TWW has a SAR around 15, all studied soils exhibited a SAR below 13 and a ESP below 15 (Table 1),



indicating good soil structural conditions (US Salinity Lab Staff 1954) and confirming a sufficient leaching of Na^+ .

Organic matter (SOM) – Because soil organic matter (SOM) can be associated with different soil chemical, physical and biological processes, it has been widely considered as one of the best soil quality indicator. The SOM impacts, among others, soil structural stability, nutrient cycling, water retention and microorganism dynamics, which is related to SOM mineralization. Here the SOM content of the upper horizon is low (1.6%) in the S-NA reference soil, as expected for a Mediterranean soil where high temperature and low rainfall favor organic matter mineralization (Fantappiè et al. 2011). The higher value (4.0 %) in the S-SS topsoil can be related to the high OM content of the sludge, as frequently observed (Haynes 1998; Gerzabek et al. 2001; Fernandez et al. 2006; Triberti et al. 2016). The S-TW and S-STW topsoils showed intermediate values (2.2 and 2.8 %, respectively). Although the S-STW soil received sludge, its lower SOM content compared to S-SS is likely related to a priming effect due to TWW-enhanced mineralization of the sludge organic matter. The high SOM content observed in the S-WR soil was directly related to cattle manure amendments. In all soils but S-WR, the C/N ratio was lower than 15, indicating a potentially good release of N during SOM decomposition process. The high C/N observed for the S-WR soil was likely related to wheat straw mixture with cattle manure.

Water extractable fraction of SOC (WEOC) – Although the WEOC is only a small percentage of SOC, it has a critical role in soils properties. It is sensitive to soil management, easily bioavailable for microorganisms and plants, and therefore a primary source of mineralizable C, N, P, and S, and exhibits a rapid turnover (minutes to months) (Ćirić et al. 2015). Its greater mobility can impact the transfers of contaminants, especially heavy metals. The relationships between WEOC and SOM are given in Fig. 2. The WEOC values ranged from 49 to 215 mg kg^{-1} , in the range of values usually observed in cultivated soils (Chantigny 2003). A positive correlation ($R^2=0.88$) was observed between SOM and WEOC in SS-amended and/or TWW-irrigated soils. The S-NA soil points, however, were outside this correlation, indicating (1) probable differences between WEOC in S-NA and WEOC in SS-amended and/or TWW-irrigated soils, (2) that the increase in SOM due to SS amendment does not increase the SOM mobility. The S-WR soil, despite high SOM contents, showed low WEOC values, confirming that the application of manure does not necessarily increase the soil WEOC (Angers et al. 2006).

SUVA₂₅₄ index, positively related to humification, and the E2/E3 index, positively related to low-molecular-weight compounds, were 6.9 and 8.5, respectively, for the TWW and 0.8 and 6.0, respectively, for the SS water extract. The SUVA₂₅₄ value was high in TWW with regard to usually observed (Michael-Kordatou et al. 2015) but in the usual range for the SS water extract (Xing et al. 2012). These values of SUVA and E2/E3,

however, can not be expected to have a significant impact on SS-amended and/or TWW-irrigated soils because of the high biological activity in the topsoil modifying the SOM after SS amendment or TWW irrigation. In the soil WEOC the SUVA and E2/E3 were in the usual range (Guigue et al. 2015). The SS-amended and/or TWW-irrigated soils showed a decrease of SUVA with depth, as frequently observed (Hassouna et al. 2010), due to a higher proportion of lignin derivative in the topsoil.

Water extractable nutrients

Nutrient concentration in TWW and in water extracts from SS and from the top 0-40 cm of the studied soils are given on Fig. 3. The sewage sludge had high amounts of leachable Ca^{2+} , Mg^{2+} , K^+ and SO_4^{2-} and lower, but non-negligible, concentrations for the sum of nitrogen species and PO_4^{3-} . The TWW brought also significant concentrations of Ca^{2+} , Mg^{2+} and K^+ , but is poor in nitrogen. These characteristics are likely related to the high K^+ , SO_4^{2-} and PO_4^{3-} values observed for the S-SS, S-TW and S-STW soils when compared to the reference S-WR and S-NA soils. The higher value of the ΣN (sum of nitrogen species) in the S-SS soil (0.2 % w/w) can also be related to N input by SS (3.5 % w/w). The lower concentrations of ΣN in the water extracts of the S-TW and S-STW soils with regard to the S-SS soil is more difficult to explain, it can be due to increased leaching of native soil organic N because of an higher hydraulic loading from the effluent irrigation (Barton et al. 2005; Belaid et al. 2012). Nitrogen species were mainly NO_2^- and NH_4^+ in SS and TWW and mainly NO_3^{2-} in soils, indicating rapid oxidation of N species in the soil, in accordance to other studies on organic-waste mineralization in soils (Odlare et al. 2011). Variations with depth of the water extractable nutrients (Fig. 4) showed that the impact of the amendments is higher in the surface horizons. In conclusion, it was proved that SS-amendment or TWW-irrigation increased the nutrients disponibility, especially regarding K and P, in accordance with previous studies with manure applied to soils (Laird 2008; Lehmann et al. 2003) or sludge from wastewater (He et al. 2001).

Bioavailability of trace elements

As sludge and/or TWW application resulted in a pH raise, the final pH being comprised between 7.2 and 7.7, there may be the question of the bioavailability of iron and of the trace-elements that are usually poorly soluble in alkaline soils (Cu, Zn, Mn, Co, Ni) (Brallier et al. 1996; Kabata-Pendias and Pendias 2001). On the

other hand, the sludge brought around 155, 370, 19 and 200 mg kg⁻¹ for Cu, Zn, Co and Ni, respectively. The TWW brought around 14 µg L⁻¹ of Cu, the other trace elements being below the detection limit.

Results of water- and sodium-acetate extractions from soil material are given on Table 3, unfortunately Mn results were unreliable so that they are not given. The water-extraction gives the element concentration likely to be found in the soil solution after a rainfall, the sodium-acetate extraction gives an evaluation of the element bioavailability in the rhizosphere, were complexing compounds released by roots or associated micro-organisms can solubilize adsorbed or precipitated elements (Hinsiger 1998). Here Cu and Zn were more bioavailable in the SS-amended and/or TWW-irrigated soils than in the reference S-NA soil. Concerning Ni, however, concentrations in most extracts from the SS-amended and/or TWW-irrigated soils were below the detection limit, and below the values found for the reference S-NA soil.

Regarding iron, the amorphous solid phase is the more likely to be dissolved by complexing compounds in the rhizosphere, as usual low-weight carboxylic acids or microbial siderophore (Kraemer 2006). Here the amorphous iron phase extracted by a citrate/ascorbate solution corresponded to 1633, 373, 617 and 415 mg kg⁻¹ for the S-SS, S-TW, S-STW and S-NA soils, respectively. There was a slight diminution of the potentially bioavailable Fe in the soil that received TWW only, but a significative increase in soil that received sludge, likely because of the iron brought by the sludge where the Fe content is usually higher than 500 mg kg⁻¹ (Sahoun et al. 2012).

Principal components analysis (PCA)

Results of the PCA are given on Fig. 5. In this representation, positive correlation between variables is the higher when the variable representative points are close together and close to the circle, negative correlation the higher when points are opposite with regard to the circle center and close to the circle. When the variable representative points are orthogonal with regard to the circle center, they are uncorrelated. The two first factorial axes encompassed 66% of the total variance, indicating a satisfactory separation of the variables in the corresponding projection. The projection confirms and clarifies most of the conclusions given above. Water-extracted main nutrients (N, P, K, Mg) were correlated one to another and their weight on the first axis was driven by the SS-amended and/or TWW-irrigated soils, overall their upper horizons. There was no relationship between these parameters and SOC and CEC, that were more driven by the specificity of the S-WR and S-NA

soils. There was no correlation between water-extracted main nutrient and water-extracted Na and Cl, confirming the sufficient leaching of salt in SS-amended and/or TWW-irrigated soils. The negative correlation between water-extracted main nutrients and density confirmed the negligible effect of the inputs on soil compaction.

Conclusion

On Mediterranean areas that have been submitted for more than 10 years to irregular and relatively poorly controlled TWW irrigation and SS amendments, the agronomic quality of the soils has not decreased. Both SS amendment and TWW irrigation increased the nutrients amounts and availability, without altering other soil quality parameters such as CEC, salinity, *SAR*, *ESP*, SOM content or SOM C/N ratio. Soil permeability and trace elements bioavailability remained also satisfactory. SOM and total N were higher in soils that received SS only, likely because no priming effect or leaching. These observations highlight the potential benefits of application of wastewater and sewage sludge for improving the agronomical properties of the soils, even without quite restrictive procedures. From an environmental point of view, however, a potential contamination of soils with heavy metals needs to be evaluated; it will be the subject of a second part of this study.

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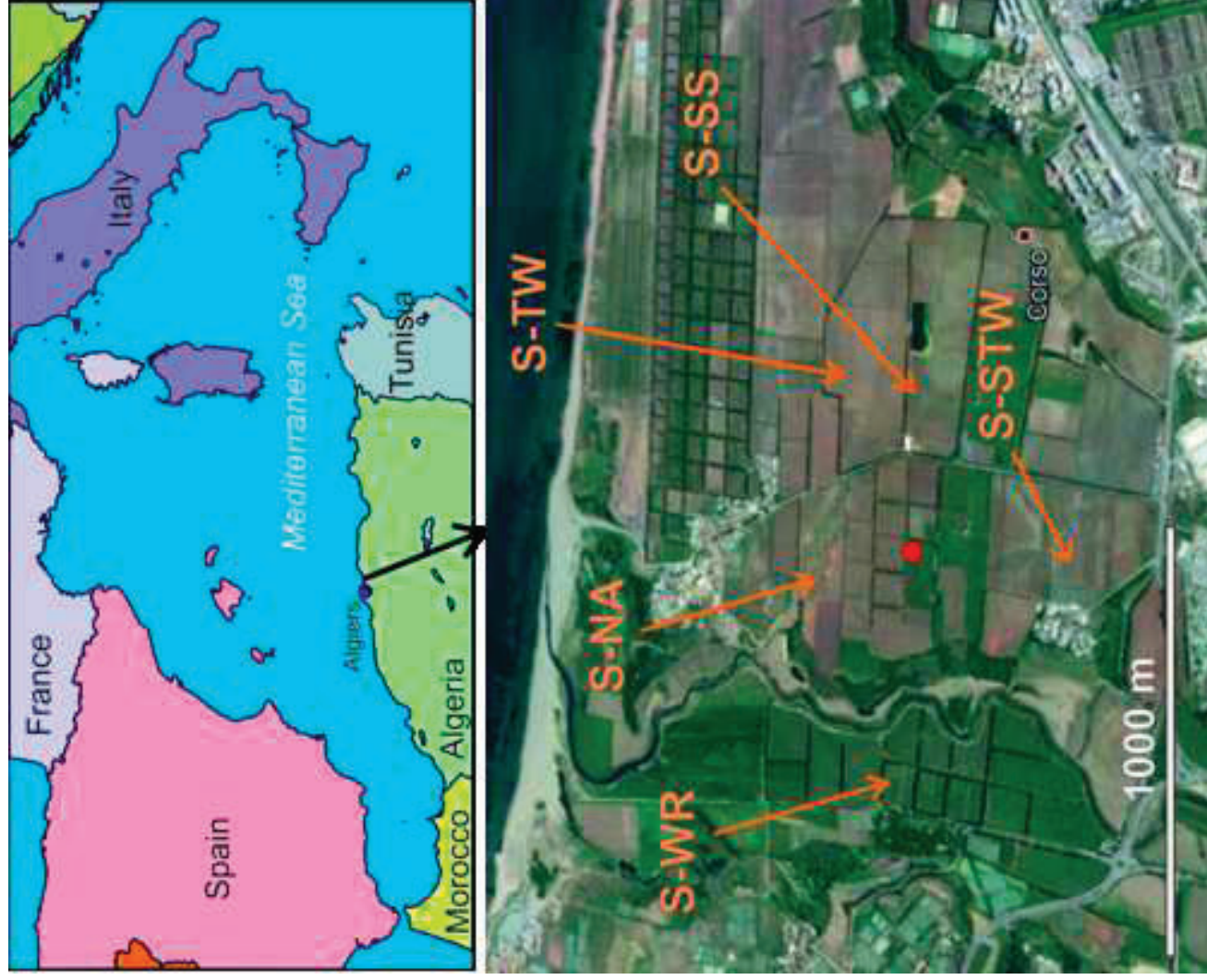


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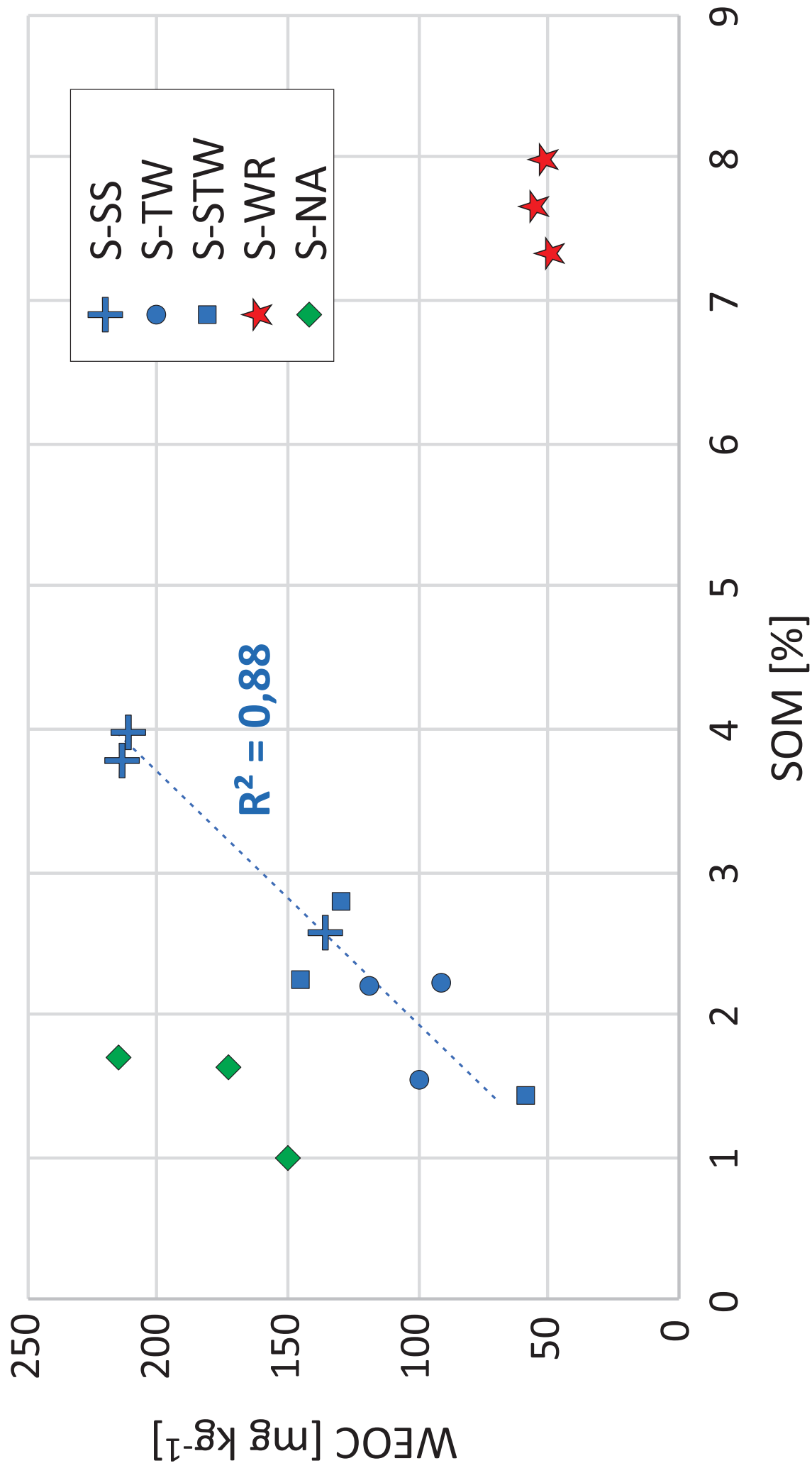


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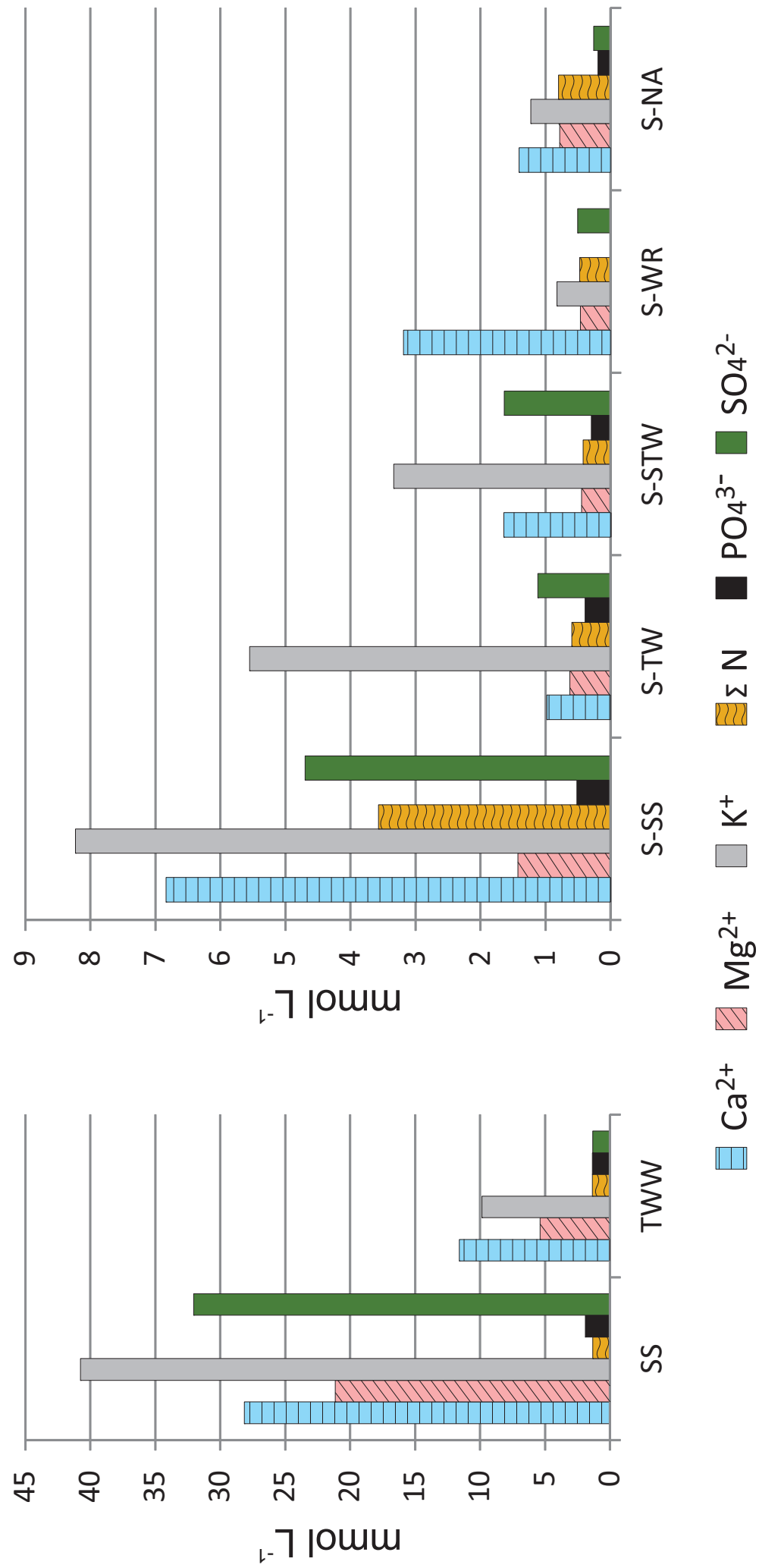




Figure

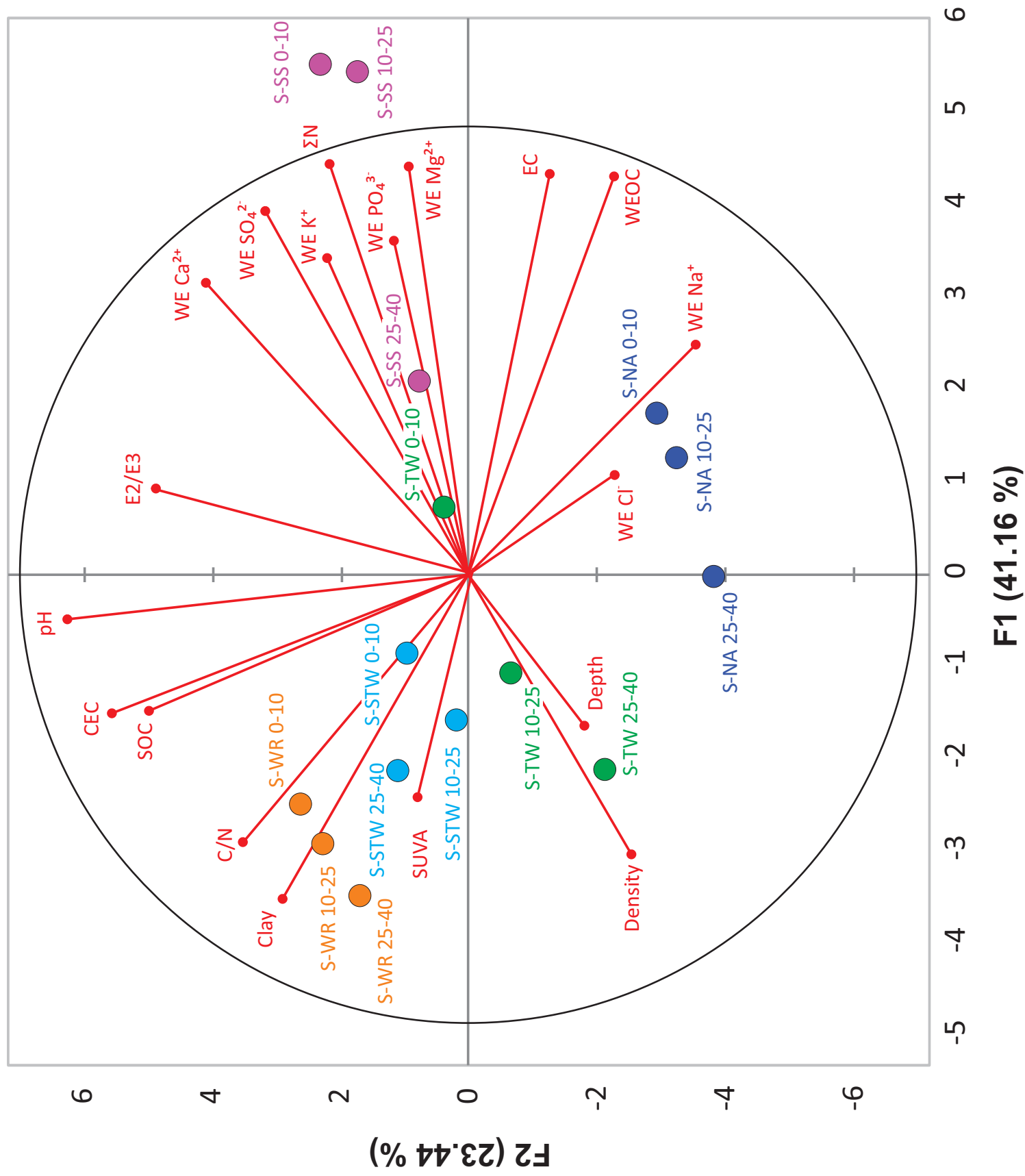


Figure



Figure

Biplot (F1 and F2 : 64.61 %)



Figure

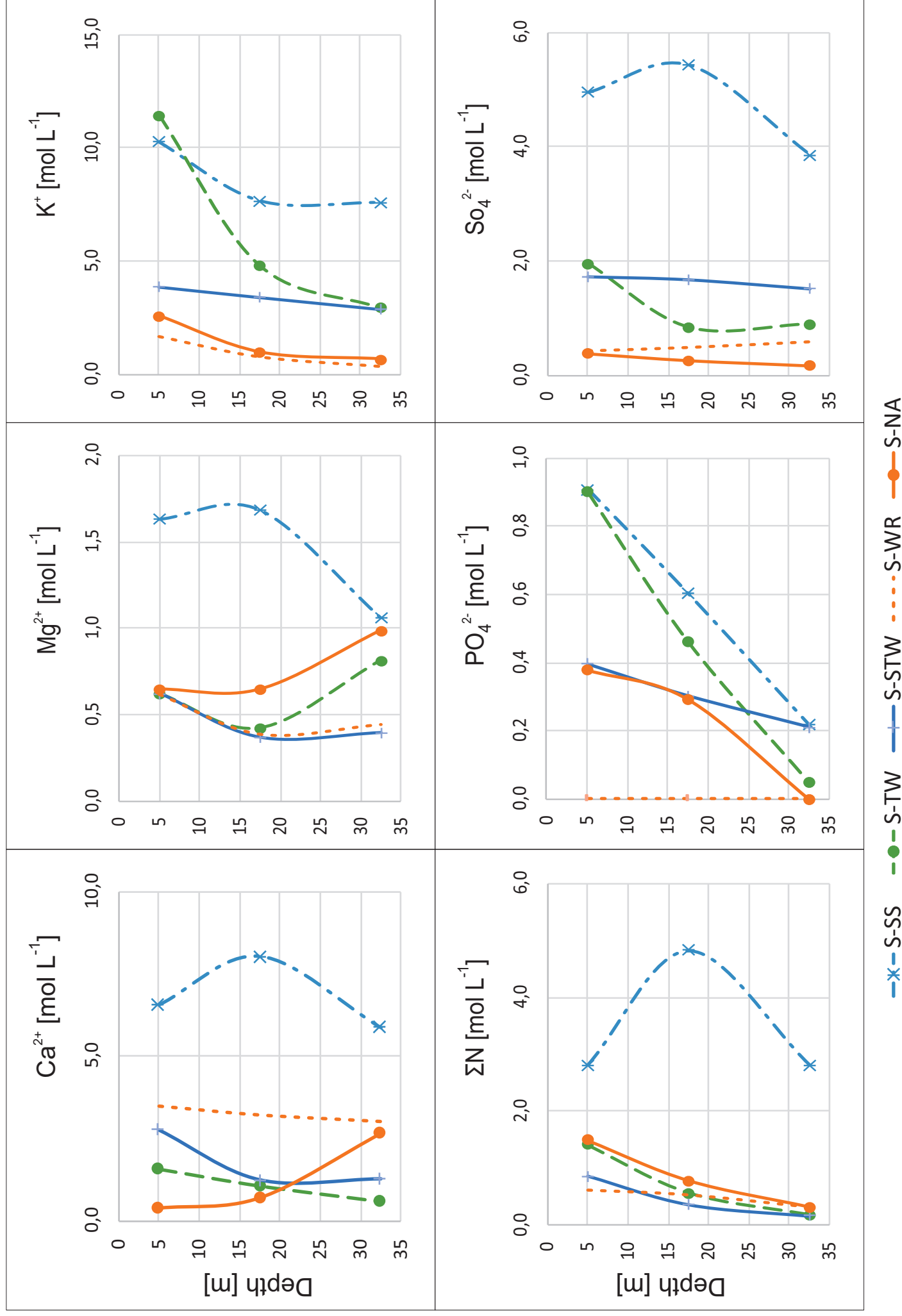


Table 1. Agronomic parameters for sludge, TWW and soils. Weighted average values for the 0-40 cm soil layer.

Parameter	Unit	S-SS	S-TW	S-STW	S-WR	S-NA	SS	TWW
Clay	%, w/w	17.4	21.6	36.8	30.9	12.7	#	#
Silt	%, w/w	44.9	51.3	30.1	42.8	55.8	#	#
Sand	%, w/w	37.7	27.2	33.1	26.3	31.5	#	#
ρ_d	g cm ⁻³	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.4	#	#
CEC	meq 100g ⁻¹	15.8	11.4	19.4	19.6	9.8	38.2	#
SOC	%, w/w	2.0	1.1	1.2	4.4	0.8	22.5	#
N total	%, w/w	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	3.5	#
C/N		9.7	13.2	10.7	45.0	9.3	6.4	#
pH		7.5	7.2	7.6	7.7	7.0	8.1	7.8
EC	μS cm ⁻¹	#	#	#	#	#	#	296
EC _{1:10}	μS cm ⁻¹	67	27	29	33	55	677	#
EC _{SP}	μS cm ⁻¹	1585	643	693	769	1296	16014	#
SAR	(mmolc L ⁻¹) ^{0.5}	1.4	1.2	2.2	1.2	3.8	4.5	15.2
ESP		2.5	1.3	1.6	1.2	5.8	8.4	#
Dissolved species in water extract for soils and SS and in TWW								
WEOC	mg kg ⁻¹	181.8	104.8	110.5	52.0	179.4	3826.0	3.8
Ca ²⁺	mg kg ⁻¹	274.1	39.4	65.8	127.6	56.4	1128.6	465.2
Mg ²⁺	mg kg ⁻¹	34.6	15.2	10.9	11.3	19.0	513.8	130.8
K ⁺	mg kg ⁻¹	321.8	217.0	130.5	32.2	47.9	1593.1	385.2
Na ⁺	mg kg ⁻¹	90.2	34.5	72.8	53.1	130.9	733.7	1439.9
Cl ⁻	mg kg ⁻¹	150.4	114.6	99.5	141.2	208.0	967.5	2061.7
F ⁻	mg kg ⁻¹	3.8	1.6	8.1	5.3	11.6	8.3	2.0
NO ₃ ⁻	mg kg ⁻¹	179.7	28.3	16.7	22.4	26.3	14.6	1.9
NO ₂ ⁻	mg kg ⁻¹	4.8	1.4	4.8	2.3	1.8	25.4	0.0
NH ₄ ⁺	mg kg ⁻¹	1.3	0.6	<dl	<dl	4.7	9.2	24.2
PO ₄ ³⁻	mg kg ⁻¹	49.2	37.5	28.0	0.0	18.6	181.8	130.1
SO ₄ ²⁻	mg kg ⁻¹	450.9	107.1	156.7	48.4	24.7	3075.9	126.6

Table 2. Variation with depth of soil main characteristics.

Depth [cm]	SOM [% w/w]	WEOC in SOC			EC [$\mu\text{S cm}^{-1}$]	pH	CEC [$\text{cmol}_c \text{ k}^{-1}$]	Clay	Silt	Sand	ρ_d [g cm^{-3}]
		% of SOC	SUVA ₂₅₄	E2/E3				[%]			
S-SS											
0-10	4.0	0.91	3.9	6.1	72.0	7.7	16.7	15.6	52.6	31.9	1.1
10-25	3.8	0.97	3.7	6.4	71.8	7.5	16.4	13.5	48.6	37.7	1.3
25-40	2.6	0.90	3.6	6.3	58.8	7.5	14.5	22.5	36.0	41.5	1.3
S-TW											
0-10	2.2	0.71	4.6	5.9	38.7	7.3	11.8	18.6	52.8	28.5	1.3
10-25	2.2	0.93	2.9	3.1	25.6	7.3	12.3	19.3	53.3	26.9	1.4
25-40	1.6	1.11	2.2	2.9	21.0	7.0	10.4	25.6	47.8	26.4	1.5
S-STW											
0-10	2.8	0.80	7.2	5.1	38.9	7.6	19.9	40.0	25.7	34.3	1.3
10-25	2.2	1.12	4.7	4.2	26.4	7.5	19.7	36.7	28.3	35.1	1.6
25-40	1.4	0.7	5.1	9.0	25.8	7.6	18.6	34.7	35.0	30.3	1.5
S-WR											
0-10	8.0	0.11	6.6	6.8	34.4	7.8	19.4	31.0	46.0	23.0	1.3
10-25	7.7	0.12	6.6	3.2	32.0	7.8	19.7	30.0	36.0	34.0	1.3
25-40	7.3	0.12	7.5	3.6	31.8	7.5	19.5	31.0	46.0	20.0	1.4
S-NA											
0-10	1.6	1.83	3.7	2.4	78.2	7.1	9.6	7.3	55.5	37.2	1.3
10-25	1.7	1.7	5.1	2.3	65.6	7.0	10.4	7.7	60.7	34.4	1.4
25-40	1.0	1.0	8.3	2.5	54.8	6.9	9.3	21.6	52.8	25.6	1.5
SS											
			0.8	6							
TWW			6.9	8.5							



Table 3. Trace element extraction, average in the 0-40 horizons, values in mg kg⁻¹. W-ex.: water-extractable; Na-ac-ex.: sodium acetate extractable.

		S-SS	S-TW	S-STW	S-WR	S-NA
Cu	W-ex	0,39	1,03	0,76	0,14	0,41
	Na-ac-ex	2,03	10,86	4,90	0,28	0,74
Zn	W-ex	0,02	0,07	0,18	0,16	0,16
	Na-ac-ex	5,94	0,74	1,39	0,29	0,60
Co	W-ex	<dl	0,03	0,04	0,11	0,00
	Na-ac-ex	0,14	0,08	0,12	0,12	0,00
Ni	W-ex	<dl	<dl	0,03	0,07	0,06
	Na-ac-ex	<dl	<dl	<dl	<dl	0,11



Figure captions

Fig. 1. Location of the sampling sites in the Boumerdes region, Northern Algeria. The point in the view is N 36°45'34.56", E 3°25'24.96". View from Google Earth, 2017.

Fig. 2. Water extractible organic carbon versus soil organic matter. The regression line concerns the S-SS, S-TW and S-STW points.

Fig. 3. Nutrients in TWW and in the water extract of SS and of the studied soils (average for the 0-40 cm topsoil).

Fig. 4. Variation with depth of water extracted nutrients.

Fig. 5. PCA correlation circle, variables (points) and samples (circles). Percent on each factorial axis gives the explained variance. WE: water extractible.

