



HAL
open science

Toward a European humus forms reference base

Augusto Zanella, Bernard Jabiol, Jean-François Ponge, Giacomo Sartori, Rein de Waal, Bas van Delft, Ulfert Graefe, Nathalie Cools, Klaus Katzensteiner, Herbert Hager, et al.

► **To cite this version:**

Augusto Zanella, Bernard Jabiol, Jean-François Ponge, Giacomo Sartori, Rein de Waal, et al.. Toward a European humus forms reference base. *Studi Trentini di Scienze Naturali*, 2009, 85, pp.145-151. hal-00494615

HAL Id: hal-00494615

<https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00494615>

Submitted on 23 Jun 2010

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

TOWARD A EUROPEAN HUMUS FORMS REFERENCE BASE

AUGUSTO ZANELLA^{1*}, BERNARD JABIOL², JEAN-FRANÇOIS PONGE³, GIACOMO SARTORI⁴, REIN DE WAAL⁵, BAS VAN DELFT⁵, ULFERT GRAEFE⁶, NATHALIE COOLS⁷, KLAUS KATZENSTEINER⁸, HERBERT HAGER⁸, MICHAEL ENGLISH⁹, ALAIN BRETHERS¹⁰

¹University of Padova, Dep. Land and Agro-Forestry Ecosystems, Viale dell'Università, 16, I- 35020 Legnaro.

²Ecole AgroParisTech – Engref, Laboratoire d'étude des ressources forêt-bois (LERFOB), 14 rue Girardet, F-54042 Nancy.

³Museum National Histoire Naturelle de Paris, 1, Avenue du Petit Château F-91800 Brunoy.

⁴Museo Tridentino di Scienze Naturali, Via Calepina 14, I-38100 Trento.

⁵Alterra, Centre for Ecosystem Studies, Environmental Sciences Group, Wageningen University and Research Centre, P.O. Box 47, NL-6700 AA Wageningen.

⁶Institut für Angewandte Bodenbiologie GmbH, Sodenkamp 62, D-22337 Hamburg.

⁷Research Institute for Nature and Forest, Gaverstraat 4, B-9500 Geraardsbergen.

⁸Institute of Forest Ecology, Dept. of Forest and Soil Sciences, University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences (BOKU) Vienna, Peter Jordanstr. 82, A-1190 Vienna.

⁹Bundesamt für Wald, Unit Site and Vegetation, Dept. f. Forest Ecology and Soil, Federal Research and Training Centre for Forests, Natural Hazards and Landscape, Seckendorff-Gudent-Weg 8, A-1131 Vienna.

¹⁰Office National des Eaux et Forêts, F-45760 Boigny-sur-Bionne.

*Corresponding author e-mail: augusto.zanella@unipd.it

SUMMARY - *Toward an European humus forms reference base* - A network of European humus researchers was founded in Trento (Italy) in 2003. The aim of the Group's work was to prepare a synthesis of the knowledge about humus forms which could be used as a field key for classifying and interpreting humus forms within an ecological framework. Stages: first European classification of terrestrial humus forms, prepared in Vienna (Austria, 2004) from a French plan, presented at EUROSOIL 2004 in Freiburg (Germany, 2004); new form (Amphi) admitted as main humus form (Italy, 2005); first European classification of semi-terrestrial humus forms, from a Dutch pattern (Italy, 2005); poster at the 18th Congress of Soil Science (USA, Philadelphia, 2006); enlargement of the Amphi category towards some Mediterranean humus forms (Italy, 2007); definitive agreement for a complete classification key, EUROSOIL (Austria, 2008). Protocols for assessment and sampling of organic and organo-mineral layers were set up, as well as definitions for specific horizons. After six years of exchanges among specialists from 12 European countries, the outcome of this European set-up is briefly presented here as a succession of figures.

RIASSUNTO – *Verso una base di riferimento per le forme di humus Europee* – Un gruppo europeo di ricercatori sull'humus nacque a Trento (Italia) nel 2003. Tale fondazione si propose di realizzare una sintesi delle conoscenze sulle forme di humus che potesse essere usata in campo come chiave di classificazione e di interpretazione di tali forme su basi ecologiche. Tappe del processo: prima classificazione europea delle forme di humus terrestri, preparata a Vienna (Austria, 2004) a partire da uno schema francese, presentata all'EUROSOIL 2004 di Friburgo (Germania, 2004); ammissione di una nuova forma (Amphi) tra le unità di primo livello (Italia, 2005); prima classificazione europea delle forme di humus semi-terrestri, a partire da uno schema Olandese (Italia, 2005); poster al 18esimo Congresso della Scienza del Suolo (USA,

Philadelphia, 2006); allargamento della forma *Amphi* verso alcune forme mediterranee (Italia, 2007); definitivo consenso per una chiave di classificazione completa, EUROSIL (Austria, 2008). I protocolli di riconoscimento e campionamento degli orizzonti organici e organo-minerali sono stati redatti insieme alle definizioni riguardanti alcuni orizzonti più specifici. Dopo sei anni di scambi tra specialisti di 12 Paesi europei, l'essenza di tale lavoro di sintesi viene qui di seguito illustrata in una successione di figure.

Key words: humus, humus classification, humus form, European Humus Group

Parole chiave: humus, classificazione di humus, forma di humus, Gruppo di Humus Europeo

1. HISTORICAL PATH

A network of European researchers working on humus forms was created in Trento (Italy) in 2003. In July 2004, the commission "Classification of (European) Humus Forms" met in Vienna (Austria) and drafted a taxonomic key to the main terrestrial humus forms based on response to environmental conditions and specific biological activities (Ponge 2003; Graefe & Beylich 2003). This draft was presented in Freiburg (Germany) at the EUROSIL 2004 congress (Jabiol *et al.* 2004).

From this event onwards, other results have been achieved:

- the definitive admission of the *Amphi* forms at the first level of the classification during the meeting in San Vito (University of Padua, Italy, 2005). The name means "twin forms", differentiating from *Moder* because of the strong earthworm activity in the A horizon and from *Mull*, on the other side, because of the important accumulation of organic matter at the soil surface. The same solution has been adopted in the last version of the French Référentiel Pédologique (Baize *et al.* 2009);
- a draft of a European key of classification has been presented in the form of a poster (Fig. 1) at the 18th Congress of Soil Science, USA, Philadelphia (Zanella *et al.* 2006);
- the first level of the proposed classification key has been implemented and integrated into the manual of the UN-ECE-ICP Forests programme available on Internet (<http://www.icp-forests.org/Manual.htm>);
- an agreement has been reached for characterizing the structure of the A horizon within the European humus forms classification. The soil structure defined in the USDA Soil Survey Manual (1993), also used in the World Reference Base for Soil Resources (IUSS Working Group WRB 2006) and the FAO Guidelines 2006, has been adopted in the new characterization of the five diagnostic A horizons;
- a workshop was made to improve and extend the *Amphi* classification draft in order to include some typical Mediterranean humus forms (meeting at the University of Cagliari, Italy, 2007);

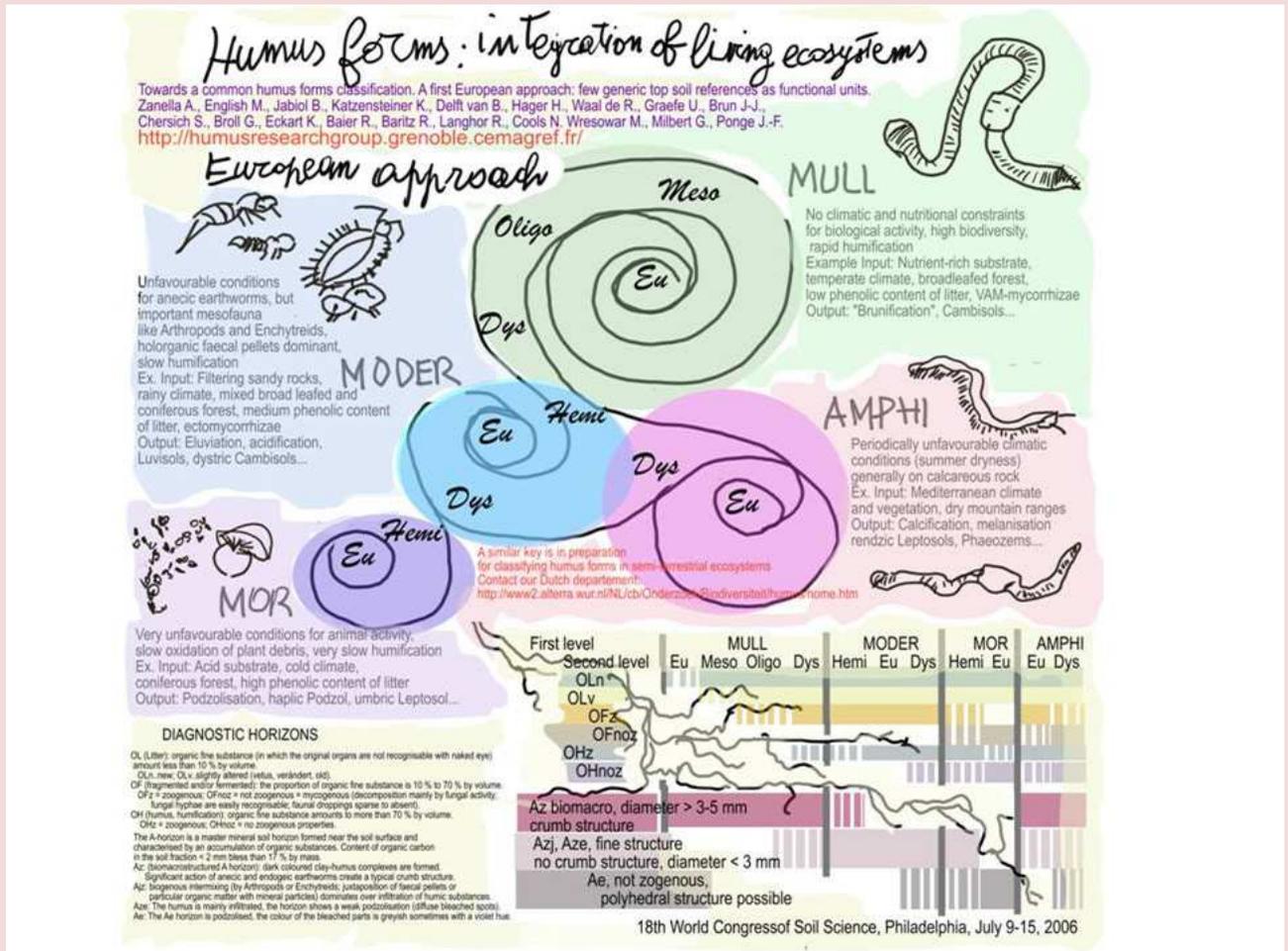


Figure 1. A poster at the World Congress of Soil Science in Philadelphia (2006), for disseminating the humus forms concept. It resumes the work about the humus forms two years after the foundation of the European Humus Group: 4 main humus forms, 11 second-level categories and a mild attempt to organize some ecological attractors around them.

- the most recent version of the key, re-elaborated thanks to a workshop organized during the EUROSOIL 2008 congress (Vienna, Austria), includes the *Tangel* humus form, which has a relatively broad distribution in the calcareous Alpine ecosystems;
- starting from a first attempt presented by the Dutch members of the humus group (Alterra) during a meeting in San Vito (Italy, 2005), the *semi-terrestrial* humus forms have been considered and included in the classification. A final agreement was found only after the Eurosoil 2008 meeting (Fig. 2). Diagnostic horizons for the first and second-level references have been established, and new *Histo* forms have been placed in synoptic tables (Fig. 3);
- with the aim to complete the humus classification panel, definitions for Hydro, Litho, Peyro, Psammo, Rhizo and Ligno forms were recently established exchanging a sharable draft (Figs 4-7).

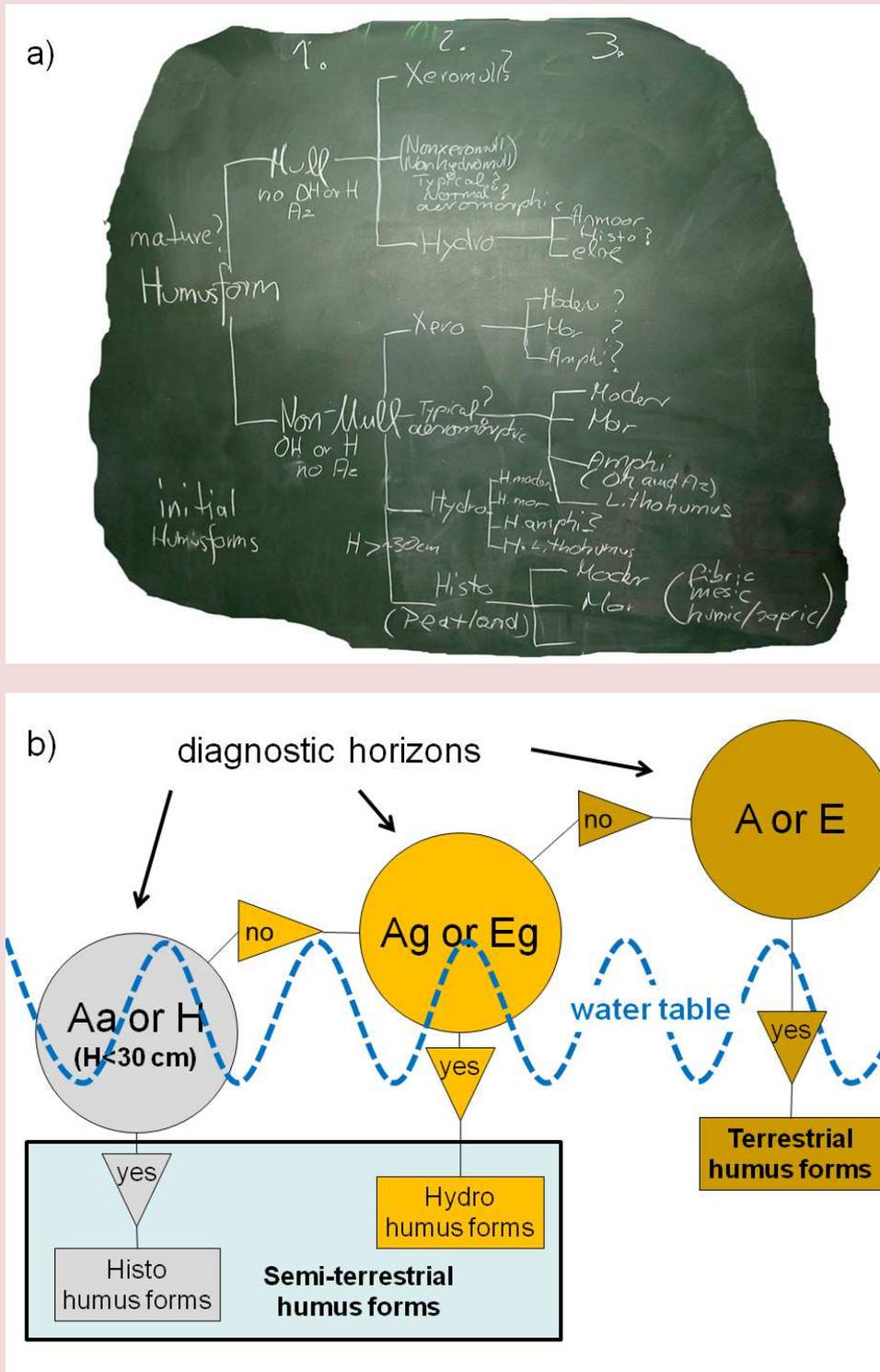


Figure 2. Water table level and diagnostic horizons for semi-terrestrial and terrestrial humus forms. a) Historical blackboard in San Vito di Cadore, on July 2005: three main levels of classification, according to the main ecological factors (temperature, water and biological component) and many question marks. b) Present-day position: “first was the water”. Aa = anmoor A; H = organic histic horizon; Ag = hydromorphic A; Eg = hydromorphic E; A = organo mineral horizon; E = mineral horizon (eluviation, podzolization).

	HISTO MOR		HISTO MODER				HISTO AMPHI			HISTO MULL		ANMOOR		
	fibri	humi	fibri	humi	mesi	sapri	fibri	humi	mesi	sapri	limi	limi	sapri	eu
Hf	I		II	III			II	II						
Hfs		II	I	I	I	II		III	II					
Hszo							I	I	I	I			II	
Hsnoz			III	II	II	I				(II)				
Hsl	I>II>III = hierarchical order of thickness										I	II		
Aa			() = possible								(II)	I	I	
Ag											(II)	(II)		

Figure 3. Synoptic table of Histo humus forms classification. Hf = fibric H; Hfs = fibric-sapric H; Hsnoz = sapric non zoogenous H; Hszo = sapric zoogenic H; Hsl = sapric-limnic H; Aa = anmoor A; Ag = hydromorphic A.

	HYDRO MOR	HYDRO MODER	HYDRO MULL	HYDRO AMPHI	HYDRO TANGEL
	OL	—————			
OFzo		continuous	discontinuous or in pockets		—————
OFnoz	—————			thickness OH ≤ 2A	thickness OH > 2A
OHzo		—————		—————	
OHnoz	—————				
maAg, meAg			—————		
nozAg	possible	—————			
AEg	—————				
pH (A)	pH < 5			pH ≥ 5	

Figure 4. Synoptic table of Hidro forms classification. OL, OF, OH = organic horizons; A = organo-mineral horizon; E = mineral horizon; zo = zoogenous; noz = non zoogenous; ma = biomacrostructured; me = biomesostrucured; g = hydromorphic. The pH is measured in water.

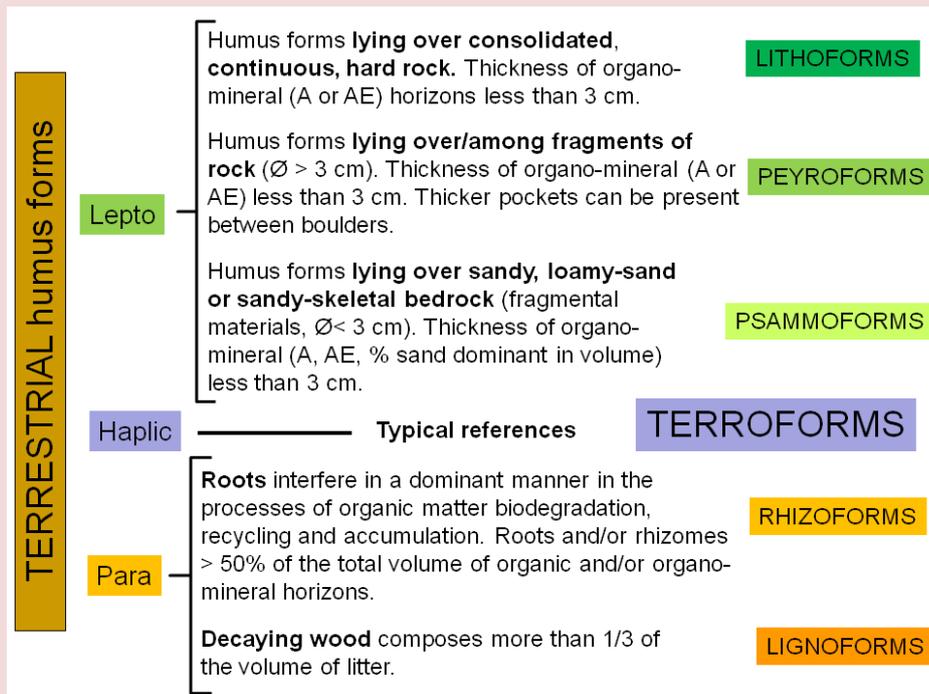


Figure 5. Terrestrial humus forms subdivision based on strongly expressed morphological properties.

LITHO PEYRO PSAMMO	SILICEOUS		CALCAREOUS or MIXED		
	MOR	MODER	MULL	AMPHI	TANGEL
OL	continuous		discontinuous		
OFzo			or in pockets		
OFnoz			thickness OH ≤ 2A		thickness OH > 2A
OHzo					
OHnoz					
meA	possible				
miA, nozA					
AE	possible				
pH (A)	pH < 5		pH ≥ 5		

Figure 6. Lepto terrestrial forms on siliceous or calcareous substrates. OL, OF, OH = organic horizons; A = organo-mineral horizon; E = mineral horizon (of eluviations or podzolization); zo = zoogenous; noz = non zoogenous; me = biomesostructured; mi = biomicrostructured. The pH is measured in water.

RHIZOMULL = MULL with roots dominant in the A horizon. Roots (essentially from grasses) and earthworms coact in producing the A horizon (at least in the first top centimeters) an aereated mesostructure with a light consistence. Typical under pastures, especially at high altitude/latitude.

RHIZOMODER, RHIZOMOR, RHIZOTANGEL = FORMS with organic horizons very rich in roots and/or rhizomes (> 50% of the total volume of organic horizons, OL+OF+OH).

RHIZOAMPHI = Amphi with roots dominant in O and/or A (roots and/or rhizomes > 50% of the total volume of organic and/or hemorganic horizons, OL+OF+OH and/or A).

LIGNO is used as prefix when decaying wood composes more than 1/3 of the volume of litter: **LIGNOMULL (rare but possible), LIGNOMODER, LIGNOAMPHI, LIGNOMOR, LIGNOTANGEL**

Figure 7. Rhizo humus forms. OL, OF, OH = organic horizons.

2. THE EUROPEAN HUMUS FORMS CLASSIFICATION

The first general principles of a European classification of terrestrial haplic forms have now been finalized (Figs 8, 9). Protocols for the assessment and sampling of organic and organo-mineral horizons are set up as well as definitions of the different kinds of organic and mineral horizons and their designation. The *recognizable remains* are separated from *humic* and *mineral components*. In fact, the Babel (1980) definition of “fine organic matter”, used in other systems of humus forms classification, did not work in an efficient way in order to describe the organic horizons with an appreciable content of large organo-mineral large structures (earthworm faeces). The definitions of *zoogenic* and *non zoogenic materials* allow to better differentiate between some key diagnostic horizons, improving the field estimate of the part of the organic matter degraded by fungi. Concerning Histo forms, *fibric* and *sapric components* of the horizons were defined.

The Humus Group considers the key of the humus forms classification as its common endeavour, a contribution to the understanding of ecosystem functioning (Fig. 10) and of nutrients cycling, and may introduce humus forms classification as a diagnostic tool for assessing the ecosystem health

status. The Humus Group sees the description and the study of humus forms as a tool to characterize ecosystems or biotic communities, which evolve together in response to environmental factors, and humus forms may be indicative for these (Ponge 2003). We see the very abstract and simplistic procedure of humus forms classification as our common and demanding task, which makes sense only within a functional approach. An effort was done for translating field data (Sartori *et al.* 2004) and present knowledge (humus forms structure and ecology) in graphical models or tables allowing to use these concepts in ecological procedures. Groups of animals were associated to diagnostic horizons and humus forms (Fig. 11).

HORIZON	MULL				AMPHI				TANGEL	
	eu	meso	oligo	dys	lepto	eumacro	eumeso	pachy	eu	dys
OLn	[Green bar]									
OLv	[Yellow bar]									
OFzo	[Orange bar]									
OHzo					< 1 cm	>= 1 cm	< 3 cm	>= 3 cm	thickness: OH>2A	
OHnoz									possible	
Trans. (mm)	< 1				< 5		>= 5		>= 3	< 3
maA	[Brown bar]				Thickness: 2A>=OH		Thickness: 2A>=OH			
miA							[Blue bar]			
meA	OR						[Dark brown bar]			
Anoz									msA	



miA AND/OR meA
OR only meA

Figure 8. Terroforms on calcareous or lithologically mixed substrates. OL, OF, OH = organic horizons; n = new litter; v = old litter; A = organo-mineral horizon; zo = zoogenous; noz = non zoogenous; ma = biomacrostructured; me = biomesostrucured; mi = biomicrostructured; Trans. (mm) = transition between organic and organo-mineral horizons (millimeters).

HORIZON	MULL				MODER			MOR		
	eu	meso	oligo	dys	hemi	eu	dys	hemi	humi	eu
OLn	[Green bar]									
OLv	[Yellow bar]									
OFnoz	[Light brown bar]									
OFzo	[Orange bar]									
OHzo					discont	<= 1cm	> 1cm			
OHnoz								[Purple bar]		
Trans (mm)	< 1				>= 5			< 3		
maA	[Brown bar]									
meA	[Black bar with OR]									
miA	[Blue bar]									
Anoz					OR sgA, msA			OR sgA, msA		

Figure 9. Terroforms on acid siliceous substrates. OL, OF, OH = organic horizons; n = new litter; v = old litter; A = organo-mineral horizon; zo = zoogenous; noz = non zoogenous; ma = biomacrostructured; me = biomesostrucured; mi = biomicrostructured; Trans. (mm) = transition between organic and organo-mineral horizons (millimeters).

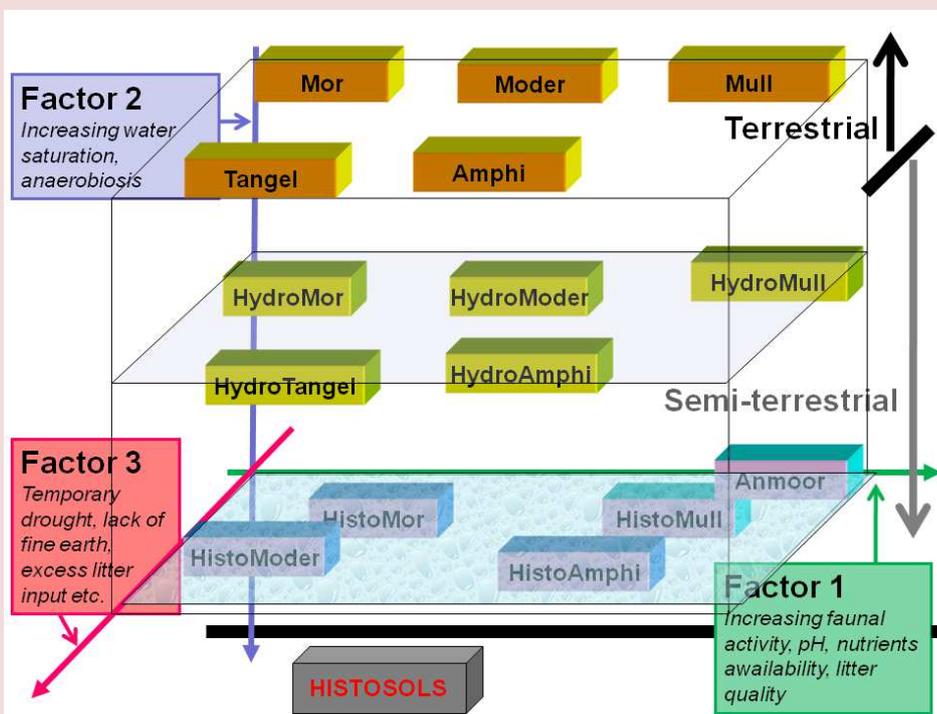


Figure 10. Eco-diagram for humus formation.

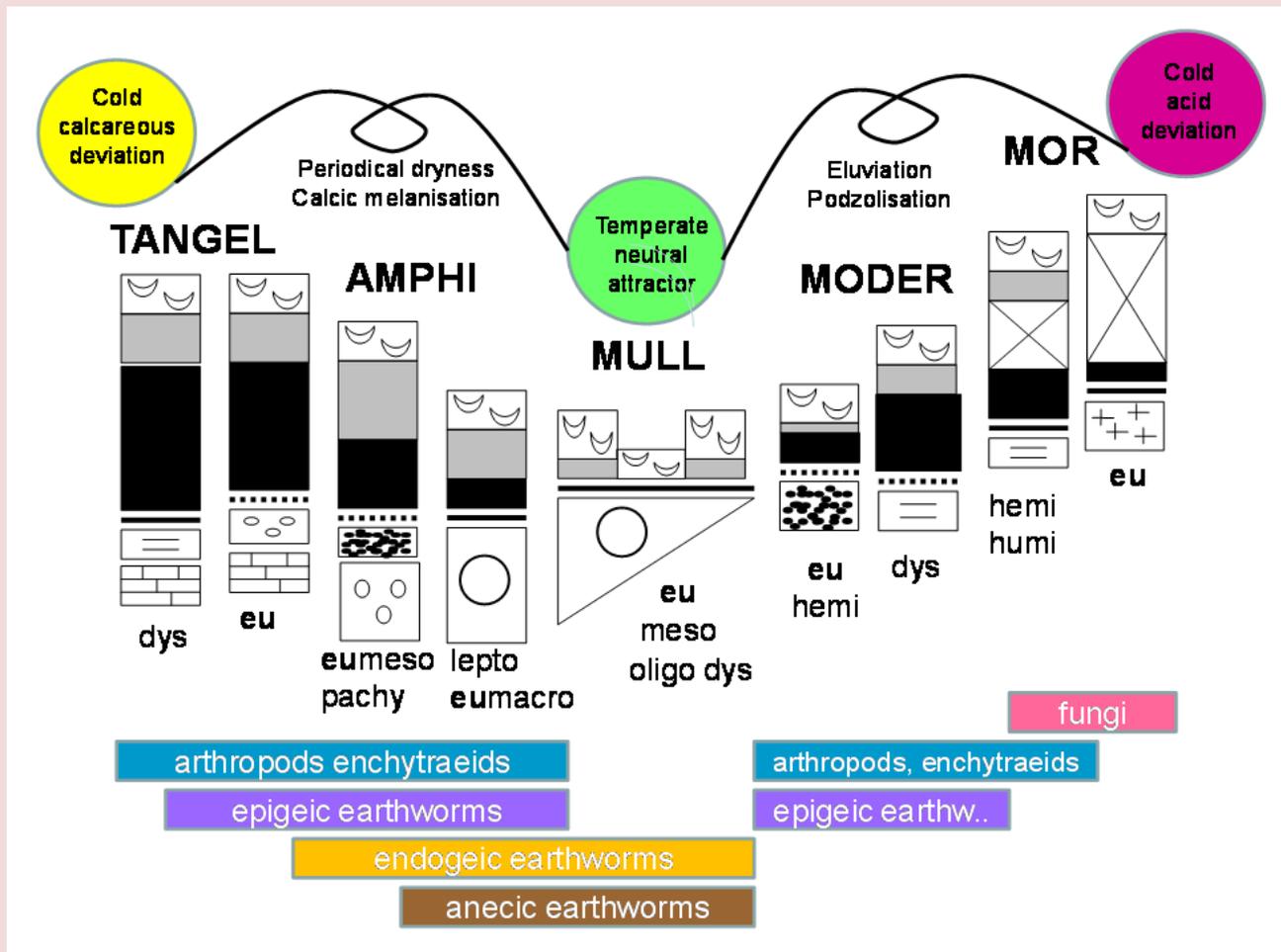


Figura 11. Ecological attractors and humus forms. The scheme shows a chained list of horizons and actors of biodegradation.

3. ISSUE

The publication is perceived by the Humus Group as a forum which allows us to introduce the wider scientific community to our work and to further our efforts towards an internationally agreed classification and standardization of defined humus forms. To achieve these goals the paper is organized as following:

- introduction and general synoptic tables of humus forms classification;
- terro forms and Histo forms classification;
- vocabulary, definition of main horizons, synoptic tables for field classification. A biological point of view is also given for linking bio-degraders and structure of the main diagnostic horizons;
- functional aspects;
- practical value of the delivered classification.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper resumes six years of exchanges among the members of the humus group (12 European countries). Their inputs contributed to the success of the synthesis of the knowledge about humus. Thanks to everybody for data, ideas, discussions, friendliness. In alphabetical forename order: *Adriano Garlato (Italy), Andrea Squartini (Italy), Andrea Vacca (Italy), Anna Andreatta (Italy), Annick Schnitzler (France), Diego Pizzeghello (Italy), Eckart Kolb (Germany), Elena Vendramin (Italy), Emil Klimo (Czech Republic), Erik Karlton (Sweden), Erwin Mayer (Austria), Eva Ritter (Finland), Fabrice Bureau (France), Fausto Fontanella (Italy), Gabriele Broll (Germany), Gerhard Milbert (Germany), Gianluca Serra (Italy), Giuseppe Concheri (Italy), Hannu Jlvesniemi (Finland), Hans-Joerg Brauckmann (Germany), Jan Sevink (Netherlands), Jarmila Lesna (Czech republic), Jean Jacques Brun (France), Lars Lundin (Sweden), Lauric Cécillon (France), Linda Scattolin (Italy), Lorenzo Frizzera (Italy), Lucio Montecchio (Italy), Marija Grozeva Sokolovska (Romania), Michael Aubert (France), Miglena Zhiyanki (Romania), Mirco Rodeghiero (Italy), Nathalie Cassagna (France), Paola Galvan (Italy), Paolo Carletti (Italy), Raimo Kolli (Estonia), Rainer Baritz (Germany), Roberto Menardi (Italy), Roberto Secco (Italy), Roberto Zampedri (Italy), Roger Langohr (Belgium), Roland Baier (Germany), Rolf Kemmers (Netherlands), Serenella Nardi (Italy), Silvia Chersich (Italy), Silvia Obber (Italy), Tomaz Kralj (Slovenia), Ugo Wolf (Italy).*

REFERENCES

Babel U., Kreutzer K., Ulrich B., Zezschwitz E. von & Zöttl H.W., 1980 - Definitionen zur Humusmorphologie der Waldböden. *Z. Pflanzenernähr. u. Bodenk.*, 143: 564-568.

Baize D., Michel-Claude Giraud, Association française pour l'étude du sol (AFES), 2009 - *Référentiel pédologique 2008*. Quae, Versailles, France: 406.

FAO, 2006 - Guidelines for Soil Description. 4th ed. FAO, Rome: 97.

Graefe U. & Beylich A., 2003 - Critical values of soil acidification for annelid species and the decomposer community. *Newsletter on Enchytraeidae*, 8: 51-55.

IUSS Working Group WRB, 2006 - World Reference Base for Soil Resources 2006. *World Soil Resources Reports*, 103.

Jabiol B., Zanella A., Englisch M., Hager H., Katzensteiner K. & de Waals R., 2004 - *Towards an European classification of terrestrial humus forms*. Eurosoil - Freiburg. September 4-12. Symposium 09 - Forest soil Monday 6th: 9.30-9.50 <http://www.bobenkunde.uni-freiburg.de/eurosoil>: 10.

Ponge J.F., 2003 - Humus forms in terrestrial ecosystems: a framework to biodiversity. *Soil Biol. Biochem.*, 35: 935-945.

Sartori G., Obber S., Garlato A., Pocaterra F. & Vinci I., 2004 - *Factors controlling the Alpine humus forms distribution (Venetian Alps, Italy)*. Poster at the Eurosoil Congress, Freiburg, September 2004.

Zanella A., English M., Jabiol B., Katzensteiner K., Delft Van B., Hager H., Waal de R., Graefe U., Brun J.-J., Chersich S., Broll G., Kolb E., Baier R., Baritz R., LAanghor, R., Cools N., Wresowar M., Milbert G. & Ponge J.F., 2006 - *Towards a common humus forms classification. The point in Europe: few top soil references as functioning systems. (Humus forms: integration of living ecosystems)*. Poster presented at 18th Congress of Soil Science, Philadelphia, July 2006.