Interactive comment on “Using globally available soil moisture indicators for flood modelling in Mediterranean catchments” by C. Massari et al.

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Received and published: 24 September 2013

Review to Massari, Brocca, Papathanassiou, Mimikou, Moramarco with the title “Using globally available soil moisture indicators for flood modelling in Mediterranean catchments” The manuscript presenting the use of six different soil moisture products to initialise a simple lumped conceptual hydrological model based on the geomorphological united hydrograph for one single catchment in Attica, Greece of medium size for 15 events. The six different products are the following: two different remote sensing products (ASCAT, AMSR-E), the soil moisture reanalysis product of the ECMWF (ERA), the SWB model of Brocca et al. driven by observed meteorological data and one single FDR-probe.

The topic is relevant to the journal. Estimating plausible initial conditions are of great importance and interest for flood forecasting and many other related topics.

To bring the text into a publishable article a lot of work has to be done. The text has to be restructured. In the present stage it is hard to follow the intention of the authors. There is no clear story line. The abstract needs more focus on the presented story and has to be rewritten. There is too much methods block included in the results, which should be moved.

By focussing on runoff response based on a better estimation of initial conditions the two other major aspects of precipitation estimation as input and runoff observation as output are here in a manor presented which is too week. And the aggregation of the different products is not explained.

They are using Thiessen polygons for interpolation of precipitation. As far as I understood the authors they are looking for flood prone events and flash floods. This interpolation method is not the state of the art to estimate the specific patterns responsible for these types of event (Heistermann and Kneis, 2010; Sangati and Borga, 2009).

A definition what is a flash flood has to be given and the relevant literature is missing (Sangati and Borga, 2009; Heistermann and Kneis, 2010; Marchi et al., 2010, Tarolli et al. 2013). Most of these flood prone events are convective events which appear in most cases during the summer period. The authors present only one such event. A description of the events is missing (advective, convective) to have an idea about the size and the speed of the event. The presented events have all low runoff coefficients, even the summer event, below 10 % except two winter events. From that perspective it is hard to follow the flesh flood argumentation and how do the authors think that their model framework is able to estimate larger events if there is no data of that size to test it.

Relevant information about meteorological input is missing and the block is more refer-
encing different networks than describing them. How many rain gauges where used for
the estimation of the precipitation, 13 or more? What kind of gauge is used? In figure 1
only 6 stations are plotted. Where are the other 7? Are they not taken into account?
Two rainfall radars (GR41 Imittos and GR45 Aigina) are available for the study area
why are they not integrated? The rainfall observation is the major point by modelling
the runoff response especially in areas with a flashy response. That factor is even more
important than initial conditions.

The second issue is the rain gauge. What kind of velocity measurement device was
conducted? Why used the authors such a short period to measure flow velocities. As
far as I understood them correctly the sediment loads in the channel in the region are
high. How could they guaranty that the geometry on the investigated channel profile of
2009 is representative for the complete time series? With such low knowledge about
the second mass balance variable it is not possible to be sure that the authors are
able to quantify the correct runoff response or even able to estimate runoff coefficients.
Can the low runoff coefficients explained by an underestimation of runoff? In the de-
scription part four runoff gauges were mentioned but in figure 1 only one is shown and
in the analysis as well. Are they taken into account and what was the quality of their
simulation?

Add a table with the different parameters of the specific soil moisture products (reso-
lution, points taken into account, frequency of the remote sensing products, algorithm,
penetration depth, etc.).

It is not clear how they estimate the mean soil moisture of the initial conditions and how
do they link soil moisture to model storage. It is just not presented. Have they taken
variability into account? The block in the model part does only give information that the
authors think there is a linear relationship between storage and soil moisture. That has
to be presented.

There is only ONE FDR – probe for ground truthing in the 100 km² catchment. FDR
method is error prone to dry states, clay soils and organics. They do not present what
kind of soil texture is dominant in the study site. It is hard to interpret if that kind of
probe which is only one for 100 km² in 25 cm depth is able to observe accurate soil
moisture data. Is it located on a representative position? They do not present what
kind of probe they use.

It is still unclear what the influence of vegetation is on the two different remote sensing
products. For bare soil the algorithms will work well. With increasing vegetation density
like for forest or crops at the end of vegetation state the presented algorithms will be
not able to estimate soil moisture (Wagner et al. 2013; Jagdhuber et al., 2013). And
even low vegetation coverage will have an effect on the algorithm (Jagdhuber et al.,
2013). There are 30 % forest and 20 % of urban areas in the study site, how do they
have taken that into account? How are landuse especially urban areas and soil types
integrated into EMCWF data?

In the modelling study again a lot of unclear statements were presented. How is the
soil moisture data introduced to the continuous model? Graeff et al. (2012) had a quit
bad not linear relationship between storage and soil moisture. What is a simplified con-
tinuous model? In the model description it sounds like they are only presenting event
based modelling. Are the soil moisture data used to update the state variables?? If so
have they tested antecedent runoff to update the model state? For a more profound
review of the results and conclusion the authors first have to present a better structure
of their manuscript.

Specific comments:

P 11001- 11002: Explain at the end of the intro what the reader can be expect from
that manuscript! P 11002, L 20-26: Geology is irrelevant, soil physics are important. P
11003-1104: What kinds of sensors are used? Shorten that paragraph to the impor-
tant facts. P 1104, L 23: add the SWB model as the fives method. P 11008-11009:
Integrate 3.2 and 3.3 to 2.3. The SWB model is the fourth method to estimate initial

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conditions. Present the parameters of the model and how they have been estimated. Is it lumped or distributed and how is aggregated? P11011, L 3: How is the normalisation realised? P11011, L 9: Is the comparison done between the observed soil moisture at the probe location and the simulated value with the different products at that point or is the mean value of the catchment soil moisture presented? P11011, L 10-17: Which method was used for the calibration? Which was the calibration period and which the validation period? P11011, L 19: Explain the T parameter in the method block. P11012 4.2.1 Move parts to the method block. Is it important to present all events in fig. 4? P11013 4.2.2 and 4.3 Again methods and results are mixed. P11013, 21-23: Unclear sentence. All tables and figures need a more profound description in the caption. They have to be stand alone. Table 1: Add the mean antecedent soil moisture or water level, to have a value of the catchment conditions. Table 3: What is NS the mean Nash of all results? Figure 3: The figure is difficult to read. Increase size and quality. Legend is too small and symbols are indistinguishable. What is ASCAT (a) and (b)? T is not explained in the text and ASCAT (b) is not identifiable in the plot. Explain the different correlation coefficients and T values in c). Figure 5: a) and b) is not in the figure. Where is Sobs in a)? Figure 7: Simplify the labels and plot one legend.

References:


Jagdhuber, T, Hajnsek, I., Bronstert, A., Papathanassiou, K.P . (2013): Soil Moisture Estimation Under Low Vegetation Cover Using a Multi-Angular Polarimetric Decomp-