

**Seasonality and mineral, chemical and optical properties of dust storms in
the Sistan region of Iran, and their influence on human health**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the

Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences

University of Pretoria

June 2012

DECLARATION:

I declare that the thesis that I hereby submit for the PhD degree in Geoinformatics at the University of Pretoria has not previously been submitted by me for degree purposes at any other university.

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Seasonality and mineral, chemical and optical properties of dust storms in the Sistan region of Iran, and their influence on human health

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Summary:

Atmospheric aerosols are suspensions of solid and/or liquid particles in the air from natural and anthropogenic sources. Aerosols are ubiquitous in the air and are often observable as dust, smoke and haze. Dust is considered to be one of the major components of tropospheric aerosols over the globe. Natural and human processes contribute to aerosol emissions. Each year, several billion tons of soil-dust is entrained into the atmosphere playing a vital role in solar irradiance attenuation, and affects marine environments, atmospheric dynamics and weather. Air pollution has recently become a serious environmental problem. Over recent years in the public health domain particulate matter (PM) concentration has become a topic of considerable importance, since epidemiological studies have shown that exposure to particulates with aerodynamic diameters of $< 10 \mu\text{m}$ (PM_{10}) and especially $< 2.5 \mu\text{m}$ ($\text{PM}_{2.5}$) induces an increase of lung cancer, morbidity and cardiopulmonary mortality.

Mineral dust plays an important role in the optical, physical and chemical processes in the atmosphere, while dust deposition adds exogenous mineral and organic material to terrestrial surfaces, having a significant impact on the Earth's ecosystems and biogeochemical cycles.

The role of dust aerosols in atmospheric processes, i.e. Earth's radiation balance, cloud microphysics, etc, strongly depends on a variety of physico-chemical parameters, size distribution, dust sources, atmospheric lifetime and mixing processes in the atmosphere.

Analysis of the physical properties and chemical composition of dust aerosols is important to determine aerosol sources, mixing processes, transport pathways and their effects on human health.

Atmospheric aerosols affect the global climatic system in many ways, i.e. by attenuating the solar radiation reaching the ground, modifying the solar spectrum, re-distributing the earth-atmosphere energy budget and influencing cloud microphysics and the hydrological cycle. Satellite remote sensing provides an important observational means for monitoring dust production and for improving the understanding of the effects of regional-scale atmospheric processes on dust emission and transport.

The Sistan region is located in southeastern Iran, close to the Iranian borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan. The climate is arid, with low annual average precipitation of ~55 mm occurring mainly in the winter (December to February) and evaporation exceeding ~4000 mm.year⁻¹. During summer (June – September), the area is under the influence of a low pressure system attributed to the Indian thermal low that extends further to the west as a consequence of the south Asian monsoon system. These low pressure conditions are the trigger for the development of the Levar northerly wind, commonly known as the “120-day wind”, causing frequent dust and sand storms and contributing to the deterioration of air quality. Therefore, one of the main factors affecting the weather conditions over the region is the strong winds rendering Sistan as one of the windiest deserts in the world. Severe droughts during the past decades, especially after 1999, have caused desiccation of the Hamoun lakes which is located in the northern part of Sistan, leaving a fine layer of sediment that is easily lifted by the wind, thus modifying the basin to one of the most active sources of dust in southwest Asia. The strong winds blow fine sand off the exposed Hamoun lake beds and deposit it to form huge dunes that may cover a hundred or more villages along the former lakeshore. Hamoun dry lake beds are mainly composed of quaternary lacustrine silt and clay material as well as Holocene fluvial sand, silt and clay. These materials have been carried to the basin by the rivers, while along their courses neogene fluvial sand, eolian sand, silt and clay are the main constituents.

This thesis analyses the aerosol characteristics, dust loading and air quality over the Sistan region based on first time measurements conducted. The dust loading was measured using dust traps near the Hamoun basin during the period August 2009 to July 2010. Dust loading from the Hamoun basin appears to have a significant contributing influence on the

development of extreme dust storms, especially during the summer days. This influence firstly seems to depend on the intensity and duration of dust storms, and secondarily, on the distance from the source region, the wind speed and altitude. The grain-size distribution of the dust loading is strongly influenced by the distance from the dust source. Furthermore, the particle size distribution exhibited a shift towards lower values as the altitude increases, with this feature found to be more obvious amongst larger sized particles, while the frequency of particles below $2.5 \mu\text{m}$ seemed not to be affected by altitude. In general, the analysis revealed significant spatio-temporal variability of regional dust loading and characteristics. This finding necessitates more systematic observations at as many locations as possible around the Hamoun basin in order to improve the understanding of force dynamics, transport mechanisms as well as to quantify the dust amounts emitted from the Hamoun basin.

To assess air quality characteristics in two cities of Zabol and Zahedan affected by the Sistan dust storms, systematic airborne PM concentrations were measured during the period September 2010 to September 2011 and July 2008 to March 2010, respectively. The results showed that the PM_{10} concentrations were considerably higher than the corresponding European Union air quality annual standard and the mean $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ concentration ($32 \mu\text{g}\cdot\text{m}^{-3}$) also overcame the Air Quality Index (AQI) annual $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ standards. This poor air quality is affected by dust storms from the Sistan desert. The drainage of the Hamoun wetlands, in association with the intense Levar winds in summer, is the main factor responsible for the frequent and massive dust storms over the Sistan region. Hamoun, as an intense dust source region, caused a dramatic increase in PM_{10} concentrations and a deterioration of air quality (65% of the days were considered unhealthy for sensitive people and 34.9% as hazardous) in Zabol city. The maximum PM_{10} concentrations occurred between 8:00 to 11:00 Local Sidereal Time (LST) in Zabol and between 12:00 and 20:00 LST in Zahedan, indicating that Sistan dust storms reach Zahedan after six to nine hours. The strong correlation between daily $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ and PM_{10} concentrations indicated that they have similar sources and an increase of PM_{10} significantly affects $\text{PM}_{2.5}$. Considering the air pollution standards defined by the United state Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), determining that only on one day per year may the AQI be higher than $100 \mu\text{g}\cdot\text{m}^{-3}$, it was found that the values of AQI in Zahedan overcame this level for 86 days out of 399, expressing a fraction of 21.5%. It should be noted that on 25 days (6.3%) the atmospheric conditions were very unhealthy or hazardous for the whole population and this requires more attention by officials, managers and urban planners.

Windblown transport and deposition of dust is widely recognized as an important physical and chemical concern to climate, human health and ecosystems. To mitigate the impact of these phenomena, this thesis examines for the first time, the mineralogical and chemical properties of dust over Sistan by collecting aerosol and soil samples. These data were analyzed to investigate the chemical and mineralogical characteristics of dust, relevance of inferred sources and contributions to air pollution. Dust aerosol characterization included chemical analysis of major and trace elements by X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF) and mineral analysis by X-Ray Diffraction (XRD). The results showed that quartz, calcite, muscovite, plagioclase and chlorite are the main mineralogical components of the dust, in descending order, over Sistan, and were present in all the selected airborne dust samples. In contrast, significantly lower percentages for enstatite, halite, dolomite, microcline, gypsum, diopside, orthoclase and hornblende were found, since these elements occurred only in some of the samples. On the other hand, silicone dioxide (SiO_2), Calcium oxide (CaO), Aluminum oxide (Al_2O_3), Sodium oxide (Na_2O), Magnesium Oxide (MgO) and Iron (III) Oxide (Fe_2O_3) were the major elements characterising the dust, while large amounts of Fluorine (F), Chlorine (Cl) and Sulfur (S) were also found as trace elements. The mineralogy and chemical composition of airborne dust at both stations were nearly the same and quite similar to the soil samples collected at several locations downwind. This suggests that the dust over Sistan is locally emitted, i.e. from the Hamoun basin, and in a few cases can also be long-range transported to distant regions. On the other hand, individual dust storms showed significant differences between either evaporite-dominated aerosols or those characterized by deflation from alluvial silts. These possibly reflect either localized climatic cyclicality or desiccation cycles. However, in some cases the soil samples showed poor comparisons with aerosol compositions, suggesting that dynamic sorting, soil-forming processes and climatic influences, such as rainfall, altered the mineralogy and chemistry in these partially eolian deposits. Estimates of Enrichment Factors (EF) for all studied elements show that all of them have very low EF values, suggesting natural origin from local materials. The results suggest that a common dust source region can be inferred, which is the eroded sedimentary environment in the extensive Hamoun dry lakes. Scanning Electronic Microscope (SEM) analyses of the samples indicated that airborne dust has rounded irregular, prismatic and rhombic shapes, with only the finer particles and a few cases of the coarser dust being spherical.

This thesis analyses the aerosol patterns over the arid environment of Sistan region by means of multiple satellite platforms aiming to reveal the spatio-temporal and vertical

distribution of dust aerosols. The dataset used includes records of Aerosol Index (AI) from the Total Ozone Mapping Spectrometer (TOMS) on board the Nimbus-7 (1979–92) and the Earth Probe (mid-1996 to 2001) satellites and six-year AI records from OMI aboard Aura. Moreover, the Aerosol Optical Depth (AOD) is analyzed through 11-year records from Multi-angle Imaging SpectroRadiometer (MISR) aboard Terra (2000-2010) and from seven-year Deep Blue records from MODIS aboard Aqua (2002-2011). The main focus is to determine similarities and differences in dust climatology provided by these sensors over the Sistan region and surroundings. The results showed a marked seasonal cycle with high aerosol loading during summer and lower in winter, while MISR, MODIS Deep Blue and OMI climatologies agree in both terms of monthly and seasonally mean spatial and temporal aerosol patterns revealing similar seasonal behavior over the region. After prolonged drought conditions in 1999 at Hamoun lakes (northern of Sistan) the dust-aerosol load over the area has increased. The higher aerosol concentrations during summer are interpreted as a result of the Levar northerly winds and the drying of Hamoun lakes. The satellite monitoring highlights Sistan and Hamoun basin as major dust source regions in south Asia, spreading dust aerosols over Afghanistan, Pakistan and Arabian Sea.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First I have to thank God for giving me the strength to overcome many obstacles and allowing me to reach my goals. I would like to express my sincere thank to Prof. Hannes Rautenbach (my supervisor) and Prof. Patrick Eriksson (my Co-supervisor) for their innumerable ideas and guidance through the development of this work, and for all the support they provided me during of my studies at the University of Pretoria. Without their excellent direction, thoughtful encouragement, and uniform assistance and support, this study would not have been successfully accomplished. I really appreciate their warm-hearted consideration and devotion and these will be deeply engraved in my memory.

I am very grateful to Dr. Dimitris Kaskaoutis (my Co-supervisor) for his valuable comments and advice during this research. Thanks to his careful guidance and keen insight, I was able to carry this study forward on a right track. His amazing ability to review any material I sent to him, usually within a day, gave me the feedback and confidence to complete the study.

I need to express my appreciation to the scientists and technical staff at the Natural and Agricultural Research Centre of Sistan, the Environmental Research Centre of Zahedan and the Zabol Meteorological Station who established, maintained and provided assistance at the two stations used in the Sistan region.

I would like to thank the collaborators, Mojtaba Ganjali and Reza Mirshekar whose hard work in the field contributed to a robust data set of in situ measurements.

Samples were maintained meticulously in laboratories at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, and Lanzhou University, China, and I would like to thank Prof. Qiang Mingroui who provided an opportunity at the Lanzhou University, to improve my experiences and do size distribution analysis, also Grote and Dykstra at the Geology laboratory, University of Pretoria, for assisting with XRD and XRF samples analysis. Thanks to my mother for supporting me through this most special part of my life and who made me what I am today.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Maryam Derakhshani, who put her career on hold and stayed with me in South Africa and endured me spending most of the time away from home working on my research. She took care of our son and everything else while I focused on my research. Thanks to her for her sharing company, support and positive attitude.

TABLE OF CONTENT

| | |
|--|--------|
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1 Atmospheric aerosols | 1 |
| 1.2 Definition of dust events | 3 |
| 1.3 Origin of Dust aerosols | 4 |
| 1.4 Physical properties of dust aerosols | 6 |
| 1.4.1 Size distribution | 6 |
| 1.4.2 Refractive index | 7 |
| 1.5 Optical Properties of Dust | 8 |
| 1.5.1 Aerosol Optical Depth (AOD) | 8 |
| 1.5.2 Extinction coefficient | 8 |
| 1.5.3 Scattering coefficient: | 8 |
| 1.5.4 Absorption coefficient: | 8 |
| 1.5.5 Single scattering albedo (SSA): | 9 |
| 1.5.6 Phase function (scattering function): | 10 |
| 1.6 Dynamics of dust aerosols | 11 |
| 1.6.1 Dust emission | 11 |
| 1.6.2 Nucleation | 11 |
| 1.6.3 Dust transportation | 12 |
| 1.6.4 Dust deposition | 14 |
| 1.7 Major desert dust source region | 14 |
| 1.8 Effects of dust storms | 15 |
| 1.8.1 Dust effects on solar radiation and climate | 15 |
| 1.8.2 Radiative effects of dust | 17 |
| 1.8.3 Dust mineralogy, chemistry and environmental impacts | 18 |
| 1.8.4 Health effects of dust storms | 19 |
| 1.8.5 Economic effects of dust storms | 21 |
| 1.8.6 Impact of dust storms in the Sistan region | 23 |
| 1.9 Satellite observation of dust storms | 25 |
| 1.10 Aim, objective and structure of the present Thesis | 27 |
| CHAPTER 2: GEOGRAPHY, METEOROLOGY AND CLIMATOLOGY OF THE SISTAN BASIN | 30 |
| 2.1 Geography of the Sistan Basin | 30 |
| 2.2 The Sistan region in Iran | 34 |
| 2.3 Hamoun Lakes | 34 |
| 2.4 Droughts in the Sistan Basin | 35 |
| 2.5 Climatology of Sistan region | 38 |
| 2.6 Temporal changes of Hamoun dry lake beds and dust | 44 |

CHAPTER 3: ASSESSMENT OF HORIZONTAL DUST FLUX LOADING

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| 3.1 | Introduction | 47 |
| 3.2 | Horizontal dust flux loading measurements | 47 |
| 3.3 | Description of the dust samplers | 48 |
| 3.3.1 | Big Spring Number Eight (BSNE) sampler | 49 |
| 3.3.2 | SUSPENDED Sediment TRAp (SUSTRA) sampler | 49 |
| 3.3.3 | Modified Wilson and Cooke (MWAC) sampler | 50 |
| 3.3.4 | Wedge Dust Flux Gauge (WDFG) sampler | 51 |
| 3.3.5 | Siphon Sand and Dust Sampler (SSDS) sampler | 51 |
| 3.4 | Particle-size analysis | 52 |
| 3.4.1 | Dry sieving | 52 |
| 3.4.2 | Electro-Sensing Methods | 53 |
| 3.4.3 | Laser granulometry | 55 |
| 3.4.4 | Abrasion emitter | 55 |
| 3.5 | Data set and experimental methods | 57 |
| 3.5.1 | Dust loading measurements and mass quantities | 57 |
| 3.5.2 | Particle-size analysis | 58 |
| 3.6 | Results and discussion | 59 |
| 3.6.1 | Dust loading measurements | 59 |
| 3.6.2 | Dust grain-size distribution | 62 |
| 3.7 | Conclusions | 66 |

CHAPTER 4: AIRBORNE PARTICULATE MATTER (PM) CONCENTRATION OVER THE SISTAN

| | | |
|---------|---|----|
| 4.1 | Introduction | 67 |
| 4.2 | Assessment of PM concentration in the city of Zahedan | 69 |
| 4.2.1 | Study area and meteorology | 69 |
| 4.2.2 | Particulate Matter (PM) measurements | 71 |
| 4.2.3 | Results and discussion | 71 |
| 4.2.3.1 | Seasonal and monthly variability in PM | 71 |
| 4.2.3.2 | Diurnal variability of PM concentrations | 77 |
| 4.2.3.3 | Air Quality Index (AQI) | 83 |
| 4.3 | PM concentration over the city of Zabol | 85 |
| 4.3.1 | PM ₁₀ measurements | 86 |
| 4.3.2 | Air quality index | 88 |
| 4.4 | Conclusions | 90 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| CHAPTER 5: CHEMICAL AND MINERALOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF AIRBORNE DUST | |
| 5.1 Introduction | 92 |
| 5.2 Methods, data and material samples | 94 |
| 5.2.1 Chemical and mineralogical analysis | 95 |
| 5.2.2 Enrichment factor analysis | 96 |
| 5.3 Results and discussion | 97 |
| 5.3.1 Mineralogical characteristics of dust | 97 |
| 5.3.2 Elemental composition of dust | 101 |
| 5.3.3 Trace elements | 108 |
| 5.3.4 Enrichment factor analysis | 109 |
| 5.3.5 Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM) analysis | 110 |
| 5.4 Conclusions | 113 |
| CHAPTER 6: SPATIO-TEMPORAL PATTERNS OF AEROSOL, BASED ON SATELLITE OBSERVATORY | 115 |
| 6.1 Introduction | 115 |
| 6.2 Satellite data sets | 117 |
| 6.2.1 TOMS, OMI sensors | 117 |
| 6.2.2 MODIS sensors | 121 |
| 6.2.3 Multi-angle Imaging SpectroRadiometer (MISR) sensor | 123 |
| 6.2.4 GIOVANNI database | 124 |
| 6.3 Multi-year variation of aerosol properties over Sistan | 125 |
| 6.4 Spatial distribution of aerosols over southwest Asia and Sistan | 134 |
| 6.5 Aerosol trends over southwest Asia detected from satellites | 142 |
| 6.6 Conclusions | 146 |
| CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORKS | 148 |
| 7.1 Conclusions | 148 |
| 7.2 Future Work | 151 |
| REFERENCES | 153 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|---|-----|
| Table 1.1: The sources, source strength, production mechanism, and particle components of the natural and anthropogenic aerosols | 2 |
| Table 1.2: Cumulative damage costs of dust storms in the Sistan region during 2000 to 2004 | 24 |
| Table 2.1: Yearly variability of percentage of water surface in Hamoun lakes in July, annual precipitation and dusty days (visibility \leq 2km) over Sistan region | 45 |
| Table 2.2: Correlations between percent of Hamoun dried beds in July and dusty days | 46 |
| Table 3.1: Recommended sieve aperture and maximum permissible sieve loading | 53 |
| Table 3.2: Variation in average grain size during different dust storms at station A. | 63 |
| Table 3.3: Variation in average grain size during different dust storms, for station B. | 63 |
| Table 4.1: Monthly mean, maximum and minimum PM ₁₀ and PM _{2.5} concentrations in Zahedan during the period July 2008 to March 2010. | 73 |
| Table 4.2: Correlation coefficient (r) values between daily mean PM ₁₀ and PM _{2.5} and PM ₁₀ and PM _{1.0} for each season over Zahedan | 76 |
| Table 4.3: Indication of health quality with the AQI, PM ₁₀ and number of days with severe pollution in Zahedan during the period July 2008 to March 2010. | 84 |
| Table 4.4: Monthly and seasonal mean AQI values in Zahedan during the period July 2008 to March 2010 | 85 |
| Table 4.5: Monthly mean, daily maximum and daily minimum PM ₁₀ concentrations in Zabol during the period September 2010 to July 2011 | 86 |
| Table 4.6: Health quality as determined by the Air Quality Index (AQI), PM ₁₀ and number of days with severe pollution in Zabol during the period September 2010 to July 2011 | 89 |
| Table 5.1: Average X-ray fluorescence (XRF) values for trace elements of airborne dust | 108 |
| Table 5.2: The Enrichment Factors (EFs) for the major and trace elements, averaged for stations A and B. | 110 |
| Table 6.1: Satellite datasets used in this Thesis | 117 |
| Table 6.2: Coefficient of determination (R^2) values from the correlations between the monthly values of the multiple satellite sensors over Sistan region | 127 |
| Table 6.3: Monthly and seasonal variability of Nimbus 7 TOMS (N7T), Earth Probe TOMS (EP), OMI AI and MISR AOD over the Sistan region. | 133 |
| Table 6.4: AOD ₅₅₀ over Sistan region based on Terra-MODIS Deep Blue retrievals during the period 2000-2007. | 133 |
| Table 6.5: AOD ₅₅₀ over Sistan region based on Aqua-MODIS Deep Blue retrievals during the period 2002 to 2011. | 134 |
| Table 6.6: Slope values and % variations of Aerosol Optical depth (AOD) over Sistan region as obtained from MISR and Aqua-MODIS satellite sensors | 146 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1.1: Various aerosol particle sources and their formation and removal mechanisms and distribution on the Earth's | 3 |
| Figure 1.2: Morphology and size classification of aerosol and dust particles | 7 |
| Figure 1.3: Phase function of various aerosol particles | 10 |
| Figure 1.4: Growth of particles in atmosphere | 12 |
| Figure 1.5: A number of jets of windblown desert dust (light brown plumes) were blowing over the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea on May 2, 2003. Originating from the Arabian Peninsula as well as Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, the dust obscures the surface over much of the region. This image was compiled using data from the MODIS sensors flying aboard NASA's Terra and Aqua satellites at hours apart on the same day. | 15 |
| Figure 1.6: The indirect aerosol effect through the modification of the cloud microphysical properties. | 17 |
| Figure 2.1: Landsat 5 image showing the lower reaches of the Hirmand River which terminate in the Sistan Basin, and also the general Sistan region. Note that the Sistan Basin lies between the Hindu Kush ranges in Afghanistan (top right of image) and the mountain ranges flanking eastern Iran (lower left of image) | 31 |
| Figure 2.2: Topographic map and hydrological network and of Sistan Basin. The location of Zabol (a city in Sistan region) is indicated by the white circle. | 31 |
| Figure 2.3. Geological map of the Sistan Basin Revised from Wittekind and Weippert (1973) and O'Leary and Whitney (2005a, b). | 33 |
| Figure 2.4. Position of the Hamoun Lakes in Iran and Afghanistan, showing a maximum inundation period | 35 |
| Figure 2.5: Satellite (Landsat) images of the Hamoun Basin in spring of different years. Hamoun lakes are fed primarily by water catchments in neighbouring Afghanistan. In 1976, when rivers in Afghanistan were flowing regularly, the lake's water level was relatively high. Between 1999 and 2011, however, drought conditions caused frequent dryness of the Hamoun lakes that almost disappeared in 2001 after a 3-year intense drought period | 37 |
| Figure 2.6. MODIS image (weather satellite) of dust deflation from the dry Hamoun lakes in Sistan on August 13, 2004. The intense dust plumes form a giant U shape that extends from Sistan into southern Afghanistan and southwestern Pakistan, and obscures the surface over much of the region. The pale color of the dust plume is consistent with that of dried wetland soils. The dust is blowing off the dry lake beds that become the Hamoun wetlands during wet years | 38 |
| Figure 2.7: Wind roses of the seasonal wind speed and direction in Zabol during the period 1963 to 2010. The percentage of calm events is shown at the bottom of each wind rose. The thickest bar represents wind speeds in excess of 11 m.s ⁻¹). | 41 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 2.8: Diurnal cycle and seasonal variability in wind speed at Zabol | 42 |
| Figure 2.9. Monthly mean variation of air temperature, Relative Humidity (RH) and atmospheric pressure (a), and Visibility and wind speed (b) at Zabol over the period 1963 to 2010. R^2 is determination coefficient of linear regression between Visibility and wind speed | 43 |
| Figure 2.10: (a) Annual variation of the average duration of dust storms (in hours) over the period 1999 to 2010, and (b) year-to-year variation of the visibility recorded at Zabol | 44 |
| Figure 2.11: Yearly variability of the dusty days (visibility \leq 2km) over Sistan region with association to percentage of Hamoun dried beds (1985 to 2005). The lower coverage of the Hamoun Basin by water (high percentage of dried beds) corresponds to higher number of dusty days over Sistan region. | 46 |
| Figure 3.1: Construction of the Big Spring Number Eight (BSNE) sampler. | 50 |
| Figure 3.2: Construction of the SUSpended Sediment TRAp (SUSTRA) | 50 |
| Figure 3.3: Sketch and construction of the Modified Wilson and Cooke (MWAC) sampler. | 51 |
| Figure 3.4: Sketch and construction scheme of the Wedge Dust Flux Gauge (WDFG) sampler | 51 |
| Figure 3.5: Construction of the Siphon Sand and Dust Sampler (SSDS) sampler | 52 |
| Figure 3.6: Illustration of the electrical sensing zone, showing an aperture tube immersed in an electrolyte with particles passing through the aperture | 54 |
| Figure 3.7: (a) A schematic illustration of an abrasion emitter; (b) Emission potential for PM ₁₀ for 8 soils plotted against the corresponding PM ₁₀ mass fractions determined using a dispersed analysis technique | 56 |
| Figure 3.8: Locations of the dust loading measurement stations (stations A and B). The left image shows an intense dust storm that originated from the Hamoun basin on 15 June 2004 (Terra MODIS satellite image), while the right image zooms in on the Hamoun wetlands on 24 October 2004. | 57 |
| Figure 3.9: Schematic diagram of (a) the dust sampler system and (b) photo of the eight meters dust monitoring tower. | 58 |
| Figure 3.10: Measurement of dust particle-size using the Malvern Mastersizer 2000 analyzer (Lanzhou University, China). | 59 |
| Figure 3.11: Average dust loading (kgm^{-2}) during various dust events in the Sistan region as measured at the 4m (station A) and 8m (station B) monitoring towers. The duration of dust events (hours), as well as the mean and maximum wind speeds on the dusty days were obtained from the Zabol meteorological station | 60 |
| Figure 3.12: Correlation between dust loading measurements and duration of dust storm events for 19 days at station A and 17 days at station B. | 61 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 3.13: Height variation of dust loadings at stations A (a) and at station B (b) for several dust storm days. Green colors are loadings for winter, yellow for spring, red for summer and blue for autumn. | 62 |
| Figure 3.14: Chart boxes for (a) the dust diameters corresponding to d(0.5) and d(0.9) grain sizes and (b) for the fraction (%) lower than PM _{2.5} and PM ₁₀ particles at both stations A and B. | 64 |
| Figure 3.15: Average and standard deviation of the dust samples particle-size distribution at stations A and B. | 65 |
| Figure 3.16: Average height variation of the grain size measured over eight days at station B for d(0.9) and d(0.5) (left panel) and PM _{2.5} and PM ₁₀ (right panel). | 65 |
| Figure 4.1: Position of the cities Zahedan and Zabol in Iran | 69 |
| Figure 4.2: Monthly-mean variation of meteorological variables in Zahedan, Iran covering the period July 2008 to March 2010. | 70 |
| Figure 4.3: Annual variation of monthly-mean values of PM ₁₀ , PM _{2.5} and PM _{1.0} at Zahedan during the period July 2008 to March 2010. | 72 |
| Figure 4.4: Frequency (%) distribution of (a) the daily PM ₁₀ and (b) PM _{2.5} for each season in Zahedan. | 75 |
| Figure 4.5: Relationship between PM _{2.5} and PM ₁₀ for each season using the daily mean values of PM _{2.5} and PM ₁₀ in Zahedan. | 76 |
| Figure 4.6: Relationship between PM _{2.5} and PM _{1.0} for each season using the daily mean values of PM _{2.5} and PM _{1.0} in Zahedan | 77 |
| Figure 4.7: Daily Particular matter (PM) concentrations at Zahedan during the period 2/7/2008 to 16/3/2010. | 78 |
| Figure 4.8: Daily concentration of the coarse-mode particular matter (PM _{10-2.5}) and percentage contribution of the PM _{2.5} to PM ₁₀ at Zahedan during the period 2/7/2008 to 16/3/2010. | 79 |
| Figure 4.9: Mean hourly variation of PM ₁₀ (left panel) and wind speed (right panel) for each season in Zahedan. | 81 |
| Figure 4.10: Diurnal variation of PM ₁₀ (a), PM _{2.5} (b) and PM _{1.0} (c) on selected days with severe pollution over Zahedan | 82 |
| Figure 4.11: Daily PM ₁₀ concentrations at Zabol during the period 28/8/2010 to 10/9/2011 | 87 |
| Figure 4.12: Frequency (%) distribution of the daily PM ₁₀ values for each season in Zabol | 88 |
| Figure 4.13: Mean hourly variation of the PM ₁₀ (left panel) and wind speed (right panel) for each season in Zabol. | 90 |
| Figure 5.1a: Mineralogical composition as obtained from XRD analysis for airborne dust samples collected on different days in station A | 98 |
| Figure 5.1b: Same as in Figure 3a, but for the station B | 98 |
| Figure 5.2: Mineralogical composition as obtained from XRD analysis for soil samples collected at various locations in Hamoun Basin | 99 |

- Figure 5.3:** Average mineralogy components for airborne dust samples in stations A and B and for soil samples obtained at various locations in Hamoun Basin. The vertical bars express one standard deviation from the mean. 100
- Figure 5.4.** Mean altitude variation of dust mineralogy components in station B. [others: Plagioclase, Orthoclase, Microcline, Gypsum, Bloedite, Diopside, Hornblende Na-Ca] 101
- Figure 5.5a:** Major elements (oxides) for airborne dust samples obtained on different days at Station A by means of the XRF analysis. 104
- Figure 5.5b:** Same as in Figure 5.5a, but for the station B. 104
- Figure 5.6:** Average XRF results for major dust elements in stations A and B. Similar results obtained in Khuzestan Province, southwestern Iran are also shown for comparison reasons 107
- Figure 5.7:** Microscope images (left column) and SEM images (right column) for airborne and soil dust samples over Sistan; there are no SEM images for soil samples (last row). The location and the height for the airborne dust samples are given, while the soil samples were collected in Sistan agriculture land and in Hamoun dry-lakes basin. The dust sample in Zabol was collected on roof of a building during a dust event on 9 January, 2010. For each case, the mineralogy and major elements percentage contribution are given for the main dust components. The scale bar in each image defines the particle size. 112
- Figure 6.1:** Terra-MODIS satellite true color and infrared (temperature) images captured on June 14, 2004 over Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan 123
- Figure 6.2:** Data series of Aerosol Index (AI) values from Nimbus 7, Earth Probe and Ozone Monitoring Instrument (OMI), as well as aerosol optical depth (AOD) values from MISR and Terra/Aqua-MODIS over Sistan region. 125
- Figure 6.3:** Annual average of Aerosol Index (AI) and aerosol optical depth (AOD) with annual average of precipitation at the Zabol meteorological station during 1979 to 2011. 127
- Figure 6.4:** Multi-year variation of the annual accumulated rainfall values at the Zabol meteorological station during 1979 to 2011. 129
- Figure 6.5:** Annual mean variation of AOD and AI for different satellite sensors and time periods over Sistan region 130
- Figure 6.6:** Annual average of Aerosol Index (AI) and aerosol optical depth (AOD) with annual average of precipitation at the Zabol meteorological station during 1979 to 2011. 131
- Figure 6.7:** Multi-year seasonal variation of Aerosol Index (AI) and Aerosol Optical depth (AOD) values from different sensors over the Sistan region 132

- Figure 6.8:** Seasonal maps of the spatial distribution of AI (Nimbus 7 and OMI) and AOD (MISR and MODIS) values over southwest Asia. The period of measurements are: for Nimbus 7 (1979 to 1992), for OMI (2005 to 2011), for MISR (2000 to 2010) and for Aqua-MODIS (2002 to 2011). 136
- Figure 6.9:** Monthly mean spatial distribution of Ozone Monitoring Instruments (OMI) satellite observations over southwest Asia during the period 2005 to 2011 138
- Figure 6.10:** Monthly mean spatial distribution of MISR Aerosol Index (AOD) over southwest Asia during the period 2000 to 2010. 140
- Figure 6.11:** Monthly mean spatial distribution of Aqua MODIS satellite observations over southwest Asia during 2000 to 2010. 141
- Figure 6.12:** Spatial distribution of the Aerosol Optical Depth (AOD) % variation obtained from MISR sensor during the period 2000 to 2010 over southwest Asia. 144
- Figure 6.13:** Spatial distribution of the Aerosol Optical depth (AOD) % variation obtained from Aqua-MODIS sensor (deep blue algorithm) during the period 2000 to 2010 over southwest Asia 145

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| AERONET | Aerosol Robotic Network |
| AI | Aerosol Index |
| AIRS | Atmospheric Infrared Sounder |
| Al | Aluminum |
| Al ₂ O ₃ | Aluminum oxide |
| AOD | Aerosol Optical Depth |
| AQI | Air Quality Index |
| ARF | Aerosol Radiative Forcing |
| As | Arsenic |
| Ba | Barium |
| BSNE | Big Spring Number Eight |
| CALIPSO | Cloud-Aerosol Lidar Infrared Pathfinder Satellite Observation |
| CaO | Calcium oxide |
| CCN | Cloud Condensation Nuclei |
| Cl | Chlorine |
| Co | Cobalt |
| COPD | Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Diseases |
| Cr | Chrome |
| Cr ₂ O ₃ | Dichromium trioxide |
| Cs | Cesium |
| Cu | Copper |
| dp | Particle Size |
| d0.5 | Median grain size |
| d0.9 | 90% of the grain size of particles is below this value |
| EARLINET | European Aerosol Research Lidar Network |
| EFs | Enrichment Factors |
| ENSO | El Niño-Southern Oscillation |
| EPA | Environmental Protection Agency |
| EPMSF | Enhanced Particulate Matter Surveillance Program |
| EU | European Union |
| F | Fluorine |
| Fe | Iron |
| Fe ₂ O ₃ | Iron III Oxide |
| g | Asymmetry parameter |
| GDP | Gross domestic product |
| HAVA | Helmand-Arghandab Valley Authority |
| HIRDLS | High Resolution Dynamic Limb Sounder |
| HNLC | High-Nutrient, Low-Chlorophyll |
| ICZ | Intertropical Convergence Zone |
| IDDI | Infrared Difference Dust Index |
| K ₂ O | Potassium oxide |
| LST | Local Sidereal Time |
| LULC | Land Use Land Cover |
| MgO | Magnesium Oxide |
| MISR | Multi-angle Imaging Spectro-Radiometer |
| MnO | Manganese oxide |

| | |
|--|--|
| MODIS | Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer |
| MWAC | Modified Wilson and Cooke |
| N7T | Nimbus 7 |
| Na ₂ O | Sodium oxide |
| Na ₃ PO ₄ 12H ₂ O | Tri-sodium orthophosphate |
| NaOH | sodium hydroxide |
| NASA | National Aeronautics and Space Administration |
| Ni | Nickel |
| NiO | Nickel Oxide |
| OMI | Ozone Monitoring Instrument |
| P ₂ O ₅ | Phosphorus pentoxide |
| Pb | lead |
| PM | Particulate matter |
| PM ₁₀ | Particulates with aerodynamic diameters of < 10 μm |
| ppm | Parts per million |
| r | Correlation coefficient |
| R ² | Determine coefficient |
| RH | Relative Humidity, |
| S | Sulfur |
| SEM | Scanning Electron Microscopy |
| Si | silicon |
| SiO ₂ | silicone dioxide |
| SSA | Single scattering albedo |
| SSDS | Siphon Sand and Dust Sampler |
| SUSTR | SUspended Sediment TRAp |
| Tg | Million tons (Teragram) |
| TiO ₂ | Titanium dioxide |
| TOA | Top-Of-Atmosphere |
| TOMS | Total Ozone Mapping Spectrometer |
| U.S | United state |
| USEPA | United state Environmental Protection Agency |
| UV | UltraViolet |
| V ₂ O ₅ | vanadium pentoxide |
| WDFG | Wedge Dust Flux Gauge |
| WMO | World Meteorological Organization |
| XRD | X-Ray Diffraction |
| XRF | X-Ray Fluorescence |
| Zn | Zinc |
| ZrO ₂ | Zirconium oxide |