



## Rainfall-Runoff Modeling for an Experimental Watershed of Western Greece Using Extended Time-Area Method and GIS

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### Abstract

In this study, an effort was made to simulate the transformation of rainfall into runoff, in a small experimental mountainous-forested watershed in western Greece. The main objective was the production of flood hydrographs by calculating average flow velocities (inside and outside the stream network). The usefulness of the flow velocities lies in using them in other ungauged small-forested watersheds that have similar geomorphological and hydrological characteristics. The meteorological and hydrological data of four storm events were obtained from the corresponding stations that are located near and at the outlet of the watershed, respectively. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology was used for the obtainment of the spatially distributed watershed characteristics. The resolution of the digital elevation model and the produced rasters was 50X50 m<sup>2</sup>. By integrating all information, a simplified model was developed, which is based on the Time – Area (TA) rainfall – runoff flow routing technique. The first results were satisfactory, especially the simulation of the ascending curve of the simulated flood hydrographs.

**Key words:** Rainfall-runoff modeling, Forested watershed, Time-area method, Flow velocity, GIS, Greece.

### INTRODUCTION

A hydrological model is a mathematical simulation of the complex hydrological cycle. The rainfall – runoff mathematical simulation is necessary for the understanding of the interaction between the climatic, terrestrial, topographic and hydrological elements of a watershed. A number of mathematical models has been developed for the investigation of these physical processes. Additionally, many researchers proposed a variety of surface runoff models that usually interact with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) (DeVantier and Feldman 1993, Olivera and Maidment 1996, Jain et al. 1997, Gorokhovich et al. 2000, Saghafian et al. 2000, Melesse et al. 2003). GIS technology is a very useful platform that is used for the production of digital elevation models (DEMs), the division of the watershed into grid-cells, in order to characterize its terrain. Furthermore, it is also used for the preparation of the appropriate input files for the models.

One of the tools that hydrologists often use for the rainfall-runoff simulation is the Time-Area (TA) method. The TA diagram is a graph that shows the cumulative drainage area that contributes to runoff during time and is derived from the sum of the incremental sub-areas of the watershed. These sub-areas are delineated by contours of equal travel time (isochrones). Many researchers estimated the travel time by calculating the flow velocity with the kinematic wave theory (Saghafian and Julien 1995, Wang and Hjelmfelt 1998, Ajward and Muzik 2000, Wong 2003). On the contrary, other researchers (Maidment 1993, Maidment et al. 1996, Ashour 2000) alleged that the average (constant) flow velocity can be used for the

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estimation of the travel time of the surface runoff and therefore, for the determination of the flood hydrograph. In this case, the hydraulics of the flow system are not taken into account. Actually, two different average flow velocities are estimated; the first concerns the velocity inside the stream network (channel flow) and the second the velocity of the rest of the watershed's cells (overland flow).

The study and investigation into the flow velocities that result from the application of a model, are of great importance. According to some researchers, the magnitude of the solid transport depends on the flow velocities and the slope of the watercourse (Fox and Bryan 1999, Grunwald and Norton 2000). Additionally, Kolsky and Butler (2000) report that the total transport capacity depends on the size of the sediment transport.

The objective of this study was the development of a simplified hydrological flow routing model in a small experimental mountainous-forested watershed of western Greece. The model is based on an extension of the Time-Area (TA) concept and uses GIS tools for the manipulation of spatial data. This method has not been applied on other watersheds in Greece. The results of this study might be used in other ungauged small-forested watersheds that have similar geomorphological and hydrological characteristics.

The applied method can be described as an evolution of Clark's original methodology (Clark 1945) to spatially distributed runoff (Kull and Feldman 1998), by ignoring the storage effects on the deeper soil layers. According to Ponce (1989, chap. 10), the results of the application in small and mid-sized watersheds are very satisfactory. This is due to the fact that a constant, time-fixed transport process is applied for the calculation of the discharge, independently of the time distribution of rainfall (Saghafian et al. 2002).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Study Area***

The study area is located in the prefecture of Etoloakarnania, western Greece. (Figure 1). The drainage area of the watershed is 1.23 km<sup>2</sup>, the average altitude is 529.6 m a.s.l. and varies from 366.3 m to 632.9 m. The mean ground slope is 13.53% (minimum ground slope = 0.35% and maximum ground slope = 33.67%). The length of the main stream is 1,373.18 m and the density of the stream network is 0.28 km/km<sup>2</sup>. The software package that was utilised in the processing of geographic and meteorological information was GIS ArcMap (ESRI 1999). This GIS environment is integrated with the National Data Bank of Hydrological and Meteorological Information (NDBHMI). NDBHMI is a database system of crucial importance to the country's water resources, as it contains raw and processed hydrometeorological and hydrological data for the whole of Greece (NDBHMI 2000).

This watershed is a small-forested one that contributes to the flow of Acheloos River. The area is covered by pure stands of *Quercus ilex* or mixed stands of evergreen broadleaved species such as *Arbutus sp.*, *Phyllirea sp.*, *Erica sp.*, *Fraxinus sp.*, etc. The dominant soil parent material in the region is the flysch (impermeable and very easily corroded formation) of the zone of central western Greece. The flysch belongs to the category of mechanical sedimentary rocks and consists of alternating layers of clay and shale sediments.

The climate of the area is the classic Mediterranean with mild winters and dry summers. The meteorological and hydrological data were taken from the corresponding stations that are located near the watershed and at the outlet, respectively (Figure 1). More specifically, the

amount of precipitation in each selected event was obtained from three non-recording raingauges operating near the watershed. The temporal distribution of the rainfall was taken from the recording raingauge, which is part of the complete meteorological station. According to the available meteorological data, the mean annual precipitation for the years 1973 – 2001 is 989 mm, while the mean annual temperature for the same period is 15.1 °C. Most of the precipitation (>95%) falls in the form of rainfall and more than 75% of it falls from October to March (Vouzaras, 1999).

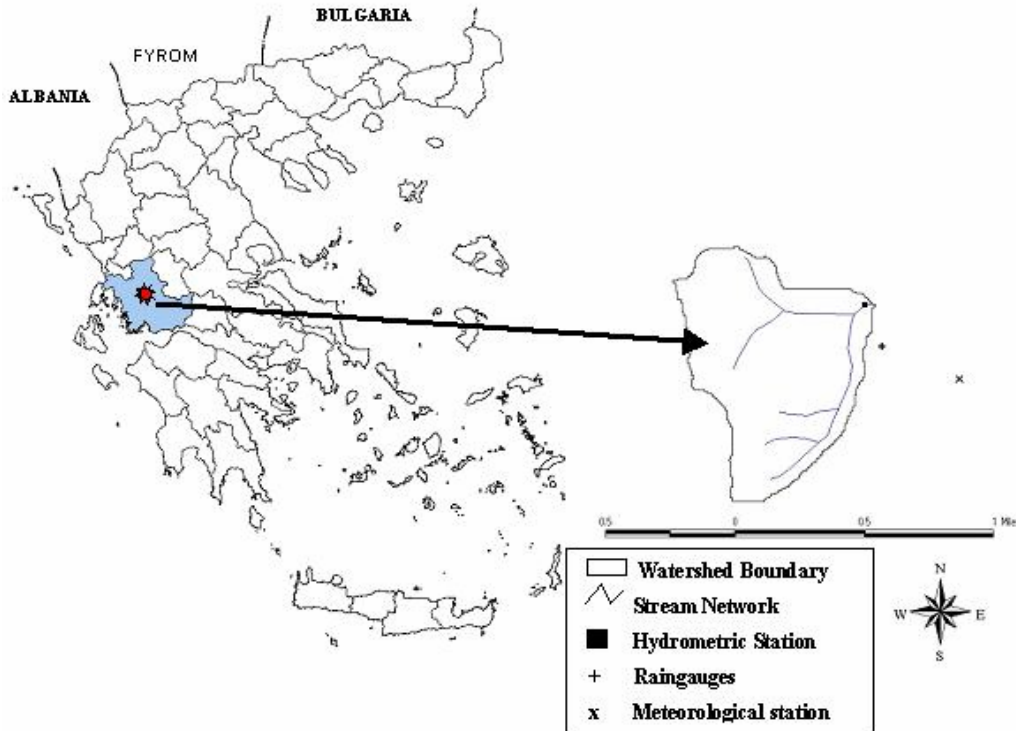


Figure 1. Map of Greece with the location of the experimental watershed.

### ***Selection of Rainfall Events***

In order to meet the aim of this work, four rainfall events were selected, based on the following criteria:

- The necessary data for each rainfall event (rainfall volume, temporal distribution and hydrograph) should be available and reliable.
- Each rainfall-runoff event occurred in the wet season (winter).

### ***Hydrological Analysis***

#### ***Estimation of Hydrological Losses and Baseflow***

The four rainfall events were analyzed on a 15 min time-step. At this point, it is of interest to note that from the available hydrological and meteorological data, it was extremely difficult to quantify the hydrological losses separately (interception, transpiration, infiltration). So, the effective rainfall ( $h_e$ ) of each event was calculated by subtracting the total losses quantified with the SCS method (SCS 1972) from the total amount of rainfall. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the selected rainfall events along with the parameters S (Potential Maximum

Retention) and CN (runoff curve number) calculated by the use of the equations (1) and (2), as follows:

$$S(mm) = 5h + 10h_e - \sqrt{h_e(h_e + 1.25h)} \quad (1)$$

where: h is the measured rainfall and

$$S(mm) = 254\left(\frac{100}{CN} - 1\right) \quad (2)$$

The  $h_e$  was already known from the measurement of the direct runoff (flood hydrographs – Table 2).

In order to derive each flood hydrograph, the direct runoff was calculated by subtracting the baseflow from the total runoff (Table 2). The baseflow separation was carried out by using the Hewlett and Hibbert (1967) empirical equation:

$$\text{Constant Separation Slope} = 0.00055 \cdot A \text{ (m}^3\text{/s)/h} \quad (3)$$

where: A is the total area of the watershed in km<sup>2</sup>.

This equation gives the slope of the base flow line and corresponds in the best way, to the real hydrological behavior of a mountainous small-forested watershed. Table 2 also shows the characteristics of the runoff that resulted from the analysis of the recorded data.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of the selected rainfall events

Rainfall Event	Date	Start Time	Ending Time	Duration (h)	Rainfall (mm)	Losses (mm)	Effective rainfall (mm)	S	CN
1	4/2/98	16:30	4:15 5/2/98	11.75	56.2	36.2	20.0	56.2	81.9
2	1/12/98	13:00	21:30	8.5	48.5	39.5	9.0	82.3	75.5
3	21/12/98	0:15	8:15 22/12/98	32	105.4	73.2	32.2	122.6	67.4
4	9/1/01	2:00	4:15	2.25	35.5	29.3	6.2	62.5	80.3

**Table 2.** Characteristics of the corresponding total flood hydrographs

Rainfall Event	Date and Start Time	Duration (h)	Date and Time to Peak	Peak Runoff (m <sup>3</sup> /s)	Total runoff (mm)	Direct runoff (mm)	Base flow (mm)	Runoff coefficient
1	4/2/1998 20:30	48.75	5/2/1998 7:45	0.8526	26.9	20.0	6.9	0.36
2	1/12/1998 16:15	23.5	22:30	0.5222	10.4	9.0	1.4	0.18
3	21/12/1998 9:15	45.25	22/12/1998 2:30	1.3952	36.8	32.2	4.6	0.30
4	9/1/2001 3:00	23.25	4:45	0.5410	7.9	6.2	1.7	0.17

### **Rainfall-Runoff Modeling**

A time-area method utilises a convolution of the effective rainfall hyetograph with the service of a time-area diagram. This diagram represents the progressive area contributions within a watershed as the time increases. Two different average flow velocities (inside and outside the stream network) had to be calculated for the production of the time-area diagram. The procedure for this production consists of the following three phases:

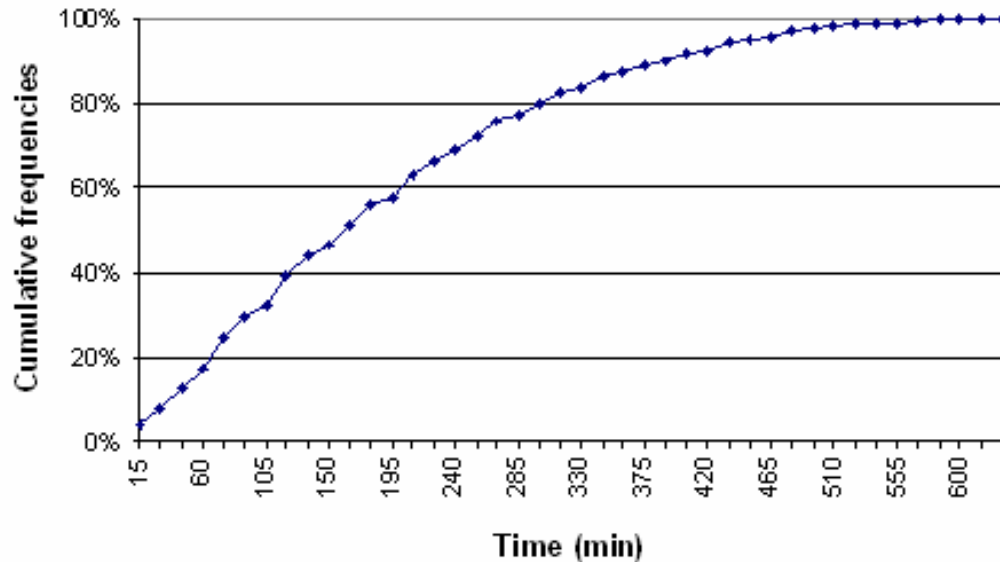
In the first phase, the ESRI's ArcGIS Desktop-ArcInfo 8.1 software was used. ArcInfo Workstation-Grid provided the necessary functions for the process of the digital elevation model (DEM file) and the obtainment of the hydrologic features. Raster-based calculations were conducted in ArcMap using the extension of Spatial Analyst. Two more important files were also created:

- (a) The Flow Direction file was derived from the DEM file. It is a raster, in which each grid-cell shows the direction that water follows and
- (b) The Flow Accumulation file resulted from the previous (Flow Direction) file. It is a raster that shows the grid-cells with the largest accumulation of water (stream channels), as well as the cells with null stocking of water (divides).

In fact, two series of files (a total of 6 files) were created:

- (a) The dimensions of each cell was (10X10) m<sup>2</sup> in the first series (a total of 12,368 grid-cells for the whole watershed) and
- (b) In the second series of files, the dimensions of each cell were (50X50) m<sup>2</sup> (493 grid-cells in total).
- (c)

Thus, with the contribution of GIS technology, spatial terrain, as well as, hydrological characteristics (ground slope, flow direction and flow accumulation) were determined for the calculation of the watershed's travel time map (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Cumulative frequencies in time of the number of grid-cells contributing to runoff.

In the second phase, the path that a raindrop follows was drawn from the center of each 50X50 m<sup>2</sup> grid-cell to the outlet, with the use of the tools of hydrological analysis that were included in the software. These tools take into consideration the flow direction and accumulation using the corresponding files from the first series of files (10X10 m<sup>2</sup>) so that the water's direction and accumulation would be realistic as much as possible (Zang and Montgomery 1994). Next, two distances were measured for each one of the 493 grid-cells. One distance concerned the path of the channel flow and the second concerned the path of the overland flow. This segregation was essential because the resistances (frictions) to the surface flow, and by extension, to the water velocity inside and outside the stream network are by far different. In our case, where the watershed in its overwhelming percentage (>90%) is forested, the flow velocities outside the stream channels are much lower.

Finally, in the third phase, a pair of flow velocities applied on each grid-cell and the travel time was calculated by the following equation:

$$t_i = \frac{D_{in}^i}{V_{in}^i} + \frac{D_{out}^i}{V_{out}^i} \quad (4)$$

where:  $i = 1-493$ , is the number of the grid-cell,

$V_{in}$  and  $V_{out}$  are the velocities (m/s) that were applied inside and outside the stream network respectively,

$D_{in}$  and  $D_{out}$  are the distances (m) that a raindrop covers inside and outside the stream network, respectively, from the center of each cell to the outlet and

$t$  is the travel time (s) of direct runoff.

Taking into account that the hydrological data were analyzed on a 15 min time step, the travel time in each cell was calculated and then each cell was classified into time-groups of 15 min (0'-15', 15'-30', and so on). Next, a time area diagram was developed for each one of the combinations of the applied pair of velocities. Convolution of the time-area diagram led to the watershed flood hydrographs. These flood hydrographs had to be compared with the measured one, for the selection of the best pair of flow velocities that represented the model's solution.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### ***Characteristics of Rainfall Events and Flood Hydrographs***

Table 1 presents the characteristics of the four selected rainfall events. A variety of duration and magnitude was considered for the obtainment of the most reliable results. The four selected rainfall events ranged from 2.25 to 32 h (duration), from 35.5 to 105.4 mm (rainfall) and from 6.2 to 32.2 mm (effective rainfall).

Table 2 presents the characteristics of the corresponding total flood hydrographs. In two out of the four rainfall events (4/2/98 and 21/12/98) the duration, the peak runoff and the runoff coefficient were similar. The same remark stands for the other two rainfall events. This is owed to the different soil moisture conditions. With respect to the runoff coefficient, it is noted that it was estimated as a fraction of the flood runoff (Table 2) to the rainfall (Table 1).

### ***Grid-cells versus Flow Velocities***

Figure 2 shows the cumulative frequencies in time of the number of grid-cells contributing to runoff for the four selected rainfall events. As it is shown, the farthest grid-cell needs 615 min to contribute to runoff at the outlet. Although the time of reaction is different for each grid-cell, the total of 493 grid-cells participate in the surface runoff and the curve's distribution is crescive. Three minor attenuations can be observed in the curve's slope due to the small area of the watershed.

The chosen pair of velocities was the following:

Average flow velocity inside the stream network,  $V_{in} = 1$  m/s

Average flow velocity outside the stream network,  $V_{out} = 0.02$  m/s

During the calibration process of the pair of flow velocities, it was clear that when the applied average flow velocities were decreasing, the peak of the calculated flood hydrograph was also decreasing and its descending curve sector had a lower slope than the corresponding measured. This finding is very important for the vegetation management in mountainous forested watersheds and especially for flood prediction simulations. In addition, an important result drawn from the analysis of the calculated flood hydrographs is some delay in the time to peak that two of them presented. This delay is due to the fact that the method does not calculate the infiltration and the interception, which have higher values at the beginning of the rainfall event and lower values, later on. However, in a study of watershed draining, the average velocity that was applied for the calculation of travel time, leads to less conservative design (Wong 2003).

Figure 3 shows an outline of the experimental watershed divided into 50 X 50 m<sup>2</sup> grid-cells. Each grid-cell depicts the calculated cumulative travel time to the outlet of the watershed (in seconds). From the analysis of these cumulative times, it is concluded that the mean percentage of time that a drop of direct runoff in each grid-cell needs inside the stream network, until it reaches the outlet of the watershed, is only 13.2% of the total travel time.





### Simulation Results

The rainfall – runoff simulation is depicted in Figure 4. More specifically, Figure 4 shows the hyetographs of the four examined rainfall events, divided into effective rainfall and rainfall losses and their corresponding flood hydrographs (measured and calculated). The pair of applied velocities presents a satisfactory relationship with the flood hydrograph that was measured at the outlet of the watershed. Table 3 presents the calculated correlations, bias and standard error of estimate in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the model used for runoff computation. In the first column, the presented correlations refer up to the peak of the measured flood hydrographs, while in the second one the reported correlations refer to the entire flood hydrographs.

**Table 3.** Statistical analysis of the simulation results for the selected rainfall events

Rainfall Event	Date	Measured Peak Correlation	Total Correlation	Bias (m <sup>3</sup> )	Standard Error of the Estimate (m <sup>3</sup> /s)
1	4/2/1998	0.534	0.367	-7.745	0.291
2	1/12/1998	0.827	0.748	-0.876	0.121
3	21/12/1998	0.879	0.847	4.226	0.219
4	9/1/2001	0.882	0.879	-1.223	0.073

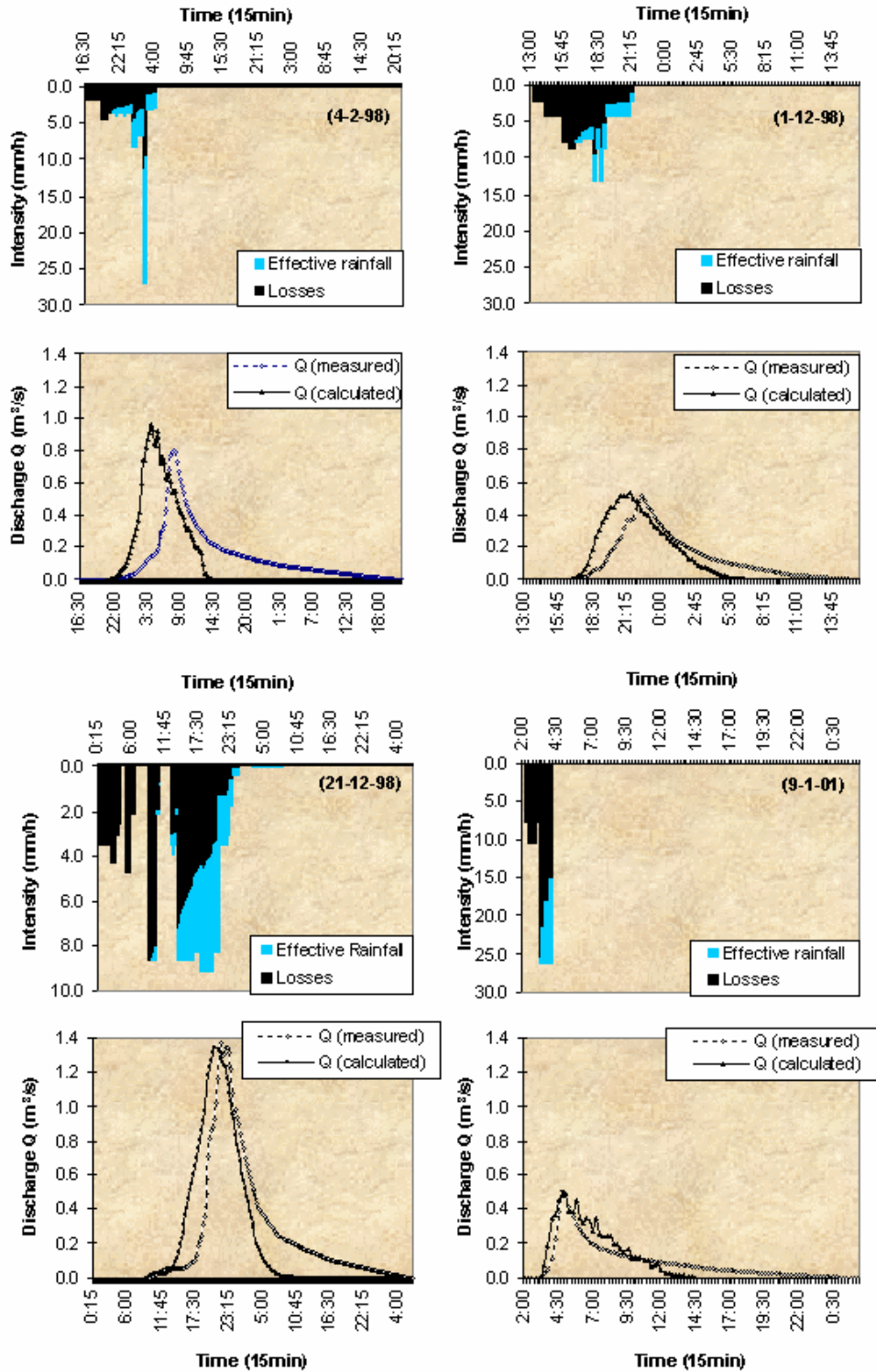


Figure 4. Hyetographs divided into effective rainfall and rainfall losses and the flood hydrographs (measured and calculated) of the selected rainfall events.

Some differences that appeared are due to the fact that this particular method calculates the base duration of each rainfall event, regardless of the excess rainfall input (Saghafian et al. 2002). Therefore, it is necessary to overcome the difficulties that may appear in the

calculation of the base duration of the flood hydrograph. These difficulties are created by the complexity of the interactions between the hydrologic parameters (topography, flow resistance within soil, soil type) and the parameters of infiltration and spatial-temporal distribution of rainfall. In addition, the form of the descending curve's sector depends almost exclusively on the characteristics of the stream channels watercourse, which the method does not take into account (Mimikou and Baltas 2002). Thus, while the produced flood hydrographs present the bell-shaped form that are supposed to have and simultaneously simulate relatively well the ascendant sector, nevertheless, the calculated flood hydrographs descend enough faster than the corresponding measured, because of their particular base duration.

## CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions resulting from this research work are concentrated on the following:

- The developed model that was based on the time area (TA) rainfall – runoff analysis and applied in a small-forested watershed gave satisfactory results especially for the ascendant curve of the simulated flood hydrographs. However, a combination of the model's application with the determination of the transportation of sediment would improve its application.
- The ratio of the flow velocity outside the stream channel to that inside the stream channel was 1:50.
- The mean percentage of time that a drop of direct runoff in each grid-cell needs inside the stream channel, till it reaches the outlet of the watershed, is only 13.2% of the total travel time.

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