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Influence of the ambient humidity on the concentration of natural deposition ice nuclei

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Abstract

This study reports measurements of deposition ice nuclei (IN) concentration at ground level during the period July–December 2014 in Córdoba, Argentina. The measurements were carried out at temperature of −25 °C and at 15 % supersaturation over ice. They were performed on days with different thermodynamic conditions, including rainy days. The effect of the relative humidity at ground level (RH_{amb}) on the IN concentration was analyzed. The number of IN activated varied from 1 L^{-1} at RH_{amb} of 25 % to 30 L^{-1} at RH_{amb} of 90 %. In general, a linear trend between the IN concentration and the RH_{amb} was found, suggesting that this variable must be related to the ability of the aerosols acting as IN. These results are consistent with previous results. From the backward trajectories analysis, it was found that the link between IN concentration and RH_{amb} is independent of the origin of the air masses. The role of nucleation occurring in pores and cavities was discussed as possible mechanism to explain the increase on the IN concentration during high ambient relative humidity events.

1 Introduction

Natural ice nuclei (IN) are considered important in atmospheric processes since they induce freezing in clouds, thus initiating an efficient mechanism for cloud particles to reach a precipitating size. Consequently, many studies have been undertaken to determine their absolute concentrations, their origin and their chemical composition (DeMott et al., 2011; Hoose and Möhler, 2012).

Homogeneous freezing of supercooled droplets occurs at temperatures near −40 °C, but at temperatures warmer than approximately −36 °C heterogeneous nucleation occurs (e.g. Cantrell and Heymsfield, 2005), which involves four different modes: condensation freezing, immersion freezing, contact freezing and deposition nucleation (Vali, 1985). Cloud condensation nuclei (CCN) serve as IN at temperatures below 0 °C during the condensation freezing mode. During the immersion-freezing mode, a particle pen-

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etrates the droplet, then initiates freezing. In the contact-freezing mode, ice is formed by the collision of cloud droplets with interstitial aerosols within the cloud. When the environment is supersaturated with respect to ice and subsaturated with respect to liquid water, ice deposits on the IN directly from the vapor phase. This last mode is known as deposition nucleation. Measurements performed in the regime below water saturation are important in the understanding of the deposition nucleation (DeMott et al., 2011).

Temperature and supersaturation ratio are the two main parameters determining the deposition nucleation. Several reports have provided measurements of IN concentration for different temperature and supersaturation conditions. Studies linking IN concentration to temperature have shown an exponential trend in the dependence of IN on temperature (e.g. Fletcher, 1962; Hussain and Saunders, 1984; Meyers et al., 1992; López and Ávila, 2013). This same correlation was found when studying IN concentration regarding supersaturation (e.g. Rogers, 1982; Al-Naimi and Saunders, 1985; Hussain and Saunders, 1984; Cooper, 1980; López and Ávila, 2013).

Although temperature and supersaturation are recognized as the two main parameters in the activation of the IN, a significant divergence among the results of IN quantification is found in the literature when IN measurements are carried out at around the same temperature and supersaturation conditions (DeMott et al., 2011; Hoose and Möhler, 2012). In general, the results show that the ice-nuclei content on the atmosphere varies considerably from day to day and from place to place. For instance, important anomalies of atmospheric ice nuclei were observed under thunderclouds. Increments at ground level ice nucleus concentrations by a factor of 10 or higher have been measured during precipitation from convective storm precipitation. These anomalies were associated with downdrafts in and under the thunderclouds (Isono and Tanaka, 1966; Isaac and Douglas, 1973). Prenni et al. (2013) also studied the impact of precipitation at a forested site on the concentration and composition of IN. They showed that at ground level IN-concentrations increase during rain events.

Thus, our knowledge of ice formation through the nucleation modes is still scarce and limited. As a consequence, the ice nucleation processes are currently very poorly rep-

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resented in global climate models (e.g. Hoose et al., 2010). Then, the study of ice cloud formation over a wide range of atmospherically relevant temperatures and humidity values is challenging (e.g. DeMott et al., 2011; Murray et al., 2012). Particularly, studies on anomalies in atmospheric ice nucleus concentration are important, since they will give us clues for solving problems on the origin and the nature of atmospheric ice nuclei. Regarding the possible effect of precipitation on the IN-concentration, this study reports measurements of IN-concentration at ground level during the period July–December 2014 in Córdoba, Argentina. The experiments were performed on days with different thermodynamic conditions, including precipitation days, and the effect of the relative humidity at ground level on the IN concentration was analyzed. IN-concentrations in deposition nucleation mode were determined at a temperature of approximately −25 °C and supersaturation of approximately 15 % over ice. The ambient relative humidity at ground level was measured during all the experiments, in order to link this variable to the IN concentration.

2 Experimental

Measurements were carried out in Córdoba, a mediterranean city of Argentina, located in the center of the country, in a semiarid region (latitude −31.4°; longitude −64.18°; 470 m a.s.l.). Córdoba is the second largest city in the country, with approximately 1.3 million inhabitants. The climate is sub-humid and the prevailing wind direction is NE. The annual average precipitation is close to 700 mm. However, the area is affected by severe and persistent dry periods that occur cyclically. Snowfalls are infrequent; thus, precipitations consist mostly of rain. Rainfall is highly seasonal, concentrated mainly in summer (December–February) having accumulated values higher than 400 mm, while the dry winter season (June–August) has a cumulative precipitation depth close to 20 mm.

In the present work, a total of 63 measurements of IN concentration were carried out during 45 days, since 28 July 2014 until 10 December 2014 (winter and spring sea-

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sons). In a previous work we have quantified the IN-concentration (López and Ávila, 2013) in deposition nucleation mode at ground level in Córdoba, for temperatures between −15 and −30 °C, and ice supersaturation ranging between 2 and 20 %. In the present work the experiments were carried out following the same procedure as described by López and Ávila (2013). This procedure involves a cloud chamber of 46 L in volume placed inside a cold room. Controlled volumes of humid air were injected from the exterior (at ambient temperature) in order to increase the relative humidity in the cloud chamber. Since the same volume of air is removed while this air is injected, the number of aerosols and the pressure inside the chamber are kept around constant. The increasing of the relative humidity inside the cloud chamber (RH) is explained according the adiabatic isobaric mixing of two masses of air with different RH and temperature (Curry and Webster, 1999). The supersaturation is achieved starting with a RH slightly lower than 100 % in the cloud chamber and introducing controlled air injections from outside. Since the increase of RH for each air injection is known, it is possible to estimate the increase produced by a known number of injections, even once the vapor is supersaturated over ice (RH > 100 %). Once the supersaturation is reached, the IN are activated and then grown at the expense of vapor until ice crystals fall down onto a dish placed on the floor of the cold chamber. This dish contains a supercooled aqueous solution of cane sugar. Once in the sugar solution, the ice crystals grow and reach a size enough to be counted with the naked eye, as can be seen in Fig. 1. For a more detailed description of the procedure, see López and Ávila (2013).

In all the measurements carried out in the present work the conditions of temperature (T) and supersaturation over ice (S_i) were settled at around −25 °C and 15 %, respectively. These values were chosen because, under these conditions, the number of activated IN are significant and can be easily determined (López and Ávila, 2013). Furthermore, these T and S_i values are experimentally quick to reach, which facilitate carrying out the experiments. In order to determine RH and T in the cloud chamber the Testo 435-4 multifunction measuring instrument was used. This instrument measures RH in the temperature range [−50, 150] °C. When RH is measured over ice at tempera-

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tures below 0 °C, the resolution is 0.1 %. The experimental uncertainty associated with the determination of T and S_i was ±2 °C and ±2 %, respectively. These errors arise from variations in the experimental conditions involved in each measurement, such as difference in the temperature between the beginning and the end of the air injections, variability in the RH increase between the injections, number of injections until reaching the particular S_i, and accuracy of the RH sensor.

Thus, considering that T and S_i were the same for all the experiments (apart from the inherent errors), the IN concentration was studied as a function of the ambient relative humidity at ground level (RH_{amb}); this is the relative humidity of the air mass injected from the exterior. RH_{amb} was measured during all the experiments by using the instrument EE31 Series Model D (E+E Elektronik), which had a remote sensing probe for relative humidity measurements in the temperature range [−40, 180] °C. The uncertainty in the determination of RH_{amb} was ±1 %.

3 Results and discussions

The experiments were all performed for a supersaturated atmosphere with respect to ice and subsaturated with respect to liquid water; thus, only the deposition IN were quantified. The IN concentration was determined at a temperature of approximately −25 °C and supersaturation of approximately 15 % over ice. Figure 2 shows the temporal variations of the IN concentration values during the period under study. The grey points in the graph correspond to measurements performed during a rain event or immediately after rain had stopped. The error associated in the estimation of IN concentration did not exceed 10 %. There are some time periods without experimental data mainly because the cold chamber was unable to achieve the expected temperature. The period of study is too short to perform a reliable statistical test showing a seasonal behavior of IN concentration; nevertheless, the results do not seem to indicate that there is any particular trend during this period.

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In order to study the effect of the RH_{amb} in the IN concentration, Fig. 3 displays the IN concentration as a function of the RH_{amb}. Again, the grey points indicate measurements performed on rainy days. IN concentration values can be seen to increase with RH_{amb}. The best linear fitting of the data yield values of 0.39 and −9.2 for the slope and ordinate, respectively, being the square of the correlation coefficient (R^2) equal to 0.71. The linear trend between the IN concentration and the RH_{amb} is remarkable and the dispersion of the experimental points is likely due to the inherent errors associated with the determination of T, S_i, RH_{amb}, and IN-number, which are present in each experiment.

The number of IN activated varies from $\sim 1\,L^{-1}$ at RH_{amb} 25 % to $\sim 30\,L^{-1}$ at $RH_{amb} \sim 90$ %. This variation is consistent with the results reported in López and Ávila (2013) on the same site, who found that IN concentration values varied between 2 and $35\,L^{-1}$ at temperature of ~ -25 °C and ~ 15 % of supersaturation over ice. Thus, the variability in the IN concentration in the previous work could be related to the variability in RH_{amb} at the time the measurements were carried out (this variable was not recorded in such experiments). Current results are also in agreement with those reported by Prenni et al. (2013), who showed that, at ground level, the IN concentration rises by a factor of up to 40 during rain. Actually, here we observe that not only rainy days are required for increasing IN concentrations but also high relative humidity is needed, as shown in Fig. 3 during rainfall events with low humidity.

A variety of insoluble particles such as volcanic ash, mineral dust, soot, metallic particles, or primary biological particles have been suggested as IN. However, the requirements needed for a surface to be an efficient IN are not completely understood or known at this time (Pruppacher and Klett, 1997; DeMott, 2010; Hoose et al., 2010). Prenni et al. (2013) presented evidence that the rising of IN concentration during rain events can be related to the increase of biological particle concentration. This assumption was supported by different studies reporting both: the release of biological particles during rain events and the role of these particles as sources of IN (Huffman et al., 2012, 2013). Even though in the present work the increase of IN concentration cannot be an-

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alyzed in relation to biological particles, the role of biological particles acting as IN will be studied in a future work.

Mineral dust aerosols seem to play a relevant role in deposition nucleation. They have active sites which are able to start ice nucleation. These active sites are linked to surface defects, like cracks, capillaries, pores or cavities which allow water vapor to condense in them under vapor pressures below saturation (Fukuta, 1966; Fletcher, 1969). Water vapor condenses in a capillary of a wettable particle under a pressure below water saturation (p), according to Kelvin equation

$$RTr\ln\left(\frac{p}{p_b}\right) = -2\gamma v_l \quad (1)$$

R is the gas constant, T the absolute temperature, r the radius of the curved water surface, p_b the water vapor pressure over a flat water surface, γ the surface tension of water and v_l the molar volume of liquid water. Recently, Marcolli (2014) hypothesized that ice nucleation below water saturation occurs predominantly in water confined between closely spaced surfaces, such as cavities and pores that may form in aerosol particles. In this sense, it is plausible to expect that as the RH_{amb} increases, more water molecules from the surrounding environment can be adsorbed in cavities and pores. As a result, the condensation and the subsequent freezing can occur in the cavity when the relative humidity is lower than 100 % outside. Considering this fact, a significant enhancement in ice nucleation efficiency should be expected at higher ambient relative humidity, which is consistent with the results reported here. Even though further work is needed to test and corroborate this hypothesis, the results presented in this work support the idea that the deposition nucleation can be a pore condensation and freezing which occur in the defects on the surface of some aerosol particles as proposed by Marcolli (2014).

In order to relate the origin of the air masses to the behavior of IN measurements regarding RH, backward trajectories were calculated for all days when IN concentration measurements were carried out. Back trajectories were calculated

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by the NOAA HYSPLIT model (Hybrid Single-Particle Lagrangian Integrated Trajectory model) (Draxler and Rolph, 2003). Air mass back trajectories were calculated at 1000 m above mean sea level (AMSL), 48 h before the arrival time to the sampling site. NOAA trajectories were calculated every day of IN concentration measurements. The air mass back trajectories were subdivided into four groups, regarding the quadrants from the Compass Rose. As an example, Fig. 4 shows the air mass back trajectories representative of the four studied sectors, which will be referred as North-West quadrant (example: Fig. 4a), North-East quadrant (example: Fig. 4b), South-West quadrant (example: Fig. 4c) and South-East quadrant (example: Fig. 4d). The lower sample number was obtained coming from NW quadrant (7.5 %), while the highest numbers of IN measurements were obtained coming from NE quadrant (42.5 %). Trajectories coming from SE and SW quadrants were 22.5 and 27.5 %, respectively. Figure 5 shows the IN concentration measurements grouped following the previous classification of the origin of air masses. Observe that the number of IN measurements from NW quadrant is scarce to make an analysis. However, the analysis from the three remaining quadrants show the increase of IN concentration with the increase in RH_{amb}, in the same way that it was observed in Fig. 3. Results show that, from the studied period, variations in RH_{amb} are not explained because of the origin of the air masses. This is to say that, the relation between IN concentration and the ambient relative humidity is independent from the origin of the air masses. This fact discards the possibility that the increase in IN concentration is due to changes in the sources of the aerosols acting as ice nuclei. Thus, HYSPLIT results seem to be consistent with the previous assumption regarding to the importance of the ambient relative humidity on the ability of aerosols to act as IN.

4 Summary and concluding remarks

Studies of heterogeneous ice nucleation with natural aerosols under a broad range of thermodynamic conditions are important, because they can provide clues for solving

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problems regarding the origin and the nature of atmospheric IN. This study reports measurements of deposition IN concentration at ground level during the period July–December 2014 in Córdoba, Argentina. The experiments were carried out at temperature $(-25 \pm 2)^{\circ}$C and supersaturation (15 ± 2) % over ice. The effect of the relative humidity at ground level on the IN concentration was analyzed and a linear trend between the IN concentration and the RH_{amb} was found, suggesting that this variable must be related to the ability of the aerosols acting as IN. This assumption seems to be corroborated by the analysis of the backward trajectories of the air masses, which shows that the relation between IN concentration and the ambient relative humidity is independent from the origin of the air masses. Therefore, the variability observed on IN concentration cannot be explained regarding the changes in the sources of the aerosols acting as ice nuclei.

The role of biological-IN and nucleation occurring in pores and cavities (as suggested by Marcolli, 2014) was discussed as possible mechanism to explain the increase on the IN concentration during high ambient relative humidity events. More ice nucleation studies should be carried out to address the differentiation between this mechanism.

This work contributes to the study of the factors affecting the IN-concentration. Laboratory studies of heterogeneous ice nucleation with natural aerosols are important for the possibility to transfer the results into parameterizations for numerical models of clouds and climate.

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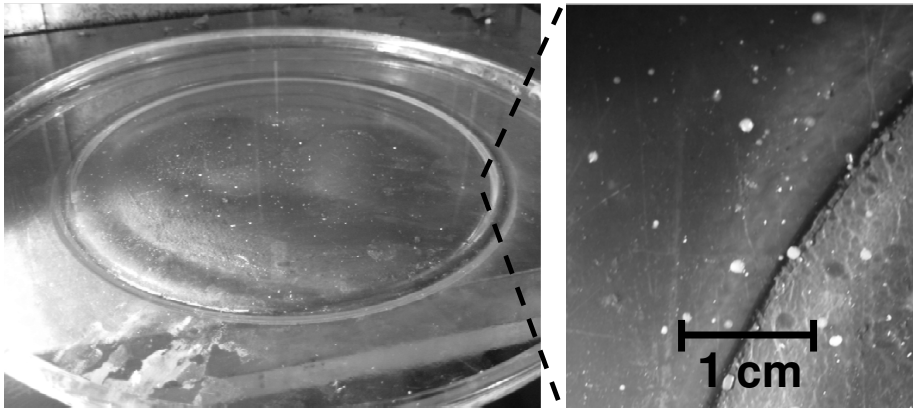

Figure 1. Images of crystals once they grown on the sugar solution.

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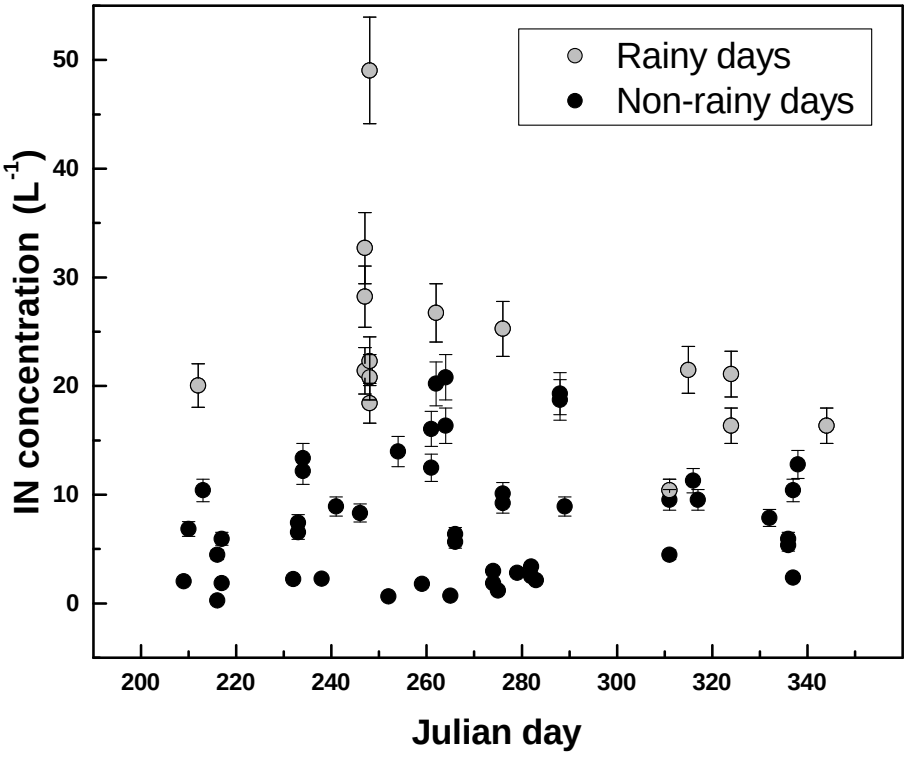

Figure 2. Data of IN concentration measured throughout the period studied.

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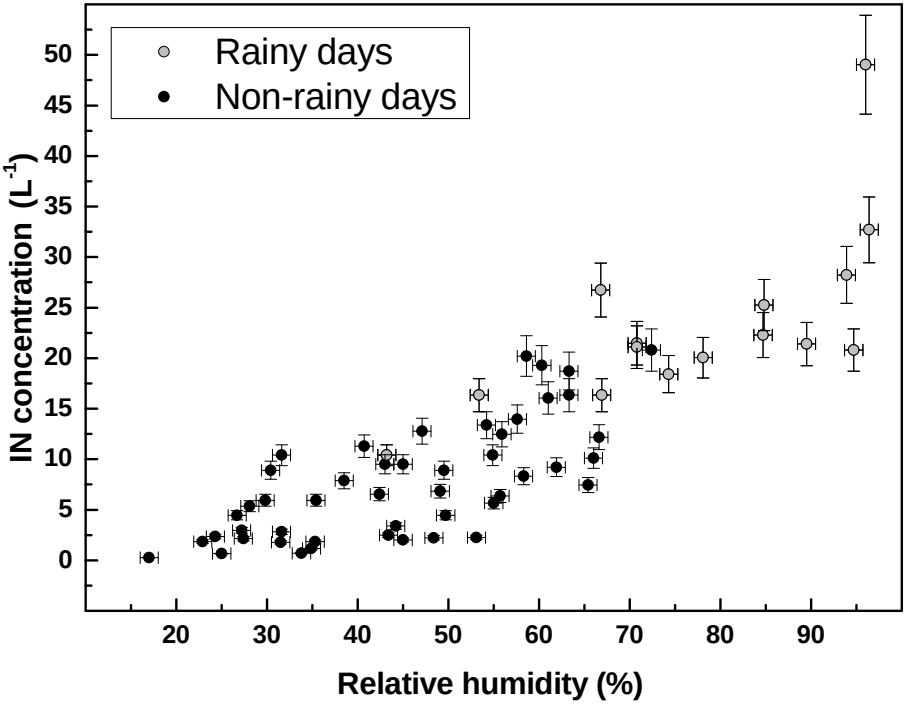

Figure 3. Data of IN concentration at different ambient relative humidity.

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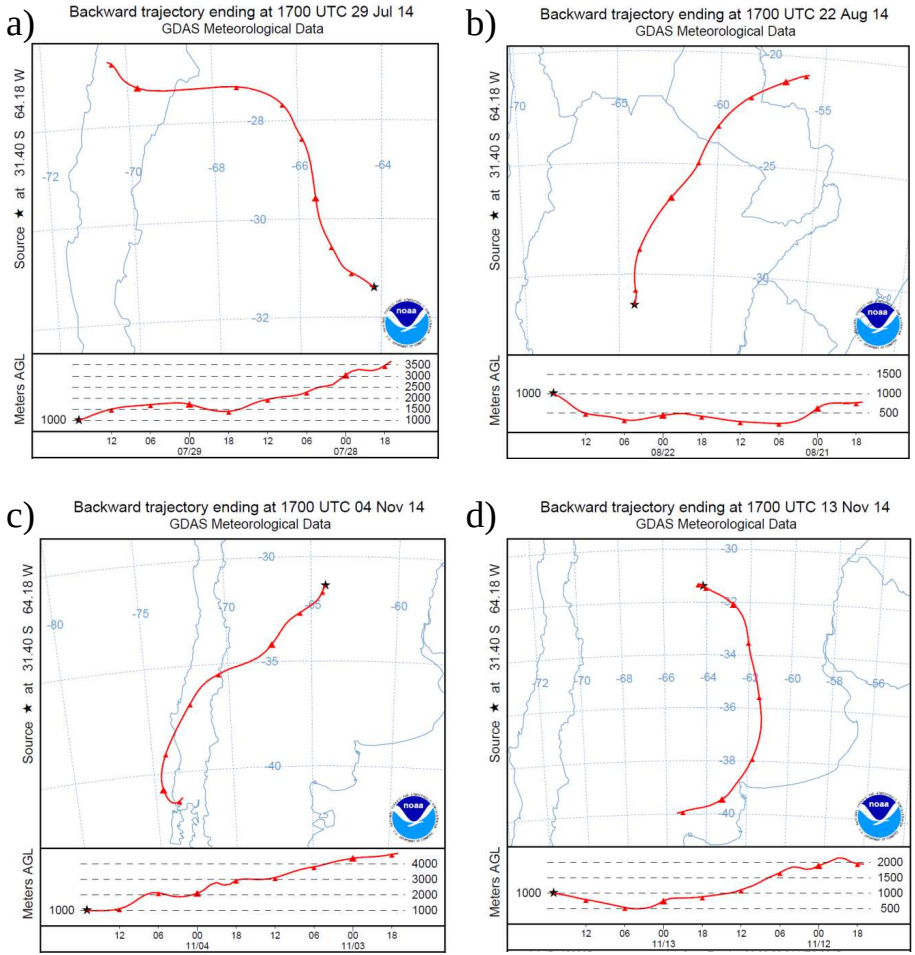

Figure 4. Air mass pathways of different categories: **(a)** North-West quadrant, **(b)** North-East quadrant, **(c)** South-West quadrant and **(d)** South-East quadrant.

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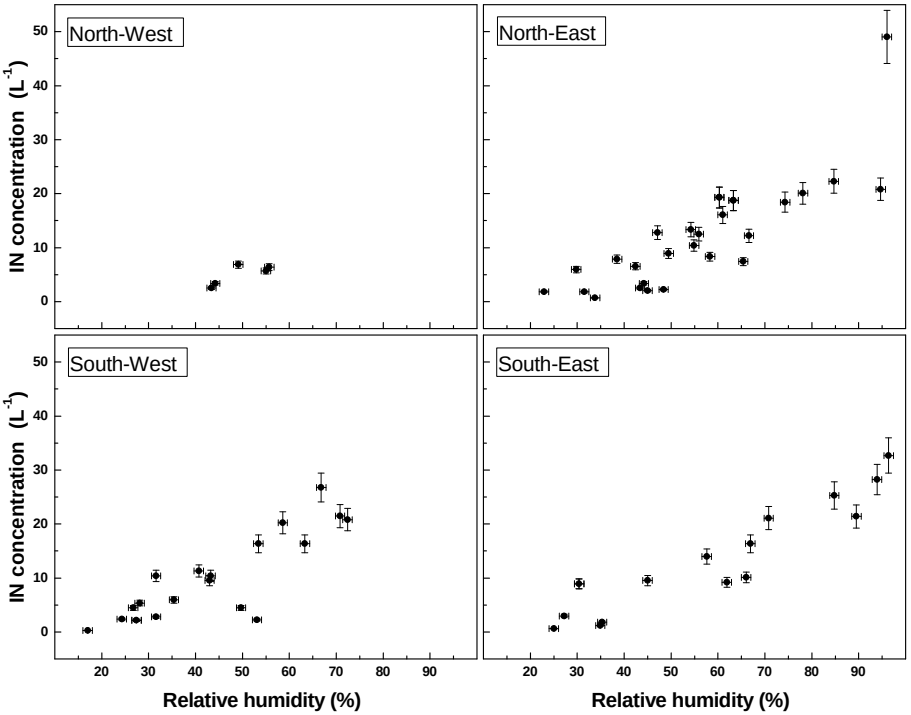

Figure 5. IN concentration at different ambient relative humidity for the different origins of the air masses.

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