

High resolution wind resource assessment over complex terrain: influence of 4D data assimilation in the WRF-LES wind model

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Abstract: To develop a reliable tool for accurate evaluations of the wind behavior over both flat and complex terrain, a novel methodology that assimilates field measurements at surface level for multiscale wind simulations was implemented and tested in the Weather Research and Forecasting model (WRF-ARW). The proposed method was applied to perform high resolution simulations, i.e. mesh sizes up to 2 m, of real case studies with nested domains and the introduction of a variational data assimilation (DA) technique of field observations, from databases registered for specific experiments over heterogeneous topography. In the inner domains, the atmospheric boundary layer (ABL) parameterization was executed with a 1.5 TKE turbulence scheme for large-eddy simulation (LES), employed to obtain detailed realizations of the anisotropic turbulence of the surface layer. Field data was introduced in the innermost domain through a 4D data assimilation system to correct the numerical deviations every 10 minutes in the first 6 hours of the simulation. Four experiments are presented, in two separate scenarios: (i) the Høvsøre case, at Denmark, to replicate a neutrally stratified wind flow over real flat terrain, in which the DA process was accomplished through a three layer single-point met-mast measurement located at the domain center and (ii) the Bolund case, at Denmark, to realize a neutrally stratified wind flow over steep complex terrain, where the DA was taken from 8 met-masts distributed in a neural network across the domain. Validation of this approach was made for each case by contrasting the modelling results with field observations from campaign databases and related literature. The outcomes show that it is possible to obtain more accurate predictions of surface wind flow, replicating the nonlinear turbulent phenomena at finescale and that employing data assimilation reduces the wind estimations and predictions over real topography by 10%. In presence of very steep terrain, the 4D assimilation technique needs further improvement due to the proximity of field measurements to the ground and strong terrain induced forcing, which impose a tough constraint on high resolution wind modelling.

Keywords: Wind resource assessment; multiscale wind modelling; data assimilation; large-eddy simulation; complex terrain.

1 Introduction

The growing demand for cleaner energy sources in power generation due to global warming and environmental issues makes it necessary to use new tools to support the investment decision-making in these projects. Specifically, if one speaks of wind energy, variables such as wind speed, direction and gradient must be predicted effectively and efficiently to respond to the electrical coordination or identify failures due to undesirable mechanical stresses in the turbines. Historically two ways has been taken to predict the wind behavior. The first is an statistical approach that uses data from several meteorological masts or other instrumentation located in a domain to extrapolate information to a time of interest. This approach present some weakness: (i) dependency of the instrumentation, (ii) the historical databases can't capture actual and local conditions of the atmosphere such as climate change, and (iii) the statistical values don't show the behavior of the continuous terrain but in some arbitrary points. Is because this that for more specific goals a second approach is used: the Numerical Weather Prediction (NWP). The NWP target is to find the future state of the meteorological variables by integration of the partial differential equations system that models the atmosphere behavior. One of the most relevant property of this system is the presence of multiples scales, i.e. the preponderant forces that governs the air dynamics vary depending of the space-temporal scale to analyze. Is convenient then to separate the spatial dependence associating a characteristic length to the domain of interest, in this way a global scale, synoptic scale, mesoscale and microscale can be defined. This scales multiplicity introduces a new challenge to overcome: the computational cost of solving a system of equations valid for the entire atmosphere. Consequence of this, a spectrum of numerical models have been created specifically for each spatial scale with their own equations, but

the initialization of a small-scale model requires the results of a larger one. With respect to global models, these have shown to be able to correctly simulate many aspects of the general circulation of the atmosphere ([Stocker et al. 2013](#)), however, for engineering interests, the focus is on the local behavior of the wind, specifically, how it moves within the planetary boundary layer (PBL) which is the part of the atmosphere we inhabit and that is outside the resolution of these models. The approach being used today for small-scale atmospheric simulation, i.e. solving the structures belonging to the PBL, is through the so-called dynamic downscaling, interpolating the results from a large-scale model to a small-scale model in order to function as a boundary condition and generate a forecast in a finer mesh. This method defines what is understood by multi-scale simulation and this type of simulation is still widely discussed by the scientific community ([Arnold et al. 2010](#)). The use of dynamic downscaling proved to be successful at least in the spectrum of global and synoptic scales. Numerical issues arise in the mesoscale due to terrain forcing and the relevance of local surface fluxes. The reduction to the microscale causes the increase in the relevance of turbulent stresses in the equations, requiring a much more precise handling. Due to the space-time numerical grid dimensions in large scale models, the turbulence associated with the interaction with the surface and the thermal effects are generally parameterized through a turbulent viscosity model. In scales close to the microscale, the models start natively to solve the turbulent structures generating a problem due to the double weighting of these structures as they are being solved on the one hand and parameterized on the other. This zone is known as the grey zone ([Wyngaard 2004](#)) and an incorrect configuration of the dynamic downscaling in this zone can cause non-physical results of the model. At the microscale it is possible to represent the turbulence according to known numerical models such as LES or RANS depending on the case. Atmospheric models such as WRF have been widely used in recent years to predict wind behavior at the mesoscale through multiscale simulations, but only a few studies have addressed this behavior at the microscale in real simulations. The researches that analyze the behavior of the LES to represent the PBL generally use ideal conditions (e.g. periodic boundary conditions, flat terrain, imposed pressure gradients) which allows the validation of the approach, but at the cost of losing the operativeness of working in a realistic scenarios. Simulating a real case implies the use of high resolution databases for terrain elevation and land use category. In this work, in order to obtain the best possible solution for a short-term wind forecast in PBL, the use of a 4D data assimilation system was also considered with measurements obtained in the surface proximity within the simulation time window.

Lastly, the philosophy of this work is to establish the foundations of a new method for assessing the wind resource without relying on ad hoc idealizations, but through fundamental physics and the correct implementation of state-of-the-art instrumentation. The results obtained will serve as a benchmark for future verification of new or experimental models that perform high-resolution simulations in real terrain.

2 Methodology

2.1 ARW-WRF Atmospheric Model and Large Eddy Simulation

The WRF model is a state-of-the-art numerical mesoscale model that represent the latest scientific and engineering developments in climate prediction. It is open source, flexible, portable and efficient so that it allows simulations on both notebooks and massively parallelized supercomputers ([Skamarock et al. 2008](#)). In this work, the 3.8.1 version was used. It solves the non-hydrostatic Euler equations for fully compressible flow through a finite difference scheme. Spatial discretization is carried out through a C-Arakawa horizontal grid and a ground-following vertical grid based on hydrostatic dry air pressure. Temporal integration is carried out with a 2nd order Runge-Kutta scheme and the pressure waves that arises due to the model compressibility are filtered from the mean field through a divergence filter and are resolved in a time sub-step (1/3 of the external mode) to ensure the stability of the model. Boundary and initial conditions are specified from the results of a global model. A constant pressure condition with a damping layer is used at the upper boundary and wall functions are used at the soil surface through the surface layer parametrization.

The physical phenomena that lies within the model's mesh resolution are parameterized through several advanced schemes provided by the WRF team. Radiation, phase-change, cloud formation, surface interaction, boundary layer transport and turbulence are all considered within the model and are included in the right side

of the equations as dependent terms. Regarding turbulence, for the mesoscale it is represented by a vertical eddy viscosity that is computed in the PBL parametrization subroutine, while the horizontal eddy viscosity is computed through a Smagorinsky closure (Smagorinsky 1963). On the microscale, the PBL parametrization is turned off and a LES 1.5TKE model is used (Deardorff 1980). The LES package in WRF (Yamaguchi and Feingold 2012), expresses the eddy viscosity as:

$$v_t = c_k \ell \sqrt{k}, \quad (1)$$

where c_k is the constant of the TKE model ($0.15 \sim 0.30$) and k is the sub-grid kinetic energy defined as:

$$k = \frac{1}{2} \tau_{nn}. \quad (2)$$

The characteristic length ℓ of the model is computed as:

$$\ell = \begin{cases} \min[(\Delta x \Delta y \Delta z)^{1/3}, 0.76 \sqrt{k}/N] & N^2 > 0 \\ (\Delta x \Delta y \Delta z)^{1/3} & N^2 \leq 0 \end{cases} \quad (3)$$

Where N is the Brunt-Väisälä frequency for humid air. The value of k in each domain cell is calculated based on the transport equation defined by Skamarock et al. (2008).

2.2 Data Assimilation Process

From the WRF model, three-dimensional arrays of resolved meteorological variables (background) are obtained for a given time. The data assimilation (DA) goal is to physically weight the field measurements (observations) with these results to obtain the best estimate of the state of the atmosphere (analysis). Theoretically, the DA tries to minimize the cost function $J(x)$ that weighs the errors coming from the background J_b and from observations J_o :

$$J(x) = J_b + J_o = \frac{1}{2}(x - x_b)^T B^{-1}(x - x_b) + \frac{1}{2}(Hx - y)^T R^{-1}(Hx - y) \quad (4)$$

Here B is the background variance or error matrix (from the model), R is the observation error matrix (from the instruments) and H is the observation operator that performs a 3D interpolation of the numerical grid values to the observation space. This equation is solved recursively using a Quasi-Newtonian minimization algorithm.

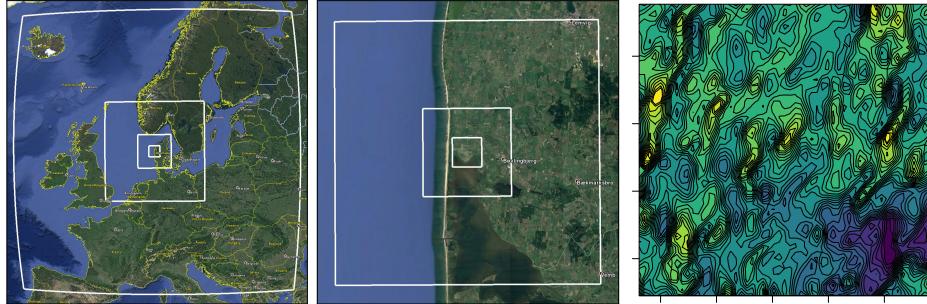


Figure 1: (Left-Center) Simulation domains for H1-H2. (Right) Resolved velocity contour at the innermost domain at UTC 15:00.

2.3 Case Study Settings

The goal of this study is to evaluate the behavior of the WRF mesoscale model in its LES mode when forced up to 3m mesh size while incorporating surface data assimilation within the PBL. Four experiments were developed for this purpose. The first two were carried out at Høvsøre (Peña et al. 2015; 2013; Floors et al. 2013) for the case without (H1) and with DA (H2). The last two correspond to simulations made in the Bolund Hill (Berg et al. 2011; Bechmann et al. 2009; 2011) for the case without (B1) and with DA (B2). The simulation's high resolution is achieved through the implementation of non-native WRF databases and downscaling The ASTER

database was used for the terrain height and Corine 2012 database (Pineda et al. 2004) was used for land use category. As for the downscaling, nested domains with feedback were used (7 for H-experiments and 8 for B-experiment). The subdomains were selected as to avoid the double weighting due to the turbulent grey zone (Wyngaard 2004). The standard 3:1 ratio was used in the meso and microscale and a 5:1 ratio (Green and Zhang 2015) for the domains where the shift to the microscale occurs (*terra incognita*). Initial and boundary condition of the coarser mesh is given by the operational analysis of the GFS global model with 0.5° of resolution. The boundary condition was mapped to the first domain border using a buffer zone of 5 elements of mesh and are updated every 6 hours. The configuration of the domains was subjected to a sensitivity analysis in order to adjust the best values to ensure: (i) the model stability, (ii) the convergence of results for the boundary layer and (iii) the lowest computation time. In this fashion, the number of elements for the mesh and the top boundary condition are established. The number of nodes in all the domains are set as $107 \times 107 \times 37$ for H-experiments and $107 \times 107 \times 41$ for B-experiment (except for the innermost domain which is $107 \times 92 \times 41$ due to the terrain database). For the vertical mesh, special care is taken to refine it so it is consistent with the application of the LES. In the first level there is an aspect ratio of $\Delta_x/\Delta_{z_1} = 2.35$ (see Figure 2) and this is progressively reduced in the higher levels. Lastly, the data needed to feed the data assimilation process comes from meteorological masts located within the innermost domain in each experiment. For the H-experiments there is one mast located at the center and for the B-experiments there are 8 masts distributed as shown in Figure 2. The frequency at which the background is corrected is set at 10 minutes and is performed during the first 6 hours of the simulation. The variables that were assimilated are wind speed and direction, and are assimilated at 10, 40, 60, 80 and 100 meters above the ground for H-experiments and 2,5 and 9 meters for B-experiments.

For H-experiments, the performed simulations consists of a total of 14 hours, where the first 6 correspond to the spinup of the model and the time window where the data assimilation is applied. The date of the simulation were selected in such a way that it corresponds to a period with neutral atmospheric stability as declared by Peña et al. (2013) in its case 5, i.e. 08/09/2010 from 06:00 to 20:00, and the validation was done through comparison with values from that measurement campaign.

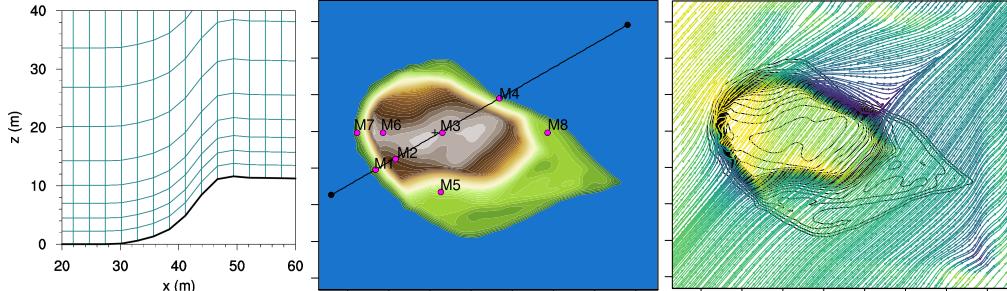


Figure 2: (Left) Detail the steep slope on a 1:1 scale. (Center) Control points locations for B1-2. (Right) Resolved streamlines at UTC 15:00.

The B-experiments consisted of 9 hours of simulation, with the first 6 hours being used for spinup and DA. The date was selected according to what was declared by Bechmann et al. (2009) for a day with the most neutral stratification possible, i.e. 29/12/2007 from 06:00 to 15:00. The validation was carried out by contrasting the values given for the blind comparison.

To evaluate the performance of the simulations in relation to the real data, RMSE and the MAE applied to the wind speed are used as metrics.

$$MAE = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n |V_m - V_o| \quad ; \quad RMSE = \sqrt{\frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n (V_m - V_o)^2} \quad (5)$$

Where V_o is the observed speed and V_m is the modelled speed. The evaluation these metrics was performed after the spinup time and each of the measured values is compared with the nearest simulated value, interpolated

to the corresponding height in the mast. The interpolation is made using a simple logarithmic law for the wind profile,

$$u(z) = u(z_r) \frac{\ln(z/z_0)}{\ln(z_r/z_0)} \quad (6)$$

Where z_0 is the corresponding roughness length for each case (Peña et al. 2013; Bechmann et al. 2011).

3 Remarkable Results and Conclusions

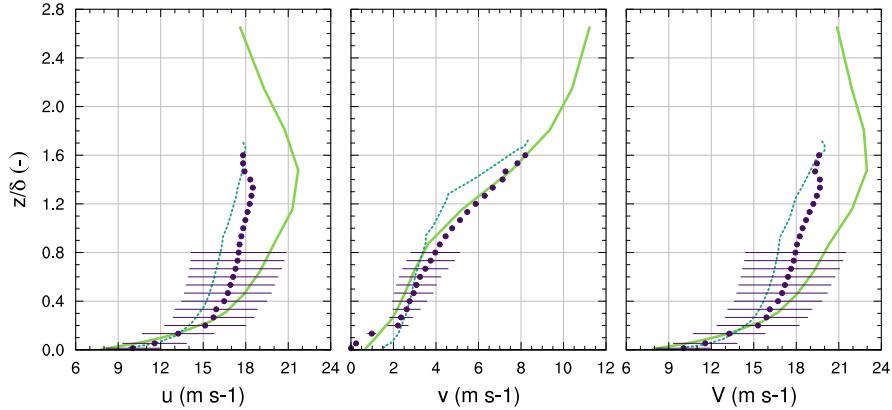


Figure 3: Comparación de la simulación (línea continua) con la simulación de Peña et. al. en el 2013 (línea punteada) y valores medidos para (a) componente u de la velocidad del viento, (b) componente v y (c) magnitud de la velocidad del viento. Los datos corresponden a promedios temporales entre las 12:00 y 15:00, y han sido rotados de tal forma que su dirección sea 0° a los 10m.

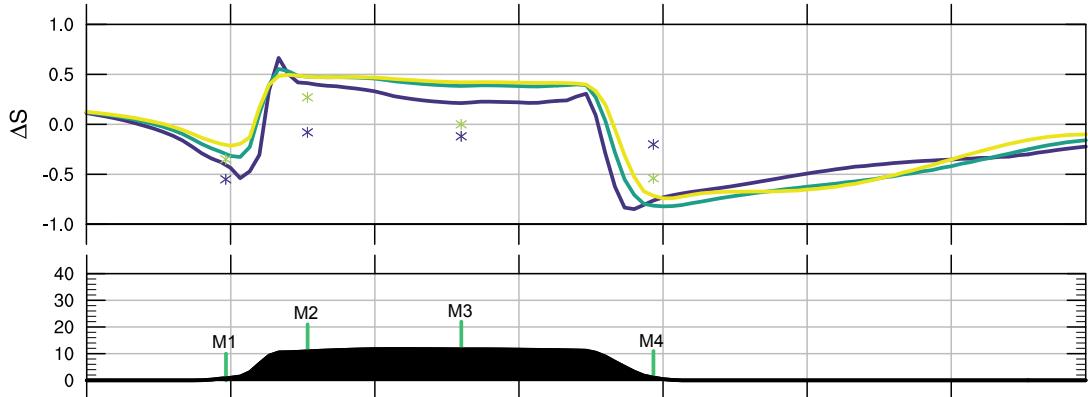


Figure 4: Speedup en los primeros 3 niveles del modelo (1.1 [m] azul; 3.4 [m] verde; 5.6 [m] amarillo) para la sección de corte a 240° en Bolund. Se muestran los resultados para las 15:00 horas.

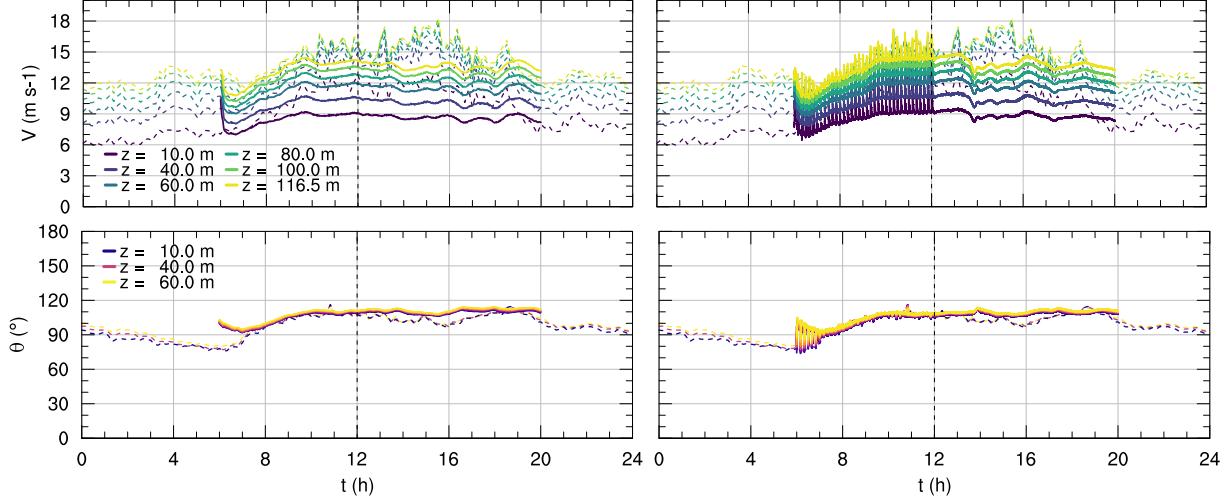


Figure 5: aaaaa

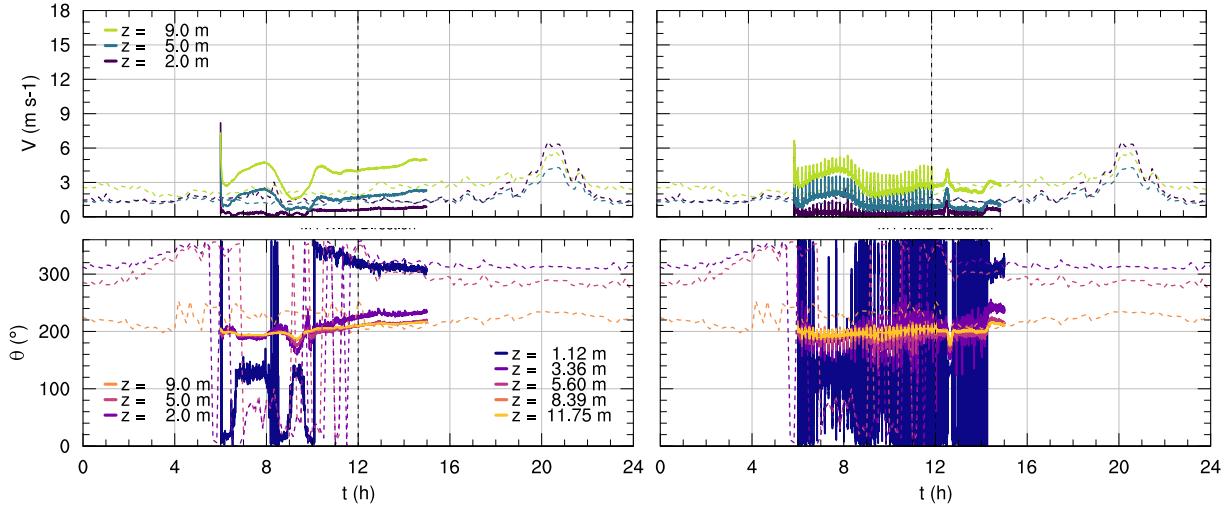


Figure 6: aaaaa

Table 1: Comparación de métricas para el caso II Bolund. Velocidad en (m s⁻¹).

	Hov	Hov w/DA	Bol	Bol w/DA
MAE	2.67	4.36	2.41	2.17
RMSE	2.95	4.90	2.80	2.56

4 Acknowledgements

The authors wish to sincerely thanks the Chilean National Commission for Scientific and Technological Research (CONICYT) for funding this research through project FONDEF ID16I10105, the Federico Santa María Technical University for its support through project PI-LI-19-04 and and the DTU Vindenergi for providing access to the data for the development of this research.

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