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3 **Table olives volatile fingerprints: Potential of an electronic nose for quality discrimination**

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## 1 **Abstract**

2 In the present work, the potential of an electronic nose to differentiate the quality of fermented green  
3 table olives based on their volatile profile was investigated. An electronic gas sensor array system  
4 comprising of a hybrid sensor array of 12 metal oxide and 10 metal ion based sensors were used to  
5 generate a chemical fingerprint (pattern) of the volatile compounds present in olives. Multivariate  
6 statistical analysis and artificial neural networks were applied to the generated patterns to achieve various  
7 classification tasks. Green olives were initially classified into three major classes (acceptable,  
8 unacceptable, marginal) based on a sensory panel. Multivariate statistical approach showed good  
9 discrimination between the class of unacceptable samples and the classes of acceptable and marginal  
10 samples. However, in the latter two classes there was a certain area of overlapping in which no clear  
11 differentiation could be made. The potential to discriminate green olives in the three selected classes was  
12 also evaluated using a multilayer perceptron (MLP) neural network as a classifier with a 18-15-8-3  
13 structure. Results showed good performance of the developed network as only two samples were  
14 misclassified in a 66-sample training dataset population, whereas only one case was misclassified in a 12-  
15 sample test dataset population. The results of this study provide promising perspectives for the use of a  
16 low-cost and rapid system for quality differentiation of fermented green olives based on their volatile  
17 profile.

18

19 *Keywords:* Table olives; Sensors; Quality; Electronic nose; Volatile fingerprints; Machine learning;

20 Neural networks

## 1 **1. Introduction**

2 Odour is a major olfactory parameter determining the sensory quality of food products and it  
3 is therefore of interest to investigate if volatile compounds contributing to the characteristic  
4 odours can be measured as indicators of quality assessment. This is also important for green table  
5 olives, one of the most popular fermented vegetables in the Western world. The production of  
6 volatile compounds tends to be the first mechanism for the development of flavour specific to a  
7 particular fermented food. Lowering the pH in lactic acid fermentation may reduce the enzymatic  
8 activity in olive tissue that generate either flavour components or flavour precursor compounds.  
9 Additionally, the microorganisms during the course of fermentation may directly metabolise  
10 precursor flavour compounds of flavour components producing a plethora of volatile compounds  
11 (esters, acids, alcohols, aldehydes, ketones, phenols, etc.) that characterise the process [1].

12 Generally, sensory analysis based on a trained expert panel is necessary for table olive  
13 classification and quality control but it is not always feasible due to high cost, while it is time-  
14 consuming and often without any objective value. In the last decades many efforts have been  
15 made to study the aromatic fraction of fermented olives based mainly on chromatographic  
16 determinations [2-9]. However, these analytical techniques are also time-consuming and require  
17 sophisticated equipment and skilled personnel. It would be therefore of great interest to  
18 investigate the potential of low-cost, rapid and non-destructive analytical procedure, such as the  
19 electronic nose, to quantify the overall quality of table olives.

20 In the last decade the electronic nose technology has offered the possibility to exploit, from a  
21 practical point of view, the information contained in the headspace in many different application  
22 areas. The use of the electronic nose for quality evaluation as a means of non-destructive  
23 olfactory sensing is becoming widespread as it has the advantage of low cost, good reliability and

1 high portability for *in situ* and on-line measurements [10,11]. Moreover, this technique has been  
2 shown to be rapid and simple compared with GC-MS [12-14]. The underlying hypothesis in  
3 electronic nose sensing for food safety/quality assessment is that the interaction of microbial  
4 association with the food system affects the type as well as the rate of metabolites produced  
5 either in the form of gas, solid or liquid. Sensing the gaseous metabolites (mainly volatile organic  
6 compounds) present in the headspace of a food commodity could provide useful information for  
7 the determination of the quality of a given food product [15]. The interaction of volatiles on the  
8 sensing element causes changes in electrical resistance of the sensor, and since sensor kinetics is  
9 different, the data produced are converted into an odour fingerprint which can be interpreted with  
10 the use of appropriate mathematical techniques, like multivariate statistical methods or artificial  
11 neural networks (ANNs). The obtained data are comparable in the sense that different samples  
12 may be characterised and discriminated based on their volatile production patterns [16,17]. In the  
13 literature there are several reports that demonstrate the potential of electronic nose in food-  
14 relevant applications for the classification of vegetable oils [18], quality control of olive oil  
15 aroma [19], characterisation of wines [20,21], determination of fish freshness [22], quality  
16 estimation of ground meat [23], grain quality evaluation [15,24-26], detection of microorganisms  
17 [27-30], detection of boar taint in meat [31], shelf life determination of tomato [32], and quality  
18 assessment of modified atmosphere packaged poultry meat [33]. However, the application of an  
19 electronic nose for quality discrimination of fermented table olives is reported here for the first  
20 time.

21 An artificial neural network (ANN) can be referred to as a neurocomputer with parallel  
22 distributed processors [34]. ANNs have been employed in recent years as an alternative to  
23 conventional regression models, due to their ability to describe highly complex and non-linear

1 problems in many fields of science. The most common neural network approach is multilayer  
2 perceptrons (MLPs) [35]. The basic idea behind ANNs lies in the direct exploration of the  
3 knowledge contained in the input-output patterns by adjusting the parameters of the non-linear  
4 network topology, as the input-output patterns are repeatedly presented to the network [34].  
5 When the system is supervised using an appropriate training dataset it can then be used to predict  
6 or classify different patterns not initially introduced to the network.

7 The objective of this study was to evaluate the performance of an electronic nose system to  
8 differentiate the quality of fermented green table olives based on their volatile fingerprints and  
9 classify them in three major classes (acceptable, marginal, unacceptable). Classification of the  
10 samples was based on both multivariate data analysis and artificial neural networks (ANNs)  
11 algorithms.

12

## 13 **2. Materials and methods**

### 14 *a. Table olive samples*

15 Twenty six samples of fermented green olives were obtained from a central hyper-market in  
16 Athens. The amount of each sample was *ca.* 0.5 kg. The volatile profile of each sample was  
17 assessed by a sensory panel and classified into three major groups, namely unacceptable ( $n = 3$ ),  
18 acceptable ( $n = 16$ ), and marginal ( $n = 7$ ). As there was no previous information on the  
19 application of an electronic nose for table olive quality assessment based on their volatile profiles,  
20 a bottom-up approach was followed to create a knowledge basis for the product. Initially, the  
21 potential of electronic nose to discriminate between unacceptable and a typical acceptable  
22 (reference) sample was investigated. Furthermore, the analysis was extended taking into account  
23 the unacceptable and marginal samples together with the reference sample. In the final step, all

1 groups of samples were taken together and their volatile profile was recorded and subjected to  
2 multivariate analysis.

3

#### 4 *b. Electronic nose data acquisition and analysis*

5 Electronic nose analysis was performed with a NST 3320 Lab Emission Analyser (Applied  
6 Sensors, Linköping, Sweden), equipped with a built-in headspace autosampler for 12 samples, a  
7 detector unit containing 23 different sensors and a built-in software package (NST Senstool) for  
8 collecting and processing data from the sensors. The instrument was equipped with 12 MOS  
9 (metal oxide semiconductor) sensors operating at 250-400°C, 10 MOSFET (metal oxide  
10 semiconductor field effect transistor) sensors operating at 140-170°C, and a humidity sensor for  
11 the determination of relative humidity at 70°C. The electronic nose operating system employed in  
12 this study has been described in detail elsewhere [33].

13 Olive samples of 2 g were weighed and placed in 25 ml glass vials, sealed with septa and  
14 screw caps, and incubated at 37°C for 1 h for headspace equilibration above the sample. Samples  
15 were then randomly placed in the autosampler and headspace gas was pumped over the sensors of  
16 the electronic nose. The total cycle time per sample was 4 min and 20 s. **The baseline phase was  
17 set to 30 s, the sample phase to 30 s and the recovery phase of the sensors to 240 s including the  
18 flush time of the gas lines .** Every sample was analysed in triplicate.

19

#### 20 *c. Data analysis*

21 The data collected were analysed using the XLStat software (version 2006.06, Addinsoft,  
22 Paris, France), a built-in statistical software package of Excel. Data exploration and interpretation  
23 was based on multivariate analytical techniques such as principal components analysis (PCA),

1 hierarchical cluster analysis (HCA), and discriminant function analysis (DFA) on the obtained  
2 sensor responses. Prior to analysis the raw sensor responses were normalised using the following  
3 equation:

$$4 \quad X_{norm} = \frac{X_i - X_{min}}{X_{max} - X_{min}} \quad (1)$$

5 where,  $X_i$  and  $X_{norm}$  are the raw and normalized response of a sensor  $i$ , and  $X_{min}$ ,  $X_{max}$  are the  
6 minimum and maximum sensor responses of the  $i$  sensor, respectively.

7 Predictive learning (classification) was performed on the whole dataset ( $n = 78$ ) of  
8 unacceptable, acceptable and marginal samples using artificial neural network (ANN) techniques.  
9 The type chosen in this study was a multilayer perceptron (MLP) based on back propagation. In  
10 these networks each node receives signals through connections with other nodes or the outside  
11 world in the case of the input layer. The net input to node  $j$  has the form:

$$12 \quad I_j = \sum_{i=1}^n w_{ij} \cdot x_i + \theta_j \quad (2)$$

13 where  $x_i$  are the inputs (sensor responses in our case),  $w_{ij}$  are connection weights associated with  
14 each input/node and  $\theta_j$  is the bias associated with node  $j$ . The output from each node is used as an  
15 input in a nonlinear transfer function:

$$16 \quad O_j = f(I_j) \quad (3)$$

17 In our work the sigmoidal function was selected as a transfer function in both hidden and output  
18 neurons. The standard backpropagation algorithm for network training is based on the steepest-  
19 descent gradient approach applied to the minimization of the error function defined as:

$$20 \quad MSE = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n (t_i - d_i)^2 \quad (4)$$

1 where  $t_i$  represents the desired network output,  $d_i$  is the actual network output, and  $n$  is the  
2 number of samples. The difference between the desired value and the actual network output was  
3 propagated back through the network to the input level. This training process, known as delta rule,  
4 is based on the minimization of the error by adjusting the weights given by the following  
5 equation:

$$6 \quad w_{kj}(n+1) = w_{kj}(n) + \eta e_k(n) x_j(n) + \alpha \Delta w_{kj}(n) \quad (5)$$

7 where  $w_{kj}(n)$  is the weight adjustment at time  $n$ ,  $e_k$  is the negative derivative of the total square  
8 error with respect to the neuron's output,  $x_j$  is the element of the input vector,  $\eta$  is the learning  
9 rate parameter, and  $\alpha$  the momentum term. In order to train and test the developed neural network,  
10 the entire database (78 samples) was divided into training (66 samples) and test (12 samples)  
11 dataset. To avoid any bias in database partitioning, table olive samples were allocated into each  
12 category using a method based on random number generation. The strategy employed for the  
13 classification of olives is the so-called one-of-many encoding [36]. The output of the network is  
14 a multidimensional vector with the number of the dimensions equal to the number of the classes  
15 of table olives to be determined, and each vectorial dimension is assigned to a class. In the  
16 training file, the class membership of a single data is coded in a numerical format by assigning 1  
17 to the belonging class and 0 to all others, i.e., acceptable olives are coded as (1,0,0), marginal  
18 samples as (0,1,0), and unacceptable as (0,0,1). In the test file, the membership of an input data is  
19 assigned to the class with greatest net output. The prediction performance of the network was  
20 defined as the ratio of number of correctly identified patterns to that of total patterns introduced  
21 to the network. The MLP network was developed using NeuralWorks Professional II/PLUS  
22 version 5.50 (NeuralWare, Carnegie, PA).

23



### 1 **3. Results**

2 Analyses were initially conducted with all samples of unacceptable olives together with the  
3 reference sample and the headspace of three replicates per treatment was examined using metal  
4 oxide/ion-based sensor arrays for discrimination. Replication of the sensor array was firstly  
5 examined and was found to be very consistent (Figure 1), indicating clear differences in volatile  
6 fingerprints between unacceptable and reference samples. The variation between replicates was  
7 relatively small and consistent. The potential for discrimination was better in the MOS sensors  
8 rather than the MOSFET sensors. Four of the sensors (MOSFET 104B, 105B, MOS 115, 116) of  
9 the electronic nose were excluded due to limited or very high response, when subjected to the  
10 volatile compounds of green olives. In addition, the responses of the humidity sensor were  
11 excluded as they did not show any clear differences among the samples.

12 Figure 2 depicts a PCA scores plot of the separation between the samples. This shows that  
13 PC1 and PC2 accounted for almost 91.6% of the variance and resulted in a clear discrimination  
14 between the volatile patterns of unacceptable samples compared to the reference sample. Cluster  
15 analysis, using Euclidean distance and Ward's linkage measure, on the same dataset, using just  
16 the first two principal components, also produced a similar result (Figure 3). Two major groups  
17 can be visualised with reference samples (A) being separate from unacceptable ones (HN, PL,  
18 AV).

19 Figure 4 shows a PCA scores plot of the separation between unacceptable, marginal and the  
20 reference sample. About 97.4% of the total variance of the data was explained by PCA in which  
21 PC1 and PC2 accounted for 87.1% and 10.3%, respectively. Although a clear differentiation was  
22 evident between the reference sample and the unacceptable and marginal samples as a whole, no  
23 clear separation could be obtained between the latter two groups. However, after analysing the

1 same dataset with DFA each group was clearly distinguishable (Figure 5). The two discriminant  
2 functions accounted for 99.7% of the variance, indicating that the separated result is better with  
3 DFA (supervised method) than PCA (unsupervised method). It is worth noting that when the  
4 same data set was analysed with both MOSFET and MOS sensors no clear differentiation could  
5 be obtained among the groups (data not shown). For this reason, only the responses of the MOS  
6 sensors were taken into account for further analysis, as sample separation could be better attained  
7 with these types of sensors (see Figure 1). The data presented in Figure 6 is the whole dataset  
8 consisting of unacceptable, marginal and acceptable samples. DFA analysis showed good  
9 discrimination between unacceptable samples and the other two qualitative groups of green  
10 olives. However, in the case of marginal and acceptable samples there was an area of overlap  
11 between the two clusters (area of uncertainty), implying that some samples cannot be classified  
12 as belonging clearly to one class or the other.

13 The MLP neural network based on back propagation was used to classify olive samples into  
14 the three categories from the volatile metabolites profile obtained from the electronic sensor array  
15 analysis. For neural network development three steps were followed including creating the  
16 network, training the network, and validating the network. A variety of hidden layers (one or  
17 two), hidden neurons, learning rates and momenta were tried by developing different networks.  
18 The selected network architecture included an input layer, two hidden layers of neurons, and an  
19 output layer. There were 18 neurons in the input layer (one for each sensor apart from the  
20 initially excluded sensors), 15 neurons in the first hidden layer, 8 neurons in the second hidden  
21 layer, and 3 neurons in the output layer (Figure 7). The learning rate ( $\eta = 0.10$ ) and momentum ( $\alpha$   
22 = 0.20) parameters were selected to ensure that the convergence of the learning process was  
23 achieved. The learning process performed until the error covering the entire training dataset

1 converged to a minimum value (RMSE = 0.017), whereas the relative value of RMSE for the test  
2 dataset was 0.206. Two olive samples were misclassified in the training dataset. Specifically, one  
3 marginal sample was classified as acceptable, and one unacceptable sample was classified as  
4 acceptable. In the test dataset, one sample was misclassified, i.e. an unacceptable sample was  
5 classified as acceptable (Table 1). The prediction performance of the network was fairly high as  
6 97% and 92% for the training and test dataset, respectively.

7

#### 8 **4. Discussion**

9 This study examined the potential of using an array of metal oxide/ion sensor system for  
10 differentiating the quality of fermented green olives. Results indicated that qualitative volatile  
11 patterns using electronic nose technology could be successfully employed as a rapid tool for table  
12 olives discrimination. The volatile fraction of table olives depends on many factors such as  
13 variety, ripening stage, process conditions, and the microbiological composition of the  
14 fermentation brines [37]. Several classes of compounds have been identified in the aroma profile  
15 of table olives, the most important being ethanol, methanol, 2-butanol, acetone, ethyl acetate, and  
16 acetaldehyde for both green and black olives [9, 38]. Many of these volatile compounds are  
17 among the end products known to be formed by the initial (e.g. coliforms, yeasts, etc) and/or final  
18 microbial association e.g. lactic acid bacteria, the major group responsible for olive fermentation  
19 or any other group (e.g. yeasts, filamentous fungi, clostridia) associated with spoilage of these  
20 fermented products [2]. It is thus clear that volatile compounds have a decisive role in the  
21 characterisation of the flavour pattern of a given olive sample. Sensory quality is taken into great  
22 account by consumers, and is therefore the predominant element of appreciation and choice.

1        Indeed sensory analysis has evolved considerably in recent years thanks to the development  
2 of statistical analysis techniques which are crucial for data processing. However, although taste  
3 panels are useful in quality classification tasks they have high running costs, are time consuming,  
4 and sometimes lead to controversial interpretations. Therefore it would be interesting to employ  
5 another method for quality discrimination based on instrumental analytical techniques, such as  
6 the electronic nose. As a first step in the investigation of the method, the volatile patterns of  
7 samples characterised as unacceptable by a sensory panel were compared with an acceptable  
8 sample that was considered as a reference. The electronic nose could clearly distinguish between  
9 the two classes as inferred by principal components analysis (PCA) and cluster analysis (CA)  
10 (see Figures 2, 3). However, as more samples were introduced in the analysis, PCA, as an  
11 unsupervised method, could not produce satisfactory discrimination (see Figure 4). For this  
12 reason, discriminant function analysis (supervised method) was employed producing a clear  
13 differentiation between unacceptable, marginal and reference sample (see Figure 5). An  
14 electronic nose is a system created to mimic the function of human nose. However, this analytical  
15 instrument is more a multi-sensor array technology than a real nose. Therefore, a sensory panel is  
16 necessary to define the desired product quality which in turn can be used to train the system for  
17 maximum discrimination [39]. Finally, when all samples were analysed and subjected to  
18 multivariate statistical interpretation, a certain level of overlapping between the classes of  
19 marginal and acceptable samples was observed (Figure 6). As discriminant function analysis was  
20 employed in the differentiation of the samples, this overlapping could be due to misclassification  
21 of the original samples by the sensory panel.

22        The discrimination of the analysed table olive samples has been tackled with a pattern  
23 recogniser based on an artificial neural network providing nonlinearity in the multivariate

1 classification performance. A feed-forward fully connected multilayer perceptron network has  
2 been trained with the back-propagation algorithm for this purpose. By introducing nonlinear  
3 methods like ANNs, it would be possible to model electronic nose data in a better way, as  
4 multivariate statistical techniques are based on a linear approach, neglecting the fact that gas  
5 sensor array data may often be nonlinear in nature [35]. The overall performance of the predictive  
6 recogniser can be appreciated by the confusion matrix obtained for each one of the three sensory  
7 classes used (see Table 1). One of the three misclassified olive samples lies in the zone of  
8 uncertainty, as it was originally marginal and classified as acceptable. For the other two points,  
9 probably a larger training dataset or another neural network classifier (e.g. a radial basis function  
10 network) could have improved classification performance [26].

11

## 12 **5. Conclusion**

13 The results of this study demonstrated the applicability of an electronic nose as a screening  
14 tool for quality control of fermented table olives based on their volatile patterns. It is worth  
15 noting that better description of the quality classes is necessary by an expert sensory panel to  
16 improve the discriminating performance of the system. Even if a larger number of table olive  
17 samples is required for better discrimination, the present results demonstrated the possibility of  
18 using this analytical technique to obtain in a rapid and objective manner information about the  
19 sensorial properties of table olives.

20

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1 **Figure Legends**

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3 Figure 1. Comparison of the responses of metal oxide sensors to three replicates of unacceptable  
4 olive samples (solid line) and the acceptable reference olive sample (dotted line).

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6 Figure 2. The principal components (PC) analysis map of data for three replicates of unacceptable  
7 olive samples and the acceptable reference sample using the metal oxide/ion-based electronic  
8 nose.

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10 Figure 3. Dendrogram showing the cluster analysis and separation of the acceptable reference  
11 sample (A) and the unacceptable olive samples (AV, PL, HN). Numbers correspond to the  
12 replicates for each olive sample.

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14 Figure 4. The principal components (PC) analysis map of data showing the discrimination of  
15 unacceptable (U), marginal (M) and the acceptable (A) reference sample. Three replicates for  
16 each sample were used.

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18 Figure 5. Discriminant function analysis (DFA) plot of the differentiation between unacceptable,  
19 marginal and the acceptable reference sample. Three replicates for each sample were used.

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21 Figure 6. Discriminant function analysis (DFA) plot of the differentiation between unacceptable,  
22 marginal and acceptable olive samples. Three replicates for each sample were used.

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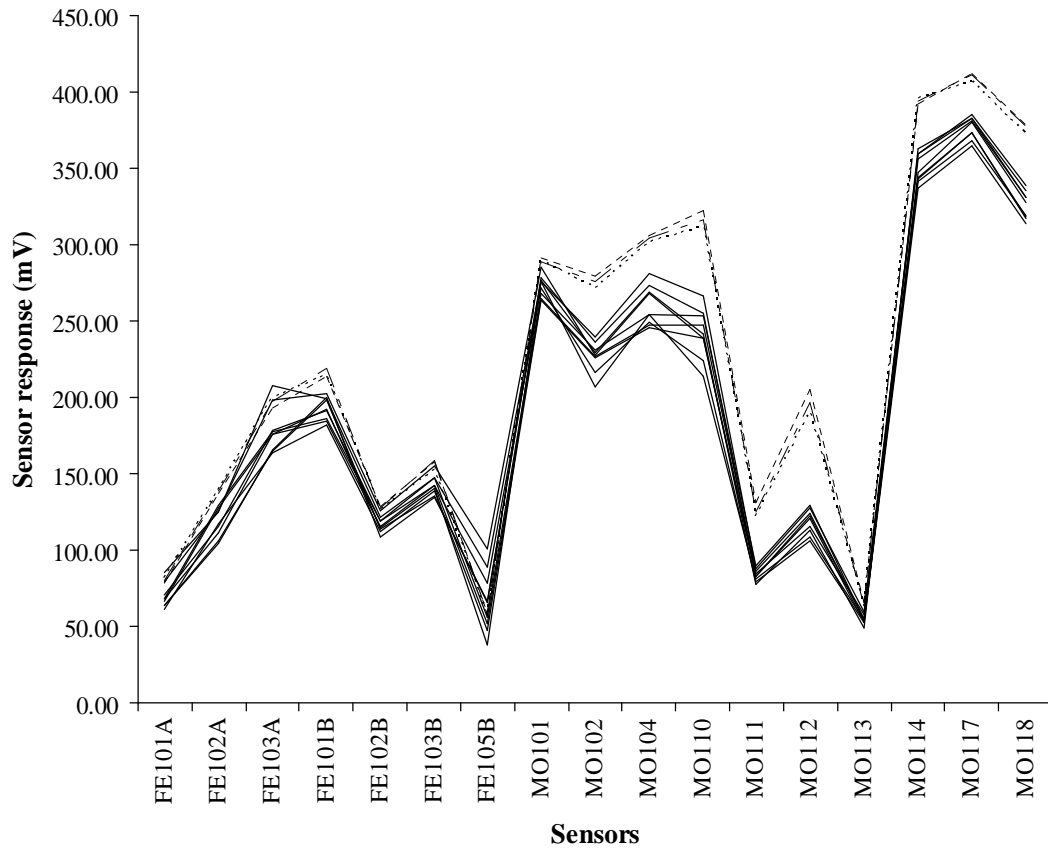
24 Figure 7. Schematic representation of a four-layered MPL network used as patterns classifier for  
25 table olives quality identification.

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2 Fig. 1

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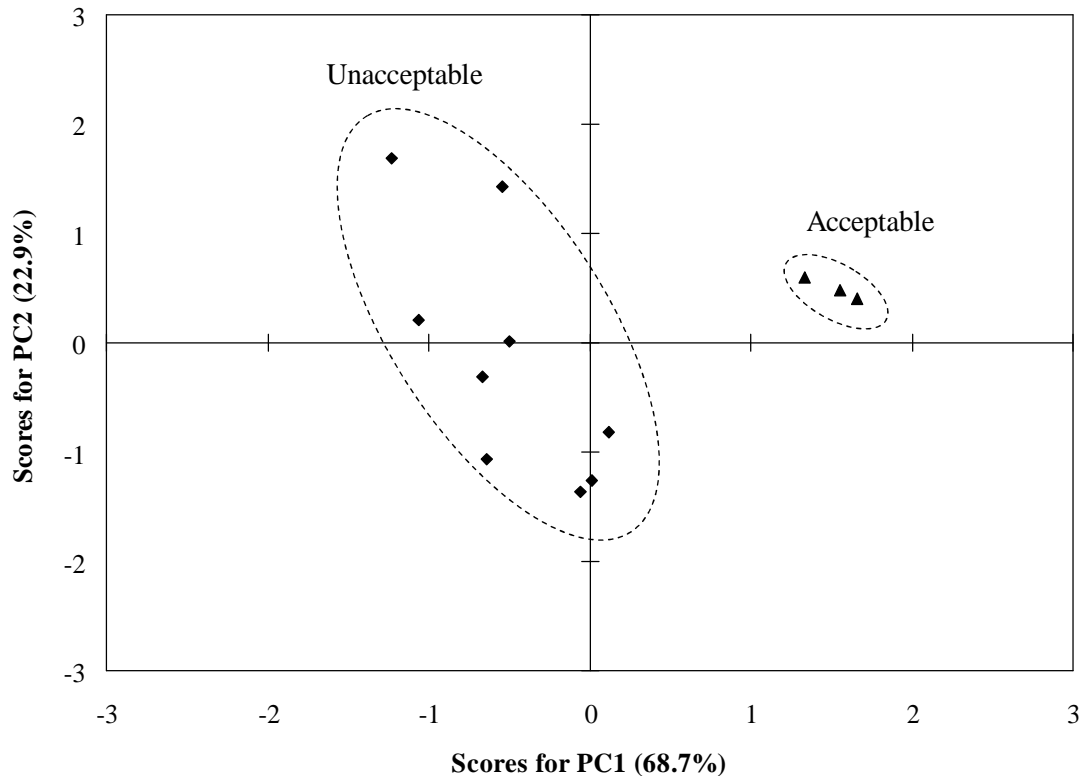
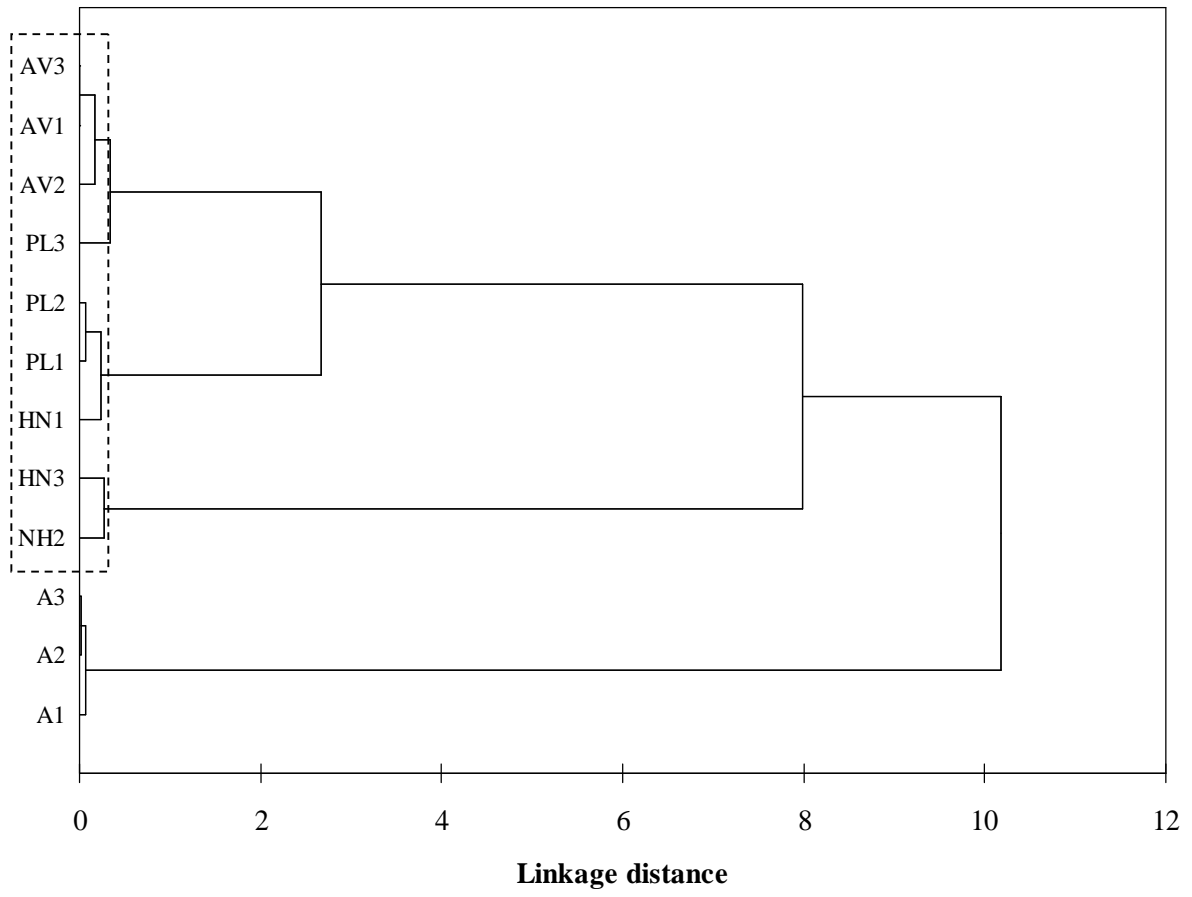


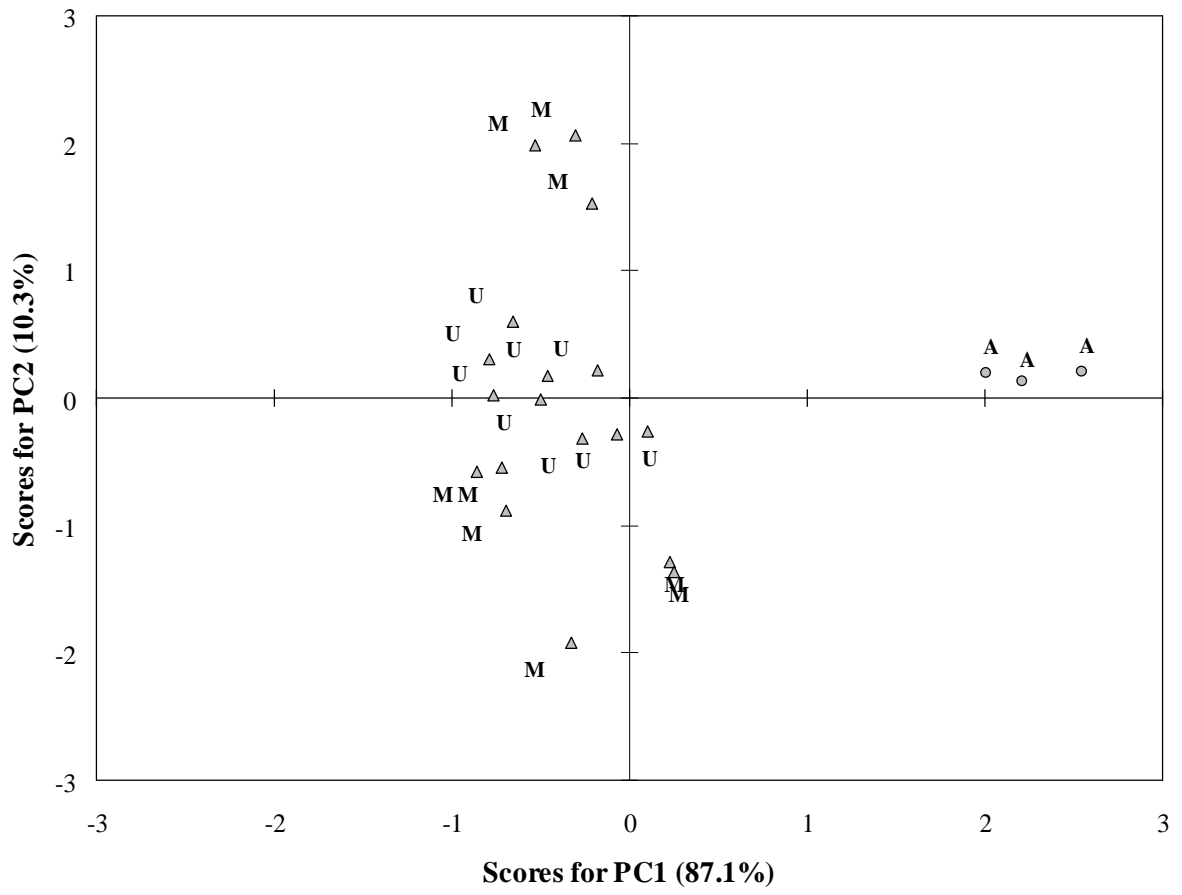
Fig. 2

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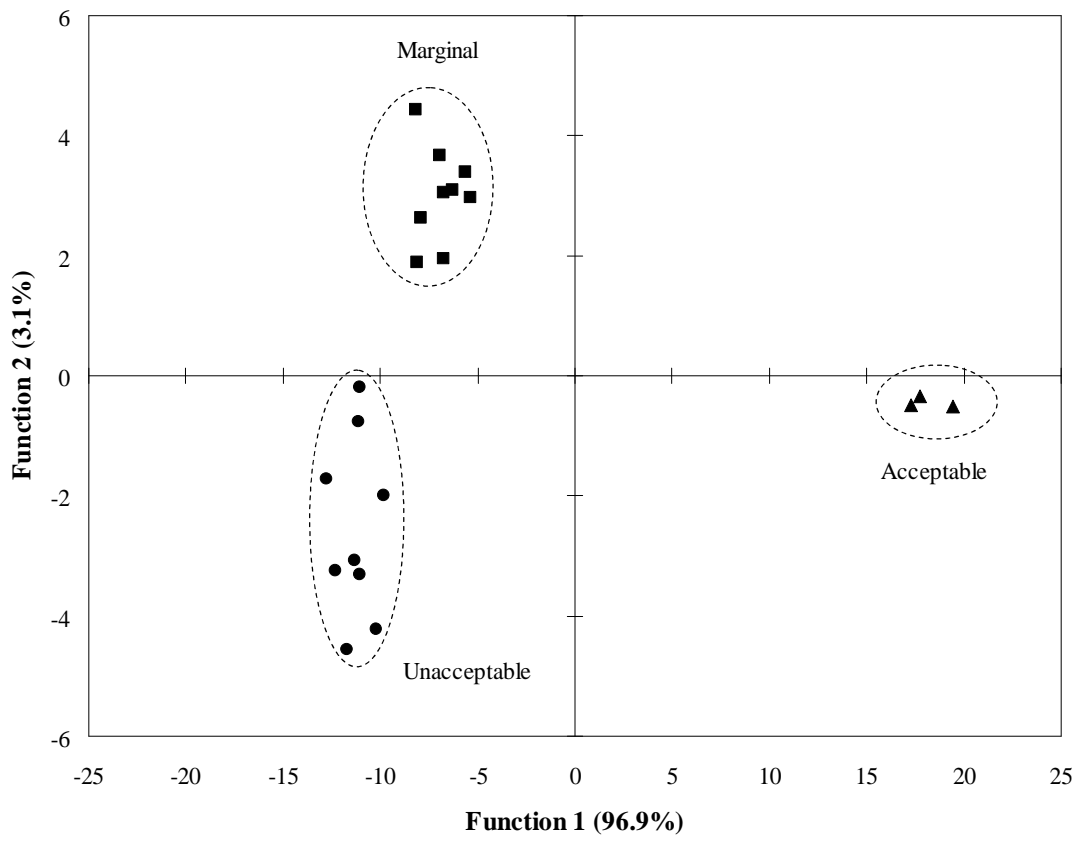


Fig. 5

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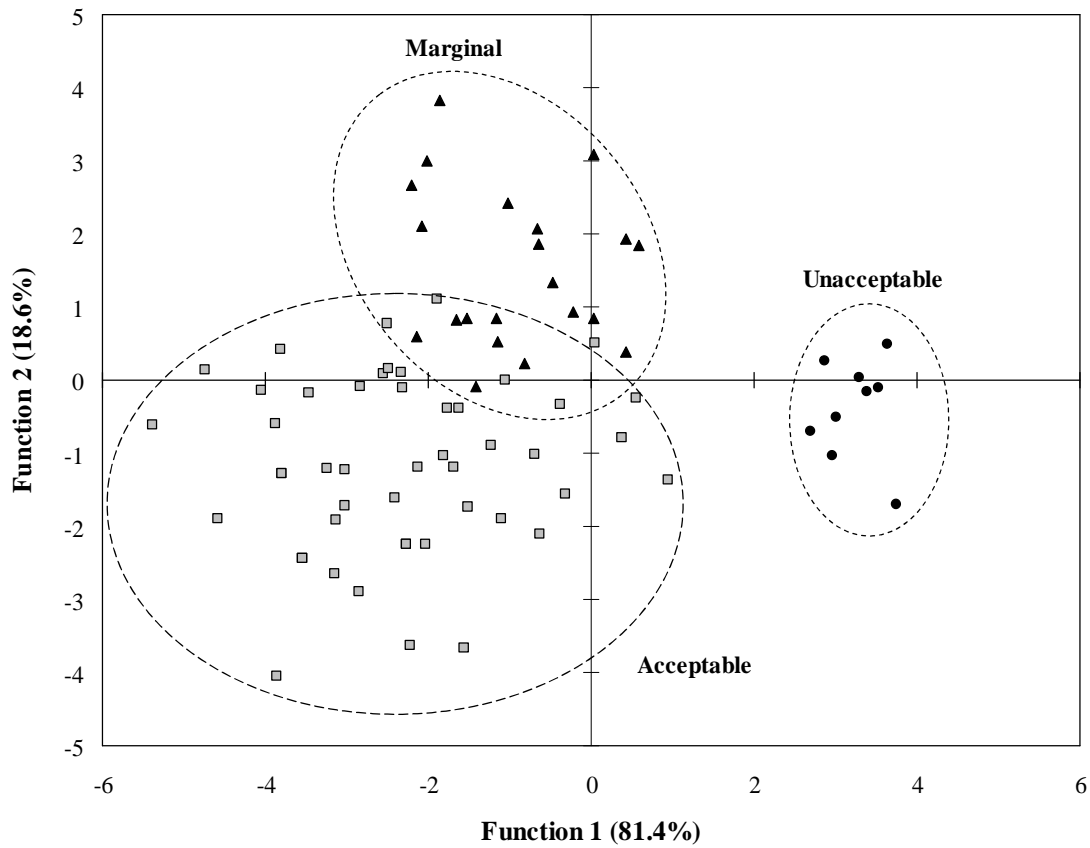


Fig. 6

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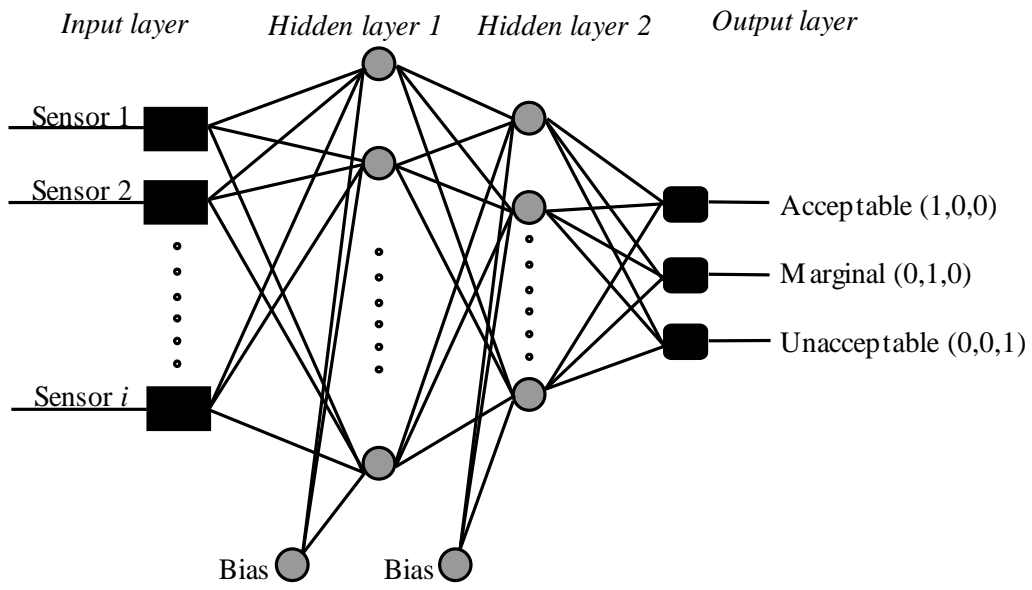


Fig. 7

1 Table 1

2 Confusion matrix of the MLP classifier performing the task of discrimination of table olive samples.

	From/To	Acceptable	Marginal	Unacceptable
Training dataset	Acceptable	34	0	0
	Marginal	1	17	0
	Unacceptable	1	0	13
Test dataset	Acceptable	5	0	0
	Marginal	3	0	0
	Unacceptable	1	0	3

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