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(Article begins on next page)

1                   Identifying uncertainty in estimates of bimrocks  
2                   volumetric proportions from 2D measurements

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9                   **Abstract**

10                  Chaotic geological bodies composed of rock inclusions of different lithology and size  
11                  enclosed in a weaker matrix are often referred to as bimrocks (block-in-matrix rocks).  
12                  When dealing with these challenging and widespread geomaterials, a major concern for  
13                  geopractitioners is the estimation of block content, which has been demonstrated to  
14                  strongly affect the overall mechanical behaviour of bimrocks. Since the estimation of this  
15                  parameter is not a simple matter, stereological principles are generally applied to infer  
16                  3D block contents from 1D or 2D measurements. However, they are often fraught with a  
17                  high magnitude of error.

18                  In this study, a statistical approach was developed to determine the uncertainties  
19                  associated with estimates of the 3D block proportions from 2D measurements. A Matlab  
20                  code was implemented to generate heterogeneous models with a size distribution typical  
21                  of bimrocks. An uncertainty factor is provided related to the size of the outcrop area  
22                  investigated and the 2D block content to adjust the initial 2D estimates. It was found that  
23                  a larger investigation area increases the reliability of the 2D measurements and as actual  
24                  volumetric block proportion increases, the uncertainty decreases.

25                  The results obtained through this procedure were subsequently compared with previous  
26                  findings from the literature concerning the uncertainty in estimates of the VBP from 1D  
27                  measurements. The outcome of this comparison highlights the strength of the procedure  
28                  described in this paper.

29                   **Keywords**

30                  Bimrocks, bimsoils, linear block proportion, areal block proportion, volumetric block  
31                  proportion, uncertainty factor

## 1. Introduction

34 Block-in-matrix rocks (bimrocks) are defined as “a mixture of rocks, composed of  
35 geotechnically significant blocks within a bonded matrix of finer texture” (Medley 1994).  
36 In this definition, the expression “geotechnically significant blocks” indicates that a  
37 sufficient mechanical contrast between the blocks and the matrix exists to force failure  
38 surfaces to tortuously negotiate around the blocks (Medley 2001). In the last few decades,  
39 the term bimrock has been widely and conveniently used by geopractitioners all over the  
40 world to indicate many heterogeneous complex formations consisting of rock blocks  
41 incorporated within a weaker matrix. Typical geological bodies belonging to bimrocks are  
42 melanges, agglomerates, conglomerates, landslide debris and glacial tills (Lindquist  
43 1994; Medley 1994; Sonmez et al. 2004).

44 The geotechnical significance of bimrocks has been highlighted by a variety of authors  
45 with different approaches. In fact, due to the erratic variability of the mechanical  
46 properties of these geomaterials, considerable difficulties may arise in their sampling,  
47 testing and characterization. As a consequence, a common engineering practice is to  
48 ignore the presence of rock blocks, choosing instead to plan engineering works in  
49 bimrocks considering the strength of the weakest component only (i.e., the matrix).  
50 However, this assumption (i.e. to neglect the presence of the blocks) has caused many  
51 technical problems and risks in the design and construction phases (Glawe and Upreti  
52 2004; Medley 2007a, 2007b), due to improper and expensive engineering geological and  
53 geotechnical mischaracterizations. In fact, as widely documented in the literature, the  
54 overall mechanical behaviour of bimrocks is directly related to their volumetric block  
55 proportion (VBP), which means that blocks must be taken into account in the planning,  
56 designing and construction phases.

57 In light of the above, several empirical approaches have been developed and used to  
58 estimate the strength and deformability of bimrocks on the basis of their VBP (Lindquist  
59 1994; Sonmez et al. 2004; Adam et al. 2014; Kalender et al. 2014, 2016). Therefore, in  
60 order for these approaches to be used, reliable estimates of 3D block contents are  
61 required.

62 The determination of the VBP is not straightforward, and stereological techniques are  
63 generally used to overcome this challenge. Specifically, VBPs can only be approximated  
64 by measuring linear (LBP) or areal (ABP) block proportions (from exploration core  
65 drilling and scanlines and geological maps or image analyses, respectively) and assuming  
66 these measurements to be stereologically equivalent to the actual 3D values. However,  
67 these assumptions are often fraught with a high magnitude of error and should not be  
68 used without due regard for the uncertainty (Medley 1997, 2001; Haneberg 2004).

69 The aim of this paper is to statistically investigate and assess the degree of error that can  
70 be introduced by inferring that the VBP of a bimrock obtained from 2D outcrop  
71 measurements (i.e. ABP) is actually the true VBP. In order to do this, a Matlab code was  
72 implemented to generate many bimrock models. From the analysis of these models, an  
73 uncertainty factor is provided to adjust the initial 2D estimate on the basis of both the

74 ABP measured and the size of the outcrop area investigated.

75 Finally, the potential of the procedure proposed in this research is compared to that  
76 presented in (Medley 1997), where the uncertainty concerning the estimate of the VBP  
77 from 1D measurements (i.e., LBPs) is provided.

## 78       **1.1 Uncertainty in estimates of VBP**

79 Although several parameters such as matrix strength and block size distributions have  
80 been proven to affect the overall mechanical behaviour of bimrocks, the VBP has been  
81 experimentally and numerically demonstrated to be the most important factor. In fact,  
82 the VBP strongly influences the strength, deformability and failure modes of many  
83 heterogeneous formations (Lindquist 1994; Lindquist and Goodman 1994; Medley 2001;  
84 Sonmez et al. 2004, 2006; Barbero et al. 2008; Coli et al. 2012; Afifipour and Moarefvand  
85 2014; Kalender et al. 2014, 2016; Zhang et al. 2019). For example, the shape and position  
86 of failure surfaces of unstable slopes have proven to be strongly influenced by the number,  
87 position and dimension of the blocks (Medley and Rehermann 2004; Barbero et al. 2006;  
88 Minuto and Morandi 2015; Napoli et al. 2018; Khorasani et al. 2019; Montoya-Araque  
89 and Suarez-Burgoa 2019). Moreover, when tunnelling in these heterogeneous materials,  
90 the presence of rock blocks can induce, among other problems, face instabilities,  
91 unexpected high stresses on the tunnel lining, obstructions and damage to cutters, with  
92 consequent schedule delays and extra costs (Button et al. 2004; DiPonio et al. 2007; Hunt  
93 2014; Gwildis et al. 2018). Hence, the accurate definition of the VBP represents a  
94 fundamental issue during earthworks or tunnel design, as this parameter plays a key role  
95 in choosing the most appropriate support and excavation method (Button et al. 2004;  
96 Hunt 2014; Dhang 2016).

97 The actual VBP can be accurately measured at the laboratory scale only, by washing and  
98 disintegrating a sample (Coli et al. 2009). However, the block content at the laboratory  
99 scale is not representative of the VBP at smaller (site) scales. As a consequence, this  
100 parameter is usually inferred via 1D or 2D measurements, which consist in the  
101 interpretation of borehole drillings and outcrop maps that provide LBP and ABP,  
102 respectively. Given enough sampling data, stereological methods can be applied to  
103 estimate the VBP from these measurements (Medley 1997, 2002; Sönmez et al. 2004;  
104 Kalender et al. 2014). Nevertheless, as reported in the literature, the results provided by  
105 these approaches are fraught with uncertainty: the amount of sampling, the actual VBP  
106 and the shape and orientation of the blocks strongly influence 1D and 2D measurements,  
107 producing biased results (Medley 2001, 2002; Haneberg 2004).

108 Hence, it is vitally important to quantify the potential errors produced by assuming that  
109 1D or 2D measurements are equivalent to 3D values, by adjusting the estimated VBPs to  
110 accommodate the uncertainty.

111 To date, few studies have been carried out on this topic. Medley's paper "Uncertainty in  
112 estimates of block volumetric proportions in melange bimrocks" (1997) is one of the most  
113 relevant works, as it investigated the uncertainty in the determination of actual 3D block

size distributions and quantities from 1D measurements (i.e. LBP) for melanges and similar block-in-matrix formations. Medley produced different physical bimrock models (using generally ellipsoidal blocks) with known VBPs and block size distributions, and simulated a great number of model boreholes. On the basis of thousands of randomized realizations of the model boring data and related LBPs, Medley provided a chart to adjust the estimated block content by means of an uncertainty factor defined as the ratio between the standard deviation of the cumulative LBP and the true VBP. This uncertainty factor is a function of the measured block proportion and total length of drilling, expressed as multiples ( $N$ ) of the known length of the largest block ( $d_{\max}$ ) used in the manufacture of the physical bimrock models. Medley showed that accurate estimations of the VBP from 1D analyses can only be obtained for high VBPs and with a considerable amount of sampling, which can be difficult to achieve because of the generally prohibitive expense of geotechnical exploration drilling.

Few studies have also been carried out to investigate the uncertainty in the estimation of the VBP from 2D measurements (Sahagian and Proussevitch 1998; Haneberg 2004). One of the most relevant studies on this topic was developed by Haneberg (2004). The author performed statistical analyses to explore the amount of bias introduced when actual block sizes (i.e., VBP) are inferred from 2D outcrop projections, such as geological maps or photographs. Ellipsoids with different eccentricities, orientations and distributions (i.e., uniform and random) were used to simulate the rock blocks. The errors produced by these analyses were found to be strongly dependent on the geometry of the problem, especially block shapes and orientations with respect to the outcrop face. The results demonstrated that outcrop sampling almost certainly underestimates block sizes and proportions.

To the authors' best understanding since Medley's work (1997) no further research has been performed using physical bimrock models to provide correction factors to adjust VBPs estimated from site measurements to true VBPs.

Some analytically-based work has been performed to produce mathematically-rich approaches to review uncertainty (Tien et al. 2010, 2011; Lu et al. 2019).

The investigation presented in this paper builds on Medley's work using 2D rather than 1D data. In fact, this research shows that working with 2D instead of 1D data can often be easier, as 2D mapping surveys/photos campaigns are usually cheaper than borehole drillings, and it is generally possible to analyse an outcrop large enough to obtain an ABP value close to the real rock mass VBP. For example, if a landslide repair or a tunnel project is carried out, an outcrop at least equal to the unstable area or excavation face should be analysable. Moreover, the ABP obtained should be closer to the VBP than the LBP would be.

In light of the above, in this paper a statistical approach is developed to statistically assess the error rate that can be introduced by assuming the equivalence between the ABP and VBP of a heterogeneous geomaterial. In this regard, an uncertainty factor is provided to adjust on-site 2D block content estimates as a function of the dimension of the outcrop area investigated and the ABP measured.

## 2. The statistical approach proposed

157 The purpose of the research described here is to quantify the uncertainty in estimates of  
 158 real VBPs as inferred from ABP measurements by studying how an increasing size of the  
 159 investigation area influences the reliability of the 2D measurements. To this purpose, a  
 160 statistical approach was developed using a Matlab routine implemented to generate  
 161 bimrock models enclosing spherical blocks of given VBPs and random positions within  
 162 the 3D domains. The rock inclusions were assumed to have a fractal block size  
 163 distribution (Medley 1994, 2001; Medley and Zekkos 2011).

164 The bimrock models were sectioned many times obtaining a great number of section  
 165 planes on which the ABP was estimated. Statistical analyses were then performed  
 166 simulating an increasing outcrop face size, by selecting different subsets of planes and  
 167 combining the results.

### 168 2.1 The block size distribution of the bimrock models

169 Most bimrocks have scale independent or fractal block size distributions, so the  
 170 relationship between block frequencies and sizes is well approximated by a negative power  
 171 law on a log-log plot (Medley 1994, 2001, 2007a, 2007b; Riedmüller et al. 2001; Medley  
 172 and Zekkos 2011; Kalender et al. 2016). This law is defined by its exponent, D, which is the  
 173 fractal dimension.

174 The property of fractality means that blocks can be found in bimrocks at any scale of  
 175 observation (Medley 1994; Medley and Rehermann 2004). As a consequence, the smallest  
 176 and largest block sizes must be defined considering the dimension of the problem at hand,  
 177 termed the characteristic engineering dimension,  $L_c$ , which may variously indicate the  
 178 height of a landslide, the diameter of a specimen or that of a tunnel (Medley 1994, 2001,  
 179 2002, 2007b; Medley and Rehermann 2004; Wakabayashi and Medley 2004; Medley  
 180 and Zekkos 2011; Kalender et al. 2014).

181 According to previous findings from the literature, the block size distribution of the  
 182 bimrock models, generated with the Matlab code, obeys a negative power law (i.e., fractal  
 183 distribution) with relatively few large blocks and increasing numbers of smaller  
 184 inclusions.

185 Since bimrocks usually show values of D between 2.3 and 2.7 (Medley and Lindquist  
 186 1995), an average value equal to 2.5 is used in this research, as in (Haneberg 2004).  
 187 However, significant differences in the results are not expected for different values of D,  
 188 as shown in Figure 6. The minimum and maximum block dimensions were chosen as  
 189 suggested by (Medley 1994, 2001), according to the scale of interest selected, limiting  
 190 blocks to be between about  $5\%L_c$  ( $d_{min}$ ) and  $75\%L_c$  ( $d_{max}$ ) (Medley 1994, 2001).

191            **2.2 The Matlab code**

192        In order to develop the statistical approach proposed in this paper, a Matlab code and a  
193        high-performance workstation were used to carry out the analyses.

194        Five VBP values were considered (i.e., VBP = 10%, 20%, 30%, 40%, 50%) and, for each of  
195        them, the procedure described below was followed.

196        A square-shaped parallelepiped domain enclosing spherical blocks was created to  
197        simulate a typical bimrock formation. The dimensions of the parallelepiped were  $L_c \times L_c$   
198         $\times 10L_c$ , so that its cross-section surface was  $A_c = L_c^2$ , which is the area of engineering  
199        interest.

200        The diameters of the spheres,  $d$ , were extracted randomly from a population distributed  
201        according to the cumulative distribution function of Eq. 1 (Napoli et al. 2018):

202

$$F(d) = \frac{a^{1+D} - d^{1+D}}{a^{1+D} - b^{1+D}} \quad (Eq. 1)$$

203

204        The corresponding probability density function,  $f(d)$ , is expressed by Eq. 2, which is the  
205        derivative of  $F(d)$  and describes a truncated negative power law (i.e. a fractal  
206        distribution):

207

$$f(d) = -\frac{1-D}{a^{1+D} - b^{1+D}} d^D \quad (Eq. 2)$$

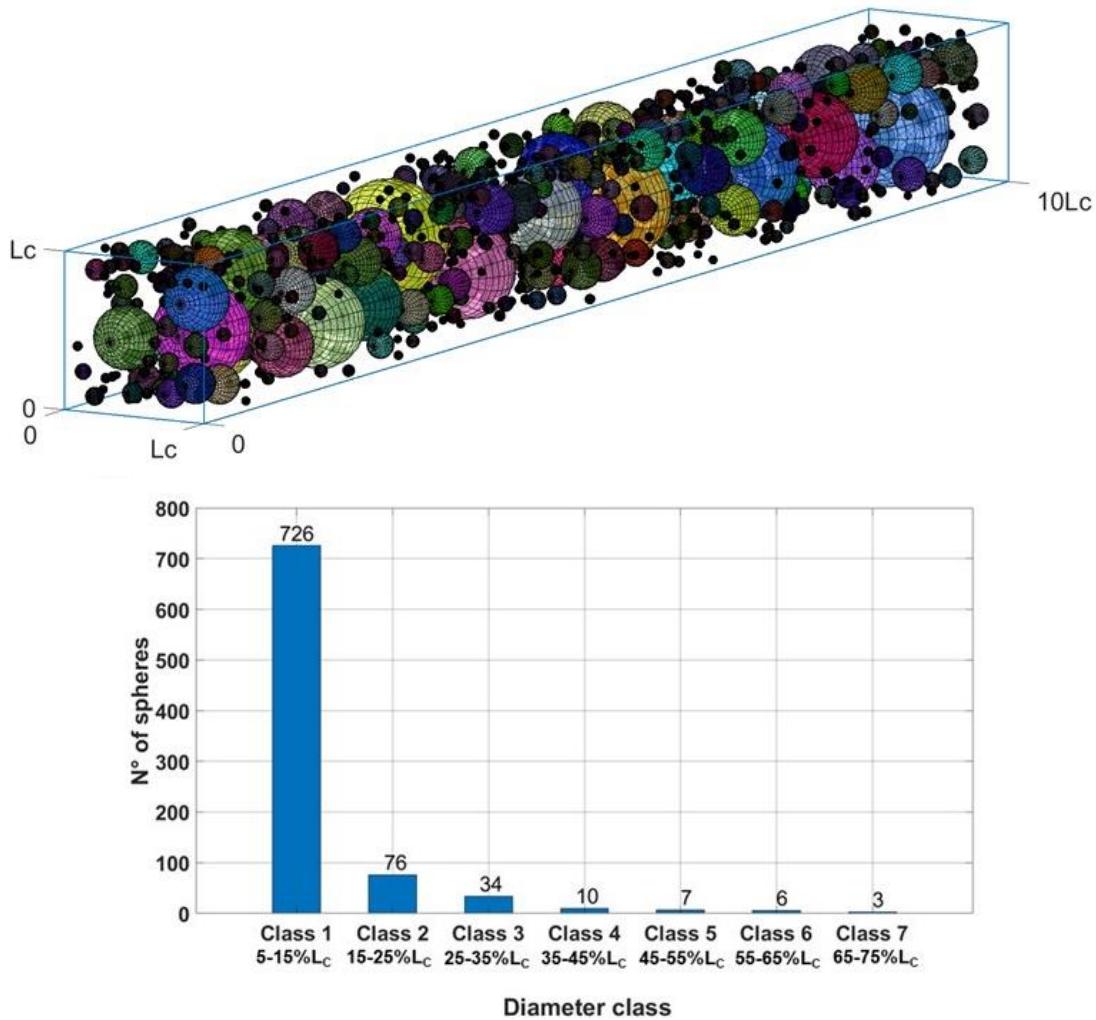
208

209        where:

- 210        -  $D$  is the fractal dimension, set as equal to 1.5;  
211        -  $a$  and  $b$  are the smallest and largest block dimensions, respectively (i.e., the limits  
212        of the block size distribution), which were set as 5% $L_c$  and 75% $L_c$ , respectively as  
213        per Medley (1994).

214        The achievement of the required VBP was checked for each bimrock model by computing  
215        the ratio between the cumulated volume of all the spheres and the volume of the  
216        parallelepiped.

217        The spheres were located randomly within the parallelepiped, by requiring that neither  
218        interpenetration between spheres nor intersections with the edges of the domain  
219        occurred. Figure 1 is an example of a virtual bimrock model resulting from these  
220        operations, obtained for an actual VBP of 30%. Since a virtual bimrock prism was created,  
221        partial blocks larger than 0.75 $L_c$  (which a real melange may contain) were not considered.



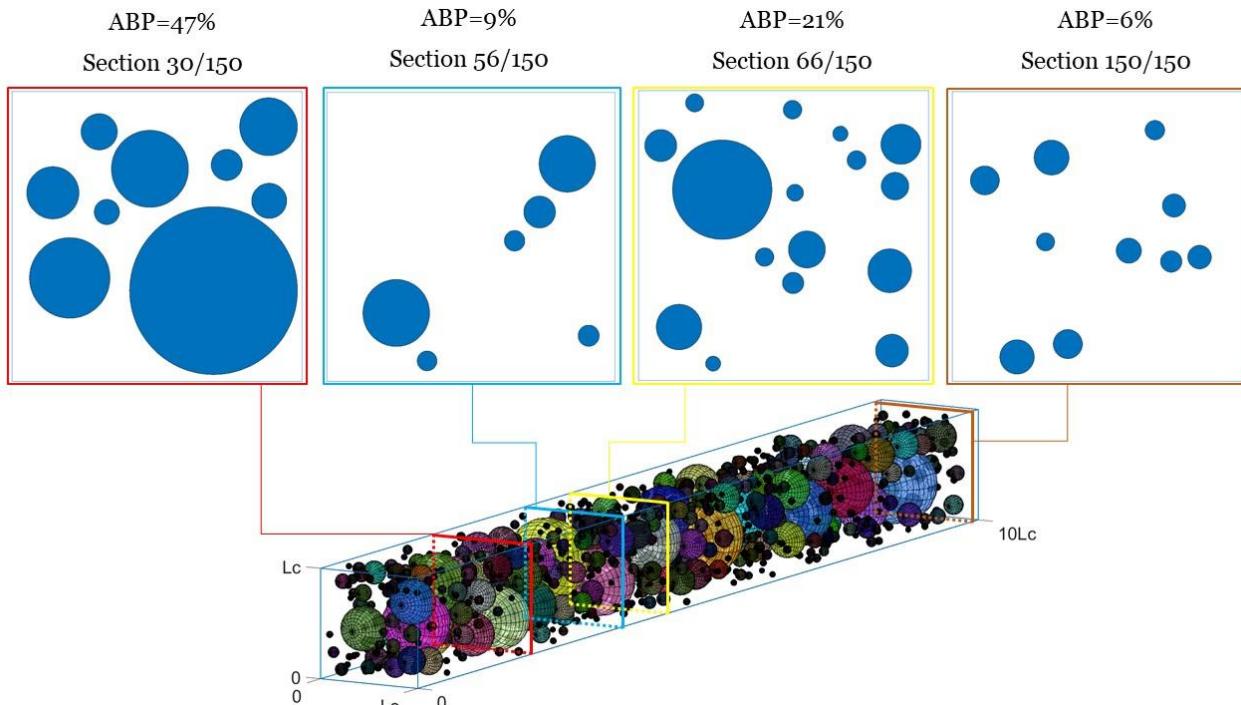
*Figure 1: Block sizes, quantities and positions for VBP=30%.*

222  
223

The parallelepiped was then sectioned along its longest dimension with 150 equidistant and parallel planes, representing potential outcrop faces. The number of section planes was defined so as to ensure the statistical validity of the results, but at the same time to avoid section planes too close to each other. In fact, this would have provided duplicate results, compromising the reliability of the results. Assuming the minimum plane spacing to be at least equal to the smallest block dimension (parameter a) 150 section planes were generated for each of the 5 models. The solid circles (discs) obtained from the intersection between the planes and spherical blocks were analysed, by evaluating their (apparent) diameters and areas. The areal block proportion (ABP) of each plane was then computed as the ratio between the total area of circles with diameters greater than 5% $L_c$  and  $A_c$  (i.e., the domain cross-section equal to  $L_c^2$ ). It is worth pointing out that outcrop discs obtained by arbitrary slicing of the spheres by the cross-sections are almost always smaller than the diametrical disks of the parent spherical blocks. As a consequence, the ABPs from cross-sectional areas of the sections only rarely have numerical values equivalent to the true VBP.

Figure 2 shows the circles (i.e. blocks) resulting from the intersection between the spheres

240 contained in a 30% VBP parallelepiped and four section planes. The total of the four  
 241 planar outcrop faces is four times greater than the area of engineering interest,  $A_c$ . From  
 242 this example, the great variability of the ABP of the different section planes is evident, as  
 243 well as the discrepancy between the average ABP value (16.25%) and the real VBP (30%).  
 244 As expected, this result indicates that inferring 3D block proportions from measurements  
 245 of a few outcrop areas (which yields an insufficiently large total sample area) compared  
 246 to  $A_c$  yields widely erroneous estimates. So, the question then presented is: "How large  
 247 should the total investigated area be to obtain confidently accurate estimates of VBPs?".



248  
 249  
 250 *Figure 2: Intersected blocks and ABPs identified on four different planes, representing outcrop surfaces of dimension*  
 251 *Lc x Lc. The planes section a 30%VBP parallelepiped.*

252 A statistical processing of the results obtained was performed in order to investigate if  
 253 and how 2D block measurements can provide more reliable estimates when increasing  
 254 the total size of the summed outcrop areas is considered.

255 To this aim, subsets of an increasing number of combined section planes from the  
 256 population of 150 cross-section slices were analysed. Specifically, an overall investigation  
 257 surface between  $1 \cdot A_c$  (corresponding to a single section plane) and  $150 \cdot A_c$  (corresponding  
 258 to 150 section planes) was examined. To do so, a number of section planes,  $\beta$ , from 1 to  
 259 150 were simultaneously considered, statistically combining the results (i.e., ABP values).  
 260 In other words:  $\beta$  represents the multiplicative coefficient to be applied to the area of  
 261 engineering interest (i.e.,  $L_c^2$ , corresponding to the area of a single section plane,  $A_c$ ) to  
 262 obtain the equivalent overall total of surfaces investigated.

263 For each value of the overall survey area, i.e. for each  $\beta$ , a great number of subsets  
 264 composed by  $\beta$  planes, extracted randomly (Monte Carlo fashion) from the total 150, were  
 265 generated avoiding duplicates. Then, for each  $\beta$ , the average ABP and the overall standard

deviation were determined provided by the planes of all the subsets.

In order to fall within the calculation and storage capacity of the workstation, the maximum number of subsets extracted for each  $\beta$  was limited to 5000. In fact, the number of possible combinations of 150 elements taken  $\beta$  at a time without duplicates (i.e., subsets) is  $N = \binom{150}{\beta}$ , which is a huge number for only some values of  $\beta$ . Instead, if  $\beta$  is equal to 1 only,  $N = \binom{150}{1} = 150$ . However, if  $\beta$  increases for example to 10,  $N = \binom{150}{10} \cong 1.17 \cdot 10^{15}$  combinations.

Finally, similarly to Medley (1997) with regard to LBP measures, an uncertainty factor (UF) was determined to adjust the initial ABP measured. This factor was calculated, for each  $\beta$  value, as shown in Eq. 3, which is a form of the equation for the Coefficient of Variation (Standard Deviation divided by the Mean):

$$UF_{\beta=i} = \frac{\sigma(ABP_j)|_{\beta=i}}{VBP} ; \quad j = 1, 2, \dots, j_{max} \quad (Eq. 3)$$

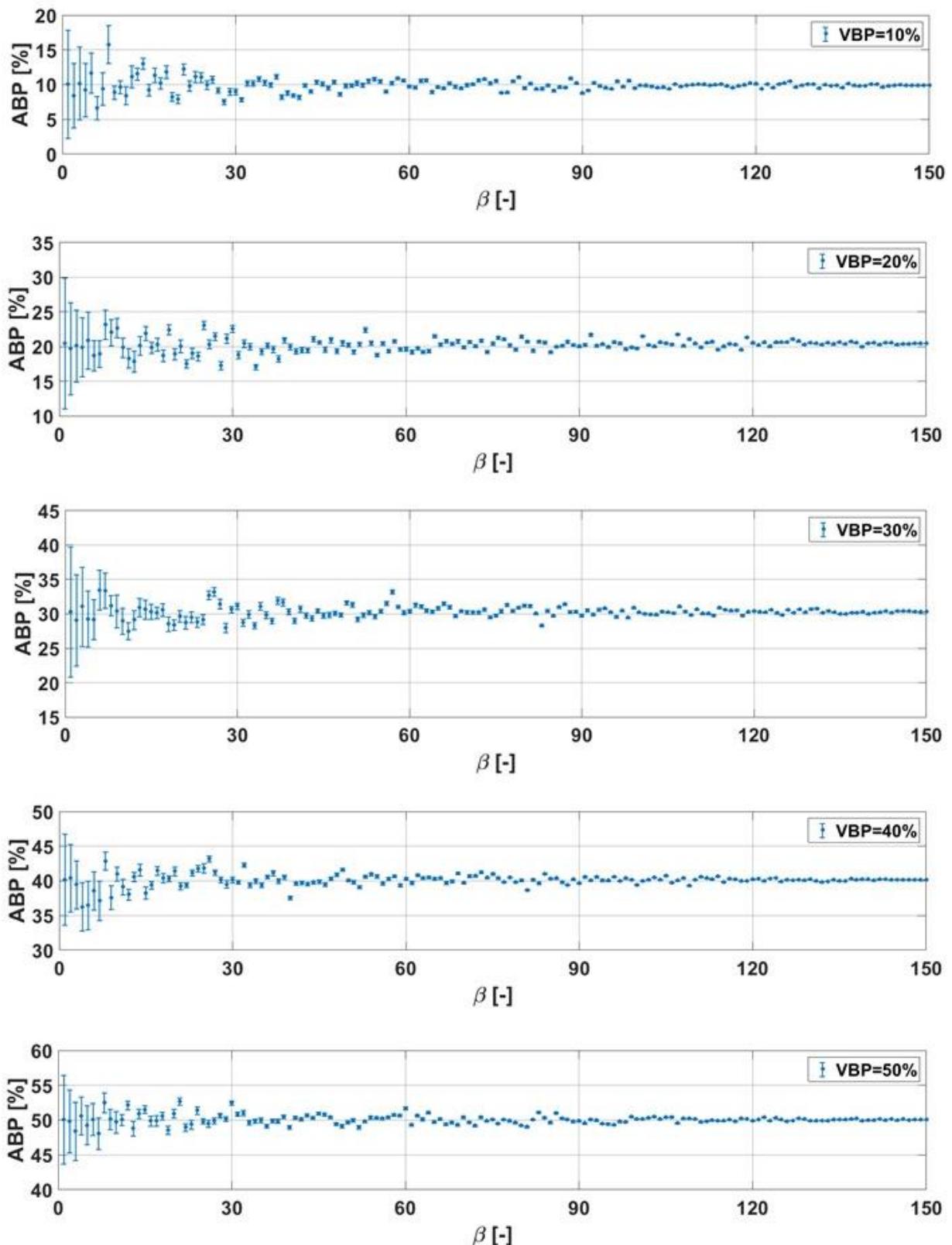
where:

- $i = 1, 2, \dots, 150$ , values of  $\beta$ , representing the number of section planes analysed simultaneously;
- $j$  = number of subsets;
- $j_{max}$  = number of subsets considered for each  $\beta = \min\left(\binom{150}{\beta}, 5000\right)$ ;
- $\sigma(ABP_j)|_{\beta=i}$  = standard deviation of the ABP values provided by all the subsets considered for  $\beta = i$ ;
- $VBP$  = real volumetric block proportion of the complex formation simulated.

### 3. Results and discussion

The average ABPs and overall standard deviations computed for each model bimrock as a function of  $\beta$  (i.e., the investigation area) are shown in Figure 3. These graphs highlight that the ABP values estimated show deviations from the real VBP value, even by taking a great number of  $\beta$  section planes into account. However, the data dispersion decreases as the investigation surface increases. Furthermore, it is possible to observe that the average ABP values trend toward the real VBP for higher  $\beta$  values. These outcomes are consistent with the results found by Medley (1997).

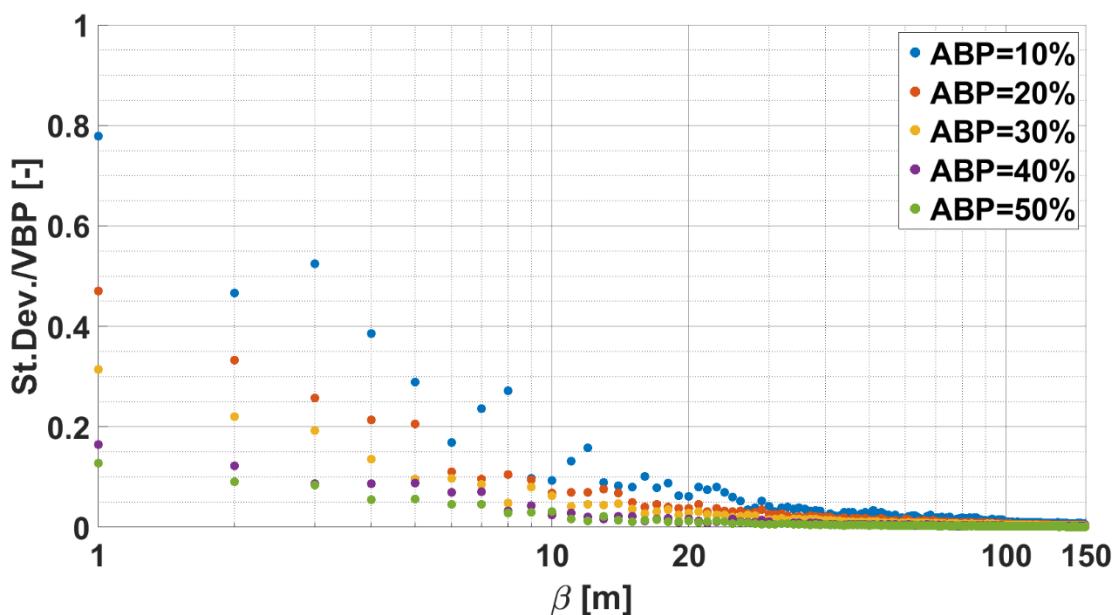
From that, it follows that the error committed by assuming  $ABP = VBP$  decreases as the analysed investigation surface increases and, for a sufficiently large outcrop area, it can be considered negligible. In fact, this error cannot be completely eliminated by considering 2D measures to describe a 3D content of blocks: the error could reach a null value only when an infinite number of sections is considered, which corresponds to the transition from 2D measurements to 3D measurements.



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Figure 3: Plot of cumulative ABPs vs the multiplicative coefficient of the area of engineering interest,  $A_c$  (total investigation surface). Error bars represent  $\pm 1$  standard deviation about the mean of the data derived from randomly combined section planes.

303 As stated above, the results shown in Figure 3 were used to define a coefficient of variation  
 304 (UF), COV, associated with the estimate of the VBP, by means of Eq. 3. Hence, to  
 305 determine the uncertainty factor (UF), the actual VBPs were used instead of the mean in  
 306 the COV expression of Figure 4, as the mean ABPs converge to the actual VBPs.  
 307 The relationship between the uncertainty (i.e., COV) in estimates of VBP, the dimension  
 308 of the outcrop where 2D measurements are performed and the measured block content  
 309 (i.e., ABP) is shown in Figure 4. Consistently with Medley (1997), for each VBP considered  
 310 a decreasing trend of the UF as a function of  $\beta$  is obtained. Moreover, higher VBPs lead  
 311 to lower biased results. This result is due to greater geometrical probability of block  
 312 encounters in outcrops with higher VBPs (and thus greater opportunity to measure  
 313 ABPs). Conversely, lower VBPs lead to less 2D expressions of blocks that, as indicated  
 314 above, are nearly always smaller than true block diametrical section views.



315  
 316 *Figure 4: Uncertainty in the VBP estimate from 2D measurements, as a function of the total investigation surface*  
 317 *(expressed as multiples,  $\beta$ , of the  $A_c$ ) and block contents measured (ABP).*

318 In Figure 4 it can be observed that the error in the estimate of the VBP stabilises and  
 319 tends asymptotically to zero for  $\beta$  greater than about 20, whatever the ABP measured.  
 320 Since the availability of investigation surfaces corresponding to  $\beta$  values greater than 20  
 321 could be difficult to achieve (see Table 1), particular attention was paid to the analysis of  
 322 the results relating to  $\beta$  values in the range [0; 20].

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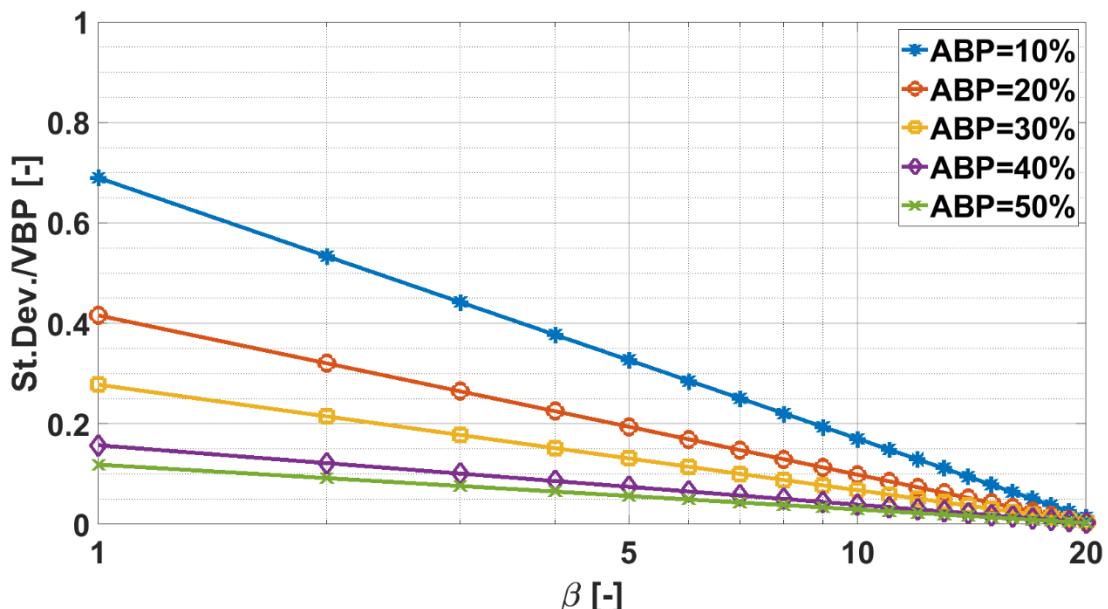
Table 1: Examples of typical engineering works and related characteristic engineering dimensions,  $L_c$ . The size of outcrop surfaces corresponding to  $\beta A_c$ , with  $\beta$  equal to 1 (i.e. engineering characteristic area), 10, 20 and 50, is given by way of example.

327

Typical engineering works and functions	Characteristic engineering dimension, $L_c$ [m]	Outcrop surfaces, $\beta \cdot A_c$ [ $m^2$ ]			
		$\beta = 1$	$\beta = 20$	$\beta = 50$	$\beta = 150$
Microtunnel (e.g., water)	3 (diameter tunnel)	7	141	353	353
Tunnel (e.g., light rail)	6.5 (diameter tunnel)	33	663	1659	1659
Tunnel (e.g., highway)	15 (diameter tunnel)	176	3534	8836	8836
Landslide	30 (high slope)	900	18000	45000	45000

328

329 Similarly to Medley's (1997) results, the trend of the UF in relation to  $\beta$  is well  
 330 approximated by a logarithmic law, which presents as a line on a semi-logarithmic plot  
 331 (see Figure 5 and Table 2).



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334

Figure 5: Linear fitting of uncertainty factors (shown in Figure 4), for  $\beta$  values in the range [0; 20], on the semi-logarithmic plot.

*Table 2: Specifications of the linear fittings.*

VBP [%]	Fitting equation [ $\beta=1;20$ ]	$R^2 [-]$	$UF_{min} [-]$	$UF_{max} [-]$
10	$UF = -0.226 \cdot \ln(\beta) + 0.690$	0.911	0.014	0.690
20	$UF = -0.137 \cdot \ln(\beta) + 0.416$	0.940	0.003	0.416
30	$UF = -0.091 \cdot \ln(\beta) + 0.278$	0.937	0.005	0.278
40	$UF = -0.051 \cdot \ln(\beta) + 0.157$	0.951	0.003	0.157
50	$UF = -0.039 \cdot \ln(\beta) + 0.119$	0.960	0.003	0.119

337 The lines in Figure 5 can be used in design to correct the ABP estimates in order to obtain  
 338 a range of VBPs which should contain the actual 3D block quantity.  
 339 For example, consider a survey which yields an estimated  $ABP = 30\%$  (i.e., the yellow line  
 340 in Figure 5) using an investigation area three times larger than  $A_c$  (i.e.,  $\beta = 3$ ), the  $UF$  is  
 341 equal to 0.178 and the real VBP can be computed as:

$$342 \quad VBP = ABP \pm UF \cdot ABP = 30 \pm 0.178 \cdot 30 = (25 \div 35)\%$$

343 In this regard, it is worth to note that, as was the case in (Medley 1997, 2001), an  
 344 interpolation can be made between the diagonal lines on the graph of Figure 5, in order  
 345 to obtain the uncertainty factors associated with ABP values other than those considered  
 346 in this study. However, it would not be correct to extrapolate the results provided by these  
 347 analyses if the ABPs were greater than 50% or lower than 10%. In fact, it is not possible  
 348 to predict accurately the trend of the lines in a range different from that analysed here.  
 349 Finally, as already suggested by (Medley 1997; Medley and Zekkos 2011), prudent and  
 350 conservative estimates of the corrected VBP should be made depending on the  
 351 engineering interest. For example, if the strength parameters of a bimrock are to be  
 352 determined, the smallest VBP value should be used. On the other hand, if the adjusted  
 353 VBP will be used to select an excavation method and/or design a cutter head for a  
 354 tunneling project, the highest VBP should be used. Adopting these guidelines, the design  
 355 engineer will err on the side of prudence and safety.

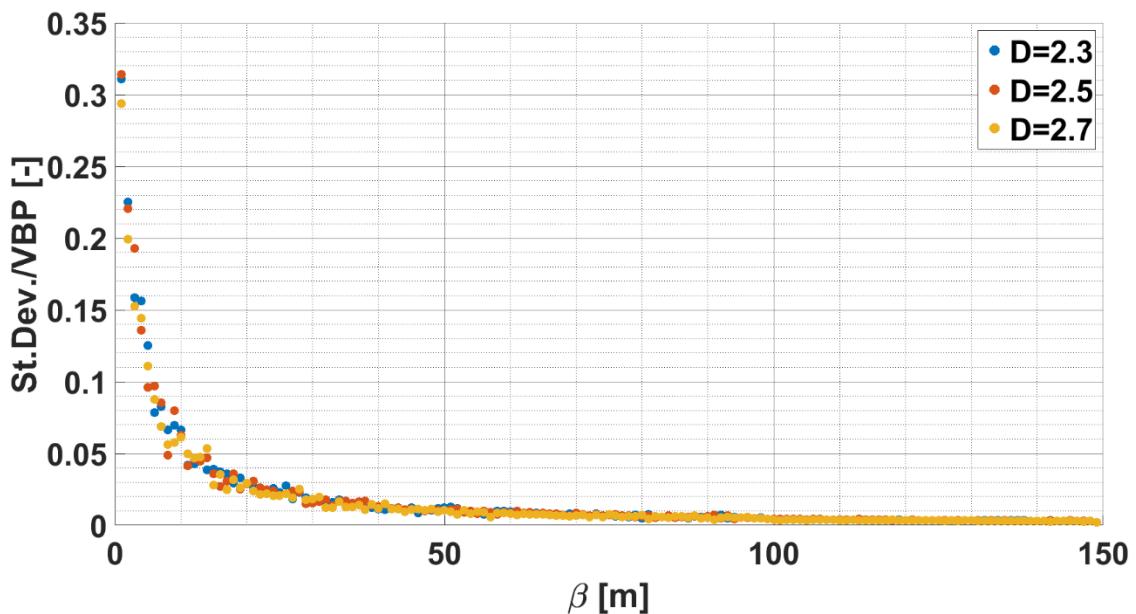
### 3.1 Influence of the fractal dimension

357 In order to verify the influence of the fractal dimension ( $D$ ) on the results, the procedure  
 358 described in the previous sections was repeated. Two further analyses were performed on  
 359 bimrock models with the same VBP, set as equal to 30%, and (different) block size  
 360 distributions with fractal dimensions,  $D$ , equal to 2.3 and 2.7, respectively. These values  
 361 correspond to the average upper and lower limits of  $D$  found for melanges and similar  
 362 bimrocks.

363 As can be seen from the example in Figure 6, the results show very similar trends and  
 364 there are no significant differences that put into question the validity of the input  $D$  value  
 365 used previously (i.e.,  $D=2.5$ ). In fact, it was observed that the data map on semi-log plot

366 as lines superimposed on each other.

367

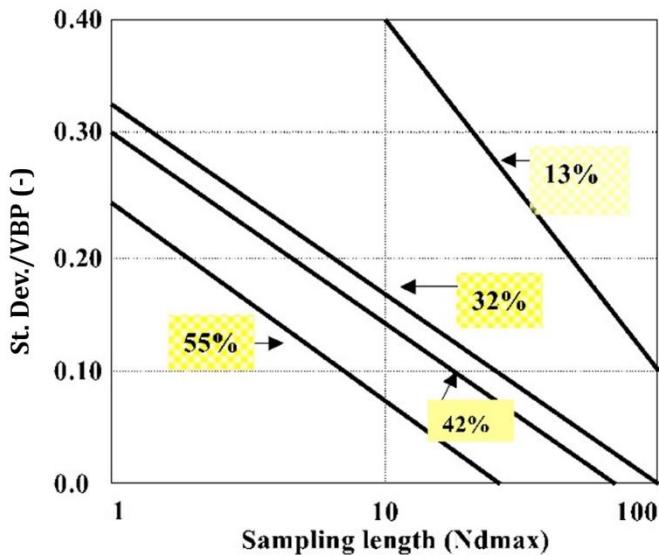


368

369 *Figure 6. Uncertainty in VBP estimates from 2D measurements, as a function of the total investigation surface of*  
370 *model bimrocks characterized by a VBP equal to 30% and block size distributions with fractal dimensions, D, equal to*  
371 *2.3 and 2.7. The results with D=2.5 are also illustrated, by way of comparison. All points are almost overlapping.*

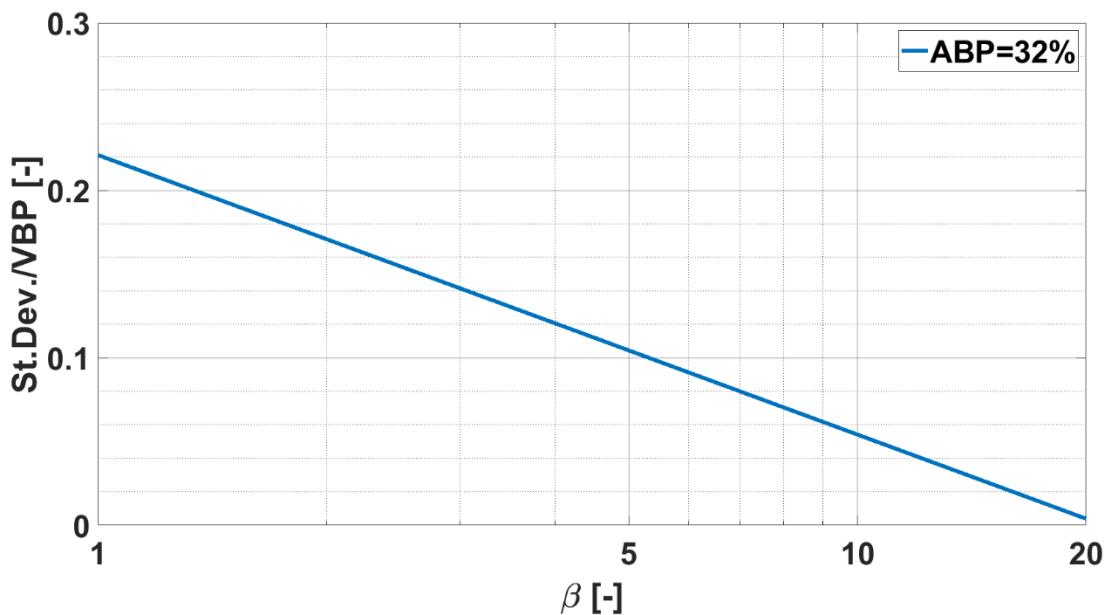
372 **3.2 Comparison between 1D and 2D measurements and**  
373 **related uncertainties**

374 The results that can be obtained through the procedure proposed in this research were  
375 compared to those presented in Medley (2001) related to the use of 1D measurements  
376 (i.e. borehole drillings) for the estimation of the VBP. The latter are summarized in Figure  
377 7, where the trendlines of the uncertainty factor are reported as a function of the  
378 cumulative sampling length and the block content measured.



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Figure 7: Uncertainty in estimates of VBP from 1D measurements as a function of the total sampling length (expressed as a multiple  $N$  of the length of the largest block,  $d_{max}$ ) and the measured LBP (modified from Medley, 2001).



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Figure 8: Uncertainty in estimates of VBP from 2D measurements of a bimrock model with VBP=32%, as a function of the total investigation area, expressed as a multiple  $\beta$  of  $A_c$ .

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In order to perform the comparison, a new bimrock model with a VBP equal to 32% was generated since it corresponds to one of the block contents considered by Medley (2001). The result obtained is shown in Figure 8.

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From the graphs of Figure 7 and Figure 8, an uncertainty factor equal to 0.1 is obtained for  $Nd_{max} = 25.2$  (Figure 7) and  $\beta = 5.3$  (Figure 8). This uncertainty factor is an acceptable value from an engineering point of view.

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Considering the characteristic dimension of the problem at hand,  $L_c$ , the area of engineering interest and the maximum block size are equal to  $A_c = L_c^2$  and  $d_{max} = 0.75 * L_c$ ,

394 respectively.

395 Table 3 shows, for different values of  $L_c$ , the investigation surface required to obtain an  
 396 uncertainty factor equal to 0.1 in the estimate of the VBP from 2D measurements ( $A_{req}$ )  
 397 and the total length of drilling/block intercepts required to obtain the same level of  
 398 uncertainty if 1D measurements are used ( $L_{req}$ ).

399 To compare the results,  $L^*$  was calculated, where  $L^*$  is the side of an equivalent square  
 400 outcrop of size  $A_{req}$ . Table 3 shows that 2D measurements may require less effort than 1D  
 401 measurements (i.e.,  $L^* < L_{req}$ ), where the uncertainties are numerically equal (in this case  
 402 0.1). For example, for  $L_c = 30$  m,  $VBP = 32\%$ ,  $N_{dmax} \sim 25$  and  $UF=0.1$ , 567 m of drilling are  
 403 required (e.g. 19 borings 30 m deep), which could be very expensive for core drilling.  
 404 Alternatively, the 2D approach just needs a total measured area of 69m by 69m, which  
 405 certainly should require a lot less effort.

406 These observations suggest that 2D areal measurements could be preferable to 1D linear  
 407 measurements for VBP estimates, this highlighting the potential of the procedure  
 408 proposed in this research. In fact, the graph shown in Figure 5 represents a useful design  
 409 guide that will encourage geopractitioners to secure on-site ABP measurements as well  
 410 as 1D borehole measurements, to reduce the burden of exploration operations.

411 *Table 3: Investigation surfaces and total perforation lengths required to obtain an UF=0.1, for VBP=32% and different  
 412 values of  $L_c$  ( $L^*$  is the side length of a fictitious square with area equal to  $A_{req}$ ).*

$L_c$ [m]	1D measurement approach $N_{dmax} = 25.2$ for $UF = 0.1$ and $VBP = 32\%$		2D measurement approach $\beta = 5.3$ for $UF = 0.1$ and $VBP = 32\%$		
	$d_{max} = 0.75 \cdot L_c$ [m]	$L_{req} = d_{max} \cdot N_{dmax}$ [m]	$A_c = L_c^2$ [m <sup>2</sup> ]	$A_{req} = \beta \cdot A_c$ [m <sup>2</sup> ]	$L^* = \sqrt{A_{req}}$ [m]
5	3.75	<b>95</b>	25	133	<b>12</b>
10	7.5	<b>189</b>	100	530	<b>23</b>
15	11.25	<b>284</b>	225	1193	<b>35</b>
20	15	<b>378</b>	400	2121	<b>46</b>
30	22.5	<b>567</b>	900	4771	<b>69</b>

## 413 4. Conclusions

414 The VBP is the most important parameter governing the overall mechanical behaviour of  
 415 a bimrock or bimsoil. Hence, correct estimation of in-site VBP is of paramount  
 416 importance. Generally, the only way to measure VBP at site scales is from 1D  
 417 borings/scanlines (LBPs) or 2D outcrop mapping/photographs (ABPs). But, assuming  
 418 the LBPs or ABPs are equivalent to the true VBP leads to significant errors which may  
 419 invalidate the geomechanical characterization of the bimrock or bimsoil under  
 420 investigation.

421 The purpose of this paper was to provide a means for assessing the uncertainty error. To  
 422 this aim, a Matlab code was developed to generate 3D bimrock models with given block

423 size distributions and different VBPs. Then, a statistical approach was applied to each  
424 model to determine the deviation of 2D measurements (ABP) from the real block contents  
425 (VBP) as a function of the size of the outcrop area investigated. The deviation was  
426 assessed by means of an uncertainty factor, and a graph (Figure 5) was developed as a  
427 design aid to adjust on-site ABP measurements to obtain an appropriate estimate of the  
428 VBP. The graph can be used, directly or by interpolation, for a range of ABP values and  
429 dimensions of the outcrop analysed.

430 The method was developed with a view to assist geopractioners with an accessible and  
431 straightforward means for accommodating the uncertainty inherent in accurate  
432 estimation of true site-scale VBPs. This method represents an extension of previous  
433 studies from the literature concerning the uncertainty in estimates of the VBP from 1D  
434 measurements and preserves the ease of application of the corrections proposed. A  
435 comparison with the results obtained from these studies was performed, highlighting the  
436 strength of the procedure developed in this research.

437 The practical potential of the research presented lies in the fact that working with 2D  
438 rather than 1D data can often be more convenient.

439 In fact, it is generally possible and easier to analyse an outcrop large enough to obtain  
440 estimates of the 3D block content that are generally closer to the real VBP than 1D  
441 measurements would be, although with a certain degree of error. Moreover, assuming that  
442 the ground surface geology is accessible and visible, 2D mapping surveys are usually  
443 cheaper to perform than geotechnical exploration drilling programs. Furthermore, the  
444 approach developed in this research is based on purely geometric considerations,  
445 regardless of the mechanical characteristics of the complex material to be analysed. For  
446 this reason, it can be used to estimate the volumetric block proportion of different  
447 geological formations with a block-in-matrix fabric.

448 However, since real bimrocks generally contain non-spherical rock inclusions, the  
449 assumption of block sphericity represents a limitation. Hence intended (and necessary)  
450 future work should investigate if other block shapes, such as more realistic ellipsoids,  
451 yield different results.

452 Moreover, other potential research areas will be to validate and extend the work of  
453 Medley (1997), by performing virtual drilling programs through the computer-derived  
454 bimrock models constructed in the research presented in this paper.

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