

# A global systematic review of publications concerning the invasion biology of four tree species

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**Key words:** *Acer negundo*, *Ailanthus altissima*, Alien plant species, Biological invasion, *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, *Robinia pseudoacacia*.

**Ključne besede:** *Acer negundo*, *Ailanthus altissima*, tujerodne rastlinske vrste, biološka invazija, *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, *Robinia pseudoacacia*.

## Abstract

Paper presents a systematic global review of *Acer negundo*, *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, *Ailanthus altissima*, *Robinia pseudoacacia* invasions focusing on the Scopus and Web of Science databases. We examined the data on papers, study areas, habitat studied, topic discussed. We hypothesized that these species were studied evenly throughout their invaded ranges and, as such, indexed by international databases. We asked whether four selected species are presented evenly in publications related to their invaded ranges, and whether both selected databases cover well a content of these papers. We found 48 papers for *A. negundo*, 14 – for *F. pennsylvanica*, 83 – for *A. altissima*, 96 – for *R. pseudoacacia*. A high percentage of the studies were conducted in Central Europe and USA (for *A. altissima*), while Eastern Europe, Russia, Western United States were poorly represented. Most studies were conducted in forests, and focused on impacts or distribution of aliens in invaded range, and their control and management. We encountered habitat types invaded by trees, factors influencing tree invasions, consequences of invaders' impact on ecosystems, counteracting measures. We concluded that the use only Web of Science and Scopus is not sufficient to obtain the complete data about the invasion biology.

## Izvleček

Predstavljamo sistematičen globalen pregled literature o invaziji vrst *Acer negundo*, *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, *Ailanthus altissima* in *Robinia pseudoacacia* na podlagi baz podatkov Scopus in Web of Science. Pregledali smo podatke v člankih, preučevanih območjih, habitatih in temah raziskav. Postavili smo hipotezo, da so bile vrste preučevane enakomerno v celotnem arealu naselitve in da so objave indeksirane v mednarodnih bazah podatkov. Predvidevali smo, da so izbrane štiri invazivne vrste zmerne cone v člankih zastopane enakomerno v njihovem arealu nove poselitve in da so primerno zbrani v obeh bazah. Kot rezultat smo našli 48 člankov o *A. negundo*, 14 člankov o *F. pennsylvanica*, 83 člankov o *A. altissima* in 96 člankov za *R. pseudoacacia*. Velik delež raziskav je bil opravljen v zahodni Evropi in ZDA (za *A. altissima*), medtem ko so bile raziskave iz vzhodne Evrope, Rusije in zahodnih ZDA slabo zastopane. Večina raziskav je bila narejenih v gozdovih in so se osredotočile na učinke ali razširjenost tujerodnih vrst, pa tudi na njihovo omejevanje in gospodarjenje z njimi. Posebej izpostavljamo najpomembnejše informacije o habitatnih tipih, ki jih tujerodne vrste naseljujejo, dejavnikov, ki vplivajo na njihovo naselitev, posledicah na naravne ekosisteme in merah omejevanja invazij. Zaključimo lahko, da samo uporaba baz Web of Science in Scopus ni dovolj za posplošene zaključke o biologiji invazije, še posebej, če ocenjujemo območja izven Severne Amerike in Zahodne Evrope.

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## Introduction

Biological invasions are a threat to biodiversity conservation on all levels (populations, species, communities, ecosystems) (Dumalisile & Somers 2017, Fateryga & Bagrikova 2017). Invasive species impact adversely ecosystem services and decrease native species abundance through numerous mechanisms such as predation, hybridization, competition and indirect effects (Simberloff et al. 2013). They are considered as one of the major drivers of global biodiversity change (Bellard et al. 2013, Pyšek et al. 2015, Seebens et al. 2015, Dawson et al. 2017). There are more than 13,000 naturalized vascular plant species globally (van Kleunen et al. 2015). In Europe, more than 12,000 species of alien plants and animals are known (Vilà et al. 2010). In other Eurasian areas including the territory of the Russian Federation, 354 plant species were considered as invasive, including 277 invasive plants in European Russia (Vinogradova et al. 2018).

Among functional groups of invasive plant species, woody plants are distinguished by their long life cycle (Richardson 1998, Richardson & Rejmánek 2011). Invasions by woody plants often alter the functioning of invaded ecosystems (Richardson et al. 2000, Bottollier-Curtet et al. 2011, Lazzaro et al. 2018). Moreover, these plants present one of the frequently used test groups in studies of biological invasions (Reichard & Hamilton 1997, Richardson 1998, Pyšek et al. 2014, Nuñez et al. 2017, Shackleton et al. 2017, Zimmermann et al. 2017, Dyderski & Jagodziński 2018). Here we focus on field ecological studies of woody plant invasions globally, including natural and semi-natural systems, excluding non-field studies, i.e. the roles of these invaders, for example in herbal medicine, in fallow agriculture or as objects of greenhouse or laboratory studies.

This review aimed to document data presented in the internationally published literature concerning the invasion biology of four invasive plant species, *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* Marshall, *Acer negundo* L., *Robinia pseudoacacia* L., and *Ailanthus altissima* (Mill.) Swingle, recognized as the most invasive tree species in the temperate zone of Eurasia. For example, in Russia, covering a large area of Eurasia, Vinogradova et al. (2018) recognized *A. negundo* and *F. pennsylvanica* as the first and thirty-fourth species respectively in a list of the most invasive plants of Russia, while Lambdon et al. (2008) indicated *R. pseudoacacia* (ranked 9<sup>th</sup>), *A. altissima* (ranked 14<sup>th</sup>), and *A. negundo* (ranked 23<sup>rd</sup>) among 150 of the most widespread alien plant species in Europe. In addition, *A. negundo*, *R. pseudoacacia* and *A. altissima* were one of the most invasive trees influencing the environment in Turkey (Yazlık et al. 2018), while the first two species were included in the

list of the most common alien plant species in European woodlands (Wagner et al. 2017). *Robinia pseudoacacia* has been included in a list of 26 plant invaders with the greatest impacts in Europe (Rumlerová et al. 2016), as one of “100 of the worst” global list of alien species (Nentwig et al. 2018), the list of the 200 most widely distributed naturalized plant taxa (Pyšek et al. 2017), and in the list of invasive alien species of China (Xu et al. 2012). All four invaders were assessed for the need to prevent or reverse their profound impacts on biodiversity (Carboneras et al. 2018). Among them, major impacts on biodiversity were indicated for *A. altissima* and *R. pseudoacacia*, while *A. negundo* and *F. pennsylvanica* had minor impacts.

One compelling reason for obtaining a better understanding of invasive species in temperate Eurasia is their potential impact on native species and natural ecosystems susceptible to invasion of alien organisms, and to identify knowledge gaps in invasive species and their habitats in different worldwide regions. Knowledge gaps occur in different temperate areas because of the limited availability or accessibility of published data from these areas to researchers in other parts of the world, or because there are fewer resources for invasive biology research in these regions. Limitations on the accessibility of the data for researchers in North America, Europe and other developed countries may also be due to huge number of non-English-language publications or publications in regional journals which are not indexed in major international databases. This issue potentially introduces a bias in understanding of biological invasions globally (Hulme et al. 2013), and limiting cooperative research on biological invasions among researchers from different countries and regions.

We hypothesized that the four studied species, considered as globally invasive plants of temperate zone, are likely to be studied evenly throughout their invaded ranges, and, as such, indexed by international databases. If so, combining the results of a literature search from the Scopus and Web of Science Core Collection (WoS CC) databases may help to form a modern and complete picture of the most important results for these four temperate plant invaders. We focused on these species because of their widespread distribution and frequently reported impacts. Summarizing what is known about a target species can be used to develop questions for future research. While in recent years, several important review papers on one or more of these species have been published (Kowarik & Säumel 2007, Lambdon et al. 2008, Cierjacks et al. 2013, Sladonja et al. 2015, Vítková et al. 2017). A complete global systematic review has not yet been carried out on these species.

To document the global research on these important temperate invasive plants, we used a search approach on the Scopus and WoS CC databases. We used the meth-

odology of systematic reviews, well established in biological and medical sciences, including ones introduced in ecology and conservation (Pullin & Stewart 2006, Cook et al. 2013, 2017, Haddaway et al. 2015, Westgate & Lindenmayer 2017, Januchowski-Hartley et al. 2018). Compared with traditional narrative reviews, systematic reviews exhibit many advantages, such as more comprehensive literature searches, more objective and transparent study selection, and contribution to update and generalize of data (Littell et al. 2008). We performed a systematic review with the goal of summarizing and categorizing the invasive biology literature on these four species throughout their invaded ranges.

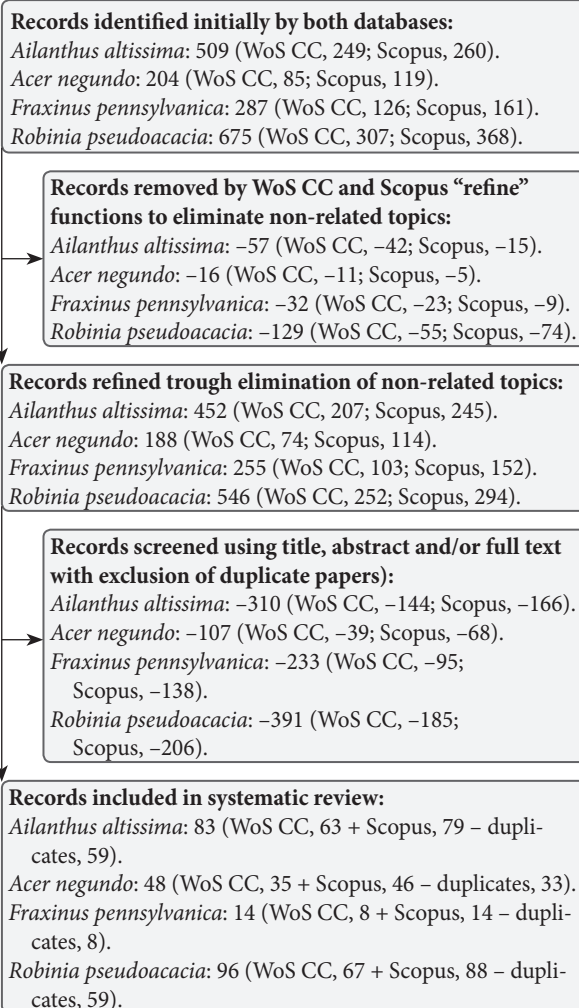
We conducted a systematic review using two of the most authoritative international databases, Scopus and Web of Science Core Collection. We aimed to: (1) conduct a broad search for *Acer negundo*, *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, *Ailanthus altissima*, *Robinia pseudoacacia* invasion literature using both well-known databases; (2) qualitatively summarize the literature on their invasion including publication information, study area location, habitat studied and topic discussed; (3) determine the quality of journals where results on the invasion biology of *A. negundo*, *F. pennsylvanica*, *A. altissima*, *R. pseudoacacia* were published and indexed in international databases selected; and (4) based on our findings, propose areas for future study.

## Methods

We generated a list of peer-reviewed journal articles, conference papers, book chapters, which assessed the invasion biology of target species using the WoS CC and Scopus databases (Figure 1).

To obtain field studies on *Ailanthus altissima*, *Acer negundo*, *Robinia pseudoacacia*, *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* published in WoS CC, on 23 April 2019 we used the specific search strings (Appendix A). Synonyms for the search were extracted from CABI (2018) database. We used all results from WoS CC citation indices. We then delimited the search by relevant research areas of study by using the “exclude” function for exclusion studies in the irrelevant fields (see Appendix A).

As an alternative, we used the search function in database Scopus. Although the search and exclusion options are not identical between the two databases, we used the same search terms. We carried out the Scopus search on 23 April 2019. Like WoS CC, we delimited the search by relevant areas of study by using the “Limit to” function to exclude studies in the all areas apart from: Agricultural and Biological Sciences OR Earth and Planetary Sciences OR Environmental Science.



**Figure 1:** Diagram documenting search and inclusion process and criteria for the global systematic review of the invasion biology of four temperate tree species.

**Slika 1:** Iskalni kriteriji in proces vključevanja v globalni sistematični pregled invazivne biologije štirih drevesnih vrst.

Non-related publications were excluded by title, abstract and/or a careful reading of full text if necessary. We only included literature that reported on these species as invasive organisms in field studies in their invaded ranges, excluding laboratory, genetic and cytological studies, reviews, and other studies that did not record or study plants in their invaded ranges in the field. We also excluded studies that did not occur in natural or semi-natural systems, such as studies of the effects on agricultural crops.

We then extracted the following information from all remaining studies: (1) publication journal; (2) year of publication; (3) country in which the study was conducted; (4) location of study area within country; (5) coordi-

nates of study location; (6) habitat in which the species of interest were found; and (7) focus of the study (see below).

We classified the studies included in our review into five focus categories: (1) testing a specific invasion mechanism; (2) studies devoted to the distribution and spread of the invasive species; (3) surveys focused on the control and management of the invaders; (4) impacts of the invaders on other organisms, the communities or the ecosystems; and (5) others (studies that do not fit into any of these focuses).

We used Google Maps (<https://www.google.com/maps>) to locate the study areas according to their names and then specified their latitude and longitude. When study sites were identified by more than one location, we characterized each of them by their mid-point. We obtained these mid-points using the Geographic Midpoint Calculator (<http://www.geomidpoint.com>).

In addition, we compared the 2017 bibliometric data for included journals from the Scopus and WoS CC. For this purpose, we analyzed 2017 JCR Impact Factor (IF) of journals from WoS CC and 2017 SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) scores of journals from Scopus (available at <http://www.scopus.com/>). We then ranked all journals by quartiles of both databases to demonstrate the quality of journals dealing with the invasion biology of the four studied plant species.

## Results

For *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, we initially identified 287 records across the WoS CC and Scopus databases accessed. After refining, we reduced the records to 255. We then excluded studies with unrelated topics, or those conducted in the laboratory or greenhouse, or those with genetic or molecular data, reviews and duplicates after reading abstracts and/or full texts, if needed. Eventually, we included 14 papers that meet our criteria, of which eight were from WoS CC, fourteen from Scopus (Figure 1 and see Appendix B). There was an overlap of eight records between tested databases, which were excluded from analysis at the last stage of selection.

Using our search terms, we initially identified 204 publications for *Acer negundo* across the both databases used, which were reduced to 188 after refining. We then perused the titles and abstracts and/or full texts (if needed) of the papers, and excluded records that were reviews, cell, molecular or genetic studies, or laboratory/greenhouse experiments with potted plants, or unrelated topics. After excluding papers step by step, we obtained a total of 48 publications on *A. negundo*: 35 from WoS

CC, 46 from Scopus (Figure 1 and see Appendix C). There was an overlap of 33 records between WoS CC and Scopus.

For *Robinia pseudacacia*, 675 records were initially identified across the WoS CC and Scopus databases. After refining, we reduced the records to 546. We then excluded studies with unrelated topics, or those conducted in the laboratory/greenhouse, those with unclear data, reviews and duplicates after reading abstracts and/or full texts (if needed). Eventually, we included 96 papers that met selected criteria, of which 67 were from WoS CC, 88 from Scopus (Figure 1 and see Appendix D). There was an overlap of 59 records between tested databases, which were excluded at the last stage of selection.

Using selected search terms, we initially identified 509 records for *Ailanthus altissima* across the both databases used, which were reduced to 452 after refining. We then investigated the titles and abstracts or full texts (if needed) of each of the papers, and excluded records conducted review articles, cell, molecular or genetic studies, or laboratory/greenhouse experiments with potted plants, or unrelated topics. After excluding papers step by step, we obtained a total of 83 publications devoted to *A. altissima* invasion: 63 from WoS CC, 79 from Scopus (Figure 1 and see Appendix E). There was an overlap of 59 records between WoS CC and Scopus, which were excluded from list of analyzed publications.

## Journals and years of publication

The 14 papers on *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* invasion were published in 13 different journals and one book chapter. Of these 13 journals, nine were indexed in WoS CC, and all 13 journals – in Scopus. The 96 articles on *Robinia pseudacacia* were published in 54 different journals. Of these, 35 journals were indexed in WoS CC, 53 – in Scopus. The 48 papers on *Acer negundo* invasion were published in 31 different journals. Of these, 22 titles were indexed in WoS CC, and 31 journals were indexed in Scopus. The 83 papers on *Ailanthus altissima* invasion were published in 57 different journals. Of these, 45 titles were indexed in WoS CC, and 57 titles – in Scopus (Table 1).

The 14 papers on *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* identified by the databases and included in our review were published from 2005 to 2018 (Figure 2). Due to the small number of records for this species there was no discernible temporal trend for *F. pennsylvanica* invasion. The first study on *Robinia pseudacacia* was published in 1991. The remarkable increase in number of field studies started since 2009. The 48 articles on *Acer negundo* were published between 2003 and 2019 with highest number

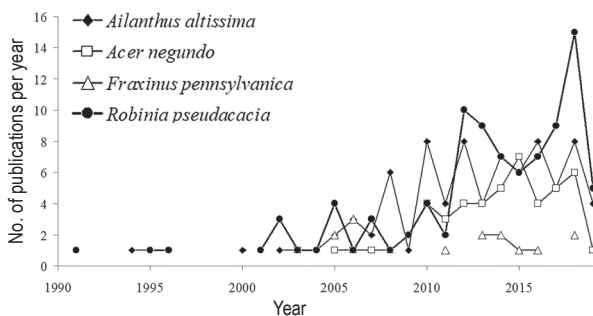


**Table 1:** The number of journals and publications identified through a global literature search from 1975 to late April 2019 using WoS CC and Scopus databases for invasion biology research on *Ailanthus altissima*, *Acer negundo*, *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, and *Robinia pseudacacia*

**Tabela 1:** Število izbranih revij in publikacij v globalnem pregledu literature od leta 1975 in konec aprila 2019 v bazah podatkov WoS CC in Scopus o raziskavah invazivne biologije vrst *Ailanthus altissima*, *Acer negundo*, *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, in *Robinia pseudacacia*

Species	No. of journals	No. of publications	Mean no. of publications per journal (M±m)
<i>Ailanthus altissima</i>	57	83	1.3 ± 0.2
<i>Acer negundo</i>	31	48	1.4 ± 0.2
<i>Robinia pseudoacacia</i>	54	96	1.6 ± 0.2
<i>Fraxinus pennsylvanica</i>	13	14	1.0 ± 0.0

(87.5%) in the period of 2010–2018. Curiously, the number of publications per year was relatively stable for this invader with a little increase since 2014 (Figure 2). Finally, our review included 83 papers on *Ailanthus altissima* which were published from 1994 to 2019. However, the greatest number of field studies (78.3%) was published in 2008–2018 (Figure 2).

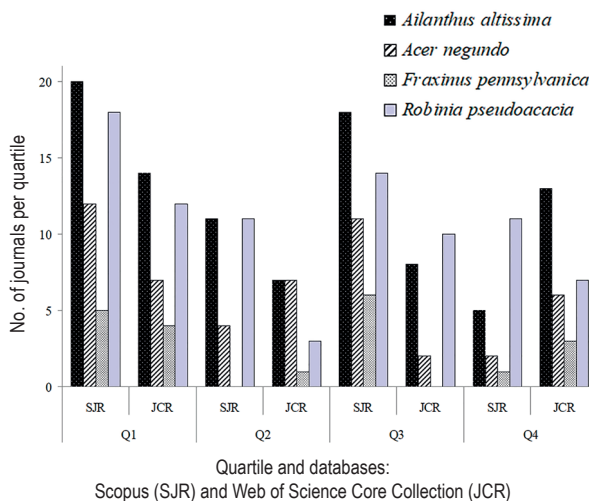


**Figure 2:** The number of publications per year. Global literature identified through a search from 1975 to late April 2019 using WoS CC and Scopus databases for invasion biology research on *Ailanthus altissima*, *Acer negundo*, *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, and *Robinia pseudacacia*.

**Slika 2:** Število publikacij na leto. Literaturni viri od leta 1975 do konca aprila 2019 v bazah WoS CC in Scopus o invazivni biologiji vrst *Ailanthus altissima*, *Acer negundo*, *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* in *Robinia pseudacacia*.

The 2017 JCR IF was available for 73 of the 80 journals included for all studied invasive species with exception of Acta Scientiarum Polonorum – Formatio Circumieciectus, Journal of Central European Agriculture, Mathematical and Computational Forestry & Natural-Resource Sciences, Poljoprivreda, Russian Journal of Biological

Invasions indexed in Emerging Sources Citation Index database, and Canadian Field-Naturalist, Ohio Journal of Science excluded from WoS CC after 2012 and 2008, respectively. In general, 2017 IF JCR of all included journals varied between 0.300 (Lazaroa) and 7.828 (Ecological Monographs). Considering invaders targeted, we found no remarkable differences between mean values of 2017 IF JCR:  $2.157 \pm 1.876$ ,  $2.134 \pm 1.192$ ,  $1.913 \pm 1.192$ ,  $2.012 \pm 1.304$  for *Ailanthus altissima*, *Acer negundo*, *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, *Robinia pseudacacia*, respectively. Of the 10886 Scopus titles, the journal Glasnik za Šumske Pokuse was excluded from analysis as discounted in the database after 2011, and Vestnik Tomskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta, Biologiya does not still have SJR value because it has been included in Scopus database at June 2018. Among analyzed journals, 2017 SJR scores varied between 0.104 (Humans and Nature) and 4.912 (Ecological Monographs). Taking into account the separate invasive tree species, there were not remarkable differences between mean values of 2017 SJR:  $0.922 \pm 1.033$ ,  $0.834 \pm 0.841$ ,  $0.834 \pm 0.841$ ,  $0.664 \pm 0.574$  for *A. altissima*, *A. negundo*, *F. pennsylvanica*, *R. pseudacacia*, respectively. The arrangement of journals included in both databases showed that the largest number of field studies was published in Q1-journals followed by Q3-journals, and then other groups. It indicated the significance of different-level journals in highlighting the issues of biological invasions of these four alien tree species (Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** Number of journals per quartiles (Q1–Q4) of both databases (Scopus – 2017 SJR, Web of Science Core Collection – 2017 JCR IF) analyzed.

**Figure 3:** Število revij, razvrščenih v kvartile (Q1–Q4) v obeh analiziranih bazah podatkov (Scopus – 2017 SJR, Web of Science Core Collection – 2017 JCR IF).

## Location of study areas, habitats and study focuses

Based on analysis of records included, the presence of *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* as an invader was studied in 19 habitats as reported in 14 papers included in the analysis. At the same time, one paper did not provide any information on habitat preference. Habitats investigated included forests, grasslands, farmlands and roadsides (Figure 4). The largest number of studies across both databases on *Acer negundo* as an alien plant were in forest ecosystems, followed by roadsides, farmlands, and grasslands respectively, while seven articles didn't provide any data on habitat invaded (Figure 4). About half of all studies on *Ailanthus altissima* invasion (47.1%) were conducted in forests. Around half of other studies were devoted to the invader records in either farmlands or roadsides, while 11 papers did not include information on habitat preference. The highest proportion (55.6%) of studies on *Robinia pseudoacacia* invasion were also in forest ecosystems, while 12 papers did not provide any information on habitat invaded. Eleven to twenty one papers included data on its invasion in grasslands, roadsides and farmlands.

The most common focuses of the studies on *Robinia pseudoacacia* invasion were its impacts on and interaction with native species, populations and plant communities, and distribution and spread of the invader, followed by other focuses (Figure 5). Similar pictures were demonstrated for other three invaders with slight variations between the categories Distribution & Spread and Impact & Interaction (Figure 5).

There were 44 locations, in which research on *Acer negundo* invasion was studied. Geographically, 38 study sites (86.4%) were located in Europe (Figure 6B), while other six were located in Canada and Asia (Figure 6A). For *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, only 15 areas were identified. Of these, 86.7% of the studies were conducted in Europe (Figure 7B). At the same time, one study was conducted in Eastern Africa (Kenya), and one – in Siberia (Figure 7A). The *Robinia pseudoacacia* invasion was studied in 143 locations (Figure 8A). There were two main clusters of records – East Asian (Figure 8C) with 22.4% of total number of locations (in China, South Korea, Japan, Russian Far East), and European – West Asian (Figure 8B) with 109 locations and with high numbers in Italy (20 sites), Slovakia (17 sites), Hungary (9 sites), Ukraine (8 sites), Croatia (7 sites), Slovenia (7 sites), Poland (6 sites). Interestingly, two studies on *R. pseudoacacia* invasion were conducted close to its native range – in United States of America (Figure 8A). For the East Asian *Ailanthus altissima*, 143 locations

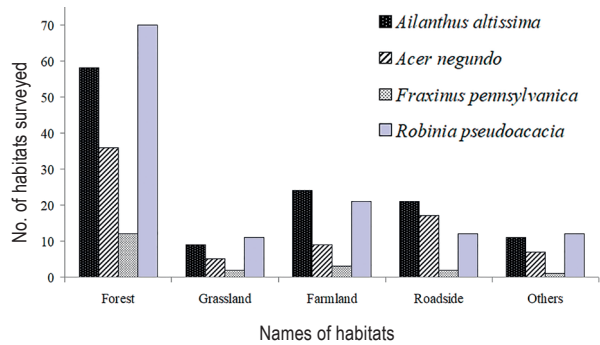


Figure 4: Habitats investigated (Plots include studies from Web of Science Core Collection and Scopus).

Slika 4: Preučevani habitati (ploskve vključujejo raziskave iz baz Web of Science Core Collection in Scopus).

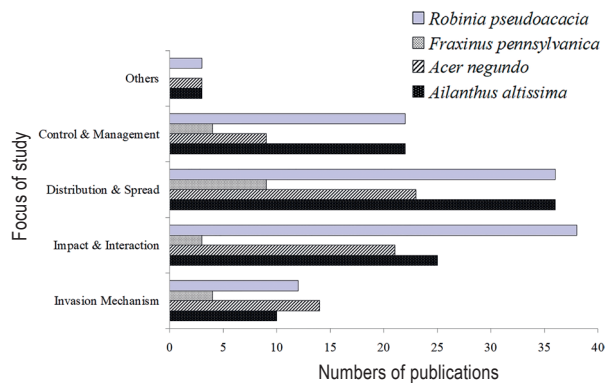
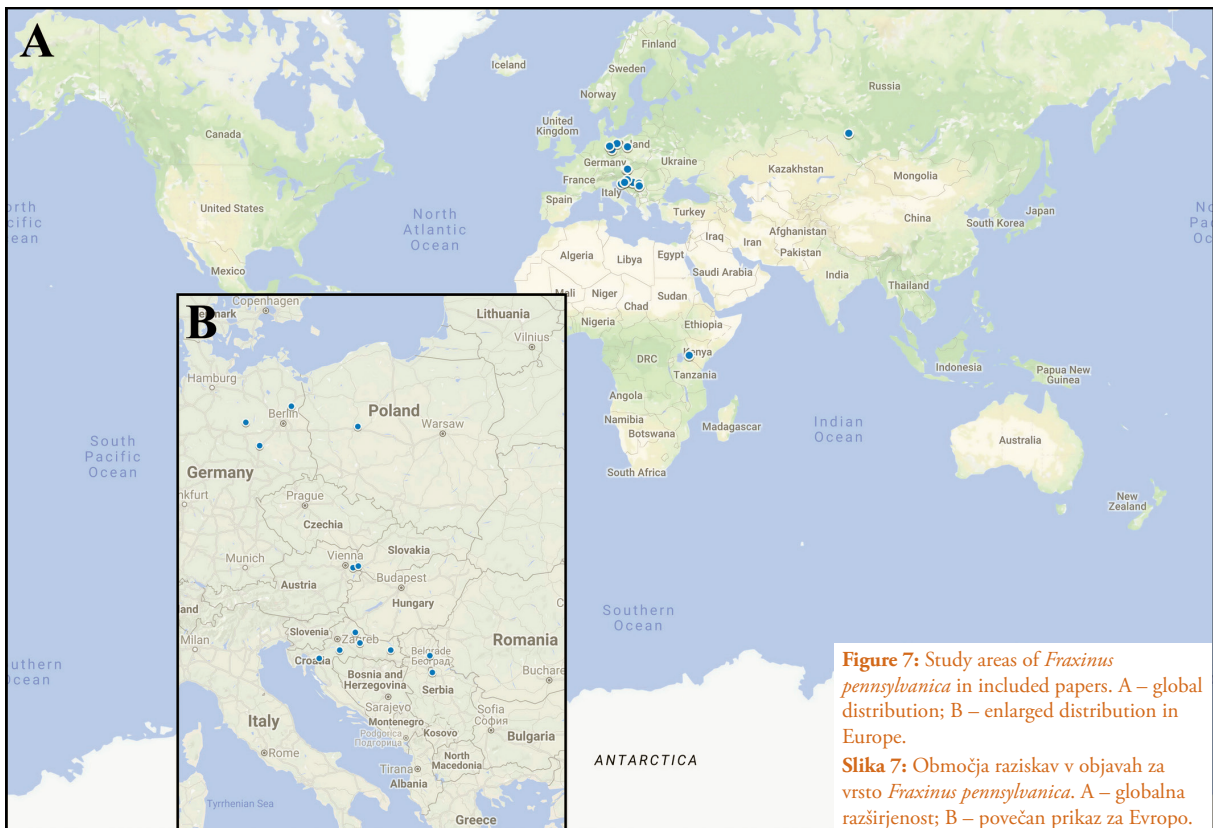
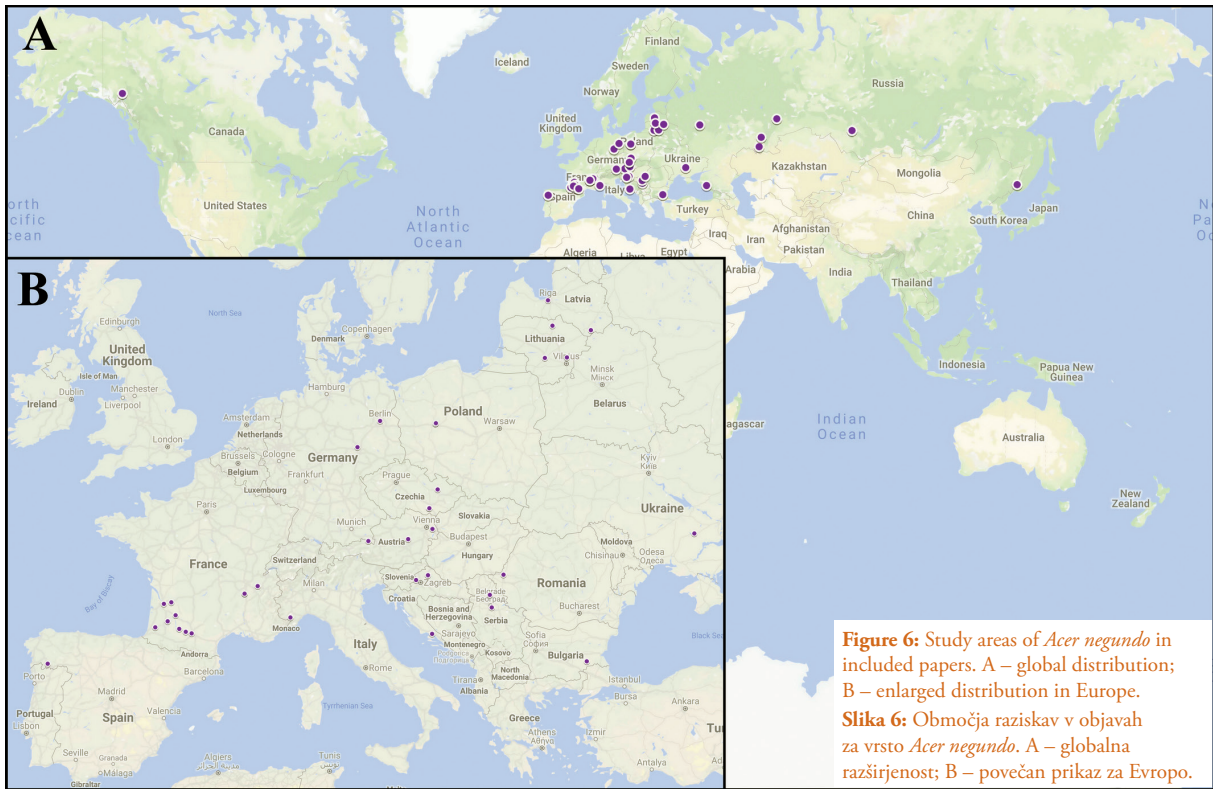


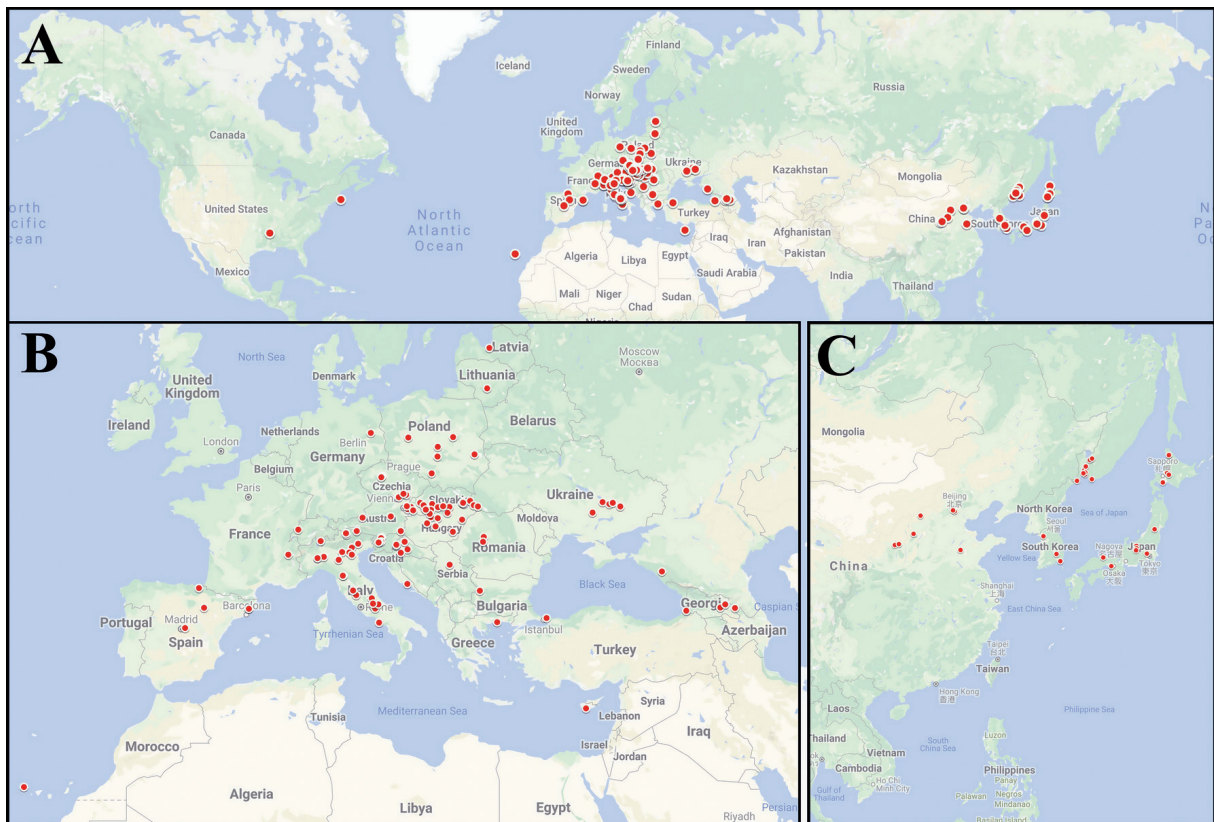
Figure 5: Focus of study (Plots include studies from Web of Science Core Collection and Scopus).

Figure 5: Namen raziskave (ploskve vključujejo raziskave iz baz Web of Science Core Collection in Scopus).

were identified. Of them, 44.7% of the studies were conducted in European countries – Slovenia (25 sites), Croatia (24 sites), Spain (7 sites), Italy (11 sites), Greece (7 sites); other countries were represented by lesser number of locations identified (Figure 9C). Also, 20.3% locations were situated in USA (Figure 9B), while six sites were identified in Asia (Figure 9C).







**Figure 8:** Study areas of *Robinia pseudoacacia* in included papers. A – global distribution; B – enlarged distribution in Europe and Western Asia; C – enlarged distribution in East Asia.

**Slika 8:** Območja raziskav v objavah za vrsto *Robinia pseudoacacia*. A – globalna razširjenost; B – povečan prikaz za Evropo in zahodno Azijo; C – povečan prikaz za vzhodno Azijo.

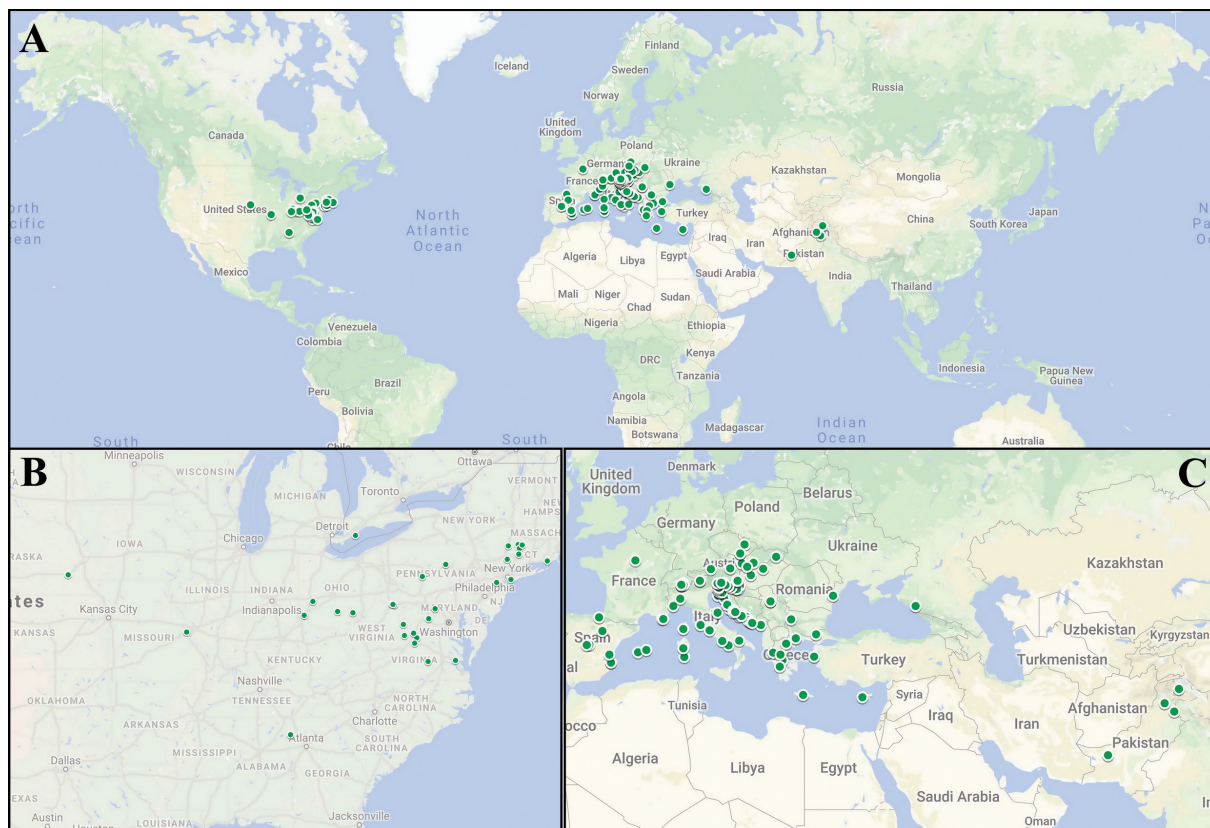
## Discussion

Our systematic review documents evidence for the four invasive plant species considered as widely spread and aggressive invaders in the temperate zone of Eurasia and Northern Hemisphere as a whole. Undoubtedly, this undercounts areas where the species are invasive, because the analyzed databases, WoS and Scopus, do not include all studies. In addition, published research might not be conducted on these invaders in all areas where they are present. Finally, a systematic review, carried out across numerous international and regional scientific databases may offer insights into the general literature on plant invasions in both hemispheres.

Research investigating the biological invasions of *Acer negundo*, *Ailanthus altissima*, *Robinia pseudoacacia* has increased substantially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Figure 2), while data on *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* invasions are insufficient to provide some conclusions. This tendency is similar to the results of recent scientific reviews on biological invasions in different ecosystems (Lowry et al. 2013, Stricker et al.

2015, Liebhold et al. 2017, Mačić et al. 2018). A large proportion of studies included in our systematic review for all invaders was conducted in areas located mainly in European countries (Figure 3), excluding, however, Eastern Europe from which there was a lack of field ecological studies published. This is particularly the case in the Russian Federation which is characterized by an extreme lack of field ecological studies on biological invasions in selected databases, despite of numerous national statements and publications (e.g. Black Data Books (Vinogradova et al. 2010, 2011, Notov et al. 2011, Vinogradova & Kuprianov 2016)) and the presence of a specialized journal (Russian Journal of Biological Invasions) indexed in the Scopus and WoS CC (ESCI) databases. This is in accord with worldwide assessments of biological invasions recently published (Lowry et al. 2013, van Kleunen et al. 2015, Dawson et al. 2017, Pyšek et al. 2017, Seebens et al. 2017). Our knowledge of biological invasions may be biased due to the inaccessibility of publication records, either due to language restrictions or due to the non-indexing of journals by the more widely used databases (e.g.





**Figure 9:** Study areas of *Ailanthus altissima* in included papers. A – global distribution; B – enlarged distribution in North America; C – enlarged distribution in Europe and Western Asia.

**Slika 9:** Območja raziskav v objavah za vrsto *Ailanthus altissima*. A – globalna razširjenost; B – povečan prikaz za Severno Ameriko; C – povečan prikaz za Evropo in zahodno Azijo.

Yu et al. 2016). Hence, to obtain the complete picture of studies, there is a need to involve national and regional bibliographic databases.

Across both the databases, a large number of these field studies on the four invasive species were conducted on bioinvasions in forests rather than along farmlands and roadsides, which are traditionally known to be favorable habitats for invasive species establishment (Yan et al. 2004, Hulme 2009). Hence, the selected alien plants can invade and then impact forested areas, as these invaders are recognized not only as naturalized plants, but often as transformers *sensu* Richardson (2000) (e.g., Vinogradova et al. 2010, Berg et al. 2017). However, this does not suggest that non-woodland habitats are not invaded severely.

Overall, a large percentage of studies measured the impacts of the invaders on either the native species, or the communities invaded. In this regard, we did not separately analyze Scopus- and WoS-indexed papers due to the insignificant differences between the both databases. Papers on invader distribution or evidence of the new records were also numerous for all selected alien species.

This indicates both the continuing spread and the high level of invasiveness of these alien trees in temperate zone of Eurasia and North America. Hence, we can expect on increasing the number of papers dealing with invaders' impact and their interactions with other organisms or ecosystems inhabited, as well as investigations on control and/or management of the invasive plants.

Based on the review of the quality of journals included in our systematic review, we conclude that most papers indexed in both databases were published in journals of 1<sup>st</sup> (1Q) and 3<sup>rd</sup> (3Q) quartiles, while 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quartiles are also presented by many journals dealing with different research fields. Among all journals included in review, there were five titles (NeoBiota, Preslia, Biological Invasions, Invasive Plant Science and Management, Russian Journal of Biological Invasions) indexed in WoS CC and/or Scopus, which are specialized on publications devoted to biological invasions. The WoS CC journals are high-quality titles of the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> quartiles, while Russian Journal of Biological Invasions is a journal of the SJR 3<sup>rd</sup> quartile. Twenty-four papers were published in these journals.

Thus, a significant percentage of papers on invasion of *Acer negundo*, *Ailanthus altissima*, *Robinia pseudoacacia* and *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* were published in specialized “bioinvasion-related” journals. However, a high number (32) of articles on these invaders were published in 14 forestry-related journals: *Annals of Forest Science* (SJR: Q1, JCR: Q1), *Canadian Journal of Forest Research* (SJR: Q1, JCR: Q2), *Dendrobiology* (SJR: Q2, JCR: Q3), *Forest Ecology and Management* (SJR: Q1, JCR: Q1), *Forest Science* (SJR: Q1, JCR: Q3), *Forests* (SJR: Q1, JCR: Q2), *IForest* (SJR: Q2, JCR: Q3), *Journal of Forest Research* (SJR: Q2, JCR: Q3), *Journal of Forestry* (SJR: Q1, JCR: Q1), *New Forests* (SJR: Q1, JCR: Q1), *Small-Scale Forestry* (SJR: Q2, JCR: Q3), *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* (SJR: Q1, JCR: Q1), *Arboriculture and Urban Forestry* (SJR: Q2), *Journal of Forest Science* (SJR: Q3), and *Journal of the Japanese Forestry Society* (SJR: Q4). Relatively low-quality (Q4) journals are almost absent. Publications on invasion biology of the four species are presented mainly by Q1–Q3 titles in both databases. Thus, we can assume that the choice of a journal for publication was more clearly reflected in the studied habitat (here is a forest as more preferable habitat for studied species, Figure 4), than in the study subject to biological invasions.

From this review, we show the utility of systematic reviews in both indicating and filling gaps in the literature. If a review is based on the international highest-quality databases, it is possible to identify a range of the most important and comprehensive studies within certain scopes, particularly related to biological invasions. It is obvious that in Eastern Europe and Russia, there is a need to include more bioinvasion-related studies in analyzed databases. It is also important to note that despite of the national statements on high-degree invasiveness of *Acer negundo* and *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, there are relatively few studies of these species indexed in the WoS CC and Scopus databases. Therefore, it is urgent to fill large gaps in the knowledge on distribution these alien plants in invasive range.

Since the publication of Elton (1958), studies on research topics and ecological systems related to biological invasions differed in different parts of the world. In one area in our review, (mainly Western Europe and Eastern United States) there is a satisfactory investigation level, while Central Europe is characterized by higher level of knowledge on invasion of the tree species. Other areas present the white gaps in terms of invasion biology of the four studied tree species based on WoS CC and Scopus. In our view, the national peculiarities of research in different countries, the accumulation of the most results in national-language publications, and the underestimation

of local and regional alien floras can explain these gaps. Thus, to obtain a full picture of biological invasions, it is necessary to take into account regional differences in study focuses, habitats invaded, and attempt to access non-English-language literature and a wider range of scientific regional and national databases. Finally, our review suggests a need to involve the wider range of literature in most underestimated regions, especially that which concerns research questions on poorly studied and/or most aggressive invaders within the framework of prevailing invasion hypotheses (Catford et al. 2009, Gurevitch et al. 2011). These actions will potentially broaden our knowledge and understanding of biological invasions worldwide.

## Species-specific insights

Using publications included in the review for studies invasive trees, we generalized the most important data by focusing on habitat types invaded, factors influencing tree invasion, consequences of each invader impact on natural ecosystems, measures for counteracting plant invasions. For all species, we noted the higher invasiveness in urban habitats in comparison with natural and semi-natural ecosystems because last ones are more susceptible to plant invasions. Therefore, we focused on overview of invaders’ features in natural ecosystems. Finally, we did not discuss the publications devoted to distribution and new records of invasive tree species.

### *Acer negundo* invasion

Based on the identified studies, we can state that this species is considerably more confined to both natural (Tabacchi et al. 2003, Lamarque et al. 2012) and urban (Straigytė et al. 2015) riparian forest ecosystems. *Acer negundo* not only invaded riparian zones, but also forms *Acer*-dominated forest communities on the place of former riparian phytocenoses.

*Acer negundo* represented a well competitive advantage over native species by showing both a high survival in the shade and a high growth in full light habitats (Saccone et al. 2010a). Saccone et al. (2010b) demonstrated that tree and shrub canopy of *Salix* and then of *Acer negundo* itself facilitated the survival and establishment of invader by negative affecting of herb layer acting as a suppressor of *Acer negundo* invasion (Saccone et al. 2013). Additionally, *Acer negundo* negatively affected the abundance of seedlings from soil seed bank in invaded habitat (Veselkin et al. 2018).

Concerning a role of environmental factors, the water was the most impactful factor determining invader

survival, more specifically precipitation during certain months (Zajpler et al. 2018), habitat moisture (Dyakov & Zhelev 2013). Säumel & Kowarik (2013) demonstrated importance of hydrochory as a dispersal vector for the invader in urban riparian ecosystems.

Among counteracting measures used to control this invader in secondary range, destroying spontaneous seedlings seems to be more preferable since cutting of the grown trees was not effective as the species can re-grow from the stumps (Valantinaite et al. 2011). Also, at a local scale, Merceron et al. (2016) showed higher effectiveness of the yearly repeated girdling, and removing seedlings of the invader from understory layer when applying girdling on adult and sapling individuals for induction of higher mortality of *Acer negundo*. For urban ecosystems, Säumel & Kowarik (2010) demonstrated that a risk of *Acer negundo* invasion could be prevented with help of planting native tree species along river corridors. Kostina et al. (2016) suspected that progressing affection of *A. negundo* leaves by fungus *Phyllosticta negundinis* and noninfectious leaf toxicosis can decrease its invasive potential.

### *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*

By generalizing data on *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* in secondary range, we noted a large number of publications (95.1% of total number of ones initially identified from both databases) excluded from the analysis. The use of key words “invasion”, “alien” often led to the selection of high number of publications, which did not aim studying its invasion in secondary range. As a rule, the mentioned cases could be explained by the fact that in its native range, *F. pennsylvanica* is affected by the invasive insect the emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis* Fairmaire, 1888) (e.g. Flower et al. 2018). From one side, it would be guessed that *Agrilus planipennis* may act as biotic agent against *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* invasion. However, Orlova-Bienkowskaja (2014) demonstrated that in West Russia the emerald ash borer damaged both invasive *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* and, although in lesser degree, native *Fraxinus excelsior* L. Thus, there are already two issues – invasive tree invaded by invasive insect, which need to be considered nowadays.

Concerning *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* invasion in secondary range, fourteen field studies identified in result of analysis were concentrated predominantly in Central Europe. Although the invader can inhabit different forest types, *F. pennsylvanica* invades predominantly floodplains. The confinement of *F. pennsylvanica* to floodplains is also related to its enhanced regeneration in flooded areas and the increase in seed germination rate with the duration of the inundation (Schmiedel & Tackenberg 2013). A threat

to natural ecosystems in Croatia and Poland also demonstrated on the basis of radial growth rates studies (e.g. Zajpler et al. 2018) with a lack of floristic and phytosociological studies (e.g. Mullah et al. (2014) in Kenya, and Kremer et al. (2006b) in Croatia). However, as a result of one of field studies, new *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*-formed syntaxon was described (Batanjski et al. 2015). Despite the recognized negative role of the invader, its useful role in management and amelioration of habitats is sometimes underlined (e.g. Kremer & Čavlović 2005).

As the most effective measure to counteract the *F. pennsylvanica* invasion was the removal single trees and seedlings of the invader and from plantation with short rotations (Kremer et al. 2006a, Drescher & Prots 2016).

### *Robinia pseudoacacia*

The highest number of identified studies demonstrated *R. pseudoacacia* invasion in forest ecosystems (Figure 4). This can be manifested either in forming of invader-dominated forest on the place of abandoned agricultural lands (Sitzia et al. 2018) or in its penetration in different existing forest ecosystems. The European mixed oak-hornbeam forest was recognized as the forest type most influenced by replacement with *R. pseudoacacia*, whereas floodplain forest was changed the least (Slabejová et al. 2019), although many of analyzed studies of *R. pseudoacacia* invasion were conducted exactly in floodplain forests. At the same time, Çoban et al. (2019) demonstrated that total invasion cover was considerably higher on the clear-cut area compared with the forest area and did not make a significant effect on forest interior species. This is consistent with statement that the invasion severity into the forest depth decreases with increase of the distance from forest edge in Protected Areas (Slodowicz et al. 2018).

*Robinia pseudoacacia* invasion affects numerous different components of natural ecosystems, first of all, the content of soil nitrogen causing many of consequent modifications (e.g. Staska et al. 2014). The invaded forests are characterized by increase of bacterial richness, decrease of abundance and richness of arthropods, richness of nematodes, and richness and diversity of plant communities (Lazzaro et al. 2018), change in plant species diversity (Benesperi et al. 2012) and even local bird species composition (Hanzelka & Reif 2015). Berg et al. (2017) demonstrated strong affecting forest communities by *Robinia pseudoacacia* as a result of building up high mean cover values in these habitats. However, in contrary to the most of analyzed studies, Masaka et al. (2013) found no statistical differences in number of understory plant species between *Robinia pseudoacacia* plantations and white birch plantations in Japan, as well as Sitzia et al. (2012)



found no evidence that the presence of *R. pseudoacacia* in secondary stands plays a major role in shaping the diversity of the understory plant groups compared to native stands. So large number of contradictions in research results of *R. pseudoacacia* influence on invaded ecosystems indicates its comprehensive and still difficultly recognized nature, which requires further studies.

Concerning ecological factors, *Robinia pseudoacacia* was capable to grow in a wide range of water availability gradient in Spain (Nadal-Sala et al. 2013). However, a lack of moisture had negative effect on *R. pseudoacacia* in China (Wei et al. 2018). Finally, Terwei et al. (2013) demonstrated that under the closed canopy inside the forest stands, i.e. with a lack of light, *R. pseudoacacia* regenerated very scarcely.

Among measures to control *Robinia pseudoacacia* invasion, the cutting of invader's canopy trees can be successfully applied to counteract its invasion in riparian forest ecosystems (Sakio 2003). According to Masaka et al. (2015), *R. pseudoacacia* trees should be cut during the dormant season to facilitate coppicing and in the summer to facilitate control or removal with additional conservation of herbaceous vegetation cover, together with consecutive sprout clipping, will aid the complete removal of the invasive species. Buffer zones around forests were suggested as a very effective passive method in controlling *R. pseudoacacia* invasion (Crosti et al. 2016). An interesting way was suggested by Motta et al. (2009) who noted that the best strategy to control the *R. pseudoacacia* spread is to support conditions favorable for its colonization, and to wait for natural suppression of the tree invader by other trees.

## *Ailanthus altissima* invasion

The generalization of the entire set of identified studies allowed considering *Ailanthus altissima* as a highly invasive tree species in Europe (e.g. Constan-Nava et al. 2015), while in North America it seems to be less aggressive, but also requiring attention (e.g. Kasson et al. 2013). It can form monodominant secondary forest and invade successfully natural forest communities. Höfle et al. (2014) demonstrated that among softwood and hardwood forests, *A. altissima* more frequently colonizes hardwood floodplain forests. Berg et al. (2017) showed that *A. altissima* also rare invaded montane beech forests, coniferous mountain forests and forests at extremely dry sites, swamp and bog forests dominated by willows and ash. Within all forest types, it has higher invasion activity along fire-damaged and opened areas (Kowarik 1995), thus exhibiting a “gap-obligate” strategy of forest recruitment (Knapp & Canham 2000). Obviously, *Ailanthus altissima* benefits from a loss of its competitors in forest communities. At a local

scale, the invader is not evenly distributed in forests. So, the number of *A. altissima* stems and its basal area decreased with increased distance from the woodlot edge (Espenschied-Reilly & Runkle 2008), although the relatively low light conditions are sufficient for the growth and survival of generative regeneration of *A. altissima* at early development stages (Knüsel et al. 2017).

The invasion rate of this wind-dispersal can be increased, if its populations border roadsides and could serve as seed sources for further local and landscape spread (McAvoy et al. 2012). Allocation of *A. altissima* populations along water courses may contribute for long-distance dispersal more than two orders of magnitude farther than recorded primary dispersal due to the retained high seed germination rates even after five months in the water (Kaproth & McGraw 2008). By considering forest ecosystems, *A. altissima* invasion is also supported and intensified by fresh clear-cuts, especially repeated ones (Radtke et al. 2013).

Despite the generally high preference to forest ecosystems, some studies indicated the higher invasiveness of *Ailanthus altissima* in coastal forest ecosystems (Novak & Novak 2018), which are obviously characterized by more mild and perhaps favorable climatic conditions. This assumption is partially supported by data on spatial distribution of *A. altissima* in a local scale (Slovenia), where the tree species invades more actively forest communities that appear in warm areas with pronounced climatic seasonality (Čarni et al. 2017). The distribution of studies identified in the review (Figure 9) can additionally indicate that *A. altissima* is more abundant in coastal areas, and seems to be occasional in the depths of mainland.

Together with *Robinia pseudoacacia*, *Ailanthus altissima* strongly affected forest communities of invaded sites due to the building up high mean cover values in invaded forests (Berg et al. 2017) and seedling success in canopy gaps and the formation of persistent clumps of clonal sprouts around canopy trees (Espenschied-Reilly & Runkle 2008). Concerning forest biota, the invasion of *A. altissima* in France associated to lower soil microbial activity, decreasing abundance of litter Acari and Collembola, and aboveground predatory Coleoptera, and decreasing terrestrial Gastropoda species richness. At the same time, the increased *A. altissima* density corresponded with greater abundance of litter Lumbricidae and aboveground coprophagous Coleoptera (Motard et al. 2015).

Among all four studied invasive tree species, *Ailanthus altissima* had the highest diversity of studies devoted to control its invasion. The herbicide imazapyr together with prescribed burn treatment seems to be one of the most effective ways in killing large saplings and trees of *Ailanthus altissima*. In addition, the late growing season

application of imazapyr was highly effective in killing the invader and subsequent sprouts (Rebbeck et al. 2019). The cut stump and glyphosate treatment have been considered as the most effective and efficient in its control of young *A. altissima* shoots because it limits disturbance and has acceptable capital and operating costs, while the EZject Capsule Injection System (using glyphosate) was effective at managing mature, seed-producing shoots, although last method had higher capital costs (Meloche & Murphy 2006, Constán-Nava et al. 2010). The counteracting measures could include a combination of mechanical (e.g. cutting) and chemical (e.g. stem injection) means (Ferrero & Vidotto 2015). In favor of this, Burch & Zedaker (Burch & Zedaker 2003) also noticed the preferred role of herbicides for controlling *Ailanthus altissima* invasion because they successfully kill the trees and prevents resprouting. As a biotic controlling factor, Harris et al. (2013) proposed the recently isolated strain of the fungus *Verticillium albo-atrum* causing near 100% mortality of *Ailanthus altissima* in laboratory and field tests, and thus this fungus appears to be a promising tool in targeted control of the invasive tree species.

## Conclusions

The generalization of analyzed studies demonstrated a higher habitat confinement of all species to forest systems. Among these, *Ailanthus altissima* and *Robinia pseudoacacia* were recognized as the most aggressive invaders, which are able to modify invaded habitats, change their environmental conditions, as well as form new secondary forest communities. At the same time, *Acer negundo* and *Fraxinus pennsylvanica* were less impactful invasive species, since they are able to penetrate into a limited number of habitats. The physical removal (cutting) of single trees and seedlings, sometimes together with chemical impact methods and prescribed burning were recognized as the most effective counteracting measures.

Despite the undoubted significance of WoS CC and Scopus databases for searching and accumulation of most important data, the use of only these sources is not sufficient to generalize the complete data about the invasion biology of certain alien plant species. It especially concerns the regions outside of North America and Western Europe. A large portion of important information on distribution, invasion success, invasion biology and ecology of alien plant species is obviously stored in national, non-English, databases. We propose the necessity to use additionally other, English or non-English-language, regional databases to conduct most comprehensive systematic reviews on invasion biology of certain alien plants.

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## Appendix

**The search strings and criteria used to summarize the invasive biology literature on *Acer negundo*, *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*, *Ailanthus altissima*, *Robinia pseudoacacia* in Web of Science Core Collection.**

### Search strings

#### *Ailanthus altissima*

Topic: [(invasi\* OR invader OR alien OR exotic OR ruderal OR weed OR non-native OR introduced OR naturaliz\*) AND (“*Ailanthus altissima*” OR “Tree of heaven” OR “tree-of-heaven” OR “*Ailanthus cacodendron*” OR “*Ailanthus giraldii*” OR “*Ailanthus glandulosa*” OR “*Ailanthus peregrina*” OR “*Ailanthus sutchuensis*” OR “*Ailanthus vilmoriniana*” OR “*Albonia peregrina*” OR “*Pongelion glandulosum*” OR “*Rhus cacodendron*” OR “*Toxicodendron altissimum*” OR “China sumac” OR “copal tree” OR “varnish tree”)].

#### *Acer negundo*

Topic: [(invasi\* OR invader OR alien OR exotic OR ruderal OR weed OR non-native OR introduced OR naturaliz\*) AND (“*Acer negundo*” OR “Ashleaf maple” OR “American maple”)];

#### *Robinia pseudoacacia*

Topic: [(invasi\* OR invader OR alien OR exotic OR ruderal OR weed OR non-native OR introduced OR naturaliz\*) AND (“*Robinia pseudoacacia*” OR “*Robinia pringlei*” OR “*robinia akacjowa*” OR “yellow locust” OR “*robiner faux-acacia*” OR “black locust” OR “Post locust” OR “Chinese scolartree”)].

#### *Fraxinus pennsylvanica*

Topic: [(invasi\* OR invader OR alien OR exotic OR ruderal OR weed OR non-native OR introduced OR naturaliz\*) AND (“*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*” OR “Green Ash” OR “downy ash” OR “*Fraxinus lanceolata*” OR “*Fraxinus pubescens*” OR “*Fraxinus viridis*” OR “red ash” OR “swamp ash” OR “water ash”)].

### Research areas excluded from analysis for each species

#### *Ailanthus altissima*

“acoustics OR “pharmacology pharmacy” OR “biochemistry molecular biology” OR “geology” OR “history philosophy of science” OR “physiology” OR “biotechnology applied microbiology” OR “imaging science photographic technology” OR “chemistry” OR “integrative complementary medicine” OR “energy fuels” OR “life sciences biomedicine other topics” OR “engineering” OR “science technology other topics” OR “social sciences other topics” OR “meteorology atmospheric sciences” OR “microbiology or water resources” OR “food science technology” OR “mycology” OR “oncology”.

#### *Acer negundo*

“geology” OR “life sciences biomedicine other topics” OR “science technology other topics” OR “mycology” OR “water resources” OR “fisheries” OR “paleontology”.

#### *Robinia pseudoacacia*

“nutrition dietetics” OR “biochemistry molecular biology” OR “genetics heredity” OR “parasitology” OR “biophysics” OR “geology” OR “physics” OR “biotechnology applied microbiology” OR “imaging science photographic technology” OR “cell biology” OR “life sciences biomedicine other topics” OR “computer science” OR “science technology other topics” OR “engineering” OR “materials science” OR “meteorology atmospheric sciences” OR “veterinary sciences” OR “microbiology” OR “water resources” OR “mycology” OR “food science technology”.

#### *Fraxinus excelsior*

“meteorology atmospheric sciences” OR “biochemistry molecular biology” OR “food science technology” OR “microbiology” OR “physics” OR “biotechnology applied microbiology” OR “genetics heredity” OR “chemistry” OR “instruments instrumentation” OR “science technology other topics” OR “dermatology” OR “life sciences biomedicine other topics” OR “veterinary sciences” OR “engineering” OR “materials science”.

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