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Proceedings of the 20th European Conference on Composite Materials

COMPOSITES MEET SUSTAINABILITY

Vol 1 – Materials

Editors : Anastasios P. Vassilopoulos, Véronique Michaud

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ECCM20
26-30 June 2022,
EPFL Lausanne Switzerland**

Edited By :

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Editorial

This collection gathers all the articles that were submitted and presented at the 20th European Conference on Composite Materials (ECCM20) which took place in Lausanne, Switzerland, June 26-30, 2022.

ECCM20 is the 20th edition of a conference series having its roots back in time, organized each two years by members of the European Society of Composite Materials (ESCM).

The ECCM20 event was organized by the Composite Construction laboratory (CCLab) and the Laboratory for Processing of Advanced Composites (LPAC) of the Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL).

The Conference Theme this year was “Composites meet Sustainability”. As a result, even if all topics related to composite processing, properties and applications have been covered, sustainability aspects were highlighted with specific lectures, roundtables and sessions on a range of topics, from bio-based composites to energy efficiency in materials production and use phases, as well as end-of-life scenarios and recycling.

More than 1000 participants shared their recent research results and participated to fruitful discussions during the five conference days, while they contributed more than 850 papers which form the six volumes of the conference proceedings. Each volume gathers contributions on specific topics:

Vol 1 – Materials

Vol 2 – Manufacturing

Vol 3 – Characterization

Vol 4 – Modeling and Prediction

Vol 5 – Applications and Structures

Vol 6 – Life Cycle Assessment

We enjoyed the event; we had the chance to meet each other in person again, shake hands, hold friendly talks, and maintain our long-lasting collaborations. We appreciated the high level of the research presented at the conference and the quality of the submissions that are now collected in these six volumes. We hope that everyone interested in the status of the European Composites’ research in 2022 will be fascinated by this publication.

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Anastasios P. Vassilopoulos, Véronique Michaud

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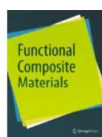
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And all those who helped, colleagues who reviewed abstracts and chaired sessions, and CCLab and LPAC students and collaborators who worked hard to make this conference a success.

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HIERARCHICAL SOLUTIONS TO COMPRESSIVE PROBLEMS IN FIBRE-REINFORCED COMPOSITES

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Abstract: *Currently, the useable compressive properties of a composite are restricted by set design limits well below the expected intrinsic performance of the materials contained within. The next generation of high-performance fibre-reinforced polymer composites will need to address the challenge of improving the absolute performance of composites in compression. This task requires a rethink of the whole system; not only to address practical limitations of current materials, but their combination, interface, and their architecture. The mechanisms involved do not simply act over the nano-, macro-, or meso-level independently, but are mutually related at the system level, complicating the approach.*

Keywords: Hierarchical; Compression; Fibre-reinforced composites

1. Introduction

In natural materials, such as wood and bone, a hierarchical framework is employed with precise structural features at all lengthscales [1]. Whilst this level of intricacy is still beyond current composite production, similar motifs can be made from intrinsically superior constituents, in order to improve (artificial non-natural) composite compression response. This hierarchical approach, with new constituent materials, and advanced assembly processes, when coupled with digital sandboxes, permits a fresh look at the failure mechanisms, providing opportunities to redirect, or suppress, failure modes to improve overall composite performance. The problem can be broken down into a number of interconnected components with attention given to the fibres, matrix and their interface/interphase, the design and lay-up of these constituents, and investigations using new analytical frameworks. This paper will outline the fibre-reinforced compressive weaknesses and approaches to resolve them, providing an insight into current state-of-the-art hierarchical composites.

2. Fibre-reinforced composites and bio-inspiration for hierarchical motifs

Fibre-reinforced composite materials are prominent in a range of applications with tensional loading conditions demonstrating their greatest performance (in the fibre axis). Whilst fibre-reinforced composites are used in other loading conditions, their compressive strength is approximately 60% of their tensile strength. Composite failure does not depend on a single element but rather a complex interconnectivity between the fibres, matrix, their interface, and the architecture of the specimen. In some instances, improving one area, for instance a high interface matrix-fibre adhesion, alters the failure mode of the composite e.g. inducing cohesive matrix failure, which can be an undesirable mechanism leading to a lower ultimate composite performance. For these reasons a holistic approach to address the compressive weakness in composites is sought with hierarchical architectures an intriguing approach to solve the weakness observed in compression. Looking to nature for inspiration [2, 3], a number of quite different approaches are observed; for example, multiscale reinforcing elements with particular orientation and support (Figure 1) [4], systems that have a strut and skeletal formation with minimal matrix content (fibrous), or conversely brick-and-mortar (layered) like formations using short reinforcing structures that dissipate stresses within the system, amongst other motifs. Alternative methods to dissipate energy or impacts through shear stiffening responses in the bulk of the material are observed but not commonly associated with a fibre-like scaffolds.

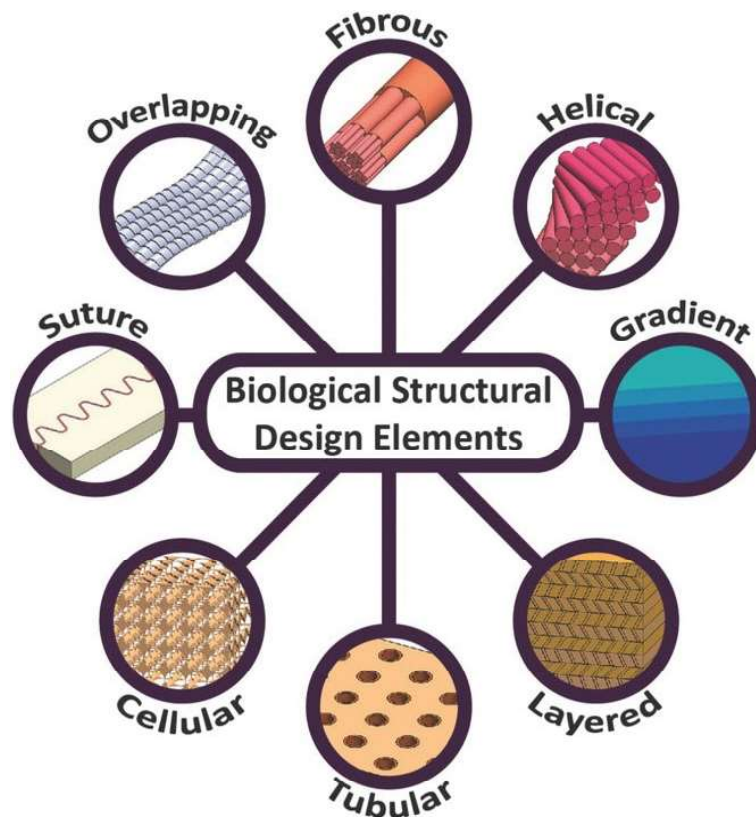


Figure 1. Diagram of the eight most common biological structural design elements [3]. [Used with permission from John Wiley and Sons]

In most instances, modifications to continuous fibre-reinforced composite materials fall broadly into categories that include, improving the interface of fibre-matrix components, introducing mechanisms to deflect, distribute, or dissipate stress to limit areas of high stress-concentrations, initiate tougher failure in a controlled manner to either defect or arrest the generated crack (introducing toughen response), or targeting the generally poor delamination strength (resin rich regions) between plies.

3. Current hierarchical composite designs and approaches

It is desirable to have fibres orientated in specified loading axis and to contain continuous fibres as these are more efficient with respect to mechanical loading [5]. Even with these design constraints, hierarchical approaches can be implemented to improve composite compression properties. A schematic of the composite designs discussed in the later sections are shown in Figure 2.

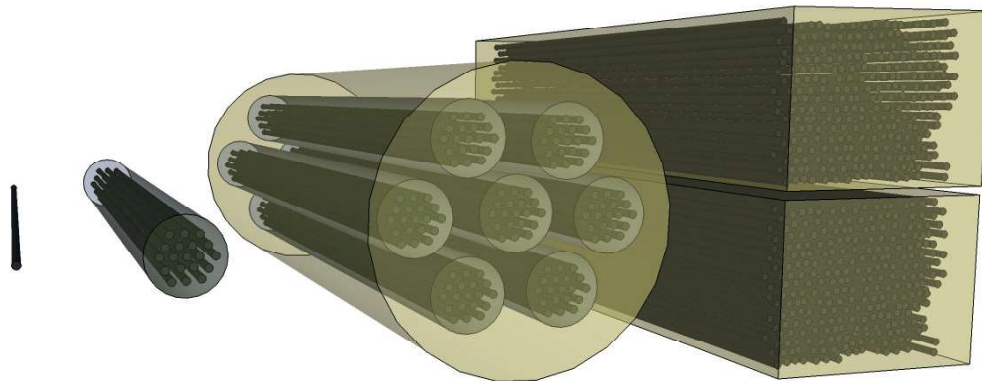


Figure 2. A schematic of the various length scales of the composite designs, from left to right, a single fibre (matrix omitted), a bundle of fibres in a matrix, a bundle-of-bundle composite, and a representation of a traditional unidirectional composite for comparison (shown with a gap to more clearly illustrate the plies).

3.1 Fibres

The shape and form of high performance (non-natural) fibres have usually been chosen for improved tensile properties and are uniform, continuous, circular, and small in diameter (~5-20 μm), but these characteristics may not be the optimal form for compressive loads. In Nature, the form of fibril scaffolds are normally non-circular, have defined periodicals of morphological changes, for instance bird feathers [6], and vary in diameter depending on their primary function. Another major difference between naturally occurring fibril/fibres and those artificially produced fibres are their hollow construction which allows for the transport of fluids throughout the organism, or to reduce weight for specific applications (e.g. flight); these features are not necessary for achieving ultimate mechanical performance using high performance constituents. Natural fibrils are often supported through a helical arrangement, or through a change in density of a porous or foam-like local structures (cellular and gradient). The complexity and refinement of the reinforcing elements of the structure changes from large features to smaller structures, which themselves can have specific alignment to aid support, when arranged about the parent fibril-structure. This alignment and change in length-scale is a key feature in improved lateral

support exhibited by these materials. These laterally supporting architectures provide adequate dissipation and non-stress localising properties and are desirable for high performance systems in a bid to reduce the failure mode(s) associated with the onset of kink-band formations. The failure of composite materials in compression is often driven by poor lateral support and early formation of kink-bands as a result of the instabilities of the loads experienced by the primary reinforcing fibres. To mimic this lateral supporting motif, there have been multiple attempts to add nanoreinforcement to the fibre surface/interphase which has the added benefit of reducing stiffness mismatch between the fibre and the matrix [7]. Methods include directly synthesising/growing nanomaterials on the surface, or depositing pre-made nanomaterials by electrophoretic deposition or some other chemical grafting process; the simplest approach is to coat the fibres in a size containing dispersions of nanomaterials. All these approaches suffer from some limitations for instance difficulties in scaling production, or poor alignment of the nanomaterial. Alignment of the nanomaterials, on the parent structure, is of particular significance, and is one of the most challenging aspect of adding nanomaterials to mimic the arrangements observed in biological systems. It is expected that if the nanoreinforcement is aligned in the axis of the parent fibre there may be limited lateral support in the surrounding interphase. However, increases in surface areas from these processes improve the mechanical interlocking of the fibre with the surrounding matrix which can improve the interfacial/interphase properties. Altering the morphology of the fibres' cross-section (unduloid or cross section shape) is a less studied approach to create supporting motifs, with either commercial fibres acquired and further processed [8] or produced/synthesised in-house to create the desired forms [9]. Depending on the materials chosen (carbon, glass, etc.) synthesising non-circular cross-section fibres can have significant cost, equipment, and processing constraints. There is also interest in well aligned nanomaterial based fibres/veils, which satisfy the requirements for local alignment whilst containing strong, stiff, and tough reinforcement.

3.2 Matrix

The most commonly used and modified composite matrix is epoxy (thermoset) due to the ease of handling and manipulation at the laboratory scale. Whilst thermoplastics are generally tougher, they require high temperatures and pressures to form around fibres, and as such they have been studied less often. Additionally, thermoplastic moduli are low resulting in less support for the fibres in compressive loading conditions; this along with poor compatibility between the thermoplastic matrix and fibres leads to a reduced fibre-matrix interface and overall composite performance. Methods to improve epoxy toughness includes the introduction of rubber particles, and for improved stiffness the introduction of nanomaterials (typically carbon) [10]. Chemical functionalisation is frequently used to improve the dispersibility of nanomaterials in an epoxy matrix resin system. However, the addition of nanomaterials to the matrix, even if unagglomerated, can alter the processability, increasing viscosities, and leading to self-filtering of the nanomaterials by the parent fibres. In natural materials there is often localised reinforcement leading to a heterogeneous structure, yet in the majority of composite systems a homogenous reinforcement is preferred. Further investigations into the impact of localising adequately dispersed nanoreinforcement and their effect on failure modes [11] is an exciting area of investigation.

3.3 Bundle systems

Bundle systems are similar, but one order of magnitude greater in size than the fibres systems previously described. Analogous adaptations for bundle composites are consequently desired, with off-axis reinforcement sought. Bundle-like pultruded composite rods are commercially available, with high alignment, allowing research into the surrounding matrices to form bundle-of-bundles composites and hybridisations. Bundle composites bridge the reinforcement length scales between fundamental systems and the ply level.

3.4 Ply level systems

In natural layer structures, deformation and localised failures are promoted to limit damage progression into the whole system. To achieve the same effect in high performance materials, the alignment of fibres within a ply may be exploited to alter and manipulate the failure modes observed. At the ply level, the introduction of misalignment (to the loading direction) or confined reinforcement to an area can alter the composite properties drastically. Choosing specific arrangements that benefit the compressive properties of the system are a challenge, and it is likely that suppression of the kink-band formation through careful consideration of materials and layup will be a route to success.

4. Outlook

The approach of introducing hierarchical constructs to fibre-reinforced composites is not new, however, in the most challenging loading condition of compression, there are very limited studies. Taking a step back, the use of existing materials, processes, and architectures needs to be revised for their suitability for use in hierarchical composite for compressive loading conditions. Whilst the focus will remain on the constituents of the composite for improvements, the combinations and arrangement need to be investigated to truly establish their performance in compression. A collaboration between Imperial College London and the University of Bristol, along with industrial partners are taking on this challenge in a five-year UK Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) funded project. We hope to share our investigations and results shortly.

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