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UC - University of Coimbra
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Editors:
João Paulo C. Rodrigues
George V. Hadjisophocleous
Luís M. Laím
Hélder D. Craveiro

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Authors:

João Paulo C. Rodrigues
George V. Hadjisophcleous
Luís M. Laim
Hélder D. Craveiro
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PREFACE

On behalf of the Organising and Scientific committees, as well as the CIB W-14 Commission on Fire Safety it is our pleasure to welcome you to the International Fire Safety Symposium - IFireSS 2015, which is organised by the CIB’s Commission W14-Fire Safety, ALBRASCI and University of Coimbra. The Symposium aims to contribute to the exchange of ideas and knowledge in the area of Fire Safety and assist in planning future research activities in this area.

CIB W14-Fire Safety is a Working Commission of CIB (International Council for Research and Innovation in Building & Construction) and its main objectives are:

• To create an ongoing research and innovation focus for the development of a comprehensive, coherent, rational and empirical basis for a safe and sustainable built environment, which includes fire science and engineering practices and design methodologies;
• To promote the acceptance of Fire Science and Engineering Practices, Procedures and Design Methodologies worldwide, and to encourage their use in Building and Fire Safety Legislation, Codes, Regulations and Standards;
• To provide technical input, from a Fire Science and Engineering Perspective, to other relevant CIB Working Commissions and Task Groups;
• To facilitate the transfer of state-of-the-art Fire Science and Engineering Technology at international level;
• To encourage capacity building for Fire Science and Engineering worldwide.

The Luso-Brazilian Association for Fire Safety (ALBRASCI) was established recently by Portuguese and Brazilian specialists in the area of Fire Safety to create a platform for the development of Fire Safety in Portugal and Brazil.

The University of Coimbra (UC) is a reference in higher education and research in Portugal, due to the quality of the courses taught and to the advances achieved in pure and applied research in various areas of knowledge. UC is also well-known around the World due to the research and training in Fire Safety with an MSc and PhD in the area.

The Symposium has participants from researchers around the world and covers a wide variety of research areas including: Structural Fire Safety; Mechanical and Thermal Properties of Materials; Fire Chemistry, Physics and Combustion; Fire Reaction; Fire Safety in Vehicles and Tunnels; Fire Risk Assessment; Smoke Control Systems; Firefighting and Evacuation; and Fire Regulations, Standardization and Construction Trends.

Joao Paulo C Rodrigues        George Hadjisophocleous
President of the Organizing Committee    President of the Scientific Committee
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FIRE RESISTANCE OF WOODEN CELLULAR SLABS WITH RECTANGULAR PERFORATIONS

Jorge Meireles
Lab tech.
IPB - Bragança

Elza Fonseca*
Professor
IPB - Bragança

Paulo Piloto
Professor
IPB - Bragança

Débora Ferreira
Professor
IPB - Bragança

ABSTRACT
This paper presents a numerical approach with finite element method in order to predict both the behaviour and the performance of the wooden slabs with rectangular perforations under fire exposure. These typical constructions have good sound absorption, thermal insulation and relevant architectonic features, they are used in many civil engineering applications. These slabs are normally installed at lower level in building constructions essentially due to an easy maintenance requisite. Depending on the installation requirement, the perforated wooden slabs could have an additional insulation material inside the cavities. The proposed numerical model could be applied to different design constructive slab solutions. For this purpose a 3D numerical simulation was conducted with particular attention to the wood thermal properties variation with temperature. The numerical results were compared with those obtained experimentally in laboratory, for two wooden slabs. The fire resistance (performance criteria related to the insulation (I) and integrity (E)) was evaluated, as well as the effect of rectangular perforations into the residual cross section of the slab. This study was conducted in accordance with European Standard EN 1365-2 and using a fire resistance furnace which complies the requirements of EN 1363-1 in the experimental test.

Keywords: Wooden slab, perforations, charring layer.

* Corresponding author – Departamento de Mecânica Aplicada da Escola Superior de Tecnologia e Gestão do Instituto Politécnico de Bragança. Campus de Santa Apolónia 5300 – 253 Bragança. PORTUGAL. Telef.: +351 273 303155, Fax: +351 273 313051. e-mail: efonseca@ipb.pt
1. INTRODUCTION

Wood is a natural material and presents advantages due its high strength and stiffness when compared with other materials. The main advantages of wood, relatively to the use of other materials, are: ease of construction and maintenance, pleasant appearance, renewable material and lightweight. The main disadvantage is the high level of combustion when exposed to fire conditions. The fire safety of this type of structures involves prevention, inhibition and detection. This involves appropriate design rules, installation, construction and maintenance of the wood in different applications [1]. If wood is submitted to a sufficient heat flux, a degradation thermal process (pyrolysis) occurs, producing gases accompanied by loss in serviceable cross-section and its mass. The factors which affect the burning behaviour of wood determine the charring rate. These types of factors include: level of radiant heat exposure, char layer formation, moisture content, species and dimensions, as reported by Poon et al [2]. The authors of this work have published different articles in conferences and journals related to this theme [3-7]. They studied different wood species and their behaviour, the evolution of charring rate, using experimental and numerical techniques. In their research activity they usually consider standard fire conditions to improve new design solutions or develop new safety design rules [8-9].

In this work, the main objectives are: present a numerical model validated with experimental tests to predict the evolution of the charring layer during a fire scenario using a finite element method with appropriate material properties and boundary conditions; determine the charring layer of two different constructive solutions using wooden slabs with different rectangular perforations; determine the fire resistance in such way that contributes for a safety design in typical perforated wooden slab.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Wooden slab design

The model considers a wooden slab with three different cellular zones and with different rectangular perforations (250x20) mm and (20x20) mm in the bottom layer for slab 1 and slab 2, considered for tests, as represented in figure 1.

Figure 1: Wooden slab with cellular zones.
The top wooden surface is solid with homogenous thickness. Figure 2 shows the geometric model considered in this work.

2.2 Experimental tests

The slabs were tested on fire resistance furnace, see Figure 3. This oven is equipped with 4 burners with natural gas, with a total output of 360 kW, a working volume of 1 m$^3$, prepared to work with any standard fire curve.

In the experimental tests, thermocouples installation was based on the criteria of EN 1365-2 [10] with interest to measuring the temperature in different positions (ceiling plate, beams, metal elements and cellular zones).
Three types of thermocouples were used: single wire for spot measurements $T_{ij}$, copper discs with plasterboard walls for measuring the temperature in the unexposed side, thermocouple wire welded to the connectors $T_{Ci}$ and plate thermocouples $T_{Pi}$ for measuring the temperature within the cellular zones, see Figure 4.

The acquisition signal of the thermocouples was made with a data acquisition systems HBM (MGC Plus and Spider 8).

2.2 Numerical simulation

A 3D finite element (Solid70) with 8 nodes was used for thermal and nonlinear transient analysis, using Ansys software. Figure 5 shows the mesh used in numerical simulation.
Each wooden slab was exposed to fire, at the bottom surface, during 1500 s and 950 s, respectively. At the exposed face and internal cavities the environment temperature follows typical heating real curves obtained previously, based on data obtained during test slab by mean of plate thermocouples (TPi). The convection coefficient is taken equal to 25 W/m²K [11] inside cavities and in the exposed face. At the unexposed face the ambient temperature is constant (20 ºC) and the value of convection is equal to 4W/m²K [12]. The surface emissivity is taken constant and equal to 1,0 for exposed side and internal cavities [11].

The non-linearity due to the thermal properties dependence will be taken into account in the numerical simulation.

Wood material when exposed to fire presents a thermal physical degradation. The interface between charred and noncharred wood is the transition phase between black and brown material [12] and is characterized by a threshold value of 300 ºC, according Eurocode 5 [13]. Also the thermal properties of wood vary considerably with temperature and should be defined according Annex B of Eurocode 5 [13]. This standard code provides the design values for density, thermal conductivity and specific heat of wood.

The wood referred to these slabs has a density approaches to 450 kg/m³, in the material for ceiling boards, and a density of 480 kg/m³ for the beams and floor.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the fire test exposure, the insulation (I) criteria were verified, in both wooden slabs, since the temperature on the unexposed surface do not exceed the initial temperature by more than 180 ºC [10]. The integrity (E) criteria was also verified during experimental tests using the cotton ignition test where no flame appearance occurred during the wooden slabs testing [10].

The time temperature evolution was compared with experimental (T_exp) results, in particular different nodal positions (T_num) during 1500 s (slab 1) and 950 s (slab 2). Figure 6 represents the temperature evolution in different locations for each slab.

Regarding the results, the obtained numerical results are in good concordance with experimental thermal response.
Figure 6: Time-temperature history in: a) beams, b) rectangular perforations (20x20)mm, e) cellular zone without perforations, d) rectangular perforations (250x20)mm.
Figure 7 shows the temperature evolution at the end of fire exposure for each slab. Both results represent the charring layer on the wood material, in grey colour. For the last time step a criterion for determine the carbonized layer is applied, that will be compared with the experimental record obtained in each slab, allowing to evaluate the residual cross section and the influence of different perforations on the fire resistance.

![Figure 7: Temperature and charring rate results.](image)

$t=1500$ s, Slab 1  
$t=950$ s, Slab 2

Table 1 presents a summary of the cross-sections and the obtained values of charring rate in different zones of the slabs, according to the location indicated in figure 8.

![Figure 8: Cross-sections locations for charring rate measure.](image)
At the end of fire exposure, cells without perforations do not exceeded 100°C, while cells with perforations presented triple temperature values. Also, the charring rate value relationship between the perforated and non-perforated layers is almost double, which is supported by the temperatures recorded within the cellular cavities of each slab.

The assessment of the charred layer allowed to verify that the cavity without perforations presents the lowest values of charring rate, being the perforated rectangular layer that reaches higher temperatures values.

The obtained results demonstrate the importance of the study of these structures and the determination of the fire resistance duration.

Table 1: Average measured charring rate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slab 1</th>
<th>Numerical charring rate</th>
<th>Experimental charring rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1, C2, C3, C9, C10, C11</td>
<td>1,3mm/min</td>
<td>1,2mm/min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4, C5, C12, C13</td>
<td>1,0mm/min</td>
<td>0,65mm/min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6, C7, C8, C14, C15, C16</td>
<td>1,4mm/min</td>
<td>1,0mm/min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slab 2</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1, C2, C3, C9, C10, C11</td>
<td>1,3mm/min</td>
<td>1,4mm/min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4, C5, C12, C13</td>
<td>0,7mm/min</td>
<td>0,8mm/min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C6, C7, C8, C14, C15, C16</td>
<td>1,2mm/min</td>
<td>1,0mm/min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. CONCLUSIONS

In wooden slab with perforations, the type and the size of perforation can limit the use of these constructive elements in terms of fire resistance. The wooden slab with perforations are typical and very common engineering solutions, used to improve the acoustic absorption of the ceiling plates. The constructive elements should be chosen before, to prevent and delay the fire damage effect, allowing that the slab could remain in service during more time. Perforations increase the wood surface exposed to the fire action, facilitating the penetration of flames and heat flow.

This study allows verifying the evolution of the temperature and the char-layer throughout a wooden slab. It was possible to characterize the thermal behaviour of the various components and the evolution of the temperature inside the cellular zones. The perforated wooden slabs reach a speed charring almost twice the unperforated. This is justified by the temperatures recorded within the cavities. To test the same time, the temperature of the unperforated cellular zone did not exceed 100 °C, while in the cavities with openings this value is the triple.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge to Jular enterprise, who provided technical support for the wood slabs construction.

6. REFERENCES


