24M Progress Report

Project title: “Environmental effects on physical properties of smart composites and FRP modified by carbonaceous nanofillers for structural applications”.

Project No. 1.1.1.2/VIAA/1/16/066.


Activity 1.1.1.2 “Post-doctoral Research Aid” of the Specific Aid Objective 1.1.1 “To increase the research and innovative capacity of scientific institutions of Latvia and the ability to attract external financing, investing in human resources and infrastructure” of the Operational Programme “Growth and Employment”.
Summary
During the second year of the project the main purpose was to design and develop smart fibre-reinforced plastic (FRP) plate by using the most environmentally stable nanocomposite (NC) configuration. As a result, within the support of collaboration partner Institute for Polymers, Composites and Biomaterials (IPCB, Portici, Italy) during Mobility#4 four basalt FRP plates were produced: two $[0]_8$ plates impregnated with the epoxy or the NC, and two $[0/45/90/-45]_2$ also impregnated with the epoxy or the NC, and two $[0/45/90/-45]_2$. Additionally, a set of the specimens for the epoxy and epoxy filled with 0.1 wt.% of hybrid nanofiller (carbon nanotubes and nanofibers in the ratio 1:1) was developed for full year environmental ageing. The characterization of flexural, thermophysical and electrical properties was performed for all materials in uncondensed state (before the environmental ageing). After that the first season of environmental ageing (summer, water absorption at room temperature) has been started for all materials. Moreover, water absorption at 20 and 50 ºC until equilibrium has been performed for all materials.
Contents

Summary........................................................................................................................................ 2
1. Objectives for the 2nd year of the project.................................................................................. 4
2. Explanation of the work carried per WP .................................................................................... 4
   WP1. Coordination and management......................................................................................... 4
   WP2. Design and development of the NC and FRP plate......................................................... 4
   WP3. Characterization of the NC and FRP............................................................................... 5
   WP4. Dissemination, communication and data management.................................................. 7
3. Preliminary conclusions.............................................................................................................. 8
4. Main results................................................................................................................................ 9
   Scientific publications.............................................................................................................. 9
   Popular scientific publications................................................................................................. 9
   Presentations at international conferences............................................................................. 9
5. Deviations from the working plan............................................................................................. 10
6. Corrective actions....................................................................................................................... 10
7. Plans for the next reporting period (2020)................................................................................ 10
8. Deliverables and Milestones for reporting period (M13-M24)................................................ 11
1. **Objectives for the 2nd year of the project**

1) Development, start of full-year environmental ageing and testing of a small-scale structural element prototype, smart FRP plate, impregnated with the most environmentally stable NC;

2) Characterization of the main mechanical, electrical and thermal properties of the epoxy, NC and FRP before hydrothermal ageing by standard tests and analytical modelling;

3) Preparation of conference reports, conference and scientific papers.

2. **Explanation of the work carried per WP**

**WP1. Coordination and management**

*T1.1. Operational issues*

During the second year several laboratory seminars were carried out in the Institute for Mechanics of Materials, University of Latvia (IMM) to evaluate progress and decide on next steps. One progress seminar was carried out in the Institute for Polymers, Composites and Biomaterials (IPCB) in Portici, Italy in September 2019 to discuss current results of the project during Mobility#5. Four quarter reports were prepared (in Latvian) and published at the website of the University of Latvia (UL, www.lu.lv). 24M public progress report was prepared in English for publishing in *Zenodo* repository (current document). Different communication activities such as e-mails, discussions by *Skype*, sharing of documents and files were performed with scientific consultant from IMM Dr. Sc. Ing. Andrey Aniskevich and representative person from IPCB Dr. Sc. Ing. Mauro Zarrelli.

*T1.2. Scientific management*

Post-doctorate monitored the project’s progress to scientific consultant from IMM and representative person from IPCB and followed up the implementation, completing all deliverables assigned in project proposal. Continuous analysis of risks was carried out by post-doctorate to avoid delays, complete material resource preparation before the given tasks.

*T1.3. IPR management*

The IPR management was performed according to IPR strategy (D1.3, M4) developed for identifying publishable subject matter, by registering and continuous updating of expected outcomes and foreground generated.

**WP2. Design and development of the NC and FRP plate**

*T2.1. Selection of the most optimal material solution*

Completed during the 1st year of the project.

*T2.2. Optimization of the NC processing conditions*

Completed during the 1st year of the project.

*T2.3. Development of NC specimens with single and hybrid fillers*

Completed during the 1st year of the project.

*T2.4. Design and development of the NC specimens at electrical percolation*
One set of NC specimens at certain filler content was prepared in IPCB during Mobility#4 by using the most optimal processing route (see D2.2). Prepared materials: RTM6 epoxy resin, RTM6 filled with 0.05 wt. % of carbon nanotubes (CNT), RTM6 filled with 0.3 wt. % of carbon nanofibers (CNF), and RTM6 filled with 0.1 wt. % of CNT/CNF in the ratio 1:1 by mass. For each material type 5 discs with diameter 8 cm and thickness 3 mm were prepared and cut into samples (Figure 1). The characterization of flexural, thermophysical and electrical properties was performed for all materials in uncondensed state (before the environmental ageing). The test samples were subjected to the 1st season of full year environmental ageing (summer, water absorption at 20°C).

![Figure 1. Steel moulds with the epoxy filled with 0.05 wt. % of CNT (to the left) and epoxy samples cut for flexural and thermophysical tests (to the right).](image1)

**T2.5. Design and development of smart FRP plate**

Within the support of collaboration partner Institute for Polymers, Composites and Biomaterials (IPCB, Portici, Italy) during Mobility#4 four basalt FRP plates were produced: two [0]₀ plates impregnated with the epoxy or the NC, and two [0/45/90/-45]₂ also impregnated with the epoxy or the NC, and two [0/45/90/-45]₂ by using vacuum assisted resin transfer moulding (VARTM). The development procedure and unidirectional basalt FRP are shown on Figure 2.

![Figure 2. Development of FRP plate by using VARTM (to the left) and unidirectional basalt FRP plate (to the left).](image2)

**WP3. Characterization of the NC and FRP**

**T3.1. Micro- and nanostructural characterization of the NC**

Completed during the 1st year of the project.
T3.2. Standard mechanical, electrical, and thermal characterization

Characterization of the epoxy, NC and basalt FRP specimens before full year of environmental testing was carried out. The mechanical properties for epoxy and NC samples were tested under three-point bending mode according to ASTM D790. The samples of sizes 3×10×80 mm were tested with a support span of 56 mm and with a strain rate of 1.5 mm/min. The flexural modulus, strength and maximal deformation were evaluated from the stress-strain curves. Before full-year environmental ageing the flexural properties of neat and nano-modified epoxy and basalt FRP were almost the same. E.g., flexural moduli of the epoxy and the epoxy filled with 0.1 wt. % of hybrid nanofiller (CNT/CNF in the ratio 1:1 by weight) were 3.0 ± 0.2 GPa and 3.2 ± 0.1 GPa, accordingly. Similar results were obtained also for epoxy-based and nano-modified basalt FRP in the direction along (25.3 ± 2.3 GPa and 23.6 ± 0.5 GPa, accordingly) and perpendicular (10.0 ± 0.8 GPa and 10.1 ± 0.8 GPa, accordingly) to the fibres. Provisionally it can be concluded that the effect of the addition of hybrid carbon nanofiller to the epoxy resin and basalt FRP was insignificant mainly due to relatively low filler content and possible aggregation of the nanofillers causing weak nanofiller-matrix interfacial interactions.

The electrical resistance of the NC samples was measured by using a multimeter DMM 4020 (Tektronix) following a two-point methodology. Opposite facets of the samples were covered with conductive silver paint to reduce contact resistance effect. Before full-year environmental ageing the electrical conductivity of the epoxy filled with 0.1 wt. % of CNT/CNF in the ratio 1:1 by weight: 0.008 ± 0.002 S/m, nano-modified basalt FRP in the direction along the fibres: 0.020 ± 0.002 S/m, perpendicular to the fibres: 0.016 ± 0.002 S/m, and in symmetrical basalt FRP: 0.006 ± 0.001 S/m. The increase of electrical conductivity of nano-modified basalt FRP could testify about the improvement in the electrical percolation along the fibres.

The thermal conductivity was measured by using thermal constants analyzer TPS 500 (Hot Disc) at a heating power 50 mW and heating time 40 s by using Kapton sensor with radius 3.2 mm. Before full-year environmental ageing the thermal conductivity of epoxy and the NC was almost the same (0.24 ± 0.02 J/mK). Similarly, for epoxy-based and nano-modified basalt FRP in different directions it can be roughly estimated as 0.30 ± 0.02 J/mK proving that the content of hybrid nanofiller (0.1 wt. % for the NC and only 0.03 wt. % in the basalt FRP) is too small to improve the thermal properties. Nevertheless, it allowed to ensure electrical conductivity that was twice higher than it was for the NC.

The dynamic mechanical thermal analysis (DMTA) was carried out by using a Mettler Toledo DMA/SDTA861 in tensile mode at a given force 4 N, frequency 10 Hz and \( T = 30-280 \degree C \) at 3 K/min heating rate to evaluate hygrothermal ageing effects in both initial and environmentally “aged” NC samples. Glass transition temperature for the epoxy and the epoxy filled 0.1 wt. % of CNT/CNF in the ratio 1:1 by weight obtained from DMTA was almost the same before full-year environmental ageing: 236± 2 \degree C proving that the crosslinking degree was similar in all materials. Similarly, for the epoxy-based and nano-modified basalt FRP in the direction along
(255 ± 2 °C and 241 ± 2 °C, accordingly) and perpendicular (238 ± 1 °C and 237 ± 1 °C, accordingly) to the fibres.

**T3.3. Nonstandard environmental ageing**

The first season of environmental ageing (summer, water absorption at room temperature) has been started for all materials. Moreover, water absorption at 20 and 50 °C until equilibrium has been performed for all materials. All samples are being stored in the same shelf of the oven to get the same thermal conditions.

The peculiarities of moisture absorption in epoxy resin and NC samples are being studied. Preliminary it can be concluded that the overall behaviour is similar for all materials following classical Fick’s law for moisture diffusion. Since water absorption is still in process the sorption characteristics of all materials investigated can’t be analysed until it is finished.

**WP4. Dissemination, communication and data management**

**T4.1. Dissemination of results**

During the second year of project implementation 4 quarter press releases (#5-8) were prepared and published in the website of UL (https://www.lu.lv/index.php?id=53864).

Current project results were discussed in two international scientific conferences *ICSAAM 2019*, September 12-15, 2019 (Ischia, Italy) and *DFMN 2019*, November 19-22, 2019 (Moscow, Russia). According conference full papers were prepared and accepted for the publication by *American Institute of Physics-Conference Proceedings (AIP)* and *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering*.

In the synergy with project activities two conference reports were done in collaboration with colleagues from Riga Stradins University (RSU) at *RSU Scientific Conference*, April 1-3, 2019 (Riga, Latvia) and *Medical Physics in the Baltic States 14*, November 7-9, 2019 (Kaunas, Lithuania).

Based on the project results one scientific paper was published in Q1 scientific journal having open access (*Polymers*).

For the dissemination of project results among general public one popular scientific publication (in Latvian with a summary in English) was published in the journal “Alma Mater” by the University of Latvia based on the project idea and activities.

For the same purpose a professional FACEBOOK profile was updated with 11 press releases (https://www.facebook.com/tatjana.glaskovakuzmina) on the project activities. The profile will be also regularly updated with the actual project information/results. More information can be found in dissemination/communication report for 2018 (D4.1, M12).

**T4.2. Communication**

According to dissemination/communication plan (D4.1, M12) developed during the first year of project implementation certain dissemination/communication activities were carried out.
During the second year of project implementation seminars organized by State Education Development Agency of the Republic of Latvia (www.viaa.gov.lv) were attended for better project implementation and preparation of project reports.

Popular scientific seminar was carried out for the schoolchildren of the postdoctoral researcher’s native school within the activity “Back to School” on May 2019.

The project activities were presented and discussed with wide audience at the European Researchers’ Night 2019, demonstrating to all its visitors nonordinary adventures of ordinary materials, telling about the components and applications of smart composite materials, and showing the real test samples and products. The interview at Latvian Television was performed speaking about activities of the University of Latvia at European Researchers’ night.

Several presentations about the project and its current results were made for the progress seminars organized in Institute for Mechanics of Materials of UL (Riga, Latvia) and IPCB (Portici, Italy). 2nd year progress seminar for the discussion of current project results and future steps was organized in the Institute for Mechanics of Materials, UL.

During the second year of project two mobilities to IPCB (Portici, Italy) were carried out by the post-doctorate: 15.-22.06.2019 and 07.-17.09.2019. During these mobilities one set of epoxy and NC specimens and four basalt FRP plates were prepared, a presentation at a progress seminar was performed, next project steps were planned, discussed and implemented.

Wide communication with international researchers discussing project results was carried out during ICSAAM 2019 and DFMN 2019 conferences.

T4.3. Knowledge and data management and protection

All data generated (raw and ready data files, reports, presentations) were transferred to the folder of POSTDOC project in the central database Dropbox providing access to scientific supervisor from LU Dr. Sc. Ing. Andrey Aniskevich and representative person of IPCB Dr. Sc. Ing. Mauro Zarrelli. All data files will be preserved in Dropbox during the project implementation and at least five years after completion of the project.

3. Preliminary conclusions

Based on similar results of characterization of flexural, electrical and thermophysical properties of the epoxy, NC and basalt FRP specimens before full year of environmental testing it can be concluded that the effect of the addition of hybrid carbon nanofiller to the epoxy resin and basalt FRP was insignificant mainly due to relatively low filler content (0.1 wt. % for the NC and only 0.03 wt. % in the basalt FRP) and possible aggregation of the nanofillers causing weak nanofiller-matrix interfacial interactions. Nevertheless, it allowed to have electrical conductivity in preliminary nonconductive basalt FRP that was twice higher than it was for the NC. The increase of electrical conductivity of nano-modified basalt FRP could testify about the improvement in the electrical percolation along the fibres.
4. Main results

Scientific publications

Popular scientific publications

Presentations at international conferences
5. Deviations from the working plan
Some positive deviations from the working plan of dissemination/communication were obtained by the post-doctorate. It is expected that the number of conference presentations and submitted/published scientific papers written in project proposal (2 presentations and 2 scientific papers) will be higher maximizing the impact of the project.

6. Corrective actions
In the case of appropriateness and need, inclusion of all additional and relevant scientific and dissemination/communication activities within the project implementation and adding them to project work was done improving the visibility of project results.

7. Plans for the next reporting period (2020)
Submission of at least one scientific paper to peer-reviewed Q1 scientific journals and popular scientific paper in Latvian press is planned for the next year.

The scientific results obtained during the second year will be published in 2020 in peer-reviewed Q1 scientific journal (ensuring open access) with SCI higher than app. 1.15 (Material science, multidisciplinary) and included in the SCOPUS (A or B) databases. The draft version of the article will be prepared early in 2020 and will be discussed with scientific supervisor from the UL Dr. Sc. Ing. Andrey Aniskevich and representative person of collaboration partner IPCB Dr. Sc. Ing. Mauro Zarrelli.

The scientific and public dissemination of the project will continue to be developed to achieve all planned objectives. The professional profile on FACEBOOK will be updated with the information on project results for general public. The open-access to project scientific results will be provided via self-archiving in ZENODO and ResearchGate repositories.

It is planned that project results will be presented in two international scientific conferences “Advanced Problems in Mechanics” in June 21-27, 2020 (Saint Petersburg, Russia) and ICSAAM in September 4-8, 2020 (Patras, Greece).

Full-year environmental ageing of epoxy, epoxy filled with 0.1 wt.% of hybrid nanofiller (CNT/CNF in the ratio 1:1 by weight), basalt FRP and nano-modified FRP will be performed which includes: 1) Summer: three months at $T = +20$ °C (room temperature), 2) Autumn: three months at $T = +10$ °C (in a fridge), 3) Winter: three months at $T = -10$ °C (in a fridge), and 4) Spring: three months at $T = +10$ °C (in a fridge). After the hydrothermal ageing (of each season and full year) all materials’ specimens will pass standard characterization of the main mechanical, electrical and thermal properties. The results obtained will be compared with the predicted ones, by using experimental results for the NC.
8. Deliverables and Milestones for reporting period (M13-M24)

Table 1. List of deliverables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Deliverable name</th>
<th>WP</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Diss. level</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<td>D3.2</td>
<td>Conference report#1 on mechanical, electrical and thermal characterization of the NCs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>PU</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>M18</td>
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<tr>
<td>D3.3</td>
<td>Scientific paper#1 on mechanical, electrical and thermal characterization of the NCs submitted for publication</td>
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<td>PU</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>M19</td>
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<td>D2.3</td>
<td>Development of smart FRP plate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CO</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>M20</td>
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<td>D1.1</td>
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<td>PU</td>
<td>OTHER</td>
<td>M24</td>
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<tr>
<td>D1.2</td>
<td>Annual public reports published (M12, M24, M36)</td>
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<td>PU</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>M24</td>
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<tr>
<td>D4.1</td>
<td>Dissemination/communication plan and annual dissemination/communication report (M12, M24, M36)</td>
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<td>R</td>
<td>M24</td>
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Type: R-report, OTHER.
Diss. level: CO-confidential, PU-public.

Table 2. List of milestones

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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Milestone name</th>
<th>WP</th>
<th>Est. date</th>
<th>Means of verification</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>M3.2</td>
<td>The most stable NC configuration/influential environmental factor specified</td>
<td>WP3</td>
<td>M18</td>
<td>Conference report#1 and preparation of publication#1</td>
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