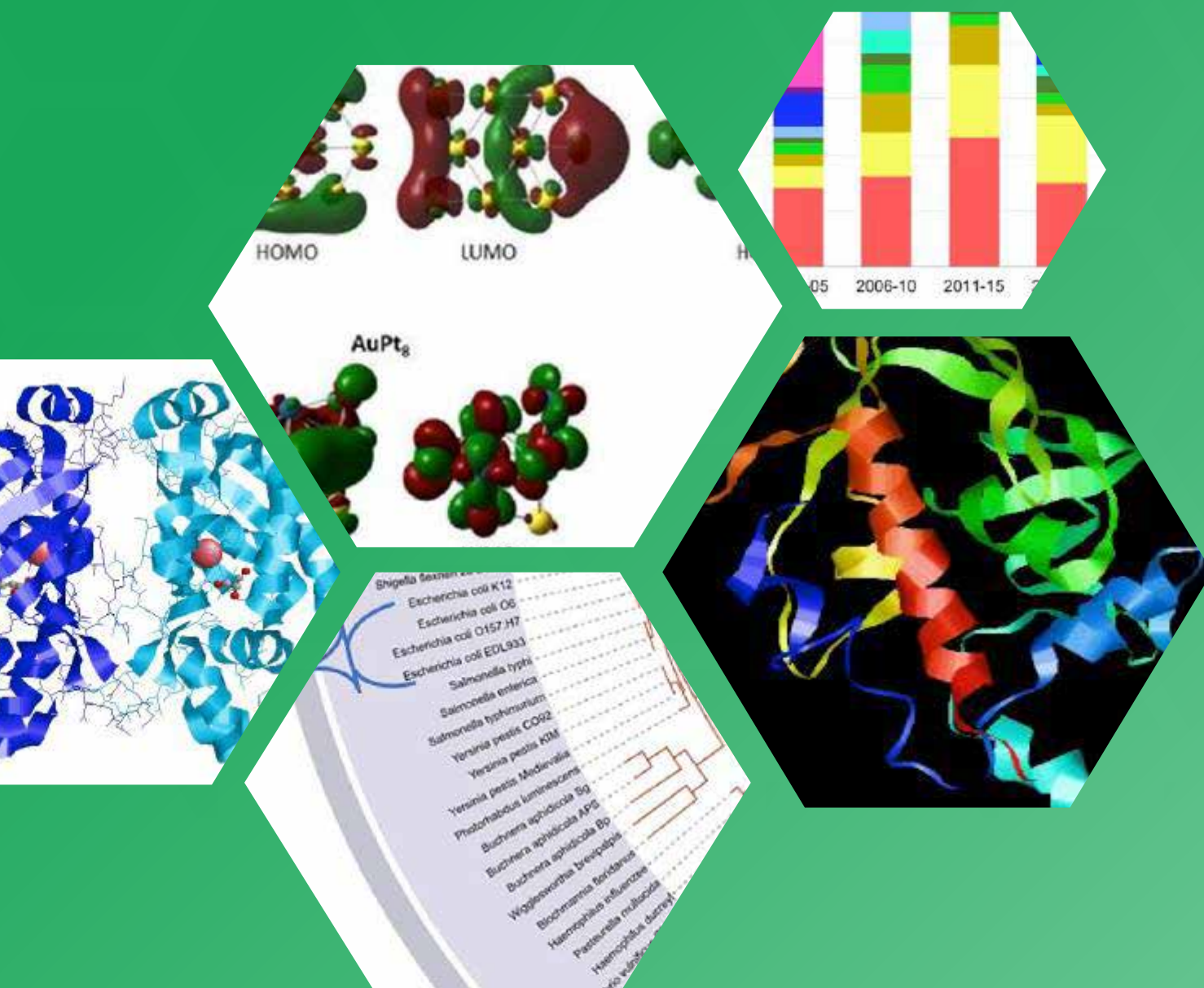




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Extraction and analysis of apoplastic phenolic metabolites in carnation roots and stems (*Dianthus caryophyllus* L)

Abstract

The present study outlines the conditioning of various parameters for the efficient removal of the apoplastic fraction of carnation enriched in polar compounds, mainly phenolics. Several studies can apply the described workflow to different plant species in the particular or global analysis of those metabolites in this peripheral extracellular space. Hence, using carnation (*Dianthus caryophyllus* L) roots and stems, we evaluated different infiltration solutions for removing apoplastic metabolites. The best outcome was obtained by using the buffer solution NaH_2PO_4 - Na_2HPO_4 0.1 M pH 6.5/ NaCl 50 mM, since the highest amount of apoplastic phenolic metabolites can be obtained with the slightest contamination of intracellular compounds. The metabolites were separated using HPLC-DAD-ESI-MS, affording chromatographic profiles with reasonable quality parameters based on resolution, selectivity, and number of theoretical plates. It was possible to identify eight differential compounds (one flavone and seven flavonols), whose core moieties consisted of (iso)pradol, kaempferide, (dihydro)kaempferol, quercetin, and myricetin-type flavonoids according to the test organ and the cultivar. We deduced that identified flavonoids are related to phytoanticipin-type metabolites in carnation, such as hydroxy-methoxyflavone, di-o-benzoylquercetin, and kaempferide disalicyloylramnoside, which are abundantly present in the resistant cultivar. The conditions described in this work are fundamental for delving into the role of apoplastic phenolic metabolites related to the defense mechanisms of this ornamental plant.

Keywords: Apoplastic fluid; *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *dianthi*; plant-pathogen; phenolic metabolites.

Extracción y análisis de metabolitos fenólicos apoplásticos en raíz y tallo de clavel (*Dianthus caryophyllus* L)

Resumen

En el presente estudio se describe el acondicionamiento de algunos parámetros con fines de obtención eficiente de extractos apoplásticos enriquecidos en compuestos polares, principalmente fenólicos. Este flujo de trabajo descrito, incluso, puede ser aplicado a diferentes especies vegetales para ser empleado en el análisis particular o global de metabolitos en este espacio extracelular periférico. Para ello, usando raíces y tallos de clavel (*Dianthus caryophyllus* L), se evaluaron diferentes soluciones de infiltración para la extracción de los metabolitos apoplásticos. El mejor resultado se logró con la disolución amortiguadora NaH_2PO_4 - Na_2HPO_4 0,1 M pH 6,5/ NaCl 50 mM, porque se obtiene la mayor cantidad de metabolitos fenólicos apoplásticos, con la menor contaminación de compuestos intracelulares. Los metabolitos se separaron mediante HPLC-DAD-ESI-MS, obteniendo perfiles cromatográficos con parámetros de calidad razonables basados en resolución, selectividad y número de platos teóricos. Con estas condiciones, fue posible identificar ocho compuestos diferenciales (una flavona y siete flavonoles), cuyas estructuras básicas comprendían flavonoides del tipo (iso)pradol, kaempférido, (dihidro)kaempferol, quercetina y miricetina, según el órgano de prueba y la variedad. Los flavonoides identificados están relacionados con metabolitos de tipo fitoanticipina en el clavel, como hidroximetoxiflavona, di-o-benzoilquercetina y kaempférido disalicilolramnósido, abundantemente presentes en la variedad resistente. Las condiciones descritas en este trabajo son fundamentales para profundizar en el papel de los metabolitos fenólicos apoplásticos relacionados con los mecanismos de defensa de esta planta ornamental.

Palabras clave: fluido apoplástico; *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *dianthi*; planta-patógeno; metabolitos fenólicos.

Extração e análise do metabólitos fenólicos apoplásticos na raiz e caule do craveiro (*Dianthus caryophyllus* L)

Resumo

O presente estudo descreve o condicionamento de alguns parâmetros para a obtenção eficiente de extratos apoplásticos enriquecidos em compostos polares, principalmente fenólicos. Este fluxo de trabalho descrito pode até mesmo ser aplicado a diferentes espécies de plantas para serem usadas na análise particular ou global de metabólitos neste espaço extracelular periférico. Para isso, utilizando raízes e caules de craveiro (*Dianthus caryophyllus* L), diferentes soluções de infiltração foram avaliadas para a extração de metabólitos apoplásticos. O melhor resultado foi obtido com a solução tampão NaH_2PO_4 - Na_2HPO_4 0.1 M pH 6.5/ NaCl 50 mM, pois a maior quantidade de metabólitos fenólicos apoplásticos é extraída. Os metabólitos foram separados por HPLC-DAD-ESI-MS, obtendo-se perfis cromatográficos com parâmetros de qualidade razoáveis baseados na resolução, seletividade e número de pratos teóricos. Nessas condições, foi possível identificar oito compostos diferenciais (uma flavona e sete flavonóis), cujas estruturas básicas compreendem flavonóides do tipo (iso)pradol, kaempferida, (dihidro)kaempferol, quercetina e miricetina, de acordo com o órgão e a variedade de craveiro utilizado. Os flavonóides identificados estão relacionados a metabólitos do tipo fitoanticipinas no craveiro, como hidroximetoxiflavona, di-O-benzoilquercetina e kaempférido disalicilolramnósido, abundantemente ocorridos na cultivar resistente. As condições descritas neste trabalho são essenciais para se aprofundar no papel dos metabólitos fenólicos apoplásticos relacionados aos mecanismos de defesa dessa planta ornamental.

Palavras-chave: Fluido apoplástico; *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *dianthi*; planta-patógeno; metabólitos fenólicos.



Introduction

The fluid that moves in the extracellular space of the plant, consisting of the cell wall matrix and the intercellular spaces, is usually called apoplast. It contains a wide variety of molecules that participate in various processes that may include: (i) growth regulation, (ii) cell wall modification, (iii) protection against dehydration and environmental stress, (iv) transport, (v) homeostasis (vi) cell-cell adhesion, (vii) gas exchange, and (viii) plant-pathogen interactions [1]–[5]. Pathogens must traverse the apoplast to reach host cells in several host-pathogen associations. Consequently, different plant compounds at this tissue level compartment are accumulated to constitute a defensive barrier against pathogens and, therefore, wall polymers, antioxidants, and antimicrobial compounds, among others, can appear in the apoplast [2], [6], [7]. The pathogen recognition at this level is based on apoplastic sensors that allow the detection of foreign components and subsequently trigger plant defense responses at the intra and extracellular levels. The perception of extracellular markers, such as pathogen-associated molecular patterns (PAMP) or damage-associated molecular patterns (DAMP), is mediated by pattern recognition receptors (PRR) linked to the plasma membrane, which indicates a prevalence of the pathogen invasion through the apoplastic pathway [3], [8]–[12].

Despite the importance of apoplastic proteins and metabolites during plant-pathogen interactions, these have been poorly studied compared to those stored at the intracellular level. This fact is predominantly due to technical difficulties in obtaining the apoplastic fluid free of those proteins and metabolites inside the cell [5]. So far, various studies have been carried out focused on studying the apoplastic proteins in different plant-pathogen interactions [3], [5], [13]. In contrast, the reports analysing the apoplastic metabolites during pathogen-host interactions are even scarcer. To date, there is only one study focused on apoplastic metabolites and proteins in *Arabidopsis thaliana* leaves during its interaction with *Verticillium longisporum* [14]. Research on plant apoplast is very relevant. Therefore, suitable protocols are required for the apoplastic metabolite extraction in those plant species to be first studied. This procedure is even more decisive in applying highly resolutive separation techniques, based on holistic approaches, whose contamination with cytoplasmic molecules can generate drawbacks when interpreting results [3]. The most used method for obtaining apoplastic fluid is infiltration, vacuum, and centrifugation [3], [15]. In this regard, the selection of the infiltration solution is a fundamental step in this process, resulting in the largest number of metabolites to be extracted for subsequent analysis. In the only report on investigating the apoplastic metabolites from a plant under biotic stress, a 100 mM KCl/0.003% Triton X-100 solution was used [14].

Non-targeted metabolite-oriented analyses require experimental conditions to optimise the number of separated compounds, extracted from the plant sample, to be analysed according to the selected analytical technique. For instance, in the case of liquid chromatography coupled to mass spectrometry (LC-MS), the analytical success requires the proper selection of extraction conditions and the subsequent separation. The separation should consider various quality parameters such as the resolution, selectivity, number of theoretical plates, and duration of the analysis [16].

In the present study, the workflow for selecting the most suitable experimental conditions for the analysis of metabolites that occurred in the apoplast of carnation roots and stems is described, including both the apoplastic fluid extraction conditions and those used for LC analysis. Accordingly, we evaluated different conditions for selecting the best infiltration solution and the proper elution profile to obtain the apoplastic fluid and separate phenolic-like metabolites, respectively. Further studies may use these experimental conditions for those metabolite-focused analyses focused on identifying resistance-related metabolites to vascular wilting, an economically relevant disease for the carnation caused by the pathogenic fungus *Fusarium oxysporum* f. sp. *dianthi* (*Fod*). In this regard, we lastly applied the selected extraction and separation conditions for recognising the differential phenolic-related metabolic characteristics of apoplast-derived extracts from roots and stems of two carnation cultivars with contrasting resistance

to *Fod* by means of multivariate statistics. Analogously, future experiments can also use this proposed workflow to select experimental conditions during the initial study of apoplastic metabolites in other plant species.

Materials and methods

Plant material

Stems and roots of indexed, pathogen-free, 3-to-4-week rooted cuttings of carnation (*Dianthus caryophyllus* L.) were used. The present study employed two susceptible cultivars (i.e., ‘*Gran Slam*’ and ‘*Solex*’) and a resistant cultivar (i.e., ‘*Golem*’) to *Fod*. These carnation cultivars were donated by the company Florval SAS, Headquarters QFC (Gachancipá-Cundinamarca, Colombia).

Carnation apoplastic fluid extraction

The apoplastic metabolites of carnation were extracted using the infiltration technique with vacuum-centrifugation [17]. Carnation roots or stems (2.5 g) were used, cut into 0.5–1.0 cm segments in length. These segments were used to evaluate the following infiltration solutions: **I** = NaH₂PO₄-Na₂HPO₄ 0.1 M pH 6.5/NaCl 50 mM, previously employed to obtain apoplastic fluid for proteomic studies in carnation [17]; **II** = 50 mM NaCl employed to modify ionic strength, and **III** = 100 mM KCl/Triton X-100 0.003% v/v previously employed in the only metabolomics and proteomics-based study in plant-pathogen interaction [14].

Verification of intracellular-component-free apoplastic fluids

The activity of malate dehydrogenase (MDH), often used to estimate cell membrane damage levels, was measured to evaluate whether the obtained apoplastic fluids presented contamination with intracellular molecules generated by a possible breakdown of the plasma membranes [5]. Extraction of total plant material was performed as described by Ardila et al., 2014 [4] and carnation apoplastic fluid was obtained as previously described. The activity of this enzyme was determined according to the conditions reported by Martínez et al. (2017) [17].

Selection of infiltration solution for metabolite analysis

The infiltration solution to be used for the suitable extraction of apoplastic fluid from carnation roots and stems for metabolite analysis was assessed based on the results following the measurement of the total phenolic, flavonoid, and sugar contents.

Determination of total phenolic content (TPC)

TPC was carried out using the Singleton & Rossi method [18] adapted by Cuervo (2018) [19]. For this determination, apoplastic fluid (50 µL) was mixed with Folin Ciocalteu’s reagent (100 µL) and double-distilled water (ddH₂O) (100 µL). The mixture was incubated for 5 min. Subsequently, 7.0% w/v Na₂CO₃ (200 µL) and ddH₂O (200 µL) were added, the resulting mixture was stirred, and the absorbance was measured in a

spectrophotometer (Genesys uv 10, ThermoFisher, USA) at 764 nm after 1 h in the dark. Gallic acid was used as a standard. The result was then expressed as mg of gallic acid equivalents per g of fresh plant material (mg GAE/g FPM). Each determination was made using biological triplicate and analytical triplicate.

Determination of total sugar content (TSC)

TSC was carried out by the method set forth by Dubois et al. 1956 [20], adapted by Cuervo (2018) [19], using D-glucose as a sugar standard. ddH₂O (195 µL) and apoplastic fluid (15 µL) were mixed in a 2.0 mL eppendorf tube. Subsequently, freshly prepared 80% w/v phenol (200 µL) was added and vortexed for 1 min. Concentrated sulfuric acid (1.0 mL) was then added and vortexed for 1 min. Samples were cooled to room temperature in the dark. Absorbance readings were measured in a spectrophotometer (Genesys uv 10, ThermoFisher, USA) at 490 nm. The reaction blank comprised distilled water (210 µL), 80% w/v phenol (200 µL), and concentrated sulfuric acid (1.0 mL). The content was expressed as mg of glucose equivalents per g of fresh plant material (mg GE/g FPM). Each determination was made using biological triplicate and analytical triplicate.

Determination of total flavonoid content (TFC)

TFC was carried out using the colorimetric method reported previously [21], [22] with slight modifications. An initial reaction mixture was prepared, involving apoplastic fluid (100 µL), 5% w/v NaNO₂ solution (30 µL), and ddH₂O (100 µL). After 5 min, 10% w/v AlCl₃ solution (60 µL) was added. After incubating for 6 min at room temperature, 2.0 M NaOH (100 µL) was added, and the absorbance at 510 nm was then measured in a spectrophotometer (Genesys uv 10, ThermoFisher, USA). (+)-catechin (Sigma®) was used as a flavonoid standard. The results were expressed as mg of catechin equivalents per g of fresh plant material (mg CE/g FPM). Each determination was made using biological triplicate and analytical triplicate.

Preparation of polar extracts for metabolite analysis

Aliquots of apoplastic fluids (200 µL) were extracted with a mixture of methanol (150 µL) and methyl *tert*-butyl ether (MTBE) (500 µL) according to the protocol reported by Matyash et al. (2008) [23] and Floerl et al. (2012) [14]. The resulting mixtures were shaken for 1 h in the dark, and ddH₂O (120 µL) was then added. Subsequently, they were incubated for 10 min and centrifuged for 15 min at 1500 rpm, and 20 °C to allow phase

separation. The polar phase of each sample was carefully transferred to a new tube avoiding contamination with the apolar one. The transferred polar phase was then evaporated using a speedback-type vacuum concentrator. The obtained residue was reconstituted in acetonitrile/methanol/water (1:1:12 v/v/v) mixture (200 µL), the resulting mixture was vortexed for 1 min until complete homogenisation, and lastly filtered using a 0.2 µm polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) membrane.

Selection of conditions for the metabolite chromatographic separation

Each obtained polar extract was analysed by means of liquid chromatography coupled to mass spectrometry (LC-MS) using a Shimadzu UFLC Prominence system. This was equipped with an SPD-M20A multi-wavelength photodiode array detector (DAD) and a Shimadzu LCMS2020 mass spectrometry detector with a quadrupole analyser and electrospray ionisation (ESI). The metabolite separation was carried out using a Synergy HydroRP C-18 column (4.6 mm x 150 mm, 4 µm). The flow was 0.7 mL/min, and the injection volume was 10 µL (50 µg dry extract/µL). The mobile phases comprised a mixture of solvent A (0.1% formic acid - water) and B (acetonitrile). The separation method was conditioned after three elution trials. The whole separation time ranged from 60 to 65 min, depending on the elution profiles presented on Table 1, until the selected signals reached reasonable chromatographic quality parameters. Detectors dually monitored the separation at 270 nm and MS scan mode (150-10000 *m/z*). The separation method was selected considering resolution, selectivity and number of theoretical plates using two reference signals (A and B) that were recognised as common in the three separation trials. Additionally, high-resolution MS (HRMS) data were also acquired using a Shimadzu UFLC Prominence system coupled to a Bruker MicrOTOF-Q II detector with a Quadrupole-Time of Flight (QToF) analyser and ESI. Identical chromatographic conditions mentioned above were used. ESI was operated in positive and negative ion modes (scan 100–1500 *m/z*), capillary voltage at 4.5 kV, de-solvation line temperature at 400 °C, nitrogen as nebuliser gas at 4 Bar, drying gas at 8 L/min, quadrupole, and collision energy at 7 and 20 eV, respectively.

Metabolite profile-derived data processing

The MS data obtained from LC-ESI-MS were pre-processed in MZmine 2.17, comprising peak detection, baseline correction, and deconvolution [24]. The pre-processed data were exported as a .csv format to build the feature intensity table (FIT), i.e., (samples × features) and imported into Matlab R2013. On the other hand, the data obtained from LC-DAD were extracted as an ACSII format and imported into OriginPro 8.5 to build a datasheet. In this datasheet, intensity data in mUA (milliunits of absorbance)

Table 1. Elution profiles of the separation trials for the LC-DAD-ESI-MS analysis of extracts from carnation apoplastic fluids.

First trial			Second trial			Third trial		
Time (min)	%B ^a	Elution	Time (min)	%B ^a	Elution	Time (min)	%B ^a	Elution
0-3	10→10	Isocratic	0-5	0→0	Isocratic	0-5	0→0	Isocratic
3-13	10→18	Gradient	5-14	0→18	Gradient	5-14	0→10	Gradient
13-18	18→18	Isocratic	14-19	18→18	Isocratic	14-19	10→10	Isocratic
18-27	18→32	Gradient	19-28	18→32	Gradient	19-30	10→30	Gradient
27-45	32→100	Gradient	28-45	32→100	Gradient	30-32	30→30	Isocratic
45-48	100→100	Isocratic	45-48	100→100	Isocratic	32-50	30→90	Gradient
48-62	100→10	Gradient	48-62	100→0	Gradient	50-53	90→90	Isocratic
62-65	10→10	Isocratic	62-65	0→0	Isocratic	53-57	90→0	Gradient
						57-60	0→0	Isocratic

^aVariations in percentage of acetonitrile (ACN) as phase B within the elution solvent along separation method.

at 270 nm were included every 0.01067 s of the whole chromatogram (i.e., bins) and organised into a matrix (samples $\times$ bins), namely the bin intensity table (BIT). FIT and BIT datasheets were jointly aligned by retention time using the COW (correlation optimised warping) algorithm obtained from <http://www.models.kvl.dk/> [25], [26]. This alignment method operates by segments and makes alignments of a sample with another reference by means of segment expansions using linear interpolation [27]. The BIT-aligned FIT was then filtered using the UV data to select only those phenolic-like features having absorbance at 270 nm. The other non-phenolic features were discarded for the present analysis. Once the FIT data were aligned and filtered, a normalisation by sum and autoscaling (unit variance scaling) was finally performed [28], [29], to distribute the data for adequate comparisons and further statistical analyses.

Statistical analysis

Data from TPC, TSC, and TFC obtained after extraction using different infiltration solutions and enzymatic activities for controlling contamination were reported as means $\pm$ standard deviation (SD). The Shapiro-Wilks test assessed the normal distribution of data. Once normality was verified, the significant differences between means were analysed by means of one-way ANOVA followed by the post-hoc Tukey test ($p < 0.05$) using Statgraphics software version 5.1. On the other hand, the pre-processed, filtered FIT datasheet was analysed by means of multivariate statistics [30], using principal component analysis (PCA), hierarchical clustering analysis (HCA), and orthogonal partial-least squares-discriminant analysis (OPLS-DA) [31]. These analyses led to the construction of the respective scores plot, dendrogram, and the variable importance in projection (VIP) scores plot, using the statistical module of MetaboAnalyst 4.0 [32].

Annotation of the main carnation constituents

Annotation procedure was employed to adequately communicate the metabolite identity of selected main compounds following the previously-proposed confidence levels [33]. In the present study, we reached the category related to the tentative candidates (level 3). Levels 1 (confirmed structure) and 2 (probable structure) were not possible due to a lack of authentic standards and insufficient information from the combined HRMS and UV spectral data to communicate a unique structure (e.g., exact isomers) of the specialised metabolites detected, filtered, and processed. Molecular formulas were predominantly deduced from the accurate mass of the quasi-molecular ion obtained in negative $[M-H]^-$ and positive $[M+Na]^+$ ion modes. Hence, the annotation was finally achieved by using the combined diagnostics of the deduced molecular formulas and the typical MS fragments, supported by UV spectra, phylogenetic filtering, chromatographic behaviour (if possible), and data comparison with different databases (e.g., dictionary of natural products, Metlin, KNApSACk, PubChem).

Results and discussion

Selection of the infiltration solution to obtain apoplastic fluid for metabolite analysis

Three different infiltration solutions were evaluated during the selection of suitable conditions for obtaining metabolites in the apoplastic fluid of carnation. The results obtained from measurements of total sugar, phenolic, and flavonoid contents and, additionally, the intracellular contamination evaluated through MDH activity led to the selection of the most appropriate infiltration solution.

Regarding the MDH activity of apoplast-derived extracts from carnation roots, the obtained values for evaluating the intracellular contamination employing this enzymatic marker did not constitute statistically significant differences ($p > 0.05$) for the three infiltration solutions. In this sense, MDH activity exhibited *ca.* 1% compared to crude root extracts, which agreed with what has been reported in other studies. Some examples are related to the apoplastic fluid from *Brassica napus* L and ryegrass leaves during senescence [34], and other plant-pathogen interactions, such as rape and *A. thaliana* leaves infected with *Verticillium longisporum* [14], [35] or wheat leaves infected with *Zymoseptoria tritici* [36]. This test was not carried out on stems since previous studies on the proteomic analysis found that this buffer solution does not generate cell membrane rupture and subsequent contamination with the respective intracellular content [17], to the same extent as observed in carnation roots after our trials. These results indicated that the three test infiltration solutions could adequately remove the apoplastic fluid from carnation roots without intracellular contamination, hence the selection criteria were required to be expanded by examining the total content outcome (Figure 1).

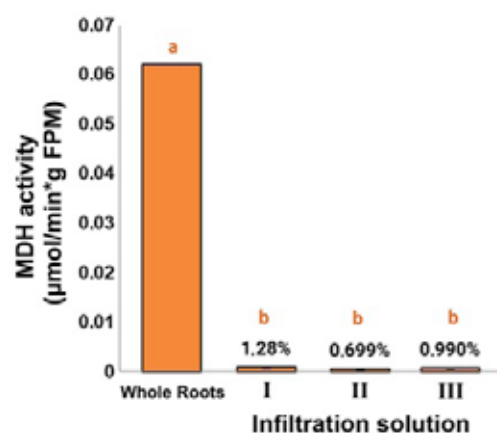


Figure 1. Determination of the presence of malate dehydrogenase (MDH) activity in carnation roots (susceptible cultivar ‘*Gran Slam*’). Total plant material and apoplastic fluid of carnation obtained with infiltration solutions I (0.1 M NaH_2PO_4 - Na_2HPO_4 pH 6.5/50 mM NaCl), II (50 mM NaCl), III (100 mM KCl/Triton X-100 0.003% v/v). MDH activity is expressed as means $\pm$ standard deviation (SD) ($n = 3$) and measured as μmol of MDH per minute and g of fresh plant material ($\mu\text{mol MDH}/\text{min} \cdot \text{g FPM}$). Different lowercase letters indicate significant differences between treatments ($p < 0.05$).

In the case of total sugar content (TSC) (Figure 2A), infiltration solutions I (i.e., NaH_2PO_4 - Na_2HPO_4 0.1 M pH 6.5 / 50 mM NaCl) and III (i.e., 100 mM KCl / Triton X-100 0.003% v/v) promoted the highest sugars extraction for stems and roots, respectively. Comparing both organs, their TSC values of stem apoplastic fluid were higher than that of the roots using infiltration solutions I and II. This result was expected considering that stems are the closest organ to the leaves, which are the place in the plant where carbohydrate synthesis occurs and from where sugars are transported to other organs and tissues [37]. Similar results have been reported in previous studies on carnation, whose TSC levels in stem apoplast are 3-fold higher than those found in the root apoplast [19]. Considering that the sugar levels did not exhibit significant differences between organs with infiltration solution III, we deduced that such an infiltration solution might not be suitable for the process under study. The importance of selecting an infiltration solution, which allows obtaining the highest reliable amount of these compounds to be subsequently analysed by means of chromatographic techniques, is based on the role of said compounds in plant-pathogen interactions. Studies carried out on this plant model have reported a wide variety of glycosylated compounds that may have a role highly associated with the carnation defense [38]. In other models, soluble sugars have been proposed as being involved in the cell osmotic balance and the reactive oxygen species equilibrium. These events comprise the plant response to oxidative stress generated by biotic or abiotic factors as a part of the physiological and biochemical mechanisms that support plant survival [39].

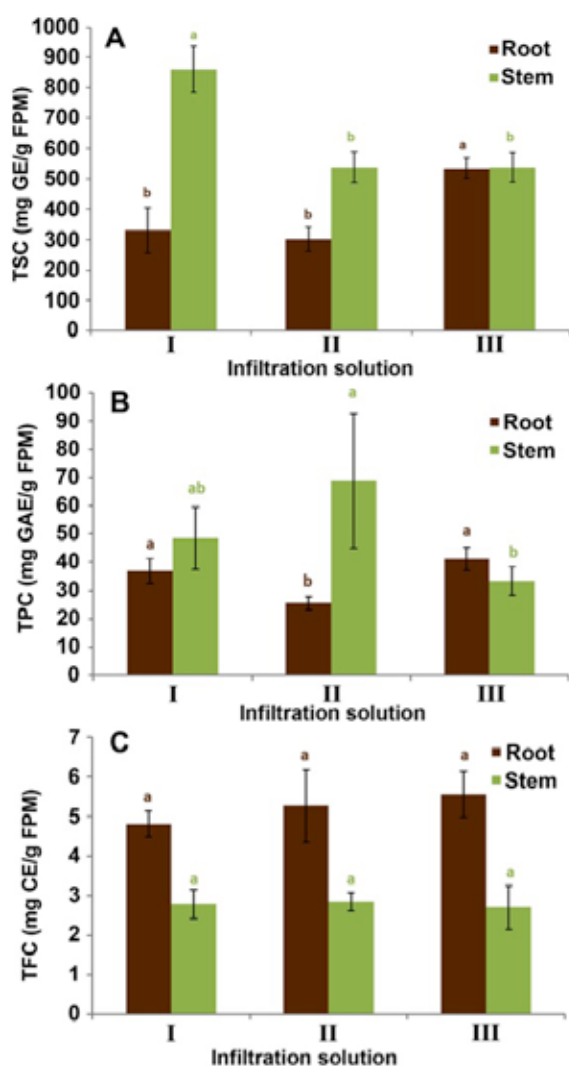


Figure 2. Determination of the total content of sugars (A), phenols (B) and flavonoids (C) (TSC, TPC, and TFC, respectively) in the apoplastic fluid of carnation roots and stems (susceptible cultivar ‘*Gran Slam*’), using infiltration solutions I (0.1 M NaH_2PO_4 - Na_2HPO_4 pH 6.5 / 50 mM NaCl), II (50 mM NaCl), and III (100 mM KCl / Triton X-100 0.003% v/v). TSC measured as mg of glucose equivalents per g of fresh plant material (mg GE/g FPM); TPC measured as mg of gallic acid equivalents per g of fresh plant material (mg GAE/g FPM); TFC measured as mg of catechin equivalents per g of fresh plant material (mg CE/g FPM). The vertical bars represent each mean’s standard deviation (SD) (n = 3). The organs were independently evaluated. Different lowercase letters indicate significant differences (p < 0.05) between the test infiltration solutions per organ.

On the other hand, the apoplastic fluid-derived extracts that exhibited the highest total phenolic content (TPC) were obtained using infiltration solutions I and II for stems and I and III for roots (Figure 2B). These results are within the range previously reported for TPC values from carnation whole plant tissue, i.e., 40-120 mg GAE/g FPM [38]. Remarkably, in the case of total flavonoid content (TFC) (Figure 2C), there were no significant differences between the three solutions used to prepare extracts from both stem and root apoplastic fluids. However, it is relevant to highlight that this total content measurement showed higher values for root apoplast than for stems. Several studies have proposed that some flavonoid-like phenolic compounds could be associated with resistance, acting constitutively as phytoanticipins [40]–[42]. This fact might rationalise the observed higher flavonoid amount in apoplastic root fluid than stem fluid. In addition, there are many phenomena related to flavonoids taking place in roots, such as nutrient uptake [43], growth [44], and interaction with soil microorganisms, including pathogens such as *Fod*, whose plant entering is favoured through

the roots. This outcome was in accord with those TFC values from carnation whole plant material determined in previous studies since higher flavonoid accumulation in root tissue was also evidenced [38]. The biosynthesis of these compounds is apparently regulated according to the test organ and its adaptive requirements, whose phenomenon has also been reported in other species [45], [46].

The pooled results obtained for TSC, TPC, and TFC showed that the infiltration solutions with the highest metabolite removal were I and III. These infiltration solutions involved no significant differences between the measured total contents. However, since the higher TSC values from apoplastic stem fluid-derived extracts were achieved with infiltration solution I, it was selected to proceed with the subsequent metabolite extraction and LC-based analysis. This solution I was formerly used to obtain apoplastic fluid for protein analysis [17]. Consequently, this fact was considered positive since both analyses can be carried out based on the same apoplastic fluids. In other words, this leads to an important experimental advantage during this type of study since the obtained sample amount is usually minimal and/or limited.

Selection of separation conditions for chromatographic analysis of apoplastic carnation extract

We studied reverse-phase HPLC-based elution conditions to obtain a suitable chromatographic separation of the root apoplast-derived extract from ‘*Gran slam*’ carnation cultivar. Thus, Figure 3 shows the results of the three-elution profiles presented on Table 1. The chromatogram of the first trial displays a very poor separation (Figure 3a). Most compounds eluted in the first 5 minutes using these conditions due to this chromatographic method appeared to involve a high elution power. Indeed, two reference signals, A and B, eluted jointly at 4 minutes. Based on this outcome, the elution profile of the second trial was modified, including 0% phase B as an initial isocratic step during the first 5 minutes. This variation offered a clear separation of reference signals A and B (ca. 13 min) and a better resolution for the other signals since reducing the elution power allowed for improved separation of them (Figure 3b). However, three chromatogram regions still had low resolution at 2-4, 12-14, and 28-36 minutes. A third trial was then proposed based on these considerations, retaining the above mentioned 5-min initial step (i.e., 0% phase B) and including three modifications based on isocratic elutions at 14-19 min (i.e., 10% phase B), 30-32 min (i.e., 30% phase B), and 50-53 min (i.e., 90% phase B). They involved subsequent middle-sloped gradient steps for improving the signal resolution. The resulting chromatogram of the third trial showed that this elution method allows a better compound separation and even A and B signals (Figure 3c). Hence, this elution appropriately separated the compounds between 2-36 min, and the rest of the chromatogram showed no phenolic-like relevant peaks. However, the elution after 40 min was maintained to eliminate from the reversed-phase column those apolar residues that could contaminate it. Additionally, these trials were compared by way of different separation quality parameters, such as resolution, the number of theoretical plates, and selectivity, calculated for signal A [47], to properly select the best elution profile.

Table 2 presents the calculated parameters for signal A. The elution profile used in the third trial allowed to obtain the best resolution (> 2.0), the highest number of theoretical plates (> 4×10^4), and enhanced selectivity (1.06). These parameters indicated that the chromatographic conditions of the third trial are suitable for a metabolite separation of polar extracts from the carnation root apoplast and, therefore, we chose it for further analysis. The selected elution profile undoubtedly guaranteed the results of the following part of the study since we carried out identical tests, using this third elution profile with a polar extract from the apoplastic stem fluid of the resistant and susceptible cultivars. Consequently, the selected

chromatographic conditions were also conducive to good metabolite separation of such mixtures (data not shown).

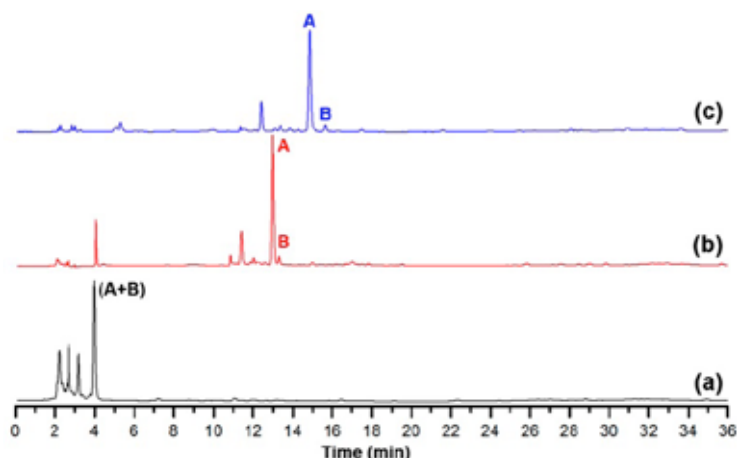


Figure 3. Chromatographic separation trials for the metabolite analysis of polar extracts from the apoplastic fluid of carnation roots (susceptible cultivar ‘*Gran Slam*’). (a) First trial, (b) Second trial, (c) Third trial. Chromatographic conditions according to the information presented on Table 1. Signals A and B were selected for the intuitive visualisation of the separation quality among trials.

Table 2. Chromatographic parameters calculated for signals A and B^a.

Parameters ^b	First trial ^c	Second trial ^c	Third trial ^c
Resolution (A, B)	0	1.1	2.4
Number of theoretical plates for signal A	Undetermined	2.8×10^4	4.7×10^4
Selectivity for signal A	Undetermined	1.03	1.06

^a Signals separated in chromatograms presented in Figure 3; ^b Parameters calculated [47] for selecting the best elution method to analyse polar extracts from carnation apoplastic fluids; ^c Trials involved chromatographic conditions according to the information presented on Table 1.

Metabolic profiling of the apoplastic fluid of two cultivars with contrasting levels of resistance to Fod-caused vascular wilt

As part of the application of the conditioned procedure for the analysis of phenolic metabolites in the carnation apoplast, extraction of the apoplastic fluid of roots and stems of the carnation cultivars ‘*Solex*’ (Fod susceptible) and ‘*Golem*’ (Fod resistant) was carried out. Infiltration solution I was used to obtain the respective apoplastic fluids, as performed previously for the ‘*Gran slam*’ cultivar. Then, the individual LC-ESI-MS-based metabolic profiles of the mentioned extracts were recorded to compare the relevant variations based on those metabolites with more contrasting differences. The LC-MS data preprocessing led to the recognition of eight main constituents (1-8) among the four types of extracts (see Figure 4), highly consistent between the biological replicates, whose characterisation details by high-resolution mass spectrometry and the respective feature annotation at confidence level 3 [33] (see Materials and Methods section) are presented on Table 3. These metabolites were related to one flavone (1) and seven flavonols (2-8), whose core moieties comprised (iso)pranol, kaempferide, (dihydro)kaempferol, quercetin, and myricetin-type flavonoids. Additionally, these compounds involved (di)acyl, glycosyl, and (di)acylglycosyl substitutions. Signals A and B, previously employed for the selection of the best elution profile from apoplast-derived from ‘*Gran slam*’ cultivar, corresponds to compounds 2 and 3.

In general, the stacked, aligned chromatograms in Figure 4 show that root-derived extracts have more abundant metabolites than extracts from stems. These organ-based differences were observed between both carnation cultivars, which exhibited phenotypic differences such as resistance to Fod-caused disease [42]. In this sense, compounds 1 (hydroxy-methoxyflavone, an (iso)pranol-like flavone), 6 (di-*O*-acetylkaempferol, a diesterified flavonol), and 8 (kaempferide disalicyloylrhamnoside, a diacylglycosylated flavonol) were found to be exclusively occurred in the root apoplast of the resistant cultivar ‘*Golem*’. However, the mere presence of a component in the resistant cultivar does not guarantee its role in resistance since it may be related to other phenotypic characteristics that differentiate both cultivars [48]. However, this differential evaluation has traditionally been used as a first approximation to study naturally-occurring compounds with potential resistance roles [4], [19], [49]–[51].

On the other hand, the two plant parts under study exhibited other constitutive differences. This observation is related to those metabolites only occurring in the apoplastic root fluid, such as compounds 3 (kaempferide salicyloylglucoside, an acylglycosylated flavonol), 5 (*O*-acetylmyricetin, an esterified flavonol), and 7 (di-*O*-benzoylquercetin, a diphenylacyl flavonol). This differential comparison indicated that the mentioned compounds possibly participate in specific mechanisms of this plant organ, for instance, possible siderophore-type or rhizosphere-signaling compounds, which may play an essential role in processes that typically occur at this level [43]. In addition, the two most abundant metabolites were also detected in both plant organs of both carnation cultivars. However, they exhibited differential content among plant organs, comprising glycosylated flavonol 4 and acylflavonol 2 as the most abundant in stems and roots, respectively, which indicate a plausible functional specialisation triggering their particular accumulation in a certain plant organ to facilitate its action.

The principal component analysis (PCA) led to expanding the global comparison of the whole set of metabolic profiles to recognise those patterns based on differences or similarities of this constitutive composition of carnation cultivars. The PCA-based dataset modeling exhibited good performance since this explained 83.6% of the total explained variance (VE) using the two-first principal components (PC1 and PC2). Thus, the resulting PC1×PC2 scores plot (Figure 5A) shows that PC1 discriminated (61.5% of VE) mainly those chemical data from each test organ. For its part, PC2 (22.1% of VE) separated the resistant cultivar (‘*Golem*’) stem extract from the other three metabolic profiles. This pattern indicated that the apoplast-derived extract from each organ of both cultivars had relevant chemical differences, as previously mentioned. Still, stem apoplast revealed higher differences between cultivars than root apoplast. This fact was evidenced through hierarchical clustering analysis (HCA). The respective dendrogram (Figure 5C) divided the metabolic datasets into two main organ-dependent groups and, subsequently, four treatment-dependent subgroups, clustering the three biological replicates under analysis with a comparable hierarchical level. Nevertheless, HCA reached the central separation of the organ-dependent groups with different cluster distances. In this regard, stem clustering exhibited *ca.* 2-fold branch height to the root clustering, indicating that root apoplast-derived extracts from both cultivars have a more similar chemical composition to those obtained from stems. These findings indicated that the selected extraction and separation conditions permitted suitable discrimination of intrinsic phenolic-related metabolic characteristics of the carnation apoplast obtained from each organ and cultivar.

Further exploration of the individual variations and the relative content distribution of the most abundant metabolites (1-8) established the specific chemical differences between the test extracts to determine the intrinsic flavonoid-based characteristics of each organ and cultivar. Thus, the peak areas of metabolites 1-8 were normalised by sum and autoscaled (unit variance) for comparative purposes by means of a heat map-based intuitive visualisation. As shown in Figure 5C, the heat map revealed that the most abundant metabolites among the four extracts were 2, 3, and 5 for ‘*Solex*’ roots, while the contents of metabolites 1, 6, 7, and 8 were higher for ‘*Golem*’ roots. The hierarchical analysis on these autoscaled contents separated these two metabolite sets, generating two main clusters, accompanied by a third

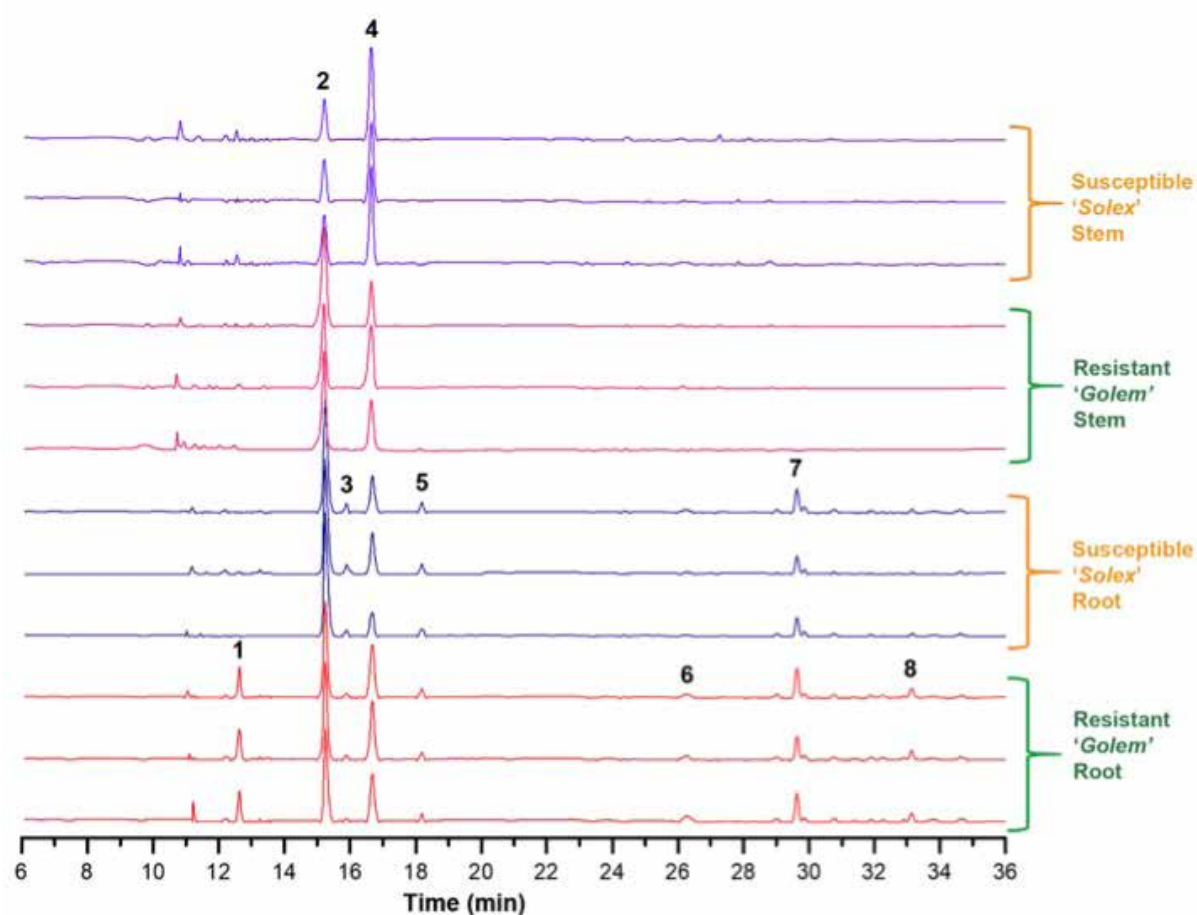


Figure 4. Stacked chromatographic profiles of apoplastic fluid-derived extracts from carnation roots and stems. Each plant organ (i.e., stems and roots) from every cultivar ('*Golem*' as *Fod*-resistant and '*Solex*' as *Fod*-susceptible) comprised three biological replicates from 3-to-4-week rooted carnation cuttings. Bold numbers indicate the main constitutive compounds of carnation cultivars.

Table 3. Most abundant phenolic-like metabolites detected and annotated in apoplastic fluid-derived extracts from carnation roots and stems.

# ^a	Rt ^b (min)	[M-H] ⁻ (m/z)	[M+Na] ⁺ (m/z)	Annotation ^c	Molecular Formula ^d	Error (ppm) ^e
1	12.6	267.0668	291.0649	hydroxy-methoxyflavone	C ₁₆ H ₁₂ O ₄	3.86
2	15.3	419.0747	443.0768	<i>O</i> -salicyloylkaempferide	C ₂₃ H ₁₆ O ₈	-4.75
3	15.8	581.1276	605.1259	kaempferide salicyloylglucoside	C ₂₉ H ₂₆ O ₁₃	-3.27
4	16.7	449.1075	473.1069	dihydrokaempferol glucoside	C ₂₁ H ₂₀ O ₁₁	-1.78
5	18.1	359.0415	383.0389	<i>O</i> -acetylmyricetin	C ₁₇ H ₁₂ O ₉	3.34
6	26.3	369.0621	393.0595	di- <i>O</i> -acetylkaempferol	C ₁₉ H ₁₄ O ₈	2.98
7	29.65	509.0891	533.0861	di- <i>O</i> -benzoylquercetin	C ₂₉ H ₁₈ O ₉	3.73
8	33.2	685.1569	709.1548	kaempferide disalicyloylramnoside	C ₃₆ H ₃₀ O ₁₄	1.75

^aCompound numbering according to Figure 4. ^bRetention time (Rt) recorded in chromatograms presented in Figure 4. ^cCompound annotation at level 3 according to the suggested communication confidence [33] by accurate mass measurements and the information of some key MS fragments. ^dMolecular formula of the annotated compounds [M], deduced from the adducts [M-H]⁻ and [M+Na]⁺. ^eRelative error calculated between the monoisotopic mass and the accurate mass measured for the *quasi*-molecular ion [M-H]⁻ of those detected, annotated compounds.

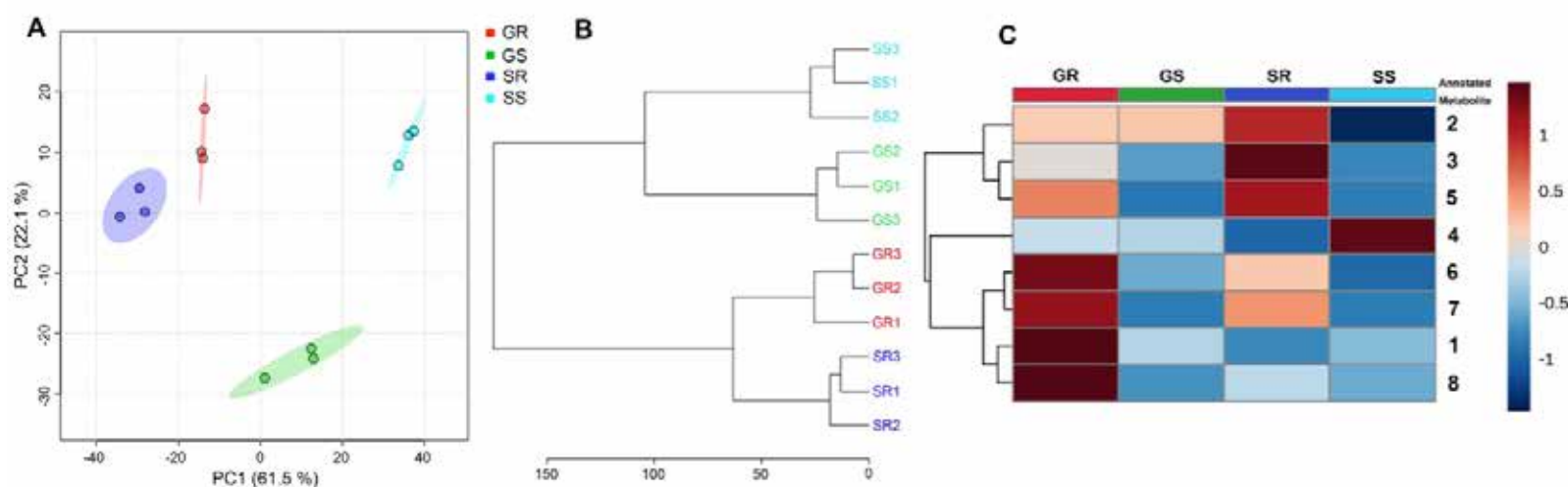


Figure 5. Comparative analysis of the metabolic profiles of the apoplastic fluid-derived extracts from roots and stems of two carnation cultivars. **A.** PC1 × PC2 scores plot from PCA. **B.** Dendrogram from HCA using Ward algorithm. **C.** Heat map-based intuitive visualisation of the relative content distribution of the most abundant metabolites 1–8, whose numbering and annotation agreed with Table 3. Each colored cell on the heat map corresponds to each compound's relative abundance (normalised, autoscaled peak area) (dark blue = low; dark red = high). GR: resistant cultivar 'Golem' root (red), GS: resistant cultivar 'Golem' stem (green), SR: susceptible cultivar 'Solex' root (dark blue), SS: susceptible cultivar 'Solex' stem (light blue). PCA = principal component analysis; HCA = hierarchical clustering analysis.

cluster corresponding to compound 4, which was very abundant for the 'Solex' stems. A detailed inspection found no structural relationship between the flavonoid moieties in these clusters derived from the hierarchical analysis. However, substitutions in the 'Solex' root flavonols were found to be monoacylated, while the 'Golem' root flavonols were predominantly diacylated. Hence, further studies are required to determine whether flavonol acylation might be related to carnation resistance. Indeed, previous studies described that *Fod*-resistant carnation cultivars can accumulate flavonoids generally glycosylated [29], [42], [52] or acylglycosylated [53], [54]. Certainly, flavonoids can have structural variations (e.g., methylation by methyltransferases, glycosylation by glycosyltransferases or acylation by specific acyltransferases), which modify flavonoid stability, solubility, and reactivity. These structural variations guide their various functions in the plant, possibly as antimicrobials or antioxidants [55], [56], and even modulate internal or external cell transport to fulfil their particular role [57], [58]. On the other hand, the 'Golem' roots showed the abundant presence of flavone 1, suggesting another metabolic trait of this resistant cultivar. This trait is possibly due to the enhanced flavone synthase (FNS) activity, diverting the metabolic route toward producing this type of flavonoids, which has also been recognised as phytoalexins [59]. Contrarily, the susceptible cultivar was the glycosylated dihydroflavonol 4, which seems to be an intermediate that did not reach the flavonol end-product, possibly due to a reduced flavonol synthase (FLS) activity. Transcriptional studies have shown that the FLS exhibited lower levels in *Fod*-susceptible carnation cultivars than in those resistant cultivars [53].

Partial least squares-discriminant analysis (PLS-DA) favored extending the previous comparisons. Thus, the resulting VIP (variable importance in projection) scores plot (Figure 6) showed that the main metabolites significantly influenced the discrimination of the four extracts (VIP > 1). In this regard, compounds 2 and 4 were those metabolites that varied the most and, therefore, contributed more to the discrimination of the root and stem apoplast, respectively, of the 'Solex' cultivar (VIP > 1.7). More abundant compounds in the 'Golem' root apoplast resumed the subsequent VIP trend (1.2 > VIP > 1.7), while the flavonols majorly present in the 'Solex' root apoplast varied the least among the four extracts (1.0 > VIP > 1.1). The relative variations displayed as box plots confirmed the PLS-DA-based previous outcome (Figure 6), specifying the amplitude of these autoscaled variations for each metabolite and rationalising the recognised patterns according to the statistical comparison of metabolic profiles. For instance, these box plots indicated that the metabolites mainly present in the root of

the resistant cultivar 'Golem', i.e., 1, 6, 7, and 8, had 2–3-fold abundance with respect to other extracts, constituting relevant information that can serve as the basis for further studies focused on comprehending the role of diacylated flavonols in carnation resistance to *Fod*.

Conclusions

Buffer solution I (i.e., NaH₂PO₄-Na₂HPO₄ 0.1 M pH 6.5 / NaCl 50 mM) reached the best removal of the apoplastic fluid from carnation stems or roots. Such an infiltration solution performed well in removing higher contents of sugars and phenolic-like metabolites while involving the slightest contamination with intracellular compounds. The best HPLC separation of polar metabolites of those extracts obtained from the optimised, removed apoplastic fluids involved three isocratic–gradient elution steps. Such an analysis permitted the detection and the subsequent HRMS-based annotation of eight phenolic compounds, i.e., one flavone and seven flavonols, as main constituents of apoplastic fluids from roots and stems of two carnation cultivars. These flavonoids may be related to the passive defense mechanisms of the plant, particularly those diacylated flavonoids, such as 1, 6, 7, and 8, which abundantly occurred in the resistant cultivar, and require further studies to disclose their plausible roles in the *Fod*-resistance of carnation. In conclusion, our findings indicated that the selected extraction and separation conditions led to adequate pattern recognition based on the differential phenolic-related metabolic characteristics of the apoplast-derived extracts from stems and roots of two carnation cultivars with contrasting resistance to *Fod*. In addition, further studies can apply this workflow to other plant species in order to study the performance and dynamics of apoplastic metabolites and their influence and plausible roles in various biological processes that may include interactions with pathogens.

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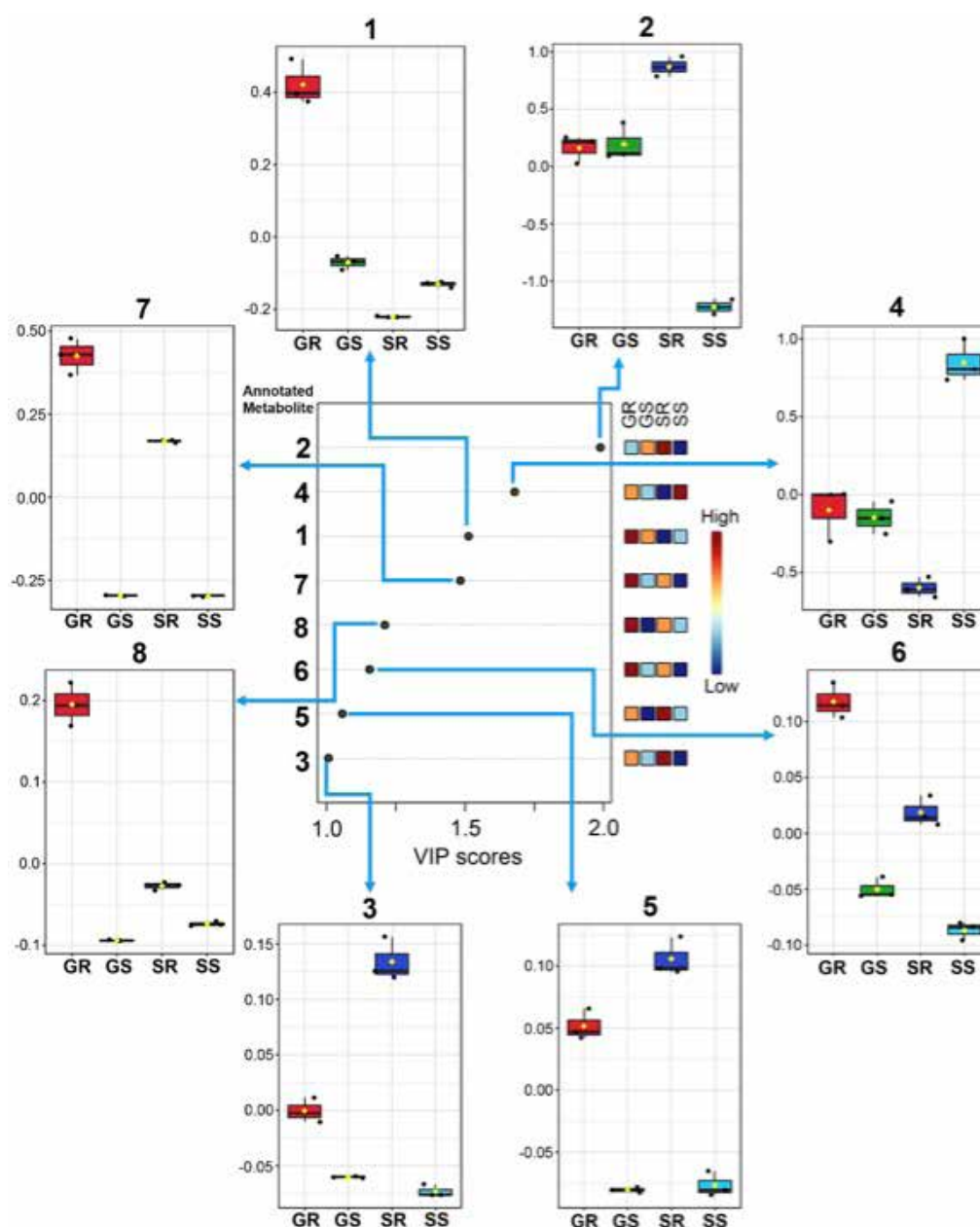


Figure 6. Relative variations and discriminating importance of the main phenolic metabolites detected in the apoplastic fluid-derived extracts from stems and roots of two carnation cultivars ('Golem' as resistant and 'Solex' as susceptible cultivars). The discriminating influence agrees with the color scale (dark blue = low influence; dark red = high influence) of the right-side heat map for each treatment. GR: resistant cultivar 'Golem' root, GS: resistant cultivar 'Golem' stem, SR: susceptible cultivar 'Solex' root, SS: susceptible cultivar 'Solex' stem. VIP = Variable importance in projection.

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Modelamiento *in silico* de la liasa organomercurial (MerB) de *Pseudomonas fluorescens*

Resumen

El modelamiento *in silico* ha sido de gran contribución en los procesos proteómicos, desarrollando estructuras de las secuencias proteicas ya existentes, que por motivos de altos costos y las diferentes tecnologías necesarias para el desarrollo de estas metodologías, se encuentran deficientes en el número de modelamientos de proteínas disponibles. Entre aquellas secuencias con carencia de estructura proteica se encuentra la proteína liasa organomercurial (MerB) de *Pseudomonas fluorescens*, importante en la resistencia al mercurio. En el presente artículo se analizó tanto estructural como funcionalmente la proteína MerB en *Pseudomonas fluorescens*, utilizando la herramienta de la química estructural “modelamiento por homología” mediante plataformas bioinformáticas, con el fin de obtener un modelo que represente la estructura 3D más precisa y que capturen las mejores variantes estructurales entre todas las posibles conformaciones de las proteínas en la familia. En este trabajo, se desarrolló un método comparativo de la secuencia estudiada con las reportadas en las bases de datos para las proteínas MerB del género *Pseudomonas*. Se propone un modelo tridimensional para la enzima (MerB) en *P. fluorescens*, mediante el modelamiento por homología, se muestra la caracterización en la estructura secundaria, terciaria, la caracterización del dominio catalítico y los motivos estructurales presentes.

Palabras clave: bioinformática; modelado por homología; organomercurial liasa; *Pseudomonas fluorescens*.

In silico modeling of *Pseudomonas fluorescens* organomercurial lyase (MerB)

Abstract

In silico modeling has made a great contribution to proteomic processes, developing structures of the already existing protein sequences, which for reasons of high costs and the different technologies necessary for the development of these methodologies, are deficient in the number of models of available proteins. Among those sequences lacking protein structure is the organomercurial lyase (MerB) protein from *Pseudomonas fluorescens*, important in mercury resistance. In this article, the MerB protein in *Pseudomonas fluorescens* was analyzed both structurally and functionally, using the structural chemistry tool “homology modeling” using bioinformatic platforms, in order to obtain a model that represents the most accurate 3D structure and that captures the best structural variants among all the possible conformations of the proteins in the family. In this work, a comparative method of the sequence studied with those reported in the databases for MerB proteins of the genus *Pseudomonas* was developed. A three-dimensional model for the enzyme (MerB) in *P. fluorescens* is proposed, through homology modeling, the characterization at the secondary and tertiary structure level, the characterization of the catalytic domain and the structural motifs present is shown.

Keywords: Bioinformatics; homology modelling; organomercurial lyase; *Pseudomonas fluorescens*.

Modelagem *in silico* da liase organomercurial (MerB) de *Pseudomonas fluorescens*

Resumo

A modelagem *in silico* tem dado um grande contributo para os processos proteómicos, desenvolvendo estruturas de sequências de proteínas já existentes, as quais, pelos elevados custos e pelas diferentes tecnologias necessárias ao desenvolvimento destas metodologias, são deficientes no número de modelos de proteínas disponíveis. Entre as sequências sem estrutura proteica está a proteína organomercurial liase (MerB) de *Pseudomonas fluorescens*, importante na resistência ao mercúrio. Neste artigo, a proteína MerB em *Pseudomonas fluorescens* foi analisada estrutural e funcionalmente, usando a ferramenta de química estrutural “modelagem de homologia” usando plataformas de bioinformática, a fim de obter um modelo que represente a estrutura 3D mais precisa e que capture as melhores variantes estruturais. entre todas as conformações possíveis das proteínas da família. Neste trabalho, foi desenvolvido um método comparativo da sequência estudada com aqueles relatados em bancos de dados para proteínas MerB do gênero *Pseudomonas*. Um modelo tridimensional para a enzima (MerB) em *P. fluorescens* é proposto, através de modelagem por homologia, a caracterização em nível de estrutura secundária e terciária, a caracterização do domínio catalítico e os motivos estruturais presentes são mostradas.

Palavras-chave: bioinformática; modelagem de homologia; organomercurial Liasa; *Pseudomonas fluorescens*.

Introducción

Desde hace 20.000-30.000 años A. de C., el mercurio ha sido un elemento incluido en la mano de obra del hombre [1], siendo la minería la más reconocida (exactamente en la extracción de oro a base de mercurio) y, a la vez, la actividad que más contaminación provoca por este metal. Por tanto, durante todo este tiempo ha surgido bioacumulación en su mayor reservorio (ríos, lagos y océanos), provocando afectaciones ambientales y en el ser humano [2]. La bioacumulación en los océanos es debida, por lo general, a las bacterias acuáticas anaeróbicas reductoras de sulfato, que transforman el mercurio elemental a metilmercurio por medio de la biometilación de este elemento [3], siendo el estado más contaminante del mercurio; aunque también puede ser transformado por actividades antropogénicas y ser, posteriormente, llevadas a las zonas acuáticas naturales. Afectando de manera directa a organismos acuáticos, y luego a las personas quienes basan su dieta principalmente de productos marinos [4].

En sintonía con la evolución del bienestar ambiental y humano, han surgido diferentes soluciones para este efecto adverso, como lo es la biorremediación, un mecanismo liderado por microorganismos y sus enzimas, para la degradación y transformación de contaminantes a otro estado de oxidación, el cual es menos tóxico para el medioambiente [5]. Entre estos microorganismos se encuentran las bacterias, uno de cuyos géneros es el *Pseudomona* [6]; las bacterias de este género son organismos Gram negativos de vida libre, con genomas grandes (en promedio 6 Mb), en los cuales tienen la información para adaptarse fácilmente a las condiciones que el ambiente en el que se encuentra le presente. Una de las especies de este género, con una amplia capacidad de adaptación y que ha sido usada comúnmente en procesos de biorremediación, es el *Pseudomonas fluorescens*. Además, se ha reportado que este microorganismo ha logrado sobrevivir en lugares con alta concentración de mercurio, por lo que la identificación de los elementos genéticos presentes, y que le dan esta característica, se han convertido en un importante tema de estudio [7].

Se ha identificado que los sistemas de resistencia bacteriana a mercurio se agrupan en un operón, conocido como el “operón Mer”, que varía en estructura y consta de genes que codifican proteínas para la regulación (merR, merD), transporte (merT, merP and/or merC, merF) y reducción de mercurio (MerA) [8] y, en algunos casos, un gen adicional, merB, el cual otorga a los microorganismos que lo presentan la capacidad de cortar el enlace carbono-mercurio de organomercuriales como el acetato fenilmercúrico, y generar Hg^{2+} , que luego es desintoxicado como mercurio metálico por la reductasa mercúrica. Se ha identificado la presencia de este gen en la bacteria *P. fluorescens*, como uno de los elementos importantes de su capacidad de biorremediación de mercurio [9-11]. MerB es la encargada de escindir el enlace carbono-mercurio por medio de una protonólisis produciendo un compuesto alifático o aromático y Hg (II) [12], el cual posteriormente es reducido a Hg (0) por la reductasa específica MerA [13]. MerB muestra una amplia especificidad de sustrato y puede dividir una gran variedad de compuestos organomercuriales que van desde compuestos de alquilo simples como Me-Hg a poliaromáticos y compuestos heterocíclicos como la merbromina [14]. En diversos reportes se evidencia que, para llevar a cabo esta reacción catalítica, los sitios activos de la proteína MerB varían en los diferentes macroorganismos en los que esta ha sido estudiada, como lo es en el dominio bacteria y en las arqueas. Se han identificado mutaciones génicas que en algunos casos producen cambios en la ubicación de algunos aminoácidos; aunque, en general, en la molécula se mantiene una gran similitud. Sin embargo, se ha identificado que estas variaciones ocasionan cambios en la expresión génica y en la estructura proteica [15].

Son estos últimos elementos los que sustentan la importancia de la biología estructural y la química computacional, con el fin de establecer con exactitud la estructura de las proteínas, confirmando mayor conocimiento de su estructura, funcionalidad, su dinámica, las interacciones con ligandos y otras proteínas [16, 17]. Tal estudio se realiza por medio de herramientas proteómicas, con el propósito de observar las estructuras proteicas como lo

es la cristalización con ayuda de la difracción de rayos X o de resonancia magnética, donde la calidad de la imagen estructural final es directamente proporcional a la perfección de las propiedades físicas del espécimen cristalino, que otorga con precisión las coordenadas atómicas, necesitándose cristales de gran tamaño y calidad suficiente para lograr obtener una recopilación de datos precisa. Sin embargo, este tipo de tecnologías son complejas y muy costosas, por lo que para todas las proteínas identificadas no existen datos de estructura generados experimentalmente [18, 19]. Pero más allá de ser un limitante, también impulsó el desarrollo de la química computacional, la cual, hoy en día, se orienta al modelaje y evaluación de proteínas *in silico*, una variante viable para ahorrar tiempo en el diseño de experimentos con mejores expectativas de éxito y disminuir costos en materiales y reactivos. Entre estas herramientas se encuentra el “modelado por homología”, también conocido como “modelado comparativo” o “modelado basado en plantilla (TBM)”; estas estrategias de modelado de la estructura 3D de una proteína, usan una estructura conocida experimentalmente como molde.

En el presente artículo se plantea estudiar, con el uso de herramientas bioinformáticas, el gen, la secuencia de proteína y dar a conocer una estrategia para modelar y analizar la estructura tridimensional de la enzima MerB en *Pseudomonas fluorescens*, la cual no ha sido reportada. De igual manera, se plantea llevar a cabo la caracterización de la estructura secundaria, identificación de dominios funcionales, estructurales y la especificación del centro activo de esta importante molécula básica en los procesos de biorremediación de mercurio.

Materiales y métodos

Secuencias de MerB y alineamiento múltiple

Las secuencias de la familia de MerB en varias especies del género *Pseudomonas*, se obtuvieron de la plataforma de UniProt [20], estas se usaron para la realización de un alineamiento múltiple con la aplicación del *European Bioinformatics Institute* [21], T-Coffe [22], con el fin de identificar el nivel de diversidad entre ellas y, por tanto, la homología presente.

Modelamiento de la estructura tridimensional de MerB de *Pseudomonas fluorescens*

Con la secuencia identificada para MerB de *Pseudomona fluorescens*, se desarrolló un modelamiento por homología con la aplicación Geno3D [23], donde, en primer lugar, se introduce la secuencia y se corre con los valores exactos que propone la aplicación, con el fin de seleccionar el modelo con mejor valor propuesto, donde luego se extrae su respectiva secuencia y para facilitar su visualización se introduce en el software RasMol [24].

Análisis de la estructura secundaria de MerB de *Pseudomonas fluorescens*

Se predijo la estructura secundaria de MerB mediante la aplicación PSIPRED [25], la cual utiliza un método altamente preciso para la predicción de la estructura secundaria a partir de secuencias de aminoácidos.

Evaluación y validación de la estructura tridimensional de MerB de *Pseudomonas fluorescens*

Se evaluó la validación de los modelos predichos usando los programas Biovia [26] para verificar la validez de su estructura secundaria; ProSA-Web [27] para su ajuste a estructuras predichas mediante métodos de laboratorio, como la resonancia magnética nuclear o la difracción de rayos X; y Verify 3D [28], con el fin de llevar a cabo la validación de los modelos de los perfiles tridimensionales.

Identificación de dominios proteicos

Los dominios proteicos de la secuencia de MerB en *P. fluorescens*, se identificaron por medio de la página web de búsqueda MotifSearch [29].

Resultados

Alineamiento por pares y múltiple

A partir de las secuencias de la familia de las proteínas MerB (Tabla 1), se realizó, en la aplicación *Phylogeny.fr* [30], el alineamiento múltiple y la obtención del respectivo árbol filogenético, identificando en él las secuencias de MerB para *P. fluorescens*, y se obtuvieron cuatro secuencias en diferentes posiciones de la filogenia, como se muestra en la Figura 1.

Tabla 1. Código y organismos del género *Pseudomona spp* aplicados en el estudio filogenético, obtenidos de UniProt [20].

Código	Organismo
Q8G9P0	<i>Pseudomonas putida</i> 1 (P_putida1)
A0A1W6QXX0	<i>Pseudomonas putida</i> 2 (P_putida2)
Q9F3W5	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> (P_sp1)
O07303	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> (P_sp2)
Q9Z3Y8	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> (P_sp3)
Q9F3W6	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> (P_sp4)
U2A0X4	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> (P_sp5)
A0A2N7XWW6	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> (P_sp6)
Q0E6C2	<i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i> (P_aeruginosa1)
A0A2N7XXX7	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> (P_sp7)
A0A212BER9	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> (P_sp8)
A0A3M5Z239	<i>Pseudomonas coronafaciens</i> (P_coronafaciens1)
A0A1G8QSD9	<i>Pseudomonas abietaniphila</i> (P_abietaniphila1)
A0A5C5R0G9	<i>Pseudomonas mandelii</i> (P_mandelii1)
A0A5P9WB02	<i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i> (P_aeruginosa2)
A0A1G5PHN0	<i>Pseudomonas psychrotolerans</i> (P_psychrotolerans1)
A0A2S7FMI2	<i>Pseudomonas oleovorans</i> (P_oleovorans1)
A0A2N7XWV5	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> P_sp9
A0A1V0M5B3	<i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i> (P_aeruginosa3)
A0A5B0BVV8	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> (P_sp10)
A0A2N7XX29	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> (P_sp11)
C0KJV0	<i>Pseudomonas aeruginosa</i> (P_aeruginosa4)
E1V302	<i>Pseudomonas plecoglossicida</i> (P_plecoglossicida1)
A4V7U8	<i>Pseudomonas fluorescens</i> (P_fluorescens1)

Código	Organismo
S2FX69	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> (P_sp12)
A0A5C5N7Q8	<i>Pseudomonas rhodesiae</i> (P_rhodesiae1)
A0A5E7MFD1	<i>Pseudomonas fluorescens</i> (P_fluorescens2)
A0A5M8ECB2	<i>Pseudomonas veronii</i> (P_veronii1)
A0A0R3BTV1	<i>Pseudomonas lactis</i> (P_lactis1)
A0A419UJ99	<i>Pseudomonas synxantha</i> (P_synxantha1)
A0A2G0W2S4	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> (P_sp13)
A0A127HQV2	<i>Pseudomonas azotoformans</i> (P_azotoformans)
A0A0R3B0W4	<i>Pseudomonas lactis</i> (P_lactis2)
A0A3M5ZUV3	<i>Pseudomonas coronafaciens</i> (P_coronafaciens2)
A0A5E7A816	<i>Pseudomonas fluorescens</i> (P_fluorescens3)
Q70MS1	<i>Pseudomonas fluorescens</i> (P_fluorescens4)
E1V304	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> (P_sp14)
A0A1E4X3J7	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> (P_sp15)
A0A1T1HZC6	<i>Pseudomonas sp</i> (P_sp16)
E1V303	<i>Pseudomonas putida</i> (P_putida3)
A0A6B7Q571	<i>Pseudomonas putida</i> (P_putida4)
A0A1H0ISK0	<i>Pseudomonas poae</i> (P_poe1)
A0A0P9GCM1	<i>Pseudomonas syringae</i> (P_syringae1)
A0A3S4N2X6	<i>Pseudomonas putrefaciens</i> (S_putrefaciens2)

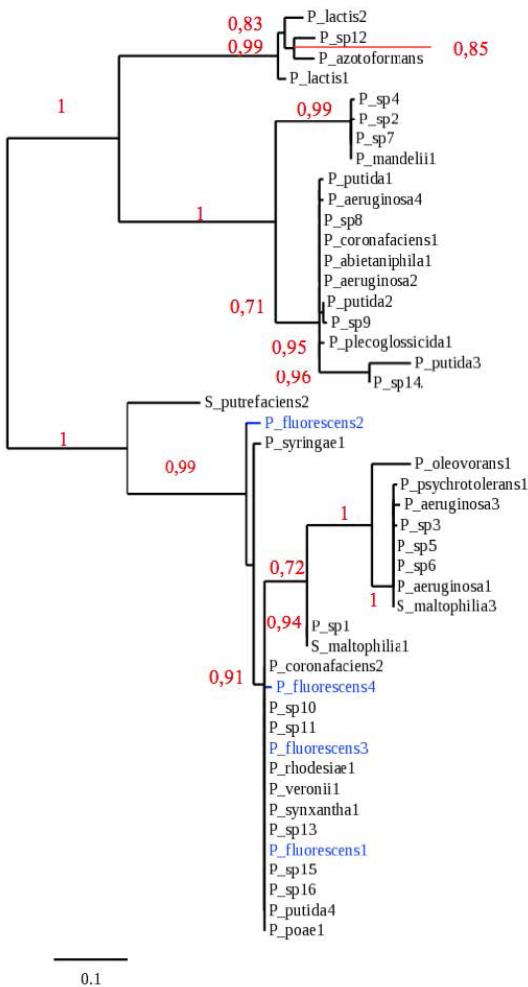


Figura 1. Árbol filogenético producto del alineamiento en *Phylogeny.fr* [30] de las secuencias reportadas de *Pseudomonas* para MerB (se resaltan en color azul los aislados de *P. fluorescens*, en rojo se observan los valores de Bootstrap, con 500 repeticiones, verificando la estabilidad de cada agrupamiento).

A partir del árbol filogenético se observan las diferentes secuencias de MerB de *Pseudomonas fluorescens*, y se identifica la diversidad entre ellas, especialmente la secuencia “*P. fluorescens* 2”, que tiene mayor similitud con *P. syringae*, y es diferente a los demás representantes de su especie en, al menos, el 5%. Teniendo en cuenta este nivel de diferencia con las otras secuencias correspondientes en la especie, se escogió la secuencia representativa para MerB de *P. fluorescens* para el análisis del modelamiento por homología.

Caracterización fisicoquímica de la enzima MerB de *P. fluorescens*

Partiendo de la secuencia proteica seleccionada de A0A5E7MFD1 para MerB identificada en *P. fluorescens* (212aa), se verificó por medio de la plataforma Expasy [31] que su peso molecular es de 23139,4 Da y su punto isoeléctrico es de 5,86. Mediante la plataforma Uniprot [20] se estableció su código EC 4.99.1.2, correspondiente a una liasa de alquilmercurio, para la cual su reacción enzimática se presenta en la Figura 2.

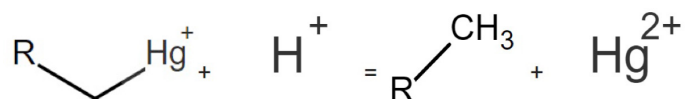


Figura 2. Reacción enzimática de MerB identificada para *P. fluorescens*, dando lugar a una reacción catabólica teniendo como sustratos un alquilmercurio y un protón de hidrógeno, que produce un alcano y un ion mercurio. Tomada de Uniprot [20].

Modelamiento de la estructura tridimensional de la proteína MerB de *P. fluorescens*

Con los resultados suministrados por Geno3D, se estableció que la mejor secuencia para el modelamiento por homología es la proteína MerB en complejo con mercurio de *Escherichia coli* 3FN8 (Figura 3). Esta secuencia presentó mayor similitud a la secuencia MerB de *P. fluorescens* 2 con un valor E de 2×10^{-50} y una desviación media de 0,48 Å.

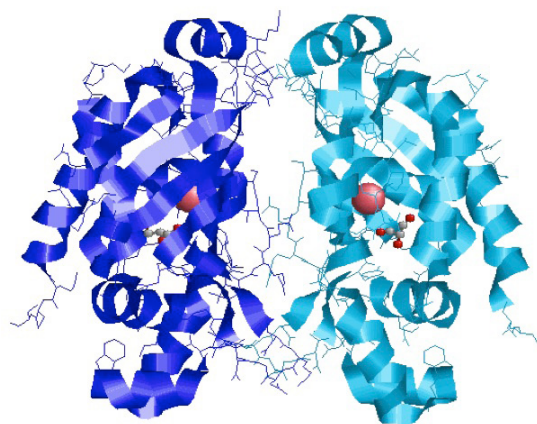


Figura 3. Modelo 3FN8 computacional generado a partir del estudio por homología para MerB en *P. fluorescens* a través de RasMol [24], observándose una proteína dimérica, cada cadena con un centro activo de mercurio (esferas rosa) y glicerol (estructura atómica), unidos covalentemente a residuos de aminoácidos.

Cada centro activo se logra (observar en la Figura 4) formado por un complejo de mercurio, el cual es clasificado como un complejo metálico, donde se sitúa un ion de mercurio (Hg^{+2}) unido covalentemente mediante

enlace metálico a dos cisteínas (Cys 96 y Cys 159) y a un ácido aspártico (Asp 99) y por medio de un puente de hidrógeno a un glicerol (Gol 222).

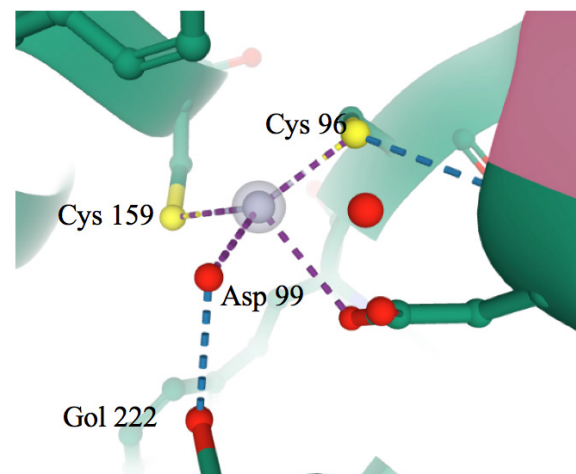


Figura 4. Ilustración computacional del complejo metálico de mercurio para MerB de *E. coli* 3FN8. Tomada de RCSB PDB Protein Data Bank [32].

Tomando a 3FN8 como molde para el diseño de MerB de *P. fluorescens*, se generaron cinco modelos (Tabla 2), donde los valores de correlación entre los cinco modelos evaluados se determinaron mediante desviación de la raíz cuadrada media (DRCM) con valores en ángstroms (Tabla 3).

Tabla 2. Comparación de la calidad de los modelos producidos por el servidor Geno3D. Todos los modelos utilizaron el mismo molde 3FN8. Cada columna representa: los valores de energía en Kcal/mol, el porcentaje de residuos que se encuentran en la región nuclear y el porcentaje de residuos no permitidos en el diagrama de Ramachandran. Los valores de energía indican la fiabilidad y la precisión de la estructura.

Nombre del modelo	Molde	Energía del modelo Kcal/mol	Porcentaje de residuos en la región núcleo del diagrama de Ramachandran	Porcentaje de residuos no permitidos en el diagrama de Ramachandran
Modelo 1	3FN8	-7.860,73	70,3	3,8
Modelo 2	3FN8	4.400,65	76,8	2,2
Modelo 3	3FN8	3.824,18	73,0	1,1
Modelo 4	3FN8	-7.859,05	72,4	1,6
Modelo 5	3FN8	-7.970,61	73,5	1,1

A partir de los valores obtenidos, se escogió el mejor modelo, el cual corresponde al valor negativo más bajo: el modelo 4; además, tiene porcentajes permitidos en el gráfico de Ramachandran.

Tabla 3. Ajuste estructural entre los modelos (DRCM en Å). Desviación media 0,882754 Å.

	Modelo 1	Modelo 2	Modelo 3	Modelo 4	Modelo 5
Modelo 1	0,00	0,77	0,88	0,81	0,88
Modelo 2	0,77	0,00	0,95	0,92	0,98
Modelo 3	0,88	0,95	0,00	0,88	0,87
Modelo 4	0,81	0,92	0,88	0,00	0,89
Modelo 5	0,88	0,98	0,87	0,89	0,00

El modelo se observó mediante la aplicación RasMol, dando como resultado la proteína presentada en la Figura 5.

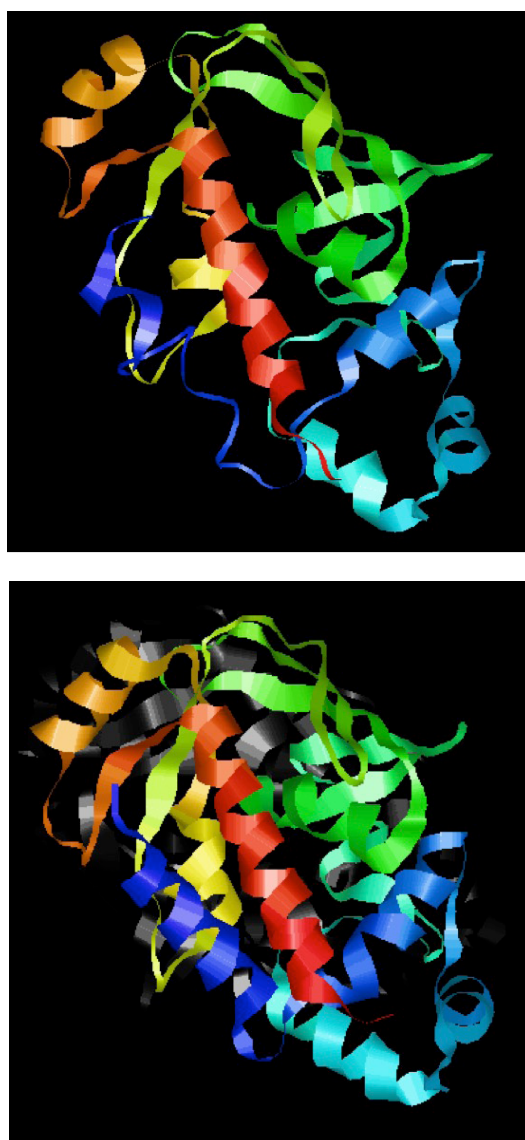


Figura 5. Estructura proteica propuesta, modelo 4, para MerB de *P. fluorescens*. Se observa un monómero, con una estructura estable, que presenta hojas beta, hélices y pequeños giros. Obtenido de RasMol [24]. Al lado derecho se muestra el monómero correspondiente a la estructura usada como molde para el diseño propuesto.

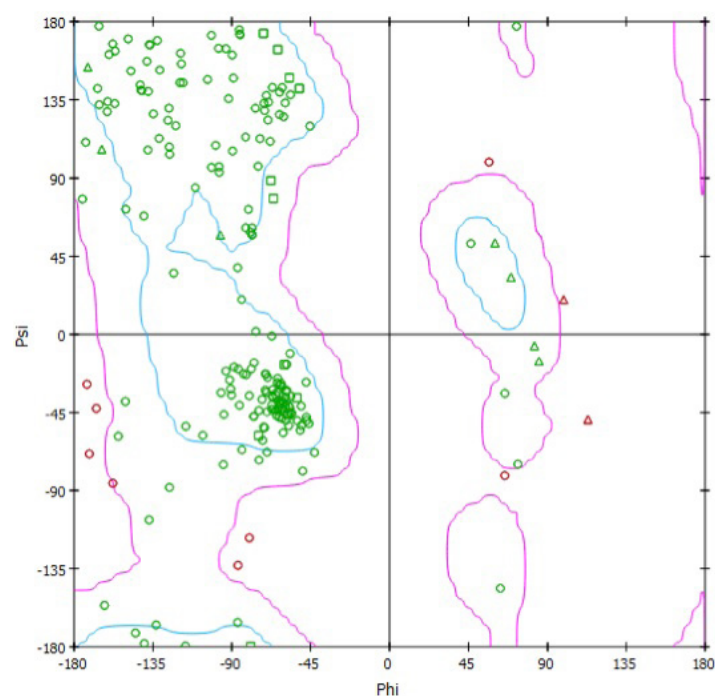


Figura 7. Diagrama de Ramachandran desarrollado por el programa Biovia [26] del modelo 4, en el que se muestra la presencia de cada uno de los aminoácidos de la secuencia en las regiones permitidas y no permitidas para su respectiva estructura secundaria.

Evaluación y validación de la estructura secundaria para MerB de *Pseudomonas fluorescens*

Para el análisis de la estructura secundaria, PSIPRED identifica nueve tramos de aminoácidos con tendencia a formar láminas beta y siete tramos con tendencia a hélices alfa (Figura 6).

Con la herramienta Biovia se verificó, por medio del gráfico de Ramachandran, la estructura propuesta en la Figura 6, identificando los aminoácidos ubicados en la región de valores permitidos y no permitidos en su estructura secundaria y la distribución de los giros Psi/Phi para el modelo 4, homóloga a *P. fluorescens* 2 (Figura 7). El diagrama de Ramachandran [33] dado para el modelo 4 de MerB, para *P. fluorescens* reveló que posee una

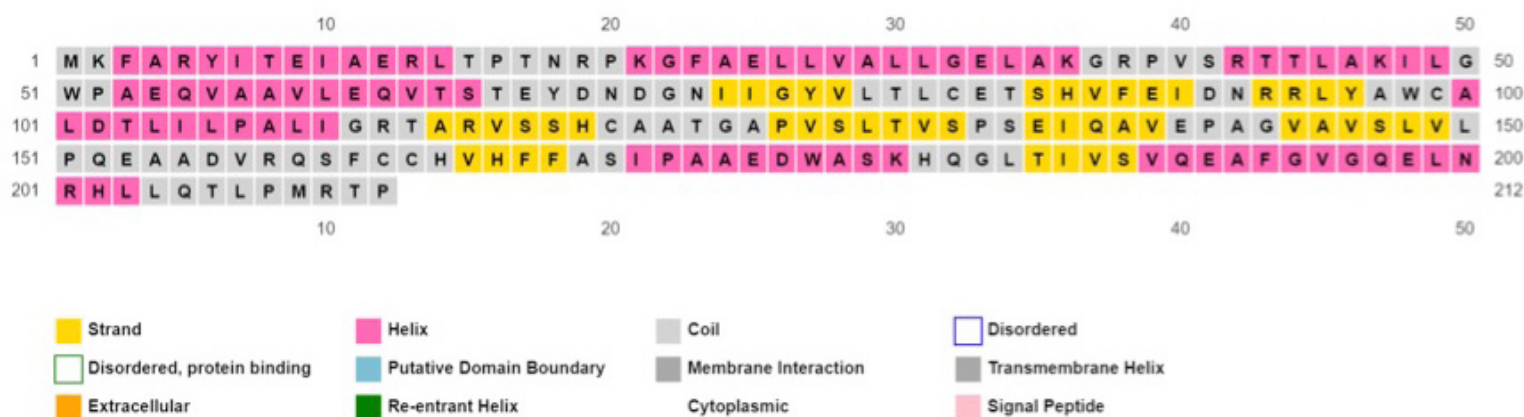


Figura 6. Gráfico de secuencia y relación con la estructura secundaria para la enzima de MerB de *P. fluorescens*, utilizando la aplicación PSIPRED [25]. En amarillo, se identifican los residuos con tendencia a formar hojas beta; en rosa, los residuos con tendencia a formar hélices alfa; y en gris, se muestran los residuos sin tendencia específica a formar una estructura secundaria.

estructura secundaria con una conformación estable, teniendo el 72,4% de residuos en las regiones más favorables, 21,6% como residuos permitidos, 4,3% en regiones generosamente permitidas y en las zonas no permitidas se encuentra una minoría de residuos del 1,6% diferentes a glicinas, para dar un total de 100% de residuos ubicados en el gráfico.

Los aminoácidos en el cuadrante superior izquierdo correspondiente a láminas betas paralelas, antiparalelas y giros, logran una mayor cantidad de residuos de hélices alfa con giro hacia la derecha en el cuadrante inferior izquierdo y un porcentaje mínimo de residuos en el cuadrante superior derecho conformados por hélices alfa con giro hacia la izquierda. Además, se identificaron que 185 residuos son diferentes a glicina-prolina, dos son los residuos terminales (exactamente glu y pro), el número de glicinas representado en triángulos es de 11, y el número de prolina fue es de 11 para un total de 209 aminoácidos.

Entre su estructura se encuentran los motivos mostrados en la Figura 8, postulados por NCBI-CDD y Pfam, descritos en las Tablas 4 y 5, con un límite de valor E de 1,0.

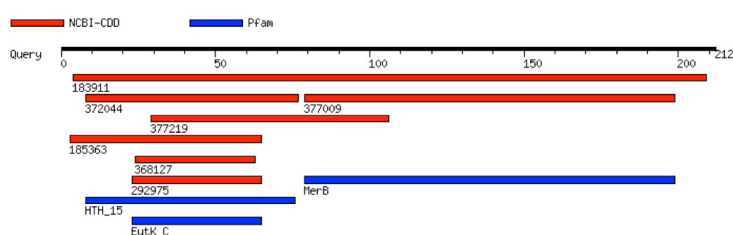


Figura 8. Motivos obtenidos a partir de la plataforma MotifSearch [29] mediante las bases de datos NCBI-CDD y Pfam para la secuencia proteica MerB de *P. fluorescens*.

Tabla 4. Descripción de motivos resultantes del análisis en MotifSearch [29] mediante la base de datos Pfam para la secuencia proteica MerB de *P. fluorescens*.

Pfam	Posición en la secuencia*	Valor E	Descripción
MerB	79..199	$2,3e^{-36}$	PF03243, alquilmercurio liasa
HTH_15	8..76	$8,4e^{-23}$	PF12324, dominio hélice-vuelta-hélice de la alquilmercurio liasa
EutK_C	23..65	0,072	PF16365, proteína de utilización de etanolamina EutK C-terminal

*Primer número: aminoácido donde inicia su posición en la secuencia proteica de MerB.

(..): representativo de la contracción "al".

Segundo número: aminoácido donde termina su posición en la secuencia proteica de MerB.

Tabla 5. Descripción de motivos resultantes del análisis en MotifSearch [29] mediante la base de datos NCBI-CDD para la secuencia proteica MerB de *P. fluorescens*.

NCBI-CDD	Posición en la secuencia*	Valor E	Descripción
183911	4..209	$1e^{-115}$	PRK13239, PRK13239, alquilmercurio liasa MerB
377009	79..199	$1e^{-38}$	pfam03243, MerB, alquilmercurio liasa
372044	8..77	$4e^{-20}$	pfam12324, HTH_15, dominio hélice-vuelta-hélice de la alquilmercurio liasa

NCBI-CDD	Posición en la secuencia*	Valor E	Descripción
377219	29..106	0,009	pfam04079, SMC_ScpB, subunidad del complejo de condensación y segregación ScpB
185363	3..65	0,027	PRK15466, PRK15466, proteína de microcompartimento de utilización de etanolamina EutK
368127	24..63	0,28	pfam04801, Sin_N, región conservada de proteína similar a Sin
292975	23..65	0,59	pfam16365, EutK_C, proteína de utilización de etanolamina EutK C-terminal

*Primer número: aminoácido donde inicia su posición en la secuencia proteica de MerB.

(..): representativo de la contracción "al".

Segundo número: aminoácido donde termina su posición en la secuencia proteica de MerB.

Entre los motivos encontrados, se escogieron aquellos con un valor E más bajo: el motivo MerB con mayor tamaño en la secuencia con ubicación en el aminoácido 79 al 1.999 con un valor E de $2,3 \cdot 10^{-36}$, seguidamente de HTH_15 con ubicación 8 al 76 y un valor E de $8,4 \cdot 10^{-23}$.

Validación de la estructura tridimensional propuesta para la proteína MerB de *Pseudomonas fluorescens*

Con el objetivo de validar el modelo 4 postulado como el homólogo de MerB para *P. fluorescens*, se desarrolló un análisis de calidad general del modelo, utilizando la plataforma Prosa-Web. Como resultado, esta estructura evaluada se calificó con un puntaje Z de $-6,5$, y se encuentra dentro del rango de puntuaciones típicas de las proteínas nativas de este grupo proteico (Figura 9). Se observa, de igual manera, que la estructura propuesta se encuentra dentro de la sección óptima en la figura del lado izquierdo, verificado por el punto negro. En la figura del lado derecho, se representa la calidad local del modelo por medio de la energía basada en conocimiento; para este análisis se identificó la presencia de picos que corresponden a regiones de paso a través de la membrana de la proteína, lográndose así una estructura totalmente sin partes problemáticas o erróneas en el modelo, evidenciándose en los valores negativos correspondientes.

En seguida, se confirmaron los datos obtenidos de Prosa-Web con la herramienta Verify 3D (Figura 10), mediante un análisis donde el límite máximo esperado es de 100,00%, de los residuos tienen una puntuación 3D/1D promedio $\geq 0,2$. Para el modelo propuesto (modelo 4), se identificó que este presenta el 80% de los aminoácidos que han puntuado con valores $\geq 0,2$ en el perfil 3D/1D, con lo cual se valida que la estructura propuesta, representada en el modelo 4, homóloga para MerB de *P. fluorescens*, es clasificada de alta calidad y posee coherencia entre la secuencia y la estructura modelada.

Todos los resultados anteriormente presentados en el documento confirman que el modelo planteado, modelo 4, representa una propuesta bastante sólida de la posible estructura 3D para la proteína MerB de *P. fluorescens* (Figura 11).

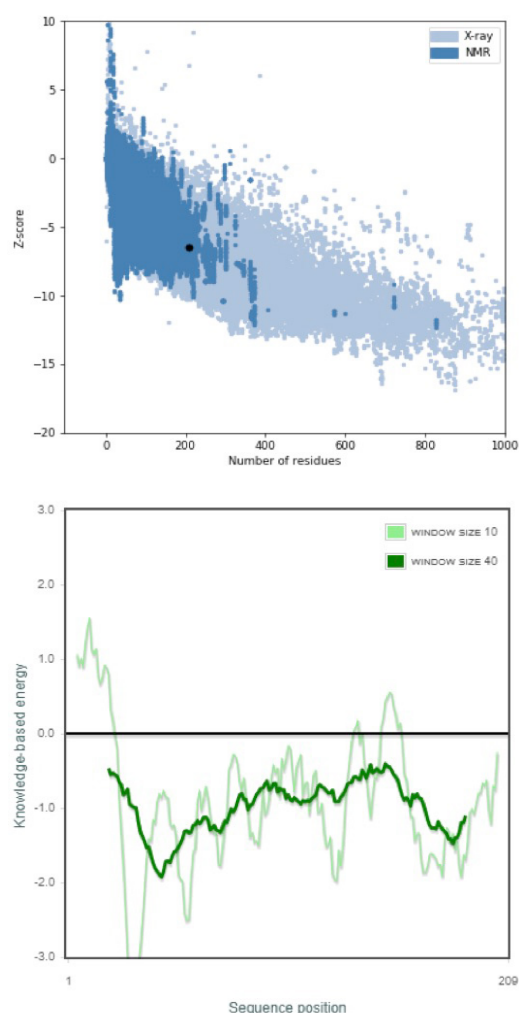


Figura 9. Datos obtenidos de validación de la estructura tridimensional del modelo 4 mediante la aplicación Prosa-Web [27]: a) Calidad total del modelo a través del puntaje Z (Z-score) y b) Calidad local del modelo por medio de la energía basada en conocimiento.

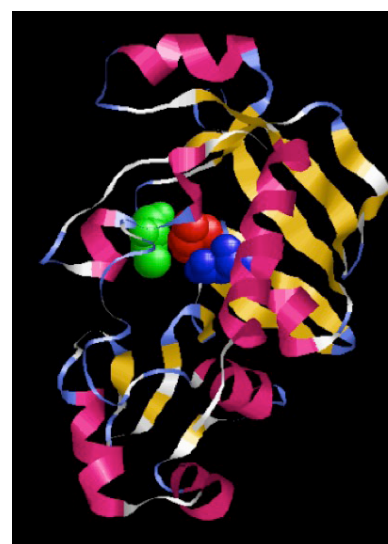


Figura 11. Modelo final propuesto para la proteína MerB de *P. fluorescens*. En color rosa se muestran las hélices, en amarillo las hojas beta, cintas azules giros y se muestra el sitio activo: en rojo Cys 99, en azul Asp 102 y en verde Cys 162.

El sitio activo se determinó mediante un alineamiento a partir del molde 3FN8 y la secuencia proteica MerB de *P. fluorescens* por medio de la aplicación del *European Bioinformatics Institute* [21], T-Coffe [22].

Discusión

En la literatura estudiada, se ha identificado y estructurado la proteína organomercurial liasa (MerB), de la cual no se encuentra una estructura única, puesto que se ha presentado en cada microorganismo con variantes genómicas, encontrándose entre ellos dos arqueas y 11 filos bacterianos [35]. Además, aún no se han reportado estructuras determinadas experimentalmente ni modelamientos de esta proteína, para la bacteria estudiada en el presente artículo, *P. fluorescens*. Por esta razón, se inició el trabajo desde su secuencia genómica, con el fin de predecir, por medio de la estrategia de modelamiento por homología con técnicas bioinformáticas,

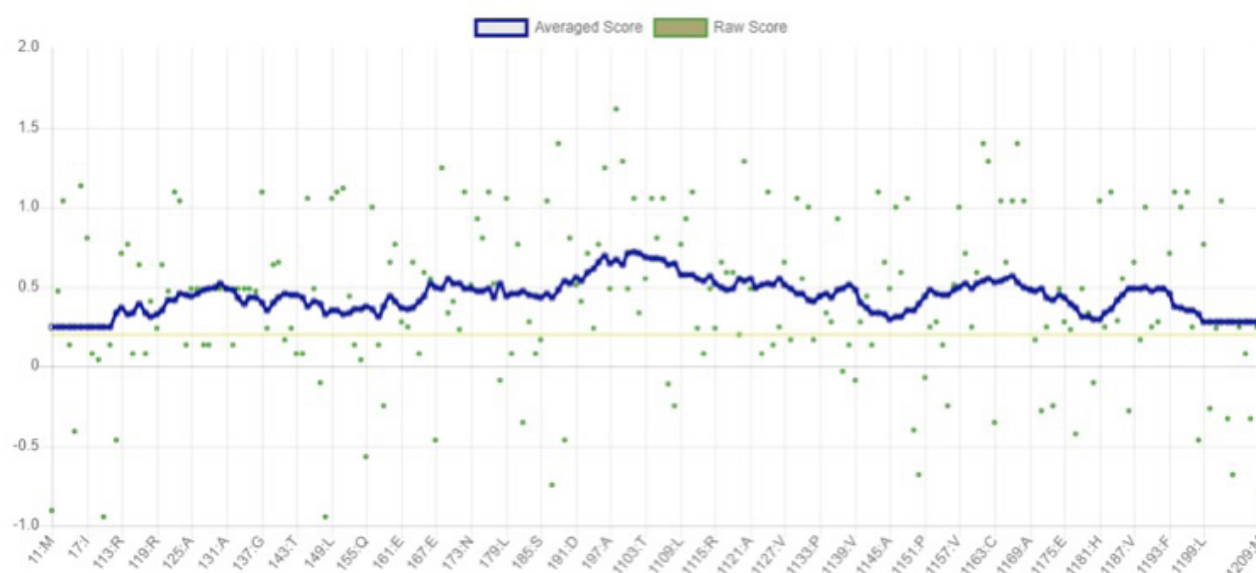


Figura 10. Validación de los datos obtenidos de Prosa-Web mediante la herramienta Verify 3D [34].

D-102 desprotonaría a C-99, pues el carboxilato D-102 está más próximo a C-99 (3,6 Å) en forma libre que C-162 (4,3 Å) [36]. Tal mecanismo de acción también se lleva a cabo gracias a la estructura de este mismo sitio activo de MerB, descrito como “sitio activo enterrado”, un proceso llamado “canalización del sustrato”, y es una alternativa a un mecanismo disociativo, ya que en el primer paso donde MerB desprotoniza, se libera el ion mercurio siendo aún más tóxico que el sustrato, el cual es altamente tóxico para las demás células; pero es esta hendidura la que evita tal afectación, pues desplaza al mercurio iónico a MerA para seguir con su reducción y evitar que proceda al citosol [36].

A partir de comparaciones por homología con diferentes secuencias de MerB, se ha establecido, además, que las proteínas MerB no poseen alta especificidad en el reconocimiento del sustrato, puesto que a partir de las secuencias de MerB de bacterias resistentes a organomercuriales aisladas, se evidenció que el ácido aspártico presenta mayor actividad de escindir enlaces C-Hg en comparación con otro residuo como lo es la serina [36]. Según estudios, las proteínas MerB con un residuo de serina están plegadas incorrectamente y no cortan los enlaces carbono-mercurio en las mismas condiciones que MerB [15].

Estructuralmente, el modelo postulado posee una composición estable y se identifica, por medio de la aplicación PSIPRED, una estructura secundaria de nueve tramos de aminoácidos con tendencia a formar láminas beta y siete tramos con tendencia a hélices alfa, unidos a su vez con pequeños giros, los cuales pueden ser confirmados en RasMol (Figura 5); y mediante el gráfico de Ramachandran, se clasifican en una estructura “tradicional”, que favorece su homología hacia las proteínas nativas de su familia y logra una estructura totalmente sin elementos problemáticos o erróneos en el modelo; se evidencia en los puntajes de calidad en ProsaWeb, por lo que se sugiere que el modelo propuesto es coherente entre su secuencia y su modelo tridimensional.

Conclusiones

El modelamiento por homología se reconoce como estrategia útil cuando hay carencia en información experimental reportada en bases de datos y se necesite realizar un ensayo experimental relacionado con la estructura y el funcionamiento de una proteína. Las metodologías existentes para la estructuración de proteínas requieren de alta precisión, ya sea mediante la difracción de rayos X o por resonancia magnética nuclear (RMN), abriendo un campo de investigación en la química computacional. Los resultados del análisis bioinformático de modelamiento por homología indican que la proteína MerB de *P. fluorescens* es homóloga con la enzima MerB en complejo con mercurio de *Escherichia coli* 3FN8, el cual es el molde para postular un modelo preciso, el modelo 4. Tales resultados relacionan a la proteína MerB de *P. fluorescens* como biorremediadora de mercurio, aportando conocimiento en el mecanismo de resistencia a metales más estudiados en la biorremediación. Tales resultados computacionales dan a conocer una plataforma para implementar más estudios y proporcionar referencias sobre el potencial biotecnológico de esta molécula, para el tratamiento de toda fuente contaminada por mercurio a través de sistemas biológicos.

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The state of the art of marine natural products in Colombia

Abstract

Marine Natural Products (MNPs) isolated from samples collected in Colombia have been an object of study since the early 1980's; however, this information is neither integrated nor compiled. This systematic review describes the articles published in scientific journals up to December 2019. 173 papers met the inclusion criteria of focusing on MNPs obtained from specimens collected from Colombian seas; all original papers written in English, Portuguese or Spanish. The selected papers were mostly authored by researchers from Colombian groups, with low interaction amongst themselves. 99.4% of the papers studied samples collected from the Caribbean Sea; 183 species were studied, mainly sponges and octocorals. In this study, 1,690 compounds (238 new ones) were reviewed, mainly diterpenes and sterol derivatives. Of the selected papers, 76.8% measured various biological activities, including antibiotic (34%) and anticancer (30%). These papers were published in 51 journals (74.6% were international). In conclusion, scientific work on natural marine products of Colombian origin has incremented over time. The most relevant opportunities to address and fill existing gaps comprise: exploring Pacific Ocean organisms and several of the misrepresented taxa; promoting strong interactions amongst the MNPs research groups, and accordingly with other areas of knowledge; and having the productive sector participate in MNPs research.

Keywords: Biodiversity; marine natural products; Colombia.

El estado del arte de los productos naturales marinos en Colombia

Resumen

Los productos naturales marinos (PNM) aislados de muestras recolectadas en Colombia han sido estudiados desde principios de los años 1980, mas esta información no está integrada, ni recopilada. Esta revisión sistemática describe los artículos publicados hasta diciembre de 2019. 173 artículos cumplieron los criterios de inclusión de enfoque en PNM obtenidos de especímenes recolectados en mares colombianos; trabajos originales escritos en inglés, portugués o español. La mayoría de los artículos fueron escritos por investigadores de grupos colombianos, con poca interacción entre ellos. El 99,4% de los artículos estudiaban muestras recolectadas del mar Caribe. Se estudiaron 183 especies, especialmente esponjas y octocorales. Se identificaron 1690 compuestos (238 nuevos), principalmente diterpenos y derivados de esteroides. En el 76,8% de los artículos se midió alguna actividad biológica, principalmente antibiótica (34%) y anticancerígena (30%). Los artículos se publicaron en 51 revistas (74,6% internacionales). En conclusión, la investigación sobre los PNM de origen colombiano ha crecido con el tiempo. Algunas oportunidades para abordar las lagunas encontradas comprenden: explorar los organismos del océano Pacífico y los taxa poco estudiados; promover interacciones entre los grupos de investigación de los PNM y de otras áreas del conocimiento; e involucrar al sector productivo en la investigación de los PNM.

Palabras clave: biodiversidad; productos naturales marinos; Colombia.

O estado da arte dos produtos naturais marinhos na Colômbia

Resumo

Os Produtos Naturais Marinhos (PNMs) isolados de amostras coletadas na Colômbia têm sido objeto de estudo desde a década de 1980; porém, esta informação não está integrada nem compilada. Esta revisão sistemática descreve os artigos publicados em revistas científicas até dezembro de 2019. 173 artigos atenderam aos critérios de inclusão de foco em PNM obtidos de espécimes coletados em mares colombianos; artigos originais escritos em inglês, português ou espanhol. A maioria dos autores dos artigos eram pesquisadores de grupos colombianos, com baixa interação entre eles. 99,4% dos artigos estudavam amostras coletadas no Mar do Caribe. Foram estudadas 183 espécies, especialmente esponjas e octocorais. Nesta revisão, identificaram-se 1690 compostos (238 novos), principalmente diterpenos e derivados de esterol. 76,8% dos artigos mediram algumas atividades biológicas, incluindo antibiótica (34%) e anticancerígena (30%). Os artigos analisados foram publicados em 51 periódicos (74,6% internacionais). Em conclusão, o trabalho científico sobre PNM de origem colombiana cresceu ao longo do tempo. As oportunidades mais relevantes para preencher as lacunas existentes incluem: explorar organismos do Oceano Pacífico e os taxa pouco estudados; promover interação entre os grupos de pesquisa de PNM e com grupos de outras áreas do conhecimento; e envolver o setor produtivo na pesquisa de PNM.

Palavras-chave: Biodiversidade; produtos naturais marinhos; Colômbia.

Introduction

Oceans occupy vast areas on the planet Earth, providing important ecosystem services and supporting a huge biodiversity [1]. Among the 37 phyla described by science, 15 are found only in the marine environment, while only one of them is found exclusively in terrestrial environments [2].

On one hand, many marine invertebrates are sessile and soft-bodied; therefore, they must base their communication and defense with other organisms on chemical compounds [3]. On the other hand, some Marine Natural Products (MNPs) have presented potent biological activity and promising efficacy in the treatment of various human diseases [4]. Regarding their structure, it has been possible to establish that MNPs are more diverse than their terrestrial equivalents; for instance, 71% of the MNPs reported in the *Dictionary of Natural Products* are exclusive to marine organisms [5]. At present, thirteen marine derived compounds have been approved as commercial drugs, while dozens of drug candidates are presently undergoing clinical evaluation [6].

The regions/countries with the greatest amount of research on MNPs include China, USA, Japan and Europe [7], with nearly 35 thousand compounds identified so far. On the other hand, when searching for articles on “Marine Natural Products” in the Scopus database and filtering the results by affiliation territory, 624 of the 10,321 results were found to be associated with Latin American countries (search carried out on May 5, 2020).

Regarding Colombia, several MNPs have been isolated with interesting biological activities; however, at the present time, this information has not been appropriately systematised or compiled. This systematic review aimed to carry out a *scoping study* to describe the scientific work on MNPs isolated from samples collected from Colombian seas with a view to establishing the state of the art thereof and identify possible gaps in this research area.

Materials y methods

Search and selection

To identify papers on MNPs of Colombian origin, a systematic search of the scientific literature published in indexed journals was carried out. The specialised databases Pubmed, Scopus, Scifinder, Scielo, MarinLit, Google Scholar and Web of Science were consulted, using the search equations shown on Table 1. The information retrieved was organised and complemented by a manual search, in official applications of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation of Colombia (Minciencias), in the Latin American and Caribbean Curriculum Vitae (CvLAC) [8] and in the

records of each Colombian research group (GrupLAC) [9] whose authors and/or groups had the largest number of articles retrieved by systematic search. Additionally, a search by author was performed in the MarinLit and Scifinder databases regarding the authors most frequently cited as the corresponding authors.

The inclusion criteria were original scientific papers on the chemistry of organisms collected from Colombian marine territories, published up until December 2019 in English, Spanish or Portuguese. Bibliographic reviews, monographs, book sections, articles related to other areas of knowledge were not included, neither were publications regarding non-marine organisms nor concerning organisms collected from territories other than the Colombian seas.

The selection of articles comprised two phases. The titles and abstracts were reviewed first; and the papers whose inclusion was open to doubt were retained for the second phase, which consisted of considering the full text. Two reviewers independently (CAB and CAP) were in charge of selecting the papers; in case of disagreement, they discussed and, if yet no consensus was reached, a third reviewer (LC) made the inclusion/exclusion decision.

Data extraction

Year of publication and authors' details were obtained from the registry generated by Zotero® for each paper. Data on the authors' affiliation and gender were extracted from the papers' information section. To analyse this information, first a standardisation of citation variants and authors' names and affiliations was established. With respect to affiliations, the most complete information (group, department or institute, and institution) was also standardised. The information regarding financing sources was obtained from the articles' acknowledgements sections. To determine the level of dedication to MNPs research of each Colombian research group, their number of published papers was counted using the records of Colciencias' GrupLAC.

Data related to the species, phyla, sample collection site and number of compounds were obtained by reading the papers. Reached isolation level, types of bioassays, and types of chemical compounds were classified by two reviewers independently (CAB and CAP), and disagreements were resolved by a third reviewer (LC).

To determine the visibility of the papers included in this analysis, three verifications were carried out. First, a search by title was performed in each database to check indexing. Second, the number of citations of the articles in each database was verified, except for MarinLit, because it is a specialised MNPs database. As for Google Scholar®, the search described whether the publication was indexed as an article or only as a citation.

Table 1. Databases and keywords used to complete the search for articles.

Database	Key words
Pubmed	“Marine natural products” [All Fields] AND (“Colombia” [MeSH Terms] OR “Colombia” [All Fields]) OR Colombian [All Fields])
Scopus	ALL (“Marine natural products” AND (Colombia OR Colombian) AND DOCTYPE (ar OR re)
Scifinder	“Marine natural products” and “Colombia”.
Scielo	“Marine natural products” AND (Colombia OR Colombian)
MarinLit	Colombia
Google Scholar	“Marine natural products” AND (Colombia OR Colombian)
Web of Science	“Marine natural products” AND (Colombia OR Colombian)

Table 2. Indicators analysed for the scoping study.

Type of indicators	Variable	Calculated indicator
Productivity indicators	Year of publication	Number of papers by five-year period, according to participation of Colombian research groups
	Affiliation	- Number of institutions by country of origin (Colombia or other) - Number of institutions by type (universities, research institutes or companies) and by nature (public or private) - Number of papers by institution or research group - Average dedication of Colombian research groups to work on MNPs according to papers reported by GrupLAC, Minciencias - Interaction among the 21 research groups with the highest number of papers
	Author	- Number of papers by author - Number of papers by corresponding author - Year the author begins to appear as a corresponding author - Number of papers with participation of female authors
	Funding source	- Number of papers by funding source - Number of funding institutions by type (government body, universities, research centers, foundations) - Number of funding institutions by nature (private or public) - Number of funding institutions by country of origin
Content indicators	Collected species	Number of papers by species studied
	Phylum of collected samples	Number of papers by phylum studied
	Sample collection site	Number of papers by geographical area of collection
	Described compounds	Total number of compounds according to the following categories: new compounds, already reported compounds; and compounds obtained by semi-synthetic approaches
	Structural classification	- Number of papers by compound category according to chemical structure - Number of papers by five-year period according to compound category and to participation of Colombian research groups
Methodology indicators	Level of separation of described compounds	Number of papers by level of separation: raw extracts, putative identification in mixture (LC-MS and GC-MS); and pure compounds
	Bioassays	Number of papers by type of bioassays carried out according to the classification proposed by Blunt et al. (2006)
Journal indicators	Country of origin of the journal	Number of papers published in Colombian or foreign journals
	Number of published papers	- Top 10 journals with the highest number of papers - Number of papers published with participation of Colombian groups in these top 10 journals
	Classification in ranking journals	- Number of journals ranked in Scimago (quartile) - Number of journals ranked in JCR (IF) - Number of journals ranked in Google Scholar (h-5, median h-5)
	Journal quartile in Scimago (SJR) since 1999. The best classification and year of publication were considered	- Number of papers by quartile in each five-year period, according to participation of Colombian research groups - Number of papers by quartile for the 21 research groups/institutions with the highest number of papers
	Impact factor according to Journal Citation Reports since 1997. The papers' publication year were considered	- Average IF of the journals, according to participation of Colombian research groups - IF range of the journals according to participation of Colombian research groups - Impact Factor of the top 10 journals with the highest number of papers - Top 10 journals with the highest impact factor - Number of papers published with the participation of Colombian research groups in these top 10 journals
	h-5 value for the journal according to Google Scholar	- Top 10 of the journals with the highest h-5 - Number of papers published with participation of Colombian research groups in these top 10 journals
	Median-h-5 for the journal according to Google Scholar	- Top 10 of the journals with the highest median h-5 - Number of papers published with participation of Colombian research groups in these top 10 journals
Article visibility indicators	Indexation in the databases	- Number of identified papers indexed in Google Scholar - Number of identified papers indexed in Scopus - Number of identified papers indexed in Scifinder - Number of identified papers indexed in Marinit - Number of identified papers indexed in Web of Science - Number of identified papers indexed in Pubmed - Number of identified papers indexed in Scielo

Type of indicators	Variable	Calculated indicator
Article visibility indicators	Trend of indexation in databases over the time	- Number of identified papers indexed in Google Scholar in each five-year period according to participation of Colombian research groups - Number of identified papers indexed in Scopus in each five-year period according to participation of Colombian research groups - Number of identified papers indexed in Scifinder in each five-year period, according to participation of Colombian research groups - Number of identified papers indexed in Marinlit in each five-year period according to participation of Colombian research groups
	Citation in the research series review: "Marine Natural Products" in the journal Natural Product Reports	Number of papers cited in the review titled "Marine Natural Products", by five-year period, according to participation of Colombian research groups
	Article citations	- Top 10 papers with the highest number of citations in Scopus - Top 10 papers with the highest number of citations in PubMed - Top 10 papers with the highest number of citations in Scifinder - Top 10 papers with the highest number of citations in Google Scholar - Top 10 papers with the highest number of citations in Web of Science
	Research group citations	- Top 5 research groups with the highest number of citations in Scopus - Top 5 research groups with the highest number of citations in PubMed - Top 5 research groups with the highest number of citations in Scifinder - Top 5 research groups with the highest number of citations in Google Scholar - Top 5 research groups with the highest number of citations in Web of Science

Data analysis

The selected articles were analysed using the indicators described on Table 2. As the search identified a considerable number of articles published by researchers from the University of Puerto Rico without the cooperation of Colombian institutions, this factor was taken into account in the analysis of several indicators.

Results and discussion

The systematic search retrieved 1,553 articles, of which 173 met the selection criteria (Figure 1). Then, the articles were carefully read, and data concerning research productivity, content, and methodology indicators (Table 2) were extracted. The data regarding journal and paper citation indicators were consulted in the databases mentioned in the method section. The variables and indicators calculated for each type of indicator are analysed below.

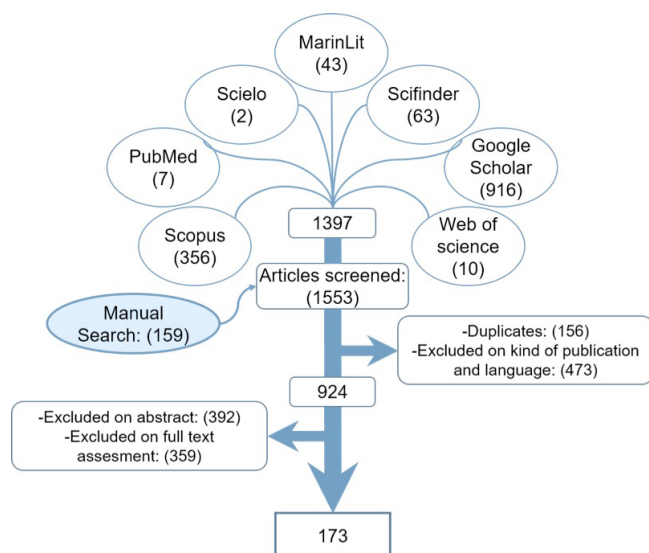


Figure 1. Flowchart of the articles included in the review.

Productivity indicators

The number of papers on MNPs developed in Colombian has incremented over time, going from 41 papers in two decades (1981-2000) to 63 in the 2011-2019 period. This trend is similar to that of the global article publishing on MNPs reported by Scopus (Figure 2). The increased number of papers published subsequent to the 1990's can be explained by several aspects, particularly the creation in 1986 of the PhD Chemistry Programme at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia (UNAL) [10]; the implementation since 1987 of policies to promote scientific research in Colombia, i.e. the National Policy on Science and Technology under Law 29 of 1990 [11]; the credit in 1990 from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB II) to financially support scientific work [12], and the fact that for the very first time the Colombian Administrative Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (Colciencias, today Minciencias) offered research grants for projects on marine sciences [13].

The last analysed period (2016-2019) showed a decreased number of papers, which can be explained not only by the fact that it was a shorter period (4 years while the other periods comprised five years), but also due to changes in the funding policies for science in Colombia. On one hand, since 2012, there has been a decrease in basic science financing by Colciencias because the General System of Royalties became the main source of financing, and it is focused on applied research [10]. On the other hand, reassessing the calls announced by Colciencias, a change in the project financing policy proved evident, which led to the elimination of specific calls for the Marine Sciences area. The last call for the Marine Sciences area was "Convocatoria para Proyectos de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación en Ciencias del Mar para la Región Caribe - 2016" [14]. In view of that, MNPs researchers had to seek funding opportunities in other areas, for example by means of call 852 "Conectando Conocimiento - 2019", whose topic number 4 included "Bioprospecting of active ingredients and metabolites of interest to the health, food, agriculture, and industry, making efficient and sustainable use of biodiversity (continental and/or marine)" [15]. All those changes in funding policies since 2016 have decreased the visibility of MNPs, and the resources assigned have been affected by competition with projects respecting other knowledge areas.

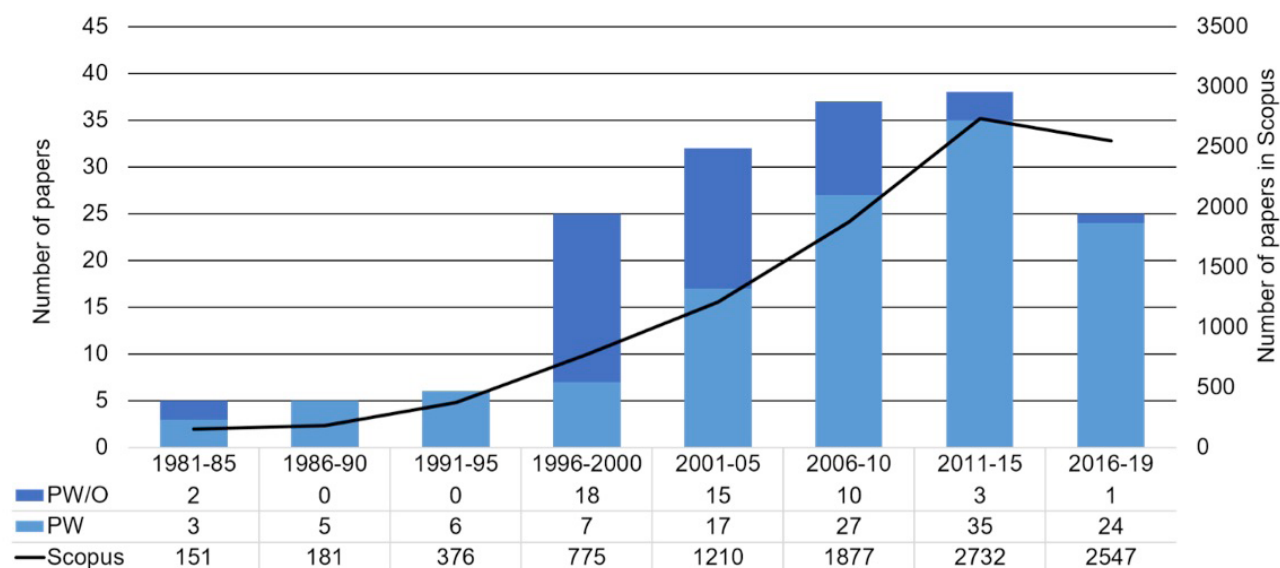


Figure 2. Trend of article publishing on MNPs isolated from organisms collected from Colombian seas. Number of papers published according to participation of Colombian institutions vs. those reported by Scopus worldwide in the 1981-2019 period; (PW/O) paper without participation of Colombian groups; (PW) paper with participation of Colombian groups; (Scopus) Scopus search for “Marine Natural Products”. The number of articles published in five-year periods is represented by the graph bars (the far-right bar corresponds to the period from 2016 to 2019). The global article publishing data were obtained from Scopus (right scale) with the key words “Marine Natural Products”, organising it by year of publication. The papers that included Colombian samples are shown on the left scale.

In the 173 articles that met the selection criteria, 97 different affiliations were identified, including research groups, faculty departments, research institutes, etc., linked to 65 institutions: 38 foreign and 27 Colombian. The Colombian institutions comprised 20 universities (14 public and 6 private); two research institutes (one private and one public) and five companies (three private, one public, and one mixed). These data show that the development of research on MNPs in Colombia is concentrated in the universities, and with low participation of productive industries. This implies that many results obtained in this area are produced and “stored” only for academic purposes and do not deliver social benefits.

The 27 Colombian institutions participated in 125 articles (72.3%), thus showing that most of said academic publications originated in Colombia. However, the trend over time shows that in 1996 (Figure 2) there was a greater number of publications by researchers linked to foreign institutions, which then decreased to almost disappear in the last two periods analysed (2011-2019). This trend can be explained by changes in Latin American and Colombian government policies regarding biopiracy, biodiversity and genetic protection (Law 99 of 1993, Congress of Colombia, 1993; Decision 391 of 1996, Comunidad Andina de Naciones; [16]. It is worth mentioning that as of 2006 there has been a change in attitude on the part of the Colombian Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MinAmbiente). In strict compliance with current regulations, it has included a permission request for both collection and research of natural products (derived products) upon consultation with the communities living in the collection area.

The research group “Estudio y aprovechamiento de productos naturales marinos y frutas de Colombia” from the Universidad Nacional de Colombia (UNAL) is the one with the highest number of published papers ($n=67$; 38.7%), followed by the research group from the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) ($n=46$; 26.6%), with publications not linked to Colombian institutions. The successive groups, in number of publications, are: “Productos Naturales Marinos” of the Universidad de Antioquia (UdeA) ($n=30$; 17.3%), “Instituto de Estudios en Ciencias del Mar -Cecimar-” of UNAL ($n=24$; 13.9%); “Bioprospección y Biotecnología” from the Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences of the Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano (UTadeo) ($n=13$; 7.5%); and “Biotecnología Animal” of UNAL ($n=13$; 7.5%). It is surprising that of all the groups or institutions

that participated in those publications, only Cecimar and Invemar are located in a coastal city (Santa Marta), which indicates the need to invest in human and research resources in this geographical area of Colombia with a view to decreasing centralism and developing local research capacities.

Research groups in Colombia are not usually dedicated to a single topic; instead, they conduct research in different areas, and this is the reason why it was important to identify their fields of activity regarding MNPs studies. To calculate that, the number of their publications on MNPs was divided by their total publications, and expressed as a percentage. Dedication percentages varied from 57.14% to 0.64%. The research groups most dedicated to MNPs research are: “Comunicación y comunidades Bacterianas” of UNAL (57.14%), “Estudio y Aprovechamiento de Productos Naturales Marinos y Frutas de Colombia” of UNAL (47.86%), “Bioprospección y Biotecnología” of UTadeo (46.43%) and “Productos Naturales Marinos” of UdeA (46.15%) (Table 3).

The interaction among the 21 research groups with the largest number of articles published on MNPs is presented in Figure 3 using the Roman numerals from Table 3. Colombian groups are represented by (○), while foreign groups are represented by (□); the size of the symbol is proportional to the number of papers published on MNPs, the lines represent collaborative work, and their width is also proportional to the number of papers published in collaboration.

Figure 3 shows two main clusters. The first one comprises mainly the Colombian groups and their collaboration network, while the second cluster includes mainly foreign groups. Colombian groups (○) showed interaction amongst themselves; only the group from the Universidad de Cartagena – UCartagena (XVIII) has not yet begun to establish research links with other institutions. Similarly, Unicórdoba (VII) produces most of its work without the cooperation of other research groups. With respect to interaction amongst Colombian groups, Figure 3 shows that the most productive groups (I and III) have very little interaction with one another. Likewise, the seven research groups from UNAL have worked together, except for the Biotecnología Animal group (VI) from the Medellín campus, which manifested a strong relationship with group III from UdeA, also located in Medellín. These data evidence the establishment of interdisciplinary networks (chemistry, pharmacy and biology) at the regional level rather than solely at the institutional level.

Table 3. List of the 21 research groups with the largest number of publications and their code number.

Code	Research group name and affiliation	No. of papers	Contribution (in %) of total published papers
I	“Estudio y Aprovechamiento de Productos Naturales Marinos y Frutas de Colombia”, (Minciencias Code*: COL0004569) Department of Chemistry, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá Campus, Colombia	67	38.7
II	Department of Chemistry, University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras Campus, Puerto Rico	46	26.6
III	“Productos Naturales Marinos”, (Minciencias Code: COL0015043), Faculty of Pharmaceutical and Food Sciences, Universidad de Antioquia, Medellín Campus, Colombia	30	17.3
IV	Instituto de Estudios en Ciencias del Mar (Cecimar), Department of Biology, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Caribbean Campus, Colombia	24	13.9
V	“Bioprospección y Biotecnología”, (Minciencias Code: COL0070232) Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences, Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano, Bogotá Campus, Colombia	13	7.5
VI	“Biotecnología Animal”, (Minciencias Code: COL0001093) Science Faculty, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Medellín Campus, Colombia	13	7.5
VII	“Química de los Productos Naturales”, (Minciencias Code: COL0015319), Department of Chemistry, Universidad de Córdoba, Montería Campus, Colombia	11	6.4
VIII	Department of Chemistry, Tokyo Institute of Technology, Japan	10	5.8
IX	“Invemar - Bioprospección Marina” (Minciencias Code: COL0033069), Institute of Marine and Coastal Research “José Benito Vives De Andréis” (Invemar), Santa Marta, Colombia	10	5.8
X	Department of Pharmacy, Faculty of Sciences, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá Campus, Colombia	9	5.2
XI	“Comunicación y Comunidades Bacterianas”, Department of Biology, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá Campus, Colombia	8	4.6
XII	Center of Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience, Central University of the Caribbean, Bayamón, Puerto Rico	6	3.5
XIII	Nice Institute of Chemistry, University of Nice Sophia Antipolis, France	6	3.5
XIV	“Grupo de Investigación en Bioprospección (GIBP)”, (Minciencias Code: COL0143114), Faculty of Engineering, Universidad de La Sabana, Puente del Común Campus, Colombia	5	2.9
XV	Department of Fundamental Chemistry, Faculty of Sciences, Universidad de Coruña, Spain	5	2.9
XVI	Institute for Advanced Scientific Research and High Technology Services, Center for Biomedical Studies, Clayton, Panama	5	2.9
XVII	Department of Systematic Biology and Laboratories of Analytical Biology, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, USA	4	2.3
XVIII	“Grupo de Productos Naturales de la Universidad de Cartagena”, (Minciencias Code: COL0010913) Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, Universidad de Cartagena, Cartagena, Colombia	4	2.3
XIX	Department of Biology, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá Campus, Colombia	3	1.7
XX	Department of Chemistry, University of Missouri, Columbia, USA	3	1.7
XXI	Chicago College of Osteopathic Medicine, Department of Pharmacology, Midwestern University, Downers Grove Campus, Illinois, USA	3	1.7

* Minciencias Code is the Colombian Group Registration Code (CCRG) assigned to each research group registered with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation.

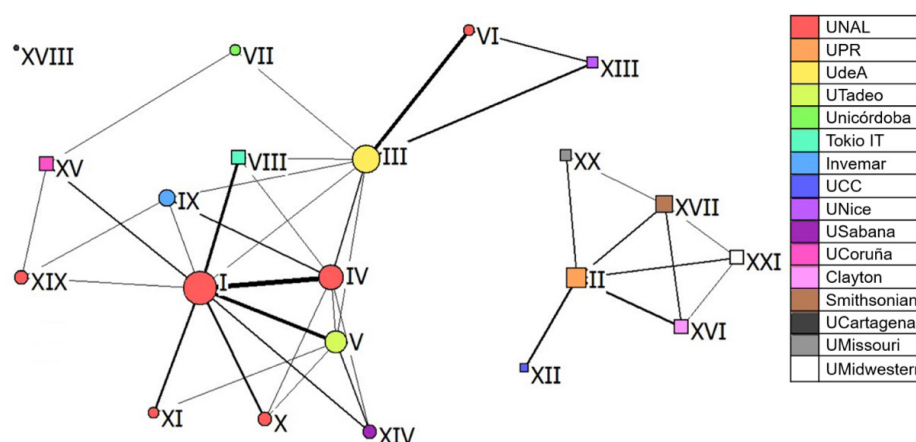


Figure 3. Network of interaction among the 21 research groups with the highest number of publications; origin and classification according to institution affiliation; (○) Colombian Groups; (□) foreign groups. The groups with the largest size are those that have the highest number of papers. The lines indicate the links between them, and the thickness of the line represents the strength of their interaction. The different colors indicate the groups' affiliations with institutions, namely: (UNAL) Universidad Nacional de Colombia; (UPR) University of Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico; (UdeA) Universidad de Antioquia, Colombia; (Unicórdoba) Universidad de Córdoba, Colombia; (Tokio IT) Tokyo Institute of Technology, Japan; (Invemar) Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas y Costeras, Colombia; (UCC) Universidad Central del Caribe, Puerto Rico; (UNice) University of Nice, France; (USabana) Universidad de La Sabana, Colombia; (UCoruña) Universidade da Coruña, Spain; (Clayton) Centro de Estudios Biomédicos, Panama; (Smithsonian) Smithsonian Institute, USA; (UCartagena) Universidad de Cartagena, Colombia; (UMissouri) University of Missouri, USA; (UMidwestern) Midwestern University, USA.

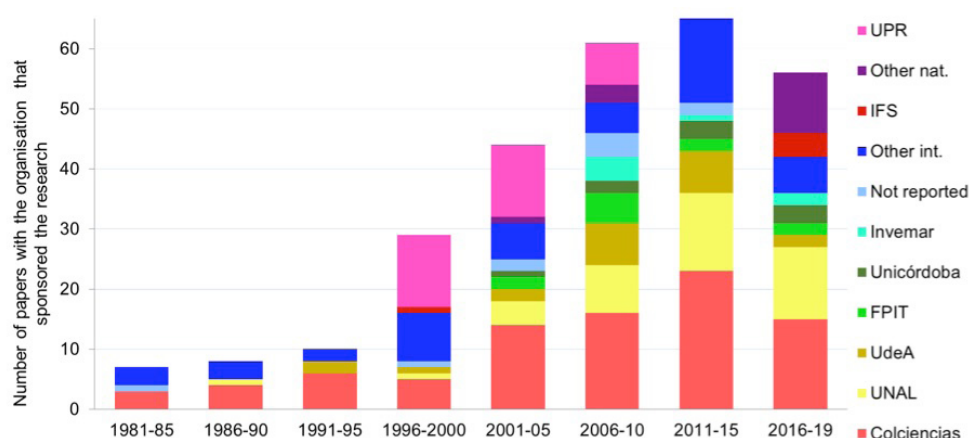


Figure 4. Sources of financing reported in articles on MNPs published by Colombian groups; (UPR) University of Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico; (Other nat.) Other national institutions; (IFS) International Foundation for Sciences, Sweden; (Other Int.) Other international institutions; (Invemar) Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas y Costeras, Colombia; (Unicórdoba) Universidad de Córdoba, Colombia; (FPIT) Fundación para la Promoción de la Investigación y la Tecnología del Banco de la República, Colombia; (UdeA) Universidad de Antioquia, Colombia; (UNAL) Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

As for the eight foreign institutions (□), only three of them showed any collaboration with Colombian groups. The group from the Tokyo Institute of Technology (Tokio IT) (VIII) maintains a relationship with groups I, III and IV, while the group from the Universidad de Coruña – UCoruña (XV) works with groups I, XIX and VII; the French group XIII (Université Nice – UNice) works only with groups III and VI.

A total of 290 authors were identified, thus evincing a large number of researchers working with MNPs, with the following authors having the highest number of papers: Carmenza Duque (n=49; 28.3%) and Leonardo Castellanos (n=33; 19.1%) from UNAL; Abimael Rodríguez (n=46; 26.6%) from UPR, and Alejandro Martínez (n=34; 19.7%) from UdeA. Amongst them, there were 44 researchers in the role of corresponding authors, the most prolific ones being Abimael Rodríguez (n=44; 25.4%) and Carmenza Duque (n=30; 17.3%). These two authors are pioneers and leaders of the two most prolific research groups.

Professor Carmenza Duque was the graduate thesis advisor of other Colombian researchers, namely Leonardo Castellanos (n=10; 5.8%) and Freddy Ramos (n=9; 5.2%), who appear as corresponding authors since 2005 and 2011, respectively; both are the current leaders of Group I (UNAL). Alejandro Martínez (n=8; 4.6%) was also advised by Dr. Duque, and appears

as corresponding author since 1991, from the UdeA group (III), who then advised Diana Márquez (n=6; 3.5%), who appears as corresponding author since 2005. Other researchers counseled by Carmenza Duque are Gilmar Santafé (n=8; 4.6%), who appears as corresponding author since 2005 and leads the Unicórdoba group (VII); and Edison Tello (n=4; 2.3%) who leads the USabana group (XIV). These results show that, in Colombia, researcher Carmenza Duque has played a very important role in the development of research regarding MNPs and has contributed to the extension of this topic to other regions of the country.

Finally, women's participation in MNPs research was considered regarding the 124 articles published with the participation of Colombian groups (see Fig. 2), which evinced that 51% of the total authors (n = 235) are women. However, when filtering among the top 20 authors with the most publications, 67% of them are men and only 33% are women. On the other hand, 40% (n = 10) of the leaders of the top 10 Colombian research groups (see Table 3) are women. No gender parity was observed, neither in terms of authorship nor in terms of leadership of the research groups in question. This highlights Professor Carmenza Duque's seminal contribution, who reinforced the important role of women as active subjects in the development of science in Colombia. In 2015, the participation of

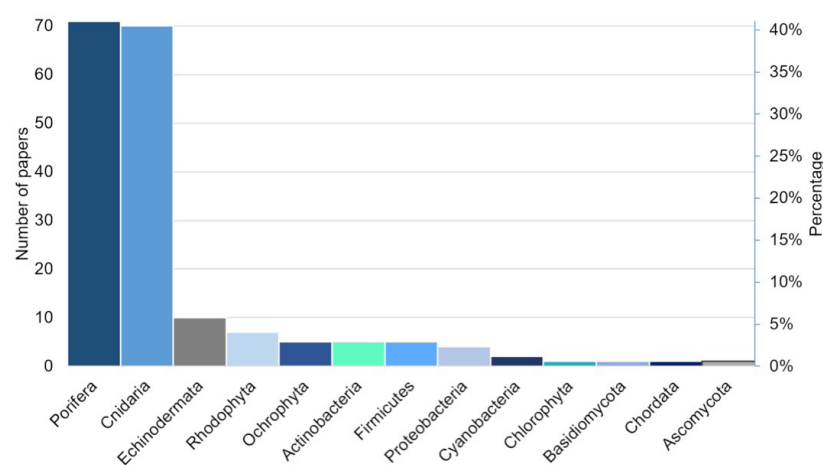


Figure 5. Percentage of publications by phylum studied.

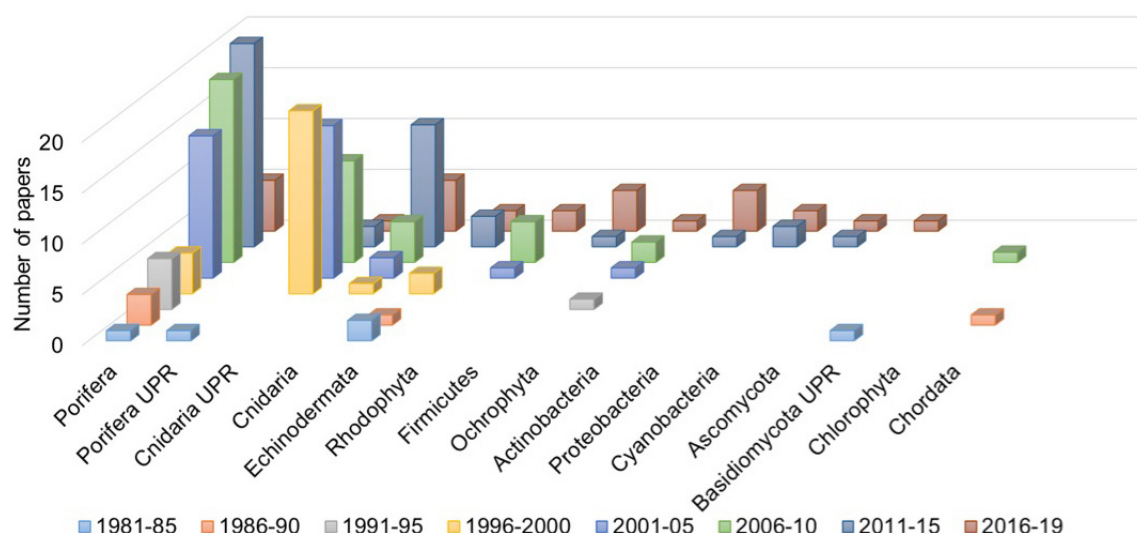


Figure 6. Phyla of most collected Colombian samples, by five-year periods; The studies carried out by University of Puerto Rico were marked with the acronym UPR as a way to differentiate them from the studies developed by Colombian groups.

women in science in Colombia represented only 39% of the total number of researchers [17] and, in 2013, 29% of the leaders of natural science research groups in Colombia were women [18] – in the area of MNPs, the percentage is higher, but it does not reach parity.

Regarding funding sources, 50 different institutions were identified, of which 16 were from Colombia – including 4 government organisations, nine universities (one of them private), two research centres (one of them private), and one private foundation. In the 125 articles in which Colombian institutions participated, the most cited funding sources were Colciencias (now called Minciencias) (n=86; 68.8%); UNAL (n=39; 31.2%); UdeA (n=21; 16.8%) and Fundación para la Promoción de la Investigación y la Tecnología del Banco de la República (FPIT) (n=11; 8.8%). As can be seen in Figure 4, over time Colciencias has been one of the main funding sources for these studies, although in percentage terms its impact has been decreasing. This is due to the increased investments by other institutions, especially universities with their own resources, and the increased participation of other national and international sources, mainly by virtue of cooperation partnerships with researchers from Brazil and Argentina. This situation can also be explained by the reduction in funding from Colciencias toward basic science research, as previously mentioned [10]. In 10 of the selected papers, there was no reporting of funding sources.

Content indicators

In the 173 selected papers, approximately 500 samples belonging to 222 species were studied – 187 samples identified at the species level and 35 identified solely at the genus level. The species reported in most publications belong to the phyla: Porifera (n=71; 41%) and Cnidaria (n=70; 40.5%), representing 81.5% (n=141) of the publications analysed (Figure 5). In particular, *Antillogorgia elisabethae* (syn *Pseudopterogorgia elisabethae*) (n=31) and *Pseudopterogorgia bipinnata* (n=10) of the phylum Cnidaria; and *Iricina capana* (n=10), *I. felix* (n=10), and *Topsentia ophiraphidites* (n=10) sponges (of the phylum Porifera) were the species studied in the majority of the papers. It is worth noting that studies on the phylum Porifera have increased over time, while the phylum Cnidaria had a marked increase only after the mid-1990s by reason of the articles (n = 21) produced by the UPR group (Figure 6), almost all of them with regard to the octocoral *Pseudopterogorgia elisabethae* collected in Colombia. In addition, the studies regarding species of the phylum Cnidaria by Colombian researchers have increased significantly in the last five years, indicating that these organisms have been included in the work of national researchers (Figure 6, Cnidaria vs Cnidaria UPR). The phylum Echinodermata is the third

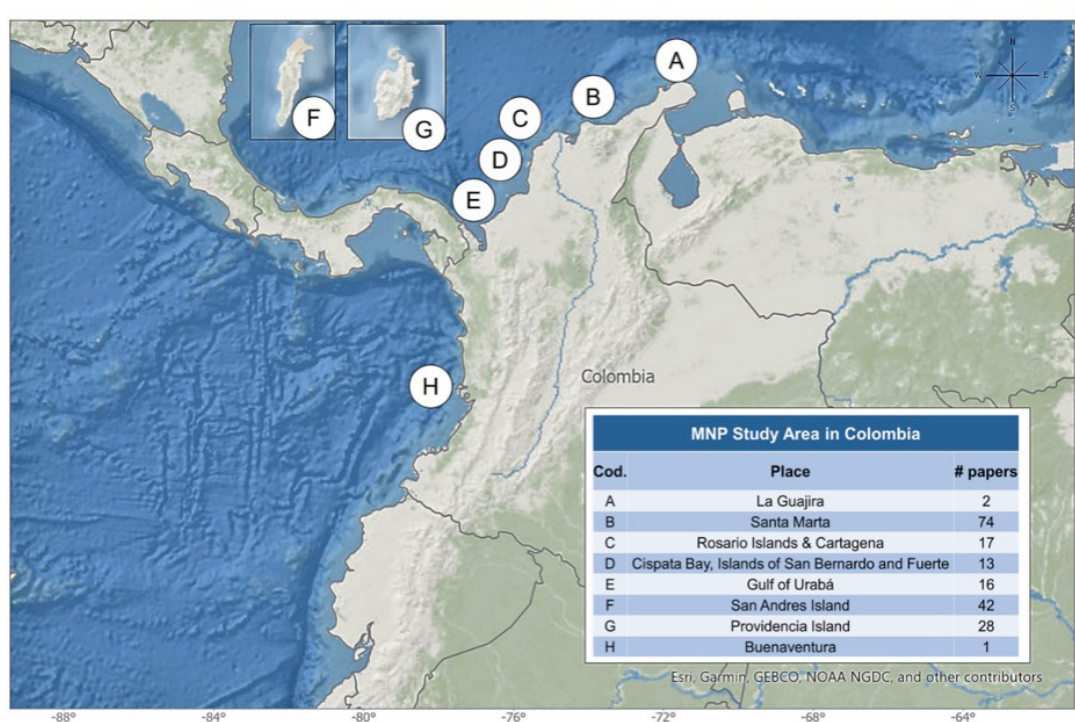


Figure 7. Main sampling areas of marine organisms for MNPs studies in Colombia.

most studied and represents 5.8% (n=10) of total publications. These investigations have not been consistent over time and have had ups and downs, and evidenced a new increase between 2011 and 2019 (Figure 6).

It is important to compare the records showing the presence of various organisms in Colombian Oceans (Colombian Marine Environmental Information System, SIAM) with their corresponding chemical studies to verify whether the abundance of any kind of organism is reflected in the related chemical studies. Notwithstanding, there are numerous records for several species, meaning that biologists have been collecting them, with a bare minimum number of chemical studies on them, indicating that researchers have not been taking advantage of the potential synergy between chemists and biologists. An example illustrating this situation is the phylum Chlorophyta, regarding which only one article has been published, while in the SIAM there are 1,123 related records with 76 identified species. Moreover, the phyla Rhodophyta (7 articles) and Ochrophyta (5 articles) have 1,491 and 1,287 records, with 121 and 35 recognised species, respectively. The Echinodermata phylum, despite being the third most studied group, was addressed in only 10 articles; however, 5,130 records of 257 species can be found in the SIAM. Finally, there is no chemical study regarding the phylum Mollusca, and there are 11,746 records of 1,147 identified species of these organisms in the SIAM system [19]. The foregoing shows that there are numerous chemically unexplored phyla, from which the production of a large number of compounds with high added value could be expected.

The aforementioned results show that the trend regarding phyla and species in Colombia is consistent with the global trend, with Porifera and Cnidaria being the most studied phyla, based on the fact that a large number of bioactive compounds have been obtained from them [20]. The concentration of chemical studies on these two phyla can also be explained by the fact that the MNPs groups carrying out such research in Colombia include experts in Porifera (Ph.D. Sven Zea, UNAL) and Cnidarian (Ph.D. Mónica Puyana, UTadeo) taxonomy. Furthermore, even though the research institutions in question also have experts in other taxonomies of phyla, there is no interaction between them and the natural product chemists, hence these organisms are not being studied from a chemical point of view. This is the case, for example, of algae and mollusks. The foregoing shows that

associations should be reinforced or initiated between research groups with a long history and newly formed ones to join efforts in MNPs research.

Nowadays, globally, the most studied source of MNPs is microorganisms, particularly phyla Ascomycota (fungi), Actinobacteria (gram positive bacteria) and Cyanobacteria (photosynthetic bacteria) [21]. This is a consequence of the fascinating number of compounds that can be isolated from them, and because they are a sustainable source thereof, overcoming the supply problem that affects natural products. In Colombia, studies on marine microorganisms are incipient (Figure 6), with a few examples found in the last period studied, and others isolated in early 1980's. This lack of chemical information is consistent with the limited records in the Marine Environmental Information System [22] on microorganisms – a consequence of lack of interest and the small number of trained researchers in the area. To overcome this problem, Colombia should focus on training researchers and building links between microbiologists and chemists. In the abovementioned data system, there are hardly any marine biological records on the phyla Ascomycota (11 records without description of the species), Proteobacteria (107 records with the description of 16 species), Actinobacteria (seven records with the description of only one species) and Cyanobacteria (210 records with the description of 10 species) [19]. There are other strain collections at different Colombian institutions but the access to such information is not easy.

Some institutions such as the CorpoGen Corporation and the Humbolt Institute currently have collections of microorganisms isolated from marine environments. In this sense, efforts are being made to consolidate initiatives such as the database of the Colombian Biodiversity Information System (SiB), which is a national open data network on biodiversity in which the aforementioned institutions and many others take part; however, the information on this network is not yet fully available.

Some efforts have been made toward the study of marine microorganisms by microbiology research groups, for instance, the groups conducted by “Microbiodiversidad y Bioprospección/UNAL Medellín” and “Bioprospección Marina/Invemar” on exploration and characterisation of microorganisms for a sustainable microbial biotechnology use. Their publications include more than 35 articles but without any chemical studies [9], thus reflecting the lack of collaborative research with natural product chemists.

Regarding sample collection sites, 195 were reported and were grouped into 8 large geographic areas: 7 located in the Caribbean Sea (San Andrés Island; Providencia Island; Santa Marta Bay; Rosario and Cartagena Islands; Cispata Bay, San Bernardo Islands and Isla Fuerte; Gulf of Urabá and La Guajira); and one in the Pacific Ocean (Buenaventura Bay) (Figure 7). The most explored sites correspond to the Caribbean Sea, particularly Santa Marta (74 articles; 42.8%), San Andrés (42 articles; 24.3%) and Providencia (28 articles; 16.2%). The concentration of research activities in the Caribbean Sea can be explained by the enormous biological diversity of such areas (Márquez, 1996), and because UNAL, UdeA and Unicórdoba have facilities for the development of these activities in this region.

Even though Colombia has more than 1,300 km of the Pacific Ocean coastline, just one paper was published with samples collected at the Colombian Ocean Pacific shore, reflecting a deep unbalance between the Caribbean and Pacific regions for the development of the country. This lack of research on MNPs cannot be associated with a lack of biological knowledge resources regarding the Pacific Ocean, given that several universities and public research institutions have been conducting research in this area. One example is the fact that the Universidad del Valle (Cali, Colombia), with great influence on the Colombian Pacific coastline, has a doctoral programme in Marine Sciences [23]. It also has research groups on estuary ecology, plant and organism biology, oceanographic sciences, coral reef ecology and animal ecology [24]. This means that many organisms in this area have already been biologically characterised, as evidenced by the 143 articles published by the research group called “Ecología de Arrecifes Coralinos” [9]; however, they carry out no chemical studies. Moreover, in the four Colombian states (departamentos) that encompass the Pacific Coast, there are research groups on natural products [25], mainly on phytochemistry, which means they have the knowledge and facilities to work with marine natural product chemistry. One reason that could explain this situation is the lack of interaction between the groups identified as leaders in MNPs research in Colombia and the research groups in the Pacific.

Therefore, some questions remain: Why have studies on MNPs chemistry not been carried out in this region? Would there be any new and interesting compounds identified in the Colombian Pacific? The safest answer is yes, especially considering the interesting compounds isolated from organisms on the Panamanian Pacific coast, mainly from the phyla Cyanobacteria and Cnidaria [26]; [27]. In any case, the South American Pacific coast, particularly comprising Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, has been little explored as shown by [28]. This is one of the issues to be overcome to ensure the development of MNPs in Latin America.

In the 173 analysed publications, covering the period from 1981 to 2019, a total of 1,690 compounds were reported, many of them described in more than one paper. These compounds can be classified as previously reported compounds (n=1358; 80.4%); new compounds at the time of their publications (n=238; 14.0%); and compounds obtained by semi-synthesis (n=94; 5.6%). The compounds were classified into 11 groups according to their structural characteristics (Table 4). Diterpenes were the most cited compounds, present in 77 articles (44.5%), of which 54 were published by research groups from the University of Puerto Rico without cooperation with Colombian research groups. Taking such data into account, the analysis by group of compounds was performed based on time, without considering those published by the UPR, to characterise the compounds identified by Colombian groups (Figure 8).

Sterols and sesquiterpenes, and their derivatives, have been studied since the beginning of research on MNPs in Colombia. This same trend is observed for lipids and diterpenes, although their study began later. The number of articles reporting diterpenes has increased significantly over time, despite the decrease (from 23 to 7) in the number of articles published by UPR researchers in the 1996-2019 period. Likewise, since the last decade, the study of alkaloids, peptides, triterpenes and polyketides, sterols and sesquiterpenes, has begun to increase, thus showing a strengthening of the research capacity of Colombian groups.

Table 4. Number of publications by groups of chemical compounds according to their structural characteristics.

Compound groups	Compounds included	No. of articles (%) [*]
Diterpenes	Diterpenes, bis-diterpenoids, nor-diterpenes, and glycosylated diterpenes	77 (44.5%)
Sterol compounds	Sterols, sulfated steroids, epidioxysterols and steroidal saponins	30 (17.3%)
Lipids	Fatty acid methyl esters obtained by hydrolysis of glycerides, phospholipids, ceramides, and related compounds; Prostaglandins	17 (9.8%)
Others	Aromatic compounds, acylhomoserine lactones (AHL), phenylpropanoids, products of combined metabolic pathways, carbohydrates and complex mixture of volatile compounds	12 (6.9%)
Sesquiterpenes compounds	Sesquiterpenes and non-cyclic nitrogenous sesquiterpenes	7 (4.0%)
Sesterpenes compounds	Sesterpenes and their esterified derivatives	5 (2.9%)
Bromotyrosines derivatives	Bromotyrosine derivatives	5 (2.9%)
Peptides	Oligopeptides	5 (2.9%)
Triterpenes compounds	Triterpenes and triterpenoidal saponins	4 (2.3%)
Alkaloids	Alkaloids and cyclic amino acid derivatives	4 (2.3%)
Polyketide	Discodermolide	4 (2.3%)
Raw Extracts	Compounds were not identified in mixture or were isolated as pure compounds	39 (22.5%)
Total		209

^{*} The denominator used to calculate the percentage was the total number of articles (173); Because more than one type of compound can be reported in the same article, the total sum may be greater than 173 and 100%.

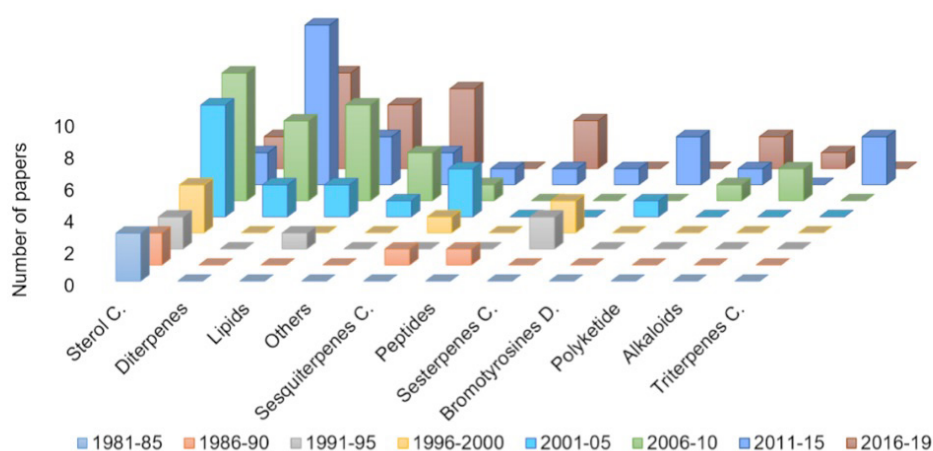


Figure 8. Trend of article publishing by type of Natural Products identified, by five-year periods (not including the UPR); C - compounds, D - Semisynthetic derivatives.

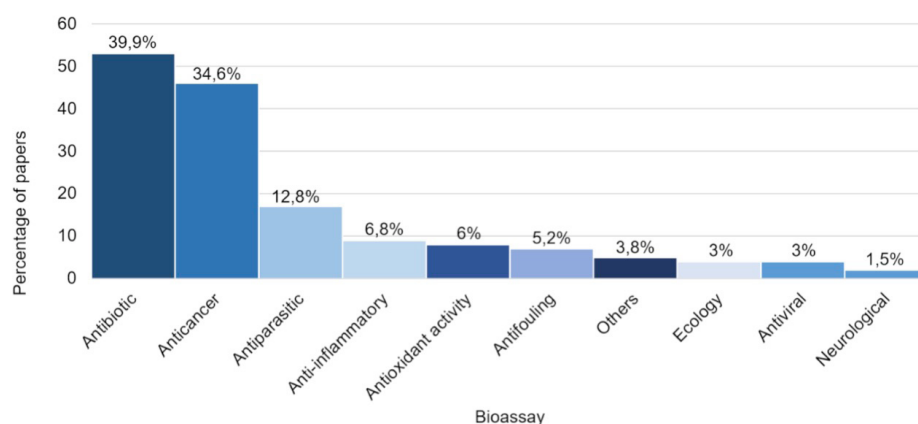


Figure 9. Distribution of publications by type of bioassays performed; Antibiotic: includes inhibition of quorum sensing, inhibition of biofilms, antimicrobial, antibacterial, antifungal and anti-tubercular activity; Anticancer: includes anticancer, antitumor, antimitotic, cytotoxic, antiproliferative and genotoxic activity; Antiparasitic: includes anti-malaria, anti-leishmanial, antiparasitic, anti-protease and anti-plasmodial activity; Anti-inflammatory: includes anti-inflammatory, degranulation, enzymatic elastase and MPO activity; Antioxidant: includes DPPH and ABTS activity; Antifouling: includes antiepihiotic activity; Ecology: includes allelopathic activity, toxicity, exudation, predation inhibition in aquarium, Others: includes inhibition of β glucosidase enzyme, ichthyotoxicity, insecticide and immunomodulatory activity; Antiviral: includes anti-herpes activity; Neurological: includes antinociceptive and muscle relaxation activity.

Methodology indicators

The workflow regarding natural products has different steps to isolate and identify secondary metabolites. In this methodology section, three levels were used for classification: raw extracts, putative identification in mixture (LC-MS and GC-MS), and isolated compounds. In the category, “Raw Extracts”, 39 articles (22.5%) were found, whose bioassays had been conducted on crude extracts without any separation process. In the “Putative identification in mixture” category, 34 articles (19.7%) were found, in which compounds had been analysed and identified by LC-MS or LC-UV methodologies – these publications involved compounds such as lipids and sterols. Finally, in the “Isolated compounds” category, 100 articles (57.8%) were found, in which purification had been performed by chromatographic methods, and compound identification by spectroscopic methods (NMR, MS, IR, etc.) – in these publications, 238 new compounds were identified, and another 94 semi-synthetic products were obtained using the natural products as the starting material.

The next aspect considered was whether or not the papers included an evaluation of biological activity. This analysis noted that most of the studies ($n=133$; 76.8%) included bioassays, while 40 of the 173 articles (23.12%) did not carry out this type of analysis. According to the 10 categories described

by [29], the most studied activities with regard to Colombian MNPs were: antibiotic ($n=53$; 39.9%), anti-cancer ($n=46$; 34.6%) and antiparasitic ($n=17$; 12.8%) (Figure 9). Compared with the global trend [2], it can be seen that, in Colombia, antibiotic bioactivity is the most studied activity, while worldwide it is ranked second in terms of importance, representing 13%. Anticancer activity, on the other hand, is the most important activity on a worldwide scale (56%), and in Colombia it represents 29.7% of the studies [2]. It is worth noting that in Colombia there have been no studies on cardioprotectors and neuroprotectors, which together represent 2% of the worldwide publications on this topic. Conversely, in Colombia, studies on antifoulants and antiparasitics are important, however these do not represent a significant percentage of studies worldwide.

Journal indicators

Journal citation indicators are used to evaluate the quality of scientific journals; however, their actual use and value is controversial [30]. In this study, they were used as an approximation to estimate the quality of the journals in which the MNPs articles with Colombian samples were published.

Table 5. Journals with the highest number of publications containing species collected from the Colombian territory and their citation indicators IF, h-5 and Median-5 (M-h5).

Journal	# of papers	CA*	IF	h5**	M-h5**
<i>Journal of Natural Products</i>	19	7	3,285	43	51
<i>Vitae</i> ***	13	13	0,259	6	10
<i>Journal of Organic Chemistry</i>	10	0	4,219	72	89
<i>Tetrahedron Letters</i>	9	2	2,683	48	72
<i>Organic Letters</i>	8	1	5,42	91	111
<i>Tetrahedron</i>	7	3	3,025	47	58
<i>Boletín del Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas y Costeras</i> ***	7	7	0	0	0
<i>Marine Drugs</i>	6	6	3,854	62	86
<i>Revista Colombiana de Química</i> ***	6	6	0	5	12
<i>Biochemical Systematics and Ecology</i>	5	5	1,170	18	22
Total	90	56			

*CA: Articles from Colombian research groups. **Values according to Google Scholar, accessed on June 10th 2020. ***Colombian journals. The data reported for each journal corresponds to the year of publication of the article with the best classification for this indicator.

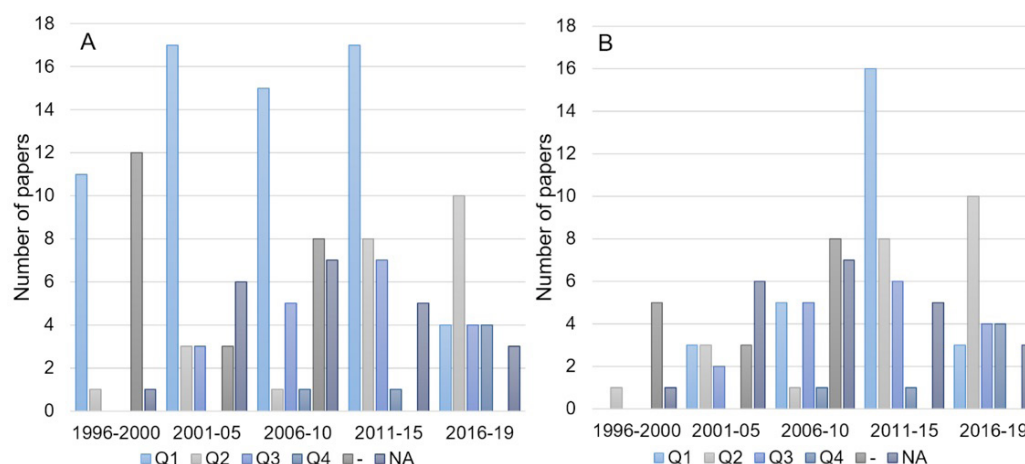


Figure 10. Total number of articles published, by five-year periods, ranked in quartiles according to Scimago: (A) Total of papers (B); Only Colombian groups' papers. Scimago ranks journals annually in quartiles, from Q1 to Q4, according to different quality criteria. This platform began its ranking in the year 1999, but here it was graphed from 1996 onwards to continue the traceability of the five-year periods. There are journals that do not provide publication data of all the years; when this was the case, the publication was coded with the symbol: "-". Several journals are not ranked by Scimago, and in this case the articles were coded as: "NA". If more than one category was applicable, the best one was selected.

Of the 173 articles analysed, most were published in foreign journals (n=129; 74.6%) and 25.4% (n=44) in Colombian journals. For articles with the participation of Colombian groups, the analysis showed that 64.8% (n=81) out of 125 articles had been published in foreign journals, indicating that Colombian scientists prefer to publish their results in these journals. Of the top 10 journals (Table 5), comprising those with the highest number of publications on organisms collected from Colombian seas, 7 were foreign and 3 were Colombian journals; the foreign ones have better classification values (IF, h-5 and M-h5) compared to the Colombian ones. The journals with the highest number of published articles on Colombian MNPs are: *Journal of Natural Products*; *Vitae* (Colombian journal); and *Journal of Organic Chemistry*; where both of these foreign journals have higher impact factors (IF), with most of their publications being by researchers from the University of Puerto Rico. The second Colombian journal with most publications (n=7), the "Boletín del Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas y Costeras", has not been classified by any of the 3 indicators used.

Regarding the visibility of the journals, the analysis considered whether they are indexed on Scimago, JCR and Google Scholar. It was observed that 64.7% (n=112), 60.1% (n=104) and 87.3% (n=151) of these journals

are included on these platforms, respectively, showing the acceptable/low visibility of the journals selected by MNPs researchers. Regarding the quality of the journals, the Scimago ranking was used (Figure 10). The number of publications in Q1 journals is more expressive from 1996 to 2015, and Q2 journals appear more often in the last period analysed (2016-2019); on the other hand, the number of publications in low-ranked journals has increased through time (Figure 10A). When the analysis excluded articles without the participation of Colombian researchers, a change in the trend is observed. In this sense, the number of articles published in Q1 journals is not predominant but has increased over time, going from 3 articles in the 2001-2005 period to 16 articles in the 2011-2015 period; however, there was a decrease to 3 in the 2016-2019 period (Figure 10B). This could be explained by the change in the project financing policy, as previously discussed.

The research groups with the highest number of publications in Q1 journals are the UPR group (II) (37 papers) and the "Grupo de estudio y aprovechamiento de productos naturales marinos y frutas de Colombia" (I) of the UNAL (22 papers). In general, the papers with the participation of Colombian researchers are published in journals of less international

visibility compared to papers published by foreign researchers working with Colombian samples. The results of this indicator show that, although the publication of articles in high-impact journals has increased, there are still challenges to overcome in order to achieve visibility for part of the scientific work in this area of study.

Table 6 displays the top 10 journals with the highest JCR-IF, also including the values of h-5 and median h-5. All the journals are foreign, none of them are Latin American (Table 6). These data also evidence that only 20 of the 57 articles published in these top-ranked journals have the participation of Colombian groups, indicating that articles published in high-impact journals are written chiefly by foreigner researchers. The average IF of the journals was 2.349 (range: 0.244 - 5.420), and when the UPR group was not considered, the average drops to 2.028 (0.244 - 4.659). This confirms that the UPR group published in journals with higher IF compared to the journals in which the Colombian groups published their papers. The publication of Colombian research groups in high-IF journals is an issue to address toward improving the visibility of their research.

Table 6. Top 10 most important journals, based on Impact Factor, in which Colombian MNPs samples were published.

Journal	TA*	CA**	IF***	H-5*	M-h5†
<i>Organic Letters</i>	8	1	5.420	91	111
<i>Journal of Organic Chemistry</i>	10	0	4.219	75	89
<i>Marine Drugs</i>	6	6	3.854	62	86
<i>Marine Biotechnology</i>	2	1	3.430	27	32
<i>Pure and Applied Chemistry</i>	1	0	3.386	25	42
<i>Journal of Natural Products</i>	19	7	3.285	43	51
<i>Journal of Functional Foods</i>	1	1	3,197	57	70
<i>Journal of Supercritical Fluids</i>	1	1	3,122	46	58
<i>European Journal of Organic Chemistry</i>	2	0	3.096	37	53
<i>Tetrahedron</i>	7	3	3.025	47	58
Total Items	57	20			

*TA: total articles published; **CA: Articles from Colombian research groups; ***IF: (Sci Journal); †H-5 and median-h5 (M-h5) in which articles with Colombian MNPs samples were published.

Article visibility indicators

To determine the visibility of the analysed articles, each article was searched in the following universal databases: Scopus, Scifinder, Web of Science, PubMed, and Google Scholar; in the Iberoamerican database Scielo; and in the specialised database MarinLit, to verify whether it was present or not in these databases, regardless of the previous search results with keywords (Table 1). Accordingly, of the 173 articles included in the analysis, 172 (99.4%) were indexed in Google Scholar, among them 4 were only present in the form of citations; 134 (77.5%) in Scopus; 127 (73.4%) in Scifinder; 103 (59.5%) in MarinLit; 94 (54.3%) in Web of Science; 67 (38.7%) in PubMed and 36 (20.2%) in Scielo. These data indicate that most of the articles are visible through Google Scholar, which is the largest database; while in more specific databases such as PubMed or Scielo the visibility is less expressive, since the former is specialised in health issues and the latter only includes Iberoamerican journals. Interestingly, because MarinLit is a database specialised in MNPs, a greater visibility of the publications would be expected; however, it has a percentage of no more than 59.5%, thus indicating a lack of relevance of the published papers.

The indexing trend of the 173 papers over time in the 4 databases with the largest number of referenced articles (Google Scholar, Scopus, Scifinder, and MarinLit) was also analysed. Between 1981 and 1995, the number of indexed articles with the participation of Colombian authors sustained a small and constant increase (Figure 11, those with the letter C). Since 1996, the number of indexed articles has grown significantly, with a steady slight increase in Google Scholar. The other databases, including MarinLit, have remained constant but with a slight downward trend. The results for the papers developed only by foreign groups (Figure 11, those with the letter F) show higher indexing over time in all 4 databases, including the one specialised in MNPs, i.e., MarinLit. Nonetheless, foreign scientific publications have decreased over time, whereas the indexing of articles produced by Colombian researchers has not been affected.

Another indicator of visibility for articles on MNPs is their citation in the research series reviews titled "Marine Natural Products" in the journal "Natural Products Reports" (NPR) of the Royal Society of Chemistry (Carroll, Copp, Davis, Keyzers, & Prinsep, 2020). These reviews are focused on articles that describe novel MNPs with relevant biological activities. Of the 173 articles, 75 (43.3%) were cited in the reviews. The number of articles referenced by this review shows a peak in 1996-2000 (n=20; 26.6% of the articles were referenced) and after that it decreased to 25% (Figure 12A). A similar behaviour is observed regarding the articles published only by Colombian groups (Figure 12B), with a maximum percentage of citations in the 1990s. Although the number of articles by Colombian researchers has been increasing gradually (Figure 12B), their visibility has not improved due to the fact that the percentage of articles cited in the NPR has decreased.

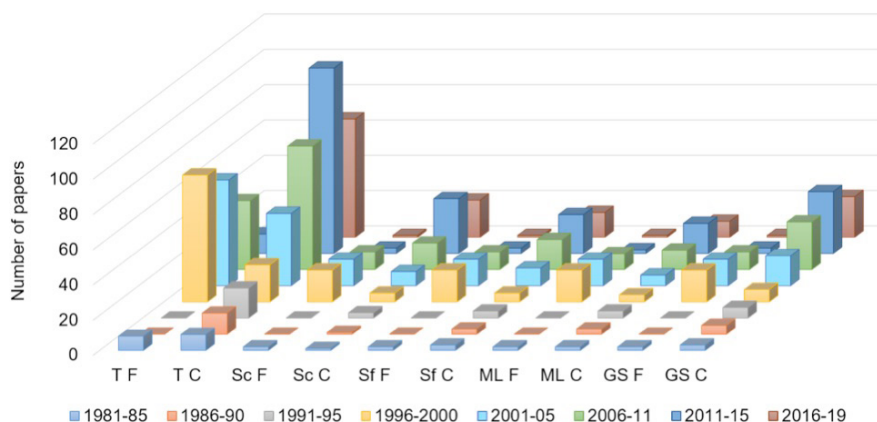


Figure 11. Timeline of the indexing of publications in the most important search engines, for Colombian (C) and foreign (F) research groups. Articles indexed by Sc F: Scopus for foreign groups; Sc C: Scopus for Colombian groups; Sf F: Scifinder for foreign groups; Sf C: Scifinder for Colombian groups; ML F: MarinLit for foreign groups; ML C: MarinLit for Colombian groups; GS F: Google Scholar for foreign groups; GS C: Google Scholar for Colombian groups. TF: Total articles for foreign groups; TC: Total articles for Colombian groups.

Table 7. Top 10 articles most cited in each database (Scopus, PubMed, Scifinder, Google Scholar, and Web of Science), year of publication and their reference.

Paper	Year	Number of citations in Scopus	Number of citations in PubMed	Number of citations in Scinder	Number of citations in Google Scholar	Number of citations in Web of Science
Rodríguez, A. D., & Ramírez, C. (2001). Serrulane diterpenes with antimycobacterial activity isolated from the West Indian Sea whip <i>Pseudopterogorgia elisabethae</i> . <i>Journal of Natural Products</i> , 64(1), 100–102. https://doi.org/10.1021/np000196g	2001	77	6	76	83	72
Marrero, J., Rodríguez, A. D., Baran, P., Raptis, R. G., Sánchez, J. A., Ortega-Barria, E., & Capson, T. L. (2004). Bielschowskysin, a Gorgonian-derived biologically active diterpene with an unprecedented carbon skeleton. <i>Organic Letters</i> , 6(10), 1661–1664. https://doi.org/10.1021/ol049495d	2004	75	11	72	106	70
Rodríguez, A. D., González, E., & Huang, S. D. (1998). Unusual terpenes with novel carbon skeletons from the West Indian Sea whip <i>Pseudopterogorgia elisabethae</i> (Octocorallia). <i>Journal of Organic Chemistry</i> , 63(20), 7083–7091. https://doi.org/10.1021/jo981385v	1998	73	4	70	68	-
Rodríguez, A. D., Ramírez, C., Rodríguez, I. I., & Barnes, C. L. (2000). Novel terpenoids from the West Indian sea whip <i>Pseudopterogorgia elisabethae</i> (Bayer), <i>Elisapterosins A and B</i> : Rearranged diterpenes possessing an unprecedented cage-like framework. <i>Journal of Organic Chemistry</i> , 65(5), 1390–1398. https://doi.org/10.1021/jo9914869	2000	68	10	6	71	-
Rinehart, K. L., Kishore, V., Bible, K. C., Sakai, R., Sullins, D. W., & Li, K. I. M. (1988). Didemmins and tunichlorin: Novel natural products from the marine tunicate <i>trididemnum solidum</i> . <i>Journal of Natural Products</i> , 51(1), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1021/np50055a001	1988	67	6	40	128	-
Tymiak, A. A., Rinehart, K. L., & Bakus, G. J. (1985). Constituents of morphologically similar sponges. <i>Tetrahedron</i> , 41(6), 1039–1047. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0040-4020(01)96471-3	1985	52	-	35	64	-
Rodríguez, A. D., & Ramírez, C. (2000). A marine diterpene with a novel tetracyclic framework from the West Indian gorgonian octocoral <i>Pseudopterogorgia elisabethae</i> . <i>Organic Letters</i> , 2(4), 507–510. https://doi.org/10.1021/ol991362i	2000	50	5	48	48	-
Rodríguez, I. I., Shi, Y. P., García, O. J., Rodríguez, A. D., Mayer, A. M. S., Sánchez, J. A., ... González, J. (2004). New pseudopteroin and seco-pseudopteroin diterpene glycosides from two Colombian isolates of <i>Pseudopterogorgia elisabethae</i> and their diverse biological activities. <i>Journal of Natural Products</i> , 67(10), 1672–1680. https://doi.org/10.1021/np049802o	2004	49	9	49	69	42
Rodríguez, A. D., Shi, J. G., & Huang, S. D. (1998). Pinnatins A-E: Marine diterpenes of the rare gersolane class derived from a photochemically induced rearrangement of a conjugated 2,5-bridged furanocembrane precursor. <i>Journal of Organic Chemistry</i> , 63(13), 4425–4432. https://doi.org/10.1021/jo980256b	1998	43	-	43	44	-

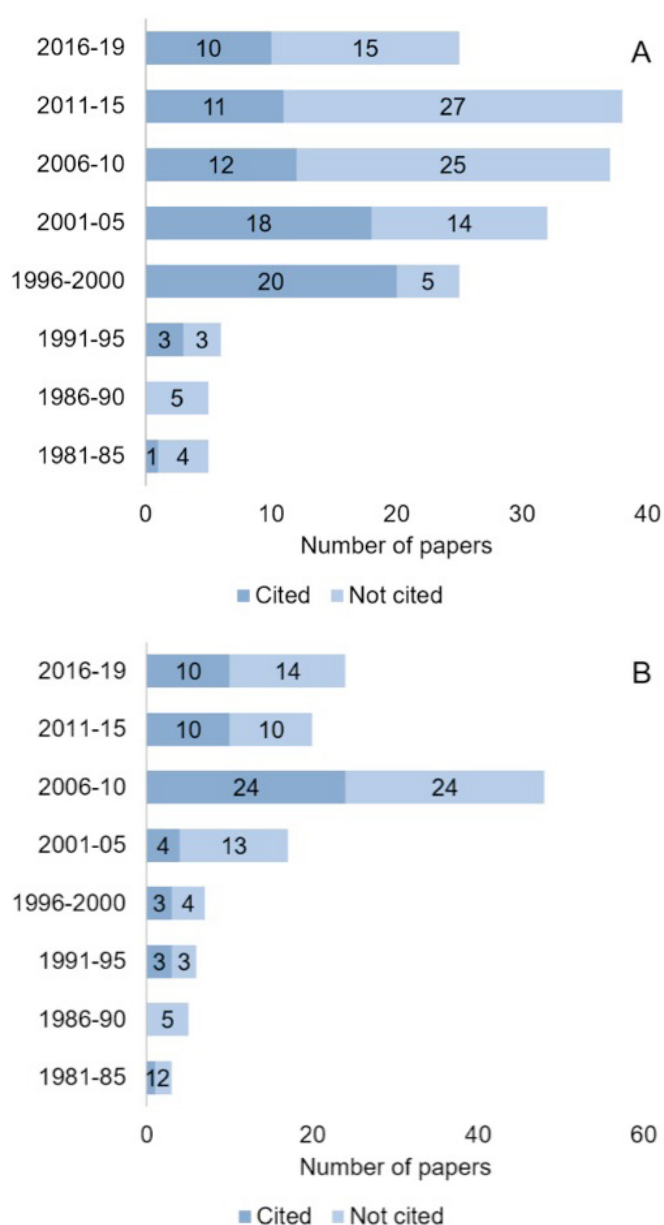


Figure 12. Articles cited in the Marine Natural Products research series review, by five-year periods. (A) Total papers. (B) Colombian groups' papers.

Table 7 shows the top 10 articles most cited in each of the databases (Scopus, PubMed, Scifinder, Google Scholar, and Web of Science), as well as the year of publication, the number of citations for each one, and their reference. Based on these results, it is interesting to note that the most cited articles correspond to products of the research group from the University of Puerto Rico, evincing the great impact that such publications have. The absence of papers by Colombian researchers indicates the lesser impact of Colombian publications. The most cited articles focused on the species *Pseudoptergorgia elisabethae* and *Pseudoptergorgia kallos*.

To better illustrate the impact of said publications, the number of citations for the entire scientific work on MNPs collected in Colombia per research group is summarised on Table 8. Surprisingly, among the top eight most cited research groups, only two are Colombian institutions and the remainder are foreign. The most cited group is the UPR (II), followed by the UNAL group “Estudio y Aprovechamiento de Productos Naturales Marinos y Frutas de Colombia” (I). The difference in number of citations is considerable and, in all cases, the UPR group is three times more than the Colombian group. This analysis also evinced that although some institutions, according to the analysis of the number of articles, are not visible, the number of citations evidenced that they have an important role in MNPs research.

Specific examples are “Instituto de Investigaciones Científicas Avanzadas y Servicios de Alta Tecnología, Centro de Estudios Biomédicos, Clayton” (XVI); “Department of Systematic Biology and Laboratories of Analytical Biology, Smithsonian Institution” (XVII); “Department of Chemistry, Chemistry Building, University of Missouri-Columbia” (XX); and “Center of Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience, Universidad Central de Caribe” (XII).

Conclusions

Scientific publications on MNPs of Colombian origin have increased over time, as has the participation of Colombian research groups. In the last period studied, the number of publications presented a slight decline, possibly related to the loss of specific funding for marine science in the country. The interaction between the research groups identified is low, an aspect that should be improved. It is also necessary to strengthen the research on Pacific Ocean organisms, in addition to the exploration of several organisms, such as microorganisms. The lack of strong interactions among MNPs-specific research groups, and with other groups of other areas of knowledge is a gap to be addressed to allow for more robust studies that will provide greater visibility for the knowledge generated in Colombia. Finally, it is imperative to involve the productive sector in MNPs research so as to give an adequate value to Colombian marine resources.

Table 8. Research groups most cited in each of the databases (Top 5, for each database).

Research groups	Citations				
	Sc*	PM**	Sf***	GS+	WOS†
Department of Chemistry, University of Puerto Rico (II)	1482	175	1495	1924	732
Estudio y Aprovechamiento de Productos Naturales Marinos y Frutas de Colombia (I)	510	93	519	1018	481
Institute for Advanced Scientific Research and High Technology Services, Center for Biomedical Studies (XVI)	198	34	213	307	193
Department of Systematic Biology and Laboratories of Analytical Biology, Smithsonian Institution (XVII)	195	36	216	298	187
Department of Chemistry, Tokyo Institute of Technology (VIII)	174	13	183	251	94
Center of Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience, Central University of the Caribbean (XII)	174	13	163	215	0
Department of Chemistry, University of Missouri (XX)	156	26	169	190	72
Departamento de Biología y Centro de Estudios en Instituto de Estudios en Ciencias del Mar – CECIMAR (IV)	145	21	132	345	136

*Scopus; **PubMed; ***Scifinder; +Google Scholar; †Web of Science.

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Evaluación del desempeño de una celda de combustible microbiana con electrodo de grafito modificado para el tratamiento de agua residual del procesamiento del café

Resumen

La actividad cafetalera en Costa Rica procesa aproximadamente 69.000 toneladas de café mediante la técnica de beneficiado húmedo. Esta actividad conlleva un alto impacto ambiental debido a la generación de 8 L de agua residual/kg de café oro producido. El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo utilizar el agua residual del procesamiento de café como sustrato en celdas combustibles microbianas (CCM), con el propósito de generar energía eléctrica a través de su uso y, a la vez, disminuir la carga orgánica del residuo. La CCM empleó un cátodo modificado con ftalocianinas de hierro (FePc), generó una eficiencia coulombica de 0,7% y una densidad de potencia de 89 $\mu\text{W}/\text{cm}^2$ en un ciclo de operación de cinco días. Además, se determinó que la CCM disminuye la demanda química de oxígeno (DQO) del residuo hasta en 27% bajo las condiciones de operación nativas del sustrato, a temperatura ambiente, sin mediadores químicos para la reacción anódica y con el uso de electrodos de platino para el cátodo. El estudio confirma la oportunidad de emplear el sustrato con una flora microbiana nativa apta para la operación de la tecnología de la CCM, y así perfilar el dispositivo como una opción novedosa para el tratamiento de este residuo en Costa Rica.

Palabras clave: agua residual; comunidad microbiana; energía sostenible; café; electroquímica.

Evaluation of the performance of a microbial fuel cell with modified graphite electrode for the treatment of wastewater from coffee processing

Abstract

In Costa Rica coffee production is the most traditional agroindustrial activity, each year approximately 69,000 tons of coffee are processed through the technique of wet processing. The process has a high environmental impact since it generates eight liters of wastewater/kg of produced coffee. Consequently, the main goal of this research was to evaluate the electric generation of a Microbial Fuel Cell (MFC) with two chambers, using coffee wastewater as a substrate, which would generate a sustainable solution with an added economic value to this waste in Costa Rica. The MFC with a cathode modified with iron phthalocyanines (FePc) generated a coulombic efficiency of 0.7% and a power density of 89 $\mu\text{W}/\text{cm}^2$ in a 5-day operation cycle. In addition, it was determined that the MFC decreases the COD of the waste by up to 27% under native substrate conditions, without the use of high temperatures, or chemical mediators for the anodic reaction and platinum electrodes for the cathode chamber. The efficiency of the device can be improved with changes at design level that reduce the ohmic internal resistance and improve electrical generation, the study confirms the potential of the substrate with a native microorganism suitable for the use of MFC technology, shaping the device as a novelty option for the treatment of the waste in Costa Rica.

Keywords: Wastewater; microbial community; sustainable energy; coffee; electrochemistry.

Avaliação do desempenho de uma célula combustível microbiana com eletrodo de grafite modificado para o tratamento de águas residuais do processamento de café

Resumo

A indústria do café na Costa Rica processa cerca de 69 000 toneladas de café por meio da técnica de moagem úmida, o que acarreta um alto impacto ambiental devido à geração de 8 L de água residual / kg de café dourado. O objetivo deste trabalho era usar águas residuais do processamento do café como substrato em Células de Combustível Microbianas (CCM) a fim de gerar energia elétrica por meio do seu aproveitamento e ao mesmo tempo reduzir a carga orgânica do resíduo. CCM usando cátodo modificado com ftalocianinas de ferro (FePc) gerou uma eficiência coulombica de 0,7% e uma densidade de potência de 89 $\mu\text{W}/\text{cm}^2$ em um ciclo operacional de cinco dias. Além disso, foi determinado que o CCM reduz a Demanda Química de Oxigênio (DQO) do resíduo em até 27% nas condições nativas de operação do substrato, à temperatura ambiente, sem mediadores químicos para a reação anódica e com a utilização de eletrodos de platina para o cátodo. O estudo confirma a oportunidade de utilizar o substrato com flora microbiana nativa adequada para o funcionamento da tecnologia CCM e, assim, delinear o dispositivo como uma nova opção para o tratamento desses resíduos na Costa Rica.

Palavras-chave: água residual; comunidade microbiana; energia sustentável; café; eletroquímica.

Introducción

En Costa Rica, la producción de café es la actividad agroindustrial de mayor tradición. Según *Estadísticas de Comercio Exterior Costa Rica* (2017), esta cuenta con un valor aproximado de US\$ 228 millones correspondientes a 1.451.100 fanegas (saco de 46 kg) exportadas [1]. El proceso de producción es altamente contaminante, ya que solo el 6% del peso total del grano se emplea para preparar la bebida y el resto son desechos sólidos como cascarilla, pulpa, mucilago y pergamino; y líquidos conocidos en la industria cafetalera como aguamiel [2, 3]. El agua residual del procesamiento del café está compuesta mayoritariamente por agua, fibra y pectinas; por cada kilogramo de café en grano se generan 8 L de agua residual, con una demanda química de oxígeno en un rango de 1.000-100.000 mg/L y un pH entre tres y cinco, lo que clasifica este residuo como altamente contaminante para su vertido en cuerpos superficiales o alcantarillado sanitario.

El tratamiento usual del agua residual generada consiste en la disminución de la carga orgánica a través de lagunas anaerobias u otros tipos de reactores y filtros, lo que implica un consumo energético y económico importante para las procesadoras de la fruta [4-6]. Existe la necesidad de darle un mejor tratamiento a este residuo, así como de investigar nuevos modelos de energía sostenible que resulten en un impacto positivo sobre el medioambiente. Las celdas combustibles microbianas (CCM), dispositivos que emplean residuos agrícolas como sustrato para la generación de energía, podrían utilizarse en el tratamiento de las aguas mieles de café.

Este tipo de celdas son objeto de investigación debido a su funcionalidad dual: generadoras de potencia eléctrica y dispositivos para el tratamiento de agua residual [4, 7-10]. Se ha reportado la alimentación de estas celdas con agua residual de industria láctea, agrícola, así como aguas negras domésticas [5, 8, 11]. La generación eléctrica con estos sustratos se encuentra en un amplio rango según su naturaleza química, densidades de potencia reportadas en la literatura rondan desde los 50 W/m² hasta 2.000 W/m² [12-14]. Factores como la concentración y composición de las aguas residuales son conocidos por causar un impacto directo sobre el proceso bioelectroquímico; sin embargo, otros como producción de hidrógeno, metanogénesis, procesos degradativos aeróbicos y difusión de metabolitos neutros hacia la cámara catódica son también integrantes en la ecuación, que permite la generación máxima de potencia eléctrica y remoción de demanda química de oxígeno (DQO) [2, 4, 11, 15].

El concepto de CCM es posible debido a la transferencia de electrones exocelulares. Los electrones se transmiten desde el organismo a aceptores de electrones extracelulares insolubles, mediante diferentes mecanismos [16, 17]. La transferencia de electrones en ambientes anaerobios se puede realizar a través de compuestos solubles como ciertos antibióticos, quinonas, riboflavina, e incluso sustancias húmicas pueden funcionar como mediadores de electrones exocelulares [18]. Estos mediadores pueden ser artificiales o producidos por el propio microorganismo; algunos microorganismos pueden transferir electrones directamente por medio de estructuras proteicas especiales llamadas “nanocables” [19].

Las modificaciones de electrodos son clave para el aumento del rendimiento de la CCM. Los materiales necesarios para llevar a cabo el proceso electroquímico deben poseer ciertas características: buena conductividad eléctrica, estabilidad química y mecánica y bajo costo [20-23]. El uso de electrodos de grafito cumple con estos requisitos, además se encuentra disponible en múltiples presentaciones como placas (superficie bidimensional), o gránulos, fieltro, papel, espuma, fibras (superficies tridimensionales), entre otras [24-26].

Para incrementar la eficiencia de la transferencia electrónica, se proponen distintos tratamientos al grafito, estos permiten disminuir las pérdidas en la interfase bacteria-ánodo. Se recomienda mejorar la adhesión de la comunidad microbiana a la superficie del electrodo mediante el aumento del área superficial; por ejemplo, tratamiento térmico, con amoníaco gaseoso o con ácido sulfúrico. Para el cátodo se han propuesto recubrimientos con nanopartículas de carbono o de metales catalíticos, como el manganeso y el hierro [9, 12, 27-29].

Las CCM se perfilan como una opción novedosa y de interés nacional para la agroindustria cafetalera, razón por la cual en este trabajo se evalúa la generación eléctrica de una CCM al utilizar como sustrato agua residual del procesamiento de café, de modo que se pueda maximizar la producción eléctrica del dispositivo, con lo cual se generaría una solución sostenible y de valor económico agregado para este residuo en el país.

Materiales y métodos

Celda combustible microbiana

Se ensambló un sistema de doble cámara; para esto se utilizaron dos botellas de borosilicato con capacidad de 500 mL cada una [13, 19]. A cada botella se le hizo un corte circular, y se insertó un tubo de borosilicato del mismo diámetro. Las cámaras se separaron con una membrana de intercambio (FUMASEP F-14100) [30] que primero se sumergió en una disolución HNO₃ (10% en volumen, 3 h a 90 °C), se trasvasó a un recipiente con agua grado 1 (90 °C durante 1 h) [31]. La membrana se almacenó en medio ácido y refrigeración a 4 °C. Se cerró el circuito con alambre de cobre hacia el recolector de datos (DataLogger Novus Automation) con resistencia de 100 Ω. Las celdas operaron en lote por 120 h y se utilizó agua residual recolectada de un beneficio en San Marcos de Tarrazú, Costa Rica, como sustrato en la cámara anódica.

Electrodos

Se emplearon láminas de fieltro de grafito (3,50 cm × 7,00 cm) [25]. Los electrodos se colocaron en HNO₃ concentrado (90 °C durante 4 h), seguidamente se enjuagaron con agua grado 1 hasta pH neutro [32]. Se colocaron en la estufa (60 °C durante 24 h). Posteriormente, se modificaron los electrodos con un recubrimiento de una disolución de 60 mg del compuesto catalítico ftalocianina de hierro (FePc) en etanol absoluto (750 µL) y Nafion (100 µL al 25%) y se dejó secar al aire 8 h [15].

Sustrato en la cámara anódica y disolución electrolito en el cátodo

Se emplearon 350 mL de agua residual en la cámara anódica y disolución amortiguadora de fosfatos (0,50 mol/L, pH = 7,00) para la cámara catódica [20, 24]. Se introdujeron los electrodos, se sellaron las cámaras y se purgó la cámara anódica (30 min) con una corriente de gas nitrógeno.

Caracterización del sustrato

Se utilizó agua residual del procesamiento del café de un beneficio en San Marcos de Tarrazú, Costa Rica, como sustrato en la cámara anódica. Este se caracterizó mediante un análisis de DQO, según el Standard Methods of Water and Wastewaters (5220D) [33]. Se realizó análisis de azúcares individuales, según procedimiento del Centro Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología de Alimentos (CITA); fibra cruda, según métodos AOAC 2002,04 y AOAC 973,18 [34]; relación carbono total: nitrógeno total (C/N), según método *Handbook of reference methods for plants analysis* (1998) [35], y sólidos totales, disueltos y volátiles, y porcentaje de método 1684 de la EPA de los EE. UU. [36]. Finalizado el ciclo de operación, se tomaron muestras del agua residual para el análisis de azúcares y DQO, previo y posterior al funcionamiento del dispositivo.

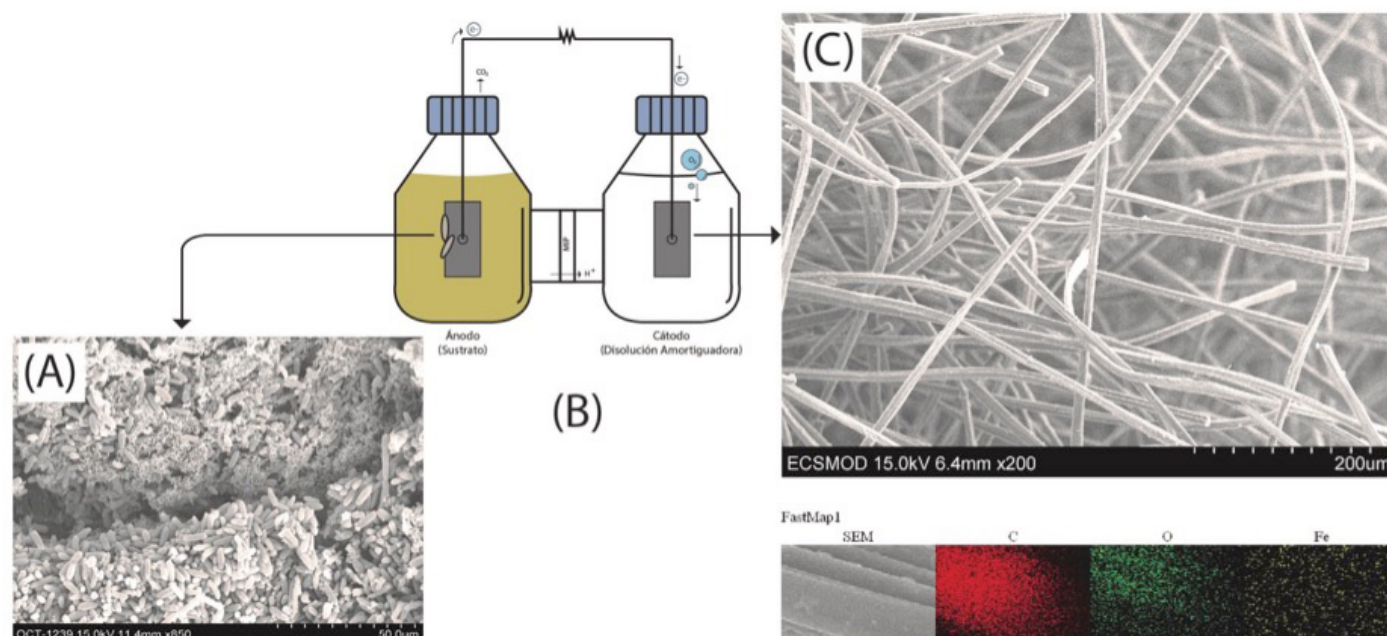


Figura 1. Celda microbiana utilizada en el desarrollo de los experimentos. (A) Imagen SEM de la biopelícula en el ánodo (850 aumentos). (B) Diagrama de celda. (C) Imagen SEM del electrodo modificado (200 aumentos) escaneo EDX.

Diseño experimental

Se estudió el efecto de tres variables sobre el funcionamiento de la CCM mediante un diseño factorial completo 2^3 para evaluar el pH (nativo o neutro), la temperatura ($35\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ o ambiente a $22\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$) y la carga orgánica (nativa o diluida). En cada caso se prepararon sustratos diferentes; el pH neutro se reguló diariamente mediante la adición de NaOH ($0,1\text{ mol/L}$). La temperatura en baño termostático. Por último, se diluyeron 250 mL de agua residual en 1 L de agua desionizada.

Operación y evaluación de los electrodos modificados

Se evaluó el desempeño del electrodo modificado de grafito; para esto se registraron datos durante 5 días (120 h) y se analizó la DQO del sistema de agua residual antes y después del ciclo de operación de la celda. Para la obtención de las voltametrías cíclicas, se utilizó un potenciostato (AutoLab Metrohm) para todas las mediciones. Se empleó un electrodo auxiliar de alambre de platino y un electrodo de referencia de Ag/AgCl (3 mol/L) [32]. El electrodo de trabajo consistió en una lámina de fieltro de grafito modificado con distintos tratamientos; todas las láminas se humedecieron con disolución de electrolito soporte previo a la medición y se realizaron las siguientes mediciones: voltametría de electrodo de fieltro de grafito sin recubrimiento, voltametría de FePc en disolución y voltametría de electrodo de grafito modificado con FePc (condiciones inertes con N_2 y O_2 a una presión de 5 psi de cada gas). Todos los experimentos se hicieron por triplicado.

Caracterización de electrodos modificados

Los electrodos modificados con FePc se examinaron con microscopía de barrido electrónico (SEM, Hitachi S3700N). Las muestras se fijaron durante 24 h en solución Karnovsky, se lavaron tres veces con disolución

amortiguadora de fosfato ($0,1\text{ mol/L}$, $\text{pH} = 7,2$) y, por último, se deshidrataron mediante un gradiente ascendente de etanol (30, 50, 70, 80, 90, 100%). Se secaron en secador de punto crítico con dióxido de carbono. Las muestras se colocaron en bases metálicas utilizando cinta de carbono doble cara y se recubrieron en un colector iónico de oro antes de ser observadas en el microscopio electrónico de barrido.

Resultados y discusiones

Como se muestra en la Figura 1, la CCM consistió en un diseño de celda tipo H o de dos cámaras. En la imagen SEM del ánodo se observó la formación de una biopelícula, conformada por una comunidad microbiana que presentaba buena adhesión y diversidad (parte A). La imagen del cátodo (parte C) muestra las fibras del fieltro modificadas con ftalocianinas de hierro; el análisis de microscopía electrónica de barrido acoplada a rayos X de energía dispersiva (SEM-EDX) muestra que el hierro quedó disperso homogéneamente en el electrodo de fieltro de grafito (el hierro se muestra en color amarillo) y se encuentra adherido de forma adecuada.

Caracterización del sustrato

La caracterización fisicoquímica del agua residual permite cuantificar la composición del sustrato y estimar la fracción que puede ser degradada por los microorganismos presentes en la CCM, lo cual es de gran importancia para los procesos de transformación de la materia presente en el dispositivo, ya que están relacionados con la generación eléctrica a partir de la misma.

En la Tabla 1 se muestran los resultados de la caracterización fisicoquímica del sustrato que corresponde al agua residual del proceso húmedo con remoción mecánica de mucílago, mayoritariamente compuesto de agua de despulpado, restos de pulpa y mucílago (crudo o hidrolizado). Estos componentes corresponden, en general, a los azúcares sencillos como la fructuosa y glucosa provenientes de la pulpa, así como carbohidratos complejos como las pectinas y material lignocelulósico que forman parte del mucílago y restos de pulpa [37].

Tabla 1. Caracterización fisicoquímica del agua residual del procesamiento del café utilizada en la cámara anódica de la CCM.

Parámetro	Resultado
Demanda química oxígeno	(58.000 ± 700) mg O ₂ /L
Azúcares	Glucosa: (1,45 ± 0,02) g/100 mL Fructosa: (1,44 ± 0,02) g/100 mL
Porcentaje de humedad	(83,3 ± 0,5) g/100 g
Fibra detergente neutro	(19,5 ± 1,2) g/100 g de materia seca
Fibra detergente ácido	(16,3 ± 1,2) g/100 g de materia seca
Lignina	(11,5 ± 0,2) g/100 g de materia seca
Sólidos totales	(3,831 ± 0,003)%
Sólidos suspendidos	(0,6287 ± 0,0003)%
Sólidos volátiles	(93,54 ± 0,03)%
Sólidos disueltos	(4,097 ± 0,003)%
Carbono total	(43,29 ± 0,01)%
Nitrógeno total	(3,01 ± 0,01)%
Relación C:N	14,4:1
pH	< 4,0

La mayoría de estos carbohidratos presentan procesos de oxidación en el agua residual que generan varios tipos de ácidos orgánicos volátiles como el ácido acético, propiónico y butírico, responsables del pH ácido en el sustrato. El pH del sustrato es clave para determinar el tipo de microorganismo que es capaz de sobrevivir y alimentarse bajo estas condiciones ambientales, por ejemplo, miembros de las familias *Lactobacillus*, *Streptococcus* y *Acetobacter* [38].

En cuanto al material lignocelulósico, se observa que el sustrato es rico en celulosa y derivados; el análisis de fibras con detergente ácido y neutro permite diferenciar el tipo de polímero que lo conforma. Para el agua residual de café se encontró que 3,2 g/100 g corresponde a hemicelulosa, 4,8 g/100 g a celulosa y 11,5 g/100 g a lignina más cutina. En general, la degradación anaerobia de este tipo de material se puede llevar a cabo por una variedad de microorganismos con distintas características fisiológicas, por ejemplo, miembros de las familias *Clostridium*, *Ruminococcus*, *Caldicellulosiruptor*, *Acetivibrio*, *Butyrivibrio*, *Halocella*, *Fibrobacter*, *Bacteroides* y *Spirochaeta* [39].

Se observa que el sustrato es rico en lignina, lo que dificulta su degradación anaerobia [40]. Para el caso del sustrato empleado, esto representa una desventaja, pues las condiciones de degradación de la CCM se consideran compuestos químicos de baja degradabilidad en el sistema electroquímico de la CCM. Caso contrario sucede con los azúcares encontrados en la muestra, que se comportan como una fuente primaria de energía para los microorganismos, los cuales pueden ser totalmente degradados al final de cada ciclo de operación de la CCM.

El contenido de sólidos totales (ST) de la muestra es muy bajo. Es normal observar pocos sólidos en el agua residual del procesamiento del café, ya que la mayoría de la pulpa es removida y los restos de mucílago crudo o hidrolizado representan un bajo porcentaje en masa del grano en procesado. Usualmente, para sistemas de tratamiento de agua residual, se considera un digestor líquido (L-AD) si el sustrato contiene ST menor a 15% y digestor de tipo sólido (SS-AD) mayor a 25% [41]. Proporciones tan bajas de ST son prácticamente desfavorables en digestores anaerobios, pues la generación de metano requiere una alta carga orgánica sólida para llevar a cabo esta reacción; sin embargo, en una CCM el bajo contenido de sólidos no es una limitante, debido a que el producto de oxidación no es metano sino dióxido de carbono; a partir de los ácidos orgánicos producidos por la degradación microbiana [42].

La relación C:N del sustrato es baja con respecto a residuos similares de la agroindustria, que son altos en material lignocelulósico. Para sustratos biodegradables, la relación C:N óptima está en el rango de 25 a 35 [43]; sin embargo, para los materiales que son resistentes a la degradación microbiana, esta relación puede llegar a valores tan altos como 40. De hecho, una relación C:N excesivamente alta provoca un aumento en la

formación de ácido que inhibe la producción de metano y ocasiona que el proceso de descomposición sea más lento. Se ha mostrado que esto influye en la tasa de descomposición de estos sustratos [43, 44].

La sumatoria de todos estos componentes oxidables en el aguamiel resulta en una alta demanda química de oxígeno, que engloba la principal problemática del residuo: una alta carga contaminante para cuerpos de agua superficial.

Influencia de variables sobre la generación de corriente eléctrica

La ecuación (1) muestra el modelo obtenido para el diseño experimental planteado:

$$I_{max} = 0,15 + 0,069C_n - 0,048pH + 0,043T - 0,059C_n:pH - 0,0052C_n:T + 0,021pH:T \quad (1)$$

Donde I_{max} corresponde a la corriente máxima. La interacción de variables en el modelo se denota con dos puntos.

Dado que la CCM empleada trabaja en modo de lote, el efecto de la cantidad de alimento que se le proporciona a los microorganismos es de gran relevancia para las respuestas de interés (corriente máxima y remoción de DQO).

De acuerdo con el modelo obtenido, la carga orgánica del sustrato mostró un efecto positivo en la corriente máxima generada (Tabla 2); conforme disminuye la concentración del sustrato, se observa una menor disponibilidad de alimento para las comunidades microbianas y, por ende, una clara disminución de la corriente máxima. Esto indica que el sustrato no necesitaría ser diluido para poder ser procesado por la CCM; altas concentraciones de materia orgánica en biodigestores son usualmente relacionadas con problemas de inactivación por floculación de los sólidos, inhibición directa, sobrecarga de ácidos libres [43], y en el caso de las CCM en específico, la inactivación de la membrana por la biopelícula.

Tabla 2. Resumen de resultados del valor de probabilidad p ($\alpha = 0,05$) del análisis ANOVA, aplicado a las variables respuesta del diseño experimental.

Respuesta: corriente máxima		
Variables	Valor p ($> F$)	Significativo
Cn ^a	$2,9 \times 10^{-7}$	Sí
pH	$2,8 \times 10^{-5}$	Sí
T ^b	$9,7 \times 10^{-5}$	Sí
Cn : pH	$2,8 \times 10^{-6}$	Sí
Cn : T	0,55	No
pH : T	0,026	Sí

Cn^a corresponde a concentración, T^b corresponde a temperatura.

Además, se conoce que el pH es un factor determinante para el tipo de comunidades microbianas que pueden existir en el medio utilizado [45]. En el sustrato empleado como inóculo se pueden encontrar varios géneros de microorganismos capaces de sobrevivir o no bajo distintas condiciones de pH [46].

En este experimento se observó una correlación significativa positiva con el pH nativo del agua residual. La degradación de carbohidratos complejos lleva consigo una acidificación inherente del medio; en procesos de degradación anaerobia esto implica una problemática, ya que inhibe a los microorganismos metanogénicos si el medio no posee la capacidad amortiguadora suficiente. En el caso de las CCM, esto no representa un problema, pues es un proceso de una fase; una vez realizada la transferencia de electrones de la respiración celular, los electrones son transferidos intracelularmente para completar la hemirreacción en la cámara catódica con la reducción de oxígeno [47, 48].

Al utilizar pH neutro se observó una disminución de la corriente máxima generada; este comportamiento se puede explicar debido a que las comunidades microbianas tienen un pH óptimo de crecimiento. Miembros de las especies del género *Lactobacillus* son capaces de desarrollarse a pH bajo. El agua residual en el procesamiento del café tiene un pH inferior a 4,0, y se han identificado varias especies del género *Lactobacillus spp* en este tipo de sustrato [49, 50].

El utilizar dos temperaturas diferentes en el diseño, define el tipo de comunidad microbiana que crece en la CCM [5]. La variable de temperatura también fue significativa en el análisis ANOVA, lo que indica que es esencial el control de temperatura en el proceso de generación de energía, ya que regula la eficiencia de los procesos metabólicos microbianos y la comunidad microbiana que se desarrolla. En este caso, a mayor temperatura (35 °C) se observó una mayor corriente máxima en la CCM; este resultado es lo esperado para un sistema con una comunidad microbiana de tipo mesofílica en las condiciones del experimento.

Las bacterias y hongos mesofílicos poseen una temperatura óptima de metabolismo y crecimiento entre 20-40 °C, por lo cual la incubación de las celdas en este ámbito de temperatura resulta positiva [51, 52]. En términos prácticos, la operación de las celdas a una temperatura diferente a la temperatura ambiente requiere una inversión para mantener esta variable constante. El impacto de la temperatura sobre la corriente producida es menor, comparado con el de la concentración y el pH, por lo cual debe ser objeto de investigación si es realmente beneficioso, desde el punto de vista económico, mantener el sistema bajo temperatura de 35 °C.

El análisis planteado demostró la complejidad de las CCM como sistemas de generación eléctrica mediante el uso de microorganismos, además de la necesidad de controlar una serie de factores para mejorar el rendimiento de la celda.

Modificación del cátodo

La modificación a la superficie del electrodo de la cámara catódica con catalizador de ftalocianinas de hierro (II) (FePc) sobre nanotubos de carbonos de multipared (MWCNT), mostró una mejora en la eficiencia de producción de energía eléctrica; esta mejora de la actividad electroquímica se atribuye a la naturaleza química de los MWCNT y a las interacciones de tipo π entre el macrociclo aromático de las FePc y las paredes laterales de los nanotubos [53].

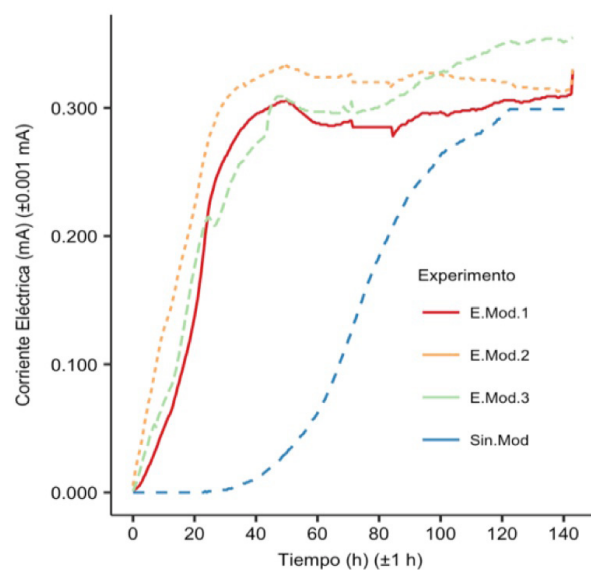


Figura 2. Comparación de la corriente en función del tiempo para una CCM con cátodo modificado con FePc/MWCNT y una CCM con cátodo de grafito sin modificar.

La superficie del electrodo se analizó con imágenes SEM y con espectrometría de energía dispersiva de rayos X. Se confirmó la deposición exitosa del recubrimiento catalítico sobre el electrodo con el método empleado, en una concentración de 1,6% en masa por área analizada. Además, se detectó oxígeno en la superficie proveniente del proceso de funcionalización/acondicionamiento de los MWCNT con ácido nítrico; estas observaciones se pueden confirmar en el perfil elemental obtenido mediante la misma técnica, en la Figura 1, el cual denota un recubrimiento uniforme sobre la superficie.

En la Figura 2 se observa el comportamiento de la corriente durante una corrida de la CCM con electrodo catódico modificado y sin modificar; la diferencia en el tiempo en el cual se observa un valor de corriente distinto a cero es muy clara. El electrodo de fieltro sin recubrimiento catalítico requiere cerca de 30 h para generar corriente, mientras que el electrodo modificado genera una corriente a pocas horas de cerrar el circuito e iniciar la medición, lo cual evidencia la acción del catalizador sobre la celda. Se observa que la celda con electrodo modificado presenta 60% más de eficiencia que la celda sin modificar, confirmando la acción del catalizador, al acelerar la cinética de reducción de oxígeno en la cámara catódica, por ende, mejorando la cantidad de electrones que se transfieren desde el sustrato hacia el ánodo.

La actividad electrocatalítica del electrodo modificado con FePc/MWCNT se examinó con una voltamperometría cíclica en 0,1 mol/L de amortiguador de fosfatos (pH = 7) saturado en aire o en nitrógeno. Como se observa en la Figura 3, en el experimento saturado con nitrógeno se aprecia la presencia de una señal de oxidación de la FePc (II); este valor es esperado para un catalítico que debe adsorber oxígeno reversiblemente. Se observa, además, en la misma figura, que la voltametría en nitrógeno no muestra signos de actividad catalítica del compuesto, con ausencia de señales en el rango de -0,100 V a +0,650 V vs. Ag/AgCl, en la voltametría correspondiente a la solución saturada en aire; la presencia de oxígeno permite dar paso a la ORR y dar su corriente de reducción catalítica; la señal se aprecia a un voltaje de +0,650 V vs. Ag/AgCl para este sistema; este potencial está dentro del ámbito esperado para la ORR a pH = 7 y confirma la actividad del compuesto. El análisis se llevó a cabo durante n ciclos ($n = 200$), y únicamente se observó actividad ORR durante los primeros dos, lo que muestra inestabilidad de la FePc en disolución.

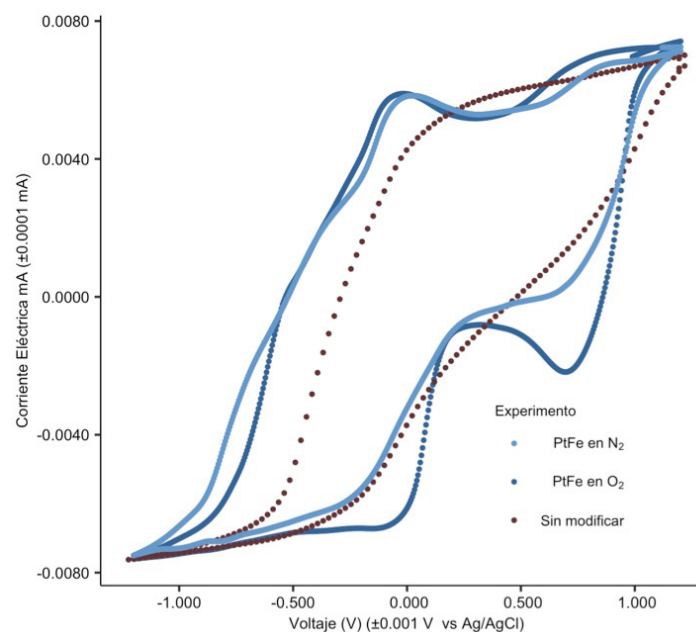


Figura 3. Voltametría cíclica vs. Ag/AgCl de un electrodo de grafito sin modificar, modificado con FePc/MWCNT con purga de nitrógeno y modificado FePc/MWCNT aireado, empleando 0,1 mol/L de amortiguador de fosfatos (pH = 7) como electrolito soporte y velocidad de escaneo de 10 mV/s.

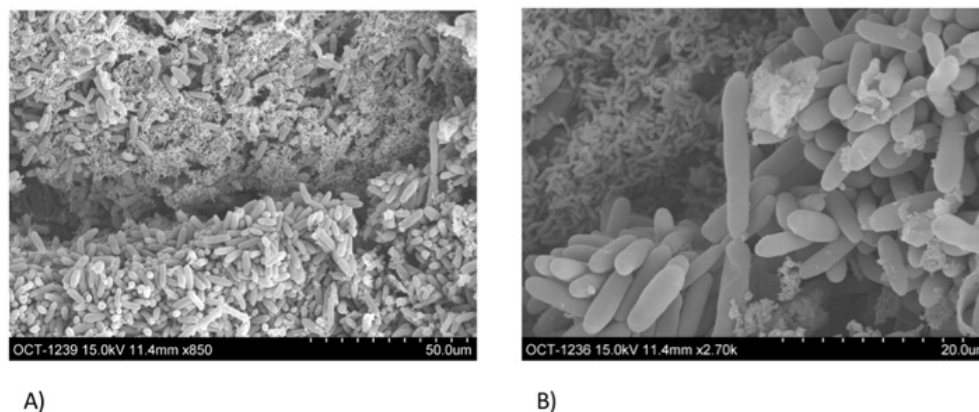


Figura 4. Imagen de escaneo electrónico de la biopelícula sobre el electrodo anódico de grafito: a) 270 aumentos y b) 2.700 aumentos.

Caracterización del ánodo

Un aspecto que afecta significativamente el rendimiento de la celda es la formación de una buena biopelícula; se busca la uniformidad en toda la superficie del electrodo para que disminuya la resistencia interna del dispositivo.

La corriente generada por las celdas es dependiente de las bacterias presentes en los electrodos; en el caso de las celdas alimentadas con el agua residual del procesamiento de café, se observa una comunidad microbiana presente en la biopelícula (Figura 4), que en estudios preliminares fueron determinados como pertenecientes a las bacterias ácido-lácticas (BAL), del cual muchas especies han sido reportadas como bacterias electrogénicas [54-56]. Las especies predominantes, además de hongos y algunas levaduras, en las celdas microbianas con sustrato de aguamiel de café son *Lactobacillus casei* y *Latobacillus paracasei* [57], estos resultados concuerdan con el uso de bacterias de estas especies en celdas microbianas por otros autores [50].

Conclusiones

La investigación realizada permitió establecer la factibilidad de utilizar agua residual del procesamiento del café como sustrato en un dispositivo con funcionalidad dual: la disminución de la carga orgánica del agua residual que se produce en los beneficios de café y la generación de potencia eléctrica.

La caracterización fisicoquímica del agua residual permitió confirmar la naturaleza lignocelulósica del material, esto con base en el análisis de los residuos generados durante el beneficiado húmedo de café en cada una de sus etapas. El bajo contenido de sólidos totales (menor a 4%) es esperado para el tipo de residuo y clasifica a la cámara anódica como un digestor de tipo líquido; sin embargo, esto permite un ágil transporte de masa dentro de la cámara anódica y no es una limitante para la producción de dióxido de carbono en la CCM. La relación C:N es otro factor de importancia en la caracterización, ya que su valor (14,4:1) no se encuentra en el rango óptimo para un sustrato de alimentación de este tipo de celdas; sin embargo, los porcentajes de remoción de materia orgánica oscilaron entre 10% y 30%, esto amerita más investigación para mejorar este rendimiento, ya sea a partir de una cadena de celdas o de un cambio en la relación C:N.

Si bien el sustrato no posee nutrientes de fácil degradabilidad para las bacterias, por sus altos niveles de fibras (lignina, hemicelulosa y celulosa), las CCM son proyectadas para trabajar en periodos largos de tiempo en fase estacionaria con un tiempo de retención hidráulico adecuado, por lo que, al optimizar este tiempo, los porcentajes de remoción de DQO pueden aumentar.

La exploración de variables influyentes en el desempeño de la CCM diseñada permitió confirmar el efecto estadísticamente significativo

de las variables de pH, carga orgánica y temperatura sobre la corriente máxima generada y sobre la demanda química de oxígeno. Se observó un comportamiento óptimo bajo condiciones de pH nativo (4,0-5,0), con carga orgánica sin diluir y a una temperatura de 35 °C; un adecuado establecimiento de la comunidad microbiana y un rango óptimo de parámetros para la degradación de materia orgánica permiten que el desempeño de las CCM, empleando agua residual del procesamiento del café, sea posible.

Las CCM son dispositivos bioelectroquímicos de alta complejidad, por lo cual es recomendable repetir el proceso de optimización con otras variables secundarias que no se analizaron en este trabajo; por ejemplo, el tiempo de operación de la celda (periodos más extensos), la inoculación de la celda (emplear un inóculo conocido) y el tipo de ánodo (forma y tipo de grafito que benefician la formación de una biopelícula exitosa).

En cuanto a la modificación de la superficie del cátodo, se encontró que el catalizador FePc acelera de forma exitosa la cinética de la reacción ORR en una CCM. A una concentración de 1,14 mg/cm² fue posible observar una disminución en el tiempo de arranque de la CCM (30 veces más rápido), además de un aumento del 60% en la eficiencia coulombica con respecto al cátodo sin modificar. Si bien estos resultados son prometedores, la CCM exhibió solo un 20% de la potencia descrita en la literatura; esto se atribuye principalmente a la resistencia interna del sistema.

El tipo de sustrato y las reacciones electroquímicas seguirán limitando el rendimiento de las celdas, además que es importante reconocer que muchos residuos no pueden ser adecuados para su alimentación; no obstante, existen diferentes estrategias y oportunidades para mejorar aún más la capacidad de generación de energía en las CCM. Si bien con el estado actual del conocimiento no es posible utilizar las CCM para la generación de una cantidad importante de energía, ya que las densidades de potencia son aún bastante bajas, mediante su uso se puede recuperar parte de la energía empleada durante los procesos agroindustriales. Además, permite la remoción de materia orgánica convirtiéndose en una alternativa interesante para el tratamiento de aguas residuales del procesamiento del café en un beneficiado en Costa Rica.

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Estudio teórico de la oxidación de CO con O₂ usando catalizadores de Au-Pd y Au-Pt

Resumen

En el presente estudio se realizaron cálculos con base en la Teoría del Funcional de la Densidad Electrónica (DFT) con la aproximación B3PW91/LANL2DZ para optimizar los sistemas monometálicos y bimetálicos Au₉, Au₈Pd, Au₈Pt, AuPd₈, AuPt₈, Pd₉ y Pt₉. Los materiales fueron teóricamente evaluados como catalizadores para la oxidación de monóxido de carbono (CO) y se determinó el sistema más favorable para la adsorción de esta molécula. La sustitución de átomos de Pt y Pd por átomos de Au en los nonámeros generó un cambio en la estructura tridimensional del sistema. El análisis de reactividad global mostró que el clúster más reactivo es Pt₉, seguido por AuPt₈. Los índices de Fukui identificaron los sitios más susceptibles para un ataque nucleofílico de ambos clústeres. La adsorción de CO generó una cascada de oxidación que liberó ~4,5 eV, indicando que la reacción es altamente exotérmica y exergónica. Los clústeres AuPt₈ y Pt₉ mostraron los valores más bajos de energía de activación de la etapa determinante del mecanismo. En general, la sustitución de un átomo de platino (o paladio) por un átomo de oro no afecta la reactividad de los nonámeros y, por tanto, se infiere que el clúster AuPt₈ podría ser un catalizador promisorio en la oxidación de CO.

Palabras clave: clústeres bimetálicos; oxidación selectiva de CO; índices de reactividad; adsorción.

Theoretical study of the CO Oxidation with O₂ using Au-Pd and Au-Pt catalysts

Abstract

In the current study were development calculations based on Density Functional Theory (DFT) with the B3PW91/LANL2DZ approach for optimizing both monometallic and bimetallic systems: Au₉, Au₈Pd, Au₈Pt, AuPd₈, AuPt₈, Pd₉ and Pt₉. Such materials were theoretically tested as catalyst for the oxidation of carbon monoxide (CO) and the most favorable system for its further adsorption was determined. The substitution of Pt and Pd by Au atoms in the nonamers generated a change in the tridimensional structure of the system. The global reactivity analysis showed that the most reactive cluster is Pt₉ followed by AuPt₈. On the other hand, the Fukui indexes identified the most susceptible sites for a nucleophilic attack of both clusters. The CO adsorption generated an oxidation cascade which liberated ~4.5 eV, indicating that the reaction is highly exothermic and exergonic. Both AuPt₈ and Pt₉ showed the lowest values of activation energy in the determining step of the mechanism. In general, the substitution of a Pt (Pd) atom by an Au atom does not affect the reactivity of the nonamers and then it is inferred that the AuPd₈ cluster could be a promissory catalyst in the CO oxidation.

Keywords: Bimetallic clusters; selective oxidation of CO; reactivity indexes; adsorption.

Estudo teórico da oxidação de CO com O₂ usando catalisadores de Au-Pd e Au-Pt

Resumo

No presente estudo, cálculos baseados na Teoria do Funcional da Densidade Eletrônica (DFT) com a abordagem B3PW91/LANL2DZ foram realizados para otimizar sistemas monometálicos e bimetálicos Au₉, Au₈Pd, Au₈Pt, AuPd₈, AuPt₈, Pd₉ e Pt₉. Tais materiais foram teoricamente avaliados como catalisadores para a oxidação do monóxido de carbono (CO) e foi determinado o sistema mais favorável para a adsorção desta molécula. A substituição dos átomos de Pt e Pd por átomos de Au nos não-nomes gerou uma mudança na estrutura tridimensional do sistema. A análise de reatividade global mostrou que o cluster mais reativo é Pt₉, seguido por AuPt₈. Os índices de Fukui identificaram os sítios mais suscetíveis ao ataque nucleofílico de ambos os clusters. A adsorção de CO gerou uma cascata de oxidação que liberou ~4,5 eV, indicando que a reação é altamente exotérmica e exergônica. Os aglomerados AuPt₈ e Pt₉ apresentaram os menores valores de energia de ativação do estágio determinante do mecanismo. Em geral, a substituição de um átomo de platina (ou paládio) por um átomo de ouro não afeta a reatividade dos não-nomes e, portanto, infere-se que o aglomerado AuPt₈ pode ser um catalisador promissor na oxidação do CO.

Palavras-chave: clústers bimetálicos; oxidação seletiva de CO; índices de reatividade; adsorção.

Introducción

La combustión incompleta de combustibles fósiles produce monóxido de carbono (CO), un gas incoloro, inodoro, muy venenoso y contaminante [1]. Puede derivarse tanto de actividades antropogénicas como de fuentes naturales. Las principales fuentes humanas son las emisiones realizadas por automóviles, estufas, fogones de gas, sistemas de calefacción, entre otros [1-3]. A nivel mundial, la intoxicación por CO es de 17,5 casos por cada 100.000 habitantes [4]. En Colombia se ha encontrado intoxicación por CO en alrededor de 20.000 a 25.000 casos anualmente [4, 5]. El límite permisible de exposición (PEL, por sus siglas en inglés) establecido por la Administración de Seguridad y Salud Ocupacional de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica (OSHA) para el CO es de 50 ppm, en promedio, durante un período de 8 h [6]. Otro gas con características similares al CO, que también se produce en la combustión de combustibles fósiles, es el dióxido de carbono (CO₂). Este es un gas incoloro e inodoro, cuyas concentraciones al aire libre varían entre 300 y 500 ppm [7-9]. El PEL actual de la OSHA para este gas es de 5.000 ppm en promedio, durante un período de 8 h. Una exposición prolongada a altas concentraciones puede generar varios problemas de salud e incluso la muerte [10]. Sin embargo, el uso de CO₂ como fuente alternativa en la producción de nuevas sustancias o materiales es un tópico de especial interés en la actualidad.

Una alternativa para disminuir el impacto en la salud a la exposición a este tipo de gases, es el uso de hidrógeno (H₂) como combustible en vehículos automotores [11-13]. Las celdas de combustible con membrana de intercambio protónico (PEMFC, por sus siglas en inglés) generan corriente eléctrica a partir de la combustión de hidrógeno (H₂) con oxígeno (O₂) en fase gaseosa y generan vapor de agua (H₂O) como único producto de la reacción [14, 15]. En la actualidad, más del 95% del hidrógeno se produce mediante el reformado de metano en donde como subproducto se obtiene monóxido de carbono (CO) [1]. Los residuos de CO en el H₂ así producido pueden envenenar el catalizador de la PEMFC. Para el óptimo desempeño de las PEMFC, el límite aceptable para las concentraciones de CO en las corrientes de H₂ es de 10 ppm cuando se utiliza Pt como catalizador, y de 100 ppm cuando se utilizan aleaciones de platino-rutenio (Pt-Ru) tolerantes a CO [16,17]. Los niveles de CO en el H₂ producido por reformado suelen estar por encima de estos límites. Considerando estos hallazgos y la importancia de remover el CO de las fuentes de H₂ antes de que este entre a la celda, se considera relevante el planteamiento de nuevas soluciones para la limpieza de corrientes de hidrógeno que alimenten las celdas de combustible, desde el punto de vista experimental y computacional con materiales novedosos y altamente selectivos.

Una posible solución a este problema, es el diseño e implementación de nuevos catalizadores metálicos efectivos para la adsorción del CO y su oxidación selectiva a CO₂ [18-20]. Este proceso se conoce como “oxidación preferencial de CO” y es de bajo costo y fácil de implementar. En este sentido, la catálisis con metales de transición desempeña un papel enorme en la industria química moderna, y dedica mucho de su esfuerzo a comprender este fenómeno y al diseño y desarrollo de catalizadores heterogéneos basados en grupos metálicos con alta actividad, selectividad y estabilidad [21, 22]. El rango de propiedades de los sistemas metálicos puede mejorarse y en tanto generar un efecto sinérgico tomando mezclas de elementos. Se ha encontrado que las interacciones intermetálicas en catalizadores bimetalicos conducen a una mejora en el rendimiento catalítico [21, 23]. Estos catalizadores bimetalicos han mostrado ser efectivos en una amplia gama de aplicaciones, como la hidrogenación de hidrocarburos insaturados [24], oxidación de CO [25], epoxidación de propileno [26], desplazamiento de gas de agua [27, 28], entre otras.

Los catalizadores de platino (Pt) tienen la desventaja de tener baja actividad a bajas temperaturas (cercas a los 100 °C, que es la temperatura máxima de operación de las PEMFC) [29]. El Au ha demostrado ser activo a temperaturas menores a 100 °C, pero su actividad es, por lo general, más baja en comparación con los metales hidrogenantes clásicos (e. g.: Pd, Pt, Ni) [30]. Por esto, se ha propuesto adicionar un segundo metal para mejorar la actividad del catalizador monometálico. El paladio (Pd), por ejemplo,

se ha utilizado en diferentes reacciones industriales como oxidación [31], hidrogenación [32], combustión de metano y varias reacciones de acoplamiento [33]. Por su lado, el Pt es un elemento de especial interés por su versatilidad en diferentes reacciones, entre las cuales se encuentran la oxidación y la reducción de compuestos orgánicos [34]. Considerando las ventajas de los tres metales: Au, Pd y Pt en diferentes transformaciones catalíticas, se han ensayado clústeres bimetalicos del tipo Au-Pd y Au-Pt para la oxidación catalítica de monóxido de carbono, encontrándose resultados promisorios [35, 36].

Considerando la problemática de la remoción del CO de las corrientes de hidrógeno por medio de su oxidación selectiva, antes de que estas entren y alimenten las celdas, esta investigación tiene como objetivo principal determinar si hay efecto sinérgico favorable sobre la reactividad de no átomos de Au, Pt y Pd al reemplazar 1 átomo por otro de los ya mencionados frente a la adsorción y posterior oxidación de CO a CO₂ de manera selectiva. Para ello, se optimizó la geometría y se calculó la reactividad de nanoclústeres mono y bimetalicos de Au₉, Au₈Pd, Au₈Pt, AuPd₈, AuPt₈, Pd₉ y Pt₉ en presencia de CO, mediante el uso de la Teoría del Funcional de la Densidad (DFT). Además, se determinó cuál clúster presentaba una mayor favorabilidad térmica en la oxidación del CO acorde con el mecanismo de reacción propuesto e investigado.

Materiales y métodos

Determinación de la reactividad de los clústeres

Se estudiaron los clústeres de nueve átomos Au₉, Au₈Pd, Au₈Pt, AuPd₈, AuPt₈, Pd₉ y Pt₉, con el objetivo de determinar el efecto de incluir un segundo metal en los clústeres de Au₉, Pd₉ y Pt₉. La elección del tamaño de clúster fue realizada acorde con el Gap_{HOMO-LUMO}; con base en ello, se obtuvo que el clúster más reactivo es Au₉ para el grupo de clústeres de 6 a 9 átomos de oro. Gap_{HOMO-LUMO} (eV): Au₆: 0,20, Au₇: 0,15, Au₈: 0,17, Au₉: 0,13; los cuales se calcularon con la aproximación CAMB3LYP/LANL2DZ. Las estructuras más estables se determinaron considerando las tres multiplicidades más bajas (singlete, triplete y quinteto o doblete, cuarteto y sexteto, para número par e impar de electrones, respectivamente), resultando en cada caso la mayor estabilidad para la multiplicidad más baja.

Para esta investigación, se eligió el funcional B3PW91 y la base LANL2DZ, ya que se ha encontrado que predice resultados óptimos para los grupos de metales de transición [37-39]. Además, se realizaron cálculos de propiedades energéticas, tales como el potencial de ionización (PI) y la afinidad electrónica (AE) para el clúster de Au₉, combinando los funcionales CAM-B3LYP y B3PW91 con las bases LANL2DZ y SDD. Se compararon dichos resultados con los resultados experimentales reportados en la literatura, y se encontraron los menores errores en el caso del PI para la combinación B3PW91/LANL2DZ (Tabla 1) y en el caso de la afinidad electrónica para CAM-B3LYP/SDD. Considerando el potencial de ionización como parámetro crítico en la selección de la base y el funcional, para la presente investigación se seleccionó la combinación B3PW91/LANL2DZ.

Tabla 1. Elección de la aproximación computacional más adecuada para el sistema de Au₉.

Funcional/base	Potencial de ionización (eV)	Error (%)	Afinidad electrónica (eV)	Error (%)
CAM-B3LYP/LANL2DZ	7,043	1,50	3,266	10,77
CAM-B3LYP/SDD	6,975	2,45	3,841	4,95
B3PW91/LANL2DZ	7,148	0,02	3,400	7,10
B3PW91/SDD	7,072	1,09	3,277	10,46

El porcentaje de error se calculó con base en lo reportado experimentalmente en [40] y [41] (potencial de ionización experimental: 7,15 eV, afinidad electrónica experimental: 3,66 eV).

Además, se determinaron los descriptores de reactividad global de potencial químico electrónico (μ), dureza global (η), índice de electrofiliidad global (ω) y la brecha de energía HOMO-LUMO, con el objetivo de determinar el sistema más reactivo, utilizando el programa TAFF con el método de diferencias finitas (TAFF: análisis topológico de la función Fukui) [42]. Como descriptores de reactividad local se calcularon los índices de Fukui. El cálculo de las cargas atómicas se obtuvo a partir del modelo establecido por Hirshfeld [43].

Determinación del mecanismo de reacción

Luego de determinar cuáles eran los clústeres metálicos/bimetálicos más reactivos, se calcularon las energías de adsorción de CO y de O₂, con el objetivo de dilucidar la etapa inicial por la que comienza el mecanismo de reacción. Las energías de adsorción se calcularon de acuerdo con la ecuación (1).

$$E_{ads} = E_{clúster-X} - E_{clúster} - E_X \quad (1)$$

Donde $X = \text{CO}$ u O_2 , $E_{clúster-X}$ es la energía total del complejo formado por el clúster con X adsorbido, $E_{clúster}$ es la energía total del clúster aislado y E_X es la energía total de la molécula de X aislada. Los estados de transición se calcularon mediante el algoritmo de optimización de Berny. A partir de estos resultados se calcularon los cambios de entalpía y energía libre de Gibbs de las reacciones. Para todos los cálculos puntuales de energía, de optimización, de frecuencias, de IRC y poblacionales se empleó el paquete de programas Gaussian 09 [44, 45]. Para todos los sistemas reportados como mínimos sobre las superficies de energía potencial se corroboró que solo presentaran frecuencias positivas, mientras que para los estados de transición se observó la presencia de una frecuencia negativa. Además, se realizó el cálculo de la IRC con el objetivo de determinar la ruta de reacción para cada uno de los estados de transición determinados.

Resultados y discusión

Análisis estructural

En la Tabla 2 se muestran las distancias promedio encontradas para los enlaces Au-Au, Au-Pt, Au-Pd, Pt-Pt y Pd-Pd para cada clúster optimizado en el presente estudio. Se determinó que para el clúster Au_8Pt las distancias promedio de enlace Au-Au y Au-Pt son de 2,73 Å y 2,75 Å, respectivamente; que comparado con lo reportado en la literatura de manera computacional presentan diferencias de 0,02 Å y 0,01 Å, respectivamente. Para el clúster AuPt_3 la longitud promedio de los enlaces Au-Pt fue de 2,81 Å y en el caso de los enlaces Pt-Pt fue de 2,87 Å. La Figura 1 muestra que los clústeres con mayor número de átomos de platino son tridimensionales en comparación de aquellos que tienen más átomos de oro; es decir, la inclusión de átomos de Pt convierte la estructura del clúster de Au de plana a tridimensional, lo que está de acuerdo con lo observado en otros estudios reportados [46]. Esto ocurre, tal vez, debido a la inserción de un átomo de menor tamaño atómico (Pt) a la red de clúster de Au. La generación de espacios en la red genera una reorganización del clúster, lo cual conduce al cambio en la estructura del clúster, pero generando isómeros estructurales de esos clústeres debido a la estructura electrónica similar. El cambio a estructuras tridimensionales se ven favorecidas por las interacciones spin-órbita con respecto a las estructuras bidimensionales. Este tipo de peculiaridades ha sido observado en el caso de las típicas configuraciones de dos dimensiones para clústeres de Au [47, 48]. Con respecto a los clústeres de Pd (Pd-Pd y Au-Pd), se puede notar que las distancias son similares a las de los clústeres de Pt (Pt-Pt y Au-Pt), con variaciones de menos de 0,1 Å. Cuando se introduce un átomo de Pd al clúster que contiene solo Au, la distancia Au-Au se hace mayor (2,78 Å) en comparación con el sistema que contiene un átomo de Pt (2,73 Å). Esto es consistente con el hecho de que el Pt y el Au tienen una configuración electrónica similar (diferencia de solo un electrón de valencia) y tanto en su densidad electrónica como en su radio atómico tienen valores semejantes. En el caso del Pd, la menor cantidad de electrones tanto de valencia como de *core* genera diferencias más notorias en las distancias de enlace.

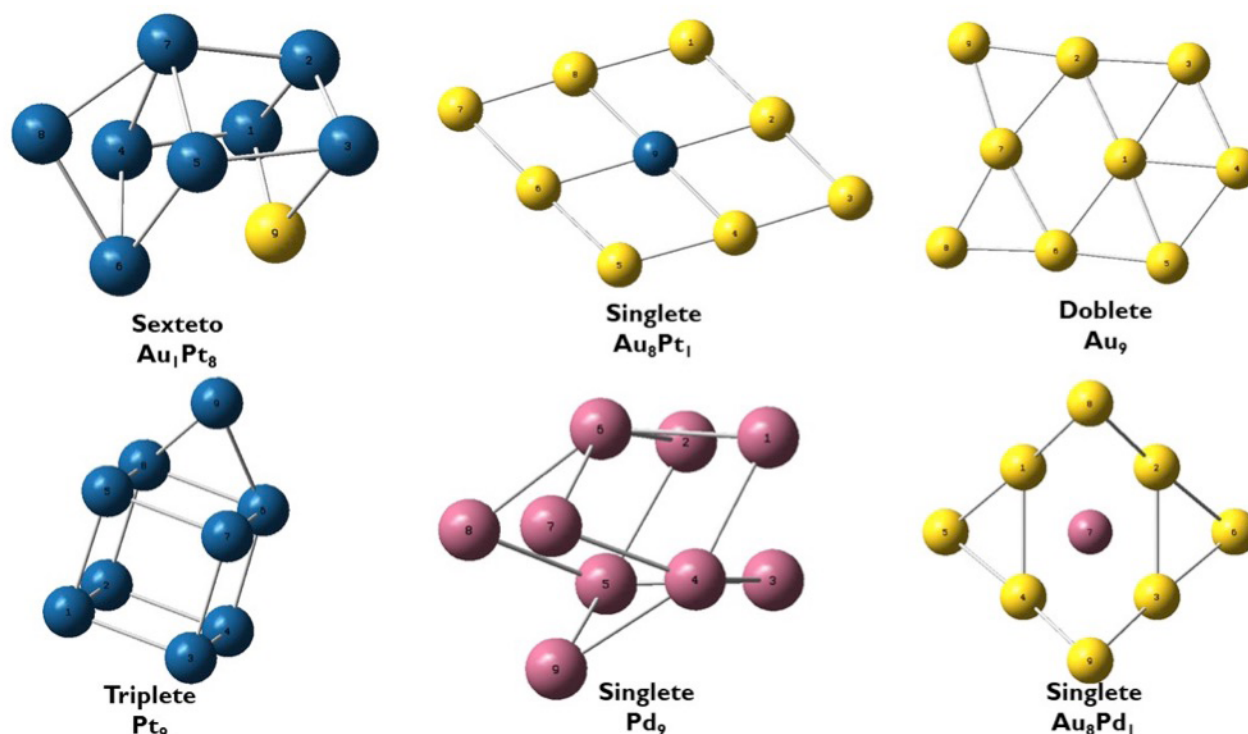


Figura 1. Estructuras estables para sistemas de Au-Pt y Au-Pd, además de los clústeres Pt_9 , Pd_9 y Au_9 . El azul corresponde a Pt, el amarillo a Au y el violeta a Pd.

Tabla 2. Distancia de enlace (Å) entre los átomos Au-Au, Au-Pt (Au-Pd) y Pt-Pt (Pd-Pd) en los diferentes clústeres.

Clúster	Au-Au		Au-Pt (Au-Pd)		Pt-Pt (Pd-Pd)	
	Rango	Promedio	Rango	Promedio	Rango	Promedio
<i>Au₉</i>	2,610-2,931	2,703	-	-	-	-
<i>Au₈Pt</i>	2,692-2,859	2,727	2,728-2,796	2,750	-	-
<i>AuPt₈</i>	-	-	2,694-2,874	2,808	2,388-3,691	2,680
<i>Pt₉</i>	-	-	-	-	2,532-2,776	2,606
<i>Au₈Pd</i>	2,629-2,965	2,779	2,607-2,619	2,615	-	-
<i>AuPd₈</i>	-	-	2,731-2,852	2,781	2,617-2,820	2,724
<i>Pd₉</i>	-	-	-	-	2,645-2,776	2,724

A medida que se reemplazan los átomos de Au por átomos de Pt, la longitud promedio de los enlaces Au-Pt aumenta y las distancias de los enlaces Au-Au y Pt-Pt disminuyen, hasta llegar al clúster *Pt₉*, el cual tiene la longitud promedio de enlace Pt-Pt más corta entre los sistemas estudiados. Este hecho podría implicar enlaces más fuertes y, con seguridad, más estables. Por otro lado, la estructura de paladio (en *Pd₉*) toma una disposición compacta deltaédrica. Se pensaría, en estos casos particulares, por corresponder a sistemas monometálicos, que la estructura geométrica fuera plana; sin embargo, esto no es lo observado, dado que no corresponden a los mínimos en las superficies de energía potencial local [49].

En cuanto a la multiplicidad de los clústeres, es importante indicar que la multiplicidad es mayor para el átomo de paladio 4d¹⁰ en el clúster que contiene solo este tipo de átomo, es decir, quintete [50]. Esto puede explicarse por el hecho de que parte de la densidad 4d se promueve en la órbita de los 5s para proporcionar enlaces metal-metal estables. Por otro lado, la baja multiplicidad del clúster *Au₉* puede ser atribuida al electrón en la capa 6s, el cual es capaz de inducir un vínculo metal-metal más estable que en el clúster *Pd₉*.

Análisis de reactividad global

Considerando las propiedades geométricas obtenidas para cada uno de los clústeres seleccionados, se estudiaron otras características tanto topológicas como electrónicas. En la Tabla 3 se presentan los potenciales de ionización y afinidades electrónicas calculados. Como se puede observar, ocurren ligeros cambios después de la incorporación de Pt o Pd al clúster de Au. En comparación con los reportes dados en la literatura para los sistemas compuestos con Pt, se puede observar que el porcentaje de error para el potencial de ionización (PI) no excede el 7,4%, mientras que para la afinidad electrónica (AE) llega hasta un valor de 13,9%. Sin embargo, es importante resaltar que para la mayoría de los casos la incorporación tanto Pt como de Pd cambia de manera ligera los valores de los dos parámetros analizados. Como se comentó antes, el Pt tiene una configuración electrónica similar a la del Au, mientras que el Pd tiene menos electrones (totales y de valencia) con respecto tanto al Pt como al Au. Esto implica que los valores tanto de PI como de AE estarán fuertemente influenciados por el comportamiento electrónico de cada elemento en el clúster, lo cual está ampliamente respaldado por los valores obtenidos indicados en la Tabla 3. En general, el sistema *Pd₉* fue el que presentó menor PI mientras que el *Pt₉* presentó el valor más alto de PI.

Tabla 3. Valores del potencial de ionización (PI) y afinidad electrónica (AE) para los diferentes clústeres de Au-Pd y Au-Pt.

Clúster	PI (eV)	%Error ^{a,b}	AE (eV)	%Error ^{a,b}
<i>Au₈Pt</i>	7,05	0,90	2,95	4,31
<i>AuPt₈</i>	7,15	-	2,84	-
<i>Pt₉</i>	7,43	7,36	2,91	13,9
<i>Au₈Pd</i>	7,03	-	2,24	-
<i>Pd₉</i>	6,34	-	2,19	-
<i>Au₉</i>	7,15	0,02	3,40	7,10

^a*Au₈Pt*: PI = 6,99 eV y AE = 2,83 eV [46, 51]. ^b*Pt₉*: PI = 6,92 eV y AE = 2,55 eV [52]. Los valores de PI y AE para el clúster de *Au₉* se reportan en la Tabla 1.

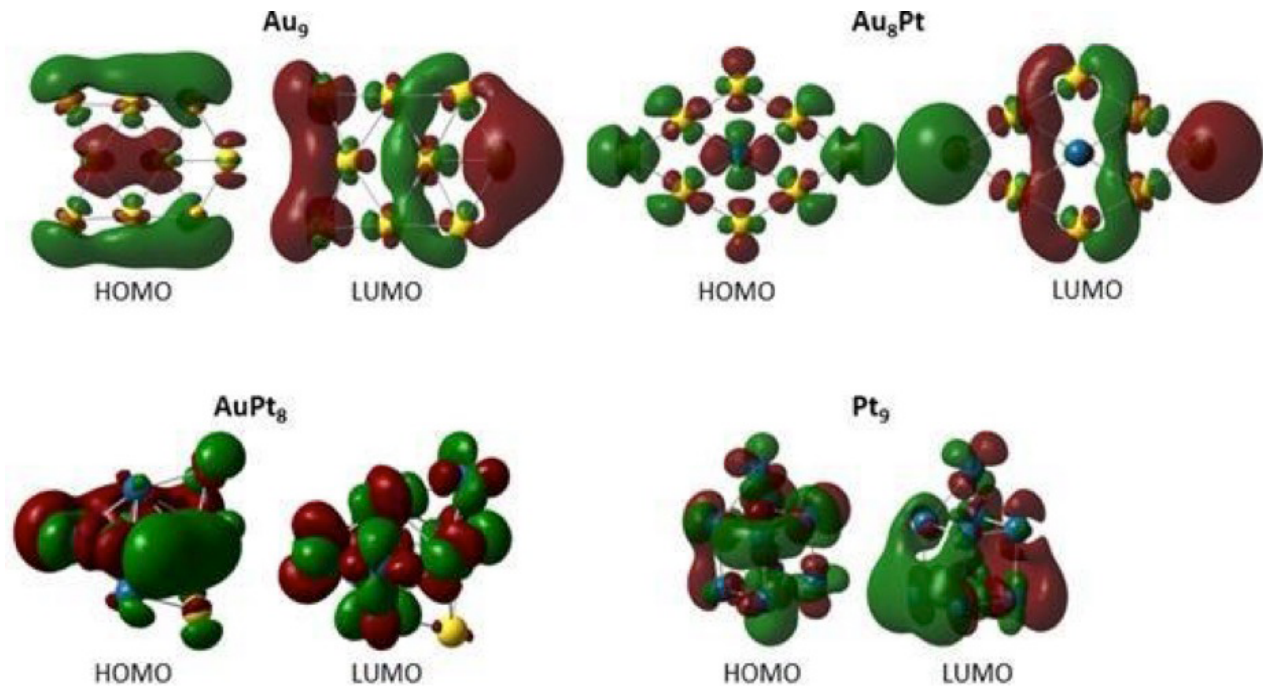


Figura 2. Esquema de los orbitales frontera (HOMO y LUMO) para los diferentes clústeres *Au₉*, *Au₈Pt*, *AuPt₈* y *Pt₉*.

En la Tabla 4 se muestran las diferencias energéticas obtenidas entre los orbitales HOMO y LUMO ($\text{Gap}_{\text{HOMO-LUMO}}$), la cual se puede utilizar para predecir la estabilidad de los complejos de metales de transición (las representaciones esquemáticas de algunos clústeres seleccionados se muestran en la Figura 2). Es bien reconocido que un valor bajo de la diferencia entre el HOMO y LUMO indica que la especie química (clúster, molécula, átomo, radical, entre otros) será más reactiva [53]. De este modo, los clústeres con mayor separación HOMO-LUMO fueron Au_9 y Au_8Pt , mientras que los sistemas con menor $\text{Gap}_{\text{HOMO-LUMO}}$ fueron AuPt_8 y Pt_9 . Es importante resaltar que la inclusión de ocho átomos de Pt o incluso tener solo átomos de Pt en cada clúster disminuye de manera notoria los valores del $\text{Gap}_{\text{HOMO-LUMO}}$, volviéndolos entonces más reactivos. Por otro lado, los clústeres que contienen Pd son menos reactivos que aquellos con Pt dado que presentan valores más altos del $\text{Gap}_{\text{HOMO-LUMO}}$.

En la Tabla 4 se reportan los valores de los otros índices de reactividad global calculados junto con el $\text{Gap}_{\text{HOMO-LUMO}}$. El potencial químico electrónico mide la tendencia de escape de los electrones en un sistema en equilibrio químico. Entre mayor (es decir, más positivo) sea el potencial químico, mayor tendencia a no estar en el equilibrio los electrones del sistema (en este caso particular, del clúster). En la Tabla 4 se observa que el clúster que presenta el menor potencial químico es Au_9 , continuando con el clúster Pt_9 y finalizando con los de Pd , lo cual muestra que los sistemas bimetalicos son los que tienen la mayor capacidad de transferir electrones junto con el clúster Pd_9 . En particular, para los casos que contienen Pd dentro de la estructura de los átomos de Au es posible observar que, a diferencia de aquellos materiales que contienen Pt, los valores de potencial químico son menores (es decir, más negativos) siendo más bajo para el sistema que contiene solo Pd. El orden general en términos de reactividad (potencial químico) para los clústeres estudiados es: $\text{Au}_9 < \text{Pt}_9 < \text{Au}_8\text{Pt} < \text{AuPt}_8 < \text{AuPd}_8 < \text{Au}_8\text{Pd} < \text{Pd}_9$.

La dureza global (η) es definida como la resistencia de los electrones a ser transferidos desde un sistema en equilibrio (no de escapar, como se definió en el potencial electrónico). De acuerdo con nuestros resultados, el clúster con menor dureza global es Pt_9 , seguido de AuPt_8 . Los menores valores de dureza corresponden a sistemas más reactivos. De este modo, se espera que estos dos materiales (Pt_9 y AuPt_8) sean los más reactivos entre el conjunto de sistemas que contienen tanto Pt como Pd. La comparación de los sistemas bimetalicos con Pt y con Pd concuerda con los resultados obtenidos para el potencial químico: se cumple que los materiales que tienen el potencial químico más bajo (es decir, los de Pd) son aquellos que tienen la mayor dureza global, los cuales corresponderán a los clústeres menos reactivos. Además, considerando no solo el menor $\text{Gap}_{\text{HOMO-LUMO}}$, sino también la menor dureza global, se confirma que el clúster más reactivo es el Pt_9 .

Finalmente, el índice de electrofilicidad global (ω) es la energía de estabilización de un sistema electrónico cuando es saturado por electrones que provienen de los alrededores; es decir, permite distinguir los sistemas más susceptibles a aceptar electrones. Un valor numérico alto de ω indicará que el material será más electrófilo mientras que los valores bajos (relativos) indican que el sistema tenderá a ser menos electrófilo.

Como se observa en la Tabla 4, el clúster más electrófilo es el Pt_9 , seguido de AuPt_8 . En comparación con los sistemas de Pt, se puede determinar que los materiales sustituidos con Pd no solo son los menos reactivos, sino, además, los menos electrófilos entre todos los materiales estudiados, con valores de índice de electrofilicidad global que varían entre 2,03 y 9,56, los cuales están alrededor del 100% de diferencia con respecto a aquellos que contienen Pt. Aunque si bien los clústeres de Pd son los menos reactivos, esto podría deberse, también, a que la composición de ambos átomos (tanto de Au como los de Pt) no es similar, lo cual es sugerido en la literatura. Clústeres bimetalicos con un número similar de átomos maximizan su estabilización [54].

Tabla 4. Índices de reactividad global.

Clúster	μ (eV) ^a	η (eV) ^b	ω (eV) ^c	ΔE (eV) ^d
Au_9	-5,27	0,92	15,06	1,85
Au_8Pt	-5,00	0,83	15,07	1,66
AuPt_8	-4,99	0,65	19,13	1,31
Pt_9	-5,17	0,57	23,52	1,14
Au_8Pd	-4,64	4,79	9,56	2,32
AuPd_8	-4,74	5,63	8,70	1,82
Pd_9	-4,33	4,82	2,03	2,02

^aPotencial químico electrónico (μ), ^bDureza global (η), ^cÍndice de electrofilicidad global (ω), ^d ΔE (eV): $\text{Gap}_{\text{HOMO-LUMO}}$.

Análisis de reactividad local

Considerando los anteriores hallazgos de reactividad global, se determinaron las funciones de Fukui para los clústeres que contienen Pt y los valores están indicados en la Tabla 5. Las funciones de Fukui estiman la reactividad de diferentes sitios dentro del clúster, es decir, la selectividad en donde la dirección del ataque sea preferida. En este sentido, el acercamiento o el ataque de un sustrato a un átomo específico del clúster se dará cuando la función de Fukui presente los valores más altos. Las funciones de Fukui se calcularon a partir de las cargas atómicas de Hirshfeld y su análisis se estableció a partir de la probabilidad del ataque nucleofílico (dado el tipo de catálisis –oxidativa– a considerar). Se observa en la Tabla 5 que para el clúster que contiene solo Au (es decir, el Au_9), el átomo 4 es el más susceptible a un ataque nucleofílico mientras que para los sistemas bimetalicos Au_8Pt y AuPt_8 la mayor probabilidad se puede localizar en el átomo 3 o 7 y 1 o 3, respectivamente (véase Figura 1). Por último, para el sistema que contiene solo Pt (Pt_9), el átomo 4 es el que presenta la mayor susceptibilidad a un ataque nucleofílico. Como era de esperarse, los átomos obtenidos en los cuales se puede generar una mayor probabilidad

Tabla 5. Funciones de Fukui para los ataques nucleofílicos y electrofílicos, calculadas desde las cargas atómicas de Hirshfeld.

Au_9			Au_8Pt			AuPt_8			Pt_9		
Átomo	f_k^{+a}	f_k^{-b}	Átomo	f_k^{+a}	f_k^{-b}	Átomo	f_k^{+a}	f_k^{-b}	Átomo	f_k^{+a}	f_k^{-b}
7	0,051	0,040	2	0,085	0,078	5	0,085	0,075	5	0,081	0,072
1	0,051	0,046	6	0,085	0,078	4	0,085	0,075	6	0,089	0,076
2	0,070	0,074	4	0,085	0,078	2	0,095	0,107	8	0,091	0,059
6	0,070	0,074	8	0,085	0,078	6	0,098	0,147	3	0,101	0,149
3	0,096	0,098	1	0,101	0,106	8	0,104	0,137	7	0,106	0,063
5	0,096	0,098	5	0,101	0,106	9	0,112	0,114	2	0,109	0,149
8	0,159	0,173	9	0,122	0,008	7	0,123	0,105	9	0,133	0,145
9	0,159	0,173	3	0,169	0,234	1	0,150	0,120	1	0,144	0,141
4	0,250	0,223	7	0,169	0,234	3	0,150	0,120	4	0,146	0,146

^aSusceptibilidad al ataque nucleofílico (f_k^{+}). ^bSusceptibilidad al ataque electrofílico (f_k^{-}). Véase la numeración de los átomos en la Figura 1.

de ser atacados nucleofílicamente, son aquellos en donde se observa una contribución alta del orbital LUMO, lo cual está acorde con los resultados ya mostrados en el análisis de los orbitales frontera. En particular, ha sido reportado que incluso la forma y el tamaño del clúster influyen el número y posición de los sitios disponibles para un ataque nucleofílico y electrofílico, y que, además, tienen una carga negativa centrada rodeada por átomos cargados de forma positiva. Estos últimos están enlazados por interacciones interatómicas de larga distancia [55]. Considerando los hallazgos obtenidos previamente para las características fisicoquímicas de los sistemas bimetalicos constituidos por Pt y Pd e incorporados en el clúster de Au, se determinó la efectividad del uso de los sistemas que contienen Pt en la adsorción y oxidación selectiva del monóxido de carbono. Los resultados se describen en la siguiente sección.

Mecanismo de reacción

Adsorción de CO

Teniendo en cuenta el análisis de reactividad, se determinó el mecanismo de reacción para los clústeres Au_8Pt y el $AuPt_8$, así como de los noámeros Au_9 y Pt_9 , para efectos de comparación. Es decir, que, dado el bajo nivel de reactividad de los clústeres con Pd, tales sistemas no fueron incluidos en el análisis general del mecanismo de la reacción de oxidación de CO. Sin embargo, es importante tener en cuenta que estudios previos han reportado también la oxidación del CO en clústeres de Au-Pd, sugiriendo que la adsorción del O₂ y del CO es más estable cuando se tiene la mezcla bimetalica, que cuando solo se tienen clústeres monometalicos del mismo tamaño [54]. Esto también es de esperarse para los clústeres reactivos de Au que contienen Pt.

Es bien conocido en la literatura que la adsorción del CO se dará a través del átomo de carbono [54]. Para identificar cuál molécula se adsorbería primero, si CO o el O₂. Se realizaron cálculos adicionales considerando la adsorción de ambas moléculas sobre los materiales bimetalicos. Además, se consideraron las funciones de Fukui para el ulterior estudio

del átomo, en los cuales existe una mayor probabilidad de adsorción del oxígeno molecular o del monóxido de carbono. Los valores de la energía de adsorción encontrados tanto para el oxígeno como para el monóxido de carbono para cada uno de los clústeres de Au y Pt se indican en la Tabla 6. Los gráficos de los complejos obtenidos después de la adsorción se indican en la Figura 3.

La energía de adsorción del CO sobre Au_9 fue de $-0,76$ eV, mientras que para los otros clústeres fueron: $Au_8Pt = -0,79$ eV, $AuPt_8 = -2,10$ eV y $Pt_9 = -1,95$ eV. La comparación de las energías de adsorción indica que los clústeres para los cuales se libera una mayor cantidad de energía y en tanto serán los sistemas más reactivos fueron $AuPt_8$ y Pt_9 . El sitio más favorable para la adsorción es un átomo de platino enlazado al oro; se encontró que al sustituir un átomo de platino por un átomo de oro se favorece más la adsorción el CO. En este sentido y considerando los hallazgos de la adsorción de CO y oxígeno molecular en cada clúster (véase Tabla 6), se modeló la oxidación de CO sobre cada sistema con el objetivo de determinar las etapas más importantes y los factores electrónicos/superficiales en cada material.

Tabla 6. Energías de adsorción en eV del CO y O₂ sobre cada clúster monometalico y bimetalico de Au y Pt.

Clúster	CO	O ₂
Au_9	-0,76	-0,63
Au_8Pt	-0,79	-0,58
$AuPt_8$	-2,10	-1,91
Pt_9	-1,95	-1,21

Oxidación de CO

El mecanismo general, incluyendo cada una de las etapas, permite establecer las interacciones de cada uno de los adsorbatos en la superficie de cada clúster. En este sentido, en las Figuras 4 y 5 se muestra la ruta de reacción, incluyendo los estados de transición, de la formación de dióxido de carbono a partir de los sustratos de CO y O₂ usando cada uno de los clústeres seleccionados.

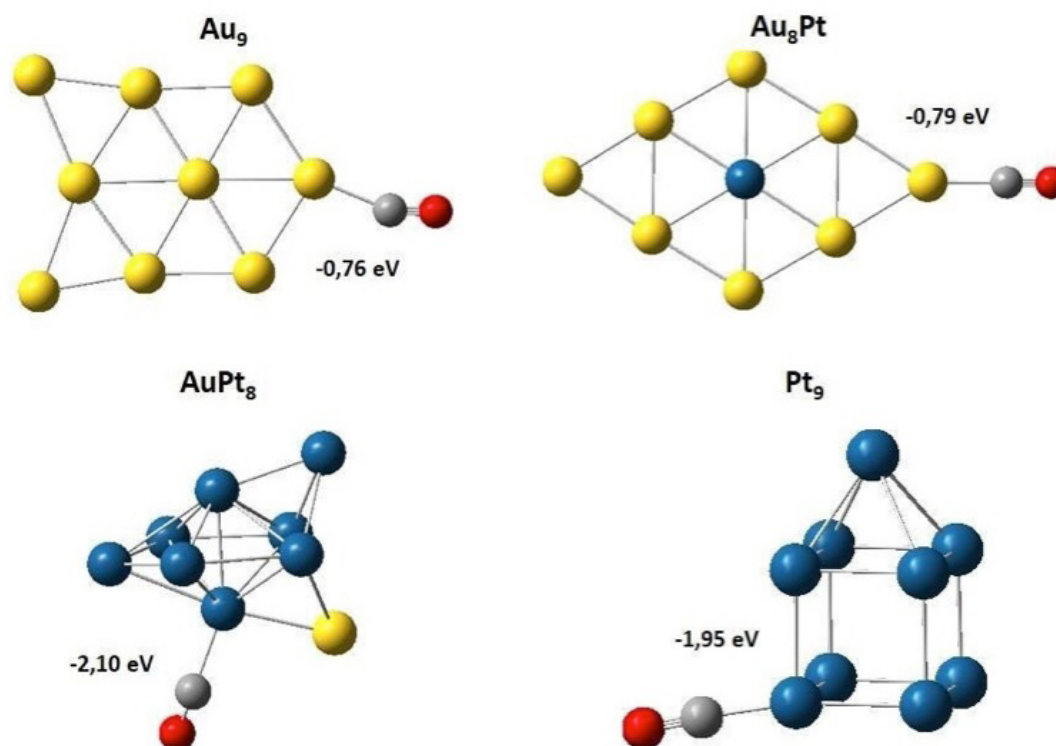


Figura 3. Geometrías optimizadas de la adsorción del CO en los diferentes sistemas monometalicos y bimetalicos de Au y Pt. Los valores en eV indican las energías de adsorción del monóxido de carbono incluyendo la corrección del punto cero. El azul corresponde a Pt, el amarillo a Au, el gris a C y el rojo a O.

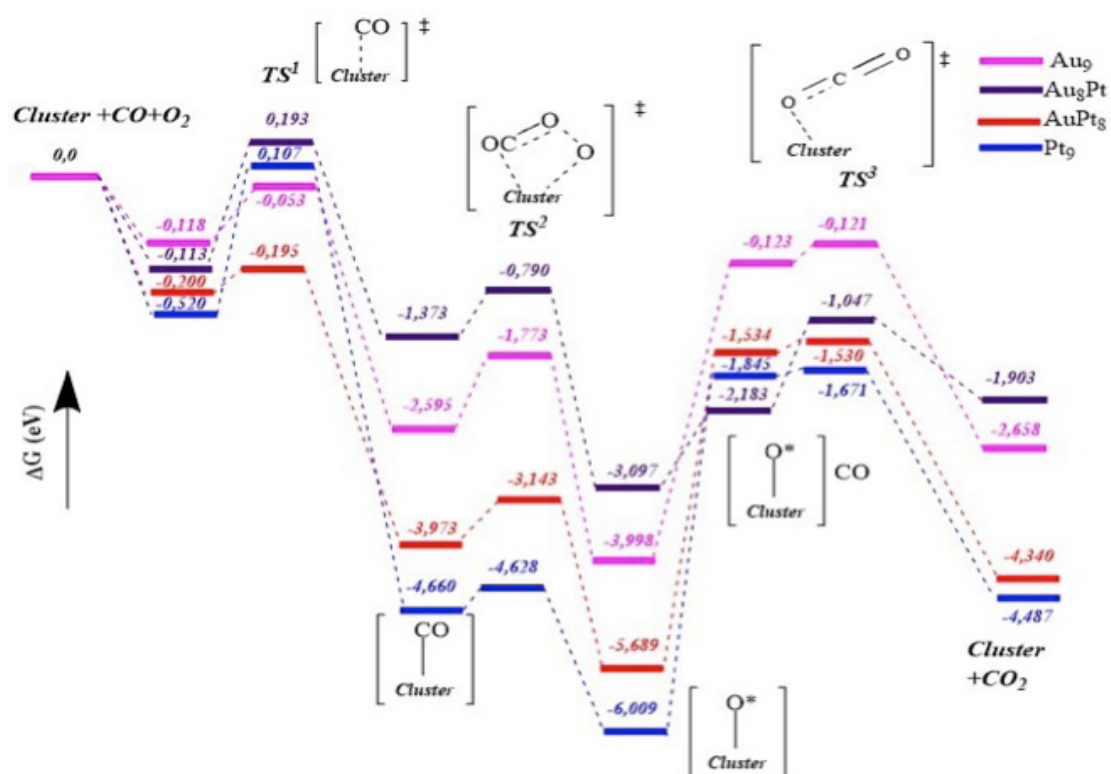


Figura 4. Comparación de los mecanismos de reacción de la oxidación selectiva de CO sobre diferentes clústeres de Au y Pt.

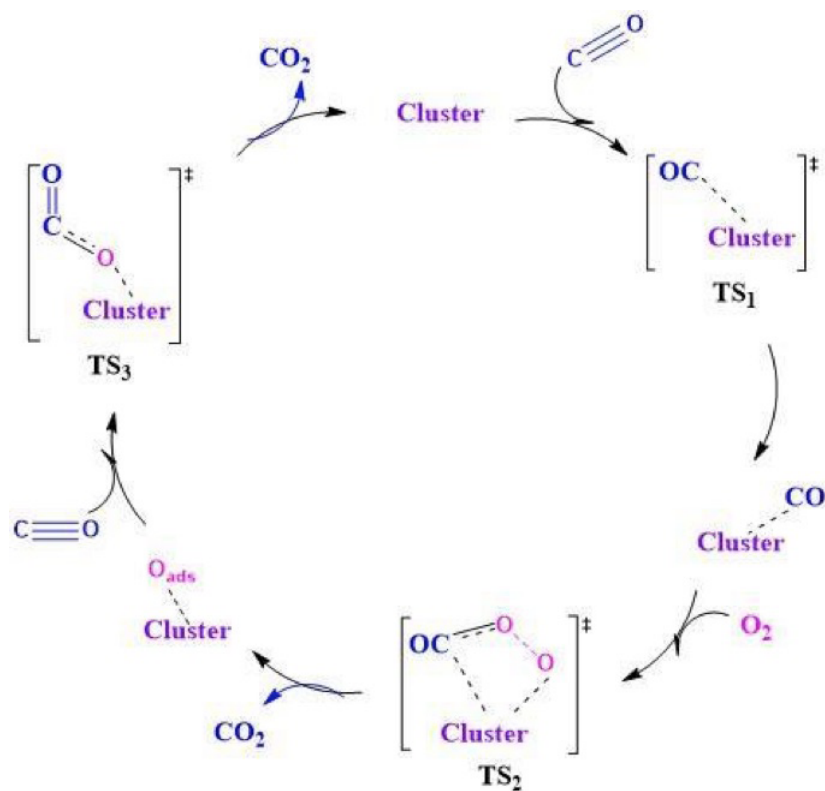


Figura 5. Resumen del mecanismo de reacción de la oxidación de monóxido de carbono sobre las diferentes series de catalizadores seleccionados de Au y Pt.

Se puede apreciar que la reacción se divide en dos etapas: la primera relacionada con la adsorción de una molécula de monóxido de carbono y su oxidación a dióxido de carbono, y luego, la formación de un intermedio oxígeno-clúster que conduce a una descompensación de la superficie del material. En la segunda etapa de la reacción, otra molécula de CO se adsorbe sobre el intermedio oxígeno-clúster y, por último, ocurre una segunda desorción de una molécula de CO₂. Como era de esperarse, por cada molécula de oxígeno se producirán dos moléculas de dióxido de carbono generando una alta productividad en los clústeres estudiados. Sin embargo, tanto en los estados de transición como en los intermediarios generados en la adsorción preferencial de oxígeno, cambia drásticamente la adsorción y esto se puede observar en las barreras energéticas obtenidas para cada material.

La comparación de cada uno de los perfiles energéticos se desarrolló en términos de la energía libre de Gibbs, para estudiar la espontaneidad y la favorabilidad termodinámica de cada una de las etapas sobre cada catalizador evaluado. En este sentido, la primera etapa en donde se genera una primera adsorción de las moléculas de CO y O₂ presenta energías similares para los clústeres de Au₉ y Au₈Pt, e incluso para el sistema que contiene un solo átomo de Au en la estructura del material. Sin embargo, resulta más favorable y espontánea para el sistema que contiene solo Pt. En el primer estado de transición que se genera, la adsorción preferencial del CO produce una diferenciación significativa (en términos energéticos) para cada uno de los clústeres, teniendo una energía de activación de 0,065 eV para el clúster Au₉, 0,326 eV para el material AuPt₈, 0,005 eV para el catalizador AuPt₈ y, por último, de 0,107 eV para el sistema Pt₉. Teniendo en cuenta estos resultados, se deduce que la primera barrera energética se ve favorecida en el sistema AuPt₈ seguido de Au₉.

Con posterioridad, la formación de un enlace covalente del carbono sobre cada uno de los clústeres genera un intermediario que se diferencia, en términos energéticos, en ~2 eV. Por ejemplo, para el sistema Au₈Pt el valor diferencial de la energía libre de Gibbs fue de -1,37 eV, mientras que para los materiales Au₉, AuPt₈, Pt₉ es de -2,60, -3,97 y -4,66 eV, respectivamente. En el siguiente estado de transición, una molécula de oxígeno se aproxima a cada clúster formando un complejo activado del tipo *OC-O-* (los * indican reacción o fisisorción con el clúster). En este caso particular, la energía de activación es de 0,830 eV, 0,822 eV, 0,583 eV y 0,032 eV para los clústeres AuPt₈, Au₉, Au₈Pt y Pt₉, respectivamente. Al contrario de lo que se expuso en el primer estado de transición, los materiales Au₈Pt y Pt₉ son los que presentaron menor energía de activación y en tanto los que menos gasto energético requerirán para pasar a la siguiente etapa.

Luego, en la siguiente etapa, se genera la desorción de la primera molécula de dióxido de carbono y se obtiene un oxígeno sobre la superficie produciendo una descompensación electrónica y de masa en el material. De nuevo, en esta etapa, los dos sistemas más espontáneos y en tanto, los más favorecidos termodinámicamente son: AuPt₈ y Pt₉. Dado que se genera tal descompensación electrónica en el volumen de la superficie de los clústeres, otra molécula de CO se adsorbe y se genera un acercamiento produciendo una etapa adicional. En este caso, el clúster que requiere menor costo energético es el sistema Au₈Pt con una diferencia de solo 0,914 eV, mientras que para los otros materiales requiere más de 2 eV para su transformación.

Después del acercamiento entre la molécula de CO hacia la superficie descompensada por el oxígeno incorporado sobre cada uno de los materiales, ocurre un ataque nucleofílico entre la molécula de CO hacia el oxígeno vacante. Esto se da, en particular, por la necesidad de compensar la carga del clúster y generar un balance de masa adecuado en la estequiometría de la reacción. Por último, se genera cada uno de los estados de transición para cada clúster, en donde la energía de activación favorece la formación del dióxido de carbono sobre Au₉ y AuPt₈, mientras que en los casos de Au₈Pt y Pt₉ son los materiales donde se requerirá de una barrera energética más alta. De esta manera, se demuestra que, aunque todos los materiales son promisorios en términos de reactividad para la oxidación de CO, el sistema AuPt₈ resulta ser uno de los más interesantes para ser evaluado como catalizador heterogéneo, dado que no solo tiene índices de reactividad atractivos, sino que, además, cuenta con las barreras de energías más bajas para la oxidación preferencial del CO.

Conclusiones

En esta contribución, se determinó la reactividad de varios clústeres de Au-Pd y Au-Pt con diferentes características electrónicas. Además, los más promisorios se evaluaron en la reacción de oxidación de CO. En este sentido, se evaluaron diferentes variables electrónicas: dureza global, índice de electrofilicidad, potencial de ionización, análisis del band-gap a partir de los orbitales frontera (HOMO-LUMO) y afinidad electrónica, encontrándose que los clústeres de Au-Pt son más reactivos con respecto a los materiales de Au-Pd. Se pudo observar que el clúster que presenta el mayor potencial químico es AuPt₈ continuando con el clúster Au₈Pt y finalizando con los de Pd, lo cual muestra que los sistemas bimetálicos son los que tienen la mayor capacidad de transferir electrones. Además, el orden general en términos de reactividad (potencial químico) para los clústeres estudiados es el siguiente: Au₉ < Pt₉ < Au₈Pt < AuPt₈ < AuPd₈ < Au₈Pd < Pd₉. El análisis de electrofilicidad indicó que el más electrófilo de los clústeres es Pt₉ seguido de AuPt₈. En comparación con los sistemas de Pt, se determinó que los sistemas sustituidos con Pd (es decir, los clústeres Au-Pd), no solo son los menos reactivos, sino, además, los menos electrófilos entre todos los materiales estudiados, con valores de índice de electrofilicidad global que variaron entre 2,03 y 9,56. De este modo, la segunda etapa de este estudio se centró en la adsorción selectiva de CO sobre cada uno de los clústeres de Au-Pt, constituyendo una herramienta esencial para el entendimiento del mecanismo de reacción. Si bien, para cada uno de los materiales ocurre la misma cantidad de etapas, incluyendo, además, la adsorción del CO, unión con el oxígeno molecular, desorción de una molécula de CO₂, descompensación de la superficie y luego la formación de una segunda molécula de CO₂; las barreras energéticas cambiaron de manera drástica, favoreciendo en casi la mayoría de las etapas a los clústeres de AuPt₈ y Pt₉. Además, se determinaron las energías de activación para cada uno de los sistemas, indicando las barreras requeridas para pasar por cada uno de los estados de transición. Este estudio contribuye a la fundamentación básica del entendimiento de reacciones en superficie y, además, genera una estrategia computacional para la selección de un catalizador adecuado para la reacción de oxidación selectiva de monóxido de carbono. Se recuerda que la parte de un estudio de selectividad más a fondo requeriría de estudios posteriores en donde los adsorbatos además de CO y O₂ incluyan al H₂.

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Syntheses and magnetic properties of substituted bis-indacenyl bi-metallic complexes & application

Abstract

Organometallic compounds, Bis (2,4,6,8 teramethyl-indacenyl) di Iron (1), Bis (2,4,6,8 teramethyl s-indacenyl) mono iron, mono cobalt (2), and Bis (2,6 diethyl-4,8-dimethyl-s-indacenyl) di cobalt (3) were synthesised by means of salt elimination strategy, using Fe(II) and Co(II) salts. The compounds were characterised through spectroscopic and electrochemical methods. Magnetic measurements were carried out by Physical Property Measurement System (PPMS). Mossbauer spectroscopic data reveals that in all compounds, surprisingly, Iron is in +3 oxidation state. DFT calculations have been carried out to understand the change in the oxidation state of a metal. DFT study confirms the electron transfer nature of ligand to metal. Cyclic voltametric study on these compounds shows a large separation ($\Delta E > 800\text{mV}$) between two oxidation peaks confirming the strong interaction between the metal centres. Magnetic measurements on these organometallic compounds reveals that they exhibit a ferrimagnetic behaviour at temperatures below 40 K.

Keywords: Indacenyl complexes; organometallic magnets; PPMS; Mössbauer spectroscopy.

Síntesis y propiedades magnéticas de complejos bimetálicos de bis-indacenilo sustituido y su aplicación

Resumen

En este trabajo se sintetizaron los compuestos organometálicos Bis (2,4,6,8 terametil-indacenil) férrico (1), Bis (2,4,6,8 terametil s-indacenil) ferroso, cobaltoso (2) y Bis (2,6 dietil-4,8-dimetil-s-indacenil) di cobalto (3) mediante la estrategia de eliminación de sales, utilizando sales de Fe(II) y Co(II). Los compuestos se caracterizan por métodos espectroscópicos y electroquímicos. Las mediciones magnéticas se llevaron a cabo mediante el sistema de medición de propiedades físicas (PPMS). Los datos espectroscópicos Mossbauer revelan que, en todos los compuestos, sorprendentemente, el hierro se encuentra en el estado de oxidación +3. También se realizaron cálculos DFT para comprender el cambio en el estado de oxidación de los metales. El estudio DFT confirmó la naturaleza de transferencia de electrones del ligando al metal. El estudio voltamperométrico cíclico de estos compuestos muestra una gran separación ($\Delta E > 800\text{mV}$) entre los dos picos de oxidación que confirman la fuerte interacción entre los centros metálicos. Las mediciones magnéticas de estos compuestos organometálicos revelan que presentan un comportamiento ferrimagnético a temperaturas inferiores a 40 K.

Palabras clave: complejos de indacenilo; organometálicos; PPMS; espectroscopía Mössbauer.

Sínteses e propriedades magnéticas de complexos bimetálicos bis-indacenílicos substituídos e aplicação

Resumo

Compostos organometálicos, Bis (2,4,6,8 terametil-indacenil) di ferro (1), Bis (2,4,6,8 terametil s-indacenil) mono ferro, mono cobalto (2) e Bis (2,6 dietil-4,8-dimetil-s-indacenil) di cobalto (3) foram sintetizados por estratégia de eliminação de sal, utilizando sais de Fe(II) e Co(II). Os compostos são caracterizados por métodos espectroscópicos e eletroquímicos. As medições magnéticas foram realizadas pelo Sistema de Medição de Propriedades Físicas (PPMS). Os dados espectroscópicos Mossbauer revelam que em todos os compostos, surpreendentemente, o ferro está em +3 estado de oxidação. Os cálculos do DFT foram realizados para entender a mudança no estado de oxidação de um metal. O estudo DFT confirma a natureza da transferência de elétrons do ligante para o metal. O estudo voltamétrico cíclico desses compostos mostra uma grande separação ($\Delta E > 800\text{mV}$) entre dois picos de oxidação confirmando a forte interação entre os centros metálicos. As medições magnéticas nestes compostos organometálicos revelam que eles apresentam um comportamento ferrimagnético a uma temperatura abaixo de 40 K.

Palavras-chave: complexos indocenílicos; ímãs organometálicos; PPMS; espectroscopia Mössbauer.

Introduction

There is a growing interest in the study of organometallic complexes derived from fused ring ligands such as pentalene, indacene and dicyclopenta dienyl naphthalene. These fused ring ligands are anti- aromatic in nature and belong to the $4n\pi$ electron system. Much of the interest is in the study of the electron delocalisation between the metal centres comprising of these ligands [1-7]. It was found that there is much greater electronic interaction in these systems due to the overlapping of the d-orbital of the metal and the p orbital of the ligand, evidenced by the spectroscopic and electrochemical characterisation [8]. Due to this interaction, a number of applications of these materials may be expected by appropriate design of the bridging groups for appropriate super exchange, combined with the use of two different metals with different spin and may lead to a ferrimagnet [9-10]. Several studies have centred on the use of bi nuclear metallocenes for third-order nonlinear optical properties. We can also imagine the second-order properties by using other species where the interaction between a metallocene donor and a metallocenium acceptor is important. Various research groups continued their effort in synthesising said organometallic compounds with novel electrical and magnetic properties [11-13]. For example, the Manriquez group have prepared the number of organometallic compounds with s-indacene as a spacer ligand and reported some interesting delocalisation properties [14-16]. Notwithstanding, to our knowledge there is no work reported on bi nuclear metal complexes with two s-indacene spacers.

A mono benzo analogue of pentalene has two isomers, s-indacene and as-indacene (Figure 1). It was found that the complexes derived from s-indacene exhibit a much higher degree of metal-metal interaction than the complexes derived from as-indacene. It was concluded that the geometry of the ligand plays an important role in the intermetallic interactions in these systems. Subsequently it was proved by virtue of Huckel's extended theoretical calculations [16].

In this paper we investigate the homo and hetero bimetallic complexes of substituted s-indacene in which two metal centres are sandwiched between the indacene spacer. We also report its electrochemical, Mossbauer and magnetic measurement results along with the DFT calculations.

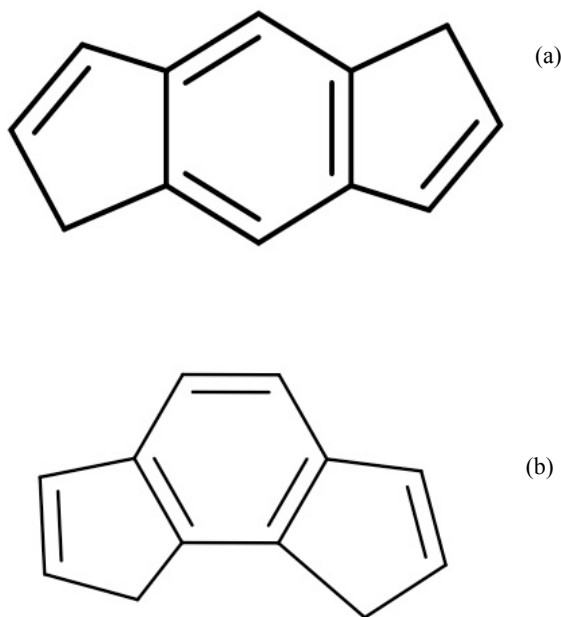


Figure 1. A mono benzo analogue of pentalene with two isomers (a) s-indacene and (b) as-indacene.

Materials and methods

General

All reactions were carried out under inert nitrogen and in dry solvents. Iron(II) Chloride was prepared *in situ* with standard procedure. The following materials were used as supplied commercially without further purification: anhydrous CoCl_2 , diethyl methyl malonate, KOH, HCl, n-butyl lithium (1.6 mol L^{-1}), poly phosphoric acid and ethyl alcohol.

Instrumental

Bruker-400 (400 MHz and 100 MHz for proton and Carbon NMR respectively) was used to record the NMR spectra and chemical shift reported in ppm relative to TMS. Bruker Vector-22 FTIR spectrometer was used to record the FT-IR spectra using Nujal Mull sample between NaCl discs. Fisons instruments EA-1108 CHNS elemental analyser was used for the elemental analyses. Bio analytical Systems Voltammetric analyser (model CV-50w, version 2.3) was used for cyclic voltammetry measurements. Platinum or a glassy carbon disc were used as a working electrode and platinum wire as an auxiliary electrode. The auxiliary electrode was isolated from the bulk solution by a glass tube with a small-porosity glass frit at the end. Neutral aluminium oxide was placed on the frit and the tube was filled with a 0.1 mol L^{-1} solution of supporting electrolyte $[\text{N}(\text{Bu})_4]\text{BF}_4$ (Bu=butyl); the reference electrode was an Ag/AgCl wire placed in a tube with a cracked glass bead at the end and containing aqueous tetra methyl ammonium chloride. The concentration of this solution was varied until the potential value was 0.0 V vs the saturated calomel electrode (SCE). This electrode was located inside a Luggin capillary in the electrochemical cell. The solvent used was dichloromethane. All the measurements were carried out under nitrogen atmosphere at room temperature (25°C).

A constant acceleration Mossbauer spectrometer with $^{57}\text{Co}/\text{Rh}$ source was used for the Mössbauer analyses of the samples. The c counts were collected in a 512 multi-channel analyser while the source was moving via triangular velocity waveform and, computer procedures were adopted for plotting and analysing the data. Velocity calibration was performed using 25 mm thick metallic Fe foil. The Mossbauer spectral parameters are given relative to this standard at room temperature. Mossbauer analyses were carried out at the UGC-DAE facilities at Indore, India.

Magnetic measurements were carried out with Quantum design (USA) Physical Property Measurement System (PPMS) with vibrating sample magnetometer (VSM) that has a temperature range from 1.9 to 400 K with a field range of 0 to 9 Tesla with sensitivity $1 \times 10^{-6} \text{ emu}$ and oscillation frequency 40 Hz. All magnetic measurements were carried out at the UGC-DAE facilities at BARC, Mumbai, India.

The density functional calculations of the complex were performed using the Gaussian programme G09 and the Gauss view 6 with the 3-21G*(6d, 7f) basis sets. The frontier molecular orbital profile and the energy gap between the highest occupied molecular orbital (HOMO) and the lowest unoccupied molecular orbital (LUMO) were optimised. The natural bonding orbitals derived from the same fundamental sets.

Syntheses of ligands

The substituted s-indacene ligands, namely 2,4,6,8 tetramethyl-1,5-dihydro-s-Indacene(L1) and 2,6 diethyl-4,8-dimethyl-1,5-dihydro-s-indacene (L2) were prepared in a good yield by reported methods [17].

Syntheses of Organometallic compounds

Synthesis of Bis (2,4,6,8 teramethyl-indacenyl) di Iron (1)

In a 100 mL Schlenk flask, 0.5 g (0.0023 mol) of L1 was dissolved in tetrahydrofuran (30 mL) and cooled to -78 °C. Under nitrogen atmosphere, n-butyl lithium in hexane (2 mol L⁻¹, 2.37 mL) was added drop wise to L1, after complete addition it was allowed to warm to room temperature and allowed to stir for 1 h. Successively, anhydrous Iron(II) chloride (0.3 g, 0.0023 mol) dissolved in THF was charged (transferring *via* cannula) at -78 °C. After the complete transfer of FeCl₂ the reaction mixture was allowed to warm to room temperature and stirred for 3 h. Solvent was evaporated under vacuum and the dark brown colour product was extracted with toluene until the extraction became colourless. The combined extracts were put together and evaporated to dryness. To this crude product, THF was added (20 mL) to dissolve and cooled to -78 °C. The precipitate was filtered and dried yielding 0.5 g. (67%) dark red microcrystalline product, sensitive to air.

¹H NMR (C₆D₆, ppm) 1.36(s, 12H, -CH₃) 2.44 (s, 12H, CH₃, benzylic) 4.92 (s, 4H, CH) 5.22 (s, 4H, CH).

Elemental analysis, Calcd for C₃₂H₃₂Fe₂: C 72.86, H 6.07; found: C 72.72, H 6.01.

Synthesis of Fe(2,4,6,8 teramethyl s-indacenyl)₂ Co (2)

In a 100 mL Schlenk flask, 0.5 g (0.0023 mol) of L1 was dissolved in tetrahydrofuran (30 mL) and cooled to -78 °C. Under nitrogen atmosphere n-butyl lithium in hexane (2 mol L⁻¹, 1.19 mL) was added drop wise to L1; after complete addition it was allowed to warm to room temperature and stirred for 1 h. Successively, anhydrous Iron(II) chloride (0.15 g, 0.0012 mol) dissolved in THF was charged (transferring *via* cannula) at -18 °C. After the complete transfer of FeCl₂ the reaction mixture was allowed to warm to room temperature and stirred for 2 h. This reaction mixture was again cooled to -78 °C and n-butyl lithium in hexane (2 mol L⁻¹, 1.19 mL) was added drop wise. Then, we allowed to warm to room temperature and stirred for 1h. Anhydrous cobalt chloride (0.15 g, 0.0012 mol) in tetrahydrofuran (30 mL) was added and stirred for 4 h. Solvent was evaporated under vacuum and the dark brown colour product was extracted with toluene until the extraction became colourless. The combined extracts were put together and evaporated to dryness. To this crude product, THF was added (20 mL) to dissolve and cooled to -78 °C. The precipitate was filtered, dried yielding a dark brown product 0.4 g (61%).

¹H NMR(C₆D₆, ppm) 0.29 (s, 6H, CH₃) 1.31 (s, 6H, -CH₃) 2.44 (s, 12H, CH₃, benzylic) 4.92 (s, 4H, CH) 5.25 (s, 4H, CH).

Elemental analysis, Calcd for C₃₂H₃₂FeCo: C 72.26, H 6.02; found: C 71.16, H 5.97.

Synthesis of Bis (2,6 diethyl-4,8-dimethyl-s-indacenyl) di cobalt (3)

In a 100 mL Schlenk flask, 0.5 g (0.0029 mol) of L2 was dissolved in tetrahydrofuran (30 mL) and cooled to -78 °C. Under nitrogen atmosphere, n-butyl lithium in hexane (2 mol L⁻¹, 2.37 mL) was added drop wise to L2. After complete addition it was allowed to warm to room temperature and allowed to stir for 2 h. Successively, anhydrous cobalt(II) chloride (0.26 g, 0.0029 mol) dissolved in THF was charged (transferring *via* cannula) at -78 °C. After the complete transfer of CoCl₂ the reaction mixture was allowed to warm to room temperature and stirred for 3 h. Solvent was evaporated under vacuum and the dark green colour product was extracted with toluene until the extraction became colourless. The combined extracts were consolidated

and evaporated to dryness. To this crude product, THF was added (20 mL) to dissolve and cooled to -78 °C. The precipitate was filtered and dried having a yield of 0.5 g (67%) of green microcrystalline product.

Elemental analysis, Calcd for C₃₆H₃₂Co₂: C 73.22, H 6.77; found: C 73.16, H 6.57.

FTIR: (Nujol, NaCl disk) 560 cm⁻¹ (corresponding to metal –carbon bonding).

Results and Discussion

Synthesis and characterisation of [(η⁵-L1)₂Fe₂] (1)

We have adopted the salt elimination method for the synthesis of bis-indacenyl complex. Making the dianion of the ligand L1 (Li⁺²L1²⁻) with two moles of anhydrous FeCl₂, that was prepared in situ, as shown in Figure 2 the reaction affords a red solution and after purification red micro crystalline product was obtained that was highly sensitive to air. The NMR spectrum shows that it has two isomers, depending on the position of the hydrogen of the indacenyl ring. No attempts were made to separate the isomers. Elemental analysis was in good agreement with the calculated value. FTIR show the formation of the characteristic metal-carbon bond frequency at 611 cm⁻¹.

Synthesis and characterisation of [(η⁵-L1)Fe(η⁵-L1)Co] (2)

This compound was prepared by stepwise salt elimination by treating ligand L1 with one equivalent of n-butyl lithium to produce monoanion of the ligand (Li⁺¹L1⁻¹) and this was first treated with one mole of anhydrous FeCl₂ producing the ferrocene type complex with L1 (Figure 3). The compound so produced was reported earlier by the Manriquez group. The characterisation of this compound matches well with the reported findings [18-19]. This mono iron organometallic complex was further treated with two mole equivalent of n-butyl lithium and with one equivalent of anhydrous CoCl₂ affording the brown colour solution. After purification and drying, it offered the brown coloured compound. The NMR shows the two shifts for the C-H of Cp rings in indacene at 4.92 and 5.25 ppm respectively for cobalt and iron next to the bis indacenyl ring. However, due to residual paramagnetism, the peaks are broad. The IR frequency characteristic of the metal-carbon bond appeared at 585 cm⁻¹.

Synthesis and characterisation of [(η⁵-L2)₂Co₂](3)

We have synthesised 3 in like manner as the synthesis of 1 by taking anhydrous CoCl₂ and the reaction offered the dark green solution. After purification and drying it offered the off green coloured powder. Elemental analysis and FTIR confirm the formation of the compound. The IR absorptions corresponding to metal-carbon bonding appeared from 567 to 580 cm⁻¹.

The salt elimination method for preparing these compounds gave a good yield. Attempts were made to partially oxidise these complexes with ferrocenium tetra fluor borate. Even after several hours of reflux, the isolated product shows similar spectral characteristics to that of complexes 1, 2, and 3 suggesting that oxidation if any is only due to the ligand.

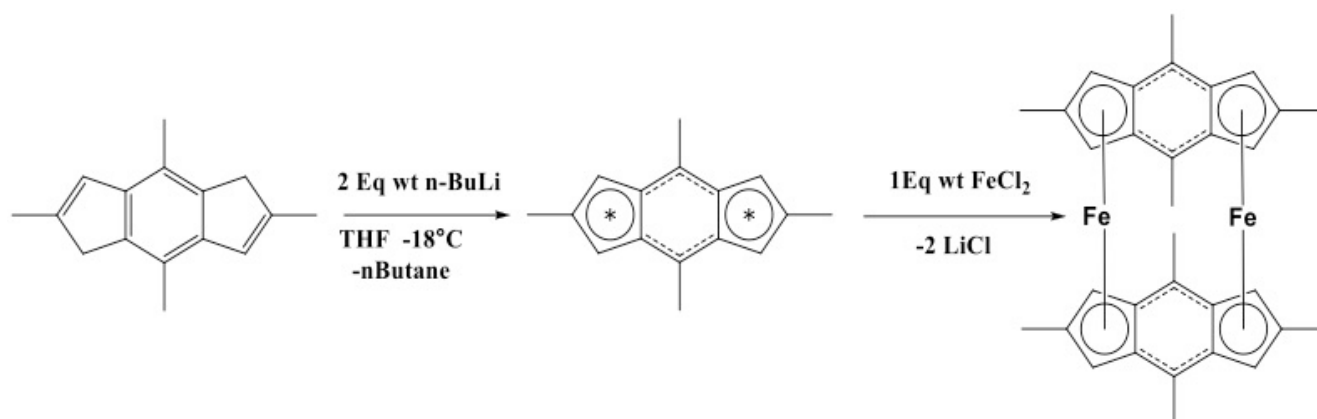


Figure 2. Synthesis of compound 1.

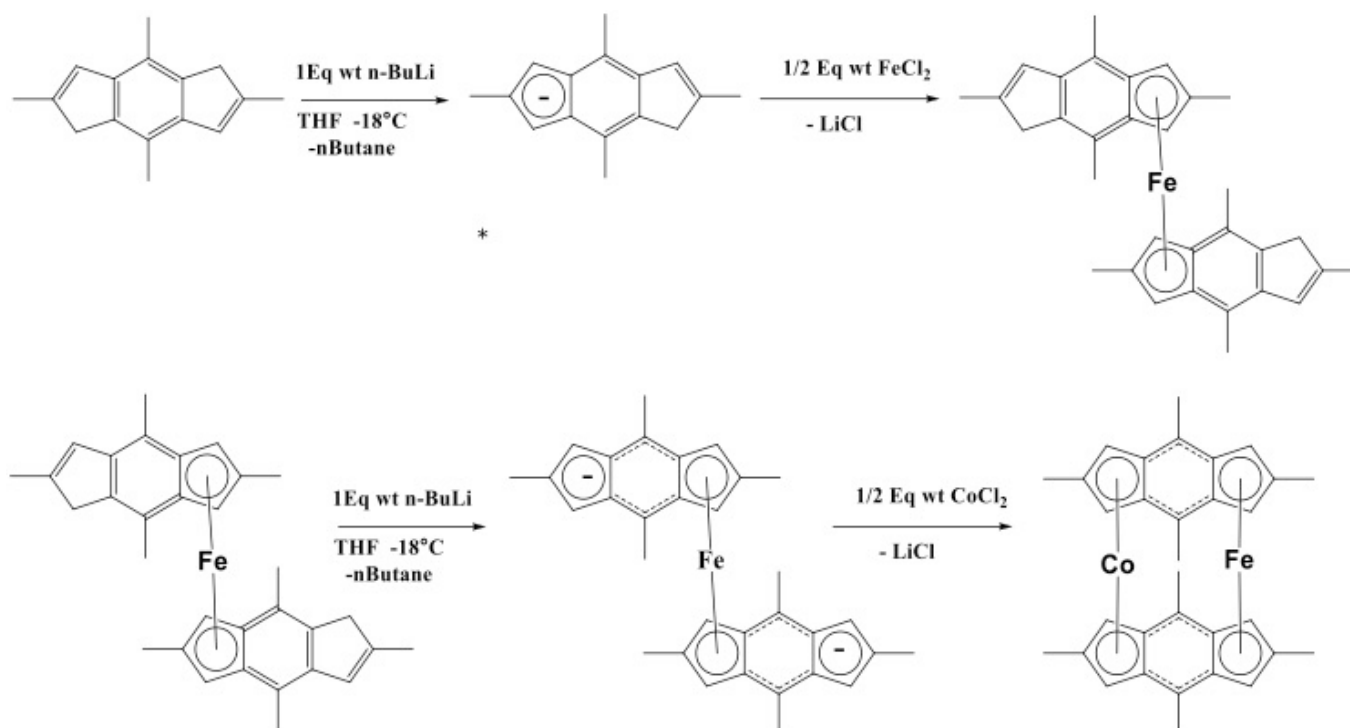


Figure 3. Synthesis of compound 2.

Electrochemical characterisation

Cyclic voltammetry studies of complexes 1, 2, and 3 were carried out in dichloromethane solvent with tetrabutyl ammonium tetra fluoroborate as a supporting electrolyte. Cyclic voltammogram of 1 presents a first reversible redox couple and a second irreversible couple. The potential values change with the scan rate. At 50 mVs^{-1} . The oxidations (E_{pa}) occur at $E_{pa1} = -1150$ and $E_{pa2} = 0.789$ vs the saturated calomel electrode. Controlled potential electrolysis at 0.789 V allowed us to determine that 1 equivalent of charge per mole of the complex has been transferred in this first redox process. Separation between two oxidation potentials ΔE is 1939 mV reveals the high degree of electronic delocalisation in the system. Complex 2 also shows a much stronger interaction than complex 1 (Figure 4). At 50 mVs^{-1} scan rate in the dichloromethane as solvent, the first oxidation occurs at -1352 mV attributed to the oxidation of Co^{+2} to Co^{+3} and the second oxidation at 759 mV corresponds to the oxidation of Fe^{+2} to Fe^{+3} . ΔE between two oxidation potentials is 2111 mV . This suggests the strong coupling between the metal and the ligand.

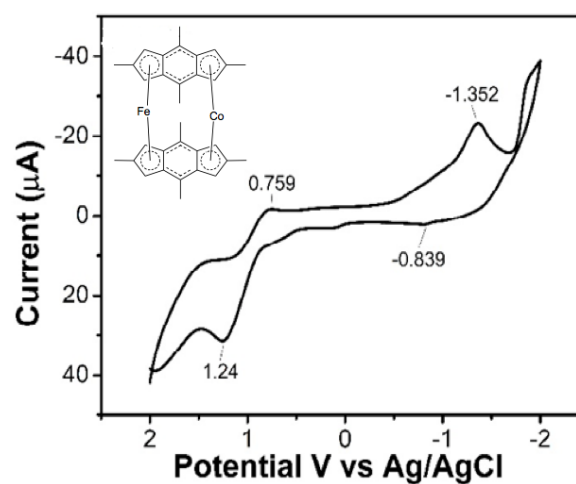


Figure 4. Cyclic Voltammogram of Complex 2.

The complexes do not show any electrochemical reversibility. The results are summarised on Table 1. This value of ΔE indicates the strong interactions between the metal centres, indicative of Class III complexes according to the modern method of classification and the Robin and Day Classification [20-21].

Table 1. Electrochemical reversibility of the complexes.

Complex	First oxidation(mV)	Second oxidation(mV)	ΔE (mV)
1	-1150	789	1939
2	-1352	759	2111
3	-1345	-296	1049

Mossbauer spectroscopic characterisation of complex 1 and 3

Mossbauer spectroscopy is a local probe technique that is very sensitive to the oxidation state and the crystallographic environment of the iron. Quadruple splitting and hyperfine interaction parameters are summarised on Table 2. On Table 2, it is evident that the Iron is in +3 oxidation state for complexes 1 and 3 by observing that the FWHM value reveals the high spin Fe(III) of the complexes. At room temperature, thermal activation promotes the electrons to a close enough excited molecular orbital state and hence we observe the change in the oxidation state from Fe^{+2} to Fe^{+3} . Similar behaviour was also observed in other reported complexes [22].

Table 2. Summarised Mössbauer parameters of complexes.

Complex	FWHM	δ_{Fe}	ΔE_{q}
1	0.61 ± 0.05	0.33 ± 0.01	0.71 ± 0.03
2	0.55 ± 0.08	0.32 ± 0.03	0.76 ± 0.06

The possible change in the oxidation state is further evidenced by the DFT calculations. The calculations were carried out on the similar compound L_2Fe_2 where L = 2,6 di phenyl 4,8 di methyl s-indacene. This indicates there exists a charge transfer from one metal centre to the other. In Figure 5, the colour red shows the depletion in the electron density and the colour blue shows the increase in electron density. The molecular orbital diagram in Figure 6 shows the ground state is a triplet.

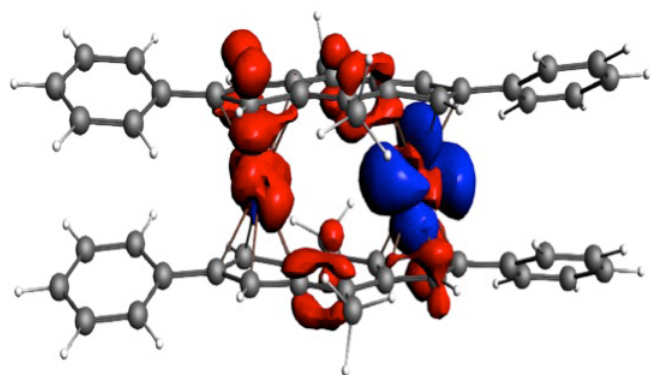


Figure 5. Optimised structure of the complex.

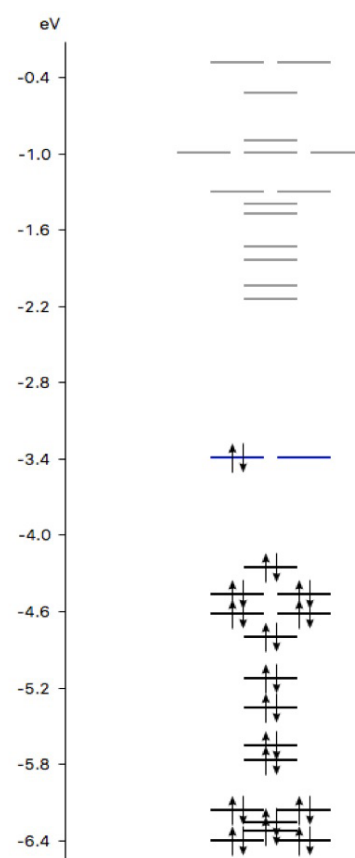


Figure 6. Molecular orbital diagram shows the ground state is a triplet.

Magnetic measurements of complexes 1, 2 and 3

Field cooled magnetisation and zero field cooled magnetisation data were taken for all the complexes. T_c was estimated from the extrapolation of the linear portion of the $M(T)$ curve. The $M(T)$ plots decrease rapidly as the sample warmed from 4K. The sharp transition at T_c suggests some degree of structural and magnetic uniformity throughout the complexes. The T_c 's of the different complexes range from 25 to 40 K with high reproducibility. The overlap of FC and ZFC suggests that there is no magnetic anisotropy in complexes 1 and 3, whereas for complex 2 there is a bifurcation of the FC and ZFC plots at 32K suggesting the possible phase transition in this complex as shown in Figure 7.

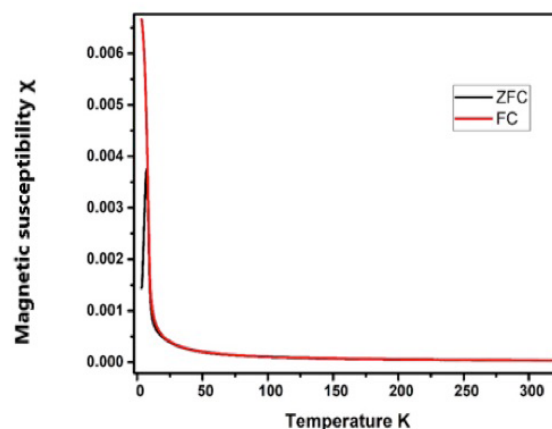


Figure 7. Magnetic susceptibility χ vs temperature curve of 2.

Measurements of magnetisation versus applied field, $M(H)$ were carried out on each material at 3 and 300 K. The results are summarised on Table 3 and the representative sample is plotted in Figure 8. It is interesting to observe that there is a large difference in the coercivity values from 3 to 300 K. The decrease in the coercivity value at higher temperature suggests that the complexes tend to reach a super paramagnetic at higher temperature

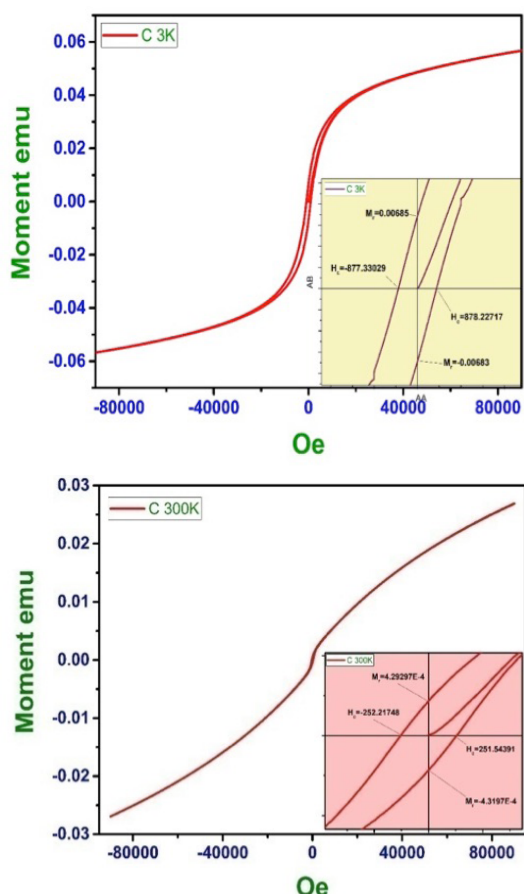


Figure 8. Represents the M_r and H_c values of the hysteresis curves at 3 and 300 K of 2.

The reciprocal of magnetic susceptibility obeys the Curie-Weiss law in the temperature range from 20 to 300 K. The Weiss constant was obtained by way of the Curie-Weiss law. The θ value was -4.566 , indicating that there exists a non-negligible antiferromagnetic coupling in this complex.

Table 3. Magnetic properties for the synthesised complexes.

Complex	Temperature(K)	H_c (Oe)	M_r emu/g	M_s emu/g
1	3	548.72	5.56	17.696
	300	72.88	1.51	15.596
2	3	961.77	0.0239	0.15
	300	61.64	2.306×10^{-5}	0.021
3	3	881	6.95×10^{-3}	0.06
	300	268	4.29×10^{-4}	0.03

Conclusions

We have successfully synthesised metal complexes with substituted s-indacene ligand by means of salt elimination. Mossbauer study shows

the oxidised metal centres. Furthermore, the attempts of partial oxidation of metal centres in the complexes either chemically or electrochemically failed suggesting the ligand centred oxidation. The magnetic measurements suggest that the complexes synthesised are magnetic at lower temperatures suggesting the spin cross over phenomenon. Electrochemical characterisation suggests the strong electronic delocalisation in these complexes. A future research goal in this area is to discern the suitability of these complexes for magnetic applications in memory storage devices. We are trying to encapsulate the complexes to avoid air sensitivity for said applications.

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