Evaluation of multilayer perceptron and self-organizing map neural network topologies applied on microstructure segmentation from metallographic images

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Artificial neuronal networks have been used intensively in many domains to accomplish different computational tasks. One of these tasks is the segmentation of objects in images, like to segment microstructures from metallographic images, and for that goal several network topologies were proposed. This paper presents a comparative analysis between multilayer perceptron and self-organizing map topologies applied to segment microstructures from metallographic images. The multilayer perceptron neural network training was based on the backpropagation algorithm, that is a supervised training algorithm, and the self-organizing map neural network was based on the Kohonen algorithm, being thus an unsupervised network. Sixty samples of cast irons were considered for experimental comparison and the results obtained by multilayer perceptron neural network were very similar to the ones resultant by visual human inspection. However, the results obtained by self-organizing map neural network were not so good. Indeed, multilayer perceptron neural network always segmented efficiently the microstructures of samples in analysis, what did not occur when self-organizing map neural network was considered. From the experiments done, we can conclude that multilayer perceptron network is an adequate tool to be used in Material Science fields to accomplish microstructural analysis from metallographic images in a fully automatic and accurate manner.

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1. Introduction

The use of artificial neural networks is quite common in artificial intelligence and pattern recognition domains. In particularly, they have been used in applications that involve shapes recognition with a high degree of parallelism, considerable classification speed and important capacity to learn through examples [1]. The smallest unit of an artificial neural network is the artificial neuron which is a mathematical representation of a natural neuron that compounds living neural systems.

Some domains in which artificial neural networks have been widely applied can be found in Material Sciences. For example, they can be employed in welding control [2], to obtain relations between process parameters and correlations in Charpy impact tests [3], to obtain the composition of ceramic matrices [3], in the modeling of alloy elements [4], to estimate welding parameters in pipeline welding [5], in the modeling of microstructures and mechanical properties of steel [6], to model the deformation mechanism of titanium alloy in hot forming [7], for the prediction of properties of austempered ductile iron [8], to predict the carbon content and the grain size of carbon steels [9], to build models for predicting flow stress and microstructures evolution of a hydrogenized titanium alloy [10], to perform segmentation and quantification of microstructures in metals from images [11,12], to classify internal damages in steels working in creep service [13], and to perform the optimal binarization of images in the morphological analysis of ductile cast iron [14].

Artificial neural networks have been also extremely applied to perform image segmentation tasks. Actually, many computational vision systems are developed based on artificial neural networks, essentially because of their main characteristics, like robustness to noisily input data or outliers, execution speed and possibility to be parallel implemented.

In this work were considered two neural network topologies widely used in pattern recognition applications: multilayer perceptron and self-organizing map, based on backpropagation

(supervised) and Kohonen (non-supervised) algorithms, respectively. In particularly, these neural architectures were used and compared in the automatic segmentation of the microstructures of metallic materials from metallographic images. To evaluate experimentally their efficiency, it was used samples of nodular, malleable and gray cast irons. Those materials were selected mainly due to their widespread use in industrial applications, as in, for example, machine base structures, lamination cylinders, main bodies of valves and pumps and gear elements.

This paper is organized as follows. In next section, some essential aspects of multilayer perceptron neural networks are reviewed and the topology used is presented. The equivalent is done in third section considering self-organizing map neural networks. In next section the experimental work accomplished is explained and results are discussed. In last section the main conclusions are presented.

2. Multilayer perceptron neural network

A human brain is composed by about 10 billion neurons and their organization is of high structural and functional complexity. These units are densely interconnected, which results in a very complex architecture and with an intelligence level that was not yet achieved by any artificial system. Several mathematical models have been developed to represent neurons and their interconnection. In this direction, artificial neural networks have appeared as an attempt to reproduce human brain potentialities, specially its learning ability [15].

The first neuron mathematical model was proposed by McCulloch and Pitts [16]. It has a binary output and several inputs, each one with a different excitatory or inhibitory gain. These gains are known as synaptic weights (or only weights). Input signal values and associated weights determine the neuron output [15].

Thus, perceptron or artificial neuron is the mathematical model of a neuron cell and the basic unit that compounds an artificial neural network. Perceptron architecture consists of a set of n inputs (x_i), each one associated to a weight (w_i) and an activation function (f_i). Perceptrons can be organized to form a layer, in which all perceptrons are linked to the same inputs but have distinct outputs. This kind of network is designated as a perceptron network. Perceptron networks can achieve good performances only when the pattern to be recognized is linearly separable [15]; therefore, they should not be used to solve complex classification problems involving non-linearly separable patterns, instead multilayer perceptron networks can be used.

2.1. Multilayer perceptron networks architecture

Multilayer perceptron networks are formed by an input layer (X_i), one or more intermediary or hidden layers (HL) and an output layer (Y). A weight matrix (W) can be defined for each of these layers. This artificial neuronal network topology can solve classification problems involving non-linearly separable patterns and can be used as a universal function generator [15].

Multilayer perceptron networks have two distinct phases: training and execution. With this network topology, it is impossible to use directly the usual delta rule [15] for the training phase, since this rule does not permit weight recalculation for hidden layers. Therefore, the most widely used algorithm for multilayer perceptron networks training is the backpropagation and its variants. This learning approach is more complex than the one for a perceptron network and it is of the type supervised [16].

2.1.1. Backpropagation algorithm

Standard backpropagation algorithm is one of the most used algorithms to train neuronal networks [15,17]. This algorithm is applied by initializing the weights randomly and presenting examples to the neuronal network as an input signal. Then, this signal is propagated through the hidden layers and achieves the output layer where the network outputs are obtained. Afterwards, the weights (w) are modified according to equation:

$$\Delta wij = \eta . \delta_j(k) s_j(k) \tag{1}$$

where

$$\delta_j(k) = f_i . e_{localj} \text{ to } e_{localj} = \begin{cases} d_j(k) - s_j(k) & \text{output layer and} \\ \sum pw_{jp} \cdot \delta_p^{l-1} & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

and i is the current neuron input, j is the neuron, l is the current layer and, s is neuron output, d is the desired output, f_i is a derivative activation function. Finally, this procedure is repeated until the error is less than a previously adopted threshold value.

This algorithm presents some disadvantages like, for example, during the search for a global minimum, the surface where the error derivative is almost null can be achieved and remain there forever. The convergence of the neural network can be very time-consuming since the trajectory of the initial weights set towards the final one is randomly defined.

2.2. Topology of the multilayer perceptron network used

In this work was used a multilayer perceptron with two layers. Since the main task was the segmentation of material microstructures from metallographic images, it was used to classify the pixels of a metallographic image as belonging to one of these material microstructures: graphite, pearlite or ferrite. For that, we choose a 3/2/3 (three inputs, two perceptrons in hidden layer and three perceptrons in output layer) topology. For each input was assigned one color component (R, G and B) of each pixel of the input image to be segmented. Each output was assigned to the three possible pixel classifications: graphite, pearlite or ferrite. The number of perceptrons used in the hidden layer was established using the method proposed by Yin et al. [18]. Finally, to perform microstructures quantification, for each microstructure segmented, the associated pixels were counted and the relative percent value for the whole image was calculated.

As already referred, to train the artificial network was used backpropagation algorithm and the examples considered were microstructure pixels chosen from representative input images. It should be noted that the training phase just needed to be done once for each kind of metallic material to be segmented.

3. Self-organizing map neural networks

Self-organizing map neural network is a topology proposed by Kohonen [19] that consists in a feedforward neural network that uses a non-supervised training. This model is usually built by a neuron layer disposed linearly (1D) or through a plane (2D) and is classified as a self-organizing map since the neurons are disposed in an 1D or 2D reticulated, as shown in Fig. 1. In this figure is illustrated a self-organizing neural network with a 1D topology and a bi-dimensional network in a squared topology with nine neurons organized in a 3×3 array.

When a pattern is presented to a self-organizing map neural network, their neurons compete among themselves in order to determine the one that has the best response to the input pattern. The neuron that generates the least Euclidian distance between the input and weights vector is the chosen winner, and it has its
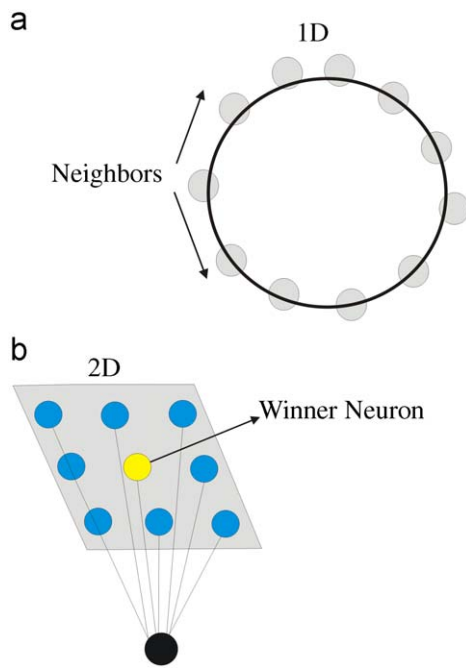
a

1D

Neighbors

b

2D

Winner Neuron

Fig. 1. Two models for self-organizing map networks: (a) 1D; (b) 2D.

weights adjusted to respond better to the input pattern. Kohonen network, then, has the characteristic of modifying internally so that the neurons respond better to a determined input pattern [20].

Concerning self-organizing non-supervised learning model, not only the winner neuron but also the ones in its neighborhood have their weights adjusted, as is explained in the next section. This paradigm is based on the theory that the cells from brain cortex are anatomically arranged in function of its stimulus originated from sensors that are directly connected to them [20].

Each neuron of a self-organizing neural network represents an output. Another characteristic of this network topology is that its neurons are totally connected (synaptic links), so that if there are 10 inputs, each neuron has 10 inputs, each one linked to a point in the input layer. Then, each synaptic connection has a weight so that if they are 10 input points, and should be three neurons in the network, then we should be 30 connections (10 for each neuron) and consequently, 30 synaptic weights (10 for each neuron).

3.1. Neighborhood

A neuron in a self-organizing map network has a set of neighbors that can be topologically organized in regions to have the best response to a given stimulus. This characteristic is similar to the one that occurs in human brain, where, depending on the activity that is happening, there are some neural centers of more intensified activity.

In the beginning of the training step, the set of neighbors is large, but it decreases along time, while the network organizes itself. In fact, for its better organization, the neighborhood begins wide and decreases monotonically, because if the neighborhood begins very small, comparing to the whole map, the network does not become globally in order [20]. Usually, at the end of the process, neighborhood radius must be null and only the winner has its weights adjusted.

Neighborhood weight adjustment permits that neurons near to the winner have good conditions to dispute with the same during next iterations, improving in this way the competition for the best network learning.

3.2. Neuron adaptation

Neuron adaptation consists in weight adjustment, looking for response improvement to determined stimulus. This process is fundamental for the formation of an ordered network. The first step to achieve weight adjustment is to determine the winner neuron. So, the winner will be the neuron that presents the least Euclidean distance $d_t(n)$ between an input pattern and its weights, calculated as:

$$d_t(n) = \sum_{i=1}^{I}(x_t(i) - w_{n,t}(i))^2, \tag{2}$$

where $x_t(i)$ is the ith input vector component at time t, $w_{n,t}(i)$ is the ith weights vector component of a neuron n at time t, i is the input and weight index of a network with I inputs and $d_t(n)$ is Euclidean distance of neuron n at time t.

Euclidian distance, as presented in Eq. (2), is the sum of squared differences between each input and its correspondent weight. In fact, the least Euclidean distance represents the neuron which weight value is the most similar to input value presented [20]. In this way, in each iteration, the neuron that has the least Euclidian distance and its neighbors must have their weights adjusted to have a better response to that input, while the other neurons remain equal. Weight adaptation at next instant $t+1$ is a simple process. It consists in taking the difference between vectors X (input) and W (weights) and sum a fraction of this difference to the weight vector at time t (actual). Neighbor weights are adjusted using the same principle, expressed by:

$$w_n(t+1) = w_n(t) + a_s(t) \cdot (x(t) - w_n(t))^2, \tag{3}$$

where $a_s(t)$ is the learning rate and corresponds to a fraction of difference between X and W that is summed to W. So that, $0 < a_s < 1$ [15].

Usually $a_s(t)$ (Eq. (3)) is initialized with a high value (around one), and successively decreases, following any rule or function, until its value achieves approximately zero. Then, map ordering that takes place in the beginning of training is affected by a large neighborhood radius and by a high $a_s(t)$ value.

3.3. Iterations

The number of iterations or epochs corresponds to the number of times that the input patterns are presented to the network. On each epoch, it must be presented all input data. For each pattern a winner neuron is determined. Then, its weights and the weights of its neighbors are adjusted. After the last pattern is presented, a new epoch begins and all input data must be presented again [19].

3.4. Training algorithm for a self-organizing map neural network

The self-organizing training algorithm used can be described as follows [19]:

1. specify the number of epochs;
2. initialize the network weights using random values;
3. specify the initial neighborhood radius for each neuron (it is recommended to use the whole network as initial radius);
4. present an input to the network;
5. calculate the output for each neuron, using Euclidean distance between input and network weight;
6. select the winner neuron;
7. adjust winner weights and the ones of its neighbors;
8. if still there are neighbors, then decrease neighborhood radius;
9. if still there are input data, then go to step 4;

10. increment number of epochs and if allowed maximum number of epochs was still not achieved, then go to step 4 and present all input data again.

It is important that the initial weight values are different from each other and much smaller than input data. If the weights are initialized with values similar to input data, then the network has the tendency to choose specific winners, avoiding its self organization.

3.5. Winner neuron

After network training, we can label each neuron according to the pattern it classifies. By this way, if, for example, a network is classifying objects, and the winner neuron represents a determined object, this neuron can be labeled with that object name. Nevertheless, many neurons can classify the same object. In fact, this can occur because of its neighborhood situation. If this case happens, then there will be more than a neuron with the same label and a post-processing step can be necessary.

3.6. Topology of the self-organizing map neural network used

The applied self-organizing map topology was a 1D self-organizing network and its main task was to perform the segmentation of material microstructures from metallographic images. Thus, self-organizing map neuronal network was used to recognize the pixels of a metallographic image that belong to each of these material microstructures: graphite, pearlite or ferrite. Hence, we choose a three neurons network having three inputs on each of them. To each input is assigned one color component of input image pixels (R, G and B). Each neuron is assigned to three possible pixel classifications: graphite, pearlite or ferrite. To perform microstructures quantification, segmented pixels were counted and the associated percent was calculated. Kohonen training algorithm was used to train the network and the examples used were microstructure pixels obtained automatically from representative input images.

4. Results and discussion

The aim of this work was to segment material microstructures from metallographic images; for this, we used two types of artificial neural network topologies to identify the following microstructures: graphite, pearlite and ferrite. The experimental results were obtained applying multilayer perceptron and self-organizing map neural networks on samples of nodular, malleable and gray cast irons. Here we present a comparative analysis between these two artificial neural network topologies in the automatic segmentation of metal microstructures from metallographic images. For that comparison, we consider the analysis presented by the Albuquerque et al. [12], which validated the quality of the segmentation and quantification results obtained by the multilayer perceptron network on the microstructures of cast irons from metallographic images. In the referred work, the results obtained by the multilayer perceptron network were very similar to the ones obtained by visual human inspection and better than the results obtained using a commercial system that is awfully common and well accepted in the microstructures analysis area. Thus, we adopted the results obtained by the multilayer perceptron network as a reference basis.

In the previous sections, we describe the neuronal network topologies to identify three different microstructures in input images, however both networks were only used to identify two

classes, where one class indicates the presence of graphite (associated with black color in the input images) and the other class refers to the presence of pearlite or ferrite (associated with the gray color in the input images). The reason for the association pearlite/ferrite in one class was because we were not able to visually distinguish these two microstructures in the input images, which could affect the further results analysis.

The experimental images considered here had size of 640×480 pixels, the training phase was performed once by an experimented operator considering four representative images of each iron considered. This number of training images was defined in function of the number of microstructures involved, and the training images were manually elected by the operator through visual inspection. The same operator accomplished the experimental results analysis and comparison. It should be noticed that different results could be obtained if the networks were trained using different sets of training images. In other words, the quality of the results accomplished depends on the quality of the image training set used and of each image considered. That is, if all microstructures involved are or not properly represented in the training images, the samples were or not well metallographic prepared or the images were or not appropriately acquired as, for example, using inadequate contrast and illumination conditions, the results quality can be affected.

In the training of the multilayer perceptron network, the backpropagation algorithm was employed, adopting a learning rate of 0.1, a moment rate of 0.001, and as stopping criterion the number of epochs equal to 2500 or an absolute error not greater than 0.01. In the training of the self-organizing map network was used the Kohonen algorithm, adopting a learning rate of 0.1 and as stopping criterion the number of epochs equal to 2500.

In Table 1, are shown the results obtained using multilayer perceptron and self-organizing map neural networks in the case of the nodular cast iron. It should be noticed that the results obtained are similar, presenting a minimum difference of 1.00% and a maximum of 5.59%, for samples 20 and 17, respectively. Moreover, it can be noticed that the multilayer perceptron

Table 1
Results obtained using multilayer perceptron (MLP) and Kohonen self-organizing map (SOM) based neural networks on samples of a nodular cast iron.

Nodular cast iron				
Samples	MLP network (%)		SOM network (%)	
	Graphite	Ferrite/Pearlite	Graphite	Ferrite/Pearlite
1	11.51	88.49	14.58	85.42
2	13.36	86.64	16.28	83.72
3	13.19	86.81	15.80	84.20
4	13.46	86.54	16.34	83.66
5	12.46	87.54	14.80	85.20
6	11.79	88.21	15.47	84.53
7	14.58	85.42	16.88	83.12
8	12.50	87.50	14.37	85.63
9	14.02	85.98	15.80	84.20
10	13.30	86.70	15.55	84.45
11	9.08	90.92	14.04	85.96
12	9.25	90.75	14.07	85.93
13	11.56	88.44	16.33	83.67
14	9.24	90.76	13.80	86.20
15	10.22	89.78	15.26	84.74
16	9.89	90.11	14.52	85.48
17	8.31	91.69	13.90	86.10
18	7.66	92.34	13.21	86.79
19	14.66	85.34	13.28	86.72
20	21.73	78.27	22.73	77.27
Average	12.09	87.91	15.35	84.65
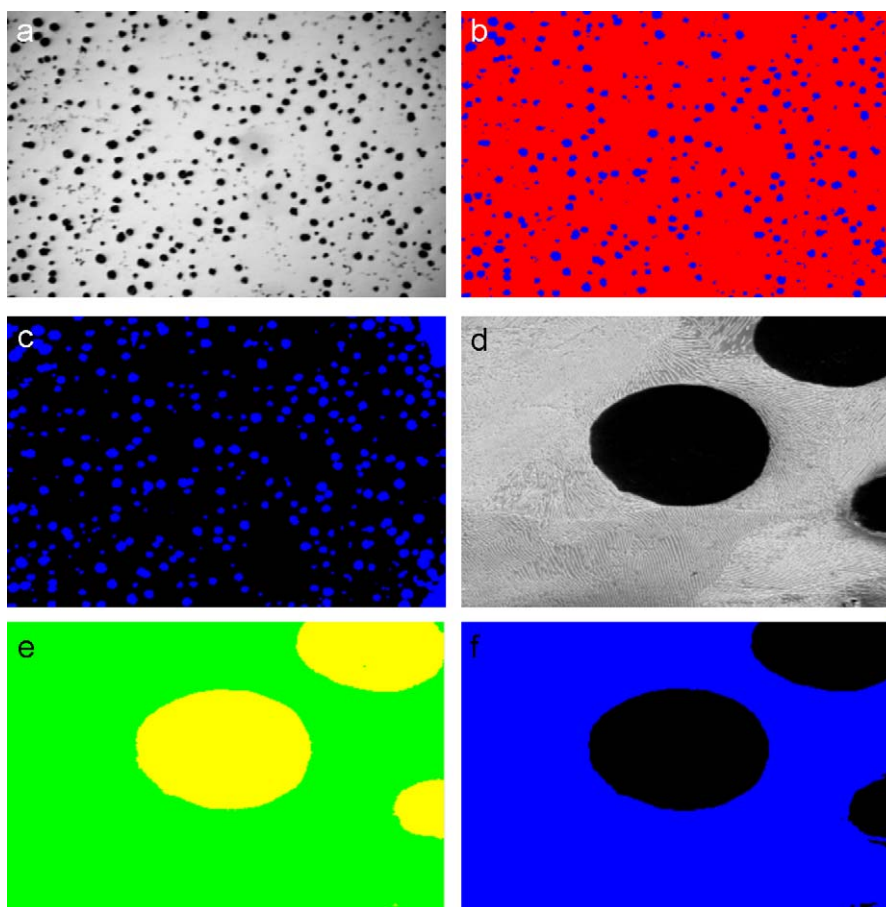
Fig. 2. Two original images of a nodular cast iron (a) and (d); resultant segmentation using multilayer perceptron (b) and (e); self-organizing map (c) and (f), neural networks.

network presented an average of graphite equal to 12.09% and pearlite or ferrite to 87.91% and that self-organizing map network presented 15.35% and 84.65% of graphite and pearlite or ferrite, respectively, being the difference average equal to 3.26%.

Figs. 2(a–c), present an original image of a nodular cast iron, and the images resulting of the segmentation process accomplished using multilayer perceptron and self-organizing map neuronal networks, respectively. These images are the ones that presented the major difference in the results obtained by the two neuronal networks. Additionally, images of Figs. 2(d–f), are the ones that presented the minor difference.

It should be noticed that the segmentation done using multilayer perceptron network is more accurate than the one obtained using the self-organizing map network, since part of the pearlite or ferrite was erroneously segmented and classified as graphite by self-organizing map network. This fact is the main justification for the existing difference in the results obtained.

In Table 2, the results of the segmentation done using multilayer perceptron and self-organizing map networks on samples of a gray cast iron are presented. These results were the most dissimilar for the studied irons, presenting a minimum difference of 1.86% and maximum of 14.70%, for samples 15 and 18, respectively. Moreover, it can be noticed that multilayer perceptron network presented an average of graphite equal to 10.28% and of pearlite or ferrite to 89.62%, and that self-organizing map network presented 19.62% and 80.38% of graphite and of

Table 2
Results obtained using multilayer perceptron (MLP) and Kohonen self-organizing map (SOM) based neural networks on samples of a gray cast iron.

Gray cast iron				
Samples	MLP network (%)		SOM network (%)	
	Graphite	Ferrite/Pearlite	Graphite	Ferrite/Pearlite
1	12.21	87.79	16.37	83.63
2	6.80	93.20	12.70	87.30
3	8.56	91.44	16.77	83.23
4	6.80	93.20	13.79	86.21
5	8.03	91.97	18.44	81.56
6	5.02	94.98	19.16	80.84
7	8.73	91.27	17.85	82.15
8	9.15	90.85	13.87	86.13
9	7.90	92.10	14.41	85.59
10	6.67	93.33	14.40	85.60
11	40.41	59.59	49.27	50.73
12	7.47	92.53	19.38	80.62
13	9.83	90.17	17.36	82.64
14	7.52	92.48	22.72	77.28
15	21.69	78.31	23.55	76.45
16	8.79	91.21	19.00	81.00
17	7.76	92.24	21.29	78.71
18	6.77	93.23	21.47	78.53
19	7.64	90.28	19.73	80.27
20	7.78	92.22	20.86	79.14
Average	10.28	89.62	19.62	80.38
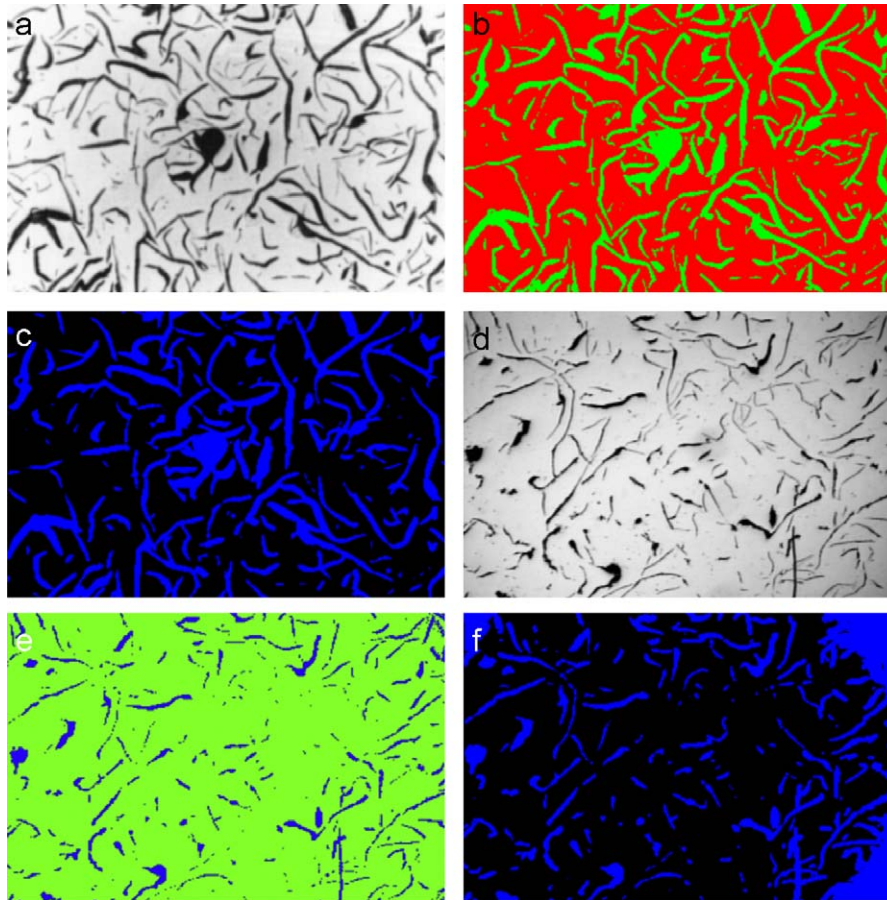
Fig. 3. Original images of a gray cast iron (a) and (d); resultant images of the segmentation done using multilayer perceptron (b) and (e); self-organizing map (c) and (f), neural networks.

pearlite or ferrite, respectively, being the difference average between the two neural networks equal to 9.24%.

Figs. 3(a–c), present the original image of a gray cast iron, and the resulting images of the segmentation done using multilayer perceptron and self-organizing map neural networks, respectively. These images are the ones that presented the minor difference between results obtained by the two neural networks. Additionally, images of Figs. 3(d–f) are the ones that presented the major difference.

Analyzing the results obtained, one can conclude that the segmentations accomplished using multilayer perceptron and self-organizing map neural network topologies are similar for sample 1. Relatively to sample 11, the segmentation done by visual inspection is very similar to the one obtained using multilayer perceptron network which not occurs with self-organizing map network, because pearlite or ferrite was erroneously segmented as graphite.

In Table 3, the results obtained by the segmentation done using multilayer perceptron and self-organizing map methods on a malleable cast iron are presented. These are the most similar results obtained by the two neural networks on all samples analyzed, presenting a minimal difference of 1.54% and maximum of 5.62% for samples 3 and 19, respectively. Moreover, it can be noticed that multilayer perceptron network presented an average of graphite equal to 14.98% and of pearlite or ferrite to 85.02% and self-organizing map network presented 17.70% and 82.30% of graphite and pearlite or ferrite, respectively, being the

Table 3
Results obtained using multilayer perceptron (MLP) and Kohonen self-organizing map (SOM) based neural networks on samples of a malleable cast iron.

Malleable cast iron				
Samples	MLP network (%)		SOM network (%)	
	Graphite	Ferrite/Pearlite	Graphite	Ferrite/Pearlite
1	18.95	81.05	20.57	79.43
2	15.71	84.29	17.73	82.27
3	14.96	85.04	16.50	83.50
4	14.00	86.00	15.63	84.37
5	15.16	84.84	17.28	82.72
6	16.07	83.93	18.32	81.68
7	19.11	80.89	20.76	79.24
8	19.22	80.78	22.17	77.83
9	15.64	84.36	17.60	82.40
10	17.64	82.36	19.40	80.60
11	11.84	88.16	16.82	83.18
12	12.04	87.96	17.32	82.68
13	13.72	86.28	18.84	81.16
14	14.06	85.94	18.07	81.93
15	11.83	88.17	16.07	83.93
16	11.40	88.60	16.19	83.81
17	11.30	88.70	15.54	84.46
18	10.68	89.32	15.15	84.85
19	21.05	78.95	15.43	84.57
20	15.27	84.73	18.57	81.43
Average	14.98	85.02	17.70	82.30
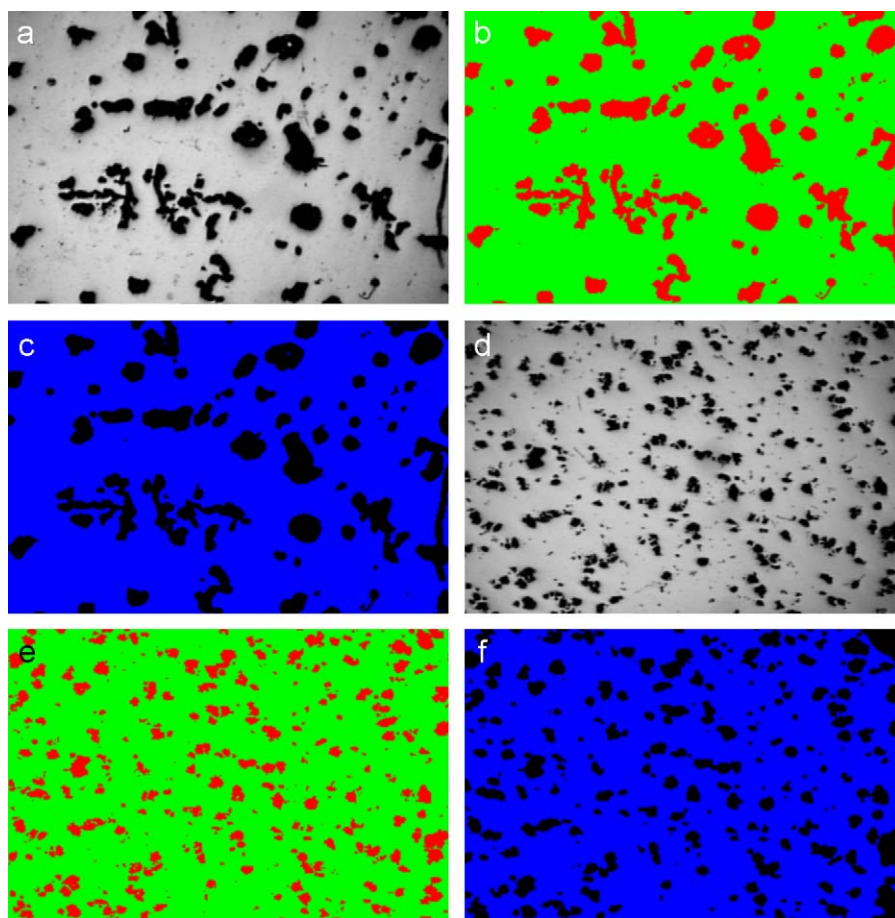
Fig. 4. Original image of a malleable cast iron (a) and (d); resultant images of the segmentation done using multilayer perceptron (b) and (e); self-organizing map (c) and (f), neural networks.

involved difference average between the neural networks equal to 2.72%.

Figs. 4(a–c), present an original image of a malleable cast iron and the images resulting from the segmentation done using multilayer perceptron and self-organizing map neural network, respectively. Notice that these images presented the minor difference verified between the results obtained by the used networks. Additionally, the images of Figs. 4(d–f), presented the major difference.

Verifying the results obtained, it can be noticed that the segmentations performed using multilayer perceptron and self-organizing map neural networks are analogous on sample 3. For sample 19, the segmentations obtained are distinct, because self-organizing map network segments great part of pearlite or ferrite as graphite (Fig. 4(f)). However, that error is not verified when used multilayer perceptron network that segmented correctly the graphite from the other two constituents.

In the results obtained by self-organizing map network on samples of nodular, gray and, in particular, malleable casting iron, we can verify its considerable difficulty to segment graphite successfully when the background of the input image was not uniform. However, multilayer perceptron network did not show this difficulty, and so it could get segmentation results very effectively.

Multilayer perceptron neural network showed to be a versatile and easy to use solution to perform automatic segmentation of material microstructures from metallographic images, even when the input images were of low quality. Moreover, when compared with self-organizing map network, solution network needed less time to accomplish the segmentation of the structures presented. Self-organizing network had as main advantage its training algorithm that was easier and faster.

5. Conclusions

This paper described two neural network topologies here considered to perform the segmentation of metallic material constituents from images. The neural network solutions were based on multilayer perceptron and self-organizing map neural topologies and use backpropagation and Kohonen algorithms. These solutions are more robust to noisy input and illumination irregularities during image acquisition than traditional segmentation techniques, as usual threshold approach, for example.

In this work was accomplished a comparative analysis on the experimental results obtained using two network topologies in the segmentation of microstructures from metallographic images of nodular, malleable and gray cast irons. The one that showed better results was the multilayer perceptron network.

From the experimental results accomplished, we can conclude that multilayer perceptron network can be successfully used in applications of Materials Science fields; in particular, for the segmentation of material microstructures from metallographic images. Comparatively to self-organizing map network, multilayer perceptron network presents as main advantages the reduction of the segmentation time and results of higher quality.

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